

Edward - II - An Irony of Kingship

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The essence of irony is opposites of meaning. It is a figure of speech that enables the speaker to convey his meaning with a greater force by means of a contrast between what he seems to express and what his words actually signify. That is the intention of the speaker is different from the proper meaning of the words. The irony of Kingship, in this play, means that the King believes in his great power. He is a sovereign and poses to be a repository of God on earth, but in actual life, he is powerless and meets the fate of a common man. Let us see the play in a brief.

A thorough study of the play reveals the fact that Spence has emphatically stressed the irony of Kingship. Edward II provides an example of it. He believes in his great power and wants to impress it upon all. He also believes in the theory of the Divine Rights of Kingship and desires to be an autocratic ruler. He asserts himself as a powerful King whose power and authority must be felt, honoured and even feared. See how he intends to be tyrannous:—

“ Edward unfold thy paws,

And let Their lives' blood slake thy fury's hunger
If I be cruel and grow tyrannous

Now let them thank themselves, and rue too late.”

When the lords demand the exile of the King's favourite, Gaveston, he expresses his anger and declares:—

“ I'll make thee rue those words

Does seem it thee to contradict thy King?

But, all his beliefs and assertions come to nothing. He is opposed by his own peers. He is rendered powerless, dethroned and finally put to death.

Thematically, Edward II is different from Tamburlain. Tamburlain triumphantly declares that 'a god is not so glorious as a King'. But it is differently treated in Edward II. Edward II shamefully utters such words as 'was ever King

overruled as I's Here, it seems that Marlowe has changed the ideals of Kingship. Edward II's career seems to be ironically retort to Tamburlain's cry 'Is it not brave to be a King?' Edward's character bears two aspects. On the one hand, he displays weakness and follies. He neglects the Kingdom, disregards the Nobles' desire, cruelly insults his queen and bestows undue love to Gavestone. On the other hand, he nourishes strong desire to be a powerful King who should be obeyed by all. But, his follies prove to be stronger than his desire for an authoritative King, consequently, he fails miserably.

The down fall of Edward II is caused by two factors.

M A H A Q U E One is his weak character and the other is his excessive love-sickness of Gavestone. He is a 'sick minded King', who puts at stake his authority for a minion. How he mourns when Gavestone is re-animated:—

"My heart is an anvil unto sorrow,
which beats upon it like the cyclops hammers
And with the noise turns up my giddy brain
And makes me frantic for my Gavestone."

The emotional longing for Gavestone alienates his queen. The Nobles boldly raise arms against him. He is arrested and humiliated. When Leicester tries to console him, he says:—

"If gentle words might comfort me,
Thy speeches long ago had eased my sorrows,
The griefs of private men are soon allayed
But not of Kings."

It is in the last scenes that Edward II comes to realise the realities. When he is compelled to part with his crown he says:—

"Now Sweet God of Heaven
Make me despise this transitory pomp."
He also realises his weakness:—

"Commend me to my son, and bid him rule
Better than I"

Thus we see that Edward II is the irony of kingship. Edward tries to behave like a powerful king. But he is not impressive at all, because of his weaknesses. In the beginning, he does not realise his weakness, though he realises it in the end, that leads to his tragic end.

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The Way of the World: - Themes - Treatment of Love, Marriage and Sex

The Way of the World is a perfect Comedy of Manners by Congreve. The very title of the Play indicates its themes. It is a veiled portrayal of the Restoration upper class society. Here, Congreve depicts the life style and manners of the aristocratic people with special stress on love, sex, marriage and wealth. But, it is only the socialised form of living that has been portrayed while the natural values have been relegated to the background.

The main plot of the play revolves round the theme of love. But, there is the absence of passionate love. The force of mutual attraction with all its actions and reactions is also obviously absent. The love between Mirabell and Millamant is not emotional. It is the Restoration ideal of love - balanced and without any sentimentality. It is based on mutual esteem, without the sacrifice of individuality. The bargaining scene can be cited as a contribution of Congreve to the philosophy of love. Here, we see that Mirabell is eager to marry Millamant, but the emotional aspect of love is missing. Their love is just a matter of give and take. They agree for marriage but with certain reservations imposed from both sides. Millamant strongly declares that she will not marry unless she gets certain assurances from Mirabell.

"Ah! I'll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure."

Besides, Mirabell's love affairs with Mrs. Fainal is completely sexual in nature. She marries Mr. Fainal not because she feels for him but to save her reputation. She does not show grudge against Mirabell, rather she helps him in their plots. There is also illicit love between Mr. Fainal and Mrs. Marwood. But, it is all passion with no sincerity. Mrs. Marwood loves Mirabell, but discloses his plots to Lady Wishfort out of revenge. Witwoud also hopes to win Millamant, but she considers him a fool whose company is good for health. There is Witfull's crude attempt to make love to Millamant.

