

Jacobean and Caroline Drama

Shakespeare and Jonson dominate our picture of early 17th century drama to such an extent that it is easy to forget that there were many other dramatists writing plays at the time. One of the most fascinating aspects of Jacobean drama is the sheer volume of potential material. Hundreds of plays (400 or 500 at least) were written and produced between 1600 and 1640. Many of these were never printed and have not survived, but very many plays have been preserved. The variety of settings, topics, and treatments is so huge that it defies all the critics' attempts to classify and make tidy patterns.

At the same time, relatively few of these plays are usually thought to be of very great interest to modern audiences and only a handful are now acted, or even studied in university courses. One reason may be the fact that so many of the plays are collaborative works involving more than one writer's talents; romantic notions of individual authorship do not leave room for this kind of writing and even when Shakespeare collaborated, as he did in *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the result is mostly neglected. Modern rejections of authorship have given birth to new interest in precisely this kind of text.

The social background

The end of Elizabeth's reign was marked by increasing social tensions. The rebellion led by the earl of Essex in 1599 was symptomatic of increasing dissatisfaction among the nobility and gentry with royal arrogance. This became far stronger with the accession of James I with his doctrines of royal absolutism and the "divine right of kings". At the same time, the merchant classes were becoming increasingly wealthy and eager to participate in the development of the national policies on which their wealth depended; they were aspiring to join the ranks of the powerful lords whose wealth derived from hereditary possession of land.

London was therefore an intensely politicized society at a time when those with power were feeling threatened. Directly political, or even satirical, writings were forbidden and many of the dramas comment on social or political issues in indirect ways, always trying to avoid the official censorship that became increasingly fierce as the social crisis deepened, especially after 1625 during the reign of Charles. Most of the plays acted were written during the reign of James and repeatedly revived until the theatres were closed by the puritans in 1642.

The audience for the plays acted in Shakespeare's time was socially a very mixed one, ranging from well-educated lords to simple apprentices. From the start of James's reign, however, there are signs that Shakespeare and several of his colleagues are writing more and more for the tastes of the upper class. From about 1608, the King's Men were producing plays for a more refined audience in the **Blackfriars Theatre**, while still using the **Globe Theatre** for more general audiences.

The immense variety of settings and plots found in the Jacobean dramas was a natural development from the classical comedy and chivalric or pastoral romance. The view of human nature grows increasingly skeptical, vice is an essential ingredient of most plays, and often the ending is troubling rather than comforting, with no obvious victory of virtue. Perhaps as a result of this more ironic attitude, many plays are self-consciously "dramatic" (modern critics often use the word metadramatic) and merrily subvert the illusion they are supposed to create by reminding the audience that they are watching actors performing a play in a theatre. The world-view expressed in the plays strongly suggests that human life itself is all a theatre, and that people in society are both actors and spectators in the *theatrum mundi*.

The Jacobean plays were written to please an audience that would attack the actors and break up a theatre if it did not like the play it was watching. This helped ensure a maximum entertainment value. The closest modern parallel to these plays would be popular cinema, films of adventure or violence, horror or sentimental romance. In reading the plays of the Jacobeans we are brought into close contact with the tastes, fears, and expectations of early 17th century London. Drama in the Restoration was to be a much more limited affair, written for a limited sophisticated audience.

In the pages that follow, the date placed after the title of a play indicates when it was first performed; printed publication often only came years later.

Francis Beaumont (1584/5 - 1616)

Beaumont came from a distinguished family of rural gentry; as a boy he studied at Oxford and then at the Inner Temple (London) but it seems he was only interested in writing for the theatre. He associated with Drayton and Ben Jonson. He wrote two plays alone: *The Woman Hater* (first produced in 1605) and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (first produced in 1607). This latter was a failure at the time, yet it is today admired as a brilliant satire of the tastes of respectable citizens and one of the best works of the time.

In 1605 he first met John Fletcher and they began to work together writing plays. Fletcher too had failed to please the London audience with his *Faithful Shepherdess* (1608) written alone; yet the collaboration at once produced successful plays. Beaumont wrote the major part of three particularly important works: the tragicomedy *Philaster* (also known as *Love Lies A-Bleeding*), acted by Shakespeare's company at their Blackfriars theatre in 1609 or 1610; the romantic tragedy *The Maid's Tragedy*, from the same period, and the incest-centred *A King and No King* (1611). In 1613 Beaumont married an heiress and retired to the countryside where he died after only a few years. *The Maid's Tragedy* was revived at the Restoration and enjoyed great popularity with a happy ending written by Waller.

