



COMPILED AND CIRCULATED

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COMEDY OF MANNERS

Setting – The comedy of manners is the unique production of the Restoration age. As literature is the mirror of society it also was full of social characteristics. It especially exhibits the upper class of the society and their life. It throws light on the small world of the fashionable parks and coffee houses of the London of Charles II's time when theatres were reopened after a ban. These comedies are always set in the public parks like Hyde Park, St. James Park, Mulberry garden, and fashionable clubs, inns etc. and the houses and drawing rooms of the aristocratic and leisured classes of the time. The characters normally do not go out of these places except in search of making some sex intrigue with the wife of a citizen or common merchant or some trader.

Manners- In the sophisticated world of the comedy of manners well-defined rules and customs are highly valued. The characters are fashionable in behavior and in style of dress also. They are polished and witty in speech and of course in manners. It is also considered to be the comedy of wit in which Polished and attractive conversation is the half of the play.

Sexual Morality – Marriage was highly esteemed before but in these comedies it is ridiculed. Characters belonged to the free world in the matter of sex relation. Libertine characters are highly appreciated in these fashionable societies. The characters took credit to practice this. Young fops and gallants and their mistresses are chiefly busy in pursuit of this relations.

Character – A couple and two gentlemen and their mistresses are the central characters of these comedies. They are usually fops, fools, and gallants. They belong to the aristocratic families by birth and breeding, rich and idle, witty, amorous and gay. In connection with these fashionable ladies many other minor characters are present sometimes. They are country gentlemen, fops, prostitutes, bawds, servants and maids.

Plot – Common and main dealing complication rises from the fashionable societies. The characters spend most of their time in drawing rooms and in parks and in coffee houses in witty and polished conversations. Mainly plots depend upon love conspiracy, attempts of gallants to cuckold a citizen, seduction of a lady, etc.

Character of libertine is very important and ingredient part of this comedies. Main plot depend upon them. Their conversation and activities form integral part of these plays.

Theme – Love (generally illegal) and sex intrigues are the common theme of the comedy of manners. With this lust, greed, materialistic nature of people, gossip, and rumors, hypocritical nature and false pretension of people were also the common subject matter of these comedies. The gay and wild couples try to rationalize sex relationships and come to an intelligent and satisfactory understanding with each other. They become able to discover dominant nature of the sex instinct and find an outlet in libertine. The hero and the heroine, who continue to pretend to be heart whole, attempt to transform marriage into a happy companionship of the two equals.

Jealousy, inconsistency, cuckoldry etc. are only the offshoots of unhappy sex relationship, and are therefore secondary to the main theme of love and marriage. Actually the playwright tries to draw the attention of the audience to the problem of sex in the contemporary society through entertainment and wittily make a solution which rejects the traditional subordination of one sex to the other and instead, plead for the equality of the sexes.