

# Anti-Sentimental Comedy

(Part-1)

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Before dealing with 'Anti-Sentimental Comedy', we should discuss about 'Sentimental Comedy'.

'Sentimental Comedy', a dramatic genre of the 18th century, denotes plays in which middle-class protagonists triumphantly overcome a series of moral trials. The 'Sentimental Comedy' is related to our emotions. 'Sentimental Comedy' reflected contemporary philosophical conceptions of humans as inherently good but capable of being led astray through bad example. 'Sentimental Comedy' had its roots in early the 18th century tragedy, which had a vein of morality similar to that of 'Sentimental Comedy' but had loftier characters and subject matters than 'Sentimental Comedy'. A 'Sentimental Comedy' is comedy that simply address itself to the beholder's love of goodness rather than humour. It shows the morality of its situations and the virtue of characters. The best-known 'Sentimental Comedy' is Sir Richard Steele's The Conscious Lovers (1722). 'Sentimental Comedy' continued to coexist with such conventional comedies as Oliver Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer (1773) and Richard Brinkley Sheridan's The Rivals (1775) until the sentimental genre waned in the early 19th century.

'Anti-Sentimental Comedy' is reaction against 'Sentimental Comedy'. The pioneer of 'Anti-Sentimental Comedy' is Oliver Goldsmith who criticized the 'Sentimental Comedy' in his essay "Essay on the Theatre" or "A Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy". He argued that the true function of a comedy was to give a humorous exhibition of the follies and vices of men and women and to rectify them by exciting laughter. Goldsmith opposed 'Sentimental Comedy' because in place of laughter and humour, it provided tears and distressing situations, pathetic lovers, serious heroes and honest servants.

He argued that 'Sentimental Comedy' was more like tragedy than a comedy. If comedy was to trespass upon tragedy, humour will have right to express itself. On two occasions and with unequal success, Goldsmith tried to count more than true moral characters. Its plot usually revolves around intrigues of lust and greed the self-interested cynicism of the characters.

As a result of the reaction of Goldsmith and Sheridan, the 'Comedy of Sentiment' was driven out, gone were the pathos and morality, preaching and meddling sentimentality. Their place was taken with humour and mirth, pleasant dialogues and wit. The writers who brought about the revival of true comedy in 18<sup>th</sup> century were Henry Fielding, Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Sheridan.

**Some characteristic features of 'Anti-Sentimental Comedy' are listed below:**

- Amusing intrigues and situations
- Satirical comedy and Irony
- Marriage for love and marriage for money
- Wit of language and verbal dialogue
- Farce and disguise
- Emotions have boundaries

The above-mentioned features are seen in prominent plays like The Rival and The School for Scandal of Richard Brinsley Sheridan and She Stoops to Conquer of Oliver Goldsmith. These three plays are the best examples of the 'Anti-Sentimental Comedy'. This kind of plays presented harsh reality and farcical elements existed in society, and thus, criticised society for its betterment.