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**SAMUEL JOHNSON'S "PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE"  
A DOCUMENT OF EMPIRICISM IN LITERARY  
CRITICISM**

"There is always an appeal open from criticism to Nature."<sup>1</sup>

Samuel Johnson's "Preface to Shakespeare" is a manifesto of empiricism in literary theory. He subjects Shakespeare's plays to human observation and experience, finds them amply fulfilling these norms and consequently gives their author the highest place as an English dramatist.

In the "Preface to Shakespeare" Johnson, bold as he is, sets out to defy all the abstract rules dictated by the classical tradition and slavishly adhered to by all of the literary theoreticians...and most of the practitioners as well. Some of the major English writers, there is no denying the fact, had all along disregarded the more cumbersome rules of the ancients in their practices but they dared not defy it in theoretical discussion of the art. Johnson is not a meek follower of any such tradition which could not be true to one's living experiences. "Johnson's practical use of tradition thus", writes Walter Jackson Bate, "refuses to allow special or fixed concepts of tradition to serve as ends in themselves."<sup>2</sup> In Shakespeare Johnson finds an impeccable model who never looks back to consult any abstract canons of composition. Critics like Ben Jonson and Dryden had all felt the powerful genius of Shakespeare but they were more of apologists in their praises of him; they implied...particularly Ben Jonson...that had he known more Greek and Latin, that is, had he been conversant with the classics, he would certainly have written much better.

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67. *Fāsil*, 242 ; *Uṣūl*, 243 note 2  
 68. *Tadrīb*, II, 57 ; *Uṣūl*, 243  
 69. *Uṣūl*, 243  
 70. *Uṣūl*, 243  
 71. Sa'd, VII, ii, 17 ; *Fāsil*, 460 ; *Kifāyah*, 352  
 72. *K. Ma'rifah*, II, 821  
 73. *Ibid*, II, 185  
 74. *Tadrīb*, 11, 57 ff ; Ibn Ṣalah, 178 ff ; *Uṣūl*, 244 ; *Manhal*, 91  
 75. *Ma'rifah*, 110 ; *K. Ma'rifah*, I, 638 ; *Tuh*, I, 231 f  
 76. *Al-Mu'jam Al-Wasīṭ*, I, 46, cited by A'zamī, 90, n. 9  
 77. *Tah*, I, 231  
 78. *Musnad*, III, 310  
 79. *Kifayah*, 354

#### ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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38. *Fāşil*, 437 ; *Kifāyah*, 321
39. *Jāmi'*, II, 179
40. *Fāşil*, 430 ; *Kifāyah*, 320, 321
41. Idem ; Ibid, 320
42. *Kifāyah*, 322, 348, *Mizān*, I, 581
43. *Fāşil*, 435 ; *Kifāyah*, 318 ; Dhahabī, VI, 96
44. *Fāşil*, 448
45. *Uşul*, 237-238
46. Ibn Şalāh, 165ff, *Tadrīb*, II, 42ff ; *Uşul*, 238 f
47. Bukhāri, '*ilm*, I, 23
48. *K. Ma'rifah*, II, 822 ; *Fāşil*, 441
49. *Jāmi'*, II, 179
50. *Tah*, X, 360
51. *Jarh*, II, i, 395
52. *Kifāyah*, 326 ; Dhahabī, VI, 96
53. *K. Ma'rifah*, II, 822
54. Ibn Şalāh, 173 ff ; *Tadrīb*, II, 52 ff ; *Fāşil*. 440 f ; *Kifāyah*, 336 ;  
*Uşul*, 240
55. *Ma'rifah*, 110
56. *Musnad*, IV, 245 ; Bukhāri, '*tişām*, IX, 117-118 ; *Tadrīb*, II, 54
57. Sa'd, VII, ii, 157
58. *Fāşil*, 439
59. *Fāşil*, 440, *Kifāyah*, 322
60. *Fāşil*, 445 ; *K. Ma'rifah*, II, 824
61. *Tah*, IX, 447
62. *Tah*, 305, 307
63. *Tah*, IX, 447 ; '*Ilal A*, I, 193
64. *K. Ma'rifah*, II, 824 ; *Kifāyah*, 344 ; Daraquṭnī, 422
65. *Tadrīb*, II, 54.
66. *Tadrīb*, II, 55 ; Some of the scholars disapproved it. cf. *Tadrīb*.  
II, 56 ; *Kifāyah*, 346, 348, 349 ; *Uşul*, 241

