CHAPTER - I

THE TEMPER OF THE AGE

We now proceed to an examination of the intellectual climate of the age as a necessary preliminary to a correct understanding of its peculiar attitude to Shakespeare. As we have pointed out in the Introduction and as we shall see later also, both Pope and Johnson pleaded for a study of Shakespeare against the Elizabethan background. We, for our part, seek to evaluate Shakespeare criticism of the classical age in its historical perspective. And, therefore, in the following chapters we shall seek to analyse the works of individual critics and discuss their critical principles with reference to the critical currents and cross-currents of the age.

The age under study at the moment is the age that includes Dryden at one end and Johnson at the other, and this age is generally called the Augustan age in England. A most well-defined period, it has a whole complex of ideas to distinguish it.

The Augustan writers, as contrasted with the writers of the previous era, addressed themselves to a wide public—a public which they sought increasingly to enlarge, educate and make their own. The whole aim was to inform and make wide-awake. It was to
nurture an intelligent and sensitive fraternity with commonly shared interests and pursuits, and to broaden it.

The age thought in terms of collectivity rather than individualism. The commonly understood object of literary activities was social welfare, a sense of cohesion, of solidarity—a sense of belonging to one great creative whole of body politic. As A. R. Humphreys puts it:

"The Augustan age is noted for its sense of man as a social being, divinely intended to collaborate in a great task. That task, which the age made particularly its own, was to live in widespread harmony, abjuring the hazards of war and fanaticism which had convulsed the 17th century. By instinct and intention men strove for a congenial society: they pondered on the principles of a civilized community and hoped to extend doctrines of 'sympathy', on both a Christian and a rational basis, as widely as possible."

With the Elizabethans and Jacobean literary pursuit was principally an individual affair, and confined in its appeal to a private circle and existing in its own right. Elizabethan literature is essentially a matter of individual expression. It is a vehicle of ideas and thoughts and emotions which are intensely personal and hence what may be called eccentric or idiosyncratic. An Elizabethan author, unless he is a playwright, is more concerned with his own gratification than with pleasing others. At any rate, he is not particularly conscious of an audience—a public he is desirous of edifying. As A. R. Humphreys observes:

"Apart from the drama, pre-augustan writing does little to call to mind any extensive public. Sidney's"
Arcadia, Spenser's Faerie QUEene, Bacon's Advancement of Learning, Donne's Songs and Sonnets, Herbert's The Temple, Browne's *Urn Burial*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* appear to be written partly for their own sakes and partly for the reader as a single person, a private auditor, not as one of a wide community. On the other hand, Restoration comedy, the Satires and Prefaces of Dryden, the prose of pamphleteers, essayists, and novelists, the addresses of philosophers and divines, and the verse of almost all Augustan poets call up an inescapable notion of an extended public, though not always the same public.\(^1\)

And because they consciously spoke to an audience and spoke to be understood and to influence, they rejected circumlocution and chose instead precision in expression. Lucid and accurate exposition replaced an extravagant style. Objective and rational statement supplanted singularly eccentric subjective modes of discourse or expression. (Incidentally, the habit bred by this attitude resulted in much of Augustan insensitivity to Shakespeare's language). Elizabethan English was, to quote Henri Fluchere, "Salty and rich, bold, direct, full of images. A grammar that was still uncertain, words with various senses side by side with concrete terms with precise shades of meaning, enabled the Elizabethan to express himself with a compact and allusive vocabulary.... All this wealth of language was at the disposal of a deep instinct for its proper use, which is primarily to express all the emotions.... The Elizabethan 'barbarians' were not, indeed, guiltless of far-fetched, precious and extravagant turns of phrase—in a word, of conventions.... but what was natural to them was just this continual effort to follow their desire for expression through to the end. Whether the writer's bent be towards the elegant or the gross, to the rhetorical or the musical, he must in the end, what he has to say, he must put into words, with all the passion necessary to carry conviction and arouse wonder, the excitement of his inspiration, the faith that sustains him, the joy that transports and the grief that

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1. The essay 'The Social Setting' in From Dryden to Johnson, ed. Boris Ford, P. 16.
leys him low. The means do not matter when the
tongue is supple and rich enough, the mind
sufficiently alert and the passion sufficiently strong.
Such a language the Elizabethan public understood and
felt, because its own was likewise living and
expressive, its mind equally alert. The dignity and
quality of poetic language had not yet become
hackneyed and insipid.\(^1\)

The intense desire for clarity and
intelligibility together with a masculine vigour
touched by a sensitive intelligence came to mark
all Augustan writing. Intellect is the most important
common property of man, and intellect functions alike.
Therefore, the Augustans came to lay the greatest
stress on it - on intellectual and rational exposition
of things. As John Butt puts it:

\[\begin{quote}
"Since all men, as was widely assumed, were
equally endowed with the power of reasoning, it seemed
to follow that when they reasoned on any given premises
they ought to reach the same conclusion. That conclusion
was believed to have universal value; it should appeal
directly to everyone, irrespective of race and age;
it should be simple, within the power of everyone to
understand; and it should be the conclusion reached by
earlier generations, since reason must work the same
way in every period of history. When Pope said of Wit
that it is 'Nature to advantage dress'd, what oft was
thought but ne'er so well express'd', and when Johnson
said of Gray's Elegy that it 'abounds with images which
find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to
which every bosom returns an echo', they were expressing
the literary application of this belief - that the
greatest art is that which is immediately understood
and has the widest appeal, which avoids the expression
of personal idiosyncrasy and notices 'general properties
and large appearances' rather than what is too peculiar
or particular.\(^2\)"
\end{quote}\]

The glory of Elizabethan literature springs
from its concern with the problems of the mind or soul.

It is the mind that is in ferment or torn asunder and

1. Shakespeare, Henri Fluchere, trans. by Guy Hamilton,
which in the process falls upon the world without with a cataclysmic effect. At one time it is a soaring aspiration or a towering rage; at another, a gnawing conflict or an almost insane obsession. Sometimes a work represents unspeakable perversion and an eventual seeking after release; again another comes up providing a magnificent portrayal of a soul in passionate quest for light—a quest which, by a sudden turn of events, is thrown into a whirl of chaos. Whether it is Marlowe or Kyd, Shakespeare or Webster—the thing held up is the human spirit in a state of disquiet. These writers would seem to be irresistibly drawn by the strange, perhaps uncanny workings of the human soul; they are at work on characters and situations and in the process let us have stunning glimpses of the immense dimensions and unsuspected depths of the world within. It can perhaps be said with truth that they are immensely concerned with human possibilities rather than with actualities; they often deal with characters that are out of the ordinary.

Now with the Augustans the cleaving preoccupation is the social reality. They address themselves to the treatment of day-to-day happenings—social and political; the pictures they present through the prison of their art are those of everyday realities. They aim at a norm of conduct, and of social intercourse,
they have in their thoughts an ideal gentleman and citizen. Interestingly, the ideal man is never meant to have anything superhuman about him. Rather, he is a plain rational being in actual existence. He is a variety of living persons — the merchant energetic in business, the divine addressing his fellow Christians with faithful good sense, the politician busy with elections and votes, the traveller observing life at home and abroad, the country gentleman directing his farms and estates, the engineer designing his roads, canals, and bridges, the lady in her social calls, the doctor, lawyer, soldier, sailor, shop-keeper, servant, and labourer in their occupations, and the writer comprehending all these as his public."

