

question
127

Restoration Comedy

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Introduction

Restoration comedy refers to English comedies written and performed in the Restoration period from 1660 to 1710. Comedy of manners used also synonyms of Restoration comedy. This comedy is realistic in nature. It describes life, manners, habits, conventions, ways, love, intrigues, and foibles of the upper and aristocratic classes of society.

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Chief Characteristics of the Restoration Comedy :-

- > This type of comedy reflects and presents the manners, modes, conventions of the upper classes of society.
- > The scenes of these comedies were generally laid in big cities like London.
- > The setting is generally laid in clubs, coffee houses, drinking and gambling houses.
- > It was in such places that the fops, and gentlemen and fashionable, gay

• ladies assembled.

→ Their lives were full of intrigues and shallowness.

→ These comedy writers were influenced by Moliere and other foreign dramatist.

→ It was the reaction against too much of Puritanism of the earlier age.

→ These comedies were also anti-social and anti-moral in nature.

→ Restoration comedy is characterized by a moral wit and stylish hedonism.

* Major writers of the Restoration comedy:

(1) William Congreve

(2) William Wycherley

(3) Sir George Etherege

(4) Sir John Vanbrugh

(5) George Farquhar

(6) Thomas Shadwell

Following writer belongs to the Restoration Age- 1660-1710

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Now we fully discussed about the writers:

(1) William Congreve - 1670-1729

Congreve lacks the strength of Etherege and Wycherley. His most important comedies are "The Old Bachelor", "The Double Dealer", "Love for All", "The way of the world". In his comedies, he creates a world of his own. It is a superficial and trivial world, no doubt, but it is interesting, and Congreve knows its ins and outs.

(2) William Wycherley :- 1640-1715

William Wycherley's reputation is based upon four plays. "Love in a wood", "The Gentleman Demanding master", "The Country wife" and "The Plain Dealer". The first three of them are after mould of Etherege. They deal with fops and gullots and seem to reveal in their contemptible intrigues. He lacks the easy wit of Etherege, but in plot construction he is much ahead of him. His plots are harmonised and rounded entities.

(3) Sir George Etherege: - 1635-91

The first true practitioner of the comedy of manners was Etherege. His important works are:

- (i) "Love in Tub"
- (ii) "She Would if she could"
- (iii) "The man of mode"
- (iv) "Sir Fopling Flutter"

Etherege himself was a courtier and naturally adept at revealing the manners of courtiers. Etherege lacks the brilliance and polish of Congreve, but he has a naturalness and easy grace of his own.

(4) Sir John Vanbrugh (1624-1726)

The best three comedies of Sir John Vanbrugh are

- (1) The Relapse
- (2) The Provoked wife
- (3) The Confederacy

The Provoked wife is his masterpiece but "The Confederacy" is the most immoral. All of them are concerned with unhappy marriages.

Page _____

He is found of fond of farce and good at caricature and his plots are soundly constructed.

(5) George Farquhar :- 1678-1707

George Farquhar wrote seven plays, the most outstanding of which are :-

(i) "The Recruiting Officer"

(ii) "The Beau's Stratagem"

"The Recruiting Officer" and the plays followed. Farquhar added something new to Restoration comedy, in taking his material from a wider life than the polite upper class depicted by Congreve and his characters are more like ordinary people.

(6) Thomas Shadwell :- 1642-92

Thomas Shadwell wrote for the stage for more than twenty years, his best plays are :-

(i) "The Sullen Lovers"

(ii) "The Squire of Alsatia"

(iii) "Buxy Fair"

He imitated closely Johnson's

Comedy of Humour. His plays are generally coarse. He reflects the everyday life of the time more than anyone else.

* Conclusion :-

Thus Restoration Comedy was also known as Comedy of manners. These comedies reflect about the life and behaviour and many other things about the people of the age.