10. Ibn Şalâh, 132 : *Tadrîb*, II, 9 ; *Kifâyah*, 271-274
11. *Tadrîb*, II 9 , Ibn Şalâh, 132
12. *Üşûl*, 234
13. *Fâsil*, 599 ; *Tadrîb*, II, 26-27 ; *Üşûl*, 234 note I Samâhî R, 186
14. *Taqdimah*, 271
15. *Ta'rikkh*, VIII, 237
16. *Ta'rikkh*, VIII, 195
17. *K. Ma'rifah*, I. 632, 640 ; *Jami'*, I, 77
18. *Jarh*, II, i, 326
19. *Musnad*, IV, 390
20. *Dāraqutnî* VII, 76
21. *Kifāyah*, 239
22. *K. Ma'rifah*, II, 184
23. *Tah*, V. 384
24. *Imla'*, 13, *Mizān*, IV, 145
25. *'Ilal A*, I, 370, 376, 377, 354 ; *Majrūhîn*, I, 34 ; *Mizān*, I, 244 ; II, 204
26. *Tadrîb*, II, 12 ; Ibn Salah, 137 ; *Fâsil*, 429 ; *Manhal*, 81 ; Samâhî R, 187 ; *Uşul*, 234 ; Bukhari, 'ilm, I, 22
27. *Ma'rifah*, 256 ; *Tadrîb*, II, 13 ; *Uşûl*, 234
28. *Fâsil*, 420 : *Tadrîb*, II, 14, 15 ; *K. Ma'rifah*, II, 826, 828 ; *Ma'rifah*, 257
29. *K. Ma'rifah*, II, 828 ; *Fâsil*, 422
30. *K. Ma'rifah*, II, 138, 828
31. *Ibid*, II, 137, 139
32. *Jarh*, II, i, 395
33. *Jāmi'*, II, 179 ; *Fâsil*, 423 f
34. Ibn Şalâh. 151 ff ; *Tadrîb*, II, 28ff ; *Uşûl*, 235
35. *Ibid*, 152, *Ibid*, II, 28, 29 ; *Ibid*, 236-237
36. *Ibid*, 152 ; *Ibid*, II, 29
37. *K. Ma'rifah*, II, 826 ; *'Ilal A*, I, 43 ; *Taqyid*, 101

were found by *ḥadīth* students who latter transmitted them.<sup>75</sup> Maslamah b. 'Amr is reported to have found a book in the office of al-Zuhrī written in his own hand.<sup>76</sup> Ishāq b. Rāshid, al-Jazarī also found a book of al-Zuhrī in Jerusalem.<sup>77</sup> 'Abd Allāh, the son of Ibn Ḥanlal, explicitly mentioned that he came across certain traditions in his father's material;<sup>78</sup> Ibn 'Umar found a *Ṣaḥīfah* in the sword-case of his father.<sup>79</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Al-Qur'ān, 2 : 285 ; 4 : 13-14 ; 33 : 21, 36 ; 27 : 64 et passim.
2. Al-Qur'ān, 3 : 31, 32 ; 7 : 107 ; 59 ; 7, 4 : 107, 65 ; 24 : 51 ; 42 : 15
3. *Ma'rifah*, 14 ; *Fāsil* 235 ; *Akhlāq*, 1 : 117
4. Tirmidhī, 'ilm 5 , 34 Mājah, *muqaddimah*, 1 : 85 ; *manāsik*, II, 1015
5. Sa'd, II, ii, 121, 122
6. Bukhārī, 'ilm, 1 , 24 ; Tirmidhī, *ḥajj*, III, 174 ; *muqaddimah*, 1 : 86
7. *K. Mā'rifah*, 1, 551
8. Mujāhid B. Mūsā (d. 144) is reported to have said that he went to Ḥammād b. 'Amr and requested him to bring the books of Khuṣayf (d. 137), but he brought the books of Ḥusayn instead (*Ta'rikkh*, VIII, 154). Ḥammād b. Salamah (d. 167) is reported to have had his *aḥādīth* arranged according to the *shuyūkh* they came from (*Tah*, I, 358).
9. For a detailed study of these methods see :  
*GAS*, I, 58 ff ; *MST*, II, 188 ; *Abbot*, I, 93 ; Bukhārī, 'ilm, 1, 24, 25 ; *Fāsil*, 420 ff ; *Jāmi'*, II, 175 ; *Ma'rifah*, 256 ff. *Kifāyah*, 259 ff, 311 ff ; *Tadrib*, II, 8 ff ; Ibn Ṣalah, 188 ff ; *Tawdib*, II, 295 ff ; Ṣubḥi, 88 ff ; *Uṣūl*, 233 ff ; *Manhaj*, 214 ff ; *Imla'*, 84 ff