The Augustan writer had his eye fixed on the social polity and he was ever anxious to bring about its health. When Pope and Dryden and Butler wrote their satires, they held the prevalent follies and foibles up to ridicule if only to cleanse the society of them all, and to usher in an era of ideal social health. They were the advocates of order, cleanliness, and decency, and therefore they held forth against their stinking opposites. Recoiling from all extra-social issues, at once from psychological perplexities and gigantic problems of life and death, of man versus universe, these classicists turned their attention resolutely to the problems that arise from man being a peculiarly social or political animal. As Douglas Bush so aptly puts it:

"The great themes of life and the universe are seldom touched, the great questions seldom asked,

in the neo-classic age; they are mostly taken as settled. For the poets of the Renaissance tradition man was an actor in a drama whose stage was earth and heaven. In the Eighteenth century that stage has immeasurably contracted."1

And so instead of concerning themselves with the mysterious inner world of spirit or the equally fascinating outer world of great action, the Augustans busied themselves only with the outer world of social behaviour.

At this stage it may indeed be asked: how was it that the Augustans could not find for their highest admiration anything higher than a mere dutiful citizen? It would certainly be an interesting question to answer. The preceding century was a century of excitement, of upheaval. It was a century packed with the din and dust of great political and military events culminating in the civil war with all its ill-will, cruelty and bloodshed. It was, as it were, a century of violent earthquakes. Not that there was any dearth of achievements. Yet for all their achievement, the nation's heart got sick and beat irregularly. It was longing for health and tranquillity. After the Restoration the people felt like convalescents and to them nothing appeared more attractive and soothing than the image of an average dutiful citizen going about his business peacefully. They had developed a bitter distaste for the headier passions and were now

yearning for a reversion to the quiet, normal existence. And consequently, everything that goes with a normal citizen appealed to them tremendously. This affection for the average social man necessitated a modification of the vocabulary. The increasing dissemination and popularity of scientific thinking contributed greatly to the characteristic thoughts and attitudes of the time.

Science

"While in dark ignorance we lay, afraid Of fancies, ghosts, and every empty shade Great Hobbes appear'd and by plain reason's light Put such fantastic forms to shameful flight."

— Mulgrave

"Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in Night God said, Let Newton be And all was Light."

— Pope

The tributes quoted above bear eloquent testimony to the kind and amount of influence the men of science exercised over the thoughts of this era. Science was in the air and the scientific temper was rapidly gaining ground. It was something distinctive and unmistakable. Science might have been there even before the Restoration—it was there, but then it was pseudo-science. It was loose and confused thinking masquerading as science. The old philosophies had left so much, so enormously much, obscure; life had remained, despite all arguments of divine wisdom, so extraordinarily mysterious and incomprehensible that irrationality and superstition could flourish in the absence of evident criteria by
which they could be refuted. The old systems were felt to be little more than wishful thinkings — theories born of the inventive human mind eager to invest human life with significance. They were designed to make life appear worth-living, compatible with human aspirations and answering to the deeper cravings of the human heart.

In such a context of things came Bacon (1661-1626) with his method of inductive reasoning followed by Descartes (1596-1650) who applied it to metaphysics in an attempt to prove the existence of God and the soul. The accent of both was on clear, logical thinking, on taking nothing on trust. Bacon stood for ridding the mind of all its 'idols' — pet, misconceived, unfounded notions — as a preparation for scientific and rational thinking. Descartes put everything — every notion — to doubt and emerged from the doubting bout to certitude with his celebrated saying — 'Cogito Ergo Sum'— I think (or doubt), and therefore I exist. He attached the greatest importance to an absolute clarity of thinking. For Galileo, Descartes, and Hobbes, the only recognisable truth was that discoverable by inductive and mathematical methods. Then came Newton (1642-1727) with his demonstration of the Laws of Gravitation and Motion by which the planets move in their orderly courses. As explained by this new science, the universe appeared like a great machine whose workings were intelligible in terms of certain principles — principles which are
well capable of rational analysis and explanation. The upshot of all this scientific thinking was that the entire creation would be understood in terms of reason and purpose. Newton's 'Philosophic Naturalis Principia Mathematica' was published in 1687 and soon proved profoundly influential. John Locke's 'Essay concerning Human Understanding' followed in 1690 and applied the scientific method to the empirical study of the human mind. "Together, Newton and Locke were to dominate eighteenth century thought and find their echo, often indistinctly, in much of the literature of the period. Newton was praised almost without exception. Addison and Thomson were wholehearted in their admiration for both the man and his discoveries. To Addison he was 'the Miracle of the present age', and it was Addison who, in the popular homilies of the Spectator, gave the lead to a succession of popularisers of science in filtering the ideas of Newton and Locke for the understanding of an inquisitive public, insisting always on the wisdom and piety to be gathered from them."1

The wind of science proved to be immensely potent in blowing away the grooves of fear and superstition. Men felt incredibly relieved. Their minds gained unprecedented strength and they grew tense with excitement, and ebullient with a new-found confidence and hope. This aspect of things is well described by Basil Willey in the following words:

"The eighteenth century — 'the silver age of the European Renaissance' — virtually begins in the final decades of the seventeenth. When we enter those decades we recognise on all sides the familiar illumination of the time. Glory and loveliness may have passed away, but so also have the fogs and glooms of history: the common daylight which now descends upon a distracted world may be prosaic, but at least it is steady and serene, and has not yet become dark with excessive light. One meets everywhere a sense of relief and escape, relief from the strain of living in a mysterious universe, and escape from the ignorance.

and barbarism of the Gothic centuries. Nature's laws had been explained by the New Philosophy; sanity, culture, and civilisation had revived, and at last across the vast gulf of the monkish and deluded past, one could salute the ancients from an eminence perhaps as lofty as their own. In England there was added to the general feeling of emancipation from historical spectres a sense of security from the upheavals of the Civil War period. 'We have so long together been had Englishmen', wrote Dryden in 1668, 'that we had not leisure to be good poets'; but now, 'with the restoration of our happiness, we see revived poesy lifting up its head, and already shaking off the rubbish which lay so heavy on it.'

Let it be remembered, however, that if there was a lot and a tremendous lot of enthusiasm, there was in evidence no inconsiderable caution either. While reason, the hallmark of man, was being constantly stressed and eulogised, so much so as to be invested with a certain halo and sanctity, it was well recognised that this faculty could only function within certain limitations. In fact, Locke had pointed out the peculiarly limited capacity of the human intellect, it being a form of matter which had necessarily to draw upon the senses, since innate ideas were an impossibility. And besides, side by side with the mounting confidence generated by the advances of science, there was also the increasing sense of the littleness, almost the insignificance of man and his affairs against the background of the ever-expanding knowledge of a limitless universe.

The overall effect of this trend of thought could not but be restrictive. Newton was frankly

against poetry which was 'a kind of ingenious nonsense'. Locke did not have much better notions about it. He thought of poetry as something that provided 'pleasant pictures and agreeable visions'. He evidently meant no high praise. The imagination was on the whole at a discount. As C.M. Bowra remarks:

"For a century English philosophy had been dominated by the theories of Locke. He assumed that in perceptions the mind is wholly passive, a mere recorder of impressions from without, 'a lazy looker-on on an external world'. His system was well suited to an age of scientific speculation which found its representative voice in Newton. The mechanistic explanation which both philosophers and scientists gave of the world meant that scanty respect was paid to the human self and especially to its more instinctive, though not less powerful, convictions. .... Locke had views on poetry, as he had on most human activities, but no very great regard for it. For him it is a matter of 'wit' and the task of 'wit' is to combine ideas and thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy.' Wit, in his view is quite irresponsible and not troubled with truth or reality."

