CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION
Chapter One: Introduction:

John Dryden was born at Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire, on 9th August, 1631. He earned his B.A. degree at the Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1654. Starting from 1664 John Dryden practised literary criticism throughout his life. Dryden died at the age of 69, on 1st May, 1700.

Although John Dryden has already been, up to some extent, recognized as a great critic, the value of his views in the field of literary criticism, which lie scattered in his numerous prefaces along with his major critical pieces, is not as widely recognized as it deserves to be. The purpose of the present research is to establish the importance of John Dryden's critical views and their relevance to the present day practical criticism in English literature.

Therefore the present work exhaustively examines Dryden's creative and critical outputs march step for step. He consistently commented upon his own creative work and developed from it a general literary theory.
and explicates Dryden's critical views and makes a plea for greater recognition to be accorded to Dryden than what has been given him thus far.

Though Dryden's fame as a critic rests mainly on his major critical pieces - "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy" and "Preface to the Fables", many of his valuable critical pronouncements are scattered in a number of his prefaces to his plays, poems and translations. It has been found that sufficient light has not been thrown on his minor critical prefaces and an attempt is now made to bring to light John Dryden's valuable critical views in these prefaces along with his major critical essays. "If he had written nothing but his Prefaces, or nothing but his Songs, or his Prologues, each of them would have entitled him to the Preference and Distinction of excelling in his Kind." 1.

John Dryden was the greatest figure in English literature in the later part of the seventeenth century. In him we have a happy blending of sound imaginative sensibility with a comprehensive and penetrating rationality and an instinct for order and balance. Dryden was great as a dedicated poet, a dramatist, an essayist and a critic. It will not be an impropriety if John Dryden is placed among the small but significant group of poet-critics like Ben Jonson, Coleridge, Arnold, Eliot and W.H. Auden who have combined in themselves a rare capacity of creative writing and critical evaluation and judgement of literary works.

Dryden's critical pronouncements provide us with intellectual stores of wealth. Each of them is valuable without the limitations of time. However, John Dryden's excellence was not properly understood or appreciated during his own
time. "Mr. Dryden, who had so many great qualities, -- who thought often, so finely, so justly, so greatly, so nobly, who had the art of reasoning very strongly -- could never receive encouragement enough to set him entirely at ease -- --."2.

Dryden was a noble man with a strong will power. His art of reasoning was not only sensible but it also reflects human sensitivity. This kind of a temperament is the basis of all moral virtues. "To the best of my knowledge and observation, he was, of all the men that I ever knew, one of the most modest, and the most easily to be discountenanced, in his approaches, either to his superiors or his equals. -- he was worthy of the distinction you have shewn him, as a Man, as well as an Author."3.

In his prefaces and other major critical pieces,

Dryden's main aim was to vindicate the freedom of the creative artist by convincing his readers against the mechanical rules of the ancients. He attempted to establish a harmony between the rules of the ancients and the concept of good sense and reason.

In order to be able to assess his work in the field of literary criticism, it is necessary to understand the value of 'criticism' as a branch of study in itself. The function of criticism is the appreciation of positive literary excellences.

Literature is a mirror of civilization, it portrays life in all its diversity and complexity and provides everlasting socio moral and ethical insights for human beings to uphold and cherish. Literature and drama not only provide entertainment to people, but they also educate them. "The idea that literature is a proper subject for study, because of what it tells us about man himself and about the ways
in which he communicates, is for us a legacy of the Renaissance, one of the re-discovered ideas of the classical past."

Besides, literature and drama also have a bearing on the minds of the people and consequently on their conduct. Therefore, is it not essential to evaluate literature which can affect human conduct and as a result our society? It most certainly is and that is why 'literary criticism' is an important branch of study. 'Literary Criticism' also helps the readers to understand and appreciate literature better.

