

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

"A GLASS FOR THE WORLD": THE WITTY AND THE
SENTIMENTAL MODES IN BRITISH DRAMA, 1660-1900

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT	i
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE	
"A Glass for the World": Restoration Comedy and the Witty Mode.	19
CHAPTER TWO	
"Things That Shadow and Conceal": Etherege's <u>She Would If She Could</u> and <u>The Man of Mode</u>	40
CHAPTER THREE	
"Minister of Justice": Wycherley's <u>The</u> <u>Country Wife</u> and <u>The Plain Dealer</u>	69
CHAPTER FOUR	
"Understood by Contraries": Congreve's Comedies.	97
CHAPTER FIVE	
"All Revolutions Run Into Extremes": Eighteenth-Century Comedy and the Sentimental Mode.	133
CHAPTER SIX	
"A Just Moral": Cibber's and Vanbrugh's Comedies.	154
CHAPTER SEVEN	
"Preacher of the Age": Steele's and Cumberland's Comedies	178
CHAPTER EIGHT	
"The Reformation to Extremes Has Run": The Eighteenth-Century Critics of the Sentimental Mode.	211

	Page
CHAPTER NINE	
"Sham'd Into Sense": Sheridan's Comedies	242
CHAPTER TEN	
"A Perfect Gallimaufry": Nineteenth-Century Drama	280
CHAPTER ELEVEN	
"A Serious Bunburyist": Wilde's Society Plays.	314
CONCLUSION	358
NOTES.	364
BIBLIOGRAPHY	466

To Rance

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ABSTRACT

Plays written between the years 1660 and 1900 have frequently been approached simply in terms of their lubricity, their didacticism or their histrionics. Only recently have critics like Robert D. Hume in The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth-Century (1976) and John Loftis in Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England (1977) attempted to discuss both the dramatists and their plays in a manner which will account for their distinctive achievements. In the past, critics have treated the plays and the playwrights as separate and definable specimens of either the Restoration comedy of manners or the eighteenth-century drama of pity and tears. As the present study attempts to show, each of the dramatists, by adopting and adapting the modes of the past, makes a distinctive contribution to the growth and development of the drama.

It is my contention that a study of what Hume calls "emphases" will lead to a clearer understanding of the drama in general and the playwright in particular. These "emphases" I have chosen to call "modes," for they are ways of linguistically expressing a dramatist's comic vision, on the one hand, and of viewing the stage of the world and the world of the stage, on the other. In the late seventeenth century, wit becomes the verbal means of clarifying a world beset by ambiguities, and to be witty, finally, is to be the social master, mocking others and concealing the self. The witty mode, as a comic "glass for the world," insures

that both persiflage and social mastery conceal the dual, and often double-dealing, nature of the human animal. In the eighteenth century, sentiment becomes the verbal means of revealing the feeling, inner self. And the sentimental mode, as a "glass for the world," reflects a confidence in the moral order and in man himself, a creature of undisguised and open-hearted inclinations. What in a seventeenth-century comedy would signal dubiety becomes in an eighteenth-century comedy a moral certainty.

Therefore, this study traces the many modifications these two modes undergo between the years 1660 and 1900. Contrary to the prevalent critical view, which would approach each period and each playwright as a distinct entity, I have shown how the witty and the sentimental modes nurture a drama at once a product of the past and a modification of the modes of the past. The study of a dramatist's use of the witty and the sentimental modes leads to a more comprehensive appreciation of the drama and of his own distinctive achievement as a playwright who holds a comic "glass for the world."

INTRODUCTION

Plays written between the years 1660 and 1900 have frequently been approached simply in terms of their lubricity, their didacticism or their histrionics. Only recently have critics like Robert D. Hume, in The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century (1976) and John Loftis, in Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England (1977), attempted to discuss both the dramatists and their plays in a manner which will account for their distinctive achievement. In the past, critics have treated the plays and the playwrights as separate and definable specimens of either the Restoration comedy of manners or the eighteenth-century sentimental drama of pity and tears. As the present study attempts to show, comedies traditionally labelled "Restoration" or "sentimental" are not always, and incontrovertibly, one or the other, although the emphasis of the plays will decidedly differ. For the sake of clarity, I have retained the conventional labels of "Restoration" and "sentimental," but my treatment and discussion will attempt to define these labels in terms of the period which they describe.

Although most of the plays under consideration include both wit and sentiment, critics over the years have never satisfactorily answered the question posed by Gay in the title of his piece, The What D'Ye Call It (1715). By the end of the seventeenth century, when Cibber produced Love's Last Shift (1696), distinctions between types of plays

had already become blurred. Even Congreve's last play, The Way of the World (1700), considered by many "manners" critics to represent Restoration comedy at its best, has lately been regarded as a "transitional" comedy, one which includes both wit and sentiment.¹ So, by the time Gay wrote his Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce in 1715, distinctions between types had become confused indeed, and many eighteenth-century playwrights, notably Goldsmith and Sheridan, soon came to deplore the "bastard species" of drama which, like Gay's burlesque, would conform neither to one designation nor the other.

More recently, as Robert Hume notes in a study entitled "Goldsmith and Sheridan and the Supposed Revolution of 'Laughing' Against 'Sentimental' Comedy," designations like wit and sentiment cannot describe "distinct entities," only "different emphases or polarities possible in comedy."² Such "emphases" do not necessarily summarize a particular comedy. Rather, they point to some of the complexities of attitudes and values in a given play.³ Merely to label comedies is often to obscure much of what is traditional and much of what is original in a playwright.⁴ More damagingly, such categorization frequently ignores a particular play's vis comica which, to generalize, is that spirit of comedy which in the late seventeenth century ridicules folly, in the eighteenth century smilingly exposes the need for virtuous reform, and in the nineteenth century mocks and chastizes social wrongdoings.

Indeed, as early as 1915, Bernbaum, in his impressive study, The Drama of Sensibility, admits that to ignore the comic elements in a play usually branded as "sentimental" is to ignore a good portion of

the play.⁵ I would add that to ignore the serious elements in a play usually branded as "witty" is also to ignore an important part of the play. Restoration plays introduce, in the character of the heroine, a glowing instance of staunch virtue. Heroines like Harriet in Etherege's The Man of Mode (1676) and Millamant in Congreve's The Way of the World (1700) are willing enough to tantalize the hero's appetites, but they are equally unwilling to surrender their virtue to him. Similarly, eighteenth-century plays include figures whose comic antics not only highlight the virtuous actions of the benevolent hero and heroine, but also arouse laughter. Even though a comic servant like Tom in Steele's The Conscious Lovers (1722) does not seek to debauch his mistress, as Dorimant would have done, Tom's love scenes with Phillis, as Burt states, smack of "skillfully veiled" sexual references, and he woos her in a manner which panders to her comic pretensions to grandeur.⁶

Therefore, it is my contention that a study of what Hume calls "emphases" will lead to a clearer understanding of the drama in general and the playwright in particular. These "emphases" I have chosen to call "modes," for they are ways of linguistically expressing a dramatist's vision, on the one hand, and of judging the human animal, on the other.⁷

Throughout these periods, the world of the stage remains, in Vanbrugh's words, "a Glass for the World to view itself in."⁸ As a "glass for the world," each mode reflects the human condition and the social milieu. In Restoration comedy, like the comedy before it, the "glass for the world" reflects man's incorrigible nature, and the dramatists ridicule the human animal, vainly seeking certainty in a world of sham. In contrast, in sentimental comedy, the "glass for the

world" mirrors man's perfectible nature. The influence of virtue can reform a vice and reclaim the vicious. The dramatist does not ridicule those who are not always exemplary in their moral or social conduct. Rather, he seeks to improve, by example, and to inculcate a worthwhile moral.

The language of the comedies expresses the playwright's view of man. In Restoration comedy, wit mocks pretensions and follies at the same time as it exposes the artifice of the comic stage of the world. Like Donne's "conceit," wit perceives a congruity in things apparently dissimilar, and so the favourite kinds of comparisons made by the wit are in the form of similes, analogies, parallels and contrasts. But when playwrights like Etherege speak of wit, they also refer to the kind of social order it creates. The witty character, who so capably controls language, also masters the social milieu. While pricking the pretensions of others, the witty character eschews malicious gossip and preserves at least the appearance of social geniality. He conceals his inner self, and thereby prevents others from mastering him. For this reason, the witty character is the play's focus, and other characters are relegated to minor roles. The witty comic mode, then, is a way of simultaneously studying and ridiculing the social animal.

In the eighteenth century, the "sentiment" is the verbal means to reveal the goodness of the human creature. To be sentimental is to possess a profound capacity for feeling. So, in addition to its expressing virtuous thoughts, the sentimental utterance is a form of self-revelation. Unlike wit, "sentimental" language becomes a means of revealing the inner, feeling self; the wit strives to guard it, but the

sentimentalist eagerly reveals it. Rhetorical as it may sometimes be in its studied compilation of tropes and figures, "sentimental" language clearly implies that every individual is capable of virtuous action and of deeply sympathizing with distress. "Prudential maxims," solemnly delivered by benevolent, feeling individuals, exhort wrong-doers to abide by the dictates of virtue.⁹ The witty character now assumes a less influential role in the play; he becomes the target for the "prudential maxims."

While many regard the dramas to be what Hazlitt called "homilies in dialogue"¹⁰ and the stage to be but a "Monastery,"¹¹ both the dialogue and its homiletic content reflect a view of mankind different from that of Restoration comedy. In Steele's view, the stage of the world and the world of the stage "reciprocally imitate each other."¹² The dramatist, therefore, must depict the "Virtues" and the "valuable Parts of a Man" if the stage is to furnish suitable models of conduct.¹³ These models serve as the play's and, by implication, society's moral touchstones. The sentimental mode, then, denotes more than a homiletic fervour uttered in weighty aphorisms or heartfelt diatribes. It is a moral way of propounding virtue, extolling benevolent inclinations and revealing the goodness of the human creature.

Notwithstanding their differences, these modes furnish comic conventions to both eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century playwrights. Indeed, the drama of these periods shows a remarkable richness, remarkable both for the modifications individual playwrights make to these modes, and for the playwrights' adoption of them. The following study proposes to discuss in detail the changes these modes undergo

between the years 1660 and 1900. It does not purport to be a survey of theatrical history or theatrical conditions, both of which have been well documented, most notably in The London Stage and Allardyce Nicoll's A History of English Drama. Rather, this study will attempt to demonstrate that the witty and the sentimental modes are part of a thriving comic heritage in the periods under discussion and that, as such, they enable individual playwrights to contribute, in their own way, to the dramatic tradition. A careful analysis of these dramatists will correct the predominant critical view which ignores the importance of these comic modes in playwrights like Sheridan and Wilde.

Often compared to playwrights of the past, both Sheridan and Wilde cannot simply be regarded as "revivers" of a "manners" tradition. Nor can they be dismissed as imitators who, unfortunately, allow sentimental excrescences in Sheridan's case, and hackneyed melodramatic devices in Wilde's, to mar their dramas. Playwrights like Sheridan and Wilde do more than just imitate the practice of their predecessors. They adopt and modify the modes of the past. In doing so, both Sheridan and Wilde create a distinctive drama of their own, at once a continuation of what went before them, and a contribution to what was to follow. The following study will attempt to show how such dramatists adopt and modify the modes of the past, and how their achievement is distinctive.

The character of the fop illustrates the modifications playwrights like Sheridan and Wilde make to the modes inherited from the past. In Restoration comedy, the fop is the comic butt of the hero's wit, but in sentimental comedy he is the object of virtuous scorn. Although in plays like Wycherley's The Plain Dealer (1677) and Sheridan's The School for Scandal (1779) the cavilling fop is exposed and derided, in

eighteenth-century sentimental comedy he assumes some of the rake's less reputable characteristics. By mid-nineteenth century, the fop is expected to reform and publicly renounce his folly, or be the object, not of ridicule, but of pity. In Wilde's plays, the fop has become the dandy, devoted to personal indulgence and affectation as well as to aesthetic pursuits. At least in the character of Lord Goring in An Ideal Husband (1895), he has also acquired the sagacity of the eighteenth-century mentor and the wit of the seventeenth-century rake, a combination of the witty and the sentimental modes which is so prominent in the works of the eighteenth-century critics of sentimental drama.

In sentimental drama, the good-natured actions of lovable eccentrics, whose "little peculiarities" make them "objects of delight and love"¹⁴, arouse "amiable, sentimental humour".¹⁵ In many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century plays, the dramatist depicts the plight of virtue in distress, and these "amiable originals," as Tave calls them, are the benevolent figures who seek to alleviate that distress (Amiable Humorist, p. viii). Their "speech, writing, action, or thought" excites "amusement and laughter by its oddity" (Martin, Triumph of Wit, p. 25). Because of their good nature, "sympathy and love" become the "distinguishing aspects of humour" (p. 26). In many ways, it is pathos which creates this necessary sympathy, and distress like Indiana's in Steele's The Conscious Lovers (1722) soon becomes the distinguishing characteristic of later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century drama.

The critics of such drama attempt to combine this kind of

"sentimental humour" with the witty perception characteristic of the Restoration hero. In Goldsmith and Sheridan, these characteristics are joined by means of the dual nature of such characters as Marlow in She Stoops to Conquer (1773) and Captain Absolute in The Rivals (1775).

In them, social acumen is finally combined with common sense and a benevolent heart. As two early critics of Vanbrugh argue: "The intrusion of feeling, common sense, and human compassion do [sic] not destroy comic effectiveness. An appeal to the emotions as well as to the intellect of an audience is not destructive of the comic spirit."¹⁶

Throughout these periods, the plays often reflect the traditional comic "discrepancy between the ideal and the actual," between what is desirable and what in fact exists (Martin, Triumph of Wit, p. 4-5). In the seventeenth century, playwrights comically dramatize the discrepancy between what one is and what one would be, "under a Voluntary Disguise."¹⁷ In many eighteenth-century plays, this discrepancy between the ideal and the actual is resolved by the play's happy ending, where material reward crowns the suffering and distress of the virtuous hero and heroine; vice, once so successful, finally suffers inevitable defeat. In Wilde, the discrepancy between the ideal and the actual is comically resolved when truth becomes illusion and illusion, truth.

In the nineteenth century, the playwright's treatment of incongruity soon includes a social as well as a moral perspective. Benevolent characters like Sir Christopher in Jones' The Liars (1897) speak both of the moral implications and the social consequences of particular actions. The characters of the cast-off mistress in the seventeenth

century and of the "fallen woman" in the nineteenth illustrate this gradual shift. In the past, the cast-off mistress is a comic termagant, vainly trying to enthrall once again the reprobate hero. Both her waspish tirades and her unrequited ardour make her a ridiculous figure, the target of the hero's, and often the heroine's, wit. But the "fallen woman" in a nineteenth-century play cannot hope to ever attain the affections of a respectable lover. Often, her only recourse is self-imposed exile. A rigid morality in nineteenth-century drama provides the certainty that the witty hero seeks, but the stage of the world still demands that a character cleverly conceal the inner self beneath a mask of social respectability. Otherwise, reputations are not merely soiled, and therefore laughable; they are lost irretrievably, and therefore damned. In Wilde, the dandy's witty epigrams mockingly expose this hypocrisy, hidden by the mask of respectability, and the dandy becomes the social critic.

Indeed, throughout these periods, the plays focus on, and criticize, society. And the comic themes reflect this concern. Restoration comedy mocks the shallowness and artificiality of a society bent on sensual gratification, and the plays dramatize the comic discrepancy between the individual's mask and his face. Eighteenth-century comedy and early nineteenth-century comedy reject a world where innocence and virtue must withstand vice, and those who espouse society's fashionable creed of appetite and pleasure are summarily dismissed in a final show of poetic justice, whereby virtue is rewarded and vice punished. However, it is important to note that, as the drama becomes more interested in social problems, the dramatists tend to view the town, in

Booth's words, as a "moral symbol," not so much of sullied virtue reclaimed, but of innocence lost in a world of "moral squalor and physical and mental suffering."¹⁸ Later, even Wilde, both in The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) and in A Woman of No Importance (1893), comments on the dire social conditions which vanquish the human spirit.¹⁹

Not only social criticism, but also criticism of the modes themselves soon becomes important, particularly in the eighteenth century and then in the nineteenth century. Both the social mastery and witty self-control extolled in Restoration comedy, and the triumph of virtue propounded in sentimental comedy, are themselves further sources of comedy to the eighteenth-century critics of the "sentimental Muse".²⁰ These critics laughingly expose both excessive good nature and "false delicacy." In many plays, those who can easily feign virtue and mouth virtuous maxims are, for a time, socially successful. The comic artifice of the past serves an hypocrisy founded upon an excessive and a false sentimentalism. Yet, neither is wit exalted. The bantering riposte has now become in many of these plays mere calumny, and scandal and the fear of scandal are two major themes. In the nineteenth century, the effects of gossip compel individuals to safeguard their reputations and preserve the appearance of respectability at all costs, even at the cost of their own personal happiness. What in Restoration comedy would be treated as a comic discovery of the inner self, subject to the derision of the social coterie, becomes in a nineteenth-century drama the veritable social demise of the offending individual and his expulsion altogether from society.

Therefore, in the chapters to follow, I attempt to provide a

critical perspective of these periods and of the changes the two comic modes undergo. The first section, Chapters One to Four, discusses in detail the witty mode and then examines the plays of important dramatists who write primarily in the witty mode. The second section, Chapters Five to Seven, discusses in detail the sentimental mode and then examines the plays of important eighteenth-century dramatists who write primarily in the sentimental mode. Finally, the third section, Chapters Eight to Eleven, explores the modifications individual eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century playwrights make to these modes.

Chapter One, entitled "'A Glass for the World': Restoration Comedy and the Witty Mode," outlines the various critical interpretations of the period and the plays, and then proceeds to examine the period's more important thematic concerns. Many playwrights, for example, dramatize the comic machinations of the "counterfeits of the age," and the plays explore those various "things that shadow and conceal" man's inner nature.²¹ This theme of artifice particularly concerns Etherege, the focus of Chapter Two. Here, an extensive analysis of She Would If She Could (1668) and The Man of Mode (1676) shows Etherege's skills in constructing a comedy which, at the same time as it ridicules pretense, artifice and hypocrisy, also suggests that sincerity and plain-dealing may exist in a world of sham. But Etherege also comically dramatizes human frailty, a concern which cancels any hint of possible adherence to the sentimental mode. The ambiguous resolutions to the plays suggest that a modish "way of the world" might well vitiate the power of love and sincerity.

Wycherley, as a "minister of justice," the title of Chapter Three,

dramatizes the vice which, in Etherege, hovers ominously in the background. In The Country Wife (1675) and The Plain Dealer (1677), the plays under discussion, Wycherley pits sincerity against sham, virtue against vice, love against appetite, the meritorious individual against a double-dealing society. Wycherley does extol "plain dealing," but in The Country Wife the machinations of the "Machiavel" in love go undetected in the end, and almost strip away irrecoverably Alithea's reputation. In The Plain Dealer, too, the virtuous Fidelia is first abused by Manly and then later sexually assaulted by Vernish. The "justice" Wycherley extols is his own vision of goodness, truth and honour. But Wycherley must also "minister" that "justice" to the world of sham, whose "way" it is to rape virtue and countenance vice.

Congreve, the focus of Chapter Four, entitled "'Understood by Contraries': Congreve's Four Comedies," also examines "the way of the world," but his "glass for the world" reflects both the possibility, and the existence, of value. The Old Batchelour (1693) comically dramatizes the familiar love chase, but in The Double Dealer (1694) Congreve analyzes vice in all its perfidy. Love for Love (1695) explores yet further the themes of love and artifice; only Valentine's sincerity and devotion finally insure that "the Masquerade is over."²² In The Way of the World (1700), Congreve's masterpiece, he combines these various themes of appetite, vice and constant love. Finally, it is precisely the point that the "contraries" explored in the earlier plays are resolved through a wit softened by feeling. Sham, the "way of the world" Congreve criticizes, is subdued at last by love, the "way of the world" Congreve endorses. Congreve's unique blend of the

witty and the sentimental modes summarizes the past at the same time as it looks forward to the future.

Chapter Five, entitled "'All revolutions run into extremes': Eighteenth-Century Comedy and the Sentimental Mode," outlines the various critical interpretations of the period and the plays, and then proceeds to examine the period's more important character types and thematic concerns. Since for many of these playwrights the "world of the stage" and the "stage of the world" mutually influence each other, the plays seek to inculcate a "just moral" and thereby effect a reformation of character and society. The major theme of such drama is the efficacy of virtue; it alone receives a just reward, and it alone triumphs. In sentimental comedy, the dramatists frequently alternate humorous and pathetic scenes in order to heighten, through contrast, this abiding value of virtue.

Cibber, the focus of Chapter Six, entitled "'A Just Moral': Cibber's and Vanbrugh's Comedies," exploits the contrast between past vice and present virtue. Indeed, Cibber's favorite theme is the reclamation of vice, evidenced most strongly in Love's Last Shift (1696) and The Lady's Last Stake (1708). In contrast, Vanbrugh in The Relapse (1697) and The Provoked Wife (1709) dramatizes the frailty of man, and his "glass" reflects the "follies of the age," one of which may well be the expectation that reformations can be long lasting.²³ While Vanbrugh's fragment, A Journey to London (1728), continues to reflect man's frail and risible nature, Cibber's adaptation of the play, entitled The Provoked Husband (1728), seeks to satisfy a "poetical justice"²⁴ which would reward virtue and thereby inculcate a

"just moral."²⁵

This decidedly didactic aim Steele refines yet further. Chapter Seven, entitled "'Preacher of the Age': Steele's and Cumberland's Comedies," examines Steele's efforts in his dramas to "Moralize the Stage."²⁶ The Lying Lover (1704) severely rebukes behaviour which formerly was laughable, and the play tries to achieve what Steele calls "a Joy too exquisite for Laughter" in his Preface to The Conscious Lovers (Plays, p. 299). In The Tender Husband (1705), Steele laughingly mocks both vanity and pretense, and the play shows his comic flair at its best. But his later play, The Conscious Lovers (1723), threatens indeed to change the theatre into a "Monastery," as the writer in The Freeholder's Journal, 28 November 1722, had complained (25). Steele's reliance on providential discoveries and coincidence will become characteristic of later eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century comedy. So, his importance lies both in his refinement of sentimental comedy, and in his influence on later dramatists, one of whom is Cumberland. Indeed, The West Indian (1771), The Natural Son (1785) and False Impressions (1797) repeat the dramatic flaws of Cumberland's predecessors at the same time as they exemplify the manner in which the witty and the sentimental modes will later be combined. For the most part, the witty mode is subordinated in Cumberland's plays to his more serious, didactic aim. At best, Cumberland alternates humorous scenes with pathetic ones in order to effectively heighten the value of virtue.

Such dramatic practice other playwrights soon criticize, and in Chapter Eight, entitled "'The reformation to extremes has run': The

Eighteenth-Century Critics of the Sentimental Mode," an analysis of playwrights like Goldsmith, Sheridan, Garrick, Murphy and Colman shows their attempt to combine the two modes in a way which will reflect "morals and mankind"²⁷ together with man's "sense and folly".²⁸ These playwrights attempt to check a sentimentalism which, in its excess, is comic, and so they also seek to portray the "mix'd character," endowed with both faults and virtues. In Goldsmith, indiscriminate good nature becomes a benevolence tempered by prudence and, in Sheridan, folly and hypocrisy yield to "absolute sense," common sense tempered by mirth and softened by good nature (The Rivals, III.i.104).

Chapter Nine, entitled "'Sham'd into Sense': Sheridan's Comedies," studies Sheridan's distinctive use of the witty and the sentimental modes, and attempts to demonstrate his comic achievement. In The Rivals (1775), the two modes are thematic "rivals," embodied as they are in the various "rivals" for Lydia's hand. The play mocks excessive sentimental refinement, in the person of Faulkland, and its pretense, in the person of Lydia. Sheridan's minor plays also dramatize comic excesses which must be checked by sense, but it is in his masterpiece, The School For Scandal (1779), that Sheridan achieves most fully a distinctive combination of the witty and the sentimental modes.

The "school" itself represents the social coterie which, as it has in the past, typifies the vice and folly of the age. But now the vice to be checked is slander, rather than foppery or libertinism. Sheridan, in this way, criticizes vice, as his predecessors have done, but his treatment of it is distinctive. The prevalence of scandal shows the degeneration of wit and demonstrates that, too often, the

fop's malice can indeed become fashionable and not just amusing.

The "school" also includes the "sentimental knave," Joseph Surface. His pose as the man of sentiment points to another of Sheridan's distinctive achievements. Artifice, a conventional focus, here serves sentiment, and the man of sentiment proves to be a knave. Opposed to him is Sheridan's own version of the comic hero. Neither a rake nor a saint, he possesses a wit and a sentiment balanced by good sense. Finally, then, Sheridan criticizes the excesses of both the witty and the sentimental modes, and his theme of "absolute sense" offers a comic balance. "Sham'd into sense," excess yields at last to moderation, and falsity is banished.

In the nineteenth century, such a combination of the two modes is not always dramatically efficacious. Chapter Ten, entitled "'A Perfect Gallimaufry': Nineteenth-Century Drama," studies the drama's attempt in the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century to inculcate a moral at the same time as it seeks to reflect the comedy of the "human chaos."²⁹ In a play like Morton's Speed the Plough (1800), the two modes clash. The emphasis on virtue often attenuates any sustained comic treatment of folly, for the dramatic point clearly subordinates comedy to a serious treatment of sin. Only later, first in Boucicault's London Assurance (1841) and then in Jones' The Liars (1897), does the bustling intrigue comically dramatize the theme of masks and faces and, once again, comically study the individual in society.

The period's increasing focus on social issues modifies its use of the two comic modes. Themes are now social institutions as well as social laws, and these themes reflect man's conflict with them rather

than with a definable social coterie.³⁰ While in the mid-nineteenth century Robertson in Caste (1867) examines the necessity for social rank and offers a conventional view of the status quo, in the latter half of the century Jones and Pinero adapt the themes of the past to their own distinctive ends. The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith (1895) extols virtue and criticizes profligacy but, in doing so, Pinero cogently questions the existing social order. So, too, does Jones in The Masqueraders (1894). But the sentimental regard for virtue, exemplified in a play like Grundy's A Pair of Spectacles (1890), also thrives in a period noted for its literary richness. Finally, Gilbert's Engaged (1877) and Patience (1881) combine the two modes only to mock them, and his "topsy turvy" methods prepare the way for Wilde, the focus of Chapter Eleven, entitled "'A Serious Bunburyist': Wilde's Society Comedies."

Here, Wilde's achievement as a dramatist is discussed both in terms of the traditions of the past and his own aesthetic view that "Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life" (The Decay of Lying, p. 782). His social figures recall the witty mode, and his moral figures the sentimental mode. Lady Windermere's Fan (1892) combines Wilde's theme of illusion with both Restoration comedy's interest in masks and faces, and sentimental comedy's concern with temptation and the triumph of virtue. In A Woman of No Importance (1893), these figures again assume importance with respect to Wilde's treatment of the "fallen woman." In An Ideal Husband (1895) Wilde, in the character of Lord Goring, most fully reveals his own distinctive innovations; Lord Goring embodies the rake's modishness, the benevolent mentor's

sagacity and the dandy's love of art.

Wilde's masterpiece, The Importance of Being Ernest (1895), most fully dramatizes his view that life imitates art. In the play, the creation of illusion is "Bunburying," an innovation of the eighteenth-century technique of the double gallant and the nineteenth-century device of the off-stage character. Bunbury himself never does emerge as a real character and remains as a comic illusion. It is the art of "Bunburying" which comes to be "simply something that is not quite true, but should be" (II.354). The play, then, demonstrates the essential truth of illusions. Wilde's "glass for the world" reflects, and ultimately re-creates, life, and his achievement as a dramatist is most clearly seen both in his distinctive use of the witty and the sentimental modes, and in his own aesthetic views.

Therefore, in the periods under discussion, such abiding concerns as love and marriage, artifice, masks and faces, social discourse, the nature of society and the individual, all reflect the "way of the world." In each period, the "glass for the world" mirrors the stage of the world, but each individual dramatist's use of the witty and the sentimental modes adds a distinctive innovation to what is a continuing, and a thriving, comic tradition.

CHAPTER ONE

"A Glass for the World": Restoration Comedy and the Witty Mode

Only recently has the critical point been made that neither the witty, late seventeenth-century mode nor the sentimental, eighteenth-century mode can be regarded as a completely "pure" genre. Robert D. Hume, in his impressive study of Goldsmith and Sheridan (1972), argues: "laughing and sentimental comedy are not distinct entities. Rather, these designations suggest different emphases or polarities possible in comedy, and different writers employ and combine them in different ways" ("Supposed Revolution," p. 267).¹ Many a witty play boasts a serious, sentimental sub-plot, and most sentimental comedies contain one or more comic figures.² What does distinguish these two modes, the dramatic legacy bequeathed to playwrights like Sheridan and Wilde, can be found in their treatment of man, who can be seen either as fallen or redeemed.

The witty and the sentimental modes each espouses a view of man which determines, to a great extent, the kind of comedy written by their adherents. While both the late seventeenth-century and the early eighteenth-century dramatists depict foolish, knavish creatures who are driven by vanity, steeped in affectation and stained by vice, the dramatists' comic ends differ markedly. As Taylor suggests, in her critical introduction to Etherege's She Would If She Could (1971),

Restoration dramatists share a vision of "the dual nature of man - half angel, half animal - and their insight raises ironic laughter."³ Rakes may be penitent, promising at the end an "amendment of life," and heroines may remain staunchly virginal, but the comedy also boldly, and bawdily, mirrors man's debaucheries, his affectations, his credulity, all the follies which make him such a laughable subject.⁴ It is a "form of criticism" which, as Willson notes in a different context, sees "man as he is and not as he would like to pretend he is."⁵

As I discuss later, early eighteenth-century comedy also portrays evil, but only in order to accentuate good. Inevitably, good breaks through what Sealand in Cumberland's The West Indian (1771) significantly calls "the veil of some irregularities," a statement unthinkable to Wycherley.⁶ Evil is no longer inherent; it is merely a "veil" which can be removed. The erring hero's reclamation to virtue becomes a dramatic testament to the "recognition of a benevolent nature at the heart of the characters, even the wickedest."⁷ These early playwrights exhort their audience either to avoid the images presented or to reform their erring ways. Later eighteenth-century playwrights who write in the sentimental mode stress the "natural goodness inherent in every man" and, by offering exemplary characters to view, didactically urge emulation.⁸ Steele instructs his audience "by positive rather than negative example" and, so, the virtuous Bevil Jr. replaces the rakish Dorimant as the comic hero (Hume, "Supposed Revolution," p. 244).

Whether, as Winton notes, the term "sentimentalism" exemplifies "a benevolent view of the nature of man," or whether it refers to "utilizing stage action to elicit audience sympathy,"⁹ both the treat-

ment of the material and the kind of characters presented do indeed help to determine whether a particular play is "sentimental" (Hume, p. 244). Increasingly, "the kind of incident or action represented"¹⁰ and "the view we are to take of the lead characters" make the drama exemplary (Hume, p. 244).¹¹ That is, these central personages serve as "models for conduct."¹² Rather than making folly implicitly ridiculous, exemplary comedy conveys moral precepts at the same time as it provides the explicit dramatic embodiments of these precepts (Loftis, Steele, p. 196). In this sense, later sentimental comedy can be said to counteract Restoration comedy.

But Restoration comedy itself has perversely posed many problems, not the least of which is what to call it. In 1698, Collier helps to initiate the nomenclature debate when, piously outraged, he winces at a comedy which to him "cherishes those Passions, and rewards those Vices, which 'tis the business of Reason to discountenance."¹³ Collier, dismissing Restoration comedy as "profane," is the most famous example of this kind of moral bias. Such short-sighted judgments belie the comic achievement of plays which would later influence the sentimental dramas of the eighteenth century and the morally upright melodramas of the nineteenth century. It is the question of morality which has, to a great extent, blurred a critical understanding of what is, after all, a continuing dramatic tradition.

These later plays conform, at least in part, to the view that comedy must "discountenance" a sustained comic portrayal of vice. The problem of dramatic excellence aside, these dramas would satisfy the moral bias of a Collier. Conversely, Restoration comedy continues to

be judged on moral grounds, and continues to be found wanting. To critics who see in the play's brilliantly witty exterior the key to its artificiality, this comedy is a falsified, and perhaps glamorized, version of aristocratic London life. Even so, in one recent critic's words: "wit seemed determined to glamorize immorality."¹⁴ "Artificial" as the play may be, it nonetheless violates the code of strict morality. The other critical camp views the comedy as a realistic, and hence morally dangerous, vision of life. In 1695, Blackmore soundly condemns the stage's promulgation of immorality: "The universal Corruption of Manners and irreligious Disposition of Mind that infects the Kingdom seems to have been in a great Measure deriv'd from the Stage, or has at least been highly promoted by it."¹⁵ Similarly, sentimental playwrights argue that the stage does in fact represent life, and they bemoan the sordid image cast for the audience's approbation.¹⁶ In 1711, Steele complains that Etherege's Man of Mode portrays "Nature in its utmost Corruption and Degeneracy."¹⁷ Writing in 1731, "Crito" likewise denounces the contemporary degeneracy of taste, and remarks that "fine Gentlemen" like Dorimant are a "Disgrace" to nature.¹⁸

More recently, critics like Williams would agree that Restoration comic dramatists reflect the nature so deplored by the moralists: "The playwrights sought, in their words, to hold the mirror up to nature and to the harsh and uncloistered realities of London life, thereby truly representing the precarious path to a valid conjugal relationship" ("No Cloistered Virtue," 234). As the words "truly representing" suggest, he tends to regard comedy as a reflection of society. Such critics view the comedy, in Holland's words, as "an analogue to reality"

(First Modern Comedies, p. 7).¹⁹ Palmer, Dobrée and, later, Muir insistently label this comedy "manners" comedy because of its aristocratic flavour and social verity. As Palmer states it: "Restoration comedy must be judged as an honest reflexion of contemporary manners".²⁰ In Dobrée's terms, "manners" comedy is so by virtue of this realism: "indeed, a superficial reading of these plays, combined with a very small acquaintance with the period, will convince us that this comedy came as close to real life as possible, not only in its setting, as Macaulay insisted, but in the actual personalities and events."²¹ Cook and Swannell, in their introduction to The Country Wife (1775), reiterate this view: "the stuff of Restoration comedy was the familiar, bustling world of just beyond the stage door" (p. xxx).

Fujimura takes the realistic argument further. Accusing these critics of dwelling more on the comedy's literary and aesthetic style than on its social accuracy, he prefers to stress both the witty and the naturalistic strains in Restoration comedy. If life is seen as a "witty enterprise," then its expression is manifested in its naturalistic outlook, in its "realism in technique" and in its subsequent "rejection of the fanciful and extravagant in content."²² Far from being immoral, as the zealot would have it, and certainly not amoral, as the "manners" critic would regard it, Fujimura suggests that "wit comedy" does deal "with morality insofar as it touches on human relations" (Comedy of Wit, p. 59).

Conversely, Nettleton's influential book, English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, originally published in 1914 and reprinted in 1968, denies the comedy any far-reaching social reality

or moral purpose, and condemns it as superficial: "Comedy mirrored not English nature, still less human nature, but the nature of the court. Elizabethan comedy had been national; Restoration comedy was local" (p.72). Nettleton solemnly concludes: "Superficial, almost of necessity, was the comedy that mirrored the manners of a superficial society" (p. 87). Not only is the comedy superficial; it is also artificial, "not in Lamb's sense that it dealt with an unreal Utopia, but in that it arbitrarily narrowed the range of comedy" (p. 72).²³

Underwood, on the other hand, contends that such terms as "artificial" and "superficial" hardly capture what Fujimura calls the comedy's "vitality and force" (Comedy of Wit, pp. 8-9). Defining "manners comedy" as the "comic depiction of the social behavior which characterized a particular historical society" (Etherege, p. 3), Underwood applies the terms "wit" and "manners" to what he considers to be "a distinctive kind of comic expression whose nature and meaning transcend the questions of both realism and artificiality; that in these terms the comedy of the plays is neither casual nor superficial but a thoughtful, carefully ordered, and pervasively ironic form of drama; that while the plays deal with a special society they project through it problems fundamental not only to the seventeenth century but to the nature of man" (pp. 6-7). In this view, Restoration comedy, as a "thoughtful" kind of drama, explores the timeless nature of man and, in so doing, goes beyond linguistic facility, studied morality or a superficial sketch of a highly mannered society.

Underwood's view, enunciated in 1957, anticipates the more recent views of critics like Taylor who, in her introduction to Etherege's

She Would If She Could, appreciates the verbal and thematic richness of the comedy, and she seeks to recognize the depths of its dramatic vision. Rejecting labels, which are limiting because she says they "exclude qualities present in the plays," she prefers instead the "chronological term - Restoration comedy" (fn. 8, p. xv), and discusses the comedy in terms of its social, artificial, romantic and satiric features. Finally, she prefers the designation "intellectual comedy," if only because the "dramatists create a complex world for the spectator or reader to evaluate, but they preach no obvious morality" (p. xx).²⁴

Diverse as these critical assessments are, many critics do recognize that fundamental to the comedy is a view of man which rests, not on manifestly moral doctrines, but on social and satiric principles.²⁵ Man in this comic world is fallible and subject to moral disease. Rampant in this complex social world are the comic disparities between "the individual [and] society, freedom [and] restraint, self-interest [and] obligation, and . . . the question of 'pleasure' [and] 'virtue'" (Underwood, Etherege, p. 9). The character who possibly can resolve such disparities comes to be a comic ideal, and in Restoration comedy the witty heroine seemingly fulfills this function. Frequently, however, the plays do not resolve the questions they pose. A dance of cuckolds ends Wycherley's The Country Wife, and Etherege suggests that Dorimant in The Man of Mode may not remain faithful to Harriet.²⁶ Such ambiguity stems both from the playwrights' view of man and from their view of comedy.

In contrast to later, more proselytizing playwrights, dramatists like Vanbrugh and Congreve enunciate a view of comedy which stresses

that "the Business of Comedy is to shew People what they shou'd do, by representing them upon the Stage, doing what they shou'd not" (Vanbrugh, Vindication, p. 206).²⁷ Indeed, the comedy may burst with lively comic portraits and revel, as it often does, in bawdy plots, but its primary thrust ostensibly is to expose mankind's moral and social failings.²⁸ In his reply to what Williams calls Collier's "wild array of charges" ("No Cloistered Virtue," 235), Congreve hearkens back to the Aristotelian notion that comedy, as "an Imitation of the worse sort of People," treats the "Manners" of those fit for comic exposure: "But the Vices most frequent, and which are the common Practice of the looser sort of Livers, are the subject Matter of Comedy. [Aristotle] tells us farther, that they must be exposed after a ridiculous manner: For Men are to be laugh'd out of their Vices in Comedy; the Business of comedy is to delight, as well as to instruct: And as vicious People are made asham'd of their Follies or Faults, by seeing them expos'd in a ridiculous manner, so are good People at once both warn'd and diverted at their Expense."²⁹

Unlike the sentimentalists' penchant for the sermon, dramatists who write in the witty mode challenge their audiences to recognize the vice and folly so lavishly displayed on the stage, and then set about to correct their own. As Vanbrugh contends, in his reply to Collier's criticism: "Nor is there any necessity a Philosopher shou'd stand by, like an Interpreter at a Poppet-show, to explain the Moral to the Audience." The stage, in this comic view, "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" (Vindication, p. 206).³⁰ Vanbrugh's comments may skirt Collier's immediate allegations of "profanity" and the stage, but they do embrace the underlying comic principles of Restoration dramatists who, though they gleefully reflect "dirty" faces, are nonetheless fundamentally concerned with the human foibles which stain man's countenance. Unlike the "Philosopher," whose moral interpolations obtrude into the play, the dramatist seeks not so much to correct as to expose and ridicule. Mankind's stained side is rigorously reflected, his follies ridiculed and his social side comically held up to view.

When Vanbrugh speaks of the "glass" he does indeed refer, at least in part, to the social agar which nurtures the comic conflict: gregarious man's striving to conform to the social dictates of the town. The playwrights stress man's undue regard for all that is fashionable and, in doing so, they highlight the basic social nature of the age and of those who live in it. "Made for Towns and Cities," the "Sociable Animal," man, thrives in his gaudy creation, the town.³¹ Yet, while man's basic social nature helps to create it, the town also perpetrates his own comic discomfort. The very thing which man has created both condones and condemns him; it feeds his folly at the same time that it demands his slavish obedience to its arbitrary dictates and derides his social transgressions. The "Vanity of this lewd Town,"³² for example, fosters what Congreve calls man's "acquir'd Folly," or affectation, a quality which makes the offender a fit comic subject ("Humour in Comedy," p. 82). Thus, the comedy becomes both a reflection of social reality and a vehicle for social criticism.

But if, as Jonson once said, the social dramatist "squeezes" mankind's "spongie" nature,³³ then the Restoration dramatist does so in a way which yokes the real "stage of the world," of which Dennis speaks, to the artificial stage of the comic theatre.³⁴ Like a mirror's inversion, the dramatist's "glass" also distorts the realistic, social image. The play is, after all, a play--and a comic one--and its very artificiality precludes a faithful transcript of reality.³⁵ In its distortion, its comic exaggeration, is the play's critical thrust: "the mirror of Restoration comic dramatists has something of the fun house in it. It enlarges and distorts the nuances of life in order to make an ironic or satiric comment about the nature of man and his society" (Taylor, Introduction, p. xvii).

To do so, these dramatists twist stage conventions to their own thematic use. As one Etherege critic correctly notes, stage conventions heighten the play's artificiality, its "playness," and thereby effectively undercut the notion that the play accurately transcribes a literal social reality (pp. xix-xx). References to the pit, to the actors, to other plays, all startle audience and reader alike into a realization that the play is a play. In The Way of the World, for example, Witwoud pointedly remarks: "Hey day! what are you all got together like Players at the end of the last Act?" (V.i.475). And just as Olivia in Wycherley's The Plain Dealer delivers a diatribe against The Country Wife, so, too, does Triffle in Burnaby's The Ladies Visiting Day refer directly to the play's title.³⁶ As Holland suggests: "By calling attention to the play as play, the dramatist says the play, the mirror of society, is a pretense and so exposes society itself as a

pretense" (First Modern Comedies, p. 116).

Similarly, traditional comic stereotypes come to serve distinctive thematic ends and underscore fundamental concerns. The embodiments of affectation and excess, these comic portraits, stereotypical as they may be, exemplify the social nature of man himself. Conventions like the aside and the soliloquy often describe the inner feelings which correct social deportment bids such characters conceal. On one level, as Congreve notes, the soliloquy expresses an individual's innermost thoughts (Dedication, The Double-Dealer, pp. 119-120). On another, more thematic level, such a convention halts the action of the play, and enables the dramatist to expose the frequent contradiction between what one is and what one appears or wishes to be in a complex social setting. Expanded beyond its basically social impetus, the comic conflict in Restoration comedy comes to include the conflict between the private and the public self, between what Kathleen Lynch calls the characters' "natural selves and the selves which society prescribes for them" (Social Mode, p. 37).

To possess wit is one means to deal with this frequent discrepancy between the person and the mask, for the language of wit helps to clarify the discrepancies between things. Witty characters perceive "similarities in things dissimilar," and they possess a finely tuned sense of the "incongruity [that] exists in the comparison" (Underwood, Etherege, p. 106). Locke defines wit as "the assemblage of Ideas" put together "with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity."³⁷ Wit, to Sir Richard Blackmore, is essentially "a Qualification of the Mind, that raises and enlivens cold

Sentiments and plain Propositions, by giving them an elegant and surprizing turn."³⁸ In the eighteenth century, Murphy describes wit in the following manner: "The point of relation, in which two or more ideas agree, should not be obvious: the two things should lie remote, their congruity not perceived, till pointed out with quickness, with novelty, and that unexpected lustre, which charms at once by the justness of the comparison, and the surprise that attends it."³⁹ Finally, then, this "wit language of analogy, simile, parallel, contrast, point and balance"⁴⁰ juxtaposes "conventionally exclusive categories [,] and their almost immediate identification one with the other results in a tingling insight, turning traditional value topsy-turvy."⁴¹

Wit also demonstrates more than intellectual and verbal agility. The would-be wits can easily draw likenesses or similitudes, but these comparisons fail to illustrate what Roper calls "something worthwhile" ("Language and Action," 45). In contrast, "the self-awareness, the tolerance, the irony, that characterize the truewits' speeches are reflections of the moral qualities they embody." Their "linguistic decorum" suggests their "moral stance."⁴² Their display of wit, as Mirabell notes, enables them to "invent an Evasion" which prevents the utterance of "unseasonable Truths" (The Way of the World, I.i.404). Eschewing obvious malice, the truly witty characters engage in a verbal repartee conducted "in a subtle and indirect manner so that the surface of genial society would not be disturbed"⁴³. Thus, wit can be said to be more than deft verbal fencing. It represents a social mastery and, ultimately, "the supreme linguistic expression of a theatrical convention demanding that feeling be controlled, if its display is not to

offend" ("Study of an Epigram," p. 176).

At the same time as it provides social amusement and intellectual detachment, wit protects the inner self; it guards the character from the onslaught of others and maintains the semblance of geniality. Not only does it clarify and refine "the values of conversational man";⁴⁴ wit also helps to articulate precisely the matters at hand. In the cerebral activities of the wits is "their awareness of complexity and need for clarification" (Cecil, "Raillery," 148). Given the complex social and personal situation, "the final comic meaning of the wit, like that of the total play, is to express the confusion, uncertainty, and ambiguity of human life" (Underwood, Etherege, p. 109).⁴⁵ And the playwrights rarely "offer remedies or prescribe reforms" to lessen the weight of the plays' ambiguities.⁴⁶

Finally, then, the dramatist's mirror, unassisted by direct authorial manipulation, constitutes a "plain Demonstration," and it is a demonstration unadorned by virtuous precepts, "or even Preaching it self."⁴⁷ Eschewing "dull morals, gravely writ," the playwrights mercilessly expose the "dirty faces" to view.⁴⁸ The play's very artificiality, coupled with its exaggerated comic portraiture and its linguistic richness, yields a comedy complex both in its criticism and in its social treatment of mankind. Notwithstanding Lamb's insistence that it represents nothing more than a "Utopia of gallantry," of harmless frivolity,⁴⁹ comedy written in the witty mode dissects the social milieu in order to lay bare its flaws and critically probe its inhabitants: cast-off mistresses who vengefully pursue their disenchanted lovers, matrons who defy the ravages of time, superannuated

rakes who foolishly wed young wives, parents who wilfully interfere with the young lovers, even the social master himself, the witty hero.⁵⁰

In their characters, then, the playwrights comically exaggerate human folly, but rarely is it treated in an exculpatory fashion. No reformation of character at the end of a Restoration comedy transforms the fool into a hero, the jade into a heroine. Rather, such instances of folly and self-deception underline Vanbrugh's comic principle that one function of the stage is to represent people's doing what they most decidedly should not do. Accordingly, foolish actions provoke ridicule.

For example, the character of Mrs. Termagent in Shadwell's The Squire of Alsatia (1688) suffers a fitting comic fate for her foolishness.⁵¹

Described in the Dramatis Personae as "a furious, malicious, and revengeful woman" (p. 207), she perpetually plagues the rakish hero, Belfond.⁵² She, like so many cast-off mistresses, foolishly seeks constancy in one who, until he yields to the charms of the heroine, can never be "that dull, that constant thing" which such a viper expects him to be.⁵³

Her excessive passion merely robs her of her wit, and reduces her to curses and impotent rage. This "froward, ill-natur'd Creature" becomes the witty hero's comic butt (The Squire of Alsatia, IV.i.252) and, finally, her passionate tirades and excessive jealousy render her ridiculous to a world governed by wit.

So, too, with the matron's absurd insistence on her youth and beauty. Lady Fantast in Shadwell's Bury Fair (1689) typifies the ridiculous posturings into which the matron falls. Although "manag'd with Care," her artifice can never conceal a face ravaged by time.⁵⁴ Oldwit, who is himself tainted by folly, bluntly ridicules her vain endeavours to

appear youthful. To her remark that she and her daughter "only use a Wash, and lay on a little Red," he retorts: "No more does a Wall: but you, for your part, are fain to fill up the Chinks in your rivell'd Skin, as House-painters do the Cracks in Wainscot, with Putty. Pox on't, you wou'd by Art appear a Beauty, and are by Nature a meer Mummy" (Bury Fair, II.i.317). Sniping as his appraisal may be, Oldwit nonetheless underlines an important Restoration theme. Blinded by her artifice and, like her "Fantastick" daughter (315), steeped in "Folly and Affectation" (313), this sullied matron pretends to be what she is not, and thereby attempts to obfuscate the distinction between what is artificial and what is natural.

Such "ridiculously proud, vain and fantastical" specimens of artifice deceive only themselves.⁵⁵ Melantha in Dryden's Marriage-à-la-Mode (1672), for example, relishes all that is French (III.i.62), but her Frenchified ways and her courtliness fail to conceal her fundamental foppery, which is soundly denounced as mere impertinence (II.i.41; V.i.117).⁵⁶ To curb her foolish affectation, the resourceful Palamede chooses to abide by the sage advice offered by Philotis and, embarking on a design to "foil [Melantha] at her own weapon" (V.i.115), Palamede does succeed in disarming her (116-120). Melantha's foolishness has, in the meantime, made her a ridiculous figure, and Palamede must now determine to "get her a place at court; and when she is once there, she can be no longer ridiculous" (134).

Melantha's concerted effort to be what she is not, an elegant if Frenchified lady of the court, steeps her in foolish posturing. But hers is an affectation which leads, finally, to marriage and to a

realization of what she has for so long pretended to be, "for she is young enough, and pretty enough, and fool enough, and French enough, to bring up a fashion [at court] to be affected" (134).

On the other hand, like the comic punishment meted out to an intransigent old father like Moody in Dryden's Sir Martin Mar-all (1667), the jealous old husband finds himself, not only the comic butt, but also the very thing he most dreads: an old man outwitted, and even cuckolded, by the wily hero. Such a jealous old husband receives a suitable comic punishment for his folly. Francisco in Behn's The False Count (1682) typifies the doddering patriarch who, although "a Thing, fit only for his Tomb" (I.ii.106), unwisely weds a young woman. His foolishness prompts Don Carlos to snarl: "I hear he keeps her as close as a Relict, jealous as Age and Impotence can make him" (I.i.103). Indeed, Francisco's excessive jealousy arouses the scorn of others: "Now is this Fellow so afraid of being made a Cuckold that he fears his own Shadow, and dares not go into his Wife's Chamber if the Sun do but shine into the Room" (I.ii.113). "Rarely cheated" (V.i.173), both by his rival and by his witty servant, the purblind Francisco finally suffers a suitable comic punishment. Not only is his self-aggrandizement checked when his haughty daughter weds a sham count, but he is also compelled to resign his matrimonial rights to Julia.

Although the Restoration hero does outwit such foolish characters, he himself receives some measure of chastisement for his wanton courses. He whose sole "Bus'ness is to laugh and love" (The Rover, IV.ii.70) decries the religious solemnity of constancy in love or virtue in women. He relishes inconstancy if only "for the sweet sake of variety"

or, as Celadon in Secret Love (1667) muses: "Well, we must all sin, and we must all repent, and there's an end on't".⁵⁷ In the eyes of the profligate, virtue frequently is a secret cloak for sin: "For Virtue's but a Name kept free from Scandal, / Which the most base of Women best preserve, / Since jilting and Hypocrisy cheat the World best" (The City Heiress, III.i.255). If virtue is a mask for hidden lechery, then fidelity in marriage is a chimera: "Marrying's the Mask, which Modesty assures, / Helps to get new, and covers old Amours" (Epilogue, p. 299). Indeed, in the hero's view, marriage itself snuffs out any amorous spark which may have survived the "cheap Drug of a Church-Ceremony" (IV.i.264). Marriage is, in Celadon's words, "poor folks pleasure that cannot go to the cost of variety" (Secret Love, I.i.125). To the hero's rakish soul, "Hymen and Priest wait still upon Portion, and Joynture; Love and Beauty have their own Ceremonies. Marriage is as certain a Bane to Love, as lending Money is to Friendship" (The Rover, V.i.101).

Impending betrothal constrains the excessive behaviour of one who has for so long dealt in the "Trade of Love" (The City Heiress, II.i.223). But it is the heroine's lack of affectation and her possession of true virtue which call into question all the hero's profligate notions of virtue and marriage.⁵⁸ She proves to be more "saintly" if only because she is what she appears to be: a lively and witty young woman of a fair and unsullied countenance. The hero may finally, if hesitantly, agree to marriage, but only after the heroine, as a comic ideal, has convinced him of her worth. To tame her wild gallant, the heroine must wittily entice an avowed libertine into conjugal submission,

and Restoration comedy at its best vivifies the comic machinations to which the amorous hero and heroine individually must resort in order to win, on their own terms, the heart of the other.

Hellena in The Rover (1677) will not be made "fit for Heaven" (I.i.22), or the hero's libidinous embraces, unless she is promised marriage; she will not bargain until she is assured that "Hymen and his Priest say Amen to't" (V.i.100). Given his roving nature, she must somehow tolerate a lover who one moment swears undying devotion and the next abjures all thoughts of constancy. He, for his part, strongly urges her to abandon herself to his own wanton desires.⁵⁹ The ensuing verbal swordplay establishes both hero and heroine as the comic standards; their spirited colloquies dramatically demonstrate the kind of social and verbal mastery which the other characters so sorely lack. In Behn's The Rover, the characters of Hellena and Willmore, as well as their extended witty exchanges, illustrate the intellectual prowess and the emotional detachment which only the two witty lovers possess. Theirs is a "sophisticated verbal repartee" which clearly displays the moods and thoughts of the participants at the same time as it refuses to sink to "uninhibited emotional revelation" (Miller, "Study of an Epigram," p. 176).

Hellena, for example, takes her roving lover to task. Using a traditional image to describe the hero's inconstant temper, she berates his lack of constancy in the following manner: "you have been staying that swinging stomach you boasted of this morning; I remember then my little Collation would have gone down with you, without the Sauce of a handsome Face - Is your Stomach so quesny now?" Willmore wittily

parries: "Faith long fasting, Child, spoils a Man's Appetite - yet if you durst treat, I could so lay about me still." Hellena's rejoinder not only enlarges upon the notion of appetite, but also rails him about marriage: "And would you fall to, before a Priest says Grace?" (The Rover, III.i.47).

Yet, Willmore's very temper, "this unconstant Humour" (IV.ii.71), only makes her engage more fiercely and more successfully in the amorous battle. Later, her witty retorts lead him to confess: "Egad, I was never claw'd away with Broad-Sides from any Female before" (V.i.100). Her witty good nature so fascinates him that Willmore must ultimately capitulate and, in doing so, he reiterates, but in a new context, the bird image he had earlier used to describe his wantonness (V.i.96). Now, when she threatens to leave him, he declares: "Nay, if we part so, let me die like a Bird upon a Bough, at the Sheriff's Charge. By Heaven, both the Indies shall not buy thee from me. I adore thy Humour and will marry thee, and we are so of one Humour, it must be a Bargain-" (101). The sinner may be tamed, but he is certainly not regarded as a saint, a chastened convert to regulated virtue.

Therefore, at its best, Restoration comedy holds the "Glass for the World to view itself in." Yet, here, to perform on this stage of the world, sociable man must "use a Wash, and lay on a little Red" (Bury Fair, II.i.317), and thereby conceal his true image beneath a cosmetic varnish. If the painted countenance is to be washed and the underlying stain removed, people must "see themselves as they are" (Vanbrugh, Vindication, p. 206). As Congreve asserts in his Amendments: "My Business was not to paint, but to wash; not to shew Beauties, but

to wipe off Stains" (p. 455). The dramatists comically mirror the folly and the vice of the world, and vivify those "things that shadow and conceal" man's dual nature (The Man of Mode, III.i.50). But they do so only to show more dramatically the disparity between the false appearance and the inner substance.⁶⁰

In a town of counterfeit shows, cunningly contrived appearances too often pass for current coin. The "counterfeits of the age" engage in dissimulation (I.i.25), an acquired social skill which effectively protects and disguises the inner self. Artful man may for the time conceal his true nature beneath a witty veneer of studied manners and dissimulated appearances. Yet, rehearsed though it may be, dissimulation "can never absolutely Transubstantiate us into what we would seem" (Congreve, "Humour in Comedy," p. 81); to attempt to do so is to confuse what we are and "what we would be, under a Voluntary Disguise" (p. 79).

Restoration dramatists vividly mirror man's comic inability to distinguish between "Voluntary Disguise" and truth.⁶¹ Steeped in folly and affectation, the fools neither can penetrate the disguise, nor can they perpetrate sham. Derived from industry, artifice becomes for them, not the picture, but the life itself, and appearance their only substantial reality. Ironically, they asseverate Wilde's "truth of masks," but they fail to distinguish between what they are and what they would be (p. 79).⁶² Only the witty hero and heroine voluntarily assume disguises which never "absolutely" transform their inner natures. The social mask is, to them, a self-consciously devised piece of artifice which hides, but does not change, their "natural selves"

(Lynch, Social Mode, p. 37). Indeed, their "intellectual ability" and "self control" successfully conceal their own inner longings.⁶³ The town must finally bow to a witty ascendancy which so artfully conceals the self and so capably masters the disguise.

To a great extent, the comic tension between what one is and what one appears to be also determines the outcome of the witty love chase itself. To outwit their amorous opponents and gain a witty ascendancy over them, both the witty hero and heroine must dissemble their feelings and wear these prevaricating masks. While they may finally agree to an offer of marriage, the impending betrothal does not, of necessity, as Holland suggests, reconcile appearance and reality (First Modern Comedies, p. 231). Nor does it always, as Deitz contends, indicate an "open trust."⁶⁴ In return for a promise of marriage, the witty combatants insist on marital "provisos" which will protect the inner self and allow them to retain their cultivated appearance of witty ascendancy.⁶⁵

Therefore, the mirror which the dramatists hold may indeed reflect the "world." But the "way of the world" demands artful disguise and witty control. The play must also mirror these "things that shadow and conceal," and the unrelieved comic disparity between art and nature, between shadow and substance, accounts for much of the drama's ambiguity. In Congreve's plays, the comic disparity comes to be "understood by contraries" (Love for Love, IV.i.297), and in Wycherley's, by satiric extremes. Etherege explores man's dual nature which remains clouded by the artfully cultivated "things that shadow and conceal" (The Man of Mode, III.i.50).

CHAPTER TWO

"Things that shadow and conceal":
Etherege's She Would If She Could
and The Man of Mode

Etherege's comedies include characters who vividly exemplify many of the themes and concerns of Restoration comedy. In She Would If She Could and The Man of Mode, he probes the artifice and folly of a creature enamoured by the fashionable vices of the town. As Sir Car Scroope asserts in his Prologue to The Man of Mode: "For, heav'n be thanked, 'tis not so wise an age / But your own follies may supply the stage" (ll. 24-5). On his world of the stage, Etherege mirrors all the "gaudy nonsense" (l. 16) which the fops so adore, and he exposes the latest "distemper" (l. 32) which, like any physical disease, afflicts the legions of fools who perform on the stage of the world. It is, then, a world of artifice and of cultivated appearances, designed to conceal the true self. Like Sir Fopling, "True fops help nature's work, and go to school / To file and finish God a'mighty's fool" (Epilogue, ll. 13-14). Etherege, like his contemporaries, holds the "Glass" for this foppish world of artifice and folly (Prologue, l. 39), and he exposes to view "Something of man," at once diseased and risible (Epilogue, l. 5).

Etherege in his most masterful comedies explores man's dual nature at the same time as he comically explores a conventional theme.

Using a counterfeiting metaphor, Etherege draws on the monetary imagery of the past in order to explain the theme of appearance and reality. In this busy world of commerce, where "angels" are coins and daughters marriageable commodities, counterfeit coins deceive the eye and cheat the pocket. Similarly, the "things that shadow and conceal" (The Man of Mode, III.i.50) the dual nature of man "gild" over the "native brass" of such an erring and frail creature (II.ii.45), and make him a counterfeit coin. Later dramatists, like Congreve, Sheridan, Wilde, Pinero and Jones, will play on the theme of counterfeit appearance and the notion of the "marriage mart." Etherege, together with Wycherley, studies the defaced angel, a clever reference both to the coin and to the fall.¹ The "counterfeits of the age" falsify appearance (I.i.25), and they are as fallen as they are modish. In his plays, Etherege comically explores this fundamental seventeenth-century theme of the disparity between what we are and what we would seem, a theme introduced in his first play, She Would If She Could.²

In the play, secrecy, dissembling and counterfeiting are so artfully contrived that artifice threatens to confound reality. Etherege's is a biting play, a play which exploits convention in order to clarify his dual vision of man. Busily engaged in cabal-like doings, the artificers enact an elaborate and highly comic ritual of physical concealment and studied false appearances, and the "wouldness" of their actions, founded as it is on counterfeiting, may temporarily pass for current coin. Nevertheless, the play makes clear that what they "dare not discover," for "fear of betraying" themselves, is this essential "wouldness" (I.i.ii).³ They foolishly strive to "transubstantiate"

their true nature into what they "would seem" (Congreve, "Humour in Comedy," p. 81). In Etherege's world of artificers, Wilde's "truth of masks" is found to be a lie, and the artificer to be a prevaricator.⁴ What the other characters "would" do, only the witty lovers can and shall do. In the end, they banish artifice and accept verity, at least for a time.

The play's structure underpins these comic themes. Expanding on the conventional picture of the licentious town and its chief proponent, the rake, the first act introduces the rich complexities which the rest of the play will develop: artifice versus nature, freedom versus constraint, secrecy versus sincerity. And the conventional character of the rake becomes a comic and thematic pivot on which Etherege's concerns will turn.

Ostensibly, when Courtall and Freeman discuss the rakish pleasures of the "old Trade" (4), they merely voice the conventional concerns of the libertine. Freeman bemoans the sad lack of "new" acquaintance, and suggests that "a bottle or two of good Burgundy" will rekindle their interest in those who now are dull (4). Their appetites are jaded and, like the rest of the raking brotherhood, they crave new "courses."

But Etherege quickly adds a twist. Courtall laments: "This is grown a wicked town" (4). The town is wicked, not because of its license, but because of its closeted activities. Formerly, "a gentleman should not have gone out of his chamber, but some civil officer or other of the game" would accost him and offer him fresh fare to satiate a gnawing appetite. Now, says Freeman, "there are a company of higling rascals, who partly for themselves, but more especially for some secret



friends, daily forestall the markets" (4).

The play's amorous intrigues highlight the surreptitiousness. In the first scene, Mrs. Sentry, acting on her mistress' orders, pretends that she comes without Lady Cockwood's knowledge (6), and Sir Oliver enjoins Courtall to secrecy (8, 9). Freeman must hide when Mrs. Sentry appears and she, in turn, must conceal herself when Sir Oliver arrives. Because they are concealed, they overhear all the secret machinations so jealously guarded by others. Sir Oliver, as it transpires, is a "vile dissembling man" (11), one who swears fidelity to his wife and yet one who secretly craves the "gentleman-like recreations" of debauchery (7).

The "old trade" suffers because individuals, "for some private reasons" (5), refuse to engage in a frank and open manner, a manner extolled by the rakes. Unlike the clandestine purveyors who secretly handle their own intrigues, Courtall yearns to remove himself from the "fatigue" and "impertinencies" associated with bringing "a young wench to the lure" (5). He prefers instead to rely on the straightforward methods of the "old trade." He can then be free to "back my own colts, and man my own hawks" (5), secure in the knowledge that he does not have to resort to charming and persuasive masks to achieve his licentious ends.

These two profligates serve as commentators on the secrecy around them, but they also come to embody Etherege's comic ideal of honest hearts and frank natures. Their "sincere dealing" with each other (13), founded on a mutual lack of pretense and on a mutual regard for propriety, contrasts sharply to the dissembling practiced by others.

Freeman hides because it is a question of decency (5). Later, though curious, he inquires: "Pray how long, if without offense a man may ask you, have you been in good grace with this person of honor? I never knew you had that commendable quality of secrecy before" (12). What could be interpreted as secrecy is more a desire to be honourable (5) and honest (12) than a covert design to "wheadle" and conceal (12). By allowing his friend to overhear his conversations with others (5), and by confiding all the secretive affairs in which he is enmeshed, Courtall deals openly and sincerely with his friend, a man who may in matters of love be "an infidel" (13) but who, as his Christian name suggests, in matters of friendship displays only frankness.

The dialogue of the first scene clearly establishes the play's themes.⁵ Casual references to "trade" and "merchants" underscore the rake's typical reduction of love to materialism. Pointed references to "secret," "private" and "dissembling" also occur, and adumbrate the themes of concealment and "wouldness." On yet another level, this scene introduces the notions of "frankness" and "sincerity," and foreshadows a corollary theme: "secret" dealings nurture the growing wickedness of the town, a wickedness which the play seeks to define, expose and vitiate.

To do so, Etherege carefully constructs an architectonic play; each scene contrasts to, or parallels, another scene. Etherege parallels I.ii and II.ii, and this method helps him to expose, not only Lady Cockwood's dissembling nature, but also her self-deception. Foolishly, she fancies herself to be sexually desirable. Like countless other matrons, she is deceived by the hero's gentlemanly deportment, which she construes to

be gallantry. In reality, Courtall finds her to be "foolishly fond and troublesome" (I.i.13), and he longs to be rid of his aging encumbrance.

Lady Cockwood's self-delusion does not stop with Courtall. In spite of Sentry's disclosure to the contrary, Lady Cockwood deludes herself into thinking that she is "not a woman easily to be deceived," nor will she believe Sir Oliver to be "an abominable hypocrite at home" (I.ii.16). The first scene has proven Sir Oliver's hypocrisy to be real. He seeks his lady's approbation (10) and yet, with all secrecy, he plays the part of the debauchee. Though he believes his consort to possess "an unblemished reputation" (8), she yearns to stain it, provided she can retain a credible semblance of honour. As the title of the play suggests, she is so steeped in her own "wouldness" that she becomes deluded by her own false appearances.

In Act II, scene ii, Etherege masterfully exploits the conventional device of the aside to illustrate the comic disparity between the reality and the appearance. To Lady Cockwood's comment that she "cannot be altogether unsensible of [his] generous passion," Courtall snickers in an aside: "Aye, aye, I am a very passionate lover!" (II.ii.33). The disparity is further heightened when, later, Lady Cockwood scolds Sentry: "Will you never take warning, but still be leaving me alone in these suspicious occasions?" (34). Sentry's aside bares Lady Cockwood's nature for what it is: "If I stay in the room, she will not speak kindly to me in a week after; and if I go out, she always chides me thus. This is a strange infirmity she has, but I must bear with it; for on my conscience, custom has made it so natural, she cannot help it" (34-5). Lady Cockwood's affected virtue, habitually practiced, seems

to be "natural." In Congreve's words, "a continued Affectation, may in time become a Habit"; Lady Cockwood can no longer distinguish between the life and the picture ("Humour in Comedy," p. 79).

Conversely, the point of the heroines' dissembling is a love game. They resolve to take the liberty of the town and "plague" the gallants their beauty ensnares (I.ii.20). Ariana uses the conventional battle image to describe their determination to become "absolute tyrants" over their "lawless subjects" (21). They must of necessity don masks to wage their battle, for their masks guard them from scandal (II.i.27). They must be sure of their quarry before they will risk exposure, and so they insist that, as a test of fidelity, the gallants swear an oath (29).

The love chase has begun in earnest. The heroines' "tongues are as nimble as their heels" (26), and their wit startles both gallants. Courtall frankly confesses: "Now would not I see thy face for the world. If it should but be half so good as thy humor, thou wouldst dangerously tempt me to dote upon thee, and forgetting all shame, become constant" (28). Freeman as freely admits: "I perceive, by your fooling here, that wit and good humor may make a man in love with a blackamoor" (28).

Nevertheless, suspicious that the heroines may be "still a little wild" and be "in need of better manning" (30), they will contest the tyranny Ariana and Gatty wish to exercise over them. Later, Courtall laments: "That which troubles me most is, we have lost the hopes of variety, and a single intrigue in love is as dull as a single plot in a play, and will tire a lover worse than t'other does an audience" (III.i.45). They resolve that their pursuit of the delectable country

lasses will serve as their "main design", and insure "a pleasant comedy" (46).

Complications soon develop. Accustomed to the efficacy of counterfeiting (III.iii.68 ff.; IV.i.79), Lady Cockwood determines to test Courtall's affection by counterfeiting letters (75). This device of the counterfeit letters may heighten the comedy but, like so many contrivances, it also underlines the pervasiveness of artificiality. So pervasive is the wickedness of the town and so numerous the secrets, the rakish heroes suddenly have what they lacked earlier: their "pleasant comedy" now has a complicated plot. To counteract the effects of counterfeiting, and bring about a genuine "pleasant comedy," the characters must resort to yet more artifice. In spite of the many entanglements into which her conniving has plunged her, Lady Cockwood still cannot circumvent the "wouldness" of her own nature. Now she must look to Freeman to satisfy her "spirit of impertinence" (I.i.13), with the result that even Freeman himself succumbs to deceit. He "secretly" addresses her (IV.i.81) and, though he later confesses to Courtall his designs upon the eager matron (IV.ii.88), he nonetheless proceeds to "deceive" his friend (V.i.101). Similarly, Gatty and Ariana still rely on artifice. Rather than dealing openly with their gallants, they choose to "dissemble" (IV.ii.88) and to prick the assurance of those whom they falsely believe to be base and deceitful. In Act IV, scene ii, the witty lovers engage in a verbal battle quite unlike their earlier witty exchange (II.i.), and the basis for their sniping colloquy is a forgery.

In contrast to their first encounter (I.i.), Courtall and Freeman for a time no longer deal "sincerely" with each other. Neither will

yield ground to the other until, finally, their natural honesty and frankness resolve the problem created by the "Madam Machiavil" (IV.ii.93), Lady Cockwood. They determine to "proceed honestly like friends" and "discover the truth of things to one another" (IV.i.85). The value of sincere dealing is re-affirmed. Yet, only in Act V are the devices of secrecy, dissembling, concealment and masking finally revealed.

Here, the play's conventional devices of hiding and subterfuge are related to the deceit entangling all the characters. Freeman must closet himself away if he is to avoid detection, and Courtall, if his paramour's honour is to remain unspotted, must also hide. The farcical complications which arise do provoke laughter (V.i.104-6) and yet, they also illustrate in their very boisterousness the perils of artifice. Engulfing the characters in darkness, the episode threatens to expose the veiled intentions of all the counterfeiterers, the rakes included.

Finally, however, concealment assists the heroes in their efforts to disentangle themselves from the subterfuge played upon them, and all that remains is for Ariana and Gatty to be illuminated. Both readily admit their bewilderment and their heartfelt hope that "time will make it out, [we] hope, to the advantage of the gentlemen" (108). Indeed, the heroines' openness with each other at the end of the play parallels the frankness the two heroes show toward each other and, at the same time, it removes at last the need for deceit.

Similar to Act I, scene i, where the two heroes deal "sincerely" with one another, the colloquy between Ariana and Gatty in Act V, scene i, enunciates the dual levels of the play. On the one hand, Gatty's song clearly outlines the witty heroine's reticence in matters

of love. Like the hero's confession that her wit tempts him into constancy (II.i.28), here the heroine admits: "I find I must love, let me do what I can!" (V.i.109). Her "fever" may last or it may expire, but her "passion shall kill me before I will show it." Gatty embodies all the qualities common to the witty heroine. Quite capable of persiflage, she nonetheless buries beneath her frivolous exterior a genuine passion, one which she must conceal if she is not to be drawn into self-betrayal: "But oh how I sigh, when I think, should he woo me, / I cannot deny what I know would undo me!" (109).

On another, and more thematic level, the colloquy between the two heroines establishes once again Etherege's corollary theme of "sincere dealing" (I.i.13). Rebuked by Ariana for her wantonness, Gatty retorts: "I hate to dissemble when I need not. 'Twould look as affected in us to be reserved now we're alone as for a player to maintain the character she acts in the tiring room" (V.i.109). Gatty recognizes the distinction to be made between art and nature; she, like an actress, can perform a part but, once off the stage of the world, she can resume her natural character.⁶

The final discovery scene balances the play's dual aspects. Concealment has enabled Courtall and Freeman to overhear the two heroines' confessions. As Courtall remarks: "Had it not been our good fortunes to have been concealed here, you would have had ill nature enough to dissemble with us at least a fortnight longer" (110). Once secrecy and sincerity are recognized, the intricacies of the comic plot can be resolved. By inventing new lies (111-113), Courtall protects the reputations of the counterfeiters and assures a comic

reconciliation. By revealing secrets, Courtall re-affirms the value of plain dealing.

Yet, the play's very complexity denies a facile resolution to the comic tension created by the discrepancy between appearance and nature. The heroes are both rakes and plain dealers, the heroines both masked and bare-faced. Since the milieu in which they move is so steeped in artifice, the "innocent freedom" afforded by the town yields comic twists (113). At the same time that it allows the heroines to ramble and yet remain "mighty honest" (I.ii.21), it also perverts and distorts the "Christian liberty" invoked by Courtall (I.i.9). Rakish freedom denotes more christenings than marriages (9) and, in Lady Cockwood's terms, freely pursuing one's inclinations demands artifice. It is "a strange censorious age" (II.ii.35), "faithless and inconstant" (IV.i.75), an age which encourages rambling, but at the risk of falsity and self-betrayal.

The comic resolution, then, reveals ambiguities. Etherege concludes his play by once again balancing the dual aspects of secrecy and sincerity. The final bargaining scene between the witty lovers recaptures the earlier episode where they verbally parry for witty supremacy (II.i.). Here, in the fifth act, the traditional imagery of mortgages and houses recalls the heroes' use of the monetary image to describe their amorous, if mercenary, intentions. Before meeting the feminine combatants who will subdue their roving spirits, the protagonists determine "to play a while upon tick" in the "hopes of payment hereafter" (I.i.14). Now, faced with the prospect of marriage, Courtall concedes: "All the happiness a gentleman can desire is to

live at liberty, till he be forced [by matrimony] to pay his own [debts]" (V.i.114). Sir Oliver sums up the disparity between the desirable condition of liberty and the "balked" state of matrimony (III.iii.67). The gentlemen, Sir Oliver notes, "have found it so convenient lying in lodgings, they'll hardly venture on the trouble of taking a house of their own" (V.i.115). "For a valuable consideration", the gentlemen are in fact willing to "mortgage [their] persons" (114). To be tempted to do so, they require "a pretty country seat, madam, with a handsome parcel of land, and other necessities belonging to't"; a mere "town tenement" will never do (115).⁷

The imagery emphasizes the complexity of the play's resolution. Blind love hardly directs the actions of even the witty lovers; pragmatic and mercenary motives are too pervasive to allow love to cloud the future. Nor does the matrimonial state promise to be a blissful retreat from the wickedness of the town. Earlier, Courtall has pronounced that "a wife's a dish, of which if a man once surfeit, he shall have a better stomach to all others ever after" (III.iii.57).⁸ The marriage of the Cockwoods also denies any romantic notion of conjugality. Equally practical, the heroines of necessity must offer their gallants "a fair proposition" (V.i.117), a test of their sincerity. If Courtall and Freeman pass the test and remain as servants for a month, then the heroines will "accept of the challenge" and enter the bonds of wedlock (117). Once before, however, the heroines have imposed a test upon the gentlemen (II.i.29), and the outcome proved ambiguous. Only by chance have Courtall and Freeman kept their word "not to visit any other women" (29). In fact, Courtall has visited Lady Cockwood

immediately after solemnly swearing the oath to Gatty. As he admits:
 "The keeping of one's word is a thing below the honor of a gentleman"
 (II.ii.39).

Now, the bargain struck, the foreshadowed dubiety creeps in. To Sir Oliver's question, "is it a match, boys," Courtall replies: "If the heart of man be not very deceitful, 'tis very likely it may be so" (V.i.117). Freeman adds: "A month is a tedious time, and will be a dangerous trial of our resolutions" (117). Although their witty colloquy ends finally with talk of "restless" expectation and hearty hunger (120), and although Sir Oliver pronounces them "all agreed on the matter" (120), the note of ambiguity remains. It is not eased but heightened by the play's closing lines, Sir Oliver's invitation to his shaken lady.

The speech rings with irony: "Give me thy hand, my virtuous, my dear. / Henceforwards may our mutual loves increase, / And when we are a-bed, we'll sign the peace" (120). Lady Cockwood has, throughout the play, endeavoured to cuckold him; neither she nor her amorous "ambitions" have proven to be virtuous (119). Sir Oliver and Lady Cockwood do agree to retire to what they can do, she to the modest confinements of "the humble affairs of [her] own family" (119), and he to conjugality. But Sir Oliver's invitation to his "virtuous" dear suggests that, rather than dispel illusion, he would willingly cling to appearance, the fanciful belief in her virtue. Earlier, in an aside, he has voiced his suspicion that Courtall's and Freeman's sudden appearance betrays a shady business with his lady (111). Yet, he is indeed "apt enough to believe" the lies perpetrated upon him by his wife and Courtall (112). Based first on deception and now on a willing credulity, their "mutual

love" gravely comments on the veiled prospects to be faced by the witty lovers. The "things that shadow and conceal" are a cloying part of the "way of the world" (The Man of Mode, III.i.50). Dissimulation and affectation, "under a Voluntary Disguise," frequently confuse appearance for truth, shadow for substance (Congreve, "Humour in Comedy," p. 79).

She Would If She Could, then, cannot be dismissed, in Nettleton's terms, simply as a "superficial" treatment of a "superficial society" (English Drama, p. 82). Nor does his other allegation, that Etherege "turns comedy, from lashing vice with ridicule, to laughter at sin as well as at folly", adequately assess a playwright who exhibits such comic mastery (p. 76). The moralistic pronouncements of "vice" and "sin" hardly do justice to Etherege's fundamental concern: the ideal of sincerity counterpointed to the reality of sham.⁹

Similar to She Would If She Could, Etherege's most famous play--and the one most piously denounced--sounds the same themes.¹⁰ But in The Man of Mode Etherege refines his technique.¹¹ Rather than relying so heavily on architectural parallels and farcical gimmicks like closets and physical concealments, Etherege critically draws man's "shadow of himself" (IV.ii.109). Etherege hierarchically clusters his characters, each of whom embodies some aspect of his fundamental comic concerns. On one level, each character functions as the comic "shadow" of the next; the shadings of one heighten and anticipate the other. On another level, the "shadow" of the self betokens the cultivated image designed to conceal the inner substance. Like the error committed by the self-imprisoned creatures in Plato's cave, the shadows betray artful man into confusing the reflected image with reality. The picture,

in Congreve's words, becomes the life ("Humour in Comedy" p. 79) and "wouldness," in Etherege's words, becomes the only recognizable substance.

Etherege vivifies a world overshadowed by counterfeiters. Here, in this modish cave of shadows, individuals are "the more acceptable, the less they are known" (IV.i.93). Those who are "Varnished over with good breeding" make "a tolerable show" (III.i.51); "sophisticate dullness" often passes "on the tasteless multitude for true wit and good humour" (III.iii.69). But artifice, like the lover's fleeting passion, "gilds" over only "for a time" what lurks underneath: the "native brass" which insistently threatens to show through the gilded exterior (II.ii.45).

The "counterfeits of the age" (I.i.25), enamoured by the "shadow" of the self, rely only on appearance, on the gaudy display of patches and paint. At this level, "a man's excellency" lies chiefly in the "neatly tying of a ribbon or a cravat" (22). Such artificers become "captive to the image in the glass, [and] hence to a shadow of the self" (Carnochan, Introduction, Man of Mode, p. xvi). Externals become verities, and "clothes" the "creatures" of substance (IV.i.99).¹² This traditional kind of "sartorism" Etherege adapts to his own themes.

Sir Fopling, "the pattern of modern foppery" (I.i.23), embodies the superficiality of those who perceive only the shadow.¹³ He is, according to Dorimant's curt appraisal, "a ridiculous animal, who has more of the ape than the ape has of the man in him" (V.i.119). Sir Fopling, "a person indeed of great acquired follies" (I.i.23), comes to be nothing more than the shadow of others, a mimic who does not

"remember the saying of the wise man, [to] study yourself" (IV.ii.109). Devoted to the image cast by his mirror, he "entertains" himself only with shadows and trusts to a glass which reflects, not verity, but appearance.

Notwithstanding all his cultivated foppery, Sir Fopling is associated with the natural order of things.¹⁴ Nature is "careful" to furnish "the world with necessary coxcombs" like Sir Fopling (I.i.22).¹⁵ Not only do such creatures provide social diversion; they also unknowingly help to condemn the society so willing to accept them. Thus, they comically heighten the counterfeit shadings of the more proficient artificers, nature's "cheats" (III.iii.69), who strive to substantiate the shadow of self.¹⁶

One such counterfeiter is Mrs. Loveit, a character who appears to be cognizant of the discrepancy between shadow and substance (V.i.119-120, 126).¹⁷ Yet, described early in the play as a woman "the most passionate in her love and the most extravagant in her jealousy" (I.i.15), Mrs. Loveit foolishly extracts oaths of constancy and vows of fidelity from a man renowned for his roving nature. In the end, his promises prove to be but shadows of a genuine passion, and their "love" merely an incurable distemper.

Throughout the course of the play, Dorimant contrives to put their "diseased" love to a "violent death", and cure the "sickly" passion which so frequently betrays Loveit (II.ii.46). But the rage which governs her only prompts her to revive a "dying love" and tender it the "cordial" of jealousy (III.iii.99). Although her dissembling a passion for a fool does succeed, temporarily (III.iii.82, 84), her

doing so makes Dorimant strive all the harder to "pluck off this mask and show the passion that lies panting under" (84). He drives her to frenzy. Her "diseased" love changes into a "raging" fever (V.ii.127), which she for a time vents in asides (137), but soon her passion rends her mask of indifference and exposes her to Harriet's chiding (143).

In spite of her seeming awareness and her artful pretenses, Loveit cannot long sustain a "tolerable show" (III.i.51). At the very moment when she longs to verify the sham she has perpetrated, she contravenes the overriding social axiom. She allows herself to be "known" to the modish counterfeiter, and she has mistakenly believed mere shadows to be substantial. Loveit, then, is a highly comic figure, a woman manipulated by the hero only because she fails to distinguish between substance and shadow.¹⁸

On yet another level, there are those counterfeiterers who effectively employ the socially acceptable device of dissembling, a device which shields the substance and verifies the shadow. This cluster of characters heightens the artifice of those who, like Sir Fopling, see only the shadows of the self, and illuminates the socially derided shams of a character like Loveit. The characters of Bellinda and Loveit, for example, mutually reflect one on the other. Where Loveit fails, Bellinda succeeds, at least for a time. Unlike her passionate compeer, Bellinda realizes the benefits to be gained by dissembling and by forswearing oaths. In order to further her pursuit of Dorimant, she meticulously cultivates her social mask of friendship and succeeds so well that, although suspicious, Loveit pronounces her friend "innocent" of any design on Dorimant (V.i.117).

But, like Loveit's, Bellinda's passion lies "panting" under her mask of sexual reticence, and Dorimant easily contrives to assuage her ill-considered love for him.

For all her apparent insight into his "ill-nature" and inconstant temper, Bellinda cannot contrive to keep herself free of Dorimant.¹⁹ Although she enjoins him not to swear any oaths to her, because she will "grow jealous of the oath and think [she owes his] truth to that, and not to [his] love" (IV.ii.106), she herself swears an oath to him (III.ii.61). Her swearing such an oath of compliance to his will leads her, not to Loveit's social downfall, but to an amorous betrayal (V.i.118). Finally, she must confess: "I knew him false and helped to make him so. Was not [Loveit's] ruin enough to fright me from the danger?" (V.ii.127). Bellinda may have "studied" herself more, but she, too, becomes blinded by the appearance of love. Her actions are comic simply because she acknowledges the discrepancy between substance and shadow, and yet acts contrary to her knowledge. While in Medley's considered judgment she exhibits "a genius that makes her worthy" of Dorimant himself (I.i.17), she falls prey to the shadow of a "man of mode," more practiced even than she in the subtle art of "things that shadow and conceal" (III.i.50).

The rakish and charming Dorimant embodies the play's dual vision of the "modish" man whose masterful counterfeiting deceives others. At the social level, he personifies the town's acceptably polished "man of mode." Fond himself of fine clothes (I.i.22), and convinced that his modishness is "a thing to be valued in men as well as baubles" (III.ii.64), Dorimant throughout the play demonstrates the value of appearance

in a world, not only given to witty laughter, but also willing enough to accept for truth the "shadow" of the self.

As her name suggests, Lady Townley represents the town and all its modish ways. Presiding over the witty company of "laughers" (60), she endorses the town's ideal of "an universal taste" (62), one which relishes wit but which also craves the variety and diversion afforded by fools (63). She also upholds the fashionable creeds of discretion and dissembling. She pities the young lovers who have lately been the subject of scandal, but she nonetheless condemns their lack of social acumen. She tells Medley: "to say truth, their conduct has been so indiscreet they deserve to be unfortunate" (57). Such is the social sentence meted out to all those who transgress the social ritual. So, as the town's representative, her good opinion of Dorimant testifies to his social success. She finds him "a very well-bred man" (58) and "a very pleasant acquaintance" (59). Finally, her favourable account of him to Lady Woodvill sways the recalcitrant matron to his side (V.ii.140).

But Lady Townley rarely concerns herself with substance. She suspects that Old Bellair does not speak what he thinks (IV.i.86), and she seemingly detects the passions which he so artlessly strives to conceal, but her assessment of Medley sees only his socially pleasant side. To her, he is "a very necessary man among us women, a witty gossip who repeats the "little news o' the town" (II.i.33). While Lady Townley refers to his gift for exaggerated story-telling (34) and Emilia perceives him to be "a living libel, a breathing lampoon" (III.ii.57), both women prove to be limited in their perception. Not

only do they defend Dorimant's appearance of wit and good nature (58-9), but they also consider Medley to be "a very pleasant man" (II.i.33). His is a much more important role. He it is who reminds Dorimant of the discrepancy between studied social appearance and inner substance. When Dorimant contends that women create their own afflictions in love (III.ii.61), Medley quips: "If you would play without being obliged to complaisance, Dorimant, you should play in public places" (62). Finally, it is Medley's derisive laughter which insures that those who fail to regard the social ritual receive the judgment Lady Townley would exact (III.ii.57). Not only does he insure that no social transgression goes unnoticed, but he also becomes for Dorimant a social arbiter, a necessary presence if the "man of mode" is to clear his reputation.

This role of social judge becomes thematically important.²⁰ Initially, Dorimant finds it expedient to engage his friend as a witness to the "good sport" designed at Loveit's expense (III.ii.76). When the contrivance fails and Loveit dissembles more capably than Dorimant anticipated (82), Medley shrewdly guesses the "secret" his friend labours to conceal. Interestingly enough, Bellinda fails to see the "alteration" Medley does (83), who accuses Dorimant: "you look a little bashful on the matter" (82). Indeed, Dorimant confesses in an aside: "He guesses the secret of my heart. I am concerned but dare not show it" (83). As Loveit later reminds Dorimant: "'tis pleasanter to laugh at others than to be laughed at ourselves, though never so wittily" (V.i.120). The chastened Dorimant can only ask Medley for a short respite: "'Twere unreasonable to desire you not to laugh at me;

but pray do not expose me to the town this day or two" (III.iii.84). His failure to triumph over his cast-off mistress and to mask his own inner emotions exposes him to hearty laughter at his own expense.

The less he is known (IV.i.93), the more pleasing and the more credible his shadow of himself and, therefore, the less susceptible he is to the laughter of others. When the veneer is cracked and the discrepancy between shadow and substance is revealed to public view, Dorimant suffers fitting social discomfiture (III.iii.80-4; V.i.125-6). Cleverness may still be, as Holland suggests, a virtue, but Dorimant must now contrive to right his social wrong (First Modern Comedies, p. 86). Otherwise, as he says, he "shall be daily minded of it. 'Twill be a commonplace for all the town to laugh at [him], and Medley, when he is rhetorically drunk, will ever be declaiming on it in [his] ears" (123). As social priest, Medley must be present when Dorimant attempts to "regain" his "credit" (III.iii.84). Only when Medley "pronounces" his "reputation clear" can Dorimant avoid the derision of his laughing compeers and resume once again his role as the witty "man of mode" (V.ii.143).

Therefore, Dorimant cannot simply be regarded as Etherege's comic social standard. Although Dorimant's social mastery contrasts sharply to Sir Fopling's, Etherege draws ironic parallels between the play's dual "men of mode."²¹ Both characters emphatically proclaim the importance of clothes (I.i.22; IV.i.99). Both are described as "apish" (V.i.119; V.ii.130), mimicking fashionable gestures and modish ways.²² Dorimant's cultivated posing, concealing as it does the inner substance, forces him to stoop to "things that shadow and conceal" (III.i.50), and he frequently risks becoming, like Sir Fopling, only a

"shadow of himself" (IV.ii.109).²³ Dorimant's posing is more accomplished, but his kinship with Sir Fopling undercuts the notion that the rake is the social ideal extolled by Restoration playwrights like Etherege.

Moreover, in The Man of Mode Etherege does not add the satiric dimension to his rake's character. In She Would If She Could, the libertines embody the ideal of sincerity. Although they, too, suffer comic discomfiture because of their rakish activities and broken vows (III.i.52), their "sincere dealing" furnishes a subtle shading to their more pronounced libertine colours.²⁴ Notwithstanding his superficial brilliance, Dorimant is revealed to be an imperfect dissembler whose triumph over the witty heroine is not assured.²⁵ Not only must he rely on the good offices of others to gain some measure of success (V.ii.140), but his cultivated pose, so beguiling to others, hardly enthralls the heroine.

Young Bellair sees in Dorimant's deportment all that is "easy" and "natural," but Harriet penetrates the studied art of Dorimant's pose: "He's agreeable and pleasant, I must own, but he does so much affect being so, he displeases me" (III.iii.70). Later, she ridicules his laboured mannerisms even more sharply. He may, Harriet declares, possess abundant wit, but he "takes a great deal of pains to show it" (V.ii.129). Though he is "extremely well-fashioned" (130), he also betrays an artificiality which she, unlike the town, cannot condone. Dorimant, to Harriet's piercing eye, is "affectedly grave, or ridiculously wild and apish" (130).²⁶ Finally, just as Dorimant copies Sir Fopling's mannerisms (V.i.118-9), so, too, does Harriet easily

imitate Dorimant's mannerisms (I.i.10, III.iii.74). She thereby illustrates, not only the ease with which affectations can be assumed, but also her own superiority to both "men of mode." Her assessment of Dorimant acknowledges the discrepancy between substance and shadow and, therefore, she contradicts the opinion of the "easy town" (III.iii.71) which, like Young Bellair, uncritically perceives only the shadow of this sophisticated "man of mode."

Unlike She Would If She Could, the satiric ideal resides, not in a dual vision of the rake, but in a subtly shaded portrait of the witty heroine.²⁷ Harriet decries Dorimant's artificiality and "plucks" off his mask. As the satiric ideal, she herself can dissemble when necessary, but she does not lose herself in "things that shadow and conceal" (III.i.50). As she curtly informs Busy: "May [Dorimant] hate me - a curse that frights me when I speak it - if ever I do a thing against the rules of decency and honour" (V.ii.134).

Refusing to be "paid down by a covetous parent for a purchase" (III.i.52), Harriet resolves, along with Young Bellair, to "deceive the grave people" who would yoke them together (53). Their mocking courtship scene (52) contrasts sharply both to Young Bellair's ardent wooing of Emilia (II.i.31) and to Dorimant's more salacious pursuit of Bellinda. This comic triad of courtship scenes heightens the unaffected emotion sought by the serious lovers and the artificiality practiced by dissemblers like Dorimant. Harriet and Young Bellair deal openly with one another (III.i.53). Engaging in the deception "if it be but for the dear pleasure of dissembling" (54), Harriet and her counterfeit lover perform their parts admirably enough to win the desired reprieve; their

success illustrates the efficacy of masterful dissembling.

Nevertheless, Harriet does not confuse the shadow and the substance, but clearly distinguishes between them. Not only does she recognize dissembling for what it is, a necessary and easily mastered social art, but she also conforms to her natural self. She as freely confesses to her essential "want of art" (IV.i.90) as she does to her talent for dissembling (III.i.56). She is, as Medley informs Dorimant, as "wild" as she is demure (I.i.13). While Dorimant prefers "masks and private meetings," she chooses to go "barefaced" (III.iii.72). He admits he loves to be well-dressed (I.i.22), but she for her part chides Busy's "officious fingers" which would tame her wildness (III.i.49). Free from habitually practised affectation, she does not violate her natural self: "My eyes are wild and wand'ring like my passions, and cannot yet be tied to rules of charming" (IV.i.90).

Dorimant finds himself enamoured by this "wildness," by her ready wit (III.iii.72); the "pleasing image of herself" which "wanders" in his "soul" soon wholly captivates him (75). As he confesses in an aside: "I love her and dare not let her know it" (IV.i.91). Yet, in spite of his thralldom to such an image, his soul nonetheless succumbs to his "flesh and blood" (100). So, to win the heart of her affected paramour, Harriet must perforce conceal her own yearnings. She confesses in an aside: "I feel as great a change within, but he shall never know it" (III.iii.72). Like so many witty heroines, she must contrive to shield herself from fates like Loveit's and Bellinda's at the same time that she inspires her recalcitrant lover to a declaration of love and an offer of marriage.²⁸

Their final courtship scene illustrates the importance of dissembling and also, at its close, the importance of unaffected truth.²⁹ Initially, she "dare[s] not look upon him," for her unconcealed love "springs" into her face (V.ii.131). If she is to retain her ascendancy, she must cloak her true feelings and maintain the appearance of emotional detachment. On another level, her ability to do so enables her to "laugh" Dorimant out of his artifice and make a trial of his genuine nature.

Their opening colloquy in Act V, scene ii casts a comic light on Etherege's themes. Dorimant refers to their meeting as "the picture of a celebrated beauty giving audience in public to a declared lover" (V.ii.131). Harriet adopts his image of the picture, the representation in art of an actual event, and extends it to the role-playing in which he so frequently indulges: "Play the dying fop and make the piece complete, sir" (131). Like the fop, he courts Harriet with images which would transform the substance of love into the artful shadow; "What think you if the hint were well improved - the whole mystery of making love pleasantly designed and wrought in a suit of hangings?" (131-2).³⁰ Harriet bluntly rejects the proposed artifice, and chides: "'Twere needless to execute fools in effigy who suffer daily in their own persons" (132). This retort initiates the comic process of tearing aside needless art to reveal and recognize the underlying reality.

To Harriet, who robs him of his soul's liberty (V.ii.144) and who gains an "ascendancy" over him (IV.i.92), he begins to reveal the less artful and less libertine side to his nature. He tells her: "But I will open my heart and receive you where none yet did ever enter. You

have filled it with a secret, might I but let you know it" (V.iii.132). Her refusal to take seriously a protestation of love from a man whose "tongue is so famed for falsehood" (132) distinguishes Harriet from her compliant predecessors. Loveit's false belief in oaths and Bellinda's hesitant regard for promises foreshadow Harriet's utter rejection of pledges. Dorimant may wish her to promise, but she dismisses him with the words: "I hate to promise. What we do then is expected from us and wants much of the welcome it finds when it surprises" (134).³¹ Like Emilia, who will not accept an oath from Young Bellair (II.i.31), Harriet sees too clearly the frailty of the artful human creature.

For her part, Harriet rejects Dorimant's extravagant promises, and chides him: "Hold! Though I wish you devout, I would not have you turn fanatic" (V.ii.133).³² What she does expect from him contradicts the social code he has zealously striven to uphold. He must test a passion which "knows no bounds" by sojourning in the "desert" beyond Hyde Park (133).³³ He must also bear laughter at his own expense. Earlier, she has instructed him: "When your love's grown strong enough to make you bear being laughed at, I'll give you leave to trouble me with it" (IV.i.93). Then, and only then, may Dorimant cease to be an artful "shadow" of himself, offering exorbitant but immeasurable vows of love. Harriet, on the contrary, can honestly and simply announce at the close of the scene: "I cannot deny it. I would, and never will marry any other man" (V.ii.141). Thus, Harriet embodies the modish ideal of witty detachment and social mastery at the same time that she exemplifies the satiric ideal of unaffected honesty and naturalness. She is what

she appears to be, and yet she also withstands a world of falsity. Her unassumed naturalness, along with that of Emilia's and Young Bellair's, illuminates the practised artifice of the "counterfeits of the age" (I.i.25).