On the far-reaching influence of Descartes's thought leading, along with other contemporary influences, to the lowering of the status of poetry, Basil Willey observes so pointedly:

"Descartes himself is perhaps only the most conspicuous representative of a way of thought which was irresistibly gaining ground as the century proceeded, and we must not, therefore, ascribe to him all the consequences of that thought. But the fact remains that by the beginning of the eighteenth century religion had sunk to deism, while poetry had been reduced to catering for 'delight' — to providing embellishments which might be agreeable to the fancy, but which were recognised by the judgment as having no relation to 'reality'. As Dryden wrote in his Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic License, we were to be 'pleased with the image without being cozened by the fiction.' The Cartesian spirit made for the

The sharper separation of the spheres of prose and poetry, and thereby hastened that 'dissociation of sensibility' which Mr. Eliot has remarked as having set in after the time of the Metaphysical poets. The cleavage then began to appear, which has become so troublesome and familiar to us since, between 'values' and 'facts'; between what you felt as a human being or as a poet, and what you thought as a man of sense, judgment and enlightenment. Instead of being able, like Donne or Browne, to think and feel simultaneously either in verse or in prose, you were now expected to think prosaically and to feel poetically. Prose was for conveying what was felt to be true, and was addressed to the judgment; poetry was for conveying pleasure, and was addressed to the fancy.

"These developments could not fail to result in a lowering of the status of poetry as an activity which by its very nature foresaw the only methods by which, it was now felt, truth could be reached. 'Philosophy' has indeed proved itself more than once the natural enemy of poetry. It was not only from the Cartesian universe, but also from Plato's Republic, that poetry was banished. From the Augustan world poets themselves were, of course, so far from being literally banished that they were highly honoured; it was poetry itself which suffered from the intellectual climate. After Descartes, poets were inevitably writing with the sense that their constructions were not true, and this feeling robbed their work of essential seriousness. It was felt, as Locke said, that poetry offers 'pleasant pictures and agreeable visions', but that these consist in 'something' that is not perfectly conformable to truth and reason."

The Royal Society of London (Publicly recognised in 1662) came forward to give directions to cultural pursuits. It gave a trumpet call to the seekers of knowledge to be engaged in fruitful enquiries of natural philosophy, using reason as the chief instrument. It called upon all "to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style; to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men delivered so many things, almost in an equal

number of words. They have extracted from all their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness; bringing all things as the Mathematical plainness, as they can; and preferring the language of Artisans, countrymen, and Merchants before that of Wits, or of Scholars.  

This, then, was its plan to 'improve' the English language which had come to be ridden with extravagances and exuberances, with uncalled for flourish and bombast. (We can here hardly avoid recalling how almost all the Augustan critics of Shakespeare discovered such 'vices'—'swellings' and 'bombasts' etc.—in him, and how, in consequence, they reacted so sharply to his language. Their training being what it was, we can hardly consider the phenomenon astonishing.) It is of interest to remember that the membership of the Society was not confined to men of science but was thrown open to eminent men of other walks of life, including poets. In fact, there were poets in the Society too, notably Denham, Dryden, and Waller; and Cowley, the most admired poet of his time, hastened on the Society's schemes with his Proposition for the Advancement of Experimental Philosophy in 1661, and honoured it with an ode.  

In this connection Basil Willey's words are worth reproducing:

"I know of no work which more fully illustrates the climate of opinion in post-Restoration days than Sprat's History of the Royal Society. This work, which has something in common with Glanvill's celebrations of the triumphs of modern learning........

is full of jubilation over the 'exaltation of truth', and of panegyrics upon those who 'removed the rubbish' of ages, and 'freed our understandings from the charms of vain apparitions'.... In several passages which clearly reveal the temper of his time and of his circle, Sprat justifies the ways of prose in a 'learned and inquisitive age', and sets aside with a confident and heavy hand the vain fancies of the poets.....

"The most important passages in Sprat's book, for our purposes, occur where, after narrating the early history of the Royal Society, he proceeds to give a 'model of the whole design'. It is noticeable that in the forefront of this account he places the intention of the Society to purge the present age of the errors of antiquity — 'And to accomplish this, they have endeavour'd to separate the knowledge of Nature from the colour of Rhetorick, the devices of Fancy, or the delightful deceit of Fables' — in a world, they have determined to declare war upon poetry."

Poets there were and poetry there was. In fact, a good deal of that poetry drew its inspiration from and seized avidly upon the notion of a limitless, yet systematic universe supplied by Newton. Here was something that stimulated their imagination. Here was something that enabled them to let loose the wings of fancy, while yet being able to extol the harmony and order reigning supreme in all things. The poets sang the glory of an ordered universe, an ordered society, and of the supreme architect, the fountain-head of all order.

### Nature

We have already seen how the people of the age, particularly those who were interested in

literature and the arts, imbibed the idea of order, of disciplined behaviour running through the world of men and things. Indeed, 18th century warmed to the idea of order as to few other things. The desire for order was powerfully backed by the conviction that there was nothing in nature that was great and beautiful without rule and order.

Now this idea of order is intimately linked up with what the age understood by the term 'Nature'. In the Augustan vocabulary of literature and criticism Nature occupies a pride of place and has a seminal importance. The motto - 'follow Nature' was so widely prevalent and accepted that the word 'Nature' would look almost ubiquitous. To this there was no one fixed meaning attached; there were almost as many interpretations as there were critics. To mention only a few of the ideas associated with the term; it meant either the order and harmony characterising the universe, or the complex of uniform laws governing the world, or the general and uniform truths of human nature, or just the world system held together by unalterable laws. Broadly speaking, it was either the general physical nature displaying a marvellous regularity of behaviour or the general human nature equally exemplifying certain representative truths and a uniformity of behaviour. Every writer that mattered understood it in his own light. Thus
Dryden says: "...... I grant you, that the knowledge of Nature was the original rule; and that all poets ought to study her, as well as Aristotle and Horace, her interpreters. But then this also undeniably follows, that those things, which delight all ages, must have been an imitation of Nature."  

And again when Dryden says of Shakespeare that "all the images of Nature were still present to him and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily", and that "he needed not the spectacle of books to read Nature", he must have had the same meaning to convey. Johnson is indeed specific in his use of the words: "Nothing can please many and please long, but just representation of general nature." (Preface to Shakespeare, 1765). It is in this sense of 'general nature' that he speaks of Shakespeare as the 'poet of nature'. And there is Pope with his celebrated exhortation in his Essay on Criticism:

"First follow Nature, and your judgment frame  
By her just standard, which is still the same;
Unerring Nature still divinely bright,
One clear, unchang'd, and universal light
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart
At once the source, and end, and test of art."

