

Major literary genres during the english commonwealth

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Major Literary Genres Poetry During this time poets contrasted the personal and the public life. (Penguin, 57) Satire became an important kind of poetry; it looks wittily at the manners and behaviour of society, and very often uses real people and situations to make its humorous point. (Penguin, 63) Drama Restoration Drama: The theatre of the Restoration was quite different from Shakespeare's theatre, with the audience now largely upper class. There were only two licensed, or "patent", theatres - the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and Duke's House at Lincoln's Inn, which moved to the Covent Garden Theatre in 1732.

Actresses could now perform on stage, the first being a Mrs Coleman, in a private performance of Sir William D'Avenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* in 1656, when theatre performances were still officially suppressed. (Routledge, 139) Tragedy and Serious Drama Both Dryden and his rival Shadwell wrote new versions of the plays of Shakespeare. The new middle-class audiences could not accept much of Shakespeare's violence and the tragic endings to some of his plays. So *King Lear*, for example, was severely rewritten to give it a happy ending, and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* was rewritten in the 1690s as a farce.

The main tragic form of the Restoration was heroic tragedy. (Penguin, 73) The more worrying of Shakespeare's excesses had to be trimmed to find acceptance in Restoration society. With harmony restored, and family virtues upheld, Shakespeare's most probing and tragic examination of man's inhumanity to man becomes a moral and reassuring tract. (Routledge, 140) At this time there were many theories about realism, how to show reality on

stage, and the role of theatre. But pressure was growing to limit what theatre could say: it was not only a danger to public morals, but it also became too controversial politically. Penguin, 74) Comedy: It is, however, for comedy that Restoration drama is better known. It was called "the comedy of manners" because it mirrored directly the manners, modes, and morals of the upper-class society which was its main attraction, sexual intrigue, and sexual conquest. Sex, and the search for sex, becomes entertainment. (Routledge, 142) The new comedy - of values and appetites - lacks any of the philosophical concerns found, for example, in Shakespeare's earlier comedies, such as *Love's Labour's Lost*, or in Ben Jonson's "humours". (Routledge, 142) The characters are obsessed with fashion, gossip and their own circle in society. Strong contrasts are made between innocence and knowingness; often these are represented as contrasts between rustic country manners and the refinements of the city. In Restoration comedy, women are such types as predatory young widows, or older ladies still trying to be attractive to young men. The best comedies reflect an amoral and frivolous society.

They could be comedies of action, such as Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677-81), or comedies of character and chatter, such as George Etherege's *The Man of Mode*. (Routledge, 142) The age reflects a wide variety of opinions and critical discussions on the nature of comedy, of tragedy, of character and plot, of representation and verisimilitude, with the result that the extensive and very rich theatrical repertoire of the time cannot be easily classified: it is second only to the Elizabethan and Jacobean period in its diversity and range. (Routledge, 142) After the Restoration, drama and the

theatre were quite different from what they had been during the Renaissance. The audience was at first upper class or upper-middle class. The plays of the time reflect the manners and morals of the men and women who had returned with the King from France – so Restoration comedy is often called the Comedy of Manners. (Penguin, 67) Dryden wrote several such comedies, but the most famous comedies were written by George Etherege, William Wycherley and William Congreve. (Penguin, 67) The main subject of these plays was love, but there were new concerns, developed from the earlier city comedy: older man or women looking for younger lovers, upper-class manners contrasting with middle-class values, and country life contrasting with city life. Sex was a major subject, and the plays became more and more obvious in their comic treatment of sexual themes. (Penguin, 67) As the century came to an end there were more and more objections to the kind of morals seen in Restoration comedy. (Penguin, 69) Between 1707 and 1737, drama went into critical decline although the theatre was still very active and popular.

The decline was partly due to opposition from Jeremy Collier and others, and partly because the middle classes were turning to journals, newspapers and the developing new genre of fictional prose to find discussion, entertainment and reinforcement of their values and beliefs. (Routledge, 149) Comic point-of-view in drama and satiric intent in verse are closely related in their observation of the new society of the late seventeenth century. (Routledge, 151) Instead of expanding, as it did so rapidly in the previous two centuries, the world was becoming more closed, contained and inward-looking.

So the comedy and satire become self-referential, with the subject matter often being highly topical and the characters particular rather than universal. (Routledge, 152) Restoration satire could be of two types: the kind of very general, sweeping criticism of mankind found in poetry in *A Satire against Reason and Mankind* by Rochester, and in prose in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* or *A Modest Proposal*; or it could be highly specific, with allusions to real figures in politics and society. (Routledge, 152) Diaries

Writers in the late seventeenth century were more ready to assume that personal experience may be of general interest. Like biographies, diaries became a form of literature. Some were consciously written as a record of the times. (Past into Present, 83) The growth of the writing profession coincided with a rise in writing which was private and not intended for publication. Diaries and letters were, for the new literate middle class, forms of expression which enjoyed increasingly wider currency. (Routledge, 163)

Biographies

Although biographies had been written in Latin in the Middle Ages to glorify the lives of the saints and to justify secular rulers, it was not until the Renaissance, with its emphasis on the human, that biography in England became more detailed, more anecdotal and more prepared to be critical. In 1579, Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (first century AD) was published. It contained the biographies of the great men of Greece and Rome, illustrating their moral character through a series of anecdotes.

Not only did it serve as a source book for Shakespeare's Roman plays, it later encouraged, in the seventeenth century the biographer to see himself

as an artist. In the eighteenth century, with the growth of a scientific and historical interest in many kinds of people, biographies were to become common and influence the development of the novel. In 1662, two years after the end of the Civil War and the Restoration of the monarchy, the Royal Society of London was founded to explore the whole field of natural knowledge.

From a philosophical base (notably expressed by Francis Bacon in 1605) the scientific spirit developed rapidly. One consequence of this was that the virtue of intellectual lucidity in the writing of prose was encouraged, and the passionate, complex prose of the beginning of the century began to disappear. Styles became plainer and more urbane, and attitudes were tolerant. (Past into Present, 64) ----- [2]. He published a pamphlet called " A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage" in 1698.