**The Restoration Period**

**Historical background**:

* 1660 the restoration of the Stuarts: Charles II came back from his exile
* well received by the people: brought political stability; relief after the oppressive puritanical morality of the years of the Protectorate;
* Charles II (the Merry Monarch): imported the worldliness, immorality but also the love of art and the neo-classical taste of the court of the French Louis XIV; surrounded himself with the best wits of the period; almost all the important literary figures of the Restoration are associated with the King’s court

**John Wilmot, the second Earl of Rochester**:

* the most notorious of the King’s friends, perfect type of the Restoration **rake** (‘a man, esp. a rich and fashionable one, who lives a wild, immoral life’)
* not only typical for his immorality but also for his wit in conversation and for his witty satirical poetry: social satires usually about the love-life of Restoration ‘quality’; blunt and obscene political satires attacking the King, his advisors and mistresses; some philosophical poems (‘Satire against Mankind’) in a bitter, cynical vein; some song-like amorous poems
* not a ‘professional’ poet; wrote poetry because a fashionable gentleman was supposed to display his wit in this form

The **Theatre**

* during the Protectorate theatres were closed; in 1660 Charles II gave patents to his friends Sir William Davenant (The Duke’s Company) and Thomas Killigrew (The King’s Company) to start producing and staging plays; court influence in the theatres was decisive
* French influence: female actors, indoor theatres, movable perspective scenery (separation of the forestage and the scenic state), rhymes in the high (heroic and tragic) genres, neo-classical aesthetic norms (three unities etc.)
* new developments: - the opera (Davenant: *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656), Purcell (semi-opera), later Handel)
* the heroic play: the usual theme is love and honour; artificial, rhetorical in character; ranting (loud, violent, theatrical oratory, bombast); often rhymed; most typical and successful example: Dryden’s *The Conquest of Granada* in two parts (1670, 1671)
* the comedy of manners

The **Comedy of Manners**

* most typical, artistically the most successful of all Restoration genres
* Sir George Etherege, William Wycherley: the ‘fathers’ of the genre; both courtiers, wrote only a few plays between 1668 and 1676 (the first great period); second period (1693-1707): Congreve, Vanbrugh, Farquhar
* the plot: wild, worldly, mostly about seducing women, cuckolding men and tricking other people for their money (e.g. Wycherley’s *The Country Wife*)
* stock characters: - the **coxcomb** (or fop): a conceited man of inferior wit, who dresses up in extravagant

clothes which are not appropriate to his social position or for the occasion

* the **rake**: rival of the coxcomb; the type of the ‘natural’ man with a strong appetite for pleasure and money and with sufficient cunning to achieve his ends; ‘a cool Machiavellian in a world of sex and money’
* manners: an explicit pattern of conduct or decorum for every station in life; if one pretended to manners for which he/she was unqualified, he/she was comic
* charge of immorality: (1) but there is a cynical morality of revealing all pretences, of unmasking human follies; (2) the exaggerated artificiality suspends the moral perspective
* literary merit: an anatomy of life rather than an imaginative representation

**John Dryden (1631-1700) – the greatest poet of the Restoration period**

**Family and Education**

* Born as the first of 14 children in the family of a landowning Puritan country gentleman
* 1644: Westminster school
* 1650-54: Trinity College, Cambridge

**Early Career**

- After graduating he went to London working for Cromwell’s Secretary of State.

- *Heroique Stanzas* (1658), a eulogy on Cromwell’s death

- 1660: *Astraea Redux* a panegyric to celebrate the restoration of the monarchy; *To his Sacred Majesty* a panegyric on the coronation

**1663-1681**: the career of a popular dramatist (he wrote ca. 29 plays)

- one of the initiators of the comedy of manners his best known comedy is [*Marriage A-la-Mode*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage_A-la-Mode) ([1672](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1672))

- 1670: *The Conquest of Granada* – introduced the genre of the ‘heroic drama’

- *All for Love* (1678): a regular tragedy (probably the best written in the age)

- 1667: *Annus Mirabilis* (long, historical poem on the events of the year 1666)

- 1668: poet laureate; 1670: historiographer royal

**1681-1687**: political, poetical and ecclesiastical controversies; the period of satires and of didactic poems

*Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) – probably his greatest satire

- the background: the Exclusion Bill crisis;

