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THE RESTORATION WAY OF THE WORLD: A STUDY OF RESTORATION COMEDY

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THE RESTORATION WAY OF THE WORLD:

A STUDY OF RESTORATION COMEDY

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THE RESTORATION WAY OF THE WORLD:
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The English comedies of the Restoration have suffered strange fortunes, both on the stage of their own time and with the critics later. Conceived and produced with boldness and vigor, they have since been viewed, if at all, with hesitation and timidity. Even before Jeremy Collier's attack the morality of the comedies had been questioned, and since that time there has been a consistent and almost constant refusal to approach the comedies on their own terms. With the possible exception of Walpole's short essay, there has been scarcely a single study, from 1700 to yesterday, to examine the comedies by their own standards and by the standards of their time without the prejudicial influence of early moralistic denunciations. As a result, little justice has been done to a group of plays that, at their best, represent the last great English comedy, and, at their peak moments, rank

with the monuments of English literature of any period, any form or impulse.

Despite denials, especially among the more modern critics, most criticism of Restoration comedy has fallen into one of two extremes -- the extremes best represented by the comments of Lamb and Macaulay. Once the moral view of the comedies had been questioned by Collier and others of his time and by Macaulay later, many students felt obligated, perhaps justifiably, to defend that view. Most critics, however, have tried to answer such men as Collier and Macaulay instead of looking where the real morality of the plays lies. Consequently, they were defeated from the start, because, granted their assumptions, Macaulay and Collier cannot be refuted. Consequently we have the phenomenon of a student such as Nicoll, for example, who, though presumably in a position for a more reasoned view, ends by voicing sentiments closely akin to the earlier attacks, that is, by lamenting the immorality of the Restoration stage.

The only real alternative to this view so far proposed, and one which is just as far from the truth, is the position taken by Lamb. According to this approach, the reader of Restoration comedy will recognize the setting as a make-believe world and will then find amusement and pleasure in these excellent representations of life in Cloud-Cuckoo Land. Some of the best and most recent

studies of the comedies -- those, for instance, of Dobrée and Fujimura -- while valuable, differ from Lamb's view only in degree.

In sources contemporary with the comedies themselves, the most spectacular remarks upon Restoration comedy occur in the various documents associated with the Collier controversy, documents which, in one way or another, have been responsible, or partly so, for the ill repute into which Restoration comedy has fallen at various times in its history. Counter to these more or less violent attacks and vastly more important are the calmer views available in prefaces and dedications to some of the plays and the comments of several critics of the time, especially John Dryden and John Dennis.

Since that time opinions have been many and varied, consistent only to the degree that they fall into the two extremes of criticism of Restoration comedy as artificial merriment or obscene jest. Not until the nineteenth century do the opinions begin to appear which, second in importance only to the documents contemporary with the comedies, are particularly associated with the history of the criticism of Restoration comedy.

In 1819 Hazlitt's Lectures on the English Comic Writers appeared, including a lecture on Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar. Introducing that lecture, Hazlitt suggested the artificial note that was to be so

frequently sounded later as characteristic of the English comedies of the Restoration:

> Comedy is a 'graceful ornament to the civil order; the Corinthian capital of polished society.' Like the mirrors which have been added to the sides of one of our theatres, it reflects the images of grace, of gaiety, and pleasure double, and completes the perspective of human life. To read a good comedy is to keep the best company in the world, where the best things are said, and the most amusing happen. The wittiest remarks are always at hand to give birth to the happiest conceptions. Sense makes strange havoc of nonsense. Refinement acts as a foil to affectation, and affectation to ignorance. Sentence after sentence tells. We don't know which to admire most, the observation, or the answer to it. We would give our fingers to be able to talk so ourselves, or to hear others talk so. In turning over the pages of the best comedies, we are almost transported to another world, and escape from this dull age to one that was all life, and whim, and mirth, and humour.[1]

The discussions which follow of four of the principal writers of the period are of value, but the tone had already been set.

It was a tone further defined by Lamb in his essay "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Age." The comedies of the last age, according to Lamb, are "a passing pageant, where we should sit as unconcerned at the issues, for life or death, as at the battle of the frogs and mice."[2] They

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[1]William Hazlitt, Lectures on the English Comic Writers, Vol. VI of The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1931), p. 70.

[2]Charles Lamb, "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Age," in The Dramatic Essays of Charles Lamb, ed. Brander Matthews (London: Chatto and Windus, 1891), p. 154.

are not to be judged, he further indicates, by our usages, since "No reverend institutions are insulted by their proceedings, for they have none among them."[1] Lamb's essay, which is still the best exposition of the artificial land of merry make-believe found by so many in Restoration comedy, continues:

> They are a world of themselves almost as much as fairyland. . . . The Fainalls and the Mirabels, the Dorimants and the Lady Touchwoods, in their own sphere, do not offend my moral sense; in fact, they do not appeal to it at all. They seem engaged in their proper element. They break through no laws or conscientious restraints; they know of none. They have got out of Christendom into the land -- what shall I call it? -- of cuckoldry, -- the Utopia of gallantry, where pleasure is duty, and the manners perfect freedom. It is altogether a speculative scene of things, which has no reference whatever to the world that is.[2]

At the other extreme from this and representing, after Collier, the most vigorous denunciation of Restoration comedy, are Macaulay's views expressed in his review of Leigh Hunt's edition of the works of several of the dramatists of the Restoration. Macaulay finds ample grounds for charges of immorality in these comedies. This part of our literature, he says, "is a disgrace to our language and our national character." Further, he says, "Its indecency, though perpetually such as is condemned not less by the rules of good taste than by those of

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[1] Ibid., p. 153.

[2] Ibid., pp. 151-152.

morality, is not, in our opinion, so disgraceful a fault as its singularly inhuman spirit."[1] It is a world, he continues, in which adultery is not an error but the calling of fine gentlemen. Macaulay quite correctly refutes Lamb's argument in this respect:

> In the name of art, as well as in the name of virtue, we protest against the principle that the world of pure comedy is one into which no moral enters. If comedy be an imitation, under whatever conventions, of real life, how is it possible that it can have no reference to the great rule which directs life, and to feelings which are called forth by every incident of life? If what Mr. Charles Lamb says were correct, the inference would be that these dramatists did not in the least understand the very first principles of their craft. Pure landscape-painting into which no light or shade enters, pure portrait-painting into which no expression enters, are phrases less at variance with sound criticism than pure comedy into which no moral enters.[2]

Macaulay is harsher with individual dramatists: Wycherley's only originality, he says, is his profligacy.

Somewhat later, in an essay that is frequently overlooked, Thackeray, who is speaking principally of Congreve's plays, continued the line already well established by Lamb:

> Reading in these plays now, is like shutting your ears and looking at people dancing. What does it mean? the measures, the grimaces, the bowing, shuffling, and retreating, the cavalier seul advancing upon those ladies -- those ladies and men twirling round at the

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[1]Thomas B. Macaulay, "Leigh Hunt," The Miscellaneous Works of Lord Macaulay, ed. Lady Trevelyan (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, n.d.), V, 114.

[2]Ibid., pp. 119-120.

> end in a mad galop, after which everybody bows and the quaint rite is celebrated. Without the music we can't understand that comic dance of the last century -- its strange gravity and gaiety, its decorum or its indecorum. It has a jargon of its own quite unlike life; a sort of moral of its own unlike life too. I'm afraid it's a heathen mystery, symbolising a Pagan doctrine; protesting -- as the Pompeians very likely were, assembled at their theatre and laughing at their games; as Sallust and his friends, and their mistresses protested, crowned with flowers, with cups in their hands -- against the new, hard, ascetic, pleasure-hating doctrine whose gaunt disciples, lately passed over from the Asian shores of the Mediterranean, were for breaking the fair images of Venus and flinging the altars of Bacchus down.[1]

With the appearance of George Meredith's "An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit," the more recent impulses to examine the nature and sources of humor and its relationship to the plays rather than the purely moral aspects of the comedies become readily apparent. According to Meredith, the requirements for comedy are a society of cultivated men and women, social equality of the sexes, and a subtle delicacy. The comedy of manners, he says, began as a combative performance, but sometimes went too far. In Meredith's view Lamb's discussion of Restoration comedy is ludicrous, since to love comedy, he says, one must know the real world, and know men and women well enough not to expect too much of them, though one may still hope for good in what he sees. Though Meredith says comedy is not presently serving to remove folly, it is the

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[1]W. M. Thackeray, "The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century," The Complete Works of W. M. Thackeray (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1903, XIV, 463.

antidote for the poison of delusion. When men "wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate," whenever men fall prey to the follies of mankind, "the Spirit overhead will look humanely malign, and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit."[1] The laughter of comedy, according to Meredith,

> . . . is impersonal and of unrivaled politeness, nearer a smile -- often no more than a smile. It laughs through the mind, for the mind directs it; and it might be called the humor of the mind.
>
> One excellent test of the civilization of a country, as I have said, I take to be the flourishing of the comic idea and comedy; and the test of true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.[2]

These studies by Hazlitt, Lamb, Macaulay, Thackeray, and Meredith represent the best criticism of Restoration comedy before the twentieth century; to some extent, as has been suggested, they also furnish basic statements for all subsequent criticism of the plays. These five studies, aside from their own value, are also aligned in the extreme positions which have characterized all studies of Restoration comedy since. In reading these plays, according to Hazlitt, "we are almost transported to another world." This is a sentiment reflected in Lamb's comment that the scene

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[1]George Meredith, "An Essay on Comedy," Comedy, introduction and appendix by Wylie Sypher (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), p. 48.

[2]Ibid., p. 47.

of Restoration comedy "has no reference whatever to the world that is," further mirrored in Thackeray's depiction of the quaint comic dance in the comedies of the period. While Meredith insists that one must know the real world to love this comedy, the society he depicts as the source of Restoration comedy, a society where cultivated men and women equal in social position are delicately touched and moved by the gentle laugh of the Comic Spirit, is only slightly removed from Lamb's fairyland. Opposed to these views and best representative of the other extreme is Macaulay, who denigrates Restoration comedy for its indecency and its inhumanity.

With the appearance of Palmer's The Comedy of Manners, we have the first of a series of studies of this group of comedies that have been published in this century. In many of these studies, too, the same opinions that characterized the earlier commentaries have appeared, often altered only slightly. Palmer, in some ways echoing Lamb, says that the Restoration society which is the source for the comedy is a "strangely distant world."[1] Life, he says in a discussion of Etherege, was "an accepted pageant, incuriously observed, uncritically accepted."[2] In a discussion of Wycherley, there is a tone almost of surprise

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[1]John Palmer, The Comedy of Manners (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1913), p. 83.

[2]Ibid., p. 91.

when he finds here a writer "whose matter is sometimes of equal importance with his manner."[1] Moving from this position, he finds what he considers to be the central concern of the comedies:

> The comic drama of the Restoration rested upon a comic treatment of sex. It depended for its effect upon the elimination of passion. Comic treatment is treatment in a dry light. . . . The swelling of human passion and the clash of emotion may for the spectators at a play be either comic or tragic. If the author has presented them so that the audience is invited to look upon them at a distance, if he makes his appeal to the intelligence rather than to the sympathy of his hearers, he is making the comic appeal. Thus employed he must avoid all that Lord Plausible has described as "passionate" or "luscious." So soon as the comedy of sex becomes in any degree impassionate then it must pass either into tragedy or into pornographic excitement.[2]

In contrast to Palmer, who, while he does not completely share Lamb's view of the comedy, does see the comic drama of the Restoration as removed from life, is Nicoll, who, at points in his discussion, cannot seem to avoid Macaulay's flagellation of these plays. The influence of an audience of wits and fops, among whom there is no thought and no faith, is evident in the plays, Nicoll says.[3] This audience, he says further, made certain demands on the dramatists:

> Impossible heroics, faithful reflections of upper-class social life, satire of everything not

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[1] Ibid., p. 93.

[2] Ibid., p. 188.

[3] Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Restoration Drama, 1660-1700 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), p. 23.

> associated with their own existence or satire of members of their own circle so long as that satire was purely personal and not general -- such were the things demanded by the audience of the Restoration: such the tendencies which made up the heroic tragedy and the comedy of manners.[1]

This was a climate in which the "love of pleasure which had come as a reaction to the restrictions of the Puritan regime, led towards a recrudescence of brutality," a climate in which "All sort of moral ties, all sense of decency had gone."[2]

Bonamy Dobrée's study of Restoration comedy, in which he sets up three categories of comedy to provide a standpoint for his analysis of the comedies, denies Lamb's point of view, but ends by coming perilously close to the same position; he is, at the same time, because of the early moralistic condemnations, impelled to consider the morality of the plays in terms established by the earlier studies. He is able to accommodate their immorality by relegating it to an unimportant role. Restoration comedy, he says, "gave a brilliant picture of its time rather than a new insight into man."[3] Its writers never saw life whole, and their morality was not a universal vision. From this to the view of the comedies as artificial in the same tone that Lamb has used is but a step:

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[1] Ibid., p. 81.

[2] Ibid., p. 21.

[3] Bonamy Dobrée, Restoration Comedy, 1660-1720 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 171.

> Here we feel that no values count, that there are no rules of conduct, hardly laws of nature. Certainly no appeal, however indirect, is made to our critical or moral faculties. . . . We are permitted to play with life, which becomes a charming harlequinade without being farce. It is all spontaneous and free, rapid and exhilarating; the least emotion, an appeal to common sense, and the joyous illusion is gone.[1]

The comedies are, in other words, a picture of a gracious and elegant life, divorced from reality.

The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama, by Henry Ten Eyck Perry, is a consideration of Meredith's thoughtful, laughing muse and its function in the comedies; and indeed, according to Perry, the thoughtful laughter required by Meredith is developed highly in Restoration comedy -- unfortunately to the sacrifice of humanity.[2] As it sacrifices the human touch, it becomes superficial; the comedy of the Restoration "is the most refined manifestation of the Comic Spirit, exquisite for the moment of its existence, but transitory, unstable, and episodic."[3] It is further "the last and most brilliant effort of the laughing muse to resist the intrusions of the more serious concerns of existence."[4]

A further step in the definition of Restoration comedy as fairy tale appears with Kathleen Lynch's The

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[1] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[2] Henry Ten Eyck Perry, The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), p. 8.

[3] Ibid., p. 132.

[4] Ibid.

Social Mode of Restoration Comedy. Here in the lighthearted, gentlemanly atmosphere of small, aristocratic groups, according to Lynch, the sprightly opposition between bad form (as in Sir Fopling Flutter) and good form (as in Millamant) works out to the elevation of the social mode.[1] The extent of the separation between art and life in these comedies as Lynch sees it is further revealed when she says it was Congreve's distinction

> . . . to reveal clearly how inexpressive much comedy must be of the realities of character, how profound must be its silences concerning human passions, how restrained and stereotyped must remain its rule of life.[2]

The opposing view, that originally maintained by Collier and Macaulay, is expressed again in another study of the comedies. Arthur E. Case, after offering an excellent short discussion of the code of the gentleman in Restoration comedy, vitiates the excellence of his comments when he remarks first that the comic dramatists could not hope to persuade their audience for long that their fine people were really admirable, and second that the comedies are totally lacking any sense of ethical value, partially because of the use of vicious agents to chastise folly.[3]

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[1]Kathleen M. Lynch, The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), p. 78.

[2]Ibid., p. 217.

[3]George H. Nettleton and Arthur E. Case (eds.), British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), p. 138.

This judgment is reflected in L. C. Knights' observation that real values do not exist in Restoration comedy. Knights is at least more complete in his remarks, since, in addition to questioning the morality of the plays, he also notes their artificiality. These comedies, he says, are also inferior because they do not represent contemporary culture adequately, because they have no significant relation with the best thought of the time. Since the comedies lack importance both morally and aesthetically, Knights continues with a judgment which is remarkable at least because it is fairly new: "The criticism that defenders of Restoration comedy need to answer is not that the comedies are 'immoral,' but that they are trivial, gross, and dull."[1]

Both the artificiality and the immorality that critics have so far seen in Restoration comedy are revived again in Krutch's study. The comedy is as immoral as it is brilliant, Krutch suggests, but he does insist that both terms be retained.[2] Here, he says, is a world in which vice is often regarded tolerantly, or at least cynically, in which faith in human nature is almost dead and the society is wholly base. The plays are

> . . . comedies depicting realistically and in a sinister spirit the life of the most dissolute portion

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[1]L. C. Knights, "Restoration Comedy: The Reality and the Myth," Explorations (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), p. 149.

[2]J. W. Krutch, Comedy and Conscience After the Restoration (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 1.

> of the fashionable society of the city. The hero is ordinarily a man pursuing the pleasures of drink, play, and love, with a complete disregard for the well being of others; and the heroine is a woman whose scruples, if she has any, are based on prudence rather than virtue. Great emphasis is laid on repartee for its own sake, and upon epigrams propounding an elaborate and systematic code of immorality.[1]

The most recent book-length study and the best available analysis of Restoration comedy is Fujimura's Restoration Comedy of Wit; yet despite its value, the study ultimately reverts to the view that the comedies are unreal, playful, and, if one carries the argument to its natural conclusion, unimportant. According to Fujimura, the key words in the background of the plays are skepticism, naturalism, and libertinism; the key figure is Thomas Hobbes. Science, the new philosophy, and the breakdown of the medieval pattern led to skepticism, he says, and to the naturalistic approach, which is revealed in the complete materialism and hedonism of Hobbes. In nature, all pleasure must be indulged as the gratification of natural appetites, and the poet must follow nature.[2]

In considering the aesthetics of wit comedy, Fujimura is concerned primarily with its effect and structure. The effect of this comedy, he says, is one of vicarious satisfaction according to hedonistic concepts:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[2] T. H. Fujimura, The Restoration Comedy of Wit (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 16-38.

> A work of art produces in us a feeling of purification and well-being. . . . Wit comedy produces this sense of well-being because it presents to us a meaningful world where a definite order prevails and definite values exist. The world of wit comedy is not a simple fairyland where the laws of cuckoldry have replaced those of matrimony; it is not quite so topsy-turvy, nor so simple. It is rather a world reduced to a harmony through the dramatist's witty apprehension of life. The great issues of life, the great sorrows and noble gestures of tragedy, do not interfere with our single, harmonious vision of life; nor is there room for involvements of a strongly emotional nature, or for the practical interests of the actual world. Rather, life is seen as a witty enterprise. . . . The witty muse flits over the surface of things, hitting those who take life too seriously -- or too frivolously.
>
> Where, one might well ask, is the principle by which the witty muse lives? . . . The witty muse is mercurial and elusive and indefinable; it pretends to no practical purpose, for it is concerned chiefly with pleasure. But beneath the constantly changing surface, it is always playful (though often with a mixture of seriousness in its levity). It sits gracefully in the company of the sophisticated men and women, with its head cocked on one side, and over its features plays a sprightly and malicious smile like a bright flame. It is the soul of irreverence, and respects no man and no thing. But to those who keep it company, it is kind indeed, for it bestows on them both freedom and pleasure. This perhaps suggests something of the effect of wit comedy.[1]

While this study was not begun with Fujimura's work in hand, and while such is not the principal purpose here, it is hoped that the following study will be to some extent an answer to Fujimura's contentions. Because his work is unquestionably the best available on the subject, his incomplete treatment of the background and his inadequate account of the aesthetics of comedy and of individual plays demand drastic qualification.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 64-65.

Since Fujimura's study was published, several short pieces on the comedies have appeared which augur well for the future of criticism of Restoration comedy. F. W. Bateson's discussion, though brief, offers some corrective measures for application in this field.[1] The best of the recent studies is that of Marvin Mudrick.[2]

The Restoration stage, its history and development have been well and completely discussed.[3] A number of studies, both contemporary with the plays and later, have examined many facets of the management of the stage, the presentation of the play, the theatre, and the audience. While the history of the theatre is not to the purpose here, it is well to note one thing about the

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[1]F. W. Bateson, "Second Thoughts: II. L. C.Knights and Restoration Comedy," Essays in Criticism, VII (January, 1957), 56-67.

[2]Marvin Mudrick, "Restoration Comedy and Later," English Stage Comedy, ed. W. K. Wimsatt, English Institute Essays, 1954 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), pp. 98-125.

[3]Some of the best studies of the Restoration stage include the following: Colley Cibber, An Apology for His Life (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, n.d.); Thomas Betterton, History of the English Stage, including the Lives, Characters, and Amours of the Most Eminent Actors and Actresses (Boston: W. S. and Henry Spear, 1814); John Genest, Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830 (Bath: H. E. Carrington, 1832), vols. I and II; John Downes, Roscius Anglicanus, ed. Montague Summers (London: Fortune Press, n.d.); Nicoll; Leslie Hotson, The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1928); Eleanor Boswell, The Restoration Court Stage (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932); and Montague Summers, The Restoration Theatre (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934).

characteristic audience of the time. It is essential to understand that it was typically upper-class, composed of sophisticated men and women, lords and ladies, often without any occupation except sophistication. It was an audience composed of people with leisure time, aristocrats who were familiar, to some extent at least, with most of what was written and thought in England and on the continent, an audience, moreover, that had grown somewhat tired of restraints.

The sources of Restoration comedy and literary influences active in the formulation of that comedy have also been the subjects of extensive investigation.[1] Molière, Beaumont and Fletcher, and the Spanish comedy of intrigue have been especially singled out as important both for source material and literary influence, while a great deal of attention has been given to the problem of whether the comedies are primarily a native product or a product of the special influence of Moliere and others. This particular area, again, is, while important, not to the purpose here.

What is to the purpose is an examination, or better

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[1]The best studies of sources and influences are the following: Dudley M. Howe, The Influence of Molière on Restoration Comedy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1910); J. H. Wilson, The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Restoration Drama (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1928); John Wilcox, The Relation of Molière to Restoration Comedy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938); Nicoll; and Dobree.

a re-examination of the nature, function, and meaning of Restoration comedy. Analyses of that body of literature so far have been singularly incomplete, often actually inaccurate. The earliest commentators are divided rather sharply on the issue of Restoration comedy: on the one hand critics have denounced the indecency and inhumanity of the plays; on the other, different students have found the comic drama of the Restoration a sprightly representation of the artificial and elegant, though amusing manners of a society divorced from the real world. The same split exists even today, when some find the artificiality amusing, while others denounce the immorality -- or ignore it.

In the study of Restoration comedy proposed here, it is my intention to present an approach to these plays that offers a marked contrast to views heretofore mentioned, an approach that relies for its validity upon (1) a wider study of the thought of the time, (2) a more thorough examination of the critics of the period and of the comments of the dramatists themselves, who have not yet been given credit for knowing what they were doing, and (3) a re-examination of the comedies, based, it is hoped, on the plays themselves rather than on previous judgments of them.

By normal, rather rigid standards, of course, Restoration comedy is indecent and inhuman. It is only when

it becomes clear that Puritan morality does not play any part in these plays that one is free to pursue their meaning further. Freed of this notion, one can agree with Dobrée that the comedies do not probe metaphysics, but one can, indeed, assert that they do probe almost to the very limits of ethics and epistemology. In these probings the best of Restoration comedy, and it is important to remember that it is only the best, establishes, on the basis of a kind of secular humanism, a very rigid social and moral code which finds its center in a qualified Epicureanism. The primary principle of this view is the idea of decorum, which during the age came to have far more than a purely literary meaning. The comedies arrive at this code through a reconciled and whole view of life, in which all the human faculties find perfect balance. According to this view it was not Jeremy Collier who reformed the stage, but William Wycherley and William Congreve, who through this sane and balanced attitude toward life, at one and the same time purified comedy -- not in the usual sense -- and reflected the establishment for a moment of a new enlightenment far more profound than the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, an enlightenment seen in the literature of this period perhaps only at the peak of the work of Wycherley, Congreve, Swift, and Pope.

In order to establish this approach to the English comedies of the Restoration, several things are necessary:

(1) A re-examination of the intellectual background of the comedies. Part of the reason for critical ineptitude in the face of Restoration comedy has been inadequate study of this background. It is necessary to consider the nature of Epicureanism in England at this time; to re-examine the terms which indicate the intellectual pre-occupations of the period -- reason, faith, naturalism, skepticism, the new science, libertinism; to attempt a re-appraisal of the significance of Thomas Hobbes; and to consider for a moment that troublesome term, "the dissociation of sensibility," which has been responsible in many works on the period for an underestimation of the value of Restoration products.

(2) A consideration of the literary background of the comedies. This will include particularly an investigation of the role played by the rules and conventions of dramatic literature, by wit, judgment, fancy, and decorum, and of criticism contemporary with the plays, with special emphasis on John Dennis.

(3) An examination of the comic tradition and Restoration comedy as a whole. This will involve looking again at various studies of the comedy. It will further involve study of the definitions of comedy and the comic tradition. Finally, this will involve the terms "comedy of humours," "comedy of manners," and "wit comedy," and an attempt to state completely the nature, function, and

meaning of Restoration comedy, its ethics, and its aesthetics.

(4) A study of the plays in the light of what has so far been determined. It will be necessary to examine not only the works of the major figures, Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve, with Shadwell and Vanbrugh secondary, but also the works of minor figures since all worked with the same material, but some created out of it works ranking easily with the greatest English comedy, while others produced plays which fully justify the most adverse criticism that has been expressed since.

CHAPTER II

THE INTELLECTUAL MILIEU OF RESTORATION COMEDY

Previous studies of the intellectual climate of the Restoration have defined the temper of the times, and Restoration comedy has been viewed against the background of those definitions. The difficulty is that though many of the studies have been brilliant, they have necessarily been incomplete. As a result the comedy has again been done scant justice. The intellectual mood of the time is defined with a rather special set of terms or emphases. The comedy, however, is created with its own interests, not adequately noted in these intellectual histories. The comedies, then, not reconciling with these definitions of intellectual interest, can only be seen as alien, foolish, foppish, inane -- in short, as a slick monument to Cloud-Cuckoo Land.

Special terms and emphases have been apparent in many of the studies of the intellectual milieu of the Restoration, especially in the more recent summations. Generally such studies have tended to explore one of three areas of thought. The intellectual interests that have

been considered most fruitfully are those centering in the development of science and the concurrent emphasis on rationalism. These studies have discussed the influence of such factors as the Royal Society, the Cambridge Platonists, Hobbes, and Descartes. Their interests have centered too in the ideas of reason, faith, and skepticism.

Principal among the studies of this group are those of Whitehead and Bredvold. Whitehead suggested that the outcome of a characteristic scientific philosophy is a nature which is "a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly."[1] He thus defined the dilemma created by the scientific outlook once and for all in discussing the mechanistic theory of the universe "which has reigned supreme ever since the seventeenth century":

> But the difficulties of this theory of materialistic mechanism very soon became apparent. The history of thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is governed by the fact that the world had got hold of a general idea which it could neither live with nor live without.[2]

Bredvold's The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, though it concentrates on Dryden, presents perhaps the best discussion of many aspects of the seventeenth-century mind. Bredvold's examination of the skeptical tradition, of the interplay of reason and religion, and of the

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[1]Alfred North Whitehead, Science and Modern World (New York: New American Library, 1948), p. 56.

[2]Ibid., pp. 51-52.

influence of Hobbes and Descartes is extremely important to any study of this period.[1]

A second principal emphasis found in studies of the intellectual temper of the Restoration period is centered in Eliot's term "the dissociation of sensibility." These studies, taking the term as established truth, have attempted to demonstrate the cleavage in man's mind that was supposed to have come into existence sometime after the Metaphysical poets and Sir Thomas Browne had last unified sensibilities. Interesting studies in this group are those of Willey, Nicolson, and Bethell.

Willey, in discussing the influence of Descartes, suggests that the dissociation of sensibilities, the cleavage which, after the time of the Metaphysical poets, begins to appear between facts and values, between what one felt and what one thought as a man of enlightenment, is characteristic of much later work.[2] The "cold philosophy," he says, did destroy "the union of heart and head, the synthesis of thought and feeling out of which major poetry seems to be born."[3] Nicolson suggests much the same thing:

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[1]Louis I. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, Studies in Some Aspects of Seventeenth-Century Thought (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1934).

[2]Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, Studies in the Thought of the Age in Relation to Poetry and Religion (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1953), p. 93.

[3]Ibid., p. 289.

> The Circle of Perfection, from which men had long deduced their metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics, was broken during the seventeenth century. "Correspondence" between macrocosm and microcosm, which man had accepted as basic to faith, was no longer valid in a new mechanical universe and mechanical world.[1]

And Bethell, in The Cultural Revolution of the Seventeenth Century, also depends upon the idea of a dissociation. Post-Restoration theology and literature, he suggests, both introduce a false dichotomy in the distinctions between reason and faith and between judgment and fancy.[2]

The third special interest in studies of the temper of the Restoration period, an interest which by now must be regarded as inconsequential, has been shown in those works which have been content to label Restoration society and Restoration literature as vicious, lecherous, and altogether worthless.

Many of these studies are of value. However, because of their rather select interests, they have created a picture of the late seventeenth century mind that leaves no place for Restoration comedy. As a consequence, this comedy has been characterized as, at best, a foolish flight away from reality, and at worst as the obscene and vicious record of the special interests of a special group.

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[1]Marjorie Hope Nicolson, The Breaking of the Circle, Studies in the Effect of the "New Science" upon Seventeenth Century Poetry (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1950), p. xxi.

[2]S. L. Bethell, The Cultural Revolution of the Seventeenth Century (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1951), p. 108.

In order to understand that comedy correctly and to understand that individual plays are not just lusty flights, it is necessary to consider further aspects of the Restoration mind.

Lamb, Thackeray, and even Meredith have suggested, even insisted in some places, that the comedy is divorced from reality, artificial, and delightfully foolish. Despite the fact that the same view is held even by some students of our own time,[1] it must be obvious that Restoration comedy is part and parcel of its time. Beljame's reaction is interesting here as a kind of continuation of the views expressed by Lamb and Thackeray. Though he recognizes a real society behind the comedy, Beljame refuses to admit any serious intent either in that society or in the works that were its record. Every form of indulgence, he says, was permitted; gallantry was enthroned at court. "Every lofty, or merely delicate, sentiment. . . was debased."[2] Moreover, "Everyone -- audience and authors alike -- unanimously refused to take anything seriously."[3]

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[1]See E. E. Stoll, "The Beau Monde at the Restoration," Modern Language Notes, XLIX (November, 1934), 425-432; and "The 'Real Society' in Restoration Comedy: Hymeneal Pretenses," Modern Language Notes, LVIII (March, 1943), 175-181.

[2]Alexandre Beljame, Men of Letters and the English Public in the Eighteenth Century, 1660-1744, Dryden, Addison, Pope, ed. with intro. Bonamy Dobrée, trans. E. O. Lorimer (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, Ltd., 1948), p. 5.

[3]Ibid., p. 64.

Serious examination of the comedies of the period and consideration of the society and thought from which they sprang are sufficient to dispell any such notions. Several recent studies have reviewed the scandals, the sins, and the derring-do of the court-wits, and there can be no doubt that there were scandals aplenty.[1] The fact remains that despite the pranks, the midnight sins, the public lechery, even that rather select group that was the subject of most Restoration comedy was faithfully recorded in the plays -- and what is more important, not only its license and lechery but also its strict code and serious conduct were faithfully depicted.

Examination of letters, diaries, journals, memoirs, conduct books, and other records of the day is enough to reveal the serious concerns of the society which were reflected in the serious intentions of the comedy. An interesting description in Grammont's Memoirs, for example, suggests the close unity of personal characteristics, the harmony of opposites that will be noticed in the plays:

> It is my part to describe a man, whose inimitable character casts a veil over those faults which I shall neither palliate nor disguise; a man, distinguished by a mixture of virtues and vices so closely linked together, as in appearance to form

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[1]See E. B. Chancellor, The Restoration Rakes (London: Philip Allan and Co., 1924); J. H. Wilson, A Rake and His Times (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1954); J. H. Wilson, The Court Wits of the Restoration, An Introduction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948).

> a necessary dependence, glowing with the greatest beauty when united, shining with the brightest lustre when opposed.[1]

Of further interest in this connection is a letter from Dorothy Osborne to William Temple discussing the ingredients of a happy marriage, which in many ways is a close parallel to some of the proviso scenes in Restoration comedy:

> . . . first . . . our humors must agree, and to doe that hee must have that kinde of breeding that I have had and used that kinde of company, that is hee must not bee soe much a Country Gentleman as to understand Nothing but hawks and Dog's and bee fonder of Either then of his wife, nor of the next sort of them whose aime reaches noe further then to bee Justice of the peace and once in his life high Sheriff, who read noe book but Statut's and study's nothing but how to make a speech interlarded with Latin that may amaze his disagreeing poor Neighbours and fright them rather then perswade them into quietness; hee must not bee a thing that began the world in a free scoole, was sent from thence to the University, and is at farthest when hee reaches the Inn's of Court, has noe acquaintance but those of his forme in these places, speaks the french hee has pickt out of Old Law's, and admires nothing but the Storry's hee has heard of the Revells that were kept there before his time; hee must not bee a Towne Gallant neither that lives in a Tavern and an Ordinary, that cannot imagin how an hower should be spent without company unlesse it bee in sleeping, that court to all the Women hee sees, thinks they beleeve him and Laughs and is Laught at Equaly; Nor a Traveld Mounsieur whose head is all feather inside and outside, that can talk of nothing but dances and Duells, and has Courage Enough to were slashes when every body else dy's with cold to see him; hee must not bee a foole of noe sort, nor peevish nor ill Natur'd nor proude nor covetous and

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[1]Anthony Hamilton, Memoirs of the Court of Charles the Second by Count Grammont, ed. Sir Walter Scott (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1846), p. 34.

> to all this must bee added that hee must love mee and I him as much as wee are capable of loveing. Without all this his fortune though never soe greate would not sattisfye mee, and with it a very moderat money would keep mee from ever repenting my disposall.[1]

Studies of the courtesy literature of the seventeenth century are indicative of the foolish and foppish, the serious and scandalous of the society and the comedy. Francis Osborn, in his Advice to a Son, reveals a cynical spirit; his section on love and marriage indicates misogyny and pessimism and suggests that a great estate is the only inducement to marriage.[2] Yet other conduct books and other species of courtesy literature clearly reveal not only the occasional profligacy but also the occasional propriety of the society and its thought.

These brief notes and others suggest that the student of Restoration comedy need no longer concern himself about accusations of artificiality in the comedy of the period. Literature is artificial, of course, in the sense that it is not life, but to suggest that a given literature is artificial and make-believe in the way that has been suggested regarding Restoration comedy, can

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[1]G. C. Moore Smith, ed., The Letters of Dorothy Osborne to William Temple (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), p. 105.

[2]Quoted in John Mason, Gentlefolk in the Making, Studies in the History of English Courtesy Literature and Related Topics from 1531 to 1774 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935), pp. 69-70.

be the result only of misunderstanding either the literature or the period itself.

One principal factor overlooked in most studies of these plays is that they themselves likely furnish the best study of the intellectual climate of the period. Hobbes and the court wits are the influences most often cited in the background of the plays, and the common mistake has been to assume that they reflect these influences undistilled. In the best of the comedies, all the forces active in the period appear refined into great literature. The same forces influence all the comedies, the best and the worst; one must remember that while some of the plays justify the most adverse criticism possible, others, especially the work of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve, refine the intellectual and philosophical influences of the time as well as the exploits of the court wits to produce great comedy. It must be then in this refinement that the essentials in the intellectual milieu of Restoration comedy are to be found.

Though it is brief, Fujimura's discussion of the intellectual background is the most valuable available. Less complete, of course, than Willey or Bredvold, it is nevertheless more interesting because it is concerned only with Restoration comedy. Certain factors lead him to consider the comedy in a manner different only in name from Lamb's view. Fujimura's key words for his examination,

again, are naturalism, libertinism, and skepticism; and the central influential figure, he says, is Thomas Hobbes.

Fujimura cites the Royal Society, Locke, and others as important forces in the increasing tendency to rely upon empiricism at the expense of the transcendental. This tendency, he suggests, encouraged naturalism, which he defines briefly as "a point of view which excludes the supernatural and accepts the empirical method."[1] Fujimura's continuing insistence on this naturalistic view reveals a growing misconception. No one can deny the increasing importance of the empirical method, just as no one can deny the existence of a naturalistic temper. What one can resist is the nature of this temper and the degree to which it governed men's lives in the Restoration. The supernatural was excluded from the empirical method, but as even a summary glance at the work of, say, the Royal Society shows, this is not to say that it was excluded from life, which is what Fujimura exactly implies.

Fujimura reveals a further misconception in his treatment of the idea of skepticism. "The conflict of the 'new philosophy,'" he begins, "with Christian supernaturalism produced an attitude of skepticism among men of rationalistic bent, who were left 'wandering between two worlds.'"[2] A growing distrust of dogmatism and a skep-

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[1] Fujimura, p. 40

[2] Ibid., p. 41.

ticism toward established beliefs, he says, explain the skeptical and cynical wit in Restoration comedy. The person most influential in fostering this skeptical temper, Fujimura says, was Thomas Hobbes.

Fujimura's study misconstrues the importance of empiricism by suggesting that this view entirely superseded any other. His comments on skepticism and rationalism need close examination too, for he has not clearly seen the distinction between the two ideas. After suggesting Hobbes as the great influence in the growth of skepticism, Fujimura continues to discuss Hobbes' "rationalistic approach to life." From this and from other points in the discussion one gathers dimly that he views the terms as at least roughly synonymous. After Bredvold's examination of skepticism, this cannot be accepted, since the skeptical view indicates that true knowledge is unattainable, while the rationalistic view, as Whitehead suggests, presupposes a metaphysics. Consequently, one is left uncertain as to what Fujimura means by skepticism.

His third point is the libertinism he finds characteristic of Restoration comedy. Here he fails again to recognize the transforming power of literature, for he relies only on such comments as St. Evremond's and Rochester's, which do reveal a libertine attitude, but forgets

that one extremely important characteristic of some of the best comedies is that libertinism disappears by the end of the play. Mirabell by Act V is no libertine, and even that most profligate of all libertines, Dorimant, rather calmly faces the prospect of a much milder life with his match, Harriet.

At any rate, another examination of the background of these comedies is needed, one that will attempt to help explain why the best comedies of the period are among the greatest in Western literature. In addition to what has already been suggested, this examination must concern itself primarily with (1) an attempt to show that in its reflection of the intellectual pre-occupations of the time the great literature of the Restoration reveals not a dissociation, but a harmony of sensibilities and interests; (2) the influence of neo-Epicureanism and its refinement in the plays; and (3) the part played by what we may call secular humanism.

No history of thought, no consideration of any individual thinker will reveal the true harmony and decorum aimed at as an ideal in the best of Restoration comedy. The work of Hobbes and Descartes, of the Royal Society and the Cambridge Platonists, of materialists, skeptics, and rationalists -- all these factors find unified expression in the work of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve. At least a part of the importance these works

have in English literature, and in comic literature of all ages, is the result of their creation and expression of harmony and decorum out of impulses that seem so divergent as to be impossible to harmonize.

The old world picture of the seventeenth century, made familiar to us by such studies as Tillyard's Elizabethan World Picture, from God to man to nature revealed a unified conception; the universe disclosed a purposive principle at work with man at the focal point; the elementary and the celestial world coalesced into harmony.[1] This was the universe supposedly shattered in the late seventeenth century:

> The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. . . . In the seventeenth century, a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered. . . .[2]

Men in this age, according to another student, "willingly sacrificed the old philosophical unity for their new freedom of inquiry," and began to distinguish more noticeably between reason and faith, man and nature, natural and supernatural.[3] Science is purified from all other discip-

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[1]C. M. Coffin, John Donne and the New Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), p. 48.

[2]T. S. Eliot, Homage to John Dryden (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), p. 30.

[3]Victor Harris, All Coherence Gone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 6.

lines, and no science is left which treats the complex spiritual, material, and social nature of man; the total mind no longer operates.[1] Except, one cannot help adding, in literature, if not elsewhere.

Men interested in science did from the first, of course, recognize the distinction between their immediate interests and the interests of, for example, religion. Glanvil indicates the separation when he delegates to science the explicable, recognizing that such problems as whether matter is compounded of divisibles or indivisibles are inexplicable.[2] Sprat further indicates the divergence between the interests of science and of religion, suggesting first that experiment will not affect moral and political rules,[3] and, at greater length, that experiment is not dangerous or prejudicial to the Christian faith, the doctrine of the Godhead, the worship of God, the doctrine of the Gospel, the doctrine of the primitive church, the practice of religion, the doctrine of prophecies and prodigies, mortification, or the Church of England.[4] In the Restoration, in other words, it is obvious that

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[1]Bethell, p. 63.

[2]Joseph Glanvil, The Vanity of Dogmatizing, Facsimile Text Society (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), p. 41.

[3]Thomas Sprat, The History of the Royal Society (London, 1702), p. 325.

[4]Ibid., pp. 344-362.

the disciplines, the interests of science are separated from other, perhaps dissimilar interests. What has been overlooked, however, is that to separate interests is not to deny any interests.

The impulses and interests of science in the Restoration can be seen best, of course, in the efforts of the Royal Society, a society which by and large, Bredvold suggests, held dear the idealistic tradition which their own work was putting on the defensive.[1] The Society opposed the materialism of Thomas Hobbes, insisting, as Sprat suggests, that men could accept the new philosophy of motion and still avoid atheistic materialism.

A tendency that is noticeable in studies of this period, a tendency possibly the result of the undue interest in a dissociation of sensibility, is that which seeks to classify all impulses of the time into only two major divergent interests -- with science, rationalism, materialism, and skepticism lumped together and opposing the emotions, the imagination, and religion. This calm splitting of interests, of course, can no longer stand. The Royal Society opposed Hobbes; it also expressed a distrust of reason. The Society's interest and emphasis was upon sense observation; its purpose was not to discover and proclaim laws, but to gather data, sense data for the

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[1]L. I. Bredvold, "Dryden, Hobbes, and the Royal Society," Modern Philology, XXV (May, 1928), p. 420.

future. At the risk of over-simplification, it can be said that, among other things, the Society relied upon sense observation, and though tending toward materialism itself, opposed Hobbes' dogmatic materialism, distrusted the reason, and was by nature non-skeptical, since its method and purpose assumed knowledge to be attainable.

Another of the primary interests that has to be considered is the idea of rationalism, an idea associated principally with Descartes and the Cambridge Platonists. The importance of Descartes as a counter to Hobbes has been underestimated. Descartes' work became available to the English almost immediately after publication, and in 1649 English translations began to appear. The influence of Descartes was powerful, though not universal, in England by the 1650's.[1]

The work of Descartes for a long while constituted one of the greatest dangers faced by the materialists, for Descartes, even in his mechanism, saves the soul, an immaterial, thinking substance:

> . . . if I had only ceased from thinking, even if all the rest of what I had ever imagined really existed, I should have no reason for thinking that I had existed. From that I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is to think, and that for its existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing; so that this 'me,' that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body, and

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[1]Marjories Nicolson, "The Early Stage of Cartesianism in England," Studies in Philology, XXVI (July, 1929), p. 356.

> is even more easy to know than the latter; and even if the body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is.[1]

The great merits of Descartes' system, as Willey suggests, were that it made a complete break with tradition, yet left faith unchallenged.[2] As a consequence, the philosophy of Descartes became one of the refuges against complete materialism. This point is too often overlooked by students who insist upon the importance of Hobbes to the exclusion of everyone else. Among the men of the Royal Society, and perhaps more noticeably among the Cambridge Platonists, the Cartesian dualism was a way out of materialism. Ralph Cudworth and Henry More, both of whom attacked the mechanistic philosophy of Hobbes, approved of and relied on the works of Descartes, at least at first. Briefly, considering Descartes and possibly the Platonists in their relations with some of the major ideas of the time, one might characterize them as rationalistic, non-skeptical, and non-materialistic. The essential point is that here, as with the Royal Society, there are interests which reflect neither pure materialism nor mere naturalism.

Just as a tension developed between the work of Descartes and that of the Royal Society, so a tension

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[1]Rene Descartes, The Philosophical Works of Descartes, trans. E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), I, 101.

[2]Willey, p. 92.

became apparent between the influences of Descartes and Hobbes. What is curious to notice is that even in Hobbes there is some support for that harmony of sensibilities that will be noted in Restoration comedy, despite those studies which see his work only as defining the purely materialistic attitude.

With the new developments in science in the Restoration, materialism became more and more an attitude of extreme significance. One bulwark against that view, as has been suggested, was the work of Descartes. Jones suggests that Hobbes' work took away the comfort left by Descartes in denying the existence of any immaterial substance. Men interested in experimental science, alarmed at being associated with Hobbes' philosophy and at the prospect of charges of atheism, were put on the defensive, and they attempted to make clear the distinction between experimental science and Hobbes' work by barring him from the Royal Society and discrediting him as a scientist.[1] In addition to the scientists, the Cambridge Platonists were especially concerned to refute Hobbes.[2]

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[1]R. F. Jones, "The Background of the Attack on Science in the Age of Pope," Pope and His Contemporaries, ed. J. L. Clifford and L. A. Landa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), pp. 96-113.

[2]See for example Henry More, "The Immortality of the Soul," Philosophical Writings of Henry More, ed. F. I. MacKinnon (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925).

Hobbes' position, among other things, proclaims the senses and the passions as fundamental to human behavior. All mental processes come from the sensations, and man without passions is dead. These passions are neither good nor bad. Man acts in his own interests; his life is a progress from satisfaction of one desire to another. Aligning with the rationalists, as James suggests, Hobbes sought to push back the limits to the power of reason:

> On the one side, he wanted power; and philosophical thought, demonstrable knowledge, was the supreme power; by it alone could society be made and kept stable. Therefore the mind was exalted to be the source of power. But on the one hand only corporeal process is intelligible and penetrable, as it were, by the light of reason. Therefore Hobbes's materialism no less than his rationalism springs from his desire to set no limits to the power of reason; his materialism and his rationalism are inextricably intertwined; one without the other is of no use to him.[1]

It is through this extension of the powers of the human reason and through his examination and recognition of the place of the imagination that Hobbes comes to have great importance for Restoration comedy.

The original of all things, Hobbes says, is sense; and imagination is nothing but decaying sense, found in men and other creatures.[2] To Hobbes, the imagination is

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[1]D. G. James, The Life of Reason (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1949), p. 20.

[2]Thomas Hobbes, The Leviathan, The English Works, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1839), III, 1-4.

a legitimate factor in the cognitive process; he did not, like other rationalistic thinkers, regard the imagination as

> . . . a highly inadequate instrument for the attainment of the highest kind of knowledge; as a member of the lower, sensitive soul, it is limited and unreflecting in its actions; it tempts to a materialistic view of life. It contains in itself another danger, too, that of stirring up the passions and leading men into excesses of "enthusiasm."[1]

To Hobbes the imagination provided a natural, unerring test of the validity of notions; consequently, through his influence, the imagination could no longer be associated solely with error and passion. Hobbes, then, suggests a reconciliation of sensibilities, and allows for the accommodation of the claims of the rational and the imaginative.

It is not only through his respect for the imagination as well as the reason that Hobbes suggests something of the balance of mind that is characteristic of the best of Restoration comedy; it is also through the suggested harmony one finds in his work between reason on the one hand and the passions on the other. The passions are the source of pleasure and knowledge for Hobbes, and "the passions of men are commonly more potent than their reason."[2] Yet the passions, the source of power and

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[1]Donald Bond, "Neo-Classical Psychology of the Imagination," Journal of English Literary History, IV (December, 1937), 255.

[2]Hobbes, p. 173.

impulse, are discovered by man's reason. As he shows the harmony possible between the reason and the emotions, so Hobbes also suggests another tempering quality which further reveals the sense of balance characteristic of the best minds of the age. Just as his materialism leads him to place more importance on the imagination and as his rationalism leads him to recognize the prominent role of the passions, so Hobbes is led to temper his materialism itself by definition:

> The world, (I mean not the earth only, that denominates the lovers of it worldly men, but the universe, that is, the whole mass of all things that are) is corporeal, that is to say, body; and hath the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth: also every part of body, is likewise body, and hath the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the universe, is body, and that which is not body, is no part of the universe: and because the universe is all, that which is no part of it, is nothing; and consequently no where. Nor does it follow from hence, that spirits are nothing: for they have dimensions, and are therefore really bodies; though that name in common speech be given to such bodies only, as are visible, or palpable; that is, that have some degree of opacity.[1]

Briefly, then, if one were to attempt a characterization of Hobbes' work, he might call it rationalistic -- remembering that this rationalism puts great emphasis on the emotions; materialistic -- remembering that the materialism is tempered; and non-skeptical. The essential point to remember is that, whether or not men like Descartes and Hobbes and groups like the Royal Society

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[1] Ibid., p. 672.

and the Cambridge Platonists ever successfully harmonized all the intellectual forces of the time, they were aware of opposing and balancing ideas in the age, and few works dogmatically assert one attitude to the total exclusion of others.

The tensions existing among the interests of the scientists, the rationalists, the materialists have been suggested, so that one may see that the work of each wrought change in the work of all. Another attitude, represented best in this age, perhaps, by John Dryden, becomes increasingly noticeable as reaction to these forces. Dryden refers to himself as a skeptic living in a skeptical age, and in the introduction to Aureng-Zebe depreciates the human reason. The work of various skeptics, notably that of Montaigne, is important in the background of Restoration skepticism. According to this point of view, a search for a standard of truth is a search for the unknowable, and true knowledge is unattainable. The skeptical attitude, then, becomes increasingly important in the age as a counter to rationalism and materialism.

The point of consideration in these brief glances at some of the major intellectual interests of the Restoration, the point that is of extreme significance in the work of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve, is that the primary ideas of the time coalesce in the great literature of the time to produce not rationalism, nor materialism,

nor skepticism, nor any trace of a dissociation of sensibilities, but a balanced body of thought. It was a body of thought which knew the place of both the reason and the emotions, which recognized both science and the supernatural, both materialism and spiritualism. Remembering the tensions that existed among the ideas of the time, one might characterize this body of thought not as materialistic, not as skeptical, not as rationalistic, but as reasonable. It is a prevailing attitude which appropriately balances both human interests and human sensibilities.

Thus one has to remember that the Royal Society, sometimes presented to us in caricature, numbered among its members men of deep religious feeling, possessed of a passion to see life whole.[1] One must remember, too, that for a group like the Cambridge Platonists, reason meant not only the discipline of thinking exactly, but also the unification of the whole personality into the pursuit of truth:[2]

> Why should there be any greater strife between Faith and Reason: seeing they are Brethren? Do they not both spring from the same Father of Lights? and can the Fountain of Love and Unity send forth irreconcileable streams? Do you think that God did ever

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[1]Charles E. Raven, Synthetic Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 18.

[2]G. R. Cragg, From Puritanism to the Age of Reason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), pp. 42-43.

> intend to divide a rational Being, to tear and rend a Soul to pieces, to scatter Principles of discord and confusion in?[1]

D. G. James, in a study of Locke, suggests something of the same notion of reasonableness developing out of the late seventeenth century:

> It was pre-eminently their temperate mien of reasonableness and faith which made possible, after the coming of Descartes and Hobbes, the greatest of English philosophers. Descartes and Hobbes were able, by prodigious intellectual gifts, to give the world highly organized systems of rationalism. . . . Yet if he was no apostle of rationalism, he [Locke] was that incalculably better thing, an apostle of reasonableness; and his reasonableness sprang, not from a doctrine, but from an indefinable temper which, because it was inspired by faith in God, declined to despise and tried temperately to employ, the powers of the reason.[2]

Appropriately enough, one can find in Rochester's work further evidence of this reasonable, balanced tone; this passage is particularly fitting since most students have quoted the first four lines only and then denounced Rochester again:

> But thoughts, are giv'n for Actions government,
> Where Action ceases, thoughts impertinent:
> Our Sphere of Action, is lifes happiness,
> And he who thinks Beyond, thinks like an Ass.
> Thus, whilst 'gainst false reas'ning I inveigh,
> I own right Reason, which I wou'd obey:
> That Reason that distinguishes by Sense,
> And gives us Rules, of good, and ill from thence:
> That bounds desires, with a reforming Will,
> To keep 'em more in vigour, not to kill.

