International Journal of innovative inventions in Social Science and Humanities

ISSN(print): 3050-6921, ISSN(online): 3050-693X

Volume 03 Issue 04 April 2026

DOI: 10.58806/ijiissh.2026.v3i4n20

Page No: 510-517

The Performance of Power: Marriage, Mobility, and Social Order in Restoration Comedy

Asst. Lect. Salam Hamzah Kadhum[1], Asst. Lect. Muntadher Aqeel Abdulhamza[2], Asst. Lect. Mohammed Hussein Abbas[3]

[1]University of Kufa- Faculty of Education

[2]Jabir Ibn Hayyan University for Medical and Pharmaceutical Sciences

[3]Jabir Ibn Hayyan University for Medical and Pharmaceutical Sciences

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine three Restoration-era comedy plays. First, The Man of Mode by George Etherege. Second, The Way of the World by William Congreve. Third, The School for Scandal by Richard Sheridan highlights that these works are not only for entertaining audiences, but rather focus on social issues such as Marriage, social mobility, and the manifestation of power. Through their characters and situations, these plays explore how influence is not only tied to class, but to behavior, reputation and social performance. The study uses Michel Foucault's ideas about power, Erving Goffman's way of looking at how people act in social situations, and Lawrence Stone's sociological examination of marriage and getting ahead in society to understand how power was controlled and used in these plays. This is all within the context of the Restoration period, a time of huge changes in the way society, politics and what people thought of as right and wrong were developing. Foucault's idea of power as being spread around and depending on relationships helps us to understand how subtle social rules and what people do are shown, particularly in the way Congreve shows marriage happening through the process of courting. Goffman's approach lets us look at the difference between how Sheridan's characters are in public and in private, and the stress caused by the fact that their public shows for society are at odds with their own goals and what society expects of them. Stone's idea of marriage being a method for improving one's position in life shows that in Etherege's plays, marriages that happen privately are frequently shown as being about social benefit, not love. Using these theories, the study demonstrates that Restoration comedies both mirrored and supported what was considered usual in society. It also finds the more hidden ways that both people and groups act, and continues to give us a better understanding of how much of our behaviour is a performance that is part of our social and cultural positions.

KEYWORDS: Restoration Comedy, Frontstage, Backstage, Social Mobility, Marriage, And Social Hierarchy.

ARTICLE DETAILS

Published On:
28 April 2026

Available on:
https://ijiissh.com/

1. INTRODUCTION

English theatre during the Restoration period (1660-1710) significantly shaped performance styles and developed social and cultural identity. The era began under the rule of Charles II, a time considered influential in American history due to the diverse social and political issues that arose. English theatre was reshaped after being suppressed during the English Civil War, especially during the Commonwealth period under Oliver Cromwell (1649-1660). As this period started, the theatre faced suppression, and actors could not find places to perform, so they either acted secretly or sought other jobs. Because the monarchy was the main supporter of theatre, as the monarchy returned, the theatre reopened and flourished again, exploring the different social, economic, and political issues that appeared in society. Hence, this was the time of the emergence of the Restoration comedies, which were the main means to criticize and tackle society's different social and moral issues, as they played a pivotal role in academic interest. The Restoration plays, comedies in particular, focused on the satirical side and the depiction of possessing authority, social relations, and social hierarchy. The presented characters in the plays are often related to manipulative behavior, using wit and charm to establish different relationships, including marriages and friendships. These social and political changes are depicted in the comedic plays, where

moral and social values are questioned as new moral and social values emerge. Therefore, the theatre was a mirror of society, with all the changing manifestations in a rapidly changing society (Burns, 1987, p. 24).

Henceforth, this study uses three well-known Restoration comedies to investigate the social manifestations of the age. The comedies that the study investigates are George Etherege's The Man of Mode (1676), William Congreve's The Way of the World (1700), and Richard Sheridan's The School for Scandal (1777). These plays' diverse issues need a broader theoretical framework to scrutinize them; hence, this study uses three frameworks to understand the various social manifestations of these comedies. The study depicts three distinct frameworks: Michel Foucault's discourse theory of power and use of authority, Erving Goffman's approach to social performances, and Lawrence Stone's perspective of marriage and social mobility. These different approaches are essential to closely analyze the social relations and identities presented in the plays to observe the events from various perspectives.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study should use various approaches to analyze some Restoration comedies to understand the different aspects of the Restoration period. The study looks at The Way of the World, The School for Scandal, and The Man of Mode in three ways, showing how to understand people's morals, behaviors, and social conditions. These methods will be explained in this section.

