

Dr. Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare. (1709- 1784)

- The Classical and Romantic tendencies in the Age of Samuel Johnson: the one representing the old, emphasizing reason to be the main test of literary values and the other representing the new, emphasizing emotion and imagination to be its chief test. Unimpassioned Reason X Emotion and Imagination.
- Dr Johnson was the most influential man in the eighteenth Century and has been described as the literary dictator of his age.
- As a neo-classical, he believed that there should be certain rules to check the free and uncontrolled imagination of the poet. And on the other hand he also asserted that the artist was not supposed to follow all the rules.
He thought there were two types of rules ① fundamental and indispensable ② useful or convenient. The artist should follow the fundamental rules but for second type rules he was free to use.
- His critical body includes Rambler, Idler, Rasselas, Preface to the plays of Shakespeare and Lives of the Poets.
- He shows distrust in 'taste' and 'beauty' as test of literary values.

GDC FUNCTION OF CRITICISM IN PRESENT TIME²

- Atkins comments on Johnson's thought "In other words, the business of criticism was to free literary judgments from the anarchy of ignorance, the caprices of fancy, and the tyranny of prescription and to assign values on rational grounds."
- The works that have stood the test of time are works. And he also says "Nothing can please many and please long but just representations of general nature". He says writer should observe nature and represent it in his works to achieve lasting fame.
- Historical Consideration: George Wilson says "Johnson is an unambiguously historical critic and true father of historical criticism in English".
- He said 'Judge a work as a whole and not by its different parts.'
- Johnson's Views on Poetry:
In his Preface to Shakespeare he says "The end of writing is to instruct, the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing". In his life of Milton he says, "Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to the help of reason".
- Poetry deals with truth: general and transcendental truths and not particular truth.

In his 'Preface to Shakespeare' he says "Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature... In the writing of other poets a character is too often an individual. In those of Shakespeare, it is commonly a species".

- Poetic Diction: He stands for clarity and simplicity as regards poetic expression. He criticizes many of the ornamental devices of his age like colourless epithets, needless inversions, harsh and daring figures etc.
- In Verification, he wants regularity and fitness. He regarded rhyme as necessary for English verse and the heroic couplet as best metric. He didn't appreciate blank verse.
- On kinds of Poetry:
 - ① Like Neo-classicists, he believed epic to be superior to all the kinds of poetry
 - ② Pastoral Elegy was least appreciated because no poet can express grief through this form.
 - ③ He found Pindaric Ode unsuitable for modern age because

- His Preface to Shakespeare:
 - ① Shakespeare as a poet of Nature:
 - ② His handling of Supernatural
 - ③ Johnson's Defense of Shakespeare's Characterization

Dennis & Lymer called Shakespeare's characters as not sufficiently Romans whereas Voltaire had objected to his representation of usurping King in Hamlet as Drunkard. Johnson replies...