

Restoration Age's social, political, historical and literary tendencies

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The Restoration Age (1660-1700) is a significant period in English history and literature. It began when Charles II was restored to the English throne after the Puritan Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. This era saw the revival of monarchy, new political changes, and flourishing art and literature. Contemporary texts reflect the social, historical, political, and literary trends of the time.

The Note will cover the following questions:

- Give a brief account of the Restoration Age's social, political and literary tendencies.
- Or, What is Restoration? Discuss the historical and political background of the Restoration Age.

☐ Social Tendencies:

Here are the social tendencies of the Restoration period:

Return of Aristocratic Life: The aristocracy regained prestige after the strict Puritan rule. Court life under Charles II became lavish, focusing on luxury, fashion, and indulgence.

Moral Looseness: Society embraced a more relaxed approach to morality, especially among the upper class. Libertinism, or the pursuit of pleasure without moral restraint, became popular. It is seen in William Wycherley's "The Country Wife" (1675), which satirized loose morals.

Revival of Entertainment and Theatres: Theatres, which were closed during the Puritan era, reopened. Comedy of Manners plays became popular, making fun of the upper class's behavior and vanity.

Rise of the Middle Class: The growing importance of trade and commerce led to the rise of the middle class. Merchants and professionals started gaining influence. By this, the middle class challenged aristocratic dominance.

Urbanization and Social Interaction: Cities, especially London, expanded. Coffeehouses became popular places for intellectual and political discussions and served as hubs for social interaction.

□ **Political Tendencies:** Chronologically, political tendencies are given below:

English Civil War (1642-1651): The war between the Royalists and Parliamentarians ended with Charles I's execution. Oliver Cromwell took control and led the republic.

Commonwealth and Cromwell's (1649-1660) Rule: Cromwell ruled as Lord Protector with strict Puritan laws banning entertainment. His harsh rule made people want the monarchy back.

Restoration of the Monarchy (1660): In 1660, Charles II returned as king. He worked with Parliament to avoid absolute power. John Dryden wrote,

Beware the fury of a patient man,

It shows the tension between the king and the people.

Exclusion Crisis (1679-1681): Religion caused conflict. The Whigs wanted to exclude James II (a Catholic) from the throne, while the Tories supported him. Dryden said in "Absalom and Achitophel" (1681),

No king could govern, nor no God could please.

It shows the instability.

Glorious Revolution (1688): James II was overthrown. William and Mary took the throne and led to a constitutional monarchy. John Milton's "Paradise Lost" (1667) captured this desire for freedom with Satan's quote,

Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.

It represents the human desire for autonomy, a key idea during this political change.

❑ **Literary Features/Tendencies:** Restoration literature reflects the complexity of its age. Sundry features are given below:

Satire and Political Allegory: Writers like John Dryden used satire to address political issues. In "Absalom and Achitophel," Dryden uses biblical figures to represent real-life politicians with humor.

Of these the false Achitophel was first;

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For close designs and crooked counsels fit,

Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit.

Comedy of Manners

: Plays like "The Way of the World" by William Congreve and "The Country Wife" (1675) by William Wycherley focus on the behavior of the elite by mocking their vanity and hypocrisy. Wycherley uses characters like Horner, who pretends to be impotent to seduce women, to satirize the immorality of the upper class.

Heroic Tragedy: "Oroonoko" (1688) by Aphra Behn combines romance and tragedy. It tells the story of an African prince who is enslaved and betrayed. This reflects the growing interest in individual heroism and the darker side of imperialism.

Religious Themes: John Milton's "Paradise Lost" (1667) was highly influential during the Restoration. Its exploration of free will, sin, and redemption speaks to the moral and religious questions of the time. Milton's portrayal of Satan as a tragic figure shows the shifting attitudes toward authority and rebellion.

Realism: Literature in this period often portrayed human flaws realistically. In "The Way of the World," characters are not idealized heroes but flawed individuals navigating a world of deceit.

Others: Love for classical literature, neglect of lower-class people, and less importance given to nature are also trends of this era.

❑ **Introduction to Restoration:** The term "Restoration" refers to Charles II's return to power in 1660. The king's return brought back the monarchy, the Anglican Church, and the aristocratic way of life. It was also a time of new freedoms and a reaction against the strict

Puritan values of the previous era.

❑ **Historical and Political Background of the Restoration Age:** Chronologically, historical and political tendencies are given below:

The English Civil War (1642-1651): England experienced a long and bloody civil war before the Restoration. The battle was fought between the Royalists (supporters of King Charles I) and the Parliamentarians (those who supported Parliament). The war ended in 1649 with the execution of King Charles I, and the monarchy was abolished. England became a republic, but Oliver Cromwell held the real power. He led the Parliamentary forces to victory.

The Commonwealth and Cromwell's Rule (1649-1660): After Charles I's execution, England was declared a Commonwealth, which meant it was a republic without a king. Oliver Cromwell became the most powerful figure during this time. In 1653, he took the title of Lord Protector and ruled like a military dictator. Cromwell imposed strict Puritan values, banning entertainment like theatres and festivities.

His rule was harsh, and people grew tired of it. When Cromwell died in 1658, his son Richard Cromwell took over. However, he was not a strong leader. This caused political instability, and many people began to miss the monarchy.

The Restoration of the Monarchy (1660): With the country in chaos, Parliament invited Charles II, the son of Charles I, back from exile in France. In 1660, Charles II was restored to the throne, starting the Restoration period. People celebrated because they were tired of the strict Puritan rule. Theatres were reopened, and culture and entertainment returned.

However, Charles II was careful to avoid repeating his father's mistakes. He balanced his power with Parliament. He understood that people would not accept an absolute monarchy again. As John Dryden wrote in "Absalom and Achitophel" (1681),

Beware the fury of a patient man.

This quote reflects the tension between the king and the people. Here, both had to proceed cautiously to avoid conflict.

Political Tensions and the Exclusion Crisis (1679-1681): Religion became a major political issue during the Restoration. Charles II was Protestant, but his brother James, who was next in line for the throne, was Catholic. This worried many Protestants, and the Exclusion Crisis began. Many members of Parliament tried to pass a law to prevent James from becoming king.

This conflict led to the rise of England's first political parties: the Whigs and the Tories. The Whigs wanted to exclude James, and the Tories supported the traditional line of succession. Although the Exclusion Bill failed, it showed Parliament's growing power. This political environment influenced literature, such as In "Absalom and Achitophel," Dryden shows how the masses are easily swayed and unreliable. Dryden says about them,

No king could govern, nor no God could please.

The Glorious Revolution (1688):

When Charles II died in 1685, his Catholic brother James II became king. However, James's attempts to promote Catholicism caused unrest. In 1688, James II was overthrown in what became known as the Glorious Revolution. William of Orange and his wife Mary (James's Protestant daughter) were invited to take the throne. This marked the end of political instability during the Restoration period.

The Glorious Revolution led to the creation of a constitutional monarchy, where laws and Parliament limited the king's power and gained more authority. This event helped shape modern British democracy. Literature of the time reflected these changes, such as John Milton's "Paradise Lost" (1667), which explored themes of rebellion and the desire for freedom. In the poem, Satan says,

Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.

It represents the human desire for autonomy, a key idea during this political change.

In conclusion, the Restoration Age was a rich period of political change and literary innovation. It blended old traditions with new ideas, especially in the realms of satire, comedy, and tragedy. The writers captured the complexities of their society, commenting on politics, morality, and human behavior in ways that still resonate today.