

THE RESTORATION AGE (1660–1700) The period from 1660 to 1700 is known as the Restoration . period or the Age of Dryden because monarchy was restored in England. Dryden was the representative writer of this period. The restoration of King Charles II in 1660 marks the beginning of a new era both in the life and the literature of England as he was defeated by the French and came back to England and became the King. Charles II and his followers who had enjoyed a gay life in France during their exile, did their best to introduce that type of foppery and looseness in England also. They demanded that English poetry and drama should follow the style of French writers. The beginning of the Restoration began the process of social transformation. The atmosphere of gaiety and cheerfulness, of licentiousness and moral laxity was restored. The theatres were reopened. There was a stern reaction against the morality of the Puritans. Morality was on the wane. There was laxity everywhere in life. All these tendencies of the age are clearly reflected in the literature of the period. During the Restoration period there was a rapid development of science. The establishment of the Royal Society was a landmark in history of England. The interest in science began to grow. The growing interest in science resulted in the beginning of rational inquiry and scientific and objective outlook.

LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS OF RESTORATION AGE The literature of the Restoration period marked the complete breaking of ties with the Renaissance literature. It reflected the spirit of the age. The spirit of corruption and moral laxity, which were predominant in the social life of the restoration, are reflected in literature. The following are the chief feature of the period: – Rise of Neo-classicism The Restoration marks a complete break with the past. For the writers of this age, both of prose and poetry, rules and literary conventions became more important than the depth and seriousness of the subject matter. They express superficial manners and customs of the aristocratic and urban society and did not pry into the mysteries of human mind and heart.

2. – Imitation of the Ancient Masters The authors of the period were not endowed with exceptional literary talents. So they turned to the ancient writers, in particular, to the Latin writers, for guidance and inspiration. They directed their attention to the slavish imitation of rules and ignored the importance of the subject matter. This habit was noticeable in the age of Dryden. It strengthened in the succeeding age of Pope.

– Realism and formalism Restoration literature is realistic. It was very much concerned with life in London, and with details of dress, fashions and manners. Dryden accepted the excellent rule for his prose, and adopted the heroic couplet. It is largely due to Dryden that writers developed formalism of style – precise, almost mathematical elegance, miscalled classicism, which ruled the English literature for the next century.

– Correctness and Appropriateness The work of the authors of the Restoration period was imitative and of limited quality as they lacked creativity and flight of imagination. This new tendency, which reached its climax in the Age of Pope, is very clearly marked in the literature of the Restoration period.

POETRY OF RESTORATION AGE The poetry of the Restoration period was formal, intellectual satirical, realistic and written in heroic couplet, of which Dryden was the supreme master. Dryden is the dominating figure of this age. He laid the foundation of the classical school of poetry in England. His poetry can be conveniently divided under three heads: – Political Satires: Absalom and Achitophel and The Medal – Doctrinal Poems: Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther – The Fables: The Palamon and Arcite

3. **PROSE OF RESTORATION AGE** The Restoration marks the beginning of modern prose. Matthew Arnold remarks: "the Restoration marks the birth of our modern English prose."

It was an age of intellectualism and rationalism, the qualities which are essential for prose. Various political parties and groups, and growing interest in day to day activities encouraged journalism which needed simple, straightforward prose style. Thus, various factors contributed to the evolution of modern prose during the Restoration period. John Dryden (1631–1700) was one of the greatest prose writers of this period. His prefaces and his famous Essay on Dramatic Poetry make him the leader of that modern prose in which the style is plain, simple and free from all exaggeration. Next to Dryden, John Bunyan (1628–1688) was the greatest prose-writer of the period. He wrote two prose allegories, Grace Abounding and The Pilgrim's Progress. He is called a pioneer of English novel. His style is simple, clear, lucid, Biblical and colloquial. Other writers of this period were Lord Halifax, Sir William Temple, Thomas Sprat, and George Saville.

RESTORATION IN DRAMA The theatres which were closed in 1642 were opened during the Restoration. They became the riotous haunt of the upper classes. Consequently, the plays written for the play houses were distinctly calculated by the authors to appeal to a courtly and cavalier audience. It is this that explains the rise of the heroic tragedy, which dealt with themes of epic magnitude, and the development of the comedy of manners, which portrayed the sophisticated life of the dominant class of society – its gaiety, foppery, insolence and intrigue. The Restoration Heroic Tragedy: The Restoration tragedy is also known as the Heroic Tragedy. John Dryden was the protagonist and writer of the Heroic tragedy. His famous tragedies are Tyrannic Love, Conquest of Granada. 4. Restoration Comedy of Manners: The Restoration comedy is also known as Comedy of Manners. Fashionable intrigues, sex, marriage and adultery were treated with cynicism, with worldly wit and a sense of the comedy of life. William Congreve Congreve is the best and finest writer