John Fletcher (1579 - 1625)

In 1647 a folio edition containing thirty-four plays attributed to "Beaumont and Fletcher" was published; in 1679, a second edition increased the number to fifty-two but Beaumont only contributed to a few of these, Fletcher mostly worked alone or with Massinger and others. The folio was the form reserved for the finest literary work; Jonson and Shakespeare are the only other dramatists to have their works preserved in such a format.

Because he often worked with collaborators, Fletcher's own talents have been hard to distinguish. Yet he must obviously have been a very gifted dramatist in his own right. His father was for a few months Bishop of London in 1595 before he died, deeply in debt. Like Beaumont, Fletcher was a disciple of Jonson. An early attempt at pastoral tragi-comedy, *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608) inspired by Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido* failed to please the audiences, it was perhaps rather ahead of its time.

Fletcher collaborated with Shakespeare in writing *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613), a play based on Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, and perhaps other plays, after his collaboration with Beaumont ended in 1613. He wrote a large number of plays with Massinger, including *Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt* (1613) and *The Custom of the Country* (1620). Other collaborators include Nathan Field and William Rowley. With Massinger Fletcher wrote *Beggar's Bush* (1622), a play that was successfully revived at the Restoration and often acted in the 18th century. Coleridge praised it as "sylvan and sunshiny".

Among the plays Fletcher seems to have written alone is the exotic tragi-comedy *The Island Princess* (1619), set in the East Indies and based on a recent Spanish publication. Other titles by Fletcher alone include *The Humorous Lieutenant* (1619), *The Wild-Goose Chase* (1621), and *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* (1624). After Shakespeare's retirement and death (1616) Fletcher was the main writer for the King's Men, who were concerned to provide plays that would please the genteel audiences of the private theatres. The original Globe burned in 1613 and although it was rebuilt, the old open-air theatres were losing their appeal.

Fletcher's plays are of two main kinds: tragi-comedy and comedy of manners. His main inspiration comes from the European pastoral romance tradition represented in English by Sidney's *Arcadia*. The feelings are of the highest kind; often noble characters make subtle distinctions between the demands of love and honour that put them in terrible situations; the dramatist seems to enjoy forcing his characters to confront innumerable near-disasters before bringing them to a happy ending where vice is punished and virtue rewarded.

Fletcher's rhetorical skill was considerable, he was a master at writing in a variety of styles. The following speech from Act One of *The Island Princess* is a well-known piece that is thought to have had an influence on Milton in some of the loftier passages of *Paradise Lost*:

We are arriv'd among the blessed Islands,
Where every wind that rises blows perfumes,
And every breath of air is like an Incense:
The treasure of the Sun dwells here, each tree
As if it envied the old Paradise,
Strives to bring forth immortal fruit; the spices
Renewing nature, though not deifying,
And when that falls by time, scorning the earth,
The sullen earth, should taint or suck their beauties,
But as we dreamt, for ever so preserve us:
Nothing we see, but breeds an admiration;
The very rivers as we float along,
Throw up their pearls, and curl their heads to court us;
The bowels of the earth swell with the births
Of thousand unknown gems, and thousand riches;
Nothing that bears a life, but brings a treasure.

Fletcher played a vital role in developing the comedy of manners that dominated the theatre after the Restoration and into the 18th century, drawing on the London scene created by Jonson and Middleton. Such plays have stock characters, including wild young men, confused matrons, solid citizen-fathers, and lively young girls, involved in variations on the traditional themes of love, lust, greed, and marriage.

Thomas Middleton (1580 - 1627)

After studying at Queen's College, Oxford, Middleton returned to his native London and by 1602 was writing for Philip Henslowe (the Admiral's Men) as well for Paul's boys company. He also composed the texts for a number of emblematic city "entertainments" and "solemnities". He is known to have written or have been the main collaborator in some 40 dramatic works: comedies, tragedies, or entertainments. Dekker, Fletcher, Rowley, and

Webster wrote with him. He had an official position as City Chronologer of London from 1620.

Middleton's work is marked by a satiric vein; "luxury" as a combination of sexual passion, greed, and social climbing is the main preoccupation of most of his characters, who inhabit a world where everything seems to have its price and where deception is normal practice. His world is that of London's rising middle class, even when he disguises the setting as an exotic Spanish one. His plays observe human vices, without romanticizing and often with mocking laughter.