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[1]Nathanael Culverwell, "A Discourse of the Light of Nature," The Cambridge Platonists, ed. E. T. Campagnac (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 315.

[2]James, pp. 66-67.

> Your Reason hinders, mine helps t'enjoy,
> Renewing Appetites, yours wou'd destroy.[1]

As a further tempering factor in the development of a balanced body of thought, one has to examine the revival and modification of Epicureanism. On May 12, 1656, John Evelyn entered in his diary:

> Was published my "Essay on Lucretius," with innumerable errata by the negligence of Mr. Triplet, who undertook the correction of the press in my absence. Little of the Epicurean philosophy then known among us.[2]

In the same year was published Walter Charleton's Epicurus's Morals, and from that time until around 1725, the revival of Epicureanism in England flourished. Epicureanism in England in the seventeenth century was largely an aristocratic matter, and there was, of course, opposition to the attitude.

Hobbes can be characterized as more or less Epicurean, and he and the Epicureans shared the same enemies: the Royal Society, the Cartesians, the Anglican clergy, and the Cambridge Platonists.[3] Creech's translation of Lucretius, as well as Dryden's, and the essays of St.

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[1]John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, Poems, ed. with intro. Vivian De Sola Pinto (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), "A Satyr against Mankind," ll. 94-109.

[2]John Evelyn, Diary of John Evelyn, ed. William Bray (Akron: St. Dunstan Society, 1901), I, 310.

[3]See Ralph Cudworth, The True Intellectual System of the Universe, Wherein All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted, and Its Impossibility Demonstrated (New York: Gould and Newman, 1837), 2 vol.

Evremond and Sir William Temple were landmarks of the revival. By the end of the century, however, the impulse was declining. From 1700 to 1725 still more Epicurean publications appeared, but they appeared in an alien atmosphere.[1]

The Epicurean position from the beginning suggested pleasure as the summum bonum. Also from the beginning, however, it was insisted that this was not the pleasure of the profligate and the sensualist; it is again at this point that Restoration thought and Restoration comedy have been denounced as the serious concerns of even neo-Epicureanism were ignored. It is through sober reasoning and searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, not through profligacy, that one produces the pleasant life.[2] "Strict moderation, then, based on self-control, lies at the very core of the Epicurean ethic."[3] Failure to understand this has meant failure to understand some of the literature of the Restoration.

It is in the work of two Epicureans that the Restoration expression of this attitude can best be seen. St. Evremond, court wit and friend to playwrights, was

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[1]T. F. Mayo, Epicurus in England (1650-1725) (Dallas: Southern Press, 1934), passim.

[2]"Epicurus to Menoeceus," The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers, ed. W. J. Oates (New York: Random House, 1940), pp. 31-32.

[3]Mayo, p. xvii.

invited to England on Charles' behalf by another Epicurean, Sir William Temple. His essay "To the Modern Leontium" is one of the principal expressions of Restoration Epicureanism. The word pleasure recalls Epicurus to St. Evremond "and makes me confess that of all the Opinions of Philosophy concerning the summum bonum, none appears to me so rational as his."[1] Although he professes not to know what Epicurus' pleasure meant, St. Evremond reveals himself to be wiser than most critics of Restoration comedy when he refuses to believe all of what either Epicurus' friends or his enemies say. He does express finally his opinion regarding pleasure:

> There is a time to laugh, and a time to weep, according to Solomon, a time to be sober, and a time to be sensual, according to Epicurus. Besides, a Voluptuous Man is not equally so all his life. In Religion the greatest Libertine becomes sometimes the most devout.[2]

Sir William Temple studied under Ralph Cudworth, who had repudiated both Hobbes and the Epicureans. He turned, however, from the Platonists and the scientists because he found in their arguments as to how man is to know the universe, "only further support for the idea that he is not going to know it at all."[3] Clara Marburg

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[1]St. Evremond, The Works of Monsieur de St. Evremond (London: Printed for T. Churchill et al, 1714), II, 286.

[2]Ibid., p. 289.

[3]Clara Marburg, Sir William Temple, a Seventeenth Century "Libertin" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), p. 16.

who studies Temple in the light of the libertin tradition, suggests that he was not vigorous enough in his mind to share the scientist's faith, nor sufficiently enthusiastic in his spirit to join with the Platonists. He did, however, have a real sympathy for the skeptics of his day, who understood how to live the meditative life:

> And this is no small distinction in an age which was given to violent excesses in living, in spite of the equally excessive emphasis placed on control by the rationalists and theologians. This is the wisdom which Montaigne, beloved by Saint-Evremond and Temple, had advanced a century earlier, when he said that virtue seemed to him not to dwell at the top of a steep and rugged precipice, but on a fruitful, sunny plain.[1]

In "Upon the Gardens of Epicurus," Temple considers the contention between the Stoics and Epicureans as to what constituted happiness, and in so doing, expresses, along with St. Evremond, the balanced tenor of life that was expected of the Epicurean and which was to be reflected in Restoration comedy:

> The Stoics would have it [happiness] to consist in virtue, and the Epicureans in pleasure; yet the most reasonable of the Stoics made the passion of virtue to be the greatest happiness, and the best of the Epicureans made the greatest pleasure to consist in virtue; and the difference between these two seems not easily discovered. All agreed, the greatest temper, if not the total subduing of the passion, and exercise of reason, to be the state of greatest felicity; to live without desires or fears, or those perturbations of mind and thought which passions raise; to place true riches in wanting little, rather than in possessing much; and true pleasure in temperance, rather than in satisfying the senses;

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[1] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

> to live with indifference to the common enjoyments and accidents of life, and with constancy upon the greatest blows of fate or chance; not to disturb our minds with sad reflexions upon what is past, nor with anxious cares or raving hopes about what is to come; neither to disquiet life with the fears of death, nor death with the desires of life; but in both, and in all things else, to follow nature. . . .[1]

Temple belonged by temperament, Marburg suggests, to those who instinctively feel that "happiness lies in the present or nowhere, and that it consists in a delicate balance between 'reason' and 'passion,' mind and body."[2]

Herschel Baker, in The Wars of Truth, suggests that as the seventeenth century waned, that complex of values called Christian humanism was gradually losing its function. Whether this is true or not, one can suggest that in the Restoration a man-centered, earthbound ethic which one might call secular humanism became so widespread and so influential as to affect the thinking and the literature of the age immeasurably. It is an ethic concerned solely with man's progress through the world and with his relations to other men and the works of men.

The experiments of the Royal Society, based as they were on man's perceptions; the rationalism of Descartes and Hobbes, intent as it was on pushing back the

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[1]Sir William Temple, "Upon the Gardens of Epicurus," The Works of Sir William Temple (London: Printed for F. C. and J. Rivington et al, 1814), III, 209.

[2]Marburg, p. 24.

limits of man's reason; even the different rationalism of the Cambridge Platonists, concerned as it was to know God and at the same time retain the dignity of man -- all these forces united to center the universe on Man. Through the work of scientists, of the Platonists, of Hobbes and Descartes, through the skepticism and the balance of the neo-Epicureans, it was proclaimed that Man, if he would order his efforts, was the Master of his universe.

The way for man to accomplish this ordering was also made evident in the major intellectual trends of the time. Scientists inspected the natural and reflected upon the supernatural; materialists proclaimed substance yet allowed for spirits; rationalists exalted reason and yet respected the emotions; and Epicureans praised the balance and harmony of the reasonable life. Man, the reasonable, was to attain order by recognizing his faculties as a man. To the extent that man recognized the appropriate, the decorous balance of his faculties, his interests and sensibilities, his tastes and his ideas; to the extent that man understood the principle of decorum in his universe and in himself, to that extent he became enlightened and the kingdom of this earth was his. Understanding that harmony, that decorum, he became capable of what Montaigne called man's most glorious masterpiece: to live appropriately. As the universe centers on man,

as we forget for a moment about his place in the cosmos and the intellectual climate becomes truly humanistic, man emerges, intent on order or disorder in his human world, and one can turn from the greatest English tragedies at the beginning of this period to the greatest English comedies at the last.

CHAPTER III

THE LITERARY BACKGROUND OF RESTORATION COMEDY: CRITICISM AND CONVENTION

For a long time, English literature associated with the neo-classical period was one of the great bugbears of literary study. English literature of the period extending approximately from 1660 to 1750 has been too often thought of as cold and brittle, as complex, rationalistic, and dispassionate, lacking all the warmth and humanity that characterize great literature. It was an age, we have been told, when men wrote by a set of rules, denying the heart for the head, placing correctness above all else. It was an age when reason, we have been told, ruled all, when literature was formal, precise, correct, and dull.

Literary study has come some way from this, but even in our own time, it is still possible for a student to say:

> The domination of reason necessarily entailed the repression of the higher qualities of poetry: emotion and imagination. . . . as they were, were individualistic and subject to change, the rationalistic critics

> of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who weighed everything in the balance of universal reason, looked upon them with suspicion.[1]

It is also possible for a more widely known student to suggest that science, the cold philosophy, destroyed the "union of heart and head, the synthesis of thought and feeling, out of which major poetry seems to be born."[2]

All this suggests a picture quite different from that indicated in the preceding chapter, where an attempt was made to re-assert a golden mean as the ethical and aesthetic principle most important in the intellectual background of Restoration comedy. This difference is apparently due only to a general refusal to examine the literature of the period. The greatest of that literature, in this case the best of Restoration comedy, is the prime means of asserting that golden mean.

The all-powerful influence of the "cold philosophy" must certainly be questioned when one remembers the opposition to science voiced by the Cambridge Platonists, the skeptics, and other groups. It must further be questioned when one remembers that the rationalist metaphysic and the scientific program -- aspects of two ideas so often thought synonymous -- do not necessarily recon-

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[1]A. Bosker, Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1953), p. 30.

[2]Willey, p. 289.

cile. As Gallaway points out, "This general enthusiasm for science could not long go unchallenged." Pure science, he says, was in time "regarded as hostile to the type of humanism embodied in Pope's dictum, 'The proper study of mankind is man,' and to the common sense in which all men shared."[1]

Just as the influence of science has been exaggerated, so the strictness of the rules and ideas associated with neo-classicism has been over-stressed. Paul Wood's study of opposition to neo-classicism in England[2] and Bond's investigation of attitudes toward the imagination in the period[3] both suggest the confusion that has resulted from the underestimation of Restoration and eighteenth century literature. Bond's studies are especially interesting. In his first, Bond discussed the unqualified hostility to the free play of the imagination that he felt to be characteristic of the time. In his later study, recognizing that the men of the period did not accept an "art which ruled imagination out or held it

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[1]Francis Gallaway, Reason, Rule, and Revolt in English Classicism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), p. 7.

[2]Paul Wood, "The Opposition to Neo-Classicism in England between 1660 and 1770," Publications of the Modern Language Association, XLIII (January, 1928), 182-197.

[3]Donald Bond, "The Distrust of Imagination in English Neo-Classicism," Philological Quarterly, XIV (January, 1935), 54-69; "The Neo-Classical Psychology of the Imagination," Journal of English Literary History, IV (December, 1937), 245-264.

in strict subordination," Bond concluded that, thanks especially to Hobbes, the imagination was no longer associated only with error and passion. Restoration objections to enthusiasm had in many cases discredited emotional appeal and, consequently, the imagination. The effect of these objections by men who desired a plain style and a reasoned accuracy was, as has so often been said, the tempering of the imagination and the diminishing of the emotions.[1] This dichotomy, this splitting of sensibilities, does not represent the complete picture of literary effort of the time, however.

Bate -- and others of course -- attributes to this split sensitivity some of the major changes in taste that occurred in the eighteenth century:

> The dichotomy which the neo-classic rationalist had tended to make between "reason" and any aspect whatever of imagination and feeling had become sufficiently prevalent so that those who urged another basis for taste were often equally extreme in maintaining emotion as its primary foundation, in viewing "reason" and the employment of the rules as almost its opposite.[2]

The point that is important in the literary background of the Restoration is that if such a cleavage did exist in the age, it disappeared in the great literature of the time. In the gardens of the period, formal in design, men looked for symmetry, proportion, and balance. One must

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[1]George Williamson, "The Restoration Revolt against Enthusiasm," Studies in Philology, XXX(October,1953), p. 603.

[2]W. J. Bate, From Classic to Romantic (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 35.

also be convinced that the same principles are at the basis of the best Restoration comedies. Gilbert Highet, speaking in another connection of the art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, discusses the baroque as "the interplay of strong emotion and stronger social, aesthetic, intellectual, moral, and religious restraints."[1] His further comment is suggestive of the balance and proportion that have been declared characteristic of the best Restoration literature:

> What we, nowadays, usually see in baroque art and literature is its formality, its symmetry, and frigidity. What the men and women of the baroque era saw in it was the tension between ardent passion and firm, cool control.[2]

To understand this reasonable view of literature, with its principles of symmetry, proportion, and balance, along with its application to Restoration comedy, it is necessary to consider briefly certain aspects of the literary scene of the time. A careful look at literary standards, at the literary criticism along with brief examinations of the attitude of practising writers toward the rules and conventions, as well as some of the principal terms in use is necessary before an intelligent examination of the comedy can be made.

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[1]Gilbert Highet, The Classical Tradition, Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 289.

[2]Ibid.

It has been suggested that in the Restoration and early eighteenth century critical theory and literary practice probably came closer together than ever before or since. The bases of that critical theory were many, but of the sources, Aristotle was still supreme, for "The Rules of Aristotle are nothing but Nature and Good Sence reduc'd to a Method."[1] The work of Horace, assumed then to be something like an addition to Aristotle, was extremely important, as was the work of the Roman rhetoricians, to whom many critics turned for a theory of comedy in default of comic theory by Aristotle or Horace. The Italian Renaissance theorists, especially Vida and Scaliger, are also important sources. The last, most immediate and direct source of this theory is French criticism. The work of Boileau, Rapin, and Bouhours came to be a directive force in English criticism as well as French.[2]

Critical comments on the comedies of the Restoration and on the nature of comedy must be reserved for a later chapter. What is essential now is a brief consideration of the direction and tone of critical theory as it applies to Restoration comedy. Such a consideration must

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[1]John Dennis, "The Impartial Critick," The Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. E. N. Hooker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), I, 39.

[2]A. F. B. Clark, Boileau and the French Classical Critics in England (1660-1830) (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Edouard Champion, 1925), pp. 385 et passim.

include three areas of critical thought: critical attitudes toward major concerns of the period -- reason, passion, imagination, and others; second, attitudes towards the rules and dramatic conventions; and third, critical opinion regarding some special terms important in the period, especially wit, fancy, judgment, and decorum.

The balance, symmetry, and proportion that are characteristic of the best Restoration comedies are reflections of the same kind of reasonable impulses in much of the criticism. Even Boileau, the most regular of critics, suggests the scope of this balance, the unification of all human sensibilities:

> Whate'er you write of pleasant or sublime,
> Always let sense accompany your rime;
> Falsely they seem each other to oppose, --
> Rime must be made with reason's laws to close.[1]

Later, in his comments on style, Boileau in discussing the freedom and careful simplicity of a just style, gives what might almost be a definition of that decorum which, in the best of the comedies, becomes not just a literary standard, but a social and ethical standard as well:

> Choose a just style. Be grave without constraint,
> Great without pride, and lovely without paint.[2]

It is, however, in the work of another man that the interests, standards, and principles of Restoration

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[1]Nicolas Boileau, "The Art of Poetry," The Art of Poetry, ed. A. S. Cook (New York: Stechert and Company, 1926), Canto I, ll. 26-29.

[2]Ibid., ll. 84-85.

critical theory, as they are modified by the reasonable, humanistic, enlightened views that were suggested in the last chapter, can best be seen, both in their general application and in their special concern for drama. The work of John Dennis, "who remains as good a critic of comedy as England has yet produced,"[1] is both representative and special. His critical work is in some ways representative, for he has always been associated with the principles commonly linked with critics of the time -- the rules, the conventions, the dogmatic morality. His work is special in the sense that it begins with just those common tenets and from them constructs a critical theory which illustrates the real enlightenment of the age of the Restoration. Without slighting the work of John Dryden, whose comments on wit and comedy must be considered later, it must be insisted that to find the critical counterpart of that ideal Restoration way of the world, one must look to the ethical and aesthetic opinions of John Dennis. There the unquestioned sway of the reason and the rules is tempered by passion and reasonableness, and the standard of appropriateness applies to literature, as in the comedies it applies to social and ethical situations. The measure of Dennis' stature as a critic is his ability "to adapt the best thought of his time to

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[1] M. T. Herrick, Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950), p. 220.

his own esthetic philosophy."[1] It is this aesthetic philosophy which best reveals the literary background of the comedies and helps to show how they synthesize the best thought of the time into a new way of the world.

After Dryden, Dennis was for many The Critic of the Restoration and early eighteenth century. Giles Jacob, writing in 1724, says of Dennis' reputation: "If I did not allow this Gentleman to be a good Poet, and the greatest Critick of this age, I should be wanting in Justice to his Character."[2]

Unfortunately, Dennis' reputation since that time has not always been so stoutly proclaimed. There are many reasons for the neglect of such a critic, as Hooker suggests.[3] He was never a member of one of the groups that were closely knit, groups such as the Kit Cat Club. He was often accused of judging solely and harshly by the rules. He was sometimes ridiculed for his devotion to the passionate and the sublime in poetry. And last, certainly not least, he came off poorly in various contests with Alexander Pope. It is unfortunate that his work has

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[1]E. N. Hooker, ed., The Critical Works of John Dennis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), II, cxxiii.

[2]Giles Jacob, An Historical Account of the Lives and Writings of our Most Considerable English Poets, whether Epick, Elegiack, Epigrammatists, & c. (London: W. Mears, 1724), p. 257.

[3]Hooker, p. lxi.

not been considered more fully, for, in addition to its immense value otherwise, Dennis' criticism furnishes the best study yet available of Restoration comedy. While the present discussion is not meant to consider Dennis' specific comments on comedy, it is worthwhile to note that his critical remarks on comedy are especially valuable in certain respects. First, his understanding of comic theory and the ends of comedy is extremely helpful as revealed in "Vis Comica," "A Large Account of Taste," and "The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry," as well as elsewhere. Second, his remarks on individual plays, for example the "Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter," reveal a clear perception of the method and manner of the plays. Third, he wrote, in "The Usefulness of the Stage," one of the few adequate answers to Collier's attack; and his entire works, not just the remarks on comedy, suggest the order and decorum that were the real counter to Collier and are best revealed in the comedies. It is only fairly recently that his work has achieved something like its proper place, in the examinations of Krutch, Thorpe, Monk, Hooker, and Herrick, but his contributions to comic theory have been largely neglected.

Dennis' work is all the more interesting in its relation to Restoration comedy when one remembers his association with men of the period, especially Wycherley and Congreve. Dennis was a friend of Dryden, though

apparently always independent of him and though their relationship ultimately cooled. He maintained a regular correspondence with Wycherley in which they shared comments on everything from puns to lost lovers. Wycherley in several places receives high praise from Dennis. Dennis and Congreve apparently maintained their friendship for about twenty-five years, from 1693. Congreve did Dennis the honor of addressing to him the letter "Concerning Humor in Comedy," and was himself held in high esteem by Dennis.[1]

It is not the purpose here to suggest influences exerted by Dennis upon the comic dramatists or by the dramatists upon Dennis. Dennis is important because his work shows how all the major impulses and interests of the time were unified into a single ethical and aesthetic position just as they are in the best of the comedies. In other words, one can find in Dennis a nearly complete reflection of the comic impulses, the harmonious intentions, the world view created by Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve.

By 1694 Dennis was apparently already recognized as a great critic. From that time, he established literary, ethical, and aesthetic attitudes of extreme importance. As Hooker suggests,[2] the ethical position that he

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[1] Ibid., pp. xiv-xvii.

[2] Ibid., p. xcii.

presents is probably a mixture of many ingredients, notably perhaps Epicurus, La Rochefoucauld, and Pascal. According to Dennis, "the Chief End and Design of Man is to make himself happy,"[1] and man in every thing that he does "proposes Pleasure to himself."[2] The thing that affords pleasure to man, Dennis goes on, is passion:

> For Reason may often afflict us, and make us miserable, by setting our Impotence, or our Guilt, before us; but that which it generally does, is the maintaining us in a languishing State of Indifference, which, perhaps, is more remov'd from Pleasure than it is from Affliction, and which may be said to be the ordinary State of Men.
>
> It is plain, then, that Reason, by maintaining us in that State, is an Impediment to our Pleasure, which is our Happiness: For to be pleas'd, a Man must come out of his ordinary state; Now nothing in this Life can bring him out of it, but Passion alone, which Reason pretends to combat.
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> Nothing but Passion, in effect, can please us. . . .[3]

Reason is a method of distinguishing truth from error, and since there is no error or falsehood in heaven, reason will be unnecessary in that life. But since man on earth is a reasonable creature, he cannot enjoy passion unless it is aroused in such a manner as to reconcile with reason:

> But though we can never be happy by the Force of Reason, yet, while we are in this Life, we cannot possibly be happy without it, or against it. For since Man is by his Nature a reasonable Creature,

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[1] Dennis, "The Usefulness of the Stage," Hooker, I, 148.

[2] Ibid., p. 149.

[3] Ibid., p. 150.

> to suppose Man happy against his Reason, is to suppose him happy against Nature, which is absurd and monstrous. We have shewn, that a Man must be pleas'd, to be happy, and must be mov'd, to be pleas'd; and that to please him to a height, you must move him in proportion: But then the Passions must be raised after such a manner, as to take Reason along with them. If Reason is quite overcome, the Pleasure is neither long, nor sincere, nor safe. For how many that have been transported beyond their Reason, have never more recover'd it? If Reason resists, a Man's breast becomes the Seat of Civil War, and the Combat makes him miserable.[1]

Consequently, Hooker suggests, "The Summum bonum for man therefore became passion reconciled with reason, for that alone could create pleasure."[2] Philosophers had failed to discover the way to happiness

> . . . because, while some tried to still the conflict by subduing reason and others by subduing passion, none had hit upon a way of reconciling both powers. Through the true religion, then, or through whatever means offer themselves, man pursues happiness in pleasure and pleasure in the enjoyment of such passions as are approved by the reason.[3]

From this ethical position, Dennis built his aesthetics of poetry. The great design of arts, he said, "is to restore the Decays that happen'd to human Nature by the Fall, by restoring Order."[4] This order is restored through the perfect harmony of all human faculties:

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Hooker, p. xcii.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Dennis, "The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry," Hooker, I, 336.

> . . . in a sublime and accomplish'd Poem, the Reason, and Passions, and Senses are pleas'd at the same time superlatively. The Reason in the Soundness and Importance of the Moral, and the Greatness and Justness of an Harmonious Design, Whose Parts, so beautiful when they are considered separately, become transporting upon a view of the whole, while we are never weary of contemplating their exact Proportion, and beautiful Symmetry, and their secret wonderful Dependence, while they are all animated by the same Spirit, in order to the same end. The Reason further finds its account in the exact perpetual observance of Decorums, and in beholding itself exalted, by the Exaltation of the Passions, and in seeing those Passions, in their fiercest Transports, confin'd to those Bounds, which that has severely prescrib'd them.[1]

Passion is the characteristic mark of poetry, according to Dennis, but not alone, for it is not even a source of pleasure unless it is brought in harmony with the reason and the senses. "The art of poetry is the art of controlling passions in accordance with a preconceived aim."[2] The end of poetry is dual: to give pleasure, and to reform manners by aligning the means to pleasure, the passions, on the side of virtue.[3] The reformation of manners is the final end of poetry.

Dennis' other contributions to literary theory, especially his comments on the imagination and the sublime, need not be considered here, nor do his special examinations of the rules and the nature of comedy, which will

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[1]Dennis, "The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry," Hooker, I, 263-264.

[2]Hooker, p. xciii.

[3]Dennis, "The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry," Hooker, I, 336.

be considered later. As was suggested earlier, the real measure of Dennis' stature as a critic is his ability to adapt the best thought of his time into his own aesthetic philosophy. Drawing from ethics, philosophy, and theology, he arrived at his statement of the summum bonum -- the kind of pleasure in which both mind and heart are satisfied:

> From Epicureanism, from Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Hobbes, and perhaps Anglican theologians he derived suggestions for this theory of self-interest as the basic motive of all men, and to this theory he added his unusually interesting ideas about the nature of the passions and their importance in the good life. Pursuing this inquiry, he came to investigate the relationship of the good life (and of poetry, in which he found that balance of passion and reason in terms of which he defined the good life) to Christianity and to the state. The aims of the Christian revelation and of poetry, he found, were in regard to man identical: both provided a means whereby men might indulge their passions with the full assent of reason and virtue.[1]

Dennis' attitudes toward a second major area in the literary background of Restoration comedy are also important. In his comments on the rules and the dramatic conventions, Dennis further reveals the harmonizing impulse of his work, the highly reasonable tone of his literary theory.

From the various sources of Restoration literary theory and the various attitudes that developed in the literary criticism of the period, there developed a body of rules, which by many of the critics were regarded as

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[1]Hooker, p. cxxiv.

the highest standard for literary composition. This regularistic impulse is, of course, one of the factors which have persuaded students of the coldness and formality of Restoration and eighteenth century literature. It is quite true, of course, that many critics did insist upon adherence to the rules; it is equally true that many others did not. A brief consideration of some opinions regarding the rules is enough to reveal again the reasonable spirit of Restoration literary theory, at least at its best, and its efforts at universality.

The chief critical dogmas maintained by the rules include instruction as the fundamental purpose of literature, the distribution of poetic justice, and the preservation of decorum. A closer look will show that the main body of the rules is divided according to certain aesthetic and ethical principles.

There are several basic ethical principles stipulated in the rules, some of them mentioned above. First, of course, all literature must be instructive. Delight will entice to instruction, the critics said. Finally, poetic justice must be observed -- good rewarded, evil punished; and it must be remembered that for many adherents to the rules, this meant not spiritual or ethical reward, but material. All the esthetic rules are subsidiary to these. According to followers of the rules, the only point in the aesthetic standards is that they

prepare the way for the ethical requirements.

Of the aesthetic rules, many are merely mechanical. The unities of time, place, and action were to be observed. This meant also that proper liaison des scenes had to be maintained and that the actions of comedy and tragedy could not be mixed. Characters were to be conventionalized. Plays were all to be in five acts; and the deus ex machina was to be used only sparingly.[1]

The greatest of the rules was the principle of decorum, which developed out of literary concern for Aristotle's standard of propriety, Horace's distinctions between people, and other sources. The principle of decorum involves many things, notably the insistence that types be presented in accordance with their typical rather than their occasional characteristics. The development of the idea of decorum as a literary and ethical standard must be considered later.

Through these rules, the imitation of nature could proceed with proper instruction, however delightful it might be, for mankind. The qualities of a work that imitated nature were universality, typicalness, uniformity, simplicity, and regularity. Forced compliance with all of these requirements could, of course, as so many have

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[1]M. T. Herrick, The Fusion of Horation and Aristotelian Literary Criticism, 1531-1555 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1946), passim.

declared, produce cold, stiff, formal work, lacking completely in human warmth. It is questionable first whether to the best literary theorists of the Restoration and later forced and rigid adherence was necessary. It is further questionable, whether these views -- the rules, standards of decorum, and others -- reasonably and sensibly modified by a sense of the harmony of human existence, are not the beginning point for the literary creation of a new enlightenment, as in The Way of the World.

Hooker discusses opposition to the rules in England and indicates that the revolt was obviously widespread.[1] Dennis, however, reaffirms the value of the rules, even though he himself was to suggest certain modifications. The rules, Dennis suggests, because they are founded on philosophy and profound investigation into human nature, reveal the best way by which an artist may produce the proper psychological effect on his audience. Since the human mind remains essentially the same, the observations based on it are universal and permanent. Though one might reject the authority of the ancients, their precepts were sound. This suggests rather a reasonable attitude than a slavish compliance with the rules. Furthermore, Dennis suggests general laws, not literary rules. He indicates, in a very important passage, the essential balance, proportion, and symmetry which are

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[1]Hooker, pp. lxxx-lxxxiv.

the ends both of literary theory and literary practice:

> There is nothing in Nature that is great and beautiful, without Rule and Order; and the more Rule and Order, and Harmony, we find in the Objects that strike our Senses, the more worthy and noble we esteem them. I humbly conceive, that it is the same in Art, and particularly in Poetry, which ought to be an exact Imitation of Nature. Now Nature, taken in a stricter sense, is nothing but that Rule and Order, and Harmony, which we find in the visible Creation. The Universe owes its admirable Beauty to the Proportion, Situation, and Dependence of its Parts. And the little World, which we call Man, owes not only its Health and Ease, and Pleasure, nay, the continuance of its very Being, to the Regularity of the Mechanical Motion, but even the Strength too of its boasted Reason, and the piercing force of those aspiring thoughts, which are able to pass the bounds that circumscribe the Universe. As Nature is Order and Rule, and Harmony in the visible World, so Reason is the very same throughout the invisible Creation. For Reason is Order, and the Result of Order. And nothing that is irregular, as far as it is Irregular, ever was, or ever can be either Natural or Reasonable.[1]

Developing along with the various attitudes toward the rules and with other critical opinions and theories were certain theories and conventions governing comic drama. First, of course, in keeping with the moral stipulations of the rules, comedy was expected to be profitable. The comic drama was to display the vices and the follies of the time. The business of the plays was to recommend virtue and discountenance vice, to expose singularities of pride and fancy, to "make Folly and Falsehood contemptible, and to bring everything that is

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[1]Dennis, "The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry," Hooker, I, 202.

ill under Infamy and neglect." Comedy, according to James Drake, author of one of the defenses against Collier, is designed to teach men civil prudence and their private duty; it is to instruct men that they fall through their own fault.[1]

Second, comedy was expected to be satirical, as indicated above, but it was to avoid satire of individuals. Further, comedy was to observe the rules, though the use of poetic justice is limited in some areas. Comedy, for instance, cannot try follies not open to ridicule. Finally, comedy was to have a due proportion of wit, and, a point strongly stressed by Dennis but often forgotten in the urgency of critical theories, comedy should be funny. Now wit is the method -- or weapon, rather -- of this comedy.

Attitudes toward wit, as indicated in the best literature and theory of the Restoration, reveal some characteristics apparent in critical opinions regarding literature. Just as the best minds of the time saw the necessity for modifying the sometimes harsh requirements of rules and conventions, just as they saw the need for modifying the harsher demands of reason with the humanizing passions, so too in literary attitudes toward wit the same kind of reasonable attitude becomes apparent.

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[1]E. E. Williams, "Dr. James Drake and Restoration Theory of Comedy," Review of English Studies, XV (April, 1939), pp. 180-191.

In the Restoration there were thought to be many varieties of wit, and illustrations abound for each variety. In the comedies the finest wit is sharpened to insure the prevalence of balance and order.

In a general characterization of wit, Eliot suggests that wit "involves, probably, a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible. . . ."[1] Williamson recounts some of the traditional treatments of wit,[2] recalling the Metaphysical wit of resemblance in incongruity, Dr. Johnson's discordia concors, and Dryden's "propriety"; here a somewhat more extended consideration of wit must be attempted in order to understand that quality in Restoration comedy which led Fujimura to adopt the new name "Comedy of Wit."

Fujimura somewhat distorts the ideas of wit, fancy, judgment and decorum. At the outset, he assumes Hobbes' statements on wit to be the most important of the time, and while no one can deny their significance, it is, at best, unfortunate so to minimize the discussions of Locke, Dryden, the dramatists themselves, and the Spectator papers of 1711. Further, because of his thesis, he confuses

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[1]Eliot, p. 45.

[2]George Williamson, "The Rhetorical Pattern of Neo-Classical Wit," Modern Philology, XXXIII (August, 1935), 55-81.

the identity of wit and judgment and decorum. Falling into a familiar trap, he suggests in one place that "suspicion of fancy was natural, of course, in a rationalistic age,"[1] and ignores the synthetic quality of wit as the expression of truth. Wit as fancy, he says, is employed only "for the purpose of securing novelty and surprise,"[2] and the Truewit is distinguished from the Witwouds by judgment.

Wit, employed at its best in the best of Restoration comedy, is a comic device and a corrective device which bases its statement on the whole man and his universe, synthesizing all his faculties. The foundation of wit can be found in "The Manners, and Tempers, and Extravagances of men."[3] The family of railleurs derives from the same original as that of philosophers.[4] It is, however, perhaps unwise to speak of wit as a device; the better term might be "manner." This manner is defined in Wolseley's defense of Rochester, and the definition reveals the all-encompassing quality of wit:

> I take Wit then in Poetry, or poetical Wit (for that is the Wit here in Question), to be nothing else but a true and lively expression of Nature. By Nature I do not only mean all sorts of material objects and

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[1] Fujimura, p. 28.

[2] Ibid., p. 32.

[3] Sprat, p. 414.

[4] Ibid., p. 417.

> every Species of Substance whatsoever, but also general Notions and abstracted Truths, such as exist only in the Minds of men and in the property and relation of things one to another, -- in short, whatever has a Being of any kind; the other terms of the Definition are, I think, so plain as not to need Explication; true this expression of Nature must be that it may gain our Reason, and lively that it may affect our Passions. . . .[1]

Wit was opposed, of course, by many who thought it took men's minds from serious matters and into flights of flowered fancy:

> Our Learning daily sinks, and Wit is grown
> The senseless conversation of the Town. . . .
> It takes Men in the Head, and in the Fit
> They lose their senses and are gone in Wit.[2]

But for every attack on wit there was adequate defense, and wit continued the manner of the time.

Hobbes' distinctions between wit as fancy and wit as judgment set the stage for further definitions. For Hobbes, wit was a combination of fancy, or the discovery of similitudes, with judgment, or the discovery of dissimilitudes.[3] After Hobbes, however, definitions tended to equate it only with one or the other. Dryden's nimble spaniel suggests wit as fancy, while Locke's statements identify wit with judgment. Many statements, however,

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[1]Robert Wolseley, "Preface to Rochester's Valentinian," Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed. J. E. Spingarn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), III, 21-22.

[2]Sir Richard Blackmore, "A Satyr against Wit," Spingarn, III, 325.

[3]Hobbes, pp. 56-70.

retain the synthesizing faculty of wit:

> Besides the heat of Invention and liveliness of Wit, there must be the coldness of good Sense and soundness of Judgment, to distinguish between things and conceptions which at first sight or upon short glances seem alike, to choose among infinite productions of Wit and Fancy which are worth preserving and cultivating. . . .[1]

Here wit is identified with fancy, but it is recognized that judgment also is necessary. In many discussions of the period, this same split occurs, but ultimately wit and judgment are married.

Wit, for Locke, Hobbes, Dryden, and others, implied a certain quickness of parts. At the same time it suggests some irresponsibility; its main concern is in combining ideas which have some congruity. For these men judgment was a necessary counterpart in its ability to distinguish ideas. Following the discussion of false wit, Spectator #62 defines this position:

> For wit lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures, and agreeable visions in the fancy; judgment, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another.[2]

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[1]Sir William Temple, "Of Poetry," Spingarn, III, 81.

[2]G. Gregory Smith (ed.), The Spectator (1711-1712), intro. Austin Dobson (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1897), I, 234.

Despite this split mentioned so often by many writers of the period, others insist on the identity of wit, fancy, and judgment:

> 'Tis a great Errour, the making a difference between the Wit and the Judgment: For, in truth, the Judgment is nothing else but the Brightness of Wit, which penetrates into the very bottom of Things, observes all that ought to be observ'd there, and descries what seem'd to be imperceptible. From whence we must conclude, that 'tis the Extention and Energy of this Light of Wit, that produces all those Effects, usually ascrib'd to Judgment.[1]

The same notion is suggested in Sheffield's "An Essay on Poetry":

> As all is Dulness when the Fancy's bad;
> So, without Judgment, Fancy is but mad:
> And Judgment has a boundless Influence
> Not only in the choice of Words, and Sense,
> But on the World, on Manners, and on Men;
> Fancy is but the Feather of the Pen;
> Reason is that Substantial, useful part,
> Which gains the Head, while t'other wins the Heart.[2]

The best study of wit in the Restoration and early eighteenth century is an unpublished doctoral dissertation by D. J. Milburn,[3] who very clearly shows that wit as fancy never gave way to the colder wit as judgment.

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[1] Abel Boyer, The English Theophrastus, or, The Manners of the Age, Being the Modern Characters of the Court, the Town, and the City, Augustan Reprint Society, Series One, No. 3 (May, 1947), p. 282.

[2] John Sheffield, The Works of John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave (London: Printed for J. B., 1729), II, 129.

[3] D. J. Milburn, "Important Aspects of Wit: 1650-1750" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Department of English, University of Oklahoma). I am indebted to Milburn in the discussion that follows except where otherwise noted.

Milburn views wit from various points: rhetoric, psychology, propriety, and sociology; and he demonstrates the principal meanings of wit to lie in aspects of rhetoric, psychology, decorum, and the *je ne sais quoi*. His treatment of wit in relation to psychology and decorum is especially important to an understanding of the critical background of Restoration comedy. After a careful discussion of the rhetorical aspects of wit, Milburn considers traditional meanings of wit and outlines the various mental characteristics associated with wit: ingenuity, invention, vivacity, brightness, celerity, and surprise. Since the various aspects of wit -- as fancy, judgment, or decorum -- as well as the distinctions between true and false wit are extremely important to Restoration comedy, it is worthwhile to pursue this subject further.

It is clear from Milburn's study that terms like wit, fancy, and judgment, so often assumed to be antithetical, are in many of the best works of the period closely unified. Many commentators on wit -- notably Hobbes, whose work was so influential -- were ambiguous, thereby causing confusion among later students. Still, the works and the theories reveal that in decorum the best qualities of wit as fancy and wit as judgment merge to form not just a literary ideal, but a way of life.

As has been suggested earlier, fancy, or imagi-

nation, was always respectable during the Restoration. One characteristic important in the history of wit in this period, as Milburn shows, is the gradual association of wit with fancy, the initial steps being wit's identification with ingenuity and invention. This association set up a clear opposition between wit and judgment. The dichotomy was evident everywhere. It was generally recognized "that wit and judgment had different functions, had indeed different natures. One finds, as a result, that wit and fancy were used interchangeably -- both in opposition to judgment." Yet even as wit, identified with fancy, is opposed to judgment, the opposition begins to disappear as writers and theorists of the period see the necessity for the balance of both faculties:

> First follow Nature, and your judgment frame
> By her just standard, which is still the same:
> . . . . . .
> Some, to whom Heav'n in wit has been profuse,
> Want as much more, to turn it to its use;
> For wit and judgment often are at strife,
> Though meant each other's aid, like man and wife.
> 'Tis more to guide than spur the Muse's steed;
> Restrain his fury, than provoke his speed;
> The winged courser, like a gen'rouse horse,
> Shows most true mettle when you check his course.

As suggested here, the growing impulse was to balance the wit or fancy with the check rein of the judgment.

Milburn's discussion of decorum and the truth of wit is particularly pertinent in the background of the comedies of the period. Decorum is generally thought of as the preservation of the type, a faithful adherence

to probability of manners and language. The treatment of decorum in Fujimura's study suffers somewhat because forced to fit a thesis. He suggests that the forces of rationalism and science were at work to shape a notion of decorum deriving solely from the judgment. This leads to a rather formal, cold concept of propriety of conduct and speech, based primarily on respect for sound judgment.[1] Because of his thesis, Fujimura views decorum as naturalistic insofar as it stands for the empirically verifiable, the normal, the probable. Milburn's study probes the matter further.

Dryden's definition of wit, of course, suggests decorum, which, in terms of expression, was the appropriate wording of the truth. Truth, of course, was always a reflection of nature. Remembering the conflict of wit and judgment, it might seem that wit could not adequately express truth, yet the great minds of the Restoration think of wit as the medium of decorum. This, Milburn indicates, is primarily due to the fact that as wit and fancy became more closely associated, judgment too was felt to be necessary as a balance. Consequently, wit, involving fancy, but also involving judgment as the fundamental balance, could be the medium of decorum and truth. Dryden, Dennis, and others, when forced to the issue, insist there can be no wit without judgment.

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[1]Fujimura, pp. 21-27.

Wit, as decorum, was an expression of nature. This was to be expected by the very nature of decorum and also by the association of wit with judgment. Judgment, according to Hobbes, was the "severer Sister" to fancy, and busies herself with "a grave and rigid examination of all the parts of Nature."[1] In literary expression, "Nature's chief Master-piece is writing well;"[2] it was a reflection of nature itself. Therefore, Milburn suggests, wit was a "true and lively expression of Nature."[3] Wit as decorum, then, meant finally an expression of truth. It was controlled by nature and judgment; true wit could not be otherwise than the expression of truth. Wit as decorum, in other words, develops as the expression of propriety, nature, and truth: wit, Milburn says, "reached one pinnacle in its association with decorum."

> True wit is nature to advantage dress'd,
> What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed;
> Something, whose truth convinc'd at sight we find,
> That gives us back the image of our mind
> As shades more sweetly recommend the light,
> So modest plainess sets off sprightly wit.
> For works may have more wit than does 'em good,
> As bodies perish through excess of blood.

Wit was accepted by all the great wits as an expression of truth. This was particularly true of a group

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[1]Hobbes, "Answer to Davenant's Preface to Gondibert," Spingarn, II, 59.

[2]Sheffield, II, 131.

[3]Wolseley, "Preface to Rochester's Valentinian," Spingarn, III, 21.

like the Scriblerus Club, whose members, in the words of Swift, felt that "To expose vice, and to make people laugh with innocence, does more public serivce than all the Ministers of State from Adam to Walpole."[1] This notion of wit as the means of expressing truth represents the ultimate development in decorum. It was the view of Dryden, who praised wit and held up poetry as the equal of philosophy in representing truth:

> Moral truth is the mistress of the poet as much as of the philosophers; Poesy must resemble natural truth, but it must be ethical. Indeed, the poet dresses truth, and adorns nature, but does not alter them:
> Ficta voluptatis causa sint proxima veris.
> Therefore that is not the best poesy which resembles notions of things that are not, to things that are: Though the fancy may be great and the words flowing, yet the soul is but half satisfied when there is not truth in the foundation.[2]

Through the Restoration and early eighteenth century, the concept of wit as decorum, the expression of truth, underwent certain changes, Milburn shows. The delicate balance of reason and enthusiasm, of rule against individual taste, of judgment and imagination that characterized true decorum was sustained at its best only in The Way of the World. Gradually a new aesthetics began to take shape as the imagination slowly took precedence over the judgment, and the individual and the personal took the place of the consensus gentium and the universal.

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[1] Quoted in Milburn, p. 126.

[2] Ibid.

This change is reflected in a tradition of wit which ran counter to wit as decorum: this was wit of an unknown quality, the je ne sais quoi, the "Grace beyond the reach of Art." This change is noted in Milburn, where he gives a further idea of the aesthetic balance of literary theory at its best in this period:

> The recognition in decorum of the utility -- even, by some, the necessity -- of the fancy in proper expression indicates a further concession by the forces of reason and judgment. And, finally, the recognition by many of the period's major literary figures of the "secret graces" which went beyond "art" was a capitulation of formalism to the new aesthetics. Therefore, one must conclude that a compromise was made throughout the neoclassical period with principles diametrically opposed to neoclassicism, that there was never a period, however brief, when imagination was not accepted theoretically and in practice. And imagination, as including emotions, luxuriance, extravagance, excessiveness, and wantonness, must be accepted as antithetical to all that neoclassicism stood for. Any view of neoclassicism which does not include its antithetical aspect is in error.[1]

There remains one segment of Milburn's study of wit that must be considered as vital in the background of Restoration comedy -- his examination of wit "as a way of life," and his discussion of the distinctions between true and false wit.

The intellectual ranks associated with true wits, false wits, and pretenders to wit are important in Restoration comedy. The true wit was a man of ability who produced geniune wit in whatever tradition of wit and

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[1]Milburn, p. 162.

medium he chose. The true wit had also a serious purpose. Men like Dryden, Wycherley, and Congreve labored to please their audience. The essence of wit was entertainment, but wit always had its ulterior motives. These were usually expressed as making folly ridiculous and vice odious. But no matter how heavy or light the moral purpose, the general aim was always, as Swift said, "to expose vice, and to make people laugh with innocence." It was in the tradition of decorum to accomplish this by simply portraying the truth.

Pretenders to wit are best catalogued, examined, and pinned to the wall in The Way of the World. They, like the false wits, lack decorum and judgment, but they also have many social defects. The same qualities which make them socially inappropriate make them mere pretenders to wit. Some conception of the varietiesof wits and pretenders to wit can be seen in The Spectator, where Steele invited "all manner of Persons" to submit essays for publication:

> . . . whether Scholars, Citizens, Courtiers, Gentlemen, of the Town or Country, and all Beaux, Rakes, Smarts, Prudes, Coquets, Housewives, and all sorts of Wits, whether Male or Female, and however distinguished, whether they be True-Wits, Whole, or Half-Wits, or Whether Arch, Dry, Natural, Acquired, Genuine, or Deprav'd Wits; and Persons of all Sorts of Tempers and Complexions, whether the Severe, the Delightful, the Impertinent, the Agreeable, the Thoughtful, Busie, or Careless; the Serene or Cloudy, Jovial or Melancholly, Untowardly or Easie; the Cold, Temperate, or Sanguine; and of what Manners of Dispositions soever.[1]

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[1] The Spectator, VI, 166.

Finally there were the false wits. False wit, as Milburn shows, can refer simply to excessive use of rhetorical devices. But there is a more important meaning:

> False wit resulted when little minds attempted wit, either in the form of satire, criticism, raillery, ridicule, humour, or other such intents. False wit was, therefore, a display of affectation, of impertinence, of pretension to wit which was obtained by borrowing and imitation. The result was abuse of these expressions of wit and a general confusion of values. Fads and frills, replaced fundamental ability and performance. The favorite contemporary descriptions were "affection" and "impertinence."[1]

It is necessary now to pause for a brief summary of the preceding discussion in order to re-state briefly the most salient points and to indicate their importance for Restoration comedy. Some attempt has been made here to consider the literary attitudes of the Restoration, both in theory and in practice, with regard to critical standards, the rules, stage conventions, and wit with its associated ideas, fancy, judgment, and decorum. This has been done in order to suggest three general characteristics of the literary climate of Restoration comedy.

First, it has been suggested that neoclassical literary theory and practice at their best achieve a synthesis of ideas and terms long thought to be diametrically opposed. It has been indicated that in the best of literary theory, for instance in the work of John Dennis, the great concerns of literary men find unity and harmony --

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[1]Milburn, p. 229.

reason and imagination harmoniously balanced, the rules praised, but quite willingly modified, or even forsaken.

Second, an attempt has been made to show that through the history of wit in this period a perfect balance is again achieved. Wit gradually becomes associated with either fancy or judgment. As it more commonly came to be associated with the fancy, the balancing control of the judgment was maintained. This harmony of human faculties in turn gave rise to the all-embracing principle of decorum, or wit as the expression of truth through all the human means.

Finally, it must be suggested that out of all these things, out of the harmony of ideas and impulses often thought to be eternally opposed derive balance, proportion, and symmetry in the principle of decorum. Through this unique harmony, the great literature of the age, in this case, Restoration comedy, expresses codes, patterns of social, intellectual, moral and aesthetic behavior, deviations from which create the greatest and the funniest of English comedies. Through this balance, proportion, and symmetry, through decorum, the truth is expressed -- about the whole <u>human</u> universe, about all the ways of the world.

CHAPTER IV

NOTES ON COMEDY AND THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF RESTORATION COMEDY

With some understanding of the intellectual and literary background of comic drama in the age of the Restoration, it becomes necessary now to consider the ultimate responsibility in such a study as this, namely, an investigation of the comic principle, the form, and the function of Restoration comedy. Aside from the fact that these things should be the principal matter of critical discussion anyhow, their importance has been increased by the inadequacy of earlier examinations, most of which, in their effort to show that Restoration comedy is either artificial, narrow, or immoral, fail entirely to discuss the central matters of comic drama. It is obvious, of course, that to understand Restoration comedy, one must understand it first as comedy, not as either moral or immoral preachment or witty nonsense; in other words, one must search out the principles of these works as comedies. To do this, it seems necessary, following a brief reconsideration of early statements, to consider their milieu,

the source of the comic impulse, their form, and their function.

These issues have rarely been discussed in critical studies of the comedies. At its worst, criticism of Restoration comedy has simply dismissed the works as inconsequential. Knights, for example, suggests that the only criticism that defenders of Restoration comedy need to answer is that the plays are "trivial, gross, and dull."[1] To John Wain, a recent critic, Restoration comedy is "the fever-chart of a sick society, a society that might easily have died."[2]

A great deal of the criticism treats Restoration comedy as artificial, divorced from any touch with the world. Nicoll depicted the comedies as passionless and lacking entirely in the warmth of life.[3] Lynch found in these plays only a glittering social code, disregarding many other things apparent in the works.[4] For still still another critic,

> The artificiality consists, however, not in a tampering with the essential facts concerning the society it pictures, but rather in the charming, artificial atmosphere and mood which suffuses these

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[1]Knights, p. 149.

[2]John Wain, "Restoration Comedy and its Modern Critics," Essays in Criticism, VI (October, 1956), 367.

[3]Nicoll, p. 187.

[4]Lynch, passim.

> facts and makes possible our delight in scenes otherwise impossible for presentation.[1]

Many of these same studies insist also on the narrowness of Restoration comedies; it has often been suggested that they are concerned only with one well-defined plane of society.

Elizabeth Mignon, in her study of old men and women in the plays who fail to fit the social scale, indicates that the youth of the plays proclaimed a carpe diem attitude in opposition to the view of their elders and in reaction to the haunting brevity of their gay years.[2] Many critics have found a similar philosophy, or worse, depicted in Restoration comedy, and so has grown the great body of criticism which denounces these works as immoral. From Collier through Macaulay to many present-day critics, the same attacks recur.

There are, of course, many studies which have approached nearer to the essential elements of comic drama, in this case that of the Restoration. Of these, some have considered the order or potential order depicted by the plays, while others have examined the source of the comic and, to a lesser extent, the form and function of comedy.

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[1]B. V. Crawford, "High Comedy in Terms of Restoration Practice," Philological Quarterly, VIII (October, 1956), 344.

[2]Elizabeth Mignon, Crabbed Age and Youth, The Old Men and Women in the Restoration Comedy of Manners (Durham: Duke University Press, 1947).

There are, for example, critics like Kathleen Lynch who have dwelt on the order or code of existence apparent or potential in these comedies. There is a code discovered in Restoration comedy, and one of its features is its flexibility. In every case, however, where students have thought of such a code, they have deemed it to be purely social and quite rigid.

The source and the nature of the comic impulse as revealed in these plays has been variously defined. Comedy, according to Meredith, is the "fountain of sound sense."

> The laughter of comedy is impersonal and of unrivalled politeness, nearer a smile, often no more than a smile. It laughs through the mind, for the mind directs it, and it might be called the humor of the soul.[1]

This, of course, to any one who has read, say, The Country Wife, is patently insufficient; but, of course, vastly different opinions have been expressed. To John Palmer, for example, the source of the comic in Restoration comic drama was the dispassionate treatment of sex.[2] Other treatments of the essential issues offer further insight as to existing attitudes toward Restoration comedy.

Bonamy Dobrée, for example, initiates his study with an attempt to classify comedy for convenience in discussion, and in doing so suggests several interesting

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[1]Meredith, p. 47.

[2]Palmer, p. 187.

ideas regarding the nature, form, and end of comic drama. Two of his categories, free comedy and great comedy, however, contribute scarcely anything to the understanding of comedy. In free comedy, Dobrée says, no values count and judgment is out of place; we gain a release from all things that limit our powers. Such a judgment, it is needless to say, says little about comedy of any kind. His great comedy, on the other hand, is a category in which he considers plays that are near-tragedies.[1]

It is only in his third category, critical comedy, that Dobrée touches on the commonly accepted principles of comic drama. The correction of manners by laughter, the cure of excess, the preachment of the happy mean -- these are the factors that Dobrée associates with critical comedy. And the distinguishing characteristic of Restoration comedy, he adds, is the attempt to rationalize sexual relationships. In a world where moral order is in ruins, where sexual protocol is the only standard, Dobree says, comedy "gives us courage to face life without any standpoint."[2]

Another effort to understand the nature of Restoration comedy is Perry's study, which follows Meredith in invoking the comic muse, the spirit of thoughtful laughter. The source of comedy, to Perry, is incongruity.

