

Restoration Drama

Restoration of the Monarchy 1660
= Restoration of the theatres

New Theatres after 1660

- Theatres were closed by the Puritans in 1642.
- They re-opened with the accession of Charles II, called back from his exile in France: **a whole generation hadn't seen any plays.**
- Two companies were given royal licence to perform in the capital; they bought new theatres.
- At first Elizabethan drama was revived (Shakespeare, Jonson, Fletcher), then a new type of comedy and tragedy developed.
- The **King** = supporter of the theatre, French and Spanish models spread.
- A new shape for the theatre.

Novelties in Playhouses

- The area for the audience: **U-shaped** area, with a dozen or more rows of benches surrounded by boxes and with two tiers of galleries above. Two revolutionary changes:
- 1 - Stage: new movable **painted scene flats** (fondali dipinti)
- 2 -Female roles entrusted to **women**
- Elite public: aristocrats, gentlemen, merchants

Restoration Comedy

- At first, external influences: imitations of **Molière**; influence of Spanish comedies of intrigue. Also, political themes (the victory over the Puritans); Then, an original **London comedy** appeared: subject matter = **metropolitan high society** to which most of the public belonged.
- Ordinary citizens of the City (merchants, tradespeople, artisans) = treated with scorn, as cuckolded husbands. Why? They are the class that supported the Puritans and Cromwell.

Comedy of Manners

- **Satire** on the manners and customs of the day. **Mockery** of the attitudes, behaviour and values of the **London** *beau monde*. Amorous intrigues, elegant world of meeting places: coffee houses, parties, dances, parks.
- **Wit** is the virtue *par excellence* in this world.
- London life is the point of reference. Elegant and **witty** characters come from the city. People from the **countryside**, even gentlemen = clumsy, despised and ridiculed.

Wit

- For **Metaphysical poets**: **wit** meant **ingenuity**, the ability to make conceits (unusual clever analogies).
- In Restoration Comedy it is above all a **linguistic ability**, “a quickness and variety for pleasantry and **entertainment**”. **Verbal fireworks**. Its heroes and heroines have wit.
- **Fop** = object of ridicule, lack of proportion. His excess also shows the inconsistency of the values of all the others. Affectation (fanatical attention to dress, studied indifference, exalted opinion of himself). He thinks he is a **wit**, but he is not. He is a **would-be wit**.

Restoration Comedies

- George **Etherege** (1635-93) *The Man of Mode* (1676).
- William **Wycherley** (1640-1716) *The Country Wife* (1675)
- William **Congreve** (1670-1729) *Love for Love* (1695), *The Way of the World* (1700)
- George **Farquhar** (1677-1707) *The Recruiting Officer* (1706)
- Aphra **Behn** (1640-89) **Sir Patient Fancy** (1678)

Etherege: *The Man of Mode or Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676)

- Man of Mode = **Fop** (as underlined by subtitle) full of affectation and presumption, embodies the code and values of high society, unmasking its superficial essence.
- The **real protagonist** is Dorimant, inspired by poet and libertine Earl of Rochester → development of the Elizabethan and Jacobean “**rake**” (a dissolute person) into a character focused on eroticism.

Etherege: The Man of Mode

- The rake, cynical, witty and elegant, generally repents at the end, when he finds his match and falls in love.
- Dorimant finds Harriet, ideal heroine of the comedy of manners: she has self-control and wit.
- Courtship = duel (psychological and verbal)
- Harriet knows she has to hide her feelings to bring out into the open his feelings. She gives him no reason for hope until the last minute. She makes his suitor a supplicant.
- She unmask his affectation and makes evident the truth of his being in love → reformed rake, accepts even to follow her to the countryside (proof of real love).

Wycherley: *The Country Wife* 1675

- The playwright returned to England in 1660, after having lived in France 5 years → Molière's influence
- The protagonist Horner = **unreformed Rake**. He pretends he is a eunuch in order to seduce the ladies of respectable society → he becomes an instrument for mocking the **cult of appearances**.
- Play on words: horny = sexually excited
- Satire on the **hypocrisy** of the “women of quality” who share Horner's favours and on their husbands that endorse Horner's deceit. **Honour is replaced with respectability**.
- He also seduces Margery, the ingenuous country wife of the odious Pinchwife. A naïve with an irresistible comic charm.

The Country Wife: Sex Comedy

- Another triangle in the play is formed by Harcourt, Alithea and the **fop Sparkish**. Alithea is engaged to Sparkish. Harcourt succeeds in showing Sparkish's stupidity and marries Alithea. Total lack of jealousy is a duty for a "man of mode". But he believes in her betrayal when she is unjustly accused and **appears** guilty.
- Lively dialogue: witticisms and puns.
- Exuberance and vitality of Horner: bearer of joyous sexuality.
- **Comedy of manners** but also **sex comedy**: the sexual aspect is at the centre of comic invention.

