Neo-Classicism

Literatry activity, we have seen was sifted in medieval period in Europe under religious impulse that imposed restrictions on its free flow. The more there was an effort at its suppression refined it became, because it is a creative urge which must find expression sooner or later. It now assumed a new form. The principles of arts were rediscovered in thirteenth Century through the spirit of crusades. Literary criticism started again, flowing especially in two processes. The principle of imitation condemned by Plato but restored to its serene purity by Aristottle and refined and rennovated by Plotinus and raised to the status of sublime by Longinus was interpreted as representational of the life in the act of copying nature by the artist consciously or unconsciously. The artist in making an image, in imitating nature, in representing life through his medium criticizes life itself on one hand, and on the other hand, he does not copy nature simply but gives us his rendering of nature which is at one and the same time less than nature, for only reality itself is equal to reality with which art cannot compete on its own terms - and more than nature because in that, he has put into it something of his own - himself.

Art as Criticism of Life:

The artist, in both of his efforts shown above, defines or criticizes life howsoever rudimentary may be his efforts. There
are other elements mixed into it because his efforts being rudimentary, they lack purposive element which is essential for synthesizing art elements. In the accidental scrawling of a child or the musical notes of a bird we have a glimpse of these rudimentary art which we describe as beauties of nature rather than beauties of art which is an outcome essentially of the characteristic criticism of life.

As the artist grows gradually, his self-consciousness also grows increasingly about his art and art-creations. He becomes more and more conscious of his methods, his models and also what it is that he wants to create. He becomes conscious of what effect his creation would leave on the viewers or what effects, he would like to leave on others through his creation and what tools and mediums would suit his purpose.

Poetic medium is language and hence the man of letters must study, first of all, language, its arrangement of words, rhythm, metre, rhyme, imagery and other technical problems though this may be infinitely complicated as it involves all sorts of considerations with regard to the function and purpose of literature. He thus becomes critic of expression in a secondary sense. The artist as a creative person criticizes, not only his own creation but by way of appreciation or otherwise he becomes critic of others. This is how a body of opinions about art and art forms grows up and diffuses itself through the whole cultural community. As critic of life, he is also a critic of methods and technique.
Sir Philip Sidney in his Apology of Poetry made a concerted effort at delivering death blow to the conceit against poetry bred by professionally learned who were ungrateful, who sought to deface poetry which "in the noblest nations and languages that are known, hath been the first lightgiver to ignorance, and first Nurse, whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards to tougher knowledges". He openly advocated that poetry does not deserve this scornful treatment and that it had those qualities which any respectable opinion would respect, that its purpose is moral and it is consistent with correct religion.

The poetry which is "honest" and does not deserve to be made "the laughing-stock of children" is a forerunner of Science, history, philosophy, morals and other fine arts like sculpture, painting, music, dance and drama. Poets went before "with their charming sweetness" to draw "wild untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge". Poets like Homer and Hesiodus were the forerunners of science in Greece, the Philosophers like Thales, Empedocles, Permenides sang their natural philosophy in verses, they being poets did exercise their delightful vein in those points of highest knowledge which before them lay hidden to the world. Among the Romans a poet was called a diviner, foreseer or prophet.
Delightful teaching: the end of Poetry:

Having set out to appease the censors of his own time, Sidney concentrates upon proving that even if poetry could delight, it was not, therefore, a "wanton of the theatre" to convince them that it conformed to their didactic standards and satisfied their school-masterish demand for edifying knowledge. He maintained emphatically that "delightful teaching is the end of poetry". In the spirit of Longinus, he went further to say that it will be the business of the Poet so to speak in his verses that he may teach, that he may delight, that he may move. In his defence of poetry he says "Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth in his word mimesis that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth, to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture with this end - to teach and delight".²

Poetic creation is free from natural laws:

What Philip Sidney wants to convey is that there is no art delivered to the mankind which has not the works of nature for its principal objects. Art imitates nature, we have taken note of in the development of Greek ideas of Art. Only the poetic works of creations disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifts up with the vigour of his own invention and grows independently of the nature in making things either better than the nature or creates anew fresh forms such as never were in nature. He goes
hand in hand with nature and yet is not bound by nature, not en- 
closed within the narrow warrant of her gifts but freely creates 
new forms from his own wit. Poet's teachings are also like that 
of a gentle wife who instructs but does not impose and leaves behind 
subtle pleasure which cannot be had from any mundane affair.

