DECEPTION AND SIGNIFICATION

IN

RESTORATION COMEDY

by

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Except where acknowledgement is made,

this thesis is my own work.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The word 'Restoration', as used in the title of this thesis, does not refer only to the period of the reign of Charles II. Despite at least one critic's use, in the interests of precision, of the phrase 'Comic Dramatists of the Restoration and Orange Periods' and F.W. Bateson's reminder that the more usual term is a misnomer,[1] 'Restoration comedy' remains a useful way of referring to the comedies of dramatists from John Dryden to George Farquhar. This thesis is chiefly concerned with the comedies of Dryden, Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve and, to a lesser extent, those of Vanbrugh and Farquhar. Mention is made of the works of lesser known dramatists when such mention seems to contribute to the discussion, while the comedies of Richard Steele are used to highlight some of the changes in comic theory and practice that occurred in the early eighteenth century.

Quotations from the comedies follow, where possible, the texts of the best available modern editions. Details of the texts used are given when the particular dramatist is first quoted. The date given after the first mention of a particular play refers to the year in which it was probably first presented. For seventeenth-century plays these were taken from Alfred Harbage's *Annals of English Drama* as revised by S. Schoenbaum, while for early eighteenth-century plays they came from *The London Stage 1660-1800, Part 2: 1700-1729*, ed. Emmett L. Avery.

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[1]W. Heldt, 'A Chronological and Critical Review of the Appreciation and Condemnation of the Comic Dramatists of the Restoration and Orange Periods', *Neophilogus*, VIII (1923), pp. 39-59; 109-128; 197-204. F.W. Bateson, 'Second Thoughts: II. L.C. Knights and Restoration Comedy', *Essays in Criticism*, VII (1957), p.63.

ABSTRACT

In John Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode*, Palamede's mistress Doralice disguises herself as a boy. In this disguise, she meets Palamede at an eating-house and initiates a conversation with him about love, women and, in particular, Palamede's mistress. She suggests, with obvious irony, that a mistress is quite likely to wish to meet her lover while disguised so as to better observe his behaviour and test his wit. A mistress might like to come to her lover 'like a riddle'. At this point, Palamede makes the fatal boast. He boldly asserts of his mistress, 'I could know her in any shape: my good Genius would prompt me to find out a handsome woman: there's something in her, that would attract me to her without my knowledge' (IV.iii.61-4). The boast, naturally enough, causes Palamede embarrassment when Doralice later discards her disguise. In Congreve's *Love for Love*, the foppish beau Tattle is forever boasting of his sexual conquests. When he comments in passing that Mrs Frail is a fine woman, Scandal promptly adds, 'Yes, Mrs. *Frail* is a very fine Woman; we all know her' (I.i.458-9). Scandal's comment is designed as a trap for Tattle. Consistent with his character, Tattle interprets the word 'know' in a sexual light. Scandal, pretending that no such meaning was intended, goes on to exploit Tattle's misinterpretation and finally has Tattle falsely admit that he has lain with Mrs Frail. This admission goes on to involve Tattle in further comic embarrassments.

The misinterpretations in the above two examples reveal character. Palamede is over-confident in his perception; Tattle, only too ready to give the impression that Mrs Frail is among his conquests. These simple examples also, however, suggest a fundamental aspect of the comic world. In comedy, the meaning of surfaces, whether they be appearances or words, is seldom plain. One associates with comedy such devices as

disguise, trickery and mistaken identity. In short, devices which complicate the relationship between surface and meaning. Some such complication is an essential feature of any comic structure as it provides the source for the mistakes, embarrassments, uncertainties and confusions that so often feature in the progress of a character in comedy.

This thesis deals with structural, thematic and moral aspects of deception and signification in Restoration comedy. The opening chapter asks the question, 'how do mistakes and confusions arise in the comedy?' It considers this question in the context of a discussion of the relationship between surface and meaning in the behaviour of the comedy's characters. Chapters two and three develop this discussion with more extended consideration of individual plays. Their chief concern is with the kinds of dramatic structures that emerge from the need for 'inconstancy of signification' in a comic world. The fourth chapter discusses the relationship between dramatic structure and morality. The more overtly moralistic climate around the turn of the seventeenth century and, in particular, the demand that comedy should present exemplary characters placed restraints on the ways in which complication in the relationship between surface and meaning could be achieved.

The relationship between outward manifestations and their meanings involves, of course, questions of morality and value. Depending on the nature of the relationship, we call behaviour sincere or hypocritical, frank or deceitful, natural or artificial, plain or mannered. The second half of this thesis discusses Restoration comedy in terms of two thematically central dichotomies — natural/artificial and honest/deceptive. Chapter five considers some of the difficulties associated with using these terms to describe and judge behaviour in the comedies. In doing so, it reviews the way the terms have been used in previous criticism of the comedy. Chapter six discusses the assumptions underlying

Norman Holland's approach to Restoration comedy. It suggests that Holland fails to recognize the importance of society as an area which provides avenues for self-expression and self-display, and goes on to emphasize this aspect of society in its discussion of Dryden's comedies and Congreve's *The Old Batchelour*. Chapter seven is concerned with deception in Etherege's *She wou'd if she cou'd* and Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, while chapter eight discusses plain-dealing and plain-dealers in Restoration comedy. The final chapter raises general questions about the signification of moral qualities in Restoration and early eighteenth-century comedy, and concludes that the fact that major characters of Restoration comedy elicit complex, mixed responses is, in the main, an important strength of this comedy.

CHAPTER ONE

SURFACES AND MEANINGS

Dramatic comedy, perhaps more than any other literary form, highlights the fallibility of human perception. The character who refuses or is unable to see what is evident to the audience and to other characters on the stage is a perennial figure in comedy. There is the credulous fool who interprets everything at face value, the 'humours' character whose bias of mind colours his perception, the vain fop who interprets everything to his own advantage. As Thomas Hobbes put it, 'men measure, not only other men, but all other things, by themselves'.[1] Perception is subjective and fallible. In this lies one of the major sources of the mistakes, errors and confusions that are characteristic of comedy. But perhaps more fundamental, is the fact that in the world of comedy meanings are seldom plain and unambiguous. One thinks immediately of the traditional devices employed in comic plots, of disguise, deception, impersonation and mistaken identity. One also thinks of those devices of language which are linked with disguise, such as verbal irony, pun, innuendo, and the conversation at cross purposes. What is in common in all these is that they complicate the relationship between the sign or surface and its meaning. Some such complication in the relationship between appearances and their import is fundamental to comedy. The comic plot and comic language must generate situations which are capable of being variously interpreted; the scene where different characters on the stage perceive events or understand language in different ways is perhaps the most common in comedy and is essential to the creation of dramatic irony. In speaking of language, Thomas Hobbes mentions as an abuse, 'the inconstancy of signification of ... words'.[2] 'Inconstancy of signification' of surfaces, whether they be words, dress, facial expressions, gestures, styles of behaviour or actions

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[1] *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford, 1946), p.9.

[2] *ibid.* p.19.

is characteristic of comedy and generates its misunderstandings and confusions.

Though difficulties in interpreting meaning and the resultant uncertainties are perennial in comedy, they have a particular interest and importance in Restoration drama. Certainly, the comedies evidence an intense and pervasive interest in the relationship between appearances and nature. This interest has been seen by Norman Holland as a symptom of changing philosophical and scientific thinking in the period. 'In the seventeenth century', he writes, 'disguise became a matter of cosmic significance, a fundamental element in ethical and metaphysical thought, largely as a result of the new physics'.[1] He goes on to argue that the new science and the sensory scepticism it entailed created a sense of separation of appearances from nature, a separation which is evident in the period's sense of language as an 'outside', and in the comedy's concern with the relationship between the inner man and his outward manifestations. In the Elizabethan period, appearances were generally thought of as reflecting nature, but, 'at the end of the seventeenth century, men came increasingly to feel that what shows not only was not but often *ought not to be* a true reflection of what is'.[2]

Norman Holland's suggestions about how trends in seventeenth-century thinking are related to the concern in Restoration comedy with the meaning of surfaces are impressive and provocative. There are, in fact, times in the comedies when characters make comments which could be construed as 'philosophical'. Lady Plyant, in Congreve's *The Double Dealer* (1693), for example, exclaims at one point, 'hearing is one of the Senses, and all

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[1]*The First Modern Comedies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p.45.

[2]*ibid.* p.50.

the Senses are fallible' (II.i.340-1).[1] Yet one feels that it is a mistake to over-emphasize the philosophical dimension of Restoration comedy's concern with appearances. Such arguments risk becoming tendentious and heavy-handed, and when Norman Holland concludes that Restoration comedies, 'represent a brilliant synthesis of abstract thought about primary and secondary qualities with the disguises and affectations of Restoration court life',[2] one feels that the comment is altogether too far removed from what one might suppose a theatre audience's response to the plays could be. While not denying the importance of changes in metaphysical thinking, it does seem, that in attempting to define the nature of the concern with surfaces and their meanings in these comedies, it is as well to remember that they inherit many of their structural techniques from earlier plays. In considering what is different or peculiar about the way these plays are concerned with appearances, one looks for changes in emphasis rather than in direction. As well, rather than stressing the philosophical and scientific thinking behind these comedies, it is perhaps more immediately relevant to consider their social character. To consider, in the first place, the nature of the social world they present and, secondly, their representation of personality as it displays itself in social contexts.

In Wycherley's *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master* (1672), Mrs Caution calls the modern setting of that play a 'masquerading Age' (I. p.139).[3] In many respects, the image of a masquerade can serve to characterize the social world of Restoration comedy and, indeed, of the society that it

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[1]All references to Congreve's plays are to *The Complete Plays of William Congreve*, ed. Herbert Davis (Chicago and London, 1967).

[2]*The First Modern Comedies*, p.50.

[3]All references to Wycherley's plays are to *The Complete Plays of William Wycherley*, ed. Gerald Weales (New York, 1966).

reflects. Bishop Burnet writes of the court of Charles II:

> At that time, the court fell into much extravagance in masquerading; both king and queen and all the court went about masked, and came into houses unknown, and danced there, with a good deal of wild frolic. People were so disguised that, without being in the secret, none could distinguish them.[1]

This essentially theatrical aspect of court life in the period is naturally accentuated in the drama itself. Physical masks and disguises abound; the mask is almost standard equipment for any lady who ventures to the theatre or to the park. Such prevalent use of masks readily generates mistakes and comic embarrassments. A familiar situation is reproduced when, in Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode* (1671), Palamede claims that his 'good Genius' would recognize his mistress in any disguise. 'I could know her in any shape', he asserts (IV.iii.61),[2] not realizing that he is addressing these words to his disguised and, of course, unrecognized mistress. In Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife* (1697), Lady Brute and Bellinda go masked and poorly dressed for a meeting with their gallants. Constant and Heartfree actually take them for the women of poor quality that they seem. As it happens, the drunken Sir John, Lady Brute's husband, passes by and, not recognizing his wife, expresses an interest in the 'strumpets'. Constant and Heartfree are at the point of giving up their mistresses when the ladies manage to extricate themselves from the difficult situation by revealing their true identity to their gallants but not to Sir John. These are typical comic situations created by the use of disguise and by the confusion of identity this generates. One can add that the ladies of Restoration comedy generally use masks either out of a concern for their

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[1] *History of His Own Time*, ed. Osmund Airy, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1897), I, p.473.

[2] All references to *Secret Love*, *Sir Martin Mar-all*, *An Evening's Love*, and *Marriage a-la-Mode* are to *John Dryden Four Comedies*, eds. L.A. Beaurline and Fredson Bowers (Chicago, 1967). References to other plays by Dryden are to *The Dramatic Works*, ed. Montague Summers, 6 vols. (London, 1931-32).

reputation, or so as to test the wit or faithfulness of their gallants. The males most often require their use in their love intrigues where parents and rivals must be deceived. It is not, however, merely their expedience which makes the use of masks and disguises attractive. When Bellmour, in Congreve's *The Old Batchelour* (1693) discovers that he must employ a disguise in his intrigue with Laetitia, he adds, 'With all My Heart — It adds Gusto to an Amour' (I.i.89-90). Many characters in Restoration comedy revel in the excitement and stimulation that a disguise can afford.

The prevalence of masks and disguises, then, is one aspect of the difficulty of 'knowing' in the world of Restoration comedy. But what of the face behind the mask?

The year 1665 saw the appearance in England of a translation from French of *The Art How to Know Men*. The work, like Fielding's *An Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men*, asserts that no matter how cunningly a masquerader dissimulates, Nature which, in Fielding's terms, 'unwillingly submits to the imposture',[1] will manifest itself. The author of *The Art How to Know Men* confidently asserts in his preface that, '*It was a groundless complaint of him, who wish'd Nature had plac'd a window before mens hearts, that the thoughts and secret designs might be seen*'. She has not only given men voice and tongue but, '*hath contriv'd a language in his forehead and eyes, to give the others the Lye, in case they should not prove faithful*'. Man's soul can be '*observ'd on the outside*', his '*Motions, Inclinations, and Habits*' are '*apparent in his face, and are there written in ... visible and manifest characters*'.[2]

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[1] *The Complete Works of Henry Fielding Esq.*, 16 vols. ([London], 1967, repr.), XIV, p.283.

[2] Sieur de la Chambre, *The Art How to Know Men*, trans. John Davies (London, 1665).

The belief that, as Addison put it, 'a Man's Speech is much more easily disguised than his Countenance'[1] was, of course, a commonplace in the period, and has a place in the way characters perceive each other in Restoration comedy. In *The Provok'd Wife*, for example, while Lady Brute can successfully dissemble her love for Constant in her language, she cannot control her eyes. Comments Bellinda, 'I am sure I have seen them gadding, when your tongue has been locked up safe enough' (I.i.123-5).[2] In Sir Robert Howard's *The Committee* (1662), Arbella and Ruth have both fallen in love at the same time. Fearing that they have both also fallen in love with the same man, they dare not reveal to each other whom they love. 'Wou'd they were now to come in', says Arbella of the men, 'that we might Watch one anothers eyes, and discover by signes'. The colonels, however, are not about to arrive so Arbella suggests that Ruth should act out the behaviour of each of the colonels in turn. She continues, 'then watch my Eyes, where I appear most concern'd; I cann't dissemble for my heart' (III.i.).[3] Certainly, other heroines in Restoration comedy also find it difficult to avoid facial evidence of their feelings. Harriet, in Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676), at one point comments, turning aside from Dorimant, 'My love springs with my blood into my Face, I dare not look upon him yet' (V.ii.95-7).[4] When Bellinda is mistakenly taken to Loveit's after her affair with Dorimant, she comments, 'I am so frighted, my countenance will betray me' (V.i.68-9). The females of

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[1]*The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1965), I, p.366.

[2]All references to Vanbrugh's plays are to *Sir John Vanbrugh*, ed. W.C. Ward, 2 vols. (London, 1893).

[3]*The Committee* in Sir Robert Howard, *Four New Plays* (London, 1665), p.98.

[4]All references to Etherege's plays are to *The Dramatic Works of Sir George Etherege*, ed. H.F.B. Brett-Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1927).

Restoration comedy, in particular, live in constant fear that they will be unable to dissemble successfully, that their feelings will show and hence make them vulnerable. Nevertheless, the confident assertion of the author of *The Art How to Know Men* that the face is a window looking into the heart, must have seemed naive to the courtiers of Charles II's reign. Charles II himself was notorious for his dissimulation and, though Halifax tells us that, 'Those who knew his face fixed their eyes there and thought it of more importance to see than hear what he said',[1] he leaves the impression that to cull any information from that face was no easy matter.

In Restoration comedy, the face is thought of more as a mask than as a window. Indeed, in Dryden's *An Evening's Love* (1671), Beatrix refers to Maskall's face as a 'Natural Visor' (I.i.191). In Congreve's *The Double Dealer,* Mellefont comments, 'women may most properly said to be unmask'd when they wear Vizors; for that secures them from blushing, and being out of Countenance' (III.i.310-2). The predominant feeling is that the language of the face can be controlled and manipulated and so cannot be trusted. For the dissimulator it can become a weapon rather than a limitation. Hence, in Farquhar's *The Constant Couple* (1699), Lady Lurewell prepares for her deception of Standard by telling herself, 'now glance Eyes, plot Brain, dissemble Face, lye Tongue' (I.ii.p.100).[2] She concludes after the success of her deception:

> Vain Man, who boasts of study'd Parts and Wiles;
> Nature in us your deepest Art beguiles,
> Stamping deep Cunning in our Frowns and Smiles.
> You toil for Art, your Intellects you trace;
> Woman without a Thought, bears Policy in her Face.
> (I.ii.p.103)

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[1] *Halifax Complete Works,* ed. J.P. Kenyon (Harmondsworth, 1969), p.252.

