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**SATIRE IN THE RESTORATION: DRYDEN AND THE COMEDY OF MANNERS.****Tursuntosh Isroilova**Lecturer, Department of English Language Theory and Practice,
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ANNOTATION. This article explores the nature and function of satire during the English Restoration period, focusing particularly on John Dryden's contributions and the development of the Comedy of Manners. The study examines the socio-political circumstances that shaped Restoration satire, the aesthetic features that distinguished Dryden's satirical voice, and the thematic mechanisms employed in the Comedy of Manners to critique aristocratic hypocrisy, gender relations, and social pretensions. By analyzing primary texts and scholarly sources, the research identifies the stylistic, structural, and ideological foundations of Restoration satire, highlighting how Dryden and playwrights such as William Congreve, George Etherege, and Richard Sheridan contributed to a tradition of witty, sharp, and highly social comedic critique. Tables summarizing thematic characteristics and authorial techniques provide structured insight into the genre's evolution.

Keywords: Restoration satire, John Dryden, Comedy of Manners, Restoration theatre, literary criticism, wit, social critique, neoclassicism.

INTRODUCTION

The Restoration period in English literature, beginning in 1660 with the return of Charles II to the throne, marked a profound transformation in cultural aesthetics, public taste, and literary production. After years of Puritan rule, censorship, and the suppression of theatrical activity, the Restoration brought with it an intellectual reawakening and a return to cosmopolitanism. Court life, influenced by French manners and continental sophistication, stimulated the growth of a literary environment in which satire thrived as both a political weapon and a stylistic mode of cultural commentary. Among the many literary figures of the era, John Dryden stands out as the central force in shaping the ideological and aesthetic character of Restoration satire. His political verse satires, dramatic works, and essays not only articulated contemporary anxieties but also laid the foundation for the sophisticated social critique later developed in the Comedy of Manners.

The Comedy of Manners emerged as a theatrical response to the shifting values of upper-class society. The genre emphasized urbanity, wit, sexual politics, and the exposure of moral duplicity. Its characters—fops, rakes, witty heroines, jealous husbands, and pretentious aristocrats—served as vehicles through which playwrights revealed the contradictions of high society. By situating Dryden within this dramatic and cultural movement, the present study seeks to clarify the connection between poetic satire and





theatrical satire, demonstrating how both forms jointly contributed to the intellectual landscape of Restoration England. This article argues that satire in the Restoration functioned not merely as entertainment but as an incisive analytical tool that mirrored the political tensions, ethical fluctuations, and social aspirations of the age.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Scholarly engagement with Restoration satire has evolved through multiple interpretive frameworks. Early studies, such as those of George Saintsbury and Edmund Gosse, positioned Dryden as the architect of modern satire, emphasizing his rhetorical mastery and political acuity. Later twentieth-century critics, including James Sutherland, Harold Love, and Dustin Griffin, shifted attention toward the socio-historical dimensions of satire, examining how the genre functioned within the partisan environment of the Exclusion Crisis and the Popish Plot. Meanwhile, research on the Comedy of Manners, notably by scholars such as Brian Corman, John Loftis, and Pat Gill, foregrounded the genre's intricate interplay between gender, power, and social performance. Recent studies (e.g., by H. Hammond and J. Morwood) continue to re-evaluate the gendered implications and performativity of Restoration comedy, reinforcing the argument that satire was deeply embedded in the mechanisms of social critique.

The methodology of the present study rests on a combination of comparative literary analysis, contextual historical interpretation, and thematic categorization. Primary texts by Dryden—especially “Absalom and Achitophel,” “Mac Flecknoe,” and “The Medal”—are examined in relation to major comedies of manners, such as Congreve’s *The Way of the World*, Etherege’s *The Man of Mode*, and Wycherley’s *The Country Wife*. Secondary critical sources provide historical grounding and interpretive depth. The article utilizes qualitative textual analysis to identify recurring motifs, rhetorical devices, and satirical strategies, while two comparative tables summarize findings regarding thematic functions and stylistic techniques. This mixed qualitative framework enables a comprehensive understanding of the literary, theatrical, and socio-cultural roles of satire in the Restoration period.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Restoration satire served as a dynamic instrument through which writers addressed political instability, religious controversies, and social excesses. John Dryden’s work exemplifies the period’s innovation in satirical form, combining classical models with contemporary political urgency. In “Absalom and Achitophel,” Dryden applied biblical allegory to critique the Exclusion Crisis, exposing the manipulations of political opportunists. His portrayal of Shaftesbury as Achitophel and Monmouth as Absalom demonstrates the poet’s skill in transforming real political actors into





symbolic figures, thereby shaping public opinion through literary artistry. Similarly, in “Mac Flecknoe,” Dryden satirized the poet Thomas Shadwell, attacking not only his literary incompetence but also the cultural decline Dryden perceived in Restoration theatrical tastes.