2.1. Foucault's Power Structure

Foucault's analytical approach provides a distinctive perspective for understanding the mechanisms society relies on to express personal and institutional relationships. One of the fundamental concepts of Foucault's theoretical framework is that power does not act highly through the authorial powers or top-down mechanisms, but spreads across the social structure, operating with distinctive formations, social practices, and personal relationships (Gordon, 1980, p. 87). In his Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1977), Foucault pretends that power cannot be understood as something that someone or some institution can possess; rather, it can be seen in everyday practices through normal social behavioral practices (p. 74). According to Foucault, power operates not only as a tool for repression but also as an operative force that influences people to shape their behaviors, desires, and the method through which people understand their societal roles (p. 94).

The Foucauldian concept of power can be significant when examining William Congreve's, The Way of the World. By examining how the characters use language, social status, and relationships, the play presents latent mechanisms that reflect Foucault's notion of power and how it operates within society. The play presents characters like Mirabell and Millamant, who depict strategic methods to transcend their social hierarchy, illustrating how power is practiced and depicted through personal relationships (Congreve, 2006). Foucault's notion of surveillance and the panopticon presents a valuable critical approach for understanding the implicit powers of social authority embedded within the characters' moral behaviors. Through the depiction of power structure, the play examines the complexities of the relationships and criticizes the broader social order, presenting Foucault's approach as a significant way to deconstruct the power relations in the play. Therefore, Foucault pretends that "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Gordon, 1980), which operates solely in Congreve's The Way of the World.

2.2. Goffman's Social Performance

Erving Goffman, in his very important 1959 book The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, came up with the idea of 'social performance,' how we act in social situations to be more than just ourselves as individuals. Goffman saw people in society as actors on a stage, and all of everyday life as a larger theatre, and he looked at social behaviour very carefully. What we do and how we act is controlled by what society expects, what we ourselves think, and what others think of us. Interestingly, these 'performances' are how we carefully create the impression we want to give to others. He called this "impression management", crafting a specific image of who we are to get a reaction from people.

So, Goffman's thinking applies to Sheridan's The School for Scandal. The characters in the play are defined by how they seem to the public, and by their reputation, both of which are essential to getting by in their world. The play shows how people act in order to create a public face, to get influence, be respected and appear positive. They manipulate how others see them and, hoping to be accepted, deal with complicated social positions and what people think of their morals, which fits with Goffman's ideas about how we interact. In The School for Scandal, Lady Sneerwell and Sir Peter Teazle are good at presenting themselves in a certain way to fit in and to get what they want; their characters are shaped to match what is expected of them and what they want to achieve, and they are always aware of how they appear to others. Lady Sneerwell's love of hearing gossip, and Sir Peter's behaviour, Goffman would call this 'front stage', which is the way they act in public. What people are like when nobody is looking, their 'back stage' selves, the case when people act privately. They reveal these sides of themselves only to people they are truly close to, and at this time, the facade they present to the world is lessened, or disappears altogether. Goffman explained that this reveals the internal battle we all have between what society expects us to be, and what we are actually like as people .

Goffman (1959) described a performance as everything someone does in a situation to have some kind of effect on anyone else in it (p. 10). He said that the people involved in this performance are the audience, those who are watching, or others who are acting parts along with them. This makes certain the person 'performing' acts as society thinks they should. Considering this in relation to Sheridan's The School for Scandal gives us a much stronger appreciation of how the characters in the play construct and then

continue to live out their roles within a very tricky social world. Essentially, by being careful in their actions and controlling how things appear, the characters are doing precisely what Goffman said they would do: how we're supposed to act, and the behavior of those around us, continually shape and adjust our roles in life (p. 47).