Reimposition of classical order by Ben Jonson:

Sidney's "defence" of poetic works and efforts was classical 
but the spirit was that of Italian Renaissance. He is essentially 
a theorist of the exuberant imagination but lacking in classical 
restraints. A far more severe classicism, squared off on the norms 
of objective ethical imitation may be observed in Ben Jonson who 
had notably critical preoccupations. He was a man of the public 
theaters whose genus lay in the saltry, astringent and prickly comic-
satiric department of classicism.

The composed poetic spirit of Ben Jonson reacted in 
protest against the extravagances of an age which admired ungoverned 
and therefore, imperfect self-expression which was prone to bombast, 
rodomontade, reckless violence, cloying sweetness, imagery for 
the sake of imagery, the alluring sound of words for the sake of 
sound. Under the urge of this unbridled and admired expressionism, 
he maintains, the lucky discernment of genuis might carry the author 
to felicitous and even immortal passages, but when inspiration failed 
it left him at the mercy of verbiage and absurdity as it so happens 
sometimes in Shakespeare but often in Marlowe.
This does not mean that Ben Jonson did not like either a Shakespeare or a Marlowe, for more than this he loved Shakespeare as he says "there was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned".

In a world in which he saw chaos, Jonson endeavoured to reimpose, in the light of ancient learning, the classic order. Ben Jonson was admirer of Sir Francis Bacon, a man of intellectual integrity, the scholar, the statesman, the scientist, the logician and the grave essayist whom no time-spirit could touch, an embodiment - in the sphere of letters of strength with restraint and hence this is what Jonson looks for the proper excellances of literature. Seeking principles of order, restraint, harmony, he takes his stand upon the percepts and examples of the Greeks simultaneously reading side by side those stilted critics who were already making their voices heard on the continent. He was preaching decorum in an atmosphere of riot. He stated, and under provocation, over-stated the values of ancient example, which the critics of the next generation, without any such excuse, exaggerated to the verge of Parody. He pleaded for "election and a mean" for proportion, fitness, propriety for a "strict and succinct style" wherein "you can take away nothing without loss". He almost restated the doctrines of the Poetics of Aristotle "only diverging from it to dot" is "which his master never dotted and to impose the unity of time more emphatically than did the master".
Emphasis on right - Proper-propriety:

Jonson accepts the classic order in a deeply critical spirit seeking to discover in the forms of ancient art, the profound spirit which they embodied. His main concern, in a literary circle which seemed to know no standards, was to impose some unquestionable standard of excellence, even if it were a superficial one, to introduce discipline, where there was none, to make art the matter of conscience as well as impulse. He insists that there is a right and wrong in art just as there is a right and wrong in moral conduct.

Qualities of a Good Poet:

Jonson is the first Englishman of letters to exhibit a nearly complete and consistent neo-classicism. Jonson himself, Dryden was to say, is a "learned Plagiary" as his Timber contains number of fragments either borrowed or translated directly from the ancients. Whatever he borrowed or translated exhibits as much care, force and accuracy of style as if they had been his own most precious individual thoughts.

He has enumerated qualities of a Poet the first of which is "a goodness of natural wit, ingenium", (2) "perfection of nature", (3) ability "by nature and instinct to pour out the treasure of his mind".
Poetry, according to him, is not "spontaneous utterance" rather it is an outcome of "laborate and painful toil". He distrusted facility, shoddy ornament, thoughtless fluency. For Jonson "hard is the beautiful" was the motto. There is no royal road to success in literature. For Jonson "things wrote with labour deserve to be so read".

Calling a man of letters, for Jonson, implies a certain life which may be lived by an Elect., a poet is what he is by the grace of God. The rapture, the madness which inspires him is not of his own power, but of divine origin.

He is against grammarians as well as philosophers for he says "I am not of that opinion to conclude a poet's liberty within the narrow limits of laws which either the grammarians or philosophers prescribe".