Once we understand the importance of literary criticism, the next important question is - 'What are the methods or ways in which literature can be evaluated?' It is more difficult to discover a method or start a work,

than to continue it. At the time when John Dryden started his pioneering work in the field of English literary criticism, there were yet no accepted theories. Besides trying to justify his works, he practised literary criticism and justified every judgement of his with proper reasoning. He tried to lay down methods of evaluating literature and was successful in doing so.

"The best we can hope for from any single critical approach is a working hypothesis — – —. It is up to us to judge each approach according to its usefulness and effectiveness." 5. The aim of the present research on the topic 'John Dryden's Contribution to English Literary Criticism' is to establish the usefulness and effectiveness of Dryden's critical approach.

One of the most important features that make
John Dryden an outstanding critic is his method of presentation. On any issue, John Dryden tries to convince his readers with the help of a detailed discussion or argument. "True criticism offers itself in a spirit of debate, as a reasoned response to one or other of the primary questions with which it concerns itself, as a thoughtful contribution to the understanding and appreciation of literature, - - -. It is only in spelling out a detailed argument that a critic really enters the debate which has been central to our culture for so long."6.

A number of quotations have been used to enable the work to be more effective. However, the intention in doing so is only to make the statements or views more strong. "We should then be sparing about borrowing our judgements, either on literature in general or on particular
texts, from other critics. We should be looking to their example, not for ready made judgements or answers, but for approaches and arguments which we may compare with our own - as a way of clarifying and expanding our own thoughts, not as a substitute for them. So when we quote in our writing from the work of another critic, we should not do it in the fond hope that a famous name will mysteriously add weight to our feeble efforts: We should only do it as a way of making clear where our own approach stands in relation to that of the other critic and as a way of furthering our own argument."7.

Dryden strongly believed in the perception of literary creation or criticism through practical experience, rather than blindly believing in rules set by others. 

- - - the tension between authority and sound sense, reflecting upon direct
experience of literary works, is present, and is fruitful, for it gives pause to authoritarianism, makes room for some freedom of movement.\textsuperscript{8}

John Dryden was a writer for all times. His views on literature or drama have not the limitations of time. The impressive critical qualities in him were his breadth of view, his skill at comparison, his sense of changing artistic conventions and his readiness to hear new evidence and if necessary change his mind. These qualities have made him the master of English literary criticism. Thus his reputation as a critic rests on sure and lasting foundations.

John Dryden was also philosophical and his views on the laws and principles which contain or ennoble human life are of permanent interest.

In 'Heads of an Answer to Rymer', Dryden says,

\textsuperscript{8,9} John Dryden, Selected Criticism, ed. James Kinsley and George Parfitt, 1970.
"Consider whether Aristotle has made a just definition of tragedy, of its parts, of its ends, of its beauties; and whether he, not having seen any other but those of Sophocles, Euripides etc. had or truly could determine what all the excellencies of tragedy are, and wherein they consist."9. Such was Dryden's cast of mind. His essays on dramatic subjects are nearly always characterized by that judicial balancing between the rules and the artistic need of the individual liberty. In an age of transition and much confusion, he set criticism on new and fruitful lines, pointing to other standards and methods than those commended by the French Neo-classical school.

Dryden was the great authority of the period not only as a critic, but he also educated his age in the matter of prose writing. In what he called 'the other harmony of
of prose', he developed an easy and natural style. Any one who reads his prefaces today knows that he is reading the English of a modern man: the words are common and still in use. As Mathew Arnold said two hundred years later, 'Dryden wrote a prose such as we would gladly use if only we know how.'

Prose is very important for the expression of thought and it was Dryden who brought into use a style suitable for every day use. It has ben rightly said that, "it is hardly too much to say that Dryden found the English speechless and he gave them speech."  

Dryden had a lot to say and said it in plain straight forward fashion which was of all things most likely to be useful for the formation of a prose style in English. The language which is used at present is not much different

11, 12 John Dryden, T.S. Eliot, New York, 1932
from that of Dryden's. T.S. Eliot, the well known critic, has rightly said that, "No one, in the whole history of English literature, has dominated literature so long, or so completely. And even in the twentieth century the language was still the language of Dryden, as it is today."12.

