

Dryden and Pope

John Dryden and Alexander Pope were Restoration period and Augustan Age poets. The Restoration refers to period of time at which Charles II began his rule of England following the Cromwell's Commonwealth and Protectorate period that ensued after the beheading of Charles I. The Augustan Age, also called the Age of Reason and the Neoclassical Age, refers to a movement of poets who deliberately returned to imitating the Classical Augustan poets Virgil and Horace. It followed the Restoration in c. 1690 and ended with the death of Pope (1744).

John Dryden and Alexander Pope came from different educational backgrounds and perspectives. Dryden received a classical education and was a graduate of Trinity College. On the other hand, Pope did not receive a classical education and educated himself through self study and determination. Despite their vastly different backgrounds, both are considered masters of literary criticism and authorship during England's Restoration and Neoclassical Period. Their views on both issues are expressed in essays on the subjects. Dryden addresses the characteristics needed of an effective critic in "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy" and "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Heroic License," while in "An Essay on Criticism," Pope addresses effective qualities needed in a critic, as well as readers and authors.

The two men also believed that great poets study and emulate the ancients such as Virgil and Homer. However, the two authors differ when it comes to formal education. Dryden uses the example of Shakespeare to contend that while Shakespeare "was naturally learned . . . He is many times flat, insipid; his comic with degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast" (2,255). Alternatively, Pope believes that taste and genius are given by "Heaven". Pope illustrates true poets are in danger of having their genius "bewildered in the maze of schools, / And some made coxcombs Nature meant but fools" (26-27).

When discussing writers, Pope states, "Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true / But are not critic to their judgment too?", arguing that the lesser of two evils is being a bad writer, because a bad critic influences many while a bad writer only influences those who have read their literature (17-18). Pope observes that "if we look more closely, we shall find / Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind" (19-20). The message in Fig. 1 embodies Pope's idea that misleading the public due to ignorance is a greater offensive than poorly written literature

Dryden concurs with this sentiment, positing "[Wit] is propriety of thoughts and words; or in other terms thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject" (2257). Dryden also notes that if critics assented to this definition, then there would be no reason for poets and critics to disagree (2257). However, if there's one thing both Dryden and Pope agree on, it's the art of writing and the skill-set required to mold a great writer. With more of a visual imagination, Dryden expresses his views on writing as "rhetoric made an art" (2256). Although Dryden at times doesn't seem to stay faithful to his words, he still knows how to feed the mind full of satire and wit. Pope's

mastery shines through clever, accessible language and comedy; a feat exceptionally impressive given the level of education he received growing up.