He is a master of complex multiple plots and writes a smooth, effective dramatic verse. Among his more often read plays are comedies like *Michaelmas Term* (1606) where an upstart draper dreams of becoming a respectable gentleman, or *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1611) with its vivid figure of Master Allwit who happily allows Sir Walter Whorehound to pay his wife for sex. Sir Walter supports the whole family until he is ruined, when he is thrown out and the Allwits prepare to open a brothel.

The characters in Middleton's tragedies are equally vicious, usually more lustful than greedy for wealth, as can be seen in *The Changeling* (1622) or in *Women Beware Women* (c. 1625) where Livia manipulates two other female characters into corruption and vice before her plots ensnare her and everyone dies, except two fools. Violence is given a free reign

The play *A Game at Chess* (1624) has attracted particular interest because in it Middleton ventured to deal very directly with forbidden issues of politics and religion. Seeming to depict a game of chess, it comments on the way James and his heir Charles were trying to form an alliance with Catholic Spain against the wishes of most English people. England and Spain, Protestant and Catholic, are the two sides in the game and each of the pieces represents a major political figure, including the Spanish ambassador as the Black Knight opposite Prince Charles, the white knight.

After being acted for nine days in succession at the Globe, a very rare event for a play, and earning a huge amount of money, it was banned, the King's Men were forbidden to act for a while, and the dramatist was threatened with arrest. Such directly political works were rare but the same political tensions underlie all the plays of the period.

One famous play that may in fact be by Middleton, *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606), has been attributed to Cyril Tourneur since 1656; it was originally published without any indication of the author's name. It is one of the very great works of the period and it seems more likely that it was the work of a talented writer like Middleton.

Philip Massinger (1583 - 1640)

Born in Salisbury and educated for a time in Oxford, Massinger began working as a playwright soon after arriving in London in 1606. The author of more than thirty plays, he collaborated with Fletcher in many but he also worked with Field, Daborne, Tourneur, and Dekker, as well as writing alone. He wrote regularly for the King's Men from 1613 until 1623 and after the death of Fletcher he became their chief writer for the rest of his life.

Massinger, like Middleton, was not afraid to write about forbidden topics, including Catholicism, Spain, and royal favourites. Massinger shows close acquaintance with the works of Shakespeare and some wonder if it was not Massinger, rather than Fletcher or Middleton, who collaborated with Shakespeare at the end of his career in *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

Few of Massinger's many plays are now read or studied, with the exception of his comedy *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (c. 1621), which has been much admired since Garrick revived it in the 18th century. It is still produced; the central character Sir Giles Overreach is a usurer and extortioner of tremendous power who prefigures the Victorian taste for melodramatic villains. Both it and *The City Madam* (perhaps 1632) are based on earlier plays to which Massinger has brought new life by creating monstrous characters of his own. Like the Augustans of the 18th century, Massinger's satire seems aimed at the vulgar city rich whose pretensions threaten the role of the traditional rural aristocracy in maintaining virtue.

Thomas Heywood (1573 - 1641)

Born in Lincolnshire, Thomas Heywood was already writing for Henslowe by 1596 and from 1598 he was himself acting in the Admiral's Men as well. Later he joined the more popular companies at the Red Bull and Cockpit theatres. His active life therefore spans the entire period, and it was very active. He claimed to have written or helped write 220 plays (35 survive). He also wrote masques, poetry, composed a treatise in favour of the theatre in *An Apology for Actors* (1612), as well as writing a number of anti-Catholic and other prose works. He also translated Ovid's *De Arte Amandi*.

He wrote in most of the popular modes. His classical tragedies include *The Rape of Lucrece* and a series of plays based on Greek myths. He also wrote English history plays: *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (also known as *The Troubles of Queen Elizabeth*) (1605) and *King Edward the Fourth* (before 1599). His most well-known work is a two-part romance adventure, *Fair Maid of the West* (or *A Girl Worth Gold*) (1610?) which travels far and wide with a true, simple, chaste heroine Bess as its main character rescuing her lover in the first part, marrying him and coming home in the second. Heywood's very early chivalric romance *The Four Prentices of London* (1592?) was satirized by Beaumont in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

Heywood's main work, *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603), is usually categorized as "a masterpiece of bourgeois realism and domestic tragedy". The violent male attitude toward supposedly adulterous women commonly found in renaissance literature, which usually involves murdering them on the spot without further enquiry (for example, *Othello*), is abandoned in favour of a much more complex solution involving forgiveness by a grieving husband, and painful remorse leading to death for the wife.