2.3 Lawrence Stone's Approach to Marriage and Social Mobility

Lawrence Stone's (1977) book, The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500- 1800, is the most complete investigation of marriage as a social institution. He explains, in a sociological way, why ideas about marriage shifted to seeing it as a method of establishing and reinforcing inequalities in society. Stone investigated how marriages took place, how people's status changed, and how marriage in early modern England supported people in upholding their place. At the time, marriage wasn't primarily about personal happiness, or even the spiritual bond many now believe in; it was constructed to allow for advancement, for more money, and for influence. Essentially marriage was a means to a better position, to ambition, and to the smooth operation of society as a whole .

Using Stone's concepts to read Etherege's The Man of Mode (1676) allows for a better grasp of the various sorts of marriage on display in the Restoration era and how they were used to achieve individual goals. The characters aren't overwhelmed by feelings in marriage; they're largely looking at it as a path to more wealth and a better situation. Etherege portrays Dorimant as strategically using his cleverness to improve his social standing and all of his encounters with women to improve his own self-image. His relationships with Mrs. Loveit and Harcourt's sister, therefore, seem deliberate, to preserve or even to enhance his reputation and position in society. This understanding of marriage and relationships mirrors Stone's idea that marriage is at once a private and a public affair, both displaying and strengthening the class structure and how people move within it. Stone (1977) wrote that marriage was regarded as "a contract like any other, subject to statutory controls for the public good" (p. 33). Applying Stone's model to The Man of Mode shows how people used marriage and love to get respect and money, and gives us a new view of how marriage worked in Restoration society.

3. DISCUSSION

People generally think of Restoration comedies as enjoyable, but they are also strict criticisms of how England's society and government were set up and the way everyone ranked within them. The plays show a lot of stress, clashing beliefs, and how much control writers had over the development of society, and they frequently uncover a falling away of morals, all because of what people wanted for themselves and their advancement. This research uses Michel Foucault's ideas about how power and conversations work, Erving Goffman's ideas on how we present ourselves to others, and Lawrence Stone's opinions on marriage and moving up in society (from a sociological point of view) as three different ways of looking at things. William Congreve's The Way of the World, Richard Sheridan's The School for Scandal, and George Etherege's The Man of Mode are the tackled plays. Using each of these three approaches on each play, the research will look at how the comedies show the relationships and rankings of people in the Restoration period, and the following chapters will explain this in more detail.

3.1 Foucault's Power Structure in The Way of the World

Michel Foucault's work on power, specifically in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1977) and his ideas about social discipline, provides a useful way to think about the complicated power dynamics in William Congreve's The Way of the World (1700). Foucault did not consider power as something that prevent people from doing specific actions and behaviours. Instead, he saw it as a network of controls that create a 'docile body', the idea that means it changes how we act by watching us, making us 'normal', and getting us to believe what society says is true (1977, p. 95). Power, for Foucault, isn't obvious, it's spread around and subtle, and it works within our everyday routines and what most people accept as normal, not by being directly repressive. This Foucauldian idea is reinforced by how women are treated in Congreve's play, showing a society that 'disciplines' its people, limiting what they do and what they're interested in with powers that aren't clearly visible. Through the play's look at relationships, what people think of someone's good name, and inheritances, we can see how individuals are restricted by the way society is organised, and this shows the 'disciplinary logic' at the heart of Restoration society.

The play explores power and control within relationships, and a lot of what happens and is said is about sex and what it's for. In fact, their relationship shows that "power is everywhere…" (Foucault, 1977, p.93), even when people are being intimate. Unlike typical, overly sentimental love stories, Mirabell and Millamant's relationship is a clever, though subtle, game of power, and shows the struggles for control and how things work in such intimacy. Foucault said power is in every part of society, even between couples, and is expressed through negotiating, keeping an eye on each other, and accepting societal expectations. Everything about Mirabell's proposal involves carefully suspecting each other's motives while appearing to be making up. Congreve suggests that the relationship between Tess and Angel is not based on a pure relationship, but rather it is based on public expectations and social rules. Millamant's state that "These articles subscribed…I may by degrees dwindle into a wife" then Mirabell replies, "have I liberty to offer conditions…that when you are dwindled into a wife, I may not be beyond measure enlarged into a husband?" (p. 108) which reveals the contractual state of their relationship. So, Congreve's play shows Foucault's idea of power as something that we can see

as a part of the situation, relating to one another, and affecting even the most ordinary things we do, including the supposedly private world of love.

