

Samuel Johnson's 'Life of Milton'

Q Explain the views of Samuel Johnson about Milton in his essay 'Life of Milton'.

Ans Dr. Johnson's 'Lives of the poets' ranks only with his Dictionary of the English Language, especially in his edition of Shakespeare's works among the great monumental works of English literature. Paradise Lost is completely assessed with a sobriety, and the Poem has a noble and lofty theme. Johnson has imperfect sympathy with Milton, only due to extra-literary prejudices. Johnson feels that Milton himself was not satisfied with Paradise an unfinished poem. According to Johnson, the power of invention and vigour of sentiment give importance. The outstanding greatness of Milton, i.e. his poetic gift is always admired and appreciated by Johnson. His impression on Milton is that Milton was and expert in handling great things, but he had not acquired the skill of doing little things. Johnson considers Milton's Paradise Lost only second to Homer's epics.

10⁽²⁾ Milton's poems 'L'Allego and Il Penseroso are read with pleasure. Milton's epics as a Pastoral elegy gains popularity, but the diction is Latin. There is no place for nature in this poem. Its form is that of pastoral, and gods.

Milton's use of mythological allusions contributes variety in the narration. Milton's references are less numerous. Milton as a spiritual poet makes use of Biblical stories in his poems. Milton is also well-versed in the

Italian Poets and he also borrowed many ideas from the Italian Poets. He has also used Latin quotations. His play on words, delights the readers. His work paradise Regained

has elegant style. The basis of paradise Regained becomes narrow and a dialogue

Without action cannot please like an Union of the narrative and dramatic power.

Milton's grand style was not modified or changed by his subject matter in his

poems. He was the master of his language though there lies many faults in his

use of diction.

According to Milton, the music of metre forms the major part to discriminate poetry in all languages. Moreover one language cannot be communicated with rules to another where metre is imperfect. English poetry gives pleasure only with the rhyme scheme. Milton as an epic poet gives more significance to the structure of an epic poem as well as to the art of Poetical narration and for all the variations of incidents too. Milton was a thinker naturally by himself. His great words become popular only under discountenance. Milton is confident of using Blank Verse. Blank Verse forms an approach to Lapidary style.

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Samuel Johnson appreciated Paradise Lost as a poem ~~because~~ with lofty theme, with respect to design the poem attains great performance also. Paradise Lost is considered to be the poem that has an idea of intellectual liberty. Milton as a puritan gave main significance to Bible rather than to the religious institutions like the church of England and the monarchy. Johnson was against Milton's democratic principles. Dr. Johnson blames Milton of superiority complex and tells that Milton never appreciated anybody. Milton was of his praise, very frugal. Johnson feels proud in praising Milton's Comus for its defence of virtue. He praises Milton's Saturnian Agonistes for its dramatic work.

Johnson's comment on Comus is that this work alone does not deserve any criticism. Milton was not so expert in writing sonnets.

Johnson.