

The Intersection Of Literature And Politics: Exploring Restoration Literature And Its Influence On 17th Century Society

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ABSTRACT

The Restoration era of English history typically refers to the period from 1660 to about 1700. This period was marked by an unprecedented degree of political, social, and cultural upheaval in England. This paper examines the intersection area of literature and politics during the unstable period of the 17th century, and what aspects of seventeenth-century change are depicted as well as how Restoration literature is impacted by these changes. The analysis of famous writers includes poems, essays, diaries, and theatrical works as subjects of discussion and evaluation. The study aims to reveal the differences among the socio-political themes that led to their current position in society. By contrast one of the main topics is the tension between the monarchy and the parliamentary authorities as well as the cross-cutting of the traditional gender roles and the slavish repaint of the society's image. The literary works after the Puritan government ended would be the trend to revive arts and intellectuality, which would result from writers trying the rules they could not follow over the Puritans to see what is trivial or interesting to them. These prominent writers, including John Dryden, Aphra Behn, and Delarivier Manley, were fearless challengers of the norms and ideologies of their times through their works, which led to new discourse channels on politics and culture. Political philosophers such as James Harrington and Algernon Sidney were engaged in a struggle between absolute monarchies and constitutional limitations. Their ideas which many people came to embrace became an important factor in the development of modern democracy. Finally, in node, Restoration literature was a powerful medium that not only reflects the deep-seated complexities of modern society but also acted as an instrument of social change. The alliance of literature and politics in that era shows the true power of creative expression on historical accounts and social constructs; providing a patrimonial that still engages today.

Keywords: English Restoration, literature, politics, socio-political themes, societal transformation.

Introduction

The English Restoration period which started in 1660 is the time when the country was experiencing the restoration of the monarchy that was led by Charles II. This great period of English history was marked by significant political, social, and cultural changes. The period of the Puritan rule under Oliver Cromwell was replaced by the return of the Stuart dynasty which led to new perspectives and ideologies that were reflected in literature of the time (Greenblatt, 2005). While England wanted to resurrect an authority that had earlier replaced the traditional monarchy, the primary focus was now shifting toward national identity, morality, governance, and class hierarchy. Literature brought forth not only its influence on the topic of political debates and transformations but also reflected the changes and the phenomenon of "a catalyst in the change of worldview" (Knights, 2005, p.77). The paper concentrates on the examination of Restoration era literary works from several genres including poetry, essays, diaries, and theatre to understand how literature intersected with and contributed to political debate and social values in this turbulent period by exploring Restoration era literary works from various genres like poetry, essays, diaries, and theater.

The beginning of the Restoration era saw the emergence of many new literary forms and contents that would have been suppressed or wiped out under Puritan rule. To this advent, Cromwell's moral dictatorship was over, hence the authors felt more at liberty to experiment in the stylistic area and the subject matters. This mood was incarnated in authors including John Dryden, Aphra Behn and John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester who were known for their naughty, witty poems, saturated with frank expressions of sex, hedonism, and skepticism, purposed to transgress the rigid norms of the previous era (Greene, 2012). Theatre was first and foremost a victim of the Puritans and then, once again, the stage became a place of rebellion where transgressive thoughts flourished. It is during the same period that the 'Restoration comedies' written by George Etherege, William Wycherley, and William Congreve make their debut. They satirize the double standards in the areas of love, marriage, and gender roles in the royal court (Greenblatt, 2005). The omnipresence of political discussion and the challenging of moral principles in those literary works made the cultural shift from conservative Protestantism to more liberal political, religious, and personal morals evident.

A major political issue that was dealt with by restoring literature was the absolutist monarchy dogma versus the constitutional control of the sovereign power. Following a change in government and the abolishment of the Parliament, society again was in a predicament of the necessity to define its relation to an untouchable monarch whose father had been overthrown as a tyrant (Knights, 2005). In this discussion between the absolute monarchy and the sphere of legal limitations, writers had their input and they also were driven by the debate. John Dryden's absolute masterpiece, *Absalom and Achitophel*, which was published in 1681, during the Exclusion Crisis when the Parliament was trying to prohibit Charles II's brother from succession because he was Catholic, exhorted the Parliament against delimiting the succession rights by that of Absalom and King David from the ancient bible (Winn, 1987). Dryden denounced hereditary divine right in a not-so-subtle manner to remind the legislator that the monarchial rule above ought to be submitted to.