The play's ambiguous resolution, however, throws the ideal into question.³⁴ Even at the moment of his "betrothal," Dorimant may still represent "the prince of all the devils in the town" (III.iii.74), the devil who would tempt the angels to a second fall (75). Dorimant swears to the forsaken Loveit: "Believe me - a wife, to repair the ruins of my estate that needs it" (V.ii.139). And he tries to entice Bellinda to a second tryst: "We must meet again" (140). Soon after, he swears to Harriet that she and love have enthralled him (144). Given her rejection of his recent passionate fanaticism (V.ii.133), Harriet here continues to ignore such protestations of love, and seems wise to do so. Instead, she describes what he can expect in the country, and she asks him whether the prospect does not "stagger" his resolution. She compares her family with birds in an aviary and, when he reiterates his devotion to her, she turns to Emilia and laments that, even now, she can hear the cawing of the rooks (144). The implication of the imagery is that Dorimant, too, in the midst of "moping" and "melancholy" birds, may well be a rook.

But this same fallen creature has "something of the angel yet undefaced in him" (II.ii.37). Loveit's statement applies to Dorimant's sexual and personal charm, which are substantial enough to warrant her dismissal of his "wickedness" to her (37-8). But, in the context of Etherege's comic ideals, this "undefaced" side to man's countenance

reveals itself, not so much in Dorimant, who may be a rook after all, as in the delicate portraits of Young Bellair and Emilia. Their courtship comprises the minor plot.³⁵

They, too, plot to deceive the old folks who would so arbitrarily dispose of them (II.i.31), and they do succeed in outwitting the intransigent old Bellair. The frankly spoken devotion of these two young lovers, a given from the beginning of the play, suggests the morally upright lovers extolled by the sentimental mode. But in Etherege's play, such "sentimental" touches are clearly subordinate to his comic themes. Etherege points to the vulnerability and essential powerlessness of these minor characters, "unaffected" and "modest" as they are (I.i.25). Young Bellair becomes Dorimant's foil (25), and Dorimant's assessment of Emilia only strengthens the notion that the influence of the "way of the world" is a corrupting one. If "nothing can corrupt her but a husband" (25), then her marriage to Young Bellair assumes ironic overtones.³⁶ Indeed, Medley's wish to Young Bellair indicates the dubious nature of earthly bliss. The young couple, Medley says, are to have "all the joys happy lovers have shared ever since the world began" (21), but it is, as Krause points out, an "Eden-like love" subject to corruption and temptation ("Defaced Angel," 95). As Young Bellair perceives, when he responds to Medley's congratulatory remarks: "You wish me in heaven, but you believe me on my journey to hell" (21). Nor does his "faith," which to Medley might "contribute much towards [his] salvation" (21), convince Emilia of any abiding hope for love or happiness. Enunciating a theme which will occupy Vanbrugh, she observes to Young Bellair; "Our love is frail as

is our Life" (II.i.31).³⁷ Her note of caution underscores the essential frailty of the human animal, a frailty which ever threatens to defile what may be yet "undefaced." She casts doubt on the permanence of a passion based on the reality of that human frailty. The "undefaced" side would appear to be so more by virtue of its present lack of stain than by the presence of a lasting purity.

Although these two serious lovers resolve to wed and although their own sincere dealings with each other appear to be lasting, the larger world of the play suggests that their bliss may not be long-lasting.³⁸ Dorimant himself may swear that, in expectation of a "happy Easter," he can "keep a Lent for a mistress" (III.iii.73), but such an assertion may be as frail as his other promises; it may be as frail as the man. Etherege does not dispel the shadows created by such brilliant, if brief, flashes of insight into the dual nature of man. In this world of sham, the "things that shadow and conceal" also comprise the "Something of man" which "must be exposed to view" (Epilogue, 1.5). Wycherley, too, will expose to view mankind's folly and artifice, but he will do so in a manner more bitingly satirical and, ultimately, more intolerant of these "things that shadow and conceal."

CHAPTER THREE

"Minister of Justice": Wycherley's The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer

In Wycherley's plays, Etherege's ambiguity is resolved.¹ Wycherley may, as Righter contends, "build upon the foundation already provided by Etherege" ("William Wycherley," p. 71), but in The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer Wycherley "strike[s] off in new directions" (p. 72).² Wycherley adopts Restoration themes, but only to adapt them to his own unambiguous and satiric use. He visually dramatizes Etherege's hints of an impending fall, and emphatically shows the debasement which in Etherege only threatens to engulf all the characters. In Wycherley's lewd town, Lady Cockwood might well be as successful a dissembler as Lady Fidget. His plays, then, critically magnify Etherege's more ambiguous glimpse of imminent vice and, as a satirist, Wycherley analyzes it in a fashion as probing as it is condemnatory. Of all the Restoration dramatists, he is, as Freedman notes, "the most critical of prevailing norms."³

Nevertheless, Wycherley does conform to the view that the comic dramatist shows people "what they shou'd do, by representing them upon the Stage, doing what they shou'd not" (Vanbrugh, Vindication, p. 206). He makes "the vices of the age" his business, and displays men as they are (Dedication, The Plain Dealer, p. 6). Like a painter, he "draw[s]

better after the life than by fancy" (p. 7) and, as a result, he copies the "small Pox" and the "Pimples" of a fallen creature.⁴ But Wycherley is also like a "minister of justice," extolling his own vision of goodness and condemning the vicious (Dedication, The Plain Dealer, p. 6).

This "minister of justice" lays bare the sordidness of creatures like the Widow Blackacre, who typifies the modifications Wycherley makes to conventional themes and characters. Unlike Etherege's Lady Cockwood and Congreve's Lady Wishfort, the Widow Blackacre must be tricked into courtship and marriage settlements. Wycherley, punning on the word "court," shows this widow to be more interested in litigation than in amorous pursuit; she would rather "sue" than wed. Her character also assumes a thematic significance. Blemishes like "pimples" and "small pox" demonstrate man's physical disease, but the widow's litigious endeavours point to man's spiritual and moral decay. She contrives to "deck" her causes with "flowers" so that "the snake may lie hidden" (The Plain Dealer, III.80). Hidden by the social mask, this metaphorical snake would, once again, tempt innocence and defile goodness. Nor is the widow the only one who would conceal the "snake." Nearly all of Wycherley's characters, conventional as they appear to be, are morally infected.

In The Country Wife, Horner is one such infected creature. He stands alone, and his dual role as manipulator and satiric judge places him in a pivotal position.⁵ Throughout the play, he displays a shrewd insight into human nature. Harcourt rests with a generalization when he observes that most men "are the contraries to that they wou'd seem" (I.266), and Dorilant merely gives instances of economic cozening.

Horner expands the observation to the world at large: "Ay, your errantest cheat, is your Trustee, or Executor; your jealous Man, the greatest Cuckhold; your Church-man, the greatest Atheist; and your noisy pert Rogue of a wit, the greatest Fop, dullest Ass, and worst Company" (266).

The play then proceeds to demonstrate the truth of Horner's insight into human nature. Pinchwife's jealousy does not protect him. Rather, both he and Sir Jaspar prove another of Horner's observations: "a foolish Rival, and a jealous Husband assist their Rivals designs" (III.295); those who are "accessaries" to their own cozening aid those who would cheat them (296). Similarly, Sparkish's foppery plagues others while it steepens him in falsity and delusion: "he can no more think the Men laugh at him, than that Women jilt him, his opinion of himself is so good" (I.265). Just as there are bigots in religion, so, too, are there "Bigots in Honour," individuals who "think there is no virtue, but railing at vice; and no sin, but giving scandal" (IV.324). Modest "Pulpit" comedians share in the sins of "honourable" women, who prefer their confessions in closets (324). In such a world, Horner easily assumes the role of comic "scare-crow" (326). He provides "innocent diversions" for the "civil" ladies (I.262).

One of the civil ladies is, of course, Lady Fidget, who disguises her own appetite beneath a mask of virtue. Indeed, so successful is her ploy that "huntmen" cannot easily distinguish her hidden vice from her apparent virtue. Horner declares: "one knows not where to find 'em, who will, or will not; Women of Quality are so civil, you can hardly distinguish love from good breeding, and a Man is often mistaken"

(I.262-3). Her "Jewel of most value and use," her virtuous reputation, "shines yet to the world unsuspected, though it be counterfeit" (V.353), and the cultivated pose shields her from censure. She and her virtuous cohorts "are only chary of their reputations, not their Persons, and 'tis scandal they wou'd avoid, not Men" (I.263). The efficacy of such tactics Lady Fidget herself enunciates: "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 State-man's Religion, the Quakers Word, the Gamesters Oath, and the Great Man's Honour, but to cheat those that trust us" (V.351).⁶ An echo of Horner's own astute observation (I.266), Lady Fidget's comment demonstrates the keen insight such debased artificers possess.

It is, then, a depraved, animal world where wives are akin to spaniels (II.286), old men to "superannuated Stallions" (I.264), men of honour to "Dogs" and "Horses" (II.283), and an emasculated man to "a drone in the hive" (III.294). It is also a world of crude animal appetite. A masked beauty parallels a "cover'd Dish" (III.293) and serves but to whet a man's appetite, ripe as it is for what Horner calls the town's "variety" of "dainties" (I.269). Seldom "hungry" (269), the gallant satiates himself at a "common house" where he may "eat with the best stomach" (V.350). What Lady Fidget and her compeers offer is a "good Table" where he may "eat most heartily of another man's meat, that is, what [he does] not pay for" (350).

To enjoy the "repast," these bestial creatures resort to hypocrisy. They must, at all costs, safeguard their reputations and conceal their depravity. Horner's contrivance, on the other hand, serves himself

as well as the satirist. Horner's ruse of impotence soon becomes a test of female virtue. As the drone whose "Sting is gone" (III.294), Horner now "can be sure, she that shews an aversion to [him] loves the sport" (I.263). At the same time as he clandestinely enjoys the favours of the "pretenders to honour" (II.285), he also brazenly ridicules and exposes them.⁷ To Lady Fidget's remark that affectation is as odious as virtue to such a "base rude Fellow," Horner snipes: "Because your Virtue is your greatest Affectation" (I.261). He is a self-interested man of mode, and his is a brilliant device, "a new unpractis'd trick" (I.259), designed to make him appear unnatural only so that he may the more easily attain his own sexual pleasure.

Thus, the "nature" which the Quack abets proves to be infected (I.258). "Helpers of nature," be they Quacks or pimps, midwives or bawds (258), pander to the "distempers" of love (259), the sexual "agues" (IV.336) which afflict the appetitive inhabitants of a world catered to by such "Quacks in love" (I.259).⁸ A Pinchwife, eager to avoid contamination, would isolate his wife from "the London disease" (IV.336), but his is a course which even Sparkish deems doomed to failure: "Cuckolding like the small Pox comes with a fear, and you may keep your Wife as much as you will out of danger of infection, but if her constitution incline her to't, she'll have it sooner or later" (IV.338). Pinchwife merely makes himself susceptible to a "sickness" which proves to be "worse than the Plague, Jealousy" (III.292), the "worst disease that Love and Wenching breeds" (I.272). Horner, by assuming impotency, "paradoxically becomes the doctor to his world of cuckolds, fools, and sexually deprived wives".⁹

Yet, when Horner condemns cheating with the words, "A Pox on 'em, and all that force Nature, and wou'd be still what she forbids 'em" (I.265), he comically points to his own cheat. "Affectation" may be nature's "greatest Monster" (265) but, just as Sparkish affects to be what he is not and the counterfeiterers prove to be the "contraries to that they wou'd seem" (266), so, too, is Horner a "monster of nature," an affected "beast" driven by his own lust. Willing enough to destroy his reputation, he contradicts his natural state. To avoid detection and preserve the reputations of all those he has debauched, he must rely on the Quack's good offices and, finally, on Lucy's nimble tongue (V.358). Wycherley's critical judgment also falls on the Machiavel who, in violating nature, cannot single-handedly engineer his deceptive machinations.¹⁰

So, too, does Manly, the plain dealer, initially espouse precepts of which Wycherley approves. As satiric spokesman, the surly Manly ruthlessly exposes the pretense and baseness of a world given to false appearances. Preferring to be "singular" rather than "general" and "follow everybody, court and kiss everybody" (I.13), Manly swears to "do a rude thing rather than an unjust thing" (14). He considers "intrinsic worth," the man and not the title (19). As Freeman avers, the "practice of the whole world" goes against a plain dealer who stubbornly insists that one must speak truth even to one's own personal detriment (23).

Yet, Manly himself does not escape the satirist. Railing against the vices of man and the ills of the age yields, not correction, but noise, the kind which Novel construes to be satire (V.ii.153).

Manly's plain-dealing lapses into an angry roaring which precludes his speaking well of those who deserve it. He tells Lord Plausible: "If I ever speak well of people (which is very seldom indeed), it should be sure to be behind their backs, and if I would say or do ill to any, it should be to their faces" (I.14). This selectivity, or what Olivia calls a "singular moroseness" (IV.ii.129), makes all men alike and wrongs the "few good men" the age can boast (I.14).

Manly comes to typify the depravity to which all men are prone. He is, as Olivia recognizes, a man whose distrust of the world falsely leads him to trust most to himself; he is, by consequence, "but the more easily deceived because he thinks he can't be deceived" (IV.ii.129). Not only does he blindly place his faith in a frail creature, himself, he also foolishly trusts those he should condemn and condemns those he should trust. This lack of sagacity makes him morally blind and satirically culpable. Refusing to bend to the "spaniels of the world" (I.13), he can acknowledge neither the efficacy of occasional dissembling (14-15) nor the frequent necessity of ceremony in friendship (21). Freeman indicates early in the play how wrong-headed Manly is, and also points to the latent hypocrisy in a man who claims so zealously to abhor all lies. Freeman states: "And no professing, no ceremony at all in friendship, were as unnatural and as undecent as in religion. And there is hardly such a thing as an honest hypocrite, who professes himself to be worse than he is, unless it be yourself" (21).

Because he sees the prominent disjunction between the outer ritual and the inner reality, Manly chides a "ceremony" which the play demonstrates can indeed lead to hypocrisy. But, as Freeman observes,

Manly's own "profession" of baseness would then become as much a lie as the ceremony in friendship and religion. He professes a baseness which he refuses to believe exists, and he must come to acknowledge that such baseness infects all mankind, even himself. Less a "plain dealer" than "an honest hypocrite," Manly may keenly perceive the hypocrisy of others, but he blinds himself to his own.

His fall into double-dealing reveals this degeneracy. He becomes increasingly disingenuous and finds himself to be as great a hypocrite as the ones he denounces (III.76). Whereas he bluntly speaks his mind at the beginning of the play, plainly informing Lord Plausible that his visit grows tiresome (I.15), Manly later contrives to rid himself of unwelcome visitants by cleverly introducing subjects antagonistic to their natures (III.98-103). His "plain-dealing," condemning as it does the hypocrisies of the age, at last yields to "shamming": "Shamming is telling you an insipid, dull lie, with a dull face, which the sly wag the author only laughs at himself, and making himself believe 'tis a good jest, puts the sham only upon himself" (99). Manly, at times the satiric spokesman, does put the "sham" upon himself; his criticism condemns his own personal vice. As his own unwitting judge, he consigns himself to the very depths of moral and physical darkness.

The darkness in Love in a Wood represents comic confusion, but here in The Plain Dealer the darkness obfuscates for a time illicit activities. Steeped in physical darkness, the characters at one point enact countless deceptions (IV.ii) and, hence, illustrate their moral depravity. As Manly laments, Olivia "makes love like a devil in a play; and in this darkness, which conceals her angel's face, if I were apt to

be afraid I should think her a devil" (IV.ii.128). But he, too, as another "defaced angel," threatens to transform himself into a very devil. He seeks revenge rather than justice, and his actions illustrate his inability to deal with the moral darkness around him and within him.

The recovery of his fortune exemplifies his blindness. Olivia's mistake, not Manly's virtue, rights the wrongs perpetrated against him (V.iii.166 ff.). Moreover, Freeman and Fidelia also try to recover his lost fortune. In them he finds two "good-natured friends" (171) who contradict his jaundiced view of the world.¹¹ Fortuitously, they also help him to dispel the darkness, deepened by his own blindness.

In Wycherley's plays, therefore, the protagonists cannot be regarded as satiric ideals. Horner's depravity testifies to the virulence of the disease afflicting all mankind, and Manly's "plain-dealing" falls into "double-dealing." Nor does either satiric spokesman single-handedly bring the action to its conclusion. Both must rely on others. These other characters, even those drawn on conventional lines, also heighten the plays' overriding purpose: to reveal man's fundamental depravity.

In The Plain Dealer the foppish characters of Novel and Lord Plausible conform to the stereotypical mold, but both also reflect a censorious society given to railing at, and condemning, those who lack social discretion. As Eliza remarks: "railing now is so common that 'tis no more malice but the fashion" (II.39). Their malice represents the censure which characters like Lady Fidget and Olivia would avoid (V.i.139). Yet, the "little harmless railing" (II.44) which Novel construes to be a "Christian liberty" (47) embodies the kind of

detraction which Eliza perceives to be but a means to hide their own flaws and vices (V.i.139). Olivia courts such "gaudy, fluttering parrots of the town", such "apes and echoes of men only" (I.35), and thereby verifies Manly's curt assessment: "Why, the devil, then should a man be troubled with the flattery of knaves, if he be not a fool, or cully, or with the fondness of fools, if he be not a knave or cheat?" (III.103).

Similarly, in The Country Wife the characters of the fop and the jealous old husband convey Wycherley's satiric theme. Like "false jewels," to the "short-sighted World" the depravity of these characters cannot be easily "discern'd at a distance" (I.265). During the course of the play, for all their social ineptitude, these characters assume grim dimensions which strongly demarcate them from their traditional predecessors. Pinchwife's jealous precautions undo him just as Sir Jasper's husbandly "prudence" betrays him into cuckoldry (261). Although a man confident in his knowledge of the town, Pinchwife unknowingly pimps for his wife. Such foolishness conforms to the traditional portrait of the jealous old husband.

Wycherley also adds new features. Pinchwife, falsely believing the country to be untainted, weds a country wife who is ignorant of the town's modish ways. He has, as Horner shrewdly detects, "only marry'd to keep a Whore to [himself]" (271), a feat which he has never managed before. Moreover, he may in part reflect the conventional image of the jealous old husband, but Pinchwife becomes more and more violent as the play progresses. His verbal rage becomes physical. At last, he viciously seeks revenge; he shows himself to be cruelly eager

to punish his wife (IV.320, 335; V.357) and to sacrifice his sister to his own selfish ends (341).

The character of the fop also conforms for a time to the traditional mode. By "being in the Company of Men of sense," Sparkish hopes to pass for one. He is, according to Horner's sniping comment, "one of those nauseous offerers at wit" who "ravishes" the witty conversation of others (I.265). Sparkish's folly does indeed make him a comic butt: "to pass for a wit in Town, [he] shewes himself a fool every night to us, that are guilty of the plot" (265). Like other fops, he is gullible and credulously accepts for truth what is blatantly counterfeit (IV.314); Harcourt's disguise easily dupes the fop, the comic "flower of the true Town Fops, such as spend their Estates, before they come to 'em, and are Cuckolds before they're married" (II.282). Sparkish very nearly does "cuckold" himself before he is wed; only Alithea's fidelity to him hinders Harcourt's design.

Conventional as his credulity makes him, Sparkish also betrays a baser side. His seeming "confidence" in the "chastity" of Pinchwife's family contrasts sharply to the latter's diatribes against wives who would cheat their husbands (III.304). But his desire to be envied and to have a wife still retain the semblance of a mistress (304-5) suggests Pinchwife's own design to keep a whore to himself.¹² Sparkish's apparent trust in Alithea's virtue derives, not from any good nature on his part, but from his inordinate vanity. As Alithea curtly notes: "Is it for your honour or mine, to suffer a Man to make love to me, who am to marry you to morrow?" (III.300). Finally, like Pinchwife's more physical reaction to his wife's suspected abuse of him, Sparkish

verbally lashes Alithea for an apparent fault. At the same time, he reveals his base mercenary motives. He swears to her that, like "other men of parts of the Town do sometimes," he would have married only her portion, not her virtue (V.347). The coxcombry of Sparkish goes far beyond the foppish antics depicted in many other Restoration plays. He may often be a comic butt, but in the end he is a vicious "man of parts," unrepentant and unreformed.

Likewise, Pinchwife remains as he was, jealous and intransigent. But Wycherley introduces a comic twist to the usual fate of the jealous old husband. Unlike many other jealous husbands, Pinchwife lacks the certain knowledge of his wife's adultery. His punishment, like his wife's virtue, is more apparent than real. Indeed, the play's final dance of cuckolds serves to punctuate the reality Pinchwife can only suspect.¹³ The dance is a testament to the efficacy of artifice and a grim reminder of the prevalence of vice. If anything, it celebrates the continuation of vice, not a comic reconciliation. It is not a festive celebration of the lovers' betrothal. So, in Wycherley's plays, vice is only momentarily checked. The dance clearly indicates that such activities as Lady Fidget's will undoubtedly recur. Just as the play opened with Horner's unnatural device, so, too, does it end on a note of sexual license.

Similarly, in The Plain Dealer the defeat of vice resides, not in the overpowering presence of virtue, but in fortuitous circumstances. The recovery of Manly's fortune seems to be as accidental as the discovery of the goodness to be found in a world overrun by cheaters. Olivia, a creature even more wanton than Lady Fidget herself, may

finally suffer exposure, but, though exposed, "neither she nor Vernish is punished or banished. Rather the Widow Blackacre assures the survival of injustice by arriving upon the scene in time to advise Olivia that she can sue" (Zimbardo, Wycherley's Drama, p. 146).

Wycherley stresses that the prevalence of vice incessantly threatens to crush any hint of human kindness. Neither vestigial romance nor the country appear to be strong enough to overpower the vice depicted in both The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer.

In The Country Wife, both the town and the country breed pernicious appetite. Unlike Etherege's Harriet, also a country lass, Wycherley's "country wife" strives as assiduously as Lady Fidget to satiate her lust, and Margery, too, acquires her share of Horner's "china." Pinchwife, of course, unknowingly abets his own cuckoldom by foolishly revealing to Margery what he should withhold. As Margery confesses: "when you forbid me, you make me as't were desire it" (II.275). But to say, as Hallett does, that Margery merely represents "instinct in its purest form, unencumbered by any knowledge of custom or law," does not adequately account for either Pinchwife's tutelage or Alithea's instructions (273).¹⁴ Nor does Margery's country naiveté "link" her, as Holland would have it, to the "sincerity of Harcourt and Alithea" (First Modern Comedies, p. 84). Alithea's example neither educates nor reforms her. Like Miss Hoyden in The Relapse, Margery follows "nature" rather than social decorum or religious sanction (V.354). As the opening epigram makes clear (I.258), it is not an Arcadian nature. Rural virtue remains unspotted only if compulsory confinement can prevent its following the "pure lives" led by London ladies (III.291).

If her desire is to be fulfilled, she soon acquires the necessary "social acumen" Holland would deny her (p. 84).¹⁵ Soon, Margery plays tricks, not only against Pinchwife, but also against Alithea. It is important to note that she wears the clothes of a truly virtuous woman to do so. By implication, Margery can only be truly virtuous if she assumes the virtue she has stolen. Finally, she does lie (V.360), and in the end she associates herself with the artificers, not with Harcourt and Alithea.

The Country Wife demonstrates the susceptibility of both the town and the country to contamination. Horner, the exemplar of town trickery, declares: "Pshaw, that's all one, that grave circumspection in marrying a Country Wife, is like refusing a deceitful pamper'd Smithfield Jade, to go and be cheated by a Friend in the Country" (I.269). Margery, for all her "innocence," verifies Horner's observation. Even in the country, a less masked version of the town, she "cou'd not help treading" on her gallant's toes or "rubbing knees" with him under the table (IV.322). Enunciating a familiar theme, Wycherley dramatizes the universal frailty of the human animal. The country, no less than the town, is no Arcadia, the seat of simple, unsullied virtue.

Nor does the Arcadian ideal thrive in The Plain Dealer. In the rank garden of London, the tenure of the Arcadian ideal is a precarious one. Fidelia in her conventional romantic disguise becomes trapped by deceit and depravity. Although she finally wins the love of the "plain dealer," she has been forced in the meantime to pimp for him and risk, not only her life (V.iii.168), but also her virtue for him (IV.ii.137). Indeed, the very man for whom she willingly sacrifices herself derides her gentle manner (I.25-6). To him, her honesty is flattery and her

devotion the cowardly action of a sycophant. Throughout the play, Fidelia is powerless.

In The Country Wife, Margery's first disguise cloaks an appetite eager to be gluttoned. Unlike a romantic heroine's, Margery's boyish disguise barely conceals her true identity and later, she borrows the garments of a truly virtuous woman in order to cuckold the jealous Pinchwife. Conversely, Fidelia in The Plain Dealer dons her boyish disguise in order to hide her "too visible" (V.iii.170) love for a man she secretly adores (168) and admires (170).¹⁶ It enables her to follow her lover undetected. Her disguise also becomes a tool to expose the infamy around her, both in the cheaters who envelop Manly and even in the "plain dealer" himself.¹⁷

The character of Fidelia has been interpreted in various ways. Zimbardo considers the character of Fidelia to be a satiric "anti-thesis." Fidelia represents virtue and, weak as she is, she "opposes the vice attacked in the thesis" (Wycherley's Drama, p. 144). On the other hand, McCarthy sees Fidelia as more than "a mere idealization, remote from all the earth" ("Limits of Wit," 81). Like Manly, she, too, learns the "way of the world." But McCarthy fails to acknowledge that her initial flight from her world into Manly's more brutal one demands deception. McCarthy prefers instead to discuss her three soliloquies in terms of her realization that words and deeds do not always reflect each other (I.34; II.79-80; IV.ii.132-3). In McCarthy's view, Fidelia, like Manly, sees pretense as an "absolute" (82). However, a disguised Fidelia masterfully deceives others, including Manly himself.

Deceived by her disguise, Manly falsely considers Fidelia to be

"a handsome spaniel" who can "fawn naturally" on his behalf (III.76). His lust for revenge has led him to a "strange cruelty" (79) which contradicts his former remark that out of "pity" he must be cruel (I.27). Now, seeking revenge, he prostitutes the ideals of love and honour. Fidelity's gentle remonstrances but incite him the more, and her insight into his false vengeful quest illustrates the depth of his depravity. Honour, says Fidelity, ceases to be honour when invoked in a "base action" (IV.i.112) perpetrated against one who is dishonourable (IV.ii.131). It is, as Fidelity perceives, a "strange revenge" (132) which belies his courage (IV.i.112) and would have her pander to his lust. Manly becomes his "own enemy" (112), foolishly striving to conceal baseness in the guise of justice. Like the Widow Blackacre's ploy in her legal machinations (III.80), he hides the snake, but beneath Fidelity's meek exterior. As a grim reminder of the snake's cunning, his revenge falls on his "dear volunteer" (IV.i.108), who is compelled by him to betray her own unspoken love (III.79). Her romantic disguise, then, entangles her in deceit, hypocrisy and vice, qualities which contradict her nature and which falsify her essential "fidelity."

The romantic disguise emphasizes the impossibility of any Arcadian ideal to flourish in a world given to deviltry and to an hypocrisy purported to be "reasonable" (V.i.143). The other characters thrive in the town but, as her hazy origins suggest, Fidelity stands singularly apart from the social hierarchy of the play (V.iii.170). She "fain would find a heaven here" (IV.ii.132). What she does find is depravity, for Vernish's attempt on her honour almost succeeds (IV.ii.136-137). Moreover, she seeks in a surly "plain dealer" the romantic hero whose

constancy and truth will answer to her own fidelity. Manly's plain-dealing does set him apart from the depravity of the age, but he willingly prostitutes his own ideals, and betrays her trust and devotion. Finally, Wycherley suggests, there is no "heaven here," only a fleeting glimpse of an outmoded ideal, fortuitously rescued at the end from further infection.

Wycherley must draw his satiric ideal from the polluted breeder of the disease itself: the town. To do so, he employs the conventional device of contrasting heroes. While many Restoration playwrights, like Etherege, portray the rakish activities of two protagonists, Wycherley dramatically demarcates them.¹⁸ The central character becomes a satiric spokesman at the same time as he himself is satirized.¹⁹ Horner and Manly expose and mock the hypocrisy of others, but both fall themselves into double-dealing. It is their counterparts who display the social acumen necessary to be an effective "plain dealer." Although none of them are faultless, Harcourt and Freeman, along with Alithea and Eliza, exemplify this satiric ideal of frankness. The central characters malign the age or mercilessly exploit it, but the standards of conduct live both in the world and, ultimately, apart from it.²⁰

These forthright characters thrive in the town and, because they are townspeople, they also possess blemishes. Alithea's fault lies in her blindness to the genuine nature of others and in her unyielding notions of honour. Alithea sought to "take the innocent liberty of the Town," which grants her freedom without the loss of her honour (The Country Wife, II.274). Like Lady Fidget, she recognizes the value of reputation. She, too, bends under the pressure of social opinion:

"for Honour, like Beauty now, only depends on the opinion of others" (V.353). She tells Harcourt that she must marry Sparkish; if she does not, her "reputation wou'd suffer in the World else" (II.279). While fundamentally different from Lady Fidget's anxiety about her honour, Alithea's regard for reputation nonetheless links her to the "virtuous gang," none of whom would willingly forfeit the appearance of honour.²¹

She may adhere to a more virtuous notion of honour, but Alithea yokes it to a vainglorious fop and foolishly blinds herself to his true nature. Because he lacks jealousy and apparently trusts to her virtue (III.300), Alithea resolves to like him (II.280), and tells Lucy: "He only that could suspect my virtue, shou'd have cause to do it; 'tis Sparkish's confidence in my truth, that obliges me to be so faithful to him" (IV.313). Yet, Sparkish's very lack of concern signals his egocentrism. His own "interest" dictates his every action and, rather than miss the king's drawing room, for example, he would avoid his own mistress (III.298).

Indeed, Alithea herself detects this indifference (301), but even Sparkish's railing against "matrimonial love," which to Harcourt is the "best, and truest love in the World" (303), fails to convince her that such an unworthy lover has given her the excuse her honour demands: "[Sparkish] only, not [Harcourt], since my honour is engag'd so far to him, can give me a reason, why I shou'd not marry him" (309). Harcourt perceives the comic incongruity of the match, and pleads with her: "I wou'd not have you miserable, and cast your self away upon so unworthy, and inconsiderable a thing" (302). Later, he cogently summarizes her folly: "Have Women only constancy when 'tis a vice, and like fortune

only true to fools?" (309).

Although virtuous in intent and unsullied in practice, Alithea's honour slips perceptibly into a rigidity which threatens to destroy her happiness and her ideals (IV.313). As Lucy expostulates: "but what a Divel is this honour? 'tis sure a disease in the head, like the Megrim, or Falling-sickness, that always hurries People away to do themselves mischief; Men lose their lives by it: Women what's dearer to 'em, their love, the life of life" (313). Lady Fidget may exemplify the falsity and vice into which an incorrect notion of honour frequently falls, but Alithea, in her refusal to injure her betrothed, perpetrates a "greater cheat"; she would give Sparkish her person without her heart (312). Her "rigid honour" affects her whole being (313), and the infection for a time renders her unable to recognize Harcourt's worth.

Alithea sees only the rake (II.277-8), and stubbornly refuses to acknowledge that Harcourt does confess "heartily and openly" his sincere regard for her (278). In her eyes, Harcourt's affiliation with "the Society of the Wits, and Raillieurs" indicates his antipathy to virtue and to plain-dealing (277). To gain her confidence, Harcourt must remove the blemish of his rakish reputation and, as his Christian name testifies, reveal his "frank" nature.

As satiric ideal, Harcourt helps to "cure" Alithea's "megrim," her misplaced allegiance to a man unworthy of her trust and love. In part, as Holland suggests, the play involves the "education of Alithea," who "must learn not to substitute a mere appearance (Sparkish's lack of jealousy) for inner nature (Harcourt's merits)" (First Modern Comedies, p. 78). Unlike his foolish rival, Harcourt displays "perfect honour,"

and proves himself to be "the honestest, worthyest, true hearted Gentleman" (II.277). Rejecting the libertine's view that "Marriage is rather a sign of interest, than love," he acknowledges marriage to be "a sign of love" (279). He finds in Alithea "the best excuse for Marriage [he] ever knew" (277). Alithea learns, then, "a wisdom of ends, a faith in love, a willingness to prefer love as an end to 'fortune, liberty, or title'" (Holland, p. 78).

To establish Harcourt as the play's central moral figure, Wycherley clearly distinguishes between the rakish man of mode and the witty plain dealer.²² While Horner contends that "Love and Wine" resemble "Oil and Vinegar," rivals which can never balance, Harcourt wittily converts opposites into apposites, and proclaims the value of love: "I grant it; Love will still be uppermost" (I.264). Later, he demonstrates even more clearly the honesty of his heart. He describes the disguised Margery as more beautiful than "a Poets first Mistriss of Imagination," a comparison which Horner reduces to his own appetitive vision: "Or another Mans last Mistriss of flesh and blood" (III.307). Horner would willingly sacrifice Alithea to his own ends, a practice "that's no new thing" (V.355) for such a "Machiavel in love" (IV.325): "in these cases I am still on the criminal's side, against the innocent" (V.355). But Harcourt pledges to defend Alithea's virtue (V.356) and confirms that his "Love proceeds from esteem" (II.279). In the man who once sought advice from an amorous Machiavel (III.295), Alithea finds her male counterpart, one who can match her faith and her "constancy in love" (303).

The prurience of the town abets its more virtuous lovers.

Margery's disguise jeopardizes Alithea's unspotted reputation but, unknowingly, Margery deceives others only to undeceive Alithea.

Confronted with the dishonourable actions of those she has falsely believed honourable, Alithea finally confides to Harcourt: "a combination against my Honour, which most concerns me now, because you share in my disgrace, Sir, and it is your censure which I must now suffer, that troubles me, not theirs" (V.355). Harcourt, once strongly associated in her mind with the rakish exponents of the town's modish ways, now becomes the only social and moral judge to whom Alithea will grant credence. Finally, unlike the hypocritical unions of the Fidgets and the Pinchwifes, who have, in Alithea's words, married "a fool, for fortune, liberty, or title" (V.347-8), the marriage of Alithea and Harcourt promises to conform to the ideal presented in Love in a Wood: "the Bondage of Matrimony, no - The end of Marriage, now is liberty, / And two are bound - to set each other free" (V.112).

Conversely, the mercenary Freeman in The Plain Dealer plots against the Widow Blackacre and proves willing enough to risk his bachelor freedom in return for a sizable settlement. Like many a rakish opportunist, Freeman seeks financial security. The woman he would wed may be herself crassly self-interested, one who would legally bastardize her child in order to protect herself (IV.i.118-120), but Freeman does not, as Righter contends, have to "stoop" to her level ("William Wycherley," p. 86). He capably outwits her. As McCarthy suggests: "disguise is not needed if one is clever enough to take advantage of the world's follies by a sort of effective plain-dealing" ("Limits of Wit, 83).²³

Freeman is "a complier with the age" (*Dramatis Personae*, 12) and, thus, he comes to represent the play's social standard. Just as he enjoys "laughing at fools and disappointing knaves" (III.103), he also recognizes the efficacy of social ritual. The worldly-wise Freeman explains to Manly: "Why, don't you know, good captain, that telling truth is a quality as prejudicial to a man that would thrive in the world as square play to a cheat, or true love to a whore! Would you have a man speak truth to his ruin? You are severer than the law, which requires no man to swear against himself" (I.22).

Freeman has learned the legal lessons the Widow Blackacre represents. To protect the self, one must, as Restoration comedy so vividly dramatizes, conceal the self. But Freeman also proves to be a man of integrity. He exhibits this personal integrity in choosing Manly's occupation, the sea, as opposed to the Widow's pursuit, the law (III.75). In his dealings with the litigious widow, Freeman displays his "plain-dealing" side. He openly declares his intentions; he would marry her simply because he, as a younger brother, is poor and she, as a widow, is rich (II.67). Given the "way of the world," which the widow so grimly embodies (V.ii.163), Freeman must perforce trick her into giving him a settlement. He cleverly serves his own interest at the same time that he saves the foolish Jerry from the widow's perfidy.

Freeman's brand of expedient social wisdom helps to check Manly's moral austerity. Freeman panders to his own interest and flatters others to achieve it; his is a necessary social virtue which prompts Manly wrongly to compare him with Lord Plausible, described as "the pink of courtesy" (I.21). However, Manly's rigid principles almost ruin

him and his followers. Convinced that his resigning his valuables to Olivia will merely strengthen her love for him, he declares: "I can never doubt her truth and constancy" (35). Freeman, less trusting and more attuned to the "way of the world," bluntly replies: "It seems you do since you are fain to bribe it with money" (35). While the morally outraged Manly temporarily prefers to salve his bruised sense of honour with protestations of hatred for the woman who has cheated him, the worldly Freeman tries to protect himself and serve his friend. He chides Manly: "Pardon me, whatsoever is yours, I have a share in it, I'm sure, which I will not lose for asking, though you may be too generous, or too angry now to do it yourself" (II.63). Indeed, even Fidelia attempts to gain back what Manly's foolhardiness has lost them.

Freeman's social success instructs Manly in the "way of the world." It is Freeman "who forces Manly to weigh and judge the worth of social values" and, by the end of the play, Manly "is at last obliged to concede that Freeman has had a clearer vision of the world than his own" (Lynch, Social Mode, p. 173). Formerly, the "plain dealer" has declaimed against social opinion, but, in the end, he now acknowledges the power of a society eager to attribute base motives to seemingly honest actions. Manly's offer to "stay in this ill world" (V.iii.170) could well be construed as an admission that Fidelia's estate conquers an aversion her virtue could not (171). As Freeman astutely perceives, "quarrels to the world" frequently spring from a failure to succeed in the social arena. Like a quarrel "to a handsome woman," a man rails against that which he cannot enjoy (171).

Freeman's remark underlines the play's satiric thrust.²⁴ Manly's

aversion to the world and to all mankind neither supports morality nor does it correct hypocrisy.²⁵ His very aversion leads him into the rankness he once so deplored. Concealing his baseness even from Freeman, he merely enacts the pose of "plain-dealer," and his treatment of both Olivia and Fidelia exemplifies his fall into double-dealing. His self-induced blindness to Olivia's true nature first initiates his "quarrel" with her and, later, failing to ravish her, he cannot "enjoy her as [he] would do" (171). Similarly, once scorning Fidelia's devotion, Manly now eschews all former criticisms and converts his quarrel with her into a "covetousness for [her] sake only" (170). Now he will live in security, ostensibly for her sake, in a world made "odious" to him by its cheating. Manly learns that, to live in such a diseased world, he must be both a "plain-dealer" and a "complier with the age." Personal integrity, coupled with self-interest, cheats the dissembling world best.²⁶

If Freeman represents the successful social ideal, then Eliza embodies the play's satiric ideal.²⁷ Like Alithea, she thrives in the town. As she informs Olivia: "Truly, cousin, I can find no fault with it but that we cannot always live in it. For I can never be weary of it" (II.37). Similar to Freeman, Eliza compares the world to "a constant keeping gallant, whom we fail not to quarrel with when anything crosses us yet cannot part with it for our hearts" (37). Because of her knowledge of the town, she provides a measure by which to judge the actions of those around her.

This socially and morally astute woman castigates the impudence of her hypocritical cousin. As she tells Olivia: "all those grimaces of

honor and artificial modesty disparage a woman's real virtue as much as the use of white and red does the natural complexion, and you must use very, very little if you would have it thought your own" (II.52).

Eliza quickly pierces her cousin's pose, not only because she is a shrewd observer of human nature, but also because she frankly acknowledges an art which does not contradict the inner substance.²⁸

But, like Lady Cockwood, Olivia so habitually practices dissembling that she mouths virtuous principles to a woman who sees the pose for what it is. Although Eliza exhorts her cousin "to leave off dissembling, since 'tis grown of no use to us," Olivia rejects the "plain dealing" Eliza espouses (II.40), and continues to practice a "fooling" which soon grows as "insipid" as it is "offensive" (V.i.144). Olivia minds "other people's actions so much" that she takes no care of her own "but to hide them" (139). Olivia's pose, unlike the capable counterfeiting of a Lady Fidget, succeeds in deceiving only Manly.

Finally, Eliza condemns her with the words: "So, so, you are damned enough already by your oaths, and I enough confirmed, and now you may please to be gone. Yet take this advice with you, in this plain-dealing age, to leave off forswearing yourself, for when people hardly think the better of a woman for her real modesty, why should you put that great constraint upon yourself to feign it?" (145). The plain-dealing Eliza harshly criticizes Olivia's pose of virtue and points to the hypocrisy of the age. Neither real nor feigned virtue succeeds in an age which considers "plain-dealing" to be both discreet capitulation to the fleshly appetite and the licensed freedom to pursue self-gratification. Ostensibly, her arrival at the very moment of her

kinswoman's exposure underscores her role as satiric judge; her real virtue witnesses the social defeat of feigned virtue.

Notwithstanding her incisive comments, Eliza remains singularly apart from the main action of the play. "Undefaced" as she may be, she affects no reformation and corrects no fault. She, like Wilde's moralists, brings about no moral change, and this ineffectiveness illuminates the playwright's thematic concerns.²⁹ A foil to Olivia, Eliza as satiric ideal stands apart from the periphery of the "way of the world." A more socially wise plain-dealer, Freeman, would appear to balance, and seemingly correct, Manly's misanthropic excess, and thereby perform a more dramatically important role. Yet, while the prospect of marriage to the romantic Fidelia softens Manly's hatred, Freeman as social exemplar receives no comparable conjugal reward.³⁰

Only the base cheaters, Olivia and Vernish, and the idealistic misfits, Manly and Fidelia, acquire matrimonial partners, and each union contradicts the other. For Olivia and Vernish, the wedded state feeds their greed and cloaks their appetite. Like the Fidgets, theirs comes to represent the social reality. Conversely, Manly and Fidelia speak of withdrawal into "the unknown pleasure of a retirement," divorced from an "ill world" which cannot accommodate them (V.iii.170). Unlike Harcourt and Alithea, they do not reconcile the "way of the world" to their own heartfelt affection. In The Plain Dealer, these two matrimonial extremes offer neither moral health on the one hand nor social harmony on the other, qualities which Freeman as social ideal and Eliza as satiric ideal might provide. Virtue, and the moral health it offers, are not converted into matrimony. Rather, at the end of the

play, both of these exemplars stand as observers, detached from any possibility of nuptial harmony.

Wycherley, then, offers no comforting vision of reconciled extremes, of vice vitiated by the power of virtue. Rather, Wycherley hints that the vice practiced by such "defaced angels" as Olivia and Lady Fidget minimizes the moral efficacy of virtue. In spite of Alithea's and Harcourt's devotion and sincere "plain-dealing," a "dance of cuckolds" ends The Country Wife's exposure of vice. In The Plain Dealer, neither Manly nor Fidelia is free from stain; lechery and dishonesty taint his "plain-dealing," and Fidelia's blind devotion to him almost crushes her virtue. Only the "compliers" with the age, like Freeman, apparently can prosper in this world of sham and deceit. So, when Holland asserts in The First Modern Comedies that "the presence of an ideal in a realistic situation signals the beginning of what we think of as eighteenth-century sentimentalism" (p. 85), he fails to account either for the lack of moral influence the virtuous exert, or for their own subordinate roles in the plays. If it is dissociated from goodness (p. 113), cleverness proves not only to be socially more successful, but also a very real threat to the survival of virtue itself.

Therefore, Wycherley offers only a faint glimmer of hope, one which vice might well extinguish utterly. As a "minister of justice," he displays the "vices of the age." He also urges reformation but, unlike the reformations dramatized in the moral dramas to come, Wycherley does not rely merely on a poetic justice which will reward the virtuous and punish the vicious. Rather, he separates the moral exemplars from the social artificers. Like the technique employed by Jones in The

Masqueraders, Wycherley demonstrates the tension between the "way of the world" and the "better way" of morality.³¹ Yet, unlike a playwright like Jones, Wycherley is less compromising and more condemnatory in his treatment of vice and folly. He also adds a significant comic dimension which many of these later dramas lack. Both disease and folly become Wycherley's comic butts and, though "unchecked indulgence in folly often ends in vice," this glimpse of man's laughable side offsets the sordidness of his more corrigible one (Mueschkes, New View, p. 133). Congreve will also explore this dual nature of man, but he attempts in his plays to reconcile Etherege's comic vision of "things that shadow and conceal" with Wycherley's critical exposure of vice and folly (Man of Mode, III.i.50).³²

CHAPTER FOUR

"Understood by Contraries": Congreve's Four Comedies

In the comedies of Etherege and Wycherley, the "glass for the world" reflects the folly and vice of the human animal. Like many other playwrights, Etherege offers only an ambiguous resolution to the plays' reflection of human corrigibility. Emilia and Young Bellair may well fall prey to the "way of the world," and Harriet herself may not be able to reform her "man of mode." Nor does Wycherley suggest that human kindness can always overcome vice. In spite of the affection between Harcourt and Alithea, The Country Wife concludes with a dance of cuckolds and Horner's triumph. In The Plain Dealer, Manly and Fidelia have been stained by the hypocrisy and the lechery all around them. So, both Etherege and Wycherley expose man's fundamental corrigibility. The presence of virtue, of man's "undefaced" side, they relegate to minor, or at any rate, less effectual characters.

In contrast to Etherege's more ambiguous treatment of folly and Wycherley's vision of vice, Congreve offers a reconciliation of extremes.¹ He exploits the comic ambiguity of Etherege and the satire of Wycherley. Like them, Congreve investigates those "things that shadow and conceal" man's nature. In Dryden's words: "In Him all Beauties of this Age we see; / Etherege his Courtship, Southern's Purity; / The

Satire, Wit, and Strength of Manly Witcherley" (Prologue, The Double-Dealer, p. 123). Indeed, in Congreve's comedies, Kathleen Lynch detects the "renewal of the Restoration mode," a revivification of what threatened to become stale (Social Mode, p. 182). Novak carefully traces Congreve's own insistence on his satiric intent.² Kaufman, for his part, also refers to Congreve's satiric bent when he remarks that, in The Man of Mode, The Plain Dealer, The Country Wife and The Way of the World, "the playwrights indict the sterility of a way of life, men who in conforming to a narrow and superficial set of conventions have made themselves barren and less than human" ("Language and Character," 414).

But to some critics, Congreve's plays represent more than the brilliant zenith of a comic mode. These critics claim that, in addition to their witty attributes, Congreve's plays also include elements of the sentimental mode. To Holland, the plays of both Wycherley and Congreve are the "direct forerunners of 'weeping' comedy" (First Modern Comedies, p. 113). To Zimbardo, Congreve, "for all his wit, is at heart sentimental, and his comedy prepares for the tradition of eighteenth-century sentimentalism."³ Similarly, in Fujimura's view, Congreve is a transitional figure who bridges the gap between the witty and the sentimental modes (Comedy of Wit, p. 195). Nevertheless, it is more to the point to say that Congreve qualifies his criticism of vice and folly.⁴

On the one hand, he directs his attack against an age grown complacent in its purported reformation. Like other dramatists, he contends that "It is the Business of a Comick Poet to paint the Vices

and Follies of Humane Kind" (Dedication, The Double Dealer, p. 121). On the other hand, Congreve pities those who are "Fools so gross" that they should be "Objects of Charity" rather than of contempt (Dedication, The Way of the World, p. 390). A "natural Folly" is one which is "incorrigible" and, therefore, in Congreve's view, it ceases to be "proper for the Stage" (390). "There are no Fools so inconsiderable in themselves," Cynthia in The Double Dealer says, "but they can render other People contemptible in exposing their Infirmities" (III.i.165). Only those follies which can be corrected are fit satiric targets.

Therefore, Congreve adapts conventional themes to his own comic ends. Valentine's "mad" truth-telling in Love for Love (e.g. IV.i.280) and the critical statements made by Heartwell and Scandal in The Old Batchelour indicate Congreve's less than tolerant view of the "way of the world."⁵ But, unlike Etherege's more ambivalent treatment, Congreve does offer what Deitz calls a "better way."⁶ In effect, Congreve demonstrates the possibility of reformation. To do so, Congreve reprehends "Folly and Vice in general" at the same time as he acknowledges man to be a "mix'd character," neither wholly vicious nor wholly virtuous (Amendments, p. 435). In this way, he tries to account for both the virtuous and the vicious side. Congreve insists in his Amendments that a "mix'd" character's "Faults are fewer than his good Qualities" (p. 453). So, if Wycherley and Etherege dramatize the conflict of virtue and vice, then Congreve portrays the "mixture" of faults and virtues. As Leech argues, Congreve "could mock at folly and pretension," and yet realize "the implications of human vulnerability" ("Century's End," 284).

Man is shown to be as vulnerable as well as an affected creature. Congreve makes his point by dividing his characters into groups: the fops, the vipers and the "mix'd" characters. These groups are both comically and morally distinguishable. Those whose "Religion is Folly" (Love for Love, I.i.219) contrast sharply to the "Vipers" (The Double-Dealer, V.i.203), whose wit disguises their villainy. In contrast to the fools and the rogues are the hero and the heroine, comic "mixtures" of faults and virtues. To escape "the satiric world of knaves, fools, and indirect ridicule," they must seek a "better way" (Deitz, "Better Way," 369). They must be free of affectation or "what [they] would be, under a Voluntary Disguise" (Congreve, "Humour in Comedy," p. 79). In this important sense, Congreve does not merely dramatize human folly. He tries to correct it.

Yet, even fools practise the vice of the "way of the world." In The Double-Dealer, Brisk's courtship of Lady Froth parodies the conventional theme of cuckolding (IV.i.175-177). The "Solemn Coxcomb," Lord Froth (Dramatis Personae, p. 126), is certainly duped, but by cheaters who are as capable as Maskwell, and just as calculating. They affect a poetic ardour, and this affectation is more than comic. It cloaks their lechery. Congreve thereby creates a subtle link between the fools and the knaves. In the midst of what appears to be social buffoonery, depravity--both the fool's and the knave's--thrives. In A New View of Congreve's Way of the World, the Mueschkes argue that the stock character types "are deliberately modified to reveal how unchecked folly degenerates into vice" (p. 10).⁷

The mirror image illustrates this kinship. Both the fools and the

knaves are drawn to the image in the glass. In The Double-Dealer, the pocket glass reflects the vanity of the fop (I.i.134; II.i.140), just as the mirror reflects the villainy of the knave. The glass reveals the physical blemishes which spot the fool's face (I.i.134-5); such blemishes mar his social appearance.⁸ The glass also captures the moral and spiritual decay of the villain, the "hideous form" of a Maskwell (136), or the "Monster" shape of a Lady Touchwood (IV.ii.185). The blemishes the mirror reflects become one of Congreve's major concerns, and he lashes an age which can allow such vice and folly to flourish.

Satiric spokesmen like Heartwell in The Old Batchelour and Scandal in Love for Love illustrate Congreve's brand of satire. Heartwell attacks the pretenses of others. Ever "snarling odious Truths, and entertaining company like a Physician, with discourse of their diseases and infirmities" (The Old Batchelour, I.i.42), Heartwell insists that "every body be what they pretend to be" (43). Nor can Heartwell admit to prevarication: "Now by my Soul, I cannot lie, though it were to serve a Friend or gain a Mistress" (III.ii.72). But, like Manly's, Heartwell's honesty leads to blindness, as Rosowski notes: "the self-placency of Heartwell limits his perception. He is unable to penetrate the social masks assumed by other characters and thus unable to relate to the private individual or to the reality beneath the mask" ("Thematic Development," 391).

If Heartwell claims that his "Talent is chiefly that of speaking truth" (I.i.45), then Scandal boasts that he is one who freely indulges the "liberty" of his tongue (Love for Love, I.i.221) and sets himself up as a defamer (226). Scandal's description of the age points to the

"life" which lies behind the picture (232). As he remarks: "I can shew you Pride, Folly, Affectation, Wantonness, Inconstancy, Covetousness, Dissimulation, Malice, and Ignorance, all in one Piece. Then I can shew you Lying, Foppery, Vanity, Cowardise, Bragging, Lechery, Impotence and Ugliness in another Piece; and yet one of these is a celebrated Beauty, and t'other a profest Beau" (233).

Both Heartwell and Scandal resemble Manly in their efforts to uncover social pretense. Like Manly, Heartwell eschews "nauseous Flattery" (The Old Batchelour, I.i.42), and he derides compliance with an age which thrives on deception (42-5). Congreve also adds his own distinctive touches to the "plain dealer." Scandal willingly dissembles a passion for Mrs. Frail, not only to serve the interests of his friend, but also to glut his own appetite. Scandal is as famous for his liberty of speech as he is infamous for his sexual license; he is "a Libertine in Speech, as well as Practice" (Love for Love, III.i.272). For his part, Heartwell is a superannuated rake, one who awaits "the natural call of [his] Lust" and pursues temptation in spite of his age (The Old Batchelour, I.i.43). In this way, Congreve comments, not only on the plain-dealer, but also on the rake. The trick of the sham marriage finally exposes Heartwell's duplicity.⁹ He has "sold" himself to the hearty laughter of the "ill-natur'd Town" (III.i.63), not only because he has hypocritically played the role of a "Woman hater" (I.i.40), but also because he has foolishly offered marriage to a whore.¹⁰ Both his hypocrisy and his folly make him a comic butt. His "plain dealing," like Manly's, falls into "double dealing," and he, too, is punished for it.

Scandal's perception also comes to the test and proves to be distorted. Summarily judging Angelica to be "a Woman of this Age" (Love for Love, I.i.225), as prone as the "celebrated Beauty" to affectation and malice (233), he falsely believes her to expect in a marriage partner either "another great Fortune, or a Fool" (225). Both his rakish ways and his black-and-white perceptions make him a self-confessed "Infidel to [her] Sex" (V.i.314). Finally, Angelica's merit convinces him that his former judgments have been too harshly inclusive. Like Manly, he has damned without discrimination both the worthy and the morally culpable members of society. He tells her: "For now I am convinc'd that all Women are not like Fortune, blind in bestowing Favours, either on those who do not merit, or who do not want 'em" (314).

Angelica modifies Scandal's new insight when she declares that such a view is "an unreasonable Accusation," founded on a desire to hide a personal want of merit by attributing baseness to others (314). The "novelty," she suggests, is not that a woman proves kind, but that a lover proves faithful. At the same time as she questions the astuteness of the plain-dealer, Angelica also challenges the creed of the rake. The rake sacrifices constancy to pleasure and pretends a faith where only lust exists. Angelica remonstrates: "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" (314).

Angelica's diatribe against the rake shows Congreve's reconciliation of Etherege's "courtship" and Wycherley's satire. He may, in a play like The Old Batchelour, chart the "taming" of the gallant. Yet, in plays like The Double Dealer and The Way of the World, he also probes

the rake's degeneration. The focus of his plays becomes, on the one hand, the tamed gallant's pursuit of the heroine and, on the other, the deflation of the rakish creed of fleshly appetite.¹¹ His plays are highly comic, but sentimental touches do appear. Because the connubial outcome is from the beginning assured, his plays lack the perplexing ambiguity found in Etherege's The Man of Mode and Wycherley's The Country Wife.

His earliest play, The Old Batchelour, introduces two protagonists who conform, at least in part, to the conventional portrait of the rake.¹² Both Vainlove and Bellmour are "young, termagant flashy sinners" who are "so eager in pursuit of the temptation, that [they] save the Devil the trouble of leading [them] into it" (I.i.43). Their encounters with the witty heroines illustrate the conventional love chase. Bellmour courts the "excessively foppish and affected" Belinda (41), who rails against "that filthy, awkward[sic], two-leg'd Creature, Man" (II.ii.54). Vainlove is known for his capriciousness in matters of love (I.i.42; IV.i.79-80). Araminta, like Angelica in Love for Love, must overturn the false temples erected by such infidels in love, who as easily forsake their idolatry as they do their idols (II.ii.58). Both couples become duellists in the "game" of love (II.ii.55).

Suspicious of all the "flattering Men of Mode" (V.i.106), Belinda compares the rake's "curious" courtship to an inadequate entertainment, rich in show but poor in substance. Marriage then becomes "a mere French dish," the shoddy "remains" of a repast finally "serv'd up cold to the Wife" (106). If she listens to Bellmour and agrees to his proposals, he is satiated and she is starved. Bellmour, for his part,

chides "timorous Virgins" like Belinda for their preference in "entertainments" (106). He contends that "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" (107). Belinda, denying the conjugal feast to come, parries: "Rather Courtship to Marriage, as a very witty Prologue to a very dull Play" (107).

To Vainlove, the "witty Prologue" is the sauce to whet his appetite; he finds in the prelude to love the pleasure he craves. Using the familiar image of the hunt, he laments: "'Tis dull and unnatural to have a Hare run full in the Hounds Mouth; and would distate the keenest Hunter - I would have overtaken, not have met my game" (IV.i.80). For the rake, fleshly delight is to be found only in the "entertainment" itself, be it a feast or a play or a hunt. To the witty heroine, only the courtship holds any anticipation of delight.

But Congreve's lovers display more than just a conventional mastery of the love chase. Congreve adapts conventional images of battle and appetite, and he thereby balances Etherege's "courtship" and Wycherley's satire.¹³ Vainlove suffers from a "damn'd illnatur'd whimsey" which, contrary to most rakish dispositions, prohibits his ever satiating his sexual appetite (79).¹⁴ To Sharper's statement that Araminta resembles "a delicious Mellon pure and consenting ripe, and only waits thy Cutting up," Vainlove complains: "'Tis an untimely Fruit" (79). If, as Sharper hints, she "has been breeding Love to [Vainlove] all this while, and just now she is deliver'd of it," then in Vainlove's capricious eyes, "she has miscarried of her Love" (79). His is a "sickly peevish Appetite," and he is one who can only "chew" love and cannot "digest" it

(80). In Congreve's hands, the conventional association of food and fleshly appetite conveys Vainlove's individual character, at once rakish and capricious.¹⁵

But, in terms of Congreve's treatment of convention, it is important to note that these rakes are genuinely in love. Bellmour professes a heartfelt regard for Belinda, a willing "slavery of honourable Love" (I.i.40). For all his caprice, Vainlove also confesses to an honourable passion. The religious imagery once associated with amorous idolatry and lusty chase becomes temporarily transformed into the sentimental language of devotion. Bellmour inquires of his friend: "Couldst thou be content to marry Araminta?" (III.i.63). Vainlove answers: "Could you be content to go to Heaven?" The two questions, parallel in structure, equate Araminta and heaven, each of which represents both a reward and an ideal to be sought. Bellmour would delay: "I'de do a little more good in my generation first, in order to deserve it." Vainlove will not marry his heaven until he "merit" her (63). Although the language hints of a sentimental ardour, the exchange which follows resumes the rakish tone. Bellmour once again speaks of her "yielding" (63), of Vainlove's marrying her "without her Consent" (64), and he thereby obviates the notion that the lover must merit the heaven represented by the heroine. To "deserve" heaven, in Bellmour's eyes, is to have spiritual need of it; earthly, and illicit, activities demand absolution. To "merit" heaven implies a fitting reward for just conduct, and Vainlove's "sawcy Credulity," which threatens to blast his hopes of heaven, prompts him at last to resolve to "weary her into a Forgiveness" which will pardon his faults and reward his virtues (V.i.100).

Significantly, the play's conclusion leaves Vainlove's and Araminta's love affair unresolved (V.ii.112).

Congreve, then, even in his earliest play, injects a sentimental flavour, offset by spirited colloquies and libertine pursuits. His heroes may, like Dorimant, be gentlemen of the town but, just as Etherege exposed the rake's social failings and moral blemishes, so, too, does Congreve, in a play like The Old Batchelour or The Double-Dealer, examine the pitfalls of a creed based solely on self-gratification.¹⁶ The Double-Dealer explores the theme of artifice, so masterfully developed by Etherege, but Congreve here balances it with a critical probing of the rake, and his portrayal of the libertine captures the virulency of Wycherley's attack on vice.

Here in The Double-Dealer, Gosse affirms, "the true wit libertine hero (e.g. Bellmour in The Old Batchelour) becomes a villainous Maskwell." Yet, and the point bears repeating, Maskwell does dwell in a comic world of fools and knaves, and so his villainy does not unnecessarily jar the play's "essentially comic focus."¹⁷ Maskwell is as Machiavellian, and as comic, as Horner in his calculated machinations. He, too, has mastered the social art of occasional dissembling and keenly perceived the advantage to plain-dealing. In Rosowski's terms, the play "illustrates the potential for evil and villainy that results from the discrepancy between the private and the public, between the actual and the ideal" ("Thematic Development," 395). The social art of dissembling may once have enabled the witty hero to chase and capture the witty heroine but, given the "way of the world," the mask that Maskwell wears so well and the feigning that Fainall practices so

expertly illustrate the ease with which the social graces can be debased.

The contrast between Mellefont, a mellowed rake, and Maskwell, a conniving Machiavel, underlines the play's critical thrust. Their friendship, for one sincere and for the other feigned, links them together. Both conspire to win their ends, and the means they employ are not only conventional devices, but are also socially acceptable. But Mellefont, while he may engage in plotting and deception, is praised for his "goodness" (V.i.200). Nor will he, like Maskwell, capitulate to his aunt's wanton desires (I.i.129-130). Gosse says that he is "neither cynic nor rake in respect to his uncle, Lord Touchwood, and his uncle's wife" ("Plot and Character," 282). Mellefont's scheming becomes his only way to protect himself from the perfidy of his aunt and the double-dealing of Maskwell.¹⁸ So, Mellefont, while he may recall other Restoration heroes, embodies traits removed from the conventional portrait of the rake. As Gosse remarks: "For well over a third of the opening act, Mellefont is presented not only as the conventional comic hero dominating the action, but also, and unconventionally, in a morally commendable light" (282). Ironically, as Rosowski points out: "The resolution within the play comes about not through recognition of the natural goodness of Mellefont"; only "after the essential steps have been taken in the resolution" does Lord Touchwood pronounce his nephew to be good ("Thematic Development," 395). In the play, Mellefont, unlike a witty hero, has been duped.

In The Old Batchelour, Fondlewife had compared plain-dealing to a jewel (IV.iv.94), but to Maskwell "double-dealing" comes to be the

jewel of most value (The Double Dealer, III.i.155). His mien glows, but with "such a smile as speaks in Ambiguity," one which suggests "ten thousand meanings" in every corner "of that various face" (V.i.198). He exploits the credulity of those who fail to perceive the difference between substance and shadow, and his mask of "open Truth" confounds as effectively as his artful contrivances deceive (V.i.190). Maskwell soliloquizes: "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" (II.i.150). Eliza in The Plain Dealer remarks that neither real nor feigned virtue now proves efficacious (V.i.145). So, too, in Maskwell's world. Artful dissimulation, habitually and skillfully practiced, blurs the distinction between artifice and nature. The "life" and the "picture" become identical, and Congreve thereby underscores the debasement into which the easy social graces and the comic conventions may fall.

All mankind harbours hidden "Fraud and Power of Baseness" (The Double Dealer, II.i.150), and credulity itself becomes a vice. Maskwell "angles" for "fair-faced Fools," and readily finds them. "That hungry Gudgeon Credulity," easily caught and easily cheated, "will bite at any thing" (150), and Maskwell's "Serpent's hiss" threatens to "sting" such fools into "experience" (V.i.194). Without the folly and the credulity of the Plyants and the Froths, there would be no comic measure by which to judge either the success or the shoddier dealings of others.

Not only the fools become the pawns of heroes and villains. Lady Plyant's and Lady Froth's seemingly harmless antics, conforming as they do to the traditional mode (I.i.138; I.i.145, 148; IV.i.176), find their

most dire expression in the comically debased Lady Touchwood. Although she embodies the threat of vice envisaged by Etherege and exposed by Wycherley, Lady Touchwood also resembles the cast-off mistress (I.i.129-130; V.i.191), the matron and the counterfeiter. In her character, Congreve suggests that what may be construed as harmless may in fact be vice.

Lady Touchwood consumes herself in rage and lust. A Machiavel herself (II.i.148), she is too violent to be successful in her villainy (I.i.130; V.i.197). In contrast is Maskwell's "thinking" kind of villainy (I.i.135). His is called a hellish fire (V.i.191) but, as Mellefont observes, hers is a devouring flame (IV.ii.187). Finally, her temper and her passion undo her. Reduced to a "Vulture," she must gnaw "piece-meal" on her own violent heart (184).

The betrothed lovers, however, display an incipient sentimentalism which counteracts the "secret Villainy" and "base Treach'ry" practiced against them (V.i.203). The colloquies between Cynthia and Mellefont reflect a seriousness quite distinct from the verbal fencing of other witty lovers. Similar to The Old Batchelour, The Double Dealer exploits conventional images only to display more fully the individuality of the characters. When Cynthia refers to marriage, she speaks of "an odd Game," and offers to draw "Stakes" (II.i.142). Mellefont continues to play upon the notion of marriage as a risky card game, but his purpose is, not to debauch her, but to convince her to marry him. He encourages her to "turn up Trump" now that they have already "Shuffled" and "Cutt" (142). The game, Mellefont contends, depends not on an "Accident of Fortune" (142), but on "Judgment" (143). Later, the game refers to the

hunt, but the imagery assumes both conventional and unique dimensions. Now "Marriage is the Game that [they] hunt" (IV.i.168), and not fleshly gratification. No longer the virtuous prey of a gallant, Cynthia fears their mutual willingness to wed impedes the hunt; when they "Hunt in Couples," she explains, both "pursue the same game" and thereby "hinder one another in the Race" (168). Although still regarded as a game, marriage to these lovers becomes pursuit founded on mutual ardour.

Cynthia's wit matches her forthright confessions of love. She may lead him no merry chase, but she does expect "a very evident demonstration of his Wit" (168).¹⁹ Her method of gaining an "ascendancy" over him is to resolve, "in spite of Duty, any temptation of Wealth, [his] inconstancy, or [her] own inclination to change," never to wed another if he does not succeed in outwitting his Machiavellian aunt (168). At the same time as she enumerates these traditional qualities of the witty lovers, she neutralizes them, and all are "turn'd topsie turvy" (V.i.200). Like a sentimental heroine, she abjures amorous deception and yet, like a witty heroine, she demands some measure of control.²⁰ Similar to those of Etherege and Wycherley, then, a Congreve heroine embodies both the comic standard of social mastery, and the satiric ideal of a frank heart and an open nature. A mistress both of her social world and herself, the witty heroine artfully performs her roles at the same time as she propels the comedy "toward an end," the end to which all the plays move: "let us think of leaving acting, and be our selves" (Love for Love, IV.i.294).

Love for Love develops most fully the theme of unaffected love and open hearts.²¹ In a world of sham, as Rosowski explains, the individual

must assume responsibility "to create meaning from an essentially meaningless society. This responsibility is implied in the title, for love is received only for love that is given" (Rosowski, "Thematic Development," 397). Lyons suggests: "the comedy celebrates a relationship which is more profound, and the comic aberrations of the sexual relationship within the play work to define both the nature and the value of an honest and faithful union of man and woman" ("Miracle of Love," 332-333). In the play, Angelica's trial of Valentine is designed less to tame a wild gallant than to make the "utmost Tryal of [his] Virtue" (V.i.312) and, ultimately, of his capacity for love.²² Only when he, like Harcourt, can sacrifice his "Interest" to his "Constancy" (314) will she openly confess her devotion to him (312). Angelica demands, like Harriet and Alithea, that her lover abjure the artifices of the "way of the world," and confess openly to her his "generous and faithful" passion (312) which, in a world devoted to self-interest, does border on a kind of "madness." Rosowski explains: "In the eyes of the world, one who adheres to values basic to this private world is 'mad'" ("Thematic Development," 398).²³

Angelica demands this kind of demonstration from a man who trusts, not to her sagacity and affection, but to his own ability to outwit her. His former behaviour only aggravates her distrust. Valentine is a "wit," one whose greatest fault, as Scandal notes, has been "Love and Pleasurable Expencc" (I.i.220). Sir Sampson hypocritically condemns "the Morality" of the wit (II.i.243), and then urges his impoverished son to live by his "wits" (246). Even Angelica does not hold the witty man in esteem. She tells Sir Sampson: "And she that marries a very

Witty Man, submits both to the Severity and insolent Conduct of her Husband. I should like a Man of Wit for a Lover, because I would have such an one in my Power; but I would no more be his Wife, than his Enemy" (V.i.229). Sir Sampson's assessment of his son may well be true: "The Rogue has not a Drachm of Generous Love about him: All Interest, all Interest; he's an undone Scoundrel, and courts your Estate: Body o' me, he does not care a Doit for your Person" (III.i.259-260). The old gent, whose self-interest blinds him to Angelica's real motives, summarizes the conventional flaws of the rake and perhaps of Valentine. His machinations may cloak the "madness" of a genuine and honorable devotion, but Angelica must determine for herself whether he does indeed "merit" her. She tells him: "Resolution must come to me, or I shall never have one" (259).

Indeed, Valentine has earlier admitted that he knows "no effectual Difference between continued Affectation and Reality" (254). He, like Sir Sampson, fails to distinguish between "masks and faces," and he thereby verifies one of Scandal's astute observations to Foresight: "Either you suffer your self to deceive your self; or you do not know your self" (268). Valentine's own "Mask of Madness" (IV.i.294) confounds what he is, a man enthralled by the "madness" of love, and what he would be "under a Voluntary Disguise," a man exhorting truth from a lying world and tricking Angelica into love.

Valentine not only engages in deception and dissembling in order to trick her into a confession of love (IV.i.276). He also betrays a mercenary desire to "preserve the right of [his] Inheritance" (294). Angelica's remark to Tattle, that he must be as "mad" as Valentine and

only the "maddest" lover shall have her (291), sharpens her rebuke to Valentine: "I thought your love of me had caus'd this Transport in your Soul; which, it seems, you only counterfeited, for mercenary Ends and sordid Interest" (294). When he insists that it is her interest that concerns him, he admits to a blindness which testifies to his present lack of merit: "I wanted more than Love, to make me worthy of you" (295). His admission prompts her to retort: "I am not the Fool you take me for; and you are Mad and don't know it" (296). Love to Angelica encompasses all, and Valentine later realizes that wanting "more than love" is as "mad" as it is blind (V.i.312). Only when he finally offers to sacrifice everything to his love is he, as Scandal observes, "mad" indeed (311). He comes to perceive the "contraries" of affectation and reality (IV.i.297), and to verify the "truth of masks."

Like Dorimant, Valentine formerly has been enslaved by the "show or 'affectation'" of love. This initial failure to distinguish between the reality of love and its "affectation" leads to his inability to outwit Angelica (Holland, First Modern Comedies, p. 162).²⁴ Just as Etherege's witty "man of mode" must forswear empty oaths and "keep a Lent for a mistress" (The Man of Mode, III.iii.73), and just as Wycherley's Harcourt must convince Alithea of his fidelity, so, too, must Congreve's Valentine refute the conventions of the past. Myers argues that, when Valentine renounces his estate, he renounces "the wit's traditional role of mastering the World" ("Plot and Meaning," William Congreve, p. 81). Valentine learns from the heroine the distinction between the social efficacy of dissembling and the personal necessity of sincere dealing. Although "disguis'd by Art", Angelica

never seeks to "transubstantiate" the "natural" into what she would seem (Congreve, "Humour in Comedy," p. 81). While she must dissemble her innermost feelings in order to gain her ends and test her lover, she readily drops her pose when it no longer serves: "I have done dissembling now, Valentine" (Love for Love, V.i.313).²⁵

In contrast, other, less capable characters fail to distinguish between opposites, between dissembling and truth. Sir Sampson Legend is, on the one hand, a conventional portrait of the intransigent parent (e.g., II.i.244; V.i.311). On the other hand, Sir Sampson also proves to be a foolishly amorous old man. Proclaiming his virility (V.i.300-1), this superannuated rake falsely believes Angelica's pose to be an unaffected passion for him (298-301). In the end, Sir Sampson has been traditionally "Cully'd, Bubbl'd, Jilted, Woman-bobb'd at last," but he has also been punished (313). As Scandal tells Angelica: "You have done Exemplary Justice, in punishing an inhūmane Father" (313). Sir Sampson is comically exposed at the same time as he, like Tattle, has "but Justice," a theme which the sentimental mode will develop even further.

Congreve also links his theme of madness to his treatment of comic convention. Foresight, another foolish old man, trusts to "false Prophecies" (II.i.237), so much so that he is blind to his own cuckoldom (III.i.269-272). Foolishly, he submits to whatever fate the stars hold for him: "Why, if I was born to be a Cuckold, there's no more to be said-" (II.i.239). He is a "most superstitious Old Fool" (I.i.231), one who reveres a man "whom the vulgar think mad" (IV.i.285), but one who fails to understand the distinction to be made between

superstition and faith, folly and madness.

In this comic world of secrets and shams, all are "mad," as Ben asserts (285).²⁶ While Prue, "a Land-Monster," and he, "a Sea-Beast" (I.i.231), resolve to deal plainly with each other (III.i.263-4), others play at courtship. Mrs. Foresight calls Scandal "mad" when he reminds her of their illicit affair (IV.i.284). Similarly, Foresight tells the countrified Prue that Tattle, her choice for a mate, is also "Mad" (V.i.305). Tattle's foppish pretense to secrecy culminates in his marriage to Mrs. Frail, a woman almost bereft of both wealth and reputation (II.i.248). Prue, for her part, must endure the fate of many a country lass who proves to be too "apt" a "Scholar" (253) in the ways of the world; her father summarily locks her up (V.i.306).²⁷ The "absolute Sea-wit," Ben, is "plain and honest" (III.i.262), and he finds in these double-dealings of others a madness which he compares to "all, the Calentures of the Sea" (IV.i.285). The follies of others lead him to a similar conclusion. He analyzes Angelica's proposed marriage to Sir Sampson in the following manner: "But she's mad for a Husband, and he's Horn-mad, I think, or they'd ne're make a Match together" (V.i.307).

In the "mad" truth-telling scenes, Valentine exposes the sham and folly around him (IV.i.279-283). In the last act, it is the plain-dealing Ben who pierces pretense and exposes folly (V.i.308-9). Ben, the "Booby-Brother" (I.i.225), extricates himself from the "Calentures" around him at the same time as Valentine, the man of wit, learns the distinction to be made between a folly which leads to lunacy, and an amorous madness which leads to marriage. Earlier, he has endeavoured to play the "Madman" and make Angelica "play the Fool" (IV.i.276),

At last, when Ben queries if he is still the madman, Valentine announces that now he is himself the fool (V.i.310). Wit, as Scandal has earlier remarked, has always contrived "it's own Ruine" (I.i.219), and, in effect, Valentine has proven willing to "ruine himself" (V.i.311).

Finally, Love for Love captures both the sprightly vis comica of the witty mode and the romantic flavour of the sentimental one. Less idealized than Wycherley's *Fidelia*, Angelica balances wit with a sentimental regard for justice. She becomes the hero's "Heav'n" (V.i.313), the "angelic" essence who converts and "blesses" the infidel (312). Angelica, in Lyons' words, "recognizes the difference between affectation and reality, as clearly as she responds to the distinction between madness and sanity, appearance and reality." Later, Valentine is himself brought to accept the "'reality' of Angelica's worth, the discrepancy between that reality and the artifice of his previous courtship" (Lyons, "Miracle of Love," 336). Theirs is a "detached, almost religious, spiritual love" (Rosowski, "Thematic Development," 400), a love which has a "touch of the new sentiment" (Leech, "Century's End," 290).²⁸

Yet, in a play where the possibility of this kind of "spiritual love" is admitted, Congreve continues to show that the world is only "understood by contraries." This kind of spiritual love exists in a world of sham. Angelica herself plays her share of tricks, and Valentine resorts to dissembling. Foppery and vice, love and truth, all must co-exist. Ultimately, even in a play like Love for Love, where its "contrary" is extolled, artifice would appear to represent "the way of the world."²⁹

Congreve's most brilliant play, The Way of the World, masterfully

explores this theme of artifice.³⁰ The play represents "one Comedy true in all its Parts" (Congreve, "Humour in Comedy," p. 83). Here, Congreve unites the vision of satire, the gaiety of the witty mode, and the ardour of the sentimental mode. To blend Etherege's comic ambiguity and Wycherley's satiric exposure, and finally to develop his own comic treatment, Congreve clusters his characters into conventional groups which then assume unique thematic dimensions. The familial ties illustrate the kinship between all the characters and between all the aspects to Congreve's complex vision of the "way of the world." Deitz argues: "The complicated intrigue structure of the whole comedy should in fact be seen as a metaphor for a scheming way to run the world ("Better Way," 368).³¹ On the one hand are the counterfeitters, the rogues and the fops who thrive in a world given to sham.³² Unlike the rogues, however, the fops must cloak, not their duplicity, but their inherent lack of witty perception. As Hinnant notes, the failure to distinguish between "false rhetoric and plain truth" separates the "would-be" wits from the true wits ("Wit, Propriety, and Style," 380). Or, as Cook and Swannell point out, the "would-be" wits lack "true standards," and fail to propound "a serious set of values about life in general" (Introduction, The Country Wife, p. xxxv).³³

Fops like Petulant and Witwoud pretend to a verbal acuity and a social mastery which is as "affected" as it is "false" (Dedication, The Way of the World, p. 390). In their "senseless Ribaldry," these two fools merely "plead the error of [their] Judgment" (I.i.409), and show their wit to be a false one. Not only their verbal gaucheries, but also their social ineptitude, display their lack of judgment. What

should maintain geniality becomes mere impudence. They shamelessly interpret "modesty" to be "ill Manners" and, as Mirabell declares, to them "Impudence and Malice, pass for Wit" (409). Their disregard for social decorum, exemplified in highly comic scenes of drunkenness and superficial verbal battle (IV.i.453-4), matches their reduction of the riposte to the similitude. "Like a Medlar grafted on a Crab," Witwoud feeds on the witty pulp of others, and reveals himself to be but "a Fool with a good Memory, and some few Scraps of other Folks Wit" (I.i.401). In his zeal to display it, he loses control of the verbal game's witty devices. Even "tho' 'tis against [himself]" (II.i.419), he never ceases to tag a similitude onto every observation, and he, like Petulant, thereby becomes a foolish "Epitomizer of Words," an "anihilator of sense" and a "retailer of Phrases" (IV.i.453). He "uses a syntax of relationship, the simile, but uses it in a way that attenuates connections. It expresses a perception which rests in disparateness, and makes small effort for unity or reconciliation" (Roper, "Language and Action," 46).

The falsity of his wit is revealed in a colloquy between him and the two central characters. Millamant swears that she has "enquir'd" after Mrs. Fainall as though she were "a new Fashion" (II.i.419). Exposing his own few "scraps" of wit, Witwoud reiterates Millamant's earlier remonstrance to him, "truce with your Similitudes," and corrects her: "No, you met her Husband and did not ask him for [Mrs. Fainall]." Mirabell wittily extends Millamant's simile at the same time as he shows Witwoud to be a false imitator of fashionable ways: "By your leave Witwoud, that were like enquiring after an old Fashion, to ask a Husband

for his Wife" (419).

Witwoud has assumed a "Voluntary Disguise" which would deny what he is and transform him into what he would be. Sir Wilfull's diatribe against such foppery punctuates the falsity of Witwoud's pose. Rather than apprentice himself to a "Maker of Felts," Witwoud has bound himself to a "Maker of Fops." Here in the town he has "serv'd" his "time" and now sets himself up as a well-groomed fop (III.i.440). Once he was a lowly apprentice subservient to a master. Now, he subjugates himself to the whimsies of fashion and the dictates of the foppish trade. Witwoud comes to represent the comic paradigm of foppery, one whose half-brother, Sir Wilfull, may then be "but half a Fool" (I.i.402).

But Sir Wilfull's country ways betray a bluff good nature. In the end, as Deitz notes, Sir Wilfull "is not mastered by trickery into assisting [the lovers]; he openly agrees and proves trustworthy in his openness" ("Better Way," 372). He does not cower when confronted with the falsity of his relations, nor do they control him. Indeed, his good nature contrasts with their folly and artifice. He recognizes Lady Wishfort's art at the same time as he himself eschews artifice. His "disguise" has been a rowdy drunkenness which ruffles the smooth surface of the "world" (IV.i.455-6), but it masks neither his blunt good nature nor his essential honesty.³⁴ He may be comic in his lack of social polish, but his final benevolent action toward the witty lovers sets him apart from the foppery around him and from the affectation of Lady Wishfort.

Lady Wishfort also illustrates the falsity into which affectation may slip. She conceals her sexuality beneath a mask of modesty (458-9) and a hearty "Destestation of Mankind" (I.i.396).³⁵ Hers is a "deprav'd"

appetite, akin to the "Green Sickness of a second Childhood" (II.i.418). Rather than ushering in the fertility of spring, her faint promise sinks into an early fall and "withers in an affected Bloom" (418). Where once "a little Art" made her picture like the original, "now a little of the same Art, must make [her] like [her] Picture" (III.i.429). Art has been reduced to artifice, and the picture replaces the life. The original comes to be, not only an "Antidote to desire" (IV.i.459), but also a poor copy, a "bloom" ravaged by time and withered by decay. But so affected is she that, until Marwood's treachery undeceives her, she falls a willing victim to Mirabell's "sham Addresses" (I.i.397). And so transparent is her peeling mask that Mirabell readily perceives that "the good Lady wou'd marry any Thing that resembl'd a Man" (II.i.418). The falsity of her pose can be easily discerned by the wit or by the rogue, and their discussion about her illustrates the folly of artifice.

Initially, both Mirabell and Fainall appear to conform to the conventional portrayal of two witty protagonists. Their discourse on the "Exportation of Fools" would apparently mark them as witty men of mode, assessing the foppery of inferiors in a manner which yokes together the seemingly disparate elements of the fool and the nation's trade (I.i.400).³⁶ Like the rake, Fainall and Mirabell both have been engaged in clandestine affairs, and neither would condemn social chicanery. But these witty men of mode are clearly differentiated. One is a "mix'd" character and the other is a false, designing villain. Mirabell, like Mellefont, is a "gallant Man," one whose "Virtue" forbids debauchery (397), at least in the case of Lady Wishfort. He prefers instead to pursue his honourable love for Millamant.³⁷ Conversely,

Fainall continues his rakish courses. He is "the libertine hero of the early Restoration" (Kaufman, "Language and Character," 417), and he is a man of "a Taste extreamly delicate," one who would "refine" his fleshly pleasures (395).

Mirabell's "Conscience" and "Generosity" distinguish his wiles from Fainall's guile (397).³⁸ Mirabell's "sham Addresses" to the credulous Lady Wishfort "might have continu'd in the state of Nature," Fainall suggests, had Mirabell "dissembl'd better" (397). What Mirabell considers a witty plot, an "Innocent device" contrived by love (V.i.472) and designed to conceal his genuine love for another, Fainall interprets to be a "state of nature." His deliberate confusion of the natural and the artificial exemplifies the decline of the conventional man of mode to the rogue, to a "merciless Villain" who exploits the social graces only to achieve his own self-serving ends (469).

In The Way of the World matrimony, which conventionally cloisters the rake and subdues his soul, comes to express this distinction. Mirabell eagerly seeks marriage. Fainall has married merely "to make lawful Prize of a rich Widow's Wealth" and thereby possess the means to "squander" it on his own pleasure (II.i.415). Marriage becomes a false social mask, a secret panderer to illicit desires. Since the matrimonial "root" society itself regards as "honourable," then its adulterous "branches" must likewise be "honourable" (III.i.443). Indeed, when he hears of his wife's past liaison with Mirabell, Fainall reduces marriage to a clandestine game of fleshly intrigue. As he exclaims: "Why then Foible's a Bawd, an Errant, Rank, Match-making Bawd, And I it seems am a Husband, a Rank-Husband; and my Wife a very Errant, Rank-Wife, - all in

the Way of the World" (442).

The "way" practiced by Fainall and his "wicked accomplice" would appear to be the accepted "way of the world" (V.i.474).³⁹ Just as Marwood's false friendship easily dupes the "easie Nature" (II.i.414) of the credulous old matron, Fainall's "outward fair Behaviour" dupes the town and earns him a creditable reputation (417). Based on hypocrisy, their "way" exploits the credulity of others at the same time as it enlarges upon the affectation and falsity practised by all. The "rank" counterfeiterers may possess, like the "truewits," a keen awareness of the "natural grain," but they cunningly conceal it in order to convincingly "transubstantiate" themselves into what they would be.

Endowed as they may be with the requisite verbal and social acumen, the rogues nevertheless slip into folly. Like the "cracks" which are "discernable" in Lady Wishfort's painted, if peeling, "Wall" of cosmetic "Vernish" (III.i.429), Fainall's mask of witty gentleman cannot long conceal the roguery which remains beneath his fair exterior. Therefore, the downfall of vice and falsity also comes to comprise the "way of the world."⁴⁰ As Fainall and Marwood themselves recognize: "'tis but the way of the World" (V.i.474) to "expect all [to] come out" at last (III.i.444). They help to bring about their own downfall. Marwood's thirst for revenge outweighs her fear of discovery (444), and Fainall's greed causes him but to "insist the more" (V.i.474). Their own single-mindedness, which for a time serves their duplicity, now becomes folly.

Finally, their social mastery proves to be as "affected" as it is "false." Against their "rank" way Congreve pits its "contrary," Mrs. Fainall's worldly circumspection. In his portrait of a cast-off mistress,

he introduces an added dimension which not only distinguishes her from her predecessors, but which also underscores the essential falsity of Fainall's way. Mrs. Fainall converts her former amorous folly into a sagacious trust in the man who has debauched her.⁴¹ Previously, she has "Lov'd with Indiscretion" (II.i.416) and "without Bounds" (417). Her ill-considered passion for Mirabell obliges her to a marriage made necessary by "that Idol Reputation" (417) and made "honourable" in the eyes of the world by her matrimonial choice. Fainall is a man "lavish of his Morals, an interested and professing Friend, a false and a designing Lover" but, as Mirabell acknowledges: "A better Man ought not to have been sacrific'd to the Occasion; a worse had not answer'd to the Purpose" (417).

Fainall has himself been cheated, betrayed by subterfuge into a union with Mirabell's cast-off mistress. Finally, Fainall can profit neither by his mistake nor by his rapaciousness. He has been "Out-Witted," "Out-Jilted" and "Out-Matrimony'd" (III.i.442). A wealthy widow as well as a forsaken mistress, Mrs. Fainall shrewdly protects her estate at the same time as she guards her reputation. As Mirabell tells Fainall: "Even so Sir, 'tis the way of the World, Sir: of the Widdows of the World" (V.i.476). No longer the conventional portrait of a viper bent on revenge or a widow ripe for conquest, Congreve's Mrs. Fainall does indeed become what Marwood disparagingly calls the "Pattern of Generosity." Befriended by her former lover, Mrs. Fainall herself is an abettor of his amorous designs (III.i.43).

While the rogues' counterfeiting may for a time deceive, the rankness of their "way" recoils back upon itself. "Base Treach'ry"

slays its own "Vile Parent," the artificer (The Double Dealer, V.i.203); falsity and infamy suffer inevitable defeat. As Hurley notes: "they have been outwitted on the very grounds they have used to threaten and intimidate others" ("Law and Dramatic Rhetoric," 201). "Wrong'd Innocence" is thereby righted and virtue "rewarded" (203).⁴² It is a sentimental touch which reiterates Cibber's contention that "good and evil actions are their own reward" and Farquhar's, that "hypocrisy, by imposing on the world, at last deceives itself."⁴³

"Truewits" like Mirabell and Millamant also abet the downfall of villainy. Their witty discernment testifies to their superior social and mental acuity. As Congreve asserts in his Preface to The Double-Dealer, the "moral" and the "fable" are designed to mutually support each other (p. 119) and, so, the distinctions to be made between the various "ways" of the world help to clarify the play's complexity. Early in the play, for example, Fainall verbally jousts with Mirabell, but soon betrays his own jealous curiosity about Marwood. Fainall queries: "What should provoke her to be your Enemy, without she had made you Advance, which you have slighted" (The Way of the World, I.i. 397). A worldly observation, befitting a man of mode, hides his personal interest in the matter: "Women do not easily forgive Omissions of that Nature" (397). Mirabell replies in kind: "She was always civil to me, till of late; I confess I am not one of those Coxcombs who are apt to interpret a Woman's good Manners to her Prejudice." Fainall, while praising Mirabell's discreet regard for a lady's honour, then openly needles him: "Yet you speak with an Indifference which seems to be affected; and confesses you are conscious of a Negligence." Mirabell

replies: "You pursue the Argument with a distrust that seems to be unaffected, and confesses you are conscious of a Concern for which the Lady is more indebted to you, than your Wife" (397). In this way, Mirabell unmasks Fainall to expose the designing lover. Later in the play, Fainall as bluntly accuses Marwood of infidelity (II.i.414), and thereby verifies the keen perception which Mirabell has earlier demonstrated.⁴⁴

Similarly, Millamant and Marwood engage in a colloquy which moves from persiflage to seriousness. Just as their male counterparts debate whether a fool is a contemptible creature or the cause of scandal (I.i. 399), so, too, do Millamant and Marwood wittily discuss the relative advantages of courting a fool (III.i.432). Millamant complains: "Well, 'tis a lamentable thing I'll swear, that one has not the liberty of choosing one's Acquaintance, as one does one's Cloaths". Marwood continues the comparison: "A Fool and a Doily Stuff wou'd now and then find Days of Grace, and be worn for variety" (433). She then injects a less bantering note, and contends: "For a Fool's Visit is always a Disguise; and never admitted by a Woman of Wit, but to blind her Affair with a Lover of Sense" (433). She shows herself eager to discover whether Millamant does intend to have Mirabell, and Marwood chides her: "If you wou'd but appear bare fac'd now, and own Mirabell: you might as easily put off Petulant and Witwoud, as your Hood and Scarf." Her accusation that Millamant's antics smack of pretense prompts Millamant to retort in kind. The folly of the fools, she declares, "is less provoking than [Marwood's] Mallice" (433). Millamant does not spare her opponent, whose reasons for discovering Mirabell's plot to Lady

Wishfort are no more "secret" than his ardent love for Millamant.

The truewits perceive the reality which lurks beneath the appearance, and their masterful control of the game's devices enables them to succeed in outwitting knaves and fools at the same time as they attain their own unaffectedly amorous ends. Foakes remarks: "The exercise of judgement is shown pre-eminently in the Truewit's ability to play the game well; to put it more elaborately, the Truewit is one who accepts, understands, and masters the conventions of his world" and this mastery, Foakes contends, enables the true wit to "control his destiny."⁴⁵ Similarly, Kaufman argues that "self-awareness, knowledge of society, generosity, and amused irony - these qualities define true wit in The Way of the World and provide the play with a moral norm, a viable life-style" ("Language and Character," 425-6). However, in his view, "there is no 'alternative' to the way of the world in the sense of an escape from it" (426); the world's way is a "certainty" (419). Fujimura argues that Congreve does "repudiate" the way of the world when he "censures" Fainall, and Mirabell and Millamant "refuse to conform to the pattern of a world which is conventional and cynical in human relations" (Comedy of Wit, p. 195). Unlike Lady Wishfort, who pretends to long for a pastoral retreat, Mirabell and Millamant do live in the world, and they prove to be successful. Thus, Mirabell and Millamant are not merely "ethical yardsticks" who serve perfunctorily "as commentators on the play's world" (Roberts, "Mirabell and Restoration Comedy," William Congreve, p. 46). As Deitz remarks, there are two ways of living, "the egocentric way of intrigue and the open way of trust" ("Better Way," n. 7, 370). Mirabell and Millamant offer a "way" which

requires more than the ability to play the "game" well.

Their bluntness suggests that the "way of the world" must also include a frank and open nature, a due regard for "plain Dealing and Sincerity" which will expose pretense and reveal artifice (II.i.422). In this sense, they do offer an "alternative" to the "ways" practiced by others, and their success suggests there is the possibility of escape from other, less masterful "ways." Indeed, the play moves from disguised rivalry and cloaked sexual battle to forthright articles of marriage, "from confusion to clarity, from disguised and hidden feeling to open and accepted emotion, from perverse social ritual to natural human relationship" (Lyons, "Disguise, Identity, and Personal Value," 258).

In this context, the love chase exemplifies the modifications Congreve makes to conventional material. Like many another witty lover, Mirabell tries to trick Millamant into a confession of love and, for her part, she tests to the limit his wit and his fidelity. Yet, Mirabell is no Dorimant. From the beginning, he has freely spoken of his love for Millamant and, just as freely, he has sought the assistance of others. His treatment of Lady Wishfort finally proves him to be generous as well as moral. But neither is he a sentimental hero. Unlike Bevil Junior in Steele's The Conscious Lovers, Mirabell has carried on illicit affairs. He also pursues a heroine whose character, unlike Indiana's, owes something to both the witty and the sentimental modes. In Millamant, Congreve modifies conventions and, in doing so, he creates a highly individualized character, one who illustrates his theme of "contraries."

Her disposition, Fainall suggests, "wou'd tempt the patience of a

Stoick" (I.i.395), and, to win her, Mirabell must subdue her contraries. She is both natural and artificial, and this duality points to her importance in Congreve's treatment of convention. On the one hand, Millamant resembles a natural force. Mirabell compares her to a "whirlwind" which befuddles the senses and confounds the reason (II.i.423). On the other hand, she transforms her "motion" into "method" (423), her natural spontaneity into a form of art.⁴⁶ Like the fashionable woman she is, she wittily compares fools and fashions (III.i.433) but, like the artful woman she is, she pins her hair up with prose (II.i.419) and woos her lovers with poetry (IV.i.446-9). What is natural and what is artful combine in Millamant to contravene what Congreve elsewhere contends: "if ever any thing does appear Comical or Ridiculous in a Woman, I think it is a little more than an acquir'd Folly, or an Affectation" ("Humour in Comedy," p. 82). Millamant changes what in others would be "odious." In her, it is an agreeable, enchanting charm (I.i.399).

In addition to this duality of art and nature, Millamant resembles both the witty and the sentimental heroine. Like other witty heroines, she capably handles her rival (III.i.432-4) and her lover (II.i.420-22). She is, as Mirabell acknowledges, "more Mistress of her self, than to be under the necessity" of abiding by the dictates of her foolish old guardian (I.i.396). Indeed, she offers no resistance to Mirabell's schemes to outwit her aunt (II.i.422). Yet, to defy the authority of her aunt is "to sacrifice half her fortune in order to elope with the man of her choice" (Mueschkes, New View, p. 64). At first, Millamant does not seem eager to sacrifice wealth for love. But later she does prove

willing to be a "Sacrifice" to her aunt's repose (V.i.470) and resign the man who has inspired her with a "violent" love for him (IV.i.453). This aspect to her nature is a side which adds a sentimental touch to her character, even though it is not developed.⁴⁷ The traditional love chase itself assumes such sentimental overtones. After all, its outcome is from the beginning almost assured.

Early in the play, Millamant hints that she has indeed considered the possibility of marrying her "sententious" (II.i.422), if witty, lover. She may quip, "I think I must resolve after all, not to have you" (422), but she indicates, at the same time, two concerns which will later be translated into marital provisos. Their "Distemper," she warns, "in all likelihood will be the same; for we shall be sick of one another" (422). Later, in the famous "proviso scene," she instructs him: "Let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while; and as well bred as if we were not marri'd at all" (IV.i.450). She would avoid the hypocrisy displayed by such couples as the Fainalls, who hide their mutual loathing under hypocritical terms of endearment (II.i.412). Nor will Millamant endure reprimands or instructions (422), and she would insure that she is "first made sure of [her] will and pleasure" (IV.i.449).