In Discipline and Punish (1977), Michel Foucault argues that modern societies try to shape people's actions by using subtle forms of discipline which allows specific norms to be normal and applicable. This is relevant to Mirabell and Millamant's relationship in The Way of the World, because the discussions about marriage are not only a test of how much they love each other, but also how much freedom and social standing they have. Millamant, refusing to become a servant to her husband, she states, "Ah! I'll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure" (Congreve, 2006, p. 85), showing another way to have power by rejecting the traditional role of women. It also confirms that power is not just about stopping things, but can also create things (Foucault, 1977; Mills, 2017), and allows and allows people to oppose and change the commonly held views. Her rejection of typical roles for women is a wider, satirical attack on how men and women were treated in Restoration times. The term 'performativity' does not mean how language and social practices describe reality, but also shape and define it in a broader way. According to Butler, performativity is not just an action that causes an immediate effect, but it is a continuous process that is revealed through time by repetition (Butler, 1990, p. 33). Because of this continual building, marriage isn't simply a structure outlined by what is considered typical, but is instead constantly forming with each couple who gets married and lives within that relationship. Millamant's negotiation of her control over her own marriage can be seen as a symbol of Butler's claim that gender is something we do, and that we act in ways that fit or go against what society expects, making things like marriage a setting for expressing and changing our identity.

Mirabell's proposal, with its language of contracts, "My dear Liberty, shall I leave thee?" (Congreve, 2006, p. 92), shows how 'biopower' works in love affairs, and uses the body as a way to spread the ideas Foucault talked about. Rather than being about love, marriage negotiations show how society controls and how people behave. Foucault (1977) says power is something we're used to, and operates on the most personal level using ways of 'disciplining' that make us 'normal' and get us to believe what society thinks. Here, the marriage contract in The Way of the World is not a private thing at all, but a space defined by culture where one person has power over another, and where they show off. The love story between Mirabell and Millamant, looking at gender, becomes a 'biopolitical' discussion about freedom, obedience, and how people relate to each other, and is controlled by hidden authorities. The idea of a contract in marriage is a symbol of the way self-identity is 'disciplined' within Restoration culture, shaping gender roles, controlling passion, and deciding what is considered desire. Looking at it this way, the possibility of romance in Congreve's play becomes a place of power, and power dynamics are built into the private world through lines of authority, making personal choices visible and public.

Moreover, Mirabell's and Millamant's relationship in The Way of the World reflects Michel Foucault's theory of 'panopticism': observing people, and through this surveillance, they internalise it and modify their behaviour without being directly observed (Foucault, 1977, p. 200). As they fall in love in their private spheres, they remain acutely aware of the societal standards and reputations imposed upon them. This sublimated surveillance results in calculated actions that follow accepted scripts. Mirabell's manipulation of Lady Wishfort illuminates this mechanism clearly: aware that seeing is believing, he navigates perceptions of him and their social consequences. The panoptic mechanism, he argues, "is not a substantial power but a modality of power … that is diffused and mediated, not located in the body of the sovereign, but spread through the capillaries of the social body" (Dore, 2009, p. 81). Therefore, it works not just by inscribing norms within the individual, but by instilling in the individual the foundation for self-observation as watched and as an object to be disciplined. Mirabell's assertion of "Why do we daily commit disagreeable and dangerous Actions? To save that Idol Reputation" (Congreve, 2006, p. 85) indicates his awareness of the influence of public opinion or the limits it imposes on possible performances. In Congreve's play, this is where the characters must learn to negotiate reputation and conformity, aspects that are not entirely public in nature considering the context of art or madness; this also demonstrates how both private and public ambitions are influenced by disciplinary power (we can even observe how sociality responds to perceived surveillance and social coercion).