Thomas Dekker (c. 1570 - 1632)

Dekker was born in London. He was a writer of plays and pamphlets in which we find an optimistic, affectionate attitude towards ordinary people and their misfortunes that contrasts with that of the more cynical dramatists. He mostly collaborated with Webster and, later, with Ford. Alone, he could write brilliant colloquial dialogue and create charming characters but had no sense of plot structure. For six years (1613-19) he was in prison for debt.

Dekker's most widely admired work, *The Shoemakers Holiday* (1599) comes at the very start of his career and shows clearly his closeness to the earlier Elizabethan ethos found in Robert Greene's works, for example. The romance is tender, the farce is hearty and boisterous, there are charming songs and lively dances, the prose dialogue is colloquial. It may not be a coincidence that the play is set in London at the time of Henry V's French wars like Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays that were playing at the Globe at about the same time.

He and Marston were criticized by Ben Jonson in *The Poetaster*; they retaliated in the opening of *Satiromastix* (1601). Afterwards he and Webster produced the comedies *Westward Ho* and *Northward Ho*. With Middleton he worked on Part I of *The Honest Whore* (1604) but unfortunately tried to write Part II alone. He also worked with Middleton on *The Roaring Girl* a few years later, based on the true story of a girl commonly known as Moll Cutpurse, who is depicted as a tender-hearted rascal. In many plays, Dekker shows apparently stern fathers and masters to be good-humored and kind deep down.

In later times, writing *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) with Rowley and Ford, we find him showing how cruel neighbours drove an ignorant poor woman to practice witchcraft. He was sympathetic to the sufferings of the poor, he hated cruelty. His didactic, moralizing pamphlets offer fascinating insights into the life of London in the early years of James's reign, especially *The Wonderful Year* (1602) with a vivid picture of London during the plague, and *The Gull's Horn-Book* (1609) which includes a section on the way fashionable young men showed off at the popular playhouses, sitting on the stage and mocking the actors or the play.

John Marston (1576 - 1634)

Marston was at Oxford for two years until 1594 but then moved to the Middle Temple, where he stayed for more than ten years. He was reputed for his love of bitter satire, and in some ways recalls John Donne. His works are experimental, unlike those of other dramatists in many ways. He was in bitter conflict with Ben Jonson during the *Poetomachia* but later they became friends. He wrote for Paul's boys company and others, was associated with the Queen's Revels company after 1604. In 1609 he became a priest in the Church of England and stopped writing. His collected *Works* including both comedies and tragedies were published in 1633.

The bitter side of his world-view marks *Antonio and Mellida* (1599) and its terrible sequel *Antonio's Revenge* (1599) is the culmination of the "revenge tragedy" tradition. Set in a sordid Venice, the dreadful moral degeneration of Antonio suggests that the human race consists of "vermin bred of putrefacted slime".

Most critics recognize *The Malcontent* (1604) as his greatest work. It offers a tragicomic satire of court and world without the dark excesses of the earlier plays. It clearly owes much to *Hamlet* and it was acted at the Globe by the King's Men, who stole the book from the Children of Blackfriars; *Malevole* was acted by Richard Burbage, who played Hamlet. The "metadramatic" induction to the play was composed by Webster; in it the actors who are about to perform the play discuss its qualities.

Another work in which the world of London's low life is central is the comedy *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604?) where moral issues such as the relationship between love and lust are discussed. In 1605, Chapman and Marston collaborated with Jonson on the parody of the "citizen comedy" *Eastward Ho* which displeased the king because of its insulting references to Scotsmen. Jonson and Chapman were imprisoned for it, but not Marston, it seems.

Almost at the end of his career, he composed a high-minded classical tragedy, *The Wonder of Women (The Tragedy of Sophonisba)* in a far more demanding style that would deserve closer study than it receives.

John Webster (c. 1580 - 1630s)

Given the fame of *The Duchess of Malfi*, astonishingly little is known of the life of its author. Neither the place or the date of his birth or death are known and virtually nothing of

what happened between the two, except that he wrote a few plays and collaborated in writing others. He is known for two works, *The White Devil* (1612?) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613-4?).

