

Restoration Theatre

1642	Theatres closed
1656	THE SIEGE OF RHODES produced by William Davenant. 1st use in England of continental wing—and shutter system for a public performance
1660	Return of Charles II to throne. King licenses two theatre companies which establish monopoly over legitimate theatre in London: The Duke's Company (Sir William Davenant) and The King's Company (Thomas Killigrew)
1660—61	Davenant converts tennis court into Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre. Killigrew converts tennis court into theatre at Clare Market
1663	Killigrew builds 1st Theatre Royal, Drury Lane
1671	Thomas Betterton taking over active management from Davenant's widow builds Dorset Garden for operatic spectacles
1674	Killigrew builds 2nd Drury Lane Theatre
1662	Companies unite. Management eventually passes from the Davenants to Christopher Rich and Sir Thomas Skipworth
1693	Betterton, unhappy with Rich's management, takes part of company and reopens Lincoln's Inn Fields. Company performs Congreve's LOVE FOR LOVE (1695), THE MOURNING BRIDE (1697) and THE WAY OF THE WORLD (1700), starring Betterton (Fainall), Elizabeth Barry (Marwood) and Anne Bracegirdle (Millamant)
1706	Companies reunited
1709	Dorset Garden demolished. Rich expelled from management at Drury Lane, but son manages Lincoln's Inn Fields and Covent Garden from 1714 to 1761.
1732	Lincoln's Inn Fields, replaced by a larger theatre in 1714, becomes site of new Covent Garden Theatre.
1737	Licensing Act imposes tighter censorship on plays and confirms the monopoly of Drury Lane and Covent Garden over legitimate theatre in England. Monopoly, with some qualifications, remains in force until 1843.

II Dominant Themes and Concerns

Tension between passion and reason. Court and upper classes simultaneously celebrated intelligence, wit and the spirit of scientific inquiry, analysis and categorization while indulging their physical appetites to extremes of violence, debauchery and dissipation. Recognition of the discrepancy leads to everything from thundering moral diatribes (sermons, tracts against theatre) or wistful evocations of a simpler, older "heroic" world ("heroic" tragedy) to works of intense social or personal self—scrutiny composed in a spirit of ironic or cynical detachment (i.e. comedy of manners)

Emphasis on rationality as man's corrective and preserving grace, regardless of whether he chooses to pursue a moral or amoral course of action. Leads to work where a high value is placed on the clear but artful expression of ideas, and the marriage of wit (quickness of the imagination to see likeness between things unlike) and judgement (ability to distinguish differences) to create true understanding. (Hobbes) Especially in comedy, people are punished more for their stupidity or intemperance (often expressed in their inability to use language effectively) than for their immorality.

Attempt to synthesize or reconcile older tradition of Elizabethan and Jacobean staging and aesthetics with the neo—classical ideal and new illusionistic stagecraft holding sway on the continent. Dryden particularly concerned about the problems of reconciling the admirable moral seriousness, emphasis on universals and structural regularity of the classical ideal (i.e. the unities) with the richness and variety of contemporary life portrayed in the vigorous but often less “regular” English comedies.

III Dramatic Forms

Built on the example set by Shakespeare, Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher, the most performed and read English playwrights of the time, but also incorporated new continental influences

- Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher -----comedy of manners
- Shakespeare, European neo-classicists-----heroic tragedy, neo-classical tragedy
- Masque, French and Italian opera-----opera and semi-opera
- Tragedy — Thomas Otway
- Comedy of Manners — John Dryden, Sir George Etherege, William Wycherley, William Congreve

IV Acting and Actors

- female roles played by women actors instead of boys.
- best actors, and actresses of their day were praised for their emotional intensity and the restraint and naturalness of their performance, but aesthetics still influenced by older concepts of (1) decorum, (2) neo—classical ideals and (3) the practicalities of production

1. *Decorum*

the outer man still presents a clear message about the essence of the inner man through emblematic use of gesture, costume, language and speech. Acting manuals of time suggest that there was still heavy emphasis on the rhetorical training of the voice, and some conventionalization of facial expressions, gestures and carriage to serve as a shorthand to the emotional or mental state of the inner person.

