Classicism Study Guide

Classicism

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Introduction

Classicism, by the standards of many critics, is not necessarily defined by the boundaries of time; however, there are several major periods with which Classicism is generally associated, including the Golden Age of Greece, the age of Cicero and Augustus in Rome, and the Enlightenment periods of France, England, and Germany. Classicism also encompasses all of what is considered Neoclassicism, though it should be noted that the inverse is not considered true.

Both ancient Greek and ancient Roman cultures had definite ideas and attitudes about literature. The qualities they valued in literary works included a sense of restraint and of restricted scope, a dominance of reason, a sense of form, and a unity of purpose and design, to name a few. Clarity was especially important to the Greeks, emphasizing that communication was an act of informational transmission between multiple individuals rather than the end result of self-expression by a single individual. They also valued objectivity over passion.

Each classical revival emulated these characteristics differently. The French classicists stressed reason and intellect, while the English took great interest in form. The Germans wanted not only to imitate but to surpass the grandeur of the original classics. Some modern-day literary works also manifest various aspects of the classical traditions, as seen in the works of T. S. Eliot, though there is less agreement about whether they can truly be described as works of classicism.

Themes

History

M. I. Finley, in *The Ancient Greeks*, speaks of the Greeks' concern with the individual and with isolated incidents of the past as expressed in their historical works. According to Finley, the Greeks were interested in history but did not take the pains that a historiographer would to report the past. He also asserts that the function of Greek history, as it expresses itself in the literature of the time, was often to provide an explanation for a current cult practice or ritual (also evidenced by the infusion of gods into these texts). Also, the events of such historical accounts do not offer a context of time or place. Greek "historians" were preoccupied with resurrecting a more glorious, heroic past and tended, in general, to view the past as being somehow "better" than the present. Most of these characteristics also permeate ancient Roman writings, like Vergil's *Aeneid*. Goethe, who wrote much later, shared this interest in history, drawing on the traditional German story of Faustus for the creation of his *Faust*. However, *Faust* does not glorify the past but rather serves as a social and political commentary on contemporary German life.

Order

Classic Greek and Roman writers also influenced the works of the later Classicists in their preference for order over chaos. Symmetry, continuity, smoothness, harmony, and logic were all characteristics classical writers would strive for in their works. The unities are an example or an outgrowth of this need for structure and for order. They are strict rules of dramatic structure formulated by Renaissance dramatists on the basis of Aristotle's views of drama, as expressed in his work *Poetics*. Among them are the three unities of action, time, and place. According to these rules, a play first must have a single plot with a beginning, middle, and an ending. Second, the action of a play should be restricted to the events of a single day. Finally, the scene should be restricted to a single location.

Reason versus Passion

It has been said that the Greeks loved to talk and listen, and they were keen on the art of conversation. Philosophers also taught by discourse and discussion. The art of conversation fed the value the Greeks placed on the process of determining the basis for an action, decision, or conviction. For them, conversation and reason went hand in hand.

The Greeks, like classicists that followed, looked unfavorably upon the over indulgence of intense emotion, preferring reason to passion. Racine's *Andromaque*, for example, centers on the fall of Troy. All of the characters in the play are dominated by their passions. The result is insanity or death, with the exception of Andromaque. Euripides'

tragedy *Medea* is yet another fatal tale in which Medea's passion, rather than reason, informs her decisions. Indulging her jealous rage results in the murder of her own children.

Style

Pastoral

A pastoral is defined as a literary composition on a rural theme. The convention originated with classical Greek poet Theocritus during the third century B.C. In a pastoral, the characters are shepherds who speak in a courtly manner despite their simple setting. Like the poetry Theocritus, Vergil's *Eclogues* are about the experiences, love affairs, and pastimes of shepherds. Of the ten poems, a few are tragic love stories, a few involve singing contests, and the rest (the majority) recall the seizure of the shepherds' lands by retired Roman soldiers.

Tragedy

The tragic form was practiced extensively by the Greeks. It is usually a drama in prose or poetry involving a noble, courageous hero who, due to a character flaw, brings ruin upon himself or herself. In Racine's tragedy *Andromaque*, all of the characters seem to fall prey to one fatal flaw, that of passion. It is Pyrrhus's passion for Hector's wife that causes him to cast aside the affections of his betrothed, Hermione. In turn, in her passion, Hermione's disappointment with Pyrrhus causes his death. Finally, Oreste, in his love for Hermione, complies with her passionate request to kill Pyrrhus in an effort to win her affections. All but Andromaque, by the play's end, either die or go mad as a result of their passionate natures.

Epic

An epic is a long narrative poem dedicated to the adventures of a hero. Usually the hero is a person of great national, historic, or legendary importance. Vergil's work the *Aeneid* has been identified as an epic of the highest caliber. It is, in some respects, an imitation of Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. The protagonist is the Trojan prince Aeneas. His wanderings, after the destruction of his city in the Trojan War, account for a very vast setting (another characteristic of the epic). The action in an epic is often given cosmic significance through the intervention of the supernatural forces. This characteristic is especially evident in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, as Aeneas travels take him to the underworld. He encounters his dead father who reveals to him the future Greatness of Rome and Aeneas's own legacy.

Historical Context

Democracy in Greece

Pericles became the leader of the democratic party in Athens in 461 B.C. and ruled during Athens's Golden Age. When state pay was instituted for officials in 450 B.C., Athens nearly became a full democracy; class was no longer a factor in official appointments. However, women, metics, and slaves were still completely excluded from politics. A demonstrated lack of respect as well as the active censorship of these residents were also byproducts of Athenian success.

Historians estimate the population of Attica, the state over which Athens was the capital, to have been approximately 315,000 at the time. Of this population, 172,000 were Athenian citizens, 28,000 were resident aliens, and 115,000 were slaves. All were registered in political and religious units known as demes. The rural population was very small, the land either owned by wealthy nobles or by farmers, whose chief crops were said to be olives and oil. Over half of the grain coming into Athens was imported. The growing middle class, whose members were chiefly involved in commerce or were artisans and laborers, largely influenced urban life. The metics, or resident aliens, were involved in trade and finance, and the state slaves contributed to public works.

The Peloponnesian War

Athens's prosperity during the Golden Age was no reflection of its foreign relations. Expansionist policies in the outlying areas of Greece, which had been denied access to Athens, helped to form an ever-lengthening list of enemies. The growth of Athenian power also caused fear and suspicion in Sparta, the head of the Peloponnesian league.

The war began in 431 B.C., with raids by Athens in Peloponnesus and a Spartan attack on Attica. The conflict raged back and forth between Athens and Sparta, with no clear victor. While Athens was a dominating force on the seas, it was no match for Sparta's armies. Sparta, however, had no navy. Eventually, when both their resources depleted, Athens and Sparta signed a treaty in 421 B.C. that temporarily ended the conflict.

Nicias was elected to oversee a more peaceful Athens. But Alcibiades, a disciple of Socrates who was interested in the democratic leadership, had visions of aggressive expansionism. Alcibiades's rhetoric would once again excite and incite Athenians and Spartans to take up swords against one another. The final defeat of the Athenians occurred in 405 B.C. at Aegospotami when its final fleet was destroyed when taken by surprise. Athens was under a state of siege at the time, until 404 when it surrendered. Though the city of Athens was spared, its walls were torn down and many of its citizenry were slain.

The Plague

Historians estimate that from 430 to 429 B.C., a plague from the east decimated Athens. Overcrowding within the city walls caused it to spread rapidly, killing one-third of the population and crippling many others. The horror of the event changed the social and religious values of the culture dramatically. Pericles died of the plague in 429 B.C., and historians are quick to point out that his death was a pivotal event with respect to the Peloponnesian war.

Movement Variations

Rome

Historians divide the movement in Rome into two periods, the Age of Cicero, from 80 to 43 B.C. and the Age of Augustus, from 37 B.C. to 14 A.D. The Roman culture is often considered an extension of early Greek civilization, the two often being described as Greco-Roman. The Romans, however, added their own political, military, and legal views to Greek values. Greek literature was the model for Roman writings in prose, poetry, as well as drama, and the works themselves were often composed in both Greek and Latin. Satire also formed the basis for Roman social commentary. Vergil (70-19 B.C.) and Cicero (106-43 B.C.) have been identified as the significant literary figures of the periods. Cicero was one of the greatest prose writers and orators of the time, whose works include numerous legal and political speeches as well as philosophical letters and essays.

France

Historians have recognized the movement in France in the 1600s for its diversity in classical values. The French classicists wrote with an emphasis on reason and intellect. French intellectual Rene Descartes, for example, tended to shy away from authority as the ultimate source of truth. He put a great deal of emphasis instead on the process of reasoning from a priori knowledge, i.e., knowledge based on hypothesis or theory rather than experiment or experience. The French dramas of Racine and others strongly influenced the English Neoclassical period. In addition to drama, the French were also noted for their use of satire. Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) has been identified as one of the best examples of satire. It systematically takes jabs at those in positions of power and privilege. This form of satire has also been identified as being part of a trend towards secularism and criticism of the church.

England

Although the terms Classicism and Neoclassicism are somewhat interchangeable (and often used as such), Neoclassicism (1660-1798) refers specifically to the literary periods in history that produced art inspired by the ancients. It is often defined as the Classicism that dominated English literature during the Restoration Age (1660-1700). In the early years of the movement, the country celebrated and enjoyed the reopening of theaters, when both William Wycherly and William Congreve were infusing the stage with their contemporary plays. Heroic drama, written in couplets, developed, as did the comedy of manners. Poetry tended to take the form of the mock epic, the verse essay, and satire, as used by Dryden, Pope and Swift. Literature drew on classic virtues such as order, restraint, simplicity, economy, and morality, all of which were guided by the politics of the day. The end of the movement would be greatly influenced by the works of Samuel

Johnson. The "Age of Johnson," as it was called, represented a transition from a focus on classical study/imitation to an interest in folk literature and popular ballads. The gothic novel also emerged as a genre, due in large part to the efforts of Anne Radcliffe and Horace Walpole.