Therefore, Foucault's very careful ideas about power really help us to make sense of all the complicated connections between people in The Way of the World. He doesn't think of power as simply something that pushes down on us and stops us from doing things. Instead, he believes it's a power that's spread out and exists in how we relate to each other, and it works by influencing what people think of themselves and how they behave, through things that are just built into the way society functions. Marriage may or may not be a plan to be 'spelt out'; it might be a 'transcendence,' a contract, and for that reason, it may seem that there is no such thing as an irreversible or entirely accountable act of marriage that 'individuals are not free' to make marriage solely their responsibility. When they cannot take more responsibility, they can take it earlier, as the partnership between the individual and society begins to fluctuate, moving back and forth between representatives and social structures, with the representatives disappearing and social representatives re-emerging. This suggests that a human being is indeed free to decide wholly subjectively. The characters' actions and manoeuvres within and among asymmetrical power relations also illustrate Foucault's view of power as an ever-present, fluid force continuously negotiated through human interactions and maintained by collective norms.

3.2 Goffman's Social Performance in The School for Scandal

Erving Goffman's dramaturgy of social action, as explained in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (2023), provides a powerful framework for character behaviour in The School for Scandal (1777) by Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Goffman identifies daily social life as a performance where individuals engage in impression management to meet social norms. He argues that "Given the fact that the individual effectively projects a definition of the situation when he enters the presence of others" (1956, p. 6). This framework shows the performance of Sheridan's characters, which clearly manages their social existence to gain social approval or to avoid scandal within a society. Moreover, the narcissism and vanity depicted in Restoration Comedy are particularly highlighted by themes of decorum and hierarchy. Lady Sneerwell and Joseph Surface, for instance, exemplify Goffman's concept of 'front stage' behavior; When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it. Whether his acquisition of the role was primarily motivated by a desire to perform the given task or by a desire to maintain the corresponding front, the actor will find that he must do both. Further, if the individual takes on a task that is not only new to him but also unestablished in the society. or if he attempts to change the light in which his task is viewed, he is likely to find that there are already several well-established fronts among which he must choose. Thus, when a task is given a new front we seldom find that the front it is given is itself new. (p. 17)

they appear to be virtuous in front of others, while leading deceitful lives behind the scenes. Their hypocrisy underscores the conflict between surface and substance which is a central theme in Goffman's sociology and Sheridan's satire. Furthermore, Restoration theatre in the form of the comedy of manners highlighted wit, affectation, and role-playing of civility; "of men and women living in a social world ruled by convention. Its 'manners' are not simply the behavior of humanity in general but the affectations and cultured veneer of a highly developed and self-conscious group." (Nicoll, 1963, p. 158). Placed within this tradition, Sheridan's The School for Scandal explores social maneuvers of miscommunication, reputation management and establishment, and moral grandstanding while emphasizing the relevance of Goffman's concepts of impression management and redefining of the self.

One of Goffman's key ideas is that people have a 'front stage' and a 'backstage' self. The 'front stage', in turn, alludes to public identity or how a person behaves with others in professional or social situations. Meanwhile, the 'backstage' is where people can behave freely and leave their public mask at the door; "… the individual who presents a character and not an aspect of the character he projects, thus forcing upon the audience an image of the man behind the mask." (Goffman, 1956, p. 135). In The School for Scandal, Sir Peter Teazle, whose reputation as a husband in society is in sharp contrast to his frustration behind closed doors. This circumstance is itself an example of Goffman's notion of role conflict, for Sir Peter Teazle must negotiate the character he presents as a good husband against his own inner unhappiness.

Later, Goffman (1956) writes that front stage is where the performance is given, and the backstage is where the performer can meet, rest and drop the role; "By invoking a backstage style, individuals can transform any region into a backstage." (p. 78). In addition to Sir Peter Teazle's confusion about his identity as a husband, Goffman's concept of the individual is constantly pulled between the presentation of self in society and reconciling that with internalised feelings, which may be considered to motivate him. Sir Peter says: "I confess that appearances are against me. If you will afford me your Patience I make no doubt but I shall explain everything to your satisfaction." (Sheridan, 1777, p.72). The play's humour arises from the characters' constantly hesitation between outward behaviours dictated by society and their true desires, a duality that is effectively captured in Goffman's concept of front stage versus backstage action. Much of the play's comic scenes comes from the contrast between the characters' personalities that they act and their real identities.