John Dryden's essays suffered very less from changes of literary fashion and they make an interesting reading even in the present day. "There is an inexhaustible liveliness and spirit in his essays which has given them an advantage over many more laborious and philosophical pieces of criticism."13.

Though most of the writers in his age believed in some rules and principles, John Dryden wrote just what he thought to be true without being bound to any such rules. "Every one of his essays contains some independent

In 'An Essay of Dramatic Poesy', Dryden presented an open argument regarding various literary issues. It allows the reader to make his own judgement. "Dryden's virtue is that in a time when literature was pestered and cramped with formulas, he found it impossible to write otherwise than freely. He is sceptical, tentative, disengaged, where most of his contemporaries and most of his successors for a hundred years, are pledged in certain dogmas and principles."  

This is one of the important reasons that made John Dryden an outstanding critic. He knew the value and purpose of literature and had the courage to reject certain formulae which imposed restrictions on creative writers and dramatists.
Literature is like an ocean and he realized the necessity for an ocean to be free. This doesn't mean that he encouraged any kind of writing, but that he wanted a good piece of literature to be free and not restricted, so that it will be table to provide entertainment while imparting knowledge.

Dryden was sceptical and a sceptic is basically independent in nature. It is wrong to believe in something, no matter how widely acknowledged it is, just because many others believe in it. One needs a lot of courage as well as confidence to raise one's voice against a popular belief, because it is then essential for one to suggest an alternative. Besides suggesting, one will also have to prove in what way the alternative is better and the necessity for the existing rules and principles to be dropped. This is exactly
what Dryden had done with regard to literary rules and principles.

Dryden's intellectual equipment and the content of his work have not been well appreciated by all. Mr. Allan Lubbock has asserted that Dryden's "whole body of work can be explained as the child of a deep enthusiasm, which made him attach but little importance to religion or politics, or even to many aspects of literature itself. What excluded everything else was the love of expression for its own sake. He devoted his time therefore to increasing the efficiency of his instruments." 16. He meant to say that though Dryden's method of expression was good, what he actually expressed was uninteresting. But Dryden's 'An Essay of Dramatic Poesy' alone shows his depth of knowledge. However, readers in the past have been able to say more

for Dryden:

"Let free, impartial men from Dryden learn,
Mysterious secrets of a high concern,
And weighty truths, solid convincing sense,
Explained by unaffected eloquence".17.

There is much we can learn from Dryden, if we try to do so without being biased or partial. In him there was an unlimited knowledge regarding literature, which we can learn through his works which he left behind. Most of what he has written unveils important facts that interest any one who is interested in literary creation or criticism. Dryden lets us know the truth behind various aspects of literature. He never forces his views on his readers, but convinces them with sensible explanation. He always wrote in a fluent and powerful way without unnecessary

ornamentation, which further helped his readers.

From the passage in Walter Savage Landor's verse letter to Wordsworth -

"Our course by Milton's light was sped,
And Shakespeare shining overhead;
Chatting on the deck was Dryden too,
The Beacon of the rhyming crew;
None ever crosst our mystic sea,
More richly stored with thought than he;
Tho' never tender nor sublime,
He wrestles with and conquers time."18.

Dryden is being compared to other great creative writers like Shakespeare and Milton. Milton lights our path and Shakespeare shines above us, but Dryden certainly isn't far behind. In fact, he is powerful enough to signal others

as to what they should do.

Literature is like an ocean and no one could ever cross this ocean of knowledge with more richness of thought than John Dryden. His essays may not be of the most exalted kind, but what he has written will remain meaningful forever and is not restricted to people belonging to one particular age alone. Dryden's essays and prefaces are like stores of knowledge to any one who is interested in literature and with them Dryden has conquered time.

No one could have given a better account of Dryden's genius than has Johnson. "- - - of genius, that power in which judgement is cold and knowledge is inert; that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates; the superiority must, with some hesitation, be allowed to Dryden."19.

