

England 1660 - 1700

RESTORATION THEATRE

The English Civil Wars

1642–1651

- Also called the **Great Rebellion**
- Fought between...
 - **Royalists** – supporters of King **Charles I** and his son/successor, **Charles II**
 - **Parliamentarians**, aka **Puritans**, aka **Roundheads**
(Roundheads? I'll explain in a moment)
- 1649 – Charles I is captured, tried, and beheaded
- 1651 – Wars finally end with the flight of Charles II to France

The Commonwealth

1651 – 1660

- Roundhead leader **Oliver Cromwell** establishes authoritarian control over Great Britain; this era known as the **Commonwealth**
- 1658 – Oliver Cromwell dies; His son succeeds him, but is ineffectual.
- **1660** – Charles II resumes the throne, thus the House of Stuart is *restored*
- Hence, the years to follow are known as the Restoration period (until abt. 1700)

EFFECT ON THEATRE

- The prevailing Puritan morality of Cromwell and the Parliamentarians leads to the **outlawing of theatre from 1642–1647**
- It is then **vigorously suppressed from 1649–1660**
[Loophole: “musical entertainments” were not banned]
 - The Globe Theatre is torn down
 - Interiors of other popular theatres are dismantled
 - Law is passed ordering that all actors be apprehended as “rogues” (dishonest, untrustworthy, unprincipled scoundrels)
 - Actors still surreptitiously perform throughout this period
 - Often officials were bribed to look the other way

Theatre Returns!

- Upon his **Restoration** in 1660, Charles II almost immediately **reversed Puritan sobriety** by encouraging the kind of entertainment and theatrical activities that he had seen during his years of exile at the French court
- One of the problems facing theatre managers in 1660 was lack of a suitable repertory
- Initially they rely on pre-Commonwealth plays, mostly works by:
 - Beaumont (1585-1616) & Fletcher (1579-1625)
- Until 1680, the dominant genre is the **“heroic” play/tragedy**

Restoration Drama

- Unique fusion between Elizabethan stage conventions and Italian and French styles
 - French culture was especially influential in Restoration society
 - Charles II had spent his exile in France
 - James II had ties with Catholic Europe
- Serious Drama
 - Heroic Tragedy
 - Dealt with extraordinary characters who undertook extraordinary deeds and had themes of love and honor
 - Restoration Tragedy
 - Adherence to Neoclassic Rules
 - Popular to rework Shakespeare into Neoclassical mold
 - Romeo and Juliet with a happy ending
 - King Lear with Lear restored to his throne and Cordelia does not die

The Heroic Play/Tragedy

- Modeled after French **Neoclassical tragedy**
- written in rhyming pentameter couplets
- presented characters of almost superhuman stature
- **predominant themes** were exalted ideals of **love**, **honor**, and **courage**
- The heroic play was based on the traditional epic and romance
- The most popular writer of heroic plays was **John Dryden**
- **George Villiers, 2nd duke of Buckingham**, satirized the heroic play in *The Rehearsal* (first performed 1671), its particular target being Dryden
- Although Dryden continued to use the form through the mid-1670s, the heroic play **had largely died out as a genre by 1680**

The Heroic Play (continued)

- Set in exotic locales
- Stories revolving around rival claims of love
- Drums and trumpets, rant and extravagance, stage battles, rich costumes
- **Thomas Hobbes**, an English philosopher of the time, defined the purpose of this genre:
 - “The work of an heroic poem is to raise admiration, principally for three virtues: valor, beauty, and love.”
- Beginning with the Greeks, moral concerns had always been central in tragedy, but this concern had been exploratory and inductive.
- The moral concern of the heroic play is the reverse. It is deductive and **dogmatic**. The first rule, writes **Dryden**, is “to lay down...what that precept of morality shall be, which you would insinuate into the people.”
- In ***All for Love*** (Dryden, 1677) the moral is all too clear: Antony must choose between the path of honor and his illicit passion for Cleopatra. He chooses Cleopatra, and they are both destroyed.