Physical universe is an orderly whole; it presents a bewitching spectacle of regularity and harmony. The whole creation is beautifully regulated by some uniform invisible laws. Try to bring such order and harmony into life and art. This is what Pope would look like saying to his contemporaries. In a word, Nature on the whole stood for "the universe conceived of as governed by laws, with general human nature as the microcosm of this mechanical order." Now where does the notion come from? It comes from physicists and deists — the former with their conception of a great orderly system and the latter with their strengthened

faith in a perfectly satisfactory scheme of things
presided over by a supremely rational Being. As
Basil Wilier explains it:

"The 'Nature' of the critics doubtless
borrowed some of its authority from physics and
theology, but the special problem in criticism was
to reconcile adherence to Nature with adherence to the
Rules of Art, and both with the requirements of
reason and good sense. The favourite solution,
that of Rapin and Pope, was to identify Nature, the
ancients, the rules, and sound reason, so that to
follow any was to follow all. 'Art', says Rapin,
is 'good sense reduc'd to method', and again, the
Rules were 'made only to reduce Nature into method'.
The Rules, in fact, are those laws in whose service
is perfect naturalness; only by following them that
the poet's work becomes 'just, proportionate, and
natural.' They are founded on good sense and sound
reason, rather than on Authority and Example' - though,
of course, the ancients exhibit these qualities in
the highest degree, and 'it is in these great Originals
that our modern poets ought to consult Nature.'
Further, 'the only certain way to please, is by Rules';
hence, what pleases must be in accordance with the
Rules, and must therefore also be an imitation of
Nature.'

Thus it is that Pope says:

"Those Rules of old discover'd, not devis'd
Are Nature still, but Nature methodised."

It comes to this, then, that to follow
Nature is, in effect, to follow all that needs to
be followed in accordance with the neo-classical
creed. Nature, Rules, Reason, Order - these stand,
in essence, for one and the same thing. It is not
surprising that things should turn out to be so, for
the idea of Nature sprang from the scientific
formulation of the universe, and science is grounded
on reason and the rules of inference. An important
point to note in this connection is that all that a

writer is exhorted to bear in mind is general or universal; it is the general physical nature, and
general or representative truths of human nature. This love of the general as distinguished from the
individual or particular is significant and worth-studying. In point of fact, we began our discussion
of the temper of the age putting accent on this conspicuous trend of thought. The eighteenth
century's accent on reason constituted a vote for a
pattern of conduct - the pattern of which both the
physical scientist and the theologian spoke so eloquently in relation to the great system to which
we belong. The century longed passionately for such a
pattern of conduct in the affairs of men where it was
conspicious by its absence. Their conception of
Nature (or Reason) put the tribe of writers in possession
of a norm or ideal by which they could judge the
conduct or behaviour around them. It may perhaps be asked what the general conduct or behaviour was like.
The legacy of Elizabethan and Jacobean excess of
individualism, the Civil War, and the protracted party
wrangling - all had combined to turn society into a
place where individual and eccentric ways ran riot.
They naturally reacted to it sharply. There grew a
strong distaste for all that was individualistic. At
the same time there developed a strong desire to
impose the ideal (which was so fondly entertained) on
society. In the critics' eyes, there had been too much of individual license, too great a latitude for the working of private tastes and proclivities. The only way to restore the society to health was to held up before its gaze the great human ideal—the ideal of a representative man whose life is entirely ruled by the universal reason which, in its turn, has secured him a uniform pattern of noble conduct. They also harped on the ineffable beauty of cosmic behaviour. All this explains why whoever was a serious writer in that age acted from a sense of mission and gave himself the title and functions of a judge, and also why it was a great age of satire.

On the significance and role of Nature in eighteenth century thought. A. Bosker makes some important observations which we quote below:

"The term 'Nature' had been taken in a rather loose sense by the critics of the Renaissance; with the neo-classic writers it assumed a definite connotation under the influence of contemporary thought. Prof. Spingarn remarks that it was more and more restricted 'to the specific interests of the age — to that social order which seemed the best safeguard against individual whim, and to the regulated life of Cities.' To Hobbes the law of Nature was identical with 'the dictate of right reason'. . . . . By him and Davenant the word was introduced into the field of criticism to express the same harmony and order as the new scientific movement had found in the mechanical universe. The writers of the Age of Enlightenment, both in England and France, implicitly believed in the cosmic order, and, in their opinion, art was to aim at the same harmonising regularity and unity of design. . . . . Under the influence of Hobbes's mechanical system, the old Aristotelian maxim that the poet was to imitate Nature received an altogether
realistic interpretation. Instead of implying the expression of the universal element in Nature, far transcending the world of reality, it began to mean that the poet was to give a picture of everyday manners, especially those of polite society and that he was to avoid any form of extravagance, anything that was not consistent with a rationalistic conception of the subject. What was either too silly or too bombastic was pronounced to be unnatural.¹

Again: "In Pope and other Augustans the term was mostly used in the limited sense of human nature. This restriction was probably due to the influence of the philosophy of the enlightenment, which made man, his religious and moral knowledge, and the solution of his ethical problems the central object of interest. The poet's aim was to be, to give a philosophical view of human nature, the description of lifeless things was considered to fall outside his pale. Universal nature, independent of place and time, and universal reason which, as Dryden said, 'underlies the order of nature' and 'is the only faculty granted to all men' were to direct him. For the critic these two criteria were at the same time the only reliable tests by which the merits of a work of art could be determined. Rules could only be accepted if they had proved to be principles of universal validity. The poet's task was to deal with the essential and permanent attributes of the human mind and man's invariable ethical principles, which had existed at all times and could be understood by everyone. He had to portray the general and the uniform and to eliminate the particular and abnormal. Personal idiosyncrasies, individual traits and the mere vagaries of fancy, which could only please a limited few, for that very reason, lay outside his scope."²

The long and short of all these remarks is that the Nature of the 18th century, while deriving from the physical scientist's conception of the universal nature, acquired a peculiar social and human complexion in that it was held to symbolise order in man's social and moral life, and consequently, so they believed, in his artistic world.

2. Ibid, PP 11-12.
Just as the word 'Nature' came more and more to signify only human nature and more particularly its peculiar social manifestations in their representative character, even so the idea of truth got severely narrowed down and came to mean only factual or experiential truths about human nature. 'The proper study of mankind is man'. Yet the statement is not as simple as it might appear to be. What man? Man in relation to the universe? Man with his unquenchable spiritual longings or man as a social reality? Man with all his mysterious and unpredictable emotional nature, with his baffling world of imaginative self or man with a uniform pattern of thinking, feeling and willing within the narrow confines of society? The Renaissance had taken cognizance of the fullness of human reality. It had dealt uninhibitedly with the inner man with all the complexity of his behaviour and action. It had given unstinted recognitions to the great truths of his imaginative and spiritual nature - truths that 'wake to perish never'. In a word, the Renaissance was never shy of coming to grips with man beyond the pale of those customs and conventions which virtually imprison him in society. The elemental human nature was what had been studied with gusto by the writers of the Renaissance. Shakespeare's works are a vibrant and magnificent example of this bold, full-blooded, and
astonishingly comprehensive Renaissance view life and art. In comparison, the Augustan writers would seem to bring about a surprising impoverishment of the terms 'Nature' and 'Truth.' Nature loses its tremendous extra-human dimension, and truth its imaginative and spiritual content. Truths are now those general aspects of man which are capable of rational or intellectual apprehension only. The laws of reason and experience assume over-riding importance consequent upon the powerful impact of the rationalistic and realistic movement. So that whatever is not amenable to either reason or experience must be cast aside and declared taboo. On the question: 'To what length can a poet go finding his material, or what are the limits beyond which a poet must not go?' Hobbes has his mind settled:

"As truth is the bound of Historical so the Resemblance of truth is the utmost limit of Poetical Liberty.... Beyond the actual works of nature, a poet may now go; but beyond the conceived possibility of nature, never."1

This dictum with its clear demarcation of poetic license renders the higher regions of imaginative art out of bounds for the poet who in the circumstances is condemned to "So earth-creeping a mind that it cannot lift itself up to look to the sky of Poetry," and who therefore attracts Sir Philip Sidney's celebrated curse.2

2. 'An Apology for Poetry' in English Critical Essays - XVI-XVIII centuries, T.C. PP 53-54.
Yet in spite of all their love for what is rational, probable, or credible, the Augustan writers, some of them at any rate, did show some understanding of what Aristotle meant when he said that even the irrational or improbable could find a place in art. Aristotle maintained that apparently unbelievable and irrational elements should find a legitimate place in artistic creation if they have been given artistic treatment. In the hands of a consummate artist even what is odd and fantastic, and hence contrary to the law of reason, sheds its oddities and becomes eminently acceptable. There is some such thing as the miracle of art which transforms dross into gold and makes improbable probable. It will be understood now how Aristotle spoke of the 'marvellous' as an essential ingredient of poetry. Now the critical attitude of the age was, by and large, one of acceptance of what Aristotle meant by his doctrine of the 'marvellous', but it sought at the same time to reconcile the Aristotelian precept with the prevalent rational creed. Dryden in particular saw what the Stagirite meant and consequently defended Shakespeare's use of what may be called the fantastic in some of his plays. Dryden's viewpoint was upheld by Rowe, Addison, Joseph Warton and others, who found great virtue in Shakespeare's use of the supernatural.
The Augustan age is also known as the age of neo-classicism. This is because this age had for its ideal and object of imitation the writings of the ancient Greek and Latin classical writers. In fact, the pillars on which the neo-classical thought in both France and England rested, were Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars Poetica*. Aristotle and Horace and some others had also been the inspiration behind the creative and critical literature produced during both European and English Renaissance. The Renaissance doctrine of art as also critical canons were founded on the precepts and practice of the ancients. Indeed, as is well known, the Renaissance was made possible by the rediscovery of the ancients whose works, by virtue of their unmatched spiritual depth, imaginative vigour, and human content, exercised a profound influence on the mind long steeped in medieval scholasticism. They roused men from their centuries-old torpor, thrilled them, and threw them into great and tremendous bursts of activity. The ancients leapt on the horizon of these excited tribes of people as light-bringers, as inspired path-finders, even as prophets who summoned their followers on to giddy heights of soul-adventure. It was the Italian critics of the Renaissance who first
formulated the critical canons on the basis of the teachings of the ancients as revealed in their works which they so avidly read. Coming to England we find Aristotle's *Poetics* being first referred to in Ascham's *Schole-master*. Sir Philip Sidney is seen to mention Aristotle as a great authority in his *Apology for Poetry*. However, the master who more than either Aristotle or any other Greek or Latin writer, dominated and directed the Renaissance thinking was Horace who through his *Ars Poetica* became the supreme guide of critics and poets alike. So it comes about that the Elizabethan age was no less influenced by the ancients than was the Augustan. How is it then that the appellation 'neo-classical' is reserved only for the Augustan period? The answer is not hard to find. Although both periods looked up to the ancients, the ways in which they sought to emulate them were fundamentally different. Whereas the Elizabethans got intoxicated by the ancients because of their richness of material, their wealth of thought and imagery as well as by their impeccable expression, the Augustans took to the ancients almost exclusively because of their external virtues such as the graces of expression. Broadly speaking, the Elizabethans were roused by the spirit while the Augustans were held by the magnetism of the body. In so far as the English Renaissance is concerned,
If there was any imitation at all, it was then on the plane of the spirit, for it was the question of the English mind being touched and kindled by its ancient Greek counterpart; it was the spiritual impact of the ancients on the modern, giving rise to momentous results. What Plato and Aristotle and others did was nothing short of releasing the English spirit from torpor, so that the great writers of the period never thought of merely copying the style of the classics. Now what was it that enabled the Elizabethans so readily and so successfully to receive the kind of influence we are speaking of? In a word, it was their varied and rich experience of life—a life that was tempestuously full-blooded and which was revealing ever-new dimensions almost at every step. Indeed, life, as it was actually lived, disclosed endless facets, held up infinite possibilities, and brought fresh challenges that kept men restive.

The people of the age had an hourly expectation of fresh discovery in the physical world and of something or other happening. It was therefore natural that they could and did respond so wholeheartedly to the representation of deep and powerful soul-thirsts or spiritual urges in the ancient classics. While the Elizabethans stood for an almost limitless expansion of life, and were accordingly making ever-new
expeditious into the unknown, the Augustans were busy sorting things our and establishing order in their small, well-demarcated world. Naturally, therefore, the ancients' clarity and lucidity of expression and their simplicity of style held the Augustans who were above all lovers of order. Imitation in the Augustan vocabulary implied the mere imitation of the style of the ancient classics.

"The study of Greek and Roman writers had fostered an unqualified reverence for the formal excellences: the perfect lucidity and simplicity of their style, the elegance and polish of their diction. It was especially on these qualities of the ancients that the doctrine of imitation was founded. The poet was to try to attain the same consummation of external form that these writers in general and the Roman poets of the Augustan age in particular, had manifested. He was to be on his guard against extravagance, irrelevance, far-fetched images and laboured diction. Poetic expression as well as poetic subject matter was to be in strict accordance with the laws of commonsense." 1

The following passage from Needham gives a short but vivid idea of the tenets of neo-classicism:

"The main tenets of neo-classicism - principles that can be illustrated much more clearly in France than in England - might be expressed in the following terms: Reason, rather than imagination or sentiment, should be the dominant faculty in artistic creation. The primary interest of the poet or writer should be the psychological study of Man, and especially of Man in society, and the subjects of literature should be drawn primarily from the Court and the City. The artist's treatment of his subject should be impersonal, rather than individualistic, and his work should be based on the close imitation of classical models. Art should be judged primarily on its technical perfection, rather than on its power to arouse emotion. The 'kinds' or genres in literature should be kept distinct - i.e., tragedy and comedy, for example, should not be intermingled, and there should be a distinction between the language of poetry and the language of prose."

Finally, the function of literature (and especially of poetry) should be to please and instruct."

The dominant critics of the time never tired of propagating the rules and canons of the ancients as they understood them. They were emphatic in their opinion that literary perfection was impossible of achievement unless those rules were followed, and that the technical perfection of the ancients should therefore be the object of constant study and contemplation by those who wished to write and write well.

