**Dr. Johnson**

**Preface to Shakespeare**

Johnson's analysis of Shakespeare reveals his ideals for literature in general. **Mimesis**.  The most notable sign of Shakespeare's greatness is in the category of *mimesis*, or **imitation**.  The greatest art is that which imitates life best.  According the Johnson, Shakespeare's characters are like real people.  His greatness in this area outweighs the negatives that could be said about him.  Shakespeare's plays endure because human nature remains the same. The **Neoclassical Era** was fond of rules.  When it came to drama, they looked back to ancient Greece for their rules, specifically to Aristotle's *Poetics*.  From that they got the idea that a drama should conform to the Aristotelian unities.  What are the Aristotelian unities?  We don't hear much about them today, unless you've seen the movie *Adams Family Values.* Wednesday and Pugsley are at camp and are being encouraged to take part in a camp skit written by the counselor Gary:

The **Aristotelian unities** are unity of time, place, and action.

1. **Time**.  The action portrayed should be able to take place during the time it takes on the stage.  The only modern series that tries to follow this closely is ***24***. Each hour on TV takes place during one hour of the day; the 24 episodes of a season together make up the 24 hours of a day.
2. **Place**.  The action of the play should take place in one area, not jump around to a lot of locations.
3. **Action**.  The play should have one primary plot with one major action, without major sub-plots.

Greek plays were shorter than Shakespeare's plays and were produced in trilogies; the trilogies could get around these limitations.  Each of Shakespeare's plays is more like one of the trilogies than like an individual Greek play.  Shakespeare's plays broke all these rules (as did Gary's skit).  Johnson sees the problem as a problem with the rules, not a problem with Shakespeare.

Johnson did see some problems with Shakespeare's plays, which reveal as much about Johnson as they do about Shakespeare.

**Vulgarity**.  Shakespeare's plays display a degree of vulgarity that Johnson finds offensive.

**Morality**.  Johnson dislikes the immorality of some the Shakespeare's characters and plays.  For Johnson, plays should encourage virtue, which in his own writing he does at the expense of mimesis.  Rasselas is not vulgar; he is moral; however, he is **NOT** very realistic.