According to Jonson the excellence of literature springs from what is excellent in the personality of the author. In all modes of expression especially where language is a medium, "words and sense are as the body and the soul. The sense is as the life and soul of language, without which all words are dead" - "language most shows a man speak, that I may see thee".

A poet, according to him is a critic whose wisdom is tempered and who demands standards and restraints. He says "to judge of poets is only the faculty of poets".
Jonson's stout and craftsmanly common sense about imitation shown even more convincingly in his practice than in his percepts may be taken as the key to a theory of Poetry which stressed hard work - imitation, practice, study, art - a theory to which stressed poems squared off by the norm of reality. It gives no concession to either spontaneity or creative imagination. His historical importance is that he throws out a vigorous announcement of the rule from which in the next generation Dryden is to be engaged in politely rationalized recessions. One basic problem he has left for our pondering is: If a poet is to give us a truthful account of human nature, should he be a learned graduate in Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric or does an aesthetic norm of personal expression entail a generic theory of untrammelled and unstudied inspiration?

Jonson in resisting the unruly romanticism of his time, helped the reverse movement towards neo-classical pedantry. During the time between Sidney's Defence of Poesie and the beginning of Dryden's long critical career, the seat of continental critical authority shifted from Italy to France. The main difference between French classicism and the earlier Italian classicism was that the best creative works associated with the earlier movement were those written without concern for the code, or at least in expansion of it, whereas the best French classicism seemed actually the product of the code or at least a conscientious attempt to demonstrate it. Neo-classicism in French Poetry was apparently a dynamic and generative force. The invention, passion, curiosity, adventurousness
and experimental effort in which the released forces of Middle ages had broken out with explosive violence, were now looked askance at - they appeared as the wildness of a disordered mind - Nature without Method - the inferior, brutish thing, which it was the business of criticism, built up on the good manners of the classics to expose and suppress. The neo-classical critics added much that is essential to "culture" and fixed all important truisms without which we can hardly begin to discuss the art of literature.

In England, neo-classicism, borrowed from France, never assumed so noxious a form as it did in its country of origin. Even the critics who followed the French, expressed themselves with more humanity.

Opposition to French Neo-classicism:

In Dryden we find a solitary opponent of French neo-classicism, borrowed by English critics which prescribed rules of poetry as precise as infantry drill regulations or technique of Parade-ground literature. Addison, Alexander Pope, Blake, for example, could not escape from it. Dryden a great poet and still greater a critic broke new grounds as a student of the principles of literature. He penetrated more deeply than any modern had yet done into the problem of the nature and character of poetry, the function and meaning of a work of conscious art.
Poetry according to him has threefold capacity - as a proper business of the poet, as the object of the critic's appreciation, and, for society, as a force operating in its midst.

Dryden opened up a new era and field for comparative criticism. Upto now post-Renaissance critics had been content to compare modern literature with Greek and Latin but always on the assumption that the latter were models for all time and in all languages. Dryden went ahead and found a difference more deeply rooted than that of language alone. The poet addresses to the genius of the age, nation in which he lives .... for though the nature is the same in all places and reason too the same, yet the climate, the age, the disposition of the people, to which a poet writes, may be so different that what pleased the Greeks would not satisfy an English audience.

Literature as an organic force:

For the first time, Dryden introduced the notion of Literature as an organic force which develops with the development of a nation, expressing the impulses of each new age in a manner best suited to its growth. Art, according to him, is a dynamic force and must speak to the spirit of each succeeding period. It is to "the disposition of the people" that the poet writes. He was not satisfied with the formula "delightful teaching which moves" or stirs up the reader, the audience. He went further
and said "Delight is the chief, if not the only, end of poesy; instruction can be admitted but in the second phase, for poesy only instructs as it delights .... My chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live".  