Sex comedy: Aphra Behn (1640-89)

- Singled out by V. Woolf (*A Room of One's Own*) as **the first woman writer**.
- Imposes a woman's point of view on her plays.
- Denounces forced marriages of the period.
- *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678): the heroine (in contravention of the laws of the time) is able to leave her old husband, whom she has married against her will, without having to renounce her dowry.

William Congreve

- Inventor of supremely witty and elegant dialogue.
- *The Double Dealer (1693)*, satirical comedy on the falsity and hypocrisy of the institution of marriage. Love, seduction, marriage.

Two Famous Comedies of Manner: *Love for Love* (1695)

- Valentine (ex libertine) and Angelica. Love story and **economic problems**: they can marry only when Valentine's former debts are paid. The **title** alludes to a contract.
- Valentine **pretends to be mad** → can throw back in the face of the other characters the **hypocrisy** of social conventions.
- **Society of appearances** in the words of the **fop Tattle** to a girl: "You must never speak what you think; your words must contradict your thoughts, but your actions may contradict your words" → see the fop Sparkish in *The Country Wife*.

The Way of the World (Così va il mondo) 1700

- *Beau Monde*, **society dominated by conventions**: no one is exempt from it. Satire of contemporary manners.
- Protagonists: Mirabel (a wit) and Millamant (a brilliant heroine). The plot: how she can marry without losing part of her inheritance. Verbal duels.
- **Economic aspect of marriage** is always present in the comedies of manners: here is a realistic component of the agreement that seals the freely chosen union of two lovers.
- Rake Fainall (cynical libertine), endowed with sharpness of mind, a true wit.
- Lady Wishfort (sex-mad lady), fops, servants = comical characters.

Restoration Tragedy

- The **tragedy** was modelled on that of **Corneille** and obliged to **avoid the excesses of language** and gruesome images of the previous age. Even Shakespeare is “improved”.
- Classical aesthetics prevails and imposes the pursuit of order, clarity, moderation.
- Dryden’s essay *Of Dramatic Poesy* (1668). He says: “the heroic couplet should be the verse of tragedy”; it has the same dignity as the alexandrines of Corneille.
- **Heroic couplets**= rhyming couplets of iambic pentameters. Previously used by Chaucer in Middle English.

John Dryden (1631-1700)

- A poet, an essayist, a playwright.
- As a poet he used the heroic couplets and dealt with political events, and religious and political questions. Celebrative poetry in heroic quatrains:
- *Heroic Stanzas* (1659): on Cromwell's death.
- *Astrae Redux* (1660): to celebrate the return of the King. A royalist panegyric.
- *Annus Mirabilis* (1666): historical poem on the year of wonders 1666, the victory against the Dutch and the Fire of London → title of "Poet Laureate".

Dryden the critic

- Dr. Johnson affirmed of Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) that "modern English prose begins here."
- Dryden's critical work was extensive, treating of various genres such as epic, tragedy, comedy and dramatic theory, satire, the relative virtues of ancient and modern writers, as well as the nature of poetry and translation.

From Poetry to Drama

- Conversion to Catholicism → *The Hind* and the Panther* (1687), allegorical poem; he criticizes the Anglican Church and expresses his theological conviction that truth is achievable only through absolute faith → deprived of the title of Poet Laureate but he remained Catholic all his life → went back to the theatre for which he had already written in the 1660s.
- *Hind = cerva

Drama: the Heroic Tragedy

- ***The Indian Emperor*** (1665), in heroic couplets: inspired by Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Love, duty, honour, loyalty (the values of noble persons) lead the actions of the characters → the elite audience liked to be represented that way.
- The formal elegance of the **heroic couplet** is suitable to build the self-image and values of upper classes.
- Great success with the court and public of the time

An Un-Orthodox Tragedy

- ***All for Love*** (1678), tragedy in **blank verse**, story of Antony and Cleopatra, Rome vs Egypt, superiority of Roman values, psychological and dramatic characterization.
- Not successful at the time, but survives in the stage repertory.
- Unlike Shakespeare Dryden respects the unities of time and place. He reduces the number of characters
- *All for Love* is not *Love for Love* (Congreve's comedy).

Dryden's comedies

- *Marriage à la Mode* (1672), similar to other Restoration comedies, calls in question the institution of marriage in a brutally open-minded fashion. Aligned with the attitude of the aristocracy.
- For Dryden comedy is regarded as an inferior genre.
- He uses prose, blank verse and heroic couplets.

Marriage à la Mode

- Two plots: a serious one in heroic couplets about usurpation and a comic plot: after two years of marriage Rodophil and Doralice have lost interest in each other.
- Intricate affairs: Rodophil is attracted to Melanthe, whose affectations annoy her fiancé, Palamede. To complete the square, Palamede is attracted to Doralice.
- Complications ensue, and in the end the characters find that they prefer their original partners after all. Happy ending

Fables Ancient and Modern 1700

- Excellent translator of classics (Juvenal, Virgil) and Italians.
- *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700) his last work
- A collection of translations of classical and medieval poetry (Ovid, Boccaccio, Chaucer) → Preface: he says: “Chaucer is the father of English Poetry”.