

**RESTORATION COMEDY**  
(or)  
**COMEDY OF MANNERS**

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## The Restoration Age

- ✓ **In 1642, Puritans closed the theatres.**
  - Playhouses were dismantled
  - Actors were persecuted
- ✓ **Around 1650, William Beeston acquired the Salisbury Court Theatre and began to train a company of boys.**
  - Performed *drolls* – short versions of full-length plays, usually comedies.

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## The Restoration Age

- ✓ The re-establishment of Monarchy in England with the return of Charles II (1660) is usually called the Restoration Period.
- ✓ Charles II, he who went into exile, returned home from Louis XIV's court in Versailles taking French culture.
- ✓ English society was influenced by it and became corrupted and more interest in entertainments than moral and social rules.

# THE COMEDY

## What is it? Why was it created?

- ✓ Comedy is applied to plays that end with happiness.
- ✓ During Restoration Period writers wrote comedies criticizing the society as people, particularly upper classes, living without moral standards.
- ✓ The restoration dramatists wrote works based on a satirical observation of the social behaviour.
- ✓ Restoration comedies are also called Comedy of Manners.

# PRINCIPAL WRITERS



**George Etherege**



**William Wycherley**



**Sir John Vanbrugh**

# PRINCIPAL WRITERS



**George Farquhar**



**William Congreve**

# MAIN THEMES

## What topics did the comedy dealt with?

- ✓ Amorous conflicts of men and women.
- ✓ Licentiousness, hypocrisy, double-dealing, moral weakness of aristocracy and new bourgeoisie in love and marriage.
- ✓ love, wit, and gaiety often immorality
- ✓ The principle theme was sexual intrigue either for its own sake or for money.

# SALIENT FEATURES

## How was it organized and written?

- ✓ It was written in prose.
- ✓ It had the function to teach people “**good manners**” showing what were bad behaviours.
- ✓ Standard characters include fops, bawds, scheming valets, country squires, and sexually voracious young widows and older women



# SALIENT FEATURES

- ✓ The plots were complex and usually double, sometimes, triple, though repartee and discussion of marital behaviour provide much of the interest, reflecting the fashionable manners of the day.
- ✓ Its predominant tone was witty, bawdy, cynical, and amoral.
- ✓ It was humorous and funny.
- ✓ Playwrights came under heavy attack for frivolous, blasphemy, and immortality.

# POPULAR RESTORATION COMIDIES

George Etherege	→	<i><b>The Man of Mode</b></i>
William Wycherley	→	<i><b>The Country Wife</b></i>
	→	<i><b>The Plain Dealer</b></i>
William Congreve	→	<i><b>The Old Bachelor</b></i>
	→	<i><b>The Way of the World</b></i>
John Vanbrugh	→	<i><b>The Provoked Wife</b></i>
George Farquhar	→	<i><b>The Beaux' Stratagem</b></i>

# CRITICS' COMMENTS

- ✓ **Charles Lamb** in his thought provoking essay on 'Comedy' calls this  
*'the artificial comedy.'*

- ✓ **Bonamy Dobree** observes thus:

*The Restoration Comedy takes us away from our familiar surroundings into a world of make belief. It is known for its wit, humour, and repartee. Its predominant tone was witty, bawdy, cynical, and amoral.*

- ✓ **Cleanth Brooks** (in his *Understanding Drama*) says thus:

*The Restoration Comedy is an accurate mirror of the 17<sup>th</sup> century society and is intensely realistic.*

**ANY QUERIES?**