Both plays cater to an audience's taste for blood, violence and horror that would today be satisfied by films such as "Dracula". Their stories come from Italian novellas inspired by actual incidents. The plays portray incest, adultery, murder, employing various methods of killing; the overall atmosphere is sombre yet the main characters face death with such great dignity that simple moralistic distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil become meaningless.

Society is portrayed as an essentially corrupt and wicked realm in which human lives count for little or nothing. Webster epitomizes one aspect of the drama of his time, using a language so full of echoes of earlier plays that it sometimes seems that every line is a quotation.

John Ford (1586 - 1640)

After studying in Oxford, Ford seems to have had a long association with the Middle Temple in London but nothing is known about his life. He was essentially a Caroline dramatist, there is no explanation as to why he began to write so late. It is not possible to determine just when his plays were written and produced.

Ford seems to have contributed the sub-plot to Dekker and Rowley's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) but his first independent play was *The Lover's Melancholy* (1628), a study of madness and despair that owed much to Ford's great interest in Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. All his plays show an intense interest in abnormal psychology and ethical paradox

Ford's most well-known play is the tragedy *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (c. 1630), set in Italy, in which the tragic characters on which the play focusses are a brother and sister guilty of incest. The impossibility and yet beauty of their relationship is delicately handled. *The Broken Heart* has a similar subtlety of psychology but a weaker plot with more sensational effects of violence and death.

It is rather surprising to find Ford as the author of one of the last chronicle plays. *Perkin Warbeck* follows the career of a pretender to the throne of England in the reign of Henry VII who attempts an invasion and is finally executed. Ford makes the play more interesting by showing us a Warbeck convinced that he has a right to the throne, hence the victim of a delusion, whereas in history he seems to have been a mere imposter.

James Shirley (1596 - 1666)

It is hard to understand the neglect into which Shirley has fallen. He wrote as many plays as Shakespeare and was also a talented poet, writing lyrics and a short epic. He was born in London, studied at Cambridge, became a priest but joined the Catholic Church in about 1625. He was also a school master for a time. After that he settled in London, began to write plays, and was associated with the court. He was one of the rare Caroline dramatists, writing for companies in Dublin as well as in London. He fought on the royalist side during the Civil War, had his poems published in 1646 by Humphrey Moseley (like so many others), survived during the Commonwealth by teaching, and lived to see the Restoration.

His plays include multi-plotted romantic comedies like *Hyde Park* (1632) set in London with "realistic" touches and lively characters, tragi-comedies like *The Young Admiral*

(1633) with complex plots where honor brings people into terrible dilemmas but all ends well, and tragedies like *The Politician* (1639?) or *The Cardinal* (1641) in which polarized qualities of good and evil confront one another.

Sir William Davenant (1606 - 1688)

Born in Oxford, Davenant (also written D'Avenant) was sometimes said to have been Shakespeare's bastard, the result of a visit by Shakespeare to Oxford. He served Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, who in youth had been Sir Philip Sidney's friend and biographer for a time, then during the 1620s began to write masques for the court, and plays. When Ben Jonson died in 1637, his pension as unofficial "poet laureate" came to Davenant. He managed the Cockpit theatre in Drury Lane until the puritans closed the theatres in 1642.

He was knighted for his services to the Royalist side during the Civil War, travelled in Europe for the king's cause, and in 1650 joined the court in exile in Paris where he knew Hobbes. He was appointed Lieutenant Governor of the colony in Maryland but was captured by puritans and imprisoned in the Tower of London until 1652.

Davenant was the main agent of continuity between the pre-Commonwealth theatre and the Restoration. From 1656 he organized dramatic performances with music at Rutland House, and by calling them "operas" he avoided the laws against "plays". *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656) began with an induction where Diogenes and Aristophanes argue the case for and against public "entertainments"; after this followed the musical drama that is counted as the first opera performed in England. In 1658 he transferred the performances to the Cockpit Theatre. At the Restoration, Charles II gave him and Thomas Killigrew a monopoly on acting in London.

Davenant opened a theatre in Lincoln's Inn but later transferred it to Covent Garden. Thus the association of Drury Lane and Covent Garden with theatre, which still continues today, dates from Davenant. In the Restoration theatre the influence of French classical drama led to the introduction of women actresses and also of moveable scenery. Davenant joined with Dryden in adapting for the taste of the age some of Shakespeare's plays, including *The Tempest* (1667).