[2] All references to Farquhar's plays are to *The Complete Works of George Farquhar,* ed. Charles Stonehill, 2 vols. (Bloomsbury, 1930).

Similarly, in *The Double Dealer,* Lady Touchwood accuses Maskwell of having 'a smile as speaks in Ambiguity' and goes on to tell him, 'Ten thousand meanings lurk in each corner of that various face' (V.i.394-5). In short, the language of the face provides almost as little guarantee of perceiving truth as the mask.

If the language of the face cannot be trusted, however, words provide an even less certain means of perceiving truth. As moralists and commentators of the seventeenth century amply testify, behaviour and conversation in London society of the period was characterized by its pervasive dissimulation. An insight into its prevalence at court is given by Rochester in a letter to Henry Savile:

> Oh that second bottle Harry is the sincerest, wisest, & most impartiall downright freind wee have, tells us truth of our selves, & forces us to speake truths of others, banishes flattery from our tongues and distrust from our Hearts, setts us above the meane Policy of Court prudence, wch. makes us lye to one another all day, for feare of being betray'd by each other att night.[1]

Rochester's bleak picture of life at court recalls Lady Fidget in *The Country Wife* (1675) who also sees the bottle as the only way to honesty. She tells her friends:

> Now Ladies, supposing we had drank each of us our two Bottles, let us speak the truth of our hearts ... By this brimmer, for truth is no where else to be found.
> (V.p.349)

A less pessimistic and at once broader view of society is presented by Archbishop Tillotson in his sermon, 'Of Sincerity towards God and man'. The sermon was undoubtedly the most eloquent appeal for sincerity and plain-dealing of the late seventeenth century. Richard Steele quoted it approvingly at length in his Spectator, No.104 and commented, 'I do not know that I ever read any thing that pleased me more'.[2] In the course

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[1] *The Rochester-Savile Letters 1671-1680,* ed. John Harold Wilson (Ohio, 1941), p.33.

[2] *The Spectator,* I, p.430.

of his appeal, Tillotson presents a vivid picture of English society of his time as a society where dissimulation has become the custom:

> Amongst too many other instances of the great corruption and degeneracy of the age wherein we live, the great and general want of sincerity in conversation is none of the least. The world is grown so full of dissimulation and compliment, that mens words are hardly any signification of their thoughts; and if any man measure his words by his heart, and speaks as he thinks, and do not express more kindness to every man, than men usually have for any man, he can hardly escape the censure of rudeness and want of breeding. The old english plainness and sincerity, that generous integrity of nature and honesty of disposition, which always argues true greatness of mind, and is usually accompanied with undaunted courage and resolution, is in a great measure lost among us; there hath been a long endeavour to transform us into foreign manners and fashions, and to bring us to a servile imitation of ... some of the worst of their qualities.[1]

Besides the fact that it depicts the prevalence of dissimulation, three things are worth noting about Tillotson's comment. The first point that should be noted is that Tillotson specifically associates dissimulation with politeness and good-breeding. Dissimulation is not merely the prerogative of court intriguers, but becomes an almost intrinsic feature of polite discourse. The second point is Tillotson's suggestion that the English character is essentially one of plainness and directness and that the social customs to which he is referring are an aberration and the result of French influence. In the comedies we will also find the Elizabethan age and, more especially, life in the country contrasted with Restoration society in these terms. The third point is the one most relevant to our present theme. Tillotson's comment that, 'mens words are hardly any signification of their thoughts' echoes the persistent concern in the Restoration period about language and whether or not it communicates truly and effectively. Richard Forster Jones has outlined the attacks on ornament and rhetorical devices by scientists and prose writers of the

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[1] *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson*, 12 vols. (London, 1757), IV, p.358.

seventeenth century and described the resultant change in prose style between the Commonwealth and Restoration periods.[1] The movement finds its most well-known expression in Thomas Sprat's resolution,

> to reject all amplifications, disgressions, and swellings of style; to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men deliver'd so many *things* almost in an equal number of *words*.[2]

This concern for language and meaning extends to more overt moralists. Obadiah Walker saw the elegant and polite conversation of Restoration society as, 'an abusing of language, a putting together many good words to signify nothing'.[3] Sir George Mackenzie, in a revealing opposition, called the age 'rather witty than honest'.[4] The major point to be made here, however, is not that the moralists were opposed to the polite forms but rather, that they recognized the tendency of polite language to subvert the clarify of signification of words.

One comedy which is very obviously concerned with abuses of language is Shadwell's *The Virtuoso* (1676). In that play, Sir Formal Trifle, an orator, is described as a 'Rascal ... that would slur, and top upon our Understandings, and impose his false conceits for true reasoning, and his florid words for good sense' (I.i.p.110). The would-be wit, Sir Samuel, is described as one for whom 'words are no more ... than breaking wind' (I.i.112).[5] The concern with language in Restoration comedy, however,

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[1] 'Science and English Prose Style, 1650-75', *P.M.L.A.*, XLV (1930), pp. 977-1009.

[2] *The History of the Royal-Society of London*, in *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Joel E. Spingarn, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1957), II, p.118.

[3] *Of Education, Especially of Young Gentlemen* (Oxford, 1673), p.244.

[4] *Moral Gallantry* (Edinburgh, 1667), p.39.

[5] All references to Shadwell's plays are to *The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell*, ed. Montague Summers, 5 vols. (London, 1927).

goes beyond such obvious satire. In Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife* we see the indirection that characterizes much of the conversation of the polite world become a source of comic misunderstanding.

In *The Provok'd Wife*, a jealous Lady Fancyful tries to sabotage the proposed marriage between Bellinda and Heartfree. Disguised, she presents herself to Bellinda claiming that Heartfree is already married and that she is his slighted and suffering wife. At the same time, Lady Fancyful has a letter delivered to Heartfree which purports to be from a man who has lain with Bellinda. When Bellinda and Heartfree meet, each thinks that he has been deceived by the other. If each were to directly accuse the other of double-dealing, the misunderstanding could be readily clarified. Instead, however, it is perpetuated by the fact that they proceed indirectly and by insinuation. As a result the meaning is unclear. 'What does the fellow mean?', asks Bellinda. 'What does the lady mean?', Heartfree responds (V.v.161-2). Sir John, who is observing their behaviour, comments pointedly, 'Your people of wit have got such cramp ways of expressing themselves, they seldom comprehend one another. Pox take you both! will you not speak that you may be understood?' (V.v.181-4). A similar situation arises in Farquhar's *The Constant Couple* (1699). Here, Sir Harry Wildair's concern for delicacy and for the pretensions to 'honour' of even the loosest women leads to comic misunderstanding.

In this play, Vizard leads Sir Harry to believe that the beautiful Angelica is a whore and that for some twenty to thirty pieces he will be able to procure a 'very civil entertainment' (I.i.p.99). Angelica, in turn, believes that Sir Harry's courtship is genuine. At their meeting, the situation is not clarified and the conversation is at cross-purposes because of Wildair's indirect approach and ambiguous language:

Angel.	... I thought Sir, you had business to impart.
Wild.	Business to impart! how nicely she words it! Yes Madam, Don't you, don't you love singing Birds, Madam?
Angel.	That's an odd Question for a Lover — Yes, Sir.
Wild.	Why then Madam, here is a Nest of the prettiest Goldfinches that even chirpt in a Cage; twenty young ones, I assure you Madam.
Angel.	Twenty young ones! What then, Sir?
Wild.	Why then Madam, there are twenty young ones — S'Life I think twenty is pretty fair.
Angel.	He's mad sure — Sir *Harry*, when you have learn'd more Wit and Manners, you shall be welcome here agen.
Wild.	Wit and Manners! — I Gad now I conceive that there is a great deal of Wit and Manners in twenty Guineas — I'm sure 'tis all the Wit and Manners I have about me at present. What shall I do?

(II.ii.p.107)

Sir Harry, in fact, leaves thinking that he had not provided himself with sufficient money. In the above conversation 'Wit and Manners' are reinterpreted by Sir Harry according to the context he believes he is in. When Sir Harry returns, this time with fifty guineas, the phrase 'strict Modesty' undergoes a similar transformation.

Angel.	Sir *Harry*, you being the best Judge of your own Designs, can best understand whether my Anger shou'd be real or dissembled, think what strict Modesty shou'd bear, then Judge of my Resentments.
Wild.	Strict Modesty shou'd bear! Why faith Madam, I believe the strictest Modesty may bear Fifty Guinea's, and I don't believe 'twill bear one Farthing more.
Angel.	What d'mean? Sir.
Wild.	Nay, Madam, what do you mean? If you go to that, I think now Fifty Guinea's is a very fine offer for your strict Modesty, as you call it.
Angel.	'Tis more Charitable, Sir *Harry*, to charge the Impertinence of a Man of your Figure, on his defect in Understanding, than on his want of Manners — I'm afraid you're Mad, Sir.
Wild.	Why, Madam, you're enough to make any Man mad. S'death, are you not a —
Angel.	What, Sir?
Wild.	Why, a Lady of — strict Modesty, if you will have it so.
Angel.	I shall never hereafter trust common Report, which represented you, Sir, a Man of Honour, Wit, and Breeding; for I find you very deficient in them all. [*Exit.*
Wild.	*solus.* Now I find that the strict Pretences which the Ladies of Pleasure make to strict Modesty, is the reason why those of Quality are asham'd to wear it.

(III.ii.pp.120-1)

Earlier in the scene, lamenting the unhappy state of woman, Angelica had mentioned, 'The strict confinement on our [women's] Words' (III.ii.p.119). Sir Harry's language is also restrained by modesty and good-breeding. It is only when he is half drunk that he can speak directly ('Wine makes me lisp', he says, 'yet has it taught me to speak plainer' V.i.140), and the misunderstandings can be removed.

In the polite world, then, directness and plain-speaking are often avoided in the interests of politeness and complaisance. As a result, misunderstanding and uncertainty as to what is actually meant is commonplace. Yet this lack of clarity of signification of words in the dialogue of Restoration comedy is at once more pervasive and fundamental than the above two examples suggest. The question of what degree of truth or of what weight or importance is to be attached to any particular statement is a matter of continual concern. At one extreme there are false oaths and blatant lies. At the other, there is the fact that the language of the wits and of witty heroines is characterized by irony and raillery. Both generate difficulties in perceiving truth.

One specific difficulty of interpreting behaviour which is repeatedly referred to in Restoration comedy is that of distinguishing between mere civility and love. At the beginning of *The Country Wife*, for example, Horner has this difficulty in interpreting women's behaviour. One 'knows not where to find'em, who will, or will not', he tells the Quack, 'Women of Quality are so civil, you can hardly distinguish love from good breeding, and a Man if often mistaken' (I.262-3). Lady Cockwood, in Etherege's *She wou'd if she cou'd* (1668), misinterprets Courtall's behaviour in just this way. Comments Courtall, 'Some conveniences which I had by my acquaintance with the Sot her Husband, made me extraordinary civil to her, which presently by her Ladiship was interpreted after the manner of the most obliging women' (I.i.244-7). In Congreve's *The Way of*

the World (1700), Mirabell associates the confusion with fools. Speaking of Mrs Marwood he says, 'She was always civil to me, till of late', and continues, 'I confess I am not one of those Coxcombs who are apt to interpret a Woman's good Manners to her Prejudice; and think that she who does not refuse 'em every thing, can refuse 'em nothing' (I.i.85-9). It is just this kind of misinterpretation that Mellefont is accused of making in *The Double Dealer* (III.i.114-6). The way behaviour is modified by good manners can make it difficult to construe truth; the desirability of restraint and self-control can impose limits on frankness in expressing feelings. A continual problem in Restoration comedy is that of distinguishing between mere politeness and genuine regard.

Another aspect of the above problem relates to the question, 'What are the signs of love?', or to phrase it another way, 'how can love be shown to be genuine?' The question is asked or implied by almost all the young couples of Restoration comedy.

In Shadwell's *Epsom-Wells* (1672), Woodly tells his mistress Carolina, 'Persist in loving you I must till death; but the methods and ceremonies I leave to you to prescribe' (II.i.p.123). One of the modes of making love he suggests is, 'the stiff, formal way of the year 42' (II.i.p.123). This doubtless refers to the conventions of love making and to the conventional outward manifestations of love associated with *préciosité*, the vogue introduced to England by Henrietta Maria in the reign of Charles I. As David S. Berkeley has pointed out, a great deal of the courtship in Restoration comedy can be seen as a reaction against the formality of *précieuse* fashions.[1] Certainly the 'whining lover' is continually parodied in the comedy. Dryden parodies the excesses of the tradition in *Secret*

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[1] '*Préciosité* and the Restoration Comedy of Manners', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, XVIII (1955), pp. 109-28.

Love (1667). Florimell demands as proof of Celadon's love, not only that he be 'an ordinary whining Lover'. 'I would have a Lover', she demands, 'that if need be, should hang himself, drown himself, break his neck, and poyson himself for very despair: he that will scruple this is an impudent fellow if he sayes he is in love'. Comments Celadon, 'Pray, Madam, which of these four things would you have your Lover do? for a man's but a man, he cannot hang, and drown, and break his neck, and poyson himself, all together' (II.i.70-80). The notion of the romantic lover is debunked by Celadon's common sense practicality. Later in the scene, Florimell demands that, as a lover, he should be 'pale, and lean, and melancholick'. Celadon, however, brings the conversation down to earth again, this time with a sexual joke. 'When you see me next? why you do not make a Rabbet of me, to be lean at twenty four hours warning?' (II.i.89-94).

In Restoration comedy, the conventions of *précieuse* love are no longer operative. They are no longer authentic signs of love. In the comedies, formal, romantic love is called 'whining love' and, as Berleley has pointed out, '"Whining", always pejoritive, was used by Restoration people to whom *préciosité* was merely ridiculous'.[1] *Préciosité*, of course, provided a language of love. A world in which *précieuse* conventions were authentic would in some senses be 'ideal'. Love could be clearly signified. In the world of Restoration comedy, there is no such clarity. Victoria, in Otway's *Friendship in Fashion* (1678), suggests a more complex version of the relationship between love and its manifestations. She labels Goodville and Trueman as, 'of that Familiar Tribe that never make Love but by contraries, and rally our Faults when you pretend to admire

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[1] *ibid.* p.113.

our perfections' (II.210-12).[1] Certainly, this type is of a 'Familiar Tribe'. John Harrington Smith has aptly commented of Shapespeare's Beatrice and Benedick that, 'the very zest with which they rail at each other testifies to the attraction subsisting between them'.[2] The description also aptly describes many of Beatrice and Benedick's descendants in Restoration comedy. Yet Victoria's notion of a lover is also an over-simplification. There are no generally held infallible signs of genuine love in Restoration comedy. The comedy emphasizes the difficulty of attaining certainty in human relations, the difficulty of 'knowing' another person, and interpreting the significance of his outward behaviour.

In Restoration comedy, social living can be seen as a continual process of manipulating and interpreting signs or surfaces, which have varying degrees of validity. The wits of the comedies recognize that signs can be misleading. In *The Country Wife*, for example, Harcourt gives us his version of the relationship between appearance and nature in the London of Restoration comedy when he says that, 'Most Men are the contraries to that they wou'd seem; your bully you see, is a Coward with a long Sword; the little humbly fawning Physician with his Ebony cane, is he that destroys Men' (I.p.266). A similar scepticism of surfaces is evident when Eliza, in *The Plain Dealer* (1676), provides the corollary to the above comment and says, 'all wise observers understand us now adayes, as they do Dreams, Almanacks, and *Dutch Gazets*, by the contrary' (II.i. p.411). Other characters, however, question the very possibility of understanding behaviour and of attaining certain knowledge. Valentine,

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[1]All references to Otway's plays are to *The Works of Thomas Otway*, ed. J.C. Ghosh, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1968, repr.).