Germany

The Germans wanted not only to imitate the works of the Greeks and Romans but also to surpass them. In the eighteenth century, classical culture became a subject of great interest. German schools and colleges began offering courses in classical literature, history, and philosophy. Great intellectuals emerged, inspired by classical ideals. During this time period, classical and romantic literature flourished side by side. An interest in a German past was also evident, as expressed in Goethe's *Faust*, an adaptation of a traditional German/ Christian tale. *Faust* symbolized the union of Classicism and Romanticism in the marriage of Faust and Helen of Troy. However, many scholars believe this era is best represented in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, George Friedrich Handel, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Franz Joseph Haydn, four of the greatest classical composers the world has known.

Representative Authors

Euripides (c. 485-406 B.C.)

A writer during the first classical period in Greece, Euripides was a playwright of great import. The decline of the Golden Age in Greece, as a result of the Peloponnesian War, was witnessed by Euripides probably accounts for the overall tone of his tragedies. His works also serve as a chronicle of Athenian thought during a rather turbulent time in its history and are excellent representations of Attic Drama, the theatrical genre of the time.

Euripides was born in 485 B.C. in Athens, where he spent most of his life. Historians believe that he was from a middle-class background, which suggests that he was well educated. Euripides was also a friend of many of the great thinkers of the time, including Anaxagoras, Socrates, and Protagoras. During his childhood and into early adulthood, Euripides enjoyed the splendor of an Athens rich in resources and political allies.

In 455, Euripides wrote his first tetralogy, a composition including three tragedies and a satyr play. Ninety-two plays are known to have been written by the dramatist after the start of the war. Only nineteen of his plays still exist, most of them tragedies in the form of divine myths, marital narratives, and noble family histories.

Euripides's works were often not warmly received by the Greeks of his time, as he did not believe in the triumph of reason over passion, nor did he believe that reason and order regulated the universe. This idea is demonstrated in the gods of his plays, who do not always act in just or compassionate ways, even exhibiting the less desirable characteristics of their mortal counterparts. It has been suggested that, as a result of these stylistic differences, Euripides's work was not popular at dramatic festivals, earning him relatively few prizes. Euripides eventually left Athens in response to his critics and at the invitation of the Macedonia King Archelaus. Archelaus requested that Euripides's writings contribute to a new cultural center the king envisioned as a rival to Athens. Unfortunately, Euripides would live less than two years in Macedonia before he died.

Despite his unpopularity, Euripides has been tagged a "stylistic innovator" for his unconventional beliefs, particularly by contemporary critics who contend that his works contributed to the creation of modern drama. In his own time, Sophocles and others admired his work for its psychological realism and its use of simple, everyday dialogue in favor of the decorative aristocratic language that dominated the genre. The Dionysian festival would also revive his plays 100 years after his death in 406, to enjoy a much greater reception.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe has been recognized for his considerable writing talents as well as his genius. He has been called a shaping force in German literature, particularly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. An exceptional man, Goethe excelled as a scientist, philosopher, musician, and artist, in addition to his literary accomplishments. Goethe's drama *Faust* has been compared to the works of Dante and Shakespeare and is an important piece of Romantic literature.

Goethe was born August 28, 1749, in Frankfurt, Germany. His mother was the daughter of the mayor, and his father spent much of his time writing memoirs, supporting local artists, and educating his children. Goethe's education was extensive at a very early age□so extensive that Goethe managed to write an epistolary novel (a novel written as a letter or series of letters) incorporating six different languages (German, French, Italian, English, Latin, and Yiddish) by his early teens. He entered the University of Leipzig at the age of sixteen to study law but found greater satisfaction in studying art, literature, and music. After two semesters, Goethe dropped out of the university to pursue an education independently. Some of Goethe's earliest works created during this time include *Buch Annette* (translated as *Book for Annette*), a book of poetry inspired by a landlord's daughter at an inn Goethe frequented, and the play *Die Laune des Verliebten* (translated as *The Wayward Lover*), a pastoral comedy.

In 1768, Goethe became ill and returned to Frankfurt to rest and recover. He studied alchemy, astrology, and the occult during this time and read the works of Shakespeare, Lessing, and Rousseau before continuing his law studies in Strasbourg in March of 1770. Goethe remained in Strasbourg to practice law for several years. During this time, Goethe wrote an epistolary novel entitled *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, based on the true story of a man's suicide over a sour love affair and his own feelings for a friend's fiancée. The novel was wildly popular in Germany but was tagged immoral by British and American critics because of the suicide depicted.

The popularity of Goethe's *Werther* also earned Goethe various official posts in Weimar, by invitation of Duke Karl August, and he stayed for over twenty-five years. A trip to Italy in 1786 fueled his creativity. Goethe was so inspired by this trip that he ultimately changed his creative direction. He began writing poetry in classical form, utilizing principles of formal unity and ordered language, as demonstrated in *Hermann und Dorothea* (Herman and Dorothea) in 1798. Goethe also developed an interest in producing scientific writings, expounding on his knowledge of botany, optics, and light.

Goethe's greatest work, *Faust*, is considered a literary classic. It was published originally in two parts, the first in 1808 and the second posthumously in 1832. Goethe continued to write until his death on March 22, 1832, publishing his autobiography and several novels.

Homer (fl. c. 750 B.C.)

It is of interest to note that Homer, whom many consider one of the greatest poets of western civilization, may not have existed. Various critics and historians offer conflicting views as to whether the man actually lived or was a fictional character given credit for the work of many. Some believed him to be a bard by profession, a singing poet who composed and recited verses on legends and history. It is difficult to say when exactly the poet would have written. Based on language and style, it can be narrowed down to the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries B.C. The language of his works, a blend of Ionic and Aeolic, indicates that he was perhaps from the Island of Chios, off the western coast of Asia Minor, where one family has actually claimed him as a legitimate ancestor.

In support of this theory, Demokodos, who appears in the *Odyssey*, is believed to be a portrait of Homer, a blind minstrel who sings about the fall of Troy. Until the third century B.C., the Greeks insisted that an individual named Homer was responsible for both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, among other various minor works that have been attributed to the author. However, grammarians eventually began to wonder if the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were written by two different people.

In direct opposition to the idea of a single author, critics also point out that an anonymous group of bards may have been responsible for the work of Homer. Blind, wandering old bards were referred to as "homros" and may be the creative energy behind a fictional Homer. Scholars have also identified many inconsistencies or stylistic differences between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, supporting the idea that they were the work of two different authors. Regardless of whether Homer's voice is that of one man or several, the literary greatness of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is unchallenged even today.

Jean Racine (1639-1699)

Born on December 22, 1639, in La Ferte- Milon, France, Jean Racine was orphaned as an infant and raised by his paternal grandparents. Racine's education was dictated by Jansenist doctrine, a sect within the Roman Catholic Church. Aside from his religious indoctrination, Racine also studied Greek and Latin literature. After studying theology in the south of France, Racine returned to Paris, where he befriended Molière. Molière's troupe performed Racine's first play, *La thébaïde, ou les frères ennemis* (translated as The Thebaid), a 1664 play about the rivalry between Oedipus's sons. After Molière agreed to put on his second play, *Alexandre le grand*, a year later, the friendship between Racine and Molière ended over creative differences when Racine pulled the play two weeks into its production.

This would be one of a series of conflicts for Racine. Upon seeing *Alexandre le grand*, Corneille harshly criticized Racine for his work, in turn leading to a bitter rivalry between the two dramatists. Racine incited the anger of the Jansenists for denouncing them publicly, making nasty comments which painted the Catholic sect in a most unfavorable light. Finally, the Duchesse de Bouillona was an enemy of Racine's and intentionally

engaged in activities that would upset Racine's career as a dramatist. In one instance, the Duchesse encouraged another dramatist to write a play to rival Racine's production. Additionally, she purposely purchased a group of good seats, only to leave them vacant on the opening nights of Racine's plays.

All of Racine's enemies took a toll on his career, and ultimately he left the theater and retired to family life. He then shared a job as royal historiographer, a high-profile post requiring him to travel with Louis XIV on military campaigns. He again put pen to paper at the request of the king's wife in 1689, writing the biblical story of *Esther* and a subsequent biblical drama *Athaliah*. Racine produced a few additional works before his death on April 21, 1699.

Racine's style is representative of several classical (and, by extension, neoclassical) ideals, namely those of simplicity, realism, and polish. Racine is also noted for the ease with which he conformed to the unities of action, time, and place, especially with plays larger in scope. It was common for the playwright to skillfully compress several years of story line into the course of two to three hours in an effort to preserve the convention. It has also been pointed out that Racine followed Aristotle's view that a cast of characters was inherently more important than any one figure within a drama.

Vergil (70-19 B.C.)

The accomplishments of Vergil as a gifted poet were an inspiration for Roman writers. Vergil drew on classical Greek conventions to compose his works while at the same time asserting his own unique sense of style. Critics also cite the strong influence his themes have had on Western literature, a vast canon from which countless authors can be named.

Publius Vergilius Maro was born on October 15, 70 B.C., at Andes in northern Italy. He was fairly well educated, which suggests his family was at least from the middle class, and was prepared for a career in law. However, he abandoned law practice after making one appearance in court. He retired to Naples, where he spent most of his life, to study philosophy. In 41 B.C., Vergil was forced to appeal to Octavian Caesar, who later became Augustus, to return his parents' land because it had been confiscated for distribution to war veterans. It was through the intercession of his friends that the land was returned. When Vergil wrote his *Eclogue*, they were partially an expression of his gratitude to his friends and to Octavian.

The *Eclogues*, written sometime between 42 and 37 B.C., were a series of pastoral poems, or poems composed on rural themes and involving shepherd characters. In the case of the ten poems comprising the *Eclogues*, unhappy shepherds unlucky in love featured in idealized settings (such setting being another convention of the pastoral form). The popularity of the works led to the publication of Vergil's *Georgics* (42-37 B.C.), a treatise on farming.

