

ASSIGNMENT

Compare and Contrast John Webster's "the Duchess of Malfi"
and Aphra Behn's "The Rover" as Jacobean Revenge Tragedy
and a Restoration Comedy respectively.

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GENERAL OVER-VIEW

In this study we will look at the similarities as well as differences characterising literary works of these two epochs: Jacobean and restoration period using "The Duchess of Malfi" by John Webster and AphraBehn's "The Rover" respectively.

Jacobean literature is a body of works written during the reign of Jame1 of England (1603-1625).It succeeds Elizabethan literature and precedes Caroline literature. Jacobean literature is always dark in mood, questioning the stability of social order; some of William Shakespeare's greatest tragedies may date from the beginning of the period, and other dramatist including John Webster, were often preoccupied with the problem of evil. Though an eminent motif in Jacobean tragic plays, revenge as the central idea in tragic works has been observed through time, be it by supernatural or natural forces. During the classical era, it is evident in "Hippolytus", Seneca's tragedies and in the Elizabethan- renaissance period by William Shakespeare in his "Hamlet".

According to Ashley H. Thorndike in his "The Relations of Hamlet to Contemporary Revenge Plays", plays are characterised as revenge tragedy when the "leading motif is revenge and whose main actions deals with the progress of this revenge leading to the death of the murderers and often to the death of the avenger himself. Good examples of plays characterised as revenge plays include: William Shakespeare's "Hamlet", Thomas Middleton's "Changeling" & "The Revenger's Tragedy"

Works between 1660- 1700 are called restoration works. This is because the restoration of the Stuart monarchy (Charles II) in place of the puritan regime headed by Oliver Cromwell brought a renaissance (rebirth) of English drama.

Restoration comedy relied upon sophisticated repartee and knowledge of the exclusive code of manners in high society, the plot being on the complex intrigues of the marriage market. These plays are often centered on love adultery and including gossip, eavesdropping and scheming; conversations are often ironic. Example of works with the above characteristics include: Thomas Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, William Congreve's *"The Way Of The World"* Aphra Behn's *"The Rover"* and more.

Revenge tragedy seeks to unleash the carnal side of human nature on stage in a grotesque way while restoration comedy satirises through ridicule the vices of social, political religious and matrimonial life of a people in efforts to re-instate virtue.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Satire is chiefly used in both works: In *"The Rover"* Willmore's inconsistency is used to satirise the relationship status of people at the time; a time when love is replaced with its ironic counterpart lust; a time when man is driven by pleasure and selfish desires. Belville who finds love has to go through hurdles to finally be with the woman he

loves but Willmore the inconsistent one, who never stays with a woman more than supposed finds no difficulty wooing as much women as possible.

Still on the use of satire in "The Duchess of Malfi" Bosola ridicules an old lady that appears on stage in the first act of the play for her artificial looks. At this point, the reader is exposed to a world where women wear make-up to conceal their actual appearance. The high ecclesiastical position of a cardinal is also satirised; in this work the cardinal is a very heartless man who uses his position to commit atrocities and pervade justice.

Machiavelli/ Hobbian figure: Ferdinand and cardinal will go to any level to get what they want even if it entails foregoing their sister's happiness. They keep her from getting married and when she finally does her head and that of her accomplice pays the ultimate price (death). They do not care about who dies or how they die so long as they get what they want. The same is found in "the Duchess of Malfi" where a brother(DonPedro) is willing to give his sister's hand in marriage to a man who does not love her for material benefit and to maintain his family's social status. Yet another character who exhibit's these traits is Willmore whomoves from one woman to another for sexual satisfaction without exception to who he gets it from; he always gets what he wants either through wit or his sword.

In both works there is remarkable employment of wit. In "The Rover" we are presented with a character Willmore; a man who has nothing but his wit and sword, with which he becomes friends with all who are wealthy and of noble birth and above

all win the heart of virtually every woman that comes by. Hellena who is another chief character is also seen as witty. As stated earlier this is not peculiar to Restoration comedy. In the "Duchess of Malfi" Antonio and Delio's discussion in the very first scene is characterised by wit. Cardinal's and Ferdinand's hypocritical wit in advising their sister against marrying for the second time is another instance where we see the display of wit. It is through wit that Bosola tricks the Duchess to eat the apricot which confirmed his suspicion of her being pregnant.

Class: difference and conflict with regards to social stratification is evident in both works: the reason why Belville is denied Florinda's hand in marriage is as a result of his low social status. Ferdinand becomes more aggrieved when he finds out who the Duchess' husband is, he takes this upon the children whom he considered of low birth. In his words; call them your children//for though our national law distinguish bastards//from true legitimate issues, //compassionate nature makes them all equal. Act IV Scene I

DISTINCTIVE ATTRIBUTE

RESTORATION COMEDY "The Rover"

No Clear Distinction between Love and Lost: in works of this period of which the Rover is an example, love at first sight is celebrated. A clear evidence is with how all young men in town are ready to give away anything for a woman who has no virtue but beauty. Willmore professes love to every new woman he comes in contact with, from Angelica Bianca to Hellena, down

to La Nuche in the second part of the play (he says I love you, when he really means I want you for the night)

Down Play on Virtue and Love for Vices: consistency, a virtue that should be up-held is down-played and its opposite (inconsistency) becomes the order of the day. Willmore who is the Father of inconsistency (the rover) is not repudiated by his society but is allowed to marry one of the virtuous women in town.

Questionable Characterisation:

Willmore: one who never gets satisfied and as such, continually demands for more

Father fool: the father of fools

Blunt: Dull in understanding; slow of discernment.

Rag- a shabby beggarly fellow; a ragamuffin

The above characterisations give a clue to the personality of the individuals bearing them.

The title of the work gives a clue to what the work is about: in "The Rover" inconsistency becomes one of the major themes made prominent by the main character (Willmore).

Intricacies of Marriage: Blunt and Father-fool are ready to get married to a dwarf & giant respectively whom they refer to as monsters in exchange for material benefit. Don Pedro is ready to give his sister away to a man who does not love her in order to gain wealth and also maintain the social status of the family.

“The Duchess of Malfi”

In revenge tragedies the revengers are always killed: this theme is peculiar only to revenge works; Bosola who is the key executioner (the actual villain of the work) is wounded by Ferdinand and eventually dies.

Trauma/Madness: after the false scene where the Duchess is shown the dead bodies of her husband and children she becomes highly traumatised and wished for nothing more but death since to her there is nothing more to leave for. She continually laments on her loss and subsequently runs mad. After all the atrocities Ferdinand commits he is dealt a huge blow and suffered from what was worse than madness; lycanthropy: condition where he believes he is a wolf, who goes around digging dead remains in odd hours of the night.

Play within a play/ dumb show: the Duchess recounts an anecdote on the salmon fish and its price in the market in comparison to the dog fish which claim superiority because of its niche. Ferdinand in Act III Scene II draws an illustration on the importance of reputation by giving a short witty account on the three friends: love Reputation and death.

In revenge tragedies there is almost always a fifth and final scene, many characters are killed and we see many corpses on stage. In the last scene Bosola strikes Antonio unknowingly, in realizing his mistake strikes cardinal, who in turn is stricken from behind by Ferdinand. They all die in the scene leaving it in blood.

CONCLUSION

With the above foregoing it has been made clear that no period has exclusive features that are limited to works of that period and that similar themes over-lap in different genres, this is possibly because all forms of literature originated from poetry. Tragic and comic work all come from the drama genre that stemmed from religion.