* 1678: Titus Oates and the Popish plot
* the issue divided the people and the Parliament (Tories and Whigs)
* 1679: the Exclusion Bill drafted (by the Whig majority, led by Anthony Ashley Cooper, 1st Earl of Shaftesbury) – some supported the Duke of Monmouth, the King’s Protestant but illegitimate son;
* The King dissolved the Parliament receiving financial support from Louis XIV of France;
* 1681: the Bill defeated in the House of Lords
* *Absalom and Achitophel* written at the King’s request and published just before the Bill was defeated;
* it gives an account of the conflict on the analogy of the biblical story of King David (Charles II) and his illegitimate son Absalom (the Duke of Monmouth)
* a series of satirical portraits

*MacFlecknoe* (1682) – an early example of **mock heroic** satire

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| All human things are subject to decay, And, when Fate summons, monarchs must obey: This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young Was call'd to empire, and had govern'd long: In prose and verse, was own'd, without dispute Through all the realms of Non-sense, absolute. This aged prince now flourishing in peace, And blest with issue of a large increase, Worn out with business, did at length debate To settle the succession of the State: And pond'ring which of all his sons was fit To reign, and wage immortal war with wit; | Cry'd, 'tis resolv'd; for nature pleads that he Should only rule, who most resembles me: Shadwell alone my perfect image bears, Mature in dullness from his tender years. Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity. The rest to some faint meaning make pretence, But Shadwell never deviates into sense. Some beams of wit on other souls may fall, Strike through and make a lucid interval; But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray, His rising fogs prevail upon the day: |

**1688-1700**: the period of translations

- 1685: Charles II died, succeeded by his brother James II

- 1688: the Glorious Revolution: Dryden lost his pension and laureateship

translations: *The Works of Virgil* (1697), *Fables, Ancient and Modern* (1700): translations/adaptations of Homer, Ovid, Boccaccio, Chaucer in heroic couplets.

- Will’s coffee house frequented by Congreve, Wycherley, Walsh, Dennis etc.; Dryden presiding

**Pope’s Age**

From 1700: a new age – two distinct strands of culture instead of the remarkably unified Restoration culture:

1. aristocratic high culture (associated with the names of Pope, Swift and Gay – the Tories)

* neo-classical
* urbane and witty (continuation of Cavalier culture)
* skeptical and pessimistic; suspicious of passion and enthusiasm

1. middle class culture: newly emerging

**neo-classicism:**

- neo-classicism can be looked at as the last phase of the English Renaissance but in its characteristic 18th century form it was imported by Charles II’s court from France (influence of Corneille, Molière, Boileau, Rapin etc.)

- basic principle: **rules** govern the arts (from Aristotle through Horace): e.g. three unities, strict boundaries between genres etc.

- the problem: English tradition goes very much against the rules (especially Shakespeare)

- different attitudes: pedantic/dogmatic (e.g. Thomas Rymer: *A Short View of Tragedy* (1692)) vs. flexible (e.g. Dryden’s generous attitude: ‘I admire him [Jonson], but I love Shakespeare.’ (in *Of Dramatic Poesie*))

Pope’s treatment of the flexible attitude in his ‘Essay on Criticism’

1. **rules** govern the arts – this is because art is primarily an imitation of Nature and Nature is itself governed by rules: art must reflect the existing order of the universe

First follow NATURE, and your Judgment frame  
By her just Standard, which is still the same:

*Unerring Nature*, still divinely bright,  
One *clear*, *unchang'd* and *Universal* Light,  
Life, Force, and Beauty, must to all impart,  
At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test* of *Art*.

1. the rules are set down by and in the classics (translation and imitation)

Those rules of old discovered, not devised,

Are Nature still, but Nature methodized;

1. no originality aimed at, poetry is concerned with the general, the universal, the common experience

True wit is nature to advantage dressed,

What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed,

Something, whose truth convinced at sight we find,

That gives us back the image of our mind:

1. the ideal poet is the learned scholar: erudition, learning, cultivation

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,

As those move easiest who have learned to dance.

A *little learning* is a dangerous thing;

Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:

There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,

And drinking largely sobers us again.

1. most successful genre: satire – public poetry (poetry and the poet have a social function)

the most characteristic and greatest poetic achievement of the age: **the mock form**

**Alexander Pope** (1688-1744): leading figure of the poetry of the first half of the century

* social handicap: a Roman Catholic; still a very influential figure in his age
* physical handicap: curvature of the spine (caused by a tuberculotic illness)

His early career (1709-1717):

* 1709: *Pastorals* – four pastoral poems addressed to the seasons
* 1711: ‘An Essay on Criticism’ – first major poem, a brilliant synthesis of the neo-classical aesthetic attitude
* ‘The Rape of the Lock’ (1712 – first version, 1714 – machinery added, 5 cantos, 1717 – Clarissa’s speech)
* the occasion: the engagement of Arabella Fermor (Belinda) and Lord Petre (the Baron) broken up
* the plot is simple, reflects the frivolous, empty, superficial life of the aristocracy
* mock-heroic form: all this is related in an epic form and style – everything is derived and yet everything is part of an original whole which is entirely Pope’s

Now *Jove* suspends his golden Scales in Air,  
Weighs the Men's Wits against the Lady's Hair;  
The doubtful Beam long nods from side to side;  
At length the Wits mount up, the Hairs subside.