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[1]Dobree, pp. 1-16.

[2]Ibid., p. 16.

In a final judgment of this comedy which he says is without moral restrictions or regard for fundamental ethical problems, Perry says that the comedy of manners is the "last and most brilliant effort of the laughing muse to resist the intrusions of the more serious concerns of existence."[1] A final note on the source of the comic in the comic drama of the Restoration, as well as a brief note on the structure of these plays, is furnished by F. W. Bateson:

> It is obviously in the auditor's sudden transition from the objective plane of everyday rational reality, which must always be the point of comic departure, to the subjective plane of dream-fantasy or irrational dream-fulfillment that the ridiculous is born. Its most elementary form is the top-hatted gentleman who skids on a banana-skin. In terms of the dramatic structure of a Restoration comedy, it is the continuous collision of the plays' heroes (including the heroines), that is, the "men of sense," with their grotesque opposites, . . each of whom is imprisoned in his own fantasy.[2]

The end of comedy has been variously stated in studies of Restoration comedy. According to Meredith, it serves to wound; it is "the specific for the poison of delusion while Folly is passing from the state of vapour to substantial form."[3] For another student, the function of the comic writer is to mock at "the infirmities of the flesh and at the illusion of discipline."[4] For another

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[1]Perry, p. 132.

[2]Bateson, p. 62.

[3]Meredith, p. 34.

[4]Clifford Leech, "Restoration Comedy, the Earlier Phase," Essays in Criticism, I (April, 1951), p. 169.

the end of Restoration comedy, apparently, is only to satirize that which is not graceful.[1] But for the most complete discussion of form and function in Restoration comedy, one must turn again to Fujimura's Restoration Comedy of Wit.

Fujimura recognizes that we are never wholly dispassionate in reading these comedies. There is also, he says, a judgment of value involved. In order to do away with the moral obstacle and to get at the heart of the wit comedy, Fujimura suggests a naturalistic and hedonic theory of art as the proper approach, an approach in which a playful and hedonic wit is extremely important. In his concern with the aesthetic experience of this hedonic art, Fujimura indicates that Horace's juxtaposition of utile and dulce is not valid, and that any stress on utile is highly questionable.

For Fujimura, the end of comedy, at least so far as Restoration comedy is concerned, is pleasure. This pleasure arises from vicarious satisfaction of our malice, egoism, sexuality, and cynicism, from the beauty of the language, and from the perception by the sense of proportion.[2] Finally, there is the satisfaction one finds in the witty apprehension of life:

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[1]Krutch, p. 44.

[2]Fujimura, pp. 58-62.

> The witty muse dances gaily over the surface of life, thrusting a sharp lance now and then at the heavy torso of mundane existence; its eyes sparkle with gaiety, and there is a radiance in its features at once intellectual and malicious and playful. We are carried away by it, and we join in the dance of the witty muse, content for the moment with its gay whirling. We do not forget the larger issues of life, nor do we flee them, as Lamb suggested; rather we are so affected by the magic touch of the witty muse that we see such issues in a shimmer of beauty, as when the first sun-drenched day of spring sets the dewdrops glistening on the flower tips. Our vision is transformed -- and perhaps constricted -- but such a narrowing of our vision is conducive to a more unified vision, so that we see more clearly and directly and wholly, if not more largely.[1]

Reading this, one must see that despite his protestations, Fujimura, with his witty muse dancing "gaily over the surface of life," is not far removed from the critical position adopted by Lamb.

Wit comedy, Fujimura goes on, produces a sense of well-being because it presents a world of definite order, where definite values exist. The great issues of life, he says, do not concern us in comedy, where life is seen as a witty enterprise. The witty muse "flits over the surface of things, hitting those who take life too seriously -- or too frivolously."[2] Yet, unaccountably, when one asks what is the nature of this world of definite order presided over by the witty muse, Fujimura only says "the witty muse answers not."[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 63.

[2] Ibid., p. 65.

[3] Ibid.

Fujimura's discussion of the form or structure of Restoration comedy, though relatively brief, is a landmark in criticism of these plays, representing as it does one of the few efforts to understand their structure. Their organization, he says, centers in an outwitting situation, a wit-contest (embracing plot and character). A further source of pleasure is in nondramatic wit (dianoia and diction), to which he adds a third source, comic wit, which is a fusion of the comic (involving character and action) and the witty (involving words and ideas), and is best seen in the famous "proviso" scenes.[1]

Many critical discussions of Restoration comedy have considerable value, but without exception their effectiveness is limited in varying degrees by certain critical preoccupations. These failures are generally attributable to one of four sources: a failure to understand the milieu of Restoration comedy; a failure to explain or allow for all kinds of laughter demonstrated in the plays; a failure to overcome the awe inspired by claims of immorality; and a failure to discuss fully the form and function, the structure and effect of these comedies. In an effort to take at least a step toward better understanding and to avoid shirking the final responsibility of any discussion of comedy, it becomes necessary now to consider (1) some notions about the source, nature, and

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[1] Ibid., pp. 65-69.

end of comedy; (2) the structure of Restoration comedies; and (3) the effect, function, or end of Restoration comedy.

Notes on Comedy

In an interesting note in his study of comedy, Ashley Thorndike suggests that to escape the banalities of farce, comedy must have some other interest than mere amusement.[1] While this is of course no conclusive argument either for the principle of instruction or for anything else in comedy, it does suggest something often overlooked in previous studies. If nothing else, this does suggest a counter to the old characterization of these comedies as pure lighthearted fluff. The continued assumption that Restoration comedy -- or any comedy for that matter -- is only froth, only the pinpricks of a witty muse flitting gaily over the surface of life not only contributes nothing to the understanding of the plays but also does them actual injustice: as Mudrick suggests, the "view that comedy is necessarily 'lighthearted,' gentlemanly, and careful of the 'ideals of the age' would of course have startled comic dramatists from Aristophanes to Jonson"[2]-- and on, one might add, to Wycherley and Congreve.

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[1]A. H. Thorndike, English Comedy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 7.

[2]Mudrick, pp. 110-111.

In short, before going any further, it is necessary to insist that comedy, even at its funniest, is a serious undertaking, concerned with somewhat more than the mere surface of life. Since this is so, then the student of comedy must determine where this serious undertaking begins, what form it takes, and what purpose it has. In order to do this -- before it is possible to determine the form and purpose of Restoration comedy -- it is necessary first of all to have some idea of what comedy itself is about. In the discussion which follows, what I have called "Notes on Comedy," an attempt has been made to develop a point of view, a line of thinking about comedy. Little that is new can be said about comedy, which has been discussed many times and many ways. What seems best is to develop a point of view which will serve in some measure to unify many conceptions of it. The sources considered in connection with each point are not presented chronologically. Generally, the plan has been to begin with more recent theories of comedy, then to consider what might be called the classical theories. The comments of the men of the Restoration, practicing dramatists, critics, and men of more or less good sense, have generally been withheld pending discussion of the aesthetics of Restoration comedy itself.

There are, of course, a great number of theories of laughter, wit, humor, and comedy, only part of which

are concerned with literature and the comic form. The basic theories of laughter, for example, most of which have been developed outside of any literary context, all revolve around one of three ideas. These three primary theories of laughter are the incongruity theory, the superiority theory, best illustrated in Bergson's concept of inelasticity; and the release from restraint theory, illustrated in Freud's account of the freedom from inhibition resulting from the gratification of repressed hostility or sexual desires. While these theories of laughter are of course important, they are not immediately pertiment to the discussion at hand. There are likewise a number of fairly recent works on the theory of comedy in a literary context, some of which are effective and must be considered later, while others shed no light either on comedy in general or on any special comedies.

While many of these studies are interesting, the essential point in a study of literary comedy is, as has been suggested, a point of view from which to consider the form itself before undertaking a close study of special comedies. Since the seriousness of comedy has been perpetually challenged, it may be helpful to seek a beginning place for the comic point of view in a comparison with tragedy, the genre to which comedy has been so often erroneously opposed.

Comedy, then, differs from tragedy in one respect

because it views man in a different situation. The comic view of life is concerned with man in society, with man in a purely human conflict. The tragic view of life, on the other hand, is concerned with man in the universe, with man in conflict with man and extra-human forces. They both are concerned among other things with situations involving ethical problems, but their approach to the conflict differs, that of tragedy being metaphysical and that of comedy being epistemological. Comedy is, according to Dennis, a realistic depiction of ordinary manners and customs, while tragedy, exalted above the ordinary level of existence, reflects nature ennobled by high position, power, and responsibility.[1]

This view is suggested also in Susanne Langer's Feeling and Form, where she distinguishes the rhythm of comedy from that of tragedy. Essentially, the distinction is that the rhythm of comedy is cyclical, never-ending, the "pure sense of life," while the rhythm of tragedy is completed, with death. Comedy, she says, "is an art form that arises naturally wherever people are gathered to celebrate life."[2] The mutual seriousness of tragedy and

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[1]Dennis, "Of Simplicity in Poetical Composition," Hooker, II, 30.

[2]Quoted in Sylvan Barnet, et al., eds., Eight Great Comedies (New York: New American Library, 1958), p. 458. This view should be considered, I think, in association with the comments in Northrop Frye, "The Argument of Comedy," English Institute Essays, 1948, ed. D. A.

comedy, as well as the distinctions between them that have been made here is further depicted by Katherine Lever:

> Comedy no less than tragedy is concerned with the fundamental problems of human life. The problems the dramatist chooses for comic or tragic treatment differ in nature rather than in importance. [Italics mine] The tragic poet is concerned with the relations of human beings to those forces which lie beyond their control; God or the gods, fate, chance, prophecies, immutable laws of religion and morality, inheritance, a man's own passions or the diabolical wickednesses of others . . . . The comic poet, on the other hand, is concerned with the relations of human beings to forces or conditions which do lie within their control: political corruption, social and economic injustice, aggressiveness in individuals and countries, war, sexual desires and romantic yearning, degeneration of literary taste, petty vexations and tensions, foibles and eccentricities of character. In the world of comedy, man has no need to fear. The supernatural world is beneficent. The natural world is amusing and friendly. The authorities who rule over us -- officials, teachers, parents, 'people' -- are strong and evil in appearance only; in the dramatic fray they show themselves weaker or kinder than we first thought. Our own worries can be resolved without permanent harm. Nor need man pity himself or others. We all have within our control powers of reason, will, and imagination strong enough to extricate ourselves from our difficulties. The protagonist in comedy thus emerges from his conflict strengthened by his fight and joyful in victory.[1]

Robertson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949). Although he suggests something like Miss Langer's distinctions between the rhythm of death (tragedy) and the rhythm of life (comedy), Frye goes on to show that tragedy in a sense is uncompleted comedy. The ritual pattern behind the catharsis of comedy, he says, is the resurrection which follows the death of the hero, a resurrection which does not occur in tragedy. At any rate, both studies suggest the similar interests of the two forms, distinguished only by their point of view toward life.

[1]Katherine Lever, The Art of Greek Comedy (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1956), p. vii.

There is a further point to consider here before going on. In the search for a point of view from which to inspect and understand comedy, it becomes apparent that comedy itself furnishes a point of view, and that this is another area where comedy and tragedy differ. Monro discussed at some length the distinguishing point of view of comedy, which he calls the "God's-eye view." At its best, he says, this is "rather a sense of the eternal inappropriateness of all human endeavor when measured by the best we know."[1] He goes on, then, to distinguish this view from that of tragedy:

> What we have called the god's-eye view consists in seeing those discrepancies between the real man, the real facts in the situation, and the man and the facts as they appear to themselves, and each other. But this, it may be objected, is also the material of tragedy. The difference is that in tragedy we see from the point of view of the characters: see from it, where in comedy we only see it. In tragedy, that is to say, we share the aims and feeling of the characters: their emotions seem to us real and important. When they are frustrated by the harsh, unaccommodating facts, we share with them their despair and disillusion. In comedy we understand and probably sympathize with the characters: but we never fully identify ourselves with them, because we are always conscious of a gulf between their view of life and the facts.[2]

Going a step further, one can suggest another basic distinction between tragedy and comedy. Tragedy, which depicts man in the world, opposed to forces that

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[1] D. H. Monro, The Argument of Laughter (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1951), p. 58.

[2] Ibid., pp. 247-248.

must inevitably mean his defeat, if it recognizes any order at all, reveals either that the order itself is upset, out of joint, or that man cannot fit himself into that order, is indeed, in conflict with it. Comedy, on the other hand, holds not only that order either does or can exist, but also that both man and society can comprehend it and so order their own existence. This order or harmony may at first be upside down, or it may be only a potential order, but the reality of an ideal order exists in comedy, along with the conception that man has a place in the pattern.

With some distinctions indicated between comedy and tragedy, it is possible to proceed with comedy as the sole interest. The comic view, then, is concerned either with an implied or a stated order. As suggested above, comedy may at first reveal an upset order or a potential order, but the possibility of an ideal order exists throughout and is revealed through the play. This order is based upon balance, harmony, propriety, and ethical conduct.

Some further notion of the nature of this pattern of existence can be inferred from various studies. Cook, for example, quite properly separates this ideal order from the Christian system of good and evil,[1] which is not,

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[1]Albert Cook, The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean, A Philosophy of Comedy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 87.

of course, to eliminate morality. He indicates further that comedy is conservative, that it is basically approval, not disapproval of present society.[1] This, of course, suggests, as so many studies have, that a rigid code exists in comedy, any deviations from which are immediately comic. This rigidity is clearly not apparent, as will be shown later in discussion of individual plays. It is obvious from the comedies that while deviations from a code may be comic, a rigidly applied code may also be comic. The nature of this ideal order is better indicated in Feibleman's suggestion that comedy is a satiric criticism of present limited historical order and a campaign for an unlimited ideal logical order of the future.[2] As Sypher suggests, we escape with the comedian "into a logical order by laughing at the imperfections of the world about us; the comic artist releases us from the limitations in things as they are."[3]

Some students have tried to show that individual reaction to the way of the world is another area in which tragedy and comedy differ. The editors of Eight Great Comedies, for example, assume that while in tragedy there

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[1] Ibid., p. 49.

[2] Cited, ibid.

[3] Wylie Sypher, "The Meanings of Comedy," appendix to Comedy, ed. with introduction and appendix Wylie Sypher (New York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1956), p. 246.

is something priceless in the struggles of a man who is, in a spiritual way, greater than the society around him,

> . . . much comedy assumes that the norms of society ought to be respected, and that the individual who attempts to go beyond the confines of the world of his fellows is not noble but foolish or even vicious. Comedy is thus frequently critical of the individual; it accepts as valid the codes of society, and is amused to see individuals set themselves up as exceptional.[1]

The same view is apparent in Dobrée's study when he suggests that comedy tends to repress deviation from the normal. Comedy does, of course, tend to repress deviation, but these are deviations not necessarily from the normal, the present way of the world, but from the logical, ideal way of the world, so that the audience witnesses what Frye calls a "renewed sense of social integration," based on some kind of ethical norm and a free society.[2] Consequently, great comedy is never dated, because it asserts the validity of the standards of an ideal order rather than those of any given society.

The conduct with which comedy is concerned and about which the ideal way of the world is constructed, then, is the logical, ideal conduct possible in a man confronting life in a purely human setting, with all deviations, eccentricities, rigidities eliminated in the course of the play. But since comedy must deal not only

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[1]Barnet, et al., p. 10.

[2]Frye, pp. 60-61.

with the potential ideal way of the world, but also with all manner of deviations, peculiarities, and rigidities, it is concerned with the manners of men, in the fullest sense of the term.

This concern with manners is patently deeper than is suggested by Cook when he substitutes manners for ethics and indicates that "Social man, to incur least shock from society and to reap most profit from business, politics, and sex, employs manners. . . ."[1] The term must be used not to signify the surface courtesies or discourtesies of men, but to denote the characters of men in depth and breadth:

> From the manners, the characters of persons are derived; for indeed, the characters are no other than the inclinations, as they appear in the several persons of the poem; a character being thus defined, -- that which distinguishes one man from another. . . . A character, or that which distinguishes one man from all others, cannot be supposed to consist of one particular virtue, or vice, or passion only; but 'tis a composition of qualities which are not contrary to one another in the same person. . . .[1]

Comedy is, then, in another phrasing, concerned with compositions of qualities in men. Moreover, according to Dennis, comedy serves its proper end by representation of these compositions of qualities: ". . . Comedy instructs by its Characters; which not only ought to be drawn truly

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[1]Cook, p. 35.

[2]John Dryden, "Preface to Troilus and Cressida," Essays of John Dryden, ed. W. P. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), I, 215.

in Nature, but to be the resembling Pictures of our Contemporaries."[1] Furthermore, "the Characters in every Comedy are always, at the bottom, universal and allegorical, or else the Instruction could not be universal."[2]

If comedy, then, is concerned with man in his human relations, with an ideal order (which may be rarely, if ever, achieved), and with the manners of men as they search out this ideal order, then the source of the comic might be said to lie in deviations from this pattern. But it is essential to note that the comic lies not necessarily in deviations from society's terms, from the standards of the community. The comic may lie, and one suspects that in the greatest comedies it always lies, either in obstacles to the search for an ideal society, or in deviations from that ideal order itself; these obstacles and deviations, the source of comedy, are the ugly, the ludicrous, the inappropriate -- in short, the indecorous. As Frye suggests, in other words, c omedy "may emphasize the birth of an ideal society as you like it, or the tawdriness of the sham society which is the way of the world."[3]

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[1]John Dennis, "A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter," Hooker, II, 245.

[2]John Dennis, "The Usefulness of the Stage," Hooker, I, 187.

[3]Frye, p. 63.

Laughter itself may spring from a number of sources. The Country Wife, for example, may arouse laughter because the audience at one and the same time perceives Horner's superiority to the various dupes and its own imagined superiority to Horner. It may arouse laughter because the audience perceives the incongruity between Horner's real and pretended action and the rigidity of those who are deceived. Or it may arouse laughter because the audience perceives the release of inhibitions and the consequent freedom. Whatever the immediate wellspring of laughter, the comic must lie in the presentation of the imperfections of human nature, the imperfections which either block the construction of, or deviate from, an ideal, free society.

Imperfection as the basis for comedy is apparent in theories of comedy from the beginning. Grant's study, for example, shows clearly the continuity of the tradition that laughter has its origin in the contemplation of the ugly or defective.[1] The Aristotelian conception of comedy as the imitation of persons of an inferior moral bent is a major source of this tradition. Comedy, according to Aristotle, imitates people who are faulty, not in any and every way, but only in so far as their shortcomings

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[1]Mary A. Grant, The Ancient Rhetorical Theories of the Laughable, The Greek Rhetoricians and Cicero, University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, No. 21, 1924, p. 19.

are ludicrous. The Tractatus Coislinianus lists the means by which laughter is aroused from this source through diction, or expressions, and things, or content. The Ciceronian theory of the laughable, developed in more detail than in any of the Greek sources, continues the tradition by citing the ugly and the grotesque as the sources of laughter.[1]

With some notion of the comic view and of the source of the comic as background, it is possible to proceed to a more exact consideration of the aesthetics of comedy, involving the form, or structure, and the function, or end, of comedy. If comedy is concerned with ethical conduct and with man's relations to men, and if comedy is concerned with the manners of men, then the search for an ideal order which will give harmony and balance to the lives of men, and the various obstacles to the search may be said to give comedy the form or structure of an epistemological progression. This progression, which usually takes the form of a debate or wit-contest, is the means by which both the ideal order itself and the obstacles blocking the way to harmony are revealed. It is essential to remember that the ideal order which has been mentioned so often here is not necessarily evident in the play, which may have to do with the standards of a given society.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 73-87.

But this ideal harmony, if not immediately apparent in the play, is discoverable through the play. In The Country Wife, for example, no character, no way of life is held up as a model for imitation. But the play itself, by revealing deceit, gullibility, and various other greater and lesser vices, along with a careful examination of the way to combat these vices, reveals the concept of a possible harmony.

One must look to the total meaning of the play, not in the play to find a set of values suggested. Many comedies, of course, depict a social code, but it is usually ludicrous. With the possible exception of The Way of the World, none of the great comedies of the Restoration depicts a social norm which must be accepted. What generally happens, instead, is that a new social norm is created. The order which exists is usually rigid, stale, sterile, and ludicrous; harmony is to be discovered.

The most interesting recent discussion of comic structure is by Northrop Frye, who first in several articles and then in his recently published book The Anatomy of Criticism has considered the argument and the structure of comedy. A great deal of what he suggests is apparent in Aristotle, but his discussion unifies much that has been said regarding the structure of comic drama.

The basis for most comedy, he suggests, is the plot structure of Greek New Comedy. What normally happens

is the arousal of some desire, usually in a young man, then resistance to the satisfaction of the desire, and finally triumph. Several elements in this pattern he discusses further. First, society ordinarily moves from one kind of rule to another. At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are normally in charge, and these obstacles to the hero's desire form the action of the play while the overcoming of them forms the comic resolution. Since the tendency of comedy is to include as many people as possible in the final society, now ruled by the young hero, the blocking characters are often reconciled. In depicting the movement from one social order to another, the action of comedy, Frye suggests, is like the action of a lawsuit, where both sides are heard (this is suggested in the parts of dianoia called pistis or opinion and gnosis or proof, which parallel the roles of the usurping and the desirable societies). He suggests further that comedy usually moves toward a happy ending, and that the society which emerges is free, having triumphed over a bound society, a movement which is fundamentally the triumph of reality over the illusion of habit, the arbitrary law, and ritual bondage.[1]

At the risk of some repetition, it is necessary before quitting the subject of form or structure, to

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[1]Barnet, et al., pp. 461-467.

consider the basic ideas on this subject in the work of Aristotle,[1] especially as amplified by Cooper's work.

Cooper assigns the same qualitative parts Aristotle discusses in tragedy to comedy. Of these qualitative parts of comedy -- plot, ethos, dianois, diction, music, and spectacle -- the first and most important consideration is the "proper organization of the incidents into a plot that shall have the ideal comic effect."[2] This action is complete in itself, forming a whole of sufficient magnitude or extent. The basis quantitative parts of this structure are, of course, a beginning,a middle, and an end. Cooper, amplifying the Poetics, suggests, from Aristophanes, rather more technical terms than these. The typical organization, in many ways suggested also by Frye, has the following divisions: prologue, parode, agon, parabasis, episode, choricon, and exode. Cornford supplements this with an account of the sacrifice, feast, and marriage which appear after the parabasis.[3] The agents involved in this action must be inferior; the intellectual element (dianoia) is every-

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[1]It is interesting to note that Frye, in his discussion of the structure of comedy, says "all the essential facts about comedy" are in the Tractatus Coislinianus.

[2]Lane Cooper, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1922), p. 186.

[3]F. M. Cornford, The Origins of Attic Comedy (London: Edward Arnold, 1914). See also other dramatic and rhetorical schemes of division discussed in Herrick Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century.

thing that is to be affected by their language -- their efforts to prove and to refute, to sway emotions, to exaggerate or diminish the importance of things.

This organization suggests the epistemological progression mentioned earlier. The exposition scenes of the prologue and parode, the fierce contest and commentary found in the agon and parabasis, and the ultimate conversion and celebration in the latter parts of the play form a framework for the scrutiny of the imperfections of the existing society, the impulse toward an ideal society, the resistance of the old society, and the final triumph of the new. The structure of comedy centers in the discovery or creation of a logical, harmonious society through careful examination of the old.

All the parts and all the problems of comedy should serve the end of comedy. The end of comedy, for Aristotle, was the arousal and relief of the emotions proper to comedy:

> Comedy is an imitation of an action that is ludicrous and imperfect, of sufficient length, [in embellished language,] the several kinds [of embellishment being] separately [found] in the [several] parts [of the play]; [directly presented] by persons acting, and not [given] through narrative; through pleasure and laughter effecting the purgation of the like emotions. It has laughter for its mother.[1]

Cooper discusses both the observable or direct effects of comedy and the indirect. Among the direct effects are

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[1]Cooper, p. 224.

a heightened sense of well-being, accompanied by a thrill of joy and the phenomenon of laughter. Indirect satisfaction comes from the pleasures connected with imitation, discoveries, or recognition, with rhythm, music, and spectacle. Beyond this is the matter that has been discussed so often, the problem of comic catharsis. Cooper suggests that since comedy distorts proportion and reveals imperfections, the ultimate pleasure deriving from comedy is that

> By contemplating the disproportions of comedy, we are freed from the sense of disproportions in life, and regain our perspective, settling as it were into our proper selves. To Aristotle, the process of settling into our true selves is pleasure; that is his definition of pleasure.[1]

Little more can be said about the end of comedy.

This recapture of proportion has been the source for discussions of the instructive effect of comedy, which have occupied men to our own day. In his edition of Terence published in 1566, for example, Stephanus Riccius says

> Comedy, to be sure, is nothing other than an image of daily life, and a speaking picture of human actions and counsels, by which one may become acquainted with the mores of life and govern his own. The learned finely call it a mirror of life. Just as we may discern in a mirror the beauty of a face and also its blemishes, so we may likewise perceive in comedy what ought to be imitated, what ought to be shunned, what is appropriate to an honorable life.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 180.

[2] Quoted in Herrick, Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century, p. 74.

Minturno, in like manner, says comedy presents some action "truly suited to the amendment of life."[1] Nearer our own time, another writer has suggested something of the instructive effect of comedy:

> If the comic writer has not, at the back of his mind, either his own theory of life which he thinks right, or somebody else's theory of life which he thinks wrong, or at least some negative notion that somebody is wrong in thinking it wrong, he has really nothing to write about.[2]

The end of comedy, finally, is to amuse and to enlighten. Comedy presents disproportions and imperfections, which, in the light of human possibilities, are ludicrous, ridiculous, inappropriate. Laughter, which is the force of comedy, finds its source in this disproportion. Cicero's definition of comedy, known only through Donatus, is "an imitation of life, the mirror of custom, the image of truth." Comedy enlightens by imitating life and mirroring custom, that is by representing the manners of men both in their proprieties and their improprieties; comedy enlightens by imaging truth, that is by revealing that the discovery or creation of proportion, harmony, and balance in an enlightened way of the world comes only through an understanding of <u>all</u> of the ways of the world.

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[1] Minturno, <u>De Poeta</u>, quoted <u>ibid</u>., p. 83.

[2] G. K. Chesterton, "On the Comic Spirit," Barnet <u>et al</u>., p. 452.

The Form and Function of Restoration Comedy

The lineal descendant of Greek comedy, transmitted by Terence and Plautus, Restoration comedy was influenced in many ways by classical comedy. The type characters apparent in the earlier comedy were still employed. There was, of course, much borrowing from earlier comic plots in the Restoration. The extent of other influences upon Restoration comedy is still questionable: the influence of French comedy has been too much explored, while that of Spanish and earlier English comedy awaits further exploration. Of the general characteristics rather commonly accepted in the period and still surviving to some extent in discussions of that comedy today, the most important are these: comedy should be profitable; it should display the vices and follies of the time; it should be satirical; it should observe the rules; it should have a due proportion of wit; it should make sport of faults of the soul rather than of the body; and it should be funny.

Many of these characteristics, of course, we think highly questionable as we look at comedy now. Mechanical rules, for example, are denounced, and criticism is often too sophisticated to admit the existence of any instructive effect. However, with at least a tentative point of view established as a means of examining comedy, it is necessary to consider some of these charac-

teristics, along with others, of a comedy which

> . . . is not a meer piece of Gallantry full of Adventures and amorous Discourses, as in Spain and France; But a Representation of the ordinary Way of living, according to the various Humours, and different Characters of Men.[1]

It is a comedy that begins in the imperfections of men:

> Comedy consists, though of low persons, yet of natural actions and characters; I mean such humours, adventures, and designs, as are to be found and met with in the world. Farce, on the other side, consists of forced humours, and unnatural events. Comedy presents us with the imperfections of human nature: Farce entertains us with what is monstrous and chimerical. The one causes laughter in those who can judge men and manners, by the lively representation of their folly or corruption: the other produces the same effect in those who can judge of neither, and that only by its extravagances. The first works on the judgment and fancy; the latter on the fancy only: there is more of satisfaction in the former kind of laughter, and in the latter more of scorn.[2]

It is a comedy in which these imperfections of men are held up to ridicule:

> To conclude with one General Observation, That Comedy may be qualify'd in a powerful Manner both to instruct and to please, the very Constitution of its Subject ought always to be Ridiculous. Comedy, says Rapin, is an Image of common Life, and its End is to expose upon the Stage the Defects of the Publick, and to correct and amend the People, by the Fear of being laugh'd at. That therefore, says he, which is most essential to Comedy is certainly the Ridicule.[3]

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[1]St. Evremond, "Of the English Comedies," Works, II, 80.

[2]John Dryden, "Preface to An Evening's Love; or the Mock Astrologer," Ker, pp. 135-136.

[3]Dennis, "A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter," Hooker, II, 249.

It is this lively ridicule, Dennis says elsewhere, this ridicule of the imperfections of men that must be the source of the comic in Restoration comedy, which supplies the chief force of comedy, laughter.

The source of Restoration comedy, as indeed the source of all comedy, is in the imperfections of men, the ugly, the ridiculous, the ludicrous, the inappropriate. The moral or ethical norm against which these imperfections are gaged may sometimes in Restoration comedy be the standards of a social group in the plays; more often, the norm is an ideal form not in the play, but discovered from the play.

One of Case's basic objections to Restoration comedy, and his basic reason for denying any instructive element in comedy, is that vicious agents are sometimes used to chastise folly. It is apparent in studies of comedy from Aristotle forward, that comedy is concerned with imperfect characters, where no model for imitation is set up. Indeed, it is the introduction of "perfect" characters in sentimental comedy that destroyed comedy apparently once and for all. Comedy, then, does not instruct by setting up a specific model. It is the examination of imperfections, the spectacle of humours and absurdities, choice vices and untidy virtues which makes possible the discovery of an ideal state of harmony.

It is not immediately pertinent to discuss the exact nature of this ideal order, but basically the harmony, proportion, and balance that are the ends of comedy are depicted in the term decorum. Now decorum, originally applied to the just representation of universal qualities in the characters of drama, by the time of the Restoration had come to signify a vastly greater complex of ideas. The term comes to signify a social, moral, and intellectual balance and appropriateness. It is this golden balance which emerges from the greatest of the Restoration comedies. Bearing in mind the importance of the principle of decorum, then, it is possible to suggest by way of preliminary to the consideration of form and function in these comedies, that the source of Restoration comedy is Indecorum.

Before turning to the structure of Restoration comedy, it is necessary for a moment to consider some of the terms that have been used to describe it. Two terms, comedy of manners and comedy of wit, have been used to describe the characteristic direction of Restoration comedy; and in addition to these two general terms, another, comedy of humours, has sometimes been used to characterize certain comedies of the period. Since there has been so much critical preoccupation with these terms, it is necessary to consider them for a moment.

Case makes a brief distinction between comedy of manners and comedy of humours in his discussion. The

two types, he says, have some things in common: both rely on ridicule, both assume an ideal mode of life, and both eschew romance and sentiment. Comedy of humours has greater depth, however, and comedy of manners has greater polish. They differ further in the ideal mode they assume to exist. In Jonson and elsewhere, he suggests, the standard is wise living, and comedy of humours is more critical of lapses in wise living; comedy of manners, on the other hand, is more critical of breaches of a sophisticated code of manners, which is the ideal mode assumed in this type.[1] Dobree similarly underestimates manners comedy in his study of the two types. One difference, Dobree says, is in the vivacity of rendering rather than in the variation of profundity. Manners comedy is much lighter in handling of personalities than humours comedy. One can only assume that he did not read The Plain Dealer. Distinguishing further, Dobree says that humours comedy searched out and displayed the hidden recesses of human passions and desires, while manners comedy showed that these passions and desires were by no means confined to hidden recesses, but might be encountered daily. Finally, humours comedy, he says, is only more profound in that it appeals to some supposedly absolute standard of morality, while manners comedy took for its standard the honnête homme of the time. Humours comedy, in other words, tried to be critical

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[1]Nettleton and Case, p. 140.

not of its own time, but of humanity, beginning with an attempted universality and leaving the immediate application to chance. Manners comedy applied the reverse method, aiming at the universal through the individual.[1]

To get some better notion of the comedy of humours and the way the terms changed in the Restoration, it is necessary to remember the dual definitions of humour in Jonson. Humour as eccentricity or affectation is, of course, the definition remembered, but there is also specified the genuine psychological humour and the association of humours with the manners of men. Dryden, defining humour as "some extravagant habit, passion, or affection, particular. . . to some one person, by the oddness of which he is immediately distinguished from the rest of men,"[2] is obviously thinking of the pseudo-humours.

Congreve, in his letter to Dennis "Concerning Humour in Comedy," makes a clear distinction between genuine humour and affectation, or pseudo-humour. True humour naturally arises from the "different Constitutions, Complexions, and Dispositions of Men." Humour, in other words, "shews us as we are." This true humour is to be distinguished from other things often called humours: external habit, or "a Singularity of Manners, Speech, and

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[1]Dobrée, pp. 34-35.

[2]Dryden, "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," Ker, I, 85.

Behaviour"; and affectation, which he distinguishes from humour as the picture from life.[1]

The initial opposition and ultimate union of wit and humour are best discussed in Milburn's Important Aspects of Wit. The initial disagreement between wit and humour is most apparent in the Dryden-Shadwell controversy. Dryden, who much preferred wit, disapproved of humour because it needed only the judgment, and he thought it was fancy that gave a "secret grace" to poetry. Shadwell said that judgment comprehends wit, and relegated wit to a subordinate role as a decorous way of writing. Gradually, of course, most critics, Dryden and Shadwell included, came to agree that both wit and humour were desirable in the best poetry. Dennis, however, unqualifiedly stated that "Humour is the business in comedy, and not Wit":

> First, because it is harder to write, for the writing Wit is the effect of Fancy, and the writing Humour is the work of Judgment. 'Tis observation alone that can qualify a man for it, and observation is the business of the Judgment. . . . secondly. . . because it gives a necessary occasion for Action, which Wit does not, and Action after all is the very Life and Soul of the Theatre. . . . thirdly, because it distinguishes the Characters better. For Wit very often destroys and confound them. . . and therefore since Humour distinguishes the Characters, it must be always agreeable to men of Sense, whereas Wit must be often shocking and nauseous to them, because it destroyes and confound the Characters, which is a

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[1]William Congreve, "Concerning Humour in Comedy," Spingarn, III, 245.

> fourth reason for giving Humour the preference; . . . But fifthly and lastly, if Comedy is Poetry, 'tis Humour chiefly which makes it so, for that which Characteristically distinguishes Poetry from Prose is Passion. . . . and Humour is subordinate Passion.[1]

Despite such an objection, which is an important one, the tendency was for wit and humour to become more alike; for some they became identical. Congreve indicates the difficulty of defining the two terms:

> To define Humour perhaps were as difficult as to define Wit; for like that it is of infinite variety. . . . tho we cannot certainly tell what Wit is, or what Humour is, yet we may go near to shew something which is not Wit or not Humour, and yet often mistaken for both.[2]

Dennis's insistence upon Humour as the business of comedy is an important factor, for it suggests how the idea of humours comedy changed. The term comedy of manners has fallen into some ill repute, especially since Fujimura suggested the alternate comedy of wit. Most "Manners" interpretations make Restoration comedy artificial and subordinate content to treatment. Generally the social satire of "Manners" critics is interpreted superficially as a matter of appearance and fine manners; their attention is usually directed toward a superficial code of affectations.

According to Dryden, it is "From the manners, the characters of persons are derived." And Dennis, in his

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[1]Dennis, "A Large Account of Taste," Hooker, I, 281-282.

[2]Congreve, "Concerning Humour in Comedy," Spingarn, III, 245.

"Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter," asserts that it is through character that comedy instructs. Dennis, who here emphasizes character, also said that "Humour is the business of comedy, not Wit." It is apparent that by this time Humour has come to mean "the different Constitutions, Complexions, and Dispositions of Men," the "composition of qualities" which makes a character.

Fujimura is unable to show that the term comedy of wit signifies anything behond the manner of Restoration comedy; he fails ultimately to show any vital link between wit and either the structure or the body or the effect of comedy. It seems clear that if we must have a term at all, the proper term for Restoration comedy is still comedy of manners. It is, of course, essential to understand that appearance and polish are not signified by the term manners. Restoration comedy of manners is concerned with enlightenment through the ridicule of characters, it is concerned with the "Dispositions of Men," the "compositions of qualities"; manners comedy is concerned with all the ways of the men of the world.

Little can be said about the actual structure of the comedies until the individual plays themselves are examined. It has been suggested earlier that the basic frame of the plays is an epistemological progression to the discovery of a free, harmonious society. An interesting illustration of this structure is suggested in a

study by Guy Montgomery. He is concerned with the effect of the new science and the "questioning spirit" upon these plays, but without this special concern, his study still suggests the movement that has been indicated above. Beneath the superficial "manners", Montgomery says, lies a system of ideas of which the manners were the realization:

> I cannot help detecting in the over-boldness of men and women in their relationships and in the frankness of their conduct, instead of abandonment of all moral standards, an approach to conduct, if not technically scientific, yet geniunely experimental.[1]

With the admitted ugliness of the comedy, Montgomery continues, "there marches a distinct desire to know how to live in a suddenly altered world."[2] A society cannot exist if it does not subject its foundations to a search for weak spots. Restoration comedy preserves a picture of a society at a time when it is becoming honest. It is a reaffirmation of the individual's privilege to live naturally in a world whose limits are being circumscribed by popular conventional morality and extended by scientific and social research.

Only a few general remarks about the structure of Restoration comedies seem necessary here. The basic framework is the discovery and removal of imperfections. Generally, a young hero, himself imperfect, is blocked

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[1]Guy Montgomery, "The Challenge of Restoration Comedy," University of California Publications in English, I (1929), 139.

[2]Ibid., p. 140.

from some desire by other characters, by society, or by the standards of society, all of which are also disproportionate. In the triumph of the young hero over the blocking forces his own imperfections are ameliorated, and often the blocking forces themselves are converted. To employ Congreve's title again, the counterpoint of all of the ways of the world, shaped, altered, converted by the principle of decorum, produces an ultimate harmonious way of the world.

The effect of Restoration comedy has generally been characterized as at best lighthearted and wickedly sophisticated: "The dramatist did not inspire to virtue, because he had no great faith in it. He hated foolishness, cant, and all that was not easy and graceful. . ."[1] The poison of attacks like Collier's and Macaulay's has affected in some way most subsequent studies, but a more honest, a less fearful appraisal of the end or effect of comedy can be found in the comments of various men of the Restoration.

Blackmore, attacking the comedies of the period, denounced them for subordinating instruction to pleasure, the principal function of comedy being, he felt, to laugh men out of their vices.[2] This is not intended, however,

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[1]Krutch, p. 44.

[2]Sir Richard Blackmore, "Preface to Prince Arthur," Spingarn, III, 227-241.

to indicate that only men antagonistic to comedy asserted its instructive end. Sir William Temple, the Epicurean, in a somewhat more reasoned study, "Of Poetry," says:

> . . . the chief end [of dramatick poesy] seems to have been Instruction, and under the disguise of Fables or the Pleasure of Story to shew the Beauties and the Rewards of Virtue, the Deformities and Misfortunes or Punishment of Vice; By examples of both, to Encourage one, and Deter Men from the other; to Reform Ill Customs, Correct Ill Manners, and Moderate all violent Passions. These are the general Subjects of both Parts, tho' Comedy give us but the Images of common Life, and Tragedy those of the greater and more extraordinary Passions and Actions among men.[1]

Dryden, as Dennis was to do later, asserts the primary importance of laughter in comedy. "Comedy is both excellently instructive, and extremely pleasant;"[2] but the chief end is "divertisement and delight":

> At least I am sure it [instruction] can be but its secondary end: for the business of the poet is to make you laugh: when he writes humour, he makes folly ridiculous; when wit, he moves you, if not always to laughter, yet to a pleasure that is more noble. And if he works a cure of folly, and the small imperfections in mankind, by exposing them to public view, that cure is not performed by an immediate operation. For it works first on the ill-nature of the audience; they are moved to laugh by the representation of deformity; and the shame of that laughter teaches us to amend what is ridiculous in our manners. This being then established, that the first end of Comedy is delight, and instruction only the second; it may reasonably be inferred, that

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[1]Sir William Temple, "Of Poetry," Spingarn, III, 89-90.

[2]Dryden, "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence, Prefixed to 'The State of Innocence and Fall of Man,' An Opera, 1677," Ker, I, 181.

> Comedy is not so much obliged to the punishment of faults which it represents, as Tragedy.[1]

Though one must recognize its purpose, Vanbrugh's reply to Collier also asserts a corrective end for comedy: ". . . if I judge right, what I have done is in general a discouragement to vice and folly; I am sure I intended it, and I hope I have performed it."[2] Further on in his reply he is more successful when he abandons Christian morality for the morality of truth represented by art:

> The stage is a glass for the world to view itself in; people ought, therefore, to see themselves as they are; if it makes their faces too fair, they won't know they are dirty and by consequence will neglect to wash 'em. If therefore I have shewed Constant upon the stage, what generally the thing called a fine gentleman is off on't, I think I have done what I should do. I have laid open his vices as well as his virtues. 'Tis the business of the audience to observe where his flaws lesses his value; and by considering the deformity of his blemishes, he would be without 'em.[3]

Farquhar, of course, took the opposing view and declared pleasure to be the end of comedy. It is a "well-fram'd Tale handsomly told," and the rules for comedy lie with the pleasure of the pit, box, and gallery.[4]

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[1]Dryden, "Preface to An Evening's Love," Ker, I, 142-143.

[2]Sir John Vanbrugh, "A Short Vindication of The Relapse and The Provok'd Wife from Immorality and Profaneness," H. H. Adams and Baxter Hathaway (eds.), Dramatic Essays of the Neoclassic Age (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), p. 194.

[3]Ibid., p. 194.

[4]George Farquhar, "A Discourse on Comedy, in Reference to the English Stage," Critical Essays of the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1725, ed. W. H. Durham (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1915), pp. 273-277.

By far the clearest and most complete exposition of the function or effect of comedy, however, is in the work of John Dennis. Some of Dennis' excellent interpretations of the literary and intellectual problems of his age have already been discussed in a preceding chapter. The possible ideal order that has been discussed at various points in this chapter is nowhere -- outside of Congreve -- more apparent than in Dennis' work. His work reveals an understanding of propriety, or wise living, that the greatest of the comedies also reveal. Split interests are quite appropriately united in his work as he discusses the harmony of reason and passion and, more directly related to comedy, the harmony of the two ends of comedy, pleasure and enlightenment.

He asserted what had to be asserted even at a time when comedy had been attacked, that "the chief Force of Comedy must consist in exciting Laughter."[1] He also remembered the second, though not necessarily the secondary, effect of comedy:

> But as Tragedy instructs chiefly by its Design, Comedy instructs by its Characters; which not only ought to be drawn truly in Nature, but to be the Resembling Pictures of our Contemporaries, both in Court and Town. Tragedy answers to History-Painting, but Comedy to drawing of Portraits.
>
> How little do they know of the Nature of true Comedy, who believe that its proper Business is to set us Patterns for Imitation: For all such Patterns are serious things, and Laughter is the Life, the

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[1]Dennis, "Vis Comica," Hooker, II, 160.

> very Soul of Comedy. 'Tis its proper Business to expose Persons to our view, whose Views we may shun, and whose Follies we may despise; and by shewing us what is done upon the Comick Stage, to shew us what ought never to be done upon the Stage of the World.[1]

One gets a somewhat more exact idea of these follies that comedy reveals, further in the "Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter":

> For as 'tis the Business of a Comick Poet to cure his Spectators of Vice and Folly, by the Apprehensions of being laugh'd at; 'tis plain that his Business must be with the reigning Follies and Vices. The violent Passions, which are the subjects of Tragedy, are the same in every age, and appear with the same Face; but those Vices and Follies, which are the Subjects of Comedy, are seen to vary continually: Some of those that belonged to our Ancestors, have no Relation to us. . . . What Vices and Follies may infect those who are to come after us, we know not; 'tis the present, the reigning Vices and Follies, that must be the subjects of our present Comedy.[2]

It would be useless -- and absurd -- to try to point out the things in Restoration comedy which are laughable. It is one thing to consider causes of laughter, but quite another to show which passages based on these causes are laughable; and no critical approach has been so ill-advised as to exhort witnesses of the plays to laugh. Laughter is, of course, the vital force of comedy, and critical discussions can examine the structure and the method which best present the materials of laughter, but no such discussion can say, "This is funny."

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[1]Dennis, "A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter," Hooker, II, 245.

[2]Ibid., p. 248.

The aesthetics of comedy involves this structure and method, yet is is obvious that this is not the only matter which has concerned critics of Restoration comedy. Any study which examines manners, humours, order, society, or the other matters that have been associated with Restoration comedy, is by virtue of the very examination, assuming a second effect of this comedy in addition to the arousal of laughter. We no longer like to consider such an obvious term as instruction in literature, but it must exist; otherwise the critic of comedy need only laugh, not write.

The ultimate effect of Restoration comedy, aside from amusement, then, is the discovery or creation of a potential, human ideal order, an enlightenment dependent upon the principle of decorum. In the comedies of the Restoration the knowledge of a possible social proportion is depicted. There is, of course, no set of manners established in, for example, The Country Wife, to be followed by all and sundry; but the debate that occurs between the various fools and dupes and silly women on the one hand and the delightfully wicked Horner on the other eventuates in the conclusion that all are absurd and laughable because men don't trust their wives, because men and women are not free to conduct themselves naturally -- because, in short, none of their actions is appropriate. The idea of decorum has been forsworn: they all

have forgotten, if they ever knew, that "There is a time to laugh, and a time to weep. . . a time to be sober and a time to be sensual."

An awareness of intellectual proportion is another aspect of the effect produced by the best comedies of the Restoration. The appropriate, the decorous balance of man's faculties, his interests, and his sensibilities that is demonstrated by Mirabell and Millamant, that is prepared for indirectly in other plays, made man potentially the master of his world and the agent of the human masterpiece -- to live appropriately. This balance is further achieved in the harmony of reason and passion, of wit, fancy, and judgment. All methods of human understanding, in short, are brought to bear on all the ways of the world, until the truth about the whole human scene is expressed.

Finally, these comedies at their best suggest moral and ethical proportion. In 1698 Collier's A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage appeared, and the troubles of Restoration comedy began in earnest. Though Collier's work is the one remembered, and justly so, it was only one in a long line of denunciations of the stage. It cannot be denied that Collier's attack had some justification: an essential point that must be remembered in any study of the comic

drama of the period is that some of the comedies were obscene and immoral -- and nothing else. Moreover, it is well known that something happened to comedy after the turn of the century; the comedies that are called sentimental no longer called for moral attacks.

But if the stage was corrected, it was an amendment wrought not by Collier, but by Wycherley and Congreve. Beginning with Etherege, then with Wycherley, finally reaching its peak in the work of William Congreve, the great comedy of the Restoration, achieving the great end of comedy, also perhaps destroyed comedy. The great comedies of the Restoration depicted all the manners of men, the way of the dupe, the dullard, the false wit, the pretender to wit, and the true wit. Using the framework of the knowledge and the real manners or qualities of the world and the tension therein existing, the great comedies discovered a real enlightenment, an enlightenment realized in the standard of decorum,where all the manners of men, examined through the structure and the method of Restoration comedy, met, merged, and reappeared as an ideal mode. The comic dramatists of the Restoration discovered in their best plays the potential balance, symmetry, and proportion of the human universe, and they so produced some of the greatest comedies of the English language. These great comedies were also the last great comedies, for the discovery in Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve

that the best way of the world could be found only in the tension of all the ways of the world seems to have disappeared with them.

CHAPTER V

ETHEREGE

Easy Etherege, Gentle George, is often thought the most glittering of the lights of the Restoration. He was, as so many have said, a man of form. "There was form; and there was bad form" in the society of the Restoration, says Palmer, and the whole duty of man was to "find the one and eschew the other." Etherege, Palmer continues, found a "form for the spirit of the age; wherein. . . lies his unquestionable merit."[1] A "brilliant butterfly" in Dobree's words, Etherege found a form which, to another student, was the standard of fashion, "the one authoritative standard of conduct." By this standard, "he deftly defines and degrades folly and gives wisdom its due."[2] He had no ethic, Dobree says, nothing to drive him to produce the laughter of correction. His laughter "is always that of delight at being very much alive in the best of all possible societies. . . ."[3]

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[1]Palmer, p. 91.

[2]Lynch, p. 154.

[3]Dobree, p. 60.

Fujimura, as usual, offers the clearest comment on Etherege, though not necessarily the justest. The salient features of Etherege's comic creation, he says, are

> . . . witty dialogue, especially between the gallant and his mistress in raillery and "proviso" scenes, a naturalistic view of man (and a consequent disregard of conventional morality), and realistic technique.[1]

Yet at the same time that he does scant justice to the purpose of the witty dialogue and the raillery and "proviso" scenes, Fujimura indicates briefly the ultimate value of Etherege's world. It is a world which

> . . . may not have the breadth of Dante's universe because the supernatural is excluded, but there is much in this world of the Truewit that is valuable, such as elegance, intellectual distinction, clarity of thought, absence of artificial formality, freedom from cant about honor, and a graceful and natural acceptance of this life on earth.[2]

One can, at this point, only protest that "acceptance" seems rather a pale word.

In a study of Etherege, one's primary, almost his only concern is with The Man of Mode. Little has been said of Etherege's two earlier comedies, and this is perhaps only proper, for they are far inferior to his great comedy. They are helpful, however, in indicating the different worlds of great comedy and the lesser, popular comedies of the Restoration.

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[1] Fujimura, p. 86.

[2] Ibid., p. 116.

Man's concern in great comedy is more than mere acceptance of the world about him, it is the conquest of that world, the attainment of man's highest human goal, an appropriate, decorous life. This is achieved through the educative process of great comedy when man, seeing both the order and the disorder of the world, recognizes the possible harmonious balance of his faculties, his interests, his ideas with the world's way, and emerges enlightened.

This enlightenment is made possible through all the means available to comic drama. It becomes clear as one sees in the best comedies of the time a balance created between reason and emotion; it reveals itself gradually as true wit triumphs, with its just balance of fancy and judgment, with its development as the medium of decorum and truth. It is further made possible through the tensions existing among the characters of the plays, the contests of various sensibilities.

The enlightened society which emerges at the end of great comedy has witnessed the expurgation of the ugly, the inappropriate, the indecorous. Human forces which have opposed this new Golden Age, the false wits, the cranks, the dullards, are controlled; and the young people who emerge freed from the old confines of rigidity and inappropriateness know there is a time to laugh and a time to weep, a time to be sober and a time to be sensual.

Comedy, then, deals with the discovery of enlightenment through the counterpoint of all the world's way. It sets no standard, though critics have said Etherege found a form for his age; rather it shows the way to a standard by bringing to bear all methodsof human understanding. A careful reading of The Man of Mode reveals this process; dismissal of Etherege as a butterfly who preached the standard of fashion is absurd. His play depicts the discovery of a mode in the same way those of Wycherley and Congreve do; it differs from them in some respects: The Man of Mode does not present as widespread an alteration of qualities as do the other plays; and its hero is not confronted with as complete a catalogue of obstacles to enlightenment as are the later heroes.

But before examining this play further, it is necessary to consider the two earlier comedies briefly. Some objection has been raised against the gentleness of the Truewits in these plays. While it is true that they are not always noted for their kindness and gentleness, still it is unfortunate that we still must think of the heroes of so many of these comedies as half-human, brilliant, but hard. What often seems to confuse students of Restoration comedy is a matter of point of view. Often the Truewit does reveal to others only his brilliance, his brittle manners, his superiority. But this is not to say that this is all there is to a Truewit;

indeed, in most if not all good comedies the Truewit is revealed as a complete being, who understands when to be warm and generous, when to be cold and harsh.