There are also a number of little known figures who played a role in the dramatic history of the time:

Anthony Munday (1560-1633)

Munday tried to be a clown of the old kind like Tarlton or Kempe but failed, worked as a spy against the Catholics living in Italy, translated prose romances that were very popular, wrote vivid pamphlets about crimes and executions; he even wrote against the theatre in the "War of the Theatres" supporting Gosson although he wrote many plays for Henslowe now mostly lost. Among the works that survive is *Sir Thomas More*, a manuscript fragment written by various hands, perhaps never completed and never produced, in which one scene seems to be in Shakespeare's own handwriting, the only Shakespearean literary manuscript.

William Rowley (1585 - 1626)

Rowley collaborated with other more famous writers on many plays, including Middleton, with whom he wrote *The Changeling*, providing the subplot. He was a comic actor with the King's Men from 1623 and the clown parts written for himself are among his best, including the role of Cuddy Banks in *The Witch of Edmonton*. He composed citizen comedies and one tragedy, *All's Lost by Lust*.

Cyril Tourneur (1575 - 1626)

In 1656, a man called Edward Archer affirmed that the impressive revenge tragedy published anonymously in 1607 under the title *The Revenger's Tragedy* had been written by Cyril Tourneur. Almost certainly, Archer was confused by the similarity between this title and the title of Tourneur's own work *The Atheist's Tragedy* published in 1611. Judging by the quality of this latter work, Tourneur could never have invented the telling plot or written the subtle poetry of *The Revenger's Tragedy* which bears all the marks of Middleton's skills.

Tourneur was a gentleman associated with powerful families who seems to have written a few plays in moments of leisure or financial need.

Richard Brome (1590 - 1652)

Significant as one of the rare Caroline dramatists, Brome started as a servant to Ben Jonson, who seems to have encouraged him. Most of his plays continue the tradition of satiric comedy started by Jonson, although Brome has none of Jonson's fierce passion or refined art. Instead he wrote pleasant works, about twenty of which have survived, including *The Northern Lass* (1629) and *A Jovial Crew* (1641). Together with Heywood he wrote *The Late Lancashire Witches* as a topical melodrama. His *The Love-Sick Court* (1633?) is something of an heroic drama, but perhaps was intended to be a satire of the mode?

Thomas Nabbes (1605 - ?)

The "minor" dramatist Nabbes disappears completely from history after writing three comedies, two tragedies, and three masques in the 1630s. *Covent Garden* is yet another of those many comedies set in London and full of entertaining characters whose pursuits of vice or love conclude in the triumph of virtue and the reformation of vice. The actors destined to perform his dreadful tragedy *The Unfortunate Mother* are reported to have refused to act it.

Thomas Killigrew (1612 - 1683)

One of the rare courtiers to write plays, Killigrew became page to Charles I in 1633. He wrote three tragi-comedies, based on popular French romances, that were acted in the 1630s. A comedy *The Parson's Wedding* depicts the fashionable London of 1639, it offers a lively picture of the adventures of a group of wits. It was produced in 1664, when Samuel Pepys saw it. He tried to join the cavalier army but was imprisoned. In 1647 he joined the exiled prince Charles in Paris and served him as a diplomat. During his years abroad he wrote

a tragedy *The Pilgrim* and a couple of romances, before beginning *Thomaso; or, The Wanderer* which is set among English exiles living in Madrid.

Killigrew's main importance in the history of English drama is as the man who built the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane in 1663, thanks to the monopoly he shared with Davenant.

Restoration drama

The drama of the Restoration owed much to the last stage of pre-Civil War drama. To that came the influence of the French classical theatre of Pierre Corneille (1616 - 1684), Molière (1622 - 1673), and Jean Racine (1639 - 1699) with its stress on the classical unities of plot, place, and time. Perhaps the most striking innovation at the Restoration was the introduction of women onto the stage.

Four names stand out as new dramatists in the Restoration: John Dryden (1631 - 1700), Sir George Etherege (1634 - 1691), William Wycherley (1641 - 1715), William Congreve (1670 - 1729), to whom have also to be added Farquhar, and Vanbrugh. Generally speaking, the early Restoration plays were particularly marked by sexual adventure of a libertine kind, a rather cynical approach to true love and marital fidelity, and much wit exposed in complicated situations of deceit and seduction. The comedy of manners gradually developed a more subtle tone and a wit better matching the demands of the emerging society, for which nothing should be too explicit or shocking.

