

# Characteristics of The Restoration Age

## ✧ Introduction

The period from 1660 to 1700 is mentioned as the Restoration Age or the Age of Dryden because the monarchy was restored in England. In the year of 1660, Charles II was brought to the throne and the restoration of Charles II brought a new era both in life and in literature. The restoration actually replaced the power of the monarchy and puritan ethos. It brought the power of a Parliamentary system under the two parties – Whigs and Tories, and both parties encouraged social stability. Thus, the period from 1660 to 1700 has the most importance and it is called the Age of Restoration. W. J. Long remarks –

**The inevitable effect of excess is disease, and for almost an entire generation following the Restoration in 1660, England lay sick of a fever; its literature especially its drama, often seems more likely the delirium of illness than the expression of a healthy mind.**

## ✧ Characteristics of the Age

### 1) Social and Political Conflicts

With the come – back of Charles II, England's social, political and religious tenets have transformed. The two devastating incidents – The great Plague of London and The Great Fire of London did much more harm to English Social life. W. J. Long said –

**Though the king and court and high society of this period arouse our disgust or pity, the private life of England remained honest and pure even in the worst days of the Restoration.**

Politically, the country was divided into two parties – The Whigs and The Tories. Both parties were largely devoted to the Anglican Church. Later, both the parties joined together to put an end to King James II who misrule for four years. After the bloodiness revolution of 1688, which called William of Orange and Queen Mary to the throne, was simply the indication of England's healthy and sanity. According to W. J. Long,

**Modern England was firmly established by the Revolution which was brought about by the excesses of the Restoration.**

## 2) *Opening of the Theatres*

All the institutions that were closed in the puritanical movement were opened during the Restoration period. Political monarchy, Parliament Episcopacy and law were all restored. The clubs and coffee houses were also established during the period. These houses become the centers of political discussions and from here only, the periodical essays were originated.

## 3) *Rise of Neo – Classicism*

The Restoration marks a complete break with the past and the Elizabethan Romanticism was almost over. With the end of the past, literature took a new spirit and outlook and a different attitude in the subject and style. As Edward Albert says,

**The Post – Restoration period is often setup as converge and anti – thesis of the previous Elizabethan Age. It is called 'Classical' as opposed to the Elizabethan Romanticism.**

Lacking of the genius in Elizabethans, the authors of the time turned to the great classical writers, particularly Latin writers, for guidance and inspiration. This habit was hardened during the Age which we called Neo – Classicism.

## 4) *Imitation of the Ancients*

The authors of the period were not endowed with exceptional talents. So, they turned to the ancient writers for guidance and inspiration. They directed their attention to the slavish imitation of rules and ignore the importance of the subject – matter. This habit was noticeable in the Age of Dryden. And it was strengthened in the Age of Pope. That's why Alexander Pope writes –

**Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem,  
To copy nature is to copy them.**

### 5) Realism

Restoration literature is realistic. It was concerned with the life and with the fashion and manners. W. J. Long writes about the practice of realism of this period –

**The early Restoration writers sought to paint realistic pictures of a corrupt court and society, and emphasized vices rather than virtues, and gave us coarse, low plays without interest or moral significance.**

Later, this tendency of realism becomes more wholesome.

### 6) New Literary Forms

The writers of the age went against the Elizabethan romantic ideals and tried to give realistic picture of the corrupt court and society. They exposed vices rather than virtues. The most important literary forms expounded during this age are as under:

#### **A. Satire**

Restoration age was an age of political unrest, sharp wit and personal contention. For this reason, satire got a new importance. Dryden's Mac Flecknoe which was written in heroic couplet is considered as the best satire respectively.

### **B. Poetry**

The Restoration poets completely discarded the romanticism of Elizabethan poetry and also rejected the morals of puritan poets. Poetry presented a realistic picture of the corrupt court, society, men and manners; and its appeal was to intellect and reason.

### **C. Drama**

The theatres which were closed in 1642 were opened during the Restoration. Consequently, the plays were written for the play – houses. It gave rise to the development of the Comedy of Manners, which portrayed the sophisticated life of the dominant class of society.

### **D. Heroic Couplet**

Restoration literature adopted the heroic – couplet as a poetic medium that is two iambic pentameter lines which rhymed together. Waller, who began to use it in 1623, is generally regarded as the father of the couplet. Later, Waller and Dryden made the couplet a literary fashion.

### **✘ Conclusion**

In a conclusion, the Restoration period is to be seen as one of transition. The glorious Revolution of 1688 also brought about a new change in social and political life. The Restoration literature developed realism and so the whole literature was developed in a new style. American biologist E. O. Wilson remarked –

**There can be no purpose more inspiring than to begin the age of restoration, reweaving the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us.**