In 'An Essay of Dramatic Poesy' and 'Preface to the Fables', Dryden faces his adversaries, personal and impersonal, with the security of a man who has confidence in his own powers. "He is at his best when he set himself to try the value of dogmatic rules and principles; cautious; respectful, seeming to comply with them, till the time comes for the stroke that ends the encounter, and leaves the arena to be cleared for the next antagonist."20.

Dryden on Shakespeare is unlike any other critic; there were as yet no commentators, and no general opinion on the subject. But Dryden's estimate of Shakespeare is idolatory. "If Dryden speaks about Shakespeare with little anticipation of the vast multitude and the many voices that were to follow him with their praises, his judgement is none the worse for that. The isolation of his point of
view, the simplicity of his statement, the enthusiastic tone, and at the same time the want of reverence, all bring out the individual genius of Dryden as a critic."

Dryden was concerned with problems which confront a practising dramatist and he gave his opinion regarding various topics without being biased. "John Dryden's efforts during the transitional years to pronounce judgement on some of the current problems with which contemporary dramatists were faced are important. With him it becomes evident, a new force entered the critical world." 22

Dryden's belief in reason over regulation, which can be found in almost every work of his, is one of the important features that make him a great critic. In his preface to "All for Love", Dryden wrote, "The French poets, would not for example, have suffered Cleopatra and Octavia


to have met; or, if they had met, there must have passed betwixt them some cold civilities, but no eagerness of repartee, for fear of offending against the greatness of their characters, and the modesty of their sex. This objection I foresaw, and at the same time contemned; for I judged it both natural and probable that Octavia, proud of her new gained conquest, would search out Cleopatra, to triumph over her; and that Cleopatra, thus attacked, was not in a spirit to shun the encounters and 'tis not unlikely that two exasperated rivals should use such satire as I have put into their mouths; for after all, though the one were a Roman, and the other a queen, they were both women."23.

Dryden was a genuine critic. He was always ready to recognize and praise the merit of an author or his works. We may note his eagerness to make people understand and

appreciate Milton's 'Paradise Lost'. Dryden's Opera, "The State of Innocence", is a dramatic version of Milton's 'Paradise Lost.' Since Milton's epic was not well appreciated earlier, Dryden tried to get justice done. In the preface to this opera, Dryden condemns those critics who seem to think that their main job is to find faults. "Criticism, as it was first instituted by Aristotle, was meant a standard of judging well; the chiefest part of which is to observe those excellencies, which should delight a reasonable reader."24.

What Dryden was against and unable to accept were rules in the form of impositions which are likely to restrict the creativeness in writers. "- - - rules - - should be seen less as arbitrary impositions than as guides to success based on the best precedent conceivable - - - a sensitive
understanding of earlier achievement can produce an art which is classical in all the best senses of that word, the art of a Virgil, a Horace, a Milton, a Jonson. The key to this kind of classicism is a respect which is not subservience, an understanding which is not self ebasing, and it is precisely this that Dryden's best criticism manifests."

Dryden's statement of the qualifications necessary to be a poet, indicates the nature of his own intellectual regimen. He wrote, "It requires philosophy as well as poetry, to sound the depth of all the passions." In the 'Defence of An Eassy of Dramatic Poesy', Dryden wrote, "I am of the opinion that they cannot be poets, who are not accustomed to argue well. False reasonings and colours of speech are the certain marks of one who does not understand the stage; for moral truth is the mistress of the
poet as much as of the philosopher, Poesy must resemble natural truth, but it must be ethical."27.

Referring to the necessity of an epic poet or a dramatist to know the manners of men, this knowledge, Dryden said, 'is to be gathered from the several virtues, vices or passions, and many other common places, which a poet must be supposed to have learned from natural philosophy, *ethics and history, of all which, who so ever is ignorant, does not deserve the name of poet".28.