2. *Neo—classical Ideal*

Being true to Nature meant heightening reality to more clearly express the ideal or ruling generalities between the surface. Tragedy should show men as “better than they are” leading to a more lofty, idealized delivery; while comedy showed them as worse than they are” or the butts of satire. Concern about the “type” rather than the individual. Since surface reality unimportant, tragedy usually done in contemporary dress, sometimes with a few suggestive props or additions, and age of actor not important to role

3. *Practicalities of Production*

Actors performed a huge number of plays each season usually with a bare minimum of rehearsals, with script access to only their own roles, and little direction beyond an indication ‘of the sequence of scenes and what exits and entrances to use. Actors coped by specializing in certain “types” of characters and maintaining possession of their roles; also had to rely on certain conventions for group configurations or the placement of the most important speaker.

Important actors and actresses:

Thomas Betterton, Nell Gwynn, Elizabeth Barry, Anne Bracegirdle, Colley Cibber, Robert Wilks, Thomas Doggett, Barton Booth, Anne Oldfield

V Audience

Court and upper stratum of society involving merchants, nobles and professional men. Expense and taste tended to exclude ordinary citizens as habitual attenders. Dynamic within theatre not unlike that at a sports event, with rowdy, noisy crowd constantly laughing, clapping, jeering and cheering to signal approval or disapproval of the dramatic action; informal, give—and—take relationship with actors, encouraged by small size of house and closeness of the thrust stage. “They do not matter tho’ the play be a hodge-potch, for they mind only the parts as they come on one after another and have no regard for the whole composition.’ Appreciation for high points of rhetoric, wit, spectacle or topicality if not the whole.

VI Theatre and Staging

Attempt to combine older, simpler English staging traditions with neo-classical staging practices and improved machinery.

Auditorium:

divided into a pit and two or three galleries, the bottom tier divided into boxes, the top given to benches. Seats between 500-600. At Drury Lane distance from front of stage to back of auditorium only 36 feet.

Thrust:

downstage acting area extending into auditorium. About 20 feet deep at Drury Lane. Approached through one or two pairs of stage or proscenium doors with balconies above them. (moved from old position at the centre back to the side leaving uninterrupted view a-F the inner stage) Illuminated by chandeliers over forestage and possibly footlights. Preferred acting area: better-lit and brings actors into closer relation to audience.

Upstage scenic area:

separated from acting area by a proscenium arch; about 25 feet deep at Drury Lane. Accommodated wing-and-shutter system of set changes. (Painted scene at back, then combination of flats or shutters set along the side in grooves to work like sliding doors. To change scenery, the first pair was slid into the wings exposing the next set behind them. Sometimes 3 to 4 pairs stacked.) Could also accommodate traps, machines for raising ghosts or engulfing the wicked, pulley systems and flying machines. Scenes lit by candles fixed in vertical rows behind each wing position. For practical and aesthetic reasons, stock scenery used (tragedy: palaces, tombs; comedy: street, lodgings).

VII Waning of the Restoration Stage

Commercialization of the theatre

- shift in audience. Restoration stage appealed originally to a well-defined, well-educated, aristocratic and upper class audience. By 1700s, attempts were already being made to appeal to a larger, less sophisticated audience by incorporating song, dance, pantomime, variety acts, afterpieces and animal acts into the evening's entertainment

- theatre houses became progressively larger to accommodate a larger clientele. Drury Lane in 1790 seats 2,300 in contrast to 650 in 1674. Decision by Drury Lane to cut the apron down by half in the 1690s to make more room in the pit negatively affects intimate acting style and helps lead to more exaggerated, formal tragic style o-F Quinn, Booth and Wilks. Increasing emphasis on spectacle leads to further growth of stage area behind proscenium

Reaction against debauchery and excesses of Restoration. Jeremy Collier in the 1690s attacks the morality of the stage and the wisdom of glorifying seducers and debauchers. New literary criticism stresses morality over wit, sentiment over ideas. Comedy moves away from satirical savagery of Jonson and the Restoration playwrights towards moralizing sentimental approach of Steele

Licensing Act imposes tighter censorship on theatrical writing and activities as a whole by restricting all legitimate drama again to either Drury Lane or Covent Garden, and demanding that all plays be censored and licensed first by the Lord Chamberlain