The final work Vergil undertook before his death was his grandest. The *Aeneid* was commissioned by the emperor, Augustus, as a way to promote his status as Roman Emperor. The epic glorifies the leader's ancestor Aeneas and prophesies of Rome's Golden Age. Vergil was paid handsomely for his tribute, which he worked on for roughly ten years until he died in 19 B.C. Curiously that same year, Vergil ordered his literary executor to burn the *Aeneid* in the event of his death upon a trip, planned to last three years, to Greece and Asia, during which he hoped to complete and polish the work. Augustus denied this request and instead had it edited and published, though nothing was added to it. The publication of the *Aeneid* ensured Vergil's fame as a poet and classicist.

Representative Works

Aeneid

The *Aeneid* has not only greatly influenced every resurgence of Classicism but has likely changed the course of all of western literature. Its effect on modern writings is so profound that its extent and nature is likely unknowable.

The *Aeneid* recalls the travels of Aeneas, the Trojan Prince, after the fall of his city as a direct result of the Trojan War. Aeneas's journey takes him to Italy at the end of the fifth book. In book, six it is prophesied by Aeneas's dead father that his descendants will be responsible for Rome's future greatness as an empire.

The *Aeneid* has been called a work that is inherently Roman because of its sense of Augustan patriotism and imperialism. Structurally, Vergil also created his epic in the true mode of a classicist. His epic, apart from its Augustan flavor, is the product of Homeric epic poetry and other ancient practices and beliefs. The work also engages in a celebration of the Golden Age and a tribute to many important political figures of the day.

Vergil's *Aeneid* is equally recognized for its narrative form. In creating a shifting narrative from the objective to the subjective, Vergil is said to have refined narrative conventions. Scholars see this shifting of perspective as an important development in the work because it fosters a sense of psychological realism while providing for contextual depth and breadth to the work. In other words, it allows readers to have a greater understanding of the events of the work, due to the insights presented by various characters or voices. Vergil also refined the dactylic hexameter, a traditionally Greek meter, in his work.

Andromaque

The play *Andromaque* is Jean Racine's first major work, appearing in Paris in 1667. The play served as direct competition to Pierre Corneille's play *El Cid*. Racine believed that Corneille was intent on ruining Racine's reputation as a dramatist. The work draws on classical characters and themes for its substance: Rome, war, heroes, and fallen empires. The play, much like Racine's other works, would help to shape some of the dramatic literary conventions of the Neoclassical period.

The play takes place shortly after the fall of Troy. It centers on the fate of Andromaque, the widow of Hector, whom Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles (a major figure in the Trojan war), is holding captive. The Greeks send Oreste, the son of Agamemnon (the king who led the expedition against Troy), along with a communication requesting that both Andromaque and her son be returned to them lest Troy should rise once again. The entire plot is complicated by deep love interests.

The world of *Andromaque* is one dominated by passions. The ancients frowned on intense emotion, preferring the dominance of reason over passion, and to that end, the play is didactic, or instructional. An overindulgence in passion can only lead to tragic results for the characters. Pyrrhus is seemingly consumed by the passion he feels for Andromaque, stopping at nothing short of blackmail to win her love. Orestes believes, meanwhile, that his heroic efforts may win over the heart of Hermione, who is already committed to the brooding Pyrrhus. It is passion that leads to the death of Pyrrhus and then to Hermione's suicide. All of the characters in the play, on some level, allow their passions to spiral out of control, and the results are fatal.

Faust

Goethe's classic *Faust* was actually published in two parts. In 1790, Goethe published the incomplete *Faust: Ein Fragment*, which he later revised and published again in 1808 as *Faust: Eine Tragödie*. *Faust: Eine Tragödie* became known as *Faust I* when *Faust II* was published posthumously in 1832. The writing of the work nearly spanned Goethe's lifetime, beginning it in 1773. The parts distinctly document his energetic outlook as a young writer (Part I) and the seasoned views of a more mature mind (Part II).

Goethe's work is modeled after a traditional German tale, warning of the dangers inherent in making a pact with the devil. In the original version, Faustus makes a pact with the devil in order to gain magical powers. He uses them to resurrect Helen of Troy, who lives with him for several years. Faustus is discovered and eventually dragged down into hell, screaming for mercy, by one of God's agents. The moral of this Christian tale is simply that one should not attempt to conspire or make secret agreements with the devil without expecting to lose one's soul.

In Goethe's version, the basic story of Faust is the same, with several additions to the original story line. Unlike in the traditional story, Faust's desire for knowledge, the very thing that compels him to make a pact with the devil, ultimately becomes his way to realize redemption.

The story of Faust, as retold by Goethe, has been called a secular tragedy that meets Aristotelian standards□the purging of fear and pity. Goethe incorporates various other classical elements to inform the text□traditional mythology, mysticism, as well as religious imagery□in order to create a sophisticated allegory of the cultural and political European life of the time.

Iliad

The *Iliad* is known as one of the greatest war epics in the history of Western literature. This masterpiece was even read and discussed by important historical figures such as Alexander the Great, who, as a schoolboy, was said to have memorized all of the passages that refer to his hero, Achilles. Its emphasis on humanistic values, those of honor, truth, compassion, loyalty, and devotion to both family and gods, has earned the work the critical reputation as being a guidebook to moralistic behavior.

The *Iliad* is the story of Achilles' anger and its effects, as expressed in the poet's invocation to the Muse of Poetry at the epic's opening. In Greek classical works, epic poets often invoke the help of the gods to assist them in their objectives. Structurally, the epic is divided into twenty-four books, accounting for the final months of the Trojan War, which lasted approximately ten years. Throughout the poem, references are made to specific past events that would have been familiar to a Greek audience.

The work is the unchallenged model for the Classic epic. It established the genre as one incorporating superhuman heroes whose achievements were accomplished for the benefit of society. Achilles, the work's protagonist, is in fact the product of a union between Thetis, a goddess, and Peleus, a mortal. Homer's poem is written in dactylic hexameter. (A line of dactylic hexameter is seventeen syllables long, which are grouped into five sets of three and an ending set of two with the accents always falling at the beginning of each set.) The *Iliad* begins at the crucial point of the Trojan conflict, utilizing the classical convention "in medias res" in which a work opens in the thick of the plot, often near the climax, and then later recounts the events leading up to it.

The *Iliad*, in addition to being the Classic, epic model, is looked to as a valuable record of the late Bronze Age, as it depicts tribal organization, burial customs, class distinctions, and warfare. Though it has some value as a historical document of ancient events, often other sources of information are looked to; however, this does not seem to tarnish its literary merit in the eyes of scholars.

Medea

The tragic play *Medea* (431 B.C.) was one of Euripides' greatest works. Written in the time of ancient Greece, the piece, in some respects, is less conventional than comparable Greek tragedies of the day, particularly in its female protagonist, Medea. Essentially the play centers on the passions of Medea, who kills her children in an effort to punish her husband for his infidelities. In addition to being criticized for his choice of a heroine, Euripedes was accused of being a misogynist, due in part to his violent portrayals of female characters, an issue still discussed by scholars today.

Euripides drew on Greek themes for the composition of his work, i.e., passion versus Socratic ideals, such as the belief that knowledge of what is good leads to virtue. However, his depiction of the triumph of passion over reason in *Medea* were not as well received as those depicting the inverse.

Euripides did not fly in the face of convention entirely, as noted by some critics. The playwright, though innovative in some ways, still resorted to the traditional unrhymed verse and inflexible meter characteristic of the Greek form. In terms of dialogue, however, the play does again stray from Greek tradition. Euripides had a preference for using common, everyday language in favor of the lofty diction so common to Greek plays, whose dialogue was dictated by noble heroes and heroines. *Medea*, like other works by Euripides, exposed its playwright as an innovator. His breaks with Greek tradition served to inspire modern dramatists.

Critical Overview

Scholars overwhelmingly acknowledge the debt the Western canon owes to the ancient Greeks and Romans, for their contributions not only to Western literature but to Western culture. The works of the classical writers were often admired for their restraint, restricted scope, sense of form, unity of design and aim, clarity, simplicity, and balance. They have been described as being models of conservatism and good sense, as demonstrated by the economy of their prose. Classical roots are evident throughout the history of Western literary thought, from the strict imitation of the Romans to the obscure, fragmented, and somewhat fuzzy poetry of the Symbolists.

But not all were champions of the classical convention. Trevor Ross has formulated his own conclusions in his discussion of the anticlassical revolution and its effect on poetry in his work entitled "Pure Poetry: Cultural Capital and the Rejection of Classicism." Ross begins his essay making much of the words of Romantic poet Joseph Wharton. Wharton was in favor of ridding poetry of its classical conventions altogether. He was more interested, instead, in promoting a "poetry of feeling." Wharton (as recalled by Ross) said of poets and the classical tradition, "We do not, it should seem, sufficiently attend to the difference there is betwixt a man of wit, a man of sense, and a true poet." Wharton was quick to point out that as men of wit and of sense, poets like Donne and Swift produce no "pure poetry."

Still other criticism surfaced as to the constraining or limiting nature of classical convention. Wharton is also identified for having similar sentiments, as quoted yet again by Ross. Said Wharton, perhaps as the "voice" of the Romanticists, classic form "lays genius under restraint, and denies it that free scope, that full elbow room, which is requisite for striking its most masterly strokes."

Finally, Ross himself has commented on what perhaps would be called the "true motives" of some of the classical poets. Although their aims were artistic, in their imitation of form and translation of works resided what has been called a rather "vigorously productive" form. Such literature, Ross points out, could be produced relatively quickly while at the same time, it could be modified to attract a wealthy patronage. Ross adds that the neoclassical poets were "less anxious to define their autonomy from economic interests than not to compromise their moral and ideological integrity as national poets."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Kryhoski is currently employed as a freelance writer. In this essay, Kryhoski considers the influence of classic conventions and thought on the work of the symbolist poets.

Although most expressive in its Greek and Roman origins and perhaps its manifestations during the French, German, and English revivals, Classicism has still managed to wind its way forward, leaving behind it a trail of "new classics." The works of the symbolist poets in some ways rely on a classical tradition to provide powerful imagery and symbolism in order to evoke a response in the reader, juxtaposing them with more contemporary images. Gilbert Highet, in "The Classical Tradition," has also given great consideration to the factors that define a classic in order to find some common ground with Classicism. Is the work of T. S. Eliot, among others, classical?