[2]*The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy* (New York, 1971, repr.), p.8.

in *Love for Love* (1695), despairs at the lack of 'Regularity and Method' in the behaviour of his mistress. Her behaviour is not even amenable to interpretation by contraries and Valentine comments of Angelica, 'She is harder to be understood than a Piece of *AEgyptian* Antiquity, or an *Irish* Manuscript; you may pore till you spoil your Eyes, and not improve your Knowledge' (V.i.801-4). In Congreve's *The Old Batchelour* (1693), Bellmour invokes Socrates so as to debunk the value of wisdom ('Wisdom's nothing but a pretending to know and believe more than we really do. You read of but one wise Man, and all that he knew was, that he knew nothing' I.i.19-22), while Standish in Farquhar's *The Constant Couple* comments, 'there is no Certainty in Nature; and Truth is only Falshood well disguis'd' (III.iv.p.124).

The wits of Restoration comedy, however, are not only those most sceptical of surfaces, but also those who are best able to manipulate and re-interpret them to their own advantage. In this, of course, they are contrasted with the fools who, in their self-assurance, constantly misinterpret evidence. Don Diego, for example, the Spanish father in Wycherley's *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master* (1672) takes every opportunity to proclaim his wisdom and will allow no-one to have more understanding than himself. When warned by Mrs Caution that he is being cheated, he sees it as an impossibility. 'I cheated by any man! I scorn your words, I that have so much *Spanish* Care, Circumspection, and Prudence, cheated by a man' (III.i.p.188). Of course, Don Diego is cheated throughout the whole play. In *The Country Wife*, Sparkish confides to Harcourt, 'I think I know thee, and I know her, [his mistress Alithea] but I am sure I know myself' (III.296). He goes on to demonstrate his ignorance by hopelessly misinterpreting, naturally to his own advantage, Harcourt's courtship of his mistress. Foresight's claim of certain knowledge in *Love for Love* ('I know when Travellers lie or speak Truth, when they don't know it

themselves' II.i.224-5) is the idle boast of a doting astrologer. Claims of certain knowledge, of confidence that one can't be deceived, then, are more often expressions of vanity or the result of self-delusion than evidence of perceptiveness.

Another contrast which is relevant to our present theme is that between the town and outside areas such as the country, the sea and the Elizabethan age. Whereas in society, the relationship between sign and object is complex, these outside areas are associated with directness, simplicity and lack of sophistication. Moody, in Dryden's *Sir Martin Mar-All* (1667) is a typical country squire, 'stout, and plain in speech and in behaviour; he loves none of the fine Town-tricks of breeding, but stands up for the old *Elizabeth* way in all things' (I.i.44-7). Clarity and directness of signification is apparent in the way Margery Pinchwife of *The Country Wife* writes to Horner of her infatuation for him. For her, the signs of love would be manifest and involuntary. She writes, 'for I'm sure if you and I were in the Countrey at cards together ... I cou'd not help treading on your Toe under the Table ... or rubbing knees with you, and staring in your face, 'till you saw me ... and then looking down, and blushing for an hour together' (IV.p.321-2). Manly and Ben, the 'plain-dealers' of *The Plain Dealer* and *Love for Love* respectively, come from the sea. At the same time, the outsiders are easily typified. Their clothes, their manners and their diversions clearly characterize them. Many Restoration comedies are structured around this contrast between the town and these outside areas. The often naive and unsophisticated character from the outside is used to highlight the nature of the town, while during the course of the play we see something of the initiation of this character into London society.

Though Restoration comedies emphasize the difficulty of attaining certainty in human relations, the need for certainty and the desire to

know is still inevitably a constant preoccupation of its major characters. When Gerrard, in *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master*, says to his mistress, 'I desire but to be secure of you' (V.i.p.220), he is voicing an impulse which appears in various forms in many of the comedy's gallants and mistresses. Hence the regularity with which such key words as 'trial', 'evidence', 'demonstration' and 'proof' recurr in the comedy; hence the importance of what Mr Lovely, in John Crowne's *The Married Beau* (1694), calls the 'arts of prying into thoughts'.

In *The Married Beau*, the affected fop Mr Lovely wants confirmation of his wife's esteem for him so as to bolster his vanity. He reacts to Polidor's gross flattery, saying:

> Thousands I'd give, my wife thought thus of me,
> And thousands more, that I cou'd know she thought it.
> (I.p.246)[1]

The difficulty is one of knowing, one of demonstration. 'I have heard ... of no instrument to find out thought', comments Polidor. Mr Lovely, however, confidently boasts:

> Yes, there are arts of prying into thoughts;
> And I've invented one to search her breast.
> (I.p.246)

Mr Lovely's technique is to have Polidor make passionate addresses to his wife. He is confident that she will resist him, and, in giving her reasons to Polidor, make known her esteem for her husband. The actual result is, of course, predictable. The scheme backfires and Lovely is cuckolded by Polidor.

The above technique is a more overtly comic version of the lover in disguise pattern so frequently employed in comedies. In Restoration comedy it is most often used by a mistress to test the constancy of her

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[1]All references to John Crowne's plays are to *The Dramatic Works of John Crowne*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh & London, 1873).

lover. In Dryden's *An Evening's Love,* for example, Jacinta first dresses up as Fatyma and then as Mulatta. By enticing Wildblood into making addresses to her while in disguise, she proves him inconstant. A disguise also, of course, allows its user to become a candid observer. As Leanthe, in Farquhar's *Love and a Bottle* (1698), comments:

> How bless'd are Lovers in disguise!
> Like Gods, they see,
> As I do thee,
> Unseen by human Eyes.
> (III.i.p.35)

A similar effect can also be achieved by a verbal rather than a physical disguise. In *The Way of the World,* for example, Mrs Marwood, in conversation with Mrs Fainall, claims that she actually enjoys the company of men and that her expressed aversion for them has been dissimulated. The tactic is a ruse aimed at trapping Mrs Fainall into agreeing with her and so revealing her true sentiments.

Another common technique of 'finding out' is one we might call the 'forged letter'. Lady Cockwood, in *She wou'd if she cou'd,* anxious to know for certain whether or not Courtall is interested in Ariana, forges letters from Ariana and Gatty making an assignation with Courtall. She comments, 'the Letters I have counterfeited in these Girls Name will clear all; if he accept of that appointment, and refuse mine, I need not any longer doubt' (IV.i.5-8). The same technique is employed in Dryden's *Secret Love.* Florimell's maid forges letters from her mistress's rivals summoning Celadon immediately. The letters will be delivered in Florimell's presence and she will be able to observe Celadon's reactions.

These so-called 'arts of prying into thoughts' use deception so as to gain knowledge. They manipulate appearances so as to create a situation where one can readily see the truth. Perhaps more important than these familiar techniques, however, is the fact that Restoration comedy presents us with a society where characters are continually

observing each other. 'What is the meaning of the sign?' is the repeatedly implied question characters have to face. Moreover, one important way characters are judged in the comedy is in terms of their perception and discernment.

This chapter has dealt, in an introductory way, with the relationship between surface and meaning in the behaviour of characters in Restoration comedy. The relationship between the surfaces, whether they be masks, faces, words or styles of behaviour, and their import or significance was seen to be complex rather than simple. This complexity generates the mistakes, confusions and uncertainties that characterize the comedy. The most frequent way in which such complication is achieved in any comic plot is through deception, and it hardly needs saying that many of the characters in Restoration comedy are deceivers or dissimulators of one kind or another. One should add that many of the deceivers in Restoration comedy are reminiscent of figures in earlier comedy. To take an obvious example, we have the play whose structural basis is the 'ingenious intrigue' perpetrated by a witty servant who recalls the intriguing slave of Latin comedy. Here, one can cite Warner in Dryden's *Sir Martin Mar-All* (1667) and Crack in Crowne's *Sir Courtly Nice* (1685). Other deceivers, however, seem more typical of Restoration comedy as such in that their deceptions embody social aims which are especially predominant in the social world of this comedy. There is, for instance, a wide-spread concern for social reputation among the characters of the comedy. Significantly, Congreve's Mirabell calls it 'that Idol Reputation' (II.i. 266). The deceptions generated by this concern are of a particular type in that they do not aim to deceive any individual but rather, attempt to create a public image. Hence, the less than virtuous females of Restoration comedy for whom reputation is most important, do not simply hide their moral lapses but take every social opportunity to loudly proclaim their

'virtue' and 'honour'. A similar kind of deception arises from the fear of ridicule and public exposure so predominant in the minds of Restoration gallants. Once again, what society thinks is the paramount concern. Other deceptions which one could call typically 'Restoration' are those which arise out of this period's particular notion of what constitutes good-manners and politeness. Also typical are the deceptions which are an essential feature of the courtship and the 'battle of the sexes' presented in the comedy. More important than the above, however, is the fact that the concern with appearances and their significance in Restoration comedy goes beyond their evident relevance to blatant deception and disguise; it extends to the comedy's whole conception of the interraction between personality and society. The point can be illustrated in terms of a broad, if somewhat too generalized, contrast.

Whereas in Elizabethan drama, the image of the world as a stage was most often used to convey a sense of the relationship between man and some ultimate controller of his destiny, by the Restoration the idea had, as Elizabeth Burns puts it, 'descended from the transcendental to the social plane'.[1] The image of the theatre was used to highlight the theatrical aspects of social living. The image, used with this significance, recurrs most frequently throughout Restoration comedy and embodies a central point they have to make about society. Characters in Restoration comedy are, as actors, concerned with the 'presentation of self'[2] or, at least with the presentation of *a* self. As observers, they are concerned with the sincerity or validity of the presentations they see around them.

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[1]*Theatricality* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London, 1973), p.11.

[2]The phrase 'presentation of self' and its relevance to social living came to my notice through Erving Goffman's *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh, 1956).
It was subsequently used with reference to Restoration comedy by Harriett Hawkins, *Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama* (Oxford, 1972).

Hence, the complication in a play about love arises, more often than not, from uncertainty as to whether the love's manifestations or signs are authentic or not. The concern is always, not only with passions and feelings, but also with how they manifest themselves in social contexts. Personality, as it displays itself socially, becomes in Restoration comedy a series of self-presentations. It is this notion of social living which, I think, best characterizes the nature of the concern with appearances and their import in Restoration comedy.

The following three chapters will be concerned with surfaces and their meanings in Restoration comedy in more detail, and with extended reference to individual plays. They will also be concerned with the kinds of dramatic structures that emerge from the need to create 'inconstancy of signification' in a comic world.

CHAPTER TWO

COMPLICATIONS: I

In response to attacks on the stage by Jeremy Collier at the end of the seventeenth century, one writer commented that the 'sort of Persons ... most proper to be employed in *Comedy*' are 'Persons of Trick and Cunning on one hand, and easie credulous Folks on the other, otherwise the Plot will but go heavily forward'.[1] Certainly, the plot which is structured around the contrast between the trickster and the dupe has been a very enduring and successful comic pattern. In this, the Restoration period is no exception. The contrast between the wit and the fool plays a major role in structuring William Wycherley's *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master* (1672) and *The Country Wife* (1675), and, of course, many other plays of the period. Our interest in the structure arises from the fact that it inevitably involves questions of perception and problems of meaning and understanding.

It will facilitate discussion of *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master* to begin with an outline of the play's opening situation. Guided by his notions of Spanish strictness, Don Diego has confined his witty and independently minded daughter, Hippolita, to his house. There, she is strictly guarded by her aunt, Mrs Caution, lest she come in contact with any man who might compromise her honour. Don Diego has also arranged the marriage of his daughter to the vain, affected fop Monsieur de Paris. Hippolita, as we would expect, objects to the marriage but, confined to the house as she is, there seems little she can do. Nevertheless, she is determined not to marry the Monsieur.

In the opening lines of the play, Hippolita complains of the restraints placed upon her liberty. 'To confine a Woman just in her rambling Age! take away her liberty at the very time she shou'd use it!'

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[1] [James Drake], *The Antient and Modern Stages survey'd* (London, 1699), p.233.

(I.p.130). Throughout the whole play, in fact, Hippolita's behaviour and, more particularly, her schemes to thwart her father's plans are subject to various types of constraints. Most obviously, we have the simple fact of her imprisonment and the fact that her behaviour is being observed by her watchful guardians. But even if she could make some outside contact, the modesty becoming a female would still necessarily inhibit her actions. At the conclusion of the opening dialogue of the play, Hippolita's maid Prue outlines a seemingly hopeless situation, telling Hippolita:

> What if you did know any man, if you had an opportunity; cou'd you have the confidence to speak to a man first? But if you cou'd, how cou'd you come to him, or he to you? nay how cou'd you send to him? for though you cou'd write, which your Father in his *Spanish* prudence wou'd never permit you to learn, who shou'd carry the Letter? but we need not be concern'd for that, since we know not to whom to send it.
>
> (I.p.132)

For all her difficulties and constraints, however, Hippolita is determined to use her wits and shift as well as she can.

It is, in fact, the confinement and the restraints placed upon liberty of action in this play which generate its essential feature, its comic exploitation of the fact that events, actions, gestures and words are subject to diverse plausible explanations and interpretations. Because of her situation, Hippolita is unable to act independently. Her only possible way of communicating with the outside world is via her would-be husband, the Monsieur. Since he must remain unsuspecting, Hippolita must use her wit so as to create events and conversations upon which a variety of constructions can be put.

Hippolita begins by extracting from the Monsieur the name of the person who is generally considered to be the finest gentleman in town. She then claims that Gerrard is, in fact, the Monsieur's rival and has often attempted to enter her chamber through her window. She goes on to manipulate this evidence to her own advantage, telling the Monsieur, 'This

discovery is an Argument sure of my love to you' (I.p.135). Given his vanity, the Monsieur is unable to resist this interpretation of the evidence. Hippolita goes on to exploit the Monsieur's love for French manners by suggesting that it would be very 'French' for him to rally his rival and make a jest of him. The way she suggests the Monsieur should rally Gerrard, however, is designed to inform him of her plight. Hippolita, then, suggests to the Monsieur a series of actions which he thinks will lead to his making a fool of his rival, but which Hippolita hopes will serve her own independent ends. In doing so, she exploits his biases of perception, particularly his vanity.

Gerrard does, in fact, accept Hippolita's implied invitation, but the initial encounter between the two is interrupted by Don Diego and Mrs Caution. For Don Diego, the import of the situation is clear and he draws his sword on the intruder. Once again, however, we see a demonstration of Hippolita's wit. This time it takes the form of an ability to reinterpret evidence and provide a plausible alternative version of a given situation on the spur of the moment. Hippolita claims that Gerrard is her dancing master. 'How do'st it appear?' (II.p.161), retorts Don Diego. But Hippolita is able to provide suitable evidence for her assertion (the fiddle on the table) and goes on to explain Gerrard's presence (sent by the Monsieur so that Hippolita might learn to dance before her wedding), and account for his entrance (he was able to enter the house just after Don Diego when the doors were still open).

The comedy of *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master*, then, arises from the fact that events are perceived differently by the various characters of the stage and from the dramatic ironies this generates. The ability to manipulate and reinterpret evidence, characteristic of the wit, is contrasted with the misinterpretations of the dupe. The Monsieur de Paris repeatedly sees his rival making love to his mistress. Observation,

however, is shown to be no guarantee of knowledge. 'I doubt not your amourè for me', he tells Hippolita, 'because I doubt not your judgment' (I.p.135). This certainty as to his own merits blinds him to the possibility of seeing Gerrard as a serious rival. Don Diego, in turn, is blinded by his certainty that he can't be deceived.

