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 XXIV'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

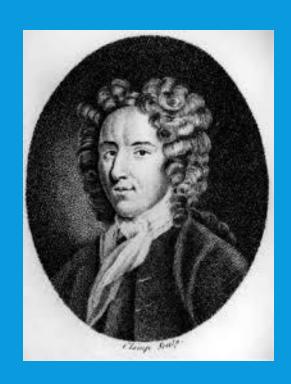


William Wycherley



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 → The Man of Mode

William Wycherley -> The Country Wife

→ The Plain Dealer

William Congreve — The Old Bachelor

The Way of the World

John Vanbrugh — The Provoked Wife

George Farquhar —> The Beaux' Stratagem

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 17th century society and is intensely realistic.

ANY QUERIES?