Many examples can be found in the body of symbolist poetry to suggest its reliance on classical conventions. Symbolist poets were interested in the representation of single events and individual persons; they applied Greek values in their realization of such representations. They believed that subjects were not necessarily considered art unless representative of eternal ideals. Although Plato stressed this belief in his own way, his emphasis was the same. Both the philosopher and the symbolist poets held that the key to understanding what was identifiably art were eternal ideals, the disseminators and interpreters of truth. It has been said that the symbolists were not conscious Platonists, despite already adopting symbols from Greek conventions.

Symbolist poets left much to the imagination. Highet is quick to point out that this preference was antithetical to Greek convention. He points out that the Greeks tended to state the essentials, allowing the hearer to supply the details. The symbolist poets, however, did not state essentials but instead described, in vivid detail, related images, the idea being that the central thought is made evident by the existence of such details. To a great degree, then, the matter of interpretation was left strictly to the reader. An Impressionist painting serves as a good example of the genre at work. Standing at an arm's length from Claude Monet's "Water Lilies," all that is perceptible to the viewer is a muddied collection of paint splotches randomly placed on a canvas. But as the viewer moves away from the canvas, the meaningless sea of paint starts to take form, to become ordered, until the viewer is able to see the beautiful image of lilies on a pond.

The works of the Classicists also employed very clear transitions, while In symbolist poetry, transitions between impressions have been characterized as being bewildering, confusing, and dreamy. Such transitions seem to be the product of a primitive impulse rather a logical sequence. The symbolists avoided symmetry, continuity, smoothness, harmony, and logic in favor of abrupt, unpredictable, random transitions. Essentially, such patterns roughly resemble a rambling conversation or monologue rather than a progression of wellbalanced ideas. The symbolist form naturally does not lend itself to the kind of creative discipline required of the classical form.

Yet the employment of the Greek myth in the creation of symbolist imagery is of great importance to the integrity of the overall work. The contrast that results from the inclusion of these images from the ancient past is powerful because, by their nature, they are often quite foreign to what has been referred to as a more vulgar, violent, short-lived present. Again, there is a connection to the Platonist idea that symbolic figures become the source of immortal stories. The symbolists were intent on taking a complex personal emotion or state of being and immortalizing it symbolically, thus making it art.

T. S. Eliot uses Greek legend to expose what he sees as a modern life devoid of meaning. His introduction of mythic symbols does not serve to boost the present, i.e., by reflecting a glorious past in an even more glorious present. Instead, he tends to use classical allusions to expose horrible truths about contemporary society. Highet adds that Eliot uses such allusions to "accentuate the sordidness of today with that of the past." Eliot actively sought out weaknesses and exposed them. In one of Eliot's very first poems, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, the poet uses a lyrical, dramatic monologue infused with classical allusions to describe Prufrock, a character plagued by self-doubt. The first classical reference in the work is to Dante's *Inferno*, Canto 27, appearing as an epigraph. It is translated as follows:

If I thought that I was speaking
to someone who would go back to the world,
the flame would shake no more.
But since nobody has ever
gone back alive from this place, if what I hear is true,
I answer you without fear of infamy.

The quotation sets up the premise or theme of the work. Eliot seems to be stating that existence is a hell and there is no possibility of escaping from it. The poem also elaborates on such sentiments. The work is not simply commenting on the struggles of a man whose insecurities have gotten the best of him and have prevented him from approaching the woman of his dreams. Prufrock is full of self-doubt, assuredly, to this aim, but his doubts run much deeper. He also expresses doubts about society , the world, and even his ability to claim a meaningful existence. To this end, he uses, among others, Christian references from the classical period. At one point in the poem, Prufrock pauses to reflect not only upon what he cannot accomplish but upon what the end result of a union with a woman would mean. He envisions his own demise in the reference "Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter . . . ." The quotation is an allusion to the beheading of John the Baptist by order of King Herod. In this biblical story, the king has the head of the Baptist brought to queen Herodias in an effort to please her. Prufrock is likening himself to John the Baptist, whose fate is dictated by the whims of a woman.

The work is also full of haunting images of the industrial landscape. As Prufrock describes "yellow smoke that slides along the street," there is an allusion made to the classical poem "Works and Days" by Hesiod, an eighth century B.C. Greek poet: "And time for all the works and days of hands." The poem, which celebrates farm work, perhaps functions as a sigh would, a momentary memory of a more favorable past

before returning to the advent of the industrial age. These themes are not new to classical works, particularly the doubts Prufrock expresses about society and the world. The work of Goethe, particularly his *Faust*, also comments on a lack of meaning apparent in contemporary German political and social life. Alexander Pope, in *The Rape of the Lock*, used the tragedy of a woman "victimized" by her boyfriend to also expose a more superficial and trivial English society.

Eliot's *The Waste Land*, perhaps his most important work, has been said to also capture the hypocrisy, disillusionment, skepticism and excess of modern life. In this work, Eliot incorporates the rituals of various ancient fertility cults, both Christian and pagan, but heavily relies on those of the Greeks (Adonis, Osiris, or Attis) to capture man's desire for salvation. The end result of such juxtaposition of ancient with modern is an exposure of a contemporary life devoid of spirituality. Highet also refers to *The Waste Land*'s theme as that of "death by water." He states that the work "is an evocation of the many epitaphs on drowned sailors in the Greek Anthology."

While it is certainly true that the symbolists were amateurs, not scholars, of ancient literature, the symbols they borrowed from the tradition have served to fortify their works, giving them not only a basis for meaning but for overall interpretation. They held a firm belief that the problems of life must be examined through a noble lens, i.e., in comparison to a more noble past, in an effort to express the malaise or social sickness prevalent in contemporary society. Does this make the symbolists classicists? Consider Euripides, who, though definitely a classicist, did not adhere to the forms and conventions of his times, and who intentionally bucked Greek tradition in favor of his own more modern views. In the same spirit, T. S. Eliot may be characterized as a "classicist in literature" if we move beyond traditional definitions.

Source: Laura Kryhoski, Critical Essay on Classicism, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Hytier explores how writers of the eighteenth century established the criteria for labeling seventeenth-century writers "classical."

We no longer know where we stand with regard to classicism. There was a time when everyone was more or less in agreement as to what was required for a French writer to deserve being called classical. But that time didn't last very long; in fact, I doubt that it went much beyond the end of the eighteenth century and the first third of the nineteenth. Voltaire, it would seem, used the expression "classical authors" only for the great writers of Greco-Latin antiquity, and he contrasted them with modern writers: "A man who has read nothing but classical authors scorns everything that is written in modern languages" (*Essai sur la poésie épique*). Yet Voltaire played a decisive role in singling out those writers of the seventeenth century who were worthy of being remembered. Raymond Naves, who rightly understood that classicism is essentially the expression of a particular taste, says that "the chief characteristic of criticism in the eighteenth century was to have recognized and sanctified the classicism of the previous period," and he points out the moment when that recognition began: "it was not until after 1735 that a real distinction was made between first-rate and mediocre writers, and Voltaire's *Temple du goût* played a crucial role in that development." Further, he tells us exactly when that classical taste began to change, its "weakening . . . confirmed in Marmontel by his contempt for Boileau" (*Le Goût de Voltaire*). Generally Voltaire did not use the word *classical* for the writers he speaks about in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. He may have used it by chance in the manner of the *Encyclopédie*, in which a supplement to the article "Classique" proposed "calling the good writers of Louis XIV's century, and of our own, *classical French writers*," or he may have done so to be accommodating. But at the bottom of his heart he was very reluctant to so exalt them. Two years before his death he wrote to the Comte de Touraille: "Today we have no Racines, no Molières, no La Fontaines, no Boileaus, and actually I doubt that we shall ever have any; but I prefer an enlightened century to an ignorant one that has produced seven or eight geniuses." He thus agreed with d'Alembert, who, shortly before, had written to Frederick II: "Our century—and again I concur with Your Majesty—does not equal the century of Louis XIV in genius and taste; but I feel that it surpasses it in its enlightenment" (February 14, 1744). Surely it would be worthwhile to find out how the custom of calling a few of the great seventeenth-century writers "classical" came to be established. There was a general agreement among minds, and the label was ready, but it had still to be applied.

Contrary to what one might believe, the schools were slow to take it up for one very simple reason, which Louis Trénard brings out in a recent study. Under Louis XVI, he tells us, "the secondary schools, even the small ones, introduced—side by side with the culture of antiquity, which remained fundamental—lessons in French and *commentaries on seventeenth-century texts*" ("L'Enseignement secondaire sous la monarchie de juillet: Les Réformes de Salvandy," *La Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, April-June 1965). Now as soon as first-rate writers—who, although belonging to the previous century, could be compared in quality to the masters of Greco-Latin antiquity—

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were studied in class, the word *classical* was bound to take on two or three meanings. The time had gone when Saint-Marc, Boileau's editor, could consider "the works of this renowned writer as being, so to speak, the only classical book we have in our language. This book should be used at every level of education." That was in 1747. Early in the next century, in 1801, Marie-Joseph Chénier, in his *Observations sur le projet d'un nouveau dictionnaire de la langue française et sur le Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, alluded not only to the seventeenthcentury writers but to those of the eighteenth, "all those great writers, all those celebrated classical authors, who were responsible for the glory of the Académie because they brought to it their own," and he proposed that the Institut make up a new dictionary, in which the definitions would be accompanied by examples "skillfully chosen from classical writers, from Malherbe to Voltaire, from Pascal to Buffon."