Fujimura indicates the disunity apparent in *Love in a Tub*, recalling the essential difference between the two strands of action, the one comic, the other heroic, where the characters are "by Custom, not by Nature led."

> The characters in the comic portion follow nature because of their naturalistic bias [perhaps one should insist, because not otherwise educated], and a person like Sir Frederick never considers honor; but the people of the Graciana-Beaufort world act according to custom and honor.[1]

She Wou'd if She Cou'd is, by common consent, a better play than Etherege's first comedy:

> Yet the wit is not always of the highest; there is often a lapsing into flat similitudes; there is not much of the malicious and skeptical wit that gives so much vitality to wit comedy; and there is little of the elegance and fine balance of language which is the mark of high wit. The comic wit sparkles at times, but principally because of the zest and high spirit of the young Truewits rather than because of an original play of ideas. The Truewits are, in fact, extremely young, and display more fancy than judgment in their speech and conduct. Finally, the wit in the play does not always spring from the dramatic action, nor is the wit of the different characters often distinguished, since the witticisms are assigned somewhat indiscriminately to the several Truewits. The best thing in the play is the naturalistic portrait of Lady Cockwood and Etherege's witty use of her to deflate the notion of honor.[2]

Love in a Tub, with its action split between comic and heroic actions, depicts four major action sequences:

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

the heroic events of the Graciana-Beaufort group; the wit contests and eventual union of Sir Frederick Frollick and the Widow Rich; the Wheadle-Palmer project to gull Sir Nicholas Cully; and the Betty-Dufoy sequence. The alternation of the comic and heroic sequences is not successful, there being no real unification of the two. There is a superficial resemblance in the triangular situations involving on the one hand Graciana, Beaufort, and Colonel Bruce, and on the other, the Widow Rich, Sir Frederick, and Sir Nicholas; there is some further hint of attempted unification of the two strands of action in the parallel comic and heroic duels, but there is no ultimately successful union of the two actions.

One of the characteristics of great comedy in this or any period is the educative process apparent in the structure of the play. In the great comedies of the Restoration, all aspects of the dramatic action cohere to depict an existing or possible order. Etherege's first comedy cannot be so characterized. The comic action of Love in a Tub, in its three sequences, is a matter of give and take, or "comical revenges," with no further effect than the immediate arousal of laughter. The contests, phenomena which became so characteristic of Restoration comedy, are much nearer to being tricks that pure outwitting situations. Sir Frederick Frollick's pretended death arouses the Widow's sympathy, not any actual change in his

manner or in the presentation of his case. All characters are reconciled at the end, but the reconciliation is possible because of factors already existing at the first of the play, not because of any drastic alteration wrought by the action.

Each of the sequences is introduced in Act I, and all of the major characters except the Widow Rich are there introduced. Thereafter, with each act the action of each of the sequences proceeds equally, with only the Betty-Dufoy action subordinated. The third act, with a series of contests between Sir Frederick and the Widow, the comic duel involving Cully with the disguised Palmer, and the Colonel Bruce-Beaufort antagonism, is suggestive of the parabasis and agon.

Another area in which this comedy differs from the great comedies of the period is the treatment of the hero, as well as that of other characters. Palmer's judgment that Etherege found a form for the Restoration is quite true if one reads only the first two comedies, for in them, the removal of obstacles to a freed society is only a matter of correct form, rather than a root and branch alteration of character and outlook. In Love in a Tub Sir Frederick's success is assured from the first; it requires only a pleasant ritual for achievement.

Sir Frederick is neither a full-fledged wit like Dorimant nor an outrageous fop like Sir Fopling Flutter.

He remains essentially the same throughout the play; neither the dramatic action nor the other characters work any profound change in him. When he hears, at the first of the play, of the Widow's interest in him, he responds by saying, "What? the Widow has some kind thoughts of my body?" Learning this, he vows "Widow, thy ruine lie on thy own head," and the principal action of the play has begun.

The Sir Frederick-Widow contest stems primarily from his conventional assumption that because she is a widow she must necessarily be more eager for physical union with him; it stems also from her insistence that he temper his fondness for his "beloved Taverns" and for fiddlers and midnight carousing:

> Sir Fred. . . . Widows must needs have furious flames; the bellows have been at work, and blown 'em up.
> Wid. You grow too rude, Sir: I will have my honour, a walk i'th' Garden; and afterwards we'll take the Air in the Park.
> Sir Fred. Let us joyn hands, then, Widow.
> Wid. Without the dangerous help of a Parson, I do not fear it, Sir.[1]
>
> (II, i)

The Widow continues to "give no entertainment to such lewd persons," as Sir Frederick, and he never forsakes his belief in her passion; rebuffed by her in a late call at her home, he leaves her with what seems to him the

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[1]George Etherege, The Comical Revenge; or, Love in a Tub, The Dramatic Works of Sir George Etherege, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1927), vol. I. All further references are to this edition.

worst of punishments:

> Go, go to bed, and be idle, Widow; that's worse then any misfortune I can meet with. Strike up [to his fiddlers] and give notice of our coming. Farewell, Widow; I pity thy solitary condition.
> (III, iii)

Perhaps the sharpest indication of the difference between this comedy and later, greater plays is in the outcome of this contest. The Widow holds Sir Frederick off throughout the play, and Sir Frederick continues in his assumption of her love or passion for him: "Pish, Widow, why so much out of humour? 'Tis no shame to love such a likely young fellow." (V, ii) In one of the best known scenes in the play Sir Frederick is carried into the Widow's home as if dead, in order to arouse her sympathy, only to be discovered and laughed at. His resultant pique calls forth her proviso:

> Sir Fred. Widow, may the desire of man keep thee waking till thou art as mad as I am [exit Sir Frederick
> Wid. How lucky was this accident! How he wou'd have insulted over my weakness else! Sir Frederick, since I've warning, you shall prove more subtill ways before I owne my Love.
> (IV, vii)

Yet despite this proviso, despite the fact that the contest is maintained until the last scene of the play, Sir Frederick assuming passion, the Widow rebuffing it, they are finally united, not by any change in either, but by the simple expedient of a kinsman joining their hands as Sir Frederick disposes of his mistress: "Widow, resolving to lead a virtuous life, and keep a house altogether with

thee, I have dispos'd of my own house-hold stuff, my dear Mrs. Lucy, to this Gentleman." (V, v)

In short, Sir Frederick is himself throughout the play, nothing altering, nothing improving. Time having passed, the dance being done, he is united with the Widow with no change whatsoever. The same thing is true of the Widow. Her interest in Sir Frederick is indicated even before she appears on the stage; she expresses sincere emotion at his make-believe bier even though she sees the trick; she pays his bail when he is taken by officers; she succumbs without the satisfaction of her proviso.

This suggests another characteristic which distinguishes this play from better comedies. Just as the hero gambols through the play without sea-change, so do the other characters, who remain at the end of the action much like what they were at the first. Their immediate physical circumstances are altered, but there is no accompanying social, ethical, or moral change. It is true of this comedy as it is of many lesser comedies of the period, that the characters are not always well differentiated; Wheadle and Palmer are not carefully distinguished, and in their scenes with Sir Frederick it becomes apparent that even class does not always differentiate between men. As a consequence of this, the attending characters of the play are less well adapted to serve as catalytic agents in the education of the hero. There is no such catalogue of

wits and witwouds, of foibles and humours and idiosyncrasies as was to react so forcibly on later comic heroes. Indeed, the only change generally apparent in such a comedy as this is a kind of superficial addition of social habits, as depicted in the extreme when Sir Nicholas Cully, intent on being gulled, appears in the trappings of a Sir Frederick Frollick.

Little is offered up to ridicule in Love in a Tub, and little is changed. Sir Frederick Frollick wins to his goal without changing; Cully, Wheadle, and Palmer, at the end of the play, find themselves in changed circumstances, but no further alteration affects them. The play depicts two ways of life, the one in the heroic plot, the other in the comic plot, which Aurelia labels in mourning for Colonel Bruce:

> But we by Custom, not by Nature led,
> Must in the beaten paths of Honour tread.
> (II, ii)

The wit and the wit contests of Love in a Tub do not successfully rise out of the dramatic action and consequently neither reveal the decline or growth of the comic characters nor contribute to that alteration. Where the wit contests in The Man of Mode are debates, in which questions of manners and conduct are worked out, the encounters between the Widow Rich and Sir Frederick are merely ritualistic hesitations of two people already committed to each other. In their first meeting, Sir

Frederick employs the figure of a trumpet sounding the charge to a dreadful foe, which the Widow counters with a properly warlike figure, thus establishing the manner they are to maintain throughout the play. But they leave the scene hand in hand.

Though not by any means equal to The Man of Mode, Etherege's second comedy, She Wou'd if She Cou'd, is far superior to his first produced play. As one might expect, it deals with a number of outwitting situations, and is improved over the first play by, among other things, the omission of the heroic plot. Dramatically the Courtall and Freeman - Ariana and Gatty opposition is perhaps most important, but attendant contests prove more interesting, among them the intimate enmity of Sir Oliver Cockwood and Sir Joslin Jolly for Lady Cockwood. The most interesting character is Lady Cockwood, and the most effective outwitting situation is that which involves her with the play's hero, Courtall.

The thing which characterizes this play and which serves to distinguish it from better comedies is a determined singleness of purpose. This is not, of course, meant as any indictment of the principle of unity; what I mean to suggest is that the characters one and all are aimed at a common end, and the dramatic structure of the play is the pattern for the accomplishment of that end. Again, as in the case of Love in a Tub, the principal

changes in the characters are only adoptions of necessary expedients. In both comedies the characters follow through the stately steps of what Dobrée has called a stylistic ballet, preserving the ritual of give and take in the various outwitting situations in order to hurry happily to bed at the end. Actual or possible union at the end is the aim of all the principal persons. Few, if any, ethical or social principles stand in their way; the plot is primarily concerned with material obstacles to the union -- untimely meetings, unexpected entrances, hidden lovers, and the like. This is especially true in the case of Lady Cockwood, she who would if she could and who finds a possible solution to her problem at the play's end.

Courtall is from the first concerned with escaping the interest of Lady Cockwood, although he is careful to pay vocal homage to her and guard her honor well even if, on his account, it needs no guard:

> La. Cock. You must not so soon rob me of so sweet a satisfaction.
> Court. No consideration, Madam, could take me from you, but that I know my stay at this time must needs endanger your Honour; and how often I have deny'd my self the greatest satisfaction in the world, to keep that unblemished, you your self can witness.[1] (II, ii)

He is also from the first more than a little smitten with Gatty:

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[1]George Etherege, She Wou'd if She Cou'd, ibid., vol. II. All further references are to this edition.

> Gatty. Truly you seem to be men of great employment, that are every moment ratling from the Eating-houses to the Play-houses, from the Play-houses, to the Mulbery Garden, that live in a perpetual hurry, and have little leisure for such an idle entertainment.
> Court. Now would I not see thy face for the world; if it should but be half so good as thy humour, thou woud'st dangerously tempt me to doat upon thee, and forgetting all shame, become constant.
> (II, i)

He is even seen at one time to blush and hang his head in the presence of his lady.

These are Courtall's problems; both of them require only management, not understanding. He and Freeman have to foil Lady Cockwood's attempts to embroil them both further by arousing antagonism between her husband and Courtall and by forged letters in the names of Ariana and Gatty before they win promise of the ceremonial union:

> Court. What think you of taking us in the humour? Consideration may be your Foe, Ladies.
> Aria. Come, Gentlemen, I'le make you a fair proposition; since you have made a discovery of our inclinations, my Sister and I will be content to admit you in the quality of Servants.
> Gat. And if after a months experience of your good behavior, upon serious thoughts, you have courage enough to ingage further, we will accept of the Challenge and believe you men of Honour.
> Sir Jos. Well spoke i'faith, Girls, and is it a match, Boys?
> Court. If the heart of man be not very deceitful, 'tis very likely it may be so.
> Free. A month is a tedious time, and will be a dangerous tryal of our resolutions; but I hope we shall not repent before Marriage, whate're we do after.
> (V, i)

The other characters of *She Wou'd if She Cou'd* are generally better defined than those of *Love in a Tub*, especially as in the cases of Lady Cockwood and Gatty.

The characters are not always clearly differentiated: Courtall differs from Freeman, for example, in little more than name, and the same is true of Ariana and Gatty; Sir Oliver and Sir Joslin differ only in marital status, their interests being largely identical. The interaction of these characters proves to be less a catalytic agent acting upon the fortunes of principal figures than is true of better comedies. The fortunes of major figures depend largely upon manipulation and management of affairs with secondary figures rather than on any educative value apparent there.

The interest of Ariana and Gatty in Freeman and Courtall is apparent almost from their first meeting, although both sexes are committed to the ritualistic working out of physical obstacles. Where in later, better comedies it is apparent that young couples debate and evolve their interests and their loves, as well as removing obstacles, here the interest is assumed from the beginning so that understanding and agreement is never so great a problem as it is, for example, in The Way of the World. Just as Freeman and Courtall are from the first aroused by the two ladies, so the ladies are in their turn aroused; after their first meeting they comment:

> Aria. Prithee, dear Girl, what dost think of 'em?
> Gat. Faith so well, that I'm asham'd to tell thee.
> Aria. Wou'd I had never seen 'em!
> Gat. Ha! Is it come to that already?
> Aria. Prithee, let's walk a turn or two more, and talk of 'em. (II, i)

And though they are careful never to reveal too much to their suitors, the same interest is apparent at the end of the play, changed only in intensity:

> Aria. I cannot but think of those letters, Sister.
> Gat. That is, you cannot but think of Mr. Freeman, Sister; I perceive he runs in thy head as much as a new Gown uses to do in the country, the night before 'tis expected from London.
> Aria. You need not talk, for I am sure the losses of an unlucky Gamester are not more his meditation, then Mr. Courtall is yours.
> Gat. He has made some slight impression on my memory, I confess; but I hope a night will wear him out agen, as it does the noise of a Fiddle after Dancing.
> Aria. Love, like some stains, will wear out of it self, I know, but not in such a little time as you talk of, Sister.
> (V, i)

Sir Oliver Cockwood gambols awkwardly and heavily throughout the play convinced of two things -- that marriage is a "damn'd trouble," and that his wife, Lady Cockwood, loves him tenderly. He, along with Sir Joslin Jolly, seeks further pleasure afield, generally in the company of Rakehell and his whores, scorning what might be found at home. When Courtall urges him to seek an accommodation with his lady, he replies:

> I had rather have a perpetual civil War, then purchase Peace at such a dishonourable rate. A poor Fiddler, after he has been three days persecuted at a Country-wedding, takes more delight in scraping upon his old squeeking Fiddle, then I do in fumbling on that domestick Instrument of mine.
> (III, vii)

He is brought to seek peace with his wife, not by any reassurance of her merit nor by any further understanding of his own quality, but by the possibility that someone

else, in this case Courtall, might be interested in her.

But it is only in the figure of Lady Cockwood that Etherege approaches the real concerns of comedy, which might be called enlightenment by ridicule. In Lady Cockwood, Etherege presents a woman delightfully false in two respects: she swears to cherish honor, yet seeks to be dishonored; and she pretends virtue while she seeks delightful vice. She is thwarted at every turn, but is given a possible solution to her problem at the end of the play. At all times and in all places, she in insistent upon her honor; during a meeting with Courtall she insists:

> O Heaven! you must excuse me, dear Sir, for I shall deny my self the sweetest recreations in the world rather than yield to any thing that may bring a blemish upon my spotless honor.
> (III, i)

When she finds Courtall interested elsewhere and "so much precious time fool'd away in fruitless expectation," Lady Cockwood begins the subterfuge which she hopes will alienate Courtall and Gatty and at the same time arouse Sir Oliver against Courtall; then when Sir Oliver appears unharmed by this antagonism, she trusts to honor again, telling Sir Oliver, "If Mr. Courtall had kill'd thee, I was resolved not to survive thee; but before I had dy'd, I wou'd have dearly reveng'd thy Murder." (V, i)

Lady Cockwood is not corrected in She Wou'd if She Cou'd; at the end of the play her pretentious manner is made all the more ridiculous by her ignorance of the

pretense. Only material obstacles have stood in her way, and they discourage her sorely until Courtall suggests a more circumspect way of satisfying natural passions which she refuses to recognize:

> Sent. What a miraculous come off is this, Madam!
> La. Cock. It has made me so truly sensible of those dangers to which an aspiring Lady must daily expose her Honour, that I am resolv'd to give over the great bus'ness of this Town, and hereafter modestly confine my self to the humble Affairs of my own Family.
> Court. 'Tis a very pious resolution, Madam, and the better to confirm you in it, pray entertain an able Chaplain.
>
> (V, i)

Again in his second play Etherege offers no full catalogue of wits as catalysts for his comic action. Courtall, Freeman, Ariana, and Gatty must, in terms of this play, be reckoned as Truewits, though only Gatty would rank with the greater figures of later comedies. Sir Oliver Cockwood and Sir Joslin Jolly are prototypes of the various Witlesses later to appear. Aside from Lady Cockwood, compound of hag and cast mistress, this completes the gallery.

Except for the figure of Lady Cockwood, the ends of comedy are not too well served in She Wou'd if She Cou'd. All the characters of this comedy are liable to ridicule, for they each and all are grotesque in their satisfaction with a mere superficial alteration of manners or appearances, but this grotesqueness is not always seized for comic purposes. The general contentment with surface change is represented metaphorically in two

scenes where characters dress to go out. In their first scene Ariana and Gatty prepare to go into Mulberry Garden masked, and in their preparation, they resolve what manner to adorn themselves with; they will drop demureness and employ honesty and tyranny over lovers. In another scene, Sir Oliver, preparing to go out, can find nothing but his "penitential clothes" and fears the derision of the ladies and beaux.

The contests involving the young lovers hardly deserve the name. Again, there is never even a semblance of extended debate which evolves understanding and agreement. The extended conversations among the four young people deal with matters of more immediate concern: the men's efforts to have the masks done away with, or the ladies' derision of hasty courtesies. Seldom, if ever, is a figure of similitude developed. They are used to heighten the fancy of individual speeches, but never carried beyond one speech.

In 1676 Etherege presented The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter, which Walpole was later to call "almost our best comedy." One of the most often attacked of Restoration comedies and also one of the funniest and the best, it has been called a play treating life "purely as an appearance," with no meaning apart from immediate reactions, creating an illusion far removed from life.[1]

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[1]Dobrée, p. 76.

That this and similar judgments are misleading and unjust is made evident simply by a careful reading of the play, the kind of reading so far best revealed in the brief notes of Walpole's "Thoughts on Comedy" and Dennis' "Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter." Sir Car Scroope's prologue to the play recognizes more clearly than has ever been done since the comic purpose of the play:

> For heav'n be thanked, 'tis not so wise an age
> But your own follies must supply the stage.
> Tho' often plowed, there's no great fear the soil
> Should barren grow by too frequent toil;
> While at your doors are to be daily found
> Such loads of dunghill to manure the ground.
> 'Tis by your follies that we players thrive,
> As the physicians by diseases live;
> And as each year some new distemper reigns,
> Whose friendly poison helps t' increase their gains,
> So among you there starts up every day
> Some new, unheard-of fool for us to play.
> Then, for your own sakes be not too severe,
> Nor what you all admire at home, damn here;
> Since each is fond of his own ugly face,
> Why should you, when we hold it, break the glass?[1]

The central, unifying principle of the structure of The Man of Mode is the progress of Dorimant, the real man of mode, the epistemological sequence which sees Dorimant develop through the influence, sympathy, or antagonism of the various manners and ways of life which he encounters. The principal stages of Dorimant's development can be seen in his romantic attachments; he rids himself of one mistress, a false wit, has a brief interlude with a better,

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[1]George Etherege, The Man of Mode; or, Sir Fopling Flutter, Plays of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, ed. Dougald MacMillan and H. M. Jones (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931). All further references are to this edition.

and thus prepares himself for the third, Harriet. Dorimant's goal and the end of this comedy is eventual union with Harriet. Unlike Etherege's earlier plays where physical obstacles bar final celebration, it is a question of knowledge, of Dorimant's understanding which acts as obstacle to that union. Dorimant hears of Harriet at the first of the play, and from the first his interest is aroused:

> DORIMANT. . . . This is a good account of the mother; pray, what is the daughter?
> MEDLEY. Why, first, she's an heiress vastly rich.
> DORIMANT. And handsome?
> MEDLEY. What alteration a twelvemonth may have bred in her I know not, but a year ago she was the beautifullest creature I ever saw: a fine, easy, clean shape: light brown hair in abundance; her features regular; her complexion clear and lively; large, wanton eyes; but above all, a mouth that has made me kiss it a hundred times in imagination; teeth white and even, and pretty, pouting lips, with a little moisture ever hanging on them, that look like the Provence rose fresh on the bush, ere the morning sun has quite drawn up the dew.
> DORIMANT. Rapture! mere rapture!
> ORANGE-WOMAN. Nay, gad, he tells you true, she's a delicate creature.
> DORIMANT. Has she wit?
> MEDLEY. More than is usual in her sex, and as much malice. Then she's as wild as you would wish her, and has a demureness in her looks that makes it so surprising.
> DORIMANT. Flesh and blood cannot hear this and not long to know her.
>
> (I, i)

And indeed he soon meets her, but Dorimant is tested and tried before there can be even the suggestion of the celebrated union at the end of the play. I have already suggested a part of this progress -- Dorimant is entangled successively with Mrs. Loveit, cast mistress and

false wit, and Bellinda, who understands perfectly the mode of the existing order, before there is any possibility of union with Harriet, and the discovery of another mode more nearly ideal. But Dorimant confronts other manners and modes; in his progress through this play he meets and is influenced directly or indirectly by various catalytic agents: a group of lesser creatures, the common people; a group of wits, including Young Bellair and Medley; a group of false wits, such as the old people, Old Bellair, Lady Woodvill, and Lady Townley, and the most magnificent of all false wits, Sir Fopling Flutter. In addition to running this gauntlet, Dorimant is examined thoroughly in a series of three major wit contests with Harriet.

Essentially the structure of The Man of Mode is again a matter of outwitting situations or wit contests, which see Dorimant, through comprehension of the various modes of life to which he is exposed in the outwitting situations, gain eventual union with Harriet. Through the course of the various contests, three essential ideas are developed -- the educative process by which Dorimant experiences and comprehends all the modes of life offered by this comedy; the perfect superficial code of conduct so often criticized by moralistic critics; and, what these same critics have ignored, the discovery of an ideal, highly moral code of life through ridicule of the former, artificial mode.

With these too-brief notes regarding the action of the play, I propose now to consider these three essential developments in the comedy -- Dorimant's education, the artificial code of manners, and the discovery of an ideal code -- by examining the characters, the thought, and the diction of the play.

Now the comic effect is in ridicule, Dennis says, and the ridicule is in the characters; consequently much of the effect of The Man of Mode should be apparent in the characters, who may be followed most easily by following Dorimant in his various encounters with the people of the play. The characters fall generally into four characteristic groups, each having its effect on the other and on Dorimant: the common, untutored people; the false wits; other true wits; and, a group herself, Harriet. One might almost say, especially since one of the wit contests in this play is based on a nature-art dialectic, that Dorimant begins with nature in the raw and proceeds to the understanding of nature methodized.

In the very first scene of the play Dorimant appears in direct juxtaposition with nature in the raw in the form of Handy, Foggy Nan, and Swearing Tom, the shoemaker. His dealings with them shed some light upon what it is that Dorimant represents in the end. The tone of his conversation with Foggy Nan is set in the passages immediately following her entrance:

DORIMANT. How now, double tripe, what news do you bring?
ORANGE-WOMAN. News! Here's the best fruit has come to town t'year; gad, I was up before four o'clock this morning and bought all the choice i'the market.
DORIMANT. The nasty refuse of your shop.
ORANGE-WOMAN. You need not make mouths at it; I assure you, 'tis all culled ware.
DORIMANT. The citizens buy better on a holiday in their walk to Totnam.
ORANGE-WOMAN. Good or bad, 'tis all one. I never knew you commend anything. Lord! would the ladies had heard you talk of 'em as I have done! (Sets down the fruit) Here, bid your man give me an angel.
DORIMANT. [To Handy] Give the bawd her fruit again.
(I, i)

This kind of abuse that is obviously tempered with a certain amount of qualified affection continues throughout their conversation and hints, in the end, almost at a kind of boisterous camaraderie.

Some of the remarks of the shoemaker are, however, more pertinent in the connection intended here. In a rapid dissemblance among Dorimant, Medley, and the shoemaker, the latter, from the point of view of the lowest of modes, is able to offer some significant comments on the society with which this play is concerned. When he is accused of living above himself, the shoemaker acquits himself:

MEDLEY. I advise you like a friend -- reform your life. You have brought the envy of the world upon you by living above yourself. Whoring and swearing are vices too genteel for a shoemaker.
SHOEMAKER. 'Zbud, I think you men of quality will grow as unreasonable as the women. You would ingross the sins of the nation; poor folks can no sooner be wicked but they're railed at by their betters.
(I, i)

There is something besides the presumed immorality of the haute monde implied here. The question of propriety

is unquestionably raised. As Medley had said, whoring and swearing are vices too genteel for a shoemaker. The idea of classes per se is not what is pertinent here, and Medley's aristocratic condescension can be forgiven, for the main point lies in discovering what is most proper for one's milieu. Yet the shoemaker, seeming to take Medley's and Dorimant's advice, turns this superficial propriety to ridicule by parodying the manners of a gentleman:

> DORIMANT. Go, get you home and govern your family better! Do not let your wife follow you to the alehouse, beat your whore, and lead you home in triumph.
> SHOEMAKER. 'Zbud, there's never a man i'the town lives more like a gentleman with his wife than I do. I never mind her motions, she never inquires into mine; we speak to one another civilly, hate one another heartily, and because 'tis vulgar to lie and soak together, we have each of us our several settle-bed.
> (I, i)

These comments, along with the brief ones of the four ill-fashioned fellows later in the play, offer the only direct statements revealing the opposition of Dorimant's world with that of the lower classes. What is particularly significant about their presence in the play, it appears, is that while most of the characters are repelled at the sight of this raw nature (Sir Fopling Flutter comments that the four fellows overcome the odor of his perfumed powder), Dorimant can bandy words with Foggy Nan and tolerate, even understand the impudent remarks of the shoemaker. The four ill-fashioned fellows lewdly perceive the artificiality of some of the characters; they know Mrs. Loveit is Dorimant's "convenient," and they

comment on her looseness; they also immediately perceive that Sir Fopling is a coxcomb, a "spruce prig," a "caravan lately come from Paris." In short, what seems important to remember is that poles set in opposition to each other do not necessarily remain forever in the opposition. There is eventually some mutual qualification, in this play apparent only in Dorimant, who is able to bandy on more or less equal terms with Foggy Nan, but who is also able to impose order upon her kind of nature -- "who's wanting in his duty, the next clap he gets, he shall rot for an example."

The second group of characters in the play which represent factors whose opposition helps form the code revealed at last in Dorimant and Harriet are the false wits. This group includes the old people, less important in this play than in many, the cast mistress, Mrs. Loveit, and the fop, Sir Fopling. Old Bellair, a witless, out of his milieu is bluntly and honestly interested in Emilia, who complains "He calls me 'rogue,' tells me he can't abide me, and does so be-pat me." Although piqued at the loss of Emilia to his son, his honesty prompts him finally to reconcile himself with the young couple, complimenting his son with "A dod, sirrah, I did not think it had been in thee."

Lady Woodvill, Harriet's mother, Dorimant is able to understand and deceive with the slightest of disguises.

She is typical of the characters whose lives are governed by a superficial code of manners and forms; fooled by a change of name, she is gulled and outwitted by Dorimant (as Courtage) with such polish that when he is finally revealed, she gives in readily to his union with Harriet:

> DORIMANT. Forms and ceremonies, the only things that uphold quality and greatness, are now shamefully laid aside and neglected . . . . [The young men] cry "A woman's past her prime at twenty, decayed at four-and-twenty, and unsufferable at thirty."
> LADY WOODVILL. Unsufferable at thirty! That they are in the wrong, Mr. Courtage, at five-and-thrity, there are living proofs enough to convince 'em.
> DORIMANT. Aye, madam. There's Mrs. Setlooks, Mrs. Droplip, and my Lady Loud; show me among all our opening buds a face that promises so much beauty as the remains of theirs.
> LADY WOODVILL. The depraved appetite of this vicious age tastes nothing but green fruit, and loathes it when 'tis kindly ripened.
> DORIMANT. Else so many deserving women, madam, would not be so untimely neglected.
> LADY WOODVILL. I protest, Mr. Courtage, a dozen such good men as you would be enough to atone for that wicked Dorimant and all the other debauchees of the town.
>
> (IV, i)

Among the more important of the false wits is Mrs. Loveit, Dorimant's mistress, whom he dispatches during the course of the play. She is "the most passionate in her love and the most extravagant in her jealousy of any woman I ever heard of." (I, i) This, indeed, is her difficulty, an inability to control or to reconcile her passion with her reason, and this, again, is one of the educative factors in Dorimant's progress. It is, however, Mrs. Loveit who identifies Dorimant's charm:

I know he is a devil, but he has something of the

> angel yet undefaced in him, which makes him so charming and agreeable that I must love him, be he never so wicked.
>
> (II, ii)

This apparent dichotomy, eventually a unified principle in the character of Dorimant, is of great importance.

The conversation which follows Dorimant's first effort to rid himself of Mrs. Loveit reveals the unbalancing effect of her passions in contrast to the calm deliberation of Dorimant. Accused by Dorimant of being interested in Sir Fopling, she replies:

> MRS. LOVEIT. So damned a lie did never malice yet invent. Who told you this?
> DORIMANT. No matter. That ever I should love a women that can dote on a senseless caper, a tawdry French ribband, and a formal cravat!
> MRS. LOVEIT. You make me mad.
> DORIMANT. A guilty conscience may do much. Go on -- be the game mistress o' the town, and enter all our young fops as fast as they come from travel.
> MRS. LOVEIT. Base and scurrilous!
> DORIMANT. A fine mortifying reputation 'twill be for a woman of your pride, wit, and quality!
> MRS. LOVEIT. This jealousy's a mere pretence, a cursed trick of your own devising -- I know you.
> DORIMANT. Believe it and all the ill of me you can, I would not have a woman have the least good thought of me, that can think well of Fopling. Farewell! Fall to, and much good may you do with your coxcomb.
>
> (II, ii)

In the face of growing passion from Mrs. Loveit, Dorimant is able finally to dispose of her. At the end of the play, alternately raging and begging, she is cast by Dorimant, who tells her, "To satisfy you, I must give up my interests wholly to my love. Had you been a reasonable woman, I might have secured 'em both and been happy." She departs, calling men villains and fools, and vowing to

lock herself away from the world. She is dispatched, appropriately enough, by Dorimant's partner in decorum, who reminds her once again of the penalty of the one-sided life:

> HARRIET. (To Mrs. Loveit) Mr. Dorimant has been your God Almighty long enough; 'tis time to think of another.
> MRS. LOVEIT. Jeered by her! -- I will lock myself up in my house and never see the world again.
> HARRIET. A nunnery is the more fashionable place for such a retreat, and has been the fatal consequence of many a belle passion.
> (V, ii)

Bellinda, with whom Dorimant shares a brief interlude between Mrs. Loveit and Harriet, is more difficult to characterize. She is lost from the moment she submits to helping Dorimant rid himself of Mrs. Loveit. She is also subject to a great passion for Dorimant, but is able to preserve something of her dignity, if not her innocence, because she remembers the society's standards. Her principal difficulty is just that -- she is committed to the existent principles of her society, submitting herself in the love game, not demanding in return, as Harriet does, the alteration of her lover. She willingly helps Dorimant in his plan to dispose of Mrs. Loveit, but becomes ridiculous herself for submitting without question, even though she is horrified at his treatment of Mrs. Loveit -- "Let me but escape this time, I'll never venture more." She is, however, successful in retaining her dignity and some of the reader's sympathy when she magnificently

minimizes the affair by saying that they only came together because she failed to give proper directions to her chairman.

The magnificent figure of Sir Fopling Flutter, who dances onto the stage in Act III, is another expression of the existent code of manners and appearances, indeed, the supreme expression. Sir Fopling is the extreme example of the exaggeration of appearance and form; he is, as a matter of fact, nothing but appearance. His perfumes (in contrast to Dorimant, who would "smell like myself today"), his entourage, the catalogues of his dress and its makers -- all produce, in conjunction with his obvious inability <u>to be</u> as well as <u>to seem</u>, the picture of an artificial code made ridiculous by its emptiness:

> SIR FOPLING. Prithee, Dorimant, why hast thou not a glass hung up here? A room is the dullest thing without one.
> YOUNG BELLAIRE. Here is company to entertain you.
> SIR FOPLING. But I mean in the case of being alone. In a glass a man may entertain himself --
> DORIMANT. The shadow of himself, indeed.
> SIR FOPLING. -- correct the errors of his motions and his dress.
> MEDLEY. I find, Sir Fopling, in your solitude you remember the saying of the wise man, and study yourself.
> SIR FOPLING. 'Tis the best diversion in our retirements.
>
> (IV, ii)

He is indeed, as Dorimant hinted, shadow rather than substance. His whole concern is with appearance, he is totally lacking in judgment, and he is, consequently, unaware that propriety of appearance, when

exalted over all else, becomes improper, indecorous. Every house, according to Sir Fopling, should have an anteroom so that one could privately straighten one's periwig, so that one could prepare a face to meet the faces that he meets. Yet Harriet can say, "I am mightily taken with this fool," for despite his failings, Sir Fopling is aware of the overt demands of propriety, and no one save himself is ridiculed by his foppery, except, of course, as Dryden says in the epilogue, he is "a people in a man."

Another group of characters that is important is the Truewits, other than Dorimant and Harriet. This includes Medley, Young Bellair, and possibly Emilia. The first of the play's wit contests involves the two young men in an argument over love. The sophisticated Medley, of course, offers strong argument against his companion's sentimental attachment, but Young Bellair in his resolution withstands, and does so still at the end of the play:

> MEDLEY. Though y'ave made us miserable by the want of your good company, to show I am free from all resentment, may the beautiful cause of our misfortunes give all the joys happy lovers have shared ever since the world began.
> YOUNG BELLAIR. You wish me in heaven, but you believe me on my journey to hell.
> MEDLEY. You have a good strong faith, and that may contribute much towards your salvation. I confess I am but of an untoward constitution, apt to have doubts and scruples, and in love they are no less distracting than in religion. Were I so near marriage, I should cry out by fits as I ride in my coach, "Cuckold, cuckold!" with no less fury than the mad fanatic does "glory" in Bethlem.

YOUNG BELLAIR. Because religion makes some run mad, must I live an atheist?
MEDLEY. Is it not great indiscretion for a man of credit, who may have money enough on his word, to go and deal with the Jews, who for a little sum make men enter into bonds and give judgments?
YOUNG BELLAIR. Preach no more on this text. I am determined, and there is no hope for my conversion.
(I, i)

Even Young Bellair, in love as he is, recognizes the demands of decorum: if others run mad, he says, does that mean I will too?[1] Dorimant, too, preserves that balanced, harmonious decorum in his loves; he protests that Mrs. Loveit would have had him give up all his interests for his love. The love of Young Bellair and Emilia foreshadows that of Dorimant and Harriet in another way, though neither of the young lovers is completely in the code established by Dorimant and Harriet. When Dorimant parts with Harriet at the end of the play, to meet her again, he leaves with words much like Young Bellair's:

Not at all, madam. The first time I saw you you left me with the pangs of love upon me, and this day my soul has quite given up her liberty.

Dorimant can thus give in to this much of a sentimental love because he has demonstrated his understanding of the demands of decorum, and because his partner has as well.

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[1]It is interesting to note the diction of this first wit contest, which is another area in which this play differs from Etherege's earlier works. Though this contest employs primarily wit of fancy, the fancy, in contrast to earlier contests, is maintained. Once Young Bellair associates joy and heaven, Medley first and then Young Bellair work out the rest of the contest in religious terms.

It is in the characters of Dorimant and Harriet that The Man of Mode achieves its real stature. It is true that the other characters are also generally superior to those in Etherege's earlier comedies, but beyond that, here for the first time is a hero, himself ridiculed, who is educated through his encounters with other ridiculous characters.

Dorimant, called "my life, my joy, my darling sin," by Medley, is a man who "next to the coming of a good understanding with a new mistress," loves "a quarrel with an old one." He is a man, too, who insists on the freedom which seems quite natural for a young man of his time; he has the additional quality of honesty:

> MRS. LOVEIT. Is this the constancy you vowed?
> DORIMANT. Constancy at my years? 'Tis not a virtue in season; you might as well expect the fruit the autumn ripens i' the spring.
> MRS. LOVEIT. Monstrous principle!
> DORIMANT. Youth has a long journey to go, madam; should I have set up my rest at the first inn I lodged at, I should never have arrived at the happiness I now enjoy.
> MRS. LOVEIT. Dissembler, damned dissembler!
> DORIMANT. I am so, I confess. Good nature and good manners corrupt me. I am honest in my inclinations, and would not, wer't not to avoid offense, make a lady in years believe I think her young -- willfully mistake art for nature -- and seem as fond of a thing I am weary of as when I doted on't in earnest.
> MRS. LOVEIT. False man!
> DORIMANT. True woman!
> MRS. LOVEIT. Now you begin to show yourself.
> DORIMANT. Love gilds us over and makes us show fine things to one another for a time, but soon the gold wears off and then again the native brass appears.
> (II, ii)

Dorimant is cherished by male companions and feared by females. He can charm old ladies and frighten young ones. While he is brutal in his disposition of Mrs. Loveit, he is admired by the gentle Emilia and loved by Bellinda despite his brutality. But this is Dorimant unaffected by the comic sea-change. He meets Harriet.

"Wild, witty, lovesome, beautiful, and young," Harriet is a young lady of great beauty, of more wit than is common and as much malice; she combines a surprising wildness and a fetching demureness. She, too, is honest; she, too, has the ability to penetrate pretense:

> BUSY. I hope without offense one may endeavor to make one's self agreeable.
> HARRIET. Not when 'tis impossible. Women then ought to be no more fond of dressing then fools should be of talking; hoods and modesty, masks and silence -- things that shadow and conceal -- they should think of nothing else.
> (III, i)

She also is committed to love, not profit:

> Shall I be paid down by a covetous parent for a purchase? I need no land; no, I'll lay myself out all in love. It is decreed --

And she willingly admits to herself at least the reality of a sentimental attachment: "My love springs with my blood into my face; I dare not look upon him yet." More important she is forceful enough and sufficiently aware of the requirements of the code of decorum, not just the existent code, to demand alteration in the conduct of that hopeless rake, Dorimant, and get it.

The eventual enlightenment possible through comic discovery is, perhaps, best illustrated in the associations of Dorimant and Harriet in the two major wit contests. To Dorimant, Harriet is "wild, witty, lovesome, beautiful, and young," and his principal efforts are to gain her. Their first meeting resolves into a wit contest, which begins in general terms to contest the virtue of men and women. They are almost immediately struck with each other, however, and the contest cannot continue along vague lines:

> HARRIET. To men who have fared in this town like you 'twould be a great mortification to live on hope. Could you keep a Lent for a mistress.
> DORIMANT. In expectation of a happy Easter and, though time be very precious, think forty days well lost to gain your favor.
> HARRIET. Mr. Bellair, let us walk; 'tis time to leave him. Men grow dull when they begin to be particular.
>
> (III, iii)

Attracted to each other, they contest, and doing so, cannot help revealing themselves. But Harriet loses this contest; it is her purpose to keep Dorimant from becoming specific, yet it is she who does so first.

Both Harriet and Dorimant employ gambling figures here, but the principal development of terms and figures is again a religious sequence. Here in this wit contest there becomes apparent wit of fancy and wit of judgment, the intellect fancifully working out in religious terms certain concepts which further the dramatic action of the play. The two contend here on different levels, Harriet

working out the sordidness of men's natures, Dorimant concerned with masculine gratification. Harriet, forgetting herself and becoming specific, seeks to know whether Dorimant could properly restrain himself for the sake of a mistress; Dorimant, however, converts and develops the wit-sequence she had worked out "mortification - hope - Lent" to the eventual gratification possible at a "happy Easter," the time of ancient fertility festivals. He is the victor here, but he must still contend, for in winning this contest, he makes it clear to Harriet that for personal satisfaction and compliance with an existent, naturalistic code, he is unwilling as yet to substitute enlightened propriety -- in short, he can keep a Lent only if there is a happy Easter. His education is not yet complete.

In their second and principal contest, something more significant concerning the discoverable code of comedy is revealed. Opposed from the beginning in the terms of nature and art, Dorimant and Harriet contest their love; but Harriet triumphs in the beginning when she forces him to concede that she does not need the trimmings of art: "You need 'em not; you have a sweetness of your own if you would but calm your frowns and let it settle." She is here the complete master. It is important to notice what all who have dismissed Dorimant as a harsh libertine have ignored, that he is by now in love:

> DORIMANT. (Aside) I love her and dare not let her know it; I fear she has an ascendent o'er me and may revenge the wrongs I have done her sex. . . . I have took the infection from her, and feel the disease now spreading in me.
> (IV, i)

But he learns from Harriet that he must let her know of his love; this is a part of his ordeal; Harriet takes on the trimmings of the art which Dorimant had said she did not need, but which she recognizes as the essential ordering of nature, and she is finally able to best Dorimant at his own game and defeat him by challenging him to an art greater than his own:

> DORIMANT. The time has been, but now I must speak --
> HARRIET. If it be on that idle subject [love], I will put on my serious look, turn my head carelessly from you, drop my lip, let my eyelids fall and hang half o'er my eyes -- thus -- while you will buzz a speech of an hour long in my ear, and I answer never a word. Why do you not begin?
> DORIMANT. That the company may take notice of how passionately I make advances of love! And how disdainfully you receive 'em.
> HARRIET. When your love's grown strong enough to make you bear being laughed at, I'll give you leave to trouble me with it; till then pray forbear, sir.
> (IV, i)

And in the end, through these instructions and others to be mentioned later, Dorimant is raised to the full requirement of the code when he is forced by Harriet to admit that his "passion knows no bounds," to admit that force which had been omitted from his deliberate, sometimes callous dealings in the love game, to admit, in short, the emotional element, which must be considered along with the rational element in the establishment of

a code of life. In a kind of embryo proviso scene, he is reduced first to begging Harriet not to turn away; he then offers to renounce all pleasures he finds elsewhere. Harriet at this point reaffirms the doctrine of decorum beautifully by requiring devotion, not fanaticism, and Dorimant is left with his promises and his hopes of union with Harriet when he talks in Hampshire as he talks in London, that is, when he is not only decorous, but also constant.

The effect of these wit contests and all other actions, in short the effect of The Man of Mode, is two-fold. First, there is ridicule of an existent order. Second, there is discovery of a potential, ideal order.

The follies and vices of the existent order, the order of the court, are best seen in the characters of Sir Fopling Flutter and Mrs. Loveit, in a scene between Harriet and Young Bellair, and in Dorimant himself. Sir Fopling is the epitome of artificiality, the grandest fop of them all, pure shadow without substance. He is so concerned with appearance that he is nothing else. Though tolerated by other characters, he is deemed by them,as well as by us, the greatest of fools. Just as he fails to find a balance between appearance and reality and is consequently ludicrous, so Mrs. Loveit fails to find a balance between reason and passion, and she too becomes ludicrous. The artificiality of the Restoration

manner is again charmingly illustrated in the instruction scene between Harriet and Young Bellair, where again it becomes apparent that polish and form far outweigh truth and substance in the minds of most:

> HARRIET. Smile, and turn to me again very sparkish.
> YOUNG BELLAIR. Will you take your turn and be instructed?
> HARRIET. With all my heart!
> YOUNG BELLAIR. Now spread your fan, look down upon it, and tell the sticks with a finger!
> HARRIET. Very modish!
> YOUNG BELLAIR. Clap you hand up to your bosom, hold down your gown, shrug a little, draw up your breasts, and let 'em fall again gently, with a sigh or two.
>
> (III, i)

Dorimant himself is made to appear ridiculous. A man of mode, brilliant, witty, callous, brutal even, Dorimant becomes ridiculous before Harriet until he learns to be completely decorous, honest, and constant. In the major wit contest with Harriet, although he is plainly smitten with her charm, he is shrugged off by Harriet because he is unwilling to admit that "infection" of love. Like Sir Fopling Flutter and Mrs. Loveit, Dorimant is unbalanced and incomplete because, up to this point, the mode is his way of life. At Lady Townley's party, he remembers, in all his assurance, that he is not yet so foppishly in love as to forget a tryst with Bellinda, yet only a short time later, his assurance gone, the mode failing him, he is prostrate before Harriet, who will not hear him until he proves his devotion.

Much, if not all, of the humor and ridicule in The Man of Mode result from some kind of unbalance. The common people are nature unordered, Mrs. Loveit is passion without reason, Sir Fopling is art without nature. Dorimant is the man of mode first because he understands that balance is presently possible in these circumstances. He can, for example, reconcile the foppery of Sir Fopling with the substance of Foggy Nan, he can harmonize the fears and quirks of the older people, like Lady Woodvill, with charm, and he can appreciate the orderly sentimental love of Young Bellair and Emilia while deploring the undue passion of Mrs. Loveit. But to be the man of mode is not enough to win Harriet. He has to discover a potential ideal order.

Early evidence of a kind of rudimentary decorum is apparent throughout the play: a love letter written in cold blood is hideous; certain follies are out of place among the poor; excellence is more than a matter of tying a cravat. But the kind of order Dorimant discovers through his contact with all the people of the play and through his ordeal with Harriet is an order elevated beyond this. From a tolerant, deliberate man of charm with a firm grasp of the pleasure principle he becomes a man of infinitely greater wisdom. His great charm for Mrs. Loveit is his combination of the angelic with the

satanic. Such a composition of qualities makes the discovery of an ideal order possible. He knows that nature must be ordered with art, and he learns from Harriet that reason must be tempered with emotion. Knowing this, he will discover, when he can speak in Hampshire as he speaks in London, that there is a time to laugh and a time to cry, and a time to be sober and a time to be sensuous, a time to reason with the mind and a time to feel with the heart -- he will, in other words, discover the enlightened order of the principle of decorum. Having already begun to learn, he emerges from the play an altered man:

> LADY WOODVILL. If his occasions bring him that way, I have now so good an opinion of him, he shall be welcome.
> HARRIET. To a great rambling, lone house that looks as if it were not inhabited, the family's so small. There you'll find my mother, an old lame aunt, and myself, sir, perched up on chairs at a distance in a great parlor, sitting moping like four melancholy birds in a spacious volery. Does not this stagger your resolution?
> DORIMANT. Not at all, madam. The first time I saw you you left me with the pangs of love upon me, and this day my soul has quite given up her liberty.
> (V, ii)

CHAPTER VI

LESSER COMEDIES OF THE RESTORATION

At the end of Aphra Behn's play The Dutch Lover, Haunce von Ezel, confused, as all readers of the play must be, by the countless intrigues and mismatchings and rematchings, finding himself with the wrong wife, says "'tis all one who's who, therefore, come on," and such must be the reaction of many who read some of the lesser comedies of the Restoration period. Surely in few periods has the gap between the best literary productions of a particular kind and the run-of-the-mill productions at the other extreme been so wide. The great majority of Restoration comedies differ enormously both in form and function from those of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve.

The "Epistle to the Reader" prefacing Mrs. Behn's The Dutch Lover, nauseous as it is in its entirety, indicates some of the characteristics of a great body of Restoration comedies and in doing so, accounts in part for the great difference in the works of the great comic dramatists. Speaking condescendingly of plays as deserving a "place among the middle if not the better sort of Books," Mrs.

Behn opposes any element of instruction in literature:

> I am myself well able to affirm that none of all our English poets, and least the Dramatique (so I think you call them) can be justly charg'd with too great reformation of men's minds or manners. . . . And therefore to return to that which before I was speaking of, I will have leave to say that in my judgement the increasing number of our latter Plays have not done much towards the amending of men's Morals, or their Wit, than hath the frequent preaching, which this last age hath been pester'd with, (indeed without all Controversie they have done less harm) nor can I once imagine what temptation anyone can have to expect it from them; for sure I am no Play was ever writ with the design.[1]

Later, having remarked as support for her contention that even the finest folk in comedy are unfit for imitation, Mrs. Behn concludes that she "studied only to make this [The Dutch Lover] as entertaining as I could."

In these remarks, Mrs. Behn is concerned with three areas of comic theory, areas where the difference between great comedy and mere funny plays becomes most moticeable. First, she denies any instructive element, as indeed anyone except Jeremy Collier would if it meant some kind of obvious moralizing. But there are two areas of instruction that cannot be denied in great comedy: the educative value in the alteration of character, and the educative value in the ridiculous spectacle of folly and vice. Second she tries to prove her case by indicating quite accurately that no play presents models for

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[1]Aphra Behn, "An Epistle to the Reader," affixed to The Dutch Lover, The Works of Aphra Behn, ed. Montague Summers (London: William Heinemann, 1915), vol. I. All further references to the play are to this edition.

imitation. This, obviously, is true, for the purpose of comedy is to show a whole world awry, then corrected in whole or part. Third, she insists on entertainment as the sole criterion, and one must agree, with the qualification that neither her play nor many of the other lesser comic dramas meet this standard.

One other note in the "Epistle" is interesting because it, too, casts some light on the difference between plays. "Plays," she says, "were certainly intended for the exercising of men's passions not their understnadings." While this may be true in Mrs. Behn's case because of a surplus of the former and a total lack of the latter, it also pinpoints the difference between, for example, The Way of the World and The Dutch Lover. The former, like all great comedies, ends with either a present or an implied balance. The latter, like all lesser comedies, ends in unbalance.

Since this is the case, it is easy to see that the worst strictures of Macaulay or any of the moralistic critics are perfectly justified in many of the comedies of the Restoration. More specific characteristics of these lesser plays will be discussed in more detail later, but one might suggest here that they typify the unbalance, the indecorum, the obscenity, the profanity that too many people have associated with all Restoration comedies. An examination of some of these plays should serve two ends.

It will show that they and the great comedies of the age begin with the same material, the same milieu. It should also emphasize by their absence some of the characteristics of good comedy and show that criticism which takes its tone from these ordinary comedies cannot be applied to all the comedies, especially those of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve.

To this ends, I have chosen, more or less arbitrarily, to consider four comedies of the period which, for various reasons, do not rank with the best work by the best comic dramatists: The Mulberry-Garder, (1668) by Sir Charles Sedley; The Dutch Lover, (1673) by Aphra Behn; Mr. Limberham; or, The Kind Keeper, (1678) by John Dryden; and The London Cuckolds, (1681) by Edward Ravenscroft.

A number of peculiar characteristics of the action of these plays both help to identify them and to distinguish them from better comedies. First of all, it is generally true that these comic plots involve much more extreme action. The incidence-rate of sudden entrances, hurried exits, and hidden lovers is generally much higher in these plays than in those by the three major comic dramatists. In the Dryden and Ravenscroft plays, especially, the reader is often hard pressed to follow the characters as they switch mistresses and mattresses.

Most of the major comedies of the age are constructed

around certain vital wit contests. A characteristic of these four plays is that the contests are no longer a matter of wit; indeed, it is possible to say that these four plays and others like them depend on action alone rather than any character development or alteration to give purpose to the play. As a consequence, one might suggest that instead of outwitting contests, we have here merely out-maneuvering contests, the goal of which is usually seduction.

Other characteristics of these lesser comedies are extensions of this quality. There is no educative structure; nothing in the action of these plays contributes to the development or enlightenment of character. The characters are, usually, ridiculous at the beginning of the action and ridiculous at the end of the action; the only change ever truly noticeable in them is a change in physical circumstances, seldom or never in ethical, intellectual, or moral awareness. Brisk action and a bawdy dialogue are their chief distinctions; and the sole motive for action, in most cases, is profit of a physical kind, usually either gratification of sensual desire or financial gain.