The "proviso" scene serves to reconcile the play's "contraries."⁴⁸ The imagery of constraint emphasizes that, paradoxically, conditions must be made if marital freedom and happiness are to be achieved. Millamant will "by degrees dwindle into a Wife," and Mirabell agrees to be "enlarg'd" into a husband, provided it is not "beyond Measure" (450). He remains a witty man of mode, but one who abides by the dictates of

conscience and virtue. Nor does he grandiloquently renounce his former ways and make extravagant promises.⁴⁹ Instead, he imposes articles of marriage which, like Millamant's, would insure harmony and safeguard personal liberty. Couching their affection in formal articles of marriage, each strives to preserve individuality and banish artifice. She deplores hypocritical shows of affection as vehemently as he forbids patches and paint (450-1). Neither Mirabell nor Millamant will suffer art to taint the "natural perspective" they have now achieved. Once Mirabell agrees to her conditions, she tells him "in plain terms" that she "must have him" (452), and confides to Mrs. Fainall: "Well, if Mirabell shou'd not make a good Husband, I am a lost thing; - for I find I love him violently" (453). Later, he confesses to Millamant: "Well, heav'n grant I love you not too well, that's all my fear" (V.i.477). The love chase has moved, both structurally and thematically, from disguise to openness. Now, they will freely give themselves to each other, over and over (477).

Throughout the play, and especially at the end, the presence of the Fainalls challenges the harmony envisioned by the lovers. But the play does end on a festive note, the conventional dance symbolizing the marital union of the lovers. Those who, like Sir Wilfull, "are not lovers" (477) also participate in the dance. At the end, as Corman notes, all the forces antagonistic to this final show of happiness are accounted for; the "plight of the Fainalls" is not left in a state of permanent uncertainty (Corman, "Morally Serious Comedy," 210-211). Instead of Etherege's ambiguity in The Man of Mode or Wycherley's romantic ending in The Plain Dealer, Congreve offers a comic solution.

Therefore, in his most famous play, Congreve explores the conventional themes of artifice and nature, and his comic treatment owes something to the witty and the sentimental modes. In The Way of the World, Congreve balances persiflage with a touch of seriousness. It is indeed a play "true in all the Parts." Gaiety neatly balances both criticism and sentiment, and this balance yields a comic drama which reconciles the "contraries" represented by the two modes. In the drama to come, such a blending of the witty and the sentimental modes will be less efficacious and, ultimately, less comic.

CHAPTER FIVE:

"All revolutions run into extremes": Eighteenth-Century Comedy and the Sentimental Mode

Congreve's blending of comic modes yields finally to an emphasis which disrupts the balance he so masterfully achieved. Heroes and heroines in Restoration comedy are social standards, sharply contrasting to the surrounding vice and folly; in eighteenth-century playwrights like Cibber, Steele and Cumberland the protagonists become moral standards worthy of emulation. Striving to mirror the ideal, the sentimental mode re-unites the battling elements dramatized by the witty mode, and the comic tension between the individual affections and the social arts weakens. As Krutch puts it: "Under this [sentimental] tradition wit died, for the basis of wit is a realization and recognition of the contrast between ideals and reality, while the sentimentalists insisted upon their identity" (Comedy and Conscience, p. 254).¹ Martin argues that, in comedy written in the sentimental mode, there is "an identification between perceiver and perceived" (Triumph of Wit, p. 29). No longer a comedy given to the exposure of foolishness, eighteenth-century comedy etiolates the subtler shadings of witty comedy at its best and becomes, instead, unambiguous in its didacticism.² This tendency to re-unite formerly battling elements reflects the concomitant shift in comic focus. Congreve emphasizes in his

Amendments that "there is generally Care taken, that the Moral of the whole [play] shall be summ'd up, and deliver'd to the Audience" in order to insure that the final words are instructive (p. 410). He also stresses that the "business" of comedy is "to expose and reprehend Folly and Vice in general" (p. 435). Congreve speaks of the "mix'd character," a risible blend of faults and virtues, for "even the best must be shewn to have Faults, that the best Spectators may be warn'd not to think too well of themselves" (p. 453).³ Therefore, the aim of Restoration comedy is to expose folly and ridicule vice, and thereby display the universal risibility of mankind.

Conversely, eighteenth-century dramatists reject the precept that ridicule is an effective moral tool. Farquhar's view of comedy, enunciated in 1702, exemplifies this shift from satire to panegyric. Comedy, he declares, "is no more at present that a well-fram'd Tale handsomly told, as an agreeable Vehicle for Counsel or Reproof."⁴ Comedy becomes a pleasant means, in Farquhar's words, of "schooling Mankind into better Manners" ("Discourse," p. 275) or, in Steele's words, of "conveying right Sentiments into the People" ("Town-Talk," 2, 23 December 1715, Richard Steele's Periodical Journalism, p. 194). To leave "Vice unpunish'd, Vertue unrewarded, Folly unexpos'd, or Prudence unsuccessful" is, in Farquhar's view, to go contrary to "the Utile of Comedy" ("Discourse," p. 285).

Addison also contends that the stage is "invented for the Accomplishment and Refining of Human Nature," and he complains that the lewdness of the contemporary theatre arises from a view of comedy which paints vices too fair and allows subjects improper to comedy to

flourish.⁵ Addison lashes the practice of his predecessors when he exclaims: "If the Talent of Ridicule were employed to laugh Men out of Vice and Folly, it might be of some use to the World; but instead of this, we find that it is generally made use of to laugh Men out of Virtue and good Sense, by attacking every thing that is Solemn and Serious, Decent and Praise-worthy in Human Life."⁶

Dramatists like Steele and Addison deny that Restoration playwrights laugh men out of vice. Rather, too often "the fine Gentleman of the Comedy[,] represented with a good Grace, leading a loose and profligate Life, and condemning Virtuous Affection as insipid," receives comic accolades. His vices go unpunished, and his libertinism receives both the reward of the heroine and her fortune (Steele, "The Lover," 5, 6 March 1714, Steele's Periodical Journalism, p. 22). Steele's criticism of The Man of Mode rests on this fundamental principle that "there is nothing in [the play] but what is built upon the Ruin of Virtue and Innocence," and the result is the propagation of vice.⁷

Playwrights insist, as Addison does, that "whatever Vices are represented upon the Stage" ought to be "so marked and branded by the Poet, as not to appear either laudable or amiable in the Person who is tainted with them."⁸ Steele elaborates further when he argues: "These gay Pictures strike strong and lasting Impressions on the Fancy and Imagination of Youth, and are hardly to be erased in riper Years, unless a Commerce between Virtuous and Innocent Lovers be painted with the same Advantage, and with as lovely Colours by the most Masterly Hands on the Theatre" (The Lover, 5, 6 March 1714, p. 22). Dramatists do attempt to remove the "amiable" and the "laudable" aspects from their

portraits of vice. Later, they also attempt to diminish the gay and augment the serious in order to correct faults, not through the effect of laughter, but through the example of virtue and the appeal to pity.

The notion that human nature is naturally good and that it is "perfectible by an appeal to the emotions" inspires the dramatist either to explicitly personify exemplary standards, designed to be emulated and applauded (Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, p.10), or to characterize "amiable originals, often models of good nature, whose little peculiarities are not satirically instructive but objects of delight and love."⁹ Contrary to the former practice of depicting in lively detail the "frailties of man" (Bernbaum, p. 7), playwrights now "represent good people" (Muir, Comedy of Manners, p. 155). Comedy comes to dwell on the "sufferings of the virtuous" (Friedman, "Aspects of Sentimentalism," Augustan Milieu, p. 252), and these virtuous characters, endowed with a "moral scrupulosity," ultimately overcome all obstacles (Bernbaum, p. 76). In such a piece of writing, "the suffering of the innocent is made to appear throughout as a condition of their future happiness, or at most as only a temporary obstacle to it" (Friedman, p. 254).¹⁰ Finally, in attaining their deserved happiness, they also reclaim or pardon the vicious, and thereby demonstrate the efficacy of virtue.

Not only does their exemplary conduct convert the reprobates. The "sentiments" of the virtuous also possess a moral impact. Sullivan suggests that the language is "essentially the language of religious ecstasy and conversion."¹¹ This observation particularly applies to the speech of the reformed reprobate. Those who have no need to be redeemed

from vice, however, are given to what George Versatile in Holcroft's He's Much to Blame calls "sage reflection." As he explains it, such an individual overflows with "prudential maxims; [he is] sententious, sentimental, and solemn" (III.vii.204). Gone is the sting of the riposte. The language of the sentimental mode becomes a series of extended homilies in dialogue. Similes and metaphors, balance and antithesis are still present, but the "subtle linguistic play" is changed (Fone, "Love's Last Shift and Sentimental Comedy," 21). Increasingly, the "sentiment" conforms to a defined syntactical pattern. After the introductory "if" clause, there follows a "then" clause, the moral truth. Such balance and antithesis expresses the "delicacy of sensation" and the "refinement of virtue" of the "epicure in feeling."¹²

The comedy "postulated, and so encouraged, an ideal sensitivity to - and spontaneous display of - virtuous feelings, especially those of pity, sympathy, benevolence."¹³ The sentimental statement and the acts of sympathy helped to relieve the "open heart" so revered by these playwrights. Soon, virtue became identified with "acts of benevolence and still more with the feelings of universal good-will which inspire and accompany these acts." As Crane says: "such 'good Affections' are the natural and spontaneous growth of the heart of man uncorrupted by habits of vice."¹⁴ The paragons of virtue were indeed "uncorrupted." Endowed with the ability to feel deeply, and blessed with a "quick emotional response to the spectacle of human misery," these "men of feeling" were susceptible to strong emotional influences (Crane, "Suggestions Toward a Genealogy," 217).¹⁵ Finally, these virtuous, sensible individuals proved by their example the inherent purity of

the human heart.

This trust in the corrigibility of human nature forms the basis for the practice of playwrights who write in the sentimental mode. As Stockwell rhapsodizes in Cumberland's The West Indian: "Yes, Belcour, I have watched you with a patient, but enquiring eye; and I have discovered through the veil of some irregularities, a heart beaming with benevolence, an animated nature, fallible indeed, but not incorrigible" (V.viii.786). Perfectible man is to be shown what he should do, and the stage is to furnish suitable models. Instances of moral decay become more than mere "diverting follies"; they are foils to the "bright contrasts" offered by the models of moral behaviour (Rothstein, "Reform of Comedy," 38). Even the rake, frequently undergoing a fifth-act repentance in early sentimental comedy, becomes less a man inherently evil than a man indulging in "thoughtless aberrations of a heart inclined to virtue" (Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, p. 69).¹⁶

Such "confidence in the goodness of average human nature" (p. 2), a confidence which, it is significant to note, flourishes in an "environment of ordinary life," overturns the seventeenth-century precept that man's folly is either laughable or incorrigible (p. 5). If the comic dramatist represents men "upon the Stage, doing what they shou'd not," as Vanbrugh asserts in his Vindication, then the playwright commits a fault by repeating the vice (p. 206).¹⁷ Over the years, the rake's charming appeal wanes, his fleshly extravagances are denounced, and the concomitant exaltation of virtue aims to "clear a path to amendment."¹⁸ Otherwise, "good Precepts are lost, when bad Examples are still before us" (The Country Wife, III.i.291).¹⁹ To shift the

comic focus from the exposure of folly to the commendation of virtue is to move from the display of "Infirmities" and "Imperfections" to the portrayal of the "Virtues" and the "valuable Parts of a Man," to move from the "use of him for the Sport of others" to the use of him "for our own Improvement."²⁰

Because of their efforts to proselytize the virtues of the ordinary human heart and to mirror the perfections of mankind, these dramatists regard the stage as a suitable vehicle to advance the cause of virtue. Contrary to the view that the stage of the theatre is a mirror which reflects the "stage of the world," the eighteenth-century dramatist argues, as Steele does, that manners and customs are "transfused from the Stage to the World, which reciprocally imitate each other."²¹ This mutual influence defines the age: "the Stage in all times has had the utmost Influence on the Manners and Affections of Mankind; and as those Representations of Human Life have tended to promote Virtue or Vice, so has the Age been improved or debauched" (The Lover, 5, 6 March 1714, Steele's Periodical Journalism, p. 22). To the eighteenth-century playwright, a dramatic representation must do more than mirror folly and ridicule vice. It must, to cite the words Otway used earlier, strive "to reclaim a vitious Age" (Prologue, The City Heiress, p. 201).²²

Notwithstanding its single-minded morality and its unambiguous resolutions to the plays, sentimental comedy, like its predecessor, poses sundry critical problems, not the least of which is how precisely to describe this "different species" of drama (Krutch, Comedy and Conscience, p. 192).²³ Dramatists who hold the view that man is a corrigible creature, blessed with a good heart and a sympathetic mind, verify Heartfree's

observation that "all revolutions run into extremes" (The Provoked Wife, V.iv.105). But with respect to the "extreme" which sentimental comedy represents, and to the kind of "revolution" it initiates, critical opinion has been varied. Interestingly enough, the debate once again concerns the question of morality, but now stresses the dramatic efficacy of extolling virtue.

For those critics who agree with Collier's assessment of Restoration comedy, the sentimental mode signals an auspicious return to morality. Thus, Bateson argues that "the revolution which 'sentimentalism' effected" banishes from the stage the licentiousness of the earlier comedy. "Sentimentalism," in Bateson's view, brings back a "sense of responsibility"; it restores "to comedy the humanity which the Restoration had suppressed" (English Comic Drama, p. 7). The artificiality of Restoration comedy, so soundly denounced by some critics, is replaced by what Bateson terms sentimental comedy's "mirror of life" (p. 9). No longer concerned, in Bernbaum's view, with the shallow disguises of a worldly and mannered society, or with "the ridiculous contrast between its pretended respectability and its actual folly and vice" (Drama of Sensibility, p. 6), sentimental comedy turns to what Bateson calls the "moral laws" which govern all life (English Comic Drama, p. 9). Critics like Bateson regard the sentimental mode both as a moral refinement of the witty mode's superficiality and lewdness, and as a realistic and just portrayal of human life.

Other critics, echoing Goldsmith, view this comedy as a facile mode of writing which, in its didactic fervour, stifles vis comica, and offers in its stead a simplistic view of man and a shallow emotionalism.

Arguing that "eighteenth-century comedy is by no means merely Restoration comedy purified," Krutch contends that the sentimental mode represents a dramatic "extreme" which forfeits laughter for tears, satire for pity (Comedy and Conscience, p. 192). In Draper's words, sentimental comedy substitutes "tears for realistic portraiture and sentimentalism for satire."²⁴ Green also argues that "the comedy of ridicule and laughter is replaced by a comedy of pity and tears."²⁵ To Mignon, "it is not dramatic evolution which is to be found in passing from the comedy of manners to sentimental comedy, but sharp antithesis" (Crabbed Age and Youth, p. 176). For these critics, the sentimental mode curbs the "evolution" of vis comica, exemplified most fully for them by Restoration comedy. Indeed, according to this critical camp, the revolution begun by sentimental comedy, as the "antithesis" to its predecessor, extinguishes altogether the spark of vis comica.

Many critics hearken to Hazlitt's observation with respect to Steele: "It is almost a misnomer to call them comedies; they are rather homilies in dialogue" ("Comic Writers," Lectures, p. 217).²⁶ Wood suggests that the appellation "sentimental comedy" constitutes a "contradiction in terms."²⁷ Sherbo in his study of sentimental drama also propounds the view that, since true comedy's "principal aim" is to amuse, and since sentimental comedy's aim is to instruct, the designation "sentimental comedy" yokes together two "irreconcilable" terms.²⁸ Charles O. McDonald argues that the "Sunday-school sort of pietism" supplied by these playwrights defuses the comic conflict, in his view a "principal ingredient of good drama" ("Restoration Comedy," 523). In McCollom's view, such pietism cancels the "preëminent" comic theme of

man's "inevitable foolishness."²⁹ These critics emphasize the comedy's moral purpose and its confidence in the corrigibility of the human heart. So, to these critics, the happy ending is merely gratuitous. In their view, the display of virtue in distress and its final, material reward help to attenuate any glimmer of vis comica.

While these various critical assessments, regardless of the point of view, may point to some of its salient features, the comedy has too often been treated merely as a form of drama which refuses to be a loyal subject of Thalia. To dismiss the comedy as "saccharine" (Mignon, Crabbed Age and Youth, p. 175), artificially contrived (Sherbo, English Sentimental Drama, p. vii), "namby pamby" (Krutch, Comedy and Conscience, p. 213), or, most damagingly, as a "debased literary genre, incapable of producing literature of any marked degree of excellence" (Sherbo, p. vii), evades Bernbaum's point on The Conscious Lovers: "the large proportion of its comic scenes, which occupy only a little less than half the play, should not be ignored in defining the genre" (Drama of Sensibility, fn. 1, p. 133). Eighteenth-century comedy's emphasis on morality and sensibility constitutes one important aspect, and the inclusion of some form of vis comica another. If comedy, as Willson asserts, is indeed "a form of criticism," then Restoration playwrights see "man as he is and not as he would like to pretend he is" (Form Confounded, p. 109). Early eighteenth-century playwrights, finding in what was formerly laughable the source of their criticism, also see man as he is, and offer instead their version of what he should be. At least in part, this view of the comedy would remove the stigma of such pejorative epithets as "maudlin" and "saccharine," and would, in Detisch's words,

"deal with the complex of attitudes and assumptions in a given play rather than postulating mutually exclusive categories and then restricting analysis to a sorting-out process" ("Synthesis," 300).³⁰ Finally, the witty and the sentimental modes would be recognized as different "emphases" or "polarities" which could then be combined in different ways and tailored to different ends (Hume, "Supposed Revolution," p. 267).

If, as Lord Brumpton posits in Steele's The Funeral, "All human life's a mere vertigo," then sentimental comic dramatists attempt to order the human "vertigo" into a resolvable and moral order.³¹ The complexities of Restoration drama become resolved, and the seventeenth-century's less sure, more ambiguous treatment of the human "vertigo" yields to the eighteenth-century's unclouded vision of benevolent man guided by Providence. This shift in "emphases" occurs gradually. As Schorer notes, many sentimental playwrights "alternate pathetic and humourous scenes" ("Hugh Kelly," 392).³² Detisch also contends that even in Cumberland's The West Indian, which has "come to represent sentimental comedy at its fullest and worst," sentimental "clichés" are effectively counterbalanced by "liveliness" and "wit" ("Synthesis," 291). In many respects early sentimental comedy retains the comic theory endorsed by Restoration playwrights. As Draper asserts, the dramatists consider "incongruity" to be the "basis of the comic" ("Theory of the Comic," 220). The incongruity depicted in earlier comedy, the discrepancy between "affectation and reality" (22), finds adherents in the later comedy, where "suddenly striking incongruities" comprise much of the comic effect (222).

Many eighteenth-century dramatists exploit comic contrast. Olivia

says in Hannah Cowley's A Bold Stroke for a Husband (1783): "Tis contrast gives effect to everything."³³ The favourite eighteenth-century theme of "double identity," of the hero with "two faces," comically underlines the incongruity between the real and the assumed self (Appleton, "Double Gallant," English Writers, p. 145). Farquhar's The Beaux' Stratagem (1706-1707), where two protagonists alternately play the parts of servant and master, exemplifies this use of contrast. Here, the incongruity between Archer's aristocratic deportment and his lowly station affords both lively comic incidents and striking contrasts. Posing as a footman, Archer suffers from the gentlemanly affliction of the spleen, and speaks in amorous flights which the ladies recognize to be "above the pitch of a livery" (III.iii.400). In a final comic twist, which Dryden had explored in Marriage-à-la-Mode and which Wilde will later magnify in The Importance of Being Ernest, Aimwell becomes indeed "the person that [he] thought [he] counterfeited" (V.v.449), and artifice and reality become congruous.

Incongruity also accords with the eighteenth-century preoccupation, not only with "rival brothers and contrasting beaux" (Appleton, "Double Gallant," p. 145), but also with the "two-couple pattern" (Smith, Gay Couple, p. 203), a complementary pair of gay and serious lovers (Rothstein, "Reform of Comedy," 39). Centlivre's The Busy Body (1709) boasts a witty couple, Sir George Airy and Miranda, who are then comically contrasted to the more serious couple, Charles and Isabinda. Unlike Dryden's technique in Marriage-à-la-Mode, where two salacious pairs of lovers contrive to arrange illicit love affairs, Centlivre's device of two pairs of lovers accentuates two sentimental themes: the

value of chaste, matrimonial love and the power of virtue. In The Busy Body, even Sir George, who confesses his preference for "the sensual pleasure," eagerly consents to "that same terrible bugbear, matrimony" and admits: "It has been my wish since first my longing eyes beheld you."³⁴

In Johnson's The Country Lasses (1715), a gallant displays two sides to his character, and the playwright thereby minimizes the appeal of the rake and extols more forcibly the appeal of the sentimental lover. On the one hand, Heartwell woos Flora with inflated language of love, designed to incite her to relish "new pleasures" unencumbered by the title of a wife (IV.44). Flora's reply chastizes the rake at the same time as it reduces his appeal to the level of the profane: "What, then I am to be your mistress only, your pretty bella favorita, your little private hunting-seat; have every inconvenience of a wife, with the scandal of a wench" (44). Heartwell succumbs to Flora's pious regard for the "paths of virtue," and bemoans what she has earlier condemned as his "worthless trifle of a heart" (45). She "conquers" him by "touching" his "soul," and he confesses: "I feel thy words; a conscious pang stabs thro' my heart, and covers me with shame" (45). Conversely, Modely refuses for a time to yield to an honourable love; his "beloved mistress" is "variety" (I.7). Heartwell, whose name betokens his more sentimental attitude to love, fails to convince a "heretic" and a "libertine" of the value of "religion" and "morals" in love (IV.50). Modely would indulge his lust for the chase (54). Only imminent death and Aura's wiles finally convert him to honourable love and matrimony (V.68-9).

Such characters recall the rakes of the past, whose language, like Modely's, reflects their profligacy. Using a conventional image, Willmore in Behn's The Rover rhapsodizes: "I must, like chearful Birds, sing in all Groves, / And perch on every Bough, / Billing the next kind She that flies to meet me" (V.i.96). These rakes frequently compare love to a banquet, and what they crave is variety. Theirs is a "swinging Appetite" which is rarely glutted (I.ii.22). Unwilling as he is to moderate his lust, the hero becomes "a knave in earnest, and a saint in jest."³⁵ He is convinced "there's no Sinner like a Young Saint" (The Rover, I.ii.22), and his use of religious imagery to describe the love chase illustrates his disregard for traditional morality.

In sentimental comedy's depiction of the rake, the dramatic intent undergoes a significant change. His comic stature declines, in part, because of the transfer of some of the rake's qualities to the fop. Once a humorous contrast to the witty mastery of the rake-hero, the fop and his similitudes in eighteenth-century comedy become a foil to the fustian rigour of the serious sentimental hero. They also come to embody the rakish excesses scorned by the exemplary characters.

Formerly, a character like Guiliom in Behn's The False Count typifies the fop's crude pretensions to the wit and social mastery of the Restoration hero. Guiliom's absurd similes brand him to be a veritable fop: "Fair Lady, - suffer the Broom of my Affection to sweep all other Lovers from your heart" (III.ii.140). As Antonio justly observes, the sham count, for all his social meanness, has enough impudence "to set up for a modern Spark - the Fool has just Wit and good Manners to pass for a Fop of Fashion" (V.i.167). The fop's very impudence becomes the playwright's satiric tool, the comic means to

punish the "Fluttering and Bustle" (The Fair Jilt, p. 73) of those who, possessed of "a Face manag'd with Care, and soften'd with Ridicule," affect to be what they are not (p. 72).

Guiliom's masquerade succeeds because his pretensions mimic so exactly the foppish antics of his social superiors: "where he is not known, [he] will gain the Reputation of a fine accomplish'd Gentleman" (The False Count, V.i.167). Guiliom as fop and as social pretender offers a comic comment both on the foolish posturings of the modish town and on its willingness to be gulled. The fop proves the truth to his own quip: "Your saucy Rudeness, in a Grandee, is Freedom; your Impertinence, Wity; your Sloven, careless; and your Fool, good-natur'd" (III.ii.134).

Guiliom's astute remark provides a further perspective on the fop, who mistakenly construes his sauciness to be gentlemanly breeding and his impertinence to be wit. If, as Behn suggests, "the only Wit that's now in Fashion / Is but the Gleanings of good Conversation" (Prologue, The Rover, 8), then Guiliom's language represents a social abuse of the conversational art. To the witty hero and heroine, impertinence cannot be construed as wit, nor can mere verbal sniping, packaged in outrageous and ill-considered similes, replace masterful repartee. Mirabell neatly sums up the excess of the fop: "he so passionately affects the Reputation of understanding Raillery; that he will construe an Affront into a Jest; and call downright Rudeness and ill Language, Satyr and Fire" (The Way of the World, I.i.401). The fop's desire to appear fashionable forces him to lose control of the game's verbal devices. He becomes a fit object of ridicule, and he contrasts sharply to the

socially and verbally adept hero.

Contrary to Guillom, Marplot in Centlivre's The Busy Body (1709) is not a satiric tool, designed to magnify the social graces of the witty hero and to heighten the follies of others. As his name suggests, Marplot obstructs the play's plot. Because of his meddlesome antics (III.vi.39), he hinders the intrigues of the lovers. Yet, his "busy body" activities ultimately lead to a demonstration of good-will. Marplot certainly is "diverting sometimes" (I.5), but he nonetheless shows himself to be kind and well-intentioned, and freely wins the forgiveness of his friends (V.iv.71).

In Addison's The Drummer (1716), the kind-hearted, if bumbling, fool has degenerated into an "empty noisy creature."³⁶ Described as a "profligate" and as a "London prodigal" (17), Tinsel no longer stands in stark contrast to the sparkling repartee and social mastery of a witty hero. Rather, Tinsel's profligate principles (17) are now measured according to different standards. While his coxcombry affords the grieving Lady Truman a necessary diversion (14), his affected and libertine ways offend her beyond measure. She admits to loving a "gay temper," but she will not abide his rallying against "things that are serious" (18). For him, the "jest" does consist in rallying the serious, but for her, the decorous standard of behaviour, his gaiety shows neither sense nor humour.

Such virtue as Lady Truman displays becomes increasingly identified with "country innocence" (17). In the country, as Flora in The Country Lasses (1715) expresses it, "every thing is unadorn'd by art, and looks so beautiful in the dress of nature, so innocent, simple, and undisguised"

(I.11). The city-bred vices, imported by fools such as Tinsel, are the exception to be deprecated: "what ought to be the distinction of virtue, has been [in the town] made the price of sin. The tyrant, money, governs all: there every thing is venal; faith, fame, friendship, reason, and religion" (10).³⁷ This view of the town later dramatists will further develop.

The rake stands for all that is "venal" in the town. But in this kind of comedy, the treatment of him and his past sins exemplifies the decline of the witty hero. No longer excused at the end of the play, the rake will not be pardoned, nor will he receive the blessing of matrimony until he proffers what Detisch calls an "elocution" exercise in "self-reproach" ("Synthesis," 294). The defects which the hero renounces are, of course, corrigible ones, "for a happy ending presupposes the possibility of reform."³⁸ Not surprisingly, like Loveless in Cibber's Love's Last Shift (1696), the reformed rake moves from the city to the country, where he can live the life of virtue he has recently adopted.

In early sentimental comedy, the rake renounces his earlier profligacy, and his inherent good nature triumphs over superficial roguery. As Wood states: "The wild gallants and the rakes of the usual Restoration comedy all make their appearance, but in the fifth act they are caused to make a sudden and surprising repentance, so that all the demands of morality, that virtue should triumph over vice, are duly satisfied" ("Beginnings and Significance," 381). The rake's apparent adherence to the ways of the town masks a fundamental side to his nature. Unlike his Restoration counterpart, he is at heart a good fellow who is, if not eager to mend his ways, then at least susceptible

to the virtuous guidance of his beloved.

Sir Harry Wildair in Farquhar's The Constant Couple (1699) illustrates this sentimental pattern. Sir Harry at first indulges himself in conventionally rakish past-times; he is described as "the joy of the playhouse, and life of the Park" (I.i.47). He rhapsodizes: "Pleasure's the means, and pleasure is my end" (II.v.78). He describes his proclivity for change as a love which is "neither romantically honourable, nor meanly mercenary," merely inconstant (II.iii.66). Yet, his is an "honest, good-natured" temper ripe for virtuous conquest (68). Encountering Angelica for the first time, he muses: "How would that modesty adorn virtue, when it makes even vice look so charming" (II.ii.63). Deceived as he may be as to her real nature, Sir Harry nonetheless recognizes the increased charm virtue would add to her mien. Finally, he refers at the end of the play to his "conversion" and eulogizes the virtuous Angelica: "But woman, - / Charming woman, can true converts make; / We love the precepts for the dear teacher's sake" (V.iii.132).

The "dear teacher" often suffers for her patience and her virtue, for the profligate mistreats and denounces the virtuous. Unlike the Restoration heroine, who delights in verbal combats and who wins the hero's heart by teasing him into submission, the sentimental heroine must suffer attempts on her virtue. Like Amanda in Love's Last Shift, she also wages a battle to reclaim a libertine and win him over to the side of virtue. The heroine prepares, not for a game of wit, but for a conquest.

Ultimately, this zeal to reclaim does indeed conquer. In early

sentimental comedy, marriage becomes a testament to patience and virtue, and a reward for penitence. Marriage also signals this fundamental change in the comic treatment of the rake. Formerly, resolved to take "no Lease" of any woman's "frail Tenement," the hero chaffs at the notion of matrimony and prefers to be a "Tenant" at his own will (The Squire of Alsatia, II.i.227). Now, the hero seeks "a lease for Life" and willingly would possess the "beautiful tenement."³⁹

The rake's decline signals the sentimental hero's rise to pre-eminence. In The Twin-Rivals (1702), for example, the two brothers each vie for the family fortune, but their very characters exemplify the rivalry between the witty and the sentimental modes.⁴⁰ Young Wouldbe, a rake whose libertine extravagance proves to be the "ruin" of him (I.i.155), relishes his "epicurean" tastes (V.i.221). To indulge them, he would cheat his brother and debauch the virtuous Constance. He is a villainous rogue whose chicanery rests upon an expedient notion of honour. Whereas honesty to him represents nothing more than "a little mechanic quality, well enough among citizens," honour "flies at a much higher pitch, and will do anything that's free and spontaneous, but scorns to level itself to what is only just" (III.ii.189).

In contrast, his elder brother embodies the sentimental attributes of forthrightness (IV.i.210), filial obedience (207), virtue (III.ii.195) and benevolence, a quality acknowledged even by the rake (IV.i.210). Like the sentimental heroes to follow, Farquhar's comic hero undergoes no dramatic reformation, but is himself the standard by which to judge and condemn the vice and corruption exhibited by the profligate. With the villains exposed and the virtuous triumphant, Hermes Wouldbe appropriately pronounces the play's didactic intent: "all parties have

received their due rewards and punishments" (V.iv.238). Designed to answer "the strictness of poetical justice," the play accords punishment to the wicked (Preface, p. 143). "That hidden power" (III.iii.199), which permits base arts to succeed only for a time, at last rewards the virtuous and thereby demonstrates the sentimental precept that "virtue ever is the secret care of Providence" (Woman's Wit, V.200). Former grief becomes merely "the best preparative for joy" (The Twin-Rivals, III.iii.199).

Farquhar admits that "the punishment of vice" may traditionally fall "into the province of tragedy," and the "business of comedy" may traditionally be "to ridicule Folly" (Preface, p. 145). But to the sentimental dramatist "the importance of the subject"--the triumph of virtue--demands that "sentiments too grave for diversion" must be given expression if the didactic aim is to be realized (p. 144). In Steele's words: "any thing that has its Foundation in Happiness and Success, must be allow'd to be the Object of Comedy, and sure it must be an Improvement of it, to introduce a Joy too exquisite for Laughter, that can have no Spring but in Delight" (Preface, The Conscious Lovers, p. 299). These comic writers do not claim to introduce "vices too great for comedy to punish" (Preface, The Twin-Rivals, p. 144). Rather, they treat a "middle sort of wickedness, too high for the sock, and too low for the buskin." Those villains who are "too mean for the heroic" must "drop into comedy (p. 145), to receive there either a suitable punishment for their misdeeds, or be reclaimed to the dictates of virtue.

A playwright like Cibber found in these two extremes of vice and virtue, and in the theme of the hero's reclamation, all he needed to

write successful plays. Indeed, Cibber's adaptation of Vanbrugh's play, A Journey to London, illustrates not only Cibber's dramatic facility, but also the precept that "all revolutions run into extremes." Replacing Vanbrugh's vision of the frail human animal with his own view of a reclamable creature, Cibber sought to offer, "Not scenes that would a noisy joy impart, / But such as hush the mind, and warm the heart" (Prologue, The Provoked Husband, l. 22, p. 10). Less an innovator than a keen man of the theatre, Cibber yoked the sinful past of the profligate to serious proselytizing, and thereby nurtured the growth of comedy written in the sentimental mode.⁴¹

CHAPTER SIX

"A Just Moral": Cibber's and Vanbrugh's Comedies

In the seventeenth century, the dramatists show the dual nature of man, as jaded as he is angelic. In the early eighteenth century, this view of man undergoes a significant change. The "best" people are shown to be indeed faultless paragons. The vice which surrounds them may vicariously touch them, but it can never stain their unequivocally virtuous natures. They are dear "teachers" all (Farquhar, The Constant Couple, V.iii.132).¹ In contrast to these paragons are those who temporarily indulge in all the vices and follies to which the witty hero is prone. But the dramatist exploits the witty mode only to subordinate it at last to the sentimental mode. By the end of the play, the erring hero repents his former vagaries, and his good side is triumphantly revealed.²

Such a dramatic technique, which displays in the first few acts the hero's lascivious behaviour and, in the final act, his underlying goodness, overturns the earlier view that man is, at heart, an incorrigible creature, more given to folly and vice than virtue.³ Yet, since such a technique chides debauchery and extols repentance and virtue, it also underscores the eighteenth-century comic view that, as Farquhar states, comedy is "a well-fram'd Tale handsomly told, as an agreeable Vehicle for Counsel or Reproof" ("Discourse," p. 273). The aphorisms of the exemplary characters "counsel," and the behaviour of

the reclaimed libertines "reprove" vice. Man is ultimately shown to be an inherently benevolent creature, only temporarily led astray by vice. Cibber's plays most fully exemplify this comic view of mankind.

Cibber successfully exploits the two extremes of past vice and present virtue, but his combination of the witty and the sentimental modes is quite distinct from Congreve's blending of the two.⁴ Vanbrugh, whom Faller calls "a comedian of the human condition," criticizes this treatment of vice and virtue.⁵ His plays I will discuss later. Suffice it to say that Vanbrugh attacks Cibber's kind of expedient morality. Cibber exploits the witty mode only to subordinate it to "a sort of poetical justice," the just reward of the virtuous (The Provoked Husband, V.iv.159). Like his hero, Loveless, Cibber is "lewd for above four acts."⁶ Nevertheless, he insures that such "Lewdness," once acknowledged and disowned, illuminates one of his comic axioms: "A play without a just moral, is a poor and trivial undertaking."⁷

On the one hand, then, Cibber's plays purport to be "but the mirrors of our lives" (Prologue, The Lady's Last Stake, 7). On the other hand, his comedies are not designed to be either realistic or comic representations of vice. He designs his plays in order to dramatize "a just moral." The Prologue to The Provoked Husband (1728) explains: "plays should let you see / Not only what you are, but ought to be: / Though vice was natural, 'twas never meant / The stage should show it, but for punishment" (ll. 7-10, p. 10). This Prologue to Cibber's adaptation of Vanbrugh's fragment, A Journey to London (1728), may attribute to Vanbrugh moral principles to which he did not necessarily adhere. As Dixon notes: "Cibber is falsely ascribing to

Vanbrugh his own faith in exemplary comedy" (Introduction, The Provoked Husband, p. xxii).⁸ To a certain extent, however, Vanbrugh's Vindication is similar to Cibber's own view. The presence of vice mirrored the "natural" state of mankind and, so, to show vice on the stage is to expose vice for what it is.⁹ In this sense, Cibber rejects Collier's principles.

In The Careless Husband (1704) Cibber refers to Collier's treatise on the profanity of the stage. Lord Morelove remarks that, "since the late short-sighted view of [plays], vice may go on and prosper; the stage dares hardly shew a vicious person speaking like himself, for fear of being call'd prophane for exposing him." Lady Easy goes on: "'Tis hard, indeed, when people won't distinguish between what's meant for contempt, and what for example."¹⁰ Cibber clearly shows both. In his plays, Cibber distinguishes between the contemptible and the exemplary. He does so by reforming vice and by extolling virtue. Increasingly, Cibber's comic technique of exposure and example comes to be the justification for his excursions into the smutty realms of the rake and, indeed, becomes the very basis for his notions of exemplary comedy.

Love Makes a Man; or, the Fop's Fortune (1700), while certainly not one of his masterpieces, illustrates Cibber's comic technique of exaggerating the vice to extol the virtue. The character of Louisa, described as "a lady of quality and pleasure" in the Dramatis Personae, is a paradigm of villainy.¹¹ Pursuing the lofty hero, and finding herself repulsed, she conspires to kill both Carlos and his virtuous Angelina. But Carlos' eloquence "disarms" her anger (V.67). Appropriately, since

the play is designed to be a comedy, impending tragedy is averted when Louisa casts off her follies and acknowledges the power of their "fair example" which has "conquer'd and reform'd" her: "now I taste more solid joy, being but the instrument of your united virtuous love, than all my late false hopes propos'd even in the last indulgence of my blind desires" (68). The play illustrates Cibber's comic premises. There is a "providential care of innocence distress'd" (68), virtuous love will find its just reward, and vice is exposed only to be conquered by the splendid example of virtue.

Cibber's most famous play, Love's Last Shift; or, the Fool in Fashion, further exemplifies Cibber's basic comic formula.¹² Glimpses of the witty mode are brief. As Sullivan notes in her recent study of Cibber: "The old spirit is invoked, but the insistent moral direction transforms the plays" (Introduction, Colley Cibber, p. xlv). The final masque, a Restoration trademark, here serves moral ends. Marriage, bound by his "yokes," bemoans his marital bonds, which have snuffed out the flame of his desires and enslaved him "to this galling yoke, - the emblem of a wife" (V.83). Love later retorts: "Where first I promis'd thee a happy life, / There thou shalt find it in a virtuous wife." Love and Fame then order Marriage to mourn the guilty passions of the past and seek repose within the constraints of his marital union (83). Indeed, after the Masque is finished, the last word is left to reclaimed virtue.¹³ The reformed Loveless proudly exclaims: "By my example taught, let every man, whose fate has bound him to a married life, beware of letting loose his wild desires: for, if experience may be allowed to judge, I must proclaim the folly of a

wandering passion" (83). Corrective virtue effectively checks the witty mode.

In the play, Cibber charts the rake's progress from profligacy to conversion. Loveless, the erring hero, indulges himself in all the vices of the age, and glories in a life of unrestricted pleasure: "the world to me is a garden stocked with all sorts of fruit, where the greatest pleasure we can take, is the variety of taste" (I.10). Loveless argues that a mate, a tasteless morsel, poisons an appetite which only variety can satiate. Dedicated as he is to a life of "uninterrupted pleasure" (11), Loveless is suspicious of fidelity, and regards any claim of constancy to be a cheat: "The joys of love are only great when they are new; and to make them lasting, we must often change" (IV.60). To Loveless, fidelity diminishes pleasure. Only infidelity can make the "joys of love" lasting, for only variety constantly titillates the senses which sameness dulls.

Yet, Cibber's title also suggests that Loveless himself, like the foppish Sir Novelty, is also the "Fool in Fashion." Young Worthy contends that Loveless, by striving to be in fashion, must assume the habits which go along with the reputation.¹⁴ Young Worthy assures Amanda that her husband's desertion of her is "more an affectation of being fashionably vicious, than any reasonable dislike he could either find in your mind or person" (I.21). Loveless has indeed discarded the woman who once "was the only celebrated beauty in town" simply because she has the singular misfortune to be his wife (10). Amanda's "innocent attempt" (V.73) to re-awaken his love for her and to "reclaim the man [she's] bound by Heaven to love" (III.39) not only becomes "a triumph

of rewarded constancy" (39), but also exposes the folly of his ill-considered attempt to live fashionably "vicious."¹⁵

Cibber dramatizes the "metamorphosis" (I.11) which Loveless undergoes, first in his pursuit of pleasure and then in his conversion to virtue.¹⁶ Initially, Loveless' debauchery so alters him that even old friends can scarcely recognize him (11). Later, when he undergoes another, more significant change, he confesses that his pursuit of pleasure has led only to blindness. Formerly enslaved to "vain deluding follies, and shadows of substantial bliss," he now "wakes" from his "deep lethargy of vice" (V.74).¹⁷ The "last shift" of Loveless' "vicious" passion has proven to be based on sham, a mere "shadow" of the reality, for his "mistress" is discovered to be his cast-off wife. It is the power of her "conquering virtue" which subdues his soul, and vice and folly are "metamorphosed" into a virtuous desire for fidelity (74). Unlike the "things that shadow and conceal" the inner selves of Etherege's characters, whose practised social arts protect the self at the same time as they manipulate the social milieu (The Man of Mode, III.i.50), the "shadows" to which Loveless has been enslaved have obscured his innate goodness of heart and cheated him out of his true bliss. He may once have construed the shadows to be real, but now he is no longer blind to the splendour of Amanda's virtue. He tells her: "Oh! why have I so long been blind to the perfections of thy mind and person?" (Love's Last Shift, V.75). Loveless moves from a trust in "shadows" to a belief in virtue, and his "metamorphosis" has been both social and moral. The "fool in fashion," once blinded by "heedless fancy" (75), becomes indeed the wise man, now guided by

"reason's never-erring perspective" (I.15).

Young Worthy, too, reveals both a rakish and a benevolent side, one subdued and the other more pre-eminent. Although he does admit to his friend that he, too, is "as much in love with wickedness as thou canst be" (12), Young Worthy's desire for the pleasures of the town is more moderate: "but I am for having it at a cheaper rate" (12).¹⁸ "Like the rest of [his] raking brotherhood," he finds in matrimony the means to "purge" his "wild humours" (13).¹⁹ The cure, Loveless warns, may only aggravate the malady, but Young Worthy, ever alert to his own best interests, confides: "By the way, I have taken care to see the dose well sweetened with a swingeing portion" (13). But marriage to him is not just a cure for his wild spirits. Supported as he is "by the continual bounty of an indulgent brother," Young Worthy admits that he is "loth to load his good-nature too much" (13). His impudent wooing of Narcissa derives, at least in part, from a wish to relieve his brother's financial burden.

So, Young Worthy is also capable of moderation and sense. It is his sense, for example, which dissuades Hillaria from courting the compliments of Sir Novelty Fashion, who treasures only public notice and who hazards the reputations of others merely to enhance his own. Young Worthy cautions Hillaria: "O, Madam, no juggler is so deceitful as a fop; for while you look his folly in the face, he steals away your reputation with more ease than the other picks your pocket" (II.30).²⁰ As a result of Young Worthy's prudent remarks, Hillaria's coquettish antics suddenly come to a halt.

In the play the coquette also undergoes a "metamorphosis."

Initially, Narcissa and Hillaria toy with their lovers, and they both shy away from a state which threatens to vanquish their spirits and reduce their powers of amorous influence. Hillaria asserts: "I'm resolv'd to be mistress of my actions before marriage, and no man shall usurp a power over me, till I give it him" (I.22).²¹ Her "mad humour" delights in torturing her lover (III.37). Narcissa is as frivolous and as vain as her cousin. Young Worthy, forced to compete with Sir Novelty Fashion for his mistress' favour, remarks: "Oh, the devil! now is she rapt with the hopes of a little flattery" (II.32). She is indeed "a strange affected piece" (I.24) who, like a Restoration heroine, is chary of letting a pursuer, who may be both mercenary and false, know her true feelings. Young Worthy complains: "she has told more lies to conceal her love, than I have sworn false oaths to promote it" (V.67). Yet, Hillaria has a dramatic change of heart. She answers Young Worthy's remonstrances by announcing: "I freely confess my folly, and forgive your harsh construction of it" (II.30). The pert coquette does mellow to become the sober wife.²²

When Narcissa finally agrees to her lover's proposals, they engage in a verbal exchange which only haltingly captures the spirit of the witty mode. Their "harmless railing" lacks the sting of a traditional battle of wit (III.47). For all his rakish charm, Young Worthy declares: "I don't love to create myself enemies, by observing the weakness of other people; I have more faults of my own than I know how to mend" (47).

Similarly, their "betrothal" scene differs markedly from the "proviso" scenes of the past. Narcissa does not bargain with her intended husband, nor does she capitulate only after she has ascertained,

as Millamant does, that her personal liberty will not be curtailed. She merely asks: "Had not we better consider a little?" (II.35). Concerned only with the opinion of the town, she deplores the brevity of his ardent courtship: "Not but I do consent to-morrow shall be the day, Mr. Worthy; but I am afraid you have not loved me long enough to make our marriage be the town-talk; for 'tis the fashion now to be the town-talk; and you know, one had as good be out of the world, as out of the fashion" (35). After she has been assured that she has in fact been the subject of gossip and the object of envy, Narcissa then briefly gives rein to her wit. The jealous Lady Manlove, whose "charitable" provocativeness has lured many a young man away from the drawing-room of the virtuous woman (35), has been a hindrance comparable to the Bank of England's taking the business away from the city's goldsmiths. Young Worthy parries: "The reason of that is, Madam, because you virtuous ladies pay no interest; I must confess the principal, our health, is a little secure with you" (36). Narcissa counters: "Well; and is not that an advantage worth entering into bonds for?"

Such incidents now help the playwright depict more forcibly his moral intent: virtue's conquest over vice and folly. Young Worthy's emotional detachment and mercenary motives may recall the rakes of the past, but his moderation and good sense contrast sharply to Loveless' wantonness. The coquette's mannerisms, subdued at last into obedience and sobriety, heighten the exemplary character's restraint. Amanda rejects the notion that wealth and widowhood should lead to a life of unrestricted pleasure.²³ She has only one worldly consolation: "All the comfort of my life is, that I can tell my conscience, I have been true

to virtue" (I.18). Her denial of the creed that love signifies variety and marriage a yoke effectively weakens the play's witty comic elements, which have been introduced only to give way to the ultimate triumph of exemplary virtue.

In The Lady's Last Stake: or, the Wife's Resentment (1707), Cibber continues to extol sentimental sobriety.²⁴ The transgressions of the gaming Lady Gentle serve a distinctly moral end. Her folly almost betrays her to ruin (V.87). Yet, for all her modishness, Lady Gentle is no giggling coquette, so harshly portrayed in the character of Miss Notable. On the contrary, Lady Gentle is renowned as much for her "unfashionable folly of liking her husband" (I.19) as for her "impregnable virtue" (20). Finally, her unwise fondness for gaming teaches her a bitter lesson. Henceforth, she will "study to deserve the providence that saved" her (V.96). Her virtue and her reformation illustrate her underlying goodness, and her folly will instruct other erring wives.

Once a witty example of social mastery, the Restoration heroine undergoes a change in Cibber's play, and she becomes either the object of a moral lesson or the object of ridicule. Miss Notable is chagrined and ridiculed. As Sir Friendly Moral declares to Mrs. Conquest, who is about to take an "innocent" revenge on both Miss Notable and the rakish Sir George: "to make her coquetry a little ridiculous, will do her no harm" (V.82). Her inordinate desire to be the centre of the social coterie leads only to folly and disgrace (97). Her excessive posing also helps to expose the absurdity of Lady Wronglove's jealousy: "Was she, that creature then, the little wicked cause of my disquiet? - How ridiculous have you made my jealousy! - Farewel the folly and the pain"

(97). Unlike the vipers in a Restoration comedy, the jealous woman in Cibber's play reforms.

In contrast to these foolish women is Mrs. Conquest. Her lively temper, rather than teasing her lover into compliance, shames him into reformation. Lord George Brilliant is a "strangepiece of wild nature" (I.17), one who espouses "modish morals" (V.73). Only Mrs. Conquest's "innocent revenge" (95) can check the "barefaced excess of his assurance" (IV.68), and prevent his attempt to debauch Lady Gentle. To tame her wild gallant, Mrs. Conquest publicly exposes him to be a vain creature who follows appetite rather than sense.²⁵ He is chastised by the triumphant Mrs. Conquest, whose name now points to her amorous as well as to her moral conquest over a rake (V.96). She chides him: "The world should judge, my Lord, so widely of your heart, that only what was grosly sensual could affect it" (94). Now, fearful of the consequences of his ill-considered acts, he reforms, and Mrs. Conquest sermonizes on his change of heart: "With all this headstrong wildness of a youthful heat, one moment's thought, you see, produces love, compassion, tenderness, and honour" (94-5). The "open freedom of her humour" may recall the liveliness of the witty heroine (II.35), but the "warmth of [her] understanding" clearly indicates her sentimental role (IV.68). Not only does she punish the folly of a coquette (V.82) and correct the impudence of a man of mode. Mrs. Conquest also saves Lady Gentle's honour. She, like Sir Friendly Moral, becomes a sentimental guide, an "idealist, solemnly protesting against vice and exhorting to virtue" (Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, p. 106).

At last, the jealous wife, the coquette, the rake, all bow to the

solemn dictates of a moral paragon. Sir Friendly Moral is one of the "guardians of the fundamental goodness of human nature" and of the "virtuous instincts" (Mignon, Crabbed Age and Youth, p. 175).²⁶ Earlier, he exhorted both Lord George and Lord Wronglove to temper their wit and extravagant pursuit of pleasure with prudence and sense: "Don't think because you pass for men of wit, and modish honour, that that's all you owe to your condition: Fortune has given you titles to set your actions in a fairer light, and Nature understanding, to make them not only just, but generous" (III.52). The old mentor ends the play and offers an appropriate moral: "Let those that here, as in a mirror, see / Those follies, and the dangers they have run, / Be cheaply warn'd, and think these 'scapes their own" (V.98).

Clearly, Cibber's "mirror" exposes follies and excesses but, unlike the Restoration playwright, Cibber urges the audience to take heed of Sir Friendly Moral's warning. The comic portrayal of folly and vice now serves moral ends, the ridicule of the coquette and the reclamation of the rake. Cibber's comic technique of exposure and example effectively changes the conventions of the past but, above all, his plays dramatize the influence of virtue and help to insure the growth of the sentimental mode.

Notwithstanding Cibber's dramatic eminence, the old comic flair was difficult to extinguish. The Relapse; or, Virtue in Danger, (1696), Vanbrugh's irreverent sequel to Cibber's Love's Last Shift, posits that Loveless' declaration of repentance at the end of the play does not necessarily signify a lasting conversion to virtue. Rather, it betokens a momentary capitulation to the powerful influence of Amanda's

example.²⁷ Vanbrugh's play shows the "futility of sentimental morality" (Kropf, "The Relapse and the Sentimental Mask," 193).²⁸ Vanbrugh here suggests that Loveless is a man more swayed by his own best interests than a man easily given to virtuous living.

In The Relapse, Vanbrugh gives a free rein to his fallen hero's pursuit of pleasure for its own sake. Loveless once again lapses into vice and, significantly, undergoes no fifth-act reformation. Indeed, unlike the Masque in Cibber's Love's Last Shift, the Masque which celebrates the marital festivities in The Relapse circumvents Amanda's ideal of a chaste union. The Masque espouses instead the rake's creed. Cupid's subjects "have taken the mode / To grow fond of a change," and the Chorus expostulates: "Constancy's an empty sound / Heaven and earth and all go round, / All the works of nature move, / And the joys of life and love / Are in variety".²⁹ The "fate of a man and his wife," Cupid asserts, is "to consume all their days in contention and strife" (V.v.139), and, therefore, he urges that "to ramble at large" (140) is a much wiser course to follow than Loveless' vain attempt to reduce the "raging flame of wild destructive lust" to the "warm pleasing fire of lawful love" (I.i.9).³⁰

Sir Tunbelly's comment summarizes both the Masque and the play: "So, very fine, very fine, i'faith, this is something like a wedding" (V.v.140). Matrimony hardly proves to be "fine." In the main plot, Miss Hoyden is all too willing to commit bigamy. In the sub-plot, Berinthia, the cause of Loveless' undoing, follows the dictates of her own appetite to the point where she agrees to pander to Worthy's designs on Amanda. For all his foppery, Lord Foppington, "piqued in honour,"

attempts to debauch Amanda, "a woman of insolent virtue" (III.i.58).³¹ In London, then, "that uneasy theater of noise" (I.i.12), the power of Amanda's virtuous example is severely put to the test.³² Vanbrugh's lively portrait of the clandestine activities of the amorous quartet challenges Cibber's sentimental confidence in the reward of virtue and the reformation of vice.

To do so, Vanbrugh reverses Cibber's comic plot.³³ In The Relapse, the initial emphasis is upon Loveless' reformation, and Vanbrugh then charts the hero's fall into the follies and vices he had previously, and so eloquently, renounced. Loveless determines, in spite of Amanda's fears, to "launch into temptation" (12) and thus re-affirm one of Cibber's favourite notions: to boast a victory, one must triumph over vice.³⁴ Musing on the "roving pleasures" of his past and the "false face" with which luxury and vice have once enslaved him, Loveless, at the beginning of the play, concludes that his "little soft retreat" affords him all the pleasure he now requires: "My life glides on, and all is well within" (9). Later, after he has met the delectable object of his curiosity, the woman who had caught his roving eye at the theatre and awakened his old desires, Loveless again contemplates his reformation. He queries: "Did [Amanda] not rescue me, a grovelling slave, / When chained and bound by that black tyrant Vice / I labored in his vilest drudgery?" (III.ii.62). But temptation, in the form of Berinthia, imprisons him once again.

Vanbrugh brings Cibber's play full-circle, and this technique underlines Vanbrugh's comic themes. The reformed hero, tempted beyond endurance, easily slips back into his former ways. As Vanbrugh expresses

it in his Vindication, the "Disorders that are slipt into Loveless's House" result from "his being too positive in his own strength, and forgetting, that Lead us not into Temptation, is a Petition in our Prayers, which was thought fit to be tackt to that for our daily Bread" (p. 210). Both his own rekindled "distemper" (The Relapse, III.ii.63), and Amanda herself, counteract the effect of virtuous example. As Kropf points out, Amanda leads Loveless into temptation when she unknowingly invites the object of his lust to visit ("The Relapse and the Sentimental Mask," 198). Finally, then, Vanbrugh inverts Cibber's sentimental formula; reclaimed heroes relapse, and chaste wives abet their own betrayal. But he also repeats Cibber's formula, and this technique highlights Vanbrugh's comic treatment of the "human condition."

At the same time as he demonstrates Loveless' relapse into vice, Vanbrugh portrays its antithesis, a conversion to virtue. So firm that it won't be swayed by her adversary's tempting arguments, Amanda's virtue stirs Worthy, so lately branded a "minister of darkness" (V.ii.117), to renounce his former wantonness. Indeed, Faller contends that "it is upon Amanda's temptation by Worthy, and not the relapse of Loveless, that the moral concern of the play is brought most prominently to bear" ("Between Jest and Earnest," 27).³⁵ On the one hand, Amanda is sorely tempted to grant her lover's desires (II.51; III.iii.73; IV.ii.89; V.iv.133). On the other hand, her repulse prompts Worthy to eulogize the woman who could so virtuously withstand his advances: "Sure there's divinity about her, / And sh'as dispensed some portion on't to me" (V.iv.134).³⁶

At first glance, the transformation of his gross desires into

adoration may seem sudden and inexplicable. But Vanbrugh has introduced yet another comic twist, and he thereby illustrates his thematic concern: the frail nature of the human creature.³⁷ Worthy may cast off his rakishness but, as the play's title suggests and as Loveless' bad example attests, relapses do occur. Conversions are, after all, subject to the mutability of the flesh. Earlier in the play, even the reformed Loveless acknowledges that "the false face of luxury / Displayed such charms / As might have shaken the most holy hermit" (I.i.9). In the midst of his rhapsody, Worthy also confesses his uncertainty as to "how long this influence may last" (V.iv.134).³⁸ In the "moment" of his purity, he will dare to accept Amanda's heart on her own terms. But Amanda, as a married woman, and a highly virtuous one at that, is beyond his reach, and he himself is too given to the demands of the flesh. Van Niel contends, in his article "The Relapse - Into Death and Damnation," that Worthy and his "conversion" merely illustrate the impossibility of ever achieving the "blessedness" such a conversion might offer: "Salvation is not possible in the context of the world of The Relapse, for man's identity is limited by his mortality, and his mortality is proved by his essential sexuality," governed by an appetite which "appears to be the law of existence" (322).³⁹ In Vanbrugh's terms, the frail human creature cannot long remain virtuous. To sin no more, Worthy protests, is "a task too hard for mortals" (V.iv.133); in spite of all endeavours, "flesh and blood / Are got in t'other scale; / And they are ponderous things" (134). As Vanbrugh says in his Vindication, in words which could apply to Worthy as well as Loveless: "This I design'd for a natural Instance of the Frailty of Mankind, even in his

most fixt Determinations" (p. 212). So, finally, Vanbrugh tailors the witty and the sentimental modes to his own ends, and any hint of his adherence to the sentimental mode is soon undermined.⁴⁰

Even the play's ending is ambiguous.⁴¹ Moral as Cibber's conclusion may be, Vanbrugh ends The Relapse by having Lord Foppington, "the prince of coxcombs" (III.i.60), speak the last word in a comedy which, like the *Masque*, effectively undercuts the sentimental notion that the virtuous example can indeed exert an influence beyond the impulse of the moment. Vanbrugh's is a "moral" play, but only insofar as "it shows the ubiquitousness of vice, its virtuous pretenses and defenses," and only insofar as it "shows, too, the general inefficacy of conventional injunctions to piety when they are applied to the actuality of man's nature" (Roper, "Language and Action," 61). For the most part, Vanbrugh's plays continue to perturb the moralists. While a character like Amanda condemns the contemporary drama's "loose obscene encouragement to vice" (II.i.31), Vanbrugh contends, in his Prologue to The Provoked Wife, that it is "the intent and business of the stage / To copy out the follies of the age" (ll. 1-2, p. 3). In Vanbrugh's view, even "bad Examples (if they are but bad enough) give us as useful Reflections as good ones do."⁴²

One of Vanbrugh's favourite reflections is that man, a creature of the flesh, cannot long withstand temptation. In The Provoked Wife, (1697), the abused Lady Brute, acknowledging the weakness of the "fortifications" which shield her honour, also admits that, should Constant begin the assault, he'd soon "carry the town too" (I.i.11). She discovers that, "once the sluice of desire is opened," she has little protection against

the "torrent of love" which "flows into the heart" (III.i.51). Lady Brute, then, "feels sharply the contradictions around and within her"; her "head is a tangle of values where the permissive code of the world of fashion, the imperatives of orthodox morality, and the demands of her own self-interest are inextricably knotted together" (Faller, "Between Jest and Earnest," 21).⁴³

However much her fleshly desires seduce her virtue, one of her provocations is undoubtedly her brutish husband, "a dainty fellow" (II.i.32) who would rather "live a rascal" than "die a hero" (V.v.109).⁴⁴ Like the lewd songs he so much admires, Sir John craves only "sin and impudence" (III.iii.58), and his example is "bad enough" to stir the other characters to "useful Reflections" (A Journey to London, II.i.153). After witnessing a particularly crass example of Sir John's ill-usage of his wife, Constant remarks: "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" (The Provoked Wife, V.iv.104). The behaviour of Lady Brute illustrates the truth of Constant's observation.

Tormented by Sir John's barbarous treatment of her, Lady Brute concludes that she could well play the role of "the downright wife - and cuckold him" (I.i.8). She argues that, if his ill-usage dissolves her vows to him, then to remain chaste is a questionable practice. She finds even virtue itself to be suspect: "Lord, what fine notions of virtue do we women take up upon the credit of old foolish philosophers. Virtue's its own reward, virtue's this, virtue's that. Virtue's an ass, and a gallant's worth forty on't" (8).⁴⁵ Lady Brute does in fact receive little reward for her virtue. She has married Sir John for his fortune,

but he has married her only because he "had a mind to lie with her" (II.i.30). Too cowardly to ravish her and risk the consequences, he resorts to matrimony and suffers the cloying presence of a wife. Both of them, he insists, have received their just, and only, reward (I.i.6).

Virtue in this play becomes less than its own reward. Like any alluring charm, it makes a prize of the woman who possesses it, and creates "an eternal obligation where'er 'tis sacrificed" (III.i.53). A Lord Rake cries for "liberty of conscience" (III.ii.56), and a virtuous reputation comes to signify discretion: "he who has discretion enough to be tender of a woman's reputation carries a virtue about him may atone for a great many faults" (III.i.51). Trapped as she is by her marital predicament and prevented from following the town's modish example, Lady Brute finds herself caught in a dilemma which can only cause the other two lovers, Bellinda and Heartfree, to take a moment's pause before they follow the Brutes' example.

Their example fills Heartfree and Bellinda with dread. Love has turned to loathing and matrimonial fervour to regret. Sir John begins the play with the words: "What cloying meat is love, when matrimony's the sauce to it. Two years' marriage has debauched my five senses" (I.i.5).⁴⁶ To Heartfree, the remedy of matrimony is as dreadful as the disease of love (V.iv.104), and Bellinda admits that the prospect also fills her with tremors and misgivings (V.v.106). Both concede that, could they avoid the bad example of Sir John and the regret of Lady Brute, then all might yet be well. Bellinda acknowledges that in matrimony there is always some risk, but she rests her hopes on her spouse's good nature: "But if a man has the least spark either of

honor or good nature, he can never use a woman ill that loves him and makes his fortune both" (V.ii.93). Faller considers Bellinda's last statement to be richly connotative: "Knowing that the gratitude of men is tickled by more than love, Bellinda can expect a modest sort of happiness; her hopes are grounded on a practical sense of human nature and how it operates in a less than ideal world" ("Between Jest and Earnest," 21). Man is frail and his "hold upon happiness and virtue is tenuous to the extreme" (25), so Vanbrugh concludes his play with an exhortation to "Take heed: the surly husband's fate you see" (V.v.116).

Vanbrugh's theme also includes "the follies of the age." In The Provoked Wife, he pokes fun at the absurd posturings of the coquettish Lady Fancyfull, "a ridiculous original" (I.i.12), who is a subject more fit for mirth than pity: "Pity those whom nature abuses, but never those who abuse nature" (The Relapse, II.37). What nature has bestowed upon her, she has "undone by art" (The Provoked Wife, II.i.23), by affectations which have indeed, to use Congreve's words, become a "habit." Prompted by her "intemperate desire" (I.ii.19), she connives to prevent Heartfree's marriage to Bellinda, but her machinations bring her only disgrace, and her vanity and affectation are punished. At the end of the play, she is judged to be "impertinent" and "ridiculous," and she is laughed off the stage (V.v.114). Similarly, Lord Foppington in The Relapse condemns himself to ridicule. He is a "vain, nauseous fop" (II.51), who is made to suffer various indignities: he is wounded when he tries to debauch Amanda and, later, ill-treated at the hands of Sir Tunbelly.

When Cibber adapted Vanbrugh's unfinished A Journey to London and

re-titled it The Provoked Husband (1728), such comic exposures were modified. Cibber offered, "Not scenes that would a noisy joy impart, / But such as hush the mind, and warm the heart" (Prologue, The Provoked Husband, ll. 21-22, p. 10).⁴⁷ Now, Cibber argued, the playwright "Resolved to bring licentious life to shame" (l. 12).

Described in the Dramatis Personae as "immoderate in her pursuit of pleasures" (11), Lady Townly represents one such "licentious life" which must be brought to shame. While physically chaste, she has yet fallen prey to an "adultery of the mind" (V.ii.137), to a prostitution of her sense and a violation of her domestic happiness. Lady Grace, who in contrast is described as a woman of "exemplary virtue" (Dramatis Personae, 11), points to the culprit responsible for her sister's laxity: "Nay, take her out of the madness of this town, [she is] rational in her notions and easy to live with" (III.92). Lady Townly, as her name suggests, is swept away by "this torrent of vanity in vogue" (92), and only imminent ruin and disgrace force her to repent her folly. After being threatened with the scandal of a separation, Lady Townly undergoes "a reverse of temper" (V.ii.141); she admits to her "mad misuse of [her husband's] indulgence" (142). Unlike Lady Townley's role in The Man of Mode, this lady of fashion serves as an example of folly corrected. She is made a convert to the moral axiom that "married happiness is never found from home" (V.iv.159).

On the other hand, Vanbrugh's Lady Arabella in A Journey to London does not reveal any predisposition to reform her ways and mend her manners: "Why, don't you know, my Lord, that whenever (just to please you only) I have gone to wean my self from a Fault (one of my

Faults I mean that I love dearly) han't it put me so out of Humour, you cou'd scarce endure the House with me?" (II.i.146). Her dearest pleasure in life is to pursue without restraint her own inclination, "for the Pleasure of all polite Women's Lives now, you know, is founded upon entire Liberty to do what they will" (149).⁴⁸

Lady Townly in The Provoked Husband also admits that she knew no directors but her passions and "no master but [her] will" (V.ii.142), but such an admission signals her conversion to the constraints of sobriety. She offers to dedicate herself to a life of repentance in the hope that atonement will yield forgiveness. Lady Arabella in A Journey to London would scoff at such a notion. Threatened with being cast out from her home, she laments only her lack of independent funds (II.i.148).

In contrast to this fashionable lady's pursuit of pleasure, the character of Vanbrugh's Clarinda is a prude by Lady Arabella's standards (149).⁴⁹ Both Clarinda's nature and her education incline her to a life of sobriety: "I would entertain my self in observing the new Fashions soberly, I would please my self in new Cloaths soberly, I would divert my self with agreeable Friends at Home and Abroad soberly" (150). To her, half a year spent in the town would be as sober a past-time as half a year spent in the country. Her very sobriety leads Sir Charles to the conclusion that she may in fact be the "one Woman fit to make a Wife of" (153). In Cibber's version, Lady Grace's "good sense" (The Provoked Husband, I.22) and "unerring virtue" (V.ii.144) enlarge upon Clarinda's more elemental prudence. Lady Grace, too, arouses in her lover, Mr. Manly, a regard for her merit: "What a vile opinion have I had of the whole sex, for these ten years past, which this sensible creature has recovered in less than one!" (I.40). Respected for his "plainness" and

"honesty" (III.71), Manly's reward for his virtue and generosity is, predictably, Lady Grace's hand.

Cibber's modifications of Vanbrugh's fragment satisfy the sentimental regard for "poetical justice" (V.iv.159). In The Provoked Husband, "licentious life" and its excesses have been brought under the sway of exemplary virtue, villainy has been punished and virtue, "unsoiled by modish art" (Epilogue, l. 33, p. 160), duly rewarded. Cibber may "touch indeed" upon the human faults reflected in Vanbrugh's glass, but Cibber paints "with a hand / So gentle, that [man's] merit still may stand" (Prologue, The Provoked Wife, ll. 26-7, p. 3). In effect, Cibber abides by Loveless' advice: "But till that reformation [of the stage] can be made, I would not leave the wholesome corn for some intruding tares that grow amongst it. Doubtless, the moral of a well-wrought scene is of prevailing force" (The Relapse, II.31).

Therefore, Cibber's treatment of mankind alters the Restoration playwright's portrayal of a jaded creature. No longer does the "glass" show mankind "of what species he's an ass" (Prologue, The Provoked Wife, l. 4, p. 3). Rather, playwrights like Cibber dramatize follies and expose vice only to show them tamed and corrected by the splendid example of virtue. The emphasis clearly shifts from mockery to panegyric, and this shift demonstrates the truth to Heartfree's observation that "All revolutions run into extremes" (The Provoked Wife, V.iv.105). The witty mode's depictions of vice Cibber modifies to suit his own ends. Later, the sentimental mode soon hazards vis comica altogether.⁵⁰ Cibber once sought to dramatize "a just moral" (Dedication, The Lady's Last Stake, 3) but, in the plays of Steele and Cumberland, comedy threatens

to become a catechistic exercise, and the dramatist a "most able and experienc'd Preacher of the Age" ("The Freeholder's Journal," 28 November 1722, 27).⁵¹

CHAPTER SEVEN

"Preacher of the Age": Steele's and Cumberland's Comedies

Many of Cibber's contemporaries change the image of man reflected in a glass like Vanbrugh's, for the playwrights increasingly strive to show that the human species is essentially moral and good. Cibber's comedies, notwithstanding the presence of virtuous characters who expound on moral topics, frequently rely on the witty mode, especially on its bawdry. To later dramatists, this undermines the moral tone of plays which clearly aspire, not to what Cibber calls "a noisy joy" (Prologue, The Provoked Husband, 1. 21, p. 10), but to what Steele calls "a Joy too exquisite for Laughter" (Preface, The Conscious Lovers, p. 299). The theatre is to have "a moral, didactic purpose," and to show "innocent, virtuous characters" (Green, "Three Aspects," 141). As Steele states in his fragment, The School of Action: "Would you reform an heedless guilty age, / Adorn with virtuous characters the stage."¹

Like Pinchwife in Wycherley's The Country Wife, Steele would also contend that "good Precepts are lost, when bad Examples are still before us" (III.291).² Denying the notion that even "bad Examples (if they are but bad enough) give us as useful reflections as good ones do" (Vanbrugh, A Journey to London, II.i.153), Steele now attempts to convey "right Sentiments into the People" ("Town Talk," 2, 23 December 1715, Steele's Periodical Journalism, p. 194). Any comic touch he does

include in his plays serves distinctly moral ends in order to provide "the English stage with a comic form that could be an effective stimulant to virtuous action" (Loftis, Steele, p. 189).³ Unlike his predecessors, Steele endeavours to reform the stage of the world by offering on the world of the stage examples of the "Virtues" and "the valuable Parts of a Man."⁴ The Conscious Lovers is to be "a play [which] has the Effect of Example and Precept" (Preface, The Conscious Lovers, p. 299). As Kenny suggests, Steele in effect wishes to "redefine" comic drama (Introduction, The Conscious Lovers, p. xviii).⁵

In Steele's view, the sins of the libertine could only be eradicated if that "Miniature of Life[,] the Stage" (Epilogue, The Funeral, l. 3, p. 98), devoted itself to the lofty presentation of "All [things] that can move the Soul" (l. 2). Neither a delight in the bawdy and profane nor a display of vice would "move the soul" and make "us our selves both more approve, and know" (Epilogue, The Lying Lover, l. 9, p. 189).⁶ Vice must be stripped of its "gay Habit" and clothed "in its native Dress of Shame, Contempt, and Dishonour" (Preface, p. 116). Vice arouses only "a distorted Passion," laughter, "born / Of sudden self Esteem, and sudden Scorn" (Epilogue, ll. 4-5, p. 189). In his plays, Steele shuns any delight but a "just Delight" (Prologue, l. 14, p. 117), any joy but a "pure Joy" (Epilogue, l. 17, p. 189). This "just Regard to a reforming Age" (Prologue, l. 18, p. 117) yields moralistic comedies which, by their very design, surpass Cibber's more limited didactic purpose and attempt to "Chasten Wit, and Moralize the Stage" (Prologue, The Conscious Lovers, l. 28, p. 304).

Steele's dramatic catechism denigrates Cibber's notion that past

vice heightens present virtue.⁷ No longer are sins vividly portrayed for four acts only to be expediently forsaken in a fifth-act reformation scene. Nor is vice merely cast aside in favour of virtue. In his early plays, Steele suggests that the pursuit of pleasure inevitably leads to a "painted woe," one which must jar the offender into penitence and eventual absolution. The threat of impending doom helps Steele to preach his moral: vice lures the unwary into suffering and disaster.⁸

To augment the impact of his moral, Steele at his best effectively exploits conventional comic devices, and flashes of the witty mode also heighten the moments of grief and repentance.⁹ In the context of the play, these, too, ultimately serve the moral aims of the sentimental mode, and Steele subordinates the comic to the didactic. Corrigible man, repenting his folly, is reborn into a life of moral perception. The Lying Lover; or, the Ladies Friendship (1704) illustrates Steele's distinctive use of both the witty and the sentimental modes.

Here, Steele shows the hero's progress from frivolity to despair and, finally, to repentance. In *Young Bookwit*, Loftis asserts, "vice and folly are totally unsuccessful, virtue only offering a reward" (Steele, p. 19). Dedicated solely to gay pursuits, Young Bookwit abandons himself to the town's fashionable delights, only to be trapped in the end by its misplaced demands on his sense of honour. To be so "janty a Town-spark" (I.131), Young Bookwit must sacrifice "Circumspection and good Sense" (Preface, p. 115).

Initially, Young Bookwit's demeanour is comic, and his lies and his intrigues recall the witty mode. Both Young Bookwit and Latine renounce scholarship in favour of those "Regions of Wit, and Gallantry, the

Parks-the Playhouse" (I.122). Whereas Latine chaffs at his friend's penchant for hyperbole and recognizes that such wiles "may prove dangerous Sport" (I.132), Young Bookwit enjoys beyond measure the extravagance of his sparkish role (III.ii.153). He cannot look gay enough or unthinking enough (I.120), and he bemoans his lack of a sufficiently brisk humour. In the town, only appearance merits attention (119-120). Finally, Young Bookwit's folly severely puts him to the test.

To extricate himself from sundry awkward situations, he frequently resorts to his quick invention, to what he calls "nothing but downright Wit" (II.ii.147). In the course of the play, such wit is shown to be, not so much a mastery of the art of verbal sword-play, but a mastery of the art of lying. As the solemn Frederick attests, the "lying lover" seldom "tells a Story by halves" (IV.iv.169), but enlivens his conversation with outrageous details only to pad what is, after all, "a mere Narration" (170). Young Bookwit's preposterous lies reduce witty repartee to mental gymnastics which, by their very extravagance, astound his listeners into credulity.

Young Bookwit's fanciful stories certainly prove to be alluring to Penelope and Victoria. They are so taken with his outlandish manner that they become rivals for his attentions, and here Steele is often at his comic best. In one delightful scene, they feign undying devotion to each other, and then proceed to disarray each other's toiletry (III. i.151-2).¹⁰ As Betty observes: "How civilly People of Quality hate one another" (151). The comedy of the "ladies friendship" nevertheless helps to promote the sentimental theme. The "diverting accident[s]"

(150) serve only to accentuate the seriousness of the situation into which the characters eventually fall.

Young Bookwit's bragging arouses the jealousy of Lovemore and provokes him to challenge the "lying lover" to a duel, but it is also Penelope's coquetry which teases her lover beyond endurance (V.iii.179). Steele carefully points to the underlying cruelty of Penelope's coquetry, a trait which no longer invites comic approbation. Steele balances her cruelty with Victoria's more "reserv'd Humour" (II.i.141) and, by contrasting her coquetry to Victoria's partiality for a more "sober Passion" (I.124), Steele exposes the essential wrongness of Penelope's actions. Even Penelope herself confides: "Dear Victoria, - you have always been my most intimate Bosom-friend: - Your wary Carriage, and Circumspection have often been a Safety against Errors to me, - I must confess it" (II.i.141-142).

The comic rivalry between them disrupts this balance. Penelope is finally made to contemplate "the Mischief of her Vanity" (V.iii.181), not by virtue of Victoria's reserve and judgment, but by the force of unhappy circumstances. Penelope must atone for her heartlessness by sobbing away the "Pride, Scorn, Affectation, and a whole Train of Ils [sic]" which have wrongly tormented the honest Lovemore (181). She finally discovers her error in preferring "agreeable Faults rather than offensive Virtues" (I.124). Like Young Bookwit's lying, her coquetish arts are shown to be as frivolous as they are base and improper, and both she and Young Bookwit are made to suffer the consequences of their shameful conduct.

His folly is even more severely punished. This self-proclaimed

master of hyperbole, who would be the "Founder of accomplish'd Fools" (III.ii.153), indulges in all manner of vice, and this kinship of folly and vice recalls Congreve's treatment of the fool and the knave. Young Bookwit's "agreeable faults" lead him into sin, and soon, he, too, is a criminal (IV.v.171). Imprisoned for the murder of his friend, he comes to repent his modish ways. Steele thereby rebukes the rake's actions but, at the same time, he demonstrates his corrigible nature.

Torn by "sweet, sweet Remorse" (V.iii.184), the reformed spark offers his own indictment of his former way of life: "Honour! the horrid Application of that sacred Word, to a Revenge 'gainst Friendship, Law and Reason, is a damn'd last shift of the damn'd envious Foe of Human Race" (V.i.176). Young Bookwit now perceives that his former carelessness and his excessive "Mirth and Humour" have indeed been false (174). He has killed friendship merely "for the empty Praise of Fools" (175). Although Latine advises him that the "fatal Accident" (175) preserved his honour (176), Young Bookwit denies any honourable intent and sentimentally abjures an act which is not honourable but contemptible. Forced to face the folly of his ways, the erring hero feels "the Compunction and Remorse" which are "suitable to a Man's finding Himself in a Gaol for the Death of his Friend, without His knowing why" (Preface, p. 115).

Any sustained comedy the "lying lover" and the "ladies friendship" might provide Steele yokes to the rigorous demands of morality. He deliberately undermines the alluring appeal of the "lying lover." Although initially Steele does attempt "to increase the comedy of the first four acts," he does so only to "create poignancy in the last

one" (Kenny, "Richard Steele," 27). Young Bookwit, a ridiculous character at first, furthers Steele's didactic aim to "elicit a sympathetic response" (Loftis, Steele, p. 199).

Unreservedly didactic as he is, Steele exploits the pathos of Young Bookwit's dire situation.¹¹ His tearful reunion with his "excellent," if over-indulgent father (I.121), Steele justifies by stressing the scene's moral impact. "The Anguish He there expresses, and the mutual Sorrow between an only Child, and a tender Father in that Distress," may, as Steele concedes, violate "the Rules of Comedy; but [he is] sure they are a Justice to those of Morality" (Preface, p. 115).¹²

Like Penelope's coquetry, the seemingly harmless antics of Young Bookwit are shown to have deeper moral implications. Coquetry, wit and jealousy serve, not as comic targets, but as moral warnings. Because they are misled by their vanity, both Penelope and Young Bookwit must come to realize the truth of Old Bookwit's final aphorism: "neither Wit, or Beauty, Wealth or Courage, / Implicitly deserve the World's Esteem, / They're only in their Application, Goods" (V.iii.187). Similarly, Lovemore's intemperate jealousy must be checked. His jealousy leads him into a duel which is provoked by nothing more than empty lies. Before "Constancy's rewarded" (186), they must all confront the moral implications of their conduct.

To help bring about their sentimental change of heart, Steele inverts yet another conventional device, disguise. Unlike the ladies' comic disguises, which lead to humorous incidents of mistaken identity (III.ii. 155 ff.), Lovemore's disguise as a sergeant-of-law prompts repentance and the final reconciliation (V.iii.181, 185). He prods Latine and

Young Bookwit into a declaration of their friendship for each other. Softened by their sentiments, Lovemore drops his disguise and sentimentally exclaims: "I can hold out no longer. - Lovemore still lives t'adore your noble Friendship, and begs a Share in't. Be not amaz'd! but let me grasp you both, who in an Age degenerate as this, have such transcendent Virtue" (185).

Steele's dramatization of the consequences of vice makes contemptible the pursuit of self-gratification at the same time as it glorifies "transcendent virtue." Not gross enough to raise "too much Horrour" (Prologue, l. 14, p. 117), vice is displayed only to be made contemptible, and any laughter it might occasion yields to "a Joy too exquisite for Laughter" (Preface, The Conscious Lovers, p. 299), a joy in the hero's redemption from vice to a clearer moral perception.¹³ Nevertheless, as Kenny notes, the "comic aspect," so frequently ignored by critics of the drama, is in Steele's plays an "essential element" ("Richard Steele," 23).¹⁴ He, too, exploits the witty and the sentimental modes, and tailors them to his own ends.

The Tender Husband; or, the Accomplish'd Fools, 1705, exemplifies Steele's comic mastery.¹⁵ Here, Loftis contends, Steele approaches the "satiric manner of Restoration comedy" (Steele, p. 19), but the play is, as Thorndike remarks, more a play of "innocent mirth" than it is pointedly satiric (English Comedy, p. 346).¹⁶ The "accomplish'd fools" of the title are indeed a comic company, and their humorous excesses Steele gently exposes. Engaged in an incongruous love triangle, they include the opportunistic Clerimont, Humphrey Gubbin, "a docile Dunce, a Fellow rather absurd" (I.i.225) and Biddy Tipkin, "A perfect Quixot

in Petticoats" (II.iii.241).¹⁷

She is the object of the amorous pursuit, and she is a delightful portrait of absurdity.¹⁸ "By being kept from the World," Biddy has created "a World of her own" (I.i.223), and it is a comic world steeped in romance.¹⁹ Like Sheridan's Lydia Languish, Biddy "governs herself wholly by Romance - It has got into her very Blood - She starts by Rule, and Blushes by Example -" (II.iii.241). Her head is so full of "Shepherds, Knights, Flowery Meads, Groves and Streams" (I.i.223) that her romantic nature recoils from the prospect of a marriage which conforms to the prudent dictates of Lombard Street (II.ii.235). Shunning the common, Biddy translates her romantic notions into her language and her very choice of name. Winds, for example, become "Fanning Gales" (234), and she rechristens herself "Parthenissa" (239).

Biddy and Humphrey become unlikely allies in their effort to "deceive the Old Folks that would Couple [them]" (III.ii.250). These two comic figures engage in "an elaborate parody of the 'proviso' scene in earlier comedies" (Winton, Introduction, The Tender Husband, p. xvii).²⁰ In their "courtship" scene, Steele plays on the verbal idiom of each to enrich his comedy. The idiosyncrasies of Humphrey's language demonstrate his country background (249). Humphrey's speech is, to Biddy, that of an "ungentle Forrester" (250) and a "good Savage" (IV.ii.260), but one which bears no resemblance to the language of the rustics she so admires in her novels. Biddy's own language causes her country cousin to proclaim her mad (III.ii.250). They end their comic interview with an avowal of hatred delivered in their own unique idiom (251).

Since Biddy is now released from his bumpkin advances, she is free

to pursue her inclination for a suitably "Quixotic" husband, a role Clerimont plays admirably. Warned that he must not talk "like a Man of this World to her," he masters the "cant of Loving" (I.i.223). His cant is so successful, in fact, that Biddy is "struck at first sight" (III.ii.248). She bemoans her momentary disregard of romantic decorum which, as she explains to the overly zealous Clerimont, demands that "a Lover should Sigh in private, and Languish whole Years before he Reveals his Passion; he should retire into some Solitary Grove, and make the Woods and Wild Beasts his Confidants" (II.ii.240). Later, her suitor can only lament: "Could I but have produc'd one instance of a Ladies complying at first sight, I should have gain'd her Promise on the Spot" (II.iii.241).

Clerimont must resort to a conventional trick, disguise. While his posing as a painter flatters his lady's desire for romance, Biddy still hesitates to commit what she calls "a Solecism against all Rules" (IV.ii.258). Such a tautology underlines her comically misguided notions of romance. She, like Bob Acres in The Rivals, understands only the "cant," and not the sense. Nor does she dare lose any opportunity for more "Disguise, Serenade, and Adventure" (259). But the threat of marriage to an "ill-bred Clown" (I.i.224), who neither understands her discourse nor cares to pursue her, weakens Biddy's defences. Clerimont convinces her with the advice: "tho' our Amours can't furnish out a Romance, they'll make a very pretty Novel" (IV.ii.259).²¹ His persuasive, and timely, literary analogy leads Biddy to the observation that "had Oroondates been as pressing as Clerimont, Cassandra had been but a Pocket-Book" (260). At last, with the words that she "ought to be

taken out of a Window, and run away with" (260), Biddy relents.

The marked contrast between the two courtship scenes of such "accomplish'd fools" is genuinely comic. The plight of the "tender husband" also affords mirth. Regardless of whether Steele or Addison penned the scenes, comedy, while bowing to the demands of morality, dominates the play.²² In the domestic plot, the reformation of "too free a Wife" (V.ii.272) at times assumes the tone of the sentimental mode, but Steele nonetheless hints at a favourite Restoration theme. As Winton suggests in his Introduction to the play: "Societies and individuals, Steele appears to imply, who value forms more than realities, shadows more than substance, invite deception and deserve to be deceived" (P. xx). Finally, Clerimont Senior's character owes something to both the witty and the sentimental modes. He is a man devoted to appearance, and a husband determined to reform an erring wife.

Perturbed by his wife's pursuit of her "Innocent Freedoms" (I.i.218), Clerimont Senior determines to chasten his wife's "fine Follies" (219) and correct the effects of her travels abroad, "where she learn'd to lose her Money Gracefully, to admire every Vanity in our Sex, and condemn every Virtue in her own" (218). But he insists that her reformation must "appear her own Act" (219). Otherwise, he risks the censure of the fashionable town.²³ As a result of his regard for social form, a regard which recalls the superannuated husbands of the past, he disguises his own mistress, Fainlove, as a "pretty Gentleman" (218), a gallant who is to be of no "Use or Consequence in the World" (218).

The trick is rich in comic potential. Fainlove's pose ridicules the legion of affected fops who "stand in Assemblies, with an indolent

Softness, and Contempt of all around 'em, who make a figure in Publick, and are scorn'd in Private" (218). Fainlove's disguise also provokes hilarious scenes of mistaken identity, another comic convention. Mrs. Clerimont, eager to indulge her "profuse Vanities" (V.i.264), freely courts Fainlove's advances and arranges an assignation with her pretty gallant.²⁴

But Steele introduces a twist into his tale of marital discord. Clerimont Senior has, after all, disguised his own mistress to act the part, and even his reason for doing so is suspect. He tells Fainlove: "Now I can neither Mortify her Vanity that I may Live at ease with her, or quite discard her, till I have catch'd her a little enlarging her Innocent Freedoms, as she calls 'em" (I.i.218). But even he acknowledges that she has not yet cuckolded him (217). When she does seem willing to do so, Mrs. Clerimont declares herself to be a "Woman of Sense," one who scarcely would allow a "pretty Beau" more than a casual flirtation (V.i.262). She proclaims the disguised Fainlove to be fit only for "Hours of Dalliance" (262). The respect she there displays for her husband's character prompts him to quip: "How have I wrong'd this fine Lady! - I find I am to be a Cuckold out of her pure esteem for me" (262). Such a comment indicates Steele's treatment of a conventional theme which, while less condemnatory than Wycherley's in a play like The Plain Dealer, nonetheless criticizes such a distortion of moral value.

Ostensibly, in The Tender Husband, the comic ruse achieves its desired end.²⁵ Guilt "transforms" Mrs. Clerimont, who seemingly acknowledges the propriety of her husband's intrigue against her honour:

"You know I have only err'd in my Intention, nor saw my Danger, till, by this honest Art, you had shown me what 'tis to venture to the utmost Limit of what is lawful. You laid that Train, I'm sure, to alarm, not to betray, my Innocence" (264). Her "innocence" has never been in question, merely her vanity. Since Clerimont Senior so jealousy guards his appearance in the world, Steele suggests that the "art" he has employed is hardly "honest." Clerimont Senior has indeed plotted to "betray" her innocence (I.i.218-219). He himself later admits: "The Impertinent was guilty of nothing but what my Indiscretion led her to -" (V.i.263).²⁶ As Mrs. Clerimont demands: "Is't possible you can forgive what you ensnar'd me into?" (264).

This last remark points to Steele's comic themes. Although Winton would argue that in the last act she is unreformed (Introduction, The Tender Husband, p. xx), it is more to the point to say that Steele here questions the value of any reformation based on such a dubious morality. Clerimont will, after all, "forgive" a fault which she has never committed, and he himself has placed her in a compromising situation. Steele also questions the permanence of her "reformation." She continues to play the "fine Lady" (265), seemingly in compliance with her husband's desire that she do so "'till [they] go out of Town" (265). The brilliant comic device of Fainlove's disguise thereby helps to expose the folly of others at the same time as it comes to serve a qualified moral end: the reformation of "too free a Wife" (V.ii.272) and the re-affirmation of the value of marital harmony.²⁷ But it is a conjugality and a penitence founded, not only on a threat of violence (V.i.264), but also on an inordinate regard for appearance.

In The Conscious Lovers (1723), Steele's most famous play, morality prevails over comedy.²⁸ It is, as Loftis notes, "patently a play in which the didactic purpose is paramount," and it "represents Steele's culminating effort in stage reform, providing as it does a pattern of comedy - exemplary comedy - in which the action and characters are designed as models for and incentives to virtuous behavior" (Steele, pp. 3-4). As one writer in The Freeholder's Journal (28 November 1722) remarks, Steele's play has "almost chang'd the Old House in Drury-Lane, to a Monastery" (24-5).²⁹

The conventions of the past have already been criticized in The Lying Lover, where wit is considered to be mere fanciful invention: "'Tis Wit, 'tis Fable, Allegory, Fiction, Hyperbole, or be it what you call it - The World's made up almost of nothing else" (I.132). To Steele, the contemporary witty man shatters any opportunity for "an easy manner of conversation," which must defer to "mutual good-will." This degenerate form of wit, like the verbal gaucheries of the fop, disregards all that is fit or just and, without a care as to "what is said, so it be what is called well said," it "breaks through all things that other people hold sacred."³⁰

In The Conscious Lovers, one of Steele's dramatic aims is to "Chasten Wit, and Moralize the Stage" (Prologue, l. 28, p. 304).³¹ Scorning to "please by Wit" and "The Aids of Vice" (l. 18, p. 303), Steele in his most famous play extols the sentimental mode at the same time as he deflates the witty mode. His comically affected servants, Tom and Phillis, may recall the comic gaiety of the past, but Steele explodes the notion that wit represents "sprightly mirth and high

jollity" ("The Tatler," 219, 1 September 1710, p. 369). As Burt declares in his study of Steele's servants, characters like Tom and Phillis provide "a 'low love' of specifically Restoration vintage" which, in its comic distortion, "continues Steele's attack on what to him was an immoral type of comedy" ("Steele's Servants," 73). As a result, while the comedy is there, it is relegated to the sub-plot, and the main plot remains "serious and high-minded" (Kenny, Introduction, Plays, p. 277).³²

A lowly servant who affects the vices of the rake, Tom is the "Prince of poor Coxcombs" (I.i.310). Like Young Bookwit, he strives to be a gentlemanly fop, a pretty fellow "kept only to be looked at" (311), but one whose pursuit of pleasure gains him "Follies and Vices enough for a Man of Ten thousand a Year" (310). Men of pleasure are now, in The Conscious Lovers, reduced to "Lacquies" (312). The morally austere Humphrey asserts: "I hope the Fashion of being lewd and extravagant, despising of Decency and Order, is almost at an End, since it is arrived at Persons of [Tom's] Quality" (311).³³

Similarly, Tom's paramour, who embodies "the whole Town of Coquets at second hand" (313), flaunts her finery as brazenly as Tom does his gentlemanly airs.³⁴ But Phillis also betrays a spirit of mischief highly comic in itself. Not only does she tease her lover in a way reminiscent of the witty heroine, but she also displays a readiness for intrigue befitting a Restoration servant.³⁵ When Myrtle believes Lucinda lost, Phillis suggests the trick of disguise, and his guise as the senile Geoffrey Cimberton enables the despairing Myrtle to outwit the ridiculous Mrs. Sealand.³⁶

But "honest" Humphrey's moral severity undercuts such comic

glimpses.³⁷ His observations at the beginning of the play mark him as a sentimental character. His sobriety effectively checks the levity of the other minor characters. A trusty and loyal servant, Humphrey possesses an "ingenuous Nature" which endears him to his master (307), and wins him the approbation and confidence of both father and son. He soothes the father, counsels the son, and acts as "useful Friend" to both (I.ii.321). Unlike the madcap Tom, whose only care is to pursue his own best interests, Humphrey selflessly devotes himself to those he serves. This trusted confidant of both Sir John and Bevil Junior plays a major role in the sentimental unfolding of virtue in distress and virtue rewarded.

Indeed, Steele's portrayal of a trusty servant, an indulgent father and a dutiful son reverses the traditional comic pattern. Not only does Humphrey stand in stark contrast to conniving servants like Tom and Phillis, but the doting care father and son bestow on each other also contradicts the comic combat between parents and children once so prominent in earlier comedy. Nor will Humphrey help the one to the detriment of the other. He is loyal to both father and son. He declares: "Well, tho' this Father and Son live as well together as possible, yet their fear of giving each other Pain, is attended with constant mutual Uneasiness. I'm sure I have enough to do to be honest, and yet keep well with them both" (I.i.310). The difficulty of his task is not a source of mirth but, rather, of seriousness. This seriousness is most fully exemplified by the virtuous hero, Bevil Junior.

The wit of both Tom and Phillis depends on invention and "sprightly mirth," but the wit of Bevil Junior reflects Steele's regard

for "mutual good-will." Indeed, as Myers points out, the play illustrates the relation of virtue to wit ("Plot and Meaning," William Congreve, p. 77). Bevil Junior is, finally, the embodiment of those characteristics which, in Steele's view, both the truly "fine gentleman" and the comic hero should possess.³⁸ Bevil is less a master of witty repartee than he is a man endowed with an unerring sense of what is fit and just. He, like any witty hero, does possess an insight into the shortcomings of others but, unlike his witty counterparts, he refuses to make others his comic butts.

He does show some spirit. He will not simply "take whomsoever [his father] pleases" (I.ii.321). Because of such independence, an early discussion between father and son brightens the play's sombre tone. Here, Bevil Junior displays his command of social situations. To Sir John's complaint that he shows "so absolute and so indifferent a Resignation" (318), Bevil repeats the rake's creed when he says that the "Woman that is espous'd for a Fortune, is yet a better Bargain, if she dies; for then a Man still enjoys what he did marry, the Money; and is disencumber'd of what he did not marry, the Woman" (319). By reminding Sir John of his own marriage (318-319), Bevil humorously criticizes his father's proposal of marriage "by way of Bargain and Sale" (319). In his efforts to outwit his father, Captain Absolute in Sheridan's The Rivals will also take advantage of his father's marriage of love.³⁹ In Steele's play, however, neither the father nor the son dares offend the other, and their delicacy of temper balances the scene's more traditional display of youthful chatter befuddling the aged.

Bevil's "filial Piety" shows his more sentimental side (II.ii.331).

He pretends to obey his father only in the hope that, with Humphrey's help, he may yet avoid the "fatal Match" to which his father has bound him (I.ii.323). Bevil's is an "honest Dissimulation" (317), one to which he feels unequal.⁴⁰ So, his pretense hardly conforms to that "dear pleasure of dissembling" enjoyed by a character like Harriet in The Man of Mode (III.i.54), nor are parents the obstacles they once were. Though he dotes on Indiana "to death" (The Conscious Lovers, I.ii.323), Bevil "never will Marry without [his] Father's Consent" (321).⁴¹ The "tender Obligations" (323) he owes the "best of Fathers" (321) have put an "inviolable" restraint on his conduct (323).

In contrast to Bevil's restraint is Myrtle's jealousy, and he represents one barrier to be overcome by the "conscious lovers." Bevil must convince his friend that he will never marry Lucinda, but Myrtle's jealousy blinds him to Bevil's goodness. Finally, what earlier has been a comic display of fretfulness, much akin to Faulkland's in The Rivals, develops into a serious threat to everyone's happiness. Myrtle's challenge emphasizes, not just his "infirmity of Temper" (IV.i.356), but also the wrongness of a "savage custom."⁴² The scene in which Bevil avoids a duel with his friend then becomes the play's moral centre. Steele declares in his preface to the play: "the whole was writ for the sake of the Scene of the Fourth Act, wherein Mr. Bevil evades the Quarrel with his Friend" (p. 299).⁴³ Having judicially demonstrated in The Lying Lover the ills attendant upon duelling, Steele here in The Conscious Lovers stresses Bevil's supreme moral conquest over a "Tyrant Custom" (IV.i.354).