Marie-Joseph Chénier is a valuable witness for the use of the word that concerns us here. He sometimes gives his opinion about editions of celebrated authors. Thus, in 1801, he stated: "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as a writer, certainly ranks among the leading classical authors of France"; in 1809: "the honor of being constantly reprinted falls to the great classical authors; in fact, that is the proof of their renown. . . Writers who are admired without being read are not admired for long; but Corneille and Bossuet, Racine and Pascal, La Fontaine and Fénélon, Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, are read again and again with delight." And he complimented Daunou on his edition of Boileau: "That is the tone in which all French classical authors should be annotated." But Marie-Joseph Chénier lived long enough (he died on January 10, 1811) to notice, and even to magnify, the threatening changes in the taste of writers and of the public. In his *Tableau historique de l'état et des progrès de la littérature française depuis 1789*, he was to write, apropos of *Atala:* "M. de Chateaubriand is pursuing the extraordinary poetics he developed in his *Génie du Christianisme*. Some day, no doubt, we shall be able to judge his construction and his style on the basis of this new poetics, which is bound to be adopted in France as soon as we agree to forget completely the classical language and works."

But no, nothing of the sort happened. Neither the one nor the other was forsaken. And Chénier could hardly have imagined□or he would have cheered, not feared□that the day would come when the first flocks of romantics would be accused of timidity! Classical taste was to persist, and most probably it is, by its very nature, indestructible. But had he lived some fifteen years more□say, until 1824□how amazed Marie-Joseph would have been to see the Académie, in the sixth edition of its *Dictionnaire*, make note of this new meaning of the word *romantic*: "Also applied to certain writers who claim to have broken away from the rules of construction and style laid down by the example of classical authors." He would surely have been satisfied by this definition and by Auger's famous speech at the yearly public session of the Institut on April 14, 1824. But what would he have made of Stendhal's statement to the effect that living classicism, the classicism of Racine at the very time he was writing, should be called romantic? (His comments are not without some inconsistency in detail, for Delille also, in his time, was precisely the romantic who suited the contemporaries of the victors at Fontenoy: "You shoot first, Messieurs les Anglais!") Stendhal's bold assimilation of the terms was to lead to two very different formulas, both of which were destined for great success: Emile

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Deschanel's "the romanticism of the classics," and André Gide's interpretation of classicism as "subdued romanticism."

As soon as an absolute contrast no longer existed between the two notions, one could expect there to be disagreement over the particular characteristics of each. The young Ernest Renan gave a remarkable account of the two ideals. In the fourth of his *Cahiers de jeunesse* (1846), he noted:

> The impression one gets in reading the great romantic works (M. Lamartine) is painful: it is not that of a finite whole, as with Racine, for example. You feel that the entire subject has been exhausted, that the thought has been enclosed within its own circle: here, on the contrary, there is an emptiness, a hollow, for the enclosure is infinite. We are not full; we would like more, we are hungry, and with the classics we are not hungry. Everything is satisfied. That is because the classics are finite and the romantics are infinite. And the infinite is more. I prefer the infinite feeling of romanticism to the restricted and calm feeling of the other. One is a hyperbola, the other a circle.

This very curious contrast between two types of art, in which the heart inclines more toward the less perfect because it is the more beautiful, offers a clear parallel to the contrast that Renan was later to set up between the Greek temple and the Gothic church. But quite obviously this very subtle distinction itself has a romantic tinge, and the images of the open and the closed, which express it so well, foreshadow both Bergson and Wölflin. Stendhal's position was far simpler, but in contrasting every contemporary epoch with its immediate past, as if to compare a son to his father and his grandfather, he was unknowingly leading up to a new opposition that would contrast this romanticism with a more profound one, which, for want of a better label, would come to be called modern, and which Denis Saurat was to set great store by around 1930. Good old Nodier, writing about "the romantic genre" the same year that Stendhal was defining "romanticism" (1823), considered that "romanticism might be nothing other than the classicism of the moderns"□setting up a balance with Stendhal, for whom classicism could well have been no more than the romanticism of earlier writers.

The idea that to be a classical author, one had first to be a romantic, was a springboard for Emile Deschanel: "Our classical authors thus began by being literary revolutionaries, who went against the established rules and provoked some fiery battles" (Opening Lecture, April 27, 1881). This simply means that every great writer contributes something, and that he is, as Deschanel says, even when speaking of a Roman writer like Horace, an "innovator." Finally, Deschanel brought out the romanticism of the classical authors by the more or less justified resemblances he found between them and the writers of 1830. To establish the theory that there is a *classicism of the romantics*, in 1932 Pierre Moreau□with far sounder methods and a sharper sense of the

nature of the problem□had only to find, among the writers of 1830, the traditional characteristics of the writers of 1660. Moreau's superiority over Deschanel is due not only to his more extensive and more discriminating erudition but to his firm hold on the basic distinction between the two types of spirit□the one tempered, enamored of unity and universality; the other, on the contrary, extreme, particular, going so far in its own direction that it reaches a paroxysm.

Once other general ideas, even vaguer than the former, were brought into the picture, the confusion could only become more glorious. Brunetière, in studying what he called "the naturalism of the seventeenth century" (his 1883 lecture), had begun to cause a certain bewilderment. Lanson was also to speak of "classical naturalism" (*Histoire*, Bk. IV). Pellissier, on the contrary, spoke of the "realism of the romantics" (1912). Faguet, with his taste for conciliation, said, apropos of La Fontaine, that a realistic romantic is no less than a classical writer. Opposites proliferate of themselves□and idealism was bound to rush in. References to it can be found everywhere, but take a reliable historian of the classical doctrine, René Bray: for him "all of classical art is pure idealism"□such a vast concept that historians of philosophy finally lost their bearings, and one that could well embrace a good half of all the writers. The idealist novel has been contrasted with the realistic novel. Thus Conrad would be seen as classical, and probably not without justification: "I have been called a descriptive writer, a romantic, and also a realist . . . whatever dramatic and narrative gifts I may possess are always and instinctively used with an eye to achieving and bringing to light *ideal values*" (written apropos of *The Shadow Line*, in 1917, to Sir Sidney Calvin, Stevenson's biographer). All the adjectives may be applied to a single writer: Flaubert, for example, is romantic, classical, realistic, idealistic, etc. It is not a bit surprising that so many books and articles ask the question: What is a classical writer?

The best means of avoiding all the *isms* is to bring them down to one alone. An excellent principle would be to define them all in relation to classicism, making classicism the norm. Meanwhile, it has been suggested that the unavoidable opposition between romanticism and classicism be reduced to a simple variation of the first term. Thus a classical writer would be no more than a conditioned romantic □whence the success of Gide's formula "subdued romanticism." Although it has been made into a definition of classicism, this was not at all Gide's intention; for he was seeking a half-moral, half-aesthetic definition: "the art of expressing the most while saying the least"; "an art of reserve and modesty," rather well described by the figure of speech *litotes*. In that way Gide contrasted the classical writer, who is "more deeply moved than he wants to appear," with the romantic, for whom the important thing is not to be, "but to appear, deeply moved." For Gide, *subdued romanticism* is both the evangelical and triumphant sacrifice of individualism; it is the refusal of artistic self-infatuation; it is a renunciation of *mannerism* in order to arrive at the simplest and greatest sense of humanity. If "the work is strong and beautiful only by reason of its subdued romanticism," it is because "the work is even more beautiful when the element overcome was initially more rebellious." And if, in Gide's eyes, classicism is an almost exclusively French phenomenon, that is because in France, he says, "intelligence always tends to prevail over feeling and instinct." Repression is therefore indeed a condition of classicism□or more precisely, domination, discipline, mastery□but the essence of classicism lies in a balance of the

most contrary qualities: "strength and gentleness, decorum and grace, logic and unconstraint, precision and poetry," all held in a perfectly natural equilibrium. Such is Gide's position, remarkably classical in itself and of supremely discriminating taste.

Gide's formula "subdued romanticism" dates from 1921. It is interesting to see how it fared through the years, as it was picked up again, adapted, and distorted. In 1924 Valéry was to say that "all classicism presupposes a previous romanticism [*romantisme antérieur*]" (Gide would have said *intérieur*); "the essence of classicism is to come afterward. Order presupposes a certain disorder which it has reduced" (that is indeed subdued romanticism); "a classical writer is one who bears a critic within himself, whom he closely associates with all his work." (And Gide: "How very reasonable all these works are! What balance! What moderation!") Valéry took a wry pleasure in stating that once a romantic has learned his trade, he becomes a Parnassian! Though somewhat limited, the comment is not absurd, and one might likewise see Flaubert as a sifted Balzac.

The idea of classicism following romanticism was to become a cliché in criticism, and a rather paradoxical one when we realize that historically it was the other way round. But a historian's resources are infinite, and one would have merely to go back to the legend of a Louis XIII romanticism for the rest to fall into place. For those who prefer the usual order, the Renaissance provides a first and most honorable example of classicism. The same manner of contrasting legacies was to be picked up by theorists of the baroque: in accordance with orthodox principles, the baroque should follow classicism; but in France, according to the learned scholars, it could come either before or after, unless, in trying to be everywhere at once, it reduces classicism to being sandwiched any which way into a continuous baroque. In 1929 Ramon Fernandez considered living classicism "the last phase of romantic development, not its negation, but rather the reshaping and crowning of it"a concept straight out of the composite Gide-Valéry, which was to be picked up by the exegetes of baroquism. Fernandez stressed the two factors involved in the process: "romanticism is a problem of supplies, classicism a problem of control." Leo Spitzer (whose 1928 essay on the style of Racine did not become known, more or less indirectly, until far later) had just replaced Gide's litotes by *die klassische Dämpfung*, at a time when Souday was speaking openly about mutes and pedals with regard to Racine's lines; and in 1948 Spitzer was to praise, in the same sense as Souday, "a continuous repression of the emotional by the intellectual," in the author of *Phèdre*.

With the translation into French of Eugenio d'Ors' book (1935), the debate began dealing rather with the relations of the baroque and classicism, but if we follow it through, we would realize that there has been no end to the use of Gide's formula. Quite recently Jacques Duron combined the Gide- Valéry theme with his baroque variation on it and an interpretation à la Saurat:

Romanticism is classicism given free rein, a delayed
classicism . . . Moderation is nothing without a previous
élan, without something passionate or excessive
to subjugate . . . Classicism is most certainly

subdued exuberance, freedom yielding to the law,
the temptation of the baroque overcome . . . Baudelaire
. . . altogether classical in form, is at bottom
baroque, indeed infernally baroque—and, by the
same token, *modern*.