Lady Teazle is a significant character in the play, and a really good illustration of Erving Goffman's 'sign-equipment'. At the beginning, she was a good wife to Sir Peter Teazle. However, as the play progresses Lady Teazle, perhaps 'evolves' is a better description, and reveals a second impulsive personality, which was motivated by her desire for advancement and social status. Her behaviour proves how accurate Goffman's idea that "Since the vital secrets of a show are visible backstage and since performers behave out of character while there, it is natural to expect that the passage from the front region to the back region." (1956, p. 70). Where he explained that people behave in certain ways and adapt their behaviour according to who is present and their reaction. She's therefore uncertain about whether to be the person in private who is trying to be accepted by respectable society, or the dutiful wife that everyone anticipates. Her ambition and wish to be more important and climb the social ladder, impacts on her dealings with others most notably Charles Surface. Lady Teazle's statement when she said, "Authority! no, to be sure—if you wanted authority over me, you should have adopted me and not married me." (Sheridan, 1777, p. 21) is a very direct statement of the pressure to conform. The disparity between her true desires and her public presentation shows how large this difference is. This fluctuation between her private and public self is essential to Goffman's theory, and offers us a method for understanding Lady Teazle's growth throughout the play.

Charles Surface complicates Goffman's ideas about 'role playing' even further. Charles, the appealing, somewhat naughty character who is seeking to improve his situation, is entirely 'performing' - full of clever conversation and amiability when in company. However, beneath this facade he is more complex, and driven as much by a need to be liked as by his ambitions. In fact, what Charles says supports Goffman's observation that a performer's triumph rests on how successfully they manage the audience's beliefs and to able to convince them. He's constructed a public persona to win favour and avoid difficulty, and his personal life is

likely riddled with moral failings and unfaithfulness. He even says, "there's nothing in the world so noble as a man of Sentiment!" (Sheridan, 1777, p. 72), and this displays his awareness of the situation and links to Goffman's idea of social performance. The remark suggests that people frequently act a part due to societal expectations, or the desires of the audience, and this is often different from what they really feel. For example, the relationship between Lady Teazle and others shows this conflict between what people really want and how they pretend to be, and emphasises Goffman's idea that social life is like a drama.

Looking at these social performances can give us a really deep understanding of the relationships and power within The School for Scandal. Sheridan's main characters move around the complicated, ranked world of social acceptance and disapproval by acting out their 'front stage' and 'back stage' selves. Goffman's ideas of managing impressions and being torn between roles help us understand what makes the characters do what they do, for them, 'acting' is how they keep their place in society and shows the balance of power in their world. Goffman's attention to establishing and protecting status against 'what society wants' is therefore very important to the play's concerns.

3.3 Lawrence Stone's Approach to Marriage and Social Mobility in The Man of Mode

George Etherege's The Man of Mode from 1676 makes fun of marriage as something people use to get ahead socially, and that shows how few morals there were in England at that time. Lawrence Stone's important 1979 book, Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800, looks at how changes in history affected the way marriages are shown in the play. According to Stone, people back then saw marriage mostly as being about finances, social status and benefits, certainly not about falling in love or being with someone you truly enjoyed;

The core of Stone's subject lay in the 'very significant changes over time' which 'took place in the Early Modern period in family functions, in emotional relationships, in character formation, in attitudes towards and the practice of sexuality, and towards the number of children born and the care taken, within marriage. (Stone, as cited in Houlebrooke, 2013, p. 14)

In fact, Stone (1979) described marriage as a business arrangement, not a romantic one. Families used it to become richer, accumulate more things, and climb higher in society; "… For persons of property it involved a series of distinct steps. The first was a written legal contract between the parents concerning the financial arrangements" (Stone, 1979, p. 30). Dorimant in Etherege's work is a brilliant illustration of this notion that when he tries to find a lover, it's not for any real fondness, but to benefit from the situation. He indicates that he will marry her based on position not on love; "Believe me—a wife, to repair the ruins of my estate that needs it. "(Etherege, 1676, p. 91) This perfectly demonstrates how marriage was presented in the play.