However, on the other hand, political philosophers James Harrington and Algernon Sidney engaged in a heated debate about absolute monarchy, arguing vehemently for the limited power of the government, and people's right to protest unjust rule. The idea of sovereignty, absolute and unlimited, was also criticized, as a result. The Republic of the Commonwealthmen, manifested in *Discourse on Government* (the 1670s), which was published posthumously in the 1690s, after the author was executed for treason, was one of the leading statements against tyranny, and it substantially influenced other Commonwealthmen and stigmatized Stuart absolutist doctrine (J.P., 1987). These discussions about the divine right absolutism versus the constitutional limitations in literature happened in different genres, which shows how literature was an influential factor in addressing the issues of governance, authority, and rights that Europe was deeply concerned with during that time.

This sociopolitical theme of gender relations and patriarchal power that has been around also formed another area that writers altered in important ways. Recent literature findings have illustrated how playwrights of the early times such as Aphra Behn, and Delarivier Manley, among others, defied the established gender hierarchies through their blazing novels with the female protagonists being tough and sexually liberated (Lowenthal, 2000; Spencer, 1986). In *The Royal Mischief* (1696), Manley championed the scandal of a woman having an affair with a royal. Behn's *The Rover* (1677) portrayed a heroine pronouncing that she was ignorant of what honor was when it involved love and desire. Behn's case, in particular, has been acclaimed as a woman who used the licentious form of a Rest According to Tauran (2004), "By exposing the hidden intricacies by which patriarchy functioned, Behn's plays set up a space for defiance and breaking the rules" (para. 4). These literary pieces gave a chance to those from the counter-culture to express themselves and demonstrate their different outlooks on traditional approaches to female roles, virginity and the institution of arranged marriage, which had a great effect on the social attitudes.

Such an unprecedented attack on women writers, along with socially relevant issues of masculine bad behavior, finally urged the Earl of Shaftesbury and others to provide a robust defense of the sex's character against the malicious claims of boorish sexuality or a cynical attitude toward marriage (Knights, 2005). Such responses as defensive or sometimes aggressive from male intellectuals to the biting criticisms of female playwrights and poets demonstrate the political card that Restoration literature had then as now to shape political views on gender. First of all, scholars agree on the great impact of these female writers and philosophers of the 18th century on the development of the subsequent women's rights movement in the 19th century (Pohl, 2004). Thinking in terms of the interrelation of literature with the dynamic gender inequality, it was indeed the most politically significant dimension of the literary realm.

Similarly, works of diaries and essays by comparatively lesser-known figures have come out as a historical fact that Restoration literature could also be a pioneer in the making of a people's opinion. As famous poets and playwrights steadily criticized absolutism or debunked marriage hypocrisy, the common folks' writing found a way to mirror these political controversies through more of a less complicated perspective. Alice Thornton's secret memoir has a passage where she says that she was greatly disturbed when she heard a pastor preach about heresy, which suggested that subjects had a right to revolt against and replace their rulers. Although not

a prominent figure, Thorton's diary shows how the anti-absolute Commonwealth ideology spread all over the society, and that the topic was a subject of fear. Lastly, Thomas Turner's memoirs as a shopkeeper "reveal gossip from small towns including failed marriages, abuse against wives and husbands, and allegations of adultery" (King, 1998). These writings which are normally about everyday occurrences make it clear that literature is a great facilitator of debate on the important and urgent social and political

English restoration was in most cases, a vivid reflection of national identity, governance, and morality, which was a mark of a new beginning. The literature was a major channel through which political concerns like high taxation, corruption, and workers' abuse were articulated and challenged both in the elite and common circles. In their satires, love poetry, political essays, and secret memoirs authors were mirroring their violence-torn times and participated in the ongoing transformation of thinking by offering new ideologies, exposing inconsistencies of establishment thought, and influencing public opinions. This paper not only makes a close study of the high points in the Restoration literature but also places them in their historical and scholarly context to shed some light on the reason why according to Zwicker, King Charles II himself proclaimed that "plays and poems are now more powerful than my armies or Parliaments" (2002, p.34). Although literature and politics at first sight seem to be very different fields, the considerable overlap during the Restoration bears testimony to the fact that creative production can be a powerful tool to mold mentalities thus making people see things from a different perspective which in turn leads to broader political changes. The persisting synergy among the arts, thoughts, and political revolutionism is the cornerstone of the intrinsic dynamism of the Restoration period.

