

Restoration Prose Reading Unit Exercise

7. An understanding of the dramatic and theatrical themes and conventions of the Restoration stage which are present in this extract can be enhanced through its comparison to ~~the~~ Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* (1696), written in the same year as *The Relapse* and commonly understood to be its prequel. The contents of the two plays, especially when examined side by side, provides insight not only into the playwrights' ~~off~~ respective beliefs about human morality and behaviour, but the ~~public's~~ response to them from external sources and the context within which they are set displays a broader backdrop in which one is able to perceive the constantly changing genre of Restoration Comedy, and must be appreciated to comprehend the purpose behind some of the comedy. This essay will ~~extend~~ compare Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* and Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* with regard to the themes mentioned in this extract and some consideration for the religious and moral context of the plays in order to establish an understanding of the dramatic and theatrical themes ~~and~~ and conventions of the Restoration stage. ~~that~~

For ~~reasons~~ an audience that had attended a performance of Cibber's *Love's Last Shift*, it is likely that this passage, ~~is~~ situated in the first act and scene of *The Relapse*, would have been considered ironic. It is true that the character 'Loveless' confesses himself to be a reformed human being with a different moral code from that which he followed ~~of~~ for much of *Love's Last Shift*, but much of his language in the extract, especially when coupled with ~~Aminda's~~ Aminda's response, ~~suggests~~ hints at

Vanbrugh's belief that the redemption of Loveless is unrealistic. Much of Loveless's language appears almost mock-epic, professing that the "Rock of Reason now supports my Love", language that is arguably hyperbolic insofar as it is exaggerated as a means to calm the

disquietude of his wife Amanda. This is effective not only because it ~~creates an image of~~ a grandiose drama of his "constancy", but his hyperbolic language also extends to his passion, such as in "The Rudest Hurricane of wild Desire",

through which the ~~stage~~ audience could clearly see that he is still subject to his wayward "Desire", since he appears to ~~still~~ be sozanalar with it still. This is intoned in Amanda's speech, in which she simply states "his safer to avoid the storm", a straightforward response that advocates how she ~~has~~ manages to maintain her moral code, and further questions that of Loveless, since he seems content to allow himself exposure to this "Hurricane of wild Desire" as Amanda suggests. The fact that this discourse is placed at the opening of the play also makes it problematic, as it is clear that it is not

fixed as resolution, or in other words, ~~that~~ it will be subject to change ^{during the play}. As the play goes on, not Amanda's moral code is ~~just~~ put under furious pressure by Young Worthy just as Loveless's is by Brachius. Their respective behaviours illustrate how Vanbrugh wishes to create characters that are far more realistic than Cibber's. If a character is subject to vice, then they will likely surrender to it, and whether there is any redemption is up for debate.

is it though? why then? mock epic?

However, it seems unjustified to argue from this that Vanbrugh's play contradicts the moral code established in Cibber's, and some further analyses of the characters can perhaps explain this. It appears that Vanbrugh's depiction of Lovelace, for example, is very much in keeping with that of Cibber's, and yet he takes this depiction to an extreme to counter his moral argument. Lovelace is an emotionally ~~weak~~ weak character who, rather than lacking any passion for his wife, is easily susceptible to his "wild desire" which sparks his inconsistency. It would be unrealistic, therefore, to present him as suddenly falling into the role of faithful husband as Cibber does. Vanbrugh is much more realistic, exposing the character of Lovelace as likely to take a lover again. Yet this does not negate the moral code that Cibber establishes that this behaviour is immoral. It may be that his behaviour is more or less entirely without punishment, but an argument might be made that throughout both plays we pity Lovelace, for he brings his misfortunes on himself and suffers through his own emotional weakness. It is easy, as an audience member, to find oneself siding with Ann as she fights any desire to betray her husband, and knee down upon Lovelace's own easy betrayal of her, but in this way, the moral code of Cibber is never threatened.

This is enhanced within the moral code found within the broader context of Restoration England. ^{Although written after his death,} Charles II's behaviour towards his wife set the example for a new type of character depiction - that of the rake who is faithful to his wife. Many of the characters

created by Cibber's contemporaries could be seen to follow this example, even characters such as Old Worthy or ~~King~~ Lovelace himself by the end of Love's Last Shift. A comparison of these plays to Jeremy Collier's extract on "Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage" uses the contents of these plays to create an argument for upholding a code of morality ~~was~~ in the interest of expelling ~~the~~ ^{any} degraded moralities present in the audience watching. ~~For~~ Collier's argument is formed on the basis of plays themselves, essentially as a critique of plays as an artform that inculcates poor morals into the public as opposed to relying on a religious argument for upholding of moral values. Within the scope of Restoration Comedy versus Subliminal Comedy, the argument aligns itself with Love's Last Shift, as many of these behaviours and ~~steps~~ moral codes presented by the characters in the play's resolution ~~as~~ ^{as} promote the good moral values expressed in Collier's work.

This is perhaps the area where Vanbrugh and Collier's works are at a difference of opinion on moral code, as Vanbrugh's The Relapse ~~to~~ ^{by} would not be as instructive as Collier would want.

If the argument was made that plays are useful tool for upholding moral codes as Collier suggests, it would be clear to see his approval of Love's Last Shift, and ~~scorn~~ ^{scorn} for The Relapse. This takes shape in the aforementioned lack of consequence for Lovelace's adultery, but also in the reward that is wrought in Young Fashion's gaudier behaviour to his brother and wife, the incest of which can be seen in his blackmail

of a Clergyman. It is clear to see from this that Vanbrugh did not ally himself with the sensibilities of his contemporaries, seeking instead to place Comedy at the forefront of his designs rather than an unimpeachable moral code. From this it is obvious why ~~the play~~ ~~he~~ Vanbrugh galled such Censorship as a playwright, and it is a straightforward process to expose the differences between Love's *Last Shift* and *The Relapse*. In this sense, the dramatic and theatrical themes and conventions of the Restoration Stage remain fairly unaltered throughout both these plays except in one major aspect, that of their moral conventions, and thus *The Relapse* avoids the subtleties of Love's *Last Shift*.

In conclusion, it is clear to see from this how the extract in question is important in conveying the dramatic and theatrical conventions of the Restoration Stage. A brief comparison of these with Love's *Last Shift* can reveal much about the Restoration comedy of the time, but also sheds light on ~~the~~ ~~the~~ the type of play each playwright sought to give their audience, and thus the moral statements of the general public at their time of writing. Using to a great extent the same characters, the playwrights create two plays with differing moral instructions, and it from this that ~~we~~ one can gain a great extent insight into the Restoration stage.

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