The action of Sir Charles Sedley's The Mulberry-Garden is somewhat less athletic than that of the other three plays, and as a result, the play is less interesting as well, since it has nothing else to commend it,

lacking as it is in character interest. The action arises out of, first, the efforts of Althea and Diana to overcome the insistence of their father, Sir Samuel Forecast, that they be kept shut up, away from the temptations of life, and their attempts, at last successful, to be matched with Eugenio and Philander; the action further develops from the intentions of Victoria and Olivia, their opposite numbers, to follow the instructions of their father, Sir John Everyoung, and live gaily and wittily. All are successful, but it is manipulation through action, not enlightenment through debate that makes them successful.

The success of the various ventures comes about, as I have said, solely through the action. Wildish is in love with Olivia from the start and Victoria is in love with Horatio; the only obstacle to their union is easily overcome as Wildish, by little more than physical maneuvering, disposes of the two fops, Estridge and Modish. Eugenio and Althea, Philander and Diana are in love from the start and are united at the end, obstacles to their union being overcome by relatively simple acts: first, the Widow Brightstone is made noticeable to Sir Samuel Forecast, whose prudishness thus begins to disappear; and second, by an accident of timing, the Restoration restores Eugenio and Philander, who were Royalists, to his favor.

One is tempted to remark of the action of <u>The</u>

Dutch Lover only that it is hopeless. One might say that in all the unravelling of plot strands, hidden identities, and mixed loves, not characters are changed, only beds. There are great obstacles to the union of lovers in this play, but they are created by Mrs. Behn, not by any action, humor, wit, or ethical and social characteristic of any member of the play. The play is cluttered primarily by seven cases of hidden or mistaken identity. Silvio's love for Cleonte cannot be consummated until he learns that he is in truth Roderigo and so not Cleonte's brother; Alonzo's complete happiness is delayed until his parentage is revealed and he can furnish dowry sufficient to allow his long-lost sister Clarinda to marry Marcel; the fact that Euphemia is the sister of his best friend, Lovis, is withheld from Alonzo for a time; Euphemia's maid mistakes Marcel for Alonzo; Marcel mistakes Euphemia for his sister, Hippolyta, whose seduction he seeks to avenge; Clarinda's maid mistakes Alonzo for Marcel; and Alonzo masquerades as the Dutch lover, Haunce von Ezel. In addition to this confusion there are three duels or near-duels: Marcel challenges Silvio because of an imagined rivalry over Clarinda; Hippolyta disguised challenges Antonio, her seducer; and Alonzo challenges Marcel, again because of imagined rivalry over Clarinda. Furthermore, there are four couples whose love affairs are entangled; as a further detriment to this comedy, all but one of these affairs, that of Alonzo and Euphemia, are apparently intended as

quite serious, with the result that again, as in Etherege's first play, we have the nearly impossible cleavage between the serious elements of the play and those that were intended as comic, with practically no connection except physical proximity.

It is easy to see to what extent the action of the play is the only active force, when one considers the events and factors that prepare for the ending. Again, it is no work of character, no change of character. The union of Alonzo and Euphemia is made possible when Alonzo's true identity is revealed and it is discovered that he is heir to a great amount of money, thus removing any obstacle offered by Euphemia's father, Don Carlo. This same money permits the undisputed union of Marcel and Clarinda, for when Clarinda is revealed as Alonzo's long-lost sister, he presents an acceptable dowry. The marriage of Silvio and Cleonte is similarly prepared. In the last act revelations it is revealed that they are not brother and sister; they can then, of course, admit their love -- there is no other obstacle. A matter of form saves the last union: Antonio and Hippolyta are blessed when her father, Don Ambrosio, learns that they have in truth been legally married.

Dryden's The Kind Keeper has at least one advantage over Mrs. Behn's play -- it is funny. Poorly received, the play was meant, according to Dryden, as a satire

against the crying sin of keeping. The Kind Keeper is, perhaps, typical of the lesser comedies of the period; it gives evidence of characteristics that are at one and the same time both generally apparent in baser works and easily distinguished from better. The action of the play depends on extreme physical manipulation, the contest is, rather than one of wit, again one of maneuverability, and the action, the whole structure of the play does nothing to develop, enhance, or change the character or the standards of the persons involved.

Woodall, the disguised younger Aldo, runs no gauntlet here save one of closet doors. His purpose is seduction; the action of the play reveals the accomplishment thereof. The tone of the action, as well as Woodall's interests, are indicated in a passage early in Act II where Woodall is troubled in deciding which conquest to seek first:

> Wood. Now the wife's returned, and the daughter has too, and I have seen them both, and am more distracted than before; I would enjoy all, and have not yet determined with which I should begin. It is but a kind of clergy-covetousness in me, to desire so many; if I stand gaping after pluralities, one of them is in danger to be made a sinecure -- [Sees Tricksy] Oh, fortune has determind for me. It is just here as it is in the world; the mistress will be served before the wife.[1]
>
> (II, i)

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[1]John Dryden, Mr. Limberham; or, The Kind Keeper, The Works of John Dryden, ed. Sir Walter Scott, rev. George Saintsbury (Edinburgh, 1882-1883), vol. VI. All further references are to this edition.

Woodall has two primary concerns: to keep his father, Aldo, who lives in the same house, from learning of his return from abroad; and to find what success he can with the ladies. In this latter connection, he is interested simultaneously in four women, and the action is concerned solely with his efforts to bed at least three of them. In the course of this action the first force of comedy, laughter, is quite apparent, but ridicule is accidental, the main concern being elsewhere. The first of the women is Mrs. Saintly, described as "an hypocritical fanatic"; she is followed by Mrs. Tricksy, "a termagant kept mistress," and Mrs. Brainsick.

Throughout the play, in his various quests, Woodall's maneuverability is severely tested. He is hidden in a chest, in a garden house, and in various closets; caught without closets he is more than once forced to explain his way out of the wrong room by various lies and chicanery. At one point -- to indicates the extremes to which the actions take him -- he is embarrassed with riches, having one woman under his bed, another in it, and a third approaching. At the end he is set on marriage to the fourth woman, Mrs. Pleasance, who is in love with him. As I shall try to show later, this union is the result of no great enlightenment or understanding; Woodall is pleased with the prospect of a wife and a mistress in one, but one suspects fatigue is the first motive.

Unlike The Kind Keeper, Ravenscroft's The London Cuckolds was apparently a huge success. It is, if nothing else, a lusty account of simple pleasures, simply enjoyed. Again, just as in the other three plays, the stress is on action, with seduction the avowed purpose. There is no growth of character. Even those figures most affected by the action, the three cuckolds, remain at the end unwilling to admit the failure of their various schemes for the maintenance of fidelity.

The action is nothing more than an account of the cuckolding of three men of London, Doodle, Dashwell, and Wiseacre, who because of peculiar foibles in their attitudes towards their wives, have made themselves ready game for the rakes. The three obsessions are revealed in the first scene of the play:

> Dood. Wou'd you have your Wife a slave?
> Wise. O much rather than be a slave to a Wife: A witty wife is the greatest plague upon earth, she will have so many tricks and inventions to deceive a man; and cloak her villainy so cunningly, a husband must always be upon the spy, watch when he should sleep, seem to sleep when he should be awake, to secure his honour against her inventions; of all which cares and troubles, he is freed that has married a wife who has not wit enough to offend.
> Dood. If my wife was a fool, I should always suspect her a whore, for 'tis want of wit that makes 'em believe the flatteries of men; she that has sense will discern their traps and snares and avoid 'em: I tell you, Mr. Alderman, a woman without sense, is like a Castle without Souldiers, to be taken at every assault.

A moment later Dashwell enters and the third obsession is revealed:

> Dash. Then let me tell you for both your comforts, a wife that has wit will out-wit her husband, and she that has no wit will be out-witted by others besides her husband, and so 'tis an equal lay, which makes the husband a Cuckold first or oftnest.
> Wise. You are a married man, Mr. Dashwell, what course have you taken?
> Dood. Ay, is yours wise or foolish? tell us that.
> Dash. Look you, the security lies not in the foolish, or in the wise, but in the godly wife, one that prays and goes often to Church, mind you me, the religious godly wife, and such a one have I.[1]
> (I, i)

With this, the game is on.

Just as there are certain peculiar characteristics of the action of these four lesser comedies, so are there interesting traits in the treatment of character. These peculiarities again serve a dual purpose; they suggest typical qualities of baser plays and also make the special quality of the great comedies more easily distinguishable. In these four comedies, one notices, for example, as in the case of Etherege's early plays, that the hero does not change. There is no alteration, no mending, no further failing in his character. He is at the end the same as he was at the first, except that his momentary well-being has been somewhat influenced by the actions of the other persons.

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[1] Edward Ravenscroft, The London Cuckolds, Restoration Comedies, The Parson's Wedding, The London Cuckolds, and Sir Courtly Nice, or, It Cannot Be, intro. and notes by Montague Summers (Boston: Small, Mayard and Company, 1922). All further references are to this edition.

This static quality is also apparent in the other persons of the play, who change only materially. Of more importance in considering the function of other figures is the fact that they fail to serve as catalytic agents in the creation of the hero. Where Dorimant, for example, must run the gauntlet of physical obstacles and also meet, adapt, or discard various points of view, various social and ethical standards, Woodall must only find the right room and the right time. In brief, the characters are effective only in their actions. It is usually true also of lesser comedies that the figures are not clearly differentiated and that there are fewer types of persons.

In The Mulberry-Garden there are no obstacles to union of the comic hero and heroine, Wildish and Olivia, except the slight, ritualistic sequence of dissembling they observe before the final ceremony. The persons of the heroic segment, Althea and Eugenio, Diana and Philander, are initially forbade marriage because the father of the two girls, Sir Samuel, has Roundhead sympathies, while the two young men are Royalists. The appearance of the Widow Brightstone melts Sir Samuel's resistance somewhat, and he is fully reconciled by the Restoration.

But the figures of the comic segment encounter little or no opposition; consequently they are not in any way forced to change or adapt themselves. The two fops,

Ned Estridge and Harry Modish, offer momentary resistance to the interests of Jack Wildish, but he is able to dispose of them with a flick of the wrist when he tricks them into bragging about their conquest of Olivia and Victoria while the two young ladies are listening.

The union of Wildish and Olivia proceeds easily; their attraction for each other is apparent from the start. It suffers no change, and they are content with observing a surface ritual of words, not wit or ideas, as they progress toward marriage. In their first extended conversation, the interest of Wildish becomes apparent, though he is still careful to maintain a properly playful tone:

> Wild. I know not what Romances order in this case. I n'ere thought it would be mine, and so han't much study'd it; but prithee don't baulk a young Beginner; 'tis my first fault, and so been't too severe, I shall relapse beyond Redemption.
> Oliv. Well, I'm content for once your ignorance shou'd plead your pardon.
> Wild. Nay Mrs. Olivia, consider me a little further; I have lost the pleasures of mirth, of Wine, and Company; all things that were before delightful to me, are no longer so; my Life is grown but one continu'd Thought of your fair self: and is a pardon all that I must hope for?[1]
>
> (II, i)

After that he beomces somewhat more insistent, and not quite so playful:

> Dear Madam, I consider not your Portion, but your Person; give your Estate where you please, so you

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[1]Sir Charles Sedley, The Mulberry-Garden, The Poetical and Dramatic Works of Sir Charles Sedley, ed. V. de Sola Pinto (London: Constable and Company, 1928), vol. I. All further references are to this edition.

> will but settle your affection upon me, my Fate depends upon your Answer; and the like Artillery of unlanded Lovers. . . .
>
> (III, i)

Later, privately, Wildish admits his concern:

> I was to blame no earlier to use my self to these Women of Honour, as they call 'um; for now like one that never practis'd swimming, upon the first occasion I am lost; there are men would have fool'd with Olivia, and fool'd her too, perhaps by this time, without ever ingaging in one serious thought: your good Fencer always thrusts in Guard, he's but a Novice that receives hit for hit. . . .
>
> (IV, i)

Of the other characters of The Mulberry-Garden little needs to be said. The persons of the serious action have little effect upon those of the comic action, their concerns being kept separate until the last act when the ritual unions are made possible. Eugenio and Philander and Horatio, Victoria's lover, are strong, gracious, and noble, differing only in name. Althea and Diana are pallid creatures, not distinguishable from each other. Estridge and Modish, who never take on life, are easily manipulated by Wildish and do not in turn affect him.

When one turns to the characters of The Dutch Lover, one can only mourn the lack of a scoreboard. The comic action of this play is slight, and never succeeds in being funny. Only in the scenes involving the Dutch lover, Haunce von Ezel, does the play even come close to achieving the first end of comedy, and even here the play ultimately fails because Haunce is not recognizably

human and hence not believable. The persons of the serious action are, as Mrs. Behn predicts in her epistle, creatures of passion, their understanding being minimized. Even Alonzo, the hero of the comic action, is too quick to love.

When he first encounters Euphemia and she offers marriage in order to escape union with Haunce von Ezel, Alonzo is at first titillated in the proper rakish spirit:

> Alon. I can promise nothing till I see my Reward. I am a base Barterer, here's one for t'other; you saw your Man and lik'd him, and if I like you when I see you -- [Offers to lift up her veil]
> Euph. But if you do not, must all my liking be cast away?
> Alon. As for that, trust to my good Nature; a frank Wench has hitherto taken me as much as Beauty. And one proof you have already given of that, in this kind invitation: come, come, do not lose my little new-gotten good Opinion of thee, by being coy and peevish.
>
> (I, iii)

But only a few lines later, Alonzo is already captured. When he tells Euphemia that he himself is to be married, she arranges to have her veil lifted up in a last effort to tempt him. Her success comes too soon:

> Euph. This I am sure is an Excuse; but I'll fit him for't. [Aside]
> To be marry'd said you?
> That word has kill'd me, Oh I feel it frill
> Through the deep Wound his Eyes have lately made:
> 'Twas much unkind to make me hope so long.
> [She leans on Olinda, as if she swooned, who pulls off her Veil: he stands gazing at a distance.
> Olin. Sure she does not counterfeit, and not I'll play my Part. Madam, Madam!
> Alon. What wondrous thing is that! I should not look upon it, it changes Nature in me.
> Olin. Have you no pity, Sir? Come nearer pray.
> Alon. Sure there's Witchcraft in that Face, it never could have seiz'd me thus else, I have lov'd a thousand

times, yet never felt such joyful Pains before.
Olin. She does it rearely. What mean you, Sir?
Alon. I never was a Captive to this Hour.
If in her Death such certain Wounds she give,
What Mischiefs she would do, if she should live!
Yet she must live, and live that I may prove
Whether this strange Disorder here be Love. [To his Heart.
Divine, divinest Maid [Kneel.
Olin. Come nearer, Sir, you'll do a Lady no good at that Distance. Speak to her, Sir.
[He rises and comes to her, gazing still.
Alon. I know not what to say,
I am unus'd to this soft kind of Language:
But if there be a Charm in Words, and such
As may conjure her to return again;
Prithee instruct me in them, I'll say any thing,
Do any thing, and suffer all the Wounds
Her Eyes can give.
(I, iii)

Euphemia is equally overcome: "I must have this Stranger, or I must die; for whatever Face I put upon't, I am far gone in Love, but I must Hide it." (I, iii) Alonzo is still averse to marriage, but is before long changed: "I think I am resolv'd in spite of all my Inclination to Libertinism." (II, vii)

Most of the other characters are also overcome with passion from the very first. Hippolyta, the sister of Marcel and Silvio, has been carried away by Antonio. When Silvio sees them together and does nothing about it, Marcel becomes enraged in his obsession with revenge:

Mar. Hippolyta!
Silv. Hippolyta, Our Sister, drest like a Venice Curtezan,
With all the Charms of a loose Wanton,
Singing and playing to her ravisht Lover,
Who I perceiv'd assisted to expose her.
Mar. Well, Sir, what follow'd?
Silv. Surpriz'd at sight of this, I did withdraw, and left them laughing at my little Confidence.

Mar. How! left them? and left them living too?
Silv. If a young Wench will be gadding,
Who can help it?
Mar. 'Sdeath you should, were that half her Brother
Which my Father too dotingly believes you [Inrag'd.
(I, iii)

Silvio's particular passion becomes apparent later in his love for Cleonte, who he thinks is his sister. The thought of his great love thwarted by moral convention urges Silvio to great heights of passion:

Silv. Oh, do not speak; thy voice has Charms
As tempting as thy face; but whilst thou art silent and unseen,
Perhaps my Madness may be moderate;
For as it is, the best Effects of it
Will prompt me on to kill thee.
Cleo. To kill me!
Silv. Yes; for shouldst thou live, adorn'd with so much Beauty,
So much my Passion is above my Reason,
In some such fit as does posses me now
I should commit a Rape, A Rape upon thee:
Therefore be gone, and do not tempt Despair,
That merciless rude thing, but save thy Honour,
And thy Life.
(III, iv)

The excess anguish and the threshing love of Antonio and Hippolyta further furnishes an embarrassment of passion, none of which has any touch of the comic, nor any effect on the comic action of the play. Antonio, seeking revenge against Marcel, seduces his sister and takes her away:

Ant. From Town to Town you know I did remove you,
Under pretence to shun your Brother's Anger:
But 'twas indeed to spread your Fame abroad.
But being not satisfy'd till in Madrid,
Here in your native Town, I had proclaim'd you;
The House from whence your Brother's Fury chas'd us,
Was a Bordello, where 'twas given out
Thou wert a Venice Curtezan to hire,
Whilst you believed it was your nuptial palace. [Laughs.

Hip. Dost think I did not understand the Plot?
Yes, and was mad till some young Lovers came.
But you had set a Price too high upon me,
No brisk young Man durst venture,
I had expos'd my self at cheaper Rates.
Ant. Your Price, I pray, young Sinner?
[Pulls off his Hat in scorn.
Hip. Thy Life; he that durst say Antonio lives
no more
Should have possest me gratis.
(III,iii)

Their antagonism at this point leads Hippolyta to masquerade as a man and challenge Antonio to a duel, yet in the next act, without due explanation, they express violent emotional attachment, and are united at the end. At the thought of losing Hippolyta, Antonio is prostrated:

Oh, stay, Hippolyta, and take me with thee,
For I've no use of Life when thou art gone. [Weeps.
Here, kill me, brave Marcel -- and yet you need not;
My own Remorse, and Grief will be sufficient.
(IV, iii)

All the passions of all the persons work out satisfactorily in the end through manipulation of action and money, not through any debate of ideas and ideals. No scene of the play could be called comic in the best sense, and in the play of five acts, nineteen scenes, only six scenes even approach comedy. These are the scenes in which appear either Haunce von Ezel or Alonzo dressed as Haunce. Any comic effect that occurs in these scenes is comedy of movement; Haunce is not a fully realized comic figure, but has qualities of several in him. He dresses fantastically, not so tastefully as a fop but in the same extreme; he has the manners of a boor; he talks bravely,

but acts cowardly except when he is once forced into bravery, and yet withal can resign himself to all the confusion at the end of the play.

Haunce is, all in all, a comic figure of some promise, but he is alone in the play and consequently has no effect upon the other persons of the drama. He is a complete grotesque, from clothes to conduct. He first appears in a scene in which he becomes involved with Antonio and Hippolyta, at the moment antagonistic to each other. He demonstrates his boorishness when, learning that Antonio is about to force Hippolyta, he asks for a share of the spoils. But appealed to by the lady, he changes and is made bold by two factors: he is left alone, and he has a store of surface wisdom to comfort him, forms he has learned in reading:

> Hau. I scorn thy works, and therefore lies my Sword; and since you dare me at my own Weapon, I tell you I am good at Snick-a-Sne as the best Don of you all -- [Draws a great Dutch knife.
> Ant. Can I endure this affront?
> Glo. The best way to make a Coward fight, is to leave him in Danger -- Come, Lady -- [Goes out.
> Ant. Thou base unmanner'd Fool, how darst thou offer at a Gentleman, with so despis'd a thing as that?
> Hau. Despis'd a thing? talk not so contemptibly of this Weapon, I say do not, but come on if you dare.
> Ant. I can endure no longer --
> [Flies at him, Haunce cuts his face, and takes away, after a-while, his Dagger.
> Injustice! can such a Dog, and such a Weapon vanquish me?
> Hau. Beg your life; for I scorn to stain my Victory in Blood -- that I learnt out of Pharamond. [Aside.

> Ant. He does not merit life, that could not defend it against so poor and base a thing as thou: Had but Marcel left me my sword --
> Hau. O then I perceive you are us'd to be vanquish'd and therefore I scorn to kill thee; live, live.
> Ant. How the Rascal triumphs over me!
> Hau. And now, like a generous Enemy, I will conduct thee to my Tent, and thy Wounds drest -- That too I had out of Pharamond. [Aside.
> (III, iv)

Haunce is a natural man, made foolish by a little learning and grotesque by his choice of apparel; despite his foolishness he is able to comment on men of fashion quite interestingly in a passage to be discussed later. He is when necessary brave, but otherwise quite sensibly fearful; he is without fine manners, but in his final reconciliation at the end of the drama, quite sensible. When he discovers he has been married to Olinda, the maid, rather than her mistress, Euphemia, he remarks

> Now doe they all expect I should be dissatisfied; but, Gentlemen, in sign and token that I am not, I'll have one more merry Frisk before we part, 'tis a Witty Wench; faith and troth, after a Month 'tis all one who's who; therefore come on, Gload.
> (V, ii)

But Haunce von Ezel is the only bright spot in The Dutch Lover.

The only important quality of the characters in The Kind Keeper is that they are male and female. This is an extremely funny play, but again the comedy is the result of movement, not character development or thought; it is the comedy of barely hidden lovers, gulled husbands, and almost open intercourse. The persons can be classified

quite easily according to their main function: there is a seducer (Woodall), a group of cuckolds (Brainsick and Limberham), and a group of women for seduction (Mrs. Saintly, Mrs. Tricksy, Mrs. Brainsick, and Mrs. Pleasance). Aldo, Woodall's father, and Gervase, his man, look on. Woodall is in no way altered by his experiences, and the other characters in no way affect him, except in the comfort and pleasure he finds in the woman.

Advised at the start by Gervase to seek a wife, Woodall replies, "I have no vocation to it, Gervase: A man of sense is not made for marriage; 'tis a game, which none but dull plodding fellows can play at well; and 'tis as natural to them, as crimp to a Dutchman." (II, i) At the end he is planning marriage to Mrs. Pleasance, but it is a sudden move, probably prompted by the fact that she possesses in greater abundance all of the qualities he seeks in women.

Woodall has a kind of "clergy-covetousness" to seek pluralities, and this he does to the very end of the play. On her part, Mrs. Pleasance is early interested:

> Why should my mother be so inquisitive about this lodger? I half suspect old Eve herself has a mind to be nibbling at the pippin. He makes love to one of them, I am confident; it may be both; for me thinks, I should have done so, if I had been a Man; but the damned petticoats have perverted me to honesty, and therefore I have a grudge to him for the privilege of his sex. He shuns me, too, and that vexes me; for, though I would deny him, I scorn he should not think me worth a civil question. (III, i)

And her interests are much like Woodall's. Her main concern, prompted by her honesty, is that whoever has her shall have her all, and with the marriage at the end she is successful in this purpose.

The marriage is, in this way, prepared for, but there is no preparation for Woodall's willingness except his sexual interest in Mrs. Pleasance. Aldo, trying to arrange the match in the last scene, pinpoints Mrs. Pleasance's main attractions:

> Aldo. . . . Come, here is a girl; look well upon her; it is a mettled toad, I can tell you that: She will make notable work betwixt two sheets, in a lawful way.
> Wood. What, my old enemy, Mrs. Pleasance?
> Mrs. Brain. Marry Mrs. Saintly's daughter!
> Aldo. The truth is, she has past for her daughter, by my appointment; but she has as good blood running in her veins as the best of you. Her father, Mr. Palms, on his deathbed, left her to my care and disposal, besides a fortune of twelve hundred a year; a pretty convenience, by my faith.
> Wood. Beyond my hopes, if she consent.
> (V, i)

So they are united, Woodal rejoicing because

> Mistress and wife, by turns, I have possessed:
> He who enjoys them both in one is blessed.
> (V, i)

The other persons of the play are important, as I have said only because of their sex. Mrs. Tricksy and Mrs. Brainsick have no effect other than physically upon Woodall; Mrs. Saintly is of some interest because of her hypocrisy, a point to be mentioned later. The men, Brainsick and Limberham, are easy foils for Woodall.

The lustiness of The Kind Keeper is matched by

The London Cuckolds, where again the sole interest is sexual. In The London Cuckolds there is not even the meager accommodation to each other, for there is no marriage in this play, no union joining young lovers except the union whereby the merchants and aldermen of london become the London cuckolds. The action of this play is easily outlined. The game is set by the peculiar obsessions of the three cuckolds-to-be, Doodle, Wiseacre, and Dashwell, when they decide, respectively that wit, lack of wit, and piety will insure fidelity. From that point on the action is a series of love matches, which cannot be called seductions, for this play, more than most, depicts women as eager and honest in their anticipation of intercourse as men have ever been represented. Ramble courts Eugenia and is foiled by the return of Doodle, whereupon Townly reaps the profit of Ramble's courting; next Ramble courts Arabella and is again foiled by the return of a husband, whereupon Townly again reaps the reward; finally Ramble courts Peggy, the presumed witless one, and is so successful in his instructions, that, no husband intervening this time, he gains the day. In the meantime another love-encounter has been successfully worked out, this one between Eugenia and Loveday.

Ramble, with whom the action is primarily concerned, is not an eminently successful lover. His failures, as a matter of fact, almost bring about the only change ever mentioned in the play. Knowing his failures,

Townly, who is "careless of women, but fortunate," urges him to find another avocation:

> Ram. The truth is, I have been unfortunate hitherto, I always meet with occasions, but never bring 'em to perfection; yet it is not my fault neither, for either my Mistress jilts me, fortune jilts me, or the Devil prevents me, I can never bring it to a home push; when I think I have overcome all difficulties, and am as sure of a woman as a Hawk is of the prey he swoops at, fortune turns the wheel, a whirlwind blows my Mistress into Asia, and I am tost to America.
> Town. Therefore prethee leave hunting that difficult game, and learn of me to divert thy self with a bottle, leave enquiring where there's a pretty woman, and ask where the best wine is, take women as I do, when they come in the way by accident; you'll never be successful so long as you make it your business; Love like Riches comes more by fortune than by industry.
>
> (I, ii)

Twice Ramble is chided by ladies, in such a manner as to suggest that they find him not bold enough for a lover. When Arabella plans to leave the bed of her sleeping husband and come to the hidden Ramble, he asks, "But, should he wake, and miss her --," whereupon she replies "Must you be the first that starts the question?" And when Ramble leaves his hiding place for fear of discovery, he is again chided, this time by the maid: "Ah, you could not stay above -- you a Lover!"

After his failure with both Arabella and Eugenia, when Townly found the pleasure he sought, Ramble is nearly converted to the bottle by Townly. It is only the prospect of the possible conquest of Peggy that prevents him from giving up women for the bottle. At the end of the play, Townly is precisely the same as he was at the

beginning. Ramble's condition has been improved somewhat by the conquest of Peggy, and he knows "I am sure of my pretty Fool when e'er I can come at her." But beyond the sexual action and the hiding, nothing occurs in the play to affect the comic heroes.

The heroines of The London Cuckolds have the distinction of being perhaps the most eager female lovers in Restoration literature. Arabella, wife of Doodle, finds a kiss a slender diet, and feels that an alderman's flesh can never surfeit her. Later, approached by Ramble, she gives further evidence of her eagerness:

> Arab. Take notice then, thou desperate resolute man, that I now go to my chamber, where I'll undress me, go into my bed, and if you dare to follow me, kiss, or come to bed to me; if all the strength and passion a provoked Woman has, can do't, I'll lay thee breathless and panting, and so maul thee, thou shalt ever after be afraid to look a woman in the face.
> Ram. Stay and hear me now: Thou shalt no sooner be there but I'll be there; kiss you, hugg you, tumble you, tumble your bed, tumble into your bed, down with you, and as often as I down with you, be sure to give you the rising blow, that if at last you do chance to maul me, 'Gad you shan't have reason to brag in the morning, and so angry, threatning woman get thee gone and do thy worst.
> Arab. And, Sir, do you your best.
> (III, i)

Later, when Loveday comes to her, speaking of his ecstasy of joy, Eugenia asks simply, "Came you hither to talk, my dear?" Sexual frankness is indeed the distinction of these two ladies, but it is their only distinction. At the end of the play, the two have resolved to meet, so that they may laugh together at the folly of their husbands.

The cuckolds are little altered by their ridiculous fate. Their cuckoldry the result of their peculiar obsessions, they cling to these same obsessions at the end of the play still arguing among themselves which scheme is the best for insuring fidelity. Wiseacres, refusing to admit that his innocent Peggy has been seduced, insists that she has dreamed the whole episode of her instruction in the ways of love. The other two are also adamant:

> Dood. Ay, ay, Mr. Dashwell; you may well scratch you Head, for all your Wives Virtue you'll see the fruits of her Zeal upon your fore-head e'er long.
> Dash. I wou'd not yet change my Wives Virtue for your Wives wit, Mr. Alderman.
> Dood. But Neighbour I think, Consideratis Considerandis, the witty wife is the best of the three.
> Dash. To that I answer in your wives own Dialect; No.
>
> (V, v)

There is no question of any interaction of characters in The London Cuckolds, except physically. The play has some interest as a sociological commentary, but the understanding and the wit play no part in either the action or the characterization. There obviously is no catalytic reaction among characters, since no change occurs. The characters fall into three classes -- the seducers, the to-be-seduced, and the cuckolds. The three classes are distinguishable by their physical location; the members of the classes are not differentiated.

When one comes to consider the effect of these comedies, again there are certain rather characteristic qualities apparent in them which both typify them and

reveal how they differ from greater works. Their framework, for example, is usually a seducing scheme or an outmaneuvering scheme, as has been suggested, with the purpose being physical profit in the sense either of sexual gratification or financial reward. Any alteration of character in such comedies as these is usually either a simple physical alteration -- increased comfort -- or a superficial addition of manners. As a result, there is no educative process, as there is at least in Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve. Further, these plays usually contain more bawdy passages than the major works, excepting The Country Wife; and the bawdy scenes are usually either simply incidental to the action, or the sole purpose of the action. Rarely, if ever, do scenes of love-making or similar sensual passages contribute dramatically to the development of any theme or end except successful love-making. It is often, true, further, that these plays are more blatantly sacrilegious than greater works. Finally, these plays are concerned only with one end of comedy, laughter, and restricted as they are to comedy of movement, they are not always successful even at that. The force of comedy, laughter, is here, but the element of discovery and enlightenment through ridicule and other methods of comedy is seldom apparent.

Some of these works, for example, do illustrate a kind of surface polish, a polish that has too often been

taken for real decorum. This usually amounts to no more than the taking on of certain refined manners, which while they affect the appearance, have not the slightest effect on the person.

In The Mulberry-Garden, the two gay girls, Olivia and Victoria, are aware of the code of the town involving the proper treatment of beaux and lovers. As they enter Mulberry Garden at the first of the play, Olivia, asked about the way to oblige men, answers quickly:

> Vict. Fye, Sister, you make him [Estridge] a saver with a look; and Fine, in but thinking he is so: you deserve not so compleat a Servant, but I hope you'le be as obliging to his face, as you are severe behind his back.
> Oliv. The only way to oblige most men is to use 'um thus, a little now and then; even to their faces, it gives 'um an Opinion of our wit; and is consequently a Spur to theirs: the great pleasure of Gaming were lost, if we saw one anothers hands; and of love, if we knew one anothers Hearts: there would be no room for good Play in the one, nor for Address in the Other; which are the refined parts of both.
> (I, iii)

Later in the same play Wildish gives an account of the true lover and what is expected of him. Since this passage occurs during his first meeting with Olivia, his own convictions of love for her somewhat less, but after this scene he is unchangingly devoted to her cause.

> Wild. If I told a Chirurgeon, I had broke my leg, do you think he wou'd not take my word?
> Oliv. Yes, sure.
> Wild. Why shou'd you not take it then for a wounded Heart? they are neither of 'um matters to brag on; and I wou'd no more lead the life of a Lover if I were free, then I wou'd that of a sick man if I were well.
> Oliv. Methinks the sick men, as you call'um, live

so like the well, as one can scarcely know one from th'other.

Wild. In your Chamber, perhaps, but abroad we find a thousand differences.

Cliv. As how, I pray?

Wild. Why, your true Lover leaves all Company when the Sport begins, the Table when the Bottles are call'd for, the Gaming-House when the Cards come up; is more afraid of an Engagement, then a Lawyer in Term-time; wou'd less miss the Last Act of a Play, the Park, or indeed any abominable old Ladies, where he may hope to see the party, then a young Wench can Grayes-Inn-walks, the first Sunday of her new Gown.

Cliv. What, is this all?

Wild. Not half: ask him to sup, he has business; or if he promise, 'tis ten to one he fails, and if he sees his Mistress, is so transported, that he forgets to send his Excuse; if he cannot find her, and so chance to keep his word, sits in such dismal Dumps, that he spoils the whole Company.

(II, i)

The remarkable alteration in the appearance of Sir Samuel Forecast is also indication of this preoccupation with surface gentility and decorum. In order to win Widow Brightstone, he adopts an apparel even finer than that of Sir John Everyoung. So he appears, "as fine as an Emperour," a manner quite foreign to him. The widow, he thinks, is

> . . . a tender piece, and though her discretion helps her to conceal it, in her heart cannot but love a little Bravery; I have two Laces in a Seam more than my Brother Everyoung, and a yard more in my Cravat.
>
> (III, ii)

This same preoccupation with surface appearance and customary conduct according to a rather superficial code is apparent in the comments of Alonzo and Haunce von Ezel in The Dutch Lover, the former speaking from his experience with the code, the latter, in his boorishness,

parodying the code. Alonzo, contemplating marriage to Euphemia, is concerned with leaving "delicious whoring, drinking, and fighting," and, convinced that this is his ill fortune, threatens his love with the curse that

> . . . may I love thee even after we are married to that troublesome degree, that I may grow most damnably jealous of thee, and keep thee from the Sight of all Mankind, but thy own natural Husband. . . . (III, i)

In one of his early appearances, Haunce von Ezel and his servant Gload are in a flat grove, drinking. There, as the drinks go round, they picture the merchant, out of fashion, and the merchant reversed, the gallant, eminently in the fashion:

> Gload. Hold, hold, Sir, you know we are to make Visits to Ladies, Sir; and this replenishing of our Spirits, as you call it, Sir, may put us out of case.
> Hau. Thou art a Fool, I never made Love so well as when I was drunk; it improves my Parts, and makes me witty; that is, it makes me say any thing that comes next, which passes now-a-days for Wit. . . .
> Gload. Why, I say, Sir, none but a Cavalier ought to be soundly drunk, or wear a Sword and Feather; and a Cloke and Band were fitter for a Merchant.
> Hau. Salerimente, I'll beat any Don in Spain that does but think he has more right to any sort of Debauchery, or Gallantry, than I, I tell you that now, Gload.
> Gload. Do you remember, Sir, how you were wont to go at home? when instead of a Periwig, you wore a slink, greasy Hair of your own, thro which a pair of large thin Souses appear'd, to support a formal hat . . . A Collar instead of a Cravat twelve inches high . . . Your Hands, defil'd with counting of damn'd dirty Money, never made other use of Gloves. . . A Cloke, half a yard shorter than the breeches, not thorow lin'd, but fac'd as far as 'twas turned back, with a pair of frugal Butter-hams. . . .
> Hau. Well, Sir, have you done, that I may show you this Merchant revers'd? . . . when one of those you hast described, goes but half a League out of Town,

> that he is so transform'd from the Merchant to the Gallants in all Points, that his own Parents, nay the Devil himself cannot know him. Not a young English squire newly come to an Estate, above the management of his Wit, has better Horses, gayer Clothes, swears, drinks, and does everything with a better grace than he; damns the stingy Cabal of the two-Stiver Club, and puts the young King of Spain and his Mistress together in a Rummer of a Pottle; and in pure Gallantry breaks the Glasses over his Head, scorning to drink twice in the same: and a thousand things full as heroick and brave I cou'd tell you of this same Holy-day Squire.
> (III, iii)

Another characteristic of these lesser comedies is their sometimes excessive bawdiness. Scenes of almost-overt lovemaking usually fall into one of two extremes, as I have suggested earlier, being either merely incidental to the action or the sole purpose of the action. In no way except through the action do these scenes affect the course of the play. Consequently it seems fair to suggest that usually the bawdy passages are there primarily for the sake of bawdiness; they assuredly do not in any way form character.

This is not, perhaps, as descriptive of The Mulberry-Garden as it is of the three other plays, for in Sedley's work, the single passage of bawdy content, itself very slight, occurs as Wildish unmasks the two fops by tricking them into bragging of their conquest of Victoria and Olivia while the two girls listen from a neighboring arbor:

> Mod. Or, if he cou'd but see Victoria's reserv'dness a little modifi'd, and brought to hand with a good Supper and the Fiddles.
> Estr. Or Olivia in her morning dress, with her Guittar, singing to it most enticingly, and then as kind in her discourse, her little breasts swelling and pouting out, as if they came half way to be kissed. (IV, i)

All this bragging is, of course, without foundation, and the fops are exposed.

In The Dutch Lover the bawdy passages have the additional disadvantage of being unbelievable. In Act III, Antonio and Hippolyta appear in a grove, resting from their flight. The audience is aware that they first fled in love, and at the end of the play they unite in love, but here in the grove, in their momentary antagonism, their passions rise so that Hippolyta vows not to be forced again and Antonio, angered at this withdrawal, is well on his way to committing rape, when Haunce von Ezel interruptes with "hark ye, Friend, say a Man had a mind to put in for a share with you."

But bawdy is the raison d'etre of both The Kind Keeper and The London Cuckolds. In both plays innumerable scenes of lovemaking occur just barely offstage. In both the action and the characters are concerned with nothing else, the contest of love offering no corresponding contest of wits or understanding. The situation itself in The Kind Keeper is rather unusual; a son, Woodall, pursues his love game in the presence of, but unknown to his father.

When he is identified to his father, that reverend gentleman proposes:

> Not a word of any passages betwixt us; it is enough we know each other; hereafter we will banish all pomp and ceremony, and live familiarly together. I'll be Pylades, and thou mad Orestes, and we will divide the estate betwixt us, and have fresh wenches and ballam rankum every night.
> (V, i)

In between, various seductions and near-seductions occur. At one point, for example, when Mrs, Brainsick has hidden Woodall in her maid's room at the approach of her husband, and, as she talks with Brainsick, the sounds of intercourse are heard within, in her envy she says, "I have a dismal apprehension in my head that he's giving my maid a cast of his office, in my stead. O how it stings me!"

There are four bedding scenes in The London Cuckolds, each, as I have said, barely offstage. Ramble meets Eugenia first and is thwarted by the approach of her husband, Dashwell. At this point Townly appears, he and Eugenia go offstage, and reappear embracing, with endearments. (II, iii) The remaining three scenes are all crowded into the fifth act. Ramble is disappointed in his efforts to secure Arabella, though she is willing, and again Townly is present. Arabella has vowed to say "no" to every question posed her, and Townly makes the most of her negative answers:

> Town. By her answering No to contraries, I find she has taken a humour to say nothing else, I will fit her with questions; now Lady answer me at your Peril.

Beware you don't tell me a lye: Are you a Maid?
Arab. Ha, ha, ha!
Town. She laughs at that -- a Widow then?
Arab. No.
Town. A Wife! -- She changes her Note now, and whistles at that to let me know she is. Is your Husband at home?
Arab. No.
Town. Is he in town?
Arab. No.
Town. Would you refuse a Bed-fellow in his room to Night if you lik'd the man?
Arab. No.
Town. If I go home with you, will you thrust me out?
Arab. No.
Town. Nor if I come to Bed to you?
Arab. No, no, no, no, no, -- Ha, ha, ha.
[Exit Arabella laughing.
(V, i)

In the next scene, Ramble seduces Peggy, presumed by Wiseacre to be innocent and witless, who has been left marching up and down her chamber in armor to insure her fidelity, and the scene closes with Ramble singing gaily:

How I'll Mouse her and Touse her and Tumbel her till Morning.
But little dreams the Bridegroom he is to be horning.
(V, ii)

And in the next scene, Loveday and Eugenia retire to their love-game. (V, iii)

One other characteristic of the eternal love-game in this group of lesser comedies, an effect of the constant courtship and libertine attitude expressed in them, is the sacrilegious air often noticeable. In The London Cuckolds, for example, Ramble reports his first encounter with Eugenia, the hypocrite wife:

Town. 'Tis strange a man should find a Mistress at Church, that never goes to one.

Ram. 'Tis true: till of late, I had never been at Church since my Father's Funeral, and I had not gone then, but to Conduct him as forward on his way as I could, that he might not return to take the Estate again I got by his Death: Nor had I been near the Church since, but for a sudden shower of Rain that drove me into the Church porch for shelter, and whilst I was standing there, came by this Miracle of a Woman, and wrought my Conversion.

Town. But as often as you have been there, you never said your Prayers?

Ram. Only the Love Litany, and some amorous Ejaculations, as thou Dear Creature, Charming Excellence, Ravishing Beauty, Heavenly Woman, and such flights as these; I durst not pray against temptations, lest Heaven should have taken me at my word, and have spoil'd my intrigue.

(I, ii)

In The Kind Keeper the dispositions and interests of several of the persons are sacrilegious, as well as their actions. Gervase, Woodall's man, is anxious to read Woodall "a lecture in the mystery of wickedness," "to instruct him in the art of seeming holiness," but Woodall will hear not one syllable of counsel, not one grave sentence. Mrs. Saintly, the landlady, is to all appearances a pious woman, fond of the parish church, anxious to remedy vice, and be herself blameless, but, of course, her real interests are the same as those of every one else:

Saint. . . . I hope you would not offer violence to me?

Wood. I think I should not, if I were sober.

Saint. Then, if you were overtaken, and should offer violence, and I consent not, you may do your filthy part, and I am blameless.

(I, i)

Later Mrs. Saintly speaks of going to the tabernacle of Mr. Limberham to discover Woodall, the crooked serpent

in his crooked path. At another point, when old Aldo is in the midst of his whores, instructing them, checking their income, and tending to their business affairs, Woodall speaks of the "brave old patriarch in the middle of the church militant! whores of all sorts. . . ."

To sum up briefly, the general effect of these comedies is not the effect of great comedy. To some extent, they each serve the first function of comedy, which is laughter, but there they stop. They depict a society of libertinistic bias, interested in physical or financial profit, in the achievement of pleasure. The disadvantage is that the pleasure they achieve is itself an extreme, the kind of pleasure regarded by Epicureans and others as itself a vice. The principal framework of these and similar comedies is some kind of out-maneuvering situation, the goal being pleasure. But the pleasure is never moderated by a wise understanding. This is true primarily because there is never any development of character in any direction. The mode of these plays is action; wit play and debate are at a minimum, generally non-existent. Any effort at instruction or enlightenment on the part of any of the characters is always concerned with surface polish, not true decorum, which implies polish and understanding. There are various specific objections one might make, objections which seem almost to bear out Collier and Macaulay -- some hints of sacrilegious import, perhaps

excessive bawdiness, though this is usually extremely funny -- but the real objection is that these plays never attempt any examination of their social and intellectual milieu, as the great comedies of the period do. Everyone is ridiculous here, from first to last, but their vices and follies are of the flesh only, demonstrated through action. There is no tension of characters, no interplay; consequently there can be no exploration of the ethical, moral, and intellectual problems that face the human creature. Not facing these problems, the persons in these works are less than human; they are indeed, as Lamb suggested, artificial -- quite funny, but the sound of the laughter dies soon.

One final word is necessary here. These four comedies and others like them, are sometimes bold, sometimes bawdy, sometimes boring. If one looked only at the plays that have been considered here, one might very well see ample justification for all the attacks that have been levelled at Restoration comedy. The point is, and this is where we have failed too often in our reading, that the better comedies of the period cannot and must not be considered in the same terms.

The lesser comedies are in some ways misleading. They begin with the same material that better works begin with, but there the similarity ends. All comedies of

the age are concerned with approximately the same society, the relatively small upper class. All are concerned with fine young gentlemen in some way pursuing fine young ladies; all are preoccupied with a code of conduct and bearing which suggests the manner of dress, the manner of speech, which suggests that lovers are not free in admissions of love unless reward is forthcoming, so that the game might be more interesting. But these lesser comedies are concerned with nothing else. At the end of The Dutch Lover Alonzo, who has been disguised as Haunce von Ezel, unmasks himself:

> Hau. How! is this Alonzo, and am I cozen'd? pray tell me truly, are you not me indeed?
> Alon. All over, Sir, only the inside a little less Fool.

And this, in truth, is their only differentiation. There is never a man of mode among them.

CHAPTER VII

WYCHERLEY

In The Gentleman Dancing-Master Hippolita tells Mrs. Caution, who has affectedly condemned the age,

> Come, come, do not blaspheme this masquerading Age, like an ill-bred City Dame, whose Husband is half broke by living in Covent-Garden, or who has been turned out of the Temple or Lincoln's Inn upon a Masquerading Night; by what I've heard 'tis a pleasant-well-bred-complacent-free-frollick-good natur'd-pretty-Age; and if you do not like it, leave it to us that do.[1]

And indeed it was such an age, at least for the classes with which Restoration comedy is concerned, but it is also Wycherley who reveals better than any one else the extremes of breeding and complacency, freedom and frolic, and the attendant perversions in the hardness, the bleakness, the severity of his best work. These extremes, he said, were the business of the comic poet. In his ironic dedication of The Plain-Dealer to the bawd, Mother Bennet,

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[1]William Wycherley, The Gentleman Dancing-Master, The Complete Works of William Wycherley, ed. Montague Summers (Soho: The Nonesuch Press, 1924), vol. I. All further references to Wycherley's plays are to the Summers' edition, vols. I and II.

Wycherley says

> But, Madam, I beg your pardon for this digression, to civil Women and Ladies of Honour, since you and I shall never be the better for 'em; for a Comic poet, and a Lady of your Profession, make most of the other sort, and the Stage and your Houses, like our Plantations, are propagated by the least nice Women; and, as with the Ministers of Justice, the Vices of the Age are our best business.

The difference in the works of Etherege and Wycherley is the difference between light and dark, but both serve well the ends of comedy. What is joyful froth in Etherege becomes the bitter lees in Wycherley. He sees the same society that Etherege sees, but to do so, he strips it bare. In The Man of Modé Harriet says at one time that she is taken with Sir Fopling Flutter because he is such a fool. Fools in Wycherley's comedies are left nothing. In his ironic, sometimes brutal revelations Wycherley lays aside all the affectations, the humours, the whims, the fancies, of fools, fops, and fine gentlemen alike. Much has been said about Wycherley's use of various figures as his mouthpiece, especially in his last two plays. If there is anything represents the spirit of Wycherley's comedy, it is the figure of Jack Horner, hovering like a dark spirit over all of Restoration comedy ready to pounce at the first sign of affectation, foible, or foolish whim. Moreover, it is not only lords and ladies that suffer under Wycherley's glance; in his bleak, realistic pictures of merchants, maids, country women, and

"precise" city women, he depicts lower strata of society that seldom occur elsewhere except in the work of some specialist like Shadwell.

Of the major dramatists of the Restoration, Wycherley is perhaps most often attacked; his plays have been called disgusting, loathsome, even idiotic. Yet it is difficult to imagine how even the most uncritical eye could look upon The Country Wife, for example, and not experience all the effects of comedy. But critical faculties often seem to fail when confronted with Restoration comedy. Even the most intelligent discussions perform the strangest kind of critical manipulation. It is especially noticeable in Fujimura's treatment, for example, that while he treats Wycherley's plays honestly, though often inadequately, he somehow seems to feel that the life of the time was artificial. Thus while he gets away from Lamb's old viewpoint for a moment, he simply transfers the idea of artificiality elsewhere. An examination of Wycherley's life, Fujimura suggests, reveals him as a Truewit -- libertine, skeptical, and naturalistic. "Wycherley also professed libertine principles, railed as heartily as Etherege against matrimony, and maintained the merits of free love."[1] One somehow conjures up visions of young men going about being wittily true and gaily libertine. While

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[1]Fujimura, p. 124.

this must have been true of some men of the time -- Rochester is perhaps a good example -- it does not take an exhaustive knowledge of the Restoration milieu to imagine that there were other interests in life, as indeed the comedies show.

A peculiar bias evident in criticism of Wycherley's plays is the insistence that nature is his standard. The only standard that Wycherley accepted, Fujimura says, "was the naturalistic one, according to which the one great sin is the sin against nature. Thus his 'satire' was directed against 'preciseness,'. . . false wit, and coxcombry, rather than against violations of morality."[1] Further he cites Wycherley's "Upon the Impertinence of Knowledge, the Unreasonableness of Reason, and the Brutality of Humanity; proving the Animal Life the most Reasonable Life, since the most Natural, and most Innocent." This piece equates the reasonable life with the natural life. But the plays do not. If the standard is nature, then the first figure of Wycherley's work would be Margery Pinchwife. The comedies, however, show that art changes nature for the ideal standard.

In Wycherley's plays one begins to be aware that the emphasis upon wit in Restoration comedy has perhaps been overdone. He was commended by his contemporaries

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[1] Ibid., p. 119.

for his pointed wit and for the nicety of his judgment, and he was himself concerned with wit, as his maxims and works show. But wit is the method of Wycherley and the other main figures of the Restoration stage, not the subject matter. The characters of the plays are themselves much concerned with wit, but to make this their sole criterion is to abuse the plays.

In his maxim LXVII, Wycherley says, "Our Luxury should teach us a Lesson of Temperance, since Pleasures turn to Surfeits by their Multiplicity; and too much of any thing makes us satisfied with nothing." This "lesson of temperance," also suggested in the dedication to Mother Bennet where Wycherley speaks of putting out fire with fire, indicates something of the effect of his comedies and of all great comedy. Wycherley's great plays fulfill the first function of comedy, the arousal of laughter, completely. But in addition to this, there is evident in the last two plays at least a developing world-view, not exemplified by any persons in the plays, but apparent from the combination of the qualities of all the figures. It is a world-view characterized by balance, harmony, and symmetry, where nature and art, reason and emotion, love and lust reconcile.

Both of the early plays forecast certain traits of the two great comedies. In Love in a Wood, for example, the treatment of Gripe, Mrs. Joyner, and Mrs. Crossbite

anticipates the barren, though comic, reaches of merchant and middle class folly realistically treated in later plays, as does the handling of Mrs. Caution in The Gentleman Dancing-Master. The merciless stripping of fools and fops which characterizes the two great plays is already apparent in the treatment of Sir Simon Addleplot, Lady Flippant, and Dapperwit in the first play, Don Diego and Monsieur de Parris in the second.

In Love in a Wood, produced in 1671, most of the persons presume to be natural only in the dark, that is, in their popular strolls in St. James Park. Structurally, this is the least successful of Wycherley's plays. The action of Valentine and Christina among the Truewits is totally separated from the comic action, although their ideas of honor illuminate the "precise" notions of honor held by Lady Flippant. Among the Truewits, only Ranger serves to bridge the gap between the serious and the comic actions in consorting with Dapperwit and Sir Simon Addleplot. As dramaturgy the play fails in some other respects. Some long dialogues, notably the extended scene of mutual praise shared by Gripe and Mrs. Joyner in the first scene, while effective in isolation, do not advance the action of the play. At least three times the movement of the action is made possible only by a hidden listener.

