

123

Q. write a note on Restoration Comedy of Manners as reflected in the various plays produced during that time.

Ans. After the reopening of the theatres in 1660, there were various factors that influenced their playwrights and thus a blending of traditions took place in the comedies. Idealistic romanticism could no more be seen, in its place appeared a somewhat skeptical attitude towards life, derived perhaps from the Romances of Beaumont and Fletcher. For plot materials and for a sense of the comedy inherent in social aberration Moliere was enormously influential on all the English comic writers of the period. Spanish comedy too encouraged bustling plots and the Spanish novelas furnished tricks of intrigue for many plays.

Although dramatists and critics alike agreed that moral instruction, through social criticism, was the aim of literature and that comedy was a corrective of vices and follies, undoubtedly laughter or entertainment and not moral improvements was the true objective of Restoration comedy. The manners of the court were highly corrupt, and the comedy that the court patronized was unblushing, hard, cynical and immoral. Among the notable playwrights Dryden, Sedley, Etherton, Wycherley, Congreve and Vanbrugh were men of fashion or courtiers;

120
and the less aristocratic writers such as Stuy and Mrs. Behn were as crudely indecent as the courtiers. The element of idealism was replaced by a cynical and frequently explicit denial or at least a disregard of healthy values.

Perhaps because of the corruptness of court circles, a more general extreme revulsion against libertinism, it was good business to present on the stage shamelessly emancipated people. But the real source of comic effect concerns manners rather than morals.

Restoration Comedy is rather an anatomy of life, not more a representation than a commentary on life and on various social schematizations. They are specialized in type or function: the indolent country squire, the rake as hero etc. George Etherege (c. 1635 - 1691) wrote the Comical Revenge or Love in a Tub which had undeserved success, coming at a period when new comedy was rare. It has four plots: a noble plot (presented in nine) concerning the loves of Lord Beville's daughters, a genteel plot presenting Sir Frederick's wooing of his widow, a low comedy plot gulling of the Cromwellian knight. Comic implications arising from patterns of social class are common and there are schematic motivations of intrigue. Of Etherege's three comedies the third, 'The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter' (1676) has caused most comment, and is doubtlessly the best. The plot is basically unified, being the rake's progress in his amours. It can

124

be traced up to his remark: "Next to the coming to a good understanding with a new mistress, I love a quarrel with an old one." This shows us that the spirit of Restoration comedy had the common thing in itself from a love affair or for indemnifying oneself against the boredom of matrimony. The married state is loudly and commonly made a subject for complimentary laughter. In the play Man of Mode, the scene that shows us Scrimant in his dressing gown and Belinda just ready to leave after their first assignation is in implication more gross, but doubtlessly provoked laughter. The better parts of the play are really a succession of episodic scenes that are delightfully comic and most skillfully written. However the first appearance of over-dressed Sir Fopling Flutter reminds us or presents before us a prominent example of the Restoration manner of dressing which was practised mainly by the aristocrats. The character ~~of~~ of Scrimant's apparently became in theatrical circles the accepted type of fine gentleman of the Restoration. Scrimant was far from the sentimental ideal, and Ethrarge himself evidently had doubts about his hero. Ethrarge wrote another play named The World if she could. In this comedy his characters are rationally defined rather than imaginatively

created.

Sir William Wycherley (1671-1718⁵) was another chief playwright of Restoration Comedies and his productions include Love in a Wood ^{at St James' Park} (1672), The Gentleman Dancing Master (1672), The Country Wife (1675) and The Plain Dealer (1676).

His first play, Love in a Wood was like 'The Revival Revenge' in that it presented a series of love intrigues as seen in different classes of the society. But Wycherley focussed on citizens and less on the life of fashion.

Alderman bribe, a hypocritical Puritan married a wench. Lady Hippark, his sister is an amorous widow whose eager quest for a husband was to be reproduced in many later spinster. Dapperwit, a fop of wit as the later Sir Fopling Flutter was to be, the fop of mode or dress, gets bribe's daughter for his wife, ^{but misses his fortune king's fast.} In the Restoration period, the fashion included

dressing up and passing of witty dialogues. The aristocrats were the only people who were accepted to do so. But if any other person was seen to dress well and pass witty dialogues he or she was laughed at by the aristocrats and called "fop of wit/dress." Thus the comedies of the Restoration

Age can also play a good role as social documentaries. Ranger, in Wycherley's Love in a Wood is a moderately uninteresting man about town, temperately forsakes Lydia apparently to complicate the love life of Valentine and Christian. The play gives sardonic philosophy which seems to be that in the state of being everyone is someone else's cully or dupe.

