

RESTORATION DRAMA

About The School for Scandal

- ✚ Our course, the Restoration Drama, involves two plays that are going to be discussed in this term. Both of these plays, **The School for Scandal** by Richard Brinsley Sheridan and **The Way of the World** by William Congreve, were written in the Restoration period.
- ❖ First, we are going to start with **The School for Scandal** by Richard Sheridan. Then we are going to move to discuss the other play which is **The Way of the World** after we finish analyzing this play and talking about its main ideas and its themes.
- ❖ In this lecture, we will mention some information about the Restoration drama and comedy of manners. Then we will focus on the background about the stage in the writer's time (Restoration Age), the plot of the play and the characters' tree which analyzes the relationships between characters and simplifies the ideas of our play.

Restoration Drama: Comedy of Manners

▪ **What is drama?**

Drama is a kind of literary works (genre) that is designed to be performed on a stage.

- ❖ All plays are written in the form of dialogue or conversation, so this can distinguish plays from other genres.
- ❖ In drama, we have dialogues, characters, a stage, positions of characters (setting) and props which are objects and items are carried by characters on a stage such as food, pens, books, etc.
- ❖ Also, in plays, we have comedy and tragedy. Comedy talks about silly subjects and makes the audience laugh. It provides mockery and laughter. However, tragedy discusses sad, serious and dangerous subjects and shows tragic heroes and tragic downfalls.

❖ Both of the plays, **The School for Scandal** and **The Way of the World** are comic plays called the comedy of manners. In fact, the prominent kind of drama, in the Restoration era, was comedy of manners which means the comedy that can satirize the manners of the upper-class people or courtiers. So, the comedy of manners can show how the high-class people act, behave and live.

▪ **What does Restoration Drama mean?**

Restoration Drama (1660-1710) can refer to the deposed and executed King Charles I in 1649 and then returning of King Charles II, Charles I's son, to the throne to become the new king of England. The coming of King Charles II was after the Civil War that was between puritans and soldiers (forces) of Oliver Cromwell. In fact, this war which was a severe conflict between them occurred against puritans who dominate the whole aspect of life at that time and considered everything as a taboo (a prohibited thing).

The main themes and topics that are discussed by writers in the comedy of manners are:

- 1.** Satire on society and vanity and morals of the upper-class people.
- 2.** Critical attitudes to arranged marriage and materialism:
At that time, people were materialists because they used to look for money, fortune and wealth even in their relationships and marriages. This means that they did not care for love; they care for their own benefits.
- 3.** Boredom of the country life: this theme is also discussed in the comedy of manners.

The attack on aristocratic sophistication:

At that age, writers used to criticize the excessive life style of aristocratic people in their writings:

❖ **Comedy of manners plays are divided into 5 acts.**

The first 4 acts always talk about the same idea which is about two outwardly lovers; they are not all the time lovers. Also, a suspicion in the love relationship between lovers is discussed in the first 4 acts. However, in the final act, the young couple marry unconvincingly and romantically because there is no marriage for love at all. There is always a search for getting benefits and gaining money. So, this arranged marriage is not acceptable or convincing. It makes excuses for adultery.

❖ The court of King Charles II was well known for its immorality, corruption and debauchery. So, wit, which is a mixture of cleverness and humor, and immorality are the most important themes discussed in comedy of manners.

❖ In comedy of manners, there are gossip, schemes, rumors and disguise. Also, there is the symbolism or indication of names of characters. So, names of characters are indicative; they indicate or suggest something related to characters.

- ❖ We can see that all of these things are related to the aristocratic class people or the courtiers.

The Background:

The Stage in Sheridan's Time

P. X (10) from The School for Scandal:

- ❖ After the Restoration, Charles I was deposed and executed in 1649, but the Commonwealth or republican government which Cromwell had up was replaced by the monarchy, restored when the son of Charles I returned to England in 1660 to become Charles II.
 - The period between the execution of Charles I and the coming of his son, Charles II, to the throne was called the Commonwealth or republican government. Restoration period started in 1660 and ended about 1710.

- ❖ The theatre flourished. In reaction against the puritanism which had closed the theatres in 1642, a cynical kind of comedy of manners now prevailed.
 - In fact, Puritans were so strict that they closed theatres between 1642 to 1660 because they considered art, plays, drama and acting as taboos or sins. We notice that wit and immorality were very much related to comedy of manners which was a reaction against the Puritanism.
- ❖ There was a reaction against such comedies in 1698 when the Rev. Jeremy Collier published his pamphlet 'A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage'.
 - Clergymen like the Reverend Collier were against this kind of comedy because they considered it as immoral and dissipated.