Like the Aurelia and Bruce, Graciana and Beaufort action in Love in a Tub, the Valentine Christina sequence is out of place. These two Truewits are governed by a set of principles not discoverable to any one else in the play, save Ranger and Vincent. Christina is genuinely given to true love, having resolved never to see men until she sees Valentine again. Valentine, in love with her, does believe her false because of the mix-up between her and Lydia, but the reasoning of Vincent is sufficient to correct him. Vincent himself is a model for the raisonneur, the moderator, later seen in Eliza in The Plain-Dealer and Harcourt and Dorilant in The Country Wife. He derides Dapperwit in the best plain-dealing manner, and in addition to this moderates the actions and words of the Truewits:

> Vin. Then know, the next day you went, she put her self into mourning and --
> Val. That might be for Clerimont, thinking him dead, as all the world besides thought.
> Vin. Still turning the daggers point on your self, hear me out; I say she put her self into mourning for you -- lock'd up her self in her chamber, this month for you -- shut our her barking Relations for you -- has not seen the Sun or face of man, since she saw you -- thinks, and talks of no thing but you -- sends to me daily, to hear of you -- and in short (I think) is mad for you -- all this I can swear, for I am to her so near a Neighbour, and so inquisitive a Friend for you --
> (II, iv)

By his reasoning Vincent is able to calm Valentine's fears sufficiently so that, in the end, when he and Christina meet, he can once again be guided by his love for her, rather than his doubts. Ranger, the gayest of the Truewits,

becomes ridiculous in his pursuit of Christina. He is superior to the Witwoud and the Witless, particularly in denouncing Dapperwit's similes, and his pursuit of Christina is easily stopped, for he repents of his infidelity to Lydia.

The Witless, Sir Simon Addleplot, and the Witwoud, Dapperwit, are somewhat more interesting. Sir Simon, as Fujimura points out, is almost too witless even for a Witless:

> Sir. Sim. Nay I'm sure Dapperwit and I have been Partners in many an Intrigue and he uses to serve me so.
> Joyn. He is an ill Man to Intrigue with, as you call it.
> Sir. Sim. I, so are all your Wits; a pox, if a man's understanding be not so publick as theirs, he cannot do a wise action but they go away with the honour of it, if he be of their acquaintance.
> Joyn. Why do you keep such Acquaintance then?
> Sir. Sim. There is a Proverb, Mrs. Joyner, You may know him by his company.
> Joyn. No, no, to be thought a Man of parts, you shou'd always keep Company with a Man of less wit than your self.
> Sir. Sim. That's the hardest thing in the World for me to do, faith and troth.
> (I, i)

Dapperwit is a somewhat more effective figure. As Fujimura says, he would rather lose his mistress than a similitude. He is a "brisk, conceited, half-witted fellow of the town." The Truewits deride him for betraying friends when he tries to win Gripe's daughter, Martha, who is also sought by Sir Simon Addleplot, but when he wins the girl, he discovers that she is pregnant with another man's child. His is wit of fancy, totally lacking

in judgment:

> Dap. Peace, Peace.
> Mart. What are you thinking of?
> Dap. I am thinking, what a Wit without vanity is like; he is like --
> Mart. You do not think we are in a publick place, and may be surpriz'd, and prevented by my Father's Scouts.
> Dap. What, wou'd you have me lose my thought?
> Mart. You wou'd rather lose your Mistress, it seems.
> Dap. He is like -- I think I'm a Sot to night, let me perish.
> Mart. Nay, if you are so in love with your thought. [offers to go.
> (V, i)

The most successful personages of Love in a Wood, however, are Gripe, Lady Flippant, and Joyner, all of whom are lecherous and grasping, though seeming "precise." Gripe is especially effective as the seemingly pious figure who, damningly depicted, emerges as the covetous, lecherous old man. There is in his surface sanctity an element of Puritanism which is torn away by the devices of Lucy and Mrs. Joyner. He is disturbed about Dapperwit because he "had the impudence to hold an Argument against me in the defence of Vests and Protections." Because he hates, and consequently ignores, all modes and forms, he is left at the end "a scandal to the Faithful, as a laughing-stock to the wicked."

Lady Flippant is desperately in search of marriage, but just as desperately rails against it. The female coxcomb, she is a character in the manner of Lady Cockwood in Etherege's She Wou'd If She Cou'd. Her faults are obvious to all; even Mrs. Joyner, from a more naturalistic

position, pinpoints her difficulty -- conformity to a rigid and artificial mode:

> Flip. I cannot deny, but I always rail against Marriage Which is the Widows way to it certainly.
> Joyn. 'Tis the desperate way of the desperate Widows, in truly.
>
> (I, i)

The naturalistic figures of Mrs. Joyner, the match-maker, and Mrs. Crosbite, the city bawd, are, like the wits at the other end of the scale, ready to make the most of the foibles and follies of the conforming crew who can be neither natural nor truly modish, though Mrs. Crosbite is somewhat less hard-bitten than Mrs. Joyner:

> Cros. Mr. Dapperwit; let me tell you, if 'twere not for Master Dapperwit, we might have liv'd all this Vacation upon Green Cheese, Tripe, and Ox-cheek; if he had it, we should not want it; but poor Gentleman, it often goes hard with him, for he's a Wit.
> Joyn. So then, you are the Dog to be fed, while the house is broken up; I say beware, the sweet bits you swallow, will make your daughters belly swell, Mistress; and after all your Junkets, there will be a bone for you to pick, Mistress.
> Cros. Sure, Master Dapperwit is no such manner of Man?
> Joyn. He is a Wit, you say, and what are Wits? but condemners of Matrons, Seducers, or Defamers of married Women, and Deflourers of helpless Virgins, even in the Streets, upon the very Bulks; Affronters of midnight Magistracy, and Breakers of Windows in a word.
> Cros. But he is a little-Wit, a modest-Wit, and they do no such outragious things as your great Wits do.
> Joyn. Nay, I dare say, he will not say himself he is a little Wit, if you ask him.
>
> (III, i)

In Wycherley, we begin to see again a somewhat more extensive catalogue of types. The truewits suffer through an ordeal, but it is not the educative, epistemological

ordeal endured by Dorimant and Manly and Mirabell; it is, rather, as in Etherege's early comedies, an ordeal of action. In Love in a Wood there is a full range -- truewit, witwoud, witless, coxcomb, and an old lecher, with the precise women minor. The characters are well-developed and true to type. Dapperwit is matched with a pregnant bride because he is a witwoud, and Gripe is gulled because he is a masquerading lecher, and the same thing is true of the other persons. But none of the persons has any effect on the others; the truewits are never influenced by other figures.

Much of the wit in Love in a Wood is wit of fancy, with no sustaining judgment. This, of course, is to be expected from a Witwoud or others not truly witty. Dapperwit's extended account of the degrees of wit is an illustration of the strained quality of his wit. He describes the court-wit, the coffee-wit, the poll-wit, the chamber-wit, and the judge-wit, or critic. His similitudes are constantly damned by Ranger and Vincent, and Ranger, a true wit, knows the correction needed:

> Dap. She is within, I hear her.
> Ran. But she will not hear you; she's as deaf, as if you were a Dun or a Constable.
> Dap. Pish, give her but leave to gape, rub her Eyes, and put on her day-Pinner; the long patch under the left eye: awaken the Roses on her cheeks, with some Spanish wool, and warrant her breath with some Lemmon Peil; the door flies off the hindges, and she into my arms; she knows there is as much Artifice to keep a victory, as to gain it; and 'tis a sign she values the conquest of my heart.

Ran. I thought her Beauty had not stood in need of Art.

Dap. Beauty's a Coward, still without the help of Art, and may have the fortune of a Conquest, but cannot keep it; Beauty and Art can no more be asunder, than Love and Honour.

Ran. Or to speak more like your self, wit and judgment.

(III, i)

The Gentleman Dancing-Master, 1671, is a somewhat better play than Wycherley's first production; it has, if nothing else, a single action, completely worked out, without the jarring notes of the serious action that occur in Love in a Wood.

The structure of The Gentleman Dancing-Master is modeled on the classic Restoration pattern: a group of young truewits outwits fools and members of the older generation. The action is single, the outdoing of the fool being a necessary part of the outwitting situation involving the young and the old generation. Hippolita and Gerard must outwit her father, Don Diego, who is afflicted with the Spanish humour, Monsieur de Parris, her intended husband, who is overcome with the French folly, and her aunt, Mrs. Caution, whose preciseness masks her lust imperfectly. The primary fault of the structure is an overuse of non-functional farce and slapstick, as, for example, in the scene in which Monsieur de Parris' French habit is reluctantly changed for the sober Spanish garb.

Monsieur de Parris is a "vain Coxcomb, and rich City-heir, newly returned from France, and mightily

affected with the French language and Fashions." He is intended as the husband of Hippolita, but she is easily able to gull him with her gentleman dancing-master. He is vain, easily fooled, easily outwitted, for his only standard is a foolish notion of good breeding:

> Mons. Why -- why his Taylor lives within Ludgate -- his Valet de Chambre is no French-man -- and he has been seen at noon-day to go into an English Eating-house.
> Hipp. Say you so, Cousin?
> Mons. Then, for being well-bred you shall judge -- first he can't dance a step, nor sing a French song, nor swear a French oate, nor use the polite French word in his Conversation; and in fine, can't play at Hombre -- but speaks base good Englis, with the commune homebred pronunciation, and in fine, to say no more, he ne're carries a Snuff-box about with him.
> Hipp. Indeed --
> Mons. And yet this man has been abroad as much as any man, and does not make the least shew of it, but a little in his Mean, not at all in his discour Jernie; he never talks so much as of St. Peter's Church, and Rome, the Escurial, or Madrid, nay not so much as of Henry IV. of Pont-Neuf, Paris, and the new Louvre, nor of the Grand Roy.
> Hipp. 'Tis for his commendation, if he does not talk of his Travels.
> Mons. Auh, auh -- Cousine -- he is conscious himself of his want, because he is very envious, for he cannot endure me --
>
> (I, i)

His opposite number is Don Diego, "an old rich Spanish Merchant newly returned home, as much affected with the Habit and Customs of Spain, and Uncle to De Parris." He is made ridiculous, yet, in his rigidity, maintains his folly at the end:

> Rob'd of my Honour, my Daughter, and my Revenge too! Oh my dear Honours! nothing vexes me but that the World should say, I had not the Spanish policy enough to keep my Daughter from being debauch'd from

> me; but methinks my Spanish policy might help me yet; I have it so -- I will cheat 'em all; for I will declare I understood the whole Plot and Contrivance, and conniv'd at it, finding my Cousin a Fool, and not answering my expectation.
>
> (V, i)

In many ways the most interesting and successful figure in The Gentleman Dancing-Master is Mrs. Caution, who, like Mrs. Joyner before her, is a representative of the other world of Restoration comedy, the lower level where vices and follies become even more vicious and foolish because so often laid bare, without the protective covering of manners or polish. Much of the humor, and nearly all of the doubles entendres of the play result from her preciseness. In the dancing scene in Act III, for example, Mrs. Caution's masquerading concerns turn the dancing instructions into sexual innuendoes:

> Ger. Come forward, Madam, three steps again.
> Caut. See, see, she squeezes his hand now, O the debauch'd Harlotry!
> Don. So, so, mind her not, she moves forward pretty well; but you must move as well backward as forward, or you'll never do anything to purpose.
> Caut. Do you know what you say, Brother, your self now? are you at your beastliness before your young Daughter?
>
> (III, ii)

Little needs to be said of Gerard, who is a rather conventional Truewit. He has been to France, too, but, as Monsieur de Parris says, is not affected with the French way. His part in the action is small, and it is weakened to an extent because he is acting under another identity. In his association with Hippolita, he is re-

quired to make no fundamental change; the two of them accept each other as they are.

Hippolita is easily the most misunderstood person in the play. Her actions seem a little bold to us because her age is fourteen, but in her own society this was no cause for alarm. When the play opens she has been confined close according to the Spanish policy of her father, not allowed to see a man; and she rails "all things are ripen'd by the Sun; to shut up a poor Girl at fourteen!" She refuses to listen to the counsel of her maid Prudence, who urges her to marry Monsieur de Parris:

> Pru. What, won't you marry him then, Madam?
> Hipp. Wou'dst thou have me marry a Fool! and Idiot?
> Pru. Lord! 'tis a sign you have been kept up indeed! and know little of the World, to refuse a man for a Husband only, because Fool. Methinks he's a pretty apish kind of a Gentleman, like other Gentleman, and handsom enough to lye with in the dark, when Husbands take their privileges, and for the day-times you may take the privilege of a Wife.
> Hipp. Excellent Governess, you do understand the World, I see.
> Pru. Then thou shou'd be guided by me.
> Hipp. Art thou in earnest, damn'd Jade? wou'dst thou have me marry him? well -- there are more poor young Women undone and married to filthy fellows, by the treachery and evil Counsel of Chamber-maids, than by the obstinacy and covetousness of Parents.
> (I, i)

When Gerard comes to her on the first visit through a window, she accepts him frankly, saying "the mask of simplicity and innocency is as useful to an intriguing Woman, as the mask of Religion to a States-man." The ordeal that she makes Gerard suffer is slight, and plays little part in the action; she is concerned only

to find out whether he was more swayed by love than by interest. Once she finds the truth, she is content:

> Well, Master, since I find you are quarrelsom and melancholy, and wou'd have taken me away without a Portion, three infallible signs of a true Lover, faith here's my hand now in earnest, to lead me a Dance as long as I live.
>
> (V, i)

But before they are joined, there occurs an incident which has caused some misunderstanding of Hippolita, and of Wycherley. Hippolita wants a love marriage, rather than an arranged marriage, and she is also interested in justifying herself. She wants a marriage based on equality and trust, and she anticipates the criticism her boldness in achieving it may bring:

> Ger. . . . come, what are you thinking of?
> Hipp. I am thinking if some little filching inquisitive Poet shou'd get my story, and represent it on the Stage; what those Ladies, who are never precise but at a Play, wou'd say of me now, that I were a confident coming piece, I warrant, and they wou'd damn to poor Poet for libelling the Sex; but sure though I give my self and fortune away frankly, without the consent of my Friends, my confidence is less than theirs, who stand off only for separate maintenance.
>
> (V, i)

But earlier, at the moment when it is first possible for Hippolita and Gerard to escape, when he has a coach ready and the coast is clear, she refuses to go with him, though it has already been made clear that her interest is in him more than anywhere else.

In this connection, though he recognizes she is a sensible person, Fujimura criticizes the inconsistency

of Wycherley's characterization of Hippolita, citing her "whimsical changes of mood." Elsewhere, Fujimura insists as he does with far too many of the Truewits, that she is "interested only in a man with wit." Now she refuses Gerard at this point for two specific reasons, and a brief notice of these reasons should indicate that this comedy and others like it are not concerned solely with wit and the union of Truewits, nor with persons whose only standard is wit. Hippolita has already discovered Gerard to be a man of wit at the time of her refusal, yet she refuses; it must follow then that wit is not her only criterion.

She refuses, first, because "it goes against my Conscience to be accessory to so ill a thing." That is, she is unable at this point to deny her father and betray Monsieur de Parris. She refuses, second, because she is not yet sure that Gerard is more interested in her than in her inheritance. By her refusal, she discovers his real interest:

> Hipp. What, wou'd you take me without the twelve hundred Pounds a year? wou'd you be such a Fool as to steal a Woman with nothing?
> Ger. I'le convince you, for you shall go with me; and since you are twelve hundred pound a year the lighter, you'll be the easier carried away.
> (IV, i)

Once she has discovered his real interest, she is free, later, to go against her father's plans and refuse Monsieur de Parris. In other words, by her refusal, she

demonstrates an interest in achieving a love marriage, founded on something besides wit. She demonstrates an involvement that readers have too often denied to any person in Restoration comedy.

Wit suffers somewhat in The Gentleman Dancing-Master. Most of the humor is broad, resulting from farce or double entendre. The spectacle of Monsieur de Parris reluctantly abandoning his French habit for the Spanish, trying to hold on at least to his French cravat, and later his dancing at the sword's point of the gentleman dancing-master are indications of the humorous business of the play. The double entendre is almost a constant source of fun in the play, much of it deriving from Mrs. Caution's pious lechery, though Hippolita and Gerard are not above the double meaning. At the end, when Monsieur de Parris has been abandoned by Hippolita and has been taken over by Flirt, there is a kind of blueprint for the magnificent proviso scenes to appear later in Congreve's work. This bargaining scene is especially ludicrous because it involves a fool and a woman of the town, and consequently is a perversion of the principles usually embodied in such contracts, being concerned only with the surface of decorous behavior.

Wycherley's first two comedies are better than the average Restoration comedy, but with his third play, The Country Wife, he presented a work destined to stand,

with The Man of Mode and The Way of the World, as the greatest height of the last great theater. Produced apparently in 1673 (there is some question about the chronology of Wycherley's last plays), The Country Wife offered what is perhaps the most striking male figure of the Restoration stage, Jack Horner. Since its appearance, the play has been praised and reviled. Although it has been recognized as good comedy, it is also one of the plays often singled out by moralistic critics for special damnation. It is, of course, mightily concerned with sex -- one critic says its main point is the sex question -- but sooner or later most comedy must deal with sexual relationships. It has been especially condemned because of its hero, Jack Horner. Earlier critics particularly denounced the play for its use of a vicious agent and deplored such an example set before the public. This, obviously, overlooks the method of comedy. Comedy does not present models of behavior for imitation, and is quite ready to use a foolish or a vicious agent. Horner is, to a great extent, the creator of a model. He is the educative spirit of Restoration comedy, seizing upon folly and vice wherever he finds them and holding them up to ridicule.

The action of The Country Wife is concerned with three sequences: the Horner-Lady Fidget story, the Horner-

Margery-Pinchwife story, and the Harcourt-Alithea story. The sequences are properly unified, and together they represent the utter destruction of a way of life. The end-result of these three stories is to show the complete fallibility of the surface, sophisticated polish that has often been thought the Restoration code. Destroying this polish and showing it to be only veneer, The Country Wife in the end implies, but does not define or illustrate the ideal code of decorum which is the real Restoration code.

The three actions, as I have said, are properly unified into a single, complete action. Horner, of course, is the central figure of two of the sequences and a guiding figure in the third. Margery Pinchwife performs functionally in all three sequences; she is predominant, obviously, in Horner's pursuit of her; she is almost instrumental in disclosing Lady Fidget's secret lechery; and she becomes involved in the Harcourt-Alithea sequence through her disguise. Alithea, through mistaken identity, is involved in Horner's affairs; and Lady Fidget is, if nothing else, an observer in the actions other than her own.

The basic structure of The Country Wife is what I have called earlier an epistemological progression or debate, employing the three intermingled sequences in the

development of the debate. There are, of course, the obvious outwitting situations: Horner feigns impotency in order to gain free access to wives and other ladies; and he is also involved in outwitting Pinchwife in order to educate Margery. But the essential debate transcends these sexual conflicts, which are the manifestation of the ethical problem argued here. Comedy reveals man in the world and shows his failures and potential successes in the human scene. In The Country Wife, Wycherley completely and successfully dramatizes the essential ideas involved in the failure of a surface code and the success of a discoverable order.

Thus we see in this play the education of a society and of themselves by a group of Truewits. Horner in his pursuit of Margery Pinchwife subdues and edifies unadorned nature, nature without art. In his scheme to cuckold husbands and befriend wives through feigned impotency he opposes himself to unnatural art, art without nature, and clearly reveals the folly of artifice. He is completely successful in all his endeavors, chastising folly and foppery everywhere he turns. He is the first educative force in the play. But the Truewits, too, are enlightened. In the same action that involves Horner with all his intrigues and beddings, Harcourt and Alithea move graciously through a debate which edifies Harcourt and makes him successful.

The persons of The Country Wife, again, represent a somewhat more extensive catalogue of human types, human foibles, and human virtues than do lesser plays. There is a group of Truewits (Horner, Harcourt, and Alithea); Sir Jasper Fidget is a typical Witless, and Sparkish is a Witwoud; there is in addition a group of male and female coxcombs (Pinchwife, Lady Fidget, Mrs. Dainty Fidget, and Mrs. Squeamish). As is to be expected in great comedy, some of the characters undergo change, sometimes radical, sometimes minor. Harcourt, Alithea, and Margery are altered fundamentally; Sparkish, Lady Fidget, Jasper, and Pinchwife, conforming ridiculously to their follies, are changed only in the sense that they are exposed to ridicule. To a greater extent than in any play so far mentioned here except The Man of Mode, the characters act upon each other in more than a physical sense. Horner, for example, is directly or indirectly responsible for changes in Harcourt, Alithea, Margery, Lady Fidget, and Jasper. Sparkish, through his folly, alters Alithea's attitude toward Harcourt. The same interaction can be noted in the relationships of most of the persons.

As the play begins, Horner is already well started on his intrigues:

> Hor. Thou art an Ass, don't you see already, upon the report and my carriage, this grave Man of business leaves his wife in my Lodgings, invites me to his House and Wife, who before wou'd not be acquainted with me out of jealousy.

> Qu. Nay, by this means you may be the more acquainted with the Husbands, but the less with the Wives.
> Hor. Let me alone, if I can but abuse the Husbands, I'll soon disabuse the Wives: Stay -- I'll reckon you up the advantages, I am like to have by my Stratagem: First, I shall be rid of all my old Acquaintances, the most insatiable sorts of Duns, that invade our Lodgings in a morning: And next to the pleasure of making a new Mistriss, is that of being rid of an old One, and of all Old Debts; Love when it comes to be so, is paid the most unwillingly.
> (I, i)

But it is important to remember that though his scheme is wicked, Horner is not himself completely wicked, and the people whom he fools are asking to be fooled. Indeed, Horner, far from being the repugnant, vicious person he is so often called, exhibits a number of startling virtues which make him a potential enlightened creature.

He is, for example, not concerned with the talk of the town in the way some one like Sparkish is; such talk cannot keep him from action: "Let vain Rogues be contented only to be thought abler Men than they are, generally 'tis all the pleasure they have; mine lyes another way." He is a plain-dealer, different from Manly only in that he takes care at times to be misunderstood. At all times, however, he is frank and open in his speech; the tricks and deceits he is responsible for stem from his audience rather than from any deceit in his bearing. He is honest in enjoyment of his friends, and there is no need to distrust him when he tells Dorilant, "Women serve but to keep a Man from better Company; though I can't

enjoy them, I shall you the more; good fellowship and friendship are lasting, rational, and manly pleasures." He never considers approaching Alithea, the beloved of his friend, Harcourt, and is concerned that Harcourt be happy. He is, furthermore, willing to fight even his friend if necessary to preserve that which is under his protection. When Margery comes to him disguised as Alithea, Horner maintains the masquerade, unwilling to sacrifice the naive girl:

> Har. . . . Horner, I must now be concern'd for this Ladies [Alithea's] Honour.
> [Apart to Horner.
> Hor. And I must be concern'd for a Ladies Honour too.
> Har. This Lady has her Honour, and I will protect it.
> Hor. My Lady has not her Honour, but has given it me to keep, and I will preserve it.
> (V, i)

Horner is, moreover, a wit, and appreciative of wit: ". . . methinks wit is more necessary than beauty, and I think no young Woman ugly that has it, and no handsome Woman agreeable without it." He is a man who does not mince words, always speaking plainly; he is also a man of courage:

> Mr. Pin. I will not be a Cuckold, I say, there will be danger in making me a Cuckold.
> Hor. Why, were thou not well cur'd of thy last clap?
> Mr. Pin. I wear a Sword.
> Hor. It should be taken from thee, lest thou should'st do thy self a mischiefe with it, thou art mad, Man.
> (IV, iii)

He is, in short, a man who understands the requirements

of a decorous life -- honesty, plain-dealing, judgment, and the natural artfulness that is the mark of a wise man in society, a man neither natural nor artificial, but combining traits of both. His sexual game is, to us, at least a little peculiar, but he needed no Sigmund Freud. Horner is a man who understands propriety and knows that a part of propriety is to avoid too great a propriety. When Lady Fidget persists in speaking of her honor in the passage just preceding the famous China scene, he replies

> If you talk a word more of your Honour, you'll make me incapable to wrong it; to talk of Honour in the mysteries of Love, is like talking of Heaven, or the Deity in an operation of Witchcraft, just when you are employing the Devil, it makes the charm impotent.
>
> (IV, iii)

Then, lest this seem too nicely proper, when Lady Fidget worries about other women finding out their secret, Horner vows to "lye with 'em all, make their secret their own, and then they'll keep it: I am a Machiavel in love, Madam."

Like Manly, Horner is also disgusted with the way of the world; unlike Manly, he does not withdraw from that world. In Horner's world the real proprieties have been forsaken for vain polish and affected fine manners. Perceiving this deviation, Horner, unlike Manly, takes positive steps to exact the penalty for that deviation. He follows his own nature, nothing else

being honest in his world, and lays about him, exploiting folly.

Lady Fidget and Mrs. Squeamish and the others of that unlikely crew who are the first target of Horner's campaign are

> . . . pretenders to honours, as critics to wit, only by censuring others; and as every raw, peevish, out of humour'd, affected, dull, Tea-drinking, Arithmetical Fop sets up for a wit, by railing at Men of sense, so these for honour, by railing at the Court, and Ladies of as great honour as quality. (II, i)

Fearful of their honor at being exposed to Horner, they are awed, amazed -- and pleased -- at his honorable sacrifice for them:

> Hor. I think I know her already, therefore may venter with her, my secret for hers --
> [Aside.
> [Horner and Lady Fidget whisper.
> Sr. Jas. Sister Cuz, I have provided an innocent Play-fellow for you there.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Squeam. Foh, we'll have no such Play-fellows.
> Dain. No, Sir, you shan't chuse Play-fellows for us, we thank you.
> Sr. Jas. Nay, pray hear me.
> [Whispering to them.
> Lad. But, poor Gentleman, cou'd you be so generous? so truly a man of honour, as for the sakes of us Women of honour, to cause your self to be reported no Man? No Man! and to suffer your self the greatest shame that cou'd fall upon a Man, that none might fall upon us Women by your conversation; but indeed, Sir, as perfectly, perfectly, the same Man as before your going into France, Sir; as perfectly, perfectly, Sir.
> Hor. As perfectly, perfectly, Madam; nay, I scorn you shou'd take my word; I desire to be try'd only, Madam.
> Lad. Well that's spoken again like a Man of honour. (II, i)

Freed of the necessity of maintaining their public faces because each of them shares a secret with Horner, three of the ladies, in a private party at his lodgings, reveal themselves, Maskless:

> Lad. Our Reputation, Lord! Why should you not think that we women make use of our Reputation, as you men of yours, only to deceive the world with less suspicion; our Virtue is like the States-man's Religion, the Quaker's Word, the Gamester's Oath, and the Great Man's Honour, but to cheat those that trust us.
> Squeam. And that Demureness, Coyness, and Modesty, that you see in our Faces in the Boxes at Plays, is as much a sign of a kind woman, as a Vizard-mask in the Pit.
> Dain. For I assure you, women are least masked, when they have the Velvet Vizard on.
> Lad. You wou'd have found us modest women in our denyals only.
> Squeam. Our bashfulness is only the reflection of the Men's.
> Dain. We blush, when they are shame-fac'd.
> Hor. I beg your pardon Ladies, I was deceiv'd in you devilishly; but why, that mighty pretense to Honour?
> Lad. We have told you; but sometimes 'twas for the same reason you men pretend business often, to avoid ill company, to enjoy the better, and more privately those you love.
> Hor. But why, wou'd you ne'er give a Friend a wink then?
> Lad. Faith, your Reputation frightned us as much, as ours did you, you were so notoriously lewd.
> Hor. And you so seemingly honest.
> Lad. Was that all that deterr'd you?
> Hor. And so expensive -- you allow freedom you say.
> Lad. Ay, ay.
> Hor. That I was afraid of losing my little money as well as my little time, both which my other pleasures required.
> Lad. Money, foh -- you talk like a little fellow now, do such as we expect money?
> (V, iv)

This scene of revelation is another of the much misunderstood scenes in a much misunderstood play. One

critic has said, "The women's drinking-bout in the last scene adds a finishing touch to the loathesomeness of what is surely the most bestial play in all literature."[1]

Sir Jasper Fidget, the witless of the play, takes delight in needling Horner about his impotency, and is pleased to give Horner the freedom of his house and of his wife. Totally devoid of judgment, he is not even alerted when Horner, plain-dealing as usual, threatens him with cuckoldry; his own dullness allows Horner to say whatever he pleases. Just at the beginning of the China scene, when Sir Jasper has entered Horner's lodging and Lady Fidget has locked herself in the inner room, Horner says

> So, she has got into my chamber, and lock'd me out; oh, the impertinency of woman-kind! Well, Sir Jasper plain dealing is a Jewel; if ever you suffer your Wife to trouble me again here, she shall carry you home a pair of Horns, by my Lord Major she shall; though I cannot furnish you my self, you are sure, yet I'll find a way.
>
> (IV, iii)

Pinchwife from the beginning asks for trouble in the same way that Wiseacre does in The London Cuckolds. A wife, he feels, must be kept hidden and ignorant, for "good Wives, and private Souldiers shou'd be Ignorant." "He's a Fool that marrys," Pinchwife contends, "but he's a greater that does not marry a Fool; what is wit in a Wife good for, but to make a Man a Cuckold?" At the same

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[1]William Archer, The Old Drama and the New, quoted, Fujimura, p. 143.

time that he forbids Margery the pleasures of the town, he arouses her interests in those pleasures:

> Mr. Pin. But you love none better than me?
> Mrs. Pin. You are my own dear Bud, and I know you, I hate a Stranger.
> Mr. Pin. Ay, my Dear, you must love me only, and not be like the naught Town Women, who only hate their Husbands, and love every Man else, love Plays, Visits, fine Coaches, fine Cloaths, Fiddles, Balls, Treats, and so lead a wicked Town-life.
> Mrs. Pin. Nay, if to enjoy all these things be a Town life, London is not so bad a place, Dear.
> Mr. Pin. How! if you love me, you must hate London.
> Alith. The Fool has forbid me discovering to her the pleasures of the Town, and he is now setting her agog upon them himself.
>
> (II, i)

The marriage is unequal, Pinchwife reserving all rights to himself, granting none to his wife.

But she soon learns to take them. The great antithesis of nature and art is nowhere better represented than in the relationship of Margery and her husband. Margery, the sheltered wife, nature's child, is triumphant in the end over the scheming art of her husband, but the great triumph comes with the union -- in more ways than one -- of this zestful nature with the masterly art of Horner. After Horner has carried Margery, whom Pinchwife has disguised as his wife's brother, off into the orchard, she returns with the fruit of the tree of knowledge:

> Enter Mistriss Pinchwife in Mans Cloaths, running with her Hat under her arm, full of Oranges and dried fruit, Horner following
>
> Mrs. Pin. O dear Bud, look you here what I have got, see.
> Mr. Pin. And what have I got here too, which you

can't see. [Aside, rubbing his forehead.
Mrs. Pin. The fine Gentleman has given me better things yet.
Mr. Pin. Has he so? (Out of breath and colour'd -- I must hold yet) [Aside.
Hor. I have only given your little brother an Orange, Sir.
Mr. Pin. Thank you, Sir. [To Horner. You have only squeezed my Orange, I suppose, and given it me again; yet I must have a city-patience. [Aside.
(III, ii)

With this, scheming art stands defeated, raw nature stands edified, and the union of the two stands victorious. Margery herself is capable of some wit -- she learns fast -- as illustrated in the letter she writes to Horner. At the end of the play, Margery is left with her husband, of course, and once she is partly educated, one can see the makings of another Lady Fidget.

The third action sequence, involving Harcourt and Alithea, is, I think, the least understood portion of The Country Wife. It is, of course, a study of marriage from another point of view, but it is also a study of the perfecting of a truewit. Critics have too long assumed that the truewit as such is the ideal character of Restoration drama. The changes that Harcourt undergoes, like the ordeal Mirabell endures, illustrate that something more than mere wit, however true, is demanded.

In this action it is again possible to see how in great comedies the characters have a catalytic function in the actions and reactions of other figures, for it is the character of Sparkish, the coxcomb, which prepares

for the change in the Harcourt-Alithea relationship. Sparkish is a talkative fool, convinced of his own wit; he is one of those who, at a play, speak louder than the players

> . . . because we think we speak more wit, and so become the Poets Rivals in his audience: for to tell you the truth, we hate the silly Rogues; nay, so much, that we find fault even with their Bawdy upon the Stage, whilst we talk nothing else in the Pit as lowd.

To be jealous of Alithea, his intended wife, he thinks is to be a country bumpkin; and it is his trust that prevents her from leaving him. So convinced is he of his own worth and of the lasting fidelity of Alithea that he too is fooled by plain-dealing. Harcourt, like Horner, is capable of speaking frankly and letting his audience misunderstand:

> Spar. . . . answer to my Catechism: Friend, do you love my Mistriss here?
> Har. Yes, I wish she wou'd not doubt it.
> Spar. But how do you love her?
> Har. With all my Soul.
> Alith. I thank him, methinks he speaks plain enough now.
> Spar. You are out still. [To Alithea. But with what kind of love, Harcourt?
> Har. With the best, and truest love in the World.
> Spar. Look you there then, that is with no matrimonial love, I'm sure.
> Alith. How's that, do you say matrimonial love is not best?
> Spar. Gad, I went too far e're I was aware: But speak for thy self Harcourt, you said you wou'd not wrong me, nor her.
> Har. No, no, Madam, e'en take him for Heaven's sake.
> Spar. Look you there, Madam.
> Har. Who shou'd in all justice be yours, he that loves you most.
>
> (III, ii)

Sparkish finally becomes jealous when he learns of a letter which he presumes to be from Alithea to Horner, and it is his jealousy that creates the change in the young lovers.

Fujimura complains that Alithea gives little evidence of being a Truewit; he also insists that "the courtship of the two Truewits is marred. . . by Alithea's somewhat strict notions of honor." Far from being cause for complaint, this is precisely the point of the courtship. Here again is evidence that wit has sometimes been overemphasized. Both Alithea and Harcourt are Truewits from the beginning; something else is necessary for the successful conclusion of their courtship. Alithea is intended as the wife of Sparkish, and she resists Harcourt, even though attracted to him, because of her obligation:

> Alith. The Writings are drawn, Sir, settlements made; 'tis too late, Sir, and past all revocation.
> Har. Then so is my death.
> Alith. I wou'd not be unjust to him.
> Har. Then why to me so?
> Alith. I have no obligation to you.
> Har. My love.
> Alith. I had his before.
>
> (II, i)

"'Tis Sparkish's confidence in my truth," she says, "that obliges me to be so faithful to him." Alithea is, of course, more concerned about the honor of Sparkish than he is. She has to be freed of what is, to her, an honorable obligation, and Harcourt has to realize it is an

affair of honor before they can be united. Sparkish finally becomes jealous when he thinks Horner is interested in Alithea, and denies the pact, forgetting his confidence in her fidelity. At this point, when Harcourt says, "'tis possible for me to love too, without being jealous, I will not only believe your innocence my self, but make all the World believe it," all is well with the young lovers.

When Sparkish rails against the stage, Dorilant tells him not to blame the poets because they "copy the age." The Country Wife presents one of the funniest pictures of any age. But Wycherley's great play serves all the functions of comedy well, arousing more than just laughter. It presents no model for emulation, it offers no overt instruction; it does, however, offer enlightenment in the ways of the world through the educative process it presents on the stage as the various strands of action are carefully held in tension each to the other. Various modes are balanced against each other in the dramatic action. It is quite true, as Dennis said, that Wycherley is "almost the only Man alive who has made Comedy instructive in its Fable." A careful reading of the play must demonstrate that it is not the vicious, one-sided monstrosity it has been called; its concern is neither solely with sexual matters nor with naturalistic

manners. Plain-dealing Horner and honorable Alithea work out a possible order that transforms the manners of the world. Horner reveals the folly of artifice in Lady Fidget, but he also reveals the folly of unadorned nature in Margery. Alithea recognizes the ideal union of the two: she is artful enough to want to introduce Margery to the pleasures of the town, yet natural enough to admit her almost immediate attraction to Harcourt. She is thus free of the revelations of Horner, but she herself reveals the folly of mere wit, which must be elevated by the honest recognition and full respect of love and honor.

As in The Man of Mode, wit in The Country Wife is directly dramatic and functional, not mere ornament. Judgment is valued over fancy -- it is continued fancy, the foolish fancy of Sparkish, for example, that leads to the downfall of fools and fops. Sparkish in his fancy to be a great wit, to find the right figure, to be always ahead of the town, traps himself into debasing matrimonial love and professing jealousy. Most of the humor, however, again derives from extended double entendre. There are few passages anywhere to match the famous China scene:

> Enter Lady Fidget with a piece of China in her hand, and Horner following.
>
> Lad. And I have been toyling and moyling, for the pretty'st piece of China, my dear.

Hor. Nay, she has been too hard for me, do what I cou'd.

Squeam. Oh, Lord, I'le have some China too, good Mr. Horner, don't think to give other people China, and me none, come in with me too.

Hor. Upon my honor I have none left now.

Squeam. Nay, nay, I have known you deny your China before now, but you shan't put me off so, come --

Hor. This Lady had the last there.

Lad. Yes indeed, Madam, to my certain knowledge he has no more left.

Squeam. O, but it may be he may have some you cou'd not find.

Lad. What d'y think if he had had any left, I would not have had it too, for we women of quality never think we have China enough.

Hor. Do not take it ill, I cannot make China for you all, but I will have a Rol-waggon for you too, another time.

(IV, iii)

This famous scene, along with the Orange scene and the drinking bout are typical of the outrageous incidents for which Wycherley is well known, and which are employed again more than once in his last play, The Plain-Dealer. This is a play which, if anything, has received even stranger criticism than has The Country Wife, one critic, for example, suggesting that it is disgusting because it presents all of life.

In The Plain-Dealer, all the world is condemned save for only a few kindred souls. Here the bitterness and cynicism, the picture of a bleak, dark world that have so often been associated with Wycherley, are much more in evidence than in The Country Wife. It is not merely a despairing cry at an evil world, however. The Plain-Dealer does come perilously close to failing in

the functions of a comedy, because here for the first time there is almost an implication that wise manners and wise morals are possible only to a few. In Restoration comedy it is always only a few who learn of an ideal order, but this discoverable order is always available, and, though one hesitates to say this, the universal availability of an ideal order may be a necessary requirement in comedy. That is, it seems possible that comedy, to fulfill its function perfectly, must depict universal follies and vices, and also, through the epistemological progression that I have mentioned, make their correction at least potentially certain and clear to every man. When at the end of The Plain-Dealer Manly adopts Swift's view, hating mankind, but loving Tom, Dick, and Harry, we have almost witnessed the exclusion of mankind from a possible order, which would suggest a near-tragic recognition on the part of Manly. But what Manly learns and the way he learns it save The Plain-Dealer and reaffirm it as a great comedy, though not, perhaps, as great as The Country Wife. When one remembers that The Plain-Dealer depicts a learning process that results in laughter and relief from disorder, then it becomes clear anew that this is comedy at or near its best.

It is through this learning process that the structure of the play becomes most evident. The play has been dismissed as less effective dramaturgy than The

Country Wife because it is too clearly an exercise in ideas and because certain passages are non-dramatic. One must, at the start, admit readily that there can be no objection to such an exercise in ideas as long as the ideas are successfully embodied in a dramatic situation, as they are here. Finally, bearing in mind the learning-process structure of the play, one can easily see that the passages which have been called non-dramatic do fall logically into place. The long conversations between Novel and Olivia and between Olivia and Eliza are rather clearly dramatic representations of certain ways of life which Manly knows and must overcome.

Manly, the Plain-Dealer, is the major character, and the plan of the play is the plan of his education. In its course he must suffer the ordeal of change wrought by the tension created between him and all the other persons. He encounters a false friend (Vernish), a foolish coxcomb who mistakes novelty, noise, and railing for wit (Novel), various minor fools (Plausible and Oldfox), and a false love, whose love is a matter of form, who is a pretender to wit, and who is a pretender to "preciseness" though sexual lust prompts her every move. But in addition to these he encounters other persons who help to shape his character, to alter the surly captain who first appears; that is, his manner is also influenced by Fidelia and Freeman. Nowhere more than this play is the dramatist's

attention so completely devoted to one figure and his education.

Fujimura asserts that in Manly's behavior, "there is too much surliness, and not enough grace and decorum." This, of course, is quite true at the first of the play; it is not, however, true at the end. Manly is described as being of an "honest, surly, nice humour," and he has chosen to avoid England by going to sea. He chooses, at first, to walk alone, and hates "your Decorums, supercilious Forms, and Slavish Ceremonies." He is a bold man, who, when a sailor offers to help him, boxes the sailor's ears and calls him a "fawning Water-dog." He is from the first ridiculous and wrong. He thinks he can see through men, but cannot recognize Freeman as a friend. He thinks he knows women, but trusts Olivia and fails to recognize Fidelia. He takes almost a wicked delight in finding people to be malicious and untrustworthy. When he is disabused of his trust in Olivia, he feels that he has come back to reason, having wavered for a moment in loving her. Save for Olivia, he trusts no one at the first:

> . . . no man can be a great Enemy, but under the name of Friend; and if you are a Cuckold, it is your Friend only that makes you so; for your Enemy is not admitted to your House: if you are cheated in your Fortune, 'tis your Friend that does it; for your Enemy is not made your Trustee: If your Honour, or Good name be injur'd, 'tis your Friend that does it still, because your Enemy is not believ'd against you. Therefore I rather choose to go where honest

> down-right Barbarity is profest, where men devour one another like generous hungry Lyons and Tygers, not like Crocodiles; where they think the Devil white, of our complexion. . . .
>
> (I, viii)

He speaks ill of most men "because they deserve it."

The course he runs through the action of the play places him in direct association with all the other persons. Manly's educative training becomes especially clear, for with each of the other characters Manly either offers an opinion of them, or they characterize him. Because of this, it is easy to see both how he feels toward the other persons and how they feel toward him.

Novel, the foolish coxcomb, is introduced as one

> . . . who, rather than not rail, will rail at the dead, whom none speak ill of; and rather than not flatter, will flatter the Poets of the Age, whom none flatter; who affects Novelty as much as Fashion; and is as fantastical as changeable, and as well known as the Fashion; who likes nothing, but what is new. . . .
>
> (II, ii)

It is noticeable as Manly moves through the play that with his plain-dealing he usually hits upon the foolishness and enormity of the people he encounters, holds them up to ridicule, and then sloughs them off, as if discarding unsuitable manners. He is able to do this eventually with all foolishness except his own, where he needs the help of Freeman and Fidelia. Novel, introduced as above, he dismisses easily:

> . . . Then, Madam, for this gentle piece of courtesie, this man of tame honour, what cou'd you find in him? was it his languishing affected tone? his mannerly look? his second-hand flattery? the refuse of the Play house tiring-rooms? or his slavish obsequiousness in watching at the door of your Box at the Play-house, for your hand to your Chair? or his janty way of playing with your Fan? or was it the Gunpowder spot on his hand, or the Jewel in his ear, that purchas'd your Heart?
>
> (II, iv)

Lord Plausible is described as a "ceremonious, Supple, Commending Coxcomb," and Manly dismisses him with ease:

> L. Plaus. What will you be singular then, like no Body? follow Love, and esteem no Body?
> Man. Rather than be general, like you; follow every Body, Court and kiss every body; though perhaps at the same time, you hate every Body.
>
> (I, i)

As for the Widow Blackacre, she is

> . . . as vexatious as her Father was, the great Attorney, nay, as a dozen Norfolk attorneys, and as implacable an Adversary, as a Wife suing for an Alimony, or a Parson for his Tiths; and she loves an Easter-term or any term, not, as other Country Ladies do, to come up to be fine, Cuckold their Husbands, and take their Pleasure; for she has no pleasure, but in vexing others, and is usually cloath'd and dagled like a Bawd in disguise, pursu'd through Alleys by Serjeants.
>
> (I, iv)

He likewise dismisses Major Oldfox in disgust. Manly's attitude toward these figures does not change during the play. He views them with scorn at the first as he does at the last; they are primarily representative of some forms and fashions that he cannot abide. Their effect on him, as is evident in the passages quoted, is to arouse

disgust, rather than to influence any direct change. The other characters are all directly active in the alteration of the Plain-Dealer.

Manly must learn through action of the falsity of his friend Vernish. This is the man whom Manly thought to be his one true friend. The betrayal by Vernish, who thinks Manly "an Honest Fool" to be led by the nose, is one of the means of opening the eyes of the comic hero to his own faults. This is likewise true of Manly's relations with Olivia; her treachery is the means of awakening the hero.

Olivia's deceit, however, takes many forms, and in doing so reveals again Wycherley's success in dramatizing ideas. She not only betrays Manly's love, but by her mode and manner betrays his ideas, which are saved only by the fidelity of Freeman and Fidelia; that is, she is a false love, but she is also a coxcomb and a witwoud. Early in the play, when Manly describes her, he describes all of the characteristics which are later to be shown false:

> Strange Charms indeed! She has Beauty enough to call in question her Wit or Virtue, and her Form wou'd make a starv'd Hermit a Ravisher; yet her Virtue, and Conduct, wou'd preserve her from the subtill Lust of a pamper'd Prelate. She is so perfect a Beauty, that Art cou'd not better it, nor affectation deform it; yet all this is nothing. Her tongue as well as face, ne'r knew artifice: nor ever did her words or looks contradict her heart: she is all truth, and hates the lying, masking, daubing World, as I do; for which I love her, and for which I think she dislikes not me:

> for she has often shut out of her conversation for mine, the gaudy muttering Parrots of the town, Apes and Echoes of men only, and refus'd their common place pert chat, flattery and submissions, to be entertain'd with my sullen bluntness.
> (I, viii)

It is some gauge of the degree to which Manly is ridiculed and to which Olivia is false that this description is disproved, in whole and part.

Manly thinks that Olivia "dislikes not me," yet it soon becomes clear that she finds his "boisterous Sea-Love" and his smell of the cabin and the sea distasteful. It also becomes clear that she belittles his plain-dealing. As a matter of fact, Olivia is usually able to hit upon the very thing in Manly that is most ridiculous:

> Fid. . . . I should think it hard to deceive him.
> Oliv. No; he that distrusts most the World, trusts most to himself, and is but the more easily deceiv'd; because he thinks he can't be deceiv'd: his cunning is like the Coward's sword, by which he is oftner worsted than defended.
> (IV, ii)

Manly thinks Olivia is all truth and "hates the masking, daubing World." Yet the audience immediately sees -- and he ultimately learns -- that she is one of the greatest of coxcombs. In the extended scene in which she converses about the town with Novel, she reveals herself very clearly as what she herself professes to dislike, one of "those Fops who love to talk all themselves."

Manly thinks that Olivia's virtue "wou'd preserve her from the subtill Lust of a pamper'd Prelate." Again,

it almost immediately becomes clear that while she masks her lust, it is a compelling force in her affairs. She is so "precise" that she vows she detests plays, "filthy, obscene, hideous things," and thinks it impossible to sit through The Country Wife without blushing. But her truer instincts are revealed when she gets rid of her husband Vernish in order to pursue her affair with Fidelia disguised as a man:

> So, I have at once brought about those two grateful businesses, which all prudent Women do together, secured money and pleasure; and now all interruptions of the last are are remov'd. Go, Husband, and come up, Friend; just like the Buckets in the Well; the absence of one brings the other; but I hope, like them too, they will not meet in the way, justle, and clash together.
>
> (IV, ii)

Opposed to this great gallery of fools, fops, and fine precise women are Manly's true allies, Freeman and Fidelia, who, as Manly learns the falseness of his former friends, supply him with the true love and true friendship, the true manners that he has been unaware of. Freeman from the first professes himself to be Manly's friend, and so proves himself eventually even to Manly. Manly, however, in his rigid plain-dealing cannot see the friendship anywhere except in Vernish. Freeman, in noting the difference between himself and Manly, indicates Manly's inadequacy and his own ability in understanding the world's ways. "You are for Plain-dealing," he tells Manly, "but against your particular Notions, I have the practice of

the Whole World." That is, Freeman, less rigid in his manners, is accordingly more comprehending in his attitudes.

Fidelia, disguised as a man to be near Manly, suffers all but the ultimate peril because of her love for him. She is the victim, of course, of the most outrageous incidents in the play. For love of Manly she guards the door while he exacts his sweet revenge on Olivia -- and is thus responsible for one of the funniest scenes in the play when Vernish, fondling her, discovers that he is in no danger of being cuckolded.

One other figure must be mentioned. Although she is not, as Fujimura suggests, the most important character in the play, Olivia's confidante, Eliza, is an important figure, a figure one might call the raissonneur, who, standing at the side, calmly judges the action and the persons. It has been suggested that Eliza is, if anyone is, Wycherley's mouthpiece in the play. She is not spectacular in verbal wit, but is a creature of great judgment, for she is able immediately to penetrate the masks of Novel and Olivia. She chides them, defends The Country Wife, and takes great joy in life:

> Oliv. Ah Cousin what a World 'tis we live in! I am so weary of it.
> Eliz. Truly, Cousin, I can find no Fault in it, but that we cannot always live in't; for I can never be weary of it.
>
> (II, i)

She is, in short, a most reasonable person, a kind of

model of the characteristics the other people in her world lack.

Through the counterpoint of personalities Manly, the comic hero, changes. Ridiculous himself, his career is altered and moved by the follies and vices of those about him. Ultimately the falseness of Olivia, Vernish, Novel and the rest of that foolish crew, and the faithfulness of Freeman and Fidelia educate Manly -- not to an ideal world, but at least to one that can be lived in:

> Man. Nay, now, Madam, you have taken from me all power of making you any Complement on my part; for I was going to tell you, that for your sake only, I wou'd quit the unknown pleasure of a retirement; and rather stay in this ill World of ours still, tho' odious to me, than give you more frights again at Sea, and make again too great a venture there, in you alone. But if I shou'd tell you all this, and that your virtue (since greater than I thought any was in the World) had now reconcil'd me to't, my Friend here wou'd say, 'tis your Estate has made me Friends with the World.
>
> Free. I must confess, I shou'd; for I think most of our quarrels to the World, are just such as we have to a handsome Woman: only because we cannot enjoy her as we wou'd do.
>
> Man. Nay, if you art a Plain-dealer too, give me thy hand; for now I'll say, I am thy Friend indeed: And for your two sakes, tho' I have been so lately deceiv'd in Friends of both sexes:
>
> I will believe there are now in the World
> Good natur'd Friends, who are not Prostitutes,
> And handsome Women worthy to be Friends:
> Yet, for my sake, let no one e're confide
> In Tears, or Oaths, in Love or Friend untry'd.
> (V, iii)

The Olivia-Novel scenes in the play exhibit false wit, the wit of fancy only, at its most complete.

Otherwise, Wycherley's wit is wit of judgment, noticeable especially in the reasonableness of Eliza and Freeman. Manly himself is often awkward when he attempts wit, and Freeman generally manages to employ some kind of unsavory or suggestive comparison. Conversation, particularly where Manly is involved, is often aphoristic. Most of the humor of the play, aside from that aroused by the spectacle of fools, derives from the outrageous incidents for which Wycherley is famous.

Wycherley's world is far from that of Etherege. The light touch of Etherege revealed a world of harmony and reasonableness, achieved by Dorimant and Harriet, possible to others through their instruction. But under Wycherley's ironic and brutal touch only a few persons emerge from a false, unreasonable, and ridiculous world. At the end of The Plain-Dealer the main figures know a kind of cynicism and despair; their only affirmation is in the repudiation of the whole of mankind for the sake of the reasonable few.

To say that Wycherley's characters despair in the end is not, however, necessarily to say that his plays have nothing of the spirit of the Restoration which has been suggested here. The cause of Wycherley's cynicism and despair seems almost to be the recognition of the total deviation in his world from the understanding and reasonableness which mark the code often mentioned here.

Manly and Freeman and Fidelia have had that deviation fully revealed to them in the characters of Vernish and Olivia. Consequently they are left with only the qualities of plain-dealing, tempered by the faith of Fidelia and the reasonableness of Freeman. These concepts are, of course, integral parts of the ideal code I have mentioned, but in this play a complete synthesis, a complete awareness of possible balance is denied because of the failure of the whole world -- a token perhaps of the real failure of the real world to meet the exacting demands of the mode, which in the end requires almost more than is possible, and to give up the mere surface polish that we associate with court manners. Manly and Freeman and Fidelia, though conscious of evil and swayed bitterly by it, nevertheless reaffirm the essential proprieties of constancy and honesty, and existence according to the standards perceived by that honesty. The faith and reasonableness of Fidelia and Freeman still demonstrate in Wycherley the tempering force of those qualities which are all that is left to save a world gone awry.