Dryden described the qualification of a poet who may build a nobler, a more beautiful, and a more perfect poem, than any yet existent since the ancients :" -- a man, who, being conversant in the philosophy of Plato, as it is now accommodated to Christian use, who to his natural endowments, of a large invention, a ripe judgement,

and a strong memory, has joined the knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences, - - - and is a master of the language in which he writes."29.

Dryden has important testimony to give regarding the moral and intellectual seriousness of his nature. He wrote, "Anything, though never so little, which a man speaks of himself, in my opinion is still too much."30.

Whenever Dryden spoke about his work or himself, it was without either false pride or false modesty: "- - - that only sort of a reputation ought to be dear to every honest man, and is to me. - - - I have seldom answered any scurrilous lampoon, when it was in my power to have exposed my enemies; and, being naturally vindicative, have suffered in silence, and possessed my soul in quiet."31.

As Johnson said, "every page written by Dryden

28, 29  John Dryden, Ibid.
31.  Dryden, Ibid.
discovers a mind widely acquainted with both art and nature, and in full possession of great stores of wealth."32. He also observed that Dryden's mind was, "always curious, always active."33.

John Dryden happened to live at a time when the foundations of good prose and sound criticism were being laid and a man less flexible than Dryden would have made English literary criticism take a different course altogether. There is an everlasting endurance in his works. "He has always had, and probably for a long time to come will have, some small following of those who delight not only in relishing his phrases, but also in thinking his thoughts. For such readers, his work is one of the classic expressions of the conservative temperament."34.

Dryden was generous in his appreciation, wherever

he saw true merit. Similarly, whenever he found any shortcomings in a writer, he was frank in his statements. He was not partial to himself either, and was always willing to accept his own mistakes.

Dryden had written a lot, but was careless and the result was that his works were in a disorder. But he was graceful to admit his fault. "I am sensible as I ought to be of the scandal I have given by my loose writings; and make what repartation I am able, by this public acknowledgement." 35.

Dryden could not tolerate unjust criticism. But whenever he was attacked justly, he had the grace to acknowledge it. His aim was always to defend a good cause. "I shall say the less of Mr. Collier, because in many things he has taxed me justly; and I have pleaded guilty to all thoughts and

expressions of mine which can be truly argued of obscenity profaneness, or immorality, and retract them. If he be my enemy, let him triumph; if he be my friend, as I have given him no occasion to be otherwise, he will be glad of my repentence."36.

However, if he or others were attacked unjustly, Dryden was not ready to accept it. "When attacked he struck to slay out right, not from any malice, but because whatever he set himself to do, he did with all his vigour."37.

In his preface to the Fables, Dryden discussed those who unjustly attacked him. "--- that such men there are, who have written scurrilously against me, without any provocation. Wilbourne, who is in orders, pretends, amongst the rest, this quarrel to me, that I have fallen foul on priesthood: If I have, I am only to ask pardon of good priests,

37. Restoration Comedy, 1660-1720, Bonamy Dobree, 1924.
and am afraid his part of the repartation will come to little. Let him be satisfied, that he shall not be able to force himself upon me for an adversary. I contemn him too much to enter into competition with him."38.

Dryden was precise either while appreciating merit or while pointing to a limitation.

"His grandeur he derived from heaven alone,
For he was great ere fortune made him so,
And wars, like mists that rise against the sun,
Made him but greater seem, not greater grow."39.

The above verse, from Dryden's 'Heroic Stanzas', which he had written on the death of Cromwell, marks the beginning of his long creative and critical career. It is an example of Dryden's way of thought, the preciseness, and the polish that mark all his literary work.

Dryden was a professional and may have written more for the sake of a living than for satisfaction. But he was at the same time a conscientious craftsman, more interested in content than form. He tried to make his works durable and to achieve a standard of real competence in whatever he attempted.

"Read all the prefaces of Dryden:
For these our critics much confide in.
Though merely writ at first for filling
To raise the volume's price a schilling." 40.

Dryden was always concerned with the quality of his writing and committed himself to his profession. He was concerned not only with the present state of literature, but also its past and future.

