

Restoration Comedy

Courtesy of Prof. R.F.W. Kroll

1. Here are some classics, as well as one or two more recent things worth looking at.

Thomas Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (1952).

Norman Holland, *The First Modern Comedies* (1959): the background chapters are quite good on the intellectual arguments in the plays.

Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (1979): treats the significance of the plays in relation to the rise of a star system and the new conditions of theatrical performance.

Maximillian E. Novak, *Congreve* (1971).

Dale Underwood, *Etherege and the Comedy of Manners* (1957): treats the intellectual background with considerable sophistication.

Rose Zimbardo, *Wycherly's Drama* (1965): emphasizes that Wycherly is a satirist.

2. Some quotations for “background”: see sheet on “The Central Problem”:

(a) Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians II: 151ff:*

Sign also has revealed itself as twofold--“commemorative,” which appears to be chiefly of use in the case of things temporarily non-evident, and the “indicative,” which is deemed proper for adoption in the case of things naturally non-evident [An example of a commemorative sign would be] smoke and fire; for as we have often observed these to be connected to each other, as soon as we see the one--that is to say, smoke--we recall the other--that is to say, the unseen fire. The same account applies to the scar which follows on the wound, and to the puncture of the heart that precedes death The soul, for instance, is one of the things naturally non-evident; for such is its nature that it never presents itself to our clear perception; and being such, it is announced “indicatively” by the bodily motions; for we argue that it is a certain power residing within the body which inwardly excites in it such motions.

(b) John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, III.ix.4:

The chief End of Language in Communication being to be understood, Words serve not well for that end, neither in civil, nor in philosophical Discourse, when any Word does not excite in the Hearer, the same Idea which it stands for in the Mind of the Speaker. But since Sounds have no natural connexion with our Ideas, but have all their signification from the arbitrary imposition of Men, the doubtfulness and uncertainty of their signification, which is the imperfection we are here speaking of has its cause more in the Ideas they stand for, than in any incapacity there is in one

Sound, more than in another, to signify any Idea: For in that regard, they are all equally perfect.

That then which makes doubtfulness and uncertainty in the signification of some more than other Words, is the difference of Ideas they stand for.

(c) Norman Holland, *The First Modern Comedies*, p. 4:

[Restoration comedies] are about the conflict between “manners” [i.e. social conventions] and anti-social “natural” desires. It is this dialectic between inner desires and outward appearance--not instinct alone or manners alone--that infuses the comedies with masks, play-acting, disguise, intrigue, and perhaps most important, creates their language.