At every turn in this play, language and action prove to be ambiguous in their signification. On Gerrard's arrival in Act III to give Hippolita another dancing lesson, Don Diego asks in passing whether Gerrard is married or not. 'No, Sir, but I hope I shall, Sir, very suddenly, if things hit right', replies Gerrard. 'What', asks Don Diego, 'the old Folks her Friends are wary, and cannot agree with you so soon as the Daughter can?' (III.p.179). The conversation continues in this vein with Don Diego not realizing that he is, in fact, describing his own family situation. Don Diego and Mrs Caution go on to observe Gerrard giving Hippolita a dancing lesson. The gestures involves are ambiguous, the dancing terms rife with sexual innuendo. 'Look you, Brother', exclaims Mrs Caution, 'the impudent Harletry gives him her hand'. Don Diego, however, retorts, 'Can he dance with her without holding her by the hand?' Mrs Caution tries to alert Don Diego to the significance of Gerrard's gestures and innuendos. 'Do you know what he means by that now', she says, and later, 'Do you hear him again, don't you know what he means?' But Don Diego, confident in his own judgement, refuses to see. Gestures and words are interpreted in terms of the context they are thought to be in. Don Diego, believing that Gerrard is in fact a dancing master, encourages their activity. He tells his daughter, 'you must move as well backward as forward, or you'll never do anything to purpose'. Seeing the events in a sexual light, Mrs Caution exclaims incredulously, 'Do you know what you say, Brother, your self now?' (III. pp. 181-4).

The Gentleman-Dancing-Master is a play in which the wit of Hippolita is contrasted with the gullibility of the Monsieur and Don Diego, a comedy where the wit and perception of youth defeats the repressive intentions of the elders. If this were all, however, the play would not really deserve extended consideration. The pattern is, after all, familiar enough. What makes this play particularly interesting is that it combines the traditional comic situation of young lovers trying to conceal their affections from a watchful parent and the dissimulation this involves, with the more characteristically Restoration theme of misunderstanding, uncertainty and dissimulation in the relations between the young couple themselves. In this play, it is not simply the case that the old couple and the foolish rival are duped while the young couple display their wit. The pattern of who is fooled and who thinks he is being fooled is more complex.

When Gerrard first receives the invitation via the Monsieur to appear at Hippolita's window, he recognizes that the invitation could be a 'Fools Trap' (I.141). The import of the invitation is anything but clear and Gerrard comments in an aside, ''Tis all a Riddle to me; I should be unwilling to be fool'd by this Coxcomb' (I.141). The fact that Hippolita's invitation can still be construed as an attempt to make a fool of Gerrard plays a vital part in later developments in the play.

If plain-dealing is impossible in Hippolita's relations with her guardians, it is also inadvisable in her dealings with Gerrard. Wycherley makes this apparent through the inclusion of a scene which presents Gerrard's reaction to Mrs Flirt and Mrs Flounce, 'Two Common Women of the Town'. Though in other respects these women cannot be compared to Hippolita, they have in common the fact that all three are desperate for a man. In the way they proceed, Flirt and Flounce can be called 'plain-dealers'. They are frank about their desires and, as the Monsieur comments,

'hunt out the men' (I.p.144). Gerrard responds to the behaviour of Flirt and Flounce with a comment that clearly reflects on Hippolita's situation. 'Ladies, I am sorry you have no Volunteers in your Service; this is meer pressing, and argues a great necessity you have for men' (I.p.145). It comes as no surprise when Gerrard tries to leave these ladies as soon as possible. Their forwardness argues for their desperation, and their desperation for their worthlessness. Hippolita's necessity, of course, springs from a different source. Nevertheless, a frank explanation of her situation to Gerrard would risk her being undervalued and thought of as easy game.

When Gerrard first arrives in response to Hippolita's invitation, she reacts coolly and denies any knowledge of a summons. Like Silvia in Congreve's *The Old Batchelour* and Lady Lurewell in *The Constant Couple*, she uses the mask of simplicity to engage the interest of her gallant. 'Pretty Creature!', comments Gerrard, 'she has not only the Beauty but the Innocency of an Angel' (II.p.154). Hippolita uses this pose of simplicity so that she can suggest her availability to Gerrard without seeming forward. 'I cou'd let you kiss my hand, but then I'm afraid you wou'd take hold of me and carry me away', she tells Gerrard (II.p.156). When Gerrard doesn't seem to respond, she lets out further bait. 'I know you come to steal me away; because I am an Heiress, and Have twelve hundred pound a year, lately left me by my Mothers Brother, which my Father cannot meddle with' (II.p.157). At this Gerrard's interest sparks up and he offers to take Hippolita away immediately. At this point, however, they are interrupted by Don Diego and Mrs Caution.

In her next two meetings with Gerrard, Hippolita retains her pose of simplicity. Confident that she has engaged his interest, however, she begins to seem a little more hesitant about escaping with him and with obvious irony accuses Gerrard of being bold and forward. Nevertheless,

she pretends to be impressed by his condescending offer of a coach and six ('What young Woman of the Town cou'd ever say not to a Coach and Six, unless it were going into the Country: a Coach and Six, 'tis not in the power of fourteen year old to resist it.' (III.p.186)) and they appoint nine o'clock that night as their hour of escape.

For Hippolita, then, the mask of simplicity has served its purpose. She has engaged Gerrard's interest and been quite forward without putting herself in the same category as Flounce and Flirt. As Gerrard tells her, 'that which wou'd be called confidence, nay impudence in a Woman of years, is called innocency in one of your age' (III.p.184). Though Gerrard has demonstrated his desire to take her away, however, Hippolita cannot be sure of his motives. After all, to kindle his interest Hippolita did have to mention that she was an heiress. Hippolita's problem is one of judging the nature of Gerrard's interest in her. In her next encounter with him, Hippolita discards her pose of simplicity and adopts one of indifference, a pose which she hopes will test Gerrard's determination.

Hippolita asserts that she has had a change of humour and no longer wishes to leave with Gerrard. She adds, 'But, Sir, you cou'd believe I was in earnest in the morning, when I but seemed to be ready to go with you; and why won't you believe me now, when I declare to the contrary?' (IV. p.205). Hippolita implies that Gerrard has been rather too confident in his own appeal. As well, like many other heroines in Restoration comedy, she resents being labelled or thought predictable. Hippolita goes on to allow Gerrard to think that he has been made a fool of all along; that he has been an object for the diversion of herself and the Monsieur. She also asserts that she is in fact no heiress and challenges him saying, 'wou'd you be such a Fool as to steal a Woman with nothing?' (IV.p.206). Gerrard is about to respond to this challenge when the couple are once

again interrupted by Don Diego and Mrs Caution.

Act V opens with a meeting between Gerrard and the Monsieur. In the scene, the Monsieur confirms Gerrard in his belief that he has been fooled and jilted. Gerrard reacts angrily, calling the Monsieur names, beating him and provoking him into a duel. In short, Gerrard reacts by a display of passion. In this display of passion and jealousy Hippolita sees a confirmation of Gerrard's love for her. She remarks, significantly, 'passion un-masks every man' (V.p.217), and goes on to tell Gerrard, 'since I find you are quarrelsom and melancholy, and wou'd have taken me away without a Portion, three infallible signs of a true Lover, faith here's my hand now in earnest' (V.p.218).

Both the dealings between the young lovers and the guardians and the relationship between the couple themselves, then, involve dissimulation and posing. Hippolita is, of course, its chief agent. Her display of wit takes the form of a series of acted roles played to perfection. In dealings with the guardians the dissimulation was necessary so as to thwart their repressive intentions. In her dealings with Gerrard, Hippolita uses dissimulation both to engage his interest in the first place and then to test the depth of his feelings.

When we turn from *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master* to *The Country Wife* we recognize many similar concerns and situations. Once again there are, 'Trick and Cunning on one hand, and easie credulous Folks on the other'. One also finds the Hippolita, Gerrard, Monsieur de Paris triangle reproduced in Alithea, Harcourt and Sparkish and the imprisoned female situation in the plight of Mrs Pinchwife. There is also a similar emphasis on problems of meaning and understanding.

When, in Act III of *The Country Wife*, Mrs Pinchwife is finally allowed by her jealous husband to take in the sights of London, one of

the first comments she makes is, 'Lord, what a power of brave signs are here!' (III.p.300). Earlier in the play, Sparkish tells Horner how the day before he had been, 'discoursing and raillying with some some Ladies ... and they hapned to talk of the fine new signes in Town' (I.266). The word 'sign' appears constantly in the play. Harcourt calls jealousy 'the only infallible' sign of love. 'Marriage', he goes on to say, 'is rather a sign of interest, than love' (II.p.279). Sparkish, on the other hand, says to Alithea, 'that I am not jealous, is a sign you are virtuous' (III.p.300). A central concern of the play is with signs and what they mean; with evidence and its true import.

In the world of this play, things are seldom what they seem. Horner is thought a eunuch and called a mere 'sign of a Man' (I.p.267). He is in fact a rake and as potent as he ever was. To ensure the spread of the news about Horner, the quack tells people its a secret; the 'short-sighted World' (I.p.265) think Sparkish is a wit, though he is a fop; 'Where's this Woman-hater, this Toad, this ugly, greasie, dirty Sloven?', asks Mrs Squeamish when she wants Horner to make love to her (IV.p.327); 'Most Men are the contraries to that they wou'd seem', comments Harcourt (I.p.266). Words and actions are ambiguous in their signification. Meanings are seldom 'plain'.

Act III of this play contains a situation very similar to that in *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master* where Don Diego and Mrs Caution observe Gerrard giving Hippolita a dancing lesson. In *The Country Wife*, Sparkish is engaged to marry Alithea. Unbeknownst to him, however, Harcourt has fallen in love with his mistress and seeks to break the engagement between Alithea and Sparkish and marry Alithea himself. While in the earlier play the necessity for indirection and ambiguity in courtship was created by the presence of the watchful father, here it arises from the fact that Harcourt is only able to meet and court Alithea in the presence of his

rival. Alithea perceives the true significance of Harcourt's ambiguous gestures and double entendres. Sparkish, however, like the Monsieur, is so certain of his own merits that he fails to see that Harcourt is his rival. Though Sparkish and Alithea interpret Harcourt's behaviour differently, both repeatedly assert that Harcourt's meaning is 'plain'. When Alithea interprets Harcourt's behaviour correctly, Sparkish comments, 'will you wrest a poor Mans meaning from his words?' (III.p.301), while Alithea is amazed at Sparkish's credulity and lack of understanding. 'Do not you understand him yet?', asks Alithea. 'Yes, how modestly he speaks of himself, poor Fellow', replies Sparkish, not realizing that Harcourt means the phrases 'contemptible Wretch' and 'the last of Mankind' to apply to him rather than to himself (III.p.302). 'I tell you then plainly, he pursues me to marry me', exclaims Alithea (III.p.301), but characteristically, Sparkish finds Harcourt's meaning 'plain' when he believes that Harcourt is suggesting that he is much less worthy of Alithea's hand than Sparkish.

At the same time that Alithea and Sparkish perceive Harcourt's behaviour differently, Harcourt and Alithea interpret Sparkish's conduct in different ways. Harcourt recognises the fact that Sparkish is a fool and has no real regard for Alithea. Because of a sense of 'honour' that proves to be misplaced, however, Alithea refuses to see this and is determined to remain faithful to Sparkish. In this scene, Harcourt tries to alert Alithea to Sparkish's true character and to the way he really regards Alithea. He tells Alithea, 'you may see how the most estimable, and most glorious Creature in the World, is valued by him; will you not see it?' (III.p.301). Harcourt tries to make Alithea see Sparkish from a new perspective.

The comedy in the above scene arises from the way Harcourt dupes Sparkish and from Sparkish's lack of perception. In its emphasis on meaning, on whether or not it is 'plain', it also highlights the ambiguity

inherent in language and gesture and alerts us to the difficulty of certain understanding. When Sparkish says of Harcourt, 'now his meaning is plain' (III.p.302), he is most deceived just as when, in Wycherley's earlier play, Gerrard, referring to his belief that he is being duped, says, 'I am no longer to doubt it then' (V.p.213) he is most mistaken. Most of the mistakes in *The Country Wife*, however, are generated by more obvious contrivances. In particular, of course, there is Horner's disguise as a eunuch.

Horner is a well known rake. His libertine reputation forbids him access to other men's wives; hence, some form of trickery is required. At the beginning of the play, Horner comments of his intended victims that, 'Shy Husbands and Keepers like old Rooks are not to be cheated, but by a new unpractis'd trick; false friendship will pass now no more than false dice upon 'em, no, not in the City' (I.p.259). As false friendship will no longer suffice, a more sophisticated manipulation of appearances is required. Hence Horner's disguise as a eunuch. The beauty of Horner's disguise is that it performs several functions at once. In the first place he will be thought harmless and so gain easy access to other men's wives. Secondly, the nature of his disguise secures the 'honour' of his partners and so should make them all the more willing. Thirdly, the disguise allows him to 'know' others. Horner had commented earlier, 'one knows not where to find 'em, who will, or will not' (I.p.262). Now, however, he will be able to distinguish between mere civility and an interest in sex. Disguised as a eunuch, Horner says, 'I can be sure, she that shews an aversion to me loves the sport' (I.p.263). By using a disguise, Horner is able to see through the masks of others. As well, the nature of Horner's disguise makes it particularly secure. When Lady Fidget expresses concern that at some future time he might reveal the truth about himself, Horner comments perceptively, 'If I did, no body wou'd

believe me; the reputation of impotency is as hardly recover'd again in the World, as that of cowardise, dear Madam' (II.pp. 289-90).

The type of comic scene that is generated by Horner's disguise as a eunuch is fairly obvious. Horner lets the wives know that he is as potent as ever, while the husbands believe him to be a eunuch. When these characters are on stage at the same time, the varying levels of knowledge creates dramatic irony. Horner and his mistresses can communicate in double entendres which go over the husbands' heads. Hence the famous 'china scene' in Act IV of this play.

The security of Horner's disguise is complete; so complete, in fact, that he is able to become a 'plain-dealer'. As in the Harcourt, Alithea, Sparkish conversation described above, Wycherley has created a situation where plain-dealing itself can be misinterpreted. As he is about to cuckold Sir Jaspar, Horner tells him, 'Well Sir *Jaspar*, plain dealing is a Jewel; if ever you suffer your Wife to trouble me again here, she shall carry you home a pair of Horns' (IV.p.326). Horner is certain, of course, that he will not be believed. In fact, quite the reverse. His speech confirms Sir Jaspar in his belief that Horner is impotent since he takes it as an expression of Horner's supposed aversion for women. As Maskwell, juggling appearances and reality, comments in Congreve's *The Double Dealer*:

> No Mask like open Truth to cover Lies,
> As to go naked is the best disguise.
> (V.i.100-1)

Throughout the whole play, Horner is in control of appearances. Apart from his initial difficulty in distinguishing civility from love, he is always certain of the facts of a situation.

Horner's control over appearances is clearly contrasted with the gullibility and ineptitude of Sir Jaspar and Pinchwife. Sir Jaspar

interprets evidence in the simplest possible way. When Horner dissembles a dislike for his wife, he immediately takes it as confirmation of the rumour that Horner is a eunuch. 'So the report is true, I find by his coldness or aversion to the Sex' (I.p.260). Pinchwife, however, provides a more interesting example in that he tries to play the game himself. 'I understand the Town, Sir', he boasts to Horner (I.p.270), and later to Alithea, 'I understand the Town-Tricks' (III.p.293). Pinchwife tries to control appearances so as to prevent being cuckolded. Everything he does, however, makes it only more likely that he will be. He becomes the victim of his own designs.

When Margery insists on seeing the sights of London, Pinchwife has his wife dressed up as a male so that the wits, particularly Horner, might show no interest in her. Horner immediately sees through the disguise, however, and proceeds to take advantage of it. Pretending that the disguised Margery is not in fact Pinchwife's wife, he fondles and kisses her in her husband's presence. Pinchwife is unable to make any public objection. Later in the play, Pinchwife forces Margery to write a false letter to Horner so as to put a quick end to their love. He only succeeds, however, in giving Margery the opportunity of sending a true letter. A similar fate awaits all Pinchwife's efforts to control appearances.

The contrast between Horner and Pinchwife becomes most apparent if we compare their respective attempts at irony. Thinking that he is delivering the letter he forced Margery to write, Pinchwife ironically refers to it as a 'Love Letter' (IV.p.331), and says to Horner, 'Now I think I have deserv'd your infinite friendship, and kindness, and have shewed my self sufficiently an obliging kind friend and husband am I not so, to bring a Letter from my Wife to her Gallant?' (IV.p.332). Events have, however, overtaken Pinchwife. The letter he thinks he is delivering

has been substituted by a real love letter and what Pinchwife meant ironically is now literally true. The irony is at his own expense. Horner, knowing the true facts can reply with genuine irony, 'Ay, the Devil take me, art thou, the most obliging, kind friend and husband in the world' (IV.p.332).