Then there is longing of Lady Wishfort to have a young husband in her old age. Her attempts to appear young and beautiful to impress Sir Roland are ridiculous as well as pathetic. See how anxious she is to impress Sir Roland:-

"Well, how shall I receive him? In what figure shall I give his heart the first impression. There is a great deal in the first impression. Shall I set? No I won't set....."

So far as marriage is concerned, we find the characters of the Play in a sort of revolt against the established concept of matrimony. It is not taken as a sacred union of two pure souls. It is carried on either for monetary gain or to cover illicit relations. It does not have spiritual basis. The married life is degenerated into boredom. Both the husband and the wife deceive each other. Cuckoldom is an accepted feature of the married life. Extra marital relation is not taken as immoral act. Mirabell has illicit relation with Mrs. Fainal but gets her married to Mr. Fainal to hide his immoral acts. Mr. Fainal has sexual relation with Mrs. Marwood, but marries Mrs. Fainal, knowing her past, just to get her property. Even Mirabell nourishes greed for Millamant's share. Wait Well and Faible get married and work Mirabell only for handsome rewards.

Thus, we see that wealth is an important aspect of the Restoration life. Marriage is just a medium of material aggrandisement and liberty to fulfill sexual appetite. The married couples enjoy extra marital relation, engage themselves in all sorts of immoral activities and feel fashionable to have lovers. However, Congreve seeks to prove that marriage is a union between two sincere and loving creatures, and that insincerity or falsehood in matrimony gets its own inevitable punishment.

"From hence let those be warned, who mean to wed;

Let mutual falsehood stain the bridal bed.

For each deceiver to his cost may find,

That marriage frauds too oft are paid in kind."

To conclude, we can say that, here, Congreve has presented Restoration life in a satiric vein. The purity of love is marred by the lust for sex and the sacredness of marriage is defiled by the greed for wealth. All the times, men and women are forming intrigues to achieve their ends. This is the way of the world of the Restoration period.

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The way of the world. - As a Comedy of Manners
= As a Restoration Comedy

Eng-H-2 - P. 3rd

William Shakespeare cultivated romantic come-

edy and represented life in general. Ben Jonson showed a flair for realism and humour. The Restoration dramatists followed Ben Jonson's realism but they regarded London as their world and concerned themselves with the sole representation of this city life. The Restoration Comedy is known as the Comedy of Manners, for it represents the manners, modes, conventions, not of the lower classes, but of the upper classes of the society. It is realistic in character and focuses our attention on the life style, love intrigues and foppery of the upper and the aristocratic classes. The way of the world is a perfect Comedy of Manners, for it displays all the traits of such a Comedy.

The way of the world deals with the artificial life of London. All of its characters completely belong to the upper class and are thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the fashionable life of London. It is Sir Willful Witwoud alone who comes from outside. But he does not adjust there, so he wants to go on travels. His affection for religion, goodness of heart and the spirit of sacrifice are alien to this aristocratic society. Witwoud represents this society at its worst. When he thinks unfashionable to recognise his half brother living outside London. He replies to Mrs. Marwood's question, 'Don't you know him'?

"Not I, yes, I think it is he. I've almost forgot him; I have not seen him since the Revolution."

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The scenes of the Comedy of Manners were generally laid in London, particularly in chocolate houses, clubs and gambling centres. At these places, the fops and gallants used to assemble in company with gay ladies and butterflies of fashion. In the present, the scenes are laid in Lady Wishfort's bed room or parlour or a London Park. The characters are engaged in love intrigues and

and designing schemes and plots to ruin their rivals in love. Mirabell loves Millamant. But he develops an illicit relation with Mrs. Fainal and gets her married with Fainal to hide his affairs. Mr. Fainal has an affair with Mrs. Marwood but marries Mrs. Fainal only for her property. Lady Wishfort feels deceived by Mirabell. Mrs. Marwood's love for Mirabell makes her his potent enemy. It is she who discloses the secret marriage of Waitwell and Fainal to thwart Mirabell's plan. She is ready to marry ^{even} a drayman to get Mirabell killed:-

"Gods my life, I'll have him, I'll have him murdered. I will have him poisoned. Where does he eat? I'll marry a drayman to have him poisoned in his wine."

