

# **CLASSICISM (ROMAN LITERATURE) AND ITS IMPACT ON ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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**Module-10**

**SEMESTER-I**  
**PAPER-V: WESTERN LITERARY HISTORY-I**

**Time: 3 Hours**

**Max. Marks: 80**

**Instructions for the Paper Setters:-**

Eight questions of 16 marks are to be set, two in each of the four Sections (A-D). Questions may be subdivided into parts (not exceeding four). Candidates are required to attempt five questions, selecting at least one question from each Section. The fifth question may be attempted from any Section.

**SECTION-A**

**Background**

**Classicism**

Medievalism

The Renaissance

Enlightenment

Neoclassicism

Romanticism

**SECTION-B**

**Drama**

**Classical Drama**

(*Poetics*, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Menander, Plautus, Terence, Seneca)

**Medieval Drama**

(Mysteries, Miracles, Moralities, Interludes)

**Renaissance Drama**

(University Wits, Shakespeare, Comedy of Humours, Jacobean Drama)

**Neoclassical and Romantic Drama**

(British Restoration Drama, French Neoclassical Drama, German *Sturm und Drang*)

**SECTION-C**

**Poetry**

**Classical Poetry**

(Homer, Hesiod, Sappho, Pindar, Theocritus, Virgil, Catullus, Horace, Ovid, Juvenal)

**Medieval Poetry**

(Old English Poetry, Romances, Allegories, Ballads, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer and his contemporaries)

**Renaissance Poetry**

(Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne and the Metaphysicals, Cavalier Poetry, Milton)

**Neoclassical Poetry**

(Dryden, Pope, Johnson, Poetic Diction, Transition Poets)

## **Romantic Poetry**

(Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Poe, Whitman, Dickinson)

## **SECTION-D**

### **Fiction**

#### **Rise of the Novel**

(Precursors, Renaissance Fictional Prose, Cervantes, Aphra Behn, Reasons for the rise of the novel)

#### **Eighteenth Century British Novel**

(Sub Genres: Picaresque, Epistolary, Sentimental, Gothic; Defoe, Swift, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Walpole, Radcliffe)

#### **Eighteenth Century French and German Novel**

(Voltaire, Rousseau, Goethe)

#### **British Romantic Novel**

(Austen, Scott)

### **Suggested Sources:**

1. Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*
2. Alexander, Michael. *A History of English Literature*
3. Cohen, J.M. *A History of Western Literature*
4. Cuddon, J.A. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*
5. Evans, Ifor. *A Short History of English Literature*
6. Hornstein, L.H et al. *The Reader's Companion to World Literature.*
7. Spiller, Robert E. *Cycle of American Literature.*
8. Encyclopedia Britannica (CD ROM)

**Q : Write a note on the classical background of Roman literature [200 BC – 100 AD] and its impact on English literature.**

**Ans : Introduction**

The history of Greece began with Homer, but the Roman history had to wait for more than five hundred years for her first writers to appear on scene. At the end of the third century BC, Plautus and Terence wrote comedies based chiefly on Greek model, just as Seneca, several hundred years later, imitated the tragic drama of Athens. Certainly Romans had no literature they could call their own until the period of Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Cicero, and Lucretius<sup>1</sup> in the first century BC.

### **The Roman Genius for Conquest, Law, and Engineering**

Although Greek literature was to supply Latin writers with their best models, both civilizations cultivated different tastes. The Greek genius was for the arts of beauty and daily living, that of Romans for conquest, law, and engineering. Roman genius is clearly revealed in Caesar's Gallic War. The book is more than an account of military campaigns and the administration of conquered tribes.

### **The Epic**

Virgil wished for his country a literature as great as that of Greece. Towards this end, he wrote The Aeneid, its theme borrowed in part from the Homeric epics. His story of the wanderings of Aeneas and the founding of Roman Empire shows deep reverence<sup>2</sup> for the past. But Virgil also loved country life and rustic virtues, as he described them in his Eclogues. However his epics lack the vivid scenario we find in the Iliad. Still he is one of the few pagan<sup>3</sup> writers esteemed<sup>4</sup> by scholars and churchmen of the Middle Ages.

### **The Lyric Poetry**

Horace is another beloved classical poet. Urbane<sup>5</sup>, temperate<sup>6</sup>, humorous, he expresses the spirit of Roman society in its Golden Age.

Among other Latin poets, Lucretius fills a place of his own. On the Nature of Things is a long philosophical poem unlike anything else in classical literature. In it he, a man centuries

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<sup>1</sup>**Lucretius** - /lu:'kri:fəs/

<sup>2</sup>**reverence** - respect.