Dryden was interested in literature's many forms

and succeeded in a large scale achievement in four major kinds - drama, poetry, translation and criticism. Through his writings, Dryden also developed an easy style of prose which became a standard.

Dryden was a poet-critic, but not a critic who later turned to creative writing. He began literary criticism mainly because he found a reason to explain what he was doing and why. He felt the need to justify his works and in the process became a literary critic and evaluated literature in general. His critical pronouncements are relevant to all times.

Though Dryden found the need to justify his works and defended them in his prefaces, his criticism was more concerned with literature in general than with particular texts. He tried to achieve a balance between respect for
authority and his own common sense, which refused to obey set theories blindly.

He rightly believed that rules should be defined, while being flexible, with the help of practical experience and good pieces of literature. But he refused to accept judgement of literature by rules. This is what made him question the unjust preference of the French writers before his native writers.

Dryden wanted to examine, understand and vindicate the rules not just for personal satisfaction but for practical purposes. He thereby wanted to enable himself and his contemporaries to write better and provide good pieces of literature to the readers.

Dryden worked as a critic without the help of any valuable native precedent. We can understand more about
values and attitudes through his critical writings. They tell us not only about the literary values and attitudes in the second half of the seventeenth century, but about the literary excellences which are relevant to all times.

"Dryden is the dominant literary figure of the period and he reflects and takes part in important literary controversies of the time.

He is concerned about the relative merits of rhyme and blank verse in drama, about the issue of the effect of drama on its audience, about the whole problem of drama's function and purpose, and about the discussion over methods of translation. Since Dryden's criticism covers wide range of time and genre, it is inevitable that he conveys much valuable information, about attitudes, beliefs, even the state of literary knowledge."
Dryden was an important critic because his views are argued and make his readers think and reconsider their views. If the job of a critic is to help the readers to understand literature better, Dryden had done his job admirably. "A critic operates valuably upon our minds when the operation of his mind upon his subject defines our own reactions more precisely, or augments them, or corrects them, or makes us re-examine them."42.

Dryden's critical powers were great and versatile. The Restoration period was one of great critical activity, but the critics were faced with opposing theories and found themselves unable to judge either way. It was a period of critical confusion with many problems demanding satisfactory solutions. Dryden's field of study was very wide and it was he who removed the veil of confusion. "The age of the
Restoration possessed many men qualified to shine in criticism but their acumen is in general only indicated by casual remarks, nearly all the serious criticism it has bequeathed to proceeds from the pen of Dryden. Dryden is entitled to be considered as the great reformer of English prose, the writer in whom the sound principles of the Restoration were above all impersonated and who above all others led the way to that clear, sane and balanced method of writing which it was the special mission of Restoration literature to introduce."43.

Dryden was a humanist and his views were based on morals and ethics. His opinions on various literary issues reveal his penetrating insight into any given problem. "He has a natural sanity of taste and straightforward perception of the deeper character of men; and from the first one
feels that if the measure of his aesthetic value is most often exact, it arises from the fact that it is guided by an intuitive grasp of psychological and moral realities which are at the base of every work."

There will always be more or less conscious criticism of a piece of art, for all creation involves public reaction. "I say what I think : I think what I feel. I cannot help receiving certain impressions from things and I have sufficient courage to declare (some what abruptly) what they are."45.

The word criticism in its present day sense was first used by Dryden and it was he who explained what the meaning and purpose of criticism is. Though not in a literary way, every person is a critic. "Man is a critic of his environment, of society, of the things of the mind and of the spirit, lastly of himself. To have a mind is to think : to think is to judge:

to judge is to criticise favourably or adversely."46.

One of the major tasks of a literary critic is to articulate what remains silent during the process of creation. Besides, he must be capable of judging a piece of art according to its merits. "If one is to say a river is deep or a mountain high, one has to see many rivers and several mountains."47.

