

QUESTIONS ON POPE AND JOHNSON

Pope's "An Essay on Criticism"

1. Who is Pope's target audience here?
2. What does Pope mean by the following terms:
'judgment'
'taste'
3. What is the source of 'judgement'? What poses a threat to it?
4. Who, in Pope's view, makes the best critics?
5. Why does Pope advise aspiring critics to know their own limitations?
6. What is the greatest flaw which afflicts critics?
7. What, according to Pope, ought to be the source, end and test of art and, therefore, the standard by which the critic should judge literature?
8. Why, according to Pope, ought the Ancients to be venerated? Do his views in this regard contradict his views on the topic of the previous question?
9. How does Pope explain maverick writers like Shakespeare who do not always follow the rules?
10. What does Pope mean when he writes "A perfect judge will read each work of wit / With the same spirit that its author writ" (233-234)?
11. Why should the critic not expect perfection?
12. Why should the critic not focus on parts of the work and thereby neglect the work as a whole?
13. What should the critic look for in a work with respect to figurative language? Which earlier poets does he seem to have in mind in this respect?
14. What should the critic look for in a work with respect to diction?
15. What should the critic look for in a work with respect to metre and rhyme?
16. Discuss Pope's warnings on the dangers posed by:
narrow nationalist or sectarian prejudice;
subjectivism, parochialness and partiality in general to the fashioning of true judgments;
following the trend of the moment rather than what is correct;
the tendency to think that one knows more than one's elders;
both following the herd and the opposite extreme of being deliberately "singular" (425);
those who "judge of authors' names, not works, and then / nor praise nor blame the writings, but the men" (412-413)
fickleness; and
focusing on the author rather than the work itself.
17. What is the thing possessed by great writers that is most envied by others? With what thought does he comfort himself about this? Why is this possession no compensation, however, for being envied?
18. Explain the following pieces of moral advice offered by Pope to would-be critics:
"in all you speak, let truth and candor speak" (563);
hold your tongue where necessary and be humble: "Be silent always when you doubt your sense, / And speak, though sure, with seeming diffidence" (566-567);
"with pleasure own your errors past, / And make each day a critique on the last" (570-571);
"Blunt truths more mischief than nice falsehoods do; / Men must be taught

as if you taught them not, / And things unknown proposed as things forgot" (573-575);

"Be niggards of advice on no pretense, / For the worst avarice is that of sense" (578-579);

"With mean complaisance ne'er betray your trust, / Nor be so civil as to prove unjust. / Fear not the anger of the wise to raise; / Those best can bear reproof, who merit praise" (580-583); and

"'Tis best sometimes your censure to restrain, / And charitably let the dull be vain; / Your silence there is better than your spite" (586-588).

19. Why may Pope be described as hostile to what today is called 'cultural nationalism'? What does he advocate in its stead?
20. For what reasons might one describe Pope as a 'rationalist'?

Questions on Johnson

"On Fiction. " The Rambler 4 (1750):

1. What should 'modern fiction' strive to represent, according to Johnson?
2. What difference does Johnson perceive between the medieval romance and modern works of fiction?
3. What, according to Johnson, is more important than the veracity of a literary work?
4. What responsibility necessarily imposes itself in this regard upon the writers of modern fiction, according to Johnson, which was not applicable however to writers of the romance?
5. Why is Johnson particularly concerned with the effect of literature on the young?
6. Why, according to Johnson, is literature more effective than philosophy in moulding people's character?
7. On what grounds does Johnson advocate censorship?
8. How does Johnson reject the argument that it is not realistic to depict characters as either entirely good or entirely bad?
9. How, according to Johnson, should virtue and vice be respectively depicted?

The History of Rasselas, Chapter X:

1. Why, according to Imlac, are the ancient writers generally considered superior to the moderns?
2. What difference does Imlac perceive between the ancients and moderns?
3. In what ways must the moderns emulate the ancients and in what ways must they not, according to Imlac?
4. To what knowledge must the poet aspire, according to Imlac? Is this a reasonable goal to Rasselas? How does Imlac respond to this objection?
5. What, according to Imlac, must be the "business of the poet" (89)?

Preface to Shakespeare:

1. Why, according to Johnson, are the ancients more respected than the moderns?
2. What, according to Johnson, is the test of literary genius?
3. What is Johnson's opinion of Shakespeare's merit as an artist in this regard?
4. What, according to Johnson, is Shakespeare's most important skill?
5. Is this skill less visible, according to Johnson, in plays where Shakespeare deals

- with supernatural matters?
6. What are Johnson's views on Shakespeare's handling of dialogue?

General:

1. Do you detect a contradiction in Johnson's views? If so, what is it?
2. How significant is Johnson's emphasis on assessing the achievements of Shakespeare, an author?