P. XI (11):

- ❖ Many courtiers had been exiled in France during the period of the Commonwealth, and their taste for witty, light-hearted comedy had been formed there, as well as for the highflown heroic plays.

- In fact, Restoration drama was influenced by French because most courtiers, who are the companions of a king or queen, were exiles in France before the Restoration Age. After they return to England, after the Restoration Era, they wrote immoral and heartless matters in order to compensate for the previous era during puritans' control. So, everything in the comedy of manners was conveyed by those courtiers who were at that age writers and actors of plays.

- ❖ By the turn of the century, however, the audience had changed. It had been aristocratic; now it was largely middle-class, bourgeois in sentiment, highly respectable. The kind of plays it preferred were sentimental rather than witty, melodramatic rather than ironic.
- The comedy of manners changed after 1700. It became more sentimental and moral.
- ❖ Fashion and ruthlessness no longer appealed: kindness was portrayed, lovers and their problems were treated with more sensitivity and there was rather less of the stark, sharp conflict between parents and children, between the old and the young.
- In early comedy of manners, there was a common theme which is arranged marriages. Because of these arranged marriages which are planned by parents, there were a lot of conflicts between parents and children.

The Plot of *The School for Scandal*

P. XIV (14) from The School for Scandal:

- ❖ The play is based on well-tried ingredients: lovers kept apart and finally rewarded; mistaken identity; mockery of the country girl taken in by the ways of smart town life; the exposure of hypocrisy: and the reassessment of a rake. The play is based on the conduct of two brothers, Joseph and Charles Surface. Joseph seems to be a model of decorum, Charles appears to be a dissipated rake. Both wish to marry Maria, the wealthy ward of Sir Peter Teazle. She is in love with Charles and he with her, and Joseph would like her money. Sir Peter Teazle will not allow Charles and Maria to marry. He believes what he hears: that Joseph is virtuous, a good as his professed sentiments. that Charles is a wild young man.

- ❖ Joseph and Lady Sneerwell spread rumours that Charles is intriguing with Lady Teazle, Sir Peter's young wife, whereas it is Joseph who is engaged in a flirtation with her. Sir Peter visits Joseph and finds his wife behind a screen. The deception is exposed, and so is Joseph's real nature, thanks to Sir Oliver Surface's actions. This wealthy uncle, back from

the East, has been urged on by Rowley, the faithful servant of his dead brother, the father of Joseph and Charles.

- ❖ The final plot against Charles is defeated by the defection of Snake. Sir Peter's obstinacy has been rewarded by the exposure of his own and his wife's silliness and they decide to avoid quarrelling in future. Joseph is shown up as the hypocrite he is and his friend Lady Sneerwell. is also exposed in her vicious nature. The action of the play has demonstrated the duplicity, the unreliability and the malice of the slanderers. The true natures of the Surface brothers have been made clear. The comic ironies are plain: all is not what it seems to be nor indeed what it is said to be.
- ❖ Sheridan's construction of the play follows the orthodox five act formula. His scenes are short and the action of the play flows smoothly, everything happening in quick succession. There is a variation in the settings, however, in the groupings of characters and in the atmosphere of the scenes (for instance, the difference between Lady Sneerwell's circle and Charles's drinking companions). The play firmly rooted in the immediate present; the characters can refer to the past - as in the case of the Teazles' courtship - or to the future - as in the case of the marriage of Charles and Maria.

- ❖ The play has an obvious turning point; the falling screen. It has a plausibility about its unfolding of events, the nearness of the scenes adds conviction, for, by the play's being set in London and by its having characters of the same social grouping, the close proximity of the houses of Lady Sneerwell, Sir Peter, Charles and Joseph is acceptable to an audience, and allows the action to move speedily.

✓ ***Read all of the pages (XIV → XX) at home because they are required.***

The School for Scandal Summary

- ❖ In a part of English high society where gossip runs rampant, a tangle of love has formed. Lady Sneerwell is in love with a young, rebellious man named Charles Surface. However, Charles is in love with Maria, as is his brother Joseph. Maria is in love with Charles, but Lady Sneerwell and Joseph plot to ruin this relationship through rumors of unfaithfulness on Charles' part.
- ❖ At the same time, an older man named Sir Peter Teazle has taken a young wife from the country, now called Lady Teazle;

after only a few months of marriage they now bicker constantly about money, driving Lady Teazle to contemplate an affair with Joseph Surface.