The main aim of a poem or play is to entertain. Dryden made this point clear a number of times and confidently challenged established authorities like Aristotle. He frankly stated: "My chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live."48.

Certain qualities in Dryden are of everlasting significance in the field of practical criticism. Dryden's wide and well informed acquaintanceship with diverse literary works of different ages and nationalities and his independence

in the matter of literary judgement made him a critic par excellence.

Dryden practised literary criticism in various ways and English criticism owes a lot to him for changing the path of criticism from the earlier prescriptive form. But this is not properly understood and appreciated by all. Bonamy Dobree, for ex. stated: "- - - Dryden's criticism is in no sense an attempt to approach the artist, or even the work of art; it is an attempt to penetrate into the mysteries of art itself, not of course metaphysically, but structurally. Thus he is the writer's critic, par excellence, and as such will always be valuable. His grand mistake, from the modern point of view, was in considering not so much what a work of art was, as what it ought to be; but we love his work for the manner of its doing, which is incomparable, and
itself great art."49.

Dobree no doubt appears to appreciate Dryden's work, but he himself has failed to understand the essence of Dryden's criticism. Throughout his long critical career, Dryden sought to convince his readers against mechanical rules.

Dryden was against prescriptive criticism and repeatedly stressed the need of a creative writer's individual liberty. In fact, he was confident enough to question established authorities - 'It is not enough that Aristotle said so -- --.'

Dryden had indeed expressed his views regarding various forms of literature. But, as an individual, each of us has a right to do so. Since Dryden was a literary critic, his views may be looked upon as suggestions, but never as prescriptions.

49, 50. Restoration Comedy, Bonamy Dobree, 1924.
Dobree was once again mistaken in his estimation of Dryden's critical abilities when he stated that, "Dryden, together with his age, did not, could not, appreciate what Shakespeare was trying to do; - - -".50

Dryden, in fact, initiated descriptive criticism. His detailed and masterly criticisms of Shakespeare, Chaucer and Ben Jonson are outstanding examples. For example, how many critics can write such a beautiful line - 'Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare.' He was also able to realize the limitations of his works and those of his contemporaries - ' - - - in the drama we have not arrived to the pitch of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson'.

No other modern critic has lavished so much praise
on John Dryden as T.S. Eliot. "To those who are genuinely insensible of Dryden's genius we can only oppose illustrations of the following proposition; that their insensibility does not merely signify indifference to satire and wit, but lack of perception of qualities not confined to satire and wit and present in the work of other poets whom these persons feel that they understand. --- he is a successor of Jonson and a descendent of Marlowe: he is the ancestor of nearly all that is best in the poetry of the eighteenth century. Once we have mastered Dryden - and by mastery is meant a full and essential enjoyment, not the enjoyment of a private whimsical fashion - we can extract whatever enjoyment and edification there is in his contemporaries, Oldham, Denham, or the less remunerative Waller; and still more his successors - not only Pope, but Phillips, Churchill, Grey, Johnson, Cowper,
Dryden's criticism is stimulating. It gives us a lot of valuable information on various literary issues. Whatever he discusses, Dryden's views are argued, not asserted. This is what makes him an interesting critic. "Dryden is a critic in an absolute sense -- he is involved and conveys a sense of literature as an important human activity."52.

Though John Dryden's critical acumen has already been discussed by critics at length, no full scale scrutiny of his criticism has yet appeared and the author deserves more scrutiny and appreciation than he has received. The present work not only attempts a detailed assessment of John Dryden's critical aims and methods, but also tries to place his valuable critical pronouncements in the context of the present age.

The present chapter serves as an introduction and presents an overview of the complete work. Chapter 2 consists of a detailed analysis of John Dryden's critical prefaces to plays. Chapter 3 deals with an analysis of Dryden's prefaces to poems & translations. Chapter 4 deals elaborately with Dryden's master piece 'An Essay of Dramatic Poesy' and Chapter 5 consists of a detailed analysis of Dryden's famous 'Preface to the Fables'. Chapter 6 is the conclusion.