

ENGLISH, Part-2, Paper-I, Gr-C - Restoration Tragedy.

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With the enthronement of Charles II as a monarch of England, Scotland and Ireland in 1660, a new trend in English literary scene came into vogue. This new trend in literature, especially in drama was sharply different from those of Elizabethan age and early 17th century. The grandeur, thematic vastness and popularity that marked English drama in Elizabethan period and early 17th century are missing the Restoration theatre. But one should remember in fact that the Puritan government in England had stopped performance of drama in 1642 and it was restored in 1660 after the gap of 18 years. When it was finally restored, the dramatist discovered a completely different kind of English society and audience with totally different taste.

Restoration tragedy is a term that implies all types of tragedies written during this historical period. Heroic tragedy is one of the types that holds the central position in this period. Here are also some plays which were written under the influence of Elizabethan dramatist. A new type of tragedy

Known as 'she tragedy' or pathetic tragedy also evolved in this period.

During the first twenty years after the Restoration, the rhymed heroic couplet reigned supreme. This form was introduced by Sir William Davenant and popularized by John Dryden. Davenant's plays "The Siege of Rhodes" owes the credit of originating of the heroic play. His other popular work based on this model is "The French Romances".

This type of drama writing was under the influence of French tragedy and its demand was heroic character without fatal flaws. John Dryden, the master of mock-heroic poetry, in his "An Essay on Heroic play".

Writes, "a heroic play ought to be an imitation of little of the heroic poems and consequently that love and valour ought to be the subject of it". As he wanted to say, the play must have a noble theme and noble expression and should be constructed around a single theme and if possible with preservation of classical unities of place, time and action.

Dryden along with Sir Robert Howard popularized this form of poetry. Both produced the "Indian Queen" in 1664. The play was successful and was immediately followed by "The Indian

Emperor (1665) and "The Conquest of Granada" in 1667. In the meanwhile Dryden composed "Aurengzebe" the most sober and the last of his contribution to this type. The play in Indian setting exposes the nobleness of Aurengzeb as he struggles against the faithlessness of father, his brother and indeed of all around him. This play shows that Dryden was growing tired of the composition of grandiose heroic tragedy in rhymed verse.

In the late 17th century, we see the almost complete replacement of rhymed by blank verse, but the heroic motive remains. It was also a period of numerous adaptation from Elizabethan dramatists especially from Shakespeare. Dryden's 'Love for all' was written in blank verse. It dealt with the story of Antony and Cleopatra. Though, Dryden chose the subject of Shakespeare for his dramatic masterpiece, but he never actually copied it.

The other important dramatist who wrote heroic tragedy was Thomas Otway. His famous work, based on rhymed verse was "Alcibiads and Don Carlos". He, too, turned to blank verse with the play "The Orphan".

Rever Boyle attempted heroic tragedy in Henry VIII and The Black Prince.

Nathaniel Lee wrote heroic tragedy in rhymed verse. Dryden and Lee collaborated

in producing blank-verse plays 'Oedipus King of Thebes' and 'The Duke of Guise'

John Crowne wrote heroic tragedies but they are not of much worth.

Thomas Southerne wrote heroic tragedies in a mixture of blank-verse and prose. His 'The Fatal Marriage' and 'Oronoko' are of note worthy.

Elkanah Settle wrote a successful heroic tragedy 'Empress of Morocco'.

Nicholas Rowe holds a unique position as a link between late restoration dramatist and those of the Augustan age. His play 'The Fair Penitent' was one of the popular tragedies of the time. The central characters of his tragedies are women rather than man. His plays moved the audience to tears.

In this way, Restoration Tragedy can be marked with three different kinds of tragedies. The heroic tragedy remained popular only for a few decades because the main demand in the Restoration age was for highly amusing comedies of manners.

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