Events, actions and words in *The Country Wife* can be looked upon as evidence. Characters can be contrasted according to how they interpret and manipulate this evidence. Perhaps the simplest example of this is provided by an event that has not as yet been cited. In Act IV of the play, Sir Jaspar Fidget enters to find his wife embracing Horner. Seeing her husband, Lady Fidget comments in an aside, 'found with my arms about another man — that will appear too much — what shall I say?' (IV.p.325). Lady Fidget is, however, able to manipulate the significance of what appears and allays her husbands suspicions by claiming that she was tormenting Horner and, 'trying if Mr. *Horner* were ticklish' (IV.p.325). But our consideration of this aspect of the play would not be complete if we were not to consider its ending, particularly with regard to Alithea's position and how it is variously interpreted.

In Act IV of the play, Pinchwife discovers his wife writing a love letter to Horner. Using her newly acquired knowledge of the deceptive ways of the town, however, Margery extricates herself from this situation by claiming that she was in fact writing the letter on behalf of Alithea. Pinchwife naturally objects, 'But why should she make you write a Letter for her to him, since she can write her self?' (V.p.339). Demonstrating her ability to manipulate appearances, Margery makes this course of action seem plausible and replies, 'Because lest Mr. *Horner* should be cruel, and refuse her, or vaine afterwards, and shew the Letter, she might disown it, the hand not being hers' (V.p.339). This ruse goes on to involve Margery in a series of situations which compromise Alithea's honour. It

would be tedious to outline the ways in which the events which follow are made to seem plausible, but what in fact happens is that Margery disguises herself as Alithea and in this disguise Pinchwife unwittingly takes his wife to Horner's lodgings. His object is to insist on a marriage between Horner and Alithea. Alithea, of course, denies that she has written any letter to Horner, and she expects this truth to become evident when she confronts Horner with the accusations against her. This confrontation occurs in the last scene of the play. Because Horner feels he must protect Margery, however, he is unable to tell the truth. He in fact confirms the accusations against Alithea. 'O unfortunate Woman', exclaims Alithea, 'a combination against my Honour' (V.p.355). It is indeed a 'combination'. All the evidence suggests that Alithea has attempted to deceive the world; that her engagement to Sparkish has merely been a cover for her clandestine affair with Horner.

The important contrast which arises from this situation is between the reactions of Alithea's two suitors, Sparkish and Harcourt, to her situation. Sparkish's response to Pinchwife's 'discovery' about Alithea exposes the shallowness of his regard for her. On being shown Margery's letter he has no hesitation in accepting it as Alithea's; he is immediately convinced of Alithea's falsehood. His only concern is that he has been made a fool of. When all the evidence points against Alithea, however, Harcourt affirms his faith in her and demonstrates a true love which is contrasted to Sparkish's false one. 'Madam', he tells Alithea, 'you shall now see 'tis possible for me to love too, without being jealous, I will not only believe your innocence my self, but make all the world believe it' (V.p.356). Subsequent events prove Alithea's innocence, but the important point is that Harcourt believes in Alithea despite the evidence and so demonstrates his love. Faith rather than reason guides his perception.

The above comments are not meant to be an adequate consideration of *The Country Wife*. The play will be considered again in a different context. The above examples are meant to suggest a few simple characteristics of the play. The confusions and mistakes of the play are the result of contrivances, chiefly the unsuccessful ones of Pinchwife and the successful ones of Horner and Harcourt. The contrivances generally take the form of attempts to control and manipulate appearances. The wits and the fools are clearly distinguished according to how well they control and, in turn, interpret appearances. Harcourt is distinguished from other characters in the play in his demonstration of faith in Alithea, despite the evidence.

This chapter began with the statement that the sort of people most appropriate for presentation in comedy are 'Persons of Trick and Cunning on one hand, and easie credulous Folks on the other'. *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master* and *The Country Wife* fit into this pattern. Though the contrast between wit and fool readily generates successful comic situations, however, it should be added that the problems of perception and understanding that arise from the pattern are of a fairly limited kind. In the first place there is the simplification inherent in the very fact that the pattern is based on contrast. Characters fall into their respective groupings all too readily and the contrast too easily becomes one of extremes. Indeed, Don Diego, the Monsieur and Sir Jaspar could be included in Congreve's category of 'Fools so gross ... they should rather disturb than divert'.[1] It takes no great ingenuity to deceive these incredibly credulous characters; the battle of wits has been won before the play even begins; the results are tabulated in the *dramatis personae*. Moreover, wit and perception in these plays often seems merely

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[1] Dedication to *The Way of the World*.

a matter of the eyes and ears, of 'quick-wittedness'. There seems little of the judgement and intellectual refinement that Thomas H. Fujimura has seen as characteristic of the seventeenth century concept of true wit.[1] Nor is perception accompanied by moral insight as it is with, say, Congreve's Mirabell.

William Congreve's dissatisfaction with a dramatic structure based on broad contrasts between wit and dupe is perhaps best evidenced by his play, *The Way of the World* (1700). It is also, however, apparent in the construction of his earlier comedy, *The Double Dealer* (1693).

The Double Dealer can, in many respects, be grouped with Wycherley's *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master* and *The Country Wife*. In all three, mistakes and confusions arise from the trickery and intrigue of central characters. In *The Double Dealer*, the complications arise from the schemes of Lady Touchwood and Maskwell. Lady Touchwood is in love with Mellefont and in her jealousy seeks to thwart the proposed marriage between Mellefont and Cynthia. Maskwell pretends a friendship with Mellefont but is in fact in league with Lady Touchwood and has designs on Cynthia for himself. Though the two Wycherley plays and Congreve's *The Double Dealer* are all structured around a central intrigue, however, they are very different in their approach to the problems of perception that arise out of the intrigue.

It is clear that some of Congreve's contemporaries were disappointed by *The Double Dealer* because they expected a play of the wit versus dupe pattern. This is apparent in Congreve's reaction to his critics in his dedication to the play:

> Another very wrong Objection has been made by some who have not taken liesure to distinguish the Characters. The Hero of the Play, as they are pleas'd to call him, (meaning *Mellefont*) is a Gull, and made a Fool and cheated. Is every

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[1]*The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (New York, 1968), pp. 16-18.

> Man a Gull and a Fool that is deceiv'd? ... If this Man be deceived by the Treachery of the other; must he of necessity commence Fool immediately, only because the other has proved a Villain?

In *The Country Wife* only fools were consistently deceived. In this play the emphasis has changed. As Congreve comments in his dedication, critics with the above objection 'have only mistaken Cunning in one Character, for Folly in another'. They have taken the set of values inherent in the wit versus dupe play and imposed them on what at least Congreve saw as a different type of structure. This play does have 'Persons of Trick and Cunning on the one hand' but their opposites are not necessarily credulous fools; mistakes in perception are no longer the province of the dupe and the power of the art of deception is stressed.

When, towards the end of the play, Lord Touchwood finally recognizes the deceptions of his wife and Maskwell, he comments, 'Heavens, what a long track of dark deceit has this discover'd! I am confounded when I look back, and want a Clue to guide me through the various mazes of unheard of Treachery' (V.i.469-72). Lord Touchwood's confusion, his reference to mazes which cannot be understood is typical of this play. Characters in this play are continually expressing their amazement at events. 'I am so amazed, I know not what to speak', exclaims Mellefont when the accusations Lady Plyant and Sir Paul level at him seem incomprehensible (II.i.263). When Lady Touchwood suggests to her husband that Mellefont has made advances to her, he reacts with, 'I'm amazed' (III.i.44) and 'I am mute with wonder' (III.i.121), while Sir Paul exclaims, 'I'm so amazed' when his wife successfully turns evidence of her unfaithfulness into an attack on Sir Paul for not trusting her virtue (IV.i.459-60). Things do not turn out as expected, evidence suggests one thing but another is the case. The amazement in which characters find themselves is symptomatic of a world that is unpredictable.

The confusions and perplexities characters face are most often, of course, the result of the scheming of Maskwell and Lady Touchwood. The success of their intrigues also emphasises, however, human gullibility, the subjectivity of our perception, and that seemingly clear evidence cannot always be trusted. Lady Plyant is a particularly easy target for the deceiver. So as to thwart the marriage between Mellefont and Cynthia, Maskwell wants to persuade Lady Plyant that Mellefont is in love with her, rather than with her step-daughter. Mellefont's seeming love for Cynthia, he suggests, is only a blind for this true attraction. Lady Touchwood comments of the scheme, 'She is so Credulous that way naturally, and likes him so well, that she will believe it faster than I can perswade her' (I.i.412-4). Lord Touchwood accurately characterizes Lady Plyant's perception in saying, 'I know my Lady *Plyant* has a large Eye, and wou'd centre every thing in her own Circle; 'tis not the first time she has mistaken Respect for Love' (III.i.5-8). Lady Plyant is the familiar type whose view of events can be manipulated by exploiting her natural biases of perception.

This subjectivity of 'evidence' is further underlined in the way Lady Plyant changes her mind about Mellefont's intentions. During the course of the play, Lady Plyant develops an attraction for Careless. Careless, a genuine friend of Mellefont's, tries to facilitate his marriage by diverting Lady Plyant's attentions from Mellefont to himself. By IV.i. we have Lady Plyant telling her husband, 'I have been inform'd by Mr. *Careless*, that *Mellefont* had never any thing more than a profound respect' (IV.i.164-6). Sir Paul, suggesting that some further proof may be necessary, begins his reply saying, 'Indeed if this be made plain ...'. Lady Plyant, however, interrupts exclaiming, 'Plain! I was inform'd of it by Mr. *Careless* — And I assure you Mr. *Careless* is a Person — that has a most extraordinary respect and honour for you, Sir *Paul*' (IV.i.171-5). Of course, the matter is now 'plain' because Lady Plyant is attracted to

Careless. Real evidence never enters into the picture.

Lady Plyant is, as I say, a rather easy target. But what of Lord Touchwood? He is presented as a man of sense and reason. He recognizes, for example, the true nature of Lady Plyant's 'honour' and comments wryly, 'Yes, I believe I know some that have been familiarly acquainted with it' (III.i.13-4). His reaction when his wife tells him that Lady Plyant believes Mellefont is in love with her is sensible and objective. 'I don't believe it true; he has better Principles — Pho, 'tis nonsense' (III.i.4-5). When his wife retorts, 'Nay, my Lord, it may be so, and I hope it will be found so: but that will require some time; for in such a Case as this, demonstration is necessary', he replies significantly, 'There should have been demonstration of the contrary too, before it had been believ'd' (III.i.16-20). As part of her plan to ruin Mellefont, however, Lady Touchwood goes on to suggest to her husband that Mellefont has shown some interest in her as well as in Lady Plyant. The reasoned judgement that Lord Touchwood could make when only Lady Plyant was involved is impossible when his wife and his own honour are concerned. In Lord Touchwood's response, sense and reason give way to passion. 'Confusion and Hell, what do I hear!', he exclaims (III.i.86), and without any trial brands Mellefont an 'Unnatural Villain' (III.i.99-100).

At one point in this play, Lady Plyant comments that 'all the Senses are fallible' (II.i.341). This notion is repeatedly demonstrated in Restoration comedy. Colonel Standard, in Farquhar's *The Constant Couple*, has ample evidence that Lady Lurewell is false to him yet refuses to believe it commenting, 'Our Belief struggles hard, before it can be brought to yield to the Disadvantage of what we love' (III.i.p.116), and later, 'I've heard her Falshood with such pressing Proofs, that I no longer shou'd distrust it. Yet still my Love wou'd baffle Demonstration, and make Impossibilities seem probable' (III.iii.p.122). In *The Recruiting*

Officer, Sergeant Kite, while disguised as an astrologer, gives Melinda ample evidence of his powers. He comments pointedly, however, that 'the word Demonstration comes from Demon the Father of Lies' (IV.ii.p.91). The comment concisely expresses the fallible nature of the proof and evidence that so often mislead characters in Restoration comedy. In *The Double Dealer*, Lord Touchwood asks Maskwell to provide him with 'Ocular Proof' (IV.i.562-3) and 'demonstrative Proof' (IV.i.574) that the allegations against Mellefont are in fact correct. Maskwell provides him with such proof, knowing that Lord Touchwood's emotions will guide his interpretation of evidence. It is, in fact, the 'proof' which effectively deceives Lord Touchwood.

The Double Dealer concludes with the exposure of Lady Touchwood and Maskwell before the whole social group. Lord Touchwood and Cynthia gather all the company into the gallery so that the exposure can be complete, while Mellefont lugs Maskwell onto the stage saying, 'Nay, by Heaven you shall be *seen*' (V.i.568, my italics). The play concludes with this true discovery. The course of the play itself, however, is full of 'discoveries' that prove to be false. Maskwell 'discovers' to Mellefont Lady Touchwood's designs; Lord Froth catches his wife embracing Brisk but is made to think that they were merely dancing; 'O Providence! Providence! What Discoveries are here made', exclaims Sir Paul when he is falsely convinced of his wife's virtue (IV.i.504-5); 'I have discovered so much Manly Vertue' says Lord Touchwood when he overhears Maskwell's dissembled soliloquy. 'To discover' is to confirm one's delusions.

That observation is no guarantee of knowledge is most heavily underlined in IV.ii. Mellefont thinks that he is about to gain the weapon that will put Lady Touchwood at his mercy and enable him to clear his name. From his position behind a hanging, he is about to see Lady Touchwood making love to Maskwell. He will disturb the couple and hence

demonstrate his knowledge of Lady Touchwood's true character. This, he assumes, will put her in his power. Mellefont comments, 'Oh that her Lord were but sweating behind this Hanging, with the Expectation of what I shall see' (IV.ii.2-3). The comment proves to be heavily ironic. Lord Touchwood is indeed about to secretly observe his wife's behaviour. But because of Maskwell's good management and Lady Touchwood's art, what he sees is not evidence of his wife's falseness but rather, confirmation of his belief in Mellefont's treachery.

The Double Dealer as a whole emphasizes the unreliability of evidence, of signs or surfaces. Its central speech is doubtless Maskwell's soliloquy at the conclusion of Act II. Remarking on his own behaviour and on the nature of deception he comments:

> 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.460-4)

There is no exterior indication of Maskwell's villainy, no 'cloven foot', no physiognomic evidence. The outward form and the inner nature are divorced.

CHAPTER THREE

COMPLICATIONS: II

The first act of George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676) opens and concludes with the discussion of a letter. The first letter is written by Dorimant to his mistress Mrs Loveit and excuses his recent neglect of her. This letter provides a convenient way of outlining how the situation stands between Dorimant and his mistress as the play opens, and goes on to play an important part in the development of the plot. The second letter comes almost as an afterthought, after the business of the act has been completed. It is from a whore and it asks Dorimant for money. Certainly it does provide some insight into Dorimant's character, but otherwise its inclusion seems to have little justification. The way the letters are placed, however, one at the beginning, one at the end of the first act, invites their comparison and it occurs that the second letter may, perhaps, have been included for the sake of contrast, a contrast which highlights self-expression as a major theme of the play.

The letter from the whore, despite its scrawl and bad spelling is frank and straightforward:

> I told a you you dud not love me, if you dud, you wou'd have seen me again e're now; I have no money and am very Mallicolly; pray send me a Guynie to see the Operies.
> (I.i.504-6)

Molly has drawn the obvious conclusion from Dorimant's neglect and in her letter makes no attempt to hide her feelings and desires. Dorimant's letter to Mrs Loveit, however, is a testimony to the fact that in his more complex social situation he cannot be frank about his desires. He writes:

> I never was a Lover of business, but now I have a just reason to hate it, since it has kept me these two days from seeing you. I intend to wait upon you in the Afternoon, and in the pleasure of your Conversation, forget all I have suffer'd during this tedious absence.
> (I.i.189-93)

The letter not only takes a conventional complimentary form, its sentiments are also totally dissembled. Dorimant no longer has any interest in Mrs

Loveit; the letter is a tedious social chore. Dorimant calls it a 'Tax upon good nature' and comments that he has paid this tax, 'with as much regret, as ever Fanatick paid the Royal Aid, or Church Duties' (I.i.4-7). The letter, then, is not intended to communicate but rather to fulfil a social obligation. Moreover, it is made clear that the recipient expects compliment and flattery. Comments Dorimant of his letter, ''Twill have the same fate, I know, that all my notes to her have had of late, 'twill not be thought kind enough' (I.i.7-9). As well, Dorimant is aware that his letter will be jealously examined by Mrs Loveit lest it discovers any sign of his loss of interest in her. The contrast between the two letters, then, is clear. While Molly's is plain and straightforward, Dorimant's is dissembled, takes a complimentary form and will be subjected to scrutiny.