With the restoration of Kingship, immorality and licentiousness, in every aspect of life, became the fashion of the time. In this period, it was a fashion to have lovers. The husbands and the wives freely enjoyed extra marital relations. Marriage was just a social custom. It was in no case a spiritual union of two souls. It was not a source of eternal pleasure. It was carried on just to cover the illicit relations or love affairs of the aristocratic people. Even the married couples thought it unfashioned to live like husbands and wives. When Mirabell proposes for marriage, Millamant expresses her feelings in these words:-

"Aye, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweet-heart and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar - I shall never bear that."

The very plot of the play is based on love intrigue. Mirabell's intrigue to win Millamant. Just for sake he pretends to make love to Wishfort.

an old aunt of his beloved. When he fails, he gets Waitwell and Poible married. Waitwell disguises Sir Rowland and is presented as a sincere lover of Lady Wishfort. But this plot is discovered by Mrs. Marwood, a rival of Millamant. At the end, Mirabell shows his shrewdness and ultimately gets his love.

In short, the way of the world possesses all traits of a perfect Restoration Comedy of Manners. It depicts the life of the aristocratic society with its minutest details. But unlike other Restoration dramatists, Congreve does not allow his dialogue to descend to a low moral tone. He has presented intrigues, immoral urge for sexual appetite or illicit love, but his dialogues are replete with wits and not not immoral jokes.

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The Revals - A drama of situations and Intrigues

III (5)

^{Eng-H-2 - P. 3rd}
Sheridan's dramatic work marks at once the height

of reaction against the sentimental drama and the most finished achievement of the English Comedy of Manners. In this warfare, Goldsmith is an elder not a better soldier than Sheridan. Really, Goldsmith and Sheridan are the two ever shining stars in the galaxy of the post-Restoration English dramatists. They declare an open revolt against the sentimental Comedy that was devoid of Comic Muse. Goldsmith registers his protest in his 'Essay on Theatre' and illustrates in the 'Good Natured Man'. Sheridan projects his protest with a greater vigour in the 'Revals' and 'The School for Scandal'.

The aim of a comic dramatist is to provoke his audience with thoughtful laughter. The greater oddities he brings in, the better dramatic artist he is. A successful dramatist excellently handles different odds and ends of the plot to which his characters are generally sub-ordinated. The same qualities are discerned in the 'Revals'. Most of his characters are types, not individuals. They are not presented as life like characters. There is no depth in them. Actually, in the true fashion of the Restoration Comedy of Intrigues, Sheridan lays too much emphasis on intrigues, situation and dialogues. His clever handling of various incidents speaks of his dramatic skill.

A thorough study of the 'Revals' reveals that it is primarily a play of intrigues and situations. The situation is so well handled that a sense of surprise is maintained till the end of the play. In the very beginning, we see that both the son and the father - Captain Absolute and Sir Anthony - are present at Bath. But, they are ignorant of each other's presence. Fag tells that the son has developed love affairs with a romantic lady who loves an enigm

but reject a Captain. The situation becomes a little complicated. We are afraid of the affair being known to the father. But, to our utter surprize, the father proposes for their marriage, of course, without any knowledge of the intimacy. The son, like a true son of his father, refuses to comply with his father's proposition, for he does not know the facts about the lady. He is ready to face the wrath of his dictatorial father who declares-

MIA HAQUE

"If not, Round! do not enter the same hemisphere with me! don't dare to breathe the same air, or use same light with me, but get an atmosphere and a sun of your own! I'll strip you of your commission. I'll disinherit you."

However, Captain Absolute comes to know about the lady and becomes an obedient son. Then he discovers that his own friend Bob Acres is a rival to his other self, Beverly. To his mental grief, Mrs. Malaprop dismisses Acres in favour of Absolute. Again there is a telling situation, when he goes to Mrs. Malaprop as Absolute but talks to Lydia as Beverly. Besides, the intriguing nature of Sir Lucious, a victimised lover of the situation, makes the story still full run of intrigues. He challenges Absolute and befools Acres. He induces Acres to challenge Beverly to a duel by involving his honour. We are unable to control our laughter when Acres solicits Absolute to terrorise his rival by describing his strength.

"True, true - but stay - stay, Jack - you may add that you never saw me in such a rage before, a most devouring rage!"

At the end, all the rivals are to decide their fate in duels. All the characters assemble in the duel ground, intrigues are disclosed and love is restored to the real lovers. Thus, we can simply say that, the Rivals is a drama

of intrigues and Situation. It is quite in the tradition of the Restoration Comedy of Intrigues and Situation. Perhaps it is so because Sheridan has tried to portray the society that is not different from the society presented in Congreve's 'The way of the World.'

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