Chief aim of poetry is "Delight":

The old tangle of art and morality inherited from dark ages setting bounds to the free play of the free genius of creative artist is resolved once for all by this facile declaration of Dryden. It is none of the business of the poet to set out to teach or preach but to cause delight and nothing else. Dryden goes further and qualifies his statement, least it may be misunderstood as "pleasure" with hedonistic overtones. In the same spirit as that of a Longinus, he declares "it is true, that to imitate well is a poet's work, but to affect the soul, and excite the passions, and above all to move admiration (which is the delight of serious plays) a bare imitation will not serve". To imitate no doubt but to imitate in a certain way - the way in which to affect the soul and this purpose will not be carried out properly if an artist merely reproduces a replica or a carbon copy of the nature, but being an artist, he will change it in its handling. The resemblance will be there but it must be with qualification, "a beautiful resemblance of the whole". The concern of an artist is to create, not to copy merely and hence he must produce something which is beautiful. No realistic or Naturalistic doctrine would satisfy Dryden because in such a
He cannot rest satisfied with the representation of life, howsoever lifelike it may be, unless it is beautiful causing delight. The artist, according to him, aims at making something more beautiful than it may be found in life, for nature is shot through and through with imperfection. The business of an artist is to remove imperfection from the raw material supplied by nature, to add something of his own and wrought to perfection so that it may cause delight to the soul. In saying so, he is not harking back on some metaphysical doctrine or the theory of creative imagination but is merely asserting that the artist or a poet does not leave things as they are, or as they are found in nature but handles them with care, heightens their qualities and so creates something which is beautiful, hiding deformities if there be any or removing them.

Poetry is not formed out of the observation of life but by shaping of the raw material of observed life in the light of imagination under the curb of the judgement. It is not a free play of imagination, which rather, if left free, would run amuck and must therefore be under the control of sound judgement. He says "imagination in a poet is a faculty so wild and lawless, that, like an high ranging spaniel, it would have clogs (rhyme) tied to it, lest it outrun the judgement".

Fancy or creative imagination under control of a sound judgement is the faculty which gives the life-touches and the secret
graces to it, especially in serious plays which depend not much upon observation or the raw material gathered by observation from out of day to day life or the history. Mere mechanical copying of life is compared by him with the work of a photographic machine, a kind of theft from nature and not a life transmitted by imagination. Shakespeare, for him is a model-creator who "needed not the spectacles of books to read nature", "he looked inwards, and found her there".

Poet or artist must adopt or mould a technique best suited to the taste of the people of his age which differs from period to period or place to place or age to age without submitting himself to any authority of the lawgiver in literature, be it Aristotle, Horace or a Boileau with a single sim i.e. that of delight born out of the sense of beauty. It is no business of his, to teach or to preach or to propagate, though poetry may instruct as it delights.

This faculty of Creative imagination is something of his own, an element inherent in the character of an artist, a quality known as genius which is an intimate part of the personality of the artist which impresses itself upon his creation. This is how artists of equal calibre, of equal qualities of genius differ as they have their own stamp on their own creations.
Before we close this chapter of our account of the development of principles of literary criticism we take account of the new developments which took place in England and Europe at large. By the time the Era known as Elizabethan closed, the philosopher-administrator John Locke published his treatise Essay concerning Human understanding. On one side neo-classicism promulgated "Nature Methodised" and on the other side, the philosophy of John Locke which in collaboration with Psychologists precisely defined "imagination" in naturalist terms in contrast to considering it as a potent faculty known to Dryden and critics of Elizabethan Era. This mongrel progeny lacked the precision of the one and the vital force of the other. Addison, for example, refers to Locke and Burke while he writes about poetic imagination. Basic wordsfold in his book Principles of Criticism mentions that Addison opened new paths of discovery in his disquisitions on the imagination. Addison merely applied the jargon, made familiar in his time by students of Locke to the language of aesthetic criticism. Burke was also under the spell of this widely read philosopher who was already out of date for those acquainted with Berkeley and Hume.

Addison and Burke speak and think in the philosophical language of Locke. Addison does no more than apply his Psychology derived from Locke's Essay somewhat loosely and naively, to the processes of the mind which occur in the appreciation of art. Burke, with a stronger grip pursues a similar but more systematic inquiry in his essay on The sublime and the Beautiful.
Addison's account of the Imagination is derived from Locke but we can find the gist of it, earlier in Hobbes's Leviathan where we read "Imagination" formerly called fancy by the ancient Greeks, which signifies appearance, "is nothing but decaying sense, and is found in men, and many other living creatures, as well sleeping as waking".9

Locke included this "decaying sense" out of which creative imagination is shaped in his category of secondary ideas they are caused by recalling original ideas of sense in our minds by conjoining of ideas as originally presented to form new and infinitely variable ideas. For Addison the imagination is (1) the perception of Nature at first hand, and (2) the mental representation of ideas derived from those original perceptions, and this he somewhat obscurely confounds with the objective representation of these ideas in works of art. Under the first head, declares he, comes the pleasures of the imagination arising from the actual view and survey of outward objects seen as Great, Uncommon or Beautiful. The Supreme Author of our Being, it seems, was careful to form our souls in this way, in order that we may take pleasure in the contemplation of the Divine Greatness. By pleasure in the beautiful, all creatures may be tempted to multiply their kind or find "Creation more gay and delightful".10

Pleasure of imagination is related to art and art activities which arises from the two-fold satisfaction of comparing a copy...
with the original, and from the variety and added liveliness which we experience from the manifold combinations of ideas which are not thus found combined in nature". The poet gives us as free a view of an object as he pleases, and discovers to us several parts, that either we did not attend to or that lay out of our sight when we first beheld it" he says.

Addition makes a distinction between philosophical use of the word imagination and its use in aesthetic criticism.

Burke is more exact and more luminous than Addison. He raises some pertinent questions with regard to whether there are any fixed standards in taste, as there are in reason, whether we can speak of a "Logic of taste" i.e. principles of judgements or rules governing whims, caprices and fancies. We are again reminded here of Longinus, Boileau and last but not least, Dryden, all of them sought to methodize nature or to raise to its sublimity especially so in the realm of literature. He raised a recurring question as to how is it that there is so great a variety of tastes in regard to literature and art. Is there any reason for supposing that one literary judgement is more valid than another? Is there any common measure between the opinion of one man about a picture or a poem, and the opinion of another man? What value has a work of art apart from the opinions which may be formed of it, and if none, why do we consider that one opinion is better than
another? Are we to assume that there is a standard of taste just as there is a standard of reason in regard to truth or falsehood, and if so, to what principles are we to refer it?

Burke addressing seriously to these questions, concludes that there is no separate faculty: known as tase of mind, that art is not distinct from life or has the world of its own and that we need not suppose that poets and literary critics derive their light or inspiration from Heaven. According to him man's knowing power is composed of three constituents: (1) sense, (2) imagination, and (3) judgement. Out of these, according to him the pleasures of sense are the same for all men, with regard to second or the power of representing images perceived by the senses, or combining them in a new manner, there is variation, no doubt, depending upon disposition of those ideas which the mind receives from senses. The judgement consists in finding differences and hence offers no food to imagination.

The differences in the tastes, according to Burke is a matter of degree and not of kind. Some have greater sensibility to ideas and have given closer attention due to which they collect richer knowledge of objects, while others less experience of life. But this is not sufficient, they must have more experience of art also, for more experience of art improves one's knowledge and brings about a finer judgement of aesthetic appreciation. The art critic takes pleasure in the resemblance which one piece of art
has with another or the original and thus increases experience and knowledge. The pleasure of art consists, according to Burke in tracing or recognizing resemblances and is the same for all men except in so far as this power of recognizing resemblances may be limited by greater or less knowledge of those ideas which resemble one another.

He virtually admits in another passage that there are pleasures which accompany the use of the judgement, for the subject-matter of imagination is not confined to the representation of sensible objects. It also includes manners, characters etc.

Burke as an art-critic is much more satisfactory than as a philosopher. His contribution lie in his dropping the conventional attitude of his time because his artist is concerned with all the matters of life that concern all men and that the practice of it depends not upon a separate faculty but a deeper sensibility to life and a profounder attention to it. His artist is not different from ordinary man but as more of a man. Art, according to him, is creative, it is synthetic and not analytic. What in its fundamental nature is constructive, alive, organic may have all its separate elements dissected by analytical philosophy, but it cannot be explained for, creation can only be described in terms of creation; the positive, in terms of positives, life in terms of life.
References

4. Ibid p. 123-4
5. Ibid p. 126-7
6. Ibid p. 127-8
7. Ibid p. 141
8. Ibid p. 144
9. Ibid p. 151
10. Ibid p. 152