Who was the first to adapt Gide's "subdued romanticism" to the baroque? In any case, "subdued baroque" became a new key phrase. Henri Peyre refers to it at the end of the chapter he has added to his book on French classicism. Jean Rousset touches on it in his *Littérature de l'âge baroque:* "the baroque is left behind and overcome" in the early plays of Racine; and it is "present but subdued" in the last works of Le Vau. Marcel Raymond, in *Baroque et Renaissance poétique*, notes that by 1670 "the baroque had been clearly left behind and overcome." Mixing together the traces of Gide and Valéry with the tradition of the theorists of the baroque, he eloquently wrote:

That type of classicism, which aims at integrating the
poet's powers and at intellectually mastering the elements
that go into the work, seems to demand, as a
requisite condition, the previous presence of an effervescent
nature, of a conflict that must be overcome,
of a tension beyond which beauty may finally
blossom forth.

Elsewhere he calls to mind

. . . a kind of *Sturm und Drang*, an early enthusiasm,
previous to any establishing of ideas or feelings . . .
What happens is that this underlying dynamism is
subjected to moderation. A process of breaking, of
filtering, a concentration of human powers, a growing
mastery of the mind, an increasing number of
constraints [how Valerian!] opposed to psychic diffusion
may progressively impose a classical style on
a creation that seemed defiant [Gidian rebellion].

It would be hard to state it, or restate it, any better. René Huyghe, praising Delacroix's universality on the occasion of the centenary of his death, acclaimed "the classical order he brought to the baroque élan"; Delacroix may have "seemed to be torn between two tendencies—his romantic soul and his classical mind . . . But, in fact, he was not at all: reason, which he believed had to be at the heart of all things, even excess, had suggested a balance to him." His works are a crossroads "where baroque fire and classical mastery come together." And then we have Francis Ponge, who was only too pleased to find just the "admirable formula" he needed for his Malherbe, in a letter from his friend Henri Maldiney: "Classicism is merely the tautest string of the baroque."

Now that we have traced the lineage of Gide's formula, how nice it would be to have the time to seek out its ancestry. But two of its forefathers will have to suffice. Emile

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Montégut, writing in *La Revue des Deux Mondes* of February 15, 1858, apropos of Emile Augier's *La Ciguë*, ventured the opinion that "it is flamboyant classicism, chastened and better-behaved romanticism." Dr. Véron, in his *Mémoires*, recalled the painter Gros' comment about Delacroix's first paintings: "Chastened Rubens," and he said that all romantic painting could adopt that phrase.

To complicate the situation of criticism still more, we must not forget that one man's baroque is not necesarily another's. And trying to pin down romanticism was not always all that easy either. "In 1820," if we are to believe Saintine, "the classical writers were represented by MM. Etienne, Jouy, and Arnault, and the romantics by MM. Soumet, Guiraud, and Lebrun. In 1830 the classical writers were MM. Lebrun, Guiraud, and Soumet." The relativity of the baroque was well brought out by Jean Rousset: A painting by Le Brun seems classical when compared to a Rubens or a Delacroix, but baroque when compared to a Raphael. And we must remember the fluctuating roles played by preciosity, burlesque, mannerism, and the rococo. According to Fidao-Justiniani, preciosity is, by its very nature, compatible with classicism (O Boileau! O Molière!). But then for Baumal and others Molière himself was *précieux*, while for Grubb and Brunello he was baroque. Pascal was considered baroque by Sister Mary Julie Maggioni in 1950, as he had been, along with La Bruyère, by Morris Croll back in 1929. Corneille, Rotrou, and Racine are sometimes altogether□sometimes only partly□baroque, or less they are baroque and classical, either simultaneously or successively, and why not alternatively. And I almost overlooked Bossuet. The baroque never stops spreading. It moves backward to d'Aubigné with Raymond, for whom he "exemplifies the concept of a baroque stylistics," and to Montaigne with Buffum, but its tentacles reach forward to poor Perrault and his fairy tales, and Pierre Mesnard proves unerringly that the true philosopher of the baroque must necessarily come rather late, having submitted that he will be characterized by "a certain tension which is active within, and profusely manifested outside, a too precisely defined given element." Mesnard has no trouble discovering his profuse philosopher in Leibnitz, who is "both the philosopher and the liquidator of baroque civilization, and indeed the one who announced the Enlightenment." And Helmut Hatzfeld will be remembered for having said, in 1959, that "from an international point of view, French classicism should be called baroque," thus remaining faithful to his old war-cry of 1935: "Klassik als barock."

But here one begins to get weary of it all. Abbé Bremond started by sighing: "There are as many romanticisms as there are romantics." As for the classical writers, I read somewhere that each one has his own form of classicism. Marcel Raymond ended by thinking that "once the idea of the baroque is assimilated, the term itself . . . seems less useful□especially when one looks more closely at individual works." What exactly does that imply? That definitions wouldn't fit any more? That criteria would no longer be applicable? Jean Boorsch has noticed "a waning of interest in theoretical definitions of the baroque," mentioning their "abundance" and suggesting that the situation is "perfectly natural," although disturbing, given all the confusion it will create. "What becomes of French classicism in all this?" wonders Boorsch, and what becomes of its precise relations to this baroque that is on its way to becoming a dead letter? Even the most observant historian of the French literary baroque, Jean Rousset, has shown signs of annoyance at the impossibility of imposing on the specialists a coherent terminology.

In 1963 he told them that their sin was to have picked up the order devised by Gide and Valéry (whom, as a matter of fact, he doesn't name) without modifying it in any real way□in other words, to have understood literally nothing of the baroque spirit. Actually, it is both instructive and amusing to note how Rousset himself sees that spirit as a disciplined phenomenon, with an order and a beauty of its own, an original taste, and a personal style□in short, as another kind of classicism:

A "baroque" too often defined as irregular, excessive, grandiloquent, overloaded, and disordered, followed by a sudden turnabout or a "classical" transcendence, which many continue to see as a purification, a repentance, a conversion toward something better□in short, a victory of order over disorder! This successive and covertly progressive pattern would only seem to be different from its predecessor . . . it remains successive because of an inadequate definition of the Baroque, considered as a form of disorder. There is a baroque order and a baroque taste. And so long as we refuse to accept that, we shan't change anything . . . On the other hand, if we are willing to recognize in the Baroque an order and a style complementary to the "classical" order and style, we may then conceive of a complex and simultaneous development, a mixture of parallel or intertwining tendencies, now antagonistic, now fused, throughout the century.

Even more recently, in 1965, Rousset came to believe that "the systematic opposition of the baroque and the classical is perhaps a dogma that should be revised, as should the successive pattern according to which classicism, in France, would always follow the baroque."

We know that Henri Peyre has just come to the conclusion that "the idea of the baroque has but little to contribute to our understanding of French classicism," and he remarked that "the examples cited by Jean Rousset are very rarely taken from writers whom today we would consider great"; for example, "the few baroque characteristics of Corneille are . . . a really small part of a huge and essentially classical body of work."

To define classicism, it is perhaps not absolutely necessary to know what the baroque is, any more than we would need to know what existentialism is, or mannerism, symbolism, naturalism, realism, or romanticism. It might perhaps be wise to go back to the time when the expression *classical writer* was not yet all muddled up by new doctrines. A look at historical and critical writings reveals that there was an underlying disagreement as to its characteristics. Now up until the time when the phrase *French classical writers* became explicit and was commonly used, those who gradually made a name for the great writers of the seventeenth century, whether their contemporaries or their successors, were concerned not with determining trends, establishing a literary

doctrine or a general philosophy, bringing out elements of civilization, contrasting religious or moral behavior patterns, or weighing the influence of economic and political factors, etc., but with appreciating the works themselves, understanding their value, admiring their craftsmanship—in short, with discovering not their physiognomy but their exemplary qualities. From that perspective, now that we are rid of all the pedantry, I think everyone just about agrees that those works which have certain undeniable merits are classical works.

Elsewhere I have said what these merits are. What remains to be shown is, on the one hand, that those of today's critics who continue to consider the classical works as classical works are—however divergent the formulas they use to express their points of view—in substantial agreement as to what constitutes the classical value of those works; and, on the other hand, that this value—however the terminology may differ from ours—has always been explicitly granted to the masterworks of a dozen French writers of the seventeenth century, from Malherbe to La Bruyère, by the few great writers who spoke of them, from Racine to Chateaubriand, and by numerous well-informed admirers as well as the influential critics who appreciated them, say from Godeau to La Harpe. But since quoting the observations of a mere fifty of them as supporting evidence would exceed the limits of this article, it will have to await another occasion.

Translated by June Guicharnaud

Source: Jean Hytier, "The Classicism of the Classics," translated by June Guicharnaud, in *Yale French Studies*, No. 38, May 1967, pp. 5-17.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Doubrovsky examines why a new generation of literary critics is drawn to seventeenth-century classical writing when their ideologies appear to be in contrast.

Classicism as everyone knows is typically French; yet, while being typically French, it is at the same time, and by definition, universal. Its universality is due to the twin cardinal virtues of order and clarity. Order, whether for literary historians like Nisard and Doumic, or for theorists like Maurras and Valéry, means the salutary enforcement of an authoritarian government on the body politic and the imposition of a strict set of rules and precepts on literature. Clarity is that unique pellucid quality of the French language once the impurity of concrete reference and the dross of emotional and imaginative outbursts have been removed. Sully, in a well-known statement in his *Economies royales*, said that "ploughing and pasturing are the two udders that feed France"; in much the same way, order and clarity are the two founts of classicism and from them every thoroughbred Frenchman must drink. The result has been that traditional criticism of French literature of the seventeenth century has long been dominated by preconceptions and prejudices which, along with the cult of Joan of Arc and the veneration of Napoleon, have been elevated across the years to the status of national myth.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the defense of so-called "classical virtues" in the cultural field and the advocacy of reactionary views in politics have often gone hand in hand on the French scene. Of course, modern scholarship has done away with such misguiding simplifications. The real complexity and diversity of human attitudes in the areas of esthetic, morals and politics—even at the heart of the classical period—have been well established by critics like Daniel Mornet and Paul Bénichou; Henri Peyre has shown how subtle and flexible any genuine definition of classicism must be if it is to remain true to the facts. In this brief study, however, I am less concerned with a survey of positive achievements in the field of accurate literary history than with a peculiar and rather recent phenomenon: where, in the past, liberal thinkers were mostly content with ignoring the seventeenth century or with pitting against it the liberating virtues of other periods, today the wheel of criticism seems to have made a complete revolution. A constant, almost compulsive interest nowadays draws the various tenants of the so-called "nouvelle critique" in France to the old classics; the game preserve of the right has in fact become the favorite hunting ground of the left.