Rationalism

Neo-classicism was not the only force at work during the period under review. Rationalism held an equally powerful sway over life and letters. In fact, the two would seem to have functioned together, for there could not have been any real quarrel between them. Neo-classicism with its emphasis on the rules of the ancients was essentially akin to rationalism with its deification of reason. The rules, in the ultimate analysis, were based on reason, and reason rather than imagination was what was held to matter in the neo-classical creed. Rationalism, which owed its origin to the philosophy of Descartes and indeed to the general advance of scientific thinking in the

period, was growing increasingly powerful as time went by. The rules were certainly not discarded even when respect for reason increased. Rather, the critical precepts and practices handed down by the ancients were sought to be explained in terms of reason with a view to proving their signal importance. The critics were busy finding a rational basis for their dearly cherished canons. However, this very tendency to rationalise the rules points to something significant. It is that reason, as the highest and most prized faculty of the human mind, came to be regarded with the greatest veneration. Literary genius was looked upon as the highest manifestation of the human intellect or reason. The people of the age looked at the classics, marvelled at their power and construed it as the expression of reason at its best. How consequential the rationalistic outlook on literature turned out to be is well brought out in the following words:

"The other important critical tendency of the seventeenth century, which gained a much firmer foothold in England than the dogmatic belief in the rules ever did, was that of making reason the final criterion of literary merit. Though the revival of learning and the progress of humanism had fostered an unalloyed veneration for classical precepts, the emancipation of the human mind from the bondage of dogma, which was one of the chief results of the Renaissance, had led to an absolute trust in the dictates of human reason and a consequent disbelief in any kind of external laws."
"The rationalistic spirit in criticism may be traced back to the beginning of the 16th century. Vida's *Ara Poetica* (1527) had already emphasised the authority of reason and Scaliger had set up his standards for the different species of literature on a rational basis. By the Italian critics individual reason and classical canons were considered as independent authorities; they were two guides that the critic was to follow. But when the French form of aesthetics gained the supreme position in Europe, the relation between the two arbiters of poetic excellence changed. Reason now became the ultimate standard, to which even classical precepts were subservient. This change in attitude did not immediately take the form of an antagonism to Aristotelian and Horatian canons, they continued to be regarded as authoritative laws, because it was believed that they conformed with reason......

Boileau bases his well-known dictum about the necessity of observing the unities on rational deduction. So does Rymer in his *Tragedies of the Last Age*. Dennis thinks the canons of Le Bossu and Aristotle incontrovertible, because they are consistent with reason. Pope's *Essay on Criticism* voices the conviction that good sense, nature, and the precepts and practice of the ancients are identical.\[1\]

All this shows how strenuously and consistently attempts were being made to show that there essentially was no antagonism between the rules and reason, and that, on the contrary, these meant perhaps one and the same thing. And this emphasis led to a glorification of reason to the exclusion of all other faculties of the human mind - these faculties in particular, which always go with good and great literature, and which in a way make such literature possible. It is well to remember in this connection that reason as a great

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faculty of the human mind had never been denied its rightful place in Renaissance thought. What the Renaissance did not recognise was any claim of reason to be regarded as all-important and as having an exclusive say in the realm of art and literature. The Elizabethans accorded a triumphant recognition to the human mind, but when they did so they did not single out any particular function or faculty; they knew the vital importance of the emotional and imaginative aspects as also of the intellectual side of the mind. And the reason why Elizabethan literature is so great and indeed so magnificent is that the poets and critics of the time knew the relative importance of the different mental faculties; if they gave freer play to the emotional and imaginative sides of human nature, it was because they realised their superior claim over that of reason in art and literature, in which reason or intellect can only be allowed to play the second fiddle. Reason was thus put in its place. The neoclassicists, on the other hand, apotheosised the rational self with the consequence that man came to be treated only as a rational being with little or nothing to do with feeling and imagination.

It is not surprising therefore that the literature of the age lacked the depth, the vision and the power of appeal that distinguished its Elizabethan counterpart. It should however be noted
that notwithstanding the over-riding authority of intellect, none of the Augustans, with probably the solitary exception of Thomas Rymer, was a thorough-going rationalist. Indeed, it is a remarkable feature of neo-classical England that a thin stream of what may be called Romanticism continued to flow and keep alive the soul of the nation in the midst of all neo-classical indoctrination. Consequently, we find all the eminent writers and poets conceding now and again the freedom of genius and imagination while discussing a Shakespeare, thereby going against their official creed with its accent on correctness and conformity. As has been pointed out: "But however great might be the veneration professed by critics like Rymer and Pope for classical precepts, it must not be forgotten that there was a general tendency in the latter part of the 17th century, and also in Pope's time, to regard the rules in their strictest form as un-English."

Or, as Needham so rightly remarks:

"This classical tradition is, however, only one element in the literature and criticism of the century; and while it is right to look on the 18th century as predominantly classical in outlook, and misleading to think of a 'Romantic revolt' as taking place in the mind of Addison, or Hurd, or even of Thomas Warton, it is equally important to remember that none of the great 'classical' writers of the age expresses a purely classical doctrine. In all of them there are reservations and contradictions—of which they were often unaware—and it cannot be denied that the elements of what we call 'Romanticism' were present in our literary criticism from the time of Dryden. Pope and Addison were both in some respects

1. Ibid, P. 6.
'Romantics' and a number of writers of the next generation (in particular, the Wartons, Young and Bishop Hurd) developed these 'Romantic' lines of thought much more fully, but without regarding themselves as rebels against the inherited tastes of their own age. 1

What these remarks pinpoint is a unique phenomenon — the phenomenon of a near-Romantic temper surviving the hostile critical atmosphere of the age. This is an important point. And when we remember it, we do not experience much difficulty in seeing how the great Augustans could enjoy themselves, to such a remarkable extent, in Shakespeare's world in the face of all neo-classical injunctions.

The Literary 'Kinds' or Genres

As we have had occasions to point out, the belief in and adherence to certain well-defined 'kinds' of literature is based on the opinions of the classical critics, who spoke of different forms of literature as being sustained by different sets of rules and appealing to the different sides of human nature. When the tide of neo-classicism was sweeping over France and England, it was only natural that the advocates of the creed should have come forward to insist on the observance of the distinction of the 'kinds', and condemn any breach of such observance. The critics of the age invoked the names of Aristotle

and Horace, and demanded that the great models be kept in view, and that any deviation therefrom be guarded against.

"One of the tenets of the neo-classical school was the rigid distinction between the various types of poetic composition..... Both Aristotle and Horace had laid great stress on this separation: in their critical treatises it was the types that were the subjects of discussion, not individual works. The Renaissance critics followed in their wake, they classified the writers according to the different genres that they had made their own. The French authorities of the 17th century and their English disciples naturally insisted on a strict conformity to the rules that their classical masters, whom they pretended to follow, had laid down for each particular species..... The extreme devotees of the 'kinds' even went so far as to deny any merit to a literary work that had not constantly kept these precepts in view."1

Now this anxiety to preserve the purity of different literary species got peculiarly accentuated by the appearance of what came to be known as tragi-comedy. Sir Philip Sidney had already come down heavily upon what he contemptuously called the 'mongrel tragi-comedy'. Both Renaissance and Augustan critical opinion was by and large severe upon this new-fangled literary phenomenon. Edward Phillips dismissed it with ridicule ("the linsie-woolsie intermixture of comic mirth with tragic seriousness.") and Addison spoke disparagingly of it in the Spectator. But whatever the criticism hurled against it from

certain quarters, there were some sensible critics who went out of their way to put in a word for it, having come to appreciate the fact that however contrary it might be to the classical precepts - this new literary phenomenon had made itself exceedingly popular and attained a great vogue in the reign of Elizabeth and the first decade of the 17th century.

