



Outside the Book

Comedy

Josie Long:

Theatrical Comedy isn't like anything you'll find on telly today. In fact, writers like Shakespeare would probably struggle in your average sitcom and, alas, shift very few stand-up DVDs.

As well as slinging more puns than an embarrassing Dad, comedies celebrate youth, desire and fertility (with a little homoeroticism for good measure).

They challenge moral codes and make particular fun of hypocrisy and pretension.

Most of the gags come from social mishaps, which escalate to the point of absurdity, like in Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, which features more cheating spouses than a rural *Swingers* party.

But all that human silliness has a social function. It's meant to make us cringe so hard, we won't make similar mistakes in the real world.

And no matter how anarchic they get, it all resolves happily at the end in that boring old, social mender... marriage.

But worry not ye singletons, some writers satirise their wedding endings. Wycherley's wedding party, for instance, is made up of a rather shoddy lot of cheats, cads and cuckolds.