For some reason, experimenters in novel critical methods and approaches—whether they be those who work under the now respectable interest in Marx and Freud, or those influenced by the more recent attraction of Sartre and Bachelard, not to mention the growing influence by Claude Lévi- Strauss—seem, more often than not, to be irresistibly tempted to test their intellectual instruments on classical authors. Racine is the easy winner; in addition to articles or chapters devoted to his tragedies by Georges Poulet and Jean Starobinski, book-length analyses, written from the Marxist, Freudian, and structuralist points of view, have been devoted to him by Lucien Goldmann, Charles

Mauron, and Roland Barthes. *La Princesse de Clèves* has also had its share of scrutinizing admirers; neither Molière nor Corneille has escaped a "new look." The question is: what is there about the Great Century that fascinates a new generation of critics whose personal ideology and private concerns appear, at first sight, to be poles apart from the classical tradition?

I do not believe that an impish desire to poach on the other fellow's territory is sufficient explanation for such a general phenomenon. As a journalist put it naively in the course of a recent controversy: "Can one build a new obscure system for judging and analyzing genius on Racine who is so clear?" (*Revue Parlementaire*, Nov. 1965). Like many childish questions, this one is very much to the point; we find an answer to it in an essay by Roland Barthes: "The reason is that 'transparency' is an ambiguous value: it is at once that about which there is nothing to say and that about which there is the most to say. Therefore, it is Racine's very 'transparency' which makes him, in the last analysis, the birthright of our literature, a kind of zero point of the critical object, an empty place which is forever open to meaning." And Barthes calls to witness the fact that it is Racine, "the French author most associated with the idea of 'transparency' who is the only one to have succeeded in having all the new critical approaches of this century focus on him." Thus modern criticism, like the medieval concept of nature, abhors a vacuum and hastens to fill the Racinian void with its own interpretations. Personally, I am not sure that I agree with this view of the matter, for, in my opinion, a work of art makes its appeal to us through the fullness and even the brimfulnessof its presence rather than through the absence of any definite core of meaning. But I agree that it is precisely the limpidity of classical writing that solicits the attention of the modern critic, accustomed to the flamboyance of Rimbaud's or Claudel's speech, as the Nero of Racine's *Britannicus* was attracted by Junie's provoking virtue:

Et c'est cette vertu, si nouvelle à la cour,
Dont la persévérance irrite mon amour . . .

Modern reflection on language on both sides of the Atlantic has shown that a work of art always has an "ambiguous" meaning, that is, any true piece of literature gathers in the fabric of its language a multi-level structure of expression. No writing of any depth can be taken merely at its face value; it never quite says or means what it means to say. There is always in it an excess of significance (which it is the critic's task to explore) over the obvious or voluntary meanings which the author gives it at the moment of creation. What has been a banality in Anglo-American criticism since Empson, and even before him, apparently has just begun to strike the Cartesian mind of the French critics, who usually make straight for the "evident" in literature as well as in philosophy. Therefore the simplicity and directness of French classical prose and verse, its undeniable poetic quality which is all but devoid of symbolic imagery and verbal fireworks, constitute something of a puzzle to the modern mind, fed on altogether different modes of literary expression. Like their predecessors, though for opposite reasons, many of the "nouveaux critiques" are fascinated by the seeming "immobility," the apparent "eternity" of classical art. In Racine's theatre, Charles Mauron looks for the recurrence of the same archetypal patterns under the surface diversity of the plays; Roland Barthes' structural approach tries to reconstruct the complex life of Racinian

humanity as though it were some sort of artifact resulting from the game-like combination of a certain set of figures and elements; in Lucien Goldmann's view, Racine's "tragical vision" is caught in the at once inevitable and insurmountable dilemma of a simultaneous "yes" and "no" to man's worldly condition; this inner conflict paralyzes the tragic consciousness with the result that the evolution of Racine's tragedies, according to Goldmann's thesis, is best explained by external factors□a traditional approach of French literary history. It is no coincidence that so many of today's ideologically motivated critics peer anxiously into the timeless essence of Racinian tragedy, while a Sartre, for instance, remains faithful to the century of Baudelaire and Flaubert, or while a Malraux or a Roger Vailland were drawn to the great adventurers of Laclos' era.

The situation of the contemporary writer has changed. In France, at least, the dream of helping to alter the world for the better with one's pen, the will to "commit" literature have generally yielded to a new feeling of withdrawal from reality in language, and to a new view of literature as remaining wholly circumscribed within the limits of the imaginary, as constituting a universe of discourse closed in upon itself. In Barthes' own terminology, today's authors (and critics are authors, too) have become convinced of the "intransitive" character of all literary writing, of its lack of any direct bearing on the real world. In brief, the same feeling of *powerlessness* is to be found in much of the writing of the late seventeenth and twentieth centuries in contradiction to the zestful and hopeful beginnings of each century. Where he had often been an active member of his community, as were Rabelais and Ronsard in the sixteenth century, where at times he had been an armed warrior like d'Aubigné and d'Urfé, where he had been at least a resolute partisan as in the case of the "libertin" or "frondeur" authors, the writer in the classical period becomes a domesticated scholar, a kept man in a princely retinue. From La Fontaine to Saint-Simon, from Pascal to La Bruyère, he develops a sense of disillusionment with society; the less able he is to influence its course, the more aloof and distant he becomes until he grows into a bitter and impotent spectator of the follies of his contemporaries. Molière hoped he could improve man with laughter; there is nothing left for La Bruyère to improve except his style.

Who does not see, to a large extent, a parallel situation in our times? Confronted with the crushing mechanisms of mass society in an industrial age, the contemporary writer experiences his utter passivity (as Lucien Goldmann has shown convincingly in his discussion of Robbe-Grillet's novels). His only kingdom becomes the magic of language, his sole province the promised land of his own imaginary creations. When all is said and done what the "new" novelists and playwrights are often trying to do is, avowedly, to show the pure workings of the mind, disengaged from all the fallacies of common sense or ideology. Even when preoccupied with the once colorful world of objects, today's literary style, having shed the picturesque ornamentation of adjectives, is not far from reminding a reader of classical abstraction. Our "blank" way of writing recalls, in its own peculiar way, the "clarity" of seventeenth-century prose. In both cases, though the historical and artistic circumstances are different, one can sense the same flight from reality, the same rejection of all concrete references to man's rootedness and participation in Nature and History, in favor of a supposedly "pure" description of an impersonal self. In both cases, language, we might say, comes full circle upon itself: it is

no coincidence that the writers of the second half of the seventeenth century were so concerned with "genres" and "rules," and that present-day writers are so acutely aware of "form" and "structure." Whenever a writer considers writing as an end, a universe unto itself, a certain formalism always ensues. If today's authors do not attempt to "eliminate" the world, as their predecessors, the *précieux*, tried to do, they strive to recreate it altogether; in the end it all comes to the same, since they have become convinced once and for all that they cannot change it. It is only natural that the "clarity" and "immobility" of classical art should exert its fascination on *nouveaux critiques* who more often than not lean to the left. While most French intellectuals are leftists, most leftists in this day and age have lost all hope of a revolution in the West. "There is classicism," as Sartre put in once in*What Is Literature?*, "whenever a society has taken a relatively stable form and whenever it is imbued with the myth of its own durability . . ." I, for one, would venture the following hypothesis: if so many liberal, radical, and marxist thinkers are constantly and consistently concerned with classical literature today, in contrast to the preceding generation of "committed" writers, is it not because their fascination with the magic power of words and the inner rules of rhetoric both reveals and conceals the practical impotence they share with classical authors of the second half of the seventeenth century?

Yet, personally, I disagree with this view of classical literature as eminently "transparent" and evidently "eternal," a modern view which strangely recalls the most traditional readings, even when a more subtle and up-to-date interpretation of the old stock virtues of Order and Clarity is now supplied. We should heed Valéry's words, whose patronage is often too readily invoked:

Mais rendre la lumière
Suppose d'ombre une morne moitié . . .

That hidden half cannot and should not be forgotten. True understanding of classical literature cannot, in my opinion, stop at the sheer enjoyment of its superficial brilliance and openness. Nor is the concinnity and brevity of classical utterance to be attributed, as Barthes seems to imply, to some sort of semantic vacuum. In this respect, contemporary critics ought not to fall too easily into the trap laid for them by their elders. To equate classicism with clarity, that is, with an immediate, translucent meaning (or absence of meaning), is simply to forget that classical art is precisely the art of reticence and understatement, or, as Gide aptly put it, the art of saying the most by saying the least. My point is that rhetoric has always to be understood in a given human context. The shaping influence of *précieux* speech on classical style, for instance, has been amply underscored. But how could one truly comprehend *préciosité*, with its manners and mannerisms, without relating it to precisely the very type of reality which it purports to shroud in metaphor? The essence of *préciosité* is entirely in its negative relationship with the natural life of the body and the material objects created by work, which for many reasons an aristocratic civilization must hide or reject. Precious, and also classical, language is not a mere given; it is man-made. It is not the creation of the Holy Spirit, miraculously descended into seventeenth-century parlance and thus deserving to be held as the eternal model; it is the product of a parasite class, the French nobility, at a precise historical moment.

