

and they are strictly enforced for all dramatic writing. Tragi-comedy and its output is totally prohibited on the basis of Aristotle's advice.

Three features, 'correctness', 'reason' and 'goodness' are insisted upon every writer. The head, that is 'reason', is expected to control and balance the heart, that is 'emotion' and 'fancy'. Moderation becomes the golden rule in life and literature.

Poets are expected to deal with universal truths and general principles. Formal finish and perfection rather than content is expected in every piece of art.

The didactic function of poetry namely, to instruct and delight, rather than the aesthetic function is given importance. The poet is expected to mete out poetic justice in his works. Tragedy is expected to purge the soul of pride and hardness of heart. "Commiseration and admiration" are now treated as the proper functions of tragedy.

The style and diction of poetry are given greater importance. A difference between the language of prose and that of poetry is made out for the first time. The language of poetry is expected to be noble and elevated. As a result, an artificial poetic diction comes into vogue. In order to attain clarity of diction, far-fetched imagery and conceits are often employed by the poets avoiding technical and archaic words.

Different kinds of poetry are assigned different dictions with strict rigidity. The heroic measure is considered the proper measure for poetry, since it is the measure the ancients supported and the French practised.

A. ESSAY ON DRAMATIC POESY

By
John Dryden

Critical Synopsis

Dryden says that his aim in writing the *Essay* is "to vindicate the honour of the English writers, from the censure of those who unjustly prefer the French before them." Dryden also desires to evolve the principles which ought to guide us in

judging a play and to formulate the rules which would help a dramatist in writing a good play. Through the *Essay*, Dryden demonstrates "the superiority of the moderns over the ancients as also the superiority of contemporary (Restoration) English dramatists over the dramatists of the last generation (Elizabethan)." Dryden also emphasises the superiority of rhymed verse over blank verse.

The *Essay* is in the form of a dialogue, like Plato's *Republic*. There are four speakers and the setting is dramatic. Crites supports the extreme classical view; Eugenius asserts the superiority of the moderns over the classical writers; Lisideus emphasises the superiority of the French over the English among the moderns; the last Neander upholds the superiority of the English drama over the French and of rhyme over blank verse.

Dryden treats Drama as a form of imaginative literature and so his remarks on Drama apply to poetry too. He defines Drama as "a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind".

The poet is a creator or maker and he aims at making something more beautiful. The poet is endowed with imagination, which enables him to select, order, re-arrange his material and thus to give a more heightened and beautiful version of reality. Dryden lays emphasis on the "liveliness" of the image rather than on its "justness".

According to Dryden, delight is the primary and instruction is the secondary function of poetry. The function of poetry is to inform the reader, in a lively way, of what the human nature is like. Human nature, here, represents a character's reaction to changes of fortune - the reactions, which bring out his 'passions and humours'. Dryden explains that the poet makes vivid and impressive the knowledge of the psychologist, by his imaginary examples. Also Dryden desires the poet to aim at the aesthetic delight through his artistic work.

Dryden's view of poetic imitation is not mere copying of Nature. The work of a poet is to make or create something that is beautiful. So he represents life or imitates life not as

Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see
Thinks but what never was, nor is, **not** shall be.

Pope also advocates certain rules about ease in writing and correctness of composition.

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.

(Expression, according to Pope, is the dress of thought and a thought "Appears more decent" and more suitable in an elevated language.)

Pope feels that restraint in language is as important as correct expression.

The winged courser, like a generous horse, Shows most true metal when you check his course.

Pope's principles of criticism are commonplace maxims. The *Essay* is a shining example of Pope's own art of poetry. It is an interesting and invaluable work of art. His advice that a poet should follow Nature avoiding the excess of fancy holds good even to-day. His praise of ancient writers is just in itself though it does not flow from his experience.

Pope, however, is absolutely correct when he says that one must criticise "with the same spirit that the author writ". That is, the critic must examine the poem under the same light or spirit with which it was written (by the poet). Pope indirectly says rules becomes superfluous when criticism comes into play.

C. PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE

By

Dr. Samuel Johnson

Critical Synopsis

Dryden represents the beginning of Neo-classicism in England. Pope is the true votary of Neo-classic criticism. Samuel Johnson signifies the last of the Neo-classic critics.

Innate in Johnson is a respect for tradition and his criticism reflects his principle of stability and disciplined order. The

sway of classicism in England during this period is due to the towering personality of Johnson, who is considered a lion of classicism in literary theory and criticism.

The *Preface to Shakespeare* is a monument of criticism created by an authority on the English language and literature. It is also a classic of criticism since all the gifts of Johnson-the energetic, lucid and vivid style-are displayed here at their best.

Shakespeare is great because there is a just representation of human nature in his work. His characters are true portraits of humanity. He deals with the common human principles and passions. His characters are universal and individualistic as well. They are true to type.

Shakespeare's plays are a perennial source of axioms and wisdom. A whole philosophy of life can be culled out of his plays.

Shakespeare does not portray 'love' as the be - all and the end - all of life. Love is one of the many passions and no one passion is given undue importance. His plays mirror life and hence all passions in life are given due representation in his plays.

Shakespeare's characters are not exaggerated; they are exact replica of real life. He has no heroes, but only human beings. Even the supernatural talk the language like human beings. His plays, thus, enhance our knowledge of human nature.

Johnson defends Shakespeare from the attack of critics, who levelled charges against him for mixing comedy and tragedy. The classical outlook and respect for tradition and authority do not prevent Johnson from defending Shakespeare against this charge.

Johnson asserts that Shakespeare is true to human nature in this respect also. Tragi-comedy is more true to life than either comedy or tragedy. The intertwining of the comic and the tragic does not impede the progress of the passions. Since all pleasure consists in variety, tragi-comedy appeals to a larger number of people.

Johnson strongly feels that comedy and not tragedy came natural to Shakespeare. There is always something wanting in his tragic sense, but his comedy often surpasses our expectation. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct. The language of his comic scenes is the language of real life. He is one of the great masters of the language.

Johnson also enumerates Shakespeare's serious faults, which even obscure his many excellences.

There is no poetic justice in his plays, since he sacrifices virtue to convenience. His plays contain many excusable faults of chronology and anachronisms. His jokes are gross and licentious. There is much pomp of diction and circumlocution in his narration. Puns and quibbles are given undue consideration even at the cost of reason and propriety.

Shakespeare's histories contain consistency and naturalness in character. His plots have a beginning, a middle and an end. Events are logically connected to one another and the plot moves gradually towards the denouement.

Johnson defends Shakespeare's violation of the unities of Time and Place and asserts that the playwright has maintained the unity of action. Johnson argues that the unities of Time and Place need not be observed since they are not essential to drama.

Johnson tells us that many of Shakespeare's faults are the faults of his age. The use of magic and the supernatural, the use of event and incident, thrill and sensation for creating suspense and exciting the curiosity of the audience are all necessitated by the exigencies of the age and the requirement of his audience.

The versatility of Shakespeare is not the result of a study of books, but thanks to his keen observation of life and nature. "Naturally learned", Shakespeare's genius is unparalleled.

Shakespeare introduces character and dialogue, which were unknown earlier.

He perfects the English blank verse and injects diversity and flexibility to it and brings it nearer to the prose of every

day conversation. He imparts softness and vigour to the harmony of the English tongue.

Johnson is against any hasty emendation of Shakespeare's plays. Many of the abstract passages can be explained with reference to the customs, manners, sports, etc. of the age.

Johnson is the first critic to stress and apply at length the historic and comparative point of view and he suggests the right directions in which criticism has to move. Shakespeare might have had "subtler and more poetical critics than Johnson", but no one has equalled "the insight, sobriety, lucidity and finality" which Johnson shows in the field of Shakespearean criticism.