The nature of Dorimant's letter to his mistress is not an isolated case. Dissimulation, indirection, the necessity to hide one's true feelings, are characteristic of the social world of this play, especially in relations between the sexes. Particularly interesting in *The Man of Mode* are non-verbal signs — gestures, facial expressions and poses — and their significance. Our brief consideration of this play will focus on these signs.

In Act II of the play Medley, in outlining the latest diversions around town, describes a work written by a late beauty of quality called the 'Art of affectation'. It purports to teach young ladies fashionable and attractive mannerisms. To teach:

> how to draw up your Breasts, stretch up your neck ... to play with your Head, to toss up your Nose, to bite your Lips ... and use all the Foolish French Words that will infallibly make your person and conversation charming.
> (II.i.149-54)

In inventing such a work, Medley is, of course, satirizing affectation in women. The significance of such description, however, goes beyond such occasional satire. Throughout the whole play, characters continually

describe each other in just these terms, in terms of their poses, gestures and facial expressions. This comes as no surprise with regard to Sir Fopling Flutter. With his self-avowed allegience to the mirror and his habit of practising his postures, it is no wonder that Medley describes him in terms of poses:

> His head stands for the most part on one side, and his looks are more languishing than a Ladys when she loll's at stretch in her Coach, or leans her head carelessly against the side of a Box i'the Playhouse.
> (I.i.377-80)

But what of the other characters? In accusing Mrs Loveit of flirting with Sir Fopling, Dorimant comments:

> at first sight ... [you] ... put on all your charms, to entertain him with that softness in your voice, and all that wanton kindness in your eyes, you so notoriously affect, when you design a Conquest.
> (II.ii.240-4)

As well, Dorimant describes Harriet's public behaviour saying:

> I observ'd ... the thousand several forms you put your face into; then, to make your self more agreeable, how wantonly you play'd with your head, flung back your locks, and look'd smilingly over your shoulder at 'em.
> (III.iii.95-101)

Harriet, in turn, retorts by mimicking Dorimant's gestures and saying:

> I do not go begging the mens as you do the Ladies Good liking, with a sly softness in your looks, and a gentle slowness in your bows, as you pass by 'em — as thus, Sir — [*Acts him.* is not this like you?
> (III.iii.102-6)

Even Old Bellair describes the unaffected Emilia in terms of facial expressions:

> I love a pretty sadness in a Face which varies Now and Then, like changeable Colours, into a smile.
> (II.i.57-9)

The vivid visual description of carriage, pose, facial expression and gesture helps make the reading of this play a genuine dramatic experience, it facilitates our imagining it on the stage. As well, the emphasis on the theatrical aspects of living makes the play particularly good theatre. It also, however, suggests a central thematic concern of the comedy.

Generally, underlying such descriptions of outward behaviour as quoted above is the sense that outward behaviour can be controlled. 'Can you play your part?', Young Bellair asks Harriet (III.i.123) and later, Bellinda to Dorimant, ''Twas a cruel part you play'd! how could you act it?' (III.ii.70-1). Social living is seen as a series of controlled self-presentations.

The skill and ease with which characters are able to control their outward aspects naturally varies according to the person and the situation. It was noted that in *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master* and *The Country Wife* characters were contrasted in terms of how well they could control and interpret appearances. Here again the control of appearances is a major concern. But whereas in the Wycherley plays the contrast was between wit and dupe, and the control of appearances was a matter of intelligence and the ability to manipulate evidence, here it concerns self-control and the ability to mask the passions. Dorimant and Mrs Loveit are contrasted in this respect in their confrontation in II.ii. Dorimant is in complete control while Mrs Loveit lacks any restraint whatsoever. The dramatic effectiveness of the scene lies in the contrast between the violence and disorder of Mrs Loveit's voice and gesture and the calm restraint of Dorimant.

In other scenes, emotion threatens to unmask but is finally controlled. When Harriet first meets Dorimant, he remarks on the change in her facial expression. Harriet, however, ensures that the face gives no indication of her true feelings and comments, in an aside, 'I feel as great a change within; but he shall never know it' (III.iii.66-7). In Act III, Mrs Loveit manages, through contrived advances to Sir Fopling, to rekindle Dorimant's interest in her and make him jealous. Dorimant is acutely aware that his reactions are being observed by his new mistress, Bellinda, and comments in another aside, 'I am concern'd, but dare not show it, lest

Bellinda should mistrust all I have done to gain her' (III.iii.304-6). Later, when he realizes that he loves Harriet, he remarks to himself, 'I love her, and dare not let her know it, I fear sh'as an ascendant o're me and may revenge the wrongs I have done her sex' (IV.i.151-3). Surprised when she finds herself by accident at Mrs Loveit's in Act V, Bellinda comments, 'I am so frighted, my countenance will betray me' (V.i.68-9), while Harriet, during another meeting with Dorimant, says to herself, 'My love springs with my blood to my Face, I dare not look upon him yet' (V.ii.95-7). Most of the characters take care lest their countenance betray their true feelings. A vital concern for characters is to have the 'ascendant' (to use Dorimant's expression) over other participants in the drama of love, and this is largely achieved through an ability to mask feelings.

No character prides himself more on being able to control appearances and manipulate social situations than Dorimant himself. Perhaps the essential feature of Dorimant's social behaviour is that he perceives his actions as a series of self-dramatizations. In his dealings with his mistresses, this is symptomatic of his lack of emotional involvement. When his new mistress, Bellinda, asks him to promise never to see Mrs Loveit again, he replies, significantly, with the use of a theatrical image. ''Tis not likely a man should be fond of seeing a damn'd old Play when there is a new one acted' (IV.ii.33-4). The image suggests the degree of seriousness he attaches to his new relationship and his sense of detachment from, and control over events. As surely as passion tends to unmask, Dorimant's lack of emotional involvement allows him to perceive his own behaviour as the playing of a part. Never foppishly affected in his poses like Sir Fopling, he nevertheless conducts his affairs through a series of dramatic scenarios.

So as to precipitate a quarrel with his mistress, Mrs Loveit, Dorimant arranges for Bellinda to visit Mrs Loveit and mention in passing that she has seen Dorimant at the playhouse with a masked lady. Dorimant describes to Medley the scene that is to follow:

> She [Bellinda] means insensibly to insinuate a discourse of me, and artificially raise her Jealousie to such a height, that transported with the first motions of her passion, she shall fly upon me with all the Fury imaginable, as soon as ever I enter; the Quarrel being thus happily begun, I am to play my part, confess and justifie all my Roguery, swear her impertinance and ill humour makes her intolerable, tax her with the next Fop that comes into my head, and in a huff march away, slight her and leave her to be taken by whosoever thinks it worth his time to lie down before her.
>
> (I.i.237-47)

In his last line, which is a variation of the Waller couplet he had quoted earlier (I.i.26-7), Dorimant leaves us with a picture of some new lover of Mrs Loveit's, prostrated before her in the conventional pose of an adoring lover. The image accentuates the fact that Dorimant's plan is all art, a theatrical conception. Dorimant will make his entrance on cue and play his part. The gestures are planned, the dialogue has been written. There is a similar description of Dorimant's plan to make public fools of Sir Fopling and Mrs Loveit. Referring to his intended postures at the meeting between Sir Fopling and Mrs Loveit he has arranged, Dorimant comments, 'I'le meet her and provoke her with a deal of dumb Civility in passing by, then turn short and be behind her, when Sir *Fopling* sets upon her' (III.iii.174-6). One should also note the relish and skill with which Dorimant acts out his role as Mr Courtage later in the play.

Dorimant is not, however, the only able actor in this play. Harriet and Young Bellair display their abilities in Act III, in a scene which leads up to the central point that is to be made about this play. Old Bellair and Lady Woodvill have arranged a marriage between Young Bellair and Harriet. Both intend to defy their parents, but in the mean time

decide to avoid parental wrath by dissembling an affection for each other. While their parents look on, they go through the motions of love. Each instructs the other on appropriate looks and gestures — the movements of the head, arms and legs, the motions of Harriet's fan, the rolling of her eyes, the heaving of her breasts. In short, signs of love are imitated in detail. Lady Woodvill and Old Bellair are, of course, completely taken in. They mistake an imitation of the conventional signs of love for an indication of real emotion.

Two major points can be made about this display of acting and how it compares to Dorimant's acts. The first relates to audience. For Harriet and Young Bellair, this act is specifically meant for their parents; its aim is to convince them that they are in love. For Dorimant, however, acting is a far more crucial aspect of his personality, and a far more pervasive aspect of his social life. At one point in the play, Sir Fopling exclaims, 'All the World will be in the Park to night' (III.ii.255). Dorimant's audience is this whole social world. Mrs Loveit is accurate when she comments of Dorimant's behaviour towards her, 'You take a pride of late in using of me ill, that the Town may know the power you have over me' (V.i.173-4). 'That the Town may know' is an all-important phrase for Dorimant. Hence his demands from Mrs Loveit of a public demonstration of disdain for Sir Fopling so as to salvage his reputation; hence his concern to justify his 'love to the World' (V.i.240). It is this dependence on his audience which is Dorimant's chief weakness and vulnerable point. It manifests itself in his slavish concern for reputation and his deep-rooted fear of being laughed at. Ultimately, however, Dorimant is dependent on his audience because as an actor it provides his very *raison d'être*.

The second point that must be made about the display of acting by Harriet and Young Bellair is more central to our continuing theme. Their

example of how signs can be manipulated is pleasant and harmless. Nevertheless, the fact that the signs of love can be so effectively imitated has more serious implications in other contexts. Given the control over gesture and expression characters maintain, who can tell the counterfeit from the real? And what can be made of Dorimant's comment to Mrs Loveit:

> Love gilds us over, and makes us show fine things to one another for a time, but soon the Gold wears off, and then again the native brass appears.
>
> (II.ii.208-10)

If love 'gilds us over', how can expressions of love be shown to be genuine? Moreover, how can one, in the process of courtship, perceive the 'native brass' of personality?

There is little doubt that Dorimant's feelings for Harriet are different in kind to his interest in Mrs Loveit and Bellinda. He tries to keep his feeling for Harriet on a purely physical level ('she has left a pleasing Image of her self behind that wanders in my Soul — it must not settle there.' III.iii.130-1), and consider her as just another mistress. He partially succeeds when he leaves Lady Townley's party to keep an appointment with Bellinda. ('I am not so foppishly in love here to forget; I am flesh and blood yet' IV.i.349-50). But, by the end of the play, he seeks to make a sincere declaration of his love to Harriet.

As Dorimant finds, however, sincerity is no longer such an easy matter:

> *Dor.* I have always my arms open to receive the distressed. But I will open my heart and receive you, where none yet did ever enter — You have fill'd it with a secret, might I but let you know it —
>
> *Har.* Do not speak it, if you would have me believe it; your Tongue is so fam'd for falsehood 'twill do the truth an injury.
>
> (V.ii.121-7)

Because of consistent dissimulation, Dorimant's words no longer have any credibility. How can he make a declaration of love that will be believed?

Dorimant goes on to plead the evidence of his face. He claims that there is no art involved and asks that Harriet not suspect the evidence of his eyes. Dorimant asks Harriet to look at him so that she might *see* that he is in love. She, however, retorts:

> Did you not tell me there was no credit to be given to faces? that Women now adays have their passions as much at will as they have their Complexions, and put on joy and sadness, scorn and kindness, with the same ease they do their Paint and Patches — Are they the only counterfeits?
> (V.ii.129-34)

Harriet's objections are telling. For all of Dorimant's assertions that he can provide 'marks that are infallible' (V.ii.141), Harriet wisely remains sceptical of Dorimant's love.

The Man of Mode concludes without any declaration of love or promise of marriage on the part of Harriet. Dorimant is merely granted leave to wait upon her in the country. In the first chapter, mention was made of how the country functions in Restoration comedy as a contrast to the town. It is an area associated with plain-speaking. It is no accident that Harriet demands that Dorimant court her in the country if he wants to pursue his love and demonstrate its genuineness. Away from the social posing, the intrigues and the affectations of the town, the truth may be more easily perceived. At least in the country Dorimant will not have an audience.

In its presentation of character as it displays itself socially, then, *The Man of Mode* highlights the difficulties of attaining certainty in human relations. Unlike Gerrard in *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master*, however, who is at one point firmly convinced that he has been duped by Hippolita, Dorimant is for the most part in control of events. In this respect, he is also different from the heroes of Congreve's comedies.

Major characters in each of Congreve's comedies are at some point unable to comprehend events around them. Vainlove, in *The Old Batchelour*,

seeing that the evidence of Araminta's behaviour and that suggested by a letter he wrongly believes she wrote are contradictory, exclaims, 'Did I dream? Or do I dream? Shall I believe my Eyes, or Ears? The Vision is here still. — Your Passion, Madam, will admit of no farther reasoning' (IV.iii.175-7). When Mellefont finds Lady Plyant's behaviour inexplicable in *The Double Dealer*, he makes a similar comment. 'Where am I? sure, is it day? and am I awake, Madam?' (II.i.323-4). Later in the play, Mellefont confesses to Maskwell, 'I am confounded in a maze of thoughts, each leading into one another, and all ending in perplexity' (V.i.103-5). In *The Way of the World*, Mirabell exclaims of his mistress Millamant, 'Think of you! To think of a Whirlwind, tho' 'twere in a Whirlwind, were a Case of more steady Contemplation' (II.i.490-2). Scandal, unable to understand Angelica's behaviour in *Love for Love*, responds to Jeremy's question of, 'What, has she gone, Sir?' by exclaiming, 'Gone; why she was never here, nor any where else; nor I don't know her if I see her; nor you neither' (IV.i.95-7). The above responses are strikingly similar. Congreve's heroes are not always in control. To them life, and especially women do not always seem comprehensible. Life cannot be understood in terms of reason. Hence, though both *The Man of Mode* and *Love for Love* focus on difficulties of understanding in human relationships, the latter play is characterized by a greater degree of confusion and misunderstanding.

The recurring idea which helps structurally unify *Love for Love* is that of 'madness'. Repeatedly, and for a variety of reasons, characters are unable to fathom the behaviour of others and proclaim it 'mad'. The character of Foresight, with his interest in omens, astrology and various other superstititions, introduces into the setting of the play the notion of affairs going contrary to expectations, of evidence having unexpected import, of behaviour being unpredictable. When Angelica asks for a loan of her uncle's coach, Foresight comments, 'What, wou'd you be gadding too?

Sure all Females are mad to day' (II.i.46-7). Earlier, he had remarked to his servant, 'I was born, Sir, when the Crab was ascending, and all my Affairs go backward' (II.i.12-3). On first seeing Foresight, the nurse remarks, 'Pray Heav'n send your Worship good Luck ... for you have put on one Stocking with the wrong side outward'. Foresight adds, 'I got out of Bed backwards too this morning' (II.i.26-32). These seemingly insignificant details suggest a comic world where affairs will not go smoothly. But perhaps most significant are the opening remarks of Act II:

> *Foresight.* Hey day! What are all the Women of my Family abroad? Is not my Wife come home? Nor my Sister, nor my Daughter?
> *Servant.* No, Sir.
> *Foresight.* Mercy on us, what can be the meaning of it? Sure the Moon is in all her Fortitudes.
> (II.i.1-6)

The question, 'what can be the meaning' is one which characters will repeatedly ask throughout the play. The expression, the 'Moon is in all her Fortitudes' refers, as Davis tells us in a footnote, to the fact that the moon is 'Exerting her full power, and thus causing uncertainty and changeableness'.[1] The whole play can, in a sense, be said to be under the influence of this 'moon', a fact which generates problems in understanding behaviour.

