



THE AGE OF DRYDEN POETRY

The light-hearted spirit of the Court of Charles II and the reaction against the Puritans, can be seen in satirical burlesque works such as *Hudibras* by Samuel Butler (1612-1680), published in three parts in 1663, 1664 and 1678. The hero of the poem, Sir Hudibras, is a fanatic judge of the Peace travelling about the country with his squire Ralph. The technique used in the poem is somewhat reminiscent of *Don Quixote* by Cervantes; but while the Spanish author satirizes outworn conventions such as the ideals of chivalry, Butler attacks the Puritans for their religious fanaticism and their hypocrisy. The author wrote many short biographies, epigrams and verses: of his verses, the best known is *The Elephant in the Moon*, about a mouse in a telescope.

A sceptical and satirical view of life was also the characteristic of a group of court poets who inherited the Cavalier tradition; the most important of them are John Wilmot (1647-1680) and Charles Sackville (1638-1706).

PROSE

Christian writers

Among the most representative writers of the period there is John Bunyan (1628-1688). In spite of his irregular education he became a considerable preacher. During the Restoration he was arrested for preaching without a licence. While in prison Bunyan wrote his autobiographical book *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666). Released in 1672, he was again imprisoned in 1675 and began to write *The Pilgrim's Progress* (in two parts, the first of which was published in 1678 and the second in 1684) concerned with the journey of the Christian pilgrim from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. The journey symbolizes human life and the hard constant struggle to reach salvation. Bunyan's book was very popular in English literature and widely read: it is arguably one of the most widelyknown allegories ever written, and has been extensively translated into other languages.

Philosophers

The philosophic tradition set up by Bacon (→ Chapter 6, Literary context, Prose) was continued by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704).

The philosophy of Hobbes is perhaps the most complete materialist philosophy of the 17th century. Hobbes rejects Cartesian dualism and believes in the mortality of the soul. He rejects free will in favour of determinism, a determinism which treats freedom as being able to do what one desires. He rejects Aristotelian and Scholastic philosophy in favour of the «new» philosophy of Galilei and Gassendi, which largely treats the world as matter in motion.

Hobbes gained a reputation in many fields: he was known as a scientist, as a mathematician, as a translator of the classics, as a writer on law, as a disputant in metaphysics and epistemology; not least, he became notorious for his writings and disputes on religious questions. But it is for his writings on morality and politics that he has, rightly, been most remembered.

What are the writings that earned Hobbes his philosophical fame? The first is entitled *The Elements of Law* (1640): this is his attempt to provide arguments supporting the king against his challengers. *De Cive* (*On the Citizen*, 1642) has much in common with *Elements* and offers a clear, concise statement of Hobbes' moral and political philosophy.

His most famous work is *Leviathan* (1651; the «leviathan» is a biblical sea monster), a classic of English prose. The book concerns the structure of society (as represented figuratively by the frontispiece, showing the state giant made up of individuals), as is evidenced by the full title *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*. Men in a state of nature, that is a state without civil government, are in a war of all against all in which life is hardly worth living. The way out of this desperate state is to make a social contract and establish the state to keep peace and order. Because of his view of how nasty life is without the state, Hobbes subscribes to a very authoritarian version of the social contract, denying any right of rebellion towards it.

Other important works include *De Corpore* (*On the Body*, 1655), which deals with questions of metaphysics; *De Homine* (*On Man*, 1657); *Behemoth* (published in 1682, though written rather earlier), in which Hobbes gives his account of England's Civil Wars.





Locke developed an alternative to the Hobbesian state of nature, and argued a government could only be legitimate if it received the consent of the governed and protected the natural rights of life, liberty, estate; if such consent was not given, argued Locke, citizens had a right of rebellion. Locke's ideas had an enormous influence on the development of political philosophy, in particular on liberalism, and he is widely regarded as one of the most influential Enlightenment thinkers and contributors to liberal theory. His writings influenced the American revolutionaries as reflected in the «American Declaration of Independence».

The fundamental principles of Locke's philosophy are presented in his monumental *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), the culmination of twenty years of reflection on the origins of human knowledge. According to Locke, what we know is always properly understood as the relation between ideas, and he devoted much of the Essay to an extended argument that all of our ideas, simple or complex, are ultimately derived from experience. The consequence of this empiricist approach is that the knowledge of which we are capable is severely limited in its scope and certainty. Nevertheless, Locke held that we have no grounds for complaint about the limitations of our knowledge, since a proper application of our cognitive capacities is enough to guide our action in the practical conduct of life. The Essay brought great fame and Locke spent much of the rest of his life responding to admirers and critics.

Locke also wrote a variety of important political, religious and educational works including the *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (1690), *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) and the *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1689-1705).