Early in his career, Dryden showed skill in the higher tones of rhymed heroic drama: *The Indian Queen* (1664) or *The Conquest of Granada* (1670); he also wrote comedies such as *An Evening's Love* (1668); Dryden's most interesting early work is found in tragicomedies such as *Marriage à-la-Mode* (1672). He quickly began to adapt plays by Shakespeare to the very different tastes of the age, starting with *The Tempest* in 1667.

As he matured, he began to reflect on the use of rhyme in drama; the great heroic drama *Aureng-Zebe* (1675) is rhymed but in its prologue Dryden denounces rhyme and his next adaptation of Shakespeare, *All for Love* (an adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, 1678) is in blank verse. In the 1680's, Dryden took the Catholic side in the constitutional crisis, becoming a Catholic himself, and this provoked plays like *The Spanish Fryar* (1681). His new religion meant that in 1688 he lost his regular pensions; to earn money he wrote *Don Sebastian* (1689), *Amphitryon* (1690) and *Cleomenes* (1692).

In many ways, Etherege was a major innovator; the lively comic subplot of his first play, *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub* (1664), laid the foundations for the full comedy of manners found in Congreve and the 18th century's Goldsmith. Molière and Italian farce were important influences. His most admired play is *The Man of Mode* (1676) but then he married a rich widow, followed James Stuart into exile, and died in Paris.

William Wycherley's four plays are more easily enjoyable than most of Dryden's, and more characteristic of Restoration theatre with their explicit interest in sexual intrigues, society scandals, amusing rogues; they are society comedies, set in contemporary London. His last two plays, particularly, are still quite often acted: *The Country Wife* (1675) and *The Plain-Dealer* (1677). It is not clear why he wrote no more plays but in 1679 he married the widow of the earl of Radnor, the countess of Drogheda, and perhaps considered writing plays unworthy of him. Later he became a close friend of Alexander Pope.

William Congreve led the way toward the more restrained tone of the 18th century, with his more subtle wit and greater sensitivity to the different social pressures operating on the people involved in love affairs and sexual adventures. His four comedies remain popular, especially *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700). As he rose in society,

working in government posts, he stopped writing plays and frequenting people such as Swift and Pope as well as Steele.

Major themes of Jacobean drama

Among the main characteristics should be mentioned the problems of knowledge, trust, and security. As in Shakespeare's plays, we find a constant "play" between seeming and being, illusion and reality; in so many works people wear disguises, or adopt false identities, while good characters mistake villains for honest friends, and villains are "hoist with their own petard". It seems impossible to know for sure what a person is, there is a pervasive crisis of identity that equally affects characters' knowledge of themselves.

Another theme common to many works is the link between sexual lust and death. Mortality looms large in most of the plays, a gloomy pondering on the prospects of Hell, a strong sense of the illusory nature of this world's pleasures. The abundant bloodshed in the last acts is often accompanied by a sense of amusement; the violent deaths in many plays are strongly fictionalized or rendered ironic while others are rendered poignant and naturalistic.

The pessimistic view of society as a corrupt and corrupting environment is accompanied by a feeling that many simple people escape the corruption and live quite happy lives away from the courts. There is a touching belief in the moral goodness and happiness of simple people. Very often the rulers shown in plays are kings and dukes who seem never to rule over a realm; their power serves only to enable them to indulge their lusts.

Ultimately, we are given many pictures of the fragility and potential collapse of all human relationships. Social relationships are threatened by the all-pervading corruption of values that characterizes the court and the city; everything becomes a matter of "politics", lying is the standard method, and self-interest the ultimate value. This crisis in relationship equally threatens to destroy the family. The dramas focussing on adultery and incest suggest that sexual passions are stronger than the "natural" laws governing parental and conjugal bonds.

The plays, especially the most violent ones, are often set in foreign, Catholic countries. This is not unlike the effect of distancing found in the pastoral mode or in the Italian setting of many romantic comedies. It does not necessarily mean that the English audience thought that such terrible things could never happen in their own country. In part it was a way of avoiding censorship and in part it stimulated an imaginative response by the exoticism of settings and customs. Audiences were very alert to satiric intentions and hidden allusions.

Further Reading

The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama, edited by A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway. Cambridge University Press. 1990.

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