At first, Bevil displays only tender concern and sympathy for his

friend (I.ii.324). For Bevil, the duties of friendship outweigh the claims of honour, and he nobly resolves when Myrtle challenges him to the duel: "He is in Love, and in every circumstance of Life a little distrustful, which I must allow for" (IV.i.354). Myrtle interprets Bevil's "Gravity, this Shew of Conscience" (355), to be mere cowardice. To Myrtle, custom demands that "every Man, who would live with Reputation and Honour in the World," must protect his Honour (353). Even the upstanding Bevil worries over "imputations" against his honour, and confesses: "I can live contented without Glory; but I cannot suffer Shame" (352). It is Tom's sudden entrance which shocks Bevil into sense. Although he has been touched "beyond the Patience of a Man" (355), his disgust for what is a "Breach of all Laws, both Divine and Human" (354), saves both himself and his friend from "the most exquisite Distress" (356).

Once the threat of the duel is averted, Steele then proceeds to his sentimental climax, the "Scene of Wonder" wherein virtue's triumphant (V.iii.377).⁴⁴ Thematically, such sudden reversals of fortune stress the "wondrous Turns of Providence" (377). To make his point, Steele relies on a "beneficent coincidence" which strains his plot and makes his play technically flawed (Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, p. 136). His introduction of the element of mystery helps to build the dramatic tension and prepare for Indiana's tearful reunion with her father. It begins early in the play when Bevil outlines her tale of woe (I.ii.321-322); her father later alludes to these same details (IV.ii.360). Her repetition of them gives her father pause and accentuates the expected discovery (V.iii.375).⁴⁵ But the discovery, in terms of the play's craftsmanship, rests solely on the "Sport of Nature, and of Fortune"

(372), and on Steele's use of coincidence and contrivance.

Indiana's history illustrates how heavily Steele relies on accidents of fortune. Bevil, after rescuing her, carries her safely home to where her long-lost father resides. Bevil also happens to be the intended groom for her half-sister. Finally, when Sealand visits the woman whom he believes has tempted Bevil away from Lucinda, the scene depends for its emotional effect on contrivance. In her confusion, Indiana theatrically tears away "all Traces of [her] former Self, [her] little Ornaments, the Remains of [her] first State, the Hints of what [she] ought to have been" (376). A trinket solves the mystery. The device is, in Dennis' harsh words, another instance of Steele's "unaccountable," "improbable" and "whimsical" devices, designed to heighten suspense at the expense of probability ("Remarks," p. 435). Indiana's throwing away her bracelet Dennis labels "an awkward expedient, though the best [Steele] could find, to bring on the discovery" (p. 437).⁴⁶ But, as Kenny points out, it is Indiana's discovery of her long-lost father which Steele's contemporaries considered his best scene in the play (Introduction, Plays, p. 285), and this kind of scene becomes even more popular in the nineteenth century. What once would have aroused mirth now evokes "a generous pity of a painted woe" and releases "a joy too exquisite for laughter."

Now, all that is left to do is to reward Bevil (V.iii.379), and to end the play with the customary betrothal. Like the delicate lovers Lord Hardy and Lady Sharlot in The Funeral (1701), Steele's "conscious lovers," as Isabella affirms, "are made for one another, as much as Adam and Eve were, for there is no other, of their Kind, but themselves" (371).

If they are Adam and Eve, and here Isabella seemingly would deny the fall, Bevil and Indiana differ markedly from the young lovers in Etherege's The Man of Mode.⁴⁷ Unlike Emilia and Young Bellair, who are threatened by the corrupting way of the world, Bevil and Indiana clearly represent exemplary characters of virtue. In spite of everything, they withstand temptation. Theirs is a chaste love, one which Bevil is, in the fourth act, almost prepared to defend, but one which is, in fact, undefiled by the sins of the flesh. In The Man of Mode, the virtuous lovers may well fall, like the first Adam and Eve, into sin. But Indiana and Bevil, Steele suggests, are the progenitors, not of a fall, but of a virtue triumphant over the weakness of the flesh. In The Conscious Lovers, such virtue is also protected by Providence, and it will receive its just reward. Indeed, their "fair Example" testifies to the play's final moral aphorism: "Whate'er the generous Mind it self denies, / The secret Care of Providence supplies" (379).

As a striking example of the sentimental mode, the play must finally be judged, not only by its craftsmanship, but also by its influence. Bernbaum claims that Steele introduced mystery "into the plot of sentimental comedy" (Drama of Sensibility, p. 157) and, later, Kenny attributes "the pattern of the distressed virgin" to Steele (Introduction, Plays, p. 287). Certainly, mystery and distress do influence the drama to come, most notably nineteenth-century melodrama. In terms of influence, The Conscious Lovers comes to represent more than a dramatic sermon "only preached in acts."⁴⁸ It is an eloquent vindication of the sentimental mode. The play, in Kenny's words, provides "a formula for sentimental comedy that works" ("Richard

Steele," 22).⁴⁹ The goodness to be found in men's hearts extenuates the follies into which they may fall, and it ultimately reclaims them from error. Mankind is not shown "of what species he's an ass" (Prologue, The Provoked Wife, l. 4, p. 3). On the contrary, mankind is shown the unfaltering virtue of the benevolent heart and the rewards to be won by those who possess "Sense enough to make even Virtue fashionable" (The Conscious Lovers, II.ii.331).

Notwithstanding Steele's decided importance, his zeal to "moralize the stage" too often subordinated comedy to sentimental ends. As Loftis suggests: "It might indeed be argued that it was the intensity of his desire for improvement in the moral tone of comedy that betrayed him into the sacrifice of the traditional merits of comedy to a sober and unenlightening piety" (Steele, p. 240). In even less capable hands than Steele's, sentimental excesses could only flourish at the expense of vis comica.⁵⁰ And in Cumberland, both Steele's precepts and, ultimately, his weaknesses, find expression.

The West Indian (1771)--Cumberland's most famous play and in Williams' view, "the most discussed eighteenth century comedy of the sentimental school"--continues the sentimental pattern enunciated by Cibber and Steele.⁵¹ Belcour, a man possessed of a lively temper, is less an exemplary hero, like Bevil Junior, than he is a man to be reclaimed to sobriety. He does, after all, attempt to debauch Louisa.⁵² In this sense, Cumberland's character recalls Cibber's reformed rake. But neither is he a Dorimant or a Loveless. Like both Bevil Junior and Charles Surface, Belcour is at heart a generous soul. Cumberland, along with many of his contemporaries, attempts to balance Belcour's hot-

bloodedness with this essential goodness of heart. Possessed of "some irregularities," Belcour is also possessed of a "heart beaming with benevolence, an animated nature, fallible indeed, but not incorrigible" (V.viii.786).

Cumberland also peoples his play with "an older relation whose presence ensures that the hero will not ultimately suffer" and with "a heroine prepared to overlook his faults" (Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 495). Not only the mentor, Stockwell, but also the virtuous heroine, Louisa, help to bring about Belcour's reformation. Belcour tells Louisa: "By bearing your idea ever present in my thoughts, virtue shall keep an advocate within me" (V.v.782). He once suffered from "tottering resolutions" (III.i.764) and admits that he's "tainted with a thousand faults, sick of a thousand follies" (V.v.783). But Belcour possesses unquestionable benevolence, "and he therefore deserves to be happy" (Yearling, 494). All barriers to that deserved happiness, here represented by modifications to a former mode, will ultimately be removed. The malicious and unrepentant Lady Rusport resembles Congreve's Lady Touchwood, and the dissembling Fulmer, whose "pose of self-righteousness is maintained to the end," recalls the double-dealing servants of the past (Detisch, "Synthesis," 297). But neither their knavery nor Belcour's own hot-bloodedness outweighs the moral impact of characters like Stockwell and Louisa, whose more virtuous characters help to define Cumberland's fundamental principles of comedy.

Cumberland endorses a drama serious in intent and moralistic in tone.⁵³ In The West Indian, Captain Dudley's discourse on Sterne can

be taken to be a capsule statement of Cumberland's own view of comedy. In contrast to Vanbrugh's Lady Brute, who speaks of the "sluice of desire" which, once opened, allows a "torrent" of love to flow "into the heart" (The Provoked Wife, III.i.51), Captain Dudley refers to the "sluice of pity and benevolence" which, once opened, "refines, amends [the heart], softens it, beats down each selfish barrier from about it" (The West Indian, II.ii.755). Passionate and, in Lady Brute's case, illicit desire yields finally to sentimental sympathy. In both Captain Dudley's and Cumberland's terms, to open the "sluice of pity and benevolence" is to be "a moralist in the noblest sense" (755).

Cumberland's importance clearly lies in this moralistic view of comedy, but he is also important for his use of the witty and the sentimental modes. He adapts Congreve's view that affectation and folly, when they become "habits," can indeed be "proper" subjects for the stage and can indeed be corrected (Dedication, The Way of the World, p. 390). But Belcour's justification for his "tottering resolutions" the righteously indignant Stockwell dismisses in the following way: "Mere rhapsody; mere chidish rhapsody; the libertine's familiar plea - Nature made us, 'tis true, but we are the responsible creators of our own faults and follies" (The West Indian, III.i.765). While, in the past, ridicule corrected such folly, here man's inherently corrigible nature ultimately will correct it.

Cumberland's treatment of two favourite seventeenth-century subjects, the libertine and the town, illustrates how his use of the two modes furthers his didactic aim. Following Steele's example, Cumberland denounces, not only the town, but also the creed of the libertine,

which would dictate that he satisfy his appetite and, as a consequence of his pursuit of pleasure, sometimes defend his honour. The reactions of Cumberland's more sentimental characters to the "savage" custom of duelling exemplify Cumberland's essentially moral stance (IV.x.778).

"Modern courtesy" may hesitate to brand the duellist a murderer, and a false notion of honour may sanctify his "bloody deeds," but "Truth disavows it, nature revolts from it, religion denounces it."⁵⁴ Only a slur on a hero's good character can provoke a duel, and Cumberland insures that bloody action is never taken, for "a quarrel well made up is better than a victory hardly earned" (V.i.781).

Similarly, the town is seen to be a place of vice and folly, where virtue is sacrificed to "modern foppery" (False Impressions, III.i.29). Altogether a "cold, contriving, artificial country" (The West Indian, IV.x.778), its centre, London, holds no appeal to those who uphold the more countrified virtues of good-will and a benevolent heart.⁵⁵ To be a man of fashion in a Cumberland play is to be "prudent but cheerful, cautious yet good-humour'd, moral but not austere."⁵⁶

Blushenly in The Natural Son (1785) typifies this kind of hero.⁵⁷ A familial dependent, Blushenly harnesses emotions which, to him, break the rules of decency. Although Lady Paragon confides to him that he alone is "the man of all the world [she can] most approve and love," he is too bound by his sense of "cruel, cruel honour" to openly confess his love for her.⁵⁸ Endowed as he is with "all the nobler superiorities of nature" (II.i.233), Blushenly proves to be an austere honourable man, one who feels himself "unfit to take up any other character than that of the humblest of [her] servants" (234). His exalted sense of honour

may initially keep his virtuous ardour in check, but at last his virtue is duly rewarded.

In a Cumberland play, those who lack Blushenly's noble self-effacement and virtue are at least granted forgiveness by the moral paragons. The cast-off mistress, once compelled to listen to the witty barbs of her compeers, is a comic joke of the past. In The Natural Son, neither Frances Latimer, the fallen woman, nor Phoebe Latimer, the rash one, is made to suffer. Thinking herself exposed "to shame and derision," Phoebe instead finds herself the object of affection (V.i.276). Her errors, the result of her own passions and headstrong will, have been forgiven by the "truly generous" Lady Paragon and Blushenly. Even Lady Rusport in The West Indian, in spite of her avarice and cruelty, is freely forgiven. Although "the very presence of malice and greed in a sentimental play contradicted the fundamental assumption of benevolism concerning man's goodness and compassion," dramatists "realized that goodness could not very well triumph without something to triumph over" (Detisch, "Synthesis," 295). Charles can now benevolently urge: "Come, let us not oppress the fallen" (The West Indian, V.viii.785). But Lady Rusport is "bitter and venomous to the end" (Detisch, 596); she refuses to be forgiven, and her refusal allows Cumberland to underline his favourite theme of virtue oppressed and virtue rewarded. Dudley reminds Louisa, in words which echo Steele: "Name not fortune; 'tis the work of Providence, 'tis the justice of heaven that would not suffer innocence to be oppressed, nor your base aunt to prosper in her cruelty and cunning" (V.vi.783). Poetic justice has been satisfied.

The courtship of Lady Paragon in The Natural Son further

illustrates Cumberland's use of these modes. Ostensibly a product of the town, the character of Lady Paragon recalls at one and the same time the seventeenth-century witty heroine and the eighteenth-century sentimental one. On the one hand, she coquettishly toys with her lover in a manner reminiscent of an age which prized emotional detachment and witty mastery. Her "modern manners" demand flattery (I.i.221); she amuses herself with fashionable clothes; she tortures her admirers. Finally, she refuses to tolerate sober sentiments: "Nay, if you talk sentiment to me, Blushenly, you'll set me a-crying; hands off from that edged tool, if you love me. Sentiment in the country is clear another thing from sentiment in town" (223). Her attitude recalls Harriet's similar remonstrance to her "fanatic" lover's protestations. Even Lady Paragon's "rallying humours" (222) hearken back to a comedy which viewed courtship as an almost endless game of poses and ripostes.

But Lady Paragon's lover is hardly a Restoration wit. When she quips, "as sure as can be, if I pitied I should love him; and if I loved him, all the world would pity him," Blushenly responds in a suitably serious manner: "Envy him, you should have said: how any man beloved by Lady Paragon can be an object of pity, is a mystery past my finding out" (223). Blushenly's respect goes yet further. Once his parentage is known, he keeps his secret to himself. He proposes instead to sound "the affections" of his choice and thereby owe his happiness solely to "her free choice and bounty" (II.i.244).⁵⁹ Since Lady Paragon has already indicated her love for him (233), Blushenly's test of her disinterestedness seems strangely suspect.

Such a test, however, suits Cumberland's dramatic purpose: to

reveal Lady Paragon's sentimental nature. Spurious as Blushenly's tactics might seem, Cumberland thereby effects a change in her outward demeanour. As her name so obviously suggests, she is no coquette; hers is a superficial frivolity which masks for a time her exemplary virtues. Fearful that Blushenly sees only her external coquetry, she chides him for his apparent neglect of her: "You see [my heart] by false lights, you know it by unfair reports; else would you treat it as you do? - No, you mistake a playful spirit for a levity of principle; you think me a coquette, who likes and dislikes by caprice, and whose favours, like false coin received in payment, you are impatient to pass off to any dupe that will take them" (IV.i.266). Gone is the suggestion of the witty heroine, now branded as a "capricious" flirt. In her stead stands the sentimental heroine, described by Blushenly: "The playfulness of your spirit shews the purity of your nature; a heart like yours would make an angel's face superfluous" (266).

Only one small remnant of her coquettish charm survives such a compliment. Blushenly's declaration of devotion arouses a final, and temporary, burst of spirit: "Oh! then you are come down from your high-flown sentiment to a little plain sense at last: you have drawn off the angel, and the woman appears: I am very glad to find that I am not quite too good to be flattered" (268). Nevertheless, the change from a frivolous to a sober heroine is unconvincing, and dramatically unaccounted for.

In The Natural Son and his other plays, Cumberland subordinates the witty to the sentimental mode. In False Impressions (1797), Cumberland revives the Restoration theme of "things that shadow and conceal,"

but he modifies it. Algernon is at heart the virtuous hero, Earling the villain and Lady Cypress the morally principled, if gullible, matriarch. Algernon has been undeservedly branded a libertine by Earling, whose skillful manipulation of Lady Cypress leads her to fix her fortune and her good-will not only on her virtuous ward, but also on her undeserving lawyer. To right his wronged reputation, Algernon must resort to deceit and disguise.

His predicament and his disguise do provide some mirth, as evidenced in the scene where the servants interview him (II.i.19-20). But Algernon's success depends less on his deceit than it does on the friendly offices of others who, like Scud, abet his designs. Because Scud vouches for his assumed character, Algernon then gains the admittance to his aunt she has for so long denied him. Ultimately, then, his situation serves Cumberland's sentimental theme of virtue in distress. His hero must clandestinely court the woman he has rescued and she, in turn, must suffer the consequences of Lady Cypress' displeasure. Once a "prisoner in a gaudy cage" (IV.i.44), the "heroic Emily" joyfully accepts her disinheritance and later, sentimentally avows: "If I am ruined in the cause of truth, I'll not regret the sacrifice" (45). Her sacrifice is, as a matter of course, rewarded. So, too, is Algernon's. Once he is assured of Sir Oliver's support, Algernon discards his deceitful mask, and he justifies his disguise in the following way: "In chace 'tis lawful to hang out false colours, but when we are cleared, and going into action, we must shew what we are." Even though he, like Earling, has stooped to tricks, Emily's response to Algernon's justification is clearly meant to verify the

rightness of his action: "Right, and where Truth unfolds her standard, Victory must follow" (V.i.58). Once again, Cumberland shows that victory is indeed owing to the virtuous.

In this way Cumberland dramatizes the conventional theme of appearance and reality. False impressions, based solely on appearance, lead to false judgments (II.i.24). By taking on an assumed identity, Algernon demonstrates the pitfalls to be found in his aunt's reliance on externals. In Cumberland's sentimental world, manners do not make the man; the heart does. The Restoration theme of "things that shadow and conceal" now conforms to the demands of the sentimental mode.

In order to contrive his happy conclusion, Cumberland overtakes his plot. The character of Sir Oliver is an instance of Cumberland's reliance on coincidence. Not only is Sir Oliver the intimate friend of Lady Cypress; he is also the uncle of the very man Algernon has wounded in his fight to preserve Emily's honour. In spite of this kinship, Sir Oliver acknowledges his nephew's infamy. Such a forthright confession and Algernon's own fortuitous, and dramatically unexpected, possession of a signed admission both combine to displace Lady Cypress' former false impressions. Sir Oliver's timely arrival, at the very moment Algernon undertakes his design, has certainly proven to be a happy coincidence.

Therefore, Cumberland qualifies the sentimental pattern of past vice heightening present virtue. He frequently separates his characters into the good and the vicious, but those who do reform are, from the beginning, good at heart. The presence of villainous characters like Earling and Lady Rusport becomes more thematically important. They

allow him, when he finally introduces the "affecting discovery" (The West Indian, V.viii.785), to evoke "a Joy too exquisite for Laughter" (Preface, The Conscious Lovers, p. 299); Cumberland can then open up "every sluice of pity and benevolence" (The West Indian, II.ii.755). The villains need not reform in order to bring about a happy conclusion. Their defeat is enough. But to insure their defeat, Cumberland must rely too heavily on happy accidents, providential discoveries and inexplicable reformations. Cumberland, in repeating the faults of both Cibber and Steele, appears to be more concerned in proving his point than in dramatizing the reasons for it.

Yet, for all his flaws, Cumberland, too, holds a place in the development of the drama, and especially of the sentimental mode. Like Steele, he both adopts and adapts conventions and, in so doing, strengthens the sentimental mode at the same time as he influences the drama to come.⁶⁰ The character of Frances Latimer in The Natural Son illustrates Cumberland's importance. The woman who, like Frances, falls into sin plays a significant role in drama concerned with virtue and redemption. The fallen woman is, of course, a conventional figure who, in earlier drama, usually died for her sins. Traditionally, she symbolizes the price of sin. Later, many nineteenth-century dramatists combine her character with their social themes. Here, the fallen woman must conceal her past if she is to be accepted in the fashionable world. Once known, she is expelled from a society which will not tolerate any reminder of sin. In The Natural Son, Frances exemplifies Cumberland's moral themes. Sin must be either forgiven or repented, for only a life of virtue can be rewarded. In this sense, Cumberland

adopts the conventional view of the fallen woman. Nevertheless, Cumberland alters the conventional treatment of such a sinner. Frances has long since made amends (II.i.236-7; V.i.274). Now, she is viewed as a "saint upon earth" (II.i.236). Her sin and her repentance point to Cumberland's moral concern: the amendment and refinement of the human heart. Striving to be a "moralist in the noblest sense" (The West Indian, II.ii.755), Cumberland introduces characters with a lurid past only to instruct through their example.⁶¹

When Cumberland does introduce comic elements, he does so only to stress his sentimental theme. In The Natural Son, Cumberland provides merely a verbal announcement that all is reconciled. The festive dance, so common to Restoration comedy, is noticably absent. What seems to matter in his plays is that the "purity" of human nature has been dramatically revealed (IV.i.266), and this concern leads him into the type of excess criticized by playwrights like Goldsmith and Sheridan. As Goldsmith declares in his Retaliation (1774): "Here Cumberland lies having acted his parts, / The Terence of England, the mender of hearts; / A flattering painter, who made it his care / To draw men as they ought to be, not as they are." Such a treatment, Goldsmith claims, simply aggrandizes folly and does not mend it: "His fools have their follies so lost in a croud / Of virtues and feelings, that folly grows proud."⁶² Sheridan continues the attack in The Critic (1779) and, in many ways, Cumberland is more remembered as the Sir Fretful Plagiary of Sheridan's play than he is for his place in the dramatic tradition.⁶³ At least in his use of the two modes, not to mention his person, which stirred Sheridan's comic genius to poke fun at him, this "mender of hearts" does deserve

some attention. In his plays, he, too, demonstrates that reformations, as Sheridan says in The Critic, can indeed become extreme.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"The Reformation to Extremes Has Run": The Eighteenth-Century Critics of the Sentimental Mode

If, as Heartfree observed in The Provoked Wife, "all revolutions run into extremes," then the dramatic revolution introduced by the sentimental mode also fell into an extreme (V.iv.105). The drama must now reflect the struggle of the virtuous to overcome distress and achieve deserved happiness, and comedy itself sought to moralize the stage and to make the playwright a "Preacher of the Age." This zeal to awaken "the alluring powers of virtue to deter vice" (Preston, "Disenchanted the Man of Feeling," Quick Springs of Sense, p. 227), and to expatiate on the admirable side of human nature, did indeed tend to verify Vanbrugh's complaint in Aesop: "The stage turns Pulpit; and the World's so fickle, / The Play-house in a whim, turns Conventicle."¹

The image of the pulpit illustrates the kind of revolution the sentimental mode intended to initiate. It is to be a reformation; the world of the stage is to reform the stage of the world. But Vanbrugh's couplet also points to its underlying flaw. This reformation is based on the "whim" of the playhouse, and the stage of the world is itself "fickle." Moral preachments may uplift the spirit, but man's fundamental nature cannot, Vanbrugh suggests, be reformed. The human creature will remain both capricious and deceitful.

So, the critics of the sentimental mode once again centred their argument on the nature of man but, in criticizing the sentimental view, they did not of necessity fall back on the witty mode. To generalize, Restoration comedy dwelt on man's knavish side, while sentimental comedy was eager to "draw men as they ought to be not as they are" (Goldsmith, Retaliation, l. 64, p. 355). The eighteenth-century critics sought to balance virtue and folly and, to do so, they adapted both the witty and the sentimental modes to their own ends. They do not, as Andrew Schiller would have it, engage in "an act of literary nostalgia" and attempt to resurrect the comedy of the past.² Their plays dramatize, not so much the struggle between the social arts and the individual affections, but the comic conflict between man's faults and virtues. Every man may have his fault, as the title of Mrs. Inchbald's play suggests, but such a risible creature may also possess a finer sense of virtue.

Clearly, then, these critics of the sentimental mode do not disparage virtue itself, or even its display on the stage. Rather, as Hume suggests in his discussion of Sheridan and Goldsmith, these playwrights react against "excessive emphasis on sensibility" ("Supposed Revolution," p. 271). What they attack is a false, or debased, sentimentality (Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 500). For, in this kind of drama, Goldsmith complains in his Retaliation, "fools have their follies so lost in a croud / Of virtues and feelings, that folly grows proud" (ll. 69-70). The folly exists, regardless, but its correction is ignored. Later critics, like Hazlitt, declare that these sentimental dramatists reduce comedy to "homilies in dialogue" ("Comic Writers," Lectures, p. 217). Solemn, and sententious, characters deliver equally solemn preachments. What to Millamant

in Congreve's The Way of the World provokes mirth becomes to these dramatists the play's moral centre. Millamant rejects Mirabell's solemn speeches, and compares his love-making to the demeanour adopted by a Biblical figure: "Sententious Mirabell! Prithee don't look with that violent and inflexible Face, like Solomon at the dividing of the Child in an old Tapestry-hanging" (II.i.422).

In sentimental comedy, the figure of the wise Solomon frequently does assume the role of sage and moralist but, unlike Mirabell, he does so only to proselytize. In the critics' view, his sentimental speech could well be a verbal, and not a heartfelt, profession of feeling.³ Benevolence itself could be as easily feigned as its utterance, and the seemingly wise Solomon could well be a pretentious copy of a lifeless "tapestry-hanging." The sentimental dramatist, however, is determined to show men as they ought to be, so this kind of hypocrisy he not only refuses to dramatize, but also to acknowledge.

In the critics' view, this failure, coupled with the plays' solemnity, frequently led to shoddy playwrighting and a bastardized form of drama.⁴ The inclusion of vice, for example, refuted the "fundamental assumption of benevolism concerning man's goodness and compassion" (Detisch, "Synthesis," 295). In order to inculcate their moral and to dramatize the triumph of virtue, dramatists felt compelled to show a "violent conflict" between the paragons and the villain. He may be an "anomaly in the sentimental world," but he is a necessary one (Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, p. 147), and the comedies came to rely on either dramatically unaccountable reformations or mechanical reproductions of vice (Detisch, 295). Often, in the case of the reclamation of the

rake, theatrical impact replaced dramatic development. The sudden fifth-act conversion, hastily eradicating the vices of the past, came to verify Snap's quip in Love's Last Shift, where he repents simply because he no longer has any more opportunity to be wicked.⁵

Later eighteenth-century comedy emphasizes even more strongly the inevitable triumph of virtue.⁶ The contrast is now between vice and virtue, not between folly and social mastery. The witty hero and heroine manipulate others at the same time as they mock them. The sentimental hero and heroine are the play's moral standards and, as such, they judge and correct the moral deficiencies of others. In this world of clearly differentiated right and wrong, social foibles are not as important as moral failings. Those who do morally err arouse, not laughter, but pity.

Comedy does indeed become, as MacMillan notes, "increasingly serious,"⁷ for the comedy strives to evoke, in Addison's words, "a pleasing Anguish in the Mind."⁸ To the eighteenth-century critics of the sentimental mode, comedy thereby blurs the conventional distinction between comedy and tragedy.⁹ Murphy explains his view of the matter in The Gray's Inn Journal, 90, 6 July 1754: "Tragedy aims more particularly at the passions: the chief merit of comedy consists in its effect on the merry affections of the human mind" (p. 189). Laughter, Murphy says, is the "first principle of comedy" (Gray's Inn Journal, 91, 13 July 1754, p. 203).¹⁰ Similarly, Goldsmith argues in his "Essay on the Theatre" (1773) that comedy should be "that natural portrait of Human Folly and Frailty" which excites "our laughter by ridiculously exhibiting the Follies of the Lower Part of Mankind."¹¹ Sentimental comedy neither

presents a "laughing picture" of frailties and follies (p. 183), nor does it display the tragic downfall of high-minded and high-ranking nobility. Rather, in a sentimental comedy, what matters most is the demonstration of virtue triumphant over vice and the vicissitudes of life. Laughter, in the sentimental view, would weaken the emotional and moral impact of virtue triumphant, and pity and fear would counteract the inevitability of that triumph.

So, rather than showing either the lower, laughable side or the tragically noble one, the sentimental mode chooses to exhibit, as Goldsmith correctly notes, the "Distresses, rather than the Faults of Mankind." Because of this emphasis, "the Spectator is taught not only to pardon, but to applaud [the sentimental characters], in consideration of the goodness of their hearts; so that Folly, instead of being ridiculed, is commended" ("Essay," p. 188).¹² Provided these characters are at all times governed by virtue and honour, the drama in which they appear is considered to be a "legitimate" form (Murphy, Gray's Inn Journal, 91, p. 196).

Yet, while it owes a great deal to tragi-comedy's "contrived happy ending" and the alternation of comic and pathetic scenes (Sullivan, Colley Cibber, p. xl), sentimental comedy attempts to show "the virtues of Private Life" (Goldsmith, "Essay," p. 188).¹³ The sentimental hero, in this sense, lacks the stature of the heroic figure, and he is meant to dramatize the possibility of every one's achieving such virtue (Sullivan, p. xlii). As the study of Cibber, Steele and Cumberland has shown, these heroes face temptation, and sometimes fall into vice, but their benevolent side always triumphs. Sullivan, in her study of

Cibber, calls this their "humanity," rather than their "heroism," for the assumption of the drama is that their behaviour, like their language, can effect a change in others (p. xlii).

The eighteenth-century critics, while they did not deny the importance of virtue, nonetheless rejected this notion that its display on stage could in fact permanently change the human animal. On the contrary, they argued that such a display flattered rather than mended. Gay, in his Preface to The What D'Ye Call It: A Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce, declared that the moral of such drama "seems entirely calculated to flatter the Audience in their vanity and self-conceitedness."¹⁴ Goldsmith also complained in his Essay that sentimental comedy flattered "every man in his favourite foible" ("Essay," p. 188). Or, as one recent critic put it, sentimental drama "tended to exalt human weaknesses and foibles into the virtues of benevolence and friendship" (Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 498).

Therefore, to the eighteenth-century critics, the sentimental playwright no longer seeks to correct human nature, but rather to commend it,¹⁵ and he transforms the comic muse into an "arrant prude" who offers only the "purest morals."¹⁶ Playwrights like Colman, Garrick, Murphy, Goldsmith and Sheridan, critical of sentimental comedy's moral preoccupations, try to temper their display of virtue with a portrayal of folly.¹⁷ Instead of offering protracted scenes of virtuous distress, these dramatists try to present comedies which, at the same time as they revivify vis comica, also curb sentimental excess.

Goldsmith in The Good Natur'd Man (1768) dramatizes one of Fielding's comic maxims: "Excess, says Horace, even in the Pursuit of

Virtue, will lead a wise and good Man into Folly and Vice."¹⁸ Excessive benevolence, Goldsmith suggests, vitiates sentimental virtues which are not in themselves faulty (Friedman, "Aspects of Sentimentalism," Augustan Milieu, p. 250). So it is with Honeywood. In his zeal to be good-natured, he merely becomes a foolish, and rather bumbling, figure. A "mix'd character," Honeywood possesses faults which, although "so nearly allied to excellence," are also akin to vices.¹⁹ The vice must be "eradicated" without destroying the fundamental virtue.²⁰

Honeywood's "fault" is his indiscriminate good nature. He "loves all the world," but "he's too much every man's man" (I.19). As a result, his uncle holds him morally culpable (19). Sir William bemoans a virtuous principle which, "tho' inclin'd to the right" (V.80), nonetheless pursues a misdirected course. Charity slips into "injustice," benevolence into "weakness" and friendship into "credulity" (80).²¹ So, in the folly of Honeywood, Goldsmith overturns the notion that "universal benevolence is the first law of nature" (IV.68).²² Not only does Croaker's violent reply to this sentiment undercut Honeywood's benevolent maxim, but Sir Williams' plot to create a "fictitious distress" also critically tests the merit of such maxims (I.20). In the end, he does expose "those splendid errors" (V.80). Goldsmith here inverts the early pattern of reforming a libertine hero. He dramatizes instead the comic correction of an excessively good-natured man, one whose folly is a "universal benevolence" and whose extravagance is a generous dissipation (I.20). The "strange good natur'd, foolish, open hearted" Honeywood must be "reclaimed" to a just sense of proportion (20).²³

Notwithstanding the laudability of Honeywood's "tenderness, his humanity, his universal friendship," qualities which in the opinion of Miss Richland "may atone for many faults" (III.51), Goldsmith clearly establishes a different comic norm. Unlike Honeywood, Sir William "is never deceived by appearances."²⁴ As this comic norm, Sir William criticizes Honeywood's excess and, at the same time, offers a comic balance between sense and feeling. His "practical sense," in Gallaway's view, "offers the clearest illustration of Goldsmith's desire to check virtue by prudence" ("Sentimentalism of Goldsmith," 1179). Sir William enunciates Goldsmith's comic theme: "They, who pretend most to this universal benevolence, are either deceivers, or dupes" (III.51). Honeywood does indeed prove to be both sentimental fool and comic knave, a man whose excess steeps him in "folly and vice."²⁵ In his comic zeal to be everyone's good-natured benefactor, Honeywood brings financial ruin upon himself. This indiscriminate benevolence ends, finally, in his arrest, and the famous "bailiff scene" dramatizes the folly, and the bumbling intentions of this "good-natured man."

Like scenes in Dryden's Marriage-a-la-Mode (II.i.41) and Steele's The Conscious Lovers (III.i.349-50), Honeywood in this scene interrupts the discourse of the bailiffs in order to safeguard his social reputation and preserve the appearance of gentility (The Good-Natur'd Man, III.48-50).²⁶ In Steele and Dryden, the hero's ruse deceives others and abets his own designs. Honeywood deceives nobody. He easily feigns tenderness of heart (46), a tenderness comically matched by a willingness to pay the bailiffs for their services, and he wheedles their compliance to his contrivance. He deceives himself into

believing that self-effacement is refinement of feeling and that the bailiffs' conversation could be interpreted as crude gentility, but he fails to blind Miss Richland. Later, she notes: "Well, tho' his perplexities are far from giving me pleasure; yet, I own there's something very ridiculous in them, and a just punishment for his dissimulation" (50). Unlike the artifice of his predecessors, Honeywood's contrivance merely accentuates his folly, and makes him ridiculous to others.

If his dissembling accentuates his blindness and folly, then his readiness to believe Lofty his benefactor leads to self-delusion. A fool whose "promises are much better known to people of fashion, than his person" (III.52), Lofty deceives Honeywood into believing that his release is owing to Lofty's good offices. Honeywood must then act upon his precept of "universal benevolence," and choose between duty and obligation to a friend (IV.59). The "friend" has in fact done nothing to warrant Honeywood's highly comic debate with himself, and Honeywood once again appears foolish. Nor does he win Miss Richland's favour. She upbraids his folly severely. He "wrongs" both her "sentiments" and his own (66), she tells him, and she must finally "disclaim his friendship, who ceases to be a friend to himself" (66). Only when Lofty is exposed as a sham does Honeywood learn to be less indiscriminate in bestowing his benevolence (V.77-79).

Honeywood's folly also leads him into more serious altercations with individuals more worthy of his friendship. Leontine's request for assistance meets with the expected reaction, but Honeywood's financial aid backfires. His eagerness to help Croaker jeopardizes the success

of Leontine's plot, for his eagerness to please everybody hampers his usefulness and makes him appear hypocritical. Leontine compares Honeywood's friendship to a "prostitute's favours," as "common" as they are "fallacious" (73); Honeywood's kindnesses cheapen true benevolence. Rather than "making the deserving happy" (I.19), as his uncle too well recognizes, Honeywood merely courts approbation. He must acknowledge his folly and correct a virtue made contemptible by its indiscriminate practice.

So, Honeywood, the man of sentiment, undergoes a reformation. This modification to the sentimental pattern is an important one. Goldsmith does not, in fact, revolt against sentimentalism itself. Rather, as Hume suggests, he in part reflects it ("Supposed Revolution," p. 260). Honeywood's faults, like those of so many sentimental characters, are pardoned, but his are hardly the failings of a libertine. Honeywood's benevolence is comic in its excess. This excess, and not benevolence itself, is exactly what must be corrected, for the virtue is praiseworthy, its practice laughable. In this regard, Yearling makes a significant point. Goldsmith, she argues, distinguishes between true charity, which he endorses, and weakness and credulity, which he ridicules ("Good-Natured Heroes," 498).

Honeywood's virtue is finally acknowledged to be, in its excess, almost a vice, and this acknowledgement demonstrates his reclamation to sense: "How have I sunk by too great an assiduity to please!" (V.75). His resolution to repent (76), unlike the rake's reformation, does not suddenly change him. The commendable virtues still remain, now directed toward a nobler end: "Henceforth, therefore, it shall be

my study to reserve my pity for real distress; my friendship for true merit" (81). Pity and benevolence, the play shows, often lead to "folly and vice"; benevolence must be properly channeled if it is in fact to be meritorious.

In part, Kelly's False Delicacy (1768) also ridicules a refined sensibility which, like Honeywood's, would deny the self in favour of a misguided concern for the welfare of others.²⁷ Like Goldsmith, Kelly exposes the ridiculous aspect of an excess commendable in intent but risible in outcome. To avoid one error, the benevolent characters only "fall into the opposite extreme" (The Way to Keep Him, II.i.25). Kelly laughs at the excesses into which such instances of the sentimental mode fall, and exposes the human absurdities which bring about distress (Schorer, "Hugh Kelly," 392).

However, Kelly's play is a comedy designed, to use Cumberland's words, "as an attempt upon [the] heart".²⁸ Garrick's Prologue to the play teases the "strange awkward bard" (False Delicacy, l. 14, p. 719) for his didactic intent, but Garrick nonetheless respects Kelly's reforming purpose: "Bards of a former age / Held up abandoned pictures on the stage, / Spread out their wit, with fascinating art, / And caught the fancy, to corrupt the heart" (ll.20-23). To the sentimentalists, "You cannot sport with virtue, even in plays" (l.25), and so, "On virtue's side his pen the poet draws" (l.26). Unlike Goldsmith, then, who ridicules excessive benevolence and seeks to correct it, what Kelly attempts to do in False Delicacy is to ridicule a virtue at the same time as he commends it (Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, p. 226), and the play is, as a result, an admixture of mirth and sentiment.²⁹

In the characters of Cecil and Mrs. Harley, Kelly presents comic figures of common sense and virtue. Measured against them is the gallery of "delicate" lovers "who are so sentimental, and so dull, so wise and so drowsy" that they almost sacrifice sense and happiness to their sensibility (I.i.720).³⁰ Like other eighteenth-century dramatists, Kelly attempts to build his comedy on "a contrast which is often extremely diverting" (722), the contrast between a "false delicacy," sentimental to the extreme, and a true good sense.

The "false delicacy" of the lovers creates comic dilemmas. Sidney, for one, is "reduced to the painful alternative, either of giving up [his] own hopes, or of opposing the happiness of such a friend" (720). Candour is sacrificed to "delicacy," and Lady Betty must admit that candour is an "essential virtue" (II.ii.728), one which is more commendable than self-effacement.³¹ So, Mrs. Harley's scorn of "delicate absurdities" points to Kelly's own comic treatment (IV.i.735). As she says: "Well, thank heaven, my sentiments are not sufficiently refined to make me unhappy" (II.i.725). "Delicacy" leads to a self-inflicted agony of mind and a "ridiculous bustle" (V.i.740). Only trickery and deception can overcome such a virtuous scrupulosity.

But Kelly does not just expose excessive sensibility. The play claims to dramatize "the triumph of good sense" (V.ii.744), the comic norm endorsed by many of the critics of the sentimental mode.³² Cecil's good sense contrasts with the absurd sentimental posturings of others (IV.ii.739; V.i.740). His balanced view of morality also helps to correct the more libertine ways of Sir Harry, a man whose "understanding is a fashionable one" (I.i.721). He almost convinces Miss

Rivers to abandon filial obedience but, when he seems about to force her into compliance, Cecil's virtue recalls Sir Harry to sense (IV.ii.739).

Although Cecil is contrasted to the "delicate lovers," he, too, is a creature of sentiment. Kelly, unlike Goldsmith, merely hints that, in opposition to this "false delicacy," there is indeed a "true delicacy" which will virtuously and sensibly govern life. In this sense, his play is an admixture, and not a balance, of wit and sentiment. Notwithstanding his comic portrayal of sentimental excess, balanced in False Delicacy by a picture of the chastened rake, Kelly ultimately agrees with Mrs. Harley's comment. One can't help "liking" delicacy, even though it is foolish (II.i.725). Kelly gently mocks it, at the same time as he commends it.³³ Its charm for him derives from his confidence in the precept Colonel Rivers preaches at the end of the play. "The stage should be," in Winworth's words, "a school of morality" and, as Colonel Rivers then makes clear, "the principal moral to be drawn from the transactions of [Kelly's play] is, that those who generously labor for the happiness of others, will, sooner or later, arrive at happiness themselves" (V.ii.744). The comic treatment of folly yields to the inculcation of the very moral which The Good-Natur'd Man mocks.

Goldsmith's masterpiece, She Stoops to Conquer (1773), continues to mock sentimental excess. It is the various contrasting courtships which illustrate Goldsmith's use of the witty and the sentimental modes, and which enable him to balance them.³⁴ Miss Neville has been "obliged to stoop to dissimulation to avoid oppression," but Kate must "stoop" to trickery to "conquer" Marlow's "very singular character."³⁵ A hero with "two faces" (Appleton, "Double Gallant," English Writers, p. 145), he

courts her in two contrasting postures: "as the mild, modest, sentimental man of gravity, and the bold forward agreeable Rattle of the ladies club" (V.212). In his courtship of the "barmaid," he, like Hastings, recalls former heroes (III.171-174). But in his courtship of Miss Hardcastle, he exhibits the delicacy of the refined hero dramatized by Kelly (II.146-8). Marlow's comic duality, like Kate's contrasting modes of attire (I.111), dramatizes Goldsmith's comic purpose. Each guise in which the lovers appear must be brought into a comic balance. Marlow's sensibility and his boldness, Kate's simplicity and her refinement, all must finally be reconciled. At last, Marlow can then be a genteel lover, and Kate can be a virtuous lady of fashion.

Their amorous encounters illustrate this fundamental purpose. Their first interview threatens to be "so formal, and so like a thing of business," that Kate dreads she will "find no room for friendship or esteem" (I.111). Pretending to like "grave conversations" (II.146), she resolves to meet the "modest gentleman with a demure face, and quite in his own manner" (143). Kate so capably mimics the deportment of the sober heroine that Marlow later complains that she is indeed "too grave and sentimental" (III.169). Goldsmith, as James Lynch points out, thereby ridicules "prudish sensibility," in the character of Marlow, at the same time he mocks "cultivated sentimentality," in the figure of Kate (Box, Pit, and Gallery, p. 190).

Marlow's "unaccountable bashfulness" and Kate's cultivated appearance of delicacy yield a comic colloquy which effectively undercuts the seriousness of "such a sober sentimental interview" (II.148). Goldsmith deflates their sentimental pretensions, and makes both them and

their formal encounter "confoundedly ridiculous" (143). Kate expresses surprise that "a man of sentiment could ever admire those light airy pleasures, where nothing reaches the heart" (146), and Marlow stammers: "It's - a disease - of the mind, madam" (146). Like the scene in The Good-Natur'd Man, where Honeywood interrupts the chatter of the bailiffs (III.48-50), Kate here pretends to understand Marlow's partial observations. As he admits, here is a comprehension which is more than his own (She Stoops to Conquer, II.147). In this way, Goldsmith demonstrates the risibility of a sobriety which can, like a "disease," infect the understanding. Marlow "has natural good sense" (129) and yet, until Kate "stoops to conquer," his sentimental delicacy overshadows it.

Kate recognizes that "it seems all natural to him" (III.158). Earlier, Marlow himself asserts that "a modest man can [never] counterfeit impudence" (II.129). As the reputedly modest man, he cannot feign the bold assurance he exhibits when he accosts the simple "barmaid." Both his delicacy and his boldness are "natural" to him; they are not artificial "things that shadow and conceal" his true nature (Man of Mode, III.i.50). Rather, his levity and his "strange reserve" of temper (She Stoops to Conquer, II.142) alternate with each other, and help to create the comic confusion. Kate must herself "find the art of reconciling contradictions" (III.161) if his demeanour is to reflect the balance of nature's own "double face" ("Essay," p. 186).

Her "stooping" serves as a comic device to correct Marlow's singularity of character and to bring into balance delicacy of temper and lively assurance. Her sentimental guise matches his reserve, and her pose as the "barmaid" accommodates his more rakish side. Although

he would be "the last man in the world that would attempt to corrupt" a truly virtuous woman (IV.178), he nonetheless discovers in the "tempting, brisk, lovely, little thing" (177) a roguery which accords with his less modest side. His "obstropolous manner" also suits Kate's lively temper (III.172); she scorns "a reserved lover" (I.112), and vows: "He must have more striking features to catch me, I promise you" (113). His impudent courtship of the "barmaid" grants her the striking features she craves at the same time as her ruse allows her to gain the friendship and esteem so lacking in their more sentimental encounter (111).

Kate's assumed lowliness of station also comes to serve another comic purpose. Her guise reflects the "lowness" associated with Tony Lumpkin and his cronies; their ale-house songs and their activities recall the notorious bailiff scene in The Good-Natur'd Man. Goldsmith asserts in his Preface to The Good-Natur'd Man that comedy must reflect "nature and humour, in whatever walks of life they [are] most conspicuous" (p. 13). The "genteel playwrights," in denying what is "low," have in Goldsmith's view "almost got the victory over humour amongst us."³⁶

Goldsmith in She Stoops to Conquer ridicules these "genteel" sentimentalists who scorn to depict "any thing that's low" (I.117). One fellow remarks: "The genteel thing is the genteel thing at any time" (117). Though "obligated to dance a bear, a man may be a gentleman for all that" (117) if only because the "bear ever dances but to the very genteelest of tunes" (118). Goldsmith insists on showing the absurdities and follies of the vulgar in order to make a comic point.

Tony represents the "lowness" deplored by the "genteel" playwrights.

His antics contrast sharply to the more genteel display of distress (IV.195).³⁷ He also offers a comic comment, first on the feigned distress of Mrs. Hardcastle (III.164) and then on the distress prompted by her avarice (167). Finally, his "low" behaviour comes to represent a comic kind of "morality" (V.208). It is Tony who brings about the punishment of avarice and the reward of merit. His tricks initiate the "mistakes of the night" (I.120-124), and it is his good nature (IV.195) which ultimately rectifies the plight of the lovers and wins him his own liberty (V.215).

Kate's pose as the barmaid links her to the "lowness" and the "morality" of her bumpkin brother. While he craves the jollity of the alehouse and the companionship of "a low, paltry set of fellows" (I.109), Kate merely acts a part (III.169). Since the modest woman "freezes" and "petrifies" Marlow (II.129), and makes him suffer from "all the terrors of a formal courtship" (130), Kate must "stoop" if she is to "conquer." Kate's mastery of the "true bar cant" convinces him that she is like all other barmaids (III.169), but she insists that never can she be robbed of her honour. The "barmaid" is at once lively and virtuous, a comic balance of mirth and sentiment.

Once he realizes that he has mistaken Hardcastle's "antique, but creditable" old mansion for an inn (II.128), Marlow also comes to perceive that the deportment of the lowly barmaid does not conform to the vulgar behaviour of her colleagues. Her conversation represents to him "the first mark of tenderness" he has ever received from a "modest woman" (IV.185). He finds himself, in spite of his regard for his father and his desire for social respectability (186), enthralled by

her innocence and virtue (V.210). The virtue which Hastings has earlier detected assures Marlow that her merit cancels the lowliness of her station (IV.178). Similarly, his demonstration of respect, directed as it is toward a barmaid, and later his willingness to "atone for the levity of [his] past conduct" (V.211), arouse in her a reciprocal respect for his merit (IV.186).

Therefore, her "contrivances" not only refute the notion that what is "low" cannot be "genteel" (V.216), but also they "cure" Marlow's sentimental gravity. His "unaccountable bashfulness" leads him into ridiculous mistakes, abetted by Kate's "stooping to conquer." His ensuing embarrassment likewise helps to curb an impudence which is both ill-governed and comic. This impudence is at last corrected by a modesty which "seldom resides in a breast that is not enriched with nobler virtues" (I.113). Pruned of excess, his sobriety and lively assurance now achieve a comic balance, and in that balance lies Goldsmith's comic aim. As Hume notes: "Given a sympathetic (if realistic) view of human nature, an author will produce neither savage satire nor pious examples of virtue" ("Supposed Revolution," p. 244). In this way, Goldsmith tries to correct the excesses of this "spurious breed" of drama which feeds on "sentimentals" (Prologue, ll. 13-14, p. 102).

Sheridan, too, attempts to counteract the excesses of the sentimental mode. Like Goldsmith and Addison, Sheridan primarily attacks what he calls its "dire encroachments" into the tragic and the comic realms, exploiting both and conforming entirely to neither (Prologue, The Rivals, l. 5, p. 75). To Sheridan, this "Goddess of the woeful countenance - / The sentimental Muse" (ll. 26-7, p. 74), dampens comedy

at the same time as she reduces the sublimity of tragedy. The Critic (1779) aims to be "critical" of a drama which purports to be both comically and tragically moral (Prologue, p. 494).³⁸

Together with the absurdity of the new plays which attract his notice, the theatrical pretensions of Dangle comically underline Sheridan's attack. One play, for example, represents "a genteel comedy" written in the style of the "true sentimental" (I.i.501), and Dangle mistakenly believes it to be a tragedy. Furthermore, a "dext'rous plagiarist may do any thing," and may even include things tragic in his comedy (504). Puff's tragedy, "The Spanish Armada," boasts a discovery scene which, as Dangle and Sneer observe, could either be a tragedy or a comedy (III.i.541).³⁹

Such are not the only flaws of the "sentimental muse." In "proper hands," Sneer avers, the theatre "might certainly be made the school of morality" (I.i.501), a deliberate echo of Kelly's avowal in False Delicacy, where Winworth states that "the stage should be a school of morality" (V.ii.744). Sheridan here turns it into ridicule. Sheridan also echoes the assertion that the stage of the theatre and the stage of the world exert a mutual influence on each other. A play like "The Reformed Housebreaker" promises to "make the Stage a court of ease to the Old Bailey" (The Critic, I.i.502). Both witty and moral, the play ridicules the crime of housebreaking in order to insure that "bolts and bars will be entirely useless by the end of the season" (502). The comic muse should not concern herself with folly, but with "the greater vices and blacker crimes of humanity - gibbeting capital offences in five acts, and pillorying petty larcenies in two" (502). Sheridan

rejects the proselytizing function of the stage, however, when he complains in his Prologue to The Rivals that comedy hardly seems formed to preach (l. 18, p. 74).

The character of Puff in The Critic deflates the didactic pretensions of the sentimental muse. A "Practitioner in Panegyric" (I.ii.511), this singular character creates his own sentimental calamities (512), and his "talents for fiction and embellishment" succeed so well that he easily dupes the benevolent heart (514). Sneer justly remarks that true charity could only be served if Puff's confession were to be published (514).

To Sheridan, it is a "bungling reformation" (I.i.501) indeed which can encourage Puff's "cant of imposition" to deceive others (I.ii.514). Comedy itself, says Sheridan, now relies on rhetorical "trope, figure, and metaphor, as plenty as noun-substantives" (II.ii.525). The stage may no longer indulge in "a style too flippant for a well-bred Muse" (Prologue, l. 16, p. 494), but neither does it mirror the faults and virtues of "flesh and blood" (Prologue, The Rivals, l. 29, p. 74). Puff affirms that plays "ought to be 'the abstract and brief Chronicles of the times'" (The Critic, II.i.519) but, if the drama is indeed "'the Mirror of Nature'" (I.i.499), then the "prudery" of the time may soon yield yet another of those "things that shadow and conceal." As Sneer declares: "our prudery in this respect is just on a par with the artificial bashfulness of a courtesan, who encreases the blush upon her cheek in an exact proportion to the diminution of her modesty" (501). Here, Sheridan comically exposes sentimental comedy's "bungling" efforts to reform the stage, and he criticizes the cant which goes with it.

Sheridan does criticize artful puffing, which becomes an "'echo to the sense'" (The Rivals, II.i.95), but he also prizes "true charity." Like Honeywood's indiscriminate good nature, the virtue can become a vice, so critics like Sheridan and Goldsmith would correct the excess without vitiating the virtue (The Good-Natur'd Man, I.20). They, like the other critics of the sentimental mode, picture the "sense and folly" to which such a foolish creature is prone (Prologue, The Way to Keep Him, v). Unlike the sentimental playwrights they criticize, these eighteenth-century dramatists do not subordinate the comic element. Nor do they dismiss the moral one. Rather, they strive to show that mankind is both virtuous and foolish.⁴⁰

Colman's The Jealous Wife (1761) depicts both the excesses and the sensibility of a "delicate mind."⁴¹ Mrs. Oakly's temper is both "violent" and "delicate" (I.i.9), and this mixture of a delicate constitution and a fiery temper modifies the comic modes of the past. On the one hand, her "combustible" temper recalls the vipers of the past (12). Like Congreve's Lady Touchwood in The Double-Dealer, Mrs. Oakly in The Jealous Wife "is all impetuosity and fire - A very magazine of touchwood and gunpowder" (14). On the other hand, Mrs. Oakly is not malicious, nor is she cunning. She is a "mix'd character," one whose faults are as pronounced as her virtues. Her jealousy springs from her attachment to her long-suffering husband (13) and, unlike the vipers of the past, she is still beloved and ever the object of pity and concern (V.iii. 90-93). Like Lady Gentle in Cibber's The Lady's Last Stake (1708), Mrs. Oakly must recognize her folly and study to deserve the kindness which helps her to correct it (93). Her final recognition of folly helps her

to mend it (93). But the "change" smacks of the sentimental reformation dramatized by playwrights like Cibber. Mrs. Oakly rhapsodizes: "I have not merited this kindness, but it shall hereafter be my study to deserve it" (93).

Harriet's more sentimental plight, however, exemplifies the distress to which a truly "delicate mind" often is reduced. Not only is she the victim of her parent's combustible passions, but also she is the victim of her own refined sensibility. So refined is her "delicate mind" that Lady Freelove, a "woman of the world" (I.i.17), complains: "I swear, child, you are a downright prude. Your way of talking gives me the spleen; so full of affection, and duty, and virtue, 'tis just like a funeral sermon" (II.iii.32). Lady Freelove herself proves to be no fit comic judge. Her conniving augments Harriet's distress (33-37). Lady Freelove finally suffers comic defeat. When her plot fails, her fashionable pride reduces her to ridicule. While she scorns what she calls Harriet's "antedeluvian notions" (33), Major Oakly for his part dismisses Lady Freelove as "easy, impudent, and familiar" (V.iii.85). It is a judgment also meted out to her fashionable counterpart, Lord Trinket (87), and Harriet herself ridicules his absurd pretensions.

Harriet is offended by Lord Trinket's foppery, which is no longer regarded as amusing. Lord Trinket "is just polite enough to be able to be very unmannerly, with a great deal of good breeding; is just handsome enough to make him most excessively vain of his person; and has just reflection enough to finish him for a coxcomb" (II.iii.33). His "qualifications," common to all "men of quality" (33), Harriet condemns.⁴² Although her refined, if seemingly "funereal," mannerisms

receive a mild rebuke, her critics are soundly ridiculed, and by Harriet herself. She proves to be less "a girl of spirit" than a virtuous heroine endowed with a "delicate mind" (I.i.16), and her refinement chastizes worldliness at the same time as it reforms the excesses of the hero (V.iii.84).

In The Jealous Wife, Colman attempts to balance Mrs. Oakly's more comic "delicacy" with Harriet's more sentimental plight. This contrast enables him to suggest a comic balance of mirth and sentiment.⁴³ In the character of Major Oakly Colman presents this figure of sense who, as the comic "physician," "cures" the comic "disorders" of those around him (93). His keen sense of moderation, exemplified by his penchant to laugh at the absurdities of others (I.i.13, 20), matches his sense of justice and honesty (V.iii.83-85). It is this balance of "mirth" and "morals" which Murphy, another critic of the sentimental mode, also seeks to achieve.⁴⁴ Murphy asserts: "In producing portraits of mankind, it is not enough to display foibles and oddities; a fine vein of ridicule must run through the whole, to urge the mind to frequent emotions of laughter" (Gray's Inn Journal, 90, 6 July 1754, p. 193).

In The Way to Keep Him (1760) Murphy exposes the folly of those who, in trying to avoid one error, merely "fall into the opposite extreme" (II.i.25). Murphy's comic "lesson" (V.i.84) urges foolish creatures to "mend" their faults and "enjoy" their virtues (83). In Murphy's view, "persons, whose minds are warped by folly [,] diseased by humour, or tainted with vice, are, I believe, more frequently seen" (Gray's Inn Journal, 91, 13 July 1754, p. 197). The rakish Lovemore is one example of a man whose "good qualities" apologize "for his vices" (III.i.52).

But he avoids one excess, uxorious love, only to adopt another, the libertine delight in "gaiety, pleasure, and enjoyment" (I.ii.16). Exposed in the end to ridicule, he "awakens" to "a sense of [his] error" and announces his "sincere remorse" (V.i.82). A "reclaimed libertine" (83), he makes a proper atonement for his faults.

Murphy's dramatization of folly reclaimed exploits the modes of the past only to endorse at last a sentimental reconciliation. Although the kindly Widow Bellmour initially displays a "wildness" balanced by sentiment (III.i.45), it is her "tenderness of disposition" (41) which enables her to tutor the melancholic Mrs. Lovemore in the surest "way to keep a man" (43). Her disposition also helps her to expose Lovemore's infamy (V.i.79, 83). She, too, may finally endure a just "reproof" for her conduct (84), but her sentimental expostulations indicate the value of a "feeling heart" (I.ii.17).⁴⁵

Clearly, neither Murphy nor Colman eschew altogether the sentimental virtues of a delicate temper and a benevolent heart. Both Harriet in The Jealous Wife and the Widow Bellmour in The Way to Keep Him possess some measure of gaiety, a quality which prevents their delicacy from lapsing into folly. Their gaiety also accentuates the comic pitfalls of an "extreme sensibility" (All in the Wrong, I.i.11). To the critics of the sentimental mode, the display of an over-refining temper, unrelieved by the influence of either gaiety or sense, too often does lead to absurdity, and the sentimentally foolish bring about their own uneasiness. Harriet and the Widow Bellmour come to illustrate the desirability of a gaiety tempered by delicacy.

These critics, adapting to their own ends the Restoration theme of

artifice, dramatize the potential falsity of a sentimental refinement. In Know Your Own Mind (1777), Murphy portrays the ease with which benevolence can be feigned. The sentimental counterfeiters "make their vices do their work, under a mask of goodness" (I.i.6), and their pose enables them to "more surely betray" the foolish and the credulous (IV.i.57). Both Mrs. Bromley and Malvil conceal their base designs behind their professions of benevolence.⁴⁶ Malvil finally suffers a fitting comic punishment for his perfidy (V.ii.69-71), but the character of Mrs. Bromley exemplifies Murphy's more sentimental treatment of vice.

She dramatizes his theme of "vices always border upon virtues" (II.i.17). Her kindness protects the unfortunate Miss Neville, a sentimental heroine endowed with "truth, good sense and virtue" (V.ii.73). But Mrs. Bromley's repeated reminders of her benevolence augment the distresses she has ostensibly relieved. Miss Neville becomes the "sport of every sudden whim" (II.i.16) and, so, whatever virtues Mrs. Bromley does possess are "overshadowed by their opposite qualities" (21). As Malvil remarks: "The whole of her virtue consists in repentance, but what kind of repentance? A specious promise to reform her conduct, and a certain return of the same vices" (IV.i.49). The promise of reformation can be given as easily as sentimental virtue can be counterfeited. Finally, then, Murphy's representation of counterfeit virtue accommodates a comic treatment of vice and folly.

Nevertheless, unlike Sheridan's Joseph Surface, who remains hypocritically "moral to the last drop" (The School for Scandal, V.iii.439), Murphy's Mrs. Bromley does reform, and she confirms her ward's trust in her underlying virtue. Mrs. Bromley is chagrined both by

Miss Neville's sense of gratitude and by the criticism of others, and she confesses to her long-suffering ward: "Your words overpower me. I feel that I have done wrong. I rejoice at your good fortune: your merit deserves it" (Know Your Own Mind, V.ii.73). Here, once again, Murphy pronounces a "very useful Lesson" (The Way to Keep Him, V.i.84). He accommodates his comic end, to "weed" out folly, to an acknowledgement of underlying virtue (Know Your Own Mind, V.ii.74).

Therefore, Murphy and Colman, along with Goldsmith and Sheridan, sought to check sentimental excess and to establish the "bounds and limits even to virtue" (Know Your Own Mind, V.i.63). To curb such excess, they attempted to balance, in Macklin's words, an essential "goodness of heart" with a "ridiculous and laughing vanity" (The Man of the World, I.6). Frequently, however, they failed to balance mirth and sentiment. Comedies purporting to be critical often verified Addison's complaint that the drama threatened to become "a motly Piece of Mirth and Sorrow."⁴⁷ Many of these dramas forcibly yoked these elements together, and the result was a heterogeneous, and sometimes confusing, play which, like Kelly's False Delicacy, pandered to the very thing it seemed to criticize.

Garrick in his Prologue to False Delicacy applauds, at the same time as he ridicules, Kelly's didactic aim. Such conflicting appraisals, in their equivocation, neither correct sentimental excess nor establish a comic balance. In The Lying Valet (1741), Garrick clearly models his play on Cibber's formula: the former errors of the hero accentuate his final reformation to virtue. But Garrick ineffectively separates his play into two parts, one comic and one sentimental. Early in the play, Gayless resolves that, since libertine extravagance has reduced him to

poverty and falsehood, he "shall quite change [his] former course of life"⁴⁸, but only after he has secured Melissa and her fortune. Having at least "purchased discretion," he now comes to "moralize and declaim" on the subjects of honour and conscience (34). Melissa's trial of him severely tests his virtuous resolution but, as Mrs. Gadabout observes: "the more his pain now, the greater his pleasure when relieved from it" (II.52). Once he is relieved, Gayless, like Loveless, rhapsodizes: "So virtuous love, afford us springing joy. / Whilst vicious passions, as they burn, destroy" (60). A "sincere" convert at last, Gayless renounces the "wild impetuous sallies" of his youth and rejoices in the "most pleasing calm of perfect happiness" (60).

In part, the levity afforded by Sharp's antics offsets the more serious business of the rake's reclamation. Yet, Melissa's "generous temper" (I.34) also rewards Sharp's faithful service to his master (II.60). As the Epilogue states, the vice of lying may be pronounced in a rogue like Sharp, but though his "tongue was false, [his] heart was true."⁴⁹ Even the comic antics of the "lying valet" are subordinated to morality. In The Lying Valet, virtue triumphs at last, the portrayal of folly vitiated by "the uncomic expedient of exhibiting virtue."⁵⁰

Similarly, The Clandestine Marriage (1766) indulges in a display of sentimental distress, so much so that those characters ostensibly designed to recall the rakes, fops and matrons of the past ultimately fail to counteract sentimental sobriety.⁵¹ Mrs. Heidelberg's affected gentility provokes mirth, and her domineering mannerisms comically perturb Sterling. At the end of the play, their individual desires are frustrated by the announcement of the "clandestine marriage," but

neither her affectation nor his folly undergoes comic correction. Melvil, too, for all his apparent rakish demeanour, finally exhibits "sensibility enough" to be ashamed of his former presumption (V.ii.713). Even Lord Ogleby, an example of the superannuated fop, fails to emerge as the traditional comic butt.

Unlike the judgment which falls on Lord Trinket in The Jealous Wife (II.iii.33; V.iii.87), Lord Ogleby and his self-delusions incite no comic ridicule. While he may lack Cecil's delicacy and prudence (False Delicacy, II.i.726), Lord Ogleby also displays a distinctly sentimental side. Though "vain to an excess," he is nonetheless reputed to be "humane at the bottom" (The Clandestine Marriage, IV.iii.701), a quality which undermines his coxcombry. Finally, Lord Ogleby himself brings about a reconciliation which rewards virtue and excuses folly. He observes to Sterling: "there have been some mistakes, which we had all better forget for our own sakes; and the best way to forget is to forgive the cause of them" (V.ii.713). Rather than being mended, folly is to be forgotten. The "cause" of their mistakes, Fanny's "amiable delicacy" (I.i.677), is a sentimental excess which likewise receives no comic correction.

Her "quick sensibility" drives her to a distress which "sinks [her] spirits" and reduces her to an insupportable "agony of mind" (677). Described by the haughty Miss Sterling as her "dear, grave, romantic sister" (I.ii.680), Fanny represents the "sweet, delicate, innocent, sentimental" heroine (II.ii.691) blessed with "goodness of heart, and generosity of mind" (IV.iii.705). But her sentimental distresses, unrelieved by any comic probing, afford no mirth. Fanny has, after all,

betrayed filial obedience in a way which neither Goldsmith's Miss Neville nor Kelly's Miss Rivers do. Neither Fanny's refined temper, which would "startle at the very shadow of vice" (V.ii.713), nor her delicate mind, which shudders at the "indiscretion" she has committed, is superior enough to prevent a serious indiscretion. Nor is she punished for her folly. "Her example, instead of encouraging, will rather serve to deter" other delicate souls from daring to transgress the bounds of prudence and filial obedience (713). She is both a sentimental heroine in distress, one whose sense of virtue is to be emulated, and a foolish young woman, one whose indiscretion is to be avoided. Together with exemplary "generosity" and sentimental "forgiveness" (713), her distress effectively dampens "giggling privilege" (Epilogue, Know Your Own Mind, 75), the ridicule of folly and the correction of sentimental excess.

Playwrights like Garrick and Colman, then, do not always achieve a comic balance of mirth and sentiment, a balance which, at the same time as it exposes absurdity, also relieves sobriety. Like the sentimental dramatists, these playwrights occasionally "alternate pathetic and humorous scenes" (Schorer, "Hugh Kelly," 392) but, in doing so, they often vitiate the comic aim of exposing and ridiculing human absurdity. In Thorndike's words: "comic persons and scenes alternate with those of extreme sensibility, and the contrasting elements are not fused in any single decisive dramatic purpose" (English Comedy, p. 425).

Opposed to the alternation of the witty and the sentimental modes is a "blend of satire, humours characters, morality, and geniality" (Hume, "Supposed Revolution," p. 265). This the Blooms call the "satiric mode of feeling," the impartial censuring of wickedness and folly in

order to stir in all "the need for remedy." The "innocent, forewarned and under the discipline of conscience, are equipped to evade the traps of wrongdoing; the guilty, if capable of repentance, are moved to self-redemption" ("Satiric Mode of Feeling," 115). To fulfill this corrective function, the dramatist must attend "to sources and instances of failure in human conduct or institutions" (116). As Goldsmith points out in his Enquiry (1759): "Every age produces new follies and new vices, and one absurdity is often displaced in order to make room for another" (Chapter XII, p. 324). The absurdity of the sentimental mode must, then, become the target for the dramatic poet who "detects all the new machinations of vice" and who "levels his satire at the rising structures of folly" (p. 324). After all, the comic purpose is to stress the inescapability of "universal culpability" ("Satiric Mode of Feeling," 115).

At the same time, the dramatic poet "should be, and has often been, a firm champion in the cause of virtue" (Enquiry, Chapter XII, p. 324). Since the instances cited by the satirist are not necessarily all "evil," nor is all human activity criminal, the critic of human absurdity often provides "contrapuntal interludes of calm, near-sentimental exposition" (Bloom and Bloom, "Satiric Mode of Feeling," 118). The presentation of folly, coupled with a presentation of virtue, can thereby achieve a comic balance which portrays "flesh and blood," as it is and not as it ought to be. In Goldsmith's words, the actions of the vile individual should incite impressionable youth "to avoid those actions which appeared so detestable in others." This character further heightens the goodness of the meritorious person, whose actions teach others "how to conduct [themselves] through life, so as to become an

ornament to society, and a blessing to [their] family and friends."⁵²

Therefore, as critics of the sentimental mode and as comic dramatists, playwrights like Goldsmith and Sheridan do not eschew all the sentimental virtues, but neither do they condone their absurdity. When they ridicule false sentiment, they may, as Macey argues, "use 'true' sentiment as the bench mark of [their] ideals" and "claim true as distinct from false sentiment" ("Theatrical Satire," pp. 126, 127), but they also, as Yearling acknowledges, attack "sentimentality on its own ground" ("Good Natured Heroes," 493).⁵³ To bring benevolence into a comic balance with mirth, they try to "reach the heart" (Prologue, The Rivals, l. 24, p. 74). Goldsmith ridicules in Honeywood the folly of indiscriminate good nature, susceptible as it is to artful "puffing." In Marlow he exposes the folly of alternately playing the roles of the man of mode and the man of sentimental refinement. Like Murphy's portrayal of easily feigned feeling, Sheridan in the romantic Lydia and in the foolish Faulkland comically displays sentimental excess. But in the knavishly comic character of Joseph Surface, he demonstrates the ease with which "flesh and blood" can indeed "shadow and conceal" its true nature behind a counterfeit sentimental pose (Prologue, The Rivals, l. 29, p. 74). Goldsmith endorses prudence rather than prudery (She Stoops to Conquer, V.208). Sheridan offers, in his comic standard of "absolute sense," an effective balance between the witty and the sentimental modes.⁵⁴

CHAPTER NINE

"Sham'd into Sense": Sheridan's Comedies

Eighteenth-century sentimental comedy reflected what man ought to be, and man's "undefaced" side became in sentimental comedy an explicit moral certainty. To the eighteenth-century critics, the sentimental mode threatened to reduce the world of the stage to a "school of morality" (False Delicacy, V.ii.744) and the playwright to a "Preacher of the Age" ("The Freeholder's Journal," 28 November 1722, 27). This the critics sought to correct. Playwrights like Goldsmith and Sheridan dramatized both indiscriminate good nature and the comic efficacy of a sentimental pose. Vivifying the Restoration theme of artifice, these playwrights once again viewed man as a foolish and, at times, knavish creature. But unlike the practise of former playwrights, dramatists like Goldsmith and Sheridan also reflected man's more "undefaced" side. At their best, the critics of sentimental comedy used the modes of the past and adapted them to their own comic ends, in Goldsmith the comic efficacy of prudence, and in Sheridan the comic standard of "absolute sense" (The Rivals, III.i.104).¹

Because of this distinctive use of the two modes, Sheridan's comedies cannot simply be regarded either as anti-sentimental attacks or as attempts to "restore" the practice of Restoration dramatists.² In his plays, gaiety is balanced by sentiment, those gentle stirrings of

the heart which in his Prologue to The Rivals Sheridan deems worthy subjects of the comic muse. Indeed, in a letter to Thomas Grenville (30 October 1772), Sheridan confesses: "For my own Part when I read for Entertainment, I had much rather view the Characters of Life as I would wish they were than as they are."³ Unlike what the Scotchman calls "Grave Comedy,"⁴ which strives to inculcate a "most serious moral" (The Critic, I.i.502), Sheridan's plays also reflect "the follies and the foibles of society" (502). Finally, like Congreve's blending of comic modes, Sheridan's comedy is at once benevolent and critical.⁵ Loftis, in Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England (1977), calls Sheridan's plays "benign comedies with a satirical bite that reaches only to fatuous and malicious individuals" (p. 9). Sheridan achieves this kind of comic balance by his introduction of "absolute sense," common sense tempered by mirth and softened by good nature.⁶ Freed from salaciousness and sententiousness, his best comedies reflect "flesh and blood" (Prologue, The Rivals, l. 29, p. 74), and his criticisms modify the comic modes of the past.⁷

On the one hand, Sheridan lashes this "Goddess of the woeful countenance" (l. 26), this "sentimental Muse" (l. 27) which delivers only "the purest morals" (Prologue, The Critic, l. 4, p. 495). Unlike a "laughing gig[g]ling piece of work" (A Scotchman, p. 804), sentimental comedy dramatizes "the viciousness of vice and the virtuousness [of virtue] in every third line" (p. 804). So, as the Scotchman declares in Sheridan's fragment, A Scotchman, those who would hiss his sentimental comedy "might as well hiss the common prayer book" (p. 804).

Sheridan comically mocks the didacticism of the sentimental mode, but

he also criticizes its confusion of tragedy and comedy. If, as the Scotchman asserts, his genius lies in tragedy, then he can indeed write a successful sentimental comedy. Puff's canting art also exemplifies the essential falsity of a mode which induces tears and proffers morals at the expense of laughter. The ease with which Puff perpetrates his cheat demonstrates the connection between chicanery and sentimentalism. Sentimental poses can indeed hide the knavish side of man's nature, and these poses serve finally to "cheat the World best" (The City Heiress, III.i.255).

On the other hand, while Sheridan does dramatize the falsity of the "sentimental muse," he does not unquestioningly accept her "comic Sister" (Prologue, The Critic, l. 13, p. 494). Frequently "ill behav'd and rude" (l. 1, p. 495), the Restoration comic muse "would sometimes in mirthful moments use / A style too flippant for a well-bred Muse" (ll. 15-16, p. 494) and sink into a "graceless wit."⁸ As both Sheridan and Vanbrugh suggest, a "loose obscene encouragement to vice" (The Relapse, II.31) can be averted by "a little wholesome pruning" (A Trip to Scarborough, II.i.582). Such "pruning" will retain the comedy as well as respect morality.

Even Sheridan's lesser plays, The Duenna (1775) and St. Patrick's Day (1775) exemplify these fundamental comic concerns. Like his predecessors, he dramatizes the deceitful tricks in which the hero engages. Yet, unlike the libertines of the past, Sheridan's heroes would eagerly submit to marriage, and they deceive only those who, in the conventional manner of guardians, hinder their pursuit of it. Don Jerome in The Duenna assumes that his control over his offspring is

absolute and, because he is so stubborn, Louisa determines, with the aid of her duenna, to outwit her father.⁹ As the duenna remarks, his trust in his own sagacity, as well as his comic gullibility, are the "rare effects of passion and obstinacy" (I.iii.240). Similarly, as his name shows, Justice Credulous in St. Patrick's Day is a gullible fool. Like so many patriarchal figures, the Justice also betrays a "violent" disposition.¹⁰ Lacking moderation, he slips into extremes and renders himself ridiculous at last (II.iv.186-190).

Sheridan exploits the comic conventions of the past, but he also adds some slight touches which individualize his characters. Neither Justice Credulous nor Don Jerome possesses the eighteenth-century patriarch's moral sagacity. Too passionate to be benevolent mentors, these characters more clearly recall the witty comic mode. Yet, unlike the parents of the past, both Justice Credulous and Don Jerome finally reveal a good-natured side. The Justice readily acknowledges his error (St. Patrick's Day, II.iv.192), and Don Jerome admits: "I'm an obstinate old fellow when I am in the wrong; but you shall now find me as steady in the right" (The Duenna, III.vii.282).

Because of their sudden conversions at the end of the plays, these characters represent a heterogeneous mixture of the witty and the sentimental modes. Justice Credulous and Don Jerome conform to one tradition only to assume shades of the other. The sudden transition from intransigence to good nature indicates dramatic expediency. Sheridan's desire to end the play on a conciliatory note may satisfy the demands of a "well-bred Muse," but it threatens to lead him into shoddy playwriting; the sudden display of an underlying benevolence is as

dramatically unaccountable as Loveless' sudden conversion in Cibber's Love's Last Shift.

More successful are Sheridan's portraits of Isaac and the duenna, both of whom exemplify the kind of modifications Sheridan could make to conventional characters. The character of the duenna comically transforms her comic antecedents. An "antiquated Eve," the duenna combines the wiliness of the witty servant with the shrewish disposition of the cast-off mistress (The Duenna, I.iv.240). Not only does she engineer the deception of Don Jerome (I.iii), but also she contrives to ensnare the "sly little villain," Isaac (II.iv.261). Finally, it is her shrewishness which serves as a fitting comic punishment for the foolish Isaac (III.vii.281).

For his part, like many a fop before him, Isaac is as enamoured of his pocket glass as he is of the beauty of a woman (I.v.243). So vain is he of his person that he takes civility to be love (243). But Isaac also preaches the libertine's creed when he declares: "Conscience has no more to do with gallantry than it has with politicks - why, you are no honest fellow, if love can't make a rogue of you" (II.iv.260). He may not debauch the woman under his protection, but he nonetheless preaches a creed based on roguery. But even the character of Isaac owes something to both the witty and the sentimental modes. Like Congreve's Witwoud in The Way of the World, Isaac comically misconstrues the actions of the hero and the heroine. But like Addison's Tinsel in The Drummer, Isaac and his rakish principles are now foppish.

Isaac is both fool and knave. He is a "Machieval" (260), but his "passion for deceit, and tricks of cunning" are comic (I.iii.237).

Louisa shrewdly observes: "the fool predominates so much over the knave, that I am told he is generally the dupe of his own art" (237). His antics propel the comedy to its conjugal end, and yet he becomes an object of "contempt and ridicule" (III.vii.281). He neither sentimentally reforms, nor does he receive forgiveness. Rather, he must undergo the comic punishment of marriage to the duenna.

He may suffer for his comic knavery, but Isaac nonetheless does inspire the friendship of Carlos, a more sentimental character. In contrast to Isaac's foppery, Carlos exhibits a sense of moderation. He wonders, for example, how his friend could love the duenna; nor can he compliment her as grandiosely as the foolish Isaac would wish (II.iii.253-4).¹¹ His honesty not only recalls the plain-dealing heroes of Etherege and Wycherley, but also the forthright heroes of Steele. Undeveloped as he is, he highlights Isaac's baseness at the same time as he introduces benevolence into the intrigues bustling around him.

His sense of honour also contrasts to the unchivalrous antics of Antonio and Ferdinand, the two heroes. Ferdinand's stealing into Clara's bedchamber arouses her scorn (I.ii.232-3), and such "insolent importunity" prevents her from seeking his assistance (I.v.240). Indeed, Antonio's reputation as a "gay, dissipated rake" who has "squander'd his patrimony" makes Don Jerome insist all the more that his daughter marry someone else (II.iii.254).

But Sheridan softens the rakish outlines to his heroes. Like Charles Surface, Antonio is also renowned for his generosity. It, "more than his profuseness" (254), strips him of his inheritance. Acts of kindness, as well as self-indulgence, have reduced his finances.

In the end, he shows himself to be a true man of honour. He scorns to "obtain her fortune by deceit" (III.vii.282), and he freely offers to relinquish it should her father still object to the marriage. His generosity and honour win him both her fortune and her father's blessing (282). So, too, with Lieutenant O'Connor in St. Patrick's Day. He is good-natured and generous (I.i.163), and he scorns artificiality in others. In Lauretta, he finds a naturalness (166) which sharply contrasts to the "artificial Graces" of the town (167). He is less a rake, eager to wed a fortune, than he is a man of honour, eager to wed the woman of his choice.

This kind of devotion illustrates Sheridan's use of the sentimental mode. Sheridan endows his heroes with good and honourable intentions. His adaptation of Vanbrugh's The Relapse introduces the character of Colonel Townly, a considerably softened version of Worthy.¹² Berinthia refers to Townly as her "good serious Colonel (A Trip to Scarborough, III.ii.598), a clear indication of his essential goodness. She flirts with Loveless only to "pique" Townly (V.i.613). For his part, Townly confesses to Young Fashion: "but [Berinthia's] failing in her promise, I, partly from pique, and partly from idleness, have been diverting my chagrin by offering up chaste incense to the beauties of Amanda" (I.i. 575). Friendship to the lady's husband precludes his carrying his attentions too far (576), but Amanda herself refutes Townly's arguments (V.i.612). Like the exhortations of Vanbrugh's Amanda, her indignant denunciation awakens in him a regard for her virtuous character. He reflects: "Sure there's divinity about her; and she has dispensed some portion of honor's light to me" (612). Vanbrugh undercuts Worthy's

"moment of purity," but, here, Sheridan explicitly makes Townly admit his error. He "was mistaken" when he thought "lightly" of Amanda's virtue. A convert to virtue, he now considers his "censure" of Berinthia to be equally questionable (612). His musings prompt Loveless and Berinthia to renounce their former behaviour. "Sincerity" and "honesty" (613), yoked to prudence, triumph at last. Ultimately, this regard for a virtuous reconciliation weakens Vanbrugh's more comic treatment of the frailty of man.

In Sheridan's fragmentary adaptation of Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield, even the profligate Thornhill proves to have redeeming qualities inimical to the villain.¹³ Arnold's preaching offsets Thornhill's profligacy, but Thornhill himself agrees that, were he to find "real vertue" in his prey, he would then "give up [his] pursuit and foregoing the dirty consideration of fortune, make atonement by marriage" (p. 802).

Such obvious concessions to morality make these plays less critical than those of many Restoration playwrights. But his less ambiguous treatment of folly and vice does not make his plays "homilies in dialogue" (Hazlitt, "Comic Writers," Lectures, p. 217). Rather, his pre-occupation, as Loftis calls it, with jealous and capricious romantics adds a distinctively comic dimension to these plays.¹⁴ The jealous Ferdinand in The Duenna distrusts even his own friend (I.ii.235), nor can he content himself with Clara's avowals of love. Although it is his own "insolent importunity" which arouses Clara's indignation (I.v.240), Ferdinand chooses to interpret her actions as instances of her "teizing [sic], tyrannical, obstinate, perverse, absurd" temper

(I.ii.231). In fact, Clara's insistence that he leave her bedchamber echoes the concern of many a Restoration heroine (I.v.242).¹⁵

His inordinate jealousy blinds him to his folly. The contrast between his jealous frenzy and his servant's more practical approach to love highlights Ferdinand's absurdity (I.i.229). Ferdinand's treatment of his beloved illustrates the servant's insight. On the one hand, he believes his suspicions of her to be just and, on the other hand, he acknowledges the "proofs of her love" to be strong enough to shake his confidence (I.ii.235). Even he must admit that jealousy brings only self-induced woe (III.ii.269), and leads to a false trust in appearances. Ferdinand finally must be cured of the jealous temper which "blinds" him (III.vi.278). He fails to recognize either his mistress or his sister (277-278), and such a concrete illustration of his blindness testifies to the essential folly of jealousy.

The Duenna is a rather slight play, hardly designed to be a correction of sentimental excess. In his earliest play, The Rivals (1775), Sheridan more fully develops his comic theme of "absolute sense" and more effectively adapts the modes of the past to his own ends.¹⁶ Restoration playwrights dramatize the corrupting influence of the "way of the world," and frequently offer ambiguous resolutions to the struggle of the individual to survive the world and its ways. Sheridan offers the "better way" of sense at the same time as he dramatizes the excesses of a sentimental way.¹⁷ He mocks the absurdities of sentimental distress and delicacy of feeling. To do so, he reconciles the earlier themes of artifice and "plain-dealing" with his own treatment of virtue and sense. He reveals the folly of a world where Puff's

"cant" can dupe others, and where a sentimental pose leads to absurdity (The Critic, I.ii.514).

Faulkland is one such example of absurdity. His refinement of feeling mocks Kelly's sympathetic portrayal of delicacy.¹⁸ Faulkland prizes the "sympathetic heart" (II.i.94), and the sentimental union of "delicate and feeling souls" (90). To be absent from his beloved is to endure an agony of mind, so Julia's "violent, robust, unfeeling health" argues a happiness in his absence (92). She should be "temperately healthy" and "plaintively gay" (94). Such paradoxical statements point to Faulkland's own sentimental absurdity. He wishes Julia to be a pining heroine whose only true joy comes from her soulful union with him, and whose absence from him should subdue her whole being. But Faulkland fails to see the paradox of both his language and his demands. By wishing her to be temperate and plaintive, he in effect wishes her to be unhealthy and sad. Sheridan mocks the delicate lover yet further when Faulkland hears of Julia's social activities in the country. A "truly modest and delicate woman," Faulkland avers, would engage in a lively country dance only with her sentimental counterpart (94). Only then, he argues, can she preserve the sanctity of her delicate soul: "If there be but one vicious mind in the Set, 'twill spread like a contagion - the action of their pulse beats to the lascivious movement of the jig - their quivering, warm-breath'd sighs impregnate the very air - the atmosphere becomes electrical to love, and each amorous spark darts thro' every link of the chain!" (94). Faulkland's sexually charged speech comically undermines his role as the delicate lover.

The object of his "sentimental" ardour, Julia, refuses to play a similar role. Not only is her health robust, but she also seems to enjoy the "electrical" atmosphere of the country dance. Once branded as the "unequivocal tribute to the sentimental formula" (Kaul, "A Note on Sheridan," p. 141), Julia does possess a lively spirit which, at times, is critical of the over-refined temper.¹⁹ Faulkland's jealousy receives a check from Julia, who reminds him: "If I wear a countenance of content, it is to shew that my mind holds no doubt of my Faulkland's truth" (III.ii.107). Unlike Lydia, Julia will not create an artificial sentimental distress.

Together with Julia's more temperate regard for the feelings of the heart, Lydia's antics also comment on excessive refinement of feeling. Julia's "robust, unfeeling health" hardly makes her a delicate heroine, pining for love and reduced to distressful illness (II.i.92). In contrast, Lydia enjoys scenes of distress. To Lydia, wealth is "that burthen on the wings of love," so she must create for herself an "undeserved persecution" (III.iii.112). She delights in the "dear delicious shifts" her lover must withstand for her sake (V.i.135). Describing one such romantic encounter with him, she uses homely, inappropriate language. Her lover is reduced to "a dripping statue," sneezing and coughing "so pathetically" as he tries to win her heart (135). They must exchange vows while the "freezing blast" numbs their joints (135).²⁰ Such a scene, told in such language, merely accentuates the falsity, and the folly, of her pretensions.

In The Rivals, then, Sheridan does indeed mock those aspects of sentimentalism which lead to folly and, to expose these absurdities,

Sheridan effectively exploits both the witty and the sentimental modes. In contrast to the artifice practised by Lydia, and the distress experienced by Julia and Faulkland, traces of the witty comic mode appear in characters like Acres, the country fop, and Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Anthony Absolute, examples of "crabbed age." Acres, like many a fop before him, slavishly attempts to imitate the city gentleman, but Acres captures only the trappings of true gentility and true wit. He, too, becomes a subject for diversion (e.g., II.i.91). And like the aging matrons of earlier comedy, Mrs. Malaprop fancies herself to be attractive and desirable, so much so that she is easily duped. The character of Sir Anthony Absolute, who attempts to bully his son into obedience, resembles another conventional character of the past, the obstinate father. At one point, he threatens to disown a son who refuses to capitulate to his wishes (99).

Foolish pretensions, like Bob Acres' "sentimental swearing" (96), represent a comic "'echo to the sense'" (95), a hollow imitation of the verbal and social mastery which Captain Absolute more truly embodies. In effect, Acres foppishly distorts both sense and sound, and applies Pope's injunction with respect to sound to a comic delivery of oaths.²¹ His swearing is also a parody of the sentiment. What should exhort others to a moral truth Acres uses to bolster his courage. Similarly, Lydia's romantic notions lead to falsity and absurdity, mere "echoes" of the sensibility and sentimental distress which Julia more truly represents.²² Faulkland's refusal to forego what he calls his "exquisite nicety" (IV.iii.131) and to follow the sensible tactics of Captain Absolute also exemplify an "echo to the sense," for his nicety is soon

found to be caprice. Both wit and sentiment fall into excess and affectation, a "Voluntary Disguise" which cloaks genuine feeling and genuine wit (Congreve, "Humour in Comedy," p. 79).

Nearly every character in the play indulges in such excess: Mrs. Malaprop with her "oracular tongue" (III.iii.110), Sir Lucius O'Trigger with his distorted view of honour, Bob Acres with his gentlemanly pretensions, Julia with her excessive good nature, Lydia with her absurd romanticism, Faulkland with his captiousness, Sir Anthony Absolute with his penchant to be "hasty in every thing" (I.i.77).²³ These excesses are nonetheless intertwined, and their inter-relationship is evident in the play's title. Contrary to the views expressed by Sen in "Sheridan's Literary Debt" (299-300) and Sherbo in English Sentimental Drama (p. 102), the play's dual lines of action are not anomalous, but thematically linked. Here, in his first play, Sheridan does, as Auburn notes in Sheridan's Comedies, show himself to be a "master of comic technique" (p. 58). Wit and sentiment are "rival" modes, and the rivalry is established as early as the Prologue, where the figure of comedy stands in opposition to the sentimental muse.²⁴ Julia's sweet-tempered nature, often regarded as sentimental, can be viewed only in its relation both to her cousin's romantic caprice and to her lover's "captious, unsatisfied temper" (III.ii.106). Her fundamental good nature "rivals," as it were, their more pronounced sentimental excess. By pairing these characters together, Sheridan strikes a balance between them. Lydia's romantic indulgences lead to imagined distresses which stand in marked contrast to Julia's own trials.²⁵ While Julia's "gentle nature" will "sympathize" with her cousin's fanciful torments, her prudence will offer only

chastisement (I.ii.81). Lydia realizes, too, that "one lecture from [her] grave Cousin" will convince her to recall her banished lover (V.i.134). Later, Julia says: "If I were in spirits, Lydia, I should chide you only by laughing heartily at you" (135).

Faulkland's fretfulness also taxes Julia's good nature and, for the most part, she allows her "teasing, captious, incorrigible lover" (II.i.90) to subdue her: "but I have learn'd to think myself his debtor, for those imperfections which arise from the ardour of his attachment" (I.ii.83). In this manner, Julia herself becomes the victim of excess. Her exaggerated sense of duty to her morose lover and her belaboured justifications of his treatment of her are found to be immoderate.

Even though she would, no doubt, crave just such an incident to befall her, Lydia effectively demonstrates just how absurd is Julia's own romantic obligation to the man who rescued her from drowning. Once again, Lydia's homely comparison makes the incident more comic than sentimental. She tells Julia: "Obligation! - Why a water-spaniel would have done as much. - Well, I should never think of giving my heart to a man because he could swim!" (83). Lydia further challenges Julia's prerogative to charge her with caprice: "What, does Julia tax me with caprice? - I thought her lover Faulkland had enured her to it" (82). Here, Lydia's clear-sightedness puts Julia's sentimental expostulations into perspective. By indulging Faulkland's every whim, and by submitting to his sentimental notions of love, Julia tolerates his fretfulness and fosters her own excess. When Julia introduces the notions of gratitude and filial duty, for example, Faulkland tells her: "Again, Julia, you raise ideas that feed and justify my doubts" (III.ii.107). He yearns to

be assured that she does in fact love him for himself alone, and here she raises doubts even as she tries to assuage his fears.

Finally, Julia must bear the consequences. Her indulgence eventually leads Faulkland into mistaking her sincerity for coquetry and hypocrisy. Intent on using the impending duel as "the touch-stone of Julia's sincerity and disinterestedness" (IV.iii.131), Faulkland wrongly judges Julia's love. When she hears of the duel, Julia first responds in sentimental fashion. In terms of Sheridan's theme of rivalry, the contrast between this scene of tender self-abrogation (V.i) and the scene where Captain Absolute plays the self-sacrificing lover (III.iii) is worthy of note.

As Ensign Beverley, the Captain makes use of Lydia's favourite sentimental notions. He will rescue her from her "undeserved persecution," and he pretends to revel in their anticipated poverty. He comically rhapsodizes: "Love shall be our idol and support! we will worship him with a monastic strictness; abjuring all worldly toys, to center every thought and action there" (III.iii.112). His "licensed warmth," which will "plead" for his "reward" (112), echoes Julia's pledge to her fretful lover. She willingly promises to receive "a legal claim to be the partner of [his] sorrows and tenderest comforter" (V.i.132). Jack vows to Lydia that, "proud of calamity, we will enjoy the wreck of wealth; while the surrounding gloom of adversity shall make the flame of our pure love show doubly bright" (III.iii.112). Similarly, Julia promises to Faulkland: "Then on the bosom of your wedded Julia, you may lull your keen regret to slumbering; while virtuous love, with a Cherub's hand, shall smooth the brow of upbraiding

thought, and pluck the thorn from compunction" (V.i.132).

Both Jack and Julia indicate their willingness to endure hardship for the sake of love. But Julia's sentiments, prompted by Faulkland's feigned distress, follow Jack's, and his scene with Lydia is highly comic. In his case, artifice clearly predominates over sensibility. The Captain is trying to trick Lydia into matrimony and, after his impassioned speech, he quips in an aside: "If she holds out now the devil is in it!" (III.iii.112). His sentiments are feigned, so merely to utter oaths of devotion does not insure a disinterested heart. Julia's sentiments are more sincere and yet, because they do follow Jack's comic ones, Sheridan here inverts the conventional technique of introducing a comic scene to parody a serious one. In doing so, Julia's sentiments are undermined. Faulkland likewise would trick Julia into a confession of love, unqualified by either gratitude or filial duty. Structurally and thematically, Sheridan in this way suggests the kinship between sensibility and artifice.

Soon, Julia's sensibility itself changes. Once she learns of Faulkland's deception, she resembles earlier heroines who, in the proviso scene, defend their individuality. Her language retains the syntax of the sentiment, but the content does not deal with a moral truth. Rather, she renounces him, and soundly condemns his artifice (V.i.133). Delicate feelings aside, she refuses to bring further distress upon herself. To make his comic point, Sheridan prolongs Julia's diatribe which, in its anger, recalls the tirades of the cast-off mistress. Nor can Faulkland interrupt the flow of her reproach.

At last, Faulkland's excess is checked, but not by Julia's language

or her finer feelings. Although in the end he pays tribute to the reforming power of her "gentleness" and "candour" (V.iii.145), here the threat of forever losing her stirs his remorse. Julia, in witnessing the extremes to which her lover will go, also comes to realize the dangers of indulgence. Like Honeywood's in The Good Natur'd Man, Julia's indiscriminate good nature must be checked and restrained.

The character of Captain Absolute illustrates Sheridan's comic standard of moderation, the lesson both Julia and Faulkland must learn. Durant remarks: "[Jack] is a sensible and practical young man; and the main thrust of the comedy comes of this practical young man's efforts to achieve sensible aims in an utterly illogical world" ("Sheridan's 'Royal Sanctuary,'" 27). Auburn in Sheridan's Comedies says that Jack is "mildly clever, motivated by honest, not entirely selfish desires," and "warmly human" (p. 50). Unlike the other characters, who are "absolute" in their self-indulgent excess, the Captain is "absolute" only in his sense. To Faulkland's suggestion that he immediately run away with Lydia, and thus fulfill her romantic desire for a sentimental elopement, Captain Absolute retorts: "What, and lose two thirds of her fortune?" (II.i.89). Like the Restoration hero, he is willing enough to woo a lady with a substantial inheritance, but he is equally unwilling to sacrifice himself to a life of poverty. As he tells Lydia: "Come, come, we must lay aside some of our romance - a little wealth and comfort may be endur'd after all" (IV.ii.125). To live in an impoverished state may be romantic, but it is also needlessly foolish.

On another level, his moderation offsets Faulkland's sensibility.

At one point, the Captain urges Faulkland to "love like a man" (II.i.90) and, at another, he chides his friend even more severely: "but a captious sceptic in love, - a slave to fretfulness and whim - who has no difficulties but of his own creating - is a subject more fit for ridicule than compassion!" (IV.iii.131). Like the balance achieved through the relationship of Lydia and Julia, the Captain's good sense will also balance Faulkland's excess.

Like Faulkland's, Lydia's folly must be mended, and by the Captain. After Lydia discovers that Captain Absolute and Ensign Beverley are one and the same person, he initially appeals to her sensibility. Meeting with no success, he must then challenge her very pretensions to sensibility. He points out to Lydia how her reputation will suffer in a world where sentiment thrives only in the lending libraries or in whimsical imaginations. It is a point which, although a criticism of the sentimental mode, also modifies the earlier theme of artifice. Now, sentiment becomes just another form of affectation. Later, Wilde will show its artfulness when he dramatizes the transfer of art into life and life into art. But here Sheridan indicates that the stage of the world and the world of the stage do not mutually influence each other.²⁶ Captain Absolute brings into comic focus the illusory, and ultimately absurd, nature of Lydia's attempt to transfer the fictional realm of sentimentalism into her own life.²⁷

Yet, he is also a lover, "aye, and a romantic one too" (II.i.90), and this aspect of his character exemplifies Sheridan's use of convention. After his breach with Lydia, the Captain agrees to a duel. Indeed, this prospect proves more successful in winning him the hand of

Lydia than all his tricks, a reversal of the Restoration practise and an apparent concession to pathos.²⁸ But it must be stressed that, unlike Steele's treatment of the duel in The Lying Lover, in The Rivals the duel becomes an effective comic device. For both Captain Absolute and Faulkland, the duel is a gesture of despair, and Sheridan has clearly indicated the absurdity of it by juxtaposing their motives with those of O'Trigger, who would fight "genteely," and like a Christian, over some imagined insult (IV.iii.128-9).²⁹ The Captain here momentarily forsakes sense, and he almost meets a romantic end.³⁰ In a final comic twist, which Wilde will later develop, Lydia's romantic desires are almost realized, and art almost does become life. It is enough to shock all the characters into sense, and pathos is thereby averted.

