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Comedy of manners is based on satirizing the style or manner of the way in which members of the social group act or behave. Much of this is physical and can be seen in the way people in a particular culture communicate through body language.

In the rivals the characters play one into the other in a comedy of manners, which pivots on confusion and confessions. This type of humour can also be found in Sheridan’s “ school for scandal”, Goldsmiths “ he stoops to conquer” and Farquars “ the recruiting officer”.

Sheridan focuses on the fables of high society and in doing so focuses on the folys of fashion and social pretension. A prime example of this is countryman Bob Acres, pretending to be something that he is not. Dressing to impress, “ I used to dress so badly” he has set out to win the heart of Lydia and to obtain her wealth “ I’ll make my old clothes know who’s master.”

Another weapon at the author’s disposal is the aping of good manners but not using them “ odd minims and crochets.” Acres uses such words to stress points and opinions. “ Odds swimmings!” Odds being short for Gods, Acres has a tendency to blurt out these profound sentences at the most inappropriate times often infuriating and provoking characters like Faulkland. “ Jigs, and reels!” He doesn’t really help the situation at hand. He gives a detailed description of Julia singing and dancing which inflames Faulklands jealousy causing him to storm out.

Sheridan makes clever use of wit especially involving plots with characters such as Jack Absolute whose main purpose in the play is to entertain the audience by making a mockery of arranged marriages, finance and romantic notions in high society. He does this very successfully and on many occasions. A good example of this is with his good friend Faulkland “ Have I been full of wit and humour? No, faith, to do you justice you have been confoundedly stupid indeed.”

This is really just good ribbing with his friend. When it comes to dealing with his father he plays the idiot Sheridan’s style of writing makes these scenes with his father effective and humorous using a soliloquy. He speaks loud to the audience presenting them with his dilemma, “ my father wants to force me to marry the very girl I am plotting to run away with!” Then uses his wit to get around the problem with amusing consequences, “ Languish! What, the Languishes of Worcestershire?” Jacks wit serves other purposes throughout the play such as making a fool out of people “ As for that old weather-beaten she-dragon who guards you-who can he mean by that?” He also plays both sides for fools to entertain himself and the audience by encouraging Acres to stand on Faulklands toes. But the comedy is at its best when Jacks wit catches up with him and it all comes crashing down.

Sheridan also makes use of lack of wit for example, Bob Acres is oblivious to what is going and misunderstands comments made by Jack that Faulkland is “ a little jealous” of Julia country dancing but Acres thinks that Faulkland is jealous of him.

Mrs Malaprop is an excellent example of comedy of manners she tries to use long intellectual words but they come out all wrong “ promise to forget this fellow -to illiterate him.” This is a form of malapropism hence Mrs Malaprop.

Lydia’s romantic notions and her ignorance of herself are just as appealing to the audience as the other comedies of manners and many hope that she would receive her poetic justice. This is typical of the higher society because they want everything their way. This is also a form of dramatic irony because the audience knows about her love affair and the true identity of Ensign Beverly.

Faulkland has exaggerated things out of all proportions and is paranoid up to a point about his relationship with Julia he has a melancholy attitude. He is neurotic and over-sensitive “ I fear for her spirits-her health-her life.” I think that he that sensitive that audience look upon him as a sort of women he isn’t really the man in the relationship at times and this appeals to the audience.

In conclusion Sheridan focuses his humour on that of upper class society and greatly exaggerates it. He uses basic principles for amusement e. g. ignorance, obsession, manners, intelligence and verbal communication.