theatres...

by Jack Denole

Papery, capgtty, knaw-... these are the stock elements of the Restoration comedy. The 'Man of Mode,' as the title suggests, is no exception. It amorous interplay forms a framework for the witty burlesque of pipe and repentance.

The main character, Dominant, is a knave. He is, at any moment in the play, extricating the emotions of two (or usually three) women. One of his women, Mrs. Lovell, a dowish viscountess who has dropped from his favor, decides to play the coquette. This is where the fun occurs. In an almost incredibly ludicrous fashion, Sir Fopling Flutter, the would-be French cavalier, is used by Mrs. Lovell to excite Dominant's jealousy. These complications generate the action for about four acts, until they are finally resolved to everyone's satisfaction in the last.

As in most Restoration comedies, there is no particular moral, the knave being one of the most engaging characters (although he does repent, at least normally, in the end). The title remains the same, the coquette continues, and the audience has been, if uplifted, at least entertained by the silliness of it all.

Foppery ridiculed in 'Man of Mode'

The choice of this play by George Etherege, as opposed to one by a more famous Restoration writer, for example, Congreve, is curious. It is refreshing to see another playwright's efforts in this genre, and those who see it will surely say that Sir Fopling Flutter was the most ridiculous character.

A Restoration comedy is by nature hard to produce. The dialogue must be convincing, not in contemporary speech, but in the manner of speaking of that period. In essence, it must be affected. The players seemed to achieve this with a degree of success, the several lags in dialogue serving only to accentuate the good performances. In particular, Mr. Melrose, as Sir Fopling Flutter, was magnificent. It is unfortunate that Etherege introduced him into the play as he did, and that this lovable fool had a lesser part in the play as a whole.

The costumes and staging were very good, and, in this respect, the play hardly seemed like a college performance.

One criticism of the play is that it tends to drag in parts, perhaps due to the players, who due to the script, or both.

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