Therefore, the duel exemplifies the basic rivalry between the sentimental and the witty modes, and the dangers to which both are subject. Lucy capably wears a "mask of silliness" and yet, like the witty servants of the past, she possesses "a pair of sharp eyes for [her] own interest under it" (I.ii.87). It is her self-interest which has led to such serious misunderstandings. The fop, too, has contributed. Seeking to master the art of "sentimental swearing" (II.i.96), Acres hopes to prove his courage. A blustering oath, delivered with "propriety" (95), would then achieve an effect which the cowardly "fighting Bob" could not do otherwise. But the duel shows his courage to be as suspect as his "sentimental swearing." More important is the dual character of Ensign Beverley/Captain Absolute. His disguise also leads to misunderstandings, but he plays the key role of the man of sense. The comic excesses of the rival modes have been checked, largely through

him. The rivalry between the various suitors for Lydia's hand reaches its climax at King's-Mead-Fields, and the concomitant rivalry between the two modes, represented by the combatants, finally ends. Out of rivalry, balance finally reigns.

This balance is reflected in Julia's concluding speech. Earlier, the actress who has played the part of Julia has delivered a prologue critical of the sentimental muse.³¹ At the end of the play, her final speech points less to a sentimental reconciliation than it does to a plea for moderation. Though couched in sentimental language, the speech hints at the true nature of things: "and while Hope pictures to us a flattering scene of future Bliss, let us deny its pencil those colours which are too bright to be lasting (V.iii.146)."³² The "squinting eye" of excess swivels either one way or the other (IV.iii.129), but it has been brought to some measure of balance and clear-sightedness. Sheridan has at last shown that only "flesh and blood" (Prologue, l. 29, p. 74), freed from excessive wit and sentiment, will ultimately triumph.³³

Julia's caution highlights the folly of trusting to appearances and, at the same time, it serves to warn against risible excess. Her prudent reminder finds its fullest expression in Sheridan's comic masterpiece, The School for Scandal.³⁴ Here, like Congreve, Sheridan masterfully weaves together Etherege's theme of artifice, Wycherley's vision of imminent vice, and Vanbrugh's comic theme of man's frailty.³⁵ A rich comic heritage, then, enables Sheridan to chide and to correct human absurdity, manifested in The School for Scandal by the characters' inordinate regard for the appearance of benevolence and by their

foolish pursuit of pleasure. As Colman The Elder's Epilogue to the play announces, the play exhorts its audience "'No more in vice or error to engage, / Or play the Fool at large on Life's great Stage'" (ll. 25-26, p. 443).

The "school for scandal" itself comes to represent this "great Stage" of the world, as prone to vice as it is to folly.³⁶ This town's most insidious vice is slander-mongering, now grown into a "modish art" which infiltrates every aspect of the fashionable world (Prologue, l. 2, p. 355). Gossip, as Leff suggests, is now "the way of the world."³⁷ Once branded "a strange censorious age" by countless matrons who, like Lady Cockwood, warily obey the dictates of the town and dread its censure (She Would If She Could, II.ii.35), the town now gluts itself on mutilated reputations as greedily as it falsifies appearances.³⁸ The Dorimants of the past may have struggled to make a "tolerable show" to a society intolerant of those who let themselves be "known" (Man of Mode, III.i.51).³⁹ Here, in the den of "this Hydra, Scandal" (Prologue, l. 14, p. 356), "utterers of forg'd Tales, coiners of Scandal - and clippers of Reputation" (II.i.376) create "Proof - where Innuendos fail" and "Omit no Circumstance - except the Fact."⁴⁰ As Lady Sneerwell herself remarks: "Well there is no trusting appearances" (V.ii.427).

The sentimental trust in the underlying goodness of the human creature and the desire to cultivate appearance Sheridan now brings together in this comic, and highly critical, treatment of scandal. Hardly paragons of benevolence, the scandal-mongers spread their gossip and deny even the appearance of virtue, for unblemished reputations can easily be sullied by the tales of the scandal-mongers.⁴¹ "The most

whimsical Circumstance," for example, deprives Miss Piper of both her lover and her character, and the demise of her reputation results from a comic misapprehension (I.i.368).⁴² Like Jones' later treatment of scandal in The Masqueraders, Sheridan here suggests that the studied cultivation of any appearance does not necessarily protect the individual, nor does it always afford social mastery.⁴³

Such comically far-fetched tales illustrate the perversely whimsical nature of scandal, but the "school" also becomes Sheridan's comic weapon. It is an effective means to lash a "wit" which now stoops to malice and which, like the fop's notion of raillery, construes ill-nature to be the very essence of repartee.⁴⁴ Lady Sneerwell says: "there's no possibility of being witty - without a little ill nature - the malice of a good thing is the Barb that makes it stick -" (364). Likewise, Joseph asserts that the "jest which plants a Thorn in another's Breast" should not be suppressed, for conversation must not become "tedious and insipid" (364). What Charles elsewhere describes as "the social spirit of Raillery" has indeed been replaced by a conversation "which has all the Pertness and flatulence of Champagne without its Spirit or Flavour" (III.iii.397). The scandal college both fosters such malice, and harbours the fools and the knaves.

The "school" indulges the vanity and malice of a fop like Sir Benjamin Backbite. His conversation, like that of Lord Plausible and Novel in Wycherley's The Plain Dealer, is a "perpetual Libel on all his Acquaintance" (The School for Scandal, I.i.363). The school also shields the knavery of a character like Snake, the minion of the scandal college's "President" (V.iii.439). In him, Sheridan portrays a

knavery morally culpable in its duplicity and in its inverted sense of value. A fellow who "hasn't Virtue enough to be faithful even to his own Villainy" (I.i.363), Snake sells his services to the highest bidder and, when "offer'd double to speak the Truth" (V.iii.439), willingly betrays his former benefactor. But his "Atonement by a good Deed at last" does not win him sentimental approbation (440). Rather, unreformed and unrepentant, Snake abjures the virtuous expostulations of Sir Oliver and begs that his act "never be known" (440). As he explains: "consider I live by the Badness of my Character! - I have nothing but my Infamy to depend on! and if it were once known that I had been betray'd into an honest Action I should lose every Friend I have in the world" (440). He is indeed a rogue, one whom the "school for scandal" has nurtured.

In the character of Joseph Surface, Sheridan exposes the roguery of another kind of knave, the "Sentimental Knave" (I.i.361).⁴⁵ Joseph is eager to grasp his own "artful [,] selfish and malicious ends" (361) and, to do so, he wears a mask of sentimental virtue. He, like Snake, allies himself with the scandalous college and, in part, Joseph's chicanery flourishes because the school sanctions his pose. His "sentimental French Plate" passes for the genuine "silver ore of pure Charity" (V.i.426). Either will make "just as good a shew" (426) for, like Puff's "cant of imposition" (The Critic, I.ii.514), Joseph and his sermonizing cheat a world too enamoured by ostentatious appearance and a mere "shew." Joseph's very comparison, then, points to the artifice upon which he relies and into which the sentimental mode itself can fall. Leff explains: "The image of plate masquerading

as silver is an appropriate one to associate with the ostensibly untarnished yet highly superficial character of Joseph" ("Disguise Motif," 353). The "silver ore of pure charity" may indeed be priceless, but the sentiment, like the ore, can be copied in order to cheat and deceive others.

So, like any deception, the external display of a good heart dupes those who value merely the appearance of benevolence. Sheridan illustrates the falsity of such appearances and the foolishness of trusting to them by showing the kinship between the "sentimental knave" and the artful Snake. Just as Snake expediently engages in any "Plot and Counterplot" which serves his own best interests (The School for Scandal, V.iii.439), Joseph, too, cannot always remain loyal to one roguery at a time. As Lady Sneerwell observes: "I hate such an avarice of Crimes - 'tis an unfair monopoly and never prospers" (434). Joseph must concur: "Well I admit I have - been to blame - I confess I deviated from the direct Road of wrong" (434). Fidelity to roguery and deceit denotes "virtue" in such a world, and this reversed notion of virtue, in league as it is with the "school for scandal," thereby cogently connects a sentimentalism based on externals with the Restoration's pre-occupation with artifice.⁴⁶ In her concerted effort to defame others, the school's "President" fosters the deliberate cultivation of deceit. Calumny proves to be a formidable rival to virtue and to sense. Slander inverts value, and two artful counterfeiterers, Joseph and Snake, deliberately falsify appearances.

The "school," then, comes to represent an age which, on the one hand, amuses itself with venomous prevarications and which, on the

other hand, condones false appearances. Credulous man, duped by deceit and hypocrisy, trusts solely to appearances and believes malicious slander to be social verity. Like Wycherley's view of imminent vice in The Plain Dealer, Sheridan's "school" for a time threatens to infect even the healthiest of moral constitutions.⁴⁷

As a symbol of his moral condition, man's physical state indicates his essential vulnerability. A "healthy" reputation does not prevent slander. In speaking of Miss Nicely, Sir Benjamin explains: "she has always been so cautious and so reserved that every Body was sure there was some reason for [the story] at bottom" (The School for Scandal, I.i.368). Mrs. Candour denies the value of a prudence derived from moral health and affirms the value of a prudence gained by moral slips: "Why to be sure a Tale of Scandal is as fatal to the Credit of a prudent Lady of [Miss Nicely's] Stamp as a Fever is generally to those of the strongest Constitutions, but there is a sort of puny sickly Reputation that is always ailing yet will outlive the robuster Characters of a hundred Prudes" (368). These "Valetudinarians in Reputation" are conscious enough of their "weak Part" to "avoid the least breath of air and supply their want of Stamina by care and circumspection" (368).

Later, when Joseph attempts to seduce Lady Teazle, he employs similar arguments. Her character, he assures her, "is like a Person in a Plethora absolutely dying of too much Health" (IV.iii.412). Her consciousness of her innocence and her trust in the value of her own reputation become sources of the "greatest Prejudice" to her, for her negligence of forms and her carelessness of the world's opinion make

her "thoughtless" in her conduct (412). As a result, she commits "a thousand little imprudences" (412). Were she to "sin in [her] own Defence - and part with [her] virtue to preserve [her] Reputation"-- Joseph's "Prescription" to cure her virtue--she would silence scandal (412). In losing her virtue, she would thereby gain circumspection.

However, just as Joseph's roguery traps him at last, so, too, does scandal suffer a comparable downfall. After all, only off-stage characters suffer irreparable damage at the hands of the scandal-mongers. Even the gullible Sir Peter abjures their obvious tales of slander. So, while the slanderous gossips in both The Plain Dealer and The School for Scandal utter falsehoods and maul reputations, Sheridan, unlike Wycherley, finally makes the scandalous college both morally instructive and highly comic. Like the "double-dealing" vivified by Congreve, scandal turns upon itself and devours its own.⁴⁸ Lady Sneerwell once again suffers from the venom of scandal when her former colleagues direct their malice toward her (The School for Scandal, V.ii.429).

While Mrs. Candour's affectation (I.i.364) and Sir Benjamin's cultivated foppery (363-4) feed their malice, Lady Sneerwell admits early in the play that, like the "fallen woman's" questionable past, a prominent feature in nineteenth-century drama, hers is a soiled reputation.⁴⁹ In this way, Sheridan adds a distinctive touch to a character who both recalls the modes of the past and suggests the drama to come. She confesses to Snake: "I am no Hypocrite to deny the satisfaction I reap from the Success of my Efforts - wounded myself in the early Part of my Life by the envenom'd Tongue of Slander I confess

I have since known no Pleasure equal to the reducing others, to the Level of my own injured Reputation" (360). Snake affirms that "nothing can be more natural" than her thirst for revenge (360), a passion which afflicts such characters as Etherege's Mrs. Loveit. In the end, it is this kind of ungovernable passion, like that of the cast-off mistress', which precludes Lady Sneerwell's redemption to moderation. Her "bitterness of Mind" thereby helps to defeat her (II.ii.383). Indeed, her tirades prompt Lady Teazle to remark: "What a malicious creature it is!" (V.iii.439). Unlike her colleagues, she must "choak" at last on her own venom (V.ii.431), and the "President" of the scandalous college becomes herself a comic testimony to the dire effects of slander and malice.

Similarly, Lady Teazle, a "Licentiate" in the scandalous college (V.iii.439), becomes a victim of its slander.⁵⁰ Revenge and love (I.i. 360-1) prompt Lady Sneerwell to "Plot mischief" (370), but an inordinate desire to be fashionable leads Lady Teazle into folly. Sir Peter's "country wife" quickly learns to play "her Part in all the extravagant Fopperies of the Fashion and the Town," and she eagerly joins the slanderous coterie which encourages her "teizing Temper" (I.ii.371).⁵¹

In the character of Lady Teazle, Sheridan also adds a colourful individuality to the conventional portrait of the country lass imitating the fashionable foibles of the town. Not only is Lady Teazle a "traditional stage type," a country lass transplanted to the town; she is also a "lady of fashion" (Price, Dramatic Works, p. 305). This duality, in Price's words, creates a "delicate balance between country manners and town refinement" (p. 292). On the one hand, Lady Teazle

violates decorum. Now, unlike the seventeenth century, to offend against "manners" is to transgress the bounds of a cavilling freedom of speech (II.i.376). Instead of abiding by the college's edict that the well-mannered slanderer utters "an ill natured thing" simply out of "pure Good-Humour" (376), Lady Teazle exhibits indecorous ill-nature and severity (II.ii.379). On the other hand, while she capably engages in a "daily Jangle" with her spouse (I.ii.376) and indulges her every whim (374-5), she nonetheless "moderates" her fashionable tastes with a country innocence. As she tells Joseph: "Certainly one must not be out of the Fashion - however I have so much of my country Prejudices left - that - tho' Sir Peter's ill humour may vex me ever so - it shall never provoke me to [do the only revenge in her power]" (IV.iii.413).⁵²

Indeed, Joseph soon discovers that her "country education" prevents her acceptance of his fashionable arguments (413). Insisting that a slanderous tale can give comfort if it is deserved (411), he attempts to blind her country prejudices with "honourable Logic" (413), a tactic which signally fails to convince.⁵³ Neither his odd "Doctrine" (412) nor the scandalous tales circulated by the college ultimately succeed in infecting her. On the contrary, she resolves that only Sir Peter's ill-usage could induce her to do wrong (413) and, when she overhears his amorous disclosures, she refuses to abet Joseph's hypocrisy. She "has recover'd her Senses, and [his] own Arts have furnish'd her with the means" to expose the base designs of the "smooth tongue Hypocrite" (422). Both her initial folly and her eventual "recovery" to sense help to overturn the lies perpetrated by the members of the scandalous college.⁵⁴

To further counteract the effects of scandal and to infuse some measure of moral health into such a comically diseased world, Sheridan also introduces the moderating influence of virtue and sense.⁵⁵ Maria abjures the company of all those who, under the guise of "witty banter," slander others, and she soundly denounces them: "if to raise malicious smiles at the infirmities and misfortunes - of those who have never injured us be the province of wit or Humour Heav'n grant me a double Portion of Dullness -" (II.ii.382-3). In an earlier version of the play, Lady Teazle says of Maria: "For tho' her Eyes have no kind of meaning in them - she very seldom talks Nonsense" (Price, "Clare Sheridan MSS.," 52). And just as Maria asserts that malice does not constitute wit (I.ii.364), Sir Peter corrects Lady Sneerwell's notions of wit when he informs her: "Ah! Madam true wit is more nearly allied to good Nature than your Ladyship is aware of" (II.ii.381). Echoing Congreve, Maria contends that malice can be pardoned only if "the intemperance of their tongues" springs from an incorrigible fault, from "a natural and ungovernable bitterness of Mind" (383).⁵⁶ Joseph's claim that "they have no malice at heart" only renders "their conduct still more contemptible" (383).

Nor is Maria swayed by Joseph's cultivated ardour. His repeated professions of devotion she rejects, and, when he insists that the "profligate Charles is still a favour'd Rival," she scorns his sentiments (383). Later, she announces to Sir Peter: "you compell me to Declare that I know no man who has ever paid me a particular attention whom I would not prefer to Mr. Surface" (III.i.391). Unlike Sir Peter, Maria hardly falls victim to Joseph's artful "Sentiments and

Hypocrisy" (I.i.362).

Sir Peter for his part trusts to appearances, and extols the false "man of Sentiment" (361) as a model worthy of emulation (II.iii.386). Joseph's renown as a "most amiable Character," one "universally well spoken of" (I.i.360), testifies to the apparent efficacy of a morality which hypocritically "masks" pretensions (361). Like Acres' "sentimental swearing," which is nothing more than an empty "'echo to the sense'" (The Rivals, II.i.95), Joseph and his sentiments distort true benevolence. In correcting Sir Peter's folly and, at the same time, exposing the "sentimental knave," Sheridan thereby restores a comic balance.

A "Taste for Mirth - by Contemplation school'd; / A Turn for Ridicule - by Candour rul'd" come to represent the comic standard (A Portrait, ll. 17-18, p. 354), the balance between mirth and feeling which corrects folly and checks the spread of infection. Contrary to the "very gross affectation of good Nature and Benevolence" exemplified by Mrs. Candour (The School for Scandal, I.i.364), whose "moral turn" actually "does more Mischief" than direct malice ever could (I.i.364), Sheridan endorses frankness balanced by mirth, and a critical spirit softened by good sense and a good heart. Sheridan, then, in The School for Scandal, balances the Restoration's spirit of ridicule with the eighteenth-century's more serious spirit of benevolence. To provide this balance, he criticizes the conventional portraits of both the rakish and the sentimental hero, at the same time as he comically inverts the conventions.⁵⁷

Sheridan dramatizes Goldsmith's, and later Lamb's, complaint that sentimental heroes bestow only sentiments or "tin money," and do not

actively relieve distress. Joseph clearly distorts the sentimental virtues to suit his own ends. He "appears to have as much speculative Benevolence as any private Gentleman in the Kingdom" and yet, as Rowley acknowledges, Joseph "is seldom so sensual as to indulge himself in the Exercise of it" (V.i.423). In this way, Sheridan deflates the sentimental regard for mere verbal sympathy.⁵⁸ Joseph's "string of charitable Sentiments" are only "at his Tongue's end" (424); his favourite maxim would appear to be, as Rowley perceives, that "'Charity begins at Home,'" a "domestic sort" of benevolence which "never stirs abroad at all" (424). Indeed, both Sir Oliver and old Rowley indicate the folly of trusting only to the appearance of a sentimental heart. As Sir Oliver tells his friend, Sir Peter: "[Joseph] has too good a character to be an honest Fellow. - Every body speaks well of him! Psha! then He has bow'd as low to Knaves and Fools - as to the honest dignity of Genius or Virtue" (II.iii.386). Should Joseph salute him "with a Scrap of morality in his mouth," Sir Oliver vows to be "sick directly" (386). In Joseph, then, Sheridan comically "attacks the excesses of sentimental drama" (Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 500).

Even when his sentimental knavery has been exposed, and the reign of scandal has been toppled, Joseph continues to utter aphorisms.⁵⁹ "Moral to the last drop" (V.iii.439), the convicted hypocrite has yet another sentiment to offer the company. This proclivity for preaching underlines Sheridan's fundamental criticism of the sentimental mode. Like the social arts so capably practised by the witty hero and heroine, the sentimental virtues are also easily mastered and easily dissembled. Rather than revealing the plain-dealing, sincere heart,

sentiments too often conceal a skilled counterfeiter.

The "rakish" hero fares no better than the "sentimental" one. Joseph, a sentimental hypocrite, also recalls the profligate hero of the past. Joseph not only pursues the wealthy heroine (I.i.361), but also he attempts to seduce the fashionable wife of his friend (IV.iii). This rakish side to his character serves to further reduce his moral stature. Initially, Charles has no moral stature whatsoever. His profligate behaviour arouses virtuous scorn (III.i.391) and also leads to slanderous gossip (I.i.369).⁶⁰ Such behaviour, Sheridan suggests, invites censure and, throughout the play, he exposes the folly of an extravagance which could lead to ruin for both Lady Teazle and Charles.

Not only does Charles' improvident behaviour abet Joseph's designs (IV.iii.410), but Charles' rakish reputation also confirms Sir Peter's prejudices against him. Described as "the most dissipated and extravagant young Fellow in the Kingdom" (I.i.360), Charles has, in Sir Peter's eyes, "dissipated" any inherited "grains of Virtue" along with "the rest of his inheritance" (I.ii.372). Because of Sir Peter's "violent" predisposition to favour sentiment and discountenance profligacy, Charles almost loses Maria's tender regard. Like Harriet in Colman's The Jealous Wife (IV.ii.71), Maria "severely condemns his Vices" (The School for Scandal, III.i.391). Her disapprobation heightens both the falsity and the folly of Charles' dissolute behaviour.

Initially, Sir Oliver's "trial" of the two brothers' "Dispositions" (I.ii.372) and "Hearts" (II.iii.386) seemingly verifies Sir Peter's prejudice and Maria's prudence.⁶¹ The extravagance of Trip alarms the

suspicions of Sir Oliver, who exclaims: "If the man be a shadow of his Master - this is the Temple of Dissipation indeed!" (III.ii.396). But Trip copies only the superficial trappings of the rake. No longer "content with the Follies" of the master, the dissipated servant must now have his "Vices, like [his] Birth-Day Cloaths with the Gloss on" (IV.ii.410).⁶² Just as the sentimental "gloss" conceals Joseph's grasping, hypocritical nature, Charles' apparent profligacy overshadows for a time his fundamental good nature. This side to his character undermines the rake at the same time as it promotes Sheridan's version of the benevolent hero, endowed with mirth and sense.⁶³

Charles is a "Dear extravagant Rogue" (IV.i.408) who, like Antonio in The Duenna (II.iii.254), owes his present distresses as much to his dissipation as to his generosity. Although in the midst of acute financial distress himself, Charles boasts a merry exterior. His is a generous, if extravagant, temper. The "old romancing Tale of a poor Relation" prompts Charles to yet another unselfish act (The School for Scandal, III.i.389). "Stanley's" misfortunes Charles treats seriously, and he refuses to listen to Rowley's "Dunning" him with practical proverbs. Charles readily admits that "he can't Get [justice] to keep pace with Generosity," and he resolves instead: "while I have, by heaven I'll give - so Damn your economy" (IV.i.409). In his trial of the "Benevolence of [the brothers'] Dispositions" (III.i.388), then, Sir Oliver discovers Rowley's assessment of Charles to be correct: "you will find in the youngest Brother - one who in the midst of Folly and Dissipation - has still as our immortal Bard expresses it - 'a Tear for Pity and a Hand open as Day for melting Charity'" (388).⁶⁴

"While He appear'd an incorrigible Rake" (V.iii.438), courting Lady Teazle (IV.iii.415) and indulging his every folly, Charles is in fact a plain-dealing (III.iii.400) and charitable rogue who espouses a morality inimical both to the "sentimental knave" and to the rake. He denies having any designs on Lady Teazle, and avers: "I hope I shall never deliberately do a dishonourable Action" (IV.iii.418). Should the temptation ever arise, he swears that then he "should be obliged to borrow a little of [Joseph's] Morality" (419).

Charles exhibits both the profligacy of the seventeenth-century hero and the virtue of the eighteenth-century hero, and these two attributes become thematically important in the famous "screen scene," where the screen represents the comic "source of knowledge" (IV.iii.414). Here, Charles acts as the agent of correction and exposure. As he so merrily remarks: "egad you seem all to have been diverting yourselves here at Hyde and Seek -" (421). His merriment at the expense of artifice, on the one hand, and false appearance, on the other, comically brings to a climax the theme of artifice. Concealed behind the screen is the fashionably pretentious Lady Teazle, trapped by her foolish desire "at least to listen to [Joseph's] pretended Passion" (422). But her temporary concealment also allows Sir Peter to drop his earlier pose of husbandly indifference (II.i.376). When the screen falls, fashionable, domestic and sentimental artifice all crumble. At that moment, Sheridan focuses on the traditional comic exposure of vice and folly, for even "morality," in the form of the sentimental knave, is "Dumb" (IV.iii.421): "As the screen goes down, Joseph reenters and the trio stands unmasked: Joseph of his sentiment, Sir Peter of his

crotchetiness, Lady Teazle of her honor" (Leff, "Disguise Motif," 359).

The "screen scene" is not, as Kaul would have it, an adventitious piece of theatricality ("A Note on Sheridan," p. 139). Like the auction scene (IV.i), the "screen scene" reflects Sheridan's themes. False sentimentalism has been exposed at the same time as Charles, the apparent profligate, now proves to be both a virtuous hero and a merry fellow. Although he pointedly mocks their former pretensions when he reminds them of what they once so piously said to him, he himself offers no moral aphorisms. Instead, he rebukes Sir Peter with the words: "tho' I found - you in the Dark - perhaps you are not so now" (IV.iii. 421). Charles does indeed have a good laugh, not just at Joseph (420), but also at the Teazles, who have either been duped by Joseph's sentimental pose or who have themselves been misled by vanity.

If Charles is "a great unmasker" (Leff, "Disguise Motif," 359), then Sir Oliver and Rowley act as the benevolent mentors who finally help to bring about a comic resolution. While Rowley "is a touchstone, an admirable character who fights deceit not with deceit but with intelligence and intuition" (358), Sir Oliver determines to deceive the brothers in separate guises which will test the profligate reputation of Charles and the sentimental one of Joseph. In effect, Sir Oliver tests both Sir Peter's and Rowley's assessments of the two brothers at the same time as he plots, "if not to reclaim a Libertine - at least to expose Hypocrisy" (V.ii.433). To do so, he conforms to "the way of the world," and it is a way which frequently falsifies appearance.

The tales of the "school for scandal" have, on the one hand, fostered Joseph's appearance of sentimental refinement and, on the

other, they have exaggerated Charles' appearance of profligacy. As Rowley has earlier remarked, the "scandalous Society" has contributed "not a little to Charles' ill-name" (II.iii.385). But neither Rowley nor Sir Oliver has ever credited the "malicious prating prudent Gossips," who "murder Characters to kill time and will rob a young Fellow of his good name before He has years to know the value of it" (385). To them, Charles is not an incorrigible creature but, rather, an extravagant young man who "will retrieve his Errors yet" (I.ii.372). Sir Oliver for his part determines that, "if Charles has done nothing false or mean [he] shall compound for his extravagance" (II.iii.385). Maria herself will not condemn a man who, in spite of his extravagant behaviour, is also in distress (III.i.391).⁶⁵

Their belief in Charles' underlying virtue proves to be correct. Charles, though he will auction the family portraits for his own gain, refuses to barter that of his benefactor, "an old Fellow" who has been "very good" to him and who therefore deserves some measure of respect and gratitude. While Careless sees in Sir Oliver's portrait only an "Inveterate Knave" possessed of an "Unforgiving Eye, and a damn'd disinheriting Countenance," Charles resolves: "Egad I'll keep his Picture, while I've a Room to put it in" (IV.i.407).⁶⁶ His generous action reveals his genuine regard, and proves to Sir Oliver that Charles has in fact never done anything "false" or "mean." Joseph, on the contrary, freely denies Sir Oliver's generosity (V.i.424), and this lack of gratitude confirms Sir Oliver's former reservations about the merit of a sentimental reputation (II.iii.386). Finally, as Friedman astutely notes: "we find it easier to forgive the good-

natured heroes their faults when they are placed in contrast with hypocrites who pretend to more conventional virtues" ("Aspects of Sentimentalism," Augustan Milieu, pp. 248-9).

Sir Oliver and Rowley help to show that a distrust of sentiment must replace a foolish regard for proverb (V.ii.433). Between them, they help to establish a comic balance between "Paint and Proverb" (II.ii.380), between artifice and sentiment. Sir Oliver's artifice, his disguises, ends in reward and reconciliation. Rowley's "dunning," his use of appropriate proverbs, puts into perspective Charles' extravagance and Sir Peter's folly (IV.i.409; V.ii.433). Finally, while the scandal-mongers make Sir Peter their comic butt, and jeer him in much the same way as offenders are mocked in Restoration comedy (431), Sir Oliver and Rowley sympathetically laugh their friend out of his folly (431-2). "Sham'd into sense," folly is now corrected.

For his part, Charles must publicly acknowledge his folly, but the errors of youth are finally excused. Earlier, Rowley has spoken of the wildness of youth as a corrigible folly (I.ii.372), and Sir Oliver also refuses to be too severe on the extravagance prompted by a generous and sincere spirit (II.iii.387). Yet, even though he appears "likely to reform" (V.iii.438), Charles will "make no Promises" (441). His gratitude and his devotion to his gentle "monitor," Maria, betoken his intention "to set about it" and make him indeed "An humbled Fugitive from Folly" (441).⁶⁷

Joseph maintains his sentimental pose to the last (439). Sir Peter declares to Joseph that "the most perfect Punishment [is] that he is known by the World" (437), but Joseph's parting words hardly signal

his reformation. Just as Snake will continue to practise his deceiving arts, so, too, will Joseph apparently continue to live according to "Paint and Proverb" (II.ii.380). Neither he nor Lady Sneerwell, both exposed to derision, sentimentally reform. Even the scandal-mongers are not permanently silenced. Indeed, at the end of the play, the cavilling college and its gossip almost succeed in further falsifying appearances (V.ii.427-431), only now the reports concern, not off-stage characters, but the central personages of the play. They leave merely promising to make the "best report" they can (431).⁶⁸

Therefore, in Sheridan's comedies, and particularly in The School for Scandal and The Rivals, he endorses neither the seventeenth-century nor the eighteenth-century comic hero. Extravagance must be restrained and yet, "one is [not] to be an absolute Joseph either" (IV.iii.417), proffering sentimental platitudes or knavishly devoted to pretense. Neither a "Rake" nor a "Saint" (420), Sheridan's comic hero boasts a moderation tempered by wit and softened by good nature. In that comic balance of wit and sentiment lies Sheridan's distinctive dramatic achievement. Folly has been checked, and artifice has been exposed. The frail human creature finally discovers in the blend of wit and sentiment the comic value of "absolute sense."

CHAPTER TEN

"A Perfect Gallimaufry": Nineteenth-Century Drama

In many eighteenth-century plays, the witty and the sentimental modes form an uneasy partnership. At times, it produces just such a "motly Piece of Mirth and Sorrow" of which Addison had complained.¹ But playwrights like Sheridan do seek to balance wit and sentiment. At his best, a playwright like Sheridan dramatizes "flesh and blood," as prone to "Paint" as it is to "Proverb" (The School for Scandal, II.ii. 380). He preserves the individual attributes of the witty and the sentimental modes, and adapts the two modes to his own comic ends. Balancing wit with benevolence and laughter with sensibility, Sheridan checks excess and endorses good sense.

Later eighteenth-century dramatists do not always achieve Sheridan's balance of wit and sentiment. The drama focuses more and more on exemplary characters and the display of virtue. "Grave and sentimental" characters preach morality.² As Warford tells the gaming Lady Henrietta in Reynolds' How to Grow Rich (1793): "Why be ashamed of sentiment? 'Tis true, it is the mode to ridicule and laugh at it; but I doubt, if fashion, and all its fopperies, can find a pleasure to supply its loss" (I.i.225).³ In opposition to such virtue is the town. The "plain simple rustic" is the embodiment of rural virtue, and the antithesis of

the town's artifice.⁴ Like Cumberland in his denunciation of the town, playwrights condemn its regard for "artificial pleasure" (The Rage, II.i.89).⁵ Finally, in late eighteenth-century comedy, this didacticism and a veneration for domesticity often subdue a laughing comic spirit.

Nineteenth-century drama develops this moral focus even further, and it does so not by showing mankind to be a mixture of faults and virtues, as many earlier playwrights have done.⁶ Rather, nineteenth-century drama sharply demarcates vice, on the one hand, and virtue, on the other.⁷ Just as the sentimental dramatists in their didacticism weakened the tension between artifice and individual affections, nineteenth-century dramatists in their reverence for innocent domesticity and virtue in distress weaken the tension between folly and virtue. Characters soon tend to embody either virtue or vice. The opposition of these two attributes in separate individuals creates a dramatic tension quite distinct from the comic conflict drawn by Restoration playwrights or by the critics of the sentimental mode.⁸ As Corrigan expresses it, in nineteenth-century drama "all the significant 'catastrophic' events which occur are caused by forces outside the protagonists."⁹ The virtuous characters themselves are frequently the victims either of vicious characters or of circumstances beyond their control.

The virtuous heroine's struggle to repel the villain's advances exemplifies this theme of virtue in distress.¹⁰ Louisa in Reynolds' late eighteenth-century comedy, The Dramatist (1789), and Rachel in Jerrold's mid-nineteenth-century melodrama, The Rent-Day (1832), both undergo a severe trial of their virtue.¹¹ As Booth states, such an

example of villainy allows for poetic justice and the "re-assertion of a benevolent moral order."¹² Furthermore, the sympathetic portrayal of domestic happiness heightens the plight of virtue in distress and underscores the villainy of the oppressor, who would willingly disrupt, if not destroy, conjugal fidelity and filial loyalty.

The "waistcoat" incident in John Bull (1803) typifies the kind of pathos evoked by the violation of this domestic ideal.¹³ In agony over his daughter's desertion of him, Thornberry at last dons the waistcoat Mary has made for him (II.iii.40). Even though she has been undutiful, he forgives her, and this action of wearing the coat comes to represent his own paternal benevolence and the abiding value of domesticity. Later, Boucicault in The Silver King (1882) also concerns himself with filial and conjugal ties. After suffering extreme hardship, including the separation of parents and children, virtue eventually receives its due reward. Jaikes, the faithful butler, expresses the kind of feelings which tearful re-unions and rewarded merit are supposed to arouse: "I'm not crying - I'm only laughing the wrong way."¹⁴

Nineteenth-century playwrights inherit this sentimental regard for an instruction which would provoke tearful smiles of approbation. Vapid's comment in The Dramatist would seem to describe the lengths to which many of these dramatists will go in order to "laugh the wrong way" and achieve the fortuitous happy ending: "I must heighten his distress, for contrast is every thing" (V.70).¹⁵ Nineteenth-century playwrights, like their predecessors, also advocate the dramatic efficacy of contrast. The alternation of comic and pathetic scenes is, as Booth contends, an important technique in sentimental drama and in melodrama

(English Melodrama, p. 35). In this way, nineteenth-century playwrights adopt conventions of the past, but not always for the better.¹⁶

The contrast afforded by such a mixture of the witty and the sentimental modes helps to create, in the first half of the century, "a perfect Gallimaufry" (Macklin, The Man of the World, II. 24).¹⁷ But only later does the motley assemblage of contrasting modes seem more "perfect."

Nineteenth-century drama, at one and the same time, reveres the sentimental virtues and dramatizes the comedy of "this human chaos," as Lady Rodolpha, in Macklin's The Man of the World (1781), calls it (II.24). Such a mixture means, at least in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, that each mode does not just contradict the other and thereby undermine its dramatic effectiveness. In striving to heighten the contrast between the two modes, a playwright like Morton deliberately uses each mode in order to attain different dramatic ends. On the one hand, he tries to comically display artifice and frivolity and, on the other, to show virtue in distress and demonstrate a "just moral" (Dedication, The Lady's Last Stake, 3).

His Speed the Plough (1800) represents an early example of this pattern of contrast which later dramatists will adopt or modify.¹⁸ The comedy afforded by the Ashfields and the inimitable Mrs. Grundy starkly contrasts to the anguish suffered by Henry and Blandford. This contrast heightens the pathos and suspense, and dramatizes the play's theme of admirable domesticity. Nevertheless, the sudden shift from farcical comedy to intense melodrama creates an odd "mixture of folly and wickedness."¹⁹ Morton exploits dramatic extremes, but he cannot always reconcile them into a powerfully cohesive drama. The comic and

the pathetic merely "coexist," and Morton makes "little attempt to integrate" them (Booth, English Plays, 3, p. 6).

Lady Handy's vanity and Mrs. Grundy's pervasive off-stage presence illustrate the play's concern with social folly. But Worrington, "ever dark, subtle, and mysterious," frustrates any sustained treatment of folly.²⁰ His sudden and mysterious appearance adds to the play's seriousness and, along with Blandford's tale of fratricide (IV.iii.67-68) and amorous betrayal (68), contrasts with the Handys' comic antics. Even Bob Handy himself finally undermines the play's comic moments. His sudden transformation from a fashionable fop (II.i.17-19), who holds marriage to be a "degradation" (V.i.71), to a "warm, steady, and sincere" friend, who attributes the "folly and levity" of his character to an "effervescence" of heart (IV.ii.64), typifies the play's inharmonious mixture of the contrasting modes.

Morton's device of the keys further illustrates his self-conscious staginess. The Ashfields long to discover the reason for Susan's grief, and even consider opening the box which contains the secret (II.iii.30). Their intended violation of her trust prompts Ashfield to remark on his wife's sudden ugliness (31). When Susan produces the key and offers to open the door (32), she demonstrates the importance of a harmonious domesticity, an important theme in the play. On the other hand, Handy's inability to produce the key which will open his ingeniously designed medicine chest is highly comic (III.iii.49). Finally, the keys which guard Blandford's secret add to the mystery (III.i.39). In each case, Morton employs the device of the keys for distinctly different dramatic ends, often at odds one with the other.

By alternating the comic and the pathetic, playwrights like Morton tend to emphasize unduly, and often to the detriment of the play as a whole, the discrepancy between the dramatic modes.²¹ Furthermore, following the dramatic practice of the sentimental mode, nineteenth-century comedy's moral treatment of mankind, and its reverence for virtue and domesticity, undercut the comic exposure of folly and pretense. Rather than ridiculing folly, these dramatists commend virtue. Even those who trespass the bounds of morality receive an "exemplary punishment."²² As the gaming Sir Harry Portland in Holcroft's Duplicity (1781) exclaims to Osborne: "I am ashamed of my folly - I despised, even while I practised it; but the punishment you have inflicted has been so judicious, so severely generous, I think I can safely say, there is no probability of a relapse."²³

Inchbald's portrait of the grasping, foppish Twineall in Such Things Are (1787) underlines this regard for a just and proper punishment. Haswell, the "kind monitor," acts as the rigorously moral judge to such fashionable fools as Twineall, who suffers "a just punishment for [his] mean premeditation and base designs."²⁴ His "glaring imperfections" are properly chastized and finally pardoned, and they "will not be of such disadvantage to society" since, as Haswell explains to the erring fop: "In beholding your conduct, thousands shall turn from the paths of folly to which fashion impels them" (V.ii.67).

While Twineall must suffer the terror of imminent execution before he can be reclaimed (V.iv.72-74), Delville in Reynolds' Laugh When You Can (1798) offers to make public atonement for his perfidy, and Sir Charles Cropland in Colman the Younger's The Poor Gentleman (1801)

frankly confesses his errors: "a man's owning he is sorry for his vices may get him laugh'd at, among a few gay friends, who have more spirits than thought".²⁵ In spite of the ridicule which may be heaped upon him, and in spite of the unfashionableness of such a confession, Sir Charles acknowledges that his modish ideas have led him wrong (V.i.83). Once described in a manner reminiscent of Harriet's in The Jealous Wife (II.iii.33), as a "coxcomb, that stares humble modesty out of countenance" (The Poor Gentleman, II.ii.30), he finally repents and receives the forgiveness of those he has offended (V.iii.83).²⁶

Later, Beau Austin, an old fop who delights in amorous intrigues, must also be tutored in the dictates of honour and virtue.²⁷ He acknowledges the justice of Fenwick's exhortations, and Austin proceeds to atone for his errors. Contrary to Dorimant and his dread of social derision, Austin now publicly exposes himself to ridicule (IV.v.174), and considers his social humiliation to be a "proper punishment" for his former moral laxity (175).²⁸

Just as the rake in eighteenth-century sentimental comedy ceases to be a social hero and assumes foppish attributes which are then deprecated by the virtuous, so, too, in nineteenth-century comedy the foppish libertine becomes a tool to inculcate sound morality. Twineall and Beau Austin illustrate the changed attitude towards traditional butts. Each receives a public admonishment for his folly and vice, and each is thereby awakened to the power of true virtue. The fop's social pretensions and his indulgence in fashionable folly have undergone a significant change. Judged by moral rather than by social standards, the fop and his modish ways no longer merely arouse laughter.

They now underscore virtue: "Error and folly impede the progress of perfection" (Holcroft, The School for Arrogance, V.i.162).

Therefore, nineteenth-century comedy copies the sentimental mode's display of virtue triumphant and vice repentant. Moreover, in nineteenth-century comedy the demands of "poetic justice" are usually satisfied. But, in adopting these important attributes of the sentimental mode, nineteenth-century dramatists repeat the flaws. The adventitious trappings of later sentimental comedy often re-appear. Like Steele's contrivances in The Conscious Lovers and like Morton's in Speed the Plough, they strain dramatic credibility.²⁹ Mystery, providential discoveries and the "strange fatality of circumstances" jar with comic incidents (The Dramatist, IV.61). In part, these flaws reflect the playwrights' adherence to the sentimental comic view. They frequently remove from their portraits of vice any appealing touches in order to make vice as black as possible.

Nevertheless, many playwrights also modify the modes of the past. They often do endow their villains with some sympathetic attributes in order to insure that the vice is convincingly powerful.³⁰ Untoward circumstances, for example, impel Luke in Buckstone's Luke the Labourer (1826) to acts of villainy.³¹ Nor do these dramatists always reduce the comic merely to augment the serious. The "Sybarites of sentiment" also partake in "the Great Comedy of Life."³² The drama may not always seek to harmoniously blend wit and sentiment but, in the nineteenth century, many playwrights still endeavour, like those who wrote in the witty mode, to "trace the whimsical variety" of men's manners. "With Observation just, and Mirror true," they strive to "Present each :

reigning Folly to the view" (Prologue, The Dramatist, 1). As Ap-Hazard remarks in Reynolds' Fortune's Fool (1796), the audience are still the "performers," and furnish the stage with innumerable instances of folly and artifice.³³ Mankind, ever enamoured by appearances, slips into a "sentimental knavery" much akin to Joseph Surface's. As the "reigning folly," such knavery must be exposed and corrected.

Reynolds' Laugh When You Can (1778) is an earlier play which criticizes the excesses of the sentimental mode. The exponent of sentimental precepts, Miss Gloomly, is a "crying philosopher" (III.ii.181) whose works "are calculated to excite sighs, and tears, and terror, and distress - in short, to make people unhappy" (I.ii.153). Her expostulations comically twist Steele's earlier assertion that comedy should excite "a Joy too exquisite for Laughter" (Preface, The Conscious Lovers, p. 299).³⁴ In Miss Gloomly's view, laughter is a "low" and "immoral" tendency (Laugh When You Can, I.ii.153). If laughter can be accused of ridiculing both vice and virtue, Reynolds hints that sentiment can likewise be accused of instruction without amusement.

Like Sheridan and the other critics of the sentimental mode, Reynolds extends his criticism of sentiment to include an attack on man's foolish trust in appearances. His portrayal of another literary Puff in the character of Miss Gloomly exemplifies Reynolds' exposure of a sentimentalism easily feigned. Miss Gloomly's sentimental notions and her contempt for ridicule mask an "artful and censorious" nature which, contrary to her literary evocation of sentimental distress and virtuous sympathy, seeks to defame the innocent (II.i.163). Her comic

defeat by the "laughing Philosopher" (I.ii.159) indicates that, like Lydia's romanticism, art cannot be translated into life; the mere appearance of sentiment, so easily feigned, might well be a false one. Later, in Robertson's Society (1865), Sam Shamheart, like Miss Gloomly, also represents "the professional philanthropist" who makes it his "business and profit to love the whole human race."³⁵ But, as his name indicates, he is a sham.

To this conventional theme of appearance, nineteenth-century drama adds its own theme of respectability. In nineteenth-century comedy, the appearance of sentimental attributes heightens the appearance of respectability. "Benevolence," Sir John Vesey explains in Money (1840), "is a useful virtue, particularly when you have it for nothing" (I.i.51). Mrs. Wilmore remarks in Jones' The Hypocrites (1906): "We all act up to our principles when it costs us nothing".³⁶ Finally, according to Wilde: "a sentimentalist is simply one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it" (De Profundis, p. 946).

Conversely, the "laughing Philosopher" in Laugh When You Can places no trust in the appearance of sentiment (III.ii.181). Rather, he upholds the moral value of ridicule when he argues: "Sentiment! psha - where one rascal is preach'd or lectured out of his vices, thousands are laugh'd and ridiculed out of them" (I.ii.159). Just as the critics of the sentimental mode attacked its sermonizing and stressed that every one does indeed have his faults, dramatists like Reynolds comically urge wrong-doers to "live and reform" (II.ii.174). Gossamer himself, after making Delville his comic butt (171-3), exhorts his erring friend to fore swear vice and acknowledge virtue: "wherever you find virtue and

merit, whether in the rich or the poor, the peer or the peasant, learn to respect and admire them" (174). In Reynolds' play, the downfall of the "crying philosopher" re-affirms, not only the value of true sentiment, but also the comic efficacy of ridicule.

Some later nineteenth-century dramatists also regard ridicule as an effective, if qualified, means to laugh men out of folly. As Pinero's "amiable, undisguised debauchee," St. Olpherts, asks in The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith (1895): "And how much is there, my dear Mrs. Ebbsmith, belonging to humanity that survives being laughed at?"³⁷ On a similar note, Sir Tristram in Pinero's Dandy Dick (1887) modifies Loveit's observation in The Man of Mode when he asserts to the Dean: "Why, Jedd, there's no harm in laughter, for those who laugh or those who are laughed at."³⁸ Some nineteenth-century playwrights, then, would deny Steele's assertion that ridicule indiscriminately mocks both virtue and vice alike. As Georgina observes in Dandy Dick: "It is Folly that is laughed at and not Virtue" (III.80).

In its bustling portrayal of foibles and artful deceptions, Boucicault's London Assurance (1841) exemplifies this comic precept at the same time as it adopts the comic conventions of the past.³⁹ Boucicault exposes those follies which not only must be acknowledged, but also must be mended. Like the faults and virtues of the "mix'd character," his characters are often foolish, but eventually the "uncorrupted" heart (Laugh When You Can, I.i.149), which lies beneath the risible exterior, re-emerges.⁴⁰

Sir Harcourt Courtly embodies the social foibles Grace so deprecates.⁴¹ Both a superannuated fop and a libertine--even his very

name recalls the rakes of the past--Sir Harcourt in reality merely apes the folly of a Lord Foppington and falsely professes the reputation of a Dorimant (I.165-6). He mouths all the fashionable precepts which extol the artificial (166), and yet he venerates his son's apparent "primitive sweetness of nature" (165). These self-deceived notions of his son's manners only feed his own inordinate vanity; Young Courtly's sober mien heightens his sire's artificial one and endows Sir Harcourt with the semblance of youth (165). Throughout most of the play, then, he is a traditional portrait of a gullible and foolish old man. He is duped by the young, easily flattered into comic misapprehensions and frankly jeered at by others more common-sensical than he. Max Harkaway, for example, mockingly challenges his friend's pretensions to youth and fashion. Max, who is a "plain man" (165), tells his friend: "you are a living libel upon common sense" (166).

Sir Harcourt finds to his dismay that his folly makes him a comic butt. Convinced of "the irresistible force of personal appearance combined with polished address," he readily believes Lady Gay's avowals of devotion (IV.184). Sir Harcourt soon realizes that he has been "a dupe to [his] own vanity" (V.188). Resolved at last to demonstrate to a laughing world that he is neither "too old to repent [his] folly, nor such an ass as to flinch from confessing it" (188), Sir Harcourt attempts to atone for his folly. He tells Grace: "reparation is in my power, and I not only waive all title, right, or claim to your person or your fortune, but freely admit your power to bestow them on a more worthy object" (189). What to Grace is "generosity" is to Sir Harcourt "justice" (189).

Boucicault's foolish old man, a fop in his deportment and a libertine in his principles, exhibits many conventional characteristics. But to these excesses Boucicault adds sentimental attributes. Unlike the superannuated fops of the seventeenth century, Sir Harcourt repents his folly and mends it. He freely forgives the deceptions of his son, and delights, as Sir Anthony Absolute has earlier done, in the discovery that Young Courtly is, after all, his son. The chastened Sir Harcourt even delivers the play's moral.⁴² Like a benevolent mentor, he enunciates at last the play's comic and moral perspective. If the "infection of the present age" is to be cured (191), excess must be curbed and folly checked, and the balance of feeling and gentlemanly ease must prevail.

It is a lesson which both Young Courtly and the vivacious Lady Gay Spanker must learn. Unlike Lady Sarah in Reynolds' The Rage (1794), who exemplifies Reynolds' critical view of fashionable society, Lady Gay exudes a vivacity which charms all around her (London Assurance, III.175). Yet, her high spirits also cloak her vanity (III.180; V.187). To indulge it, she dupes Sir Harcourt and taxes Dolly's good nature. Even she must admit: "I am heartless, for [Dolly] is a dear, good little fellow, and I ought not to play upon his feelings" (188). Her insistence on a duel, which Sir Harcourt believes to be a punishment for his folly (188) and which Dolly construes to be a testament to her vanity (187), seduces the two combatants "from the paths of propriety" (190). What began as a joking exercise to subdue Dolly's bid for husbandly authority (189) ultimately shocks her into a recognition that a self-indulgent "cavalier spirit" is often no more than folly (IV.181).

Although at last she may assure Sir Harcourt of her abiding love for him (V.191), she nonetheless has learned the value of Dolly's regard (188, 189). Vivacity has been tempered by some measure of sense.

Similarly, Young Courtly must learn moderation. His assurance wrongly leads him to suppose that his "fulsome speech" and fashionable manners sway an impressionable country heart (189). But his very assurance, unlike that of characters like Careless and Atall in Cibber's The Double Gallant (1707), does not make him socially successful. Rather, it makes him comically foppish. His adoption of another identity, a common device employed by many comic heroes, fails to dupe Grace or to extricate him from his personal discomfiture (London Assurance, IV.182; V. 190). That Dazzle, a comic sycophant, must suggest the trick only accentuates Young Courtly's inability to manipulate others as effectively as earlier comic heroes had done.⁴³

Grace helps to "cure" Young Courtly of his assurance. She will not be tricked into avowals of love. Nor does she initially view marriage as an affair of the heart. Her proposed marriage to Sir Harcourt represents merely a "mercantile" transaction, one which will salvage his encumbered estate and offer her a measure of personal freedom (II.169). Unlike a witty heroine, who would willingly cheat her elders to pursue a young gentleman, Grace convinces herself that love is nothing more than "a breathing satire upon man's reason" (172). In the fashionable "marriage mart," love itself has become reduced to a "dapper shopman," descanting on the relative merits of the saleable commodities (171).

Grace criticizes a society which can make love a commodity, but

some of her judgments are shown to be suspect. To her, love is nature's amorous "jester, who plays off tricks upon the world, and trips up common sense" (172). She, too, for all her perceptions of the social world, must learn the lesson of love. In railing against love, she has erected a "pedestal to place [her] own folly on" (III.179). Her folly, like Heartwell's, receives a comic correction, personal discomfiture (179; IV.180-1). Only when her trust in her own common sense has been shaken and her view of love corrected can she receive the reward of marriage (V.190).

In this way, Grace's vanity makes her laughable. But her sense also makes her a comic ideal. She, like a witty heroine, possesses a social mastery which is matched by astute perception. In addition to this quality, Grace also displays the common sense extolled by eighteenth-century playwrights. Deprecating "all folly," she criticizes a society which prescribes the follies to be practised (II.172). In the play are many instances of such folly, Young Courtly's assurance being one of them. Using the conventional theme of appearance, Boucicault shows how folly leads to "false impressions," about the self and about others. As the play's moral makes clear, "barefaced assurance" is only a "vulgar substitute for gentlemanly ease" (V.191) and, yet, even as the moral is being delivered, Dazzle stands as a comic exception.

At the end, he still manages to escape the comic correction the others must undergo, and he continues to exploit his comically dazzling social connections. Dazzle does virtually "dazzle" those around him, and his comic assurance dupes those who trust merely to appearances. His presence at the end of the play demonstrates the need for the "plainness" of a Max Harkaway or the sense of a Grace. Since, as

"mix'd characters," they display both sense and folly, Dazzle will continue to "dazzle" them and make them believe mere appearances to be real.

In later comedy, the "mix'd character" undergoes a change. Just as the introduction of extenuating circumstances tends to humanize the villain, so, too, do later playwrights like Robertson try to combine humour and pathos in a manner more dramatically effective, one that makes virtuous distress less morally didactic and more socially cogent.⁴⁴ At their best, later nineteenth-century playwrights are successful if only because the dramatic modes now serve distinctly social themes. As Salerno expresses it, this kind of social drama concerns itself with social institutions, and the conflict involves man pitted against society and social order ("Problem Play," 196-7). In Robertson's Caste (1867), a very defined social rank helps to obscure the value of true merit, which in early nineteenth-century comedy finally does receive both recognition and reward.⁴⁵ The play, as Durbach suggests, can be viewed as "a reaction against melodramatic excess," as an "attempt to domesticate the overprotected emotional displays of the first half of the century."⁴⁶ But in Caste the social concerns are, ultimately, most important.⁴⁷

The play exploits both the comic and the serious, and their combination underlines the play's conflict: true individual worth versus necessary social prescriptions.⁴⁸ George's apparent death and his eventual return illustrate this combination. Addison in The Drummer (1715-1716) had depicted a spouse's apparent death in order to portray the comic tricks to which the wife's suitors resort. Robertson

employs the convention in order to create suspense and pathos, exemplified most fully by Esther's emotionally charged reunion with her long lost husband. Robertson also infuses a comic touch, however slight, to counteract the pathos.⁴⁹ George loses some of his sobriety (III.399), and the presence of Polly helps to lighten the play's more serious tone. In Durbach's words: "Potential melodrama is held in check by a style of ridiculous understatement," a style which undercuts the scene's more sensational, and sentimental aspects ("Remembering Tom Robertson," 285).

Because of the play's serious social theme, indicated by the play's title, Robertson modifies dramatic conventions to his own ends. In Caste, he alters the eighteenth-century convention of two central male personages, who mutually reflect one on the other. Instead, he contrasts his two heroines, a practice which Albery in Two Roses (1870) will also follow.⁵⁰ Esther, blessed with a natural nobility (Caste, II.374), contrasts to the madcap Polly (I.355). Robertson further modifies convention in his treatment of the theme of appearance. Both Esther and Polly perform on the stage, but this "artificial life," which to Peg Woffington in Masks and Faces (1852) often blurs the distinction between appearance and reality, Robertson in Caste adapts to his social theme.⁵¹ Hawtree explains that "all those marriages of people with common people are all very well in novels and in plays on the stage," but "in real life with real relations, and real mothers, and so forth, it's absolute bosh" (Caste, I.349).⁵² Esther, however, ignores Hawtree's caution. She does attempt to translate art into life. As she tells George: "Our courtship was so beautiful. It was

like in a novel from the library, only better" (II.363). In Robertson's play, Lydia's desire to create a romance in her own life ostensibly succeeds.

Nevertheless, social law inevitably intrudes into this romance, as Hawtree said it would. Described by Hawtree as "so becoming and so good" (I.349), this social law must be obeyed. Even Esther must finally acknowledge it.⁵³ The "inexorable law of caste" (349) dictates that Eccles can never mingle, as he proposes to do (III.406), with the Marchioness. Earlier, Esther did fulfill her filial obligations to Eccles, but "that time is past" (384). It is her own altered status, both personal and social, which helps to relieve her. Finally, caste "shuts the door on the pretentious and the vulgar" (405), and thereby protects itself from the contamination with which Eccles threatens it.⁵⁴

Having established the rightness of caste, Robertson can then make his point. Although it excludes the vulgar, caste must also "open the door very wide for exceptional merit" (405). Such is the case with Esther. She does display a natural gentility (404), and earns her social rank. Robertson thereby demonstrates, in terms of his social themes, the necessary existence of caste. Yet, Robertson also suggests that Esther can indeed contradict Hawtree's pronouncements, not only on caste, but also on art and life (I.349).

Therefore, Robertson adopts and adapts conventions. He extols a favourite nineteenth-century theme, the material reward accorded to true merit, at the same time as he alters a corollary theme, the abiding value of innocent domesticity.⁵⁵ The Marchioness is a "grand Brahmin priestess" (350) nourished by the "Chronicles of

Froissart" (II.370). In the play, she must rid herself of "an absurd prudery" (371), which has in the past isolated her from any domesticity whatsoever (I.349).⁵⁶ George's daring transgression of caste's "inexorable law" finally compels her to accept a reality quite apart from the outdated romance of the "chronicles." On the other hand, when Eccles steals from his grandson and seeks only to gratify his own dissipation (III.382-3), Robertson clearly shows how filial obligation and paternal responsibility can be traduced.⁵⁷

Although in the characters of the Marchioness and Eccles Robertson dramatizes the excesses of both classes, he nonetheless ends with "a conventional ratification of the status quo" (Durbach, "Remembering Tom Robertson," 286). His rebellion, as Savin puts it, is "against theatrical convention, not against Victorianism" (Thomas William Robertson, p. 118). However, in Jones' The Masqueraders (1894), such fine social distinctions as Robertson endorses become blurred.⁵⁸ To the dissolute Monty, social democracy means "that there is no line to be drawn, either socially, morally, pecuniarily, politically, religiously, or anywhere."⁵⁹

The play demonstrates the essential truth of his remarks. In spite of Dulcie's low origins, her place in society is assured; all "crush to her receptions" simply because everybody else comes (II.475). As Monty rhetorically demands: "Do we ever have any other reason for going anywhere, admiring anything, saying anything, or doing anything?" (474). The "moral tone of society" (475) is not lowered, as Lady Crandover fears it will be. Rather, given "the present decadence of political manners and morals" (477), David concludes that "our moral

evolution is now complete" (479). The age's one "supreme merit" is its refusal "to render to virtue the homage of hypocrisy" (479). No longer must hypocrisy guard a virtuous pose, once regarded as a secret cloak for sin.⁶⁰ Since "no line [is] to be drawn," anywhere (474), a frank avowal replaces the need for double-dealing.

This regard for what is "charmingly frank" (479) fosters scandal, on the one hand, and self-gratification, on the other. Just as Monty refuses to deny himself "one single pleasure in life" and boasts of his "consistent selfishness" (479), so, too, does he refuse to forfeit "the pleasure of believing and circulating a spicy story about [his] friends merely because there is only the very slightest foundation for it" (475). As Monty exclaims: "what does it matter what lies we tell about each other when none of our friends think any the worse of us if they are true!" (475). Frankly acknowledged, the rake's pursuit of pleasure and the scandal-monger's delight in slander thereby undermine the ideal of frankness.

Frankness even comes to govern amorous intrigue. The comic love chase becomes a sober commercial transaction, a "marriage market" where love is sold to the "highest bidder" (I.471). "Proviso scenes," calculated to insure personal liberty, become in this society "frank" offers of a marriage based on "a patent self-adjusting, self-repairing, safety-valve plan" (II.480). Love, "a perverted animal instinct" (480), and marriage, a "philistine" and "provincial" arrangement (479), are now "outworn impulses" (480). Indeed, Monty proposes that marriage be an expedient means to dispense with "exaggerated" notions of conjugality (480). In her efforts to gratify her own desires "to be somebody in

the world" (I.469) and to attain a social position, Dulcie exemplifies Monty's principles. Willingly, she submits to a marriage with a man who, in an auction ostensibly designed to raise money for charity (470-1), wins her amorous favours and who, later, as readily gambles her away (III.488-9).

Marriage, then, occupies Jones as much as it did his predecessors. Restoration comedy mocks it; frequently, it becomes, as Etherege and Congreve present it, a convenient mask to conceal lechery. Eighteenth-century comedy extols its value. Now, Jones and his contemporaries attack its commercial foundation, and they dramatize the unhappy consequences of a bad bargain.⁶¹ Grace in London Assurance initially regards it as just another financial exercise; Agnes in The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith views it as a "curse" and Gertrude as an almost "intolerable" hell (III.523). Compelled to live with a man she detests, Dulcie, too, comes to view it as a kind of martyrdom, to be borne only because society "plasters" it, "poultices" it and "sugars" it with such cheating words as "moral," "ideal" and "respectable" (The Masqueraders, III.486).

Finally, even David must admit, in spite of his all-consuming love for Dulcie: "I've played this great game of love like a fool, as men would say. Perhaps I've played the great game of life like a fool, too. If we are sacrificing ourselves for a shadow we are only doing what earth's best creatures have done before us" (IV.492). Monty finds "this world the pleasantest possible place" (II.479) and Helen retreats from it, but David views it as "a world of shadows" (I.468). Here, he contends, "phantoms" play their parts and, as "charming" as the "shadows" may be (II.479), they are occupied solely in "playing at money-making,

playing at religion, playing at love, at art, at politics" (479). Their elaborate "game" (479) lacks what David calls "reality." To him, only his own imagined "Andromeda," the "one perfect world," helps to make "the imbroglio of the universe complete" (I.473); Andromeda does not become a sham, for there all is real (IV.492).

The "crowds of shadows" (II.479), engaged though they may be in their "masquerade" of life, yet exert control. Monty commandeers the auction (I.470-1) and, as the defender of this "remarkably comfortable and well-arranged place" (II.479), he inculcates the social catechism. He defines social democracy (474); he asks the questions which require no answers (475). For "a man who has a heart," it is the "very worst world that ever spun around" (I.473), a world where a man like David must "always wear a mask over [his] heart" (II.479). So he, too, must become a kind of masquerader, forced to conceal his heart, compelled to pretend that Andromeda exists (478). He belongs, then, both to Monty's sham world and to his own self-created one (478). Finally, he must concede to Helen's moral one.

Helen demands that "right-wrong-duty" (IV.492) be properly performed (491). Her upright moral laws may likewise all be "shadows" (492), but they provide the "line" which Monty dismisses and which, ultimately, forces the lovers into conjugal obedience.⁶² Only in the imaginary world of Andromeda can David's "marriage" to Dulcie be "real" (492). If "folly is happiness" (I.465), then his "one chance of happiness" (IV.491) also proves to be folly. It is founded on a game of chance (III.488-9) and on his own self-willed pretense (II.478). Once again, he holds to a "pleasing delusion" (I.473), first with

respect to women (466) and now with respect to the world. The astronomer must leave both the fashionable world of sham and his own imagined world, and retreat instead into a world of science, described in the play as a world of death and disease (III.487).

In The Masqueraders, Jones depicts a society given to sham and illusion, but he adapts the modes of the past to suit his own dramatic ends. The theme of "things that shadow and conceal" he transforms (The Man of Mode, III.i.50). The masqueraders, the "phantoms" of which David speaks (The Masqueraders, II.478), no longer conceal vice; "frankness" precludes a mask. The masqueraders, like Etherege's fop, are themselves mere "shadows." It is the astronomer who yearns to dispel the shadows, both in society and in the heavens, and who must also don a mask to protect his inner self.

Therefore, many later nineteenth-century playwrights like Jones adapt to their own dramatic ends the corollary themes of artifice and appearance. Frail human creatures, contriving to hide their social and moral failings, yet strive to safeguard their reputation in the world. In the seventeenth century, the concern is for a "tolerable show" (The Man of Mode, III.i.51); the characters must perform well on the stage of the world. In nineteenth-century society, "the only way to show oneself thoroughly respectable is to make a thoroughly respectable show" (Money, IV.ii.103). Not only must the character prove his respectability, but also he must jealously guard its appearance.

Pretense no longer can be viewed simply as a social art acquired by every witty hero and heroine. The "dear pleasure of dissembling" comes to have, not only social, but moral ramifications as well (The Man

of Mode, III.i.54). Earlier, in John Burgoyne's The Heiress (1786), dissembling is regarded as a vice to be morally discountenanced.⁶³ In Masks and Faces, it is a tool to expose vice (II.165). But, here, a "lying, selfish, treacherous world" preaches morality at the same time as it propagates scandal.⁶⁴ To adopt a pose or play tricks fails to insure either lasting personal control or social mastery.

Artifice still attracts a few adept practitioners. Mrs. Modely in Holcroft's Seduction (1787), for example, "has had the art so well to conceal her intrigues, and preserve appearances, that she is every where received in society" (II.ii.273). Similarly, Lady Audley in Hazelwood's Lady Audley's Secret (1863) so capably hides her past crimes that her mask of innocence imposes "on all the world."⁶⁵ Their "mimic art" deceives only for a time (Masks and Faces, II.171), and moral verdicts ultimately punish such artificers. In the genteel circle of the drawing-room, however, virtuous appearances must be maintained, and artifice must bow to the dictates of both morality and propriety.⁶⁶ Now, to preserve appearances depends on the ability to "arrange things not perhaps exactly as they were, but as they ought to have been" (The Liars, III.127). As Sir Christopher shrewdly observes in The Liars (1897): "In that way a lie becomes a sort of idealized and essential truth -" (128). The "ought to be" urged by the sentimental mode has ostensibly been reduced to the perpetration of sham.

In The Liars, Lady Jessica's deceit springs from what she wrongly calls a "mere indiscretion" (127). But her flirtation, unlike the social implications of the love chase in Restoration comedy, traps her in a compromising situation which threatens to expose her to the scandal

associated with a "fallen woman." While Beau Austin publicly proclaims his folly, Lady Jessica can clear her reputation, and avoid the moral grumblings of "Mrs. Grundy" (I.102), only if she engages in deceit.⁶⁷ To tell the truth, as Sir Christopher initially suggests, would "place Lady Jessica in a position where she will have no alternative but to take a fatal plunge" and cause a "very unpleasant family scandal" (III.136). Later, when Lady Jessica does determine to take a "fatal plunge" and elope with Falkner (IV.148), Sir Christopher, as the play's moral touchstone, reminds her that, in ruining her reputation and creating a "shabby scandal" (149), she will be "miserable for life" (148).⁶⁸ Once even the semblance of reputation is lost, as Pinero dramatizes in The Benefit of the Doubt (1895), Lady Jessica only has "the one solitary hope and ambition of somehow wriggling back into respectability" (The Liars, IV.149).⁶⁹ This "dry society dust" (II.110) may well "choke" her but, as Sir Christopher makes clear, "the luxury of self-sacrifice" (I.105) belongs only to the Beatrices, more "spiritual" (104) than worldly.⁷⁰ The play demonstrates the truth of Sir Christopher's observations. Lady Jessica's indiscretion and the play's dramatization of fashionable lying, designed to preserve appearances, both indicate the dangers to be faced by the individual who transgresses the social law. For their own worldly benefit, they must, as Lady Jessica does, "sacrifice" themselves to the social merit attached to virtuous appearances.

This pre-occupation, not only with folly and hypocrisy, but also with the moral question of the "fallen woman," exemplifies society's effort to "make a thoroughly respectable show" (Money, IV.ii.103).⁷¹

In this society, as Miner suggests, "respectability constitutes virtue," and "a sound morality must be founded upon conventionality."⁷² Like the cast-off mistress, the "fallen woman" is a woman with a past, and she must guard her pretense to virtue.⁷³ When the mask of honour falls, her predecessor incurs social censure, and must endure the laughter of those who are better able to conceal themselves. But the "fallen woman" flounders; if she fails to conceal herself, then she cannot long sustain a "thoroughly respectable" appearance. Judged by a hypocritical society which seemingly prizes innocence, she is consigned to the "social Dead Sea."⁷⁴ Ultimately, she falls victim to society's harsh judgments which are both morally rigorous at the same time as they smack of hypocrisy.⁷⁵

Pinero's The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith illustrates this common nineteenth-century theme.⁷⁶ In the play, Nicolls contends, "social conventions" are pitted against "natural instincts," and this observation suggests the connection between a conventional theme and Pinero's techniques (British Drama, p. 236). Unlike the witty mode's dramatization of the conflict between instinct and society, however, Pinero joins this conflict to morality. He dramatizes two battles, one social and the other moral. Within this framework, Agnes' quest for social and personal freedom is doomed to failure. Structurally, the play moves from the battle for Lucas' social conscience to the battle for Agnes' soul.

She and the superannuated rake do symbolic battle for Lucas' "social" conscience, to Agnes an idealistic commitment to society's needs and to St. Olpherts an expedient capitulation to a shallow

ambition. But the same society which damns Agnes, and which leads Paula in The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (1893) to suicide and Mrs. Dane in Mrs. Dane's Defence (1900) to exile, seemingly condones St. Olpherts' folly and vice. As Miner says: "he more than anyone else in Pinero's drama personifies late Victorian society with all its outward respectability and moral rectitude, and all its inner hypocrisy and ruthlessness" ("Limited Naturalism," 149). St. Olpherts can, for example, unashamedly enjoy his reputation as "an amiable, undisguised debauchee" (II.510), and he can also frankly admit that he is a "sensualist" who doesn't "take the trouble to deceive himself" (511). This open avowal of libertinism, recalling as it does the rakes of the past, now assumes an added social importance. In contrast to Agnes' moral high-mindedness, St. Olpherts supports a "sham reconciliation" which admirably appeases any decorous demands for "a proper aspect to the world" (III.521).

Just as Agnes and St. Olpherts fight for Lucas' social conscience, Gertrude, a "virtuous, unsoiled woman" (523), and her pious brother do battle for Agnes' soul (IV.527), and apparently win. Miner's suggestion that it is St. Olpherts who determines her ultimate fate neglects the important roles these two religious figures play (149). Gertrude's confession of marital unhappiness justifies Agnes' moral rebellion. Agnes has, at least, had her "hour" of happiness (III.521); Gertrude, chaste and pious, has suffered. On another level, her admission of loving another man, and resisting the happiness he offered, rebukes Agnes' present behaviour.⁷⁷

This "friendship" between the two women thereby places in perspective the moral and social dilemmas Pinero presents. The cost is

high for both of them. Gertrude lives an unhappy, but chaste, life. She adheres to the moral law forbidding adultery, and she conforms to the social law exacting respectability. For her part, Agnes sacrifices her social ideals as well as the man she loves. As Gertrude has earlier done, she, too, finally submits to the moral law. In a highly theatrical scene, she retrieves a charred Bible (525), and this action represents her conversion to Winterfield's moral way.⁷⁸ She is unwilling to martyr herself for a man like Lucas, one who chooses expediency rather than feeling. Nor will she commit a moral wrong and condone his hypocrisy.

Winterfield's, then, is the moral triumph, the reclamation of a woman society brands as "fallen." But Gertrude has already declared Agnes to be in fact a "moral woman living immorally" (524). So, in the play's terms, Agnes does not represent the conventional "fallen woman" but, rather, a moral woman who has in advisedly tried to join her morals to her social ideals. And society is not the place for ideals.

Ultimately, St. Olpherts' is the victory, for morality is made to serve society. Agnes must be "saved," but in the mean time St. Olpherts and the hypocritical society he represents do not confront the implications of the two conflicts Pinero dramatizes. Here, where "civilization means rottenness," such "organized hypocrisy" thrives everywhere (The Hypocrites, I.34). As Sir Christopher explains in The Liars: "We're not a bit better than our neighbours, but, thank God! we do pretend we are, and we do make it hot for anybody who disturbs that holy pretence" (IV.148). Jones in Mrs. Dane's Defence offers an even more scathing attack on the pretentiousness and hypocrisy of such a society. Lady Eastney exclaims: "Aren't we all humbugs?"

Isn't it all a sham?"⁷⁹ Even though Pinero in the last act of The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith does not resolve the conflict between the individual and the hypocritical society, he nonetheless effectively challenges that society's right to make moral judgments.⁸⁰

In this important sense, the "town" continues to exercise a powerful influence in nineteenth-century drama. The town still demands compliance to its dictates, and it still sanctions appearance. The town is also governed by a rigorous moral scrupulosity; moral blights like Mrs. Dane's must be removed. Wycherley's portrait of rampant vice and Sheridan's of garrulous gossip finally produce in nineteenth-century drama a vivid picture of a society which, on the one hand, breeds hypocrisy and slander and, on the other hand, piously upholds an austere morality. Earlier dramatists ruthlessly mock such an excessive reverence for social appearance, and comically expose those individuals who can neither cultivate nor penetrate artifice. Many nineteenth-century dramatists, as "moral dramatists," expose hypocrisy, not to ridicule it, but to propound more forcibly true morality (The Dramatist, II.27).

In later nineteenth-century drama, a sentimental treatment of mankind and morality still flourishes, but in a modified form. In contrast to Jones' grim vision of society, comprised of liars, hypocrites and masqueraders, Pinero in Sweet Lavender (1888) extols the presence of virtue. Even in the midst of such a "jungle," Wedderburn extols the "flowers" which "find strength to raise their heads - the flowers of hope and atonement."⁸¹ Here London is a "most beautiful garden" (III. 180), where fortunes are forfeited, reparations feelingly made and an

"exemplary" constancy (The Rage, II.i.90) yet survives. Similarly, in Grundy's A Pair of Spectacles (1890), Goldsmith's theme of indiscriminate benevolence undergoes a transformation. Benjamin's good-nature receives no comic check.⁸² His brother's spectacles alter his view of the world for a time but, finally, he chooses to be blinded by his benevolence, in his view a worthier attribute than worldliness. As he observes: "If there are some impostors in the world, I'd rather trust and be deceived than suspect and be mistaken" (III.567). The exposure of a willing credulity in the presence of vice yields, then, to a more sympathetic treatment.

What earlier playwrights ridiculed and comically exposed, later nineteenth-century playwrights come to treat seriously; they launch a cogent and sober attack against society's artifice and hypocrisy, favourite comic targets in the past. Indeed, their portrayal of the "fallen woman" transforms a fundamentally comic portrait, the cast-off mistress, into a socially and morally charged issue. Similarly, the sentimental trust in benevolence and good nature find a full comic expression in such farces as Pinero's Dandy Dick (1887) and Grundy's A Pair of Spectacles. The playwrights use the witty and the sentimental modes to suit their own dramatic ends.

Perhaps no playwright embodies nineteenth-century "Gallimaufry" more "perfectly" than does Gilbert. Lady Rodolpha's description of a motley assembly, which exemplifies the "human chaos" (Man of the World, II.24), also describes Gilbert's comic works. They are highly comic, and only smilingly acknowledge sentiment.⁸³ In Engaged (1877), the lovers each declare their ardent passion in an inflated language like that offered by sentimental heroes and heroines.⁸⁴ In spite of this

language of sentiment, farcical circumstances and, ultimately, money govern their various affairs of the heart (III.429). Gilbert even resurrects the food and animal imagery so pronounced in Restoration comedy, but here he reduces it to absurdity. Eyes, for example, are compared to "poached eggs" (I.412), the beloved becomes a "tree upon which the fruit of [the] heart is growing" (412), and a marriageable daughter is compared to a "little lamb" ready for the "sacrifice" (II.417).

Mr. Symperson's advice to his daughter hardly suggests she be the bride about to be sacrificed to conjugal obedience. She is, he tells her, to "be sure [she has her] own way in everything," and to stand resolute, "however wrong [she] may be" (417). Minnie herself proves to be quite capable of managing her personal affairs (III.426); she resolves, contrary to the sentimental domestic ideal, to satisfy only herself (II.416). The witty heroine's regard for personal liberty and the sentimental heroine's virtuous diffidence Gilbert links to the nineteenth-century heroine's view of matrimony as a financial transaction.

Similarly, Gilbert mocks the traditional opposition between the country and the town. His rustics are as commercially minded (I.414) as the "dandy townfolk" (409). Mrs. MacFarlane exercises her benevolence on passengers she herself has caused to be de-railed (409-410). Nor does Maggie pretend to blush at the prospect of her beauty's being admired; if things in nature are sure to be beautiful, then she will not be guilty of "base ingratitude" and shut her eyes to her own fair image in the glass (413).

The additional element of mystery augments Gilbert's comically

audacious portrayal of a hypocritical society, professing sentiments while it busily seeks advantageous financial arrangements. Like some melodramatic villain, Belvawney exercises "an all but supernatural influence" over his friend (411); his "dreadful eyes" Cheviot cannot resist (412). Later, Belvawney exerts his control, and Gilbert's stage directions punctuate the "melodramatic intensity" his portrayal of Belvawney is designed to suggest (II.422).⁸⁵ While his "Fiendish exultation" and "Satanic laugh" may recall the melodramatic villains of the past (422), Belvawney represents nothing more than a mercenary young man eager to retain his income, dependent as it is on Cheviot's remaining a bachelor (I.411).

Finally, Gilbert suggestively exploits the traditions of the past only to deflate them at last. Circumstances and coincidence alone dictate the happy outcome and, for all Cheviot's "airy badinage" (411) and "heroic impulse" (III.427), even Gilbert's comic hero cannot intrigue as capably as his predecessors. Gilbert's comic technique of deflation checks the excesses of all the dramatic traditions. In Patience (1881) he now jeers at the pretensions of contemporary aesthetes like Wilde, regarded by many as the later nineteenth-century's embodiment of "decadence."⁸⁶

Gilbert's exaggerated portraits of Bunthorne, "a Fleshly Poet," and of Grosvenor, "an Idyllic Poet," illustrate the excesses to which these dramatic traditions are prone.⁸⁷ The "peripatetics / Of long-haired aesthetics" (I.182) like Bunthorne appeal to the romantic longings of the "twenty love-sick maidens" (172); they dedicate their souls to him and luxuriate in the agony of their unrequited love. Once as practical

as Patience, the "love-sick maidens" now speak of an "aesthetic transfiguration" which exalts their perceptions and "etherealizes" their tastes (175). What to Patience is "nonsense" is to them "precious nonsense" (181). The meaning of his poetry, Bunthorne later admits, "doesn't matter if it's only idle chatter of a transcendental kind" (183).

So, Bunthorne proves to be an "aesthetic sham" (183). He admits that, while he utters "platitudes / In stained-glass attitudes," his "mediaevalism" nonetheless is "affectation, / Born of a morbid love of admiration" (183). As Stedman notes, the play becomes "a criticism of affectation as a motivating principle in human nature" ("Genesis of Patience," 58). Like any Restoration fop, Bunthorne affects to be what he is not, for a "mere / Veneer" conceals his essential lack of substance (183).

But Gilbert endows his portrait of a fop with unique attributes. Bunthorne strikes "intensely melodramatic" poses (182), and even boasts a mysterious power over his rival, Grosvenor (II.211). Yet, like his cultivation of "a sentimental passion of a vegetable fashion" (I.184), such affectations merely accentuate the vacuity of his aesthetic pose. Not only does the "sentimental passion" rest solely on his inordinate desire for admiration, but so, too, does the melodramatic "curse" (II.211). Bunthorne at last compels the aesthetic "Narcissus" (210), Grosvenor, to become a "commonplace" young man only to assure his own supremacy in the ladies' affections (211).

Like any affectation, these aesthetic postures can be easily mastered and easily tailored to suit any occasion. To regain the ladies' love, the Dragoons imitate the "attitudes" Bunthorne and the ladies

display (206). Similarly, like Grosvenor, Bunthorne "reforms." He replaces one affectation with another. Adopting his rival's pose, Bunthorne henceforth will be "mildly cheerful" rather than melancholic, and his conversation will blend "amusement with instruction" (213). Gilbert here also comically deflates the sentimental notions so revered by his predecessors. A fop, both affected and aesthetic, will now inculcate the moral lesson. In this way, Gilbert deflates poetic pretensions at the same time as he exposes absurd affectations. Love itself becomes reduced to postures, for the "love-sick maidens" a hopeless affection and for Patience an idealistic sacrifice (I.189).

In his singular use of dramatic modes, tailored to his own outrageous ends, Gilbert paints an absurd, "topsy-turvy" portrait of the "human chaos." Wilde recaptures even more brilliantly the modes of the past.⁸⁸ Nineteenth-century "Gallimaufry" furnishes Wilde with an important dramatic tradition: a unique, if motley, assemblage of wit and sentiment. Indeed, Wilde's plays effervesce with some of the qualities so admired by Mabel in Marston's earlier play, The Patrician's Daughter (1842): "'Tis full of mirth and sprightly incident, / And keen, bright satire, through all which the heart / Breathes truth and sympathy! O, how I love / To track a noble soul in masquerade!"⁸⁹ Like Sheridan, Wilde will further enliven a thriving tradition and, at his best, revivify vis comica.⁹⁰

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"A Serious Bunburyist": Wilde's Society Comedies

Itself the combination of earlier modes, nineteenth-century "Gallimaufry" gave to Wilde a flourishing dramatic tradition.¹ Playwrights like Robertson, Pinero and Jones tailored the modes to suit their own social and comic themes, and Gilbert for his part mocked them. But, in general, nineteenth-century drama threatened to become merely a "motly Piece of Mirth and Sorrow," ineffectively combining the witty and the sentimental modes.² Indeed, what Lord Henry Wotton says of cast-off mistresses in Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) might also apply to many nineteenth-century dramas: "'If they were allowed their own way, every comedy would have a tragic ending, and every tragedy would culminate in a farce" (Chapter 8, p. 85).³ To put "Tragedy into the raiment of Comedy" is to make "the great realities" seem "commonplace or grotesque or lacking in style" (De Profundis, p. 936), an observation which elaborates on the earlier criticism levelled against a drama which would either "end her Comedies in blood" (Prologue, The Rivals, l. 34, p. 74), or which would transform the theatre into a "school of morality" (False Delicacy, V.ii.744).

Wilde rejects such a notion. He comically inverts any serious treatment of life only to extol an aesthetic appreciation for art and life. As Lord Illingworth in A Woman of No Importance (1893)

proclaims: "the world has always laughed at its own tragedies, that being the only way in which it has been able to bear them. And that, consequently, whatever the world has treated seriously belongs to the comedy side of things" (III.462). As San Juan states, such a vision as Lord Illingworth's "reconciles life's discords"; it recognizes life's incongruities, an important theme in Wilde's comedies (Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 165). Wilde offers, most clearly in The Importance of Being Earnest (1895), "trivial" comedies for "serious people." He thereby dramatizes his own creed of the transfer of art to life at the same time as he dismisses the claims of the moralists.⁴

In Wilde's view, the intrusion of morality into a work of art is gratuitous, for ethical pronouncements on art testify to the age's lack of aesthetic appreciation.⁵ Contrary to the practice of many of his predecessors, Wilde denounces the kind of sacrifice expected of those who transgress society's laws. While playwrights like Jones expose the hypocrisy of such a society and criticize its ethics, these earlier dramatists nonetheless uphold the moral dictum that the wrong-doer must be expelled.⁶ This regard for "poetic justice" Wilde would discard. To define "fiction" as "the good ended happily, and the bad unhappily" not only simplifies life (The Importance of Being Earnest, II.341), but also it denigrates art. In Wilde's view, "it takes a thoroughly selfish age, like our own, to deify self-sacrifice. It takes a thoroughly grasping age, such as that in which we live, to set above the fine intellectual virtues, those shallow and emotional virtues that are an immediate practical benefit to itself" (The Critic as Artist, p. 1043). Philanthropic zeal, practised by "well-meaning and offensive busybodies,"

destroys whatever "simple and spontaneous virtue that there is in man" (p. 1044). Custom, in Wilde's view, and "the terror of society, which is the basis of morals" (The Picture of Dorian Gray, Chapter 2, p. 29), both regulate society; ethics simply make "existence possible" (The Critic as Artist, p. 1058). Those who indulge in such sentimental philanthropy may perceive "an absurd value in everything," but they fail to know the "market price of any single thing" (Lady Windermere's Fan, III.418). Wilde concludes that sentimentalists desire to have "the luxury of an emotion without paying for it" (De Profundis, p. 946).

Similarly, those who do emphasize "a certain amount of sordid terror" show a "certain lack of imaginative thought, and a certain low passion for middle-class respectability" (The Critic as Artist, pp. 1057-1058). They may serve ethics and popularize "the vulgar standard of goodness" (p. 1057), but in pandering to the populace they cease to be true artists: "the sphere of Art and the sphere of Ethics are absolutely distinct and separate" (p. 1048). In Wilde's view, a novelist like de Maupassant merely builds a "prison-house of realism" (The Decay of Lying, p. 981), a prison-house which fosters a "monstrous worship of facts" at the same as it threatens to chase away beauty and make art "sterile" (p. 973).⁷ Echoing the complaints of the critics of the sentimental mode, Wilde accuses de Maupassant of writing "lurid little tragedies in which everybody is ridiculous," and "bitter comedies at which one cannot laugh for very tears" (p. 974). To Wilde, the realistic writer presents "dull facts under the guise of fiction" (p. 972). In slavishly copying it, he finds life "crude" and leaves it "raw" (p. 974), neither aesthetically uplifting it nor imaginatively

creating it. The nineteenth-century "dislike of Realism," Wilde says, is the "rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass" (Preface, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 17). Indiscriminately mixed, wit and sentiment, realism and fiction merely substitute the "common livery of the age for the vesture of the Muses" (The Decay of Lying, p. 977).

The true artist dismisses morality as readily as he does realism: "No great artist ever sees things as they really are. If he did he would cease to be an artist" (p. 988). The true artist does not copy, but creates, and he evokes in others a comparable creativity. Playing Chopin, Gilbert explains, makes him weep over sins he has never committed and mourn tragedies not his own (The Critic as Artist, p. 1011). Such art "creates for one a past of which one has been ignorant, and fills one with a sense of sorrows that have been hidden from one's tears" (p. 1011). Truly splendid art, Wilde insists, "makes and unmakes many worlds, and can draw the moon from heaven with a scarlet thread" (The Decay of Lying, p. 982).⁸

In Wilde's aesthetic view, only art, and not dull facts, can form the basis of life. Herein to Wilde lies melodrama's chief fault: "As the inevitable result of this substitution of an imitative for a creative medium, this surrender of an imaginative form, we have the modern English melodrama" (p. 979).⁹ Stage characters who copy "the gait, manner, costume and accent of real people" would, in reality, pass "unnoticed in a third-class railway carriage" (p. 979). Even on the stage they fail to arouse imaginative sympathy. Nature and life, says Wilde, are imperfect; only art can endow them with grace and beauty and spirituality (p. 983).

The world may well be a stage, "but the play is badly cast" (Lord Arthur Savile's Crime, p. 174). In life, "most men and women are forced to perform parts for which they have no qualifications" (p. 174), and to mirror life is to copy this fundamental imperfection.¹⁰ The distinction between the stage of the world and the world of the stage, once so important to the Restoration playwright, has become blurred by the slavish reproduction of reality.¹¹ In rejecting realism, Wilde propounds, not imitation, but creativity, and he adapts the earlier Restoration view to his own view of art. If the basis of life is "simply the desire for expression," then only art can present the "various forms through which the expression can be attained" (The Decay of Lying, p. 985). As Gilbert says in The Critic as Artist (1891): "Life and Literature, life and the perfect expression of life" (p. 1016). Only art can allow individuals to discover in nature and in life what they already bring to them (The Decay of Lying, p. 977).¹²

To Wilde, the stage represents "the return of art to life" (The Truth of Masks, p. 1067). The human actors create a life-like reproduction. It is at once an illusion of "actual life" (p. 1068) and a dramatic fiction, for in art the actors choose "whether they will appear in tragedy or in comedy, whether they will suffer or make merry, laugh or shed tears" (Lord Arthur Savile's Crime, p. 174). The stage is also the "meeting-place of all the arts" (The Truth of Masks, p. 1067), of all these "various forms" of expression. Simultaneously creating and re-creating life, the stage comes to mirror most fully "man in all his infinite variety" (The Critic as Artist, p. 1016).¹³ Wilde's "glass for the world" is at one and the same time a reflection

of the stage of the world, and an aesthetic re-creation of it.

Therefore, Wilde adapts the eighteenth-century precept that art and life mutually influence and reflect one on the other (The Decay of Lying, pp. 983-5), but for Wilde "Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life" (p. 982).¹⁴ Similarly, Wilde also recalls the seventeenth-century concept of the stage of the world and the world of the stage, but for him the stage, "in one exquisite presentation," beautifies and perfects actual life, and combines it with "the wonder of the unreal world" (The Truth of Masks, p. 1068). "Gallimaufry," the motley assembly of the witty and the sentimental modes, also furnishes Wilde with the means to capture and to express man's "infinite variety," but in a distinctly "Wildean" way.¹⁵

For Wilde, the drama represents "a form of exaggeration," an "intensified mode of over-emphasis" (The Decay of Lying, p. 978). Wilde views art as an exquisite form of lying, "the telling of beautiful untrue things" (p. 992).¹⁶ Whereas the "liars" in Jones' play "arrange things" and perpetrate sham (The Liars, III.127), the liars in Wilde's plays seek to live creatively.¹⁷ To them, mendacity represents "simply something that is not quite true, but should be" (The Importance of Being Earnest, II.354). If the "prison-house of realism" stifles the imagination, then lying nourishes it.

Yet, the lie is not an "idealized truth," as it is in The Liars (III.128), for the "object of Art" is not truth but beauty (The Decay of Lying, p. 978). Unlike the prevaricating politicians, who "never rise beyond the level of misrepresentation, and actually condescend to prove, to discuss, to argue" (p. 971), the "true liar, with his frank, fearless statements, his superb irresponsibility, his healthy, natural

disdain of proof of any kind," speaks of things which are their "own evidence" (p. 971). The artful liar is "the true founder of social intercourse" (p. 981).¹⁸ The social art of conversation, so revered by the Restoration wit, Wilde revitalizes, and he ironically endorses what Steele so deprecated. The liar does indeed seek, to use Steele's words, only to entertain, and "it is of no consequence to him what is said, so it be what is called well said".¹⁹ For "the aim of the liar is simply to charm, to delight, to give pleasure," and his brand of creativity revivifies art (The Decay of Lying, p. 981).

In many ways, Wilde does indeed summarize many of the dramatic modes of the past, but his Gilbertian sense of the ridiculous and his own aesthetic principles uniquely transmogrify these earlier modes.²⁰ Wilde transforms the traditional theme of "masks and faces." Formerly an artifice practised by such dissimilar characters as Dorimant and Mrs. Loveit in Etherege's The Man of Mode, the mask becomes to Wilde the emblem of creative mendacity. Contrary to the falsities which masks in earlier drama had perpetrated, masks in Wilde's view tell us "more than a face;" for masks intensify the personality (Pen, Pencil and Poison, p. 995). As Toliver says, Wilde stresses the "usefulness of pretense in escaping the rigors of fact and discovering a higher reality."²¹ Since "man's deeper nature is soon found out" and only the "superficial qualities" last (Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young, p. 1206), Wilde explores, "not the reality that lies behind the mask," but the mask itself (The Decay of Lying, p. 975).²² It alone, as a piece of art, separates individuals. Lord Darlington explains: "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars." (Lady

Windermere's Fan, III.417). The mask, then, helps to distinguish between the "dowdies," who mindlessly conform to social and moral laws, and the "dandies," who are fully able to create art and thereby realize life.²³

The dandy comes to embody the "truth of masks."²⁴ His is a cultivated pose which artfully blends the fop, the libertine and the aesthete. Like Etherege's man of mode, the dandy is an affected creature;²⁵ he is concerned about his external appearance in general, and his buttonhole in particular (An Ideal Husband, III.522).²⁶ As Gregor says, the buttonhole "proclaims" the dandy, whose "favourite view" he finds in his own mirror ("Comedy and Oscar Wilde," 502). But the dandy is also a social master. His epigrammatic observations are frequently cited by those who uphold the social creed (A Woman of No Importance, I.433, 438). Indeed, for all his "delicate fopperies of Fashion," the dandy "stands in immediate relation to modern life, makes it indeed, and so masters it" (An Ideal Husband, III.522). He comes to be "the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought" (522). Finally, the dandy's cultivated mask allows him to be the spectator (The Picture of Dorian Gray, Chapter 9, p. 91) and, ultimately, to prophesy about life and to "give the truths of to-morrow" (Chapter 17, p. 147).

So, unlike Restoration wit, which verbally surprises the hearer and protects the speaker, and unlike eighteenth-century humour, which amuses by virtue of its quaintness and amiability, Wilde's wit becomes associated with "the whole of the mental faculties" (Martin, Triumph of Wit, p. 26).²⁷ Wilde's wit, while it is conventional in its social

concerns, is also unique. His brand of wit certainly does include the speaker's ability to lay bare the foibles of society, but the dandy's wit inverts the cliché. The startling insight does not arise from the unexpected connection between incongruous things. Rather, hackneyed phrases are given new meaning and significance. The seven deadly sins, for example, become the seven deadly virtues (An Ideal Husband, I.495). In this way, wit cuts "'life to pieces'" (The Picture of Dorian Gray, Chapter 8, p. 82), and shows society's complacency of thought and language. At the same time, it challenges custom and convention. The dandy sums up the "world in a phrase" (Chapter 1, p. 26), and he becomes a cogent commentator on the age.²⁸

He is also the liar, the teller of "beautiful untrue things" (The Decay of Lying, p. 992). This side of the dandy's character helps to make his wit unique. His mask, a cultivated piece of art, enables him to "assert the absolute modernity of beauty" (The Picture of Dorian Gray, Chapter 11, p. 103), more complex than "simple truth" (The Decay of Lying, p. 978). As "Prince Paradox" (The Picture of Dorian Gray, Chapter 17, p. 147), the dandy professes that "'the way of paradoxes is the way of truth'" (Chapter 3, p. 43) and, as Gregor says, "the essence of paradox is contradiction" ("Comedy and Oscar Wilde," 514). Wilde himself, in speaking of art in general, says that a "Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true" (The Truth of Masks, p. 1078). Indeed, Algernon in The Importance of Being Earnest tells Jack that "the truth is rarely pure and never simple" (I.326).

In order to dramatise some of these aesthetic views, Wilde, like many other dramatists, combines the modes of the past in a manner at

once distinctive and conventional.²⁹ Throughout his plays, his use of these past modes dictates to a great extent his treatment of the dandy. The dramatic pattern formulated by his predecessors enables Wilde to dramatize the often sordid lubricity of the dandified rake. Past practice also allows him to expose, not only the plight of the "fallen woman," but also the shallowness of a society which would hypocritically denounce a morally wronged woman and yet tolerate her seducer. Wilde dramatizes a "sentimental education," but not of those who have erred. Rather, those who profess a strict, uncompromising morality must be taught, unlike the benevolent mentors characterized by his predecessors, the value both of humane feelings and practical morality.³⁰ To vivify this creed, Wilde adopts a melodramatic framework and combines it with his portrait of the dandy.

Wilde capably draws the villain's outline, but endows his portrait with an added touch, the dandy's aesthetic pursuits. The dandy may worship art but, in the early plays, he also possesses disreputable attributes and mouths precepts which often violate the aesthetic creed of art in life and life in art. Like the eighteenth-century "mix'd character," the dandy is not simply a dramatic or an aesthetic ideal. In many ways, he resembles the rakes and the villains of the past, and Wilde's portrait of the dandy combines and changes these earlier modes.

The cunning of both Prince Paul in Vera, or the Nihilists (1880) and Lord Henry in The Picture of Dorian Gray recalls the villains of the past, but their dandified airs exemplify, at least in part, Wilde's creed of art in life. In Vera, Wilde occupies himself primarily with the social theme of political repression and with the personal theme of

sacrifice for the sake of love. Wilde's play contains the cogent social commentary so prominent in his nineteenth-century contemporaries. He portrays the antagonistic forces, villainous in the extreme, which impede the progress of personal and social liberation. Here, the dandified Prince Paul Maraloffski fits the role of villain exceedingly well. He betrays a cruelty and guile which match his ready wit: "He would stab his best friend for the sake of writing an epigram on his tombstone" (II.665).

Similarly, Lord Henry Wotton in The Picture of Dorian Gray exerts a devastating influence on the impressionable and egotistical Dorian (Chapter 10, p. 97; Chapter 16, p. 140). Lord Henry likewise would "sacrifice" anybody "for the sake of an epigram" (Chapter 18, p. 154).³¹ Prince Paul cunningly serves his own best interests (Vera, III.674), and unhesitatingly sacrifices others to his own quest for political power (681), but Lord Henry Wotton amuses himself by studying Dorian's development into a dandy (Chapter 3, p. 41; Chapter 4, p. 55).³² Yet, as a dandy himself, Lord Henry also strives to realize art in life, and in The Picture of Dorian Gray Wilde does indeed present the mutual transference of art and life.³³ Dorian's picture becomes in fact the mirror of his soul (Chapter 7, pp. 78-9; Chapter 8, p. 88; Chapter 10, pp. 96-7); the actions of his dissolute life mar the portrait and leave unscarred his beautiful face. Life becomes art, and art itself assumes the attributes of an actual existence: the visible signs of aging and the physical marks of dissipation. Lord Henry's epigrammatic observations help Dorian to learn to relish this transfer of life's qualities to the painted canvas (Chapter 11, p. 103), for now Dorian

can become the spectator of his own life and of his own debilitating sin (Chapter 9, p. 91).