The Gentleman Dancing Master is the simplest and least satiric of Moliere's plays. It concentrates on a single intrigue that plays that of Hippolite, who to avoid marriage with a franchised fop, finds herself a true gentleman who poses as her dancing master. The comedy arises from the fact that a fop though English, burlesques French manners, by being more French than the French. Mrs. Caution, as the suspicious aunt and critical sister, is an admirably comic person. The scenes in which Mr. Beverard who cannot dance a step is forced to show Hippolite the steps of the coranto in the presence of relatives must have been uproarious farce.

(His third play, the Country wife) has been considered to be his best play lately. It involves two intrigues, first is that by which ~~Horner~~ ^{Horner} practises promiscuous cuckolding and wins the favour of a country wife whom the superannuated ~~churchwife~~ ^{churchwife} has married. (The more polite but less distinguished intrigue of the play concerns her ultimate gulling of Spanish and marrying with Harcourt.) The broad indecency of the leading farcical situation - alleged impotence of Horner - dominates the play, which is whimsical gulling of cuckolds, and especially of the distasteful churchwife

The central device of the play is doubtless highly indelicate - which is a reflector of the Restoration society.

However, his last play, The Plain Dealer (1676) was thought to be his finest achievement. Captain Hanly, the Plain Dealer has been robbed wronged by his mistress Olivia and his closest friend, Venush. (He is aided throughout his misfortune by the virtuous and lovely Fidelity, who long followed him disguised as a man. The character of Widow Blackacre has been derived by Wycherley from Racine's Les Plaideurs (1665), and the character of Hanly was derived from Moliere's Misanthrope (1666) which strikes the trend of following French influence in literature. In all his plays, except the 2nd, Wycherley exposed the absurdities of mere pretenders to wit and lashes the hypocrisy of mankind: he paints a dark picture of the men and women of his age. Lacking the aloofness and unconcern of Etherege and Congreve, he is vehement scolding the backbiting of Sappho, the hypocrisy of Alderman Gripe and falseness of Olivia. In Christiana, Hippolita, and Fidelity, he presents more virtuous characters than one can find in other leading comedies of his time.

He could have been as refined and easy as he was knowing and amusing. His pictures of "real life" are most repugnant.

Sir Thomas Shadwell (c. 1642 - 1692) had produced 9 plays during the days of Etherege and Wycherley, and by 1692 his total was 18. In the preface to his first play, The Sullen Lovers (1668), he had announced his program: he was against the frivolous wit or repartee, against the love and honour cliches, and against the use of either

d
ide

romantic or radically disreputable lovers; he adhered to the school of Ben Jonson, the comedy of humours. He admired Boccaccio but at times equaled Boccaccio in vulgarity or brutality. He was more explicitly concerned with obeying the rules than were the witty comic writers of his time.

Among his early works 'The Luller Lovers' a satire on the household family of wits, was very successful, as was the more vulgar 'Epsom Wells' (1672). In 'The Virtuoso' (1676) he had fun with the supposed absurdities of the new science with its strange experiments and its love of theory. Shadwell won partisan popularity with 2 political comedies, 'The Lancashire Witches' (1681) and 'The Amorous Bigotte' (1690). Of his later plays, 'The Squire of Alsatia' (1688) and 'Bury Fair' (1689) are the best. Alsatia was a low section of London and in its environment Shadwell created his plot. The Squire of Alsatia was enormously popular in its first run, having one suspects, in parts the appeal of a gangster play of our days.

Mrs. Aphra Behn's productive career began in 1670 (before Wycherley's) and her last play (1696) was her 19th. Only one of these 19 (~~Abdelazer~~, 1676) was a tragedy. Much under the influence of Spanish novels, she wrote stories herself and comedies of adventurous intrigue derived from Spanish novelas.

romantic or radically disreputable lovers; he adhered to the school of Ben Jonson, the comedy of humours. He admired Etcherage but at least equaled Wycherley in vulgarity or baseness. He was more explicitly concerned with obeying the rules than were the witty comic writers of his time.

Among his early works 'The Luller Lovers' a satire on the Howard family of milks, was very successful, as was the more vulgar 'Epsom Wells' (1672). In 'The Virtuoso' (1676) he had fun with the supposed absurdities of the new science with its strange experiments and its love of theory. Shadwell won partisan popularity with 2 political comedies, 'The Lancashire Witches' (1681) and 'The Amorous Bigotte' (1690). Of his later plays, 'The Squire of Alsatia' (1688) and 'Bury Fair' (1689) are the best. Alsatia was a low section of London and in its environment Shadwell created his plot. The Squire of Alsatia was enormously popular in its first run, having one suspects, in parts the appeal of a gangster play of our days.

Mrs. Aphra Behn's productive career began in 1670 (before Wycherley's) and her last play (1696) was her 19th. Only one of these 19 (*Abdalgaz*, 1676) was a tragedy. Much under the influence of Spanish novels, she wrote stories herself and comedies of adventurous intrigue derived from Spanish novelas.

typical would be 'The Dutch Lover' (1673) and 'The Rover' a play in 2 parts (1677, 1681). Disguisings, farce elements and char. characters from commedia dell'arte are used in his plays. She also included political hits, as for example, in 'The City Heiress' (1682). In character Mrs. Behn was definitely emancipated, and her compliance with the taste of the time, together with the prime fact that her plays came from a woman's pen, gave her a reputation for shocking indecencies as a dramatist.

Edward Ravenscroft (c. 1650 - 1697) between 1672 and the ~~end~~ end of the century, he produced a dozen plays. His first plays, 'The Citizens' and 'The Careless Lovers' (1673) were synthesized from Moliere in a fashion such as to stress the bustle of situation and even farce and to minimize characterization or wit. In general, he was more competent in farce than anything subtle enough to be called comedy.

From this middle period of the mediocrity (1677-92) we pass to the final brilliant outburst of comedies composed in the Restoration spirit by Congreve, Vanburgh, and Farquhar and staged in the years 1693-1701. The focal work in his attacks on the theatre was that of the non-juror, Jeremy Collier, who in 1698 published 'A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage'. Collier's chief victims were Dryden, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanburgh, D'Urfey and Otway (The Orphan). He also held that the popular Restoration comedy thus begins with Otway and reaches its consummation with Congreve. Jeremy Collier's pamphlet appeared in 1698 but did not however immediately kill this kind of comedy of manners but reflected its attitude

130

to life and letters far different world of Restoration comedy. There were many other practitioners of Restoration as well as writers who combined this genre with comedy of intrigue. Plays of the time encouraged immorality. He urged in orthodox neoclassical fashion, that comedy should correct vice and not promote it. The newly founded society had denounced theatre before Collier's book appeared.

William Congreve (1670-1729) was definitely among the unregenerate. Doubtless he was shocked and annoyed to find his work rather ineptly attacked by Collier. Congreve regarded himself as a reformer of the stage and had been praised by Dryden, Sothorne and also by Addison and Swift. Congreve was a formalist technician, a man of artistic rather than moral conscience. That his characters were subtler than Ethraged's can be seen by comparing his gentleman, Vainlove and Mirabell with the celebrated servant. Congreve's heroes do not love a quarrel with a past mistress.

He pays more attention to the three unities than his contemporaries did? The 'Old Bachelor' (1693) like Ethraged's 'Comical Revenge' involves a series of intrigues on different social levels. His second play 'The Double Dealer' has a unified plot describing the struggle

force with varying degrees of sentimentalism. Colley Cibber (131)
was already developing a sentimental bourgeois comedy

~~Love's Last Shift~~

of Heliogabos against jealous Lady Touchwood and
Sago-like Mackwell to win his charming Cynthia.
'Love for Love' (1695) was a very popular play. The
plot tells us how Valentine, at odds with a critical father,
is likely to lose his estate to a sea-going younger brother
and thus miss getting his beloved heiress, Angelica.

In 'The Way of the World' (1700), his
best comedy, he had an excellent plot. He had too
much love of topical conversation to waste time in
telling the story of how Mirabell evades the malicious
flattery of Lady Wishfort, Mrs. Harwood, and her lover
Fainall, and persuaded the aloof but charming Millamant
to marry him. Financial reverses, jealous east mistresses
are the big obstacles to success and legal documents,
signed or unsigned, disguisings and masked marriages
that involve mistaken identities are frequent episodes.
Moreover, we find in Congreve a more matured and
sensible way of handling his plays than the others
like Wycherley, Etherege etc. His comedies do not promote
the lecherousness of the Restoration court but are genuine
at their correct functions.