

INTRODUCTION OF DR SAMUEL JOHNSON:

Samuel Johnson often referred to as **Dr. Johnson**, was an English writer who made lasting contributions to English literature as a poet, playwright, essayist, moralist, literary critic, biographer, editor, and lexicographer. He was a devout Anglican.

Born: 18 September 1709, Lichfield

Died: 13 December 1784

INTRODUCTION OF SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare (6 April 1564 – 23 April 1616) was an English poet, playwright, and actor. He was born on 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. **Shakespeare** is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and nicknamed the Bard of Avon.

Age of Shakespeare and its characteristics

The Elizabethan Age can be identified by the following characteristics:

1. This was a period of great literary creativity and prolific writing. The works included a variety of prose and verse with topics ranging from Platonic idealism, to romance, to repulsive realism.
2. Romance dominated all types of literature including drama and plays that were of utmost importance during this time.
3. This was a time of great experimentation that resulted in wonderful new discoveries and imposing failures that often became literary topics in both drama and prose. Science, theology, and the geography were topics of poetry and literature in general.
4. Literature in Elizabethan England was heavily influenced by that of Italy, and to a lesser extent by that of Spain and France.
5. Authors during this era came from all of the classes including distinguished courtiers to poor poets who hung out in local taverns, but invariably all were male.

Some of the most famous and prolific writers of this period include Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Roger Ascham, Richard Hooker, Christopher Marlowe, and William Shakespeare.

DR.. JOHNSONN WAS NEO CLASSIICA CRITIC WHICH MEANS THAT HE BALANCES BETWEEN EXCELLENCIES AND FALLS OF SHAKESPEARE

MERITS OF SHAKESPEARE:

1) Representation of general nature:

Shakespeare is, more than anyone else, a poet of nature. Through his works he reflects life.

(2) His characters have a universal appeal:

Shakespeare's characters do not belong to the society of a particular place or time; they are universal, representing every man. His characters have a universal appeal. They act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles which are experienced by all mankind.

(3) Shakespeare's greatness does not rest upon individual passages:

It is because of this universality in the portrayal of characters that Shakespeare's plays are full of "practical axioms and domestic wisdom".

(4) The dialogue in his plays is based on the actual conversation of people:

Shakespeare's dialogue is thoroughly realistic. His dialogue is pursued with much ease and simplicity. And it seems to have been taken from the common conversation of human beings.

(5) Theme of love is not over-emphasized:

In a majority of the dramas of other dramatists love is the universal agent that causes all good and evil and hastens or retards every action. Shakespeare never assigns any excessive role to this passion in his plays. He catches his clues from the world of day-to-day life and exhibits in his plays only what he finds in life.

(6) Every character is distinctly individualized:

Shakespeare's characters are universally delineated but it is easy to distinguish one from another. In other words, there is no blurring of characters. No character shades off into another.

(7) A realistic and convincing portrayal of human nature:

Shakespeare's characters are not exaggerated. He does not give us purely virtuous or utterly depraved characters. Even when the plot requires a supernatural agency, the tone of the dialogues of various characters is life-like and realistic.

(8) Reflection of life:

Shakespeare deserves praise because "his drama is the mirror of life". His characters express human sentiments in human language in situations derived from real life.

(9) Objection of some critics is answered:

Shakespeare's emphasis on general human nature has invited censure and hostility from some critics. Johnson answers that, in reality, Shakespeare assigns nature a prominent role and gives less room to the accidental features. He is careful of preserving adventitious distinctions. His story or plot may demand Romans or kings but what Shakespeare thinks about is the human element in them. The objection of the critics on this issue merely proves their petty-mindedness.

(10) Mixture of tragic and comic elements is defended:

Johnson agrees in the strictest sense that Shakespeare's plays are neither comedies nor tragedies. They are compositions of a distinct kind which show the real state of nature. Shakespeare's genius is proved in his power to give rise to joy and sorrow through the same play. Almost all his plays have serious as well as absurd characters and thus sometimes cause seriousness and sorrow, and sometimes levity and laughter.

(11) Appeal from rules of criticism to the reality of life:

Shakespeare's practice in mingling the comic and tragic elements in the same play is contrary to the rules of dramatic writing. But rules are not more important than the claims of realism:-

"There is always an appeal open from criticism to nature".

The object of literature is to give instruction by pleasing the reader.

(12) The artificial classification of Shakespeare's plays:

The division of Shakespeare's plays into comedies, tragedies and histories is not based on any exact or definite ideas of such labels. A comedy has generally been regarded as a play with a happy ending, no matter how distressing the incidents of the plot in general may be. A play is classified as a matter how light some of the scenes in the course of its plot may be. A historical play is believed to be one that depicts a series of actions in a chronological order. It is not always very exactly distinguished, from tragedy.

(13) Shakespeare's natural genius for comedy:

Shakespeare wrote his plays in accordance with his natural disposition. He did not know the "rules" of dramatic writing. **Rymer** correctly tells us that Shakespeare's natural disposition lay in the direction of comedy. In writing tragedy he had to toil hard. But his comic scenes seem to have been written spontaneously and with great success. Comedy was, indeed, congenial to his nature._

Shakespeare:

the father of English drama. Johnson attributes to Shakespeare the credit of being the father of English drama. He was the giver of breath and life to "the form, the character, the language and the shows" of English drama. He was the first, except for Spenser, to discover and expose the degree or level of harmony and smoothness which the English language was capable of attaining.

Conclusion:

Johnson's admiration for Shakespeare was not merely passionate but instinctive too, though, as a neo-classicist he was naturally obliged to introduce Shakespeare to his contemporaries in particular critical idiom with which they were acquainted. As a neo-classical critic he had to approve look at Shakespeare's plays in the light of 'rules' but the moment he comes to compare *Cato* and *Othello* he relies, not upon the man-made rules, but upon his own instincts. Thus we see that Johnson's rules, as a professional critic, way hold *C'ato* to be superior, but his instinctive liking admits that *Cato* is no match for *Othello*.