In Lady Windermere's Fan (1892), a play which relies on melodramatic devices, Wilde briefly characterizes four aspects of the dandy, and all of them recall individual comic portraits of the past: the fop, the rake, the villain and the wit.³⁴ To do so, he presents a comically critical portrait of a highly mannered society. Here, in a world fascinated by his appearance of wickedness and yet charmed by his wit (I.390), the dandy thrives. Lord Augustus is dismissed by the Duchess as her "disreputable brother" (390), one who enjoys all the dissolute pleasures afforded by society. Yet, his blind infatuation with Mrs. Erlynne makes him a dandified descendant of the credulous old man. The clever Mrs. Erlynne teases the gullible Lord Augustus into devotion (II.401-2), and cajoles him into matrimony, even after her reputation appears to be ruined (IV.429).

Lord Dumby, for his part, resembles the fop so eager to please that he agrees with everyone (II.397) only to contradict at last all his earlier opinions (398). Within the play's social context, he also typifies the kind of social hypocrisy so prevalent in many earlier plays. He claims not to know the notorious Mrs. Erlynne and, indeed, sneeringly remarks that she "looks like an édition de luxe of a wicked French novel, meant specially for the English market" (402). When confronted by her, Lord Dumby, "with perfect nonchalance" (402), accepts her dinner invitation. Moreover, his unthinking obedience to Lady Plymdale's commands recalls the henpecked husbands of the past.

Cecil Graham adds the dimension of triviality to Wilde's quartet

of dandies. Lord Augustus accuses Cecil of being "excessively trivial" (400), flippant in his comments and eager to contradict others. It is a characteristic which Wilde's later dandies, most notably Algernon, will further endeavour to transform into a studied art. Cecil also delights in gossip, to him a "charming" diversion (III.416) which many other fops of the past endorse and which Sheridan critically exposes. Finally, Cecil's self-centredness suggests the egotism associated with the dandy as villain (II.399-400).

In the character of Lord Darlington, Wilde portrays the dandy as both the witty social master and as the rakishly seductive charmer (I.390).³⁵ In a world where, as Cecil remarks, "nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion" (II.406), Lord Darlington shrewdly adjudges that a pretense of wickedness prevents society's serious treatment of him (I.387). Lady Windermere herself verifies his assessment when she tells him: "I sometimes think you pretend to be worse [than you are]" (386). Even into her morally upright world, where a woman of Mrs. Erlynne's stamp is forbidden admittance, Lord Darlington gains free access, an access which he then uses to gratify his own passions. As Ganz states: "If the dandy is to dominate his society, he should possess social as well as intellectual superiority" ("Divided Self," 21).

While a character like Worthy in Vanbrugh's The Relapse desires only a sexual conquest, Lord Darlington in Lady Windermere's Fan tries to convince Lady Windermere to love him (II.404-5).³⁶ In spite of her suspicions about his sincerity (I.386) and her accusation that he is trivial (390), she does for a time succumb to the force of his arguments which, like Joseph Surface's, would have her "sin" in her own "Defence"

(School for Scandal, IV.iii.412). To do as he bids her, she may have to forsake respectability, but such an action relieves her of "some false, shallow, degrading existence that the world in its hypocrisy demands" (Lady Windermere's Fan, II.404). At the same time that she would gratify her own inclinations, she would also reject a hypocritical social creed.

But Wilde's portrayal of the "seduction" modifies a traditional pattern. Lady Windermere is not a cast-off mistress, subjected to the witty ploys of a disenchanted lover; her husband dearly loves her and, so, too, does her prospective lover (404). Nor is she a sentimental heroine, existing in a virtuous marriage and resisting all temptation. It is Mrs. Erlynne, the woman who has many years before deserted her family, who must remind Lady Windermere of her obligations and of her husband's devotion to her (III.413). Lady Windermere's own morality traps her at last. Lord Darlington plays on her earlier refusal to compromise, and forces her to abide by her own moral pronouncements (I.387; II.404). She finds herself condemned by her own uncompromising moral scrupulosity, socially damned if she becomes another Mrs. Erlynne and morally damned if she chooses hypocrisy or compromise. Wilde reverses the earlier treatment of the "fallen woman," morally schooled by the righteous one, and in a brilliant stroke he shows the pitfalls of a morality less practical than it is rigid.

Lady Windermere's moral awakening comes to verify Lord Darlington's earlier comment that life is "too complex a thing to be settled by these hard and fast rules" (I.388).³⁷ Her desire to "live securely," according to such rules, has "blinded" her to the pits and precipices

into which one may so easily stumble (IV.429). She must recognize the frailty both of herself and of her views. In Wilde's drama, unlike sentimental drama, neither moral uprightness nor virtuous precepts can protect her. She must admit at last that "there is the same world for all of us, and good and evil, sin and innocence, go through it hand in hand" (429).

Both the dandy and the "fallen woman" become the means by which she achieves this insight. The dandified Lord Darlington lures her into the "abyss" of dishonour (III.411), but Mrs. Erlynne teaches her the dangers encountered in the precipice, dangers so vividly dramatized by Wilde's predecessors.³⁸ Both the dandy and the "fallen woman" remind Lady Windermere of society's harsh, if equivocal, moral laws. Even Lord Darlington must acknowledge the force of societal judgment (II.404), and society's creed of "manners before morals" (IV.423) seemingly justifies the Duchess of Berwick's equivocal social decrees with respect to Mrs. Erlynne (I.390-392; II.405).³⁹

In his portraits of the virtuous woman and her counterpart, the fallen woman, Wilde adds more twists. Both mother and daughter are tempted to forsake virtue, and Lady Windermere's dilemma repeats her mother's earlier one (408). Coincidence, then, plays a significant role in Wilde's tale. Nevertheless, this traditional contrivance is combined with his own dramatic and aesthetic concerns. As charming and as clever as the dandy, Mrs. Erlynne capably returns to "the society that has made or seen her ruin" (I.395). Moreover, to do so, she does not repent. Rather, like a capable Restoration heroine, she assumes a mask which not only protects her inner self, but which also deceives

others (III.413). Lady Windermere, on the other hand, is a "mere girl," possessing "neither the wit nor the courage" to withstand social infamy or the struggle to "get back" into a society which is both hypocritical and superficial (413).

Finally, these social and moral questions Wilde connects to his theme of illusions.⁴⁰ Not only is there a filial relationship between the virtuous and the fallen woman, but there is also a kindred trust in illusions. Mrs. Erlynne discovers her "heartlessness" to be nothing more than an "illusion" (IV.425). Notwithstanding the painful shattering of this illusion, she chooses to pursue only pleasure and "to live childless still," even though her choice defies reality (425). In this way, illusions are both challenged and preserved. Realities may be better, as she affirms (427), but illusions also come to have their place. To undeceive her daughter would mean that the idealistic Lady Windermere would lose everything (427). If her moralistic pronouncements and her regard for her own virtue are found to be fragile illusions, then her idealism with respect to her mother must remain a pleasant untruth. As Nassaar explains: "Mrs. Erlynne understands the age, and she knows that both Lord and Lady Windermere must be shielded from some of its truths if their marriage is to survive" (Into the Demon Universe, p. 79).

Mrs. Erlynne, however, for a time substantiates her daughter's illusions about her. She may not always be a living paragon of virtue and self-sacrifice, but she does indeed prove to be willing enough to risk her own happiness for the sake of her daughter's. She comes to verify, in part, one of Lady Windermere's earlier remarks: "Nowadays

people seem to look on life as a speculation. It is not a speculation. It is a sacrament. Its ideal is Love. Its purification is Sacrifice" (I.387). Mrs. Erlynne's selfless actions dramatize the "love" and the "sacrifice" of which her daughter speaks. She exclaims: "Oh! to save you from the abyss into which you are falling, there is nothing in the world I would not dare, nothing in the whole world" (III.411). In reality a "fallen woman" herself, Mrs. Erlynne nonetheless conforms, at least for a time, to her child's illusions about her.

Wilde toys yet further with the complexity implicit in his presentation of illusion and reality, appearance and truth. Mrs. Erlynne succeeds, not only in saving her daughter's reputation, but also in rewarding herself. At last, she does reproduce in life the respectable "saintly" mask, for so long merely an illusion. A seventeenth-century "witty" attribute, cunning artifice, is temporarily allied to an eighteenth-century "sentimental" one, sacrificial love. This alliance makes reality of illusions.

But Mrs. Erlynne's "sacrifice" proves to be no "purification" at all. Even though her daughter's folly awakens in her a passion never felt before (II.409), Mrs. Erlynne, in the fourth act, refuses to indulge her newly discovered feelings of matronly concern. As Wilde himself suggests, this fourth act is "the psychological act, the act that is newest, most true" (Letters, 23 February 1893, p. 332). Like Snake in The School for Scandal, she has no desire to have her one good deed acknowledged (Lady Windermere's Fan, IV.427). Nor will she have a "pathetic scene" with her daughter (425), or a melodramatic show of repentance.⁴¹ Rather, she asserts: "I thought I had no heart. I

find I have, and a heart doesn't suit me, Windermere. Somehow it doesn't go with modern dress. It makes one look old" (425). And to repent in a manner acceptable to society, a woman must "go to a bad dress-maker, otherwise no one believes in her" (425). With dandified assurance, she dismisses her lack of repentance or maternal sentiment: "I suppose, Windermere, you would like me to retire into a convent, or become a hospital nurse, or something of that kind, as people do in silly modern novels. That is stupid of you, Arthur; in real life we don't do such things - not as long as we have any good looks left, at any rate. No - what consoles one nowadays is not repentance, but pleasure" (425).

On the one hand, then, Mrs. Erlynne will remain a "fallen woman," for she is unrepentant and unwilling to stoop to emotionally charged scenes of penitence. On the other hand, her marriage to Lord Augustus socially "redeems" her. In this way, Wilde inverts the contrived conclusions of his predecessors. Mrs. Erlynne does indeed exile herself, but not out of compulsion or shame (429). Her actions thereby demonstrate that sacrifice does purify life but, at the same time, they also prove life to be a speculation. Her daring to risk her own ambitions for the sake of her child represents a sacrifice which ironically justifies the profitability of the speculation. Wilde connects this ironic interplay between sacrifice and profitability to his theme of illusion. To "purify" life is, ultimately, to create art. Masks become realities, and illusions are preserved. As Gregor puts it, her behaviour becomes the "effective embodiment of the dandy's aspiration to turn his own life into a work of art" ("Comedy and Oscar Wilde," 507).

Illustrating as it does Wilde's aesthetic creed of art in life and life in art, the melodramatic device of the fan underscores this fundamental irony.⁴² Initially a token of love (I.386), the fan successively becomes an ineffectual instrument of vengeance (396), a sign of moral cowardice (II.400-1), a symbol of sacrifice (III.419) and a mark of shame (IV.420). At critical moments in the play, this visible piece of art represents the emotional and moral turmoil which Lady Windermere suffers, and it thereby underlines the intimate connection between art and life. However, not only is the fan the physical emblem of the marriage bond; it also is a birthday present, given in celebration of Lady Windermere's "coming of age" (I.386). This social "birth" thematically mirrors Lady Windermere's personal initiation into worldly experience. She moves from innocence and blindness to a recognition of "temptation, sin, folly" (IV.420). Hence, the fan becomes the pivot for the action.

This "fatal fan" (420) also comes to be both the physical and symbolic link between characters and their respective illusions. On the one hand, apparent truth heightens illusions and, on the other hand, illusions are believed to be realities. Lord Windermere contends that, once Mrs. Erlynne has touched it, for him the fan becomes soiled (424). But he is unaware that his wife has almost lost the innocence he so reveres (423), or that Mrs. Erlynne has preserved that innocence. Conversely, in first avowing the fan to be hers (III.419) and then in accepting it as a gift (IV.428), Mrs. Erlynne destroys her own illusion of heartlessness and surreptitiously acknowledges her maternal bond to her child. At the same time, she substantiates her daughter's

illusions; the mother does indeed become self-sacrificing. Thus, the fan symbolizes Lord Windermere's progress from reality to illusion and Mrs. Erlynne's from illusion to reality.

Lady Windermere both achieves a social insight and retains her illusions. Her morality formerly blinded her to the reality of human fault (I.388), but her gift of the fan to the very woman accused of destroying marital happiness indicates her new awareness: "Bad women, as they are termed, may have in them sorrow, repentance, pity, sacrifice" (IV.421). Her social initiation culminates in her gift of the fan, but Lady Windermere neither knows the reality of her birth, nor will she ever have to suffer the social shame associated with it. Mrs. Erlynne remains her unacknowledged mother. Art, now represented by her mother's "miniature" (425), and by the illusions Lady Windermere weaves around it, replaces the social realities of scandal and shame, represented by the fan. Art thereby creates an idealized version of life.

Therefore, Wilde in Lady Windermere's Fan changes traditions.⁴³ The "fallen woman," initially masked and then exposed, suffers no social exile or moral recrimination. Indeed, the virtuous, if sorely tempted, woman in the end pronounces Mrs. Erlynne to be a "very good woman" (430).⁴⁴ So successful is Mrs. Erlynne that she transforms the mask of respectability into a social reality, and she conceals the maternal reality beneath a mask of friendship. Finally, Wilde adapts these traditions to fit his aesthetic concerns. A physical object comes to mirror the action of the play and to dramatize Wilde's creed of art in life and life in art. Through the device of the fan, Wilde connects

his theme of birth, both into life and into social reality, to his theme of illusion. As a piece of art, the fan reflects life, the actuality of birth. But the birthday present also represents art, the illusions to which Lady Windermere clings.

In A Woman of No Importance, Wilde further exploits convention only to strengthen his own individual themes.⁴⁵ Once again, he focuses on the plight of the "fallen woman" and the status of the dandy in a hypocritically domestic society. If society condemns Mrs. Arbuthnot on the basis on respectability, then moralists like Gerald and Hester judge her on the basis of a vigorous moral law: the sanctity of wedlock and the chastity incumbent on a woman of honour. All must learn the traditional lesson of the dangers incurred by an excessive trust either in moral absolutes or in appearances. Mrs. Arbuthnot is only seemingly chaste, and she wears only a mask of saintliness. She is also a morally wronged woman, and Wilde dramatizes the conflicting claims of morality and social success. In doing so, he modifies the practice of his predecessors. Mrs. Arbuthnot encounters her seducer, a socially aristocratic dandy, but such a "horrible accident" (II.457), a traditional melodramatic device, becomes in Wilde's play an effective means of challenging moral and social certitude.

The rakish Lord Illingworth worships only the pursuit of pleasure. Like Monty in The Masqueraders, Lord Illingworth is the social master, but he is also the dandified villain, the seducer of innocence. Mrs. Arbuthnot once amused him as "the prettiest of playthings" (IV.480),⁴⁶ but to him she now represents merely "a woman of no importance" (I.443). Lord Illingworth, then, resembles the rakes of the past. Endowed

though he is with the dandy's epigrammatic skill and studied triviality, Lord Illingworth also represents the unrepentant nineteenth-century villain. He suffers a traditional defeat in the end, and the "insult of his punishment," inflicted by the very woman he has wronged, "dazes him" (IV.481). Moreover, he loses his son, the one asset which he confesses would make his life "complete" (II.455).⁴⁷ Yet, in Wilde's play, the villain is socially victorious at last, much as St. Olpherts is in The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith. Like him, Lord Illingworth and his shallow society will yet survive. Indeed, they will flourish, in spite of moral recrimination and "punishment."

Wilde's treatment of a hypocritical society is at once new and traditional. Lord Illingworth's social success and Mrs. Arbuthnot's apparent social demise offer a cogent criticism of a society which would expel her and embrace him. Yet, Wilde questions the social and moral issues raised by his contemporaries in order to dramatize the subtle complexity of truth and of masks. Mrs. Arbuthnot, for example, must wear a mask, "like a thing that is a leper" (III.469), but society itself "lies like a leper in purple" (II.449). Both are "diseased," and both conceal the infection. So capably has she concealed her sinful origins that society remains ignorant, not only of Lord Illingworth's perfidy, but also of her past. If he is readily accepted, so, too, is she (450). Unlike Mrs. Erlynne in her battle to re-enter society, Mrs. Arbuthnot finds herself welcomed by society, and in spite of her voluntary retreat from the world.

Mrs. Arbuthnot has converted her shame into a form of self-gratification comparable to Lord Illingworth's pursuit of self.⁴⁸ To

keep her son and shield him "from the world's sneers and taunts" (IV. 474), she willingly prevaricates. Just as she has rejected Lord Illingworth's earlier offers of assistance only to find ample recompense in her lavish maternal devotion (II.455-6), so, too, does Lord Illingworth's perfidy to her "feed" this all-consuming passion for her son, a "sort of love" which even she must admit to be "terrible" (IV. 480). As Lord Illingworth shrewdly, if cruelly, tells her: "You talk sentimentally and you are thoroughly selfish the whole time" (II.456).⁴⁹ Even her philanthropic zeal, a form of sentimental benevolence, proves to be a selfish pandering to her own maternal love (IV.475). She has never repented (475) a "sin" which blesses her with a "pearl of price" (474), and such self-conscious Biblical echoes seemingly warrant Hester's impassioned view that, in Mrs. Arbuthnot, "all womanhood is martyred" (476).⁵⁰

Wilde's portrayal of Mrs. Arbuthnot, then, adds distinctive features to the conventional portrait of the fallen woman. Mrs. Arbuthnot is morally tainted, but socially secure. While, like Mrs. Erlynne, she refuses to indulge in selfless acts of repentance, she is also this exemplar of wronged womanhood. Yet, Mrs. Arbuthnot is also a woman steeped in her own excessive passion, and Wilde's treatment of this fallen woman suggests that her punishment of her seducer does not merely right wronged domestic virtue, nor is it merely a sentimental form of "poetic justice."⁵¹ Neither Lord Illingworth nor Mrs. Arbuthnot will, or must, suffer social shame. His callous remarks at the end of the play signal, not only his flippant disregard for a bastard son and a cast-off mistress, but also his assured return to society. In

eradicating the past which Lord Illingworth so bitterly embodies for her, Mrs. Arbuthnot's retributive act dramatizes the beginning of her new life, a kind of rebirth enhanced by the forgiveness Gerald and Hester finally bestow.

Wilde's treatment of the moral and the social implications of human behaviour, then, is important. Unlike Pinero's dramatization in The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith of two battles, one moral and the other social, Wilde depicts the traditional confrontation only to transform it. It is not Hester, the voice of moral authority in the play, who brings about any reformation. Rather, it is Mrs. Arbuthnot. She abets Hester's "sentimental education," and her plight convinces the "little puritan" that love, not punishment, should be the moral law. The character of Mrs. Arbuthnot dramatizes the lesson to be learned, and Hester preaches the morality which, in many ways, contradicts that lesson. Hester attacks both society and its sinners, and she is the one who pronounces the conventional moral sentence: "Let all women who have sinned be punished" (II.449). But Mrs. Arbuthnot escapes the punishment traditionally meted out to the fallen woman, and she thereby avoids any moral demand for repentance (Lady Windermere's Fan, I.395; IV.425). Society itself also disregards Hester's morality.

In its contempt for the "gentle and the good," the "simple and the pure" (A Woman of No Importance, II.449), society welcomes debauchees like Lord Henry Weston, "a man with a hideous smile and a hideous past," but a man who nonetheless makes complete every dinner party (449). So prevalent is the hypocrisy and the moral laxity that a reverence for a "moral system," exemplified by the English "home-

life" (I.439), even society claims to acknowledge. The domain which for them embodies this domestic ideal is itself tainted by the past actions of both the saintly philanthropist, Mrs. Arbuthnot, and the social master, Lord Illingworth. Such, Wilde suggests, is the ultimate value of a "moral system."

"Well-made" as it is, the play's structure highlights Wilde's dramatic treatment of a rigid morality in conflict with a mannered society.⁵² Morally "punished," if still socially successful, Lord Illingworth is dismissed by the woman he has wronged as a "man of no importance" (IV.481), a pronouncement which parallels his own earlier indifference (I.443). The title of the play climaxes the first act and the fourth act, and Wilde thereby subtly links his moral and his social themes. Morally, Lord Illingworth is expelled from the domestic circle; he is unimportant in that sense. But, in leaving their home, Mrs. Arbuthnot and her children now become, in the context of the play, socially unimportant.⁵³

The play's structure also displays an architectonic skill similar to Etherege's. Wilde presents dramatically charged exchanges between Mrs. Arbuthnot and Lord Illingworth, and between them and their son. These serious confrontations (II.455; IV.477) parallel the witty colloquies between Lord Illingworth and Mrs. Allonby (I.440; II.453). Similarly, Mrs. Allonby propounds her view of marriage (446-8) immediately before Hester's outraged speech (449-450). Lady Hunstanton, ever the genteel hostess and the arbiter of social ease, worries that Mrs. Allonby's "clever talk" shocks Hester (448). The hostess' remarks dramatically separate and heighten the utterance of these two opposing

views; Hester's diatribe underlines the moral aspect of the play, and Mrs. Allonby's "clever talk" exemplifies the social. Indeed, Hester's preachments structurally fall midway between fundamentally social exchanges. Mrs. Allonby first speaks of the "Ideal Husband," and the dramatic exposition which follows Hester's "little speech" (450) then reiterates the social principles so recently denounced. These hypocrites countenance what they claim to deplore, and Hester's speech serves as one measure of their social and moral deficiencies.

Although Hester denounces this lack of morality and social justice, Wilde nevertheless undercuts the impact of her moral and social pronouncements. Her diatribe fails to produce any social effect or moral reform. After her passionate speech, Lady Caroline casually asks: "Might I, dear Miss Worsley, as you are standing up, ask for my cotton that is just behind you?" (450). As San Juan writes: "Lady Caroline's remark at the end of [Hester's] speech, in its timely juxtaposition, deflates at once Hester's solemn rant" (Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 160). Her accusations are further questioned when Lady Hunstanton then introduces the fallen woman as "one of the good, sweet, simple people" (450) Hester claimed were never admitted into society (449). The little "Puritan in white muslin" (IV.478) may help to bring about Lord Illingworth's downfall (477-8; 480), but she herself is singularly ineffectual, and her proselytizing, so prominent a feature of sentimental drama, is comically reduced.

Clearly, therefore, Wilde owes a great deal to the modes of the past, for he adapts them to his own ends. His epigrammatic brilliance captures the sparkling dialogue of many earlier comedies of the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵⁴ In A Woman of No Importance, Lord Illingworth's bantering ripostes and Mrs. Allonby's deft verbal fencing recall the Restoration hero and heroine. At the end of the first act, they capably spar with one another, and Lord Illingworth praises Mrs. Allonby's witty mastery (I.443). Even her challenge to his amorous talents (II.453) echoes Berinthia's role in Worthy's attempt on Amanda's virtue in The Relapse (III.ii.66-70). And if the witty mode is important, so, too, is the sentimental mode. Coincidence dictates in large part the dramatic action of Wilde's plays, and theatrical props like letters and fans recall the devices used by such playwrights as Congreve and Steele.⁵⁵ Finally, his nineteenth-century contemporaries furnish Wilde with traditions which uniquely alter conventions of the past. Wilde, like them, constructs a "well-made" play, and he limits his action to the twenty-four hours recommended by Aristotle. Wilde's inclusion of the sickly Mrs. Daubeny in A Woman of No Importance exploits the nineteenth-century convention of the elusive off-stage character.⁵⁶ Algernon's "Bunburying" in The Importance of Being Earnest represents the consummate comic expression of such a convention, but in plays like A Woman of No Importance and An Ideal Husband Wilde capably exploits various traditions at the same time as he infuses them with a uniqueness.

In An Ideal Husband (1895), an off-stage character governs the actions of both Mrs. Cheveley and Lord Chiltern.⁵⁷ Her blackmail tactics and his quest for wealthy respectability exemplify the Baron Arnheim's "philosophy of power," the lust for "power over other men, power over the world" (II.505). Like Lord Henry Wotton, the Baron

preaches a doctrine which ultimately contaminates. But the Baron, unlike Lord Henry, also epitomizes conventional society. Worshipping a "gospel of gold" (505), society nourishes the Baron's greed and sanctions his philosophy of power. Lord Chiltern claims to have "fought the century with its own weapons," prevarication and ambition, and won (506). Ironically, the man renowned for his untarnished public image has achieved a position which only his own falsehood and the Baron's wealth could procure. Yet, although socially esteemed as a man of "high character, high moral tone, high principles" (IV.546), Lord Chiltern now represents the Baron's gilded public counterpart.

But the champions of wealth must be the slaves of respectability. The "modern mania for morality" insists that everyone pretend to be good, and "to pose as a paragon of purity, incorruptibility, and all the other seven deadly virtues" (I.495). Scandal crushes where once it charmed (495). Here, Wilde clearly agrees with Wycherley's, Sheridan's and Jones' view of scandal. So, when Mrs. Cheveley threatens to expose him, Lord Chiltern is singularly helpless. She, too, fights with the century's "weapons" (II.506), and against the very man so enamoured by the century's "gods" (504), wealth and power.

Mrs. Cheveley is both fallen woman and villainess. No longer a forsaken woman struggling to re-assert herself in a society which condemns her, Mrs. Cheveley seeks only her own pleasure and self-gratification. Even her questionable past arouses in her, not compunction, but delight. She dismisses Lady Chiltern's contempt with the words: "Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike" (519). If, as Lord Goring shrewdly observes,

she finds "a new scandal as becoming as a new bonnet," she has no need of a saintly mask (508). So, whereas Mrs. Erlynne betrays a self-sacrificing nature and Mrs. Arbuthnot punishes a social injustice, Mrs. Cheveley exemplifies a "thoroughly grasping age" (The Critic as Artist, p. 1043). As Lord Goring perceives, her business with Lord Chiltern passes "as a loathsome commercial transaction of a loathsome commercial age" (An Ideal Husband, III.534).

In this way, Wilde creates an initial conflict between the Baron's two protégés. Both have been corrupted by his philosophy of gold but, as an off-stage character, the Baron himself during the course of the play becomes less important than the conflict between the man who, unlike the Baron, tries to do some good, and the woman who, like the Baron, serves only herself. Soon, the conflict moves beyond the Baron's philosophy of gold altogether, and includes Wilde's aesthetic concerns.

Wilde joins his portrait of the "fallen woman" to his aesthetic concerns. Just as the other characters, with the notable exception of Lord Goring, are described in terms of paintings, Mrs. Cheveley is herself "a work of art" (I.484).⁵⁸ She resembles "an orchid, and makes great demands on one's curiosity" (484). Like the artist who "makes and unmakes many worlds" (The Decay of Lying, p. 982), she is the actress who performs many parts on the stage of the world. As the liar, she couches the reality of her past in allurements, mystery and intrigue. Yet, when he adds that, as a work of art, she betrays "the influence of too many schools" (An Ideal Husband, I.484), Wilde subtly summarizes her character. Rather than making life an artistic creation in itself, Mrs. Cheveley capably imitates; she does, for example,

reveal how studiously she has absorbed the lessons of her tutor, the Baron (496).

The Baron seeks to convert artistic elegance into power; to him, luxury represents "nothing but a background, a painted scene in a play" (II.505). To the Baron, then, art serves life. The play he stages is life itself, his own consuming passion for power. Similarly, as the "fallen woman," Mrs. Cheveley has played so many roles that circumstances, not art, dictate the form her mimicry will take. Indeed, a piece of art traps her at last. The bracelet she has stolen at first lends her beauty an enticing backdrop but, finally, as a clever piece of craftsmanship, it helps to expose her moral ugliness (III.535).⁵⁹ When she realizes her danger, a "mask" falls from her face and she is "dreadful to look at" (536).

Significantly, the "flawless dandy" (I.488), Lord Goring, has no antecedent in art, and he it is who brings about her downfall. He has made of life an art, and his amorous entanglements underline his role as dandy.⁶⁰ On the one hand, his former attachment to Mrs. Cheveley illustrates the dandy's love of art. But her beauty is morally contaminated. Her present desire for a "romantic interview" (III.534), for example, would have him sacrifice himself for the sake of his friend. Lord Goring wittily rejects the creed of self-sacrifice when he tells her, with dandified assurance, that he already contemplates his own perfections (533).

On the other hand, his courtship of Mabel Chiltern and his treatment of his father recall the witty mode. Indeed, his humorous attempts to handle his unexpected guests even recall the machinations of a

Horner (The Country Wife, IV.iii; V.iv) or a Joseph Surface (School for Scandal, IV.iii). But his attachment to Mabel highlights the dandy's studied triviality. She dislikes seriousness as much as he (An Ideal Husband, II.512), and she proves to be, like any Restoration heroine, his female counterpart (IV.547). If he perplexes his old sire with his banter, then so, too, does she confound Lord Goring's dandified demeanour. When he tells his father that, during the season, he can talk seriously only "on the first Tuesday in every month, from four to seven" (III.524), he wittily bows to society's demand for fact and order at the same time as he reduces to absurdity the need for seriousness at all. Similarly, Mabel merrily deflates serious marriage proposals. Tommy Tafford, she informs Lord Goring, "always proposes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, during the Season" (IV.541), and she thereby converts Lord Goring's efforts to be serious into a comic colloquy.

In addition to his studied triviality and witty mastery is the sentimental mentor's benevolent sagacity. He thereby comes to represent the voice of moral and social authority in the play at the same time as he embodies Wilde's creed of art in life.⁶¹ In the character of Lord Goring, Wilde tailors the traditions of the past to his own dramatic, and aesthetic ends. As "the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought" (III.522), Lord Goring "plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world" (I.488). His "post of vantage" (488) lies in his very triviality and in society's persistent inability to recognize "the philosopher that underlies the dandy" (IV.548).⁶² Lord Caversham, for example, complains that he never knows when his son speaks seriously

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or not (538).

Similarly, his offer of friendship to Lady Chiltern startles her, and she confesses: "Lord Goring, you are talking quite seriously. I don't think I ever heard you talk seriously before" (II.511). But Lord Goring has earlier admitted to his friend: "I am always saying what I shouldn't say. In fact, I usually say what I really think" (507). In contrast to Lord Darlington's offer of friendly assistance, Lord Goring seriously endeavours to use his role as dandy to his friends' advantage. Of "practical life" he claims to know "nothing by experience, though [he knows] something by observation" (511), and his intimate acquaintance with, and observation of, Mrs. Cheveley prove to be invaluable.

While he stands aloof from the serious concerns of life in order to indulge more fully his affectations, Lord Goring alone can defeat Mrs. Cheveley and correct the excesses of the Chilterns. He alone can initiate a balance between duty (IV.548) and charity (II.511).⁶³ As Martin suggests in another context, wit such as Lord Goring possesses can indeed include sentiment. Because of this inclusion, the witty character is less constricted than the sentimental one in his view of the world (Triumph of Wit, pp. ix-x). Only Lord Goring perceives the moral lesson propounded in the earlier plays. As he tells Lady Chiltern, whose views on life he finds "a little hard": "All I do know is that life cannot be understood without much charity, cannot be lived without much charity" (511).

Finally, both the Chilterns must be taught the value of a love tempered by sense and benevolence. Excessive worldliness and excessive

idealism must be checked. As Wilde says in a letter to the editor of the St. James's Gazette, 26 June 1890: "All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment" (Letters, p. 259). "Pitiless in her perfection" (III.529), Lady Chiltern would ruthlessly judge all by their past (I.500; II.519). For his part, Lord Chiltern would reduce all life to a science (505), and sacrifice honour and trust to worldly ambition. It is Lord Goring who asserts a creed which combines her idealism with Lord Chiltern's expediency. "Wheels within wheels" demand that Lord Chiltern publicly serve (I.501) but, to do so, the "gospel of gold" must be replaced by love and sacrifice (II.505). Similarly, Lady Chiltern must acknowledge that love is the "true explanation of this world" (511), rather than a "worship" of a "false idol" (521). Her ideals must also be softened, but by "pardon, not punishment" (IV.548).

"Understood by contraries" (Love for Love, IV.i.297), the world of the play dramatizes the dandy's creed that "the way of paradoxes is the way of truth" (The Picture of Dorian Gray, Chapter 3, p. 43). But Wilde extends Congreve's blending of comic modes. Lord Goring remarks: "Everyone one meets is a paradox nowadays" (An Ideal Husband, III.525). As the embodiment of seventeenth-century wit, eighteenth-century benevolence and nineteenth-century dandyism, Lord Goring is himself a paradox: a unique blend of wit and sentiment masterfully transformed by Wilde's dramatic artistry.

The Importance of Being Earnest, his comic masterpiece, most fully illustrates Wilde's use of modes and his transformation of them.⁶⁴

Once again, Wilde comically exploits the traditions of the past only to create a Gilbertian world of nonsense which, treated seriously, assumes

an absurd importance.⁶⁵ As Nassaar phrases it: "the play itself is a reduction of all seriousness to the level of nonsense" (Into the Demon Universe, p. 129). But Wilde only smilingly acknowledges Gilbert's legacy of nonsense. When, for example, a healthy Ernest appears in the shape of a disguised Algernon, Miss Prism's expression of dismay (II.347) echoes Mr. Symperson's sentiment in Gilbert's Engaged (III.428). Nevertheless, Wilde's aesthetic concerns and his social criticism augment Gilbert's comic techniques of amplification and deflation.⁶⁶

Here, a highly mannered society, typified by Lady Bracknell, reduces social position to residences and addresses (The Importance of Being Earnest, I.333).⁶⁷ Such an "age of surfaces" (IV.374) is enamoured by the "shallow mask of manners" (III.364) and by social profiles (IV.374); familial connections are important.⁶⁸ Wilde reduces to absurdity this traditional regard for a cultivated, social appearance, and he does so by mocking the convention of the long-lost child.⁶⁹ Theatrical props, like the hand-bag which contains the "orphaned" Jack, illustrate both Wilde's adoption of traditional modes and his comic technique of amplifying the importance of ordinary objects only to reduce them at last. Jack's hazy origins prompt Lady Bracknell to remark: "To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life" (I.334). To lose one parent, this lady asserts, is a "misfortune," but "to lose both seems like carelessness" (333). Consequently, she resolves that her daughter can never "marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel" (334).⁷⁰ As Spinninger suggests, the "deflating equation[s]" which the language

produces would make babies and hand-bags, marriage and parcels, of equal importance ("Profiles and Principles," 64). So, in the play, the standard themes of art, such as love and marriage, are more than just comic sources of fun and child-like "pretending," as Jordan would have it ("Satire and Fantasy," 107). They are comic examples of how illusion becomes reality, and the fiction the fact.

Past traditions frequently conform to an "age of surfaces" (IV. 374), bereft of creatively spun illusions, so Wilde modifies them. His use of these modes exemplifies his technique of comic reduction. Miss Prism's tutelage of Cecily includes a study of political economy but, as the staid spinster warns her pupil: "The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational for a young girl. Even these metallic problems have their melodramatic side" (II.342).⁷¹ By linking the two, Wilde reduces them both to absurdity. Even the coincidence upon which this play, like so many others, depends Lady Bracknell herself ridicules: "The improbable is always in bad, or at any rate, questionable taste" (IV.379). "Strange coincidences," she affirms, "are not supposed to occur" (379). But in the play the improbable and the coincidental do occur. At first, Algernon's pose as his brother serves only to further Jack's deception (375), but at last the pose is found to be reality. Jack is in fact Ernest, and his long-lost brother is discovered to be Algernon. At one and the same time, social strictures--propped up by cultivated appearances--are deflated, fiction becomes fact, and art is transferred to life.⁷²

Wilde also inverts the character of the benevolent mentor. Jack's benefactor, Mr. Cardew, is blessed with "a very charitable and kindly

disposition" (I.333), but he is also absurdly practical. After finding the infant Jack in the hand-bag, Mr. Cardew gives the child the name of Worthing, "because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort" (333). Such factual details, comically underlined by the crisp syntax, undercut a potentially maudlin tale. Sentimental benevolence here finds its expression in the Gilbertian realm of the absurd.

Moreover, Wilde introduces twists to his portraits of the moralists.⁷³ The clergyman can adapt both his sermons and his views on the primitive church to suit the immediate occasion (II.345-6; IV.381). He expediently applies a less imaginative form of art to life. For her part, Miss Prism sees in Ernest's demise a valuable moral lesson, one which she hopes will profit him, even in death (II.345). Nor does she propound reformation. As she exclaims: "Indeed I am not sure that I would desire to reclaim him. I am not in favour of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice" (340). In the character of Miss Prism, Wilde inverts the sentimental creed which would welcome the reformation of the profligate at the same time as he inverts the platitude.⁷⁴

Miss Prism is herself the writer of "a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality" (IV.378). Here, she didactically urges that the "good ended happily, and the bad unhappily" (II.341). If such "poetic justice" does indeed explain "what Fiction means" (341), then this sanctimonious figure does not have to abide by such a creed. Not only does she abjure the principle of reformation, she also

suffers no punishment for her own former laxity. Unlike her fictional creations, she does not end "unhappily." Rather, in a brilliant touch of comic reduction, Miss Prism both weds the reverend and has her lost hand-bag propitiously restored to her (IV.379).

Wilde, then, transforms comic conventions, and he adapts them to his own aesthetic ends. The traditional opposition between the town and country, for example, he infuses with a fresh vitality.⁷⁵ On the one hand, Jack plays Ernest in the town and Jack in the country (I.325). This dual identity recalls the comic antics of a Captain Absolute, who also assumes two roles in order to gain his own ends. As Cecily's staid guardian, the countrified Jack condemns the dissolute behaviour of his reprobate "brother." Yet, once in the town, he becomes Ernest and, seeking to amuse only himself (322), sustains Ernest's reputation (326). On the other hand, balanced with Jack's dual identity is Algernon's "Bunburying," the artful creation of illusion.⁷⁶ An "invaluable permanent invalid" (326), Bunbury epitomizes the conventional nineteenth-century off-stage character. Nevertheless, his imaginary existence remains an illusion artfully maintained by Algernon's prevarication. Bunbury exists neither upon the stage of the world nor upon the world of the stage. He remains an illusion--an off-stage character--within an illusion--the play itself. Thus, the Restoration dramatist's artfully contrived world of the stage Wilde combines with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century convention and, finally, with his own aesthetic concerns.

Combined with the eighteenth-century convention of the dual hero, the sentimentalist's insistence on the mutual influence exerted by

art and life serves to underscore Wilde's own themes of illusion and reality, of appearance and truth. Both "Bunburyists" are adept artificers, and both endow art, an illusion, with life. In the town, Jack's actions lend credence to the illusion of his brother, Ernest. Similarly, Algernon embroiders his artifice with realistic details of Bunbury's ill-health. Furthermore, Algernon possesses various Bunbury "suits" (338), disguises designed to heighten the illusion. Jack for his part must rid himself of Ernest's noisome presence, and ill-health provides the means. Once Ernest has died of a chill, Jack must then don mourning clothes in honour of an imaginary brother whom now Algernon impersonates (II.345).

In Wilde's play, the "actual facts of real life" become blurred, and "metaphysical speculations" (I.330), seemingly quite distinct from reality, come to have a significant relation to life.⁷⁷ Although Jack artfully contrives to spin illusions which will make an untruth an "actual fact" of life, he at last discovers that "all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth" (IV.383). Like the liar and the dandy, "Bunbury" comes to represent "simply something that is not quite true, but should be" (II.354), and the play demonstrates the essential truth of illusions.

If he, like Gilbert, deflates pretensions to social mastery and virtuous authority, Wilde also mocks those who fail to appreciate the importance of such earnest illusions. Contrary to Gwendolen's assertion that "in matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing" (IV.371), the social and moral voices in the play insist that rules be obeyed, and states of health link these social and moral

voices. Lady Bracknell insists that "illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others" (I.329), and hers represents the social decree which would dismiss the illusion of the sickly Bunbury. She is very pleased to learn that Bunbury's death at last resolves the question of health (IV.372-3). The reverend Chausable, however, admits to a susceptibility to draughts (II.346), a susceptibility which, he claims, testifies to mankind's general lack of perfection. Apparently, as Jack asserts, "a high moral tone" does not "conduce" very much to one's health (I.326). Nor does such piety help the reverend who, as Ganz suggests, cannot distinguish between moral and physical well-being ("Meaning of Importance," 42). In Chausable's view, since Ernest has died of a severe chill, Miss Prism should show more charity (II.346). These social and moral figures concentrate their attentions on a physical fact, ill-health, but they apply their maxims to fictional creations. In these social and moral figures, Wilde mocks traditions which fail to appreciate earnest illusions and which try to re-create in fiction the semblance of life.

He reduces such life-like situations to comic absurdity. To the disappointed Jack and Algernon, a quarrel over muffins assumes more importance than crushed romantic hopes (III.368). To be "trivial" is, finally, to be serious about everything (367), including "the importance of being earnest."⁷⁸ As Spinger notes: "The muffins, in the course of a rather short scene, serve as the source of discussion for standards of propriety, consolation, selfishness, greed, hospitality, and then repentance" ("Profiles and Principles," 62). Later, in a comically pompous speech which questions Algernon's "moral character,"

Jack first attacks Algernon's "false pretence" (IV.375), a traditional target, but then he moves to a comically trivial complaint: "He subsequently stayed to tea, and devoured every single muffin" (375). Wilde dramatizes the ordinary, exaggerates the trivial, and thereby deflates their semblance to life. In doing so, he also reduces dramatic traditions and, finally, transforms them. In The Importance of Being Earnest, not only does art anticipate life, but life itself comes to verify art.

Cecily's grandfather has included in his will a "wise provision" which "undoubtedly foresaw the sort of difficulty that would be likely to occur" (376). Cecily laments: "Then grandpapa must have had a very extraordinary imagination" (376). His kindly, and practical, treatment of Jack also indicates his firm grasp of the actual. But it is his kind of nonsensical foresight, expressed in the prosaic terms of the will, which helps others to weave the illusions, those things which "should be" true (II.354). Similarly, Lady Bracknell is the embodiment of a factual society. Jack compares her to a Gorgon: "she is a monster, without being a myth" (I.335). She breathes fact into life and yet, she, too, helps verify Jack's lies. It is her regard for the social facts of life--addresses and properties and relations--which helps her to establish the truth of Jack's origins.⁷⁹ Jack himself must search the military directory for a name which Lady Bracknell heartily dislikes and so forgets (IV.383). Finally, then, she proves unable to verify illusions or to establish them as verities.

The notebook she so jealously guards represents her basic opposition to creative lying. The questions she directs to Jack "are

sometimes peculiarly inquisitorial" (I.331), quite opposite to the "nonsensical" statements which Jack and Algernon frequently direct against each other. Moreover, her strict regard for railway timetables, and her fear that "to miss any more [trains] might expose [them] to comment on the platform" (IV.377), contrast sharply to Jack's insistence that Algernon not miss his train. Desirous as he is to be rid of his "brother's" impostor, Jack exhorts Algernon: "You have got to go, and the sooner you go the better. Bunbury is extremely ill, and your place is by his side" (II.355). Bunbury may be "very much better" (355), as Algernon asserts, but for both men the illusion of Bunbury significantly accentuates the very real pursuits in which each is presently engaged.

So, too, with the illusions earnestly held by characters like Gwendolen and Cecily.⁸⁰ Gwendolen records actual events in her diary, a "sensational" account of her life (III.363). But her life centres on her ideals, on her "destiny" to love "some one by the name of Ernest" (I.330). Because she idealizes the very name her mother detests, she undermines her mother's strict adherence to social realities. Cecily also records her daily happenings but, like a Bunburyist, she creates her own. Algernon may comically "dictate" to her his romantic profession of love and devotion, and Cecily for her part may delightedly transcribe it into her diary, but she has herself already written their love story three months earlier (III.359). Like Lydia in The Rivals, she invents incidents to suit her own romantic inclinations, but, unlike Lydia's ultimate capitulation to common sense and social decorum, Cecily's fabricated account becomes reality, and art is realized in life.

Therefore, in The Importance of Being Earnest, Wilde's aesthetic concerns alter conventional characters and themes. But he also exploits the modes of the past to good effect. His "glass for the world" reflects the stage of the world at the same time as it, like that of the Restoration playwright, resembles the mirror of the "fun-house" (Spininger, "Profiles and Principles," fn. 5, 51). His "mirth" and "sprightly incident" recapture the sparkling vis comica of the past. But, in his first three plays, the "heart" still "Breathes truth and sympathy" (The Patrician's Daughter, I.i.112) into his portrait of "man in all his infinite variety" (The Critic as Artist, p. 1016).⁸¹ In this way, he conforms in part to nineteenth-century "Gallimaufry," a motley assemblage of wit and sentiment. But Wilde finally transforms it. His unfinished play, tentatively entitled Love is Law (Letters, 20 June 1900, p. 829), and later completed by Harris as Mr. and Mrs. Davenport, suggests Wilde's use of traditions and his own distinctive touches.⁸² In a letter to George Alexander, August 1894, Wilde describes the action of the play in a manner which illustrates his unique combination of "sprightly incident" and the sympathetic heart; the social, the sentimental and the melodramatic finally yield to Wilde's own theme of love: "That is what the play is to rise to - from the social chatter of Act I, through the theatrical effectiveness of Act II; up to the psychology with its great dénouement in Act III, till love dominates Act IV" (Letters, p. 362).

Finally, in the character of the dandy, Wilde draws on the modes of the past only to express more fully and more effectively his aesthetic creed. The dandy epitomizes the wit, the rake, the benevolent

mentor, the villain. Ultimately, he embodies Wilde's aesthetic creed of art in life and life in art. In The Importance of Being Earnest, Wilde gives his most consummate expression to his dramatic concerns and his view of the dandy. Here, he comically exploits, and then inverts, the modes of the past, and this technique modifies the earlier modes at the same time as it brilliantly shows Wilde's comic achievement.⁸³ To be a Bunburyist, one has only to be "serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life" (III.367), but to become "earnest," one has only to make of life an art.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the years 1660 to 1900, the witty and the sentimental modes describe a thriving comic tradition. In his "perfectly wonderful Bunbury," The Importance of Being Earnest (III.367), Wilde summarizes the many modifications these comic modes undergo. The appetitive pursuits of the witty reprobate, so vividly dramatized in Restoration comedy, yield at last to the antics of the Bunburyists, the artful creators of illusion. The stirrings of the heart and the triumph of virtue, so piously dramatized in eighteenth-century sentimental comedy, yield to the comic posturings of the moralists. Finally, Wilde is himself a "serious Bunburyist," balancing "mirth" and "sympathy" with aesthetic concerns.

Together with the many other dramatists under discussion who both adopt and adapt the witty and the sentimental modes, a study of an individual playwright like Wilde demonstrates, on the one hand, the development of a thriving comic tradition and, on the other hand, the individual playwright's contribution to that development. In Sheridan and Wilde in particular, the dramatists exploit the modes of the past at the same time as they look forward to what is to come. This study has described, by a careful analysis of individual playwrights, the shift in dramatic "emphases" and has thereby demonstrated the importance of these modes.

To possess wit is to perceive "similarities in things dissimilar" (Underwood, Etherege, p. 106), and together with this acuity is the ability to recognize the comic discrepancy between what one is and what one would be, "under a Voluntary Disguise," (Congreve, "Humour in Comedy," p. 79). The world of the stage mirrors this comic discrepancy between the mask and the face, and those who do not recognize the "way of the world" to be the way of sham are ridiculed. In Restoration comedy, to be witty is to be the social master, mocking the pretensions of others and carefully concealing the self, for the stage of the world is, finally, a comic imbroglio. Sham parades as plain-dealing, and personal desires are hidden by clever verbal swordplay and social perspicacity. In a world beset by ambiguities, verbal wit provides a kind of social order. Witty mastery protects the individual at the same time as it safeguards the appearance of social geniality. As a "glass for the world," the witty mode reflects man's dual, and often double-dealing, nature.

To be sentimental is to perceive man's underlying goodness. In the eighteenth century, dramatists try to reveal "the angel yet undefaced" (Man of Mode, II.ii.37). "Things dissimilar" resolve themselves into a unified vision of a virtue common to all men and the comedy mirrors man's undisguised benevolence. Social mastery and artful masks are no longer necessary. The world of the stage now provides a moral certainty; virtue will be rewarded, distress will be relieved and vice will be punished. The sentimental utterance represents this resolution to what was once a comic discrepancy between what one professes and what one is. The comedy's moral touchstones become models of conduct, worthy of

emulation, for, in the eighteenth century, the world of the stage and the stage of the world mutually influence each other. As a "glass for the world," the sentimental mode reflects man's virtuous, and openly good-hearted, inclinations.

Dramatists like Goldsmith and Sheridan, who criticize the sentimental mode, mock the comedy's excessive refinement and "false delicacy." The critics of the "sentimental Muse" portray, in Goldsmith's case, the foolish "good-natured man" and, in Sheridan's case, "the sentimental knave." Now, the hypocrite or the fool betrays a false or excessive sentimentalism. The witty mode also comes under critical scrutiny. The tiresome similitudes and the flippant style of a Witwoud become pieces of calumny. So, these dramatists attempt to combine the witty and the sentimental modes in a manner which will "charm the fancy and yet reach the heart" (Prologue, The Rivals, l. 24, p. 74). As John Loftis convincingly argues in Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England: "There is no incompatibility, . . . between a comedy that dramatizes the emotional and ethical attitudes many of us are accustomed to associate with eighteenth-century sentimentalism, and a didactic comedy that evokes laughter and satirical perception by ridiculing persons who are vain, affected, foolish, or malignant" (p. 10).

This modification to the vision of man's dual nature, on the one hand, and to man's perfectible nature, on the other, is seen most clearly in the treatment of the comic hero. Once a "knave in earnest and a saint in jest" (City Politiques, I.i.109), the reprobate soon becomes, in early sentimental drama, a repentant sinner only to emerge at last, in later drama, a paragon of virtue. The "mix'd character,"

as Congreve in his Amendments describes the hero (p. 453), exhibits both "sense and folly" (Prologue, The Way to Keep Him, v). Neither "Paint" nor "Proverb" entirely governs his behaviour (The School for Scandal, II. ii.380). Rather, he is a mixture of faults and virtues, and good nature, together with good sense, soften his wit.

Finally, the hero's pursuit of the heroine exemplifies, not only the different emphases which the witty and the sentimental modes represent, but also the various modifications made to the common themes of love and marriage. Throughout the periods under discussion, the drama concerns itself with man's pursuit of conjugal bliss. In the seventeenth century, the heroine is a comic standard of sense and sincerity, and she must somehow convince the profligate that the end of the amorous chase should be matrimony. While he may at last resolve to be "enlarg'd into a Husband," she for her part must allow herself to "dwindle into a Wife" (The Way of the World, IV.ii.450), forfeiting her "dear Liberty" in exchange for the marriage she has so zealously sought (449). In the eighteenth century, marriage, together with innocent domesticity, represent the ideals to be preserved. In the nineteenth century, virtuous domesticity still exists as an ideal to be sought and maintained, but the "marriage mart" reduces the love chase to yet another commercial transaction (London Assurance, II.171).

At the same time as it either ridicules his foibles or extols his perfections, the drama also concentrates on man's social nature. It often leads him into artifice or venality, so the playwrights' view of the town illustrates the modifications made to the witty and the sentimental modes. In Restoration comedy, "this dear town" represents the centre of the social order (The Man of Mode, III.i.53). The "vanity

of this lewd Town" is such that characters willingly bend to its modish code, which demands social perspicacity as well as a personal secretiveness (The Squire of Alsatia, IV.i.253). Later, the town is viewed as an "uneasy theatre of noise" (The Relapse, I.i.12), "cold, contriving" and "artificial" (The West Indian, IV.x.778). Only in the country can virtue remain unsullied, for in the town "every thing is venal" (The Country Lasses, I.10). Even later, the town once again possesses a fashionable charm. As Wilde's Lord Illingworth declares in A Woman of No Importance (1893): "A man who can dominate a London dinner-table can dominate the world" (III.459). Only people who can't get into society speak "disrespectfully" of it (The Importance of Being Earnest, IV.374). In many nineteenth-century "social" plays, the town is the centre of social activity, but this social activity, together with the focus on commercial transactions, quite often displays the "venality" complained of in the past.

Therefore, the witty and the sentimental modes come to describe the dramatic legacy which playwrights as chronologically distinct as Sheridan and Wilde adopt and modify. In the seventeenth century, comedy ridicules folly. In the eighteenth, it dramatizes the need for virtuous reform. In the nineteenth, it mocks and chastizes social wrongdoings. A close analysis of each dramatist's use of these two modes, as this study has shown, leads to a clearer understanding both of their place in the dramatic tradition and their distinctive achievement.

Contrary to the prevalent critical view, which would approach each period and each dramatist as a distinct entity, I have shown the "different emphases or polarities possible in comedy" (Hume, "Supposed

Revolution," p. 267), one of which is the witty mode and one of which is the sentimental. Furthermore, this study has demonstrated that these modes together have been part of a thriving comic heritage, evidenced most clearly in the uses to which individual dramatists like Sheridan and Wilde have put these comic modes. Mirroring man's witty perception of the "way of the world," on the one hand, and his sentimental regard for virtuous inclinations, on the other, comic playwrights like Sheridan and Wilde both nurture and continue a comic vision of the stage of the world and the world of the stage. In combination, these modes finally yield a drama at once a product and a modification of the past. A dramatist's use of these modes, therefore, indicates his place in the comic tradition and his distinctive achievement as a playwright who holds a "glass for the world."

Notes: Introduction

¹ For example, Thomas H. Fujimura considers The Way of the World to contain shades of "sense and sensibility." See his "Congreve's Last Play," in Restoration Dramatists: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Earl Miner (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 165-174; cited below as Restoration Dramatists, ed. Miner.

² Robert D. Hume, "Goldsmith and Sheridan and the Supposed Revolution of 'Laughing' Against 'Sentimental' Comedy," in Studies in Change and Revolution: Aspects of English Intellectual History, 1640-1800, ed. Paul J. Korshin (Scolar Press, 1972), p. 267; cited below as "Supposed Revolution."

³ Robert J. Detisch, "The Synthesis of Laughing and Sentimental Comedy in The West Indian," Educational Theatre Journal, 22 (October, 1970), 300; cited below as "Synthesis."

⁴ See also Robert D. Hume, The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), p. 36; cited below as Development of English Drama.

⁵ Ernest Bernbaum, The Drama of Sensibility (Boston and London: Ginn, 1915), fn. 1, p. 133; cited below as Drama of Sensibility.

⁶ David J. Burt, "Rakes, Rogues, and Steele's Servants," Ball State University Forum, 11:4 (1970), 73; cited below as "Steele's Servants."

⁷ Traditionally, critics have referred to "mixed" or "mingled" modes, especially when they are discussing tragi-comedy. See, for example, Peter A. Tasch, "Bickerstaffe, Colman and the Bourgeois Audience," Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research, 9 (May, 1970), 44-51. Kathleen M. Lynch, in The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy (1926; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1965), refers to Corneille's statement, "la mode nous oblige à cette complaisance," a statement which Lynch quotes on the title page; cited below as Social Mode. Earl Miner, in The Restoration Mode from Milton to Dryden (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974), defines mode as "style," as "thing" apart from essence and as definition of self (pp. x-xi). Miner's use of the word attempts to link historical and critical approaches with an "hypothesis" about the "nature of human experience" (pp. xv-xvi). Allan

Rodway, in English Comedy: Its Role and Nature from Chaucer to the Present Day (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), speaks of tragedy and comedy as modes, rather than as genres (p. 15). Modes, in this view, "represent the work's most general aspect" (p. 33); cited below as English Comedy.

⁸ Sir John Vanbrugh, "A Short Vindication of The Relapse and The Provok'd Wife from Immorality and Profaneness," in The Complete Works of Sir John Vanbrugh, 1, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Bloomsbury: Nonesuch Press, 1927), p. 206; cited below as Complete Works. All further references to Vanbrugh's Vindication will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁹ Thomas Holcroft, He's Much to Blame, in The Modern Theatre: A Collection of Successful Modern Plays Selected by Mrs. Inchbald, 2 (1811; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), III.vii.204; cited below as Modern Theatre.

¹⁰ William Hazlitt, "Lecture VIII, on the Comic Writers of the Last Century," in Lectures on the English Comic Writers (1818; rpt. London: Oxford UP, 1907), p. 217; cited below as "Comic Writers," Lectures.

¹¹ "The Freeholder's Journal," 28 November 1722, Essays on the Theatre from Eighteenth-Century Periodicals, The Augustan Reprint Society, nos. 85-86, ed. John Loftis (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1960), 25. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

¹² Sir Richard Steele, "The Spectator," 370, 5 May 1712, in The Spectator, 3, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 393.

¹³ Steele, "The Spectator," 249, 15 December 1711, in Spectator, 2, p. 466.

¹⁴ Stuart M. Tave, The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. viii; cited below as Amiable Humorist.

¹⁵ Robert B. Martin, The Triumph of Wit: A Study of Victorian Comic Theory (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), p. viii; cited below as Triumph of Wit.

¹⁶ Paul Mueschke and Jeannette Fleisher, "A Re-Evaluation of Vanbrugh," PMLA, 49 (September, 1934), 854; cited below as "Re-Evaluation."

¹⁷ William Congreve, "A Letter to Mr. Dennis: Concerning Humour in Comedy," 1695, in The Idea of Comedy: Essays in Prose and Verse, Ben Jonson to George Meredith, ed. W. K. Wimsatt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 79; cited below as Idea of Comedy. All further references to Congreve's "Humour in Comedy" will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

¹⁸ Michael R. Booth, "A Defence of Nineteenth-Century English Drama," Educational Theatre Journal, 26 (March, 1974), 11; cited below as "Defence."

¹⁹ See Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, With an Introduction by Vyvyan Holland (1948; rpt. London and Glasgow: Collins, 1969), pp. 44 and 437. All further references to Wilde's work will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁰ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Prologue, The Rivals, in The Dramatic Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, 1, ed. Cecil Price (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 1. 27, p. 74; cited below as Dramatic Works. All further references to The Rivals will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²¹ Sir George Etherege, The Man of Mode, ed. W. B. Carnochan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), I. 25 and III.i.50. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²² William Congreve, The Way of the World, in The Complete Plays of William Congreve, ed. Herbert Davis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), III.i.433. All further references to Congreve's plays will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²³ Sir John Vanbrugh, Prologue, The Provoked Wife, ed. Curt A. Zimansky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 1. 2, p. 3. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁴ Sir John Vanbrugh and Colley Cibber, The Provoked Husband, ed. Peter Dixon (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), V.iv.159. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁵ Colley Cibber, Dedication, The Lady's Last Stake, in British Theatre: Eighteenth-Century English Drama, 3 (Frankfurt: Minerva GMBH, 1969), 3; cited below as British Theatre. All further references to The Lady's Last Stake will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁶ Sir Richard Steele, Prologue, The Conscious Lovers, in The Plays of Richard Steele, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 1. 28, p. 304. All further references to Steele's plays will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁷ George Colman and David Garrick, Prologue, The Clandestine Marriage, in Plays of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, eds. Dougal MacMillan and Howard Mumford Jones (1931; rpt. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1959), 1. 8, p. 675; cited below as Plays, eds. MacMillan and Jones. All further references to The Clandestine Marriage will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁸ Arthur Murphy, Prologue, The Way to Keep Him, in British Theatre, 8, v. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁹ Charles Macklin, The Man of the World, The Augustan Reprint Society, no. 26, With an Introduction by Dougal MacMillan (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1951). All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³⁰ Henry F. Salerno, "The Problem Play: Some Aesthetic Considerations," English Literature in Transition, 11:4 (1968), 196-7; cited below as "Problem Play."

Notes: Chapter One

¹ See also Hume, p. 259, and Chapter V, p. 143-144. Allardyce Nicoll, in A History of English Drama: 1660-1900, 2, 3rd edition (1925; rpt. Cambridge UP, 1952), makes a similar point (p. 27); cited below as History.

² See Robert D. Hume, "The Theory of Comedy in the Restoration," MP, 70 (May, 1973), 306; cited below as "Theory of Comedy." See also A. H. Scouten, "Notes toward a History of Restoration Comedy," PQ, 45 (January, 1966), where he makes the point that "sentimental comedy" antedates both The Way of the World and Jeremy Collier (65); cited below as "Notes."

³ Charlene M. Taylor, ed., Introduction, She Would If She Could (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. xvii; cited below as Introduction.

⁴ David S. Berkeley, "The Penitent Rake in Restoration Comedy," MP, 49 (May, 1952), 224; cited below as "Penitent Rake."

⁵ Robert F. Willson, 'Their Form Confounded': Studies in the Burlesque Play from Udall to Sheridan (Paris, Mouton, 1975), p. 109; cited below as Form Confounded. Here Willson speaks of comedy in general, but he then speaks directly of Restoration comedy's suspicion of both "excessive virtue and strained debates over questions of honor, love, and friendship" (p. 109). Rodway, in English Comedy, states that comedy, unlike tragedy, deals with what man is and, by implication, what he ought not to be (p. 15).

⁶ Richard Cumberland, The West Indian, in Plays, eds. MacMillan and Jones, V.viii.786. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁷ B. R. S. Fone, "Love's Last Shift and Sentimental Comedy," Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research, 9 (May, 1970), 14. See also Chapter V, pp. 136-139.

⁸ Norman N. Holland, The First Modern Comedies: The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1959), p. 113; cited below as First Modern Comedies. See also Mark S. Auburn,

Sheridan's Comedies: Their Contexts and Achievements (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), p. 19; cited below as Sheridan's Comedies.

⁹ Calhoun Winton, "Sentimentalism and Theater Reform in the Early Eighteenth Century," in Quick Springs of Sense: Studies in the Eighteenth Century, ed. L. S. Champion (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1974), p. 99; cited below as "Sentimentalism," Quick Springs of Sense, ed. Champion. Rodway, however, in English Comedy, insists that "sentimentality" manufactures feelings instead of discovering them (p. 53). Rose Snider, in Satire in the Comedies of Congreve, Sheridan, Wilde, and Coward (1937; rpt. New York: Phaeton, 1972), makes a useful distinction between sentiment and sentimentality: the former is the "sincere and unaffected" expression of a sensitive person's true feelings, and the latter is a self-conscious indulgence in feelings for their own sake (p. 43); cited below as Satire.

¹⁰ Arthur Friedman, "Aspects of Sentimentalism in Eighteenth-Century Literature," in The Augustan Milieu, Essays Presented to Louis A. Landa, eds. Henry Knight Miller et. al. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), p. 247; cited below as "Aspects of Sentimentalism," Augustan Milieu, ed. Miller.

¹¹ In "Theory of Comedy," Hume offers a synopsis of the change which occurred in comedy between 1650 and 1750 (306). And so, too, does Dale Underwood in Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957), pp. 155, 161; cited below as Etherege. But David Cook and John Swannell, in their Introduction, The Country Wife: William Wycherley (Manchester UP, 1975), insist that "there was no complete break in the continuous development of English drama, in spite of the Civil War and the Commonwealth" (p. xxx); cited below as Cook and Swannell, Introduction, The Country Wife. However, Sharon Kaehle Shaw, in "Medea on Pegasus: Some Speculations on the Parallel Rise of Women and Melodrama on the Jacobean Stage," Ball State University Forum, 14 (Autumn, 1973), gives a brief historical synopsis which relates earlier drama both to later eighteenth-century and to nineteenth-century melodrama (15). Rodway, in English Comedy, separates Restoration comedy from the comedy which preceded it by emphasizing the strong "ideological element" present in Restoration comedy (p. 116).

¹² John Loftis, Steele at Drury Lane (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952), p. 188; cited below as Steele.

¹³ Jeremy Collier, A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage, 1698 (Wilhelm Fink Verlag München, 1967), p. 287. For a discussion of Collier's views, see Aubrey Williams, "The 'Utmost Tryal' of Virtue and Congreve's Love for Love," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 17 (1972), where he points out that Collier's criticism of the stage "proceeds by distortion and exaggeration" (12); cited below

as "Utmost Tryal." Also see Williams' later article, entitled "No Cloistered Virtue: Or, Playwright versus Priest in 1698," PMLA, 90 (March, 1975), 234-246; cited below as "No Cloistered Virtue."

14 Don R. Kunz, The Drama of Thomas Shadwell, Salzburg Studies in English Literature and Poetic Drama, 16 (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1972), fn., p.32; cited below as Thomas Shadwell. In "The Rake's Progress from Court to Comedy: A Study in Comic Form," SEL, 6 (Summer, 1966), John Traugott, uneven as his analysis is, would seem to reach similar moralistic conclusions (381); cited below as "Rake's Progress." also Louis I. Bredvold, The Literature of the Restoration and the Eighteenth-Century, 1660-1798, (New York: Collier, 1966), p. 90.

15 Sir Richard Blackmore, Preface, Prince Arthur, an Heroick Poem, 1695, in Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, 1685-1700, 3, ed. J. E. Spingarn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909), p. 232.

16 For a discussion of this point, see, Winton, "Sentimentalism," in Quick Springs of Sense, ed. Champion, p. 99.

17 Steele, "The Spectator," 65, 15 May 1711, in The Spectator, 1, ed. Bond, p. 280.

18 "The Universal Spectator and Weekly Journal," 10 April 1731, in Essays on the Theatre from Eighteenth-Century Periodicals, Augustan Reprint Society, nos. 85-86, ed. Loftis, 16.

19 But realism, according to G. H. Nettleton, in English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, 1642-1780, (1914; rpt. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1968), disrupts such comedy (p. 164); cited below as English Drama.

20 John Palmer, The Comedy of Manners (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913), p. 15. To Allardyce Nicoll, in British Drama, 5th edition, revised (1925; rpt. London: George G. Harrap, 1964), the comedy of manners "concentrates upon the depiction of men and women living in a social world ruled by convention" (p. 158). David Krause, in "The Defaced Angel: A Concept of Satanic Grace in Etherege's The Man of Mode," Drama Survey, 7 (Winter, 1968-1969), rejects the "bland concept of the 'comedy of manners'" because it "reduced the Restoration plays to an aristocratic parlor game of musical beds" (88); cited below as "Defaced Angel."

21 Bonamy Dobrée, Restoration Comedy, 1660-1720 (1924; rpt. Oxford UP, 1938), pp. 26-7. See also John Conaghan, ed., Critical Introduction, The Man of Mode (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1973), p. 3; cited below as Introduction, The Man of Mode.

²² Thomas H. Fujimura, The Restoration Comedy of Wit (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1952), pp. 64, 52; cited below as Comedy of Wit.

²³ Later, F. W. Bateson, in English Comic Drama, 1700-1759 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), argues that Lamb was right (p. 7); cited below as English Comic Drama.

²⁴ On the other hand, Jocelyn Powell, in "George Etherege and the Form of Comedy," in Restoration Theatre, eds. J. R. Brown and Bernard Harris (New York: Capricorn Books, 1967), argues that, if comedy purports to correct the vices and follies of men, then the "criticism demands a structure based upon a determined morality" (p. 43); cited below as "Form of Comedy," Restoration Theatre.

²⁵ For example, critics like Dobrée, Restoration Comedy, p. 32; Snider Satire, p. vii; Berkeley, "Penitent Rake," 230; Lynch, Social Mode, p. 7; Maximillian E. Novak, "The Artist and the Clergyman: Congreve, Collier, and the World of the Play," CE, 30 (April, 1969), 559; Taylor, Introduction, p. xv. Even Traugott, who otherwise is singularly obstreperous in his treatment and oddly deaf to ironic overtones, in "Rake's Progress," mentions the comedy's "satire of society" (397). And, of course, there is Charles O. McDonald's study, "Restoration Comedy as Drama of Satire: An Investigation into Seventeenth Century Aesthetics," SP, 61 (July, 1964), where he argues that Restoration comedy is satiric. See especially, 542 and 544; cited below as "Restoration Comedy."

²⁶ As Rodway explains in English Comedy, the conclusion of a comedy "usually implies a fresh beginning," evidenced most clearly by a marriage, a punishment or a reform (p. 21).

²⁷ In "Theory of Comedy," Hume quite rightly points to the problems inherent in any effort to define a Restoration comic view. Hume can only conclude that "there is no such thing as a standard 'theory of comedy' in this period" (302). But he makes no mention of the comedy's treatment of man, nor does he attempt to show how the oft-invoked image of the glass accommodates itself to such a treatment.

²⁸ See Dryden's Epilogue, The Man of Mode, ed. Carnochan, where Dryden speaks of Sir Fopling as "a people in a man" (l. 18), and contends that "Something of man must be exposed to view" (l. 5).

²⁹ William Congreve, "Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations, &c," in The Mourning Bride: Poems, and Miscellanies, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford UP, 1928), p. 408; cited below as Amendments. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically. Scroope's Prologue, The Man of Mode, makes a similar claim: "For, heav'n be thanked, 'tis not so wise

an age / But your own follies may supply the stage" (ll. 24-5). Even Sir Richard Blackmore, in his Preface, Prince Arthur, an Heroick Poem, 1695, in Critical Essays, 3, ed. Spingarn, concurs: "The business of Comedy being to render Vice ridiculous, to expose it to publick Derision and Contempt, and to make Men asham'd of Vile and Sordid Actions" (p. 228). If tragedy "scares" men, then the design of comedy is "to Laugh them out of their Vices" (p. 228). See also Edwin E. Williams, "Dr. James Drake and Restoration Theory of Comedy," RES, 15 (April, 1939), 183, 185.

³⁰ Scroope's Prologue, The Man of Mode, also uses the image to advantage: "Since each is fond of his own ugly face, / Why should you, when we hold it, break the glass?" (ll. 38-9). See also Maximillian Novak, "Love, Scandal and the Moral Milieu of Congreve's Comedies," in Congreve Consider'd (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA, 1971), where Novak mentions the aptness of the image of the glass (p. 35); cited below as "Love, Scandal and Moral Millieu," Congreve Consider'd.

³¹ Thomas Shadwell, Bury Fair, in The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell, 4, ed. Montague Summers (London: Fortune, 1927), I.i.309, and III.i.336. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³² Shadwell, The Squire of Alsatia, in Complete Works, 4, IV.i.253. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³³ Ben Jonson, Prologue, Every Man Out of His Humour, in Ben Jonson, 3, eds. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927), l. 145, p. 433.

³⁴ John Dennis, in his pamphlet "A Defense of Sir Fopling Flutter," 2 November 1722, in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy, ed. Scott McMillin (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), re-affirms Vanbrugh's precepts: "laughter is the life and the 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 showing us what is done upon the comic stage, to show us what ought never to be done upon the stage of the world" (p. 429); cited below as "Defense." All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically. Congreve, in "Humour in Comedy," affirms that comedy exaggerates reality and therefore cannot be its equivalent (p. 80).

³⁵ For a discussion of the plays' artificiality and the problems of realism, see Hume, "Theory of Comedy," 313, 314-315.

³⁶ William Wycherley, William Wycherley: The Plain Dealer, ed. Leo Hughes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), II.52-55, and William Burnaby, The Ladies Visiting Day, in The Dramatic Works of William Burnaby, ed. F. E. Budd (London: Scholarates, 1931), IV.vi.254-255. All further references to Wycherley's play will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³⁷ John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), Book 2, Chapter xi, p. 156.

³⁸ Sir Richard Blackmore, "An Essay upon Wit," 1716, in Essays Upon Several Subjects, facsimile (New York: Garland Publishing, 1971), p. 191.

³⁹ Arthur Murphy, "The Gray's-Inn Journal," 92, 20 July 1784, in The Lives of Henry Fielding and Samuel Johnson, together with Essays from "The Gray's-Inn Journal," With an Introduction by Matthew Grace, facsimile (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968), p. 207.

⁴⁰ Alan Roper, "Language and Action in The Way of the World, Love's Last Shift, and The Relapse," ELH, 40 (Spring, 1973), 51; cited below as "Language and Action".

⁴¹ Joyce Miller, "A Study of an Epigram: The Mode of Wit in Restoration Comedy," in Scripta Hierosolymitana, 19, ed. Arie Sachs (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1967), p. 177; cited below as "Study of an Epigram."

⁴² Anthony Kaufman, "Language and Character in Congreve's The Way of the World," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 15 (Fall, 1973), 421; cited below as "Language and Character."

⁴³ John Hayman, "Raillery in Restoration Satire," Huntington Library Quarterly, 31:2 (1968), 111.

⁴⁴ C. D. Cecil, "Raillery in Restoration Comedy," Huntington Library Quarterly, 29 (February, 1966), 159; cited below as "Raillery." See also John S. Bowman, "Dance, Chant and Mask in the Plays of Wycherley," Drama Survey, 3 (October, 1963), 192.

⁴⁵ In his study of Vanbrugh, entitled "The Relapse - Into Death and Damnation," Educational Theatre Journal, 21 (October, 1969), Pieter Jan Van Niel makes a similar assertion with respect to comedy as a whole: "the complex language is seen as the means of a profound exploration of human experience within a comic form" (318).

⁴⁶ Irving Kreutz, "Who's Holding the Mirror?", Comparative Drama, 4 (Summer, 1970), 82.

⁴⁷ Aphra Behn, Dedication, The City Heiress, in The Works of Aphra Behn, 2, ed. Montague Summers (New York: Phaeton, 1967), p. 200. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁴⁸ John Dryden, Epilogue, Marriage-a-la-Mode, ed. J. R. Sutherland (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1934); p. 136. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁴⁹ Charles Lamb, "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century," 1822, in Idea of Comedy, ed. Wimsatt, p. 217.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of ridicule directed against the protagonist, see Hume, "Supposed Revolution," p. 243; Taylor, Introduction, She Would If She Could, p. xviii. Agnes V. Persson, in Comic Character in Restoration Drama (Paris: Mouton, 1975), discusses at great length the various comic characters present in the comedy, and bases her analysis on the degree and kind of ignorance each type displays; cited below as Comic Character.

⁵¹ Scouten, in "Notes," claims that Shadwell's works connect him with sentimental comedy (65). However, Shadwell's contribution as a comic dramatist has only recently been given adequate critical attention. Kunz' Thomas Shadwell stresses that Shadwell's keen didactic intent and his "judicious social commentary" disparaged the notion that "fashionable drama" should celebrate sin and folly (p. 10). Notwithstanding his more Jonsonian and didactic approach, Shadwell (Kunz argues) does incorporate certain Restoration features into the moral textures of his plays. As Kunz notes: "Shadwell not only wrote comedies of humours, but of wit, manners, and sentiment" (p. 22).

⁵² Belford Junior's rakish demeanour is more superficial than actual. As William W. Appleton contends, in "The Double Gallant in Eighteenth-Century Comedy," in English Writers of the Eighteenth Century, ed. John H. Middendorf (New York and London: Columbia UP, 1971), Shadwell in The Squire of Alsatia embarks on the task of defining a new "man of mode" and, consequently, "the calculating egotistical hero of Etherege's comedy has been transformed into a generous, good-hearted rake" (p. 147); cited below as "Double Gallant," English Writers. In Topics of Restoration Comedy (London: Victor Gollancz, 1974), Donald Bruce agrees (p. 333). For a contrary view, see Hume, Development of English Drama, pp. 81-86, 378.

⁵³ Behn, The Rover (Part 1); or, The Banish'd Cavaliers, in Works, 1, ed. Summers, V.i.96. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically. See McDonald, "Restoration Comedy," where he argues that Restoration comedy boasts no heroes, only romantic protagonists and antagonists (534, 536). McDonald limits himself to a discussion of the hero, and does not see the importance of the heroine to the playwrights' comic vision.

⁵⁴ Behn, The Fair Jilt: or, The Amours of Prince 'Tarquin' and 'Miranda,' in Works, 5, p. 72.

⁵⁵ Behn, The False Count, in Works, 3, I.i.103. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁵⁶ See Leslie H. Martin, "Past and Parody in The Man of Mode," SEL, 16 (Summer, 1976), where Martin compares Melantha to Loveit (fn. 10, 365); cited below as "Past and Parody."

⁵⁷ John Dryden, Secret Love, in The Works of John Dryden, 9, ed. John Loftis (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), III.i.162. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁵⁸ As P. F. Vernon affirms in "Marriage of Convenience and The Moral Code of Restoration Comedy," Essays in Criticism, 12 (October, 1962): "In practice the rake discovers that all his cynical theories can do nothing to stop him falling in love" (378). McDonald asserts in "Restoration Comedy": "The attempts made by the best writers of the period to arrive at positive values always start from what a thing is not" (542).

⁵⁹ Later, in comedy written in the sentimental mode, the hero begins as a rake and ends as a penitent. Heartwell, for example, in Charles Johnson's The Country Lasses (1715), in British Theatre, 12, makes a similar assault on Flora's honour (IV.43-5). But, at last, he confesses his error (45-6).

⁶⁰ Cumberland, in his play False Impressions, also picks up on the theme of false appearances and deception. But, as I discuss later, Cumberland's dramatic ends are not the comic ones of Restoration playwrights.

⁶¹ For a discussion of this point, see, for example, John Traugott, "Rake's Progress," 398; Underwood, Etherege, p. 39.

⁶² See Chapter XI, pp. 320-321.

⁶³ Yvonne Bonsall Shafer, "The Proviso Scene in Restoration Comedy," Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research, 14 (May, 1970), 2; cited below as "Proviso Scene."

⁶⁴ Jonathan E. Deitz, "Congreve's Better Way to Run the World," PLL, 11 (Fall, 1975), 368; cited below as "Better Way." John Harrington Smith, in The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1948), contends that marriage to the witty, "gay" couple represents "the greatest adventure - and gamble - of all" (p. 76); cited below as Gay Couple.

⁶⁵ Shafer, in "Proviso Scene," contends that the witty lovers realistically appraise "marriage and its pitfalls," and that the "proviso scene" represents both their attempt "to maintain their freedom" and their attempt "to form a solid basis on which their alliance will work" (5). See also Susan J. Rosowski, "Thematic Development in the Comedies of William Congreve: The Individual in Society," SEL, 16 (Summer, 1976), 406; cited below as "Thematic Development."

Notes: Chapter Two

¹ In Act II, scene ii, Loveit says: "I know [Dorimant] is a devil, but he has something of the angel yet undefaced in him" (37). Krause's study of Etherege is entitled "The Defaced Angel," but Krause's analysis centres more particularly on the "concept of Satanic grace" rather than on the notions of counterfeiting and coins.

² Anne Richter, in "William Wycherley," in Restoration Theatre, eds. Brown and Harris, asserts that the play "charted the basic dimensions of Restoration comedy" (p. 71); cited below as "William Wycherley."

³ In "George Etherege," in Restoration Theatre, Jocelyn Powell argues that, though Etherege in the play "has a main theme ideal for a critical comedy" (p. 53), She Would If She Could is a "comedy of judgement" (p. 52). Extravagance, Powell argues, and not falsity, makes the play an uncritical exposure of follies.

⁴ See Chapter XI, pp. 319-322.

⁵ Powell asserts that this first colloquy "becomes a telling comment upon a leisured society." Because of the "temper of the time," the "truth of almost any relationship must be concealed" (p. 57).

⁶ For Gatty, the mask is only a partial truth. She may be "hooded" like the prostitute, Mrs. Rampant. But, unlike Sir Oliver's "she," Gatty demonstrates a nimble tongue (II.i.26) and an unaffected nature. The character of Mrs. Rampant, on the other hand, remains only as a name and, when she does appear, she is disguised (V.i.116), and does not speak a word.

⁷ The image is a conventional one. See Thomas Shadwell's The Squire of Alsatia in Complete Works, 4, ed. Summers, II.i.227; Susannah Centlivre's A Bold Stroke For A Wife, in British Theatre, 1, V.i.64.

⁸ Throughout the play, references to animals, hunting, food and the law recur. See Chapter I, pp. 36-37.

⁹ See Dale Underwood, Etherege, where he discusses Etherege's "many-sided awareness" and his ambiguity (p. 161). Persson, in Comic Character, denies Etherege any complexity (p. 61).

¹⁰ Sir Richard Steele's moral judgments are perhaps the most famous. In "The Spectator," 65, 15 May 1711, in The Spectator, 1, ed. Bond, for example, he condemns the play, and asserts that it portrays "Nature in its utmost Corruption and Degeneracy" (p. 280). As he complains in "The Lover," 5, 6 March 1714, in Richard Steele's Periodical Journalism, 1714-16, ed. Rae Blanchard (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), too often in Restoration comedy "the fine Gentleman of the Comedy [,] represented with a good Grace, leading a loose and profligate Life, and condemning Virtuous Affection as insipid," receives comic accolades (p. 22); cited below as Steele's Periodical Journalism.

¹¹ John Conaghan, in his Introduction, The Man of Mode, describes Etherege's technique as one of "elaboration," and Etherege thereby "contrives a variety of interest in his plot." In part, this variety derives from the "contrast between the two love affairs" and from the "complicating series of relationships between the characters" (p. 4).

¹² John King McComb, in "Congreve's The Old Bachelour: A Satiric Anatomy," SEL, 17 (Summer, 1977), remarks that Sir Fopling's nature is "entirely expressed in his clothes" (363); cited below as "Satiric Anatomy."

¹³ Powell, in "George Etherege," in Restoration Theatre, eds. Brown and Harris, contends that the fault of the entire society is its substitution of form for feeling, and Sir Fopling serves as a "comic embodiment of this idea" (p. 66). Ostensibly, Dryden's lines in the Epilogue to the play substantiate this view. Sir Fopling "represents ye all" (l. 16). He is, as Dryden says, "a people in a man" (l. 12).

¹⁴ "True fops help nature's work, and go to school / To file and finish God a'mighty's fool" (Epilogue, ll. 13-14).

¹⁵ Dorimant here refers to fops like Sir Fopling. But, just as the fop "puts sophisticate dullness often on the tasteless multitude for true wit and good humor" (III.iii.69), so, too, as Harriet notes, does Dorimant "pass" his affectation "on the easy town, who are favorably pleased in him to call it humor" (71). Since Sir Fopling "represents ye all" (Epilogue, l. 16), all finally are nature's "cheats."

¹⁶ Cf. Paul C. Davies, "The State of Nature and the State of War: A Reconsideration of The Man of Mode," UTQ, 39 (October, 1969), where Davies argues that "the state of nature" exists in the "sphere of secretive extra-marital skirmishing" (55); cited below as "State of Nature."

17 Underwood, in Etherege, oversimplifies Loveit when he sees her merely as "the victim of a passionate love and nature which prevent dissembling" (p. 76). Loveit does manage, at least for a time, to dissemble and to make Dorimant look foolish (III.iii.82). More recently, Martin, in "Past and Parody," has studied the character of Mrs. Loveit in terms of the conventions of the heroic drama. In this view, Mrs. Loveit becomes "an exquisite parody of a stock character in heroic drama, the termagant heroine" (364). Loveit, then, "ill-advisedly brings the rigid prescriptions of a literary convention" into Dorimant's highly mannered world (368).

18 For a discussion of this point, see Holland, First Modern Comedies, p. 88; Powell "George Etherege" in Restoration Theatre, eds. Brown and Harris, p. 63.

19 Here, Davies, in his study "State of Nature," posits that "we are called on to register an unfavourable judgement of Bellinda"; she has, after all, "witnessed, abetted indeed, his treatment of Loveit" and yet, "she does nothing to extricate herself from his clutches" (56). Powell argues that Bellinda can neither resist her passion, nor exert her will (pp. 62-3).

20 In Holland's analysis, in First Modern Comedies, Medley is "always a spectator of the action, never a participant" (p. 87). He is, as Krause asserts in "Defaced Angel," Dorimant's "disciple and confidant" and, as such, "he preaches what Dorimant practices" (95).

21 For a discussion of this point, see Holland, pp. 87-8; McDonald, "Restoration Comedy," 529; Conaghan, ed., Critical Introduction, Man of Mode, p. 8. Krause, in "Defaced Angel," would sharply contrast the two characters (98-9).

22 One further instance is Dorimant's imitating the mannerisms of Sir Fopling (V.i.118-9).

23 Ronald Berman, in "The Comic Passions of The Man of Mode," SEL, 10 (Summer, 1970), alludes to the first scene, where Dorimant enunciates his wish to drop his "pis aller" (I.i.15), Loveit; cited below as "Comic Passions." The lines which follow Dorimant's recited couplet (8), quoted in Berman, are intriguingly connotative: "Too late he would the pain assuage, / And to thick shadows does retire" (463). Berman argues that Dorimant's clever use of Waller parodies the courtly rituals of the past and, thus, Etherege's "reductive purpose" makes itself felt in the "ironical opposition" between Dorimant, who is breaking off with Loveit, and Waller's lover, who is "plainly a figura of heroic feeling" (463). For a discussion of Waller's poetry and the play, see also Martin, "Past and Parody," 374-5.

²⁴ Although they do not refer specifically to She Would If She Could, Krause's remarks on sincerity cast some light on my analysis of The Man of Mode. Krause, in "Defaced Angel," contends that in the play "form and style remain the only refuge for self-respecting ladies and gentlemen" (92). I would argue that, later, Harriet does try to crack the form, or the shadow, and discover the inner substance. Krause's reference to Wilde's "Bunburyism" (92) also tends to ignore Wilde's own unique comic themes. See Chapter XI, pp. 320-323, and pp. 347ff.

²⁵ John G. Hayman, in "Dorimant and the Comedy of A Man of Mode," MLQ, 30 (June 1969), notes "the comic failure of Dorimant's mannered behavior to control his natural impulses and emotions" (194); cited below as "Dorimant." Dorimant loses "the composure or self-control" so valued by the mannered codes. Moreover, Harriet shows herself fully capable of "ruffling" his "social composure" (195). Davies, in "State of Nature," would disagree. He sees Dorimant as "ironical" and "self-aware" (54), and contends: "Dorimant retains his poise and his irony throughout the play" (60). See also Underwood, Etherege, p. 74. But Dorimant's comic discomfiture, perpetrated by his own dissembling, would seem to indicate a loss of self-awareness and irony in the sense that Davies means it. In those scenes where Dorimant finds himself the comic butt, he has lost the social mastery which his former wit and dissimulation had given him.

²⁶ In "Dorimant," Hayman does not acknowledge Harriet's view to be any more valid than Young Bellair's. Although I concur with Hayman's conclusion that both the socially adept and the socially inept are objects of ridicule, Hayman does not explain or illustrate his contentions, nor does he explore why the artifice of Dorimant's manner has "apparently escaped Young Bellair's notice" (194).

²⁷ Conaghan, in his Introduction, Man of Mode, states: "It falls to Harriet both to subdue Dorimant and reclaim him from the triviality, the debility of feeling, which accompanies an excessive preoccupation with appearances and social forms" (p. 8). On the other hand, Harold Clifford Brown, Jr., in "Etherege and Comic Shallowness," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 16 (Winter, 1975), argues that as a "woman-Dorimant" (689), Harriet engages in a "game of defiance" and insists that Dorimant "humiliate himself to prove his devotion to her" (688-9); cited below as "Etherege."

²⁸ John Wain, in "Restoration Comedy and its Modern Critics," Essays in Criticism, 6 (October, 1956), speaks of Harriet's ruthlessness and "necessary savagery" (382).

²⁹ Berman, in "Comic Passions," claims that, in this final encounter, "the wars of love are to be fought in sincerity" (465). Later, Berman analyzes Dorimant's last few quotations of Waller to indicate that Dorimant does in fact undergo "a violent change of self-

conception" (466). Dorimant's exaggerated protestations and his imagery contradict the use of the word "sincerity," and his final words to Bellinda and Loveit indicate no "violent" change in his character. See also Cook and Swannell, eds., Introduction, The Country Wife, who speak of the "genuine human emotions behind the elegant trifling" (p. xxxiv).

³⁰ Berman, in "Comic Passions," quotes this same passage (V.ii.131) to indicate that Dorimant and Harriet, "even as they feel the effects of love" nonetheless are ironically aware of its "appearance" (fn. 3, 462).

³¹ In "State of Nature," Davies sees this as "witty indifference" and not as an indication of Harriet's more balanced view of the foolishness of swearing oaths (61).

³² On two earlier occasions, the word "fanatic" is used to describe the "way of the world." Dorimant bemoans the "tax upon good nature" which his loss of passionate ardour has compelled him to pay. Although he does pay it, he does so "with as much regret as ever fanatic paid the Royal Aid or church duties" (I.i.7). Similarly, Medley in his worldly way associates marriage and cuckoldom, and compares the latter state to fanaticism and madness: "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" (21). Harriet's use of the word suggests that extravagant declarations of love could lead to the same end: regret, infidelity or madness. She attempts to use moderation and rejects fanaticism.

³³ Berman in "Comic Passions" notes that the country is like the ideal world of the pastoral, and Berman suggests that the sojourn in the country is less a trial of Dorimant's resolution than it is a fitting setting for their love to prosper (467-8). Given their love for the town, I doubt whether Berman's notion holds. On another note, Davies, in "State of Nature," states that Dorimant does in fact capitulate to Harriet, his "equal in terms of dissimulation, wit, irony, and self-command" (54).

³⁴ Conversely, Davies announces: "Only if we take a rather sentimental view of the characters is the conclusion of the play bedevilled by irony and ambiguity" (62). Judging the play to be "an uncompro-misingly tough and realistic play," he considers Dorimant's "patching up" his relations with Bellinda and Loveit to be true to his character. To Davies, Dorimant's confidential remarks to Bellinda are not "intimations of domestic disaster" (62). Rose A. Zimbardo, on the other hand, in Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1965), stresses Etherege's "desire to weigh many perceptions of reality" (p. 4); cited below as Wycherley's Drama. Thus, the "line of demarcation between true and false is blurred," and the final impression, Zimbardo argues, is of "multiple realities in constant flux" (p. 6). Neither critic would appear to give much credence to my contention that Etherege, like so many of his contem-

poraries, treats mankind's dual nature, and that in doing so he reflects the ambiguity associated with that duality.

³⁵ Many critics regard Emilia and Young Bellair in this light. While Dobrée, in Restoration Comedy, refers to them as a "happy mean, or an indication of the most comfortable way to live" (p. 75), and Underwood, in Etherege, considers them a "norm in manners, wit, passion, and control which helps to define contrasting divergencies in the several worlds about them" (p. 84), Brown, in "Etherege," brands them "sentimental lovers" who keep "the play from seeming too cynical and exploitive" (688).

³⁶ In his Critical Introduction to the play, Conaghan sees in Dorimant's comments "a certain subversive menace," since his sexual "designs" on Emilia "impinge on the romantic part of the play" (p. 7). But, while Dorimant claims he has found "the little hope" needed to make him believe that, after her marriage, she will not hesitate to make Young Bellair a cuckold (I.i.26), even Medley considers her to have "the best reputation of any young woman about the town who has beauty enough to provoke detraction" (25).

³⁷ See Chapter VI, pp. 168-170.

³⁸ In Etherege, Underwood contends that, in the midst of tension, Emilia and Young Bellair "quietly accept their faith in each other" (p. 83). Underwood, then, ignores Emilia's note of caution to Young Bellair.

Notes: Chapter Three

¹ Anthony Kaufman, in "Wycherley's The Country Wife and the Don Juan Character," ES, 9 (Winter, 1975-6), argues that the play is both sinister and ambiguous (216); cited below as "Don Juan Character."

² See also Roy S. Wolper, "The Temper of The Country Wife," Humanities Association Bulletin, 18 (Spring, 1967), 74, and Cook and Swannell, eds., Introduction, The Country Wife, p. xxxiv.

³ William Freedman, "Impotence and Self-Destruction in The Country Wife," ES, 53 (1972), 421; cited below as "Impotence and Self-Destruction."

⁴ William Wycherley, The Country Wife, in The Complete Plays of William Wycherley, ed. Gerald Weales (New York: New York UP, 1967), III.298. All further references to Wycherley's plays, with the exception of The Plain Dealer, will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁵ Peter M. Malekin, "Wycherley's Dramatic Skills and the Interpretation of The Country Wife," Durham University Journal, 62 (December, 1969), contends that Horner's role is a passive one; cited below as "Wycherley's Dramatic Skills." Once he has launched his plot, Malekin argues, Horner merely waits for the husbands and fiancés to bring the women to him. His purpose in the play is "to reveal, to unmask, to disclose what lies behind the façade of society's pretences. It is to what is revealed rather than to the character of Horner that one must look for any moral impact in the play" (39).

⁶ Wilding, in Aphra Behn's The City Heiress, in Works, 2, ed. Summers, comments on this appearance of virtue so carefully guarded only to cheat the world: "For Virtue's but a Name kept free from Scandal, / Which the most base of Women best preserve, / Since Jilting and Hypocrisy cheat the World best" (III.i.255). This attitude, prevalent in The Country Wife, comes under critical scrutiny in The Plain Dealer. See also Cook and Swannell, p. 1 eds., Introduction, The Country Wife, where they speak of the inverted values of the play (pp. xxxvi-xxxvii; xli).

⁷ In his article, "The Ethic of The Country Wife," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 9 (Spring, 1967), Ronald Berman argues that Horner "may be debased, but he is also justified" (54). Horner removes the masks of others and, consequently, he accelerates the satiric action, which in Berman's view is to "impale" those who "mask their motives" (54).

⁸ Joyce Miller, in "Study of an Epigram," gives a close analysis of the play's opening epigram, and finally asserts: "the juxtaposition of conventionally exclusive categories and their almost immediate identification one with the other results in a tingling insight, turning traditional value topsy-turvy. Nature is revealed as no more than a biological sexual urge which only the unnatural or unhealthy may not exercise" (p. 177).

⁹ Peter L. McNamara, "The Witty Company: Wycherley's 'The Country Wife,'" Ariel, 7 (January, 1976), 66; cited below as "Witty Company." For his part, Freedman, in "Impotence and Self-Destruction," asserts that "impotence is the mark of the Restoration society as Wycherley presents it" and, therefore, Horner's "trick is the key to the play's meaning no less than to the action and the comedy" (422).

¹⁰ While I agree with Berman that Horner can be regarded as a satiric spokesman, I do not think, as Berman tentatively suggests in "Ethic of The Country Wife," that Horner can be treated as "an analogue of the satirist himself" (55). Such a suggestion fails to account for the interesting features of the plot, designed to reveal Horner's less than perfect dissembling. As McNamara asserts, in "Witty Company," the play focuses upon "the interlocking self-interests" which allow Horner to succeed (71), and "it is just this web of self-interest which saves Horner from disaster in the final scene" (72). Horner, then, may possess a keen insight into the hypocrisy of others, but his own "debased" nature, as Berman calls it, allies him with those he abuses and mocks (54). Moreover, in his Critical Introduction, The Man of Mode, John Conaghan remarks: "the deceit itself is a limitation: there is always the possibility that the stratagem will be discovered, which operates throughout as a kind of reassurance of moral order" (p. 6).

¹¹ Kathleen Lynch, in Social Mode, argues that the play proves Manly's judgment to be "short-sighted" and that Freeman, and in part Fidelia, bring about Manly's "conversion to the ways of the world" (p. 173). Eugene B. McCarthy, in "Wycherley's 'The Plain Dealer' and the Limits of Wit," English Miscellany, 22 (1971), also suggests that Manly comes to acquiesce "to the forms of polite custom" (80); cited below as "Limits of Wit." Once given to "anti-social railing," Manly finally achieves a "good-natured acceptance of the world's proper custom of decorum and ceremony" (81).

¹² Cook and Swannell, in their Introduction, The Country Wife, note that "the deliberate contrast between Pinchwife and Sparkish" (p. xxxviii) is fundamental to the play's treatment of marriage and hypocrisy (p. xli).

¹³ In Pinchwife's case, McNamara says in "Witty Company" that "self-interest conquers truth where credulity cannot conquer suspicion" (71).

¹⁴ Charles A. Hallett, "The Hobbesian Substructure of The Country Wife," PLL, 9 (Fall, 1973), 384; cited below as "Hobbesian Substructure."