The vaunted clarity of the French classical style is no magical void. Its slow conquest of the proliferating inventiveness of the baroque spirit, the implacable and voluntary impoverishment of its discourse, the substitution of a strict, collectively elaborated rhetoric for free individual fancyall these result from an historical process which has to be understood as such. It is no coincidence that literature then becomes wholly "psychological." Prevented from calling into question the fundamental ideology of his time, obliged to keep his hands, so to speak, away from religion and politics, operating within the precincts of an aristocratic culture that desires to see its own image mirrored in literature from inside, the classical writer, in Sartre's phrase, cannot help being relegated to an "eternal Cogito." Classical language rejects concrete terms, which are viewed as "low"; it takes on its unmistakably abstract and limpid quality because the nobleman cannot be shown in any direct relationship to Nature through work or even through the workings of his body. His own justification is that he is pure will, pure thought, in opposition to the coarse creatures who people the Third Estate and who, as La Bruyère justly points out, look like animals in the fields. The famed clarity of the classical style reflects the other and higher side of an alienated and reified order.

Traditional criticism was not wrong in assuming that there is an essential link between clarity and order, style and society, in the seventeenth century. It was mistaken about the true political and ethical significance of that order, and consequently about the esthetic and human quality of the literature which expresses it. Yet the marxist view of man's activity as necessarily inserted in a given social context and necessarily a response to it must be rounded off by the existentialist view that any authentic act of self-awareness transcends the limits of environment and goes on to uncover a fundamental aspect of human reality. To recognize that the writer, as well as any other man, can be historically alienated also implies the full consciousness that it is precisely the nature of a great work of art to surmount that alienation. Thus the very process of reflection in the purely "psychological" writings of our classical authors uncovers both man's historic and intrinsic contradictions and therefore constitutes ultimately a means of freeing man from himself. While classical literature is the intellectual instrument which an aristocratic society gave itself in order to negate historical change and eternalize its own image (and this is the deeper meaning of the "pastoral" vogue in novels and on the stage from *L'Astrée* to the beginnings of the Opera), it is, in the last analysis, a radical challenge of that very image which is often proposed to us. To my mind, at least, Corneille's theatre, intended to celebrate the triumph of will over Nature at the hands of the aristocratic hero, explores and finally explodes the intricate fallacies of his quest. Racine, the perfect courtier, puts in an implacable light the powerlessness of the Prince to govern himself and the world, while Pascal takes a disillusioned look at royalty and society alike. *La Princesse de Clèves*, which purports to be a tale of self-mastery, is rather a study in self-deception. Although thoroughly steeped in the ideology of his time and never wishing to doubt it any more than Descartes would doubt the laws and religion of his country, the classical writer, through sheer lucidity, appears like a permanent, if discreet, challenger of the petrified and mystified values of his period and, for that matter, of any other period.

To overlook this questioning and selfquestioning of classical art; to forget that its order derives its main significance from the disorder which it endeavors to suppress; to be

oblivious to the fact that the blankness and perfection of form is a deceptive surface that often veils inner conflicts on the psychological, ethical, and political levels□all this, in my estimation, tends to miss altogether the nature□and the greatness□of a literature that does not simply reflect the polish of courtly life, but unmasks the face of the man underneath, our face. Behind the apparent negation of human becoming (our present laws are eternal and our king God-sent, true religious and literary models have already been given us in the ancient past, man will always be the same, etc.), there runs through the century a most acute and sometimes desperate sense of deep rootedness in history. This sense of history may at first have been buried in the recess of what one might metaphorically call the collective unconscious of the time, until it grew keener and keener and burst forth irrepressibly in La Bruyère's and Saint-Simon's writings. Instead of clinging to the dead myth of classical eternity and of mistaking transparency of style for some sort of magic void, I believe that the task of new criticism in the field of the seventeenth century consists in restoring this long immobile body of literature to its full life. The statues in their niches must be returned to the painful dynamics of human change. Like any manifestation of freedom, literary creation must be understood□and we have known this since Hegel□by the inner negativity of the spirit, by its power to challenge and transcend the given, both in it and around it; in brief it must be understood in terms of the process of selfdeception, self-discovery, and self-accomplishment in historical man. In my opinion, therefore, attempts at understanding the old classics with modern intellectual tools lies in the effort to apply a *dialectical* type of comprehension to a traditionally *analytical* literature.

Source: Serge Doubrovsky, "New Critics and Old Myths," in *Yale French Studies*, No. 38, May 1967, pp. 18-26.

Adaptations

Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were recorded as books on tape in 1992 by the Highbridge company. The *Odyssey* has been adapted to film several times, including a 1997 television miniseries and as the 2000 film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

Faust has been adapted to film numerous times, including a 1960 German production and a 1994 animated version by Jan Svankmajer.

Topics for Further Study

The music of German Classicism captures the artistic expression of the movement as a whole. Study the works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or another classical composer. Note the impact this music has had on the works of modern composers and musicians.

Classicists incorporated Greek myths into their works to enrich their meaning. Investigate the origins of these myths and observe how their imitators have altered them. How can these deviations enhance or diminish the overall impact of a piece? Give specific examples.

The Greeks and Romans have been looked upon as being part of the "glorious past" of Western civilization. Influences of this past are evident in contemporary Western society. Investigate the impact of such influences, positive and negative, on contemporary life.

Works from many cultural periods all over the world have been said to incorporate classical attributes. Choose a piece of literature, art, or music and discuss its classical characteristics. Make a supported argument for what you think the author, artist, or composer was trying to achieve by incorporating these characteristics.

Compare and Contrast

400s B.C.: A plague of unknown cause and the Peloponnesian war have a profound effect on the shape of Greek literature.

Today: Cancer and AIDS, both of which have been called "the plague of the twentieth century," as well as both World Wars and the Vietnam War have resulted in entire subgenres of literature and have greatly affected the course of postmodern writing.

91-87 B.C.: Rome's Italian allies go to war to remove Rome from her predominance in the Italian peninsula. Rome gains the upper hand in the dispute by granting full citizenship to the residents of all Italian cities once they reaffirm their loyalty to Rome.

Today: The Civil Rights movement of the midtwentieth century, led by such renowned figures as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, brings to pass the end of much discriminatory legislation and the implementation of Affirmative Action in the United States. Despite the progress brought about by the movement, hate crime, racial profiling, and discrimination continue to be pertinent and volatile topics.

1700s: The excavation of Pompeii and Herculaneum, which were buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, sparks a revival in classical art, thought, and literature in England.

Today: The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, in caves less the 15 miles from Jerusalem, vitalizes interest in ancient Hebrew texts

What Do I Read Next?

The second edition of Victor Davis Hanson's *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (2000) describes in great detail what actually took place on the battlefield in ancient Greece, where the Greeks developed the basic tactics for Western warfare. Their brief, violent, decisive head-on battles involve opponents fighting with great resolve to defeat their enemies. The author has been praised not only for his use of technical description but for the imagination he employs, particularly in explaining factors such as the tremendous weight of Greek armor. In this way, Hanson fleshes out such battle details, conveying the immense strength and bravery of Greek soldier contending with heavy equipment that obscured movement as well as hearing and vision.

Originally published in 1903, Jane Ellen Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (reprint, Princeton University Press, 1992) is noted for its consideration of how the ancient Greeks perceived the world around them and how these perceptions affected their religious practices. In her employment of both classical archeology and comparative evolutionary anthropology, Harrison challenges the Homeric depiction of religion in the *Iliad*. She rejects the previously accepted view in favor of extensive evidence supporting the views of the Greek masses, who favored "earthly spirits" to Homer's "sky bound" Olympians. Harrison examines Greek ritual with respect to Greek mythology. She is admired for her portrayal of the evolution of Greek religion, not only as a concise history but as a human endeavor.

Women in Antiquity: New Assessments (1997) is a collection of original essays in which experts in classical studies offer their assessments of gender roles in antiquity. Some of the works examine a wide variety of topics studied over the past twenty years while others are representative of new areas of research. The roles of women are carefully considered with respect to Greek literature, Roman politics, ancient medicine, and early Christianity. The avenues that it opens for research in new directions and its focus on methodology make it a valuable resource.

In *Basic Teachings of the Great Philosophers* (1989), S. E. Frost Jr. thoroughly explores many of the great philosophical challenges faced by the Western world, calling on the views of the most important Western philosophers, chapter by chapter. The topics covered include the nature of the universe, mankind's place in the universe, a discussion of good and evil, the nature of God, fate versus free will, the soul and immortality, mankind and the state, mankind and education, mind and matter, ideas and thinking, as well as some recent approaches to philosophy. Each chapter offers a discussion moving from the views of the early Greek philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, to more contemporary views, such as those of German philosophers like Johann Fitche, Friedrich Schelling, and Georg Hegel.

Further Study

Finley, M. I., *The Ancient Greeks*, Penguin Books, 1991.

The Ancient Greeks is a reader-friendly, while historically accurate, book about the ancient Greeks. It covers the Greek classical period and includes discussions on Greek literature, science, philosophy, architecture, sculpture and painting.

Hytier, Jean, "The Classicism of the Classics," translated by June Guicharnaud, in *Yale French Studies*, No. 38, 1967, pp. 5-17.

"The Classicism of the Classics" is an interesting consideration of what defines a French classic. The authors look to the history of French literature to help them reach some rather interesting conclusions.

Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, translated by Aubrey De Sélincourt, Penguin Books, 1960.

Titus Livius (Livy) appears to have composed *The Early History of Rome* over a period of forty or more years during the last years of the Roman Republic and the early years of the Roman Empire. He has been praised for his vivid historical imagination and his ability to bring to life the great characters and scenes of Rome's past.

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner, Viking Penguin, 1972.

History of the Peloponnesian War is a lucid translation of Thucydides' account of a defining period in Greek history and is a valuable resource on the rivalry between Athens and Sparta and the resultant twenty-seven-year conflict.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literary Movements for Students (LMfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LMfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LMfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LMfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LMfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LMfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LMfS includes The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literary Movements for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literary Movements for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literary Movements for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LMfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LMfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literary Movements for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literary Movements for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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