

Dryden as a critic -

After Renaissance, Italian ⁷ neo-classicism:

inspired critics and artists but from the middle of the 16th Century French neo-classicism took the position of authority. Italian neo-classicism ~~was~~ is liberal in outlook, respects the ancients but never falls to servile attitude and is ready to welcome the new. But the French one is rigid, narrow, shuts its door against any thing new. Ben Jonson ~~was~~ is a disciple of Italian ~~the~~ neo-classicism. But, after his death criticism goes to the hands of rule-mongers. It is Dryden who allows fresh air to come in and new attitudes are developed. He is a real neo classicist who never allows himself to be tied down by the rules as set up by the ancients. He has a peculiar commonsense, a great love for national literature and an understanding of the eternal value of literature. As a critic his position is unrivalled.

Dryden writes the essay on Dramatic Poesie to combat the ideas of French neo-classicism. He points out the greatness of English drama. His observations are from the stand points of a neo-classicism, but he is never over ^{awed} ~~whelmed~~ by the performance of the ancients or the French. With an open mind he appreciates Shakespeare, Fletcher and Jonson, and speaks against the French Critics who were condemning English dramatists because of their non-observance of classic unities. This upholding of the cause of the English writers makes him the first national critic of England. Eliot rightly comments that the greatest work of Dryden the Criticism is that at the right moment he became conscious of the necessity of

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affirming the native element in literature.

This English accent of Dryden was the necessity of the time. The new King was more of a French than of an English who wanted to remodel English literature on the French lines and showed apathy for the native elements. Naturally, it was a moral responsibility of Dryden, the greatest man of the letters of the age to safeguard the honour of English writers. But, Dryden was inspired not only by the nationalistic ideas, but he was ^{also} convinced of the greatness of the writers like Chaucer, Spenser, Jonson and Fletcher. That is why he writes: "It is not enough that Aristotle has said so for Aristotle drew his model of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides: and if he had been ours, he might have changed his mind." This is really a heroic statement specially in an age when the neo-classic rules were held in high authority and esteem.

The Essay of Dramatic Poesy is in a form of dialogues between four characters representing four different attitudes to life. Crites, a classicist upholds the superiority of the ancient dramas. Eugenius champions the cause of the moderns but he is not against the classical tenets. Lisideius declares that English dramas are inferior to French dramas. He criticises Spenser for looseness of plot construction and for not observing the three unities. Neander, Dryden himself, replies to all these things. He upholds the greatness of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama. He argues that these gentlemen have failed to understand the and appreciate

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The real ^{spirit} ~~attitude~~ of classical attitude to literature.

Merely the following of the three unities will not make a drama successful. There are other things needed—humour, passion, human character and life-likeness.

However, all the ~~disputants~~ accept the basic definition of a drama that forms the theoretical basis of all discussion: "A just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortunes to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind." Dryden stresses on the life-likeness of the characters portrayed in a drama. He says that a certain character must be in flesh and blood: its humour and passion should be properly portrayed. He stresses on the unity of action. Where plot, dialogue and character meet at one point, what is needed of a dramatist is the charact perspective of an artist. He must be able to see the drama from one point, where all the different forces meet and bring out a unified and total effect.

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Dryden upholds the use of rhyme in tragedies and strongly supports Shakespeare's non-observance of classical unities. He says that in comedy rhyme may appear to be unnatural, but in tragedy it is perfectly appropriate. "Tragedy is indeed the representation of nature, but... nature wrought up to a higher pitch." Again "the plot, the character, the wit, the passion, the descriptions are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them, with proportion to verisimilitude".
To conclude, Dryden is the greatest ned.