¹⁵ According to Hallett's Hobbesian analysis, Margery represents the "natural man in the state of nature," and she acts, accordingly, solely "from self-interest" (384). Although "socialized during the course of the play" (385), her "instinctual drives do not change, nor does she find it necessary to control them. She merely begins to dissemble" (386). See also Cook and Swannell, eds., Introduction, The Country Wife, where the editors argue that Margery, "essentially innocent," is the "very opposite of the ruthless London poseurs" (p. xlv). But Margery does learn the tricks and deceptions so artfully practised by Lady Fidget, a creature possessed of "instinctual desires" surely as all-consuming and as unchanging as Margery's. McCarthy, on the other hand, in "Limits of Wit," refers to the country wife as the "simplistic" Margery, and contends that her "naturalness," her failure to grasp art, almost topples Horner's artifice, which leads McCarthy to assume that wit is "tenuous" (73).

¹⁶ In Not in Timon's Manner: Feeling, Misanthropy, and Satire in Eighteenth-Century England (University of Alabama Press, 1975), Thomas R. Preston argues that Fidelia, "in morality play fashion," leaves her fortune and her home in order to follow Manly; cited below as Not in Timon's Manner. As Preston notes: "Indeed, Fidelia's dogged attachment to Manly keeps admiration for his brand of 'plain dealing' alive even during the course of his moral decline" (p. 12). I think, however, that Wycherley emphasizes the "moral decline" at the same time as he questions Manly's brand of plain dealing.

¹⁷ In "Dance, Chant and Mask in the Plays of Wycherley," Drama Survey, 3 (October, 1963), John S. Bowman overstates the case when he asserts: "there is Fidelia's disguise which effects an un-masking of everyone else" (199); cited below as "Dance, Chant and Mask." The plain dealer's own blindness, coupled with the hypocrites' less than perfect dissembling, help to bring out the play's resolution.

¹⁸ As Appleton explains in "Double Gallant," in English Writers, ed. Middendorf, the device comes to be common in the eighteenth century. Sheridan and Goldsmith, for example, comically exploit the dramatic device of the dual hero, the hero who displays two sides to his nature, or who has in another character a reflection of himself (pp. 151-3).

¹⁹ As Taylor points out in her Introduction, She Would If She Could: "Restoration wits, though they are not necessarily moral exempla, serve as touchstones for testing the values and assumptions of other characters; but their proximity to the dupes, which allows them to function as exposers, also brings the assumptions and actions of the wits under satiric scrutiny" (p. xviii). Dorimant in The Man of Mode is mocked and derided, but Wycherley's central protagonists conform more

closely to what Taylor suggests.

²⁰ In "William Wycherley," in Restoration Theatre, eds. Brown and Harris, Righter remarks: "Alitheia and Harcourt stand formally at the centre of the play; it is by their standard that Wycherley intends the other characters, including Horner, to be judged" (p. 78). Contending that Wycherley's main interest is "a savage vision of society," Righter concludes that the Harcourt-Alitheia plot lacks dramatic interest and lapses into the mechanical, if only because the dramatist, unlike Etherege, "is not really interested in his young lovers" (p. 79). Such a statement attributes attitudes to Wycherley which are difficult to verify. Malekin, in "Wycherley's Dramatic Skills," contends that Harcourt, far from performing a "normative function" in the play, is a "peripheral character" (39). But, as Cook and Swannell argue in their Introduction, The Country Wife, the play reflects in the characters of Alitheia and Harcourt a more positive standard of conduct (pp. xlv-xlv). On the other hand, Righter concludes: "By minimising the role of Eliza, and degrading Freeman, Wycherley prevents them from establishing a positive value at the end of the play" (p. 86). But, interestingly enough, Righter does not explore their failure to wed.

²¹ McCarthy, in "Limits of Wit," would concur. Alitheia's regard for reputation, he argues, represents a "more selfish end which she has developed as she goes about town in 'innocent liberty'" and, thus, she fears "losing Sparkish as a non-jealous husband" less than she fears "the 'loss of the town' and reputation" (69). Malekin, in "Wycherley's Dramatic Skills," also argues that Lady Fidget and Alitheia "stand as the opposed extremes of folly on the question of 'honour'" (37). On the other hand, Berman, in "Ethic of The Country Wife," states that, because she "has isolated herself from vice and the retribution it brings," Alitheia is decidedly unlike the other characters. She alone "takes seriously both friendship and 'reputation.'" She exists to prove the possibility of moral action" (52). Similarly, Hallett, in "Hobbesian Substructure," argues that Alitheia's role is "that of touchstone" (391). Alitheia, unlike the others, refuses to take lightly the seriousness of the contract and she alone is the one character "who does not act out of self-interest" (391). So, her blindness to Sparkish's true nature, Hallett asserts, is not a moral blindness. To condemn her loyalty to Sparkish is, in Hallett's view, to "undermine the concept of honor Wycherley has labored to endorse" (391). Although he agrees that Wycherley would not "make Alitheia a sacrifice upon the altar of honour" (393), he does not acknowledge the implication that she herself does appear to be a willing victim, and that she does display a certain "rigidity" (IV.313), which the play corrects.

²² McCarthy, in "Limits of Wit," also points to the important differences between Harcourt and Horner, both of whom defend, at the end of the play, a lady's honour. But Harcourt "wishes to publish Alitheia's honor and Horner wishes to keep his lady's covert." McCarthy then concludes that the difference exemplifies Harcourt's change from a

man cognizant of Horner's quibbling to a man "direct and open" (67).

²³ Relating character to metaphorical speech, McCarthy also notes that Freeman's figures of speech "are natural parts of his speech and not contrived" (83). If Freeman "finds that wit has had its day" (83), though, it should also be noted that Eliza, too, regards dissembling as an ineffective and inappropriate measure (II.40).

²⁴ Lynch in Social Mode argues that Freeman, "master of the situation" and "knowing well the heart of his friend," turns to Manly with "a pleasant aphorism on his lips." She concludes that Manly, in agreeing with Freeman's "pleasant aphorism," thereby "makes his peace with the age" (p. 173). However, Lynch fails to discuss the thematic importance of Freeman's remark, even though she sees in him Manly's mentor.

²⁵ Righter, in "William Wycherley," in Restoration Theatre, eds. Brown and Harris, refers to Manly as "an agent of destruction," a harsh judgment which neither explores nor accounts for the change wrought upon the surly plain dealer (p. 86).

²⁶ Conversely, Holland, in First Modern Comedies, tends to see the play's ending in slightly different terms. He argues: "Manly's reformation in the finale consists of acquiring exactly the knowledge that Freeman had at the beginning (p. 106), that is, "that though dissimulation may be an evil, there are more basic goods and evils concealed beneath its surface" (p. 107). Zimbardo, on the other hand, sees the final scene in less felicitous terms. "The note upon which the play ends," Zimbardo warns in Wycherley's Drama, "should give us pause. It should remind us that Freeman's view, the view of the majority, still exists, untouched by the virtue of Fidelity." She also considers Fidelity's very virtue to be the spark which ignites the "ray of hope" in the satirist, Manly. Yet, in spite of Manly's betrothal to Fidelity, Manly's "cure" is not assured: "He embraces Freeman here as he had embraced Olivia at the beginning, for being a superficial copy of himself, a seeming plain-dealer" (p. 146). Zimbardo's caution may be necessary, but she nevertheless does not explore Freeman's role as a socially adept plain-dealer throughout the play.

²⁷ Holland, while affirming, in First Modern Comedies, that Eliza is unnecessary (p. 101), at the same time indicates her satiric function. Her recognition that a discrepancy exists between appearance and nature contrasts to Olivia's lack of knowledge. Furthermore, Eliza "serves as a reflector for Fidelity just as Freeman does for Manly" (p. 100) and, "though she does not play any causal part in the play, her presence develops a tension" (p. 100). This tension Holland attaches to the "natural relation" between her and Freeman, a relation which never reaches fruition and which therefore contributes to the meaning of the play. Presumably, this importance derives from Eliza's knowledge of the town and of the discrepancy between appearance and reality.

²⁸ T. W. Craik, in "Some Aspects of Satire in Wycherley's Plays," ES, 41 (1960), dismisses Eliza with a parenthetical remark that she "exists simply in order to expose Olivia's hypocrisy" (173). And Ian Donaldson, in "'Tables Turned': The Plain Dealer," Essays in Criticism, 17 (July, 1967), concurs: "Eliza is a marginal character who is really no more than a foil to Olivia" (307). Neither critic investigates why Eliza may be such a peripheral character.

²⁹ See Chapter XI, pp. 338.

³⁰ Most critics (for example, Righter and Zimbardo) have problems with the play's conclusion. McCarthy, in "Limits of Wit," strives to account for Manly's marriage to Fidelia but omits any discussion of Freeman's remaining apart from Eliza (92).

³¹ The phrase is taken from the title of Deitz's article, "Congreve's Better Way to Run the World." See Chapter X, pp. 349-350.

³² Holland, in First Modern Comedies, concludes that the plays of both Congreve and Wycherley "are the direct forerunners of 'weeping comedy'" (p. 113).

Notes: Chapter Four

¹ In Development of English Drama, Hume refers to the "dual comic tradition of the nineties" (p. 379).

² Maximillian E. Novak, "The Artist and the Clergyman: Congreve, Collier and the World of the Play, CE, 30 (April, 1969), 559-560. See also John King McComb, "Satiric Anatomy," where he speaks of Congreve's "satiric themes" (372).

³ Rose Zimbardo, "The Satiric Design in The Plain Dealer," in Restoration Dramatists, ed. Miner, p. 124; cited below as "Satiric Design." But, as Maximillian Novak remarks, in "Love, Scandal and Moral Milieu," in Congreve Consider'd: "Rose Zimbardo's mistaken view of Congreve's heroes and heroines as sentimental seems to arise from the strange choice of Wycherley's characters as a norm" (fn. 54, p. 54).

⁴ See Clifford Leech, "Congreve and the Century's End," PQ, 41 (January, 1962), 275-293; cited below as "Century's End." Here, Leech recognizes both Congreve's Restoration roots (276) and his more serious inclinations (283). As Cook and Swannell express it, in their introduction, The Country Wife, in The Way of the World Congreve achieves the "perfect balance" between "laughter and social criticism" (p. xxxiv).

⁵ Congreve argues in his Amendments: "A third use of this pretended madness [in Love for Love] is, that it gives a Liberty to Satire" (p. 431).

⁶ The phrase is part of the title of Deitz's article, "Congreve's Better Way to Run the World."

⁷ Later, they expand on the argument, and contend: "the fool may turn knave; or conversely vice may revert to folly, the knave may turn fool" (p. 62).

⁸ See Chapter II, pp. 54-55, where I discuss the importance of the mirror to Sir Fopling.

⁹ McComb, in "Satiric Anatomy," analyzes Heartwell's character in terms of Congreve's representation of "stages in a single process initiated by disordered lust" (361). In this sense, Heartwell was once

like Vainlove. Heartwell, the potent lover, has become like a fop, and the fop the satirist satirized (365).

¹⁰ Lynch, in Social Mode, refers to Silvia as a "designing courtesan" who easily beguiles Heartwell (p. 189). On the other hand, in an obstreperously argued piece, George Parfitt, in "The Case Against Congreve," in William Congreve, ed. Brian Morris (London: Ernest Benn, 1972), takes Congreve to task for his seeming failure to attend to the "implications" of The Old Batchelour. The "implications" would seem to be that such a "wronged individual" as Silvia is more a victim than a victimizer, and Parfitt questions whether Silvia "deserves" the man she eventually marries (p. 26). Yet, when she extorts an offer of marriage from Heartwell, Silvia's own glee surely betrays her designing nature (III.ii.74-5).

¹¹ Harriett Hawkins points out, in Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972): "In The Way of the World the values of The Man of Mode are held up to question and found wanting" (p. 93); cited below as Likenesses of Truth.

¹² Gerald Weales, in "The Shadow on Congreve's Surface," Educational Theatre Journal, 19 (March, 1967), labels The Old Batchelour, "a fairly conventional Restoration comedy in which a great many plots are in operation at one time" (30). And Rosowski, in "Thematic Development," also points to the "amount of conventional material in the play" (389). Rosowski contends, as I do, that Congreve's aim is to show the "dehumanizing effect of such convention" (389). For her, the plays demonstrate the "necessity of the individual to wrest a meaningful ideal from a social system seemingly organized for the suppression of that very quality" (388). Similarly, Philip Roberts, in "Mirabell and Restoration Comedy," in William Congreve, ed. Morris, suggests that Congreve "continually creates characters and situations which are apparently conventional but then proceeds to a rigorous investigation and exposé of what he regards as the real nature of these things" (p. 48). More recently, McComb, in "Satiric Anatomy," has argued that Congreve's originality lies in the twists which he gives to conventional material (361).

¹³ Novak, in "Love, Scandal and Moral Milieu," Congreve Consider'd, suggests that Congreve was particularly successful in "presenting convincingly witty characters who were at the same time convincingly in love" (fn. 47, p. 50). See also Hume, Development of English Drama, pp. 388-9.

¹⁴ Weales, in "Shadow on Congreve's Surface," states the glaringly obvious when he writes: "Whether [Vainlove's] name implies love in vain (impotence) or vain in love (narcissism), it is clear that his pleasure lies in making the approach and that it stops once he gets on the green"

(32). Kenneth Muir, on the other hand, goes further in his analysis of Vainlove's character. As Muir states, in "The Comedies of William Congreve," in Restoration Theatre, eds. Brown and Harris: "His name is itself a criticism of his character, and Congreve was clearly alive to its absurdities" (p. 222).

¹⁵ In "Satiric Anatomy," McComb compares Vainlove both to Sir Fopling and to Dorimant (363).

¹⁶ Heartwell's concluding speech also casts doubt on the matrimonial bliss anticipated by Bellmour. Heartwell refers to the "youthful Beast" who "neighs aloud" but, while "All Coursers the first Heat with Vigour run," a wife is a "galling Load." Finally, only "with Whip and Spur the Race is won" (V.ii.112).

¹⁷ Anthony Gosse, "Plot and Character in Congreve's Double-Dealer," MLQ, 29 (September, 1968), 277; cited below as "Plot and Character." Critical opinion with respect to Maskwell has been varied if only because of his villainy, and a critical failure to acknowledge the inevitability of his downfall. Paul and Miriam Mueschke, in New View, contend that Maskwell, along with Lady Touchwood, "are too vicious for comedy" and, therefore, the play exhibits an imbalance between gaiety and villainy (p. 70). Leech, in "Century's End," regards both Maskwell and Lady Touchwood to be manifestations of human evil (281). And just as Leech argues that the treatment is not comic, so, too, does Aubrey Williams, in "Poetical Justice, the Contrivances of Providence, and the Works of William Congreve," ELH, 35 (December, 1968); cited below as "Poetical Justice." Here, he asserts that the play "is not a comedy concerned merely with ridicule of the frail and foolish; the play also exposes a completely malignant spirit, elusive and elemental, in human nature" (558-9). More recently, William Myers, in "Plot and Meaning in Congreve's Comedies," in William Congreve, ed. Morris, argues: "Congreve has suddenly found a way of bringing the anarchic extravagance of melodrama into striking conjunction with the ordinariness of comedy"; cited below as "Plot and Meaning."

¹⁸ Underwood points out, in Etherege, that Congreve's heroes only play the Machiavel in order to survive (fn. 6, p. 75).

¹⁹ In "Plot and Character," Gosse remarks: "Act IV begins with an encounter between the serious couple in which Cynthia issues the traditional challenge of the Restoration heroine to the hero to win her with his wit" (279). Gosse also points out, as I do, that Cynthia's reasons for offering this traditional challenge suggest a new seriousness (280). See also Leech, "Century's End," 289; John Barnard, "Passion, 'Poetical Justice,' and Dramatic Law in The Double-Dealer and The Way of the World," in William Congreve, ed. Morris, pp. 98-112; cited below as "Dramatic Law." See also Williams, "Poetical Justice," 540-565.

²⁰ Gosse emphasizes the discrepancy between Cynthia's demand for a "very evident demonstration of his Wit" (IV.i.168), and her credulity: "Cynthia, too, trusts Maskwell, who persuades her (off stage) to elope with Mellefont, despite his failure to meet her challenge, a condition of their marriage" (280).

²¹ Love for Love, described by Leech, in "Century's End," as the most "vigorous" of Congreve's plays (283), also has elicited diverse critical comment. In "Plot and Character," Gosse refers to its "mocking, enigmatic treatment of romantic love," which is "not far removed from the portrayal of credulous goodness in The Double-Dealer" (288). On the other hand, Charles R. Lyons, in "Congreve's Miracle of Love," Criticism, 6 (Fall, 1964), argues that Love for Love demonstrates a "greater implicit seriousness" (332); cited below as "Miracle of Love."

²² Lyons indicates that the trial of Valentine is a test of his love (347), and Rosowski, in "Thematic Development," points to the play's opening scene where Valentine's character is individualized "by contrasting him to the conventional libertine rake hero" (fn. 15, 399). See also Aubrey Williams, "Utmost Tryal," where Williams speaks of the play as a play of test and judgment (2-3).

²³ See also Williams "'Utmost Tryal,'" where he discusses the significance of "madness" as sacrifice (13).

²⁴ See also Chapter II, pp. pp. 60-61.

²⁵ Only when she fears a trick is put upon her (IV.i.277), or when she acknowledges Valentine's generosity (V.i.312), does she speak in asides. Throughout the play, she offers Valentine no encouragement (e.g., I.i.225; III.i.254). But when she believes him to be seriously ill, she does openly admit her concern (IV.i.276-7).

²⁶ In Likenesses of Truth, Hawkins correctly notes that "mad" is Congreve's "favourite adjective for the world of this comedy" (p. 109).

²⁷ Rosowski, in "Thematic Development," calls Prue a "foolish natural" but one who, maskless, "portrays the desperate need for human contact that motivates the other characters but that they conceal behind a masquerade of manners and poses" (400).

²⁸ In discussing Love for Love and The Double-Dealer, and the "cavalier fashion" in which the plays are resolved, Leech notes, in "Century's End," that the endings compare with the "noble gesturing at the end of Love's Last Shift" (290). The Mueschkes, in New View, tend to view the "prodigal's" pursuit of the heroine as fundamentally romantic, although they merely hint that, at times, the "love for love" strand of

the play does veer into the "sentimental" (p. 75). Cf. Williams, "'Utmost Tryal,'" where Williams argues that the characters' "callousness" hardly conforms to a sentimental treatment (11).

²⁹ Kaufman, in "Language and Character," comments that the "inadequacy of society is seen even in the more joyous and robust Love for Love. Valentine and Angelica engage in banter between themselves - as will Mirabell and Millamant - and yet the main tension is between the witty couple and their society, the society of Tattle, Sir Sampson, and Foresight, which threatens to engulf them in darkness" (420). In "Thematic Development," Rosowski claims that the question as to whether the value defined in the play can in fact be achieved within society will be explored in The Way of the World (400). See also Williams, "'Utmost Tryal,'" where he remarks on the necessity of testing love (11-12).

³⁰ The play has been analyzed in various ways, most recently by Sharon Kaehle Shaw, "The Burying of the Living in Restoration and Eighteenth Century Comedy," Ball State University Forum, 11:4 (Autumn, 1970), where she refers to Congreve's "serious analysis of the marriage relationship" (77); by Paul J. Hurley, "Law and the Dramatic Rhetoric of The Way of the World," The South Atlantic Quarterly, 70 (1971), as an example of a "trial atmosphere" in which "an important judgment must be decided, a verdict rendered" (193); by Brian Corman, "The Way of the World and Morally Serious Comedy," UTQ, 44 (Spring, 1975), as a "morally serious comedy" (200); and finally by Charles H. Hinnant, "Wit, Propriety, and Style in The Way of the World," SEL, 17 (Summer, 1977), as a dramatic example of Dryden's definition of wit (374). Cited below as Shaw, "Burying of the Living"; Hurley, "Law and Dramatic Rhetoric"; Corman, "Morally Serious Comedy"; Hinnant, "Wit, Propriety, and Style."

³¹ Corman, in "Morally Serious Comedy" (203), and Hurley, in "Law and Dramatic Rhetoric" (201), also point to the dramatic necessity for the play's complexity.

³² Kaufman, in "Language and Character," speaks of Witwoud, a "would-be wit," and Lady Wishfort, a sullied matron, as two characters who are "central to Congreve's definition of the 'the world'" because they represent the "social and moral disorder" from which the wits must free themselves (417). And Kaufman concludes: "Typically the truewit of Congreve's last three comedies must attempt to disengage himself from the way of the world, represented by the fools and malicious wits who surround him" (419).

³³ See also Cordatus' description of the fop in Jonson's Every Man Out of His Humour, in Ben Jonson, 3, eds. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927). Here, in speaking of Buffone, Cordatus says: "[he is one] whose company is desir'd of all men, but belou'd of none; hee will sooner lose his soule than a iest, and prophane even the most holy things, to excite laughter: no honorable or reuerend

personage whatsoever, can come within the reach of his eye, but is turn'd into all manner of varietie, by his adult'rate simile's" (p. 441). In New View, the Mueschkes consider the difference between true and false wit to be "not primarily a difference of form, nor altogether one of content"; rather, "it is fundamentally a difference in the degree of discrimination and judgment shown" (p. 40). In "Language and Character," Kaufman sees in Witwoud's "parasitic" form of wit and fashionable pretenses "the logical end product of a society that overvalue appearance" (414). See also Hinnant, "Wit, Propriety, and Style," 375-7, and 380, where he discusses the fool's wit and the rogue's wit.

³⁴ Rosowski, in "Thematic Development," argues that Sir Wilfull represents the "purely private" and, because he is "unable to communicate with the other characters - with Witwoud or with the truewit Millamant," he "escapes from the way of the world, first by becoming thoroughly drunk, and then by physically departing" (405). But even Lady Wishfort, whose own façade describes "the entire society she represents" (404), for a time yearns to leave the world (V.i.465). And Hinnant stresses, in "Wit, Propriety, and Style," as I do, that Sir Wilfull may be a "country rustic," but Congreve endows him with a "natural sagacity" (376).

³⁵ In "Morally Serious Comedy," Corman considers Lady Wishfort to be "enough the stock hypocritical and foolish old woman of Restoration comedy to deflate serious concern for her" (209-210). On the other hand, in "Those Dying Generations," in William Congreve, ed. Morris, Malcolm Kelsall detects in Lady Wishfort a sentimentality and a vulnerability which sharpen the outlines of her character (p. 124). Kelsall's analysis may go too far in suggesting that her lack of knowledge hints of sentimentality. He does, however, indicate the comic importance of Congreve's striking and unique portrait of the sullied matron. As Roberts suggests, in "Mirabell and Restoration Comedy," in William Congreve, she also assumes thematic importance. If she is the "embodiment of the implications of the beau monde," then her "desperate attempts to swap nature for art become an index to the moral juggling which pervades much of the play" (p. 49). As Charles R. Lyons puts it, in "Disguise, Identity, and Personal Value in The Way of the World," Educational Theatre Journal, 23 (October, 1971), hers is a "futile illusion" which "illustrates the emphasis put upon appearance in the artificial world of the play" (261); cited below as "Disguise, Identity, and Personal Value."

³⁶ Corman, in "Morally Serious Comedy," points to this scene as an example of Congreve's use of convention for his own ends (200).

³⁷ Corman, in "Morally Serious Comedy," points out that "similar scruples did not prevent his affair with [Lady Wishfort's] daughter. His distinction would seem to be between a sincere relationship and one which is totally false" (202). As Rosowski notes, in "Thematic Development," Mirabell's primary concern is to "protect" his relationship with Millamant (402). Much earlier, in "Congreve's Mirabell and the Ideal of the

Gentleman," PMLA, 79 (September, 1964), Jean Gagen had argued that Mirabell's affair with Mrs. Fainall is "never regarded within the ethical framework of the play"; he has neither "debauched a virtuous maiden," nor has he "deceived her with promises of marriage" (424). Fainall marries Mirabell's cast-off mistress under equally false pretences (425).

³⁸ Although Holland, in First Modern Comedies, claims that Mirabell and Fainall "behave very much alike" (p. 188), most critics acknowledge a dual aspect to Mirabell's character. H. Teyssandier says, in "Congreve's Way of the World: Decorum and Morality," ES, 52 (1971), Mirabell "emerges as an expert, but discriminate deceiver" (129); cited below as "Decorum and Morality." Mirabell is an "honest rake" at the same time as he is a "fair-dealing deceiver" (130). Teyssandier's assessment agrees with the earlier one of the Mueschkes', who speak, in New View, of the need for a "mean between the plain dealer and the double-dealer" (p. 66). Similarly, Kaufman, in "Language and Character," refers to Mirabell's goodness and generosity which Fainall, a consummate double-dealer, lacks: "although [Mirabell] must of necessity promote his pleasure and safeguard his interests in a hardheaded manner, he is the basically benevolent man who attempts, as far as it is in his power, to act honorably" (418). His "good sense and detachment from a world he still must use are not seen in Fainall, who is committed to envy and malice" (419). In Fainall, then, Congreve once again attacks the character of the rake and, in Mirabell, offers what Corman in "Morally Serious Comedy" calls "a model of witty urbanity," an "ideal hero for the comedy of the age" (201). See also Hawkins, Likenesses of Truth, pp. 120-122.

³⁹ In Comedy of Wit, Fujimura affirms that "it is Fainall, and not Mirabell, who exemplifies the title of the play; for it is he, and not Mirabell, who accepts infidelity in matrimony and friendship as 'all in the Way of the World'" (p. 192). Such a view ignores the other references to the play's title and, as I show, Congreve masterfully demonstrates Fainall's "way" to be ultimately unsuccessful. See also Rosowski, "Thematic Development," 401; Deitz, "Better Way," 370-1, 373.

⁴⁰ Such a view is consistent with Myers' analysis. In "Plot and Meaning," in William Congreve, ed. Morris, Myers examines the defeat of vice according to Congreve's attempt in the play to "bring his view of public order and his sense of private values into a coherent and optimistic dramatic relationship" (p. 84). I cannot agree that vice and folly admit to their own "unsuitability." Teyssandier's comments, in "Decorum and Morality," seem more to the point: "the elaborate make-believe is eventually shattered, and the moral of the story is that appearances are deceptive as long as they are maintained, but that they cannot succeed in deceiving for ever" (129).

⁴¹ While Hinnant in "Wit, Propriety, and Style" speaks of Mrs. Fainall's "naiveté compounded of good nature and a faulty education" (378), Corman in "Morally Serious Comedy" points to the character of Mrs. Fainall as an example of villainy's power (209). Deitz, in "Better

Way," emphasizes her "open, mutual relationship" with Mirabell (371).

⁴² See Williams, "'Utmost Tryal,'" 5, and also Congreve's epigraph to The Mourning Bride, in Complete Plays, ed. Davis: "A rightful Doom, the Laws of Nature cry, / 'Tis, the Artificers of Death should die" (p. 320).

⁴³ Colley Cibber, Woman's Wit; or, the Lady in Fashion, in The Dramatic Works of Colley Cibber, 1 (1777; rpt. New York: Ams Press, 1966), V.i.200, and George Farquhar, The Constant Couple, in George Farquhar, ed. William Archer (New York: Hill and Wang, 1959), IV.iii.105. All further references to Farquhar's plays will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of Mirabell's witty perception, see Roper, "Language and Action," 47; Rosowski, "Thematic Development," 404.

⁴⁵ R. A. Foakes, "Wit and Convention in Congreve's Comedies," in William Congreve, ed. Morris, p. 68; cited below as "Wit and Convention." On the other hand, Hurley, in "Law and Dramatic Rhetoric," contends that only a superior knowledge of legal machinery insures success (194).

⁴⁶ Kaufman, in "Language and Character," contends that Millamant's attitude represents a "delicate balance" between seriousness and frivolity, and that she plays a deliberate game "because it frees her from engagement with the hostility and witlessness that surrounds her" (424). Indeed, Millamant's more peripheral involvement with the various intrigues sets her apart from the actions of the other characters, and this aloofness, coupled with her "stylish response" to those around her (424), leads to the "perception of Millamant as an ideal within the play;" she is not only the "fine lady," but also the "embodiment of a proper state of mind" (424). In "Wit, Propriety, and Style," Hinnant discusses Millamant in terms which would attribute "method" to her, that is, her desire to ensnare Mirabell, but would deny any particular "method" to her wit (381-2).

⁴⁷ Similarly, Fujimura, in Comedy of Wit, contends that Millamant, like Mirabell, anticipates the coming age in her "increased sensibility" (p. 188). William Van Voris, in "Congreve's Gilded Carousel," Educational Theatre Journal, 10 (March, 1958), argues differently. Mirabell, Van Voris claims, "has Millamant pretend to accept Sir Wilful so Lady Wishfort cannot under any circumstances seize her property" (216). Van Voris, however, does not provide any textual basis for this assertion which, considering Mirabell's foresight in acquiring the deed of trust, might well be true.

⁴⁸ To Kaufman, in "Language and Character," the proviso scene is a "symbolic working out of a modus vivendi in a world of fools and knaves,

a mutual guarantee of individual dignity and worth in a world where these qualities are always threatened" (421). Roberts notes, in "Mirabell and Restoration Comedy," in William Congreve, ed. Morris, that Mirabell's provisos would, "if implemented, effectively ruin a normal Restoration comedy, since it is a catalogue of structural props and variations upon which much of the intrigue in Restoration comedy is based" (p. 45). Bernard, in "Dramatic Law," in William Congreve, argues that legal metaphor heightens the witty truth of the scene since "it too reflects the 'Way of the World'" (p. 106). This metaphor "enfranchises the lovers" and it reconciles the "competing demands of wit (in the sense of judgment) and love" (p. 106). See also Hinnant, "Wit, Propriety, and Style," 382-3. Novak, in "Love, Scandal, and the Moral Milieu," in Congreve Consider'd, argues that the provisos establish the "moral ideal" of love, "asserted in the face of a society composed for the most part of fools and knaves" (p. 27). See also Deitz, "Better Way," 375, 377. I would add that the proviso scene also reconciles artifice and nature.

⁴⁹ In First Modern Comedies, Holland asserts that the play, like any Restoration comedy, "deals with the reform of the hero, not his reward," but this reform arises from his "initiation into true love at the end - his 'reward'" which marks his "reclamation to virtue." As Holland states: "The knowledge and experience the hero gained as a rake become the wisdom necessary for real virtue" (p. 203). Such a view would as easily accommodate Cibber's kind of sentimental comedy as it does Congreve's play. Leech, in "Century's End," would concur with my assessment. Mirabell, who "appears not merely the wit but the thoughtful man," is no victim of a sudden transformation, like Cibber's Loveless, but he does have a plan for "rational living" (291).

Notes: Chapter Five

¹ Mark Schorer, in "Hugh Kelly: His Place in the Sentimental School," PQ 12 (October, 1933), points to the "didactic purpose" of sentimental comedy (398); cited below as "Hugh Kelly."

² As Dorimont expresses it in Thomas Holcroft's The School For Arrogance (1791), in Modern Theatre, 2: "Error and folly impede the progress of perfection" (V.i.162). All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³ At the conclusion of Mrs. Inchbald's play, Every One Has His Fault (1792), Lord Norland says: "And whilst a man like [Harmony], may have (among so many virtues) some faults; let us hope there may be found in each of us (among our faults) some virtues." See British Theatre, 7, V.iii.88.

⁴ George Farquhar, "A Discourse upon Comedy, in Reference to the English Stage," 1702, in Critical Essays of the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1725, ed. Willard Higley Durham (1915; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), p. 273; cited below as "Discourse." Durham notes in his introduction that Farquhar's view is "a theory which justifies comedy by its success" (p. xxix). Krutch, however, in Comedy and Conscience, considers Farquhar to be "the last of the old school," and Farquhar's "Discourse" comes to be "the best exposition of the principles of Restoration Comedy" (p. 237). Krutch contends that, while conciliating the moralists, Farquhar still manages to see an "excellent moral" in Congreve's The Old Batchelour (p. 237). More recently, Sharon Kaehele Shaw suggests, in "Burying the Living," that the problem exemplified by Congreve's Fainalls Farquhar treats later in The Beaux' Stratagem, but in the sentimental mode (77). Paul Mueschke and Jeannette Fleisher, in "Re-Evaluation," link Farquhar's play to Vanbrugh's The Provok'd Wife (865-889). In "Supposed Revolution," Hume points to Farquhar's combination of ridicule and "moral lead characters" so that, finally, "he mixes essentially good-humored satire with basically good-hearted characters" (p. 264). Finally, like Congreve and Cibber, and later Sheridan and Wilde, Farquhar makes use of both the witty and the sentimental modes. See also Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, pp. 84-5; Eric Rothstein, "Farquhar's Twin-Rivals and the Reform of Comedy," PMLA, 70 (March, 1964), 41; cited below as "Reform of Comedy."

⁵ Joseph Addison, "The Spectator," 446, 1 August 1712, in The

Spectator, 4, ed. Bond, pp. 67 and 68.

⁶ Addison, "The Spectator," 249, 15 December 1711, in The Spectator, 2, p. 467.

⁷ Steele, "The Spectator," 65, 15 May 1711, in The Spectator, 1, p. 290. See also Loftis, Steele, p. 18. C. J. Rawson, in "Some Remarks on Eighteenth-Century 'Delicacy,' with a Note on Hugh Kelly's False Delicacy," JEGP, 61 (1962), explains that "anti-sensualism and the doctrine of 'moral sense' were basic to sentimentalism" (fn. 11, 4); cited below as "Some Remarks."

⁸ Addison, "The Spectator," 446, 1 August 1712, in The Spectator, 4, p. 67.

⁹ Stuart M. Tave, "Corbyn Morris: Falstaff, Humor, and Comic Theory in the Eighteenth Century," MP, 50 (November, 1952), 102; cited below as "Corbyn Morris." See also W. F. Gallaway, Jr., "The Sentimentalism of Goldsmith," PMLA, 48 (December, 1933), 1167, 1171. For a discussion of this point, see also Hume, "Theory of Comedy," 306; Preston, Not in Timon's Manner, pp. 19-20..

¹⁰ Friedman also makes the distinction between a comic work and a serious work. If a piece is serious, the felicitous outcome is not clearly determined from the outset (fn. 1, p. 253). See also Auburn, Sheridan's Comedies, where he makes a similar distinction (n. 16, p. 190; pp. 12-13); Loftis, Steele, where Loftis discusses how pathetic and distressful situations demonstrate the exemplary character's benevolence and humanity (p. 199).

¹¹ Maureen Sullivan, ed., Introduction, Colley Cibber: Three Sentimental Comedies (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1973), p. xxvi; cited below as Introduction, Colley Cibber.

¹² J. M. S. Tompkins, "Didacticism and Sensibility," in The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 93, and Edith Birkhead, "Sentiment and Sensibility in the Eighteenth-Century Novel," in Essays and Studies, The English Association, 11 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925), p. 95. See also Elizabeth Yearling, "The Good-Natured Heroes of Cumberland, Goldsmith, and Sheridan," MLR, 67 (July, 1972), where she speaks of the comedy's pre-occupation with emotion (490); cited below as "Good-Natured Heroes."

¹³ Brian Vickers, ed., Introduction, The Man of Feeling (London: Oxford UP, 1967), p. ix.

¹⁴ R. S. Crane, "Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" ELH, 1 (December, 1934), 206; cited below as "Suggestions Toward a Genealogy." See also Thomas R. Preston, "Disenchanted the Man of Feeling: Smollett's Ferdinand Count Fathom," in Quick Springs of Sense, ed. Champion (p. 15); cited below as "Disenchanted the Man of Feeling," Quick Springs of Sense. Yearling, in "Good-Natured Heroes" (491-2) also discusses this point.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the importance of sensibility, see, for example, David S. Berkeley, "The Art of 'Whining' Love," SP, 52 (July, 1955), 483-4.

¹⁶ Schorer, in "Hugh Kelly," refers to the reformed Restoration hero as the "'amiable rake'" (400).

¹⁷ Congreve, in his Amendments, refers to Collier's point that to repeat the vice is to commit a fault (p. 488). See Collier, A Short View, p. 71.

¹⁸ Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, "The Satiric Mode of Feeling: A Theory of Intention," Criticism, 11 (Spring, 1969), 124. Cited below as "Satiric Mode of Feeling."

¹⁹ In Wycherley's play, Pinchwife, who is himself a bad example of a superannuated rake, makes the comment. So, what to Wycherley is a double-edged remark, to eighteenth-century playwrights becomes a dramatic truism.

²⁰ Steele, "The Spectator," 249, 15 December 1711, in The Spectator, 2, ed. Bond, pp. 466-7.

²¹ Steele, "The Spectator," 370, 5 May 1712, in The Spectator, 3, p. 393. Winton, in "Sentimentalism and Theater Reform," in Quick Springs of Sense, ed. Champion, points to the eighteenth-century notion that the stage exerts an influence on the age (p. 99).

²² See also Stanley Williams, "The English Sentimental Drama from Steele to Cumberland," Sewanee Review, 33 (October, 1925), 409; cited below as "English Sentimental Drama."

²³ In "Supposed Revolution" Hume asserts that "no clear-cut genre can be isolated" (p. 244) for, as he stresses, sentimental comedy is a "complicated phenomenon" (p. 270).

²⁴ John W. Draper, "The Theory of the Comic in Eighteenth-Century England," JEGP, 37 (April, 1938), 221; cited below as "Theory of the Comic."

²⁵ Elvena M. Green, "Three Aspects of Richard Steele's Theory of Comedy," Educational Theatre Journal, 20 (March, 1968), 141; cited below as "Three Aspects."

²⁶ See also Krutch, Comedy and Conscience, p. 252; Leo Hughes, The Drama's Patrons: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century London Audience (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1971), p. 120; cited below as Drama's Patrons.

²⁷ Frederick T. Wood, "The Beginnings and Significance of Sentimental comedy," Anglia, 55 (1931), 369; cited below as "Beginnings and Significance."

²⁸ Arthur Sherbo, English Sentimental Drama (Michigan State UP, 1957), p. 166.

²⁹ William G. McCollom, "Form and Attitude in Comedy," Drama Survey, 3 (May, 1963), 57.

³⁰ See also Hume, "Supposed Revolution," p. 244; Ashley Thorndike, English Comedy (New York: MacMillan, 1929), p. 413.

³¹ Sir Richard Steele, The Funeral, in British Theatre, 10, I.16.

³² And so notable a critic as Samuel Johnson, in "The Rambler," 156, 14 September 1751, in Samuel Johnson: Essays from the "Rambler," "Adventurer," and "Idler," ed. W. J. Bate (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1968), contends: "is it not certain that the tragic and comic affections have been moved alternately with equal force, and that no plays have oftner filled the eye with tears, and the breast with palpitation, than those which are variegated with interludes of mirth?" (p. 195).

³³ Hannah Cowley, A Bold Stroke for a Husband, in British Theatre, 13, IV.ii.58.

³⁴ Susannah Centlivre, The Busy Body, in British Theatre, 1, I.i.2, and IV.v.51. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³⁵ John Crowne, City Politiques, ed. John Harold Wilson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), I.i.17. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³⁶ Joseph Addison, The Drummer, in British Theatre, 12, I.12. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically. Thorndike, in English Comedy, considers Addison's play to be an example of morality balanced by satire (p. 351).

³⁷ See David Garrick's Bon Ton, or High Life Above Stairs, in The Dramatic Works of David Garrick, 3, (1798; rpt. Gregg International Publishers, 1969), I.i.140, 142, where the same point is made. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³⁸ Thomas Lockwood, "The Augustan Author-Audience Relationship: Satiric vs. Comic Forms," ELH, 30 (December, 1969), 656.

³⁹ Susannah Centlivre, A Bold Stroke for a Wife, in British Theatre, 1, V.i.64.

⁴⁰ In "Reform of Comedy," Rothstein contends that the play shows the kinship, or "twinship," between "rakery and amorous decorum" (34). The "supposed extremes of rakery and decorous virtue are actually quite close together" (35). Rothstein also argues that the play "rebutts the force of Collier's moral inventive by presenting, concretely, the kind of moral comedy that Collier himself claimed to favor and that the various apologies for comedy had presented, verbally, as a justifying ideal" (33). Muir, on the other hand, in Comedy of Manners, claims that The Twin-Rivals is a sentimental comedy (p. 145). See also Appleton, "Double Gallant," in English Writers, ed. Middendorf, where he speaks of Farquhar's originality (p. 148).

⁴¹ For a discussion of this point, see Sherbo, English Sentimental Drama, p. 24; Paul E. Parnell, "Equivocation in Cibber's Love's Last Shift," SP, 57 (July, 1960), 533; cited below as "Equivocation." See also John Harold Wilson, A Preface to Restoration Drama (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 194; B.R.S. Fone, "Colley Cibber's Love's Last Shift and Sentimental Comedy," Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research, 7 (May, 1968), 40, 41; Fone, "Love's Last Shift and Sentimental Comedy," 12; Sullivan, ed., Introduction, Colley Cibber, p. ix.

Notes: Chapter Six

¹ As John Harrington Smith points out in Gay Couple, early eighteenth-century comedy sought to "repress rakishness and coquetry, and to recommend the contrary ideals" (p. 199). Cf. Congreve, Amendments, p. 453.

² See Daniel Dafoe's Preface, The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c., ed. G. A. Starr (London: Oxford UP, 1971), which states in part: "To give the History of a wicked Life repented of, necessarily requires that the wicked Part should be made as wicked, as the real History of it will bear; to illustrate and give a Beauty to the Penitent part, which is certainly the best and brightest, if related with equal Spirit and Life" (p. 2). See also Williams, "English Sentimental Drama," who makes the point that, in spite of flaws, the sentimental hero nonetheless possesses a heart "deeply benevolent" (415).

³ See B. R. S. Fone, "Love's Last Shift and Sentimental Comedy," where he says that the recognition of a benevolent heart, even in a wicked character, is more important than any reformation scene (14).

⁴ Most critics contend that Cibber exploits both the witty and the sentimental comic modes. While some suggest that the two modes are not reconciled, others argue that the two co-exist. See especially Bateson, English Comic Drama, pp. 26, 41; Nicoll, History, 2, p. 161; Parnell, "Equivocation," 520; Bredvold, Literature of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, pp. 91-2; Fone, "Love's Last Shift and Sentimental Comedy," 15; Roper, "Language and Action," 49, 53; Sullivan, Introduction, Colley Cibber, pp. xvi-xvii, and xix. Nicoll and Bateson refer to Cibber's comedies as instances of "genteel comedy": the "compromise" in Bateson's terms (p. 41), or the "adaptation" in Nicoll's terms (p. 161), of the comedy of manners and the sentimental strain. For a discussion of Congreve's use of the witty and the sentimental modes, see Chapter IV, pp. 97-101.

⁵ Lincoln B. Faller, "Between Jest and Earnest: The Comedy of Sir John Vanbrugh," MP, 72 (August, 1974), 20; cited below as "Between Jest and Earnest."

⁶ Colley Cibber, Epilogue, Love's Last Shift: or, the Fool in Fashion, in British Theatre, 2, 84. All further references will be to

this edition, except where indicated, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁷ Colley Cibber, Dedication, The Lady's Last Stake; or, the Wife's Resentment, in British Theatre, 3, 3. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁸ In "Between Jest and Earnest," Faller argues that, as a "comedian of the human condition," Vanbrugh "is interested in characters who are conscious of their malaise." Furthermore, unlike the sentimentalists, Vanbrugh "trusts neither in human nature nor in providence" (20).

⁹ See Vanbrugh's Vindication, in Complete Works, 1, ed. Dobrée, p. 206.

¹⁰ Colley Cibber, The Careless Husband, in Dramatic Works, 2, V.iii. 76. Muir, in Comedy of Manners, p. 128, and Loftis, in Steele, pp. 197-8, both argue that the play captures the spirit of the witty mode. Indeed, Loftis goes so far as to say that Cibber "supports explicitly in the dialogue of the play the satirical theory" of comedy which the Restoration dramatists seek to defend (p. 198). And he cites Lady Easy's remarks as proof that Cibber here directly attacks the reformers (p. 198).

¹¹ Colley Cibber, Love Makes a Man; or, the Fop's Fortune, in British Theatre, 2, 4. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

¹² Although the play is frequently cited as one of the first plays to be an "obtrusively moral play," as Krutch phrases it in Comedy and Conscience, (p. 101), most critics point to its conventional plot and its bawdy incident. As Krutch also points out, Cibber does give convention a "new emphasis" (p. 203). The triumph of virtue, the presence of Amanda and the rake's realization of his errors all distinguish Cibber's play. See also Arthur Sherbo, English Sentimental Drama, p. 104; B. R. S. Fone, "Love's Last Shift and Sentimental Comedy," 12-13, 16.

¹³ In "Language and Action," Roper points out that the play contains "two distinct moralities and actions whose contradictions Cibber makes no attempt to resolve" (52). Cf. Sullivan, p. xviii.

¹⁴ Parnell, in "Equivocation," considers Young Worthy's remarks to be an indication that Loveless' "real fault" was his "ingenuousness: he was naive enough to take Restoration principles seriously" (522).

¹⁵ Parnell insists that Amanda's scheme is less "innocent" than it is "thoroughly questionable," a scheme which smacks of the "bawdiest of Restoration overtones" (524).

¹⁶ Sullivan, in Introduction, Colley Cibber, makes the point that the hero's humanity "provides susceptibility to the weaknesses of the world and the flesh on the one hand, and the strength of good nature and reasonableness on the other" (p. xlii). Later, she discusses the significance of the "metamorphosis" (p. xlvi).

¹⁷ Roper, in "Language and Action," points to Loveless' concomitant change in language. Loveless adopts Amanda's language, and slips "from analogy and pointed contrast into her relaxed, open syntax, with its little, unobtrusive metaphors and its large exhortations to virtue" (53). Finally, then, Loveless' "former extravagance in vice becomes at the end an equal extravagance in virtue" (54).

¹⁸ Parnell, in "Equivocation," argues that his "worthiness" offsets his more rakish qualities (522), and Fone, in "Love's Last Shift and Sentimental Comedy," argues that Young Worthy's comments to Loveless in the first scene counter the lewdness of some of the lines (18). Roper, in "Language and Action," speaks only of Young Worthy's place in the "penitent fifth act" (51).

¹⁹ Sharper, in William Congreve's The Old Batchelour, makes a similar connection between marriage and cures when he says to Heartwell: "Why if whoring be purging (as you call it) then I may say Marriage is entering into a Course of Physick." See Complete Plays, ed. Davis, I.i.44.

²⁰ Leech, in "Century's End," cites this same passage as an instance of Cibber's "cultivation of the moral idea" prevalent throughout the play (279). Interestingly enough, Mirabell gives Millamant comparable advice. See The Way of the World, in Complete Plays, II.i.421.

²¹ Fone, in "Love's Last Shift and Sentimental Comedy," considers Hillaria, along with the Elder Worthy, to be good examples of the "sententiously moral couple" of sentimental comedy (16). But Fone does not attempt to relate Hillaria's earlier behaviour to his assessment, although he does refer to the ladies' first conversation together (I.18-20). Parnell, in "Equivocation," sees both "the wily Narcissa" and "the forward Hillaria" to be more like Restoration heroines (523).

²² In "Love's Last Shift and Sentimental Comedy," Fone speaks of Cibber's "triple tale of moral reform," but he mentions Loveless, Young Worthy and Narcissa, Snap and the maid (19). He omits Hillaria's dramatic change.

²³ Roper, in discussing the opening dialogue between the ladies (I.18-20), points out in "Language and Action" that Amanda "translates" the analogies which her companion offers into the "language of moral distinction" (50). Although he does not elaborate on the point, Parnell, in "Equivocation," views Amanda as a later version of an Alithea or an Angelica, rather than an Indiana. Amanda's ploys, coupled with her "forceful" and "self-reliant" nature, apparently account for Parnell's comparison (531).

²⁴ In the play, Cibber does refer to the steinkirk scene in The Careless Husband, in Dramatic Works, 2, V.77-78. In The Lady's Last Stake, Lady Wronglove mocks Lady Easy's gesture (IV.55-56). Consequently, Sherbo argues, in English Sentimental Drama, that, had Cibber been a "true sentimental writer, it seems unlikely that he would have introduced a direct thrust at one of the most sentimental scenes in one of his earlier 'sentimental' comedies" (p. 117). But Sherbo's is an odd comment, given his remark that, frequently, the author's own prologues and epilogues to their sentimental plays were anti-sentimental (p. 145). Finally, Lady Wronglove's remarks could be construed to be subtle comments on her own mordant nature, which shows her to be more willing to "grieve" than to rectify her husband's apparent indifference to her. And for playwrights to comment on their own works is conventional. See Chapter I, p. 77-78. Bateson, for his part, in English Comic Drama considers the play to be "the most serious of Cibber's plays" and to be, in fact, "a comedy of ideas, a problem play in embryo" (p. 33). Here, unlike The Careless Husband, Cibber illustrates the conduct to be avoided (p. 32).

²⁵ Later, in nineteenth-century comedy, the erring character will also suffer social discomfiture and exposure.

²⁶ Bernbaum also considers Sir Friendly Moral to be an important character addition to sentimental comedy. See also Sullivan, Introduction, Colley Cibber, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

²⁷ Most critics, like Faller in "Between Jest and Earnest" (24), and Shaw in "Burying of the Living" (76), point to the play's being a "sequel" to Love's Last Shift. See also Mueschke and Fleisher, "Re-Evaluation," 851; Curt A Zimansky, Introduction, The Relapse (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. xiv; cited below as Introduction, The Relapse. But most critics do argue that Vanbrugh in The Relapse also criticizes sentimentalism itself. Roper states, in "Language and Action," that the play implies that "the current language of virtue glosses an actual viciousness" (55). C. R. Kropf, in "Notes and Comment: The Relapse and the Sentimental Mask," The Journal of Narrative Technique, 1 (September, 1971), offers the following analysis: "the main plot [that is, the Fashion-Foppington plot] presents us with an ironic inversion of the same [sentimental] philosophy" (193); cited below as "The Relapse and the Sentimental Mask."

²⁸ For a discussion of Vanbrugh's uniqueness and his contribution to the drama, see Mueschke and Fleisher, "Re-Evaluation," 887.

²⁹ Sir John Vanbrugh, The Relapse; or, Virtue in Danger, ed. Zimansky, V.v.139. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³⁰ Van Niel, in "The Relapse - Into Death and Damnation," briefly analyzes this passage in terms of Vanbrugh's "pessimistic evaluation of the nature of man and the universe" (330), and the play's theme of damnation (330-1).

³¹ On the one hand, Faller suggests, in "Between Jest and Earnest," that Lord Foppington "may perhaps be said to anticipate the amiable fools of Goldsmith and Sheridan" (18). In "The Relapse and the Sentimental Mask," Kropf contends that, in the main plot, Lord Foppington serves a function similar to Amanda's. Like her, he "showers blessings on his favorites and damns those who go astray," and his source of Christ-like power, like hers, is money (197). Although Kropf's comments are illuminating, he relies too heavily of Paul E. Parnell's analysis of sentimental comedy, entitled "The Sentimental Mask," PMLA, 78 (December, 1963), 529-535.

³² Van Niel, in "The Relapse - Into Death and Damnation," describes the "literal movement" of the play as one from country to town (318). John Loftis, in Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding (Stanford UP, 1959), argues that, since Vanbrugh is "critical of the sophisticated vice of fashionable London" and since he "shows no inclination to prefer rural simplicity" (p. 72), Vanbrugh "satirizes both extremes," even though he may well prefer the town (p. 70); cited below as Comedy and Society. Kropf's argument, which sees Lord Foppington and Amanda as the false gods of "two opposed orders of reality," would make their respective locales, the town and the country, equally suspect, but for different reasons. In Kropf's terms, then, when Amanda "moves from the cloistered life of the country to the social realities of the town, her ideal world disintegrates." See "The Relapse and the Sentimental Mask," 197. Aubrey Williams, in "'Utmost Tryal,'" also points to the pattern of testing which is so prominent a feature of late seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century drama, and he cites the "fierce trial of Amanda's virtue in The Relapse" as an example (3).

³³ Henry Ten Eyck Perry, in The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama: Studies in the Comedy of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar (1925; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), suggests that perhaps the approach to Love's Last Shift and The Relapse should be altered to read: "'The end of a sentimental comedy is but the beginning of a true comedy'" (p. 84). Kropf, in "The Relapse and the Sentimental Mask," also remarks: "In a sense it is useful to regard

[the first scene] more as the last scene of Cibber's play than as the first of Vanbrugh's" (195).

³⁴ In Love's Last Shift, Loveless asks: "for who can boast a victory, when they have no foe to conquer?" (V.72).

³⁵ Roper, in "Language and Action," also refers to the main interest of the plot, that is, "the endangered virtue of Amanda" (57). Bernbaum, in Drama of Sensibility, argues that the attempted seduction of Amanda is designed to "cast a doubt upon the perfection of Amanda" (p. 77). See also Roper, 57, 61; Van Niel, "The Relapse - Into Death and Damnation," 329; Zimansky, Introduction, The Relapse, p. xv.

³⁶ Van Niel contends that Worthy's reflection makes him the "most worthy" character in the play (328).

³⁷ See also Faller, "Between Jest and Earnest," 25.

³⁸ In "Language and Action," Roper argues that Worthy's virtue is unbelievable "because he acknowledges the uncertainty of its duration" (61). And, as Kropf notes, in "The Relapse and the Sentimental Mask," Worthy's speech "ends with the old pun on 'die'" (195).

³⁹ Kropf has difficulty placing Worthy in a context compatible with his argument that Amanda is a false god and the sentimental mask a false moral stance. His concluding comment is thereby weakened: "we can safely predict that his miraculous conversion will wear off even faster than Loveless's" (195). Neither Van Niel's view, nor Kropf's, add much to Vanbrugh's belief in, and representation of, the inherent "Frailty of Mankind."

⁴⁰ See Krutch, Comedy and Conscience, where he contends that Vanbrugh does indeed engage in "serious discussions of ethical problems" and mingles them with "not a little sentiment" (p. 215). See also Zimansky, Introduction, The Relapse, where he speaks of Vanbrugh's use of verse and contends that, in such instances, Vanbrugh is not satiric (p. xviii). Auburn, however, in Sheridan's Comedies, would disagree (p. 98).

⁴¹ Vanbrugh himself, in his Preface to the play, in Complete Works, 1, ed. Dobrée, refers to the "barrenness of the conclusion," but even here he undermines the comment when he suggests that, had the drunken Mr. Powell (Worthy) succeeded in his sexual attack on Mrs. Rogers (Amanda), the play would then have had "a very Natural Close" (p. 12).

⁴² Sir John Vanbrugh, A Journey to London, in Complete Works, 3, ed. Dobrée, II.i.153. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁴³ Muir, in Comedy of Manners, states that the play is both a criticism of marriage-à-la-mode, and "of literary sentimentality and humbug" (p. 133).

⁴⁴ For an early discussion of Sir John Vanbrugh's interest in marital incompatibility, see Mueschke and Fleisher, "Re-Evaluation," 865-878. Later, Faller, in "Between Jest and Earnest," states that there is pleasure in Sir John, but there is also disgust and, as Faller argues: "how else can we respond to him, but with laughter?" (19). On the other hand, Antony Coleman, in "Sir John Brute on the Eighteenth Century Stage," Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research, 8 (November, 1969), states: "Vanbrugh through Sir John Brute satirizes the social ideal to which the Knight aspires--the 'Man of Quality' whose stated preference was for 'beating the watch' and 'invading brothels.' By placing in the mouth of so unmannerly a character impeccable sentiments of the 'Man of Quality' the writer implies approval of its antithesis" (43). Loftis, in Comedy and Society, points to the character as a further instance that Vanbrugh, like Congreve and Farquhar, "had an eye to folly and wickedness in fashionable life" (p. 54). This later view would relate to Vanbrugh's own Vindication, in Complete Works, 1, ed. Dobrée, pp. 206-7.

⁴⁵ However, in "Between Jest and Earnest," Faller points out that, in spite of her inclinations to cuckold her brutish husband, Lady Brute still "is deterred from seeking, through intrigue, the emotional satisfaction she so sorely craves by the attractiveness of a moral ideal" (22). See IV.iv.84.

⁴⁶ See Chapter I, p. 36-37, and Chapter III, pp. 72-73, where other instances of the reference to appetite are cited.

⁴⁷ For a brief discussion of Cibber's more domestic and moral treatment, see, Faller, "Between Jest and Earnest," 28-9.

⁴⁸ Her remark recalls Alithea's desire to "take the innocent liberty of the Town." See William Wycherley, The Country Wife, in Complete Plays, ed. Weales, II.274. See also Chapter III, pp. 85-86.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of Clarinda and her significance to Vanbrugh's treatment of the ideal woman and marital harmony, see Mueschke and Fleisher, "Re-Evaluation," 852-854; 880-2.

⁵⁰ See Loftis, Steele, where he says Steele here dwells on solemn things "almost to the exclusion of everything humorous" (p. 187).

⁵¹ Ashley Thorndike, in English Comedy, also calls Steele an "evangelist" (p. 351), and Shirley Strum Kenny, in "Richard Steele and the 'Pattern of Genteel Comedy,'" MP, 70 (August, 1972), refers to Steele as the "mentor of moral drama" (31); cited below as "Richard Steele."

Notes: Chapter Seven

¹ The lines are quoted in Loftis, Steele, p. 234. Critics have, for the most part, stressed Steele's didacticism. Bateson, in English Comic Drama, points out that Steele characteristically evokes pathos with only a suggestion of humour (p. 44). Krutch, in Comedy and Conscience, also notes that, since "the spectacle of virtue finally triumphant was, in a large measure, to supplant the pleasure of laughter" (p. 82), Steele, along with Jeremy Collier, becomes "associated with the literary triumph of morality and dullness" (p. 258). Loftis and Greene would concur. Loftis, in Steele, refers to Steele's "rationale of laughterless comedy" (p. 199), and Greene, in "Three Aspects," says that for Steele "the comedy of ridicule and laughter is replaced by a comedy of pity and tears" (141). Williams, however, in "English Sentimental Drama," had earlier made the point that Steele does possess a "natural wit" (418) and later Kenny, in "Richard Steele," also states that Steele does, in fact, infuse the comic spirit into his plays (23).

² See Kenny, "Richard Steele," where she explains the importance of "good precepts" and good examples to Steele's view of comedy (30-31).

³ Krutch, in Comedy and Conscience, makes a similar point (pp. 234, 238) and Kenny, in "Richard Steele," outlines Steele's ways of doing so (24).

⁴ Sir Richard Steele, "The Spectator," 249, 15 December 1711, in The Spectator, 2, ed. Bond, p. 466. Loftis stresses that Steele always considered the stage to be a useful and necessary vehicle of instruction. See both Steele, pp. 21-22, and Comedy and Society, p. 32. See also Shirley Strum Kenny, ed., Introduction, The Conscious Lovers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), p. xx; Winton, "Sentimentalism," in Quick Springs of Sense, ed. Champion, pp. 106, 110. Indeed, what Steele says in "The Tatler," 271, 2 January 1710-11, in Addison and Steele: Selections from "The Tatler" and "The Spectator," ed. Robert J. Allen (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), also applies to his plays: "The General Purpose of the whole has been to recommend Truth, Innocence, Honour, and Virtue, as the chief Ornaments of Life" (p. 54).

⁵ Earlier, Tave, in Amiable Humorist, had noted that what Steele wanted "was not to attack the conventional comic method but rather to reform the abuses of it" (p. 47). Krutch, in Comedy and Conscience,

contends that Steele established "a rapport between esthetics and morality in criticism," and thereby "unobtrusively laid down and defended the theoretical basis of sentimental comedy" (p. 235). Hughes, in Drama's Patrons, agrees with Krutch when he, too, argues that Steele is "the pioneer, the exponent, the exemplar of the new ethic" (p. 121).

⁶ Rothstein, in "Reform of Comedy," contends that here Steele "tried to scout hostile laughter of the sort that satire evokes, the laughter of security, confidence, and contempt" (40).

⁷ Ernest Bernbaum, however, in Drama of Sensibility, argues that Cibber, along with Farquhar, "set [Steele] the example of arousing a moral emotion by a pathetic appeal" (p. 91). Loftis, on the other hand, in Steele, concludes that only Steele's conscious "appeal to sympathy" is a "uniform characteristic of earlier 'sentimental' comedy." Loftis rightly notes that Steele does indeed introduce important elements into the comedy: exemplary characters and the avoidance of licentious dialogue (p. 197). See also Green, "Three Aspects," 141-6.

⁸ Many critics point to what Williams, in "English Sentimental Drama," calls Steele's "pleasure in pathetic scenes," which often made him "sacrifice in their behalf the true spirit of comedy" (418). Earlier, of course, John Dennis, in his "Remarks," 24 January 1723, in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy, ed. McMillin, had accused Steele of confusing the two genres, comedy and tragedy (p. 433). This same allegation will also be pursued by the critics of the sentimental drama. See Chapter VIII, pp. 213-216. See also Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama: An Historical Survey from the Beginnings to the Present Time, 5th edition, revised (1925; rpt. London: George G. Harrap, 1964), pp. 184-5; cited below as British Drama. See also Krutch, Comedy and Conscience, p. 245; Nicoll, History, 2, p. 192; Tave, Amiable Humorist, p. 49; Green, "Three Aspects," 145-6.

⁹ Bernbaum, in Drama of Sensibility, points to the significance of Steele's use of the witty and the sentimental modes (p. 95), as does Kenny in her Introduction, The Conscious Lovers, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

¹⁰ Kenny in her introductory remarks to the play, in Plays, considers this particular scene to be "one of the funniest passages Steele ever wrote." She adds that here Steele offers "social commentary, amusement at the idiosyncrasies of the times, and satire on social foibles" (p. 104).

¹¹ Later, Kenny calls the final act an act of melodrama (29). See also Williams, "English Sentimental Drama," 418. Elsewhere, in her Introduction to the play, in Plays, Kenny remarks that the final act "differed so radically and so suddenly from the rest of the play that Steele found cause to defend it on grounds of morality." She goes on: "Act V is a highly emotional condemnation of duelling; there is not one humorous line or one unworthy sentiment. The tone is highly serious,

even tragic" (p. 104).

¹² Bernbaum, in Drama of Sensibility, argues that Old Bookwit "is in this play Steele's only wholly new contribution to the personnel of the drama of sensibility" (p. 91). Sherbo, in English Sentimental Drama, refers to the "emotional orgy" in which the father and son engage, and he further claims that "the effect loses rather than gains intensity because of the dramatist's reluctance to let well-enough alone" (p. 59). Mignon, in Crabbed Age and Youth, suggests that Steele employs the favourite sentimental theme of the "recovery to virtue" by dramatizing the "temporary suppression of the sense of filial duty in a son whereby the final triumph of that son's highly emotionalized morality, especially as it pertains to love of the parent, is more spectacular" (p. 177).

¹³ See George Farquhar's Preface, The Twin-Rivals, in George Farquhar, ed. Archer, pp. 144-5. See also Chapter V, where I briefly discuss Farquhar's views.

¹⁴ Bernbaum makes similar remarks in Drama of Sensibility (fn. 2, p. 101; fn. 1, p. 133). Kenny notes in her Introduction, The Conscious Lovers that, while Steele sought to create exemplary characters, "his talent lay in creating comic ones" (p. xxiii).

¹⁵ In History, 2, Nicoll argues that in The Tender Husband Steele still writes in a sentimental vein. Although Nicoll does concede that in Bridget Steele recalls "some older type of satire," for the most part, in Nicoll's view, "the whole conduct of the plot is in this moralizing style" (p. 192). Sherbo, while admitting in English Sentimental Drama that the play is a very "diverting" one (p. 72), nonetheless considers the "tender husband" plot to be a serious action (p. 81). Similarly, Bernbaum, in Drama of Sensibility, acknowledges Steele's comic "power" in his portrait of Biddy (p. 101), but Bernbaum also considers the other plot to be sentimental. Bateson, in English Comic Drama, goes yet further, and argues that the play is like a Restoration piece (p. 50). Kenny, in "Richard Steele," refers to The Tender Husband as an "unsentimental" comedy (23), as indeed a "laughing comedy" (29). See also Calhoun Winton, ed., Introduction, The Tender Husband (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), especially p. xvi; Sherbo, English Sentimental Drama, p. 106.

¹⁶ In his discussion of "Cheerfulness and Innocent Mirth," the title of the first chapter, Tave in Amiable Humorist cites Addison's use of the term, which refers to the "innocent social expression of cheerfulness, the good humor of the man who recognizes that the true spirit of religion is amiable and sociable" (p. 11).

¹⁷ Tony Lumpkin in Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer, and Lydia Languish in Sheridan's The Rivals owe a great deal to Steele's humorous characters. See Loftis, Comedy and Society, p. 75.

¹⁸ Loftis, in Comedy and Society, says of Biddy: "the most charming of Steele's female characters, [she] can by reason of her innocence and sprightliness scarcely be considered an agent of any severe social satire" (p. 64). In her introductory remarks to the play, Kenny in Plays states that Steele does attack "the romances and the English taste for them, but Biddy herself, a victim of contemporary taste, escapes unscathed; she is never cured or even criticized for her romanticism by any character except her old aunt, who is scarcely a spokesman for acceptable behavior" (pp. 191-2).

¹⁹ See Berkeley, "Art of 'Whining' Love," 478-496. Berkeley here outlines the "code of love-making" (478) and the use of the word "romantic" to describe it.

²⁰ In "Two Scenes by Addison in Steele's The Tender Husband," Studies in Bibliography, 19 (1966), Shirley Strum Kenny convincingly argues that Steele wrote "at least most and probably all of the scenes of Biddy's romance (I.i., III.i., and IV.ii)." Kenny also notes that, originally, Biddy's romance was Steele's "main plot, for which the play was titled [The City Nymph; or The Accomplish'd Fools] before Addison's scenes changed the emphasis" (225); cited below as "Two Scenes."

²¹ Captain Absolute in The Rivals also urges Lydia to lay aside her romance, and endure wealth and comfort. See Chapter IX, p. 258.

²² Kenny asserts, in "Two Scenes," that parts of Act III, scene i, and Act V, scene i, should be assigned to Addison (217). So, in effect, "Addison rather than Steele is responsible for the serious marital plot and the conventional sword-drawing" (226). The plot's more comic side she would attribute to Steele. But the "tender husband's" concern for appearances does come out at the beginning of the play as well as at the end of Act V, scene i. This concern tends to make him less a long-suffering husband than a foppish, worldly one.

²³ Winton also suggests that any satiric criticism the play does contain is directed against the "fashionable London society as represented by the tender husband of the title, Clerimont Senior" (p. xxi).

²⁴ The incident recalls Fidelia's "courtship" of Olivia in Wycherley's The Plain Dealer. Manly's aim is, of course, vengeance, while Clerimont Sr.'s is ostensibly to reform his wife or discard her (I.i.218). See Chapter III, pp. 83-84.

²⁵ In "Richard Steele," Kenny asserts that, "until the moment of her repentance, the scene is comic, and she resembles the foppish wife satirized in plays of the Restoration" (29). Kenny contends that, after the "reformation," the play reverts to its characteristic tone (30).

But Kenny also makes the point that, since Mrs. Clerimont's guilty only of affectation and is, as yet, an unstained wife, her repentance, his brandishing a sword and her "abject apologies" seem unduly "theatrical" (30).

²⁶ Kenny, in "Two Scenes," argues that Addison's contributions to the play "extend from Clerimont Senior's 'discovery' of his wife to his forgiving her" (221).

²⁷ Bernbaum, in Drama of Sensibility, argues that Steele's Tender Husband reverses the situation dramatized in Cibber's The Careless Husband (p. 100).

²⁸ Most critics comment on the play's importance to comedy written in the sentimental mode. Bredvold, in Literature of the Restoration and the Eighteenth Century, states that in The Conscious Lovers Steele "definitely formulated the creed of sentimental comedy," for here Steele advocates that, "by stimulating tears, by softening the heart of the audience, drama might revive the 'social passions' and thus induce and sustain a moral feeling" (p. 93). Nicoll, in History, 2, also refers to the drama as "in reality a new form of drama" (p. 2). Loftis, in Comedy and Society, calls the play "a comedy of ideas, of ideas that in dramatic form were in 1722 fresh and new" (p. 83). Elsewhere, in Steele, Loftis also contends that the play's exemplary characters point to both its newness and its significance (p. 193). Finally, Detisch, in "Synthesis," argues that, if there is a need for a "quintessential sentimental comedy," The Conscious Lovers deserves the title (300). See also Kenny's introductory remarks to the play, in Plays, pp. 285-6.

²⁹ Kenny, on the other hand, in "Richard Steele," states that Steele could always "manipulate all [the] tricks of the sentimental dramatist and balance them against the comic elements" (24).

³⁰ Sir Richard Steele, "The Tatler," 219, 1 September 1710, in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy, ed. McMillin, pp. 368, 369.

³¹ Kenny, in her Introduction, The Conscious Lovers, in Plays, indicates that the play was to be the embodiment of Steele's theory of comedy (pp. 284-5).

³² Bernbaum, in Drama of Sensibility also remarks that in the play the "comic element" (p. 132) constitutes the "subordinate incidents and characters" (p. 133). In her Introduction, The Conscious Lovers, Kenny states that these minor characters are "ridiculed in the manner of Restoration comedy" (p. xx). Elsewhere, in "Richard Steele," Kenny refers to the servants as the Restoration rake and coquette "descended below stairs" (35). In this role, Kenny argues, Tom and Phillis not only "indicate that such love duels are out of fashion," (35), but they

also "parody the fine sentiments of Bevil and Indiana" (35-6). See also Burt, "Steele's Servants," 72. Other comic touches are, of course, the foppish Cimberton's courtship of Lucinda in III.345-7, and Myrtle's humorous pose in III.348-351.

³³ Steele, in "The Guardian," 87, 20 June 1713, in British Essayists: The Tatler and The Guardian (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1861), describes the courtship of two servants (p. 136), which he later comically dramatizes in Phillis and Tom's encounter.

³⁴ Phillis bears some resemblance to Melantha in Dryden's Marriage-a-la-Mode. See Chapter I, pp. 33-34.

³⁵ Kenny, in Introduction, The Conscious Lovers, argues that, unlike those in Restoration Comedy, here in Steele's play the characters "are rendered incapable of seizing the advantages gained by their trickery," and the disguise scenes "do not ultimately affect the outcome of the plot" (p. xxiii).

³⁶ Kenny discusses the Myrtle-Lucinda plot in terms of the ample comedy it affords. See her Introduction, The Conscious Lovers, p. xxii; Introduction, The Conscious Lovers, in Plays, p. 277; "Richard Steele," 34.

³⁷ Kenny, in "Richard Steele," states that Humphrey, himself an exemplar, is introduced "primarily for purposes of plot"; Humphrey's sobriety and honesty lend a gravity to the main plot (33).

³⁸ As Steele declares, in "The Spectator," 65, 15 May 1711, in Spectator, 1, ed. Bond: "I will take for granted, that a fine Gentleman should be honest in his Actions, and refined in his Language" (p. 278). Elsewhere, Steele has outlined the qualities to be found in a truly virtuous man. See Spectators 42, 51, 75, 422 and Tatlers 59, 219. In Comedy and Conscience, Krutch remarks that in Bevil Jr. Steele depicts "a model gentleman of the new and reformed school" (p. 224), and Bevil himself is to be "a picture of the model gentleman" (p. 250). He is, as Loftis points out in Steele, "a new type of hero for comedy" (p. 18). Significantly, the play was first entitled "The Fine Gentleman" (p. 203). Steele clearly seeks to show a character who is a "fit subject for the spectators' emulation" (p. 199). In Amiable Humourist, Tave points out that wit was to be tempered with good nature (p. 13). Later, he dismisses Bevil as a "falsified simplification of a character" (p. 105), and Kenny in a similar vein also concludes, in her Introduction, The Conscious Lovers: "In making Bevil a model of virtue and filial obedience, Steele creates a prig instead of a hero" (p. xxi).

³⁹ See The Rivals, in Dramatic Works, 1, ed. Price, II.i.99.

⁴⁰ In "Richard Steele," Kenny indicates the crucial difference between Myrtle's disguise as a stuttering lawyer, a comic device, and Bevil's "disguise" in a suit of wedding clothes. Bevil, Kenny contends, disguises himself only in order to appease his father's importunate demands, so Bevil's pretense affords no mirth (35).

⁴¹ Kenny, in "Richard Steele," notes that one of Steele's problems was to account for Bevil's "duplicity in dealing with his father" in terms which would not detract from Bevil's essential goodness (32). Loftis contends, in Steele, that Bevil Jr.'s action does demonstrate "how a son can have his own way without actually disobeying his father" (p. 186). Dennis' remarks, however, were more condemnatory. He complains in his "Remarks," in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy, ed. McMillin, that Steele is "unaccountable," "improbable" and "whimsical" in his treatment of Bevil's promise to his father and in his concealing his passion for Indiana (pp. 435, 437). The writer in "The Freeholder's Journal," 14 November 1722, in Essays on the Theatre from Eighteenth-Century Periodicals, ed. Loftis, concluded that Bevil's chief merit "amounts to no more than this, that he relieved a fine Woman he fell in Love with, maintained her with the greatest Elegance, and never made use of those Obligations to him, as a means to debauch her" (22).

⁴² Stockwell, in Cumberland's The West Indian, in Plays, eds. MacMillan and Jones, says: "Savage as the custom [of duelling] is" (IV.x.778).

⁴³ In Comedy and Conscience, Krutch considers this sentiment to be "one more protest against the Restoration comedy" (p. 225). Myers, in "Plot and Meaning," in William Congreve, ed. Morris, claims that there are no important connections "between the complications of the Fourth Act and the dénouement in the Fifth," and that the scene for which "the whole was writ" is "wholly unprepared for and is without issue in terms of the action" (p. 77). Kenny, in her Introduction, The Conscious Lovers, argues that, since an exemplary character cannot display internal struggle, Steele had great difficulty in devising an action which would clearly demonstrate, through stage action, Bevil's moral superiority. The famous scene, then, gives Bevil "his only chance to exhibit his virtue" (p. xxi). Bevil's virtuous behaviour toward Indiana is the only other indication, but here his action is less theatrically effective.

⁴⁴ Bateson, in English Comic Drama, argues that Steele's play lacks dramatic construction and so, "his substitute for [plot] was a lavish ingenuity in elaborating intricacies of plot" (p. 57). In "Plot and Meaning," in William Congreve, ed. Morris, Myers also considers the play's action to be rather limited (p. 77). Kenny, in "Richard Steele," concurs: "the only real action is that of the discovery scene, for there is no quarrel between the lovers, no other complication. The playwright's task was to build suspense over a basically static situation" (34). One could argue, however, that Bevil Senior's marital

arrangements for his son, as well as the delicacy both father and son display to one another, are complications of sorts.

⁴⁵ Another edition of the play has Sealand mysteriously remark: "but yet there's something in your story that promises relief when you least hope it." The remark may refer to the coincidence of details; Sealand's own story does match Indiana's. Or, Sealand may be easing her mind by reminding her that, in spite of affliction, some sudden relief has always come to her aid in the past, and may do so again. But it is her bracelet which confirms that Indiana is his long-lost child; the details she recounts arouse his sympathy, and maybe his curiosity, but there is no hint, other than this very cryptic line (omitted in Kenny's edition), to suggest that Sealand at this point suspects the truth about his relation to Indiana. See The Conscious Lovers, in British Theatre, 10, v.67.

⁴⁶ In her Introduction, The Conscious Lovers, Kenny also declares that Steele's dénouement "suffers from improbability." Kenny cites Sealand's own inexplicable change of name, and Isabella's "very unlikely decision not to identify herself to her brother and her remarkable ability to hold her tongue" (p. xxii). Krutch, in Comedy and Conscience, denies the play a dénouement when he says that Steele "concludes with a scene of tender and almost tearful joy such as the sentimentalist liked to offer instead of a comic dénouement" (p. 224). The writer in "The Freeholder's Journal," 28 November 1722, considers the discovery scene to be a "Tragi Comical" meeting, the pathos of the reunion balanced by the happiness of the discovery (27). The writer in "The St. James's Journal," 3 December 1722, in Essays on the Theatre, nos. 85-86, echoes Steele's own view of comedy: "A Pleasure built upon the most sincere Delight, which no sensible Mind would exchange for the momentary passant Transports of an inconsiderate Laughter" (31).

⁴⁷ See Chapter II, pp. 67-68. Interestingly enough, Emilia and Young Bellair appear in a play which The Conscious Lovers ostensibly was designed to repudiate, but their apperance has not received much critical attention. Dorimant seems to have attracted the most critical attention, even Steele's.

⁴⁸ Prologue, False Delicacy, in Plays, eds. MacMillan and Jones, 1. 6, p. 719.

⁴⁹ Elsewhere, in her Introduction, The Conscious Lovers, Kenny indicates the impact the work had on the drama to come (p. xxv). See also Plays, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny, pp. 276, 286, 290; James L. Lynch, Box, Pit, and Gallery: Stage and Society in Johnson's London, 1737-1777 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953), p. 39; cited below as Box, Pit, and Gallery. Krutch, however, in Comedy and Conscience, claims that Steele was "a theorist more than he was a playwright" (p. 49).

⁵⁰ Williams, in "English Sentimental Drama," argues that sentimental comedy reaches its climax in Cumberland, whose achievement lay "in carrying a certain sentimental principle to its logical conclusion" (425). Cumberland, Williams suggests, not only idealized humble life, but he also idealized traditional comic butts. Detisch, on the other hand, argues, in "Synthesis," that in this play Cumberland effectively synthesizes wit, knavery and sentimentalism (291). Sherbo also makes the point, in English Sentimental Drama, that Cumberland, along with Kelly and others, "took occasion to satirize extreme sentimental drama and its audience" (p. 147). Earlier, in Drama of Sensibility, Bernbaum, while acknowledging the comic element, insisted that Cumberland's "sentimental conception of life" determined the action and the characters in his plays (p. 267). Nicoll, in outlining the tendencies discernible in the sentimental comedy of the later eighteenth century in A History of English Drama, 1660-1900, 3, 2nd edition (1927; rpt. Cambridge UP, 1955), refers to one tendency exemplified in Cumberland's plays: "the often mawkishly pathetic theatre of Cumberland, intent upon raising a sigh and calling forth a tear" (p. 154).

⁵¹ Stanley T. Williams, "Richard Cumberland's West Indian," MLN, 35 (November, 1920), 413.

⁵² Detisch, in "Synthesis," points to Belcour's sexuality (293), and Williams, in "Richard Cumberland's West Indian," speaks of the critical controversy provoked by Belcour's "hotbloodedness" (414).

⁵³ Williams outlines Cumberland's distinguishing sentimental traits in "English Sentimental Drama," 424. Both Williams (417, 421) and Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility (p. 267), relate Cumberland to his predecessors, Cibber and Steele. Sherbo, in English Sentimental Drama, refers to Cumberland's "dubious honor of heading the sentimental school in the latter years of the century" (p. 132). More recently, Preston, in Not in Timon's Manner, in discussing the use of the "benevolent misanthrope as satirist," suggests that such a figure "seems to have been confined to the notorious sentimental playwright Richard Cumberland," a view which adds to Cumberland's treatment of characters like the West Indian and the Jew (p. 146).

⁵⁴ Richard Cumberland, False Impressions, in Modern Theatre, 3, III.i.32. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁵⁵ John Loftis, in Sheridan and the Drama of Georgian England (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1977), refers to Cumberland's "repugnance" with London society, but also contends that such a harsh judgment is not unlike Sheridan's (p. 19); cited below as Sheridan.

⁵⁶ Richard Cumberland, The Box-Lobby Challenge, in Modern Theatre, 3, I.ii.153.

⁵⁷ In History, 3, Nicoll states that The Natural Son "has considerable affinities with The West Indian," ostensibly because of its hero, Blushenly (p. 126).

⁵⁸ Richard Cumberland, The Natural Son, in Modern Theatre, 3, II.i.233, 234. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁵⁹ Nicoll, in his discussion of "romantic" in History, 3, states that in False Impressions the word "might be defined as 'not looking for immediate personal gain'" (fn. 3, p. 51). The same definition could apply to The Natural Son.

⁶⁰ Nicoll makes the interesting point that False Impressions shows "how the sentimental play and the melodrama come to coalesce towards the end of the century," and Nicoll then cites the plight of Algernon, the perfidy of Earling and the honesty as Sir Oliver as proof (p. 129). Nicoll states that Cumberland, along with George Colman the Younger, "helped the development of the melodrama" (p. 106).

⁶¹ Williams writes in "English Sentimental Drama" that the "purpose of [Cumberland's] dramatic life is to instruct through feeling" (409). See also Chapter V, pp. 152-153, and Chapter X, p. 308.

⁶² Oliver Goldsmith, Retaliation, in Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith, 4, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), II. 61-64 and 69-70, p. 355; cited below as Collected Works, ed. Friedman. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁶³ Incidentally, Oliver W. Ferguson, in "Sir Fretful Plagiary and Goldsmith's 'An Essay on the Theatre': The Background of Richard Cumberland's 'Dedication to Detraction,'" in Quick Springs of Sense, ed. Champion, acknowledges the accuracy of Sheridan's satiric portrait (p. 113); cited below as "Sir Fretful Plagiary," Quick Springs of Sense, ed. Champion.

Notes: Chapter Eight

¹ Sir John Vanbrugh, Prologue, Aesop (Part 1), in Complete Works, 2, ed. Dobrée, p. 11. On a similar note, Garrick says in his Prologue to Kelly's False Delicacy: "Write moral plays - the blockhead! - why, good people, / You'll soon expect this house to wear a steeple! / For our fine piece, to let you into facts, / Is quite a sermon, - only preached in acts." See the play itself, where Kelly says the stage should be a "school of morality," in Plays, eds. MacMillan and Jones, ll. 3-6, p. 719, and V.ii.744.

² Andrew Schiller, "The School for Scandal: The Restoration Unrestored," PMLA, 71 (March, 1956), 694; cited below as "Restoration Unrestored."

³ See George Colman the Younger, The Heir at Law, 1797, in British Theatre, 4, where Stedfast refers to the language of the sentimental mode as "modern complimentary cant"; it is the "coinage of dishonesty, - for the profession exceeds the feeling" (III.i.43).

⁴ Earlier, Williams, in "English Sentimental Drama," had concluded that sentimental comedy was dull (407) and that its "elements of plot and character and dialogue" weaken its dramatic efficacy (413). See also Schorer, "Hugh Kelly," 395; Auburn, Sheridan's Comedies, p. 15.

⁵ Colley Cibber, Love's Last Shift, in Dramatic Works, 1, V.iii.92.

⁶ In History, 3, Nicoll detects in the sentimental drama of the second half of the eighteenth century "three distinct tendencies" (p. 152): Cibberian "genteel" comedy, the "mawkishly pathetic," and the more "revolutionary humanitarian drama." The latter tendency Nicoll considers the basis of nineteenth-century poets endowed with "humanitarian sympathy," and the first as the basis for Goldsmith's attack (p. 154).

⁷ Dougald MacMillan, "The Rise of Social Comedy in the Eighteenth Century," PQ, 41 (January, 1962), 335; cited below as "Rise of Social Comedy."

⁸ Joseph Addison, "The Spectator," 40, 16 April 1711, in The Spectator, 1, ed. Bond, p. 169.

⁹ See Williams, "English Sentimental Drama," where he argues that this blurring of conventional distinctions is one of sentimental comedy's distinguishing traits (424).

¹⁰ See also Congreve, Amendments, p. 408; Sir Richard Blackmore, Preface, Prince Arthur, an Heroick Poem, 1695, in Critical Essays, 3, ed. Spingarn, p. 228; John Dennis, "Defense," 2 November 1722, in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy, ed. McMillin, p. 429.

¹¹ Oliver Goldsmith, "An Essay on the Theatre, or A Comparison Between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy," 1773, in Idea of Comedy, ed. Wimsatt, pp. 186 and 187; cited below as "Essay." All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically. Ferguson, in "Sir Fretful Plagiary," Quick Springs of Sense, ed. Champion, makes the point that the essay essentially objects to the "ubiquity of the type rather than to a specific sentimental comedy - indeed, one of its chief criticisms is that all sentimental comedies were alike" (p. 117). On the other hand, Hume, in "Supposed Revolution," considers Goldsmith to be "reacting excessively to very temporary phenomena" (p. 238) and, thus, he does not accurately reflect dramatic trends "when he implies that sentimental comedy is a bastard version of tragedy" (pp. 241-242). Of course, Goldsmith "implies" such a conclusion; he openly states it. However, Ricardo Quintana, in "Goldsmith's Achievement as Dramatist," UTQ, 34 (January, 1965), considers Goldsmith's essay to be "in the manner quite traditional in eighteenth-century criticism: comedy and tragedy were separate and distinct genres" (162); cited below as "Goldsmith's Achievement." See also Quintana, "Oliver Goldsmith as a Critic of the Drama," SEL, 5 (Autumn, 1965), 446; cited below as "Oliver Goldsmith." Loftis, in Sheridan, comes to similar conclusions (pp. 15, 17, 76).

¹² Echoing Goldsmith, Charles Lamb refers to sentimental comedy's "pampering" the audience "with images of notional justice" and "notional beneficence." See his essay "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Age," 1822, in Idea of Comedy, ed. Wimsatt, pp. 221-222. See also W. F. Gallaway, "Sentimentalism of Goldsmith," 1176, 1180.

¹³ John Dennis, in his "Remarks," 24 January 1723, in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy, ed. McMillin, argues that Steele's drama "confounds comedy with that species of tragedy which has a happy catastrophe" (p. 433). One should bear in mind Hughes' caution that while Dennis "could make acute observations about the literature of his day," he also possessed "blind spots," particularly with respect to Cibber and Steele. See Hughes, Drama's Patrons, p. 81. See also Dougald MacMillan, "David Garrick as Critic," SP, 21 (January, 1934), 76, 77; Nicoll, History, 3, pp. 153. But Samuel Johnson himself, in "The Rambler," "Adventurer," and "Idler," ed. Bate, defends the "mingled drama" (p. 194), and he compares it to life itself. Similarly, Charles Dickens, in Oliver Twist, in The Oxford Illustrated Dickens

(1949; rpt. London: Oxford UP, 1970), also justifies the "regular alternation" of comic and pathetic scenes by referring to life itself (p. 118). Sullivan, however, in her Introduction, Colley Cibber, suggests that sentimental comedy is closer to romance than to life (pp. xlvi-xxix).

¹⁴ John Gay, Preface, The What D'Ye It, in Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century, ed. Simon Trussler (London and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969), p. 59. For recent insightful discussions of the play, see Ian Donaldson, The World Upside-Down: Comedy from Jonson to Fielding (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), pp. 159-182, and Howard Erskine-Hill, "The significance of Gay's drama," in English Drama: Forms and Development, Essays in Honour of Muriel Clara Bradbrook, eds. Marie Axton and Raymond Williams (Cambridge UP, 1977), pp. 148-159.

¹⁵ In History, 3, Nicoll asserts that many writers during this period realised that "sentimentalism, if allowed to progress too far, would crush out entirely the spirit of laughter" (p. 154). Indeed, Myers, in "Plot and Meaning," in William Congreve, ed. Morris, begins his analysis of Congreve's comedies with the assertion that "the decline of English comedy is notoriously sudden" (p. 75). In "Supposed Revolution," Hume refutes these critics by referring to the number of laughing comedies which were, in fact, successful during this time (pp. 247, 256).

¹⁶ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Prologue, The Critic, in Works, 2, ed. Price, ll. 2 and 4, p. 495. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

¹⁷ Frequently, critics point to the incipient sentimentalism of these eighteenth-century critics. In their view, these dramatists weaken their criticism of sentimental drama, on the one hand, and on the other, fail to "restore" the Restoration's comic tone. See Frederick T. Wood, "Sentimental Comedy in the Eighteenth Century," Neophilologus, 18 (1933), 285, 286; Nicoll, History, 3, p. 157; Schiller, "Restoration Unrestored," passim; C. J. Rawson, "Some Remarks," 10, 12. Recently, literary critics have come to recognize that the eighteenth-century critics of the sentimental drama need not refute the "basic tenets of sentimentalist philosophy" in order to attack sentimental excess. See Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 500.

¹⁸ Henry Fielding, "The Covent-Garden Journal," 55, 18 July 1752, in Idea of Comedy, ed. Wimsatt, p. 170. Preston, in Not in Timon's Manner, notes: "During the midcentury Fielding became one of the major expounders of prudent benevolence" (p. 22).

¹⁹ Oliver Goldsmith, The Good Natur'd Man, in Collected Works, 5, ed. Friedman, I.20. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁰ Critical opinion varies with respect to Goldsmith's play. Some critics point to the play's sentimentalism. See, for example, Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 424; Nicoll, History, 3, p. 158; Rawson, "Some Remarks," 10; Allan Rodway, "Goldsmith and Sheridan: Satirists of Sentiment," in Renaissance and Modern Essays, ed. G. R. Hibbard (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 67; cited below as "Goldsmith and Sheridan." On the other hand, Friedman, in "Aspects of Sentimentalism," Augustan Milieu, ed. Miller, argues that the play reverses the "moral distinctions" of sentimental comedy, and makes benevolence ridiculous (p. 250). See also Gallaway, "Sentimentalism of Goldsmith," 1179; Preston, "Disenchanted the Man of Feeling," in Quick Springs of Sense, ed. Champion, p. 226. Other critics, like Quintana, regard the play as satire. See "Goldsmith's Achievement," 169-170; "Oliver Goldsmith," 445.

²¹ Both Gallaway and Quintana refer to the significance of the play's title. Quintana argues that the play sets up erroneous expectations in order to satirize prevailing sentimental notions. For his views of the play's title, see Oliver Goldsmith: A Georgian Study (New York: MacMillan, 1967), p. 148; cited below as Oliver Goldsmith. Gallaway, in "Sentimentalism of Goldsmith," emphasizes Goldsmith's fundamental purpose: "to check virtue by prudence" and "to ridicule extravagance disguised as generosity and gullibility masked as universal benevolence" (1179).

²² In the character of Croaker, Goldsmith adds further bite to his criticism. When he falsely believes he has received an "incendiary letter" (IV.67), threatening destruction to him and his family (63), the volatile Croaker reacts with typical impatience. Croaker exclaims: "Yes, and my universal benevolence will hang the dog, if he had as many necks as a hydra" (68). Moreover, Honeywood's agreeing with Croaker and his wife, each of whom holds a contrary opinion (68), recalls Sheridan's Joseph Surface, who will also agree with whatever opinion is the most recently given. See The School for Scandal, in Dramatic Works, 1, ed. Price, I.i.364. In Honeywood's case, this basically affable temper, which hates to disagree, will later be condemned as an absurd "assuidity to please" (The Good Natur'd Man, V.75), neither placating others nor forwarding the cause of truth and merit.

²³ Gallaway, in "Sentimentalism of Goldsmith," refers to the importance of prudence (1179), and Preston, in "Disenchanted the Man of Feeling," in Quick Springs of Sense, ed. Champion, refers to the necessity both for prudence and discrimination (p. 226).

²⁴ Richard Helgerson, "The Two Worlds of Oliver Goldsmith," SEL, 13 (Summer, 1973), 528. But Helgerson also argues that, if he is to remain aware of the deceptiveness of others and "to see through the false appearances of the world" (532), Sir William and all good-natured men must wear a "prudent disguise" (528), a "dissembling, self-protective" mask which also guards them from falling into indiscriminate and excessive benevolence (53); cited below as "Two Worlds." However, in

discussing Sir William's role in the play, critical opinion has been varied. See, for example, Parnell, "Sentimental Mask," 531; Quintana, Oliver Goldsmith, p. 148.

25 In "Two Worlds," Helgerson argues that, "in the world of Georgian comedy," folly can be accepted but not knavery (526-7). Thus, Honeywood's "betrayal" of his friend does not brand him as a knave, and comic exposure is reserved for Lofty, a fop whose undoing "echoes and amplifies that of Honeywood" (527). If, however, as I argue, Honeywood is a foolish exemplar of sentimentalism, then he does indeed suffer fitting comic punishment for the excesses and follies into which his misguided notions lead him, and one of those mistakes is his betrayal of Leontine.

26 John Harrington Smith, in "Tony Lumpkin and the Country Booby Type in Antecedent English Comedy," PMLA, 58 (December, 1943), posits that the bailiff scene may be "a much 'cleaned-up' version of IV,i, in The Wild Gallant, where Constance and Isabelle, happening in at Justice Trick's, catch Loveby in bad company which the embarrassed hero is compelled to try to pass off as 'Persons of Quality of my acquaintance'" (fn. 26, 1047).

27 Many critics acknowledge this aspect of Kelly's work. See, for example, Schorer, "Hugh Kelly," 390; Sherbo, English Sentimental Drama, p. 147.

28 Richard Cumberland, Advertisement, The Fashionable Lover, in British Plays from the Restoration to 1820, ed. Montrose J. Moses, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929), p. 713.

29 Williams, in "English Sentimental Drama," considers the combination to be "ingenious" (422), while Rawson, in "Some Remarks," argues that the title of the play suggests that it is not "a straightforwardly sentimental play" but, rather, a play designed to be funny (10).

30 Schorer, in "Hugh Kelly," refers to the lovers' "impossible sensibility" (394). Rawson, in "Some Remarks," refers to their "extreme delicacy" (11). Both critics argue that these attributes form the basis of the complicated plot.

31 For an analysis of the term "candour" in eighteenth-century writings, see Mary Claire Randolph, "'Candour' in XVIIIth-Century Satire," RES, 20 (January, 1944), 45-62. Randolph suggests that the "deterioration of this single critical term" mirrors "the decay of the genus Satire" (45), for "candour" soon connotes, not kindness and plain-dealing, but "rank hypocrisy on the part of both satirists and readers" (61).

³² For a discussion of Cecil and Mrs. Harley as instances of common sense, see Schorer, "Hugh Kelly," 390-1, and Rawson, "Some Remarks," 8, 10. Tompkins, in "Didacticism and Sensibility," in Popular Novel in England, speaks of the compromise many writers of the period depict; they provide instances of sensibility as well as models of common sense (p. 110).

³³ For further discussion of Kelly's dramatic methods, see, Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, p. 226; Quintana, "Goldsmith's Achievement," 165; Loftis, Sheridan, p. 107.

³⁴ Rodway and Lynch discuss the play as farce, while Appleton and McCarthy treat the play's pattern of contrasts. See Rodway, "Goldsmith and Sheridan," p. 69; Lynch, Box, Pit, and Gallery, p. 190; Appleton, "Double Gallant," in English writers, ed. Middendorf, p. 152; B. Eugene McCarthy, "The Theme of Liberty in She Stoops to Conquer," University of Windsor Review, 7 (Fall, 1971), 1; cited below as "Theme of Liberty."

³⁵ Oliver Goldsmith, She Stoops to Conquer, in Collected Works, 5, ed. Friedman, V.214 and I.114. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically. For a discussion of Miss Neville, see McCarthy, "Theme of Liberty," 6.

³⁶ Goldsmith, "Chapter XI," An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe, in Collected Works, 1, ed. Friedman, p. 320. For a discussion of Goldsmith's "lowness," see Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, p. 262; Tompkins, "Didacticism and Sensibility," in Popular Novel, pp. 112-113; Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 492.

³⁷ For a discussion of Tony's importance to the play, see Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 428; McCarthy, "Theme of Liberty," 2. In Sheridan, Loftis calls Tony a "benevolent eccentric" (p. 19).

³⁸ For a discussion of Sheridan's attack on the sentimental muse, see Williams, "English Sentimental Drama," 423; Samuel Macey, "Theatrical Satire: A Protest from the Stage Against Poor Taste in Theatrical Entertainment," in The Varied Pattern in the Eighteenth Century, eds. Peter Hughes and David Williams (Toronto: A. M. Hakkert, 1971), pp. 122-3; cited below as "Theatrical Satire." See also Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 493.

³⁹ Henry Fielding makes a similar point. See The Historical Register for the Year 1736, in Eighteenth-Century Drama: Afterpieces, ed. Richard W. Bevis (London and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970), where the first player confesses to Sowwit that he "can't tell" whether the play to be rehearsed is a tragedy or a comedy (I.i.14).

⁴⁰ For a discussion of this point, see Quintana, "Goldsmith's Achievement," 164; Hume, "Supposed Revolution," pp. 256, 265; Detisch, "Synthesis," 291, 292; Sven Bäckman, This Singular Tale: A Study of 'The Vicar of Wakefield' and its Literary Background (C.W.K. Gleerup Lund, 1971), p. 240.