Houlebrooke (2013) has pointed out that marriage contracts in early modern England were frequently made to secure money and political advantages, especially for those in the upper levels of society. Etherege also, treats women as items for sale in a social environment, a viewpoint that resonates with Stone's assessment of how women were regarded at that time. A woman's worth was generally tied to what she could bring to a man's standing, not her principles, good character, or emotions; "For him the prime object of marriage was the apt and cheerful conversation of man with woman, to comfort and refresh him against the solitary life" (Milton, as cited in Stone, 1979, p. 102). We can see this in his dealings with Harriet and Mrs. Loveit: he selects them for their wealth and social importance, not any affection for them. This treating of marriage as a business mirrors wider worries in the Restoration period about losing one's good name, what you'd inherited, and being able to climb the social hierarchy (Gill, 2012) .

Furthermore, Etherege shows marriage as more a method of operating within the strict levels of Restoration society than as a lovely, romantic idea. Considering marriage and family inheritances from the beginning, and how they support these straightforward deals, makes the connection between the Grant and Hussey families much more obvious; as Bonfield (1983) has demonstrated, marriage settlements in early modern England depended on family line such as moving property and forming alliances to maintain the partnership in marriage; "trusts, for example, were employed to enable married women to hold property independently of their spouses." (p. 70). Dorimant's affairs with Harriet and Mrs. Loveit show a completely practical way of thinking. He's more interested in what he can gain than in any true emotion and his courtship of them is more about strategy than genuine feelings. Harriet has a lot of money and wants to gain her financial reputation in society. So Dorimant's problems in love are not what they seem; they are actually planned moves in a fairly underhanded attempt to climb the social hierarchy. This is one of the common themes in Restoration comedy about how we try to appear to others financially. His extreme caution regarding the idea of marriage demonstrates how people of the Restoration era thought that it was clever and natural to control and manipulate others to get what they want.

The Man of Mode shows Dorimant's interactions with everyone, especially with Mrs. Loveit, and how he tries to manage things and how others react; "A fine mortifying reputation 'twill be for a woman of your pride, wit, and quality!" (Etherege, 1676, p. 28). Harriet differs from Mrs. Loveit, she is smart enough to analyse Dorimant's speech and she does not let him to fulfil his plans and tricks; "Dorimant. May I not hope?"," Harriet. That depends on you and not on me…" (Etherege, 1676, p. 87). By doing so, Harriet illustrates a viewpoint about marriage, which is totally different from his views, where marriage is seen as a business arrangement. Ungerer (1990) argues that Restoration heroines like Harriet often challenge the freedom of a 'libertine' by asking for a return to emotional connection instead of just being something pretty to help a man improve his social position.

Dorimant struggles to maintain complete control over Harriet, which hints at the emergence of continually shifting ideas that will challenge the traditional notions of power in relationships. His despair indicates a deeper conflict than the usual one between love and ambition; between control and equality. Instead, Etherege has Harriet to undermine Stone's marriage as an institutional tactic, criticizing the gendered implications of social advancement through marriage much more subtle than in Stone mentioned. The analysis of Stone and his traditionalist narrative confirm this instrumental aspect of the estate of marriage among early modern English; when being part of the marriage market was the only way to accumulate wealth:

They were particularly common among successful wealthy bourgeoisie without ambitions to transform their children into gentlemen. These upwardly mobile groups might cut the ties of blood which bound them to their humbler relatives back home, but would cement business connections with their economic peers or superiors by a new set of kinship relations. (1979, p. 98).

In George Etherege's The Man of Mode, how important having a wife is to Dorimant is very obvious. He's looking for a wife to benefit himself, not because he's in love. Mostly he wants to move up in society. He is after Mrs. Loveit because of her money and how well-regarded she is; he doesn't actually love her, and he wants Harriet for similar reasons related to what she has, which shows how much romance in Restoration times was about money and advantage.