Objective of the study

1. Analyze the socio-political themes in Restoration literature and their impact on contemporary society
2. Investigate the role of Restoration literature in shaping political discourse and cultural norms during the 17th century
3. Examine how Restoration writers used literary techniques to critique and comment on their time's political events and power structures

Materials and Methods

The Restoration Age of England (1660-1700) is known for the return of monarchy rule under King Charles II after Oliver Cromwell's Puritanic rule from 1650 to 1659. The very essence of power relations was questioned by this rapid reversal in power, and it affected the literature and culture. Restoration writers defied the orthodoxy of Puritanism and their predecessors by infusing eroticism, entertainment, and social norms into their literary creations. The essay will focus on the major themes and trends in English Restoration literature as a reflection of the 17th-century social life of Britain. A historical background will comprise the most important events. Next, a look at Restoration comedies, new prose genres, and the role of theaters and patrons during this period of transformation will illustrate how literature both reacted and inspired the cultural developments after the Restoration.

Background

The clash of two essential positions in the English Civil War resulted in the execution of Charles I in 1649, which made way for the English Interregnum under Puritan Oliver Cromwell. Theatres were shut down and the concept of art was over-ruled. Upon Cromwell's death, the Stuarts were back in power, with Charles II being on the throne in 1660, causing a reopening of theater houses and hence extensive artistic energy. The Puritan code of strict morality and the just-introduced court with all its extravagance caused the Puritan society to seek a way of questioning this through literature.

Restoration Comedy

They were often raunchy, very funny comedies scripted to ridicule manners and to draw the curtain on hypocrisy. The playwrights Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve parodied the norms and roles associated with the middle class, marriage treaties, and sexual infidelities among the high-class people. These plays served as a mirror to the immoral conduct the audiences observed onstage, which on the one hand led to excitement and on the other hand entertained a critical view of this libertine court culture. Besides, they emphasized promotion to female theater-goers, letting women discover the beauty of culture.

New Prose Genres

The genres such as essays, diaries, memoirs, and newspapers were alive and well, which was the access point to many literate people in the growing middle class. Seventeenth century society had *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* which were patronage and subscription funded. They were not only for informing the readers but they also dictated how people dressed and how they consumed. It started the social class to develop a new public sphere with debates on the topic of urban commercial society.

Theaters and Patronage

Reformed theaters provided a social setting to enact and respond to societal pressures. Dramatists were constantly vying for fame and money from noblemen and women, thus they had to make sure a good part of the audience was made up of wealthy, elegant people. On the other hand, these plays were also taking the stands of the cultural critics and even made them laughable. It is this constant oscillation that manifests the conflicted nature of literary attitudes towards the transformed power systems after 1660.

The study will briefly discuss how the themes that were addressed reflect and in most cases engage with cultural shifts, that is, from post-Civil War ideology shifts to modernization and class issues. It will also combine the double function of literature: as a mirror and intellectual innovator, with public theatres, print media, and royalty patronage during this vibrant period.

Result and Discussion

The English Restoration period, 1660 to 1700, formed a passionate intensity of political, social, and cultural topics. This time became the restoration of the monarchy under King Charles II, after the troublesome period of Cromwell's Puritan epoch. The emergence of nature literature paralleled the transformation of society and was an effect of the change in the social dynamics around issues like politics and social norms. Using an analysis of poetry, essays, diaries, and the theater, this paper aims to disclose the connection between Restoration literature and political conversation as well as the new values of society that appeared in the Seventeenth Century.

Recurring Political Leitmotifs in the Restoration Era Writings

A major theme in Restoration literature that involved the discussion of the power balance between monarchs and representatives of the House of Commons was scrutinized. The restoration of The Monarchy by Charles II led the people to hold discussions of whether the power of the rulers exceeded constitutional constraints. Playwrights and poets of this era, like John Dryden, the veteran playwright, used their literary productions to pass through the politics and the confrontations. The historical event of the Exclusion Crisis, which started in 1679 and ended in 1681, was the main motivation for the production of John Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel," which came out in 1681 to address the issue of succession rights. The Catholic brother of Charles II, the king at the time, was trying to prevent him from ascending to the throne. By means of his characters developed from certain parables in the Bible, Dryden attacked the controversial concept of the divine right of kings who ascended to the throne through heredity and promoted the popular view of parliament as sovereign.

However, both of these thinkers, namely James Harrington and Algernon Sidney also wrote about governance and sovereignty and these have had an impact on their discourse as well. In his "Discourse on Government", Harrington contended that people should with propriety be limited by the government and that the people are permitted to disapprove of the ruler system if he or she violates people's rights (J . P . , 1987). Also, just like Sidney's, the works of Locke contemplated the significance of constitutional limitations on monarchical power in defense of absolutist viewpoints, sponsored by the Stuart monarchs. This was an important contribution that literature made to the development of political ideas of theories at that time; it argued for the formation of public opinions and contributed to political changes of that time.