(Canto V, ll. 71-4)

* main strategy: a play with scale; placing the great, the elevated, the heroic and the frivolous, the petty, the superficial side by side for the comic effect
* playful and easy, no serious moral content
* the symbolic function of the lock: a playful representation of the war of the sexes
* 1717: the publication of Pope’s collected *Works* – the climax of his career

Pope’s second creative period (1715-1726): translating Homer and editing Shakespeare;

Pope’s third creative period (1728-1744): satires: 1728 the *Dunciad*, 1742 *The New Dunciad* (in four books)

– regarded by many as his greatest achievement: mock-heroic satire subsumes the pathetic, the tragic, and the sublime, too

**Jonathan Swift** (1667-1745)

Family and Education

* born of English parents in Ireland (his father died seven months before his birth)
* Trinity College, Dublin (acquaintance of William Congreve), BA 1686
* before he could get his MA, they had to leave Ireland (1688)

1688-1704

- employed as secretary and personal assistant to Sir William Temple (a family acquaintance, a retired Whig diplomat and a man of letters) at Moor Park

- met Esther Johnson (Stella; the daughter of Temple’s deceased steward), and participated in her education

- close but difficult relation with Temple; 1694: Swift was ordained as an Anglican parish priest and appointed to a prebend in Northern Ireland

- 1696: back at Moor Park – stayed with Temple till his death (1699) editing and publishing Temple’s memoires and correspondence

- 1704: published his own satires including *The Battle of the Books* and *A Tale of a Tub*

1704-1714

- frequent visits to England on behalf of the Church of Ireland

- allegiance with the Tories: pamphlets, editing the *Examiner* (1710-1713)

- literary friendships: Pope, Gay, Arbuthnot, Parnell (the Scriblerus Club)

1714-1745

- 1714: death of Queen Anne, fall of the Tories – Swift made Dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin

- fewer and fewer visits to England; he became an Irish patriot: *The Drapier’s Letters* (1724), *A Modest Proposal* (1729)

- 1742 he suffered a stroke, declared ‘of unsound mind and memory’; died in 1745

His greatest literary achievement: *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, in Four Parts, by Lemuel Gulliver, first a surgeon, and then a captain of several ships* (1726)

***Gulliver’s Travels***

- connection to *Robinson Crusoe*: similar story, similar hero, similar presentation

- but obvious difference: the topic not suited to realistic presentation

- a parody of realistic fiction (mock-novel): the conventions, forms, techniques of realism set against an emphatically unrealistic topic

- hero ironically distanced, ridiculed (Gulliver: a telling name)

- a typical technique of Swift’s: using a persona (cf. ‘A Modest Proposal’)

“Swift is literature's great ventriloquist, and we have come to recognize that understanding his works is a matter of distinguishing the master's voice from those of his puppet personae.” David Nokes

- Gulliver as Swift’s persona: it is impossible to know what Swift’s position is

- travel, exotic, foreign environment is only a pretext for talking about the present day social reality of England: a **satire**

Part I: Hanoverian England (the Emperor = George I; Flimnap = Robert Walpole; Skyres Bolgolam = the Earl of Nottingham, etc.; High and Low heels = Tories and Whigs etc.)

Part II: Gulliver is little – represents the complacence, self-importance, narrow-mindedness, pride of the British middle class man; some 17th century customs made fun of

Part III: Laputa and Barnibalby = England and Ireland; Academy of Lagado = Royal Academy

Part IV: general satire on man – the most difficult of the travels

* earned him the reputation of being a misanthrope

Dr Johnson: ‘a book written in open defiance of truth and regularity’

Swift’s character in the light of this prejudice: ‘the apostate politician, the ribald priest, the perjured lover, a heart burning with hatred against the whole human race, a mind richly stored with images from the dunghill and the lazar house.’ (Thomas B. Macaulay)

Swift in his letters to Pope: ‘I hate and detest that Animal called Man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas and so forth...’

‘I tell you after all that I do not hate mankind: it is *vous autres* [you others] who hate them, because you would have them reasonable animals, and are angry for being disappointed.’