

CHARLES SEDLEY POETRY IN THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY IN ENGLAND

The present article studies the individual peculiarities of the poetry of Sir Charles Sedley – the representative of the Restoration poetry within the socio-cultural context of the second half of the XVIIth century. Despite the fact that this representative of the English literary tradition can be labeled as extraordinary and should attract close attention of the critics, neither his literary heritage, nor the period he belongs to are well-known to the general public both abroad and at home.

It can be explained by the overall underestimation of the Restoration period, which sometimes is still regarded merely as “the decay of the Caroline courtly tradition”. As Sir Charles Sedley is named as one of “the wits of Charles’ days, the mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease”, it seems appropriate to investigate the major peculiarities of his poetic style within the social and cultural contexts of England.

It should be noted that the poetry of the Restoration wits is the last body of English verse which was produced by a court, which, with all its shortcomings, still regarded itself not merely as a fashion club but as an ideal community embodying certain qualities of grace and fine living and which was also in touch with a genuine popular culture of the street and the tavern.

The poetry of the Restoration wits used was shrouded with the atmosphere of gossip, scandal and synthetic romance for several centuries and it is only now that some scholars in America and England have started to investigate this phenomenon. It is worth mentioning that the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 meant, among other things, the revival of the English court. In spite of the upheaval of the Civil War, the great courtly tradition of the Renaissance, with its ideal of the gentleman, remained alive at the court of Charles II, which was believed to be the last English court representing the real centre of culture as well as of fashion. But the ideal of the gentleman changed – he was no longer “courtier, soldier, scholar”, but more of “a young gallant”, a man of letters who was in touch with the life of the street, the tavern and the coffee-house, the rough democracy of seventeenth-century London. And Sir Charles Sedley is the man of his time – not a great poet, but a genuine one. He is a gentleman-amateur, but not a dilettante. His poems grow directly out of his life and are a natural product of the society he lived in. His love poems belong to the courtly convention of love-making, according to which lady was no longer a goddess but the player in the game. And love itself was treated more like fun and enjoyment than a fight or something making the lovers to suffer.

Key words: love lyrics, hedonistic world perception, courtier poetry, “merry gang”.