

Examine the claims of Dryden to be regarded as the father of practical criticism.

(Dryden) OR

"He established the English fashion of criticising as Shakespeare did the English fashion of dramatising - the fashioning of aiming at delight, at truth, at justice, at nature, at poetry and letting the rules take care of themselves".
Discuss.

Ans. The father of English criticism is a title conferred on John Dryden by Dr. Johnson. His verdict has been supported by every critic of Dryden from Saintsbury to T. S. Eliot. George Saintsbury very aptly remarked that

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That Dryden set the fashion of criticising just as Shakespeare set the passion of dramatising.

It was Dryden who never recognized any merit of originality in Johnson's Discoveries. In fact Dryden is reported to have remarked that there is hardly any observation in his Discoveries which may be called original. But Dryden little realised that in a way he was himself an inheritor of Johnson's liberal classicism. But there is a difference: while Johnson is ruthless, Dryden is tolerant; while Johnson is limited, Dryden is urban in his critical range.

Dryden has a deep affection for English literature. He had the courage of his

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own conviction. He was the last man to stomach the trivialities of Boileau.

George Watson in his 'The Literary Critics' distinguished three kinds of criticism. First there is legislative criticism which claims to teach the poet how to write or how to write the better.

Secondly there is 'Theoretical criticism' which deals with aesthetics. Finally we have 'descriptive criticism' which concerns itself with the analysis of existing literary work.

Again, Dryden is the first ~~critic~~ critic who became conscious of the necessity of affirming of the native elements in literature and blended the English accent with the

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French accent. He has digested Sappho and Euripides, Theocritus, and Virgil.

If Dryden is the father of English criticism it is also because he has opened a new field of comparative criticism. The method followed by predecessors was to compare modern literature with Greek and Latin.

Prof. David Daiches has brought out notable quality of Dryden's critical faculty. "The primary qualification of a good practical critic is the ability to read the work under consideration with full and sympathetic consideration." He considers Johnson learned and judicious writer who ever wrote for the stage. While comparing the two dramatists Shakespeare and Johnson, Dryden writes observes:

"I must acknowledge him the more correct poet but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the father or Homer of our dramatic poets; Johnson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him but I love Shakespeare".

To crown all what lends point and pungency to Dryden critical pronouncement in his inimitable prose style. His manner is as facile and unostentatious as his matter is impregnated with meaning. Dr. Johnson was the greatest admirer of Dryden's prose style. He observed "they have not the formality of a settled style, in

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which the first half of the sentence betrays the other.

From all we have said above it follows that is for his native sensibility, for his classical liberalism, for his catholicity of taste and broadness of outlook, his conversational pace, the gentlemanly tone and cool, judicious posture and above all for his animate and easy style that Dryden deserves to be called 'The father of English criticism'.

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