Thus Dryden with his singular largeness of mind and rare faculty of literary appreciation, gladly put his seal of approval upon it. Dryden, hailed tragi-comedy and saw good reason to congratulate the nation which had the singular honour to produce this charming novelty. Johnson's defence of it, at a later date, is equally memorable. Once again therefore it becomes clear that the neo-classical age did not present a uniform spectacle of dead conformity. It is unmistakable that even when a particular set of ideas grew dominant and gathered round it a large band of followers, there still remained some dissenting voices - voices which proclaimed that sanity was not altogether dead, that dogmas did not always have the last word, and that independent thinking was still very much there. That the theory of literary 'kinds' did not have a particularly widespread following and that it was treated with almost scant respect, are
evidenced by the birth and vigorous pursuit of an altogether new genre of writing, viz., the novel, which did not agree with the notion of fixed types.

The novel, as it made its appearance, was a sort of portmanteau or pot-pourri, being an unexampled mixture of the tragic, comic, mock-heroic, epistolary, and so on. Needham's remarks in this connection are quoted below:

"The emergence of the novel - almost a creation of the eighteenth century - undoubtedly played a particularly important part in helping to destroy belief in the old notion of fixed kinds........ English writers were doubtless encouraged in their free handling of literary forms by the long tradition of independence in our literature, especially, in poetry and drama. The success that our poets and dramatists had achieved in defiance of classical canons was a constant obstacle to attempts to apply rigid rules in English letters, and Faerie Queene, the tragi-comedies of Beaumont and Fletcher, and the plays of Shakespeare are perpetual reminders of this tradition."

Sentiment and Taste

The Augustan literary scene did not, on the whole, present a picture of unredeemed rationalism; that a trickle of emotion and feeling ran throughout the epoch, overshadowed though by the dominance of reason and the rules. In fact, it would appear that the very tyranny of rationalistic jargon hastened a revolt

1. Taste and Criticism in the 18th century, EB. Needham, PP 24-25.
against it — a revolt which took the form of a sympathy for all such faculties of the mind as were suppressed or sought to be crushed by the onslaught of reason. There grew a tendency to reassert the claims of emotion, enthusiasm, imagination, and like qualities in matters of literary creation and literary criticism. It came to be realised that mere technical excellence or perfection was not enough, that the starved powers of the mind had to be given their due, and that art and literature could only be enlivened and enriched by welcoming and securing a free play of the emotional and imaginative resources of the human mind. It was increasingly realised that nothing great was ever produced by a strict adherence to a body of precepts which had little relevance to the age or time in question. Genius could never function in fetters, and in estimating the work of a genius due attention should be paid to the large role played by distinctive individual and national tastes and imaginative vigour in making the work what it is. The man whose work gave the most powerful fillip to this liberal tendency was Longinus of the first century A.D. "The greatest single stimulus to this new trend came from the dissemination of a knowledge of the ideas of the famous essay *On the Sublime* (1st century A.D.). This essay ... was translated into French in 1674 by Boileau, who followed up this translation with Critical Reflections on the work (1694). The fact that this treatise was reintroduced to the modern world by a great modern classical critic shows how the elements of the newer conception of taste
combined with the more traditional ways of thought. In Longinus, the 17th century found a master who, while not underestimating the place in poetry and rhetoric of the classical qualities of logic, decorum, and structure, attached a still higher value to originality and the power of moving reader and auditor. Though the full implications of his doctrine were not realised at the time, much of the spirit was perceived, and from the study of his work there arose also a new conception of the function of the critic. Henceforth the critic was to be regarded, not so much as a judge, still less a picker-out of faults, but rather as a revealer of the 'beauties' of the work under examination. In English criticism the influence of this work was first clearly seen in Dryden's Apology for Heroic Poetry (1677), in which besides discussing the theory of the heroic poem, Dryden also dealt with the qualifications of the critic and the methods proper to criticism. The majority of Dryden's own essays exemplify the new and liberal spirit of criticism which many other writers, from Steele, Addison, and Pope to Goldsmith, continued to advocate and practise. It is noteworthy that in spite of the force of neoclassicism, Dryden and the majority of English eighteenth century critics preserved a spirit of independence and breadth of judgment.\footnote{Ibid, P. 20.}

Terms such as 'taste' and 'good taste' were first made current in England by Dryden, Saint Evremond, and Temple, and then popularised by Addison and Shaftesbury. The emergence of 'taste' signified a somewhat altered view of things. Those who used the term and discussed it, bringing out its true implications, showed clearly how individual or national taste could not just be a matter of application and study, but was more a matter of some innate faculty. In other words, it was more intuitive than rational or intellectual. Taste, while having to do with factors of history,
climate, national temperament and so on, was inextricably connected with the inexplicable nature of individual genius. What was most remarkable about it all was the recognition of something mysterious, something elusive, something which would not submit to rational explication. And no doubt this tendency to explore and recognise the deeper layers of the human mind in aesthetic appreciation was largely due to the great example of emotional and imaginative appreciation left by Longinus. Addison recognised that taste involved an innate or original element, while it could be improved by study and should be viewed in relation to tradition. He further admitted that, in the last resort, genius, a power above all rules, was an essential factor in artistic creation.

"Burke made an even more comprehensive analysis of the conception of taste. He was prepared to admit that the common nature of men's minds caused them to make similar judgments, but pointed out that differences existed in the intensity and direction of the taste of different persons. He saw, too, that taste, while not a mere instinct, was not a separate faculty of the mind, but depended on the harmonious working of sensibility, judgment, and imagination. This clear relating of terms was long overdue.

"A similar balancing of evidence marked Hume's treatment of the subject in his essay 'Of the standard of Taste' (1757) and from about this time, as a result of the gradual relinquishing of the Rules, and of classical standards, the validity of individual taste and the independence of imaginative genius were clearly recognised."

1. Ibid, P. 37.
Emotion and Imagination

It will have been clear from the above discussion that the rules and dogmas could not wholly repress the native deep-rooted instinct for artistic appreciation which involved a presupposition of emotion and imagination. Longinus's role in the formation of this trend in literary taste has been noticed. It bears repetition that Longinus with his use of the terms - 'sublime', 'exaltation', 'passion', 'rapture' and 'enthusiasm' exercised a most seminal influence on the critical temper of the age. He may be said to have roused the nation from its neoclassical and rationalist slumber and made it alive to its great heritage - the magnificent poetic and dramatic literature of the Elizabethan age which offers an unforgettable illustration of what the great Greek spoke of. Elizabethan literature affects one emotionally, it excites and thrills; it elevates and throws one in raptures. It is sublime. In a way, Longinus was a powerful reminder of what had been forgotten or neglected by the neo-classical age. What he did from across the barrier of time to modify and liberalise the critical temper of the age by making it recognise the legitimacy of passion and exaltation, was destined to bear lasting fruits. Dryden, Dennis, Addison, Pope, Kames, Morgann, besides many others,
came to recognise in their different ways the claims of the emotional and imaginative factors in the making of literature and the great Longinian virtues in Shakespeare's works.

"In Dryden's opinion, Longinus whom he considered the greatest critic among the Greeks after Aristotle, had rightly observed, that 'to write pathetically ..... cannot proceed but from a lofty genius.' Like the Greek rhetorician Dryden is convinced that the pathetic and the sublime are closely connected and that a good poet is born with the power to evoke violent emotion naturally. Addison too thinks that following mechanical rules is not enough to make a good poet; something that elevates and astonishes the fancy, and gives a greatness of mind to the reader, which few of the critics besides Longinus have considered."

"The great advocate of emotion during the Augustan period was John Dennis. His insistence on ecstasy and exaltation as the fundamental element of poetry gave him the name of 'Sir Longinus' among his contemporaries."