Stone's scorn also reflects a shift in the cultural value of marriage by the end of the seventeenth century. Marriage was originally about keeping families joined together. But gradually marriage turns to be understood as a means to fulfil individual's specific desires. In the play of The Man of Mode, Dorimant and Harriet particularly show this transformation. They are confused between their personal desires and what society should think about them. Also, they try to balance this behavioural confusion. Harriet acts differently when she meets a man. She does not like to be in love in an ordinary way. This would indicate that her personality wants to be in love with her own terms and conditions. What Stone stated about women being seen as inferior is clearly shown in the representation of woman in this play; "Among the population in general, only one woman in three could even sign her name in a marriage in 1754..." (Stone, 1979, p. 144). Dorimant's words, "You women make 'em, who are commonly as unreasonable in that as you are at play; without the advantage, be on your side a man can never quietly give over when he's weary" (Etherege, 1676, p. 38) are a perfect example of how marriage and relationships were not considered as a helpful bond that is based on social acceptance. The way Dorimant views women as being part of a social game, not as people who can make their own decisions, fits with Stone's explanation of the different rules for men and women in marriage in England at that time.

CONCLUSION

Restoration comedy isn't simply for amusement, but it is a cleverly disguised, yet strong, criticism of the accepted ways of life at the time. The plays use a delicate mix of cleverness, acting, and mockery to expose the pressures and inconsistencies in the society of that era, and in particular how power, what people thought of the one, and climbing the social ladder were all constantly shifting during the Restoration. This study, investigated George Etherege's The Man of Mode (1676), William Congreve's The Way of the World (1700), and Richard Sheridan's The School for Scandal (1777). The study used the ideas of Foucault, Goffman and Stone to show how playwrights use the stage as a looking glass, showing human and social behavior with a farcical and obvious flair which is typical of these plays .

Foucault's view of power being in the structure of society, not in straightforward control, and working through habits and standards we have absorbed, is easy to see in how Congreve's characters act during courtship and in love. Goffman's 'dramaturgy', the idea that life is like a performance, helps us to grasp the idea of presenting an identity to the world while being watched, and the difference between how Sheridan's flawed people appear publicly and what they actually want. Stone's thoughts on marriage being a financial and status move show us how calculating relationships are in Etherege's world, where getting married is often about getting ahead socially .

These theories gave us different angles on examining the plays, and they also helped us to understand the concerns and wishes of the Restoration people. The comedies, full of characters who trick each other, make plans, and bargain within very firm rules of society, aren't about one particular time. They examine questions of being real, having control over one's life, and putting on an act, and these are issues with continued relevance when comparing history, different cultures and human beings.

REFERENCES

1) Bonfield, L. (1983). Marriage Settlements, 1601-1740: the Adoption of the Strict Settlement. Cambridge University Press.
2) Burns, E. (1987). Restoration Comedy: Crises of Desire and Identity. Springer.
3) Butler, J. (1990). Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Routledge.
4) Butler, J., & Trouble, G. (1990). Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Gender Trouble, 3(1), 3-17.
5) Congreve, W. (2006). The Way of the World and Other Plays. Penguin UK.
6) Dore, C. (2009). The Panoptic Spectacle: Foucault and the Politics of Visibility in Literature. Palgrave Macmillan.
7) Etherege, G. (1676). The Man of Mode: Or, Sir Fopling Flutter. A Comedy. Acted at the Duke's Theatre. J. Tonson: and sold.

8) Foucault, M. (1977). Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Vintage.
9) Gill, E. R. (2012). An Argument for Same-Sex Marriage: Religious Freedom, Sexual Freedom, and Public Expressions of Civic Equality. Georgetown University Press.
10) Goffman, E. (1956). The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre
11) Gordon, C., & Foucault, M. (1980). Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972− 1977.
12) Houlebrooke, R. A. (2013). The English Family 1450-1700. Routledge.
13) Nicoll, A. (1963). A History of Restoration Drama 1660-1700 (Vol. 1). The University Press.
14) Sheridan, R. B. (2008). The School for Scandal and other Plays. Oxford University Press.
15) Stone, L. (1979). The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (Vol. 43). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
16) Ungerer, G. (1990). Thomas Shadwell's" The Libertine": a forgotten Restoration Don Juan Play. SEDERI: Yearbook of the Spanish and Portuguese Society for English Renaissance Studies, (1), 222-239.