⁴¹ George Colman, The Jealous Wife, in British Theatre, 4, III.ii.52. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁴² Satire of this sort, directed against aristocratic excesses, recalls both the Restoration's more amused treatment of the fop and Sheridan's picture of sneering society in The School for Scandal. Yearling says, in "Good-Natured Heroes," that Sheridan "revives Restoration criticism of the aristocracy in picturing the nastiness of a society of Sneerwells, Backbites, and Candours who are neither genteel nor benevolent" (496). Harriet's sniping appraisal also conforms to this type of criticism, although her comments are more biting direct.

⁴³ For a discussion of the play, see W. K. Wimsatt, ed., Idea of Comedy, fn. 4, p. 178; Hume, "Supposed Revolution," p. 243; Elizabeth P. Stein, David Garrick, Dramatist (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), p. 199.

⁴⁴ In History, 3, Nicoll proclaims Murphy to be one of the most important dramatists who "perpetuated the style of Congreve" (p. 162). And J. Homer Caskey, in "Arthur Murphy and the War on Sentimental comedy," JEGP, 30 (1931), likewise pronounces Murphy to be "one of the chief defenders of the old comic tradition" (564); cited below as "Arthur Murphy." Hume for his part, in "Supposed Revolution," concludes that Goldsmith, viewing comedy as "goodnatured," becomes "much less a follower of Restoration satiric practice than is a writer like Arthur Murphy" (p. 265).

⁴⁵ Most critics acknowledge the play's vein of ridicule as well as its sentimental one. See Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 424; Caskey, "Arthur Murphy," 571; Hume "Supposed Revolution," p. 250.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of Malvil, see Caskey, 574, and Friedman, "Aspects of Sentimentalism," Augustan Milieu, ed. Miller, p. 249.

⁴⁷ Addison, "The Spectator," 40, 16 April 1711, in The Spectator, 1, ed. Bond, p. 170.

⁴⁸ David Garrick, The Lying Valet, in Dramatic Works, 1, I.35. All further references will be to this edition, except where indicated, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁴⁹ Garrick, Epilogue, The Lying Valet, in British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan, eds. George H. Nettleton and Arthur E. Case (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), l. 49, p. 646; cited below as British Dramatists, eds. Nettleton and Case.

⁵⁰ Virgil R. Stallbaumer, "Thomas Holcroft: A Satirist in the Stream of Sentimentalism," ELH, 3 (March, 1936), 41; cited below as "Thomas Holcroft."

⁵¹ Some critics see the play as sentimental while others regard it as manners comedy. See Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, pp. 218-219, 241; Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 425; Quintana, "Goldsmith's Achievement," 165; Wimsatt, ed., Idea of Comedy, p. 178; Hume, "Supposed Revolution," pp. 253-254.

⁵² Oliver Goldsmith, Preface, Plutarch's Lives, in Collected Works, 5, ed. Friedman, p. 227.

⁵³ Loftis, in Sheridan, argues that there is no incompatibility "between a comedy that dramatizes the emotional and ethical attitudes many of us are accustomed to associate with eighteenth-century sentimentalism, and a didactic comedy that evokes laughter and satirical perception by ridiculing persons who are vain, affected, foolish, or malignant" (p. 10).

⁵⁴ Even Andrew Schiller, in "Restoration Unrestored," acknowledges the craftsmanship of Sheridan's play, which he terms "one of the triumphant examples of the yoking together of opposed forces into a work of art" (704).

Notes: Chapter Nine

¹ Loftis, in Sheridan, points to Sheridan's use of traditions and to his unique dramatic qualities (p. 7), one of which is a "firmly conceived moral vision of tolerant good sense and compassion" (p. 11).

² For a discussion of Sheridan and his "sentimentalism," see Schiller, "Restoration Unrestored," 694-704; Marvin Mudrick, "Restoration Comedy and Later," in English Stage Comedy, English Institute Essays, ed. W. K. Wimsatt (New York: Ams Press, 1964), p. 115; Muir, Comedy of Manners, p. 157; A. N. Kaul, "A Note on Sheridan," in The Action of English Comedy (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970), pp. 131, 136; Samuel L. Macey, "Sheridan: The Last of the Great Theatrical Satirists," Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research, 9 (November, 1970), 37; Leonard J. Leff, "Sheridan and Sentimentalism," Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research, 12 (May, 1973), 36-7, 46; Madeline Bingham, Sheridan: The Track of a Comet (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973), p. 223. Cited below as Kaul, "Note on Sheridan"; Macey, "Sheridan," Bingham, Sheridan.

³ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, The Letters of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, 1, ed. Cecil Price (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), p. 61; cited below as Letters, ed. Price. Wilde also deprecated the realism of contemporary writers. He extolled instead things which were "not quite true, but should be." See his The Importance of Being Earnest, in Complete Works, II.354.

⁴ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, A Scotchman, in Dramatic Works, 2, ed. Price, p. 804. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁵ See Chapter IV, pp. 97-100.

⁶ Thorndike, in English Comedy, remarks on the importance of "good sense" to Sheridan's The Rivals, (p.435).

⁷ For a discussion of Sheridan's place in dramatic tradition, see Sailendra Kumar Sen, "Sheridan's Literary Debt: The Rivals and Humphrey Clinker," MLQ, 21 (December, 1960), 291-300; Tuvia Bloch, "The Antecedents of Sheridan's Faulkland," PQ, 49 (April, 1970), 266-8; cited below as Sen, "Sheridan's Literary Debt," and Bloch, "Antecedents."

See also Hume, "Supposed Revolution," pp. 268-271.

⁸ R. B. Sheridan, Prologue, A Trip to Scarborough, in Dramatic Works, 2, ed. Price, l. 10, p. 571. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁹ R. B. Sheridan, The Duenna, in Dramatic Works, 1, I.iii.237. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

¹⁰ R. B. Sheridan, St. Patrick's Day, in Dramatic Works, 1, I.i.166. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

¹¹ Eulogizing Isaac's "sense" and the duenna's "beauty," Carlos' song, "studied for the occasion," ironically suggests that they are a comic pair "justly form'd to meet by nature" and that they will receive "Each blessing equal to [their] merit" (II.ii.254). For a discussion of Carlos, see Auburn, Sheridan's Comedies, p. 77, and n. 19, p. 197.

¹² A Trip to Scarborough rarely receives much critical attention. On the one hand, those critics who do mention it usually damn it as a bastardized version of the original. See Rodway, "Goldsmith and Sheridan," p. 66; Bingham, Sheridan, p. 223; Kaul, "Note on Sheridan," p. 137. On the other hand, Hume, in "Supposed Revolution," remarks on its "earthy vigor" (p. 270). Auburn, in Sheridan's Comedies, discusses the play in greater detail, focusing on Sheridan's changes to the original (Chapter IV, pp. 81-104).

¹³ R. B. Sheridan, The Vicar of Wakefield, in Dramatic Works, 2, ed. Cecil Price, p. 801. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

¹⁴ Bloch, in "Antecedents," indicates some of the sources for Sheridan's comic portrayal of the jealous lover (267-8). See also Loftis, Sheridan, where he contends that Sheridan is pre-occupied with depicting the "neurotic personality" (p. 112).

¹⁵ See, for example, Gatty's song in Etherege's She Would If She Could, ed. Taylor, V.i.109. See also Chapter II, pp. 48-49.

¹⁶ Scattered throughout the play are references to "absolute." For example, Mrs. Malaprop has "fallen absolutely in love with a tall Irish baronet" (I.ii.81), and Acres swears "absolutely" to polish like the gentleman (II.i.95). So, too, is the Captain renowned for his "absolute sense" (III.i.104). Ironically, though, to be absolute is to risk immoderation. Seldom is a character, even the Captain, able to sustain a fixed mode of behaviour. But he alone possesses a restraining judgment which consistently checks him at times when he could fall into excess.

Auburn, in Sheridan's Comedies, mentions the importance of common sense to Georgian comic writers (p. 125).

17 Some critics view the play as a concession to sentimentalism. See Bernbaum, Drama of Sensibility, p. 253; Nicoll, British Drama, p. 194; Mudrick, "Restoration Comedy and Later," in English Stage Comedy, ed. Wimsatt, p. 116; Macey, "Sheridan," 27; Kaul, "Note on Sheridan," pp. 140-141; Leff, "Sheridan and Sentimentalism," 37-38, 40-41; Mark S. Auburn, "The Pleasures of Sheridan's The Rivals: A Critical Study in the Light of Stage History," MP, 72 (February, 1975), 256, 264; cited below as "Pleasures of Sheridan's Rivals." Some critics, like Thorndike in English Comedy (p. 431) and Auburn in "Pleasures of Sheridan's Rivals," (265, 271), view Julia and Faulkland as sentimental lovers, and consider their presence to be a major flaw to the work. See also Auburn, Sheridan's Comedies, pp. 35, 59. On the other hand, Hume, in "Supposed Revolution," sees the contrast between the two pairs of lovers to be comic (p. 268). Leff, in "Sheridan and Sentimentalism," 38, Kaul in "Note on Sheridan," p. 148, and Jack D. Durant in "Sheridan's 'Royal Sanctuary': A Key to The Rivals," Ball State University Forum, 14 (Winter, 1973), 29, all remark on the importance both of contrast and of Jack's sense; cited below as "Sheridan's 'Royal Sanctuary.'"

18 Some critics see Faulkland as undoubtedly sentimental. See Leff, "Sheridan and Sentimentalism," 37. Rodway, however, in "Goldsmith and Sheridan" (71) and later Durant in "Sheridan's 'Royal Sanctuary'" (28) find Faulkland's presence a puzzle. Others, like Sen in "Sheridan's Literary Debt" (300) and Muir in Comedy of Manners (p. 161), regard Faulkland as a caricature of the man of sentiment. Auburn, in Sheridan's Comedies, considers Faulkland to be Lydia's male counterpart (p. 55), but he also explores the psychological depth of the jealous character (pp. 55-57).

19 But discussions on Sheridan's treatment of Julia do vary in their emphasis. Earlier, Bernbaum, in Drama of Sensibility, had spoken of Faulkland's "unhappy temper," reformed by Julia's correspondingly gentle temper (p. 253). Kaul, in "Note on Sheridan," points to Julia as "the epitome of goodness, patience, sense, sensibility" (p. 141), and Durant, in "Sheridan's 'Royal Sanctuary,'" likewise extols her as "an authentic portrait of Sheridan's ideal woman," one who is to be "open, honest, above pretense, above caprice" (28). Rose Snider, in Satire, echoes Parnell's complaint that the sentimental figure smugly extols his own virtue and moral superiority, but Snider goes on to suggest that, in the context of Lydia's absurdity, Julia's sobriety cannot be treated seriously (pp. 48-49). Sheridan, in this view, caricatures the sentimental heroine, and treats her in a "mock-serious" manner (p. 47). For Leff, in "Sheridan and Sentimentalism," Julia is the golden mean (41) and for Auburn, in "Pleasures of Sheridan's The Rivals," the scenes between Julia and Faulkland are as sentimental as they are comic (264-5). In Sheridan's Comedies, Auburn calls her "passive" (p. 48), "sensible" and "sentimental" (p. 58).

²⁰ As Loftis says in Sheridan, the language of Sheridan's characters achieves its witty effects "by common images used in unexpected ways" (p. 90).

²¹ Pope's lines read: "'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence, / The Sound must seem an Eccho to the Sense." See Alexander Pope, An Essay on Criticism, in Eighteenth-Century English Literature, eds. Geoffrey Tillotson, Paul Fussell, Jr., and Marshall Waingrow (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), ll. 364-5, p. 559.

²² In the eighteenth century, foolishly romantic heroines are, in many ways, traditional. Biddy in Garrick's Miss in Her Teens, Miss Fuz in Garrick's A Peep Behind the Curtain, and Biddy in Steele's The Tender Husband are all comically romantic. For a discussion of other possible sources, see Coleman O. Parsons, "Smollett's Influence on Sheridan's 'The Rivals,'" Notes and Queries, 164 (January, 1933), 39-41; Miriam Gabriel and Paul Mueschke, "Two Contemporary Sources of Sheridan's The Rivals," PMLA, 43 (March, 1928), 237-250. Auburn, in Sheridan's Comedies, points to Lydia's uniqueness (p. 55). However, Laretta in Sheridan's own St. Patrick's Day and Louisa in The Duenna also help to illuminate both Lydia's romantic inclinations and Faulkland's romantic desire to be sentimentally beloved. See St. Patrick's Day, I.ii.170 and III.ii.107, and The Duenna, I.iii.236. See also Sheridan's fragment, The Vicar of Wakefield, where the heroine delights in "filling her head [with] novels" (p. 803).

²³ For a discussion of Mrs. Malaprop's conventional character, see Kaul, "Note on Sheridan," p. 141; Hume, "Supposed Revolution," p. 262. Other critics stress both her conventional attributes and her uniqueness. See Sen, "Sheridan's Literary Debt," 292, 293; Auburn, "Pleasures of Sheridan's The Rivals," 266-267; Durant, "Sheridan's 'Royal Sanctuary,'" 24, 26; Auburn, Sheridan's Comedies, p. 37.

²⁴ In Development of English Drama, Hume speaks of "exemplary comedy" as an emerging "rival" mode in the sixteen-eighties (p. 377).

²⁵ What keeps both sets of lovers apart, Kaul argues in "Note on Sheridan," is caprice (p. 145). Auburn, in "Pleasures of Sheridan's The Rivals," would deny Julia any active part in the comic exposure of excess (263).

²⁶ See Chapter V, pp. 138-140, and Chapter XI, pp. 318-319.

²⁷ Lydia's hiding her sentimental novels in closets and under toilets comments on the essential comedy of her attempt to live the life of a sentimental heroine. As a "female Quixote," Lydia fails to distinguish "romance from real life," as Kaul puts it in "Note on

Sheridan" (p. 147). Sir Anthony Absolute also offers a glimpse into the effect which he thinks fiction, exemplified by the notorious lending libraries, can have on real life: "Madam, a circulating library in a town is, as an ever-green tree, of diabolical knowledge! - It blossoms through the year! - And depend on it, Mrs. Malaprop, that they who are so fond of handling the leaves, will long for the fruit at last" (I.ii. 85). But his understanding is shown to be suspect. See also Durant, "Sheridan's 'Royal Sanctuary,'" 26.

²⁸ While, in Sheridan, Loftis says that Charles Surface "wins his lady by qualities of the heart rather than by clarity of mind" (p. 10), Loftis does not mention the Captain. He does note that Sheridan avoids "pathetic situations" in his comedies (p. 10), but does not account for the duel and the distress it causes.

²⁹ Cf. Sen, "Sheridan's Literary Debt," 296. However, in Act III, scene iv, Sir Lucius confides to Acres that a "gay captain" has affronted him and his country (117) and, yet, here, Sir Lucius mentions the "affront" only after he has successfully provoked the Captain to "quarrel genteely" (IV.iii.128).

³⁰ For a discussion of the duel and its relation to Jack's sense, see Sen, "Sheridan's Literary Debt," fn. 9, 297; Durant, "Sheridan's 'Royal Sanctuary,'" 27.

³¹ Cf. Leff, "Sheridan and Sentimentalism," where Leff argues that this second prologue does not change the sentimental tone of the comedy (41).

³² Leff considers this speech to be sentimental simply because Julia utters it (41). Auburn in Sheridan's Comedies calls it a "moral tag" (p. 135).

³³ Durant in "Sheridan's 'Royal Sanctuary'" concludes that only good sense, which corrects folly and whimsy, will ultimately yield a social harmony (30).

³⁴ For a discussion of the play's witty attributes, and Sheridan's use of them, see Muir, Comedy of Manners, p. 162; Hume, "Supposed Revolution," p. 269; Arthur C. Sprague, "In Defence of a Masterpiece: 'The School for Scandal' Re-examined," in English Studies Today, ed. G. T. Duthie (Edinburgh UP, 1964), p. 128; cited below as "Defence of a Masterpiece," English Studies Today, ed. Duthie. See also Leff, "Sheridan and Sentimentalism," 37, 42; Macey, "Sheridan," 37, 38; Auburn, Sheridan's Comedies, pp. 108-9.

³⁵ Appleton, in "Double Gallant," in English Writers, ed. Middendorf, notes the surface similarities between Etherege and Sheridan (p. 146). Schiller, in "Restoration Unrestored," notes Sheridan's similarities to Wycherley (698). Most critics do point to Congreve as Sheridan's model, but some, like Muir in Comedy of Manners, also refer to Vanbrugh (p. 162). Loftis, in Sheridan, links The School for Scandal most closely to Wycherley, Congreve and Vanbrugh (p. 93).

³⁶ With respect to the scandal scenes, see also Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 496; James L. Lynch, Box, Pit, and Gallery, p. 179. Most critics, however, do not regard either the title or the scandal scenes to be of any importance to the play as a whole. See Leff, "Sheridan and Sentimentalism," 43; Mudrick, "Restoration Comedy and Later," in English Stage Comedy, ed. Wimsatt, pp. 115-6; Schiller, "Restoration Unrestored," 699, 702; Kaul, "Note on Sheridan," p. 137.

³⁷ Leonard J. Leff, "The Disguise Motif in Sheridan's The School for Scandal," Educational Theatre Journal, 22 (December, 1970), 358; cited below as "Disguise Motif." Loftis, in Sheridan, refers to the play's "vision of depravity in fashionable London life" (p. 22).

³⁸ Cumberland's view of the town and of appearances is much more condemnatory, and less comic, than Sheridan's. See Chapter VII, p. 201-202.

³⁹ In "Disguise Motif," Leff suggests that gossip is another form of disguise (350).

⁴⁰ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, A Portrait: Address'd to a Lady with the Comedy of the School for Scandal, in Dramatic Works, 1, ed. Price, 11. 21 and 23, p. 351. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁴¹ As Loftis says, in Sheridan: "The malice of the gossips in The School for Scandal poses questions concerning human benevolence" (p. 99).

⁴² J. R. deJ. Jackson, in "The Importance of Witty Dialogue in The School for Scandal," MLN, 76 (November, 1961), discusses passages such as these, not in terms of their thematic significance, but in terms of wit for wit's sake (602); cited below as "Importance of Witty Dialogue."

⁴³ See Chapter X, pp. 299.

⁴⁴ See Mirabell's summary, The Way of the World, in Complete Plays, ed. Herbert Davis, I.i.401.

⁴⁵ Some critics point to the superficiality of Joseph's villainy. See Kaul, "Note on Sheridan," p. 138; Schiller, "Restoration Unrestored," 703; Appleton, "Double Gallant," in English Writers, ed. Middendorf, p. 155. Other critics see Joseph's character in terms of his "sentimental knavery" and Sheridan's comic treatment of the man of sentiment. See Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 496; Muir, Comedy of Manners, pp. 162-3; Leff, "Disguise Motif," 353. Auburn, in Sheridan's Comedies, compares Joseph's intelligent villainy to classical punitive comedy (pp. 109-110).

⁴⁶ For a discussion of Sheridan's pre-occupation with artifice, see Leff, 351. Appleton, in "Double Gallant," in English Writers, ed. Middendorf, argues that playwrights in the eighteenth century were "in search of a gentleman-hero and a new tradition of manners" (p. 153).

⁴⁷ For a discussion of Sheridan's attitude towards the scandal-mongers, see Rodway, "Goldsmith and Sheridan," p. 68; Jackson, "Importance of Witty Dialogue," 602; Leff, "Disguise Motif," fn, 8, 352; Loftis, Sheridan, pp. 86-7.

⁴⁸ Joseph himself predicts his own downfall when he says: "Sincerely I begin to wish I had never made such a Point of gaining so very good a character - for it has led me into so many curs'd Rogueries that I doubt I shall be exposed at last" (II.ii.384). See Congreve's The Double-Dealer, in Complete Plays, ed. Herbert Davis, V.i.203. See also Chapter IV. pp. 124-125.

⁴⁹ Mrs. Candour's character is another instance of Sheridan's skilfull comic portraiture. Her very name, for example, links her to eighteenth-century benevolism. See Randolph, "'Candour' in XVIIIth-Century Satire," 45-62; Tave, Amiable Humorist, p. 25; Preston, Not in Timon's Manner, p. 19. For a discussion of the "fallen woman," see Chapter X, pp. 304-305.

⁵⁰ Price in his article "The Clare Sheridan MSS. in the British Theatre Museum," Theatre Notebook, 29: 2 (1975) indicates some of the "softening" which Lady Teazle's character underwent. One sampling of the early manuscript has Lady Teazle refuting Joseph's assertion that she has been corrupted by Lady Sneerwell in the following words: "No indeed I have not opinion enough of her to be taught by her" (52-3); cited below as "Clare Sheridan MSS."

⁵¹ Leff, in "Disguise Motif," compares Lady Teazle to Congreve's Millamant, to Etherege's Harriet and to Wycherley's Margery. But Leff, like many critics, sees Lady Teazle's role to be a fundamentally sentimental one. See his article, "Sheridan and Sentimentalism," 43. Schiller, in "Restoration Unrestored," even contends that she is misled more by vanity than she is by scandal.

⁵² Miss Tittup in Garrick's Bon Ton also speaks of the "foolish prejudices" she's acquired in the country. See Dramatic Works, 3, I.i.144.

⁵³ Price interprets Lady Teazle's comment, that she came "at least to listen to [Joseph's] pretended Passion" (IV.iii.422), to be an illustration of the "hypothetical" nature of her acquiescence. See Introduction, The School for Scandal, in Dramatic Works, 1, p. 305.

⁵⁴ Indeed, at one point, she is perturbed by their malice (IV.iii.411). Schiller finds her "conversion" sudden, and Leff contends that it, too, is a part of the "disguise motif"; Lady Teazle now sets about to do some "unmasking" of her own. See Schiller, "Restoration Unrestored," 699; Leff, "Disguise Motif," 355.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of this point, see Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, "Satiric Mode of Feeling," 118, 121; Leff, "Disguise Motif," 351, fn. 8, 352, 354; Loftis, Sheridan, pp. 86, 99.

⁵⁶ Her statement recalls Congreve's remarks in the Dedication to The Way of the World. See Complete Plays, ed. Davis, p. 390.

⁵⁷ Many critics refer to Sheridan's use of two central characters. See Appleton, "Double Gallant," in English Writers, ed. Middendorf, p. 156; Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 494; Schiller, "Restoration Unrestored," 702-3; "Note on Sheridan," p. 138; Arthur Friedman, "Aspects of Sentimentalism," in Augustan Milieu, ed. Miller et.al., p. 250; Auburn, Sheridan's Comedies, pp. 126, 129.

⁵⁸ See also Oliver Goldsmith, "An Essay on the Theatre," 1773, in Idea of Comedy, ed. W. K. Wimsatt, p. 188; Charles Lamb, "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century," 1822, in Idea of Comedy, p. 222.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of Joseph's uninterrupted moralizing, see Macey, "Sheridan," 40; Leff, "Disguise Motif," 354.

⁶⁰ Many critics compare Charles to Honeywood. See Kaul, "Note on Sheridan," p. 138; Rodway, "Goldsmith and Sheridan," p. 72.

⁶¹ Rodway views Sir Oliver's test to be sentimental (p. 68), and Leff, in "Disguise Motif," relates the test to disguise and the laughter produced by it (357). For a discussion of prudence, see Auburn, Sheridan's Comedies, pp. 130-131.

⁶² This criticism clearly recalls Humphrey's remarks in Steele's The Conscious Lovers, where he states that servants now imitate the follies and the vices of their masters. See Chapter VII, p. 192.

⁶³ Sprague, in his piece, "Defence of a Masterpiece," in English Studies Today, ed. Duthie, suggests that Charles, along with Joseph and Lady Teazle, "could be fitted into the moulds of Victorian domestic drama" (p. 132).

⁶⁴ Interestingly enough, Sheridan's A Portrait and Churchill's lines both stress the balance of "good humour" and wit, and the attribute of candour.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of Maria as forgiving heroine, see Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 495.

⁶⁶ Leff and Auburn are among the few critics who attempt to account for Careless' presence. See "Disguise Motif," fn. 19, 359, and Sheridan's Comedies, pp. 146-7.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of Charles and the play's ending, see Leff, "Disguise Motif," 360; Yearling, "Good-Natured Heroes," 500; Loftis, Sheridan, p. 97.

⁶⁸ In Sheridan, Loftis remarks that the final impression left by the play is a "disturbing recollection of malicious persons who embody ubiquitous qualities of mind as well as of heart" (p. 87). Auburn, in Sheridan's Comedies, discusses the changes the scandal-mongers undergo and Sheridan's treatment of them (pp. 143-144).

Notes: Chapter Ten

¹ Joseph Addison, "The Spectator," 40, 16 April 1711, in The Spectator, 1, ed. Bond, p. 170.

² Frederick Reynolds, How to Grow Rich in Modern Theatre, 1, I.i.225. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³ George Rowell, in The Victorian Theatre, A Survey (London and New York: Oxford UP, 1956), suggests that playwrights like Morton, Holcroft and Colman the Younger helped nurture melodrama (p. 43); cited below as Victorian Theatre. And Frank Rahill, in The World of Melodrama (University Park and London: Pennsylvania UP, 1967), also refers to these playwrights, as well as to Cumberland, as precursors of nineteenth-century melodrama (p. 104). MacMillan, in "Rise of Social Comedy," also points to the "new serious drama" which, at the end of the eighteenth-century, grew out of sentimental comedy (330). As Michael R. Booth, in English Melodrama (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), asserts, the form developed as a distinct dramatic mode in the 1790's (p. 13). Therefore, many critics point to the connection between late eighteenth-century sentimental drama and nineteenth-century melodrama: in particular, to their treatment of virtue and domesticity, to their morality and their view of man, and to the co-existence of the serious, comic and pathetic. See Ernest Reynolds, Early Victorian Drama, 1830-1870 (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1936), p. 128; Nicoll, History, 2, p. 219; Nicoll, History, 3, p. 157; Sherbo, English Sentimental Drama, pp. 165-166; Booth, English Melodrama, pp. 13-14, 41-43; Henry F. Salerno, ed., Introduction, English Drama in Transition, 1880-1920 (New York: Pegasus, 1968), p. 17; Raymond Chapman, The Victorian Debate: English Literature and Society, 1832-1901 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 335; Michael R. Booth, ed., Introduction, English Plays of the Nineteenth Century, 3 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), pp. 1, 10. Cited below as Salerno, English Drama in Transition; Chapman, Victorian Debate; Booth, English Plays.

⁴ Frederick Reynolds, The Rage, in Modern Theatre, 1, I.iii.77. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁵ See Chapter VII, p.202. Booth, in "Defence," indicates the thematic value the town holds for a drama concerned, not only with virtue, but also with social issues (10-11).

⁶ Robert B. Heilman, in Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1968), suggests that characters in a melodrama are essentially "whole"; that is, the conflict is between men, or between men and circumstances, and not within man himself (p. 79); cited below as Tragedy and Melodrama.

⁷ Many critics point to the moral absolutes of the drama. See Booth, English Melodrama, p. 14; Booth, "Defence," 9; Gary J. Scrimgeour, "Nineteenth-Century Drama," Victorian Studies, 12 (September, 1968), 94; Richard A. Cordell, Henry Arthur Jones and The Modern Drama (New York: Ray Long and Richard R. Smith, 1932), p. 32; cited below as Henry Arthur Jones. With respect to the moral tone and reverence for virtue in nineteenth-century plays, see also Tave, Amiable Humorist, p. viii; Newell W. Sawyer, The Comedy of Manners from Sheridan to Maugham (1931; rpt. New York: A. S. Barnes, 1961), p. 48; cited below as Comedy of Manners. See also Rahill, World of Melodrama, p. 9; Heilman, Tragedy and Melodrama, p. 79.

⁸ See Martin, Triumph of Wit, where he discusses the "distance from the object of comedy" and the perception of how that object is "out of joint." In sentimental comedy, he argues, there is an "eradication of that distance and an identification between the perceiver and perceived" (p. 29). In nineteenth-century drama, the conflict is between heroes and villains, good and evil. See Heilman, Tragedy and Melodrama, p. 78; Booth, English Melodrama, p. 14. Lynton Hudson, in The English Stage, 1850-1950 (1951; rpt. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972), argues that such dramas are "serious" plays where "incidents control and determine conduct" (pp. 110-111); cited below as English Stage. Maynard Savin, in Thomas William Robertson: His Plays and Stagecraft (Providence, R.I.: Brown University, 1950), remarks that, in the nineteenth century, "the stage self-consciously assumes the office of the pulpit" and, in doing so, reassures the audience "that the theater is a moral force" (p. 46); cited below as Thomas William Robertson. See Chapters V, pp. 178-180 and VII, pp. 178-180.

⁹ Robert W. Corrigan, ed., "Melodrama and the Popular Tradition in the Nineteenth-Century British Theatre," in Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century (New York: Dell, 1967), p. 8; cited below as "Melodrama," Laurel British Drama.

¹⁰ Many critics point to the more sensational trials virtue must withstand. Heilman, in Tragedy and Melodrama, speaks of the distinction between the sentimental treatment, which capitalizes "on the more relaxed and familiar emotions," and the sensational treatment, which capitalizes "on the more tense and exotic emotions" (p. 216). Similarly, in Victorian Debate, Chapman considers the misfortunes of innocent youth to be a major melodramatic theme (p. 336).

¹¹ Frederick Reynolds, The Dramatist, in Lesser English Comedies of the Eighteenth Century, ed. Allardyce Nicoll (Oxford UP, 1927), IV.46-50; cited below as Lesser English Comedies, ed. Nicoll. The edition has no page numbers, so I have supplied them. All references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically. Douglas William Jerrold, The Rent-Day, in British Plays of the Nineteenth Century, ed. J. O. Bailey (New York: Odyssey Press, 1966), III.i.272; cited below as British Plays, ed. Bailey.

¹² Booth, Introduction, Hiss the Villain: Six English and American Melodramas (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), p. 10; cited below as Hiss the Villain.

¹³ George Colman the Younger, John Bull; or, The Englishman's Fireside, in British Theatre, 4, I.i.20. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically. Chapman, in Victorian Debate, points to the genre's emphasis on domestic, middle-class life (p. 334), and Booth, in "Defence," also indicates the stress, not only on middle-class family life, but also on the humble home (11).

¹⁴ Sir Henry Arthur Jones, The Silver King, in British Plays, ed. Bailey, V.ii.367. Most critics consider the play to be of significant importance to the development of melodrama. Cordell, in Henry Arthur Jones, considers the play's importance to lie in its mixture of the humorous and the pathetic (p. 36). Chapman, Victorian Debate (p. 341) and Hudson, English Stage (p. 112), both remark on the hero's inner conflict and its importance to the development of the form.

¹⁵ Booth, in his Introduction, Hiss the Villain, stresses that comic relief is as much a part of melodrama as pathetic or sensational incident (p. 11). For a discussion of contrast in Restoration drama, see Chapter I, pp.38-39, and Chapter II, p. 53-54. See also Chapter VIII, where I discuss the use of contrast in sentimental comedy (pp. 239).

¹⁶ Many critics would regard the dramatic conventions to represent an impoverished tradition. See Sawyer, Chapters I and II, Comedy of Manners, pp. 1-35; Fred C. Thomson, "A Crisis in Early Victorian Drama: John Westland Marston and the Syncretics," Victorian Studies, 9 (June, 1966), 375; Scrimgeour, "Nineteenth-Century Drama," 98; Jonas A. Barish, "Antitheatrical Prejudice in the Nineteenth Century," UTQ, 40 (Summer, 1971), 289; Sharon Kaehle Shaw, "Medea on Pegasus," 15. Cited below as Thomson, "Crisis in Early Victorian Drama" and Barish, "Antitheatrical Prejudice." Conversely, other critics regard the drama as part of a thriving tradition, and regard it as a developing form in its own right. See Reynolds, Early Victorian Drama, p. 128; Heilman, Tragedy and Melodrama, fn., p. 75, p. 83; Booth, "Defence," 5, 7.

¹⁷ Many critics point to nineteenth-century drama's mixture of modes. See Sawyer, Comedy of Manners, p. 31; Rahill, World of Melodrama,

pp. xiv, 109; Booth, "Defence," 12; Booth, ed., Introduction, English Plays, 3, pp. 1, 4, 23, 31.

¹⁸ Heilman, in Tragedy and Melodrama, contends that the play does indeed represent the form, and he refers to Morton's "luxuriant theatrical mélange" (p. 76). See also Booth, ed., Introduction, English Plays, 3, p. 4.

¹⁹ Thomas Holcroft, Seduction, in Modern Theatre, 2, III.ii.294. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁰ Thomas Morton, Speed the Plough, in Lesser English Comedies, ed. Nicoll, III.ii.45. The edition has no page numbers, so I have supplied them. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²¹ As Charles Dickens expresses it in Oliver Twist, in Oxford Illustrated Dickens: "It is the custom on the stage, in all good murderous melodramas, to present the tragic and the comic scenes, in as regular alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon" (p. 118).

²² Frederick Reynolds, The Will, in Modern Theatre, 1, V.i.57. John Russell Taylor, in The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play (London: Methuen, 1967), indicates that, in the world of the well-made social drama, right and wrong are as distinct as black and white (pp. 49, 85); cited below as Rise and Fall. Robert B. Heilman, in The Iceman, the Arsonist, and the Troubled Agent: Tragedy and Melodrama on the Modern Stage (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), also states that in melodrama there is an "ordering" of the world since there is only one legitimate force, the force of good (pp. 22-3); cited below as Iceman. Rowell, in Victorian Theatre, points to the importance of poetic justice in melodrama (pp. 39-40), as does Booth, Introduction, Hiss the Villain (pp. 9-10).

²³ Thomas Holcroft, Duplicity, in Modern Theatre, 2, V.ii.72.

²⁴ Elizabeth Inchbald, Such Things Are, in British Theatre, 7, V.iii.71, and V.iv.73. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁵ Frederick Reynolds, Laugh When You Can, in Modern Theatre, 1, V.i.207, and George Colman the Younger, The Poor Gentleman, in British Theatre, 4, V.i.84. All further references to these plays will be to these editions, respectively, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁶ see Chapter VIII, pp. 232-233.

²⁷ W. E. Henley and R. L. Stevenson, Beau Austin, in Three Plays (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), II.iv.141-5. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

²⁸ Sawyer, in Comedy of Manners, calls Beau Austin "one of those courtly dandies of impeccable manners but censurable morals"; his repentance, however, "gives a Victorian stamp to the play" (p. 153). One should add that it also gives a sentimental "stamp" to the play.

²⁹ Booth, in his Introduction, Hiss the Villain, states that Steele's "excesses of pathetic sentiment" influenced the melodrama (p. 14), but he does not expand on some of the ways Steele aroused that sentiment. Scrimgeour, in "Nineteenth-Century Drama," remarks on the age's "experimentalism" (93-4), while Henry F. Salerno, in "Problem Play," considers the extensive use of coincidence and the "contrivance of scene" to be two of many faults besetting the genre (200). See also Hudson, English Stage, where he argues that incidents control conduct (pp. 110-111), and Booth, English Melodrama, where he speaks of the "accidental reversal of fortune" (p. 17).

³⁰ For a discussion of the villain, see Booth, Introduction, English Plays, 3, fn. 2, p. 7; Booth, Introduction, Hiss the Villain, p. 10.

³¹ John Baldwin Buckstone, Luke the Labourer; or, The Lost Son, in British Plays, ed. Bailey, I.ii.246.

³² Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Money, in Nineteenth-Century Plays, ed. George Rowell, 2nd edition (1953; rpt. London: Oxford UP, 1972), V.iii.112, 120. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³³ Frederick Reynolds, Fortune's Fool, in Modern Theatre, I, III.ii.255. Miss Gloomly in Reynolds' Laugh When You Can and Miss Prism in Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest are similar in their attitude to fiction. See Chapter XI, p. 350-351.

³⁴ For a discussion of Steele's views on laughter, see Chapter VII, pp.178-351. Miss Gloomly's deprecation of what is "low" also recalls Goldsmith's complaints. See Chapter VIII, pp. 226-227.

³⁵ T. W. Robertson, Society, in Society and Caste, ed. T. Edgar Pemberton (Boston and London: D. C. Heath, 1905), II.i.32.

³⁶ Sir Henry Arthur Jones, The Hypocrites (New York: Samuel French, 1908), III.110. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³⁷ Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, in British Plays, ed. Bailey, II.510. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

³⁸ Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, Dandy Dick, With an Introduction by Denys Blakelock (1893; rpt. London: William Heinemann, 1959), III.80. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically. For Loveit's comments, see Etherege, Man of Mode, V.i.120.

³⁹ Most critics agree that the play looks backward. For a discussion of the play as a manners comedy, see Sawyer, Comedy of Manners, p. 44; Reynolds, Early Victorian Drama, pp. 61, 64; Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 518; Rowell, Victorian Theatre, pp. 28, 53; David Krause, ed., "The Theatre of Dion Boucicault: A Short View of his Life and Art," in The Dolmen Boucicault (Chester Springs, Pennsylvania: Dufour Editions, 1965), pp. 16, 17; cited below as "Theatre of Dion Boucicault," Dolmen Boucicault. See also Scrimgeour, "Nineteenth-Century Drama," 98; Paul D. Herring, "Nineteenth-Century Drama," Modern Drama, 68 (August, 1970), 86; Booth, Introduction, English Plays, 3, p. 25. Earlier, Reynolds, in Early Victorian Drama, had contended that the play is a "comedy of transition" (p. 64), one which wavered "between eighteenth-century comedy and nineteenth-century melodrama" (p. 79). In Thomas William Robertson, Savin argues that "a Victorian screen" carefully guards the play against anything more than a superficial tincture of the Restoration tradition (p. 12).

⁴⁰ David Krause, in "Theatre of Dion Boucicault," Dolmen Boucicault, remarks that Boucicault, while he wrote in a comic tradition, nonetheless "saw the drama as a mixed or impure form, a combination of comedy and melodrama, farce and sentiment" (pp. 9-10). See also Sawyer, Comedy of Manners, p. 45.

⁴¹ Dion Boucicault, London Assurance, in British Plays, ed. Bailey, II.172. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁴² Krause, in "Theatre of Dion Boucicault," Dolmen Boucicault, points to the familiar character types (p. 16). Earlier, Savin, in Thomas William Robertson, had made a similar observation. Savin considers Sir Harcourt's final speech to be "out-of-character" (p. 12) and, likewise, Booth, in his Introduction, English Plays, 3, refers to the "gulled fop who ends as a moralist," one reason for Booth's considering the play's spirit to be more late eighteenth century than nineteenth century (p. 25).

⁴³ Reynolds, in Early Victorian Drama, refers to Dazzle as the hero's conventional coxcomb friend (p. 61). See also Krause, "Theatre of Dion Boucicault," Dolmen Boucicault, where Krause calls Dazzle the "parasite friend" (p. 16) and the "glib man-about-town" (p. 17).

⁴⁴ Heilman, in Tragedy and Melodrama, contends that the pathetic signifies innocence, misery and victimization (fn., pp. 20-21). For a discussion of the mixed mode in mid-nineteenth-century social drama, see Booth, Introduction, English Plays, 2, p. 11. For a discussion of nineteenth-century drama as social drama, see Booth, Introduction, English Plays, 3, p. 21; Jane W. Stedman, "General Utility: Victorian Author-Actors from Knowles to Pinero," Educational Theatre Journal, 24 (October, 1972), 299; cited below as "General Utility." See also Booth, "Defence," 11.

⁴⁵ Most critics view Robertson's plays as important landmarks in the history of the drama. See Reynolds, Early Victorian Drama, p. 136; Rowell, Victorian Theatre, p. 75; Cordell, Henry Arthur Jones, p. 52; Marvin Carlson, "Montigny, Laube, Robertson: The Early Realists," Educational Theatre Journal, 24 (October, 1972), 235; cited below as "Early Realists." However, some view his contribution as a more limited one. Savin, for example, states in Thomas William Robertson that, on the one hand, Robertson's "best work represents a formidable native groundswell before the Ibsenite invasion" (p. 45). On the other hand, Savin clearly relates Robertson to the tradition of *la pièce bien faite*, and concludes that Robertson's innovations were "limited," primarily because "he had nothing much to say" (p. 104).

⁴⁶ Errol Durbach, "Remembering Tom Robertson (1829-1871)," Educational Theatre Journal, 24 (October, 1972), 285; cited below as "Remembering Tom Robertson."

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the play's realism, see Clayton Hamilton, ed., The Social Plays of Arthur Wing Pinero (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1917), p. 11; cited below as Introduction, Social Plays of Pinero. See also Reynolds, Early Victorian Drama, pp. 86-7, 89; Taylor, Rise and Fall, p. 16; Hudson, English Stage, p. 47.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of Robertson's plays as sentimental, see Cordell, Henry Arthur Jones, pp. 2, 10; Savin, Thomas William Robertson, p. 113. Conversely, Salerno, in "Problem Play," considers Robertson's plays to be "problem" plays (197), and Herring, in "Nineteenth-Century Drama," indicates the "cup-and-saucer" realism of the plays (84). Other critics stress Robertson's use of both wit and sentiment. See Sawyer, Comedy of Manners, p. 71; Taylor Rise and Fall, p. 25; Booth, Introduction, English Plays, 3, p. 18. For a discussion of Robertson's departures from melodramatic stereotypes, see Salerno, Introduction, English Drama in Transition, p. 17; Taylor, Rise and Fall pp. 27-8; Chapman, Victorian Debate, p. 340; Durbach, "Remembering Tom Robertson," 285; Carlson,

Early Realists," 233.

⁴⁹ T. W. Robertson, Caste, in Nineteenth Century Plays, ed. Rowell, III.399-403. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁵⁰ As Savin remarks in Thomas William Robertson: "To the stock motifs of mésalliance, and withheld identity, Robertson in this play discovered the device of two contrasting feminine roles, the one sentimental; the other, pert" (p. 47). Robertson, of course, did not "discover" the technique; he "re-discovered" it. The dual protagonists in Etherege's She Would If She Could and in Farquhar's The Beaux' Stratagem, as well as the prevalence of the complementary couples in comedy in general, are instances of the dramatic convention. For a discussion of Albery, see Cordell, Henry Arthur Jones, where he speaks of Two Roses as an imitation of London Assurance (p. 3); Hudson, English Stage, where he speaks of Albery's use of epigram and its culmination in Wilde's plays (p. 58); Booth, Introduction, English Plays, 3, where he speaks of Albery's imitation of Robertson (p. 43). In contrast, Chapman in Victorian Debate considers Albery to display "signs of strong psychological penetration" (p. 340).

⁵¹ Tom Taylor and Charles Reade, Masks and Faces: or, Before and Behind the Curtain, in Nineteenth Century Plays, ed. Rowell, I.i.133. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁵² A few critics point out that, while descended from the fop, Hawtree represents a more sympathetic character, in keeping with a nineteenth-century comedy. Sawyer, in Comedy of Manners, remarks that Hawtree's "sympathetic understanding of others" is a "new factor to be reckoned with in the history of the comedy of manners" (fn. 5, p. 70). Similarly, Booth, in his Introduction, English Plays, 3, asserts that, as a sympathetic character, Hawtree becomes "an ideal of quiet manliness, decency, good humour, and true friendship" (fn. 1, p. 43). It is more to the point to say that, in this regard, Robertson follows convention. Lord Ogleby in The Clandestine Marriage, to name an obvious example, also has foppish characteristics but he, too, proves to be sympathetic.

⁵³ Most critics acknowledge the class-consciousness which pervades Robertson's dramas. See Savin, Thomas William Robertson, p. 106; Booth, Introduction, English Plays, 3, p. 26; Durbach, "Remembering Tom Robertson," 286.

⁵⁴ Savin comments on the attitude expressed in this speech, and remarks that Jones later decried "the falsehood and abortive nature of such a starting point in dramatic art" (p. 110). Durbach, in "Remembering Tom Robertson," considers such attitudes, which Gilbert was to parody

in the Savoy operas, to be inadequate answers to the difficulties created by such a caste system (287).

⁵⁵ Durbach refers to Robertson's "fussy sense of domestic realism," as well as his "sentimental inclination" (284), but fails to explore Robertson's modifications to both the domestic and the sentimental dramatic conventions.

⁵⁶ Savin, in Thomas William Robertson, considers the Marchioness to be a stock character of Restoration comedy (p. 111). Vivian, in Wilde's The Decay of Lying, in Complete Works, cites Froissart as one of the "liars" to be imitated (p. 980).

⁵⁷ Savin calls Eccles a "distasteful caricature" (p. 107), while Rowell, in Victorian Theatre, considers Eccles and his lack of reformation to be "a break with one of the most popular conventions of melodrama" (p. 77).

⁵⁸ Critics tend to regard Jones' plays in various ways. Booth stresses the melodrama to be found in Jones' plays. See Booth's Introduction, English Plays, 2, p. 20; Introduction, Hiss the Villain, p. 31; English Melodrama, p. 176. In his Introduction, English Plays, 3, Booth suggests that Jones assimilated subject matter and techniques from the past. Yet, Booth argues, nineteenth-century dramatists like Jones "had learned to blend comedy with pathos and potential tragedy rather than alternate them" (p. 50). Other critics also comment on Jones' debt to the past. See Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties, (1913; rpt. England: Penguin Books, 1939), p. 191; Salerno, Introduction, English Drama in Transition, p. 18. Cordell, in Henry Arthur Jones, labels the play a "romantic comedy," because "it satisfies no sense of the real; its very charm arises from its sentimental appeal to the imagination" (p. 114). Likewise, Taylor, in Rise and Fall, calls the play "a deliberately wayward and fanciful piece" (p. 42). On the other hand, many critics consider Jones' realism and his view of the drama as a criticism of life to be attributes which make him an important figure in the development of modern drama. See Sawyer, Comedy of Manners, p. 91; Rahill, World of Melodrama, p. 181; Hudson, English Stage, pp. 84, 90; Alan S. Downer, The British Drama: A Handbook and Brief Chronicle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1950), p. 288; cited below as British Drama. See also Nicoll, British Drama, p. 238.

⁵⁹ Sir Henry Arthur Jones, The Masqueraders, in British Plays, ed. Bailey, II.474. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁶⁰ See Chapter One, pp. 34-36.

⁶¹ Patricia Thomson's comments in The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal, 1837-1873 (London: Oxford UP, 1956), apply equally well to the drama's heroine (pp. 101, 158); cited below as Victorian Heroine. See also Epifanio San Juan, Jr., The Art of Oscar Wilde (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967), p. 155. Both critics point to society's mercantile attitude to marriage and the woman's often unhappy place within the marriage.

⁶² Ashley Thorndike, in English Comedy, makes the point that, although The Masqueraders is a satire, Jones preaches conformity to social convention (pp. 564-5). Downer, in British Drama, also suggests that Jones, at the same time as he is critical of middle-class morality, is also morally conventional (p. 296). See also Cordell, Henry Arthur Jones, p. 117; Sawyer, Comedy of Manners, p. 171; Taylor, Rise and Fall, p. 39; Hudson, English Stage, p. 91. Rowell, in Victorian Theatre, goes further. In Rowell's view, the lovers "renounce happiness at the dictates of convention," and they do so in a way which "sounds an ominous note of cant" (p. 120).

⁶³ John Burgoyne, The Heiress, in British Theatre, 13, I.ii.17.

⁶⁴ Sir Henry Arthur Jones, The Liars, in Victorian Plays, 1890-1914, ed. George Rowell (London: Oxford UP, 1968), I.101. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁶⁵ C. H. Hazelwood, Lady Audley's Secret, in Nineteenth-Century Plays, ed. Rowell, II.i.252.

⁶⁶ Thorndike, in English Comedy, states that the characters in the play "represent the manners and ideas of upper-class London society of the day" (p. 566). Herring, in "Nineteenth-Century Drama," refers to the play as a "society drama" (84), and Booth, in his Introduction, English Plays, 3, refers to its "domestic idealism" (p. 50). See also Cordell, Henry Arthur Jones, pp. 214, 219, 228; Rowell, Victorian Theatre, p. 121. Taylor, in Rise and Fall, calls it "a comedy of intrigue and sentiment which owes something to Sheridan" and "the example of Oscar Wilde" (p. 45). Nicoll, in British Drama, compares the humour to that of both Sheridan and Goldsmith (p. 241).

⁶⁷ Cordell, in Henry Arthur Jones, states that the play deals with the disastrous consequences of lying, and not the morality, or immorality, of lying (p. 223). See also Thorndike, English Comedy, pp. 567-8.

⁶⁸ Salerno, in his Introduction, English Drama in Transition, considers this type of character, of which Sir Christopher is one example, to be Jones' most successful type (p. 24). For a discussion of Jones' "raisonneur" and his moral and social role, see Cordell's Henry Arthur Jones, pp. 214, 221. Cordell also emphasizes that, although a

character like Sir Christopher is annoyingly earnest, the play is a comedy, not a problem play (p. 221). For his part, Taylor in Rise and Fall asserts that Jones turns "the materials of melodrama consistently to the uses of comedy" (p. 46).

69 Taylor brands the play a dramatic comedy (p. 73) which depends on technique (p. 76). On the other hand, Booth, in his Introduction, English Plays, 2, considers the play to be a "bitter comedy-drama" (p. 21). More recently, Edmund J. Miner, in "The Limited Naturalism of Arthur Pinero," Modern Drama, 19 (1976), discusses Pinero's treatment of society and its inhabitants (151-2), and concludes that, in The Benefit of the Doubt, Pinero satirizes society (158); cited below as "Limited Naturalism."

70 Although Beatrice is idealized (even her name suggests her idealistic character), she nonetheless has withstood a harsh environment, one which Sir Christopher feels only she (IV.143), and not Lady Jessica (149), can withstand. Therefore, Beatrice hardly conforms to what Savin in Thomas William Robertson calls the "frailty" of the nineteenth-century heroine (pp. 105-6). She may not be the "new woman" as Ibsen and Shaw painted her, but Beatrice's stamina, coupled with her depth of feeling, are rather distinctive attributes.

71 Thorndike, in English Comedy, notes the increasing attention paid to the place of woman in society (p. 513). See also Hudson, English Stage, p. 92; Booth, English Melodrama, p. 157; Miner, "Limited Naturalism," 157.

72 Edmund J. Miner, "The Novelty of Arthur Pinero's Court Farces," English Literature in Transition, 19:4 (1976), 302.

73 As Thomson, in Victorian Heroine, expresses it, the standard of judgment is still virtuousness in any treatment of the "fallen woman." Unlike the eighteenth-century reprobate, however, the fallen woman in the mid-nineteenth century must die as well as repent (p. 99). See also Rahill, World of Melodrama, p. 201; Booth, English Melodrama, p. 155. On a different note, San Juan, in Art of Oscar Wilde, asserts that the "fallen woman" does indeed reflect, at least in part, "the insidious effects of a double standard of morality, the ruthless indifference to feminine welfare" (p. 154). See also Cordell, Henry Arthur Jones, where he speaks of society's stern injustice (p. 166).

74 Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, in English Plays, 2, ed. Booth, I.257.

75 Heilman, in Tragedy and Melodrama, contends that the "serious" drama deals with the victims of society, but that these victims cannot be deviants from the "authoritarian norms of society" (p. 42). On the other hand, J. T. Grein, in reviewing Mrs. Dane's Defence, refers to

"the dread sentence of our conventional laws upon [the] victim," and concludes that Mrs. Dane's punishment makes her the pitiful example of "the inexorable laws of convention which condones the past of men and is merciless to women." See J. T. Grein, Mrs. Dane's Defence: Dramatic Criticism, 1900-1901, 1902, in Victorian Dramatic Criticism, ed. George Rowell (London: Methuen, 1971), pp. 246-247.

⁷⁶ Like Jones', Pinero's importance as a playwright has been assessed in various ways. Some critics complain that Pinero merely plays the new "game" of problem drama according to the old rules of a melodramatic framework and a conventional morality. See Downer, British Drama, p. 292; Hudson, English Stage, p. 118; Booth, Introduction, Hiss the Villain, p. 31; Booth, ed., Introduction, English Plays, 2, pp. 20, 21; Salerno, "Problem Play," 198, 201. See also George Bernard Shaw, "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith," The Saturday Review, 16 March 1895, in Victorian Dramatic Criticism, ed. Rowell, pp. 240, 243. Here, Shaw condemns Pinero by saying that the play centres on a hackneyed situation invested with the appearance of intellectual novelty. Max Beerbohm similarly accuses Pinero of writing technically good plays which are intellectually weak. See his review of "Letty", The Saturday Review, 17 October 1903, in Victorian Dramatic Criticism, p. 248. On the other hand, Chapman, in Victorian Debate, suggests that Pinero is in the mainstream of modern drama (pp. 341-2), and Nicoll in British Drama gives Pinero credit for being a pioneer in the development of the theatre of ideas (p. 237). More recently, following Hamilton's view in Introduction, Social Plays of Pinero (p. 38), Miner in "Limited Naturalism," discusses Pinero's plays as dramas of characters (153).

⁷⁷ Thomson, in Victorian Heroine, notes that the "disastrous consequences of free marriage formed a recurrent theme in the novel" (fn., p. 158).

⁷⁸ Booth, in Introduction, English Plays, 2, suggests that melodramatic devices frequently nullify Pinero's ambitious treatment of an important social issue (p. 21). See also Rowell, Victorian Theatre, p. 117.

⁷⁹ Sir Henry Arthur Jones, Mrs. Dane's Defence, in English Plays, 2, ed. Booth, IV.415. Taylor, in Rise and Fall, states that Lady Eastney introduces ironies and ambiguities into the play (p. 48) and not, as I suggest, a very cogent criticism of society. But the fourth act is not "superfluous," as Cordell in Henry Arthur Jones would argue (p. 164), or as, earlier, J. T. Grein in "Mrs. Dane's Defence," Dramatic Criticism, 1900-1901, contended. See Victorian Dramatic Criticism, ed. Rowell, pp. 245-6.

⁸⁰ While Taylor, in Rise and Fall, contends that the play fails to measure up to the questions posed in the first three acts (p. 69), and Hudson, in English Stage, asserts that Pinero does not propound a "new moral code" (p. 92), Miner, in "Limited Naturalism," argues

convincingly that Pinero's main focus is the individual in conflict with social convention (149, 159). For a discussion of Pinero's mixture of comedy and sentiment, see also Hamilton, ed., Introduction, Social Plays of Pinero, p. 7; Rowell, Victorian Theatre, p. 113; Taylor, Rise and Fall, pp. 53, 57; Salerno, ed., Introduction, English Drama in Transition, p. 82; Stedman, "General Utility," 292. Wilde's views on the matter are not unlike Pinero's. See Chapter XI, p. 315-316.

⁸¹ Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, Sweet Lavender (1891; rpt. London: William Heinemann, 1914), III.179. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁸² Sydney Grundy, A Pair of Spectacles, in Nineteenth Century Plays, ed. Rowell, I.526. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically. Nicoll, in British Drama, calls the play "a rather mawkish commentary on contemporary social life" (p. 234), while Taylor, in Rise and Fall, suggests that the play reveals an elementary symbolism (p. 33).

⁸³ For a discussion of Gilbert's topsy-turvyism, sentiment, satire and fantasy, see Thorndike, English Comedy, pp. 540, 545, 549; Nicoll, British Drama, p. 229; Sawyer, Comedy of Manners, pp. 82-3; Downer, British Drama, p. 285; Rowell, Victorian Theatre, p. 95; Taylor, Rise and Fall, p. 32; Chapman, Victorian Debate, p. 343; John Bush Jones, "Gilbertian Humour: Pulling Together a Definition," The Victorian Newsletter, 33 (Spring, 1968), 28-31; cited below as "Gilbertian Humour." See also Hudson, English Stage, pp. 50, 78, 106.

⁸⁴ W. S. Gilbert, Engaged, in British Plays, ed. Bailey, I.410, and III.430. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically. A. B. Walkley, in his review, "The Importance of Being Earnest," Speaker, 23 February 1895, calls Engaged "grim." See Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage, ed. Karl Beckson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 197; cited below as Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson. See also Stedman who, in "General Utility," calls it "eccentric" (295).

⁸⁵ Romaldi and Montano in Thomas Holcroft's A Tale of Mystery, 1802, for example, strike "attitudes" and glare at each other. See British Plays, ed. Bailey, I.229.

⁸⁶ In The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture (1951; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1964), Jerome Hamilton Buckley states that in Patience Gilbert "exposed to Philistine laughter" the mannerisms of the Aesthetes (p. 219). Herring, in "Nineteenth-Century Drama," goes further. The play, he says, is also a "deliberate burlesque of melodramatic conventions" (86). However, Jane W. Stedman, in "The Genesis of Patience," MP, 66 (August, 1968), indicates that, initially,

Gilbert's poets were clergymen and that the satire on aestheticism came later (48, 50); cited below as "Genesis of Patience." See The Letters of Oscar Wilde, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Butler and Tanner, 1962), where Davis makes the point that the "Fleshly Poet," Bunthorne, "was generally taken as a caricature of Wilde" (p. 85); cited below as Letters, Hart-Davis.

⁸⁷ W. S. Gilbert, Dramatis Personae, Patience, in Laurel British Drama, ed. Corrigan, p. 171. All further references will be to this edition, and will be documented parenthetically.

⁸⁸ Downer, in British Drama, asserts that Gilbert "clearly stands alone among the playwrights of his age, both as a literary man and a critic of human foibles" (p. 286). Booth, in his Introduction, English Plays, 3, comes to the same conclusion (p. 43). As I discuss later, Wilde owes a great deal to Gilbert's merry world of topsy-turvy nonsense, but Gilbert can hardly be said to "stand alone." Not only Wilde, but Shaw, would fit Downer's description of Gilbert.

⁸⁹ John Westland Marston, The Patrician's Daughter, in British Plays, ed. Bailey, I.i.112.

⁹⁰ As Thorndike in English Comedy asseverates, Wilde's contribution to the drama is "an overflowing measure of wit" (p. 574).

Notes: Chapter Eleven

¹ See Hume, "Supposed Revolution," p. 267. Booth, in his Introduction, English Plays, 2, makes a similar point, namely, that nineteenth-century plays and techniques "can be related forwards as well as backwards" (p. 23).

² Joseph Addison, "The Spectator," 40, 16 April 1711, in The Spectator, 1, ed. Bond, p. 170. Booth, in his Introduction, English Plays, 3, speaks of the "intermingling of serious and comic elements" in nineteenth-century drama, which attempts to blend, rather than to alternate these elements (p. 50).

³ Wilde also recognized the value of contrast. As he says in a letter to Marie Prescott, ? March-April 1883: "You can produce tragic effects by introducing comedy." See Letters, ed. Hart-Davis, p. 143. According to Wilde, "raising a laugh" does not destroy tragedy, but intensifies it (p. 143).

⁴ A. E. Dyson, in "The Socialist Aesthete," The Listener, 66, 24 August 1961, makes the point that "the tragic, the heroic, the comic are triumphs of form which life, again, only hints at, and art alone can make real" (273). Richard Ellmann, in his Introduction, The Artist as Critic: The Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde (London: W. H. Allen, 1970), reiterates the point that, in Wilde's view, art isolates itself from experience and its "unreality" (p. xx); cited below as Artist as Critic.

⁵ For a discussion of Wilde's rejection of morality in art, see Richard Ellmann, ed., Introduction, Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 3; cited below as Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann. See also Dyson, "Socialist Aesthete," 273; J. E. Chamberlin, "Oscar Wilde and the Importance of Doing Nothing," Hudson Review, 25 (Spring, 1972), passim; cited below as "Importance of Doing Nothing." Some critics point to Wilde's social concerns. See Ellen Berland, Form and Content in the Plays of Oscar Wilde, Diss. Columbia University 1970 (Ann Arbor: Xerox University Microfilms, 1974), p. 2; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 203.

⁶ For a discussion of the conventional treatment of moral issues in nineteenth-century drama, see Cordell, Henry Arthur Jones, p. 252; Beckson, ed., Introduction, Oscar Wilde, pp. 1-2; Hudson, English Stage, p. 93. See also Chapter X, pp. 297-298. Martin, in Triumph of Wit, does, however, indicate that, although the Victorians question whether comedy has a serious purpose or not (p. 2), nineteenth-century drama undergoes a gradual shift from an "amiable, sentimental" approach (p. vii) to an intellectual one (pp. vii, viii, ix, 3). By the end of the nineteenth century, sentiment had become the "butt" of comedy (pp. 99-100).

⁷ Christopher S. Nassaar, Into the Demon Universe: A Literary Exploration of Oscar Wilde (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1974), uses Sybil Vane as an example of what happens when the artist rejects art for life (pp. 47-48); cited below as Into the Demon Universe.

⁸ For a discussion of this point, see Ellmann, ed., Introduction, Artist as Critic, pp. xx-xxi. Herod, in Wilde's Salomé, says: "Only in mirrors should one look, for mirrors do but show us masks" (p. 571). See also A. E. Dyson, The Crazy Fabric: Essays in Irony (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 144; cited below as Crazy Fabric. See also Dyson's "Socialist Aesthete," 273.

⁹ For a discussion of the importance of form to Wilde's view of art, see Arthur Ganz, "The Meaning of The Importance of Being Earnest," Modern Drama, 6 (May, 1963), 49; cited below as "Meaning of Importance." Nassaar, however, in Into the Demon Universe, contends that James Vane and his mother are themselves melodramatic (p. 51).

¹⁰ Many critics also mention this point. See Dyson, "Socialist Aesthete," 274; Ellmann, ed., Introduction, Oscar Wilde, p. 3; Barish, "Antitheatrical Prejudice," 283, 285; Dennis J. Spinninger, "Profiles and Principles: The Sense of the Absurd in The Importance of Being Earnest," PLL, 12 (Winter, 1976), 57; cited below as "Profiles and Principles." Wilde himself, in a letter to Alfred Douglas, January-March 1897, which Ross would later publish as De Profundis, asserts: "I treated Art as the supreme reality, and life as a mere mode of fiction." See Letters, ed. Hart-Davis, p. 466.

¹¹ See Chapter I, pp. 28-29.

¹² See Jackson, Eighteen Nineties, pp. 57, 96; Dyson, Crazy Fabric, p. 142; Dyson, "Socialist Aesthete," 273.

¹³ In a letter to Marie Prescott, ? March-April, 1883, Wilde asserts that "the drama appeals to human nature." See Letters, ed. Hart-Davis, p. 143. In his letter to Alfred, Lord Douglas, January-March 1897, Wilde describes the drama as "the most objective form known to art." While he may incline to self-aggrandizement in the letter, Wilde does indicate

his own personal contribution to the drama when he says that he "made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or the sonnet, at the same time that [he] widened its range and enriched its characterisation" (p. 466). At least in characters like Lord Goring and Mrs. Erlynne, in the early plays and the entire cast of The Importance of Being Earnest, in the later one, Wilde in many ways assesses his contribution quite rightly. Many critics, as I have earlier acknowledged, do grant Wilde a prominent place in the annals of drama because of his view of art and because of his treatment of the dandy.

¹⁴ See Chapter V, pp. 138-140.

¹⁵ Although Cordell, in Henry Arthur Jones, dismisses Wilde's comedies as "strange compounds of melodrama and superimposed epigram," and therefore quite apart from the mainstream of English drama (p. 72), Helmut E. Gerber, in "The Nineties: Beginning, End, or Transition?", in Edwardians and Late Victorians, English Institute Essays, 1959, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Columbia UP, 1960), argues that Wilde is "a many-faceted artist discovering new relationships" between genres (p. 60); cited below as "The Nineties," Edwardians and Late Victorians, ed. Ellmann.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the connection between art and lying in Wilde's aesthetic view, see George Woodcock, The Paradox of Oscar Wilde (New York: MacMillan, 1950), p. 128; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 7; Richard Foster, "Wilde as Parodist: A Second Look at The Importance of Being Earnest," CE, 18 (October, 1956), 20; cited below as "Wilde as Parodist." See also Salerno, ed., Introduction, The Importance of Being Earnest, in English Drama in Transition, p. 145; Chamberlin, "Oscar Wilde," 208-9.

¹⁷ Unlike the mendacious servants in Restoration comedy, and unlike a "lying valet" of Sharp's stamp in Garrick's play of the same name, Wilde's liars do not lie merely in order to outwit or cheat others. William G. McCollom, in The Divine Average: A View of Comedy (Cleveland and London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1971), suggests that in Wilde's plays wit is better than truth (p. 108); cited below as Divine Average.

¹⁸ Words, for example, entrance Dorian, for words "seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things" (Chapter 2, p. 30). And in The Critic as Artist, Gilbert asserts: "It is only by language that we rise above [the lower animals], or above each other - by language, which is the parent, and not the child, of thought" (p. 1023). Spinger, in "Profiles and Principles," also speaks of the power of words in Wilde's play and their importance to his comic vision (68).

¹⁹ Sir Richard Steele, "The Tatler," 219, 1 September 1710, in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy, ed. McMillin, p. 369. Algernon in The Importance of Being Earnest asserts that his comment "is perfectly phrased! And quite as true as any observation in civilised life should be" (I.335).

²⁰ Many critics point to Wilde's indebtedness to Gilbert. See Bailey, ed., Introduction, British Plays, p. 28; Chapman, Victorian Debate, p. 344; Booth, ed., Introduction, English Plays, 3, pp. 47-8. However, many critics also point to Wilde's indebtedness to past traditions, and some refer specifically to such earlier playwrights as Congreve and Sheridan. See George Bernard Shaw, "My Memories of Oscar Wilde," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, p. 105; Beckson, ed., Introduction, Oscar Wilde, p. 30; Ernest Newman, "On Wilde's Genius for Paradox," The Free Review, 1 June 1895, in Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, p. 205; J. T. Grein, "On The Importance of Being Earnest," Sunday Times, 8 December 1901, p. 240; A. B. Walkley, Introduction, The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Vol. vii, 1923, in Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, p. 400; Werner, Vordtriede, "A Dramatic Device in Faust and The Importance of Being Earnest," MLN, 70 (December, 1955), 585; Morris Freedman, "The Modern Tragicomedy of Wilde and O'Casey," CE, 25 (April, 1964), 522; cited below as Vordtriede, "Dramatic Device" and Freedman, "Modern Tragicomedy." See also San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, pp. 197, 203; Salerno, ed., Introduction, The Importance of Being Earnest, in English Drama in Transition, pp. 144-5; Booth, ed., Introduction, English Plays, 3, p. 48; Hudson, English Stage, p. 99. On the other hand, other critics do stress the element of newness in Wilde's plays, particularly in The Importance of Being Earnest. See Jackson, Eighteen Nineties, p. 203; Gerber, "The Nineties," in Edwardians and Late Victorians, ed. Ellmann, p. 60; Foster, "Wilde as Parodist," 20; Nicoll, British Drama, pp. 242-3; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 203; Eric Bentley, "The Importance of Being Earnest," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, p. 112; McCollom, Divine Average, p. 37.

²¹ Harold E. Toliver, "Wilde and the Importance of 'Sincere' and Studied Triviality," Modern Drama, 5 (February, 1963), 397; cited below as "Sincere and Studied Triviality." In San Juan's view, in Art of Oscar Wilde, the comedies explore "the duality between what the characters show on the surface and what they really are inside" (p. 200).

²² Gilbert in The Critic as Artist says: "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth" (p. 1045). See also Spinger, "Profiles and Principles," 69.

²³ Mrs. Marchmont in An Ideal Husband asserts that London society is "entirely made up of dowdies and dandies" (I.491). Ganz, in "Meaning of Importance," speaks of the dandies (42) and of the "middle-class, Philistine society of [Wilde's] day," with its "coarseness, its pitiless morality, and its incomprehension of beauty" (43). See also his article,

"The Divided Self in the Society Comedies of Oscar Wilde," Modern Drama, 3, (May, 1960), where he speaks of the tension between the sentimental plot and the dandiacal world (16); cited below as "Divided Self." Indeed, Dyson, in Crazy Fabric, argues that the comedies represent "a running battle against obtuseness, hypocrisy and cant" (p. 145).

24 Most critics emphasize the importance of the dandy to Wilde's view of art and its expression in his work. See Sawyer, Comedy of Manners, p. 157; Jackson, Eighteen Nineties, pp. 98-9; Woodcock, Paradox of Oscar Wilde, p. 220; Ganz, "Divided Self," 19-21; Ganz, "Meaning of Importance," 44; Ian Gregor, "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," Sewanee Review, 74 (April-June, 1966), 501-2, 512; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 179; Joseph Stein, "The New Woman and the Decadent Dandy," Dalhousie Review, 55 (Spring, 1975), 55.

25 James M. Ware, in "Algernon's Appetite: Oscar Wilde's Hero as Restoration Dandy," English Literature in Transition, 13:1 (1970), compares Algernon as dandy to the Restoration hero as a man of mode (17); cited below as "Algernon's Appetite."

26 Booth, in his Introduction, English Plays, 2, remarks that the buttonhole is the sign of the villain (p. 16), an interesting remark given, as I describe later, the dandy's sometimes villainous inclinations. Geoffrey Stone, in "Serious Bunburyism: The Logic of 'The Importance of Being Earnest,'" Essays in Criticism, 26 (January, 1976), states that Wilde frequently used "an Intelligent Bad Man" to express his views (29); cited below as "Serious Bunburyism." Conversely, Chamberlin, in "Importance of Doing Nothing," suggests that the buttonhole represents the "only link between Art and Nature" (205).

27 See also Tave, Amiable Humorist, p. viii; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 199. For a discussion of the epigram, and Wilde's use of it, see Jackson, Eighteen Nineties, p. 100; Hudson, English Stage, p. 58; Julian Hawthorne's review of Dorian Gray, Lippincott's, September, 1890, xlvii, in Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, p. 80; W. Outram Tristram's review of Lady Windermere's Fan, Black and White, 27 February 1892, in Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, p. 127.

28 Some critics mention this aspect of the dandy's role. See Downer, British Drama, p. 291; Dyson, Crazy Fabric, p. 146; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 202. In his letter to Alfred, Lord Douglas, January-March 1897, Wilde makes the same claim for himself when he writes: "I summed up all systems in a phrase, and all existence in an epigram." See Letters, ed. Hart-Davis, p. 466.

29 For a discussion of the conventional nature of Wilde's plays, see J. T. Grein, "On Wilde as a Dramatist," Sunday Special, 9 and 16 December 1900, in Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, pp. 233, 235; A. B. Walkley, Introduction, The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, New York, 1923, in

Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, p. 402; Sawyer, Comedy of Manners, p. 154-156; Marvin Mudrick, "Restoration Comedy," in English Stage Comedy, ed. Wimsatt, p. 122; Vordtriiede, "Dramatic Device," 585; Rowell, Victorian Theatre, pp. 109, 110; Gregor, "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," 506; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, pp. 197-8; Salerno, ed., Introduction, English Drama in Transition, pp. 18, 19; St. John Hankin, "Wilde as a Dramatist," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, pp. 61-2, 66; Ware, "Algernon's Appetite," 22; Beckson, ed., Introduction, Oscar Wilde, p. 14; Nassaar, Into the Demon Universe, pp. 73, 75. However, many critics also acknowledge Wilde's distinction as a dramatist. See Woodcock, Paradox of Oscar Wilde, pp. 181, 238; Ganz, "Divided Self," 16; Freedman, "Modern Tragic-comedy," 519-520; Ellmann, ed., Introduction, The Artist as Critic, p. xxiii.

³⁰ Gregor, in "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," makes a similar point when he states that the play's central theme is "the hazards of precipitate and inflexible moral judgment" (503). David Parker, in "Oscar Wilde's Great Farce, The Importance of Being Earnest," MLQ, 35 (June, 1974), also refers to the theme of "sentimental education," which, he argues, is "parodied by inversion" in Wilde's comic masterpiece (182); cited below as "Wilde's Great Farce."

³¹ Nassaar, in Into the Demon Universe, contends that Lord Henry is the devil to which Dorian sells his soul, and further argues that Lord Henry is both external to Dorian and a "voice within him" (p. 38). On the other hand, Freedman, in "Modern Tragicomedy," considers the book to be a study in the "tragedy of affluence" (522). Barbara Charlesworth, in "The Solitary Prison of Oscar Wilde," Spectrum, 6 (Winter-Spring, 1963), speaks of Lord Henry as a moral contrast to Basil Hallward (101); cited below as "Solitary Prison."

³² See Nassaar, Into the Demon Universe, where he suggests that Dorian is an "instrument" for Lord Henry's art (pp. 41, and 43-4). The Baron Arnheim in An Ideal Husband also has a significant, if not quite what Nassaar would call "demonic," effect on Mrs. Cheveley. See pp. 341-343 above.

³³ Sybil Vane cannot, of course, transfer art into life. See Nassaar, p. 47.

³⁴ Many critics point to the play as yet another instance of either a melodrama or a society problem play. For a discussion of the play as a melodrama, see Toliver, "Sincere and Studied Triviality," 395; Booth, English Melodrama, p. 176; Booth, ed., Introduction, English Plays, 2 p. 20; Hudson, English Stage, p. 101. For a discussion of the play as a conventional society drama, see Taylor, Rise and Fall, pp. 89, 90; Chapman, Victorian Debate, p. 344; Booth, ed., Introduction, English Plays, 3, p. 47; George Woodcock, "The Social Rebel," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, p. 156. Indeed, as already mentioned, critics generally do

acknowledge the play's debt to past traditions. Hesketh Pearson, for example, in Oscar Wilde: His Life and Wit (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), claims that, since Sheridan's The School for Scandal, no other play had appeared with which to compare Wilde's Lady Windermere's Fan (p. 198); cited below as Oscar Wilde. San Juan, in Art of Oscar Wilde, suggests that Wilde's play "applies the elegant conversation of Congreve to nineteenth-century domestic drama" (p. 202), and Ware, in "Algernon's Appetite," avers, albeit in a note, that "the earlier plays are comedies of manners" (fn. 10, 26).

³⁵ Ganz remarks in "Divided Self," the villain invariably is a dandy (21). Gregor, in "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," makes the point that the dandy ever has a "social sense of what is fitting" (504). Stein, however, in "New Woman and the Decadent Dandy," claims that Lord Darlington, like Lord Illingworth, is aging and disreputable and that he, too, is defeated by the moral strength of a woman (59).

³⁶ Worthy tells Berinthia that he intends "one short campaign with Amanda." Vanbrugh, The Relapse, ed. Zimansky, III.ii.68. For a discussion of Worthy, see Chapter VI, pp. 168-169.

³⁷ Toliver, "Sincere and Studied Triviality," asserts that it is "an education in moral cliché" (395). Ganz, in "Divided Self," argues that the stock figure of a "woman-with-a-past" Wilde uses for his own ends namely, his central concern with Lady Windermere's "education" (17).

³⁸ Mrs. Erlynne's character has provoked some critical comment. Freedman, in "Modern Tragicomedy," considers the play to be "peculiarly modern tragedy," where "provincial standards of feeling and conduct" and an inordinate regard for a superficial society determine the actions of characters who, ultimately, are "pathetic" because of their slavery to such a society (519). Finally, he sees both mother and daughter simply as instances of impulsive folly (519). In "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," Gregor sees a discrepancy between Mrs. Erlynne's role as a "fallen woman" eager to re-enter society, and her role of "Wildean commentator." Gregor asserts that her "crisscross" roles in the plot make us "react critically to sentiments which we are meant to approve" (505). More recently, Stein, in "New Woman and the Decadent Dandy," sees one of Wilde's basic themes to be what Stein calls the "antagonism between modern women and the dandy." One of these modern women is, of course, the traditional "femme fatale" (58). In a sense, Stein is correct. Just as Gertrude and the Reverend Winterfield are opposed to St. Olpherts in The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, Lord Darlington and Mrs. Erlynne in Lady Windermere's Fan urge Lady Windermere to different courses of action.

³⁹ As San Juan states in Art of Oscar Wilde, such dowagers as the Duchess of Berwick are the "upholders of traditional prejudices" and, as

such, they are often "capricious and fatuous." She, for example, is a "tireless chatterbox," who "changes opinions for convenience" (p. 202).

⁴⁰ For a discussion of illusion and its place in comedy, see San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 200; Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (New York: Atheneum, 1967), pp. 169-170. Eric Bentley, in The Life of the Drama (1964; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1974), speaks of illusions and realities, and their importance to the Shavian drama of ideas (p. 136).

⁴¹ Few critics see the significance of such a scene, with respect either to Wilde's aesthetic views or to his comedy. Ruth A. Temple, in "The Ivory Tower as Lighthouse," in Edwardians and Late Victorians, ed. Ellmann, claims that Wilde all too frequently indulges in a sophisticated sentimentality (p. 39). Ganz, in "Divided Self," claims that, in Wilde's plays, "the outcast is always repentant and desires forgiveness" (17). Freedman, in "Modern Tragicomedy," also seems to think that Mrs. Erlynne, in a "final renunciation scene, which can so easily be read as melodrama," capitulates to a society intent on enslaving the individual (520). Rahill, in World of Melodrama, suggests that, in the 1860's the "technically bad woman" has a "good heart," and she "redeems her scarlet past with generous and noble acts of repentance" (p. 202). Conversely, Frederick Wedmore, in his review of the play, in Academy, 5 March 1892, considers Mrs. Erlynne's lack of repentance to be in keeping with her character and, as he suggests, what would Mrs. Erlynne "do among the proprieties and domesticities?" Similarly, in a letter which appeared in Theatre, 1 June 1893, another contemporary of Wilde's considers Mrs. Erlynne to be one of Wilde's best characters and his treatment of her to be superior. See Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, pp. 128, 157-158.

⁴² As Richard Ellmann suggests in "Two Faces of Edward," in Edwardians and Late Victorians, ed. Ellmann, writers of the period usually used some "unifying event or object" as their thematic centre (p. 200). An unsigned review of the play, which appeared in Black and White, 27 February 1892, states that the play owes both its title and its theme to a "piece of domestic furniture," and further considers plays which are "built up round some inanimate object" to be "boring." See Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, p. 126. Downer, in British Drama, argues that Wilde merely relies on stage tricks to create suspense, and one of his tricks is the fan itself (p. 290).

⁴³ A. B. Walkley's review of the play, Speaker, 27 February 1892, in Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, points to Wilde's breaking conventions (pp. 119-122). Similarly, George Alexander's review of the play, which appeared in Westminster Review, April 1892, also calls the play "original" as well as clever. See Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, p. 130. See also Morse Peckham, "What Did Lady Windermere Learn?", CE, 18 (October, 1956), where he discusses Wilde's technique of not completing traditional patterns (11-18).

⁴⁴ Originally, the play's title was to have been A Good Woman. See Wilde's letter to Augustin Daly, Autumn 1891, in Letters, ed. Hart-Davis, p. 296. For comments on Lady Windermere's assessment of her mother, see Toliver, "Sincere and Studied Triviality," 395, and Gregor, "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," 507.

⁴⁵ On the one hand, some critics view the play as an oblique criticism of society. See Stone, "Serious Bunburyism," 29-30. Other critics point to the play's brilliant dialogue as well as to its sentimental treatment of its subject. See Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 572; Jackson, Eighteen Nineties, p. 190; Woodcock, Paradox of Oscar Wilde, p. 162; Woodcock, "Social Rebel," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, p. 156. Woodcock, however, does point to the play's emphatic portrayal of sexual and social issues (p. 157). San Juan, in Art of Oscar Wilde, views the play as a dramatization of the "conflicting attitudes" with respect to vice and virtue (p. 203), and E. H. Mikhail, in "Self-Revelation in An Ideal Husband," Modern Drama, 11 (September, 1968), speaks of the play as yet another instance of Wilde's "conspicuous" interest in the outcast (180); cited below as "Self-Revelation."

⁴⁶ Earlier, the more piously righteous Kelvil had made a similar observation when he said: "I am afraid, too, that Lord Illingworth regards woman simply as a toy" (I.439).

⁴⁷ In Into the Demon Universe, Nassaar claims that Mrs. Arbuthnot "robs" Lord Illingworth of his son, "the symbol of his virility" (p. 119). Gerald's own hostility towards his father, however, has some significant part to play in his refusal to be with the man who not only debauched his mother, but who also attempted to debauch Hester.

⁴⁸ In his review of the play, World, 26 April 1893, William Archer wonders what all the "melodrama" is about. He queries: "But why all this agony? Why all this hatred?" He suggests that maybe, after all, "she has suffered from a stubborn determination to be unhappy." See Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, p. 146. San Juan, in Art of Oscar Wilde, makes a similar point (p. 162). Nassaar, in Into the Demon Universe, considers her to be "a true daughter of Herodias, a cultured Victorian version of Salome" (p. 115).

⁴⁹ As Gregor suggests in "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," Lord Illingworth's observations in general point out the "rigidity and self-satisfaction behind Hester's puritan values and Mrs. Arbuthnot's religious grief" (508). While San Juan, in Art of Oscar Wilde, speaks of Lord Illingworth's perception and Mrs. Arbuthnot's refusal to compromise (p. 159), Nassaar, in Into the Demon Universe, claims that the play substantiates Lord Illingworth's curt words (p. 113).

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the kinship between the two women, and the significance of their retreat into the garden at the end of the play, see Nassaar, Into the Demon Universe, pp. 110, 116, 118.

⁵¹ Cf. Gregor, in "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," who claims that the play ends with a "routine melodramatic finale," and that the dandy has been "degraded into a melodramatic villain" (509).

⁵² For a brief discussion of the "well-made" play, see Salerno, ed., Introduction, English Drama in Transition, p. 17, and Hudson, English Stage, p. 97. Beckson, in his Introduction, Oscar Wilde, notes that the society comedies are written "within the framework of the well-made play" (p. 14). See also Ganz, "Meaning of Importance," 44. Nassar, in Into the Demon Universe, also discusses the structure as an important part of the play (pp. 115, 118).

⁵³ Nassaar would have it that, given the play's theme of corrupt humanity, Mrs. Arbuthnot is, therefore, "a woman of no importance because she is like everybody else in this respect" (p. 119).

⁵⁴ Wilde himself, in a letter to Alfred, Lord Douglas, January-March 1897, states that he penned "comedies that were to beat Congreve for brilliancy." See Letters, ed. Hart-Davis, p. 500. Some critics would agree that not only is Wilde's epigrammatic brilliance worthy of note, but also it is part of dramatic tradition. See San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 197; Salerno, ed., Introduction, English Drama in Transition, pp. 18-19; E. H. Mikhail, "Oscar Wilde and his First Comedy," Modern Drama, 10 (February, 1968), 395; Booth, ed., Introduction, English Plays, 3, p. 47.

⁵⁵ In Congreve's The Way of the World, for example, the "black box" containing the necessary legal documents nicely resolves the conflict between Fainall and Mirabell. And in Steele's The Conscious Lovers, Indiana's trinket luckily helps to re-unite her with her long-lost father.

⁵⁶ Mrs. Grundy, in Morton's Speed the Plough, is an obvious instance of the off-stage character who is frequently mentioned, but who is never seen.

⁵⁷ A. B. Walkley, however, in his review of An Ideal Husband, Speaker, 12 January 1895, declares that Wilde "flatters the public" and "presents it with a false picture of life which it likes to fancy true." See Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, p. 180. San Juan, in Art of Oscar Wilde, considers the character of Lord Goring, as well as Wilde's "light parody of romantic love," to be Wilde's only innovations to what San Juan considers to be a conventional well-made play (p. 203). George Woodcock's "Social Rebel," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, stresses the play's very

"open attack on the social system" (p. 157). George Bernard Shaw's review of the play, Saturday Review, 12 January 1895, in Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, states that "the modern note is struck in Sir Robert Chiltern's assertion of the individuality and courage of his wrongdoing" (p. 177). In "Solitary Prison," Charlesworth argues that, in the character of Lord Chiltern, Wilde continues to explore, as he had done in The Picture of Dorian Gray, "the validity of conscience" (105). Many critics point to the theme of corruption. See, for example, Gregor, "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," 511; Mikhail, "Self-Revelation," 183; George Woodcock, "Social Rebel," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, p. 157.

⁵⁸ Nassaar, in Into the Demon Universe, suggests that the Chiltern's household resembles "a nonhuman art world" (p. 123).

⁵⁹ The device has been the subject of critical comment. A. B. Walkley's review, in Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, calls it a hackneyed "klepto-dramatic" device (p. 182), and Gregor, in "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," considers it to be rather "arbitrary" as a device and rather too "casually" introduced (510). San Juan, in Art of Oscar Wilde, however, compares the intrigue to the screen scene in The School for Scandal (p. 203).

⁶⁰ For a discussion of Lord Goring's amorous entanglements, see Gregor, "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," who considers Mabel to be a minor figure and Lord Goring to be free of commitment (509); Stein, in "New Woman and the Decadent Dandy," who views the affairs as the traditional confrontation between the dandy and the femme fatale, on the one hand, and the new woman, on the other (59); Nassaar, Into the Demon Universe, who views Lord Goring's entanglement with Mrs. Cheveley as an early "brush with the demon universe" (p. 128).

⁶¹ Dyson, in "Socialist Aesthete," argues that the moral thrust of Wilde's plays lies in this confrontation of "moral humbug parading as righteousness with moral good-heartedness parading as flippancy" (274). Rowell, in Victorian Theatre, grants that a character like Lord Goring does exemplify Wilde's originality, but he nonetheless concludes that, as a whole, the play is nothing more than an "anthology of stage clichés" (p. 110). However, Otto Reinert, in "Satiric Strategy in The Importance of Being Earnest," CE, 18(October, 1956), recognizes Lord Goring's distinctive role to be that of "the mocking mask of enlightened irony in a pompous society" (14); cited below as "Satiric Strategy."

⁶² Both Reinert (14) and Mikhail, in "Self-Revelation" (183), stress the underlying seriousness which the mask of frivolity conceals. Dyson, in Crazy Fabric, also states that the moralists fail to recognize this seriousness (p. 147).

⁶³ A significant part of Nassaar's argument in Into the Demon Universe centres around Wilde's plea for a balance between "evil and renunciation" (p. 103). But most critics point to the lessons which characters like the Chilterns must learn. Ganz, "Divided Self," 18; Gregor, "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," 510. But Charlesworth, in "Solitary Prison," argues that "the central conflict in the principal character is left unresolved," because he does, after all, preserve his public integrity and materially advances in the world (107).

⁶⁴ This play, more so than any other play of Wilde's, has received the widest critical attention. Wilde himself, in a letter to George Alexander, ? July 1894, spoke of the play as "an amusing thing with lots of fun and wit," a play whose charm lies in dialogue and not in plot. Later, in a letter to Reginald Turner, 20 March 1899, Wilde declared: "I like the play's irresponsibility and its obiter dicta." See Letters, ed. Hart-Davis, pp. 359, 786.

⁶⁵ Many critics point to the play's debt to past traditions. See Salerno, ed., Introduction, The Importance of Being Earnest, in English Drama in Transition, p. 144; Chapmen, Victorian Debate, p. 344; Ware, "Algernon's Appetite," 17, 25; Parker, "Wilde's Great Farce," 177. Some, of course, stress Wilde's particular indebtedness to Gilbert. See Note 20. For a discussion of the play as farce, see Reinert, "Satiric Strategy," 14-15; Foster, "Wilde as Parodist," 19; Otto Reinert, "The Courtship Dance in The Importance of Being Earnest," Modern Drama, 1 (February, 1959), 257; cited below as "Courtship Dance." See also Freedman, "Modern Tragicomedy," 522; Gregor, "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," 515; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 180; Taylor, Rise and Fall, p. 90; Parker, "Wilde's Great Farce," 175, 186. Most critics do admit, however, that the play is a difficult one to treat simply as farce. Robert J. Jordan, for example, in "Satire and Fantasy in Wilde's 'The Importance of Being Earnest,'" Ariel, 1 (July, 1970), treats the play as, in part, a delightful fancy (104); cited below as "Satire and Fantasy." In his review of the play, World, 20 February 1895, in Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, William Archer refers to it as "an iridescent filament of fantasy" (p. 190). Although Shaw's review of the play, Saturday Review, 23 February 1895, in Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, speaks of the play's sources (pp. 194-5), St. John Hankin's piece, "Wilde as Dramatist," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, points to Wilde's originality (pp. 61, 63). Mary McCarthy's article, "The Unimportance of Being Oscar," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, considers the play to be "a ferocious idyl" (p. 108). However, W. H. Auden's "An Improbable Life," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, calls the play "the only pure verbal opera in English" (p. 136). Other critics speak of the play's combination of seriousness and frivolity. See Spinger, "Profiles and Principles," 58; Stone, "Serious Bunburyism," 31.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of the importance to the play of Wilde's aesthetic views, see Ganz, "Meaning of Importance," 49; Salerno, ed., Introduction, The Importance of Being Earnest, in English Drama in Transition, p. 145;

Spininger, "Profiles and Principles," 64. In this regard, the role of the dandy also figures prominently in some critics' consideration of the play. See Ganz, "Divided Self," 23; Ganz, "Meaning of Importance," 42; Gregor, "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," 501, 512. Some critics see in the play a serious criticism of life which is close to satire. See H. G. Wells' review, Pall Mall Gazette, 15 February 1895, in Oscar Wilde, ed. Beckson, p. 188; Woodcock, Paradox of Oscar Wilde, p. 240; Foster, "Wilde as Parodist," 19, 20-22; Ellmann, ed., Introduction, Oscar Wilde, p. 8; Eric Bentley, "Importance of Being Earnest," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, pp. 112, 114; Parker, "Wilde's Great Farce," 177; Spininger, "Profiles Principles," 51, 55. On the other hand, some critics see the play as a lampoon or a parody of convention. See Downer, British Drama, p. 297; David Krause, ed., "Theatre of Dion Boucicault," in Dolmen Boucicault, p. 20; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 185.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the importance of society to the play, see Reinert, "Courtship Dance," 257; Freedman, "Modern Tragicomedy," 520. And for a discussion of the importance of appearances, see Arthur H. Nethercot, "Prunes and Miss Prism," Modern Drama, 6 (September, 1963), 115. Ganz, in "Meaning of Importance," views Lady Bracknell as a dandy who has a Philistine exterior (45), while Parker, in "Wilde's Great Farce," views the indomitable lady as a "creative power" who can will into being a social world (184-5). Jordan, in "Satire and Fantasy," considers her to be an "adult" figure in a world of child-like attitudes and innocence (106, 108), and Stone, in "Serious Bunburyism," refers to Lady Bracknell as a "dominant, even predatory" character (39). However, San Juan, in Art of Oscar Wilde, regards her simply as the representative of society and its laws (p. 187).

⁶⁸ As Lord Augustus says in Lady Windermere's Fan: "Demmed nuisance, relations! But they make one so demmed respectable" (II.399). San Juan states that, to have identity, one must have relations (p. 192).

⁶⁹ Northrop Frye, in Anatomy of Criticism, notes that the works of Wilde and Shaw "parody" melodramatic situations (p. 48). Nassaar, in Into the Demon Universe, argues that the play also mocks the "blind sentimentalism" to be found in a play like A Woman of No Importance (p. 144). A few critics do indicate Wilde's "literary burlesque" of past traditions. See Foster, "Wilde as Parodist," 22; Spininger, "Profiles and Principles," 68.

⁷⁰ Spininger, in "Profiles and Principles," cites this whole question-and-answer sequence as an example of the play's "verbal, if not intellectual, slapstick" (66).

⁷¹ San Juan, in Art of Oscar Wilde, quotes this speech as an instance of how Wilde manipulates a stock character to fit his themes (pp. 184-5). Jordan, in "Satire and Fantasy," also refers to this passage, and uses it as an example of the characters' "absence of a moral

sense" as well as their fundamental innocence in a world without evil (105). Reinert, in "Satiric Strategy," suggests that the "non-farcical" reality, however much it is "kept strictly outside the play" (15), nonetheless informs Wilde's "topsy-turvy" treatment (17). Ellmann, in his Introduction, Artist as Critic, makes a similar point: "much of the comedy derives from Wilde's own sense of the realities of what are being mocked" (p. xxviii).

⁷² some critics mention this point. See, for example, Charlesworth, "Solitary Prison," 108; Gregor, "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," 516; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, pp. 180; 193; Spinger, "Profiles and Principles," 52, 70.

⁷³ For a discussion of the Reverend Chausable and Miss Prism as fools, see Foster, "Wilde as Parodist," 19. Nethercot, in "Prunes and Miss Prism," discusses their assumed names (112); and Gregor, in "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," speaks of their eccentricity (518). Parker, in "Wilde's Great Farce," considers their characters to be parodies of the central characters; the moralists propound an order inimical to Wilde's vision (185). Vordtriede, in "Dramatic Device," views Miss Prism as "foolish and muddle-headed" (584), and Ganz, in "Meaning of Importance," remarks that "ordinary morality" is made to appear ridiculous, and even Miss Prism unintentionally propounds the "dandiacal attitude" (46). With respect to Miss Prism as a representative of prim morality, Nassaar in Into the Demon Universe contends that she is Wilde's "version of Mrs. Grundy," that nineteenth-century "comic personification of ultra-respectability" (p. 139). Parker, however, in "Wilde's Great Farce," views her, not only as the embodiment of the "Victorian" attitude toward "earnestness" (178), but also the "embodiment of aggressive masculine intelligence" (184).

⁷⁴ As Jordan expresses it in "Satire and Fantasy": "Instead of the conventional sentiment comes, more often than not, its complete negation" (101). And the "inversion of the platitude" sounds just as "plausible" as the platitude itself (101).

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the play's settings, see Reinert, "Satiric Strategy," 18; Vordtriede, "Dramatic Device," 584-5; Krause, ed., "Theatre of Dion Boucicault," in Dolmen Boucicault, p. 18; Mary McCarthy, "Unimportance of Being Oscar," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, pp. 108-9; Spinger, "Profiles and Principles," 70.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of "Bunburying," see Reinert, "Satiric Strategy," 16-18; Freedman, "Modern Tragicomedy," 519; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, pp. 181, 190-1; David Krause, "Defaced Angel," 92; W. H. Auden, "Improbable Life," in Oscar Wilde, ed. Ellmann, p. 129; Ellmann, ed., Introduction, Artist as Critic, p. xxvii; Nassaar, Into the Demon Universe, pp. 136-7; Ware, "Algernon's Appetite," 17, 23; Stone, "Serious Bunburyism," 37; Spinger, "Profiles and Principles," 60-1, 63-5.

77 For a discussion of the relation of reality to illusion, see Gregor, "Comedy and Oscar Wilde," 517, 518; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde p. 200; Salerno, ed., Introduction, The Importance of Being Earnest, in English Drama in Transition, p. 145; Jordan, "Satire and Fantasy," 107; Parker, "Wilde's Great Farce," 179, 183; Spinger, "Profiles and Principles," 52.

78 For a discussion of the interplay between triviality and seriousness in the play, see Toliver, "Sincere and Studied Triviality," 389-390, 394-395; Ganz, "Meaning of Importance," 43; Jordan, "Fantasy and Satire," 109; Ware, "Algernon's Appetite," 17, 23; Parker, "Wilde's Great Farce," 175, 177, 180; Spinger, "Profiles and Principles," 54. For a discussion of the play's title, and the importance of "earnestness" in the play, see Reinert, "Satiric Strategy," 17; Toliver, "Studied and Sincere Triviality," 396; Ganz, "Meaning of Importance," 5; San Juan, Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 193. See also Lord Illingworth's comment in A Woman of No Importance, where he says: "Taking sides is the beginning of sincerity, and earnestness follows shortly afterwards, and the human being becomes a bore" (I.437).

79 Reinert, in "Satiric Strategy," claims that one reason for Lady Bracknell's self-assurance is her achieving a "compromise between practical hardheadedness and conventional morality" (16). For a discussion of her practicality, see Foster, "Wilde as Parodist," 23; Stone, "Serious Bunburyism," 33.

80 For a discussion of the two heroines as comic figures of romance, see Foster, "Wilde as Parodist," 21-22. For a discussion of their hard-headed practicality, and their "new woman" attributes, see Jordan, "Satire and Fantasy," 102-103. For a discussion of the significance of their illusions, see Parker, "Wilde's Great Farce," 183.

81 San Juan, in Art of Oscar Wilde, summarizes Wilde's use of convention and his uniqueness in much the same way (p. 203). See also Nicoll, British Drama, p. 246.

82 See Letters, fn. 1, p. 362, and fn. 4, p. 829.

83 Foster, in "Wilde as Parodist," calls the play an "intellectual tour de force" (23). San Juan, in Art of Oscar Wilde, concludes his study by saying: "Wilde lends to caricature and satire a poise and dignity which offset the vulgar staginess of commonplace melodrama. At best Wilde renders the very rhythm of life" (p. 204).

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