Pope's critical writings, which reveal a mingling of neo-classical dogma and a large draught of liberal thought, bear pointed testimony to the growing strength of the new outlook on life and letters. His youthful Essay on Criticism which is more a restatement of the prevalent neo-classical and rationalist doctrines than a recognition of the elements of passion and mystery which go with genius,

1. Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson (1954), A Bosker, PP 33-34
yet makes a passing reference to the liberties which a genius is entitled to take and which may be productive of rarer beauties than any scrupulous adherence to the rules could ever bring into being:

"Some beauties yet no precepts can declare,  
For there's a happiness as well as care.  
Music resembles poetry; in each  
Are nameless graces which no methods teach,  
And which a master-hand alone can reach.  
If, where the rules not far enough extend  
(Since rules were made to promote their end),  
Some lucky license answer to the full  
Th' intent propos'd, that license is a rule.  
Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take  
May boldly deviate from the common track.  
Great wits sometimes may gloriously offend  
And rise to faults critics dare not mend;  
And vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,  
And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,  
Which, without passing thro' the judgment, gains  
The heart, and all its end at once attains."

Pope's prefaces to his Homer and to his edition of Shakespeare contain even more pronounced pre-Romantic views. That genius or imagination is the essential gift the poet finds forthright affirmation in his preface to his translation of Iliad. Pope speaks eloquently of Homer's moving power and creative imagination ('invention') in the following passage:

"Homer is universally allowed to have had the greatest invention of any writer whatever..... Nor is it a wonder if he has ever been acknowledged the greatest of poets, who most excelled in that which is the very foundation of poetry. It is the invention that, in different degrees, distinguishes all great geniuses; the utmost stretch of human study, learning, and industry, which masters everything besides, can never attain to this..... It is to the strength of this amazing invention we are to attribute that unequaled fire and rapture which is so forcible in Homer; that
no man of a true poetical spirit is master of himself while he reads him. What he writes is of the most animated nature imaginable; everything moves, everything lives, and is put in action."

And when we turn our attention to other critics of the time, we feel that Bosker is right when he observes:

"The rationalistic critics by no means denied that it was the poet's duty to move the heart of his audience or readers. Johnson, though a thorough-going rationalist, was also a man of strong temperament; his Prayers and Meditations are the expression of a strongly emotional nature and we know from Boswell that in conversation he was often carried away by his feelings. But he was of opinion, and this opinion was shared by most of his contemporaries, that the poet, who wrote for the reading public, should give no expression to his emotions before they had been properly toned down by reflection. He should keep his personal sentiments to himself. Though Johnson's love of truth drove him into violent opposition to any false display of passion and to morbid sentimentism, it would be wrong to say that he could not appreciate artistic expression of genuine emotion. Of the several instances that his critical writings afford in support of this statement, I need only mention his strictures on Addison's Cato, in which he sees merely a 'splendid exhibition of artificial and fictitious manners.' He admires its 'just and noble sentiments'... but 'its hopes and fears communicate no vibration to the heart.' Human sentiments and human feelings are absent in Addison's tragedy, whereas Shakespeare's characters all 'act upon principles arising from genuine passion.'

"What has been said of Johnson is true even to a higher degree of his contemporaries. Kames severely inveighs against florid declamation and cool descriptions which often take the place of truthful delineations of the human heart. He attacks the pompous tragedies of his time, 'showing only the mere outline of passion,' and contrasts Shakespeare's sentiments, which are 'the legitimate offspring of passion,' with those of Corneille, who describes in the style of a spectator instead of expressing emotion like one who feels it." 2

2. Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, 1954, P. 49.
Historical Criticism

While discussing 'Taste and Sentiment' we referred to a gradual recognition of sharply varied tastes and temperaments depending upon the factor of individual and national genius, climate, and culture etc. The historical criticism has something to do with that. It implies that literary taste and compositions are profoundly influenced by the character of the age and society to which they belong. An artistic or literary work should never be torn away from its historical background and examined as though it never belonged to any particular age or society. In order to understand and appreciate such a work, it was imperative to bring within the scope of study a whole complex of details -- the state of the society, its literary tastes and standards, the national genius and so on. Now this was essentially a scientific approach and it went very much against the spirit of the set dogmas and doctrines prevalent at the time. For it had been assumed that the rules had a timeless applicability.

The new attitude which was indeed an offshoot of historical and antiquarian studies called for the recognition of wide and sharp variation of tastes and genius. It also demanded a meticulous research into the complex forces governing all literary phenomena.
"The study of historical development fostered the conviction that a work of art is at least partly the result of the social and mental conditions of its era, and that these underlying forces should be studied by the critic. What had been stigmatised by the critics of the preceding age as extravagant and grotesque, was seen in quite a different light when due allowance was made for the difference in manners between modern times and those in which the poet lived. The affectations, conceits, and fopperies of chivalry, which had so often been ridiculed in the days of the Augustans, were pronounced by Hurd's and Warton's to be imitations of real life. Thus the defence of 'Gothic' poetry necessarily conducd to the rejection of the judicial method in criticism and to the acceptance of the historical point of view.

"Most of the critics of the Johnsonian period recognised that it was the only method to arrive at a just estimation though they did not apply it consistently and often reverted to the old dictatorial ways."

Now this idea of historical relativity was not altogether a new phenomenon in England; it could be traced back to the early years of the 17th century. As Needham points out:

"As early as 1602 Daniel had claimed the right of the nations of modern Europe to develop their own poetic genius independently of the methods of classical antiquity, and Bacon, in his Advancement of Learning (1605) had shown the significance of the historical growth of man's intellect and artistic genius. As early as 1668 Dryden, in his Essay of Dramatic Poetry showed the futility of trying to measure Shakespeare's value by classical rules...."

In his preface to Shakespeare, Pope pleaded for this historical approach which must later have prompted Johnson to adopt an identical view and to make the following significant pronouncement in his preface to Shakespeare:

"Every man's performances to be rightly estimated, must be compared with the state of the age.

2. Taste and Criticism in the 18th century, ed. H.A. Needham, P. 21."
in which he lived and with his own peculiar opportunities."

If all this discussion suggests anything in particular, it is that the nation's artistic spirit refused to lie for long in neo-classical fetters, that there gradually came an awakening — an awareness of the nation's past and consequently a heightened realisation of present responsibilities, that there came about an enlargement of the conception of art, and especially of poetry, with a corresponding weakening of the hold of mere reason and the rules. Attention should at the same time be called to the fact that whatever liberalisations came about by degrees, the age remained on the whole classical in temper, with the important difference that unlike France which made nearly a fetish of the rules and went far on the road of critical fanaticism, England, true to her characteristic spirit of independence, made use of the classical precepts in such a manner as to be in keeping with her native genius. She was never a blind imitator of the classical masters of antiquity or their modern disciples. Her essential sanity of spirit stood the nation in good stead. So that even when the writers of the age remained theoretically doctrinaire, they were in practice guided by their native sensibility which was surprisingly catholic. And incidentally, Shakespeare himself may be said to have contributed to this liberalisation of critical spirit.
The discussion in this chapter gives us the necessary perspective in which to approach the Shakespeare criticism of the age. The chapters that follow deal with individual critics. Our considerations of these critics will be carried on in close relation to this chapter. While discussing them with a view to bringing out their respective individual approaches and contributions, we shall constantly have the age in mind and shall seek to indicate the direct bearing of the age on their works, to trace the age at work in their efforts to understand Shakespeare.