At the end of the play Manly finally recognizes the stature of Fidelia and Freeman and changes. The three have a code which will encompass themselves, but there is no promise of a discoverable harmony for anyone else. In The Man of Mode harmony is reached at the final agreement of opposing forces, both aware of the requirements of

decorum. In The Plain-Dealer it is Manly and Freeman and Fidelia against the world, and for Wycherley at least, the world, the whole social and ethical structure of his time, had no understanding of the ultimate grace of decorum.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MIDDLE GROUND AND THE DECAY OF COMEDY

As I have suggested in an earlier chapter, previous studies of Restoration comedy have too often been devoted solely to considerations of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve, and as a result the vast difference between the works of these men and those of other comic dramatists has too often been overlooked. I have tried to show in Chapter Six that the lesser comedies of the period, while often funny, do not stand up as comedies, and that they justify much of the adverse criticism that has been leveled against the drama of the period. A brief look at the comic dramatists of the middle rank will also reveal interesting variations.

The works of men like Shadwell, Vanbrugh, Farquhar, Cibber, and Steele have usually been lumped together and rather hastily dismissed. Indeed, a full examination is not possible here, but it is essential to notice in the works of these men certain trends that were of utmost importance to the development of comedy. Their works begin

with approximately the same interests -- a bright, sophisticated society, outwitting contests, sex contests, and the like -- but there is a significant difference in their effect. Where the works of the lesser dramatists varied in the direction of comedy of action, it is possible to note in the works of the middle dramatists quite different variations, not least of which is the movement in the direction of comedy of feeling. Indeed, it is possible to trace the decay of comedy in these works, from Shadwell to Farquhar, and, in the work of Sir Richard Steele, to witness the mournful death not just of Restoration comedy, but apparently of all true stage comedy. In an effort to note both the differences between these works and those of the three great writers of the period and the variations in the comic manner which ultimately ruined comedy, I have chosen to consider briefly six comedies of the middle ground. These include Shadwell's The Squire of Alsatia, Cibber's Love's Last Shift, Vanbrugh's The Relapse and The Provok'd Wife, Farquhar's Beaux Stratagem, and Steele's The Conscious Lovers. These six comedies, considered chronologically, represent the decline and fall of classical comedy, with The Provok'd Wife the only exception, consistently maintaining as it does at least the tone of great comedy, if not the polish and profundity.

Certain characteristics of these comedies are almost immediately apparent. They introduce, for example,

many new types to the stage, most noticeable among these being the country people and beaux of The Relapse. There is usually a wide catalogue of types in the plays, and in most of them the types are well differentiated. There is, someone has said, less wit and more fun here; and there is, if anything, franker, more overt sexual exhibition in them than in the works of the three great comic dramatists. Where Harriet and Millamant would not permit direct physical suggestion, Berinthia, Lady Brute, and Mrs. Sullen encourage it, the last-named being one of the frankest speaking characters, male or female, in all the comedy of the Restoration. These plays are less sound dramatically than the great plays of the period; as illustration of this one need only consider how often their structure is dependent upon accident, upon the deus ex machina.

But there are two primary traits that serve best to distinguish these plays from greater works. The first is that each of them has some kind of special interest beyond its intrinsic merit. The Squire of Alsatia, for example, is of peculiar interest for the introduction of scenes of low life, while The Relapse is of special interest for its country scenes. Love's Last Shift is of special interest because it is the first well-known sentimental comedy, while The Relapse, again, has added interest since it is an attempted rebuttal of this sentimental comedy. With each of these plays, as I shall try

to show later, there are peculiar features, special interests that set them to a degree outside the stream of classical comedy.

But the most important feature noticeable in these comedies is the gradual development of sentimental comedy. I have suggested earlier that the stage was corrected, if it was corrected, by Wycherley and Congreve, not by Jeremy Collier. Throughout the great comedies of the period, as I have tried to show, there is made evident a discoverable universal order, based on the grace of decorum, and resulting from the tensions of all the world's manners. As the seventeenth century came to a close this order came to be assumed. Various forces -- deistic doctrine, Shaftesbury's benevolism, the complex of ideas associated with the developing Enlightenment -- led some men to see a far kinder and wiser world than ever they had seen before. In a sense, men came to assume the existence of the balanced universe created by the best of Restoration comedy. In such a world, the sharp, penetrating debates of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve are no longer deemed necessary. The comic muse must inevitably suffer in such a world. The comic hero, instead of being a target, becomes a model, and an example for his audience, and comedy cannot long survive with perfect personages crowding its pages, for the source of laughter is in disorder and the instruction

of laughter is the correction of disorder. The great comedy of the Restoration suggests that man might be good by careful adherence to the code of decorum with its stern balance of human qualities; such a view obviously indicates countless deviations in the direction of evil, vice, chicanery, and folly -- and here is the material for laughter. By 1722 comedy apparently assumes men to be by nature good, and there is no ideal source for laughter.

The development toward sentimental comedy is plainly evident in the six comedies I have mentioned. Beginning with small hints in The Squire of Alsatia and blossoming in Love's Last Shift the attitudes of sentimental comedy become more and more clear and finally culminate in what must surely be one of the worst plays ever written, The Conscious Lovers. Congreve, of course, was writing in the main stream of classical comedy until 1700. The only other bulwark against sentiment was Sir John Vanbrugh, and even his first attempt to answer sentimental comedy, The Relapse, failed as comedy, though it was successful on the stage. With the exception of Congreve's work, Vanbrugh's The Provok'd Wife is the last major play consistently in the manner of great Restoration comedy.

The Squire of Alsatia, presented in 1688, is perhaps most remarkable for its scenes of London low life. Earlier, of course, Wycherley had depicted scenes from

levels of society far below the usual aristocratic class found in Restoration comedy, but here for the first time in a major play of the period Shadwell offers scenes from Alsatia, the Whitefriars district of London where there was no law. Nicoll suggests that no play "could have pictured more faithfully the debased standards of social existence,"[1] yet it is clear that Shadwell, while apparently faithful to the spirit of Whitefriars, was not faithful to the letter. Much of the low cant, as will be mentioned later, though colorful, is inaccurate.

The fable of The Squire of Alsatia is borrowed from the Adelphoe of Terence. Education of young men is not, however, the subject of the play. Aside from the scenes of low life realism introduced for entertainment, the play is further notable for the touch of sentiment revealed in the scenes involving Belfond Junior and Lucia.

The Whitefriars scenes occur when Belfond Senior, "bred after his father's rustic, swinish manner," is cozened by Cheatly and Shamwell, who lead him to think that they will alter him into a fine gentleman, free him from his father's country care, and find him a wealthy wife:

> BELFOND SENIOR. . . . Sweet Mr. Cheatly, my best friend, let me embrace thee.
> CHEATLY. My sprightly son of timber and of acres! My noble heir, I salute thee! The cole is coming, and shall be brought this morning.

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[1] Nicoll, p. 75.

BELFOND SENIOR. Coal? Why, 'tis summer, I need no firing now. Besides, I intend to burn billets.

CHEATLY. My lusty rustic, learn, and be instructed. "Cole" is in the language of the witty, money; the ready, the rhino. Thou shalt be rhinocerical my lad, thou shalt.

BELFOND SENIOR. Admirable, I swear! "Cole, ready, rhino, rhinocerical!" Lord, how long may a man live in ignorance in the country.

SHAMWELL. Ay, but what asses you'll make of the country gentlemen when you go amongst them! 'Tis a providence you are fallen into so good hands.[1]

(I, i)

Belfond Senior goes through a whole course of instruction in low cant, and then parades his knowledge wherever possible:

> Look, sirrah, here's a show, you rogue. Here's a sight of cole, darby, the ready, and the rhino. You rascal, you understand me not! You loggerhead [Lolpoop], you silly put, you understand me not! Here are megs and smelts. I ne'er had such a sight of my own in my life. Here are more megs and smelts, you rogue; you understand me not.
>
> (II, ii)

Often Belfond Senior uses his new-found language inaccurately. Speaking to Margaret, his whore, and Mrs. Hackum, the bawd, he says

> O Lord, madam, your most humble servant to command. My pretty blowen, let me kiss thee. Thou shalt be my natural. I must rummage thee. She is a pure blowen. My pretty rogue -- how happy shall I be? Pox o' the country, I say. Madam Hackum, to testify my gratitude, I make bold to equip you with some megs, smelts, decu's, and Georges.
>
> (II, ii)

The terms "blowen" and "natural" are used mistakenly here. Both are terms to be used in reference to a whore or

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[1]Thomas Shadwell, The Squire of Alsatia, Macmillan and Jones. All further references are to this edition.

mistress, but are not to be used in direct address to such a person. His instructors apparently are also guilty of inaccuracy. Cheatly and Shamwell are confidence men, yet most of the cant terms they employ are characteristic of thieves and pickpockets.[1]

We are also indebted to the low-life scenes for the introduction of another character not hitherto fully developed in a major Restoration play, the miles gloriosus. Captain Hackum, "a blockheaded bully of Alsatia, a cowardly, impudent, blustering fellow," is brave in word, but not in deed. In conversation he is bold, and anticipating insult he says, "My honor is tender, and this one affront will cost me at least five murders." But when Belfond Junior confronts hime with his rascality, trying to convince Belfond Senior of his cowardice, he is of another manner:

> BELFOND JUNIOR. Here! Where are you, sirrah kill-cow?
> (Takes Hackum by the nose and leads him)
> HACKUM. 'Tis no matter; I know honor; I know punctilios to a hair. You owe your life to your brother. Besides I am to be second to a dear friend, and preserve my vigor for his service; but for all that, were he not your brother --
> BELFOND JUNIOR. Will not this convince you, brother, of their cowardice?
>
> (III, ii)

Shadwell's play fails principally in the scenes

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[1]Lindsay Almand, Class Report, "Cant Terms in the Restoration," Dryden Seminar, Department of English, University of Oklahoma, November, 1957.

depicting Belfond Junior's romantic entanglements. He emerges from these scenes as an unbelievable fool, yet he is apparently not intended to be held up to ridicule. The pattern of his affairs is identical with the Dorimant-Loveit-Bellinda-Harriet sequence in The Man of Mode, but the similarity ends with the pattern. The effect is far different. Belfond Junior has cast Mrs. Termagant, is presently involved with Lucia, and is engaged in courtship to Isabella. Mrs. Termagant is notable primarily for her rages, flying into violence and violent language at the thought of anything coming between her and Belfond Junior, threatening harm even to the child she has borne.

The relationship of Belfond and Lucia is not without genuine emotional attachment. This is suggested in her first appearance:

> LUCIA. Ah, cruel Belfond, thou hast undone me.
> BELFOND JUNIOR. My pretty little rogue, I sooner would undo myself a thousand times.
> LUCIA. How I tremble to think what I ha' done! I have made myself forever miserable.
> BELFOND JUNIOR. Oh, say not, dear child! I'll kiss those tears from off thy beauteous eyes. I shall wrong thy cheeks, on which they fall like precious drops of dew on flowers.
> (II, i)

Later, when Belfond has told her of Mrs. Termagant's wildness, some further indication of their relationship is revealed:

> LUCIA. Ungrateful creature! She is, indeed, a fury. Should'st thou once take thy love from me, I never should use such ways; silently should mourn and pine away; but never think of once offending thee.

BELFOND JUNIOR. Thou art the prettiest, sweetest, softest creature! And all the tenderest joys that wait on love are ever with thee.
LUCIA. Oh, this is charming kindness! May all the joys of earth be still with thee.
BELFOND JUNIOR. (Aside) Now here's a mischief on the other side: for how can a good-natured man think of ever quitting so tender and so kind a mistress, whom no respect but love has thrown into my arms? And yet I must. But I will better her condition.
(IV, i)

There are no truly comic features in the whole pattern of Belfond's romantic relations. Mrs. Termagant, wild as she is, is not successfully held up for ridicule as Mrs. Love-it was. The audience, it is obvious, could feel only sympathy for Lucia. She is a sentimental figure, a kind and devoted mistress, with no discoverable faults. Shadwell does not successfully show, as Etherege did, the lover moving through a series of affairs in the direction of the ideal affair. There is nothing to prepare the audience for Belfond's dismissal of Lucia except his sudden protestations of love for Isabella, which have not been dramatically prepared for.

With only the mention to Truman of an unnamed love as background, Belfond suddenly in Act III proclaims to his father "I am most passionately in love." Later, in Act V, he vows that he looks on marriage "as the most solemn vow a man can make, and 'tis by consequence the basest perjury to break it." Nothing in all his affairs prepares an audience for this kind of proclamation. He has been devoted to Lucia, yet he is just as devoted to

Isabella, with no accounting for the change. Belfond Junior is a model son and brother, and, to both Lucia and Isabella, apparently a model lover. He is, if anything, a comic hero only by accident.

The Squire of Alsatia approaches success only in the scenes of low life. The falseness and chicanery of Shamwell, Cheatly, Scrapeall, and Hackum emerge clearly as Belfond Junior exposes them to his brother. Belfond Senior is an admirable gull, pleased at being gulled. But elsewhere, Shadwell is far less successful. Sir William Belfond performs interestingly to the last where he suddenly alters within a page. The scenes in which Sir Edward Belfond and Belfond Junior appear, suggestive of scenes later in The Conscious Lovers, are almost too cloying for any play, much less a comedy, where laughter and ridicule are supreme. In the scenes of Belfond Junior's romantic affairs, no one is ridiculed, no one is subject for laughter. Belfond Junior is important as the physical agent responsible for exposing the shams of Whitefriars, but his own faults are never apparent. Any order represented in The Squire of Alsatia is accidental, not revealed dramatically and epistemologically.

The author of A Comparison Between the Two Stages said Cibber's Love's Last Shift did well, "there being few Comedies that came up to't for purity of Plot, Manners and Moral . . . ." Such a judgment is perhaps questionable,

but there can be no doubt that comedy changed with this play and others like it, going into a rapid decline, and eventually fading completely. Love's Last Shift has been called the first sentimental comedy in the eighteenth century sense of that term, and it is indeed obvious that something has happened to comedy when a major figure says "All the comfort of my life is that I can tell my conscience I have been true to virtue." The play presents a serious problem with a happy solution, with "not one cuckold made in all this play." The rake and libertine is reformed, and virtue is made triumphant through the appeal to pity:

> An honest rake forego the joys of life,
> His whores and wine, to embrace a dull, chast wife!
> Such out-of-fashion stuff! But then, again,
> He's lewd for above four acts, gentlemen!
> For faith, he knew, when once he'd changed his fortune
> And reformed his vice, 'twas time to drop the curtain.
> Four acts for yourcoarse palates was designed,
> But then the ladies' taste is more refined;
> They, for Amanda's sake, will sure be kind.[1]

By 1696, when Love's Last Shift appeared, public taste had no doubt changed. The play has been called a sop to bourgeois morality; even though it is little more than extended seduction scene, the salaciousness is tempered greatly by virtue of the fact that the principals in the seduction happen to be married.

The principal action, involving Loveless and Amanda,

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[1]Colley Cibber, "Epilogue to Love's Last Shift," Macmillan and Jones. All further references to the play are to this edition.

offers the principal offense. Loveless, when the play opens, has been absent from his wife ten years, having deserted her soon after their marriage. His attitudes at this point are clear:

> The world to me is a garden stocked with all sorts of fruit, where the greatest pleasure we can take is in the variety of taste; but a wife is an eternal apple tree -- after a pull or two you are sure to set your teeth on edge.
> (I, i)

He has pawned his estate "to buy pleasure, that is, old wine, young whores, and the conversations of brave fellows as mad as myself." Appetites, he says, "are torments if not indulged."

This is the man Amanda resolves to reform, arousing his interest first as a disguised lover:

> I can't help a little concern in a business of such moment, for though my reason tells me my design must prosper, yet my fears say it were happiness too great. Oh, to reclaim the man I'm bound by heaven to love, to expose the folly of a roving mind in pleasing him with what he seemed to loathe were such a sweet revenge for slighted love, so vast a triumph of rewarded constancy as might persude the looser part of womankind even to forsake themselves and fall in love with virtue.
> (III, i)

Her attempt, as young Worthysays, is "love's last shift." Even when her plan is underway, Loveless remains the scornful, pleasure-seeking man:

> AMANDA. Your pardon, sir, I drink out of nobody's glass but my own. As the man I love confines himself to me, so my inclination keeps me true to him.
> LOVELESS. That's a cheat imposed upon you by your own vanity, for when your back's turned your very chambermaid sips of your leavings and becomes your rival. Constancy in love is all a cheat; women of

> your understanding know it. The joys of love are only great when they are new, and to make them lasting we must often change.
>
> (IV, iii)

Even as late as Act V Loveless remains himself, confessing that he once felt some attachment for his wife "for she was within two women of my maidenhead." Then suddenly made serious by Amanda's sincerity and anguish, he professes that he cannot praise a cloistered virtue, and it is then revealed to him that his wife, before him now, is truly virtuous, one "whose conscience and whole force of reason can curb her warm desires when opportunity would raise them." Dumfounded at his wife's constancy, Loveless is reformed: "Oh, thou hast raised a thought within me that shocks my soul . . . thou hast raised me from my deep lethargy of vice."

> Twas heedless fancy first that made me stray,
> But reason now breaks forth and lights me on my way.

In this nicer than nice seduction, Cibber has somehow managed to retain more lewdness than Wycherley at his worst. Some of the scenes between Young Worthy and Narcissa are suggestive:

> YOUNG WORTHY. . . . Let this be the last night of your lying alone.
> NARCISSA. What do you mean?
> YOUNG WORTHY. Some small encouragement which my hopes have formed, madam.
> NARCISSA. Hopes! Oh, insolence! If it once comes to that I don't question but you have been familiar with me in your imagination. Marry you! What, lie in a naked bed with you, trembling by your side, like a tame lamb for sacrifice? Do you think I can be moved to love a man, to kiss him, toy with him, and so forth?

> YOUNG WORTHY. (Aside) Egad! I find nothing but downright impudence will do with her. -- No, madam it is the man must kiss and toy with you, and so forth. Come, my dear angel, pronounce the joyful word and draw the scene of my eternal happiness. Ah, methinks I'm there already, eager and impatient of approaching bliss! Just laid within the bridal bed, our friends retires, the curtains close drawn around us, no light but Celia's eyes, no noise but her soft, trembling words and broken sighs that plead in vain for mercy. And now a trickling tear steals down her glowing cheeck, which tells the rushing lover at length she yields, yet vows she'd rather die, but still submits to the unexperienced joy.
>
> (I, i)

Even at the scene of the reformation of Loveless, his man Snap is below, tumbling Amanda's woman into the cellar, and Loveless himself, speaking to Amanda before his transformation, says

> Oh, lead me to the scene of unsupportable delight, rack me with pleasures never known before, till I lie gasping with convulsive passion. This night let us be lavish to our unbounded wishes.
>
> (IV, ii)

Love's Last Shift is also noted for the appearance of one of the more famous coxcombs, Sir Novelty Fashion, later to be Lord Foppington, who is "a very pleasant comedy indeed . . . and dressed with a great deal of satire." But its main claim to fame -- or infamy -- is the sentimental fable of the reformation of Loveless by sweet Amanda. After meeting some of the full-bodied, vital heroines of other comedies of this period, one can almost understand why Loveless deserted her in the first place, though not why he came back. Amanda as she is and Loveless as he becomes are no fit subject for comedy. There

virtue is exalted, there is no place for ridicule. Where correctness and reformation are already assumed, there is no place for the spirit of comedy. Where pity and gratitude sway men's minds, the comic muse does not dwell.

In the same year that Love's Last Shift appeared, 1696, there appeared an answer employing many of the same characters, Vanbrugh's The Relapse. Vanbrugh is, of all the lesser figures, the one dramatist who approaches the three great comic dramatists of the Restoration, but The Relapse is not as successful as his next play, The Provok'd Wife. Vanbrugh was no writer according to Hazlitt, but he made up for it by a prodigious fund of comic invention. Palmer suggests that in Vanbrugh's plays promiscuous gallantry was yielding to temptation, that it had become passionate, and was no longer viewed by the dry light of comedy. This, perhaps, true of The Relapse, where, as Perry suggests, Vanbrugh compromised with the public taste.

The Relapse furnishes a comment on the morality of Love's Last Shift, and is characterized by homely wit and fresh jokes. It is particularly important here in three connections. First, it is important to see the reaction to Cibber; second, it is important to notice the new treatment of sex which I have mentioned earlier; and third, it is interesting to see the new vistas opened up by Vanbrugh's introduction of new faces and places.

The relapse of the title is the relapse of Loveless,

Cibber's reformed husband. When the play opens, he is with Amanda at their country home, his "life glides on, and all is well within." The central action records his fall and the temptation of Amanda, where Vanbrugh fails, leaving her virtue intact. It soon becomes apparent that his eye has begun to wander and that it has lit upon Berinthia, who is staying with Amanda. Amanda is content; Loveless, she says, "sits triumphant in my heart, and nothing can dethrone him." She is herself courted by Worthy, and as the play develops, her resistance slips a little:

> Alas! Berinthia, did I incline to a gallant (which you know I do not), do you think a man so nice as he could have the least concern for such a plain unpolished thing as I am? It is impossible![1] (IV, ii)

As the relationship between Loveless and Berinthia develops unknown to Amanda, she becomes somewhat disenchanted with her husband. Her love, she says, is "all disposed of, though, I confess, to one ungrateful to my bounty." Loveless's pursuit of Berinthia is quite succesful since she does not flee, but Worthy's courtship of Amanda fails:

> BERINTHIA. What's the matter?
> WORTHY. The lady has a scruple still, which you must remove.
> BERINTHIA. What's that?
> WORTHY. Her virtue -- she says.
> BERINTHIA. And do you believe her?
> WORTHY. No, but I believe it's what she takes for her virtue; it's some relic of lawful love. (V, ii)

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[1]Sir John Vanbrugh, The Relapse, Macmillan and Jones. All further references are to this edition.

Loveless, the unrepentant rake, is typically successful in his pursuit of a willing lady, but Worthy is in the end unsuccessful, for Amanda finds refuge in her virtue, which, unfortunately, has been assumed throughout both this play and Love's Last Shift and is never dramatically discovered.

Amanda is again inconsistent with the comic code. She fails to meet the standard requirement of comedy that its characters be imperfect; moreover, she is not believable in her perfection. Dramatically there is no justification for her virtue, yet she is successful in reforming Worthy, temporarily at least. At the moment of her greatest weakness she resists Worthy, telling him that if he loves her he will repent and never more offend:

> You see the price I set upon my heart;
> Perhaps 'tis dear: but, spite of all your art
> You'll find on cheaper terms we ne'er shall part.
> Exit.
>
> WORTHY. (Solus) Sure there's a divinity about her! And sh'as dispensed some portion on't to me. For what but now was the wild flame of love, or (to dissect that specious term) the vile, the gross desires of flesh and blood, is in a moment turned to adoration. The coarser appetite of nature's gone, and 'tis, methinks, the food of angels I require.
>
> (V, iv)

What Vanbrugh failed to show is that the ideal love affair of the ideal Restoration mode demands both nature's coarser appetite and the food of angels.

The Relapse, in the person of the witty Berinthia, reveling in love, depicts the blunter interest of fine

ladies in sex. The greatest heroine of them all, Millamant, recognizes all kinds of desires in her lover, but never permits overt sexual address. With Berinthia and several ladies in this group of plays such address is possible, even desired. This emphasis on the physical aspects of lovers' relations is due primarily, I think, to the fact that these plays have not the scope of greater plays which allows them to find balance in all human desires.

One of the early conversations between Loveless and Berinthia reveals her lustiness:

> LOVELESS. . . . I have reason to believe, should I put myself into your hands, you would increase my distemper.
> BERINTHIA. Perhaps I might have reasons from the college not to be too quick in your cure; but 'tis possible I might find ways to give you often ease, sir.
> LOVELESS. Were I but sure of that, I'd quickly lay my case before you.
> BERINTHIA. Whether you are sure of it or no, what risk do you run in trying?
> LOVELESS. Oh! a very great one.
> BERINTHIA. How?
> LOVELESS. You might betray my distemper to my wife.
> BERINTHIA. And so lose all my practice.
> LOVELESS. Will you then keep my secret?
> BERINTHIA. I will, if it don't burst me.
> . . . . . .
> LOVELESS. I'm satisfied. Now hear my symptoms, and give me your advice. . . . What think you of these symptoms, pray?
> BERINTHIA. Feverish, every one of them. But what relief, pray, did your wife afford you?
> LOVELESS. Why, instantly she let me blood; which for the present much assuaged my flame. But when I saw you, out it burst it again, and raged with greater fury than before. Nay, since you now appear, 'tis so increased, that in a moment, if you do not help me, I shall, whilst you look on, consume to ashes.
> (III, ii)

Berinthia's frank enjoyment of sex is further revealed in what must surely be the funniest short scene in all of Restoration comedy:

> (Loveless puts out the candles)
> BERINTHIA. O Lord! are you mad? What shall I do for light?
> LOVELESS. You'll do as well without it.
> BERINTHIA. Why, one can't find a chair to sit down.
> LOVELESS. Come into the closet, madam, there's moonshine upon the couch.
> BERINTHIA. Nay, never pull, for I will not go.
> LOVELESS. Then you must be carried.
> (carrying her)
> BERINTHIA. (Very softly) Help! help! I'm ravished! ruined! undone! O Lord, I shall never be able to bear it.
> Exit Loveless carrying Berinthia.
> (IV, iii)

Sir Novelty Fashion reappears here, created Lord Foppington, a man "very industrious to pass for an ass." The repugnant match-maker, Coupler, who fails to meet the Aristotelian standard, applied by Cooper to comedy, that a character be no baser than is necessary, is of some interest, but more interesting are some new types that appear on the stage here. The beaux have been mentioned in earlier plays, but here the type is fully exposed in a long dialogue between Berinthia and Amanda. Men have brains, Berinthia says,

> . . . the beau has none. These [men] are in love with their mistress; the beau with himself. They take care of her reputation; he's industrious to destroy it. They are decent: he's a fop. They are sound; he's rotten. They are men; he's an ass.
> (II, i)

Of still greater interest is Vanbrugh's introduction of country scenes and country figures. Sir

Tunbelly Clumsy and his daughter, Hoyden, are refreshing new types. The scenes in which they appear -- their relations with Young Fashion and Lord Foppington make up the secondary action in the play -- are among the more successful in the play. According to Sir Tunbelly, what Hoyden "wants in art, she has by nature." She invites comparison to Margery Pinchwife because of their common natural state. Both are immensely eager to learn the ways of the town. Hoyden says "that which pleases me, is to think what work I'll make when I get to London; for when I am a wife and a lady both, ecod, I'll flaunt it with the best of 'em." She is by nature somewhat more sophisticated than Margery; when Fashion asks if she would be alone with him, she replies, "O dear, yes, sir, I don't think you'll do anything to me I need be afraid on." And of course she fares better than Margery because of the relative mildness of her surroundings.

Vanbrugh was more successful with his next comedy, The Provok'd Wife, which rather consistently maintains the comic mode established by Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve. Vanbrugh says in his prologue that the business of the stage is "To copy out the Follies of the Age,"[1] and to hold a mirror so that every man can see "of what species

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[1]Sir John Vanbrugh, "Prologue to The Provok'd Wife," The Complete Works of Sir John Vanbrugh, ed. Bonamy Bonamy Dobree (Bloomsbury: Nonesuch Press, 1927), vol. I. All further references are to this edition.

he's an Ass." In his play he successfully dramatizes the difference between the fool and the man of worth. None of his characters is perfect; all are subject to ridicule. The Provok'd Wife is, perhaps, the only work that comes near the level of the comedies of the three great dramatists. This is true because he maintains their mode without diminishing the effect with virtuous persons and ineffective dramaturgy. Indeed, Lady Brute feels that "Virtue's an Ass, and a Gallant's worth forty on't."

The principal action is the outwitting of Sir John Brute, who vilifies his wife because "No Boy was ever so weary of his Tutor; no Girl of her Bib; no Nun of doing Penance nor Old Maid of being Chast, as I am of being married." Indeed the relationship of Sir John and Lady Brute has some sociological significance beyond its comic worth as it reveals the flaws too often apparent in the marital manner of the age. Totally lacking in their relationship is the reasonable balance and understanding it is the business of this play to demonstrate.

Balance and worth are the qualities dramatically learned here. Heartfree rails at Lady Fanciful for her ingratitude to nature and her excess of art. Constant derides Sir John for his consuming interest in wine while married to such a woman as Lady Brute. The reasonable virtue of the man of worth is aptly defined by Constant

in a conversation with Lady Brute:

> Const. Virtue? -- Virtue alas is no more like the thing that's call'd so, than 'tis like Vice itself. Virtue consists in Goodness, Honour, Gratitude, Sincerity, and Pity; and not in peevish, snarling strait-laced Chastity. True Virtue whereso'e'er it moves, still carries an intrinsique worth about it, and is in every place, and in each Sex of equal value. So is not Continence, you see: That Phantome of Honour, which men in every Age have so contemn'd, they have thrown it amongst the Women to scrabble for.
> Lady Brute. If it be a thing of so very little Value, why do you so earnestly recommend it to your Wives and Daughters?
> Const. We recommend it to our Wives, madam, because we wou'd keep 'em to our selves. And to our daughters, because we wou'd dispose of 'em to others.
> Lady Brute. 'Tis, then, of some Importance, it seems, since you can't dispose of 'em without it.
> Const. That importance, madam, lies in the humour of the country, not in the nature of the thing.
> (III, i)

Witnessing the spectacle of Sir John Brute's marriage, the paired heroes, Constant and Heartfree, learn something of the real possibilities of marriage. When Heartfree remains reluctant finally to give up to wedlock, Constant reminds him

> . . . A Man of real Worth, scarce ever is a Cuckold, but by his own fault. Women are not naturally lewd; there must be something to urge 'em to it. They'll cuckold a Churl, out of revenge; a Fool, because they despise him; a Beast, because they loath him. But when they make bold with a Man they once had a well grounded Value for, 'tis because they first see themselves neglected by him.

Constant's relative definition of virtue has some influence on Lady Brute, and, as is characteristic of these plays, she is rather more outspoken and blunt about her sexual interests than is ever permitted in the plays

of Etherege and Congreve at least. When she and Bellinda go over the list of women's affectations, they come eventually to conduct at the theater, and it becomes apparent that Lady Brute honestly enjoys the often ribald laughter occasioned there:

> Bell. . . . my Glass and I cou'd never yet agree what Face I shou'd make when they come to blurt out with a nasty thing in a Play: For all the Men presently look upon the Women, that's certain; so laugh we must not, tho' our Stays burst for't; because that's telling Truth, and owning we understand the Jest. And to look serious is so dull, when the whole house is a laughing.
>
> Lady Brute. Besides, that looking serious do's really betray our Knowledge in the Matter, as much as laughing with the Company does. For if we did not understand the thing, we shou'd naturally do like other People.
>
> Bell. For my part I always take that Occasion to blow my Nose.
>
> Lady Brute. You must blow your Nose half off then at some Plays.
>
> Bell. Why don't some Reformer or other beat the Poet for't?
>
> Lady Brute. Because he is not so sure of our private Approbation as of our publick thanks.
>
> (III, iii)

A moment later, telling Bellinda that Constant has besieged her for two years, she says, "I'm afraid the Town won't be able to hold out much longer; for to confess the Truth to you, Bellinda, the Garrison begins to grow mutinous."

There are many attractive things about this play. Many of the characters deserve special attention -- notably perhaps Lady Fanciful, who feels that she was formed "to make the whole Creation uneasy." But there is one

other factor essential to notice because of its bearing on the remaining plays to be discussed in this chapter. I have indicated earlier that some of the plays under consideration here make use of the deus ex machina. The Beaux Stratagem and The Conscious Lovers both reveal unfortunate use of the fortunate accident. Such an occurrence is also apparent in The Provok'd Wife, where Rasor, not appearing on stage until Act V, becomes the agent preparing the conclusion. Yet the sudden appearance and the sudden importance are so consistent with the wittily sexual interests of the play that there is no objection.

Rasor endears himself first in the scene with Madamoiselle, where they act out in dumb-show his narrative of courtship and intercourse. He assists Lady Fanciful in her plan to thwart Constant by telling Sir John he has been cuckolded, to alienate Heartwell from Bellinda by pretending that she is pregnant, and to alienate Bellinda from Heartwell by pretending that he is married. But at the critical moment, when he has set the plot working, Rasor alters when he sees the two couples estranged:

> Here is so much Sport going to be spoil'd, it makes me ready to weep again. A Pox o' this Impertinent Lady Fanciful, and her Plots and her Frenchwoman too; she's a whimsical, ill-natur'd Bitch, and when I have got my Bones broke in her Service, 'tis Ten to One but my Recompence is a Clap; I hear 'em both without still. I Cod, I'll e'en

> go lug 'em both in by the Ears, and discover the Plot, to secure my Pardon.
> (V, iii)

Virtue as Amanda conceived it never appears in this play, yet a different kind of virtue, and one must say a sounder, is apparent. Lady Fanciful and Sir John Brute are obvious fools, but they are not alone in being ridiculed. Heartfree's drinking and plain-dealing, Constant's polish, Bellinda's affectation, Lady Brute's somewhat restrained natural lust and her plight wrought by a foolish husband -- each of these is in isolation ridiculous. But when all these qualities are held in tension and mutually tempered by the relations of the four lovers, one can see dramatically depicted the code of a man of real worth. Vanbrugh presents here a comedy which differs from the great comedies only in scope. It is not so deep as a Wycherley, not so wide as a Congreve, but it will do.

Another step in the movement toward sentimental comedy is apparent in Farquhar's The Beaux Stratagem. He is, as Dobrée suggests, generally more interested in lively action and a roguish tale than in serious comment on manners. Unfortunately, as Perry suggests, his works also contain usually a kind of pseudo-romantic plot in which wild young heroes are presumed to be both laughable and admirable, an almost impossible combination of traits.

In a benevolent world like Farquhar's, good humor and fun take the place of wit. Intellectual morality changes to sentimental morality, and intellectual action changes to physical action.

> When strife disturbs, or sloth corrupts an age,
> Keen satire is the business of the stage.

But

> When Anna's sceptre points the laws their course,
> And her example gives her precepts force:
> There scarce is room for satire; all our lays
> Must be or songs of triumph, or of praise.[1]

The action of The Beaux Stratagem is much livelier than that of many better plays. Aimwell and Archer, the latter disguised as a footman, seek their fortunes in the country, their particular fortunes here being Dorinda and Mrs. Sullen. Archer's wild movement through the play (he can, as Mrs. Sullen says, fight, love, and banter all in one breath), the delightful scenes of Lady Bountiful's cures, and the climatic scene of the attempted theft all make for lighthearted fun.

Yet the play is impossibly sentimental. Aimwell and Archer are both, at first, dedicated to profit. At the end they have both succumbed to a purely emotional attachment. Archer plans success with the ladies by counterfeiting the passion without feeling it, while

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[1]George Farquhar, "Prologue to The Beaux Stratagem," Macmillan and Jones. All further references are to this edition.

Aimwell insists that "no woman can be a beauty without a fortune." Even in gayer moments the cloud of sentiment and passion looms over the play. The charming catechism which Archer teaches Cherry suggests the dominance of the passions, without the temper of the reason:

> ARCHER. Had ever a man so hopeful a pupil as mine! -- Come, my dear, why is Love called a riddle?
> CHERRY. Because, being blind, he leads those that see, and, though a Child, he governs a man.
> ARCHER. Mighty well! -- And why is Love pictured blind?
> CHERRY. Because the painters out of the weakness or privilege of their art chose to hide those eyes that they could not draw.
> ARCHER. That's my dear little scholar, kiss me again. -- And why should Love, that's a child, govern a man?
> CHERRY. Because that a child is the end of love.
> ARCHER. And so ends Love's catechism. -- And now, my dear, we'll go in and make my master's bed.
> (II, ii)

Yet both these gentlemen, so dedicated to profit, surrender to passion. Aimwell is willing, in the end, to give up Dorinda rather than marry her under false pretenses: "Such goodness who could injure! I find myself unequal to the task of villain; she has now gained my soul, and made it honest like her own." Archer, though less romantic, is also attached to Mrs. Sullen.

Inconsistent with the developing romantic plot is the overt sexuality of Mrs. Sullen. She is, in her lustiness, most delightful. She vows to cuckold her husband, and indicates she would like Archer better in a design upon herself. She swears some measure of revenge

upon her husband for his boorishness:

> SQUIRE SULLEN. Look'ee, madam, don't think that my anger proceeds from any concern I have for your honor, but for my own; and if you can contrive any way of being a whore without making me a cuckold, do it and welcome.
> MRS. SULLEN. Sir, I thank you kindly; you would allow me the sin but rob me of the pleasure. No, no, I'm resolved never to venture upon the crime without the satisfaction of seeing you punished for't.
> (III, iii)

When Archer says he feels ill, she declares that she could find the cure, and she defends Archer as a lover at the claims of Dorinda for Aimwell's charms, by depicting his more natural desires:

> MRS. SULLEN. My fellow took the picture of Venus for mine.
> DORINDA. But my lover took me for Venus herself.
> MRS. SULLEN. Common cant! Had my spark called me a Venus directly, I should have believed him a footman in good earnest.
> DORINDA. But my lover was upon his knees to me.
> MRS. SULLEN. And mine was upon his tiptoes to me.
> DORINDA. Mine vowed to die for me.
> MRS. SULLEN. Mine vowed to die with me.
> DORINDA. Mine spoke the softest moving things.
> MRS. SULLEN. Mine had his moving things too.
> (IV, i)

All in all, Mrs. Sullen appears as a woman of the world, finding Squire Sullen repugnant. The others in the play are as romantic adolescents compared to a full-bodied, vital woman.

In discussing the Rasor episode in The Provok'd Wife, I have suggested something of the dramatic weakness of The Beaux Stratagem. There is no intellectual working-out of problems here, no tension of qualities which makes

a proper mode. Instead, the resolution, happy for all concerned, is the product of accidents. The potential divorce of Mrs. Sullen is prepared for at the first of Act II, but the agent for it, her brother, is an intervention not otherwise functional in the play. Worse than this is the device which makes Aimwell and Dorinda happy. He has foresworn his love because he has falsely presented himself as Lord Aimwell. Then at the moment when he has made the sentimental sacrifice, Mrs. Sullen's brother, already an intervention, comes in with the news that he is Lord Aimwell, for his brother had died.

The Beaux Stratagem is a rollicking kind of play, and one imagines that it would present well on the stage. The fact remains, however, that it does not measure up to the great comedies of the age. The comic problems of the persons involved are not worked out on the stage; they are resolved, instead, by fortunate circumstance. Action is substituted for intellectual effort, and the qualities and manners of the persons are less important than where they happen to be standing at the moment. Worse than this, however, is the sentimental ending of a play that had better possibilities. Aimwell and Archer are unaccountably changed; there is no dramatic justification for their sudden virtue; and Dorinda seems rather to be pallid than all-good.

By 1722, with the presentation of The Conscious Lovers, the comic mode of the Restoration was dead, and unmourned. The witty, epistemological debates which placed all human qualities -- vices and virtues as well -- in tension, and from the tension created an ideal mode of natural artistry guided by the standard of decorum, balance, and harmony -- all this was gone. Sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century, represented here by Steele's play, presented instead virtuous characters for emulation:

> The chief design of this was to be an innocent performance, and the audience have abundantly showed how ready they are to support what is visibly intended that way; nor do I make any difficulty to acknowledge, that the whole was writ for the sake of the scene of the fourth act, wherein Mr. Bevil evades the quarrel with his friend, and hope it may have some effect upon the Goths and Vandals that frequent the theatres, or a more polite audience may supply their absence.[1]

The Conscious Lovers marks the climax of the first stage in the development of sentimental comedy, characterized by the presentation of a moral problem and the happy solution of it for admirable persons. "Anything that has its foundation in happiness and success," Steele says in his preface, "must be allowed to be the object of comedy." The Conscious Lovers, and sentimental comedy in general, represents a concession to middle-class morality,

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[1]Richard Steele, "Preface to The Conscious Lovers," Macmillan and Jones. Further references to the play are to this edition.

a concession occasioned by the gradual change in the theater audience. Comedy becomes a mirror of life, true, but mirrors only the virtues, thereby presenting models for imitation. The whole significance of comedy is changed. Ridicule is gone. Comedy instructs by example, not by ridicule:

> No more let ribaldry, with licence writ,
> Usurp the name of eloquence or wit;
> No more let lawless force uncensured go,
> The lewd dull gleanings of a Smithfield show.
> 'Tis yours, with breeding to refine the age,
> To chasten wit, and moralize the stage.
> Ye modest, wise, and good, ye fair, ye brave,
> To-night the champion of our virtues save,
> Redeem from long contempt the comic name,
> And judge politely for your contry's fame.

The delicate balance of sensibilities, the harmonious union of nature and art, of reason and emotion that was caught and maintained for a splendid moment by the comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve was gone, and The Conscious Lovers reveals what happened. Indiana loves completely: "All the rest of my life is but waiting till he comes. I only live when I'm with him." But her love is pure emotion, without the rigid intellectual inquiry that Harriet and Millamant demand. Bevil very wisely avoids the duel with his friend, that is true, but he does so purely by cool reason, without the emotional quality that makes Dorimant and Mirabell both reasonable and human. All their problems are solved quickly by the discovery of Isabella and Indiana as the

long-lost sister and daughter of Mr. Sealand, but these problems are not solved by the comic efforts of the persons involved.

Comedy originates in disorder, and ridicule arises with the different variations of disorder. The comic correction of disorder is the mode for arriving at the ideal way of the world, the just and decorous balance of all human qualities. In The Conscious Lovers there is no disorder of intellect or manners. The play starts with nothing and goes nowhere, and with it the severe yet hilarious muse of Restoration comedy departed.

CHAPTER IX

CONGREVE

One does not have to read past the first page of the first play that William Congreve wrote before he realizes he is in a different world. Etherege and Wycherley produced great works, to be sure, but when Mrs. Bracegirdle steps upon the stage to speak the prologue of The Old Batchelor a new kind of impudence and profundity, of wittiness and wisdom is apparent.

The four comedies produced by Congreve from 1693 to 1700 represent the culmination of English comic art. The Way of the World, indeed, is at one and the same time both the peak of English comedy and the death of English comedy, for comic drama became humble and nice thereafter, and the wittily serious comic muse was seen no more at her best.

Walpole called Congreve, "the wittiest author that ever lived." Whether this is so or not, it must be apparent that Congreve, as he produced some of the best of English comedies, and in The Way of the World, perhaps

the very best, also was spokesman, along with Swift and Pope, for an ethic and an aesthetic so wise and so demanding in their requirements, in their humanity, that their likes have not been seen since. Ignoring the total effect of the comedies, students have often devoted their time to flaying Congreve's comedies for their apparent inhumanity, the whole point being, of course, that Congreve in his comedies expected more of the true man of worth than we are normally prepared to give.

Congreve himself was a man who did not always choose to conform himself to the manners of his time, as his letters to Keally show. Despite this, he was in everyone's opinion a gentle perfect wit; one likes to think that the manners he conformed to were those of Mirabell and Millamant. Even in the kindest criticism, Congreve is often dismissed as a fine stylist, and there can be no doubt that he was; but a careful reading of his plays should be enough to demonstrate that there is far more here than a delightful style. Dr. Johnson, whose words hardly can be ignored, though he has some misgivings about Congreve, gets at the heart of the matter when he suggests the seriousness of the plays:

> Congreve has merit of the highest kind: he is an original writer, who borrowed neither the models of his plot nor the manner of his dialogue. Of his plays I cannot speak distinctly, for since I inspected them many years have passed; but what remains upon my memory is that his characters are

> commonly fictitious and artificial, with very little of nature, and not much of life. He formed a peculiar idea of comick excellence, which he supposed to consist in gay remarks and unexpected answers; but that which he endeavoured, he seldom failed of performing. His scenes exhibit not much of humour, imagery, or passion; his personages are a kind of intellectual gladiators; every sentence is to ward or strike; the contest of smartness is never intermitted; his wit is a meteor playing to and fro with alternate coruscations. His comedies have therefore, in some degree, the operation of tragedies: they surprise rather than divert, and raise admiration oftener than merriment. But they are the works of a mind replete with images, and quick in combination.[1]

There is a remarkable unity in Congreve's four plays, as if each prepared for the next. It is not necessary to try to suggest stages of development in the plays, since each is worth considering in its own right, but it is interesting to notice how the method and material of the first three plays anticipate the last comedy. The joyful impudence of The Old Batchelor, the disillusionment and evil of The Double Dealer, the serious love of Love for Love -- all these are joined, along with the various disorders of various fools, into a unified whole in The Way of the World. And it is not only the material that is so perfected, but also, as I have suggested, the method, for the last comedy perfected the various techniques for which Congreve is well known, the wit contest and wit catalogue, the hero's ordeal, and the proviso scene. In short, The Way of the World is the culmination

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[1]Samuel Johnson, "Congreve," The Lives of the English Poets, ed. G. B. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), I, 228.

of an ethical and aesthetic position carefully worked out and never duplicated.

Congreve's first comedy, The Old Batchelor, 1693, is a piece of joyful fluff. This play illustrates another of the peculiar unifying characteristics in Congreve's plays. The heroes, as one goes through the plays, retain their wit, if anything grow wittier, but at the same time become more serious. It is, as a matter of fact, the introduction of the obviously serious into The Double Dealer that has made many people underestimate it. The heroines also become more serious while at the same time they improve on their affectations. The fools become gradually more complete. Heartwell, for example, the old bachelor, is a dupe in the first play, but he has many of the traits of the Truewit. By The Way of the World foolishness is universal, the decorum of character is more completely maintained, and ridicule is more often and more easily aroused.

There is less of the educative process, which I have suggested to be characteristic of comedy, apparent in The Old Batchelor than in Congreve's remaining plays. Bellmour and Belinda move through the play on one last fling, wittily chastising all they meet, before they settle down, content, with each other. In the course of their final promenade, they see Heartwell duped, Vainlove

transformed, and Sir Joseph Wittol, Captain Bluffe, and Fondlewife exposed. The experience also works a kind of alchemy upon them, as will be noted later. There are three central problems in the play, unified because of Bellmour's interest and because each deals with a kind of love. Bellmour is intent on duping Heartwell, the crusty bachelor; further he is interested in working out a satisfactory meeting with Laetitia Fondlewife; and finally he is concerned with the affair of Vainlove and Araminta.

Despite his many interests, Bellmour is the least interesting of Congreve's heroes. Witty and gay, he has not the abiding and universal interest of Mellefont, Valentine, and Mirabell. He asserts at the first that nothing else has meaning but pleasure:

> Ay, ay, pox Wisdom's nothing but a pretending to know and believe more than we really do. You read of but one wise Man, and all that he knew was, that he knew nothing. Come, come, leave Business to idlers, and Wisdom to Fools; they have need of 'em: Wit, be my Faculty; and Pleasure, my occupation; and let Father Time shake his Glass. Let low and earthy Souls grovel till they have work'd themselves six foot deep into a Grave -- Business is not my Element -- I rowl in a higher Orb and dwell --[1]

His attitude toward Belinda, early in the play at least, is somewhat flippant. He is more or less assured of her love, and is quite interested in her money; his attitude

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[1]William Congreve, The Old Batchelor, The Complete Works of William Congreve, ed. Montague Summers (Soho: Nonesuch Press, 1923), vol. II. All further references are to this edition.

alters somewhat later.

> Sharp. Faith e'en give her over for good-and-all; you can have no hopes of getting her for a Mistress, and she is too Proud, too Inconstant, too Affected, too Witty, and too Handsome for a Wife.
> Bell. But she can't have too much Mony -- There's twelve thousand Pound, Tom -- 'Tis true, she is excessively foppish and affected, but in my Conscience, I believe the Baggage loves me, for she never speaks well of me her self, nor suffers any body else to rail at me. Then, as I told you, there's twelve thousand Pound -- Hum -- Why faith upon second Thoughts, she does not appear to be so very affected neither -- Give her her due, I think the Woman's a Woman, and that's all. As such I'm sure I shall like her; for the Devil take me if I don't love all the Sex.
> (I, i)

Bellmour is a full-fledged, devoted man of the world, so devoted, in fact, that he suggests he would be reluctant to leave this world even for entrance to Heaven. In one of the passages that is often cited in attacks on Restoration comedy, Congreve fully reveals the earthbound quality of the ethic he develops. Men of Restoration comedy are concerned with this world; Christian morality, as I have suggested before, plays no part:

> Bell. . . . Couldst thou be content to marry Araminta?
> Vain. Could you be content to go to Heaven?
> Bell. Hum; not immediately, in my conscience not heartily; I'd do a little more good in my generation first, in order to deserve it.
> (III, i)

Though Bellmour may be irreverent, his remark reveals his awareness of needed merit, and is far from being fuel for charges of atheism.

With all his gaiety, Bellmour is not incapable of

some compassion. Though he dupes Heartwell into false marriage with Vainlove's cast mistress, he is not willing to be quite so unkind to either of them. Heartwell, he says, is "my Friend; and tho' he be blind, I must not see him fall into the snare, and unwittingly marry a Whore." And at the same time he vows to find a fitter husband for the woman. Bellmour becomes somewhat more interesting in his further relations with Belinda, which must be mentioned later.

Belinda is one of Congreve's most interesting heroines, especially since she appears to be almost a working model for Millamant. All of the lady's fine affectations, but something less than her great charm and wisdom appear in Belinda. Sharper characterizes her in a passage already quoted as too proud, inconstant, affected, witty and handsome for a wife. Her great affectation is evident the moment she appears on the stage -- in Act II as do all of Congreve's heroines:

> Belin. Ah! nay Dear -- prithee good, dear sweet Cousin no more. Oh Gad, I swear you'd make one sick to hear you.
> Aram. Bless me! what have I said to move you thus?
> Belin. Oh you have raved, talked idly, and all in Commendation of that filthy, awkard, two-leg'd Creature, Man -- you don't know what you said, your Fever has transported you.
>
> (II, ii)

When Bellmour approaches her with a fanciful reference to her "cruel frozen Heart," she replies

> O Gad, I hate your hideous Fancy -- You said that once before -- If you must talk impertinently, for Heav'ns sake let it be with variety; Don't come alway, like the Devil, wrapt in Flames -- and I'll not hear a Sentence more that begins with an, I burn -- Or an, I beseech you, Madam.
>
> (II, ii)

From that filthy creature man, in other words, she demands more than mere fanciful expression.

When Bellmour's plan for gulling Heartwell works, Belinda is touched to sympathy for the old bachelor, but in other circumstances she is merciless. Heartwell's genuine desire for love arouses her compassion, but any disorder resulting from appearance or manners quickly arouses her antipathy:

> Aram. You were about to tell me something Child -- but you left off before you began.
> Belin. Oh, a most Comical sight! A Country-Squire, with the Equipage of a Wife and two Daughters, came to Mrs. Snipwell's Shop while I was there -- But, Oh Gad! Two such unlicked Cubs! --
> Aram. I warrant, plump, Cherry-cheek'd Country Girls.
> Belin. Ay, O my Conscience, fat as Barn-door-Fowl: but so bedeck'd, you wou'd have taken 'em for Friezland Hens, with their Feathers growing the wrong way -- O such Out-landish Creatures! such Tramontanae, and Foreigners to the Fashion, or any thing in practice! I had not patience to behold -- I undertook the modelling of one of their Fronts, the more modern Structure --
> Aram. Bless me, Cousin! Why wou'd you affront any Body so? They might be Gentlewomen of a very good Family --
> Belin. Of a very sncient one, I dare swear, by their Dress. . . .
>
> (IV, iii)

The other characters exhibit not only different degrees of wit, but also different modes of love. The affair of Vainlove and Araminta is slowed because Vainlove

is, at first, fonder of the chase than of the catch. He is "continually starting of Hares" for Bellmour to course, and he says "I hate Love when 'tis forc'd upon a Man, as I do Wine." He is, of course, eventually brought around by Araminta's charm.

Heartwell, the old bachelor, pretends to slight women; he vows he would not sneer "fulsome Lyes and nauseous Flattery," and says

> I confess you that are Women's Asses bear greater Burdens; are forc'd to undergo Dressing, Dancing, Singing, Sighing, Whining, Rhyming, Flattering, Lying, Grinning, Cringing, and the drudgery of loving to boot.

