

Public Abstract

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Title:Reflective Gazes: Character and Audience Perception in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*

The significance of William Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* has been hotly debated by literary critics for decades, and it is no wonder: in his final work, Wycherley focuses not on the plots and intrigues of the typical cool Restoration rake-hero, but rather on scenes of obsession and excess. In presenting two main characters with differing philosophies and two interconnected plots, Wycherley twists the customary elements of Restoration comedy in order to twist his audience's perception back upon themselves.

Wycherley's final dramatic work is a highly complex and sophisticated commentary on the emptiness of Restoration social practices and the need for a new social ideal, and a new perception of the self. By manipulating our view of the main character, Manly, and his approach to the World, Wycherley subsequently alters our view of commonly accepted standards of judgment and perception. In this psychoanalytic study of character, language, and dramatic structure, we find that *The Plain Dealer* is not a contradictory failure, as some critics would propose, but rather a carefully constructed portrait of obsession, desire, and the need for social correction.