In the course of Act III Scandal, a free speaking libertine, arranges an assignation with Mrs Foresight, a lady who publicly proclaims her virtue but privately has contrary inclinations. The assignation results in Mr Foresight's cuckoldom. When, in Act IV, Foresight comments on his abilities to foretell, Scandal remarks knowingly to his wife, 'Madam, you and I can tell him something else, that he did not foresee ... relating to his own Fortune'. Mrs Foresight, however, unexpectedly retorts, 'What do you mean? I don't understand you' (IV.i.311-5), and later, 'you

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[1] *The Complete Plays of William Congreve*, p.235.

are mad in my opinion' (IV.i.323-4). Mrs Foresight's seemingly inexplicable response is explained by the fact that Mrs Foresight has what Scandal calls the 'admirable quality' of forgetting her indiscretions, at least in public. This is one source of inconsistency and unpredictability. Mrs Foresight completely separates her public and private behaviour. The above accusation of 'madness' is immediately followed by the entrance of Ben proclaiming, 'All mad, I think' (IV.i.356) in response to his inability to understand his father's behaviour. More important, however, is the difficulty the plain-speaking Ben has in fathoming the behaviour of his would-be mistress, Mrs Frail.

Thinking that Ben is to inherit Sir Sampson's fortune, Mrs Frail is intent on marrying him. To this purpose, she dissembles an admiration for Ben's honest humour and suggests her availability. When it becomes clear, however, that Ben has little chance of actually getting the inheritance, she naturally changes her mind. Ben, of course, innocent as he is of the intrigues of the town, suspects nothing of her underlying motives. He interprets everything at face value. Using Ben's argument with his father as a pretext, Mrs Frail provokes a split between them. Ben simply can't understand the sudden change in Mrs Frail's attitude towards him and exclaims, 'O Lord, O Lord, she's mad, poor Young Woman, Love has turn'd her senses, her Brain is quite overset' (IV.i.403-4).

A similar sequence of events occurs in the relationship between Tattle and Prue. Prue's situation is similar to Ben's in that she also has no experience of the ways of the town. Tattle, a half-witted fop, pretends to love Prue so that he can boast of her as one of his conquests. When he thinks he has a chance to marry Angelica, however, he will have no more to do with her. Prue complains to Mr Foresight, 'O Father, why will you let him go? Won't you make him be my Husband?'. Foresight responds, 'Mercy on us, what do these Lunacies portend? Alas! he's Mad,

Child, stark Wild' (V.i.300-4).

Particularly for the outsiders Ben and Prue, behaviour in this play does not follow comprehensible patterns. 'Your words must contradict your thoughts', Tattle tells Prue when giving her a lesson in courtship. Behaviour is characterized by inconstancy and dissimulation, and is perceived by other characters as 'mad'. Madness also plays a major role, however, in the main plot, in the relationship between Angelica and Valentine.

In Act I of the play, Scandal describes Angelica as one of those women who 'rarely give us any light to guess at what they mean' (I.i.349-50). Later in the play, the difficulty of interpreting Angelica's behaviour is once again emphasized when Valentine comments, 'She is harder to be understood than a Piece of *AEgyptian* Antiquity, or an *Irish* Manuscript; you may pore till you spoil your Eyes, and not improve your Knowledge' (IV.i.801-4). Valentine complains of the lack of 'Regularity and Method' in Angelica's behaviour (IV.i.810). One of the reasons Valentine adopts his mask of madness in the play is as an attempt to find out what Angelica really thinks of him. He hopes that in her concern for him, she will manifest her love. Angelica, however, is determined to keep Valentine uncertain of her feelings until she gets some proof of the genuineness of his supposed love for her.

Valentine's chief concern at the beginning of the play is with the protection of his estate. He is forced by the pressure of creditors to pledge away his rights of inheritance. So as to defer signing away his estate, Valentine pretends to be mad and hence incapable of making any conveyance in law. Congreve described the dramatic usefulness of this disguise in terms of three functions. In the first place, it 'conduces somewhat to the design', secondly it 'makes a Variation of the Character', and thirdly, Valentine's disguise as a madman 'gives a Liberty to

Satire'.[1] The disguise of madness is also, however, conducive to dramatic conciseness. Because the notion of madness can apply with different significance both to the lunatic and the lover, it allows Congreve to develop both aspects of the plot involving Valentine — his relationship with his father, and that with Angelica — simultaneously. Valentine's desire to become a poet was shallow ('Nay, I am not violently bent upon the Trade'. I.i.152-3) and short-lived, his lunacy is only a pretence. Angelica is concerned to see that as a lover he is more genuine.

As mentioned earlier, Valentine tries to exploit his disguise as a madman so as to force a declaration of love from Angelica. Scandal, as part of the ploy, tries to suggest that the madness is, in effect, Angelica's fault, the 'effect of an unsuccessful Passion' (IV.i.46). Angelica, however, sees through the pretence and decides to 'play Trick for Trick' (IV.i.67). Instead of providing an acknowledgement of love, she dissembles an exaggerated indifference.

At their next meeting, Valentine attempts to come to an understanding with Angelica and drop his disguise of madness. In a tone of voice which is reminiscent of his earlier pose as poet, however, he seeks to present his pretended madness as a grand demonstration of his love for Angelica:

> You see what disguises Love makes us put on; Gods have been in counterfeited Shapes for the same Reason; and the Divine Part of me, my Mind, has worn this Mask of Madness, and this motly Livery, only as a Slave of Love, and Menial Creature of your Beauty.
>
> (IV.i.700-4)

Angelica, however, is unimpressed by these exaggerated claims. Just as Valentine's madness was pretended, the affected tone here suggests the inadequacy of this as a genuine demonstration of love. Angelica rewards

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[1] *Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations* in *The Complete Works of William Congreve*, ed. Montague Summers, 4 vols. (London, 1923), III, p.187.

Valentine for his pains by pretending not to understand him. When Valentine wants to leave off acting she insists that he is in fact truly mad. Angelica refuses to understand Valentine till she has some more convincing proof of his love for her than his inflated declarations can provide.

When Tattle, who believes that Valentine has truly lost his senses, attempts to court Angelica, he contrasts his own health and vigour with Valentine's demented state. Angelica, however, retorts, 'O fie for shame, hold your Tongue, A passionate Lover, and five Senses in perfection! when you are as Mad as *Valentine*, I'll believe you love me, and the maddest shall take me' (IV.i.585-8). As it applies to a lover, madness is an excess of passion, a transport of the soul, and hence a proof of love. Valentine insists on pretending madness to his father, but wishes to drop the mask when he is with Angelica. He comments, 'I'm Mad, and will be Mad to every Body but this Lady.' Jeremy, however, adds, 'So — Just the very backside of Truth, — But lying is a Figure in Speech, that interlards the greatest part of my Conversation' (IV.i.773-7). The riddle lies in the dual signification of madness, firstly as it applies to the lunatic and secondly as it applies to the lover. Valentine only apprehends the first meaning, while Jeremy's reference is to the second. Valentine should, in fact, be 'mad' to Angelica and sane to everyone else. Indeed, this is how the play concludes. Valentine, certain that Angelica is about to marry Sir Sampson, drops his pretended madness and willingly offers to sign away his estate. Scandal objects, ''S'death, you are not mad indeed, to ruine your self?' Valentine replies, referring to his belief that he has lost Angelica, 'I have been disappointed of my only Hope; and he that loses hope may part with any thing' (V.i.541-4). This declaration is seen by Angelica as a sign of genuine madness, a display of passion and proof of love. Now she feels able to declare her love for Valentine and give herself to him.

In this and in the previous chapter, five plays written between 1672 and 1695 have been briefly considered with one question in mind. 'What is the source of complication in these comedies? How do uncertainties, mistakes and confusions arise?' In approaching the question, two broad ideas — 'inconstancy of signification' and the fallibility of perception — have been used. The relationship between the characters in the comedies can be classified into two major groups. In the first place there is the interaction between the wit and the dupe, and secondly, the relationship between a young couple in the process of courtship. In both the above patterns, problems of how to interpret behaviour, of how to read signs, arise. While the first emphasizes the biases of perception characteristic of the fop, the second highlights the difficulty of attaining certainty in human relationships.

While the five comedies showed many similar concerns, however, contrasts and differences in treatment and emphasis were also noted. In its treatment of deception, *The Double Dealer* is different from the two Wycherley plays that were considered. The values inherent in the wit versus dupe pattern cannot be applied to it. 'Manipulation of surfaces' has a different meaning depending on whether one is talking about *The Country Wife* or *The Man of Mode*. If one can say that much of the deception in *The Country Wife* is a pretence at being something other than what one is, *The Man of Mode* is more concerned with hiding what one actually is. There is also the difference between plays where the hero is mostly in control of events and in a position of superiority as in *The Country Wife* and *The Man of Mode*, and the plays where he can be as perplexed as any other character on the stage as with *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master* and *Love for Love*. As well, there are differences in the treatment of problems of perception. Whereas *The Gentleman-Dancing-Master* and *The Country Wife* exploit gross mistakes for broad comic effect, *The Man of Mode* is concerned

with the more subtle difficulties of perception associated with social living. Whereas *The Double Dealer* explores calculated deception, the difficulty of understanding Angelica in *Love for Love* stems less from deception than from her refusal to commit herself and clarify her position.

The question, 'what are the important sources of complication and uncertainty?' is at once a matter of dramatic construction and of the dramatist's thematic concerns. This chapter will be concluded with a contrast between the structure of *The Double Dealer* and Congreve's masterpiece, *The Way of the World*, a contrast which highlights the above relationship.

In one important aspect of plot, *The Double Dealer* is similar to *The Way of the World*. In both plays there is an older woman who is in love with the chief young gallant of the play. In her jealousy, this older woman tries to disrupt a relationship between this gallant and the young lady that he loves. The plays are very different, however, in the way they exploit the deceptions and intrigues that arise from this situation. These differences will become evident if we compare the plot summaries of both these plays given in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

The Double Dealer is described saying,

> Mellefont, nephew and prospective heir of Lord Touchwood, is about to marry Cynthia, daughter of Sir Paul Plyant. Lady Touchwood, a violent dissolute woman, is in love with Mellefont, but as he rejects her advances, determines to prevent the match and ruin him in Lord Touchwood's esteem. In this design she finds a confederate in Maskwell, the Double Dealer, who has been her lover, pretends to be Mellefont's friend, and aspires to cheat him of Cynthia and get her for himself. To this end he leads Plyant to suspect an intrigue between Mellefont and Lady Plyant, and Touchwood an intrigue between Mellefont and Lady Touchwood; and contrives that Touchwood shall find Mellefont in the latter's chamber. Mellefont is disinherited and Cynthia is to be made over to Maskwell. The latter's plot, however, here goes wrong. Lord Touchwood informs Lady Touchwood of Maskwell's intention to marry

> Cynthia. This awakens her jealousy. She finds Maskwell and upbraids him, and is overheard by Lord Touchwood, who now perceives Maskwell's treachery, and defeats his final attempt to carry off Cynthia.[1]

while for *The Way of the World* we have,

> Mirabell is in love with Millamant, a niece of Lady Wishfort, and has pretended to make love to the aunt in order to conceal his suit of the niece. The deceit has been revealed to Lady Wishfort by Mrs. Marwood to revenge herself on Mirabell, who has rejected her advances. Lady Wishfort, who now hates Mirabell "more than a quaker hates a parrot", will deprive her niece of the half of the inheritance which is in her keeping, if Millamant marries Mirabell. The latter accordingly contrives that his servant Waitwell shall personate an uncle of his, Sir Rowland, make love to Lady Wishfort and pretend to marry her, having, however, first married Lady Wishfort's woman, Foible. He hopes by this deception to win Lady Wishfort's consent to his marriage to her niece. The plot is discovered by Mrs. Marwood, and also the fact that Mirabell has in the past had an intrigue with Mrs. Fainall, daughter of Lady Wishfort. She conspires with Fainall, her lover and the pretended friend of Mirabell, to reveal these facts to Lady Wishfort, while Fainall is to threaten to divorce his wife and discredit Lady Wishfort unless he is given full control of Mrs. Fainall's property and Millamant's portion is also handed over to him. The scheme, however, fails. Mrs. Fainall denies the charge against her, brings proof of Fainall's relations with Mrs. Marwood, while Mirabell produces a deed by which Mrs. Fainall, before her last marriage, made him trustee of her property. Lady Wishfort, in gratitude for her release from Fainall's threats, forgives Mirabell and consents to his marriage to Millamant.[2]

The first and most obvious point to be made about these outlines, is that the plot of *The Way of the World* is far more complex than that of *The Double Dealer*. This complexity has often been remarked upon by critics and has provoked such diverse responses as John Wain's dismissive, 'the only defence of such a plot' is in the 'cross-word puzzle pleasure' it can generate,[3] and Harriett Hawkins's more sympathetic (and well-founded)

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[1] *The Oxford Companion to English Literature,* ed. Sir Paul Harvey (Oxford, 1967), p.244.

[2] *ibid.* p.876.

[3] 'Restoration Comedy and its Modern Critics' in *Preliminary Essays* (London, 1957), p.29.

comment that, 'Congreve's play is deliberately designed to reflect a world of confused social and personal relationships'.[1] While agreeing with this latter comment, however, one should add the obvious point that *The Way of the World* is not a confused play. This is a matter of the role the plot takes in the overall design of the play. In *The Double Dealer*, the sequence of the scenes and their interrelationships, indeed, the structure as a whole, is governed by the plotting of Lady Touchwood and Maskwell, and by the situations of deception this plotting generates. In this play, an excessively complex plot would create a confused dramatic structure. *The Way of the World* is not, however, structured primarily in terms of how its plot unfolds, but rather in terms of its organization of character groupings, confrontations and conversations. Hence, the play can retain a clarity of design despite its complex plot.

This difference in structural approach accounts for the second way in which the descriptions of these plays in *The Oxford Companion* can be contrasted. One does not, of course, expect entries in this volume to provide satisfactory descriptions of literary texts. Its extreme brevity notwithstanding, however, the entry for *The Double Dealer* gives a fair outline of what in fact happens in the play. The source of complication and misunderstanding is given, as is an outline of the scenes which the central deceptions of the play generate. To phrase it another way, if one were to approach the play with a view to investigating the kinds of problems of perception with which it is concerned, one could identify, from the above plot summary, the major scenes that one would deal with. This is simply not true of the description of *The Way of the World*. In its emphasis on 'plot' and events, the description creates a completely false impression of what the play is actually like. In *The Way of the*

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[1] *Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama* (Oxford, 1972), p.118.

World it is not the plot as such, which generates the play's most interesting conflicts and dramatic situations.

Indicative of this, is the way Mirabell's schemes to thwart Lady Wishfort's intentions are introduced. During a break in the conversation between Fainall and Mirabell with which the play opens, a servant enters and tells Mirabell that a marriage has taken place. We become aware that the marriage is part of some design that Mirabell is pursuing but are not told what that design is, nor how far it has progressed. Another piece of information about the intrigue is given later in the act, this time in terms of a 'false clue'. Witwoud tells of a rumour that Mirabell's uncle is about to arrive in town, and mentions talk of a possible match between this uncle and Millamant. As yet the audience is unaware that this uncle is Mirabell's creation and that he will be played by Mirabell's servant, Waitwell. In the middle of Act II, however, the audience is finally given a factual account of Mirabell's plans as he outlines them to his confidant, Mrs Fainall.

The point about the way Mirabell's intrigue is introduced is simply that the intrigue is not allowed to become the centre of dramatic interest. Mirabell himself is not particularly enthusiastic about the intrigue. He refers to it as a 'Matter of some sort of Mirth' (I.i.136-7). But he is hardly the trickster who exults in his ability to deceive and manipulate. His description of his plans to Mrs Fainall is matter of fact and businesslike. In this respect, Mirabell is obviously different to Maskwell for whom intrigues are the central preoccupation.

There are, in *The Way of the World,* dramatically effective scenes which originate in Mirabell's plot. There is the confrontation between Foible and Lady Wishfort in III.i., Lady Wishfort's elaborate preparations for her meeting with Sir Rowland, and, of course, the meeting itself. Yet one feels that these scenes are of secondary importance. The real interest

in *The Way of the World* is less in the way intrigue generates problems of meaning than in the more subtle deceptions of conversation. Nor are Mirabell and Fainall contrasted in terms of their skill and enthusiasm as intriguers, but rather in terms of their social awareness and sense of responsibility.

