This work aims at a critical evaluation of the pattern of Shakespeare criticism arising with Dryden and ending with Morgann. The reason why these two critics have been seized upon at the two ends is that Dryden's observations on Shakespeare would seem to be archetypal to the trend of much of the subsequent Shakespeare criticism, while Morgann is very much a culmination of this trend besides being in a way an inaugurator of a new epoch of Shakespeare criticism whose representatives are Hazlitt and Coleridge and others.

To each of such critics as Dryden, Rowe, Addison, Pope, Warton, Kames, Johnson, Whateley and Morgann, the thesis will have a chapter to devote. Another full chapter will be set apart for a detailed discussion of the temper of the age since an understanding of 18th century England in its literary, critical and social outlook is likely to help one see more clearly why the critics of the time looked at Shakespeare in the way they did.

The burden of the present study is that Shakespeare criticism came of age in the period under consideration - an epoch which cannot be said to have been insensitive to any particular aspect of Shakespeare's world. Though a large part of the criticism of the time happens to be of a general nature, there is no inconsiderable
detailed criticism either. While the tendency towards detailed criticism began with Rowe and Warton, it gained particular and decided strength and importance in the works of Johnson, Whateley and Morgan among others. The critics remark on Shakespeare as a whole, on individual plays, on characters and scenes; they also compare characters to bring about the differences lying concealed under an appearance of similarity. Besides, they speak rapturously of Shakespeare's magic, his imagery, his poetry and language. Dryden, Addison, Gray, Pope, Kames and Morgan come to mind in this connection. They manifest considerable responsiveness to the beauty of Shakespeare's language. And this is particularly significant, for it shows that the English mind did not allow the current dogmas on literary tastes and standards to deaden its innate sensibilities. Not that the critics always succeeded in working out their views. And this is particularly true of Gray and Pope who stopped short of an elaboration of their appreciative attitude towards Shakespeare's language and poetry. One thing, however, stands out. The criticism of the period succeeds in opening several windows on the fascinating world that Shakespeare's dramas are.

The thesis will seek to suggest and demonstrate that the much-maligned age of "Prose and Reason" produces a refreshing crop of fine imaginative appreciation of Shakespeare, and that a good part of the criticism of
this time was strikingly anticipatory in character in the sense of having foreshadowed the enthusiastic and character-centred criticism of the 19th century, and also certain other approaches to Shakespeare in both the 19th and 20th centuries - for example, the exploration of Shakespeare's imagery and of the total scheme of a play as opposed to a mere treatment of isolated passages. These approaches were anticipated respectively by Whiter and Johnson.

Though the emphasis has throughout been on the signal merit and prognostic character of the criticism of the time, attention has also been called to the drawbacks arising out of literary and critical orthodoxies of the period. When all is said, it is proposed to make the point that the overall critical work on Shakespeare turned out to be eminently large-hearted, perceptive, and suggestive in character in spite of the critical theories that held away.

I fondly hope that a touch of freshness may perhaps be seen in my approach to and actual treatment of the subject.

Before I conclude I must place on record my very deep sense of gratitude to my guide Dr. A. Dutta, Professor and Head of the Department of English, Gauhati University who has helped me in a great variety of ways. My grateful thanks are also due to
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