

## **Richard Brinsley Sheridan, School For Scandal A Comedy of Manners**

Comedy of Manners is based on satirizing the style or manner of the way in which members of the social group (society) act or behave. Much of this is physical and can be seen in the way people in a particular culture communicate through body language. Furthermore, analyzing the courtship manners and social niceties of a period can see much of this. Period music and dance play major roles in this. The School for Scandal is probably the most famous English language social comedy. It is the ultimate comedy of manners.

In this type of play the linchpin of the dramatic plot is the social conventions and customs of a leisured class. Such a social comedy may not appeal to all members of an audience. First, the comic effect of this type of play demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to pure and simple intelligence. However, there is a distinction between intellectual involvement and indifference. Indifference is the deadly foe of all comedy (Corrigan, 5).

A comedy of manners works best, evoking laughter, when the audience is not removed too far from the society in the play, either by time and place or by temperament. However, it seems that the connection is too tenuous for a real comic intellectual engagement that sets up in the audience a sense of general exhilaration, because it presents the very image of living ness and the perception of it is exciting (Langer, 347). The School for Scandal does not achieve a comic effect probably because the subject matter and the action on the stage are merely curious, not exciting, and not allusive to the audience. It calls for titters, but not for the comic laughter. Another interesting thing, here, is that Sheridan does not create affairs between the characters of his play. Lady Table was willing to cuckold Sir Peter with Joseph, until she hears the truth of his love and, as in every melodramatic drama, she realizes the error of her ways, repents and, when she is discovered, tells all and is forgiven.

Of course, in a comedy, all must be restored to a happy ending, so, in the end Charles says, Why as to reforming, Sir Peter, I'll make no promises, and that I take to be a proof that I intend to set about it. - But here shall be my monitor - my gentle guide. - Ah! can I leave the virtuous path those eyes illuminate? At the end, though, readers and viewers are left with a all-too-perfect feeling. There is nothing really realistic about the play, but his intent seems to have been much more moral than any of the earlier comedies. This proves again that The School for Scandal is a comedy of manners. One of the major themes is marriage and the game of love.

However, if marriage is a mirror of society, the couples in the plays show this mirror as something very dark and sinister. Many critiques of marriage that we see in the play are devastating, but the game of love is not much more hopeful. Although the endings are happy - the man invariably gets the woman (or at least that is the implication), there are marriages without love and love affairs, which seem to be rebellious against the established traditions. This play is a comedy of manners also because appearance does not fool anyone for long, especially when the long lost guardian, Sir Oliver, comes home to discover all. In the Cain and Abel scenario, Cain, is exposed as being an ungrateful hypocrite and Abel, is really not that bad after all (all blame seems to be laid on his brother).

Also, the virtuous young maiden Maria - was right in her love at the end, though she obeyed her

fathers orders to refuse any further contact with Charles until he was vindicated. The School for Scandal is a typical comedy of manners. It is reflected in the way the characters talk and act. The very topics they discuss and are concerned with awaken readers laughter.

Everything seems to be so elevated and apart from the reality, that one takes neither the plot nor the characters seriously. Sheridan has brilliantly portrayed and laughed at the realities of high classes leisure life