John Dryden (1631-1700)

- English poet, **dramatist**, and literary critic who so dominated the literary scene of his day that it came to be known as the Age of Dryden.
- Dryden joined the little band of dramatists who were writing new plays for the revived English theatre
- The Wild Gallant*** (1663), his first play, was a farcical comedy with a good deal of licentious dialogue
- The Indian Queen*** (1664), his first heroic play

Comedies of Intrigue

- Daring exploits of romance and adventure with complicated plots
 - Aphra Behn
 - First woman English playwright
 - Plays followed the trend of being bawdy
 - “It was bawdy, the least and most excusable fault in the men writers, to whose plays they all crowd, as if they came to no other end than to hear what they condemn in this, but from a woman it was unnatural.” – Aphra Behn
 - John Dryden spoke of her as “writing loosely, and giving, ... some scandal to the modest of her sex. I confess, I am the last man who ought, in justice, to arraign her, who have been myself too much a libertine in most of my poems.”
 - Plays include: *The Forced Marriage* (1677), *The Rover* (1677), *The Amorous Prince!* (1671), *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687)

The Female Wits

- ◉ Group of women writers who worked to increase the involvement of female playwrights in English theatre, building on Aphra Behn's work
 - Catharine Trotter
 - Mary Pix
 - Delariviere Manley

Comedy of Manners

- Restoration theatre is most noted for the **comedy of manners**
- Values had changed since Shakespeare's day: the new audience consisted of fashionable young cynics and dilettantes, self-indulgent rakes and wits who prized glittering conversation and were interested only in seeing themselves on stage, no matter how satirical the portrait.
- Thus came about the bawdy **comedy of manners**, heavily influenced by Molière but chilled with the dry wit of the London aristocracy.
- Romance and emotion gave way to intellect in sophisticated plays about **cuckoldry, gossip, intrigue**, and **sexual license**, yet tempered with a strong sense of **decorum**

What exactly is a Comedy of Manners?

- ⦿ A witty, cerebral form of comedy that depicts and often satirizes the manners and affectations of a contemporary society.
- ⦿ It is concerned with social usage and the whether or not characters meet certain social standards.
- ⦿ The plot is subordinate to the play's brittle (fragile) atmosphere, pithy dialogue, and pungent (severely critical or sarcastic) commentary on human foibles (minor weaknesses or failings of character).

Comedies of Manners

- Focuses on the fashions and foibles of the upper class – gossip, adultery, sexual escapades
- Poke fun at the social conventions and norms of the time and satirize the preoccupation of the upper class
- Language consists of witty exchanges and sexually suggestive references
 - Influenced by Molière
- Characters are stock types – their names usually describe their distinctive personality traits
 - Doctor Quack, Pinchwife, Horner, Fidget, Squeamish,
- William Wycherley
 - Most famous play: *The Country Wife* (1675)
 - In the play a man attempts to keep his wife away from the amorous advances of Horner, who specializes in seducing other men's wives

Characteristics of a COM

- ◉ Witty dialogue
- ◉ Sophisticated vocabulary
- ◉ Cleverly constructed scenarios
- ◉ Rapid twists in events, often precipitated by...
- ◉ Miscommunications
- ◉ Typically set in the world of the upper class
- ◉ Ridicules the pretensions of those who consider themselves socially superior, deflating them with satire
- ◉ Comments on the standards and mores of society and explores relationships between the sexes
- ◉ Marriage is a frequent subject
- ◉ Little depth of characterization

Comedy of Manners (continued)

- ◉ Usually written by sophisticated authors for members of their own coterie (clique) or social class, the comedy of manners has **historically thrived in periods and societies that combined material prosperity and moral latitude** (i.e., freedom from narrow restrictions).
- ◉ Playwrights took aim at affected wit and acquired follies, and satirized these qualities in caricatured characters with label-like names such as Sir Fopling Flutter and Tattle.
 - **Caricature** – **a ludicrously exaggerated** description, visual representation, imitation, or **portrayal**
 - **Folly** – **absurd or foolish action**

Examples

- *The School for Wives* (1662) and *The Misanthrope* (1666) by Molière
- *The Country-Wife* (1675) by William Wycherley
- *The Way of the World* (1700) by William Congreve
- *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) by Oliver Goldsmith
- *The Rivals* (1775) and *The School for Scandal* (1777) by Richard Brinsley Sheridan
- In the 19th century the tradition was carried on by Oscar Wilde:
 - *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892)
 - *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)
- In the 20th century the comedy of manners reappeared in the “drawing-room plays” of Noël Coward, Somerset Maugham, Philip Barry and S.N. Behrman.