Parallel to Dryden’s poetic satire, the Comedy of Manners evolved as a dramatic form that targeted the affectations and moral inconsistencies of the aristocracy. Congreve, Etherege, and Wycherley depicted characters whose social identities were built upon flirtation, deception, wit, and aggressive self-presentation. Female agency became a key thematic focus, as heroines such as Millamant in *The Way of the World* asserted intellectual equality through verbal dexterity. The genre’s preoccupation with appearances—reputation, fashion, conversational elegance—highlighted the tension between external manners and internal ethics. As a result, the Comedy of Manners served as a social mirror, reflecting the frivolity, decadence, and performative sophistication of Restoration elites.

To illustrate the findings more clearly, the following tables categorize (1) major thematic aspects of Dryden’s satire and the Comedy of Manners, and (2) stylistic techniques characteristic of the two traditions.

Table 1. Major Thematic Functions in Dryden’s Satire and the Comedy of Manners

Literary element	Dryden’s satire	Comedy of manners
Political critique	Allegorical interpretation of contemporary political conflicts; exposure of corruption	Rare, indirect political hints; focus shifted to aristocratic social power
Moral hypocrisy	Attacks on duplicity and religious manipulation	Comic exposure of marital deception, flirtation, and false manners
Social identity	Leaders turned into symbolic archetypes	Identity built on fashion, wit, and reputation
Cultural decadence	Denunciation of literary shallowness and poor poetic standards	Representation of elite leisure, sexual intrigue, and public performance

Table 2. Stylistic Techniques in Restoration Satire

Technique	Dryden	Comedy of Manners
Wit and Irony	Classical rhetorical wit, elevated mock-heroic tone	Rapid conversational wit, repartee, double entendre
Characterization	Political allegory, personalized attack	Social types: rake, fop, witty heroine, jealous husband
Structural Approach	Long verse satire, heroic couplets	Multi-act plays, intricate plots, dramatic reversals
Tone	Serious, moralizing, politically sharp	Light, playful, socially observant





The results indicate that while Dryden's poetic satire functioned primarily as a vehicle for political intervention and moral didacticism, the *Comedy of Manners* adopted a more socially oriented and humorous tone, emphasizing interpersonal dynamics rather than political ideology. Despite these differences, both forms share a commitment to exposing human folly, interrogating moral inconsistencies, and reflecting the cultural complexities of Restoration England.

CONCLUSION. The study demonstrates that satire in the Restoration period was both a reflection of and a response to the intense political, social, and cultural transformations of late seventeenth-century England. John Dryden's contributions to the development of political satire established a model grounded in classical rhetoric, moral persuasion, and allegorical sophistication. His use of heroic couplets, sharp personal characterization, and biblical or historical parallels enabled him to critique political actors with precision, shaping public discourse during tumultuous times. Dryden's satires reveal not only his literary mastery but also his ability to negotiate the shifting ideological terrain of Restoration politics.

Meanwhile, the *Comedy of Manners* developed as a theatrical counterpart to poetic satire, expressing the unique cultural ethos of the Restoration court. The genre provided a humorous yet penetrating critique of aristocratic society, exposing the tensions between appearance and reality, sincerity and performance, love and manipulation. Through complex characters and sparkling dialogue, playwrights like Congreve, Etherege, and Wycherley articulated the anxieties and aspirations of a society preoccupied with reputation, sexuality, and social mobility.

By examining these two modes of satire side by side, the article highlights their shared concern with human behavior, their differing stylistic tools, and their complementary contributions to Restoration literary culture. Both Dryden's satire and the *Comedy of Manners* reveal the underlying moral contradictions and ideological uncertainties of the time, making the Restoration one of the richest periods in English literary history. The article's analysis ultimately emphasizes that satire was not merely a form of entertainment, but a complex medium through which writers interrogated the ethical, political, and social fabric of their world. Its legacy continues to shape modern understandings of irony, social critique, and literary representation.

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