- ❖ The plot thickens when Sir Oliver Surface, the rich uncle of Joseph and Charles, returns to town from abroad. He schemes to test the rumors he has heard of Joseph being the well-bred and deserving brother and Charles having fallen into ruin; to do so, he goes to each of them in disguise.
- ❖ He disguises himself as a money lender named Mr. Premium to investigate Charles's spending habits, and is infuriated when he sees Charles living lavishly while driving the family far into debt.
- ❖ Charles proposes to sell him all he has left, the collection of family portraits, angering his uncle even more; however he forgives him when Charles refuses to sell the painting of his uncle.
- ❖ The tangle of love and rumors becomes clear when, while Lady Teazle is visiting Joseph Surface, her husband comes to

call. Lady Teazle hides behind a screen and listens to their conversation.

- ❖ Then, Charles Surface comes to call on his brother as well; Sir Teazle, hoping to see whether Charles is having an affair with his wife as has been rumored, also tries to hide behind the screen. He sees what he thinks is simply a young woman Joseph has been trying to hide.
- ❖ Sir Teazle hides in the closet instead, but when Charles starts to talk about Joseph's relationship with Lady Teazle, Joseph reveals that Sir Teazle is hiding in the closet, and Charles pulls him out. When Joseph goes out of the room momentarily, Sir Teazle tells Charles about the young woman he thinks is hiding behind the screen, and they pull it down to reveal his wife.
- ❖ Sir Oliver visits Joseph dressed as one of their poor relations looking for money. Sir Oliver is disappointed to find that Joseph is only kind on the surface, but will not do anything material to help his relative.

- ❖ The play ends with Sir Oliver revealing his plot and his findings to Charles and Joseph. Everyone realizes that Lady Sneerwell and her servant Snake orchestrated the rumor about Charles and Lady Teazle.

The School for Scandal Character List

Joseph Surface

Joseph is Charles' brother, cunning and ambitious. He wants to marry Maria because of her money, and he plots with Lady Sneerwell to make this happen. He is promiscuous and propositions Lady Teazle to have an affair. He loves money and he refuses to help his poor relative, Stanley (really Sir Oliver in disguise), telling him that he has no money, even though this is not true.

Charles Surface

Charles is one of Sir Oliver's nephews, madly in love with Maria. He is a young man who likes to spend money; he has a kind heart and is open about his flaws. He is grateful for the help his uncle provides and refuses to sell his portrait out of respect even when Mr. Premium (really Sir Oliver in disguise) offers to

pay a fortune for it. Because of this, Charles is considered to be the worthy nephew.

Sir Oliver Surface

Sir Oliver is Charles and Joseph's rich uncle, who has been in the East Indies for a long time. He sent his nephews money while he was away; once he returns, he wants to find out more about their true character in order to determine who is worthy to get his inheritance. To do this, he assumes the identities of Mr. Premium and Stanley to test them. He is kind and vigilant, not believing everything he hears about Charles and Joseph.

Sir Peter (Pete) Teazle

Sir Pete is an old gentleman, very rich, who marries a young girl. He takes Joseph's side and tells Sir Oliver about Charles' behavior. He wants to separate from his wife because he thinks that she spends too much money; in the separation, he is willing to let her a large sum of money as a form of compensation. Ultimately, however, he decides against breaking up with his wife, and tries to reconcile with her.

Lady Teazle

She is Sir Pete's young wife, described as very beautiful but vain, with a passion for having fashionable clothes. She and her husband have their little arguments and Lady Teazle thinks about having an affair with Joseph; however, she decides against it when she hears her husband talking about the money he intends to leave her.

Maria

Maria is a young girl, one of the only characters who doesn't like to gossip. She can be viewed as a symbol for what is pure and good. She loves Charles, but Joseph tries to break them up; he almost succeeds when rumors are spread about an affair between Lady Sneerwell and Charles.

Lady Sneerwell

Lady Sneerwell is a widow, a wealthy woman who likes Charles and who is willing to do anything to break up Charles and Maria. She finds an ally in Joseph, and together they start to scheme. She is known for her tendency to spread rumors; because of this, she is very popular in her social circle.

Mrs. Candour

She is one of Lady Sneerwell's friends who also likes to spread rumors. She is a hypocrite because she affirms that spreading rumors is bad, even though she does this too.