Influences?

- The **New Comedy** works of ancient Greek playwright **Menander**
- In turn, Menander's plays were imitated by the Roman poets **Plautus** and **Terence** whose comedies were widely known and copied during the Renaissance.
- Molière

Molière

1622 – 1673

- ◉ French actor and playwright
- ◉ Considered France's greatest writer of comedies
And well beyond that...
- ◉ Considered one of history's all-time greatest writers of comedies
- ◉ His satires mocked the affectations of his audience of socialites
- ◉ Stated that while tragedy might be heroic, comedy must hold the mirror up to nature:
 - “You haven't achieved anything in comedy unless your portraits can be seen to be living types.”

Molière's Concept of Comedy

“The comic is the outward and visible form that nature's bounty has attached to everything unreasonable, so that we should see, and avoid, it. To know the comic we must know the rational, of which it denotes the absence and we must see wherein the rational consists . . . **incongruity is the heart of the comic** . . . it follows that all lying, disguise, cheating, dissimulation, all outward show different from the reality, all contradiction in fact between actions that proceed from a single source, all this is in essence comic.”

SATIRE

- Satire is more a tool than a genre
- Satire is when human vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of **ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature**, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform.
- Satire is a complex word that signifies not only a kind of literature, but also **a mocking spirit or tone** found in many literary genres. Essentially, it can be present in almost any kind of human communication because *satire exists wherever wit is employed to expose something foolish (or vicious) to criticism*. In this sense, **satire is everywhere**.
- In literary works, satire can be direct or indirect:
 - Direct satire – the narrator speaks directly to the reader
 - Indirect satire – the author's intent is realized within the narrative and its story

Restoration Audiences

- ⦿ Audiences were quite spirited in their behavior during performances
 - Spoke back to the actors, arranged assignations with each other and attended the theatre to be seen rather than to see the play
- ⦿ Primarily audiences of the upper class – the same group being satirized in the plays
 - Playwrights tailor their works specifically for the audience they know will be watching

Performers

◎ Thomas Betterton

- Admired for his attention to detail, self-discipline and majestic restraint, he remained a model of English oratorical style
- Noted for his dazzling characterizations of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, even though he was equally skillful in comedy and tragedy

◎ Appearance of actresses on the English stage

- Popular dramatic device to dress woman as a man – called *breeches roles*
 - Considered by religious leaders to be scandalous
- Actresses often seen as no better than prostitutes
 - Not necessarily a sign of equality or equal treatment by allowing women to perform
- Eleanor (Nell) Gwynn
 - Famous actress – excelled in singing and dancing but was a failure in tragedy
 - Drew attention of Charles II and became his mistress and left the stage

Acting Companies

- Actors were hired on a *contract system* and not a sharing plan
 - Marked a decline of actors' control over theatre in London
 - Actors were provided with yearly “benefits” where one actor would keep all the profits of a performance
- Actors learned their craft through apprenticeships
- Rehearsals lasted less than 2 weeks
- Acting styles featured broad gestures and powerful declamatory delivery
 - Actors fell back on conventional patterns of stage movement

Government and the Theatres

- ◉ Master of Revels took control of theatre and issued licenses
- ◉ In 1737, Parliament passed the Licensing Act
 - Only two theatres were authorized to present “tragedy, comedy, opera, play, farce, or other entertainment for the stage for gain, hire or reward”
 - Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres were the two theatres authorized

Theatre Architecture

- ⦿ All theatres were now indoor proscenium-arch buildings
 - Audience areas divided into pit with backless benches and raked from back to front, boxes, and galleries
- ⦿ Stage divided into two distinct halves
 - The Apron – the forestage in front of the proscenium – major area for performance
 - Backstage housed the scenery
 - Entire stage was raked
- ⦿ Proscenium doors
 - Used for entrances and exits

Scenic Practices

- Sets painted in perspective
- Flats on groove system
 - Stock settings were normal: drawing room and the park
- Scene changes happened while audience watched
- Costumes followed traditions of English Renaissance
 - Contemporary clothing was standard
 - Traditional costumes and accessories worn to indicate historical figures or eras
- Lighting was difficult
 - Performances took place in the afternoon to use natural lighting
 - Candles and chandeliers were used to light as well
 - Used footlights – lights on the floor running along the front of the stage