To Be a Man: Gender Relations and Patriarchal Power

Restoration literature was also notable for the theme of undermining traditional gender roles and patriarchal power structures through the appeal to perceptions of men as equal to women or even greater than the man. Female writers like Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley came as a challenge (female writers who were pioneers in this area) to traditional values with their depictions of female protagonists who were strong and able to enjoy sexual liberation. Behn's "The Rover" (1677) Brought to the screen images of a heroine, who overcame restrictions placed by an unsympathetic society on love and honor, and in "The Royal Mischief" (1696) these guidelines covered by writer Manley described the theme of female agency and sexuality (Tauran, 2004). These literary depictions of female characters who defied patriarchal limits were indicators against the constraining of social identities and were on the frontline of giving women a voice in society and challenging gender stereotypes. In addition, the men of letters, who were provoked by wives' criticisms, retorted to their arguments with rebellious or abusive phrases. It is true that even after the Restoration, the gender discourses of the featured texts still echo accusations against Lady Littlewood's character that portrayed women as morally depraved. In particular, Earl Shaftsbury would stand out as the defender of women's character in this regard and this would be a great advancement as he highlighted the political dimensions of gender discourse in this literature (Knights, The discourses on gender in writing contextually manifested themselves in social controversies which led to a constant reevaluation of things as they stood.

Literature as a Genetic Production and Transmission of Social Change

Cultivation literature appeared as a mirror of modern society and significantly led to social change. With the coming of the period of the restoration, a new form of literature emerged, such as the restoral comedies and prose writings, creating a new genre where there could be a protest and pushing of the moral values in the

society. Comedies of, a class that is identifiable for its ironic reproach of rules and manners, provided their audiences with several points of criticism from which they could view the “serious” situations of the time (Greenblatt, 2005). In the words of these didactic the dramatists not only did entertain, but also prompted discussions on the social issues, that the society at the time was grappling with, that is, the choice of partners, class, and morality.

Also, prose types, such as a letters, diaries, and magazines, took a great part in the organization and the said public discourse and formed public opinion. Similarly, other writers like Alice Thorton and Thomas Turner provided insights into the social and political world of the Restoration Era, and such work explaining the concerns of the ordinary people greatly contributed to the development of the historiography of the late 17th and early 18th centuries (King, 1998). Print media encouraged the spread of ideas and strengthened the national cohesion among literate individuals as more people, thus, joined together to elevate the cultural appreciation of the elite class toward the masses. Finally, there is a word to say that Restoration literature reinforced itself as a powerful experience of mirroring and shaping the political, social, and cultural activities of seventeenth century England. Through a critical analysis of multiple literary forms such as political speech, the role of women, and conformism using literature a light has been shown that has portrayed the functions of literature in molding public opinion and igniting social reform during the Restoration period in England. Through involvement with current disputes and challenging well-accepted standards, authors of that age time helped to develop a more thorough introspection of values and ideologies, making an outstanding heritage for the generations to come. As such, the convergence between literature and politics taking place during the Restoration period exhibits the remarkable role of creative work in the course of historical trends.

Conclusion

To sum up, the Restoration period in English literature presents a fascinating conflicting model of interconnected political, social, and creative elements. This was the period that reinstalled the monarchy led by Charles II under which literature forms and themes took a different orientation, revealing the sweeping changes in power and societal norms. Modernist authors such as John Dryden, and Aphra Behn, along with others, demonstrated a keen awareness of their era and often used their poetry to incite original ideas on the present situation. Southern restricted politics helped in Restoration literature, as writers involved the issues of royal power and constitutional rights in their works. To provide their readers with accurate information about governance and sovereignty, there were works such as Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel" and writings of political philosophers like James Harrington and Algernon Sidney. Moreover, these works impacted political developments by shaping the opinions of the public, which eventually influenced politics. Besides this, the transformation of traditional family structures and so-called male dominance is not only one of the major points in Restoration literature but also one of the main grounds for disputes between the supporters and opponents. Female writers like Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley portrayed heroines in charge of their own lives, via their novels. This effort was aimed at changing traditional sex roles and dynamics and thus re-understanding gender relationships. Besides depicting nature, this literary genre also reveals a clearer view of the character of modern life, from the fickleness of court life down to the difficulties encountered by ordinary individuals. Writers, through different styles of writing like Restoration comedies, essays, diaries, and newspapers, revealed the true complexities of the era which could build a sense of community among the educated people. Briefly, Restoration literature was an epitome of its epoch, but an impetus of social change as well. Its significance is not just in its ability to make muggles meditate, to trigger a controversy among witches and vampires, and to form an ironclad fabric after each generation of hearers. So, this gives the interconnection between literature and politics in the Restoration period which reaffirms the transformative nature of creative expression in the course of history-making and the creation of societal values.

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