The Way of the World does not open with a description of Mirabell's plan to thwart Lady Wishfort, but instead, with a conversation between Mirabell and Fainall, the play's two most important male characters. The dialogue is characterized firstly by the care with which each participant chooses his words, and secondly by the intelligence with which each listens and judges. Fainall, for example, suggests that Mrs Marwood has become Mirabell's enemy because he has slighted her advances. Fainall pays close attention to the tone of Mirabell's reply, and then comments, 'you speak with an Indifference which seems to be affected; and confesses you are conscious of a Negligence' (I.i.93-4). Mirabell is, however, as perceptive as Fainall and is also sensitive to possible undercurrents of meaning. In reply, he suggests that there is in fact a relationship between Fainall and Mrs Marwood saying, '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' (I.i.95-8). The dialogue itself is accompanied by an effort to read between the lines, to understand not only what is said, but also to perceive what is left unsaid.

This same close observation is evident in the dialogue between Mrs Marwood and Mrs Fainall which opens Act II of the play. Both ladies are in love with Mirabell, yet both deny it. They dissemble an aversion for all men. In their conversation, however, what they learn from each other's speech is modified by what they see in each other's faces:

Mrs. Fainall. Ingenious Mischief! [referring to Mrs Marwood's plan to marry only so as to torment her husband] Wou'd thou wert married to *Mirabell.*
Mrs. Marwood. Wou'd I were.
Mrs. Fainall. You change Colour.
Mrs. Marwood. Because I hate him.
Mrs. Fainall. So do I; but I can hear him nam'd. But what Reason have you to hate him in particular?
Mrs. Marwood. I never lov'd him; he is, and always was insufferably proud.
Mrs. Fainall. By the Reason you give for your Aversion, one wou'd think it dissembl'd; for you have laid a Fault to his Charge, of which his Enemies must acquit him.
Mrs. Marwood. O then it seems you are one of his favourable Enemies. Methinks you look a little pale, and now you flush again.

(II.i.65-79)

Beneath the superficial agreement between the ladies and their stated aversion for men, is their rival love for Mirabell and jealousy of each other.

The above two conversations are indicative of the kinds of deceptions which typify this comedy. In *The Way of the World,* dialogue is accompanied at once by subtle dissimulation, and relentless scrutiny. It is this, rather than the intrigue *The Oxford Companion* describes, which characterizes the play's concern with meaning.

CHAPTER FOUR

MORAL RESTRAINTS

Jeremy Collier's *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage* (1698), purports to expose and attack those aspects of Restoration theatre which were corrupt and obscene. It is, however, evident from the final section of his work and implicit in his argument as a whole that Collier's objections to the theatre go beyond this aim. He attacks aspects of comedy that are fundamental, and his tirade against the stage can properly be seen as part of the tradition of moral opposition to the theatre embodied in the writings of such Church fathers as Tertullian and Augustine, and finding its best known expression in the seventeenth century in William Prynne's *Histrio-Mastix*.[1] For all its narrow, moralistic stance, its strident tone and strained interpretations of plays, however, *A Short View* proves useful in guiding one to a central issue in any discussion of the structure of Restoration comedy. Collier's objections to Restoration comedy highlight one aspect of the relationship between dramatic structure and morality.

For Jeremy Collier, the sole aim of comedy was to promote moral virtue and decry vice. With the proviso that comedy's chief concern should be with folly rather than vice, Restoration dramatists would have agreed, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and sincerity, that to instruct was one of the major aims of comedy. They would have disagreed with Collier, however, about the way in which such instruction should be accomplished. Though Collier pays lip service to the neo-classical theory of comedy, his real demand is that comedy instruct in the simplest possible way. Vice should be discouraged by presenting plays where the vicious are severely punished; virtue encouraged by presenting as leading characters exemplary figures whom an audience could imitate. This latter

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[1]For a historical sketch of opposition to the stage, see Jonas A. Barish, 'The Antitheatrical Prejudice', *The Critical Quarterly*, VIII (1966), pp. 329-48.

demand raises an important question about what kind of character is appropriate for presentation in comedy.

Significantly, William Congreve opened his defence of his plays against the accusations of immorality levelled at them by Collier with a quotation from Aristotle's definition of comedy that '*Comedy* ... is an Imitation of the worst sort of People'. Congreve went on to note that comedy instructs by exposing vice and folly to ridicule and concluded his opening remarks saying, 'Thus much I thought necessary to premise, that by shewing the Nature and End of Comedy, we may be prepared to expect Characters agreeable to it'.[1] Underlying the controversy between Jeremy Collier and the dramatists of the period then, were different conceptions of the nature of comedy. Collier thought that comedy should instruct by presenting virtuous characters while the dramatists and dramatic theorists of the seventeenth century saw comedy's role as one of presenting the ridiculous and affected. Complaints about the immorality of characters presented in Restoration theatre were not confined to Jeremy Collier. Joseph Wood Krutch has noted that there was opposition to the excesses of the stage throughout the Restoration period.[2] Among the dramatists, Thomas Shadwell, referring to Dryden's comedies, had objected as early as 1668 that, 'in the *Playes* which have been wrote of late, there is no such thing as perfect Character, but the two chief persons are most commonly a Swearing, Drinking, Whoring, Ruffian for a Lover, and an impudent ill-bred *tomrig* for a Mistress, and these are the fine People of the *Play*'.[3]

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[1]*Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations* in *The Complete Works of William Congreve*, ed. Montague Summers, 4 vols. (London, 1923), III, p.173.

[2]*Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration* (New York, 1957, repr.), pp. 92-101.

[3]Preface to *The Sullen Lovers*, *The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell*, I, p.11.

The demand that the major characters of a play should be virtuous and exemplary, however, became much more forceful in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and came to be seriously heeded by dramatists. Richard Steele's well-known objections to Etherege's *The Man of Mode* are to the point. 'I will take it for granted', writes Steele, 'that a fine Gentleman should be honest in his Actions, and refined in his Language. Instead of this, our Hero, in this Piece, is a direct Knave in his Designs, and a Clown in his Language'.[1] The fact that Steele assumes and can take it for granted that the chief figure in a comedy should be a fine gentleman who is 'honest in his Actions' cuts completely across the neo-classical theory of comedy espoused by Congreve and most other Restoration dramatists and testifies to the change in direction comic theory took in the early eighteenth century. Certainly, John Dennis objected to Steele's approach, writing in his *Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter*, 'How little do they know of the Nature of true Comedy, who believe that its proper Business is to set us Patterns for Imitation'.[2] But it was the view that comedy should instruct by presenting such patterns for imitation that came to dominate critical thinking in the early eighteenth century.

James Drake responded to Jeremy Collier's attack on the stage with the comment, already quoted in chapter two of this thesis, that the 'sort of Persons ... most proper to be employed in *Comedy*' are 'Persons of Trick and Cunning on one hand, and easie credulous Folks on the other, otherwise the Plot will but go heavily forward'.[3] With his mention of the demands

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[1] *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1965), I, pp. 278-9.

[2] *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols. (Baltimore, 1939), II, p.245.

[3] *The Antient and Modern Stages survey'd* (London, 1699), p.233.

of plot, Drake adds a new dimension to the question of what kind of character is appropriate for comic presentation. One can readily see how the trickster functions as the agent in constructing the plot and how the interaction between trickster and dupe generates comic situations. The notion that the most important characters in a comedy should be strictly virtuous, however, presents dramatic problems. Dramatists from Jonson to Congreve saw flaws in character as their sources of comic situations. James Drake goes on to say that 'all Characters absolutely perfect are excluded the *Comick* Stage. For what has a Man of pure Integrity to do with Intrigues of any kind? He can't assist in the execution of any design of Circumvention without forfeiting his Character'. Drake does concede that 'Men of Honour may be made use of to punish Knaves' but insists that 'their honour ought not to be too straitlaced, too squeamish and scrupulous. They must be Persons of some Liberty, that out of an over-niceness will not balk a well laid design, and spoil a Project with too much honesty'.[1] In a context dominated by strict moralists, Drake's obvious appreciation of a well laid intrigue plot is refreshing. His point is also valid. If comedy is based on intrigue and strategem, how can a character who is always 'honest in his Actions' be a chief protagonist? The point also has relevance beyond comedy whose structural basis is the intrigue plot. Misunderstanding and uncertainty are fundamental to the creation of comic situations. The scene where different characters perceive events with different levels of knowledge is fundamental to comedy. In comedy, meaning and significance must be unclear or at least capable of being misinterpreted. Most often, such situations are created through behaviour which is less than honest. Certainly, if honesty is the criterion by which one judges whether a character is suitable to comedy, the opportunities for the creation of

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[1] *ibid.* pp. 233-4.

such situations are severely limited. One can also add that it is precisely those qualities of personality which a moralist finds suspect — exhibitionism, extravagance, flamboyance — which are most dramatically effective. The Christian virtues of patience, silence and moderation, by their very nature, resist successful presentation on the stage. As Jonas A. Barish has noted, this fact contributed to the widespread opposition among moralists to the stage as such.[1] It can also be seen as a difficulty inherent in the notion of a drama which purports to instruct through the presentation of ideal characters.

In Congreve's discussion of comedy in his famous letter to John Dennis of July 10, 1695, Congreve notes that, to be dramatically effective, characters on the stage must be 'something larger than the Life'.[2] This notion of 'enlargement' is, of course, a variation of Dryden's view that 'heightening' is a necessary part of the dramatist's task. Dryden was concerned that a play be not only a just, but also a lively image of nature. A dramatist must certainly imitate nature. But he must also 'heighten' it so that it is dramatically effective.[3] One can readily see how such a notion can apply in the depiction of comic characters. Congreve, for example, notes with approval the exaggerated characterization of Jonson's Morose saying, 'It is his excess ... that makes him become Ridiculous, and qualifies his Character for Comedy'.[4] The question which arises in this context is, can virtuous characters also be 'heightened' and 'enlarged' so as to become dramatically forceful and effective?

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[1]'The Antitheatrical Prejudice', *The Critical Quarterly*, VIII (1966), p.337.

[2]*William Congreve Letters & Documents*, ed. John C. Hodges (London, 1964) p.181.

[3]See *Of Dramatic Poesy: An Essay* and, especially, *A Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.

[4]*op. cit.* p.180.

In the main body of Restoration comedy, virtuous characters were depicted. One thinks, for example, of Emilia in *The Man of Mode*, Alithea in *The Country Wife* and Eliza in *The Plain Dealer*. These characters are sometimes seen as central figures in their respective plays by critics who seek to find a norm in each comedy in terms of which other characters can be judged. Their roles are overshadowed, however, by other, more dramatically forceful figures. Serious and frequent attempts to make a virtuous character dramatically as well as morally central began towards the end of the seventeenth century with the plays of Cibber, Vanbrugh and later, Richard Steele. These dramatists attempted to make virtuous characters dramatically effective by giving them 'heightened', emotional language, by having them utter virtuous sentiments which might excite admiration in the audience. As the popularity of sentimental comedy testifies, contemporary audiences found the results effective. To the modern reader, however, the taste of these audiences seems curious. The attempts at 'enlargement' seem to betray the superficiality and self-indulgence of the sentiments expressed, rather than suggest their depth and authenticity. But even if virtuous characters can be made dramatically forceful, their role in comedy is still dubious. The question which arises is, can the behaviour of these characters readily generate comic situations? One aspect of this problem manifests itself in the construction of Vanbrugh's *The Relapse*.

The Relapse was hardly a play which pleased the moralists. Jeremy Collier devoted a whole chapter to its immorality in his treatise. Nevertheless, it has been correctly seen as a play written in the reform stream.[1] What is interesting about the play in this context is that, in its two plots, it largely separates the two functions of comedy — to

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[1] *Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration*, p.112.

divert and to instruct. One plot (whether it is the major one or the minor one was a subject of controversy) turns around the popular comic story of how a worthy younger brother gulls his affected elder brother and marries the latter's intended wife. In his attack on the play, Jeremy Collier emphasised this plot. The other plot of *The Relapse* is a sequel to Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* (1696). Cibber's play was concerned with the reform of the rake Loveless through the influence of his virtuous wife Amanda. This play shows Loveless relapse into his former immoral ways. As well, we see an extended assault on Amanda's virtue by an attractive gallant called Worthy. The climax of this plot comes when Amanda heroically resists Worthy's advances and in the process reforms him.

In his defence of his play against Collier's attacks, Vanbrugh naturally emphasises the Amanda, Loveless, Worthy plot. He locates the play's instructive element in this section of the play commenting, 'Loveless had a part that, from people who desire to be the better for plays, might draw a little more attention'.[1] Vanbrugh also recognizes that, in giving this plot an overt moral message, he risks making it unsuitable for comedy. Referring to Worthy's conversion speech, he comments, 'This I thought was a turn so little suited to comedy, that I confess I was afraid the rigour of the moral would have damned the play'.[2] In Vanbrugh's view, the interests of overt instruction and comic diversion pull apart. He reiterates the sentiment in his prologue to *The False Friend* (1702):

> To gain your favour, we your rules obey,
> And treat you with a moral piece to-day;
> So moral, we're afraid 'twill damn the play.
> (4-6)

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[1] *A Short Vindication* in *Sir John Vanbrugh,* II, p.402.

[2] *ibid.* p.409.

The problem is not simply that rigorous morality seems to jar in the traditionally more liberal comic world, but also that overtly moral plots are not conducive to the creation of comic situations. Significantly, Vanbrugh sees the moral of a play as something which 'lies much more in the characters and the dialogue, than in the business and the event'. 'Business and event', in turn, can provide diversion but necessarily involve 'inferior persons'. Hence, Vanbrugh writes of the Young Fashion, Lord Foppington section of *The Relapse*, 'In short; my Lord Foppington, and the Bridegroom, and the Bride ... are the inferior persons of the play (I mean as to their business) and what they do, is more to divert the audience, by something particular and whimsical in their humours, than to instruct 'em in anything that may be drawn from their morals'.[1] Vanbrugh, then, has divided his characters into two groups, those that can instruct and those that are meant to divert. The former can be exemplary figures who instruct through their character and dialogue. The latter, concerned as they are with plots and intrigues, are more lively and entertaining. This fact, however, also renders these characters 'inferior persons' who can play little part in overt instruction.

In comedies written around the turn of the century, intrigue and deception still remain a frequent source of plot complication and comic misunderstanding. A new restraint is noticeable, however, in the way these are used. In *The Way of the World* (1700), Mirabell's use of Waitwell to dupe Lady Wishfort is played down. There is no pleasure taken in the intrigue. More significantly, Captain Clerimont in Steele's *The Tender Husband* (1705) delegates the responsibility for plotting to a lesser figure, Pounce. Clerimont Senior tells Pounce, 'Now, my Brother and I want your help, in a Business that requires a little more dexterity, than

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[1] *ibid.* pp. 401-2.

we our selves are Masters of' (I.i.96-8). It is as if dexterity or the ability to manipulate are no longer appropriate qualities for a hero. Attempts are also made to set the activities of the intriguer into a morally acceptable framework. In Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* (1696), Young Worthy cheats his father-in-law of five thousand pounds, but not before Elder Worthy highlights the moral dimension and advises him, 'But hark you, brother; I have considered of it, and pray let me oblige you not to pursue your design on his five thousand pounds: for, in short, 'tis no better than a cheat, and what a gentleman should scorn to be guilty of' (V.p.64). In *The Relapse*, 'a qualm of conscience' delays Young Fashion's plans to dupe his brother (I.iii.328-9). He refuses to proceed till he has tested his brother's generosity once again. Only if his brother fails him will Fashion 'subdue' his 'conscience' (V.iii.351). Farquhar 'regularises' Aimwell's imposture as his elder brother in *The Beaux Strategem* (1706) by announcing the latter's death towards the end of the play. These can be seen as attempts at exploiting the dramatic and structural value of the deceiver plot, while avoiding its moral dubiety. But perhaps the most obvious way a plot which generates dramatic interest can be made morally acceptable is through the use of the fifth act repentance. This is Richard Steele's technique in *The