Diarists

Of great importance as a source of information and a picture of the Restoration period are the diaries of John Evelyn (1620-1706) and Samuel Pepys (1633-1703).

Evelyn was a follower of the Royal Society, who kept a record of his impressions during his journeys to France, Italy and Holland.

Pepys was a practical naval administrator and Member of Parliament, but also had a wide-ranging appetite for knowledge. His classical and mathematical education was the basis from which he explored the arts and sciences, and he was an accomplished musician too. Pepys gave a precise day-to-day account of his deeds and through his descriptions the reader can penetrate deeply into the life of the time. It provides a fascinating combination of personal revelation and eyewitness accounts of great events, such as the Great Plague and the Great Fire of London.

DRAMA

Comedy of Manners

After the closure of the theatres the public who returned to them was not the same public who had crowded the theatres in the Elizabethan Age, including a large section of the population. The Puritans attacked every form of amusement and the public of the Restoration theatre was limited to the courtiers and to a group of pleasure-seekers.

The Restoration Comedy, highly influenced by continental fashions and literary patterns, expressed the most cynical and frivolous aspects of the age: it was satirical without being didactic, as it did not aim at instructing people. The plots generally consisted of amorous intrigues, and the new comedy was called Comedy of Manners as it reflected the tones and ways of life of the Court and of aristocracy in an artificial setting removed from the everyday reality. In that setting nothing was to be taken seriously: virtues were regarded suspiciously or ridiculed, while vices were concealed under an atmosphere of elegance and scepticism. The Comedy of Manners expressed a sort of libertine philosophy, which was that of a large part of the society. Among the greatest authors we may quote George Etherege (c. 1635-1691), William Wycherley (1640-1716) and William Congreve (1670-1729).

George Etherege was the first to produce specimens of the «new comedy». His three plays, *The Comical Revenge* (1664), *She Would if She Could* (1668) and *The Man of Mode* (1676), reflect no strain in their constructions as if the author relied freely on his temperament and experience, in fact he appears always at perfect ease in the society he depicts.

William Wycherley's best comedies are *Love in a Wood* (1672), *The*

Gentleman Dancing Master (1673), *The Country Wife* (1675) and *The Plain Dealer* (1677). They reveal the author's bitter and satirical spirit in criticizing the vices of the society, but Wycherley depicted a world in which no idea of good and no moral sense existed. Moreover, the complacency he showed in some scenes and the brutality of his language make the spectator doubt the sincerity of his attacks.





William Congreve is considered the best playwright of the Restoration for his brilliant and sparkling dialogues and the depth in the delineation of the characters. His plays are much more refined than those of his contemporaries and show a touch of originality in the subtlety of the language and in contents. Congreve's most famous plays are *The Old Bachelor* (1693), *The Double Dealer* (1694), *Love for Love* (1695) and his masterpiece *The Way of the World* (1700).

Other famous authors were George Farquhar (1678-1707) and John Vanbrugh (or Vanburgh, 1664-1726). The former wrote *Love and a Bottle* (1698), *The Constant Couple* (1700), *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) and *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707). The latter is remembered for *The Relapse* (1696) and *The Provoked Wife* (1697).

Heroic Play and traditional tragedy

If the Comedy of Manners was the chief glory of the Restoration theatre, the traditional tragedy continued to be performed, and alongside it a new genre developed: the Heroic Play. Like the Comedy of Manners, the Heroic Play reflected the influence of French models, above all of Corneille and Racine. The plots derived from French prose romances and related the adventures of great heroes, unequalled in valour and courage, and also faithful and incomparable lovers. The main themes of love and valour were dealt with exaggeration and the dialogues of the heroic plays tended to be pompous and full of high resounding speeches.

Sir William Davenant (1606-1668) introduced the first specimen of heroic plays with *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656), but the best examples remain those set up by John Dryden (→ Great Writers).

In the field of tragedy the best authors are Thomas Otway (1652-1685), Nathaniel Lee (c. 1653-1692) and Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718).

Otway wrote *The Orphan* (1680) and *Venice Preserved* (1682): the former is a Domestic Drama set in a romantic atmosphere; the latter is a moving report of the Spanish plot against the Venetian Republic in 1618.

Lee was famous for his declamatory passages recalling those of the

Elizabethan dramatists; his best known tragedies are *The Rival Queens* (1677) and *Mithridates* (1678).

Rowe, dramatist, poet and miscellaneous writer, was selected Poet Laureate in 1715; he is remembered for his tragedies *The Ambitious Stepmother* (1700), *Tamerlane* (1702), *The Fair Penitent* (1703), *The Royal Convert* (1707) and *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714).