He has some of the characteristics of a plain-dealer; he would have "every body be what they pretend to be." But he who pretends to slight women is, when confronted with Silvia, overcome:

> I am Melancholy when thou art absent; look like an Ass when you are present; Wake for you, when I should Sleep, and even Dream of you, when I am Awake; Sigh much, Drink little, Eat less, court Solitude, am grown very entertaining to my self, and (as I am informed) very troublesome to everybody else. If this be not Love, it is Madness, and then it is pardonable -- Nay yet a more certain Sign than all this; I give thee my Mony.

Though he arouses some sympathy by his chagrin when he discovers Silvia to be a cast mistress, Heartwell soon loses it when his natural gruffness insults Belinda and Araminta.

Sir Joseph Wittol, who is ultimately tricked into marriage with Silvia, and his "Back," Captain Bluffe, are

a pair of admirable fools, though by no means up to some of the witless figures in Congreve's later comedies. Sir Joseph is rather stupid, and Captain Bluffe affects curt speech and great courage. When they are insulted by Sharper, Captain Bluffe pretends great bravery until the critical moment:

> Sir Jos. Prithee, don't speak so loud.
> Bluffe. Damn your Morals: I must revenge th'Affront done to my Honour. [In a low Voice.
> Sir Jos. Ay; do, do, Captain, if you think fit -- You may dispose of your own Flesh as you think fitting, d'ye see: -- But by the Lord Harry, I'll leave you. [Stealing away upon his Tip-toes.
> Bluffe. Prodigious! What! Will you forsake your Friend in his Extremity? You can't, in Honour, refuse to carry him a Challenge.
> [Almost whispering and treading softly after him.
> (V, i)

The remaining fools, Fondlewife and Laetitia, are participants in the infamous Cocky-Nykin scenes, and they illustrate again, among other things, the absurdity of the marriage of an old fool and a lusty young woman. Fondlewife is a "kind of Mungril Zealot, sometimes very precise and peevish," who is very apprehensive of being cuckolded; he calls for Tribulation Spintext to chaperon his wife whenever he has to leave her. He is completely witless. When he discovers Bellmour disguised as Spintext, he is beguiled by Bellmour's plain speaking and fondles his wife forgivingly -- while Bellmour kisses her hand behind his back.

Bellmour and Belinda witness three kinds of love affairs in The Old Batchelor and run a gauntlet of fools. Each of the three love affairs has certain follies. Vainlove and Araminta love at first without reality; they cherish the romance of the chase without regarding the greater pleasures of consummation. Heartwell loves deeply, but without perception; and the Fondlewife-Laetitia marriage is without openness or honesty. They both recognize possible shortcomings of a sophisticated marriage:

> Belin. Yes: You flattering Men of the Mode have made Marriage a mere French dish.
> Bell. I hope there's no French Sawce. [Aside.
> Belin. You are so curious in the Preparation, that is, your Courtship, one wou'd think you meant a noble Entertainment: -- But when we come to feed, 'tis all Froth, and poor, but in show. Nay, often, only Remains, which have been I know not how many times warm'd for other company, and at last serv'd up cold to the Wife.
> Bell. That were a miserable Wretch indeed, who cou'd not afford one warm Dish for the Wife of his Bosom. -- But you timorous Virgins, form a dreadful Chimaera of a Husband, as of a Creature contrary to that Soft, humble, pliant, easie thing, a Lover, so guess at Plagues in Matrimony, in Opposition to the Pleasures of Courtship. Alas! Courtship to Marriage, is but as the Musick in the Play-house, till the Curtain's drawn; but that once up, then opens the Scene of Pleasure.
> Belin. Oh, Foh, -- no: Rather, Courtship to Marriage as a very witty Prologue to a very dull Play.
> (V, i)

Belinda maintains her affectations; her artfulness, indeed, is one of the things that Bellmour must accept. But after he has seen Heartwell's troubles, buffeted with Wittol and Bluffe, survived Laetitia in the Cocky-Nykin scenes, and known at last the extent of Belinda's love,

Bellmour knows the time when breeziness ends to give way to a surer and more lasting pleasure and harmony:

> Bell. Well; 'Midst of these dreadful Denunciations, and notwithstanding the Warning and Example before me, I commit my self to lasting Durance.
> Belin. Prisoner, make much of your Fetters.
> (V, ii)

The Old Batchelor is by no means as fine a play as any of Congreve's later comedies, yet it has its own singular charm. Its wit is largely wit of fancy, but it is a great fancy. Where the last three comedies work out several problems, this play is concerned only with the nuances of love. But as Bellmour and Belinda flash and flutter through the course of the play, they work out a most satisfactory mode, and there can be no doubt that they both will make much of their glittering fetters.

Congreve's second comedy, The Double Dealer, 1694, did not meet with immediate success, though it is easily his second most impressive work. Dryden, writing to William Walsh, said

> His Double Dealer is much censurd by the greater part of the Town: and is defended only by the best Judges, who, you know, are commonly the fewest. Yet it gains ground daily, and has already been acted Eight times. The women thinke he has exposed their Bitchery too much; & the Gentlemen are offended with him; for the discovery of their follyes: & the way of their Intrigues, under the notion of Friendship to their Ladyes Husbands.[1]

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[1]John Dryden, The Letters of John Dryden, with Letters Addressed to Him, ed. C. E. Ward (Durham: Duke University Press, 1942), pp. 62-63.

Mentioning his own commendatory verses written before the play was acted, Dryden adds that he has not altered his opinion of the play. From this letter, it seems apparent that Congreve achieved the effect he desired; his preliminary statements to the play indicate something of his purpose, his plan in writing The Double Dealer, but no one has been willing to give him credit for knowing what he was talking about.

The Double Dealer, it has often been said, is almost not a comedy, with its deep concern with the incest motif and the dark malignity of Maskwell. It seems possible that a close examination of certain elements of the play would reveal perhaps one of the best exhibitions of the establishment of the code of decorum. The evil of Maskwell and the boundless passion of Lady Touchwood on the one hand, the carefree manipulations of Careless, the love of Cynthia, and the virtue of Mellefont on the other, together with perhaps the finest array of fools outside The Way of the World seem to suggest here in the near-tragic dealings of this play a very serious -- and often hilarious -- consideration of the way of the world.

Congreve's dedication to the play gives the reader some insight into his comic practice, and should be enough to refute the condemnations of many. He designed, he says, "to have written a true and regular comedy":

> I design'd the Moral first, and to that Moral I invented the Fable, and do not know that I have borrow'd one hint of it any where. I made the Plot as strong as I could because it was single, and I made it single because I would avoid confusion, and was resolved to preserve the three Unities of the Drama, which I have visibly done to the utmost severity.[1]

In the course of the dedication Congreve answers many of the most severe objections which have been raised against his play both in his own time and in ours. In his own time, he says, the fair sex objected because he presented some women vicious and affected. In answer to this charge he says:

> It is the business of the Comick poet to paint the Vices and Follies of Humane kind; and there are but two sexes that I know, viz. Men and Women, which have a Title to Humanity: And if I leave out Half of them, the Work will be imperfect.

In our time one of the common criticisms of the play has been the presumed weakness of the hero, Mellefont. In answer Congreve quite reasonably shows that not every man who is deceived is a fool or a gull. Moreover, he says, the cunning of Maskwell is ample reason for Maskwell's apparent gullibility.

Congreve's great art was already apparent in The Old Batchelor, but with the second play, it becomes apparent that really great comedy had come again to the English stage, wrought by a young dramatist well

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[1]William Congreve, "Dedication to The Double Dealer," Works, II. All further references are to this edition.

characterized by Dryden:

> In Him all Beauties of this Age we see,
> Etherege his Courtship, Southern's Purity,
> The Satire, Wit, and Strength of Manly Witcherley.

It is of The Double Dealer that one of the most amazing pieces of criticism anywhere has been written. Fujimura suggests that this is a poor example of the comedy of wit, and offers two reasons for this failure. One is that it was written with a moral purpose in mind "if we are to believe" the statement in the dedicatory epistle. The second reason is that its standards are inconsistent since it is interested both in true and false wit and in villainy.[1] In answer to this, one can only say first, that the whole method of comedy assumes a moral purpose, and second, that Congreve was interested in the way of the world; to have left out villainy would have been as absurd as to have left out women.

Congreve successfully maintained the dramatic unities in The Double Dealer. The scene is a gallery in Lord Touchwood's house, with surrounding chambers. The time elapsed is three hours. The unity of action is not quite so obvious. The central problem involving the hero and heroine in this play is their prospective marriage and the problems attaching to that affair. In order to be united at the end, Mellefont and Cynthia have to

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[1] Fujimura, pp. 170-171.

circumvent the malicious intrigues of Maskwell, the passionate tirades of Lady Touchwood, and the gauntlet of fools that gambol about the stage. It has been argued that the fools take over the play, and there can be no question that Mellefont and Cynthia are less forward than Mirabell and Millamant. Nevertheless the plottings of Maskwell and Lady Touchwood and the absurdities of the gallery of fools form the education of Mellefont and Cynthia, and their predominance is justifiable. One way to get at the structure and the effect of this play is to align the characters according to their interests: Mellefont, Careless, and Cynthia on the one side; Maskwell and Lady Touchwood on the other, with the third group, the fools, rambling about through the action. It is necessary to consider these three groups and the effect their interplay has on Mellefont and Cynthia.

Mellefont is a virtuous figure, uninterested in the charms of Lady Touchwood. He is from the first concerned about the devils of Lady Touchwood's imagination. That lady's passion had led her to surprise him in his bed, an event which he reports to Careless:

> It was long before either of us spoke: Passion had ty'd her Tongue, and Amazement mine. -- In short, the Consequence was thus, she omitted nothing, that the most violent Love could urge, or tender words express; which when she saw had no effect, but still I pleaded Honour and nearness of Blood to my Uncle, then came the Storm I fear'd at first, for starting from my Bed-side like a Fury, she flew to my Sword, and with

> much ado I prevented her doing me or her self a mischief: having disarm'd her; in a gust of Passion she left me, and in a resolution, confirm'd by a Thousand Curses, not to close her Eyes till they had seen my ruin.
>
> (I, i)

In order to prevent her revenge, Mellefont assigns his friends certain tasks for the evening: Careless is to keep Lady Pliant occupied, and Cynthia Sir Paul Pliant, her father; Lord and Lady Froth will be busy with Brisk; he himself will entertain Lord Touchwood, his uncle; and Maskwell is to watch Lady Touchwood.

Careless, his friend, is immediately concerned that he has "the weakest Guard where the Enemy is strongest." He is not able to convince Mellefont of Maskwell's possible villainy, since as Congreve says in the dedication, he has no proof. Careless is a free-spoken true wit, giving cavalier treatment to the fools he encounters. He is hard put to flatter Lady Pliant, for he lacks the proper cant terms. The scene in which he speaks passionately to her all the while wondering if he is going to have to repeat himself is one of the more amusing in the play.

Fujimura is startled by Cynthia's seriousness, just as he was by the lack of libertine principles in Mellefont, though it is difficult to see how either of these peculiarities is a shortcoming. She is serious in her love for Mellefont, vowing to her father that if she cannot have him, she will not marry, but she is also able

to dispatch fools readily:

> Ld. Froth. Don't you think us a happy Couple?
> Cynt. I vow, my Lord, I think you the happiest Couple in the world, for you're not only happy in one another, and when you are together, but happy in your selves, and by your selves.
> Ld. Froth. I hope Mellefont will make a good husband too.
> Cynt. 'Tis my Interest to believe he will, my Lord.
> Ld. Froth. D'e think he'll love you as well as I do my Wife? I'm afraid not.
> Cynt. I believe he'll love me better.
> Ld. Froth. Heavens! that can never be; but why do you think so?
> Cynt. Because he has not so much reason to be fond of himself.
>
> (II, i)

On the other side, intriguing against these persons, are Lady Touchwood and Maskwell. Fujimura insists that Lady Touchwood is too passionate for wit comedy, but that perhaps is just the point. It is her passion that makes her ridiculous and which helps to instruct the truewits in the play. She is the scorned woman, similar in many respects to Mrs. Loveit and Mrs. Termagant. But her partner is far more interesting.

Maskwell works with Lady Touchwood to gain her revenge, hoping thereby to ruin Mellefont, discard Lady Touchwood, and gain Cynthia for himself. He works his intrigues by speaking the truth. At one point he tells Mellefont, "I am your greatest enemy," and later he says

> 'Tis no fault of mine: I have told 'em in plain terms how easie 'tis for me to cheat 'em, and if they will not hear the Serpent's hiss, they must be stung into experience and future caution.

There is, he says, no such thing as honesty:

> For your honest man, as I take it, is that nice, scrupulous, conscientious Person, who will cheat nobody but himself; such another Coxcomb as your wise man, who is too hard for all the World, and will be made a Fool of by no body but himself; Ha, ha, ha. Well, for Wisdom and Honesty give me Cunning and Hypocrisie; oh, 'tis such a pleasure to angle for fair-faced Fools! Then that hungry Gudgeon Credulity will bite at any thing. -- Why, let me see, I have the same Face, the same Words and Accents when I speak what I do think, and when I speak what I do not think, -- the very same; and dear dissimulation is the only Art not to be known from Nature.
>
> Why will Mankind be Fools, and be deceiv'd,
> And why are Friends and Lover's Oaths believ'd,
> When each, who searches strictly his own mind,
> May so much Fraund and Power of Baseness find.
> (II, i)

Maskwell's character indicates something about the true-wit, the man of mode, by contrast. The man of mode has many faults; he is himself usually ridiculous. He is promiscuous, sometimes brutal, but always there is either already apparent in him or created in him a set of strict principles which give order to his pleasure. Maskwell, by contrast, is completely disillusioned. His only principles are the schemes and villainies that are expedient to gain him immediate, though momentary pleasure.

The fools, as fine a group of pretenders to wit as can be found outside The Way of the World, form two interesting groups. In this group are Lord and Lady Froth and Brisk, who cuckolds Lord Froth. It is fairly common for students to dismiss such characters as these, saying simply that they illustrate in one way or another the author's ideas; but of course, this is just the point --

they do illustrate the author's ideas in such a way as to lend unity to the central action by indicating the scope of the course Mellefont must run to win his happiness. Lord Froth, for example, is a "solemn Coxcomb," who professes sobriety; he is, of course, completely witless, never understanding Brisk's intentions. Brisk himself shows up rather well when contrasted to Lord Froth:

> Ld. Froth. . . . But there is nothing more unbecoming a Man of Quality than to Laugh; Jesu, 'tis such a Vulgar Expression of the Passion! every Body can Laugh. Then especially to laugh at the Jest of an Inferiour person, or when anybody else of the same Quality does not Laugh with him -- Ridiculous! To be pleased with what pleases the Croud! Now when I Laugh, I always Laugh alone.
>
> Brisk. I suppose that's because you Laugh at your own Jests, I'gad, ha, ha, ha.
>
> Ld. Froth. He, he, I swear tho', your Raillery provokes me to a smile.
>
> Brisk. Ay, my Lord, it's a sign I hit you in the Teeth, if you show 'em.
>
> Ld. Froth. He, he, he, I swear that's so very pretty, I can't forbear.
>
> (I, i)

Brisk, a "pert Coxcomb," is, according to Careless, always "spoiling Comapny by coming into't." He is lacking in judgment: "Pox on't, why should I disparage my parts by thinking what to say? None but dull Rogues think." The scenes in which he and Lady Froth, "a great Coccquet" and pretender to poetry, appear poring over her notes to an epic poem are representative of fanciful wit at its best, and there are few scenes which match their return from the garden for lighthearted irreverence:

> Sir Paul. . . . I saw her go into the garden with

Mr. Brisk.
Ld. Froth. How? where, when, what to do?
Sir Paul. I suppose they have been laying their heads together.
Ld. Froth. How?
Sir Paul. Nay, only about Poetry, I suppose, my Lord; making Couplets.
Ld. Froth. Couplets.
Sir Paul. O, here they come.

Enter Lady Froth, Brisk.

Brisk. My Lord, your humble Servant; Sir Paul, yours, -- the finest night.
L. Froth. My dear, Mr. Brisk and I have been Stargazing, I don't know how long.
Sir Paul. Does it not tire your Ladyship? Are not you weary with looking up?
L. Froth. Oh, no, I love it violently.
(V, i)

Ridicule is raised to its greater heights with these figures, as it is with Sir Paul and Lady Pliant. Sir Paul is a foolish old man, and Lady Pliant is "easie to any pretender." Lady Pliant debases her husband in every way, reading his mail, refusing the privileges of a husband to him. When he sleeps he is bound up hand and foot in the bed clothes, and "there he lies with a great beard, like a Russian bear upon a drift of Snow."

Fujimura insists that The Double Dealer lacks harmony because there is "too much froth in the Witwouds, toomuch judgment in the Truewits, and too much passion in the knaves." This, of course, is an absurd criticism. No one who reads the play carefully could object to judgment, any amount, in the Truewits -- that, after all, is what makes them true. And it is precisely the froth in the pretenders and the passion in the villains that

justifies their places in the comic scheme and elevates them up to the heights of ridicule. There are shortcomings in The Double Dealer, as I shall show later, but any failings must lie elsewhere than this.

Disorder, asymmetry, and unbalance are rampant in The Double Dealer, and the heroes are consequently put to a severe test before they emerge victorious. Maskwell is deceptive and villainous, while Lady Touchwood is too given to passion. On the other hand Lord Froth denies passion, while Brisk ignores reason and judgment. Each of the characters is ridiculed for his own particular follies. The Double Dealer is a play of ideas, where the hero's experience of the follies he sees in all about him is a corrective, permitting him, aware of the possible balance of all these peculiarities, to prevail in the play. The scope of this play is greater than in many comedies in the period, for darkness and disillusionment seem for a while to prevail. The hero alone is insufficient to withstand the passion and deceit he encounters; it is only with Cynthia and Careless acting in his behalf that Mellefont can overcome Maskwell and Lady Touchwood.

Mellefont suffers through an ordeal at the hands of Maskwell and Lady Touchwood, and he also finds it necessary to meet certain requirements posed by Cynthia. The ordeal is not so demanding, nor quite so comic as the

ordeals of Valentine and Mirabell, but it does serve to educate its victim:

> Cynt. . . . Here then, I give you my promise, in spite of Duty, any temptation of Wealth, your inconstancy, or my own inclination to change --
> Mel. To run most wilfully and unreasonably away with me this moment and be Married.
> Cynt. Hold. -- Never to Marry any Body else.
> Mel. That's but a kind of Negative Consent. -- Why, you won't baulk the Frollick?
> Cynt. If you had not been so assured of your own Conduct I would not -- But 'tis reasonable that since I consent to like a Man without vile Consideration of Money, He should give me a very evident demonstration of his Wit: Therefore let me see you undermine my Lady Touchwood as you boasted, and force her to give her Consent, and then --
> (IV, i)

The lover is not allowed to forget reason, nor does the beloved forget her passion; it is Cynthia's intervention which helps unmask Maskwell and Lady Touchwood. Order overcomes disorder; reason and passion nicely balanced triumph over unseemly passion and injudicious wit.

The Double Dealer is not as great a comedy as The Way of the World, though the pleasure it gives is a lasting one. One suspects that it differs from The Way of the World fundamentally with regard to the force of comedy, laughter. The latter play is funny in whole and in part, but this is not completely true of The Double Dealer. Maskwell and Mellefont furnish little if any material for laughter; there are times, indeed, when one could forget that they belong in a comedy. It is only when one remembers that the whole situation is absolutely

absurd -- a pleasant young man relying on a completely deceitful friend to ward off the advances of a passionate aunt, while random fools flutter about -- that the comic force of the play is again felt. Mellefont is perhaps not quite as active and forceful as one would expect of a comic hero, but it must be remembered that he himself is ridiculous, and meant to be so.

Love for Love, presented in 1695, is especially interesting for three features. First, it represents another step in Congreve's perfection of the comic ordeal. Second, in Valentine, it presents the most interesting hero of Congreve's early comedies. Third, it represents another stage in the development of the ideal comic heroine, who demands demonstration not just of true wit, but also of true love. Since this is true, I propose to examine Love for Love briefly by considering (1) the ordeal and the sufferer, (2) the comic antagonists in the ordeal, and (3) the culmination of the ordeal.

The problem that is central to the action of Love for Love is Valentine's urgent need to reinstate himself in his father's good graces in order to retain his share of his father's money and his wish to marry Angelica. In order to accomplish both his ends he is forced to outwit his father and a brace of fools and to prove his love for Angelica. The first he does by overcoming disorder with disorder and pretending insanity. In this way, when he

says, in a moment of feigned madness, "I am Truth," he is dramatically truthful, for his madness exposes the lesser madnesses of those about him. He accomplishes his second goal, union with Angelica, by offering to give up what he has gained in pursuit of his first.

Valentine is that unusual comic hero, one whose learning and reflectiveness shows. His past, apparently, has been profligate, his money is gone, his father's favor is lost. He has an impertinent servant, Jeremy, who reveals his private interests and relates his public woes:

> Sir, you're a Gentleman, and probably understand this fine Feeding: But if you please, I had rather be at Board-Wages. Does your Epictetus, or your Seneca here, or any of these poor, rich Rogues, teach you how to pay your Debts without Mony? Will they shut up the Mouths of your Creditors? Will Plato be bail for you! Or Diogenes, because he understands confinement, and liv'd in a Tub, go to Prison for you? 'Slife, Sir, what do you mean, to mew yourself up here with Three or Four musty Books, in Commendation of Starving and Poverty?[1] (I, i)

He vows to pursue Angelica "with more love than ever," and, fearing that his father will make him sign over his right to the estate to his sailor brother, Ben,he feigns insanity. To regain favor and to win his love, he has to oppose a group of rivals and fools and to prove his worth to Angelica.

Angelica is a Truewit, but her special interests

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[1]William Congreve, Love for Love, Works, II. All further references are to this edition.

make her, for a while, a comic antagonist. She is another of Congreve's delightful heroines, for she is equal to every occasion. Not quite as affected as Belinda, and not quite as witty as Millamant, she is still quite able to dispose of the fools that she encounters. The scene in which she rails at Foresight and the nurse, threatening to reveal fancied midnight sorcery and unnatural teats is one of the most amusing in the play. But at the same time, she insists that her lover meet certain requirements. Valentine is, as I have suggested, unusual in that his reflective side is often quite apparent, especially in his moments of madness, when in the disguise of insanity, he is free to comment on the world about him in a way different from the usual wittiness. It is this honest, open air of Valentine's that Angelica is intent on discovering.

She pretends indifference to Valentine at first, but her interest is soon apparent. She is directly in the tradition of Congreve's heroines -- witty, gay, and demanding, but also giving. Valentine's ordeal is fairly clear when she tells him, "Resolution must come to me, or I shall never have one." When she discovers that his madness is feigned, and learns that he hopes to hear an acknowledgment of love from her in sympathy, she plans revenge upon him for his trickery by a continued indifference:

> Acknowledgment of Love! I find you [Scandal] have mistaken my compassion, and think me guilty of a Weakness I am a Stranger to. But I have too much Sincerity to deceive you, and too much Charity to suffer him to be deluded with vain hopes. Good Nature and Humanity oblige me to be concern'd for him; but to Love is neither in my Power nor inclination; And if he can't be cur'd without I such the poison from his Wounds, I'm afraid he won't recover his Senses 'till I lose mine.
>
> (IV, i)

The charm and the demands of a woman like Angelica are handsomely described by Valentine in one of the moments of pretended insanity: "You're a Woman -- One to whom Heav'n gave Beauty, when it grafted Roses on a Briar. You are the Reflection of Heav'n in a Pond, and he that leaps at you is sunk."

In another interview between the two lovers, it becomes clear how Valentine has so far failed to meet her requirements. What she asks is simply devotion:

> Val. Nay faith, now let us understand one another, Hypocrisie apart, -- The Comedy draws toward an end, and let us think of leaving acting and be our selves; and since you have lov'd me, you must own, I have at length deserv'd you should confess it.
>
> Ang. Sighs.] I would I had lov'd you -- for Heaven knows I pitie you; and could I have foreseen the bad Effects, I wou'd have striven; but that's too late.
>
> [Sighs.
>
> Val. What sad Effects? -- What's too late? My seeming Madness has deceiv'd my Father, and procur'd me Time to think of Means to reconcile me to him, and preserve the right to my Inheritance to his Estate; which otherwise by Articles I must this morning have resign'd: And this I had inform'd you of to Day, but you were gone, before I knew you had been here.
>
> Ang. How! I thought your Love of me had caus'd this Transport in your Soul; which it seems you only counterfeited, for by mercenary Ends, and sordid Interest.

> Val. Nay, now you do me wrong; for if any Interest was considered, it was yours; since I thought I wanted more than Love, to make me worthy of you.
> Ang. Then you thought me mercenary. . . .
> (IV, i)

But Valentine's education is not yet complete. He still has to deal with a group of fools and rivals and experience more of the lover's ordeal before he can by happy.

Mrs. Frail and Mrs. Foresight are not in themselves particularly interesting figures. They have a plan to interest Prue in Tattle so that they can snare Ben, Sir Sampson's younger son and Prue's intended, for Mrs. Frail. Foresight himself is an "illiterate old Fellow, peevish and positive," and pretending to understand astrology and related arts. He is characterized by his superstitions:

> Nurse. Pray Heav'n send your Worship good Luck, Marry and Amen with all my heart, for you have put on one stocking with the wrong side outward.
> Fore. Ha, How? Faith and troth I am glad of it, and so I have, that may be good Luck in troth, in troth it may, very good Luck: Nay I have had some Omens, I got out of Bed backwards too this Morning, without Premeditation; pretty good that too: But then I stumbled coming down Stairs, and met a Weasel; bad Omens those; some bad, some good, our Lives are chequer'd: Mirth and Sorrow, Want and Plenty, Night and Day, make up our Time. -- But in troth I am pleas'd at my Stocking. Very well pleas'd at my stocking. . . .
> (II, i)

Sir Sampson Legend and his younger son Ben are cut from the same cloth; both are rough, outspoken persons with no pretense of dissimulation. Ben, the sailor, is one of Congreve's most interesting lesser

figures, and is important in the tradition of rough seamen with stout heart and blunt humor. His is a wit of the sea, blunt, lacking in decorum; courting Miss Prue, he says:

> Look you forsooth, I am as it were bound for the Land of Matrimony; 'tis a Voyage d'ee see, that was none of my seeking, I was commanded by Father, and if you like of it, may-hap I may steer into your Harbour. How say you, Mistress, the short of the thing is this, that if you like me, and I like you, we may chance to swing in a Hammock together.
> (III, i)

Where Ben's images come from the sea, Sir Sampson, in his outspokenness, employs often a sexual wit, as when he speaks of the intended marriage of Ben and Prue:

> To a Minute, to a Second; thou shalt set thy Watch, and the Bridegroom shall observe its Motions; they shall be marry'd to a Minute, go to Bed to a Minute; and when the Alarm strikes they shall keep time like the Figures of St. Dunstan's Clock, and Consummatum est shall ring all over the Parish.
> (III, ii)

The most interesting of the fools in Love for Love is Tattle, who values himself for secrecy:

> A mender of Reputations! ay, just as he is a keeper of Secrets, another Vertue that he sets up for in the same manner. For the Rogue will speak aloud in the posture of a Whisper; and deny a Woman's Name, while he gives you the marks of her Person: He will forswear receiving a Letter from her, and at the same time shew you her Hand upon the Superscription: And yet perhaps he has counterfeited the Hand too, and sworn to a Truth; but he hopes not to be believ'd; and refuses the reputation of a Ladies favour, as a Doctor says No to a Bishoprick, only that it may be granted to him. -- In short, he is a publick Professor of Secresie, and makes Proclamation that he holds private Intelligence.
> (I, i)

Tattle is seen at his best in a scene with Prue, where he instructs her in the art of courtship. Among the other little arts he teaches her is the art of dissembling. He tells her "you must say no, or you believe not, or you can't tell" instead of a straightforward Yes, and she learns rapidly:

> Tatt. . . . And won't you shew me, pretty Miss, where your Bed-Chamber is?
> Miss Prue. No, indeed won't I; but I'll run there, and hide my self from you behind the Curtains.
> Tatt. I'll follow you.
> Miss. Prue. Ah, but I'll hold the Door with both Hands, and be angry; -- and you shall push me down before you come in.
> Tatt. No, I'll come in first, and push you down afterwards.
> Miss Prue. Will you? then I'll be more angry, and more complying.
> Tatt. Then I'll make you cry out.
> Miss Prue. Oh but you shan't, for I'll hold my Tongue --
> Tatt. Oh my dear apt scholar.
> (III, iii)

In addition to the ordeal of love that Valentine endures, he also, as I have suggested, has to run a course of fools. He must mollify Sir Sampson, who would give his estate to his younger brother Ben. He must tolerate Tattle's attempted love-making to Angelica. In addition to this there is the spectacle of the other fools -- Mrs. Frail, Mrs. Foresight, Prue, Foresight, and the others -- for educative profit. Shaped by his encounters with the fools and by the spectacle of the fools and by Angelica's witty turn denouncing him for thinking her mercenary, Valentine emerges at the end of the play the

true comic hero, educated by what he has seen and done, and altered, having finally understood the mode of lovers and of men of worth. When he thinks Angelica plans to marry his father, he is quite willing to sign over his right to the estate, for

> . . . he that loses Hope may part with any thing, I never valu'd Fortune, but as it were subservient to my Pleasure; and my only Pleasure was to please this Lady: I have made many vain attempts, and find at last that nothing but my Ruine can effect it: Which, for that Reason, I will Sign to -- Give me the Paper.
>
> (V, i)

When her lover has thus proved himself, Angelica admits that she was "resolv'd to try him to the utmost," and she also admits her love; "I have done dissembling now, Valentine," she says; and as the play closes she herself indicates the educative effect of comedy:

> Scan. . . . you have converted me -- For now I am convinc'd that all Women are not like Fortune, blind in bestowing Favours, either to those who do not merit, or who do not want 'em.
>
> Ang. 'Tis an unreasonable Accusation, that you lay upon our Sex: You tax us with Injustice, only to cover your own want of Merit. You would all have the Reward of Love, but few have the constancy to stay till it becomes your due. Men are generally Hypocrites and Infidels, they pretend to Worship, but have neither Zeal nor Faith: How few, like Valentine, would persevere even unto Martyrdom, and sacrifice their Interest to their Constancy! In admiring me, you misplace the Novelty.
>
> The Miracle to Day is, that we find
> A Lover true: Not that a Woman's kind.
>
> (V, i)

The Way of the World, presented in 1700, "being too Keen a Satyr, had not the Success the Company expected."[1] This is perhaps not too surprising, since Congreve says in the dedication that little of the play was prepared for the public taste. The prologue confesses that the play had been polished and commenting ironically, says the play contains no satire, "For so reformed a town who dares correct?"

Any student of Restoration comedy, one feels, must come to The Way of the World with some misgivings, for the brilliance and wisdom of the play are so immediately apparent that the student must feel at once hard pressed to do the play any kind of justice. Yet this play has been subject to as gross misreading as any of the period. The play, one student has said, is based on the principle of life of superficies.[2] Another says the theme is artificial and the conclusion is artificial, though exactly how the play differs in this respect from any literature is not made clear.[3] Still another suggests that while the surface of the play dazzles, it lacks the body of good understanding of the fundamental principles

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[1]John Downes, Roscius Anglicanus, ed. Montague Summers (London: Fortune Press, n.d.), p. 45.

[2]Palmer, p. 191.

[3]Nicoll, p. 231.

of human behavior.[1] But perhaps the most flagrant misreading of The Way of the World is that which suggests that it is "too full of serious reflections," and "lacks not only a strong naturalistic substratum but skeptical and sexual wit, comic wit that is easily grasped, and a consistent attitude toward life."[2] For Fujimura, The Way of the World is ultimately unsuccessful because it is not completely naturalistic, libertine, and skeptical.

The action of The Way of the World is the classical situation in which the truewits must foil the guardians, rivals, and fools in order to emerge educated and triumphant. In this case Millamant and Mirabell must counter Lady Wishfort so as to marry and yet retain Millamant's money. Mirabell must also foil the schemes of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood and ward off the foolish suitors to Millamant, Witwoud, Petulant, and Sir Wilful Witwoud. Most important of all, Mirabell has to experience the lover's ordeal, must demonstrate his worth in every way, before he can find happiness with Millamant. Congreve does not instruct by his fable; the plot is rather simple. Mirabell plans by disguising his servant Waitwell and marrying him to Lady Wishfort to force her into compliance with his wishes. Fainall opposes this, wanting Lady Wishfort's money for his wife so that he in turn can use

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[1]Perry, p. 80.

[2]Fujimura, pp. 184-185.

it. Mirabell's plan is exposed, but he is successful anyhow by virtue of prior planning, having gotten Mrs. Fainall to assign her property to him for safekeeping.

As Dennis has said, the instruction is in the character, and that is quite true of Congreve's last play. Congreve indicated that one purpose of his play was to distinguish between the degrees of wits. The Way of the World presents the most complete catalogue of types and wits in all of Restoration comedy. There are the two most marvelous and elegant truewits, Mirabell and Millamant, and there is in addition a group of subtly drawn fools, who range from the witless Sir Wilful Witwoud to a false wit so finely drawn as to seem almost a true wit, Fainall. Since Congreve's purpose is the distinction of characters and since the primary effect of this play can be seen in the tensions existing between characters in Mirabell's ordeal, I propose to consider the play by aligning the characters according to their position in the contest and ordeal. To this end, it seems best to consider first Mirabell and his reaction to the other figures in the play, second to consider Millamant and her reaction to these same figures, and finally to consider the major contest and ordeal involving Mirabell and Millamant alone.

Mirabell's character is most clearly revealed in his associations with Millamant, which will be considered later. He is a judicious person, not often given to

fancy, yet he aptly alters his wit to match -- and often debase -- the person he talks to, as he does with Petulant, for example. It has been objected that he is too refined and too reflective, that he has more of the eighteenth century man of sense about him that the seventeenth century man of mode. Yet after all the difference between Mirabell and Dorimant is merely one of degree. Mirabell has had his mistresses -- two of them appear in the play -- and he has not been above making love to Lady Wishfort to gain his own ends. Those who object to his seriousness have usually overlooked the fact that Dorimant himself changes at the end of The Man of Mode. One very obvious factor has also been overlooked in comparisons between the two: the fable creates differences. Mirabell at the beginning of The Way of the World is further along in his educative carrer than is Dorimant at the first of Etherege's play. Mirabell already knows and is in love with Millamant, while Dorimant does not meet Harriet until later in the play. At any rate, Mirabell is a wit of principles, both serious and gay, foolish and wise, mercenary and kind.

Fainall is first seen in opposition to Mirabell in a wit contest, and the reader is given the first foreshadowing of the ultimate fate of Fainall when he knows that he is lucky at cards. Treated rather lightly and somewhat coldly by Mirabell, Fainall reveals that he is still concerned with wit for the sake of wit. Later, as

he proceeds with his plotting, Fainall is made ridiculous by a woman:

> FAINALL. Death, am I not married? What's pretence? Am I not imprisoned, fettered? Have I not a wife? -- nay, a wife that was a widow, a young widow, a handsome widow; and would be again a widow, but that I have a heart of proof, and something of a constitution to bustle through the ways of wedlock and this world! Will you yet be reconciled to truth and me?
> MRS. MARWOOD. Impossible. Truth and you are inconsistent -- I hate you, and shall forever.
> (II, ii)

Fainall as he is seen by the other characters in the play is most clearly revealed in Mirabell's words to Mrs. Fainall. Mrs. Fainall, Mirabell's cast mistress, has been married to Fainall to save "that idol, reputation," and Mirabell says of him in this connection, "A better man ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion, a worse had not answered to the purpose." He reveals himself irrevocably as a false wit when it becomes clear that he is not guided by the rules of decorum. In his complete cynicism, speaking of the money he hopes to get from Lady Wishfort, he ridicules himself:

> Damn him! that had been mine, had you not made that fond discovery. -- That had been forfeited, had they been married. My wife had added lustre to my horns by that increase of fortune; I could have worn 'em tipped with gold, though my forehead had been furnished like a deputy-lieutenant's hall.

Fainall knows the way of the world; indeed, that expression and many variations of it characterize many of his speeches. Cuckoldry and scheming are a part of the way of the world for him; he accepts current usage, current

modes, current fashion, current standards, the way of the lewd town, as his standard; and his failure is brought back to him when Mirabell comforts him ironically at the moment of his defeat, "Even so, sir; 'tis the way of the world." What Fainall does not realize, of course, is that Mirabell and Millamant shun the current way for a better way of the world.

In Mirabell's characterization of Tony Witwoud is revealed the picture of a man skilled in the overt practices of the extant rules of society, but lacking in the real knowledge of the significance of the code of decorum:

> MIRABELL. Not always; but as often as his memory fails him, and his commonplace of comparisons. He is a fool with a good memory and some few scraps of other folks' wit. He is one whose conversation can never be approved; yet it is now and then to be endured. He has indeed one good quality -- he is not exceptuous; for he so passionately affects the understanding of raillery that he will construe an affront into a jest, and call downright rudeness and ill language, satire and fire.
> (I, v)

Petulant, who affects bluntness and courage, fares no better even in the hands of Witwoud:

> WITWOUD. Truths! ha! ha! ha! No, no; since you will have it -- I mean, he never speaks truth at all -- that's all. He will lie like a chambermaid, or a woman of quality's porter. Now that is a fault.
> (I, v)

Petulant's bluntness and courage fail him, of course, at critical moments:

MIRABELL. Have you not left off your impudent pretensions there yet? I shall cut your throat some time or other, Petulant, about that business.
PETULANT. Aye, aye, let that pass -- there are other throats to be cut.
MIRABELL. Meaning mine, sir?
PETULANT. Not I -- I mean nobody -- I know nothing. . . .

(I, vi)

Witwoud's comparisons, which see only resemblances and cannot judiciously make distinctions, and Petulant's simulation of blunt honesty are efforts to achieve the highest mode, but they fail because they are indecorous. In their drunkenness, they are finally repelled by Millamant, while the poor country bumpkin they had so condescended to, Sir Wilful, recognizing at least his own total lack of art, is at least sufficiently cognizant of the demands of decorum that he can revert to his own natural condition and there in the kind of force his nature has, stop Fainall's attempt to kill his wife. Because of this, and because of his compassion for lovers, he is Mirabell's friend and comes nearer to being in the mode than either Witwoud or Petulant.

Mrs, Marwood and Mrs. Fainall join at the first in their hatred of mankind and, unknowingly, in their love for Mirabell. Mrs. Marwood reflects something of their attitude in her impatience with ordinary mores:

To be free; I have no taste for those insipid dry discourses with which our sex of force must entertain themselves apart from men. We may affect endearments to each other, profess eternal friendships, and seem to dote like lovers; but 'tis not in our natures long

> to persevere. Love will resume his empire in our breasts and every heart, or soon or late, receive and readmit him as its lawful tyrant.
> (II, i)

She goes on later to reveal the extent of her passions, and her disgust with the whole for the sake of the particular man, when she rails:

> O man, man! Woman, woman! The devil's an ass; If I were a painter, I would draw him like an idiot, a driveller with a bib and bells. Man should have his head and horns, and woman the rest of him.
> (III, vi)

At the end of the play, Mrs. Marwood, the passionate and irrational, is foiled along with Fainall. Mrs. Fainall, who is given throughout a particularly cold, realistic portrayal, is active in the foiling because she trusted Mirabell. While Mrs. Marwood goes out shrieking vengeance, Mrs. Fainall, upon whom have fallen the harsh decorums of the cast mistress, is left with sufficient support to seek her own kind of rapport with the standards limiting her.

Lady Wishfort, the "antidote to passion," is one of Congreve's more spectacular and amusing fools. Her colorful language, called "boudoir billingsgate" by Meredith, her absurd rantings and burlesques of the decorums demonstrate another kind of extreme avoided by the balanced seeker after decorum. In the plot formed by Mirabell to marry her to his servant, the reputed Sir Rowland, she appears at her best in her apprehensions at meeting the

make-believe knight. She has forgotten nature. Where once a little art made a picture like her, "Now a little of the same art must make you like your picture." She professes to be in "mortal terror at the apprehension of offending against decorums." Yet she is extravagant in her similitudes and in all her speech:

> FOIBLE. Your ladyship has frowned a little too rashly; indeed, madam. There are some cracks discernible in the white varnish.
> LADY WISHFORT. Let me see the glass. -- Cracks, sayest thou? -- why, I am arrantly flayed -- I look like an old peeled wall.
> (III, iii)

Her idea of the decorums is best revealed in the scene where she studies how to position herself in order best to receive her knight. The decorum she speaks of is only a matter of appearance. She has not even sufficient understanding to control her language which ranges from one extreme to another, from the billingsgate of the boudoir to the excessively fine language she employs when speaking to Waitwell disguised as Sir Rowland.

Fujimura, again denying any real body or humanity to the Truewit, offers as a serious criticism of Millamant the fact that she has "too many palpitations of the heart." This, of course, is part of what makes her the personage she is, as will later be seen. In keeping with Congreve's habit, she does not appear on the scene until Act II, and it is difficult to imagine a dramatic figure who better fulfills one's expectations. She appears in full array:

> Here she comes, i'faith, full sail, with her fan spread and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders. Ha, no, I cry her mercy!
> (II, iv)

Millamant's reactions to the persons of the play is fully as important as those of Mirabell, though she herself is best seen in relation with her lover. She dispatches Mrs. Marwood in a wit contest, in which they debate their respective interests in Mirabell. Millamant's affectations, her pretended disregard for Mirabell's love, so confound Mrs. Marwood that she lowers her guard, debases her wit by unseemly comparisons, and eventually forgets decorum so much as to threaten Millamant:

> MRS. MARWOOD. Mr. Mirabell and you both may think it a thing impossible, when I shall tell him by telling you --
> MILLAMANT. Oh dear, what? for it is the same thing if I hear it -- ha, ha, ha!
> MRS. MARWOOD. That I detest him, hate him, madam.
> MILLAMANT. O, Madam! why, so do I -- and yet the creature loves me -- ha, ha, ha! How can one forbear laughing to think of it. -- I am a sibyl if I am not amazed to think what he can see in me. I'll take my death, I think you are handsomer -- and within a year or two as young; if you could but stay for me, I should overtake you -- but that cannot be. -- Well, that thought makes me melancholic. -- Now I'll be sad.
> MRS. MARWOOD. Your merry note may be changed sooner than you think.
> MILLAMANT. D'ye say so? Then I'm resolved I'll have a song to keep up my spirits.
> (III, viii)

Millamant's reaction to Witwoud and Petulant is also interesting. She begins the process of discarding them in Act III, when to their attentions she replies

"an illiterate man's my aversion. I wonder at the impudence of any illiterate man to offer to make love." Later, when they approach her drunk, her distaste grows; she regards them as "filthy creatures." Though the essence of Sir Wilful Witwoud "grows very powerful" and distasteful to her when he is drunk, his hardy defense of her and Lady Wishfort and Mirabell against Fainall draws praise from Millamant.

Her humanity -- a feature that most critics seem unwilling to admit exists -- begins to be revealed in her attitude toward her aunt, Lady Wishfort. When the plot is revealed whereby her aunt was to have been married to Waitwell, Millamant's regard for her aunt and for her own honesty make her willing to sacrifice her love to assuage Lady Wishfort:

> I am content to be a sacrifice to your repose, madam, and to convince you that I had no hand in the plot, as you were misinformed. I have laid my commands on Mirabell to come in person and be a witness that I give my hand to this flower of knighthood [Sir Wilful]; and for the contract that passed between Mirabell and me, I have obliged him to make a resignation of it in your ladyship's presence. He is without, and waits for your leave for admittance. (V, vi)

But it is the operations and final union of Mirabell and Millamant that are most important in this play. It is they who reveal the established way of the world, debase it and ridicule it. They do this as they overcome various obstacles, conflicts which would have had a damning

effect on the fine code they eventually discover. In what is almost a purgatorial process, the two progress through the world, voiding what is inappropriate and assimilating that which is appropriate. Mirabell has to cope with the scheming of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood, the needs of his cast mistress, Mrs. Fainall, the demands of Lady Wishfort, and the force of his own passion for Millamant, and still emerge able to understand and agree with the stringent demands set up by Millamant. She has to ward off the attentions of Petulant, Witwoud, and Sir Wilful, aid in the disposal of Mrs. Marwood, and placate her aunt. More important, she has to be able, even knowing the force of her love, still to force herself and Mirabell up to the requirements of decorum. As Millamant and Mirabell so proceed, they discover at last the enlightened way of the world.

Mirabell is early introduced as something above the normal cut of man. After he has deftly handled Fainall, a strange emphasis is pointed out in his character when it is made known that his virtue forbade him to placate Lady Wishfort in the most obvious way. The rather obvious fact that his taste would also have forbade it is, in a figure such as Mirabell, clear; the fact that it is his virtue which he names seems to add something to his stature. A further indications of his awareness of the tensions of human characteristics, the "composition of

qualities," is shown in his comments on his love for Millamant:

> And for a discerning man, somewhat too passionate a lover; for I like her with all her faults -- nay like her for her faults. Her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her; and those affectations which in another woman would be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable. I'll tell thee, Fainall, she once used me with that insolence, that in revenge I took her to pieces, sifted her, and separated her failings; I studied 'em, got 'em by rote. The catalogue was so large that I was not without hopes one day or other to hate her heartily: to which end I so used myself to think of 'em, that at length, contrary to my design and expectation, they gave me every hour less and less disturbance, till in a few days it became habitual to me to remember 'em without being displeased. They are now grown as familiar to me as my own frailties, and, in all probability, in a little time longer I shall like 'em as well.
>
> (I, iii)

Something else of great importance in the character of Mirabell is learned in his passage-at-arms with Witwoud and Petulant at the close of Act I. Varying his tone to meet the need and to meet the capacities of the hearer, Mirabell is in turn foolish, insulting, wheedling, and sinister, demonstrating again his ability to act forcefully out of nature or art or a combination.

And then, Millamant appears, or ascends, "full sail, with her fan spread, and her streamers out," and his course is clear. Millamant is, of course, a lady of great affectation (she binds her hair up only with verse); but the point is, as Mirabell remarks, that she is so natural, or artful -- or, what he doesn't say -- both, that her affectations are only her fit trappings.

Millamant and Mirabell immediately undertake their first wit contest. An interesting comment on the differences between this play and many lesser ones is that Millamant will not tolerate sexual matters in wit, even metaphorically:

> MRS. MILLAMANT. I please myself. Besides, sometimes to converse with fools is for my health.
> MIRABELL. Your health! Is there a worse disease than the conversation of fools?
> MRS. MILLAMANT. Yes, the vapors; fools are physic for it, next to asafoetida.
> MIRABELL. You are not in a course of fools?
> MRS. MILLAMANT. Mirabell, if you persist in this offensive freedom, you'll displease me. -- I think I must resolve, after all, not to have you; we shan't agree.
> MIRABELL. Not in our physic, it may be.
> MRS. MILLAMANT. And yet our distemper in all likelihood, will be the same; for we shall be sick of one another. I shan't endure to be reprimanded or instructed; 'tis so dull to act always by advice, and so tedious to be told of one's faults -- I can't bear it. Well, I won't have you, Mirabell, -- I'm resolved, I think -- you may go. -- Ha, ha, ha! What wou'd you give, that you could help loving me?
> MIRABELL. I would give something that you did not know I could not help it.
> MRS. MILLAMANT. Come, don't look grace, then. Well, what do you say to me?
> MIRABELL. I say that a man may as soon make a friend by his wit, or a fortune by his honesty, as win a woman by plain dealing and sincerity.
> (II, iv)

Obviously he is right, and this is just the point. He cannot win a woman, or live the proper way of the world by these relatively simple standards, for while they are part and parcel of the code, alone they are insufficient. There is a time to be serious, he finds, and a time to be gay, a time to be serious and a time to dissemble, a time to laugh and a time to cry.

It is essential to remember that while Mirabell and Millamant can rationally control their passions, their love is a sentimental love, one which requires the saving grace of art. Without art, Mirabell would be too serious. Millamant's stand is substantiated, for if reason or sentiment were all, there would be no love. But the sentiment is there. Millamant admits that "if Mirabell should not make a good husband, I am a lost thing, for I find I love him violently." And Mirabell confesses, "I would have you as often as possibly I can. Well, Heaven grant I love you not too well; that's all my fear." It is this love which tempers and demands the requirements stipulated in the famous bargaining scene, perhaps the single most enlightening passage in Restoration comedy.

Both Mirabell and Millamant aim at gaining pleasure. Their conception of pleasure is both refined and dignified; they are at the mercy of no casual impulses, and though they love sentimentally, both are far removed from sentimentalism.

> They are indeed a pair of soundly sensible people with no illusions about human nature, no unduly lofty idealisms to pursue to their own distraction. They both aim quite consciously and philosophically at a pleasant life. They are both sufficiently intelligent -- and, we may add, sufficiently like Epicurus himself -- to realize that a pleasant life must also be a decent one. Finally both of them are generous and sensitive enough to build their decently pleasant lives about a love which includes good fellowship between intellectual and spiritual equals.[1]

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[1]Mayo, pp. 162-163.

Three provisos suggested by Millamant and the three by Mirabell finally reveal the choicest way of the world. It is necessary to remember that each of them has already taken steps to arrive at this synthesis: Millamant in her art is sufficiently aware of nature to recognize the need to order their love; Mirabell in his nature is sufficiently aware of the order of art to submit to her. Their provisos very carefully make possible the full sway of decorum. She demands:

(1) Art in Love:

> Oh, I hate a lover that can dare to think he draws a moment's air, independent of the bountry of his mistress.

(2) Art in Social Behavior:

> Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together; but let us be very strange and well-bred. Let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while, and as well-bred as if we were not married at all.

(3) Art in Personal Behavior:

> And Lastly, whereever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in. These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.

Mirabell, on the other hand, demands:

(1) Naturalness in Love:

> No decoy-duck to wheedle you -- a fop scrambling to the play in a mask -- then bring you home in a pretended fright, when you think you shall be found out -- and rail at me for missing the play and disappointing the frolic you had, to pick me up and prove my constancy.

(2) Naturalness in Social Behavior:

> . . . but that on no account you encroach upon the men's prerogative, and presume to drink healths, or toast fellows: for prevention of which I banish all foreign forces, all auxiliaries to the tea-table. . . .

(3) Naturalness in Personal Behavior:

> I article, that you continue to like your own face, as long as I shall; and while it passes current with me, that you endeavor not to new-coin it.

So the decorum of art and the decorum of nature, the coldness of thought and the heat of emotion, meet, match, and merge. Mirabell says, "Then we're agreed." Understanding nature methodized, the comic hero is educated, and the most enlightened way of the world stands full and clear.

I have deliberately avoided ending this study with a section entitled "Conclusions," for The Way of the World is the conclusion of the great comic art of the Restoration in England, both aesthetically and ethically. Some suggestion has been made concerning the wide gap between the great comedies of the period and the poor ones, which rely upon action rather than character and so fail to achieve the proper end of comedy. Some indication has also been made of the characteristic marks of Restoration comedy -- the wit contest, the catalogue of wits, the hero's ordeal, and the bargaining scenes. The Way of the World brings each of these comic devices to perfection.

The wit contests are not only entertaining in their own right, but dramatically advance the movement of the play. The catalogue of wits is the most complete in all of Restoration comedy, ranging from the blunt witless to the subtlest of false wits. The hero's ordeal and the bargaining scenes are the means by which the comic enlightenment is revealed. Restoration comedy has its source in disorder. By means of the epistemological progress which gives the comedies their structure, the comic hero learns the ways of the world and so educated, gains the comic effect, the arousal of laughter by ridicule and the arousal of enlightenment by the discovery of order.

It is an order of the human world, using all the agencies of self-realization. It is an order achieved through the study not of God but of man, and it depends upon the human reason as well as imagination and all the human faculties as the instruments of knowledge. It is an order which encloses and illumines for man the force of art and reason and feeling upon the universe and upon man, who, in Dorimant and Mirabell and Millamant, had almost established the best of all possible ways of the world.

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