<sup>3</sup>**pagan** - non-Christian because belonging to the period before the birth of Christ.

<sup>4</sup>**esteemed** - respected; valued.

<sup>5</sup>**urbane** - polished; refined.

<sup>6</sup>**temperate** - mild; moderate.

ahead of his time, examines natural phenomena, religion, science, philosophy, and in the process he anticipates<sup>7</sup> several scientific discoveries of many centuries to come.

## The Prose

Cicero is the most famous of Latin prose writers. Lawyer, politician, and a master of eloquence<sup>8</sup>, he shaped a lasting prose style which even in translation is very powerful in clarity. Fifty-seven of his speeches have been preserved, along with fragments of many others. His treatises<sup>9</sup> have influenced many English prose writers like Montaigne, Bacon, and Swift.

## The Biographies

If Herodotus is the father of history, then Plutarch stands in the same relationship to biography. Living in a world dominated by the Roman Empire, Plutarch was able to make comparisons between great men of both civilizations (i.e. Greek and Roman). His method in Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans was to place two figures side by side as in the case of Alexander and Caesar, Alcibiades and Coriolanus, Demosthenes and Cicero (i.e. Greek and Roman personalities side by side) and then subject them to the tests of Greek philosophy. He may be criticized for his carelessness with dates and scientific detail by modern scholars, but we still appreciate him for his knowledge of the subject he has presented to us. The Lives is still one of the great source books in history and literature. Shakespeare is only one of so many later writers who have borrowed from the first and one of the best of biographers.

## The Histories

The leading historians of the Roman Empire were Livy and Tacitus. Livy wrote the history of Rome from its founding to the fall of Carthage. However he drew much of his material from Polybius, a Greek historian.

Tacitus, another Roman historian, records the first century AD history of Roman Empire. His effectiveness as a historian lies in his power of analysis, his excellent character sketches, and his lucid<sup>10</sup> and ironic style.

Suetonius presents a different and more scandalous<sup>11</sup> picture of Roman history. His most important surviving work is a set of biographies of twelve successive Roman rulers, from Julius Caesar to Domitian, entitled The Twelve Caesars. It tells the tale of each Caesar's life according to a set formula: the descriptions of appearance, omens, family history, quotes, and then a history are given in a consistent order for each Caesar. Other works by Suetonius

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<sup>7</sup>**anticipates** - foretells; predicts.

<sup>8</sup>**eloquence** - expressiveness; persuasiveness.

<sup>9</sup>**treatise** - /'tri:tɪs/ a long and serious piece of writing on a particular subject.

<sup>10</sup>**lucid** - well-structured.

<sup>11</sup>**scandalous** - shocking; disgraceful.

concern the daily life of Rome, politics, oratory, and the lives of famous writers, including poets, historians, and grammarians. A few of these books have partially survived, but many have been lost.

### **Prose Fiction**

What Suetonius did with historical characters, Petronius, friend of the Emperor Nero, did in prose fiction. His Satyricon is a shameless comedy of manner laying bare a decadent society that had lost the sense of honour. Several centuries later Lucius Apuleius wrote The Golden Ass, a satirical story of witchcraft and picaresque adventure.

### **Towards the Fall of Roman Empire**

By the second century, Roman culture had grown stagnant and the empire was crumbling from within. Only two other literary works stand out in the closing centuries of Roman rule. One of these is the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius. It reveals the inner thoughts of a wise and humane ruler who believed that virtue is its own reward and that the ways of the gods, inscrutable<sup>12</sup> to men, are just.

The other is On the Consolation of Philosophy by Boethius, who has been called the last Roman writer. This work, which bridges the gap between pagan philosophy and Christian belief, was a favourite book among scholars and writers of the Middle Ages.

### **The Dark Ages**

Through the writings of some great scholars, like St Augustine, Latin survived as the language of the church. But during the Dark Ages (500-1100 AD) which followed the fall of Roman Empire in the second and third centuries AD, the great Greek and Latin classics were to have little influence on thought and whatever could be called literature (the Dark Ages were not altogether dark). We only witness a few attempts on translation of some Latin classics. And we will have to wait for the great Renaissance to come.

### **Revival of Greek and Latin Classics in the Fifteenth Century (i.e. the Renaissance)**

Latin continued to be of limited use as the language of the medieval Church of England, monasteries, and academic institutions. But a few hundred years, which followed the fall of Constantinople in 1453, witness the full flowering of the revival of ancient classics; and the period is called by the name of The Renaissance (a French term for 'the revival' of ancient classical literature of Greece and Rome).

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<sup>12</sup>inscrutable - mysterious; enigmatic.