Snake

She is Lady Sneerwell's servant who helps her by spreading her rumors.

Moses

He is one of Charles' money lenders, who helps Sir Oliver get in touch with his nephew.

NOTE:

Our analysis of a character will depend on many things:

- 1-** The number of appearances of a character.
- 2-** The number of speeches of a character.

- 3- Their role and participations in the development of play's events.
- 4- Their characteristics.
- 5- The others' views and opinions about a certain character.
For example, what Lady Sneerwell said about Joseph.
She said that he is artful, selfish and malicious.

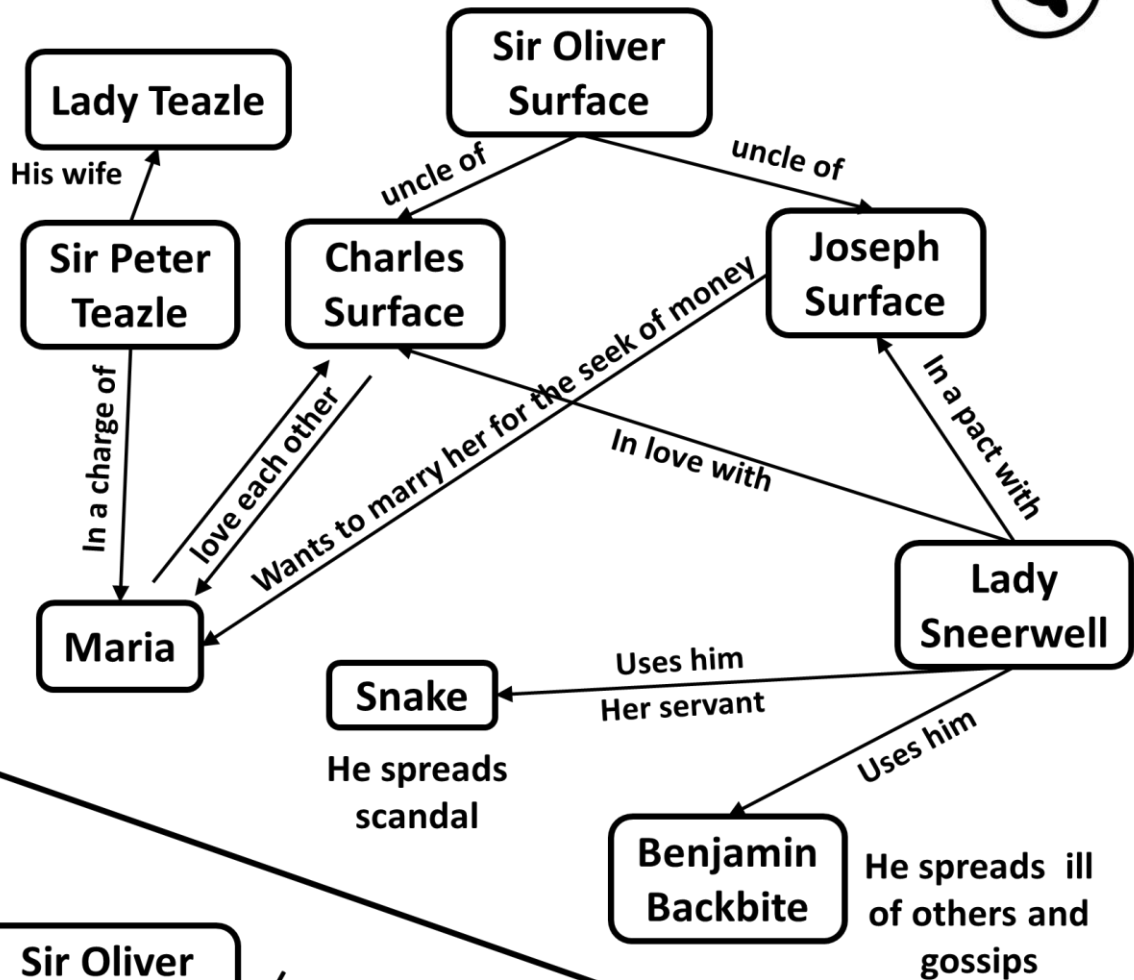
	At the beginning	At the ending
Joseph seems to be	virtuous gentleman chaste	hypocrite wicked
Charles seems to be	dissipated فاسق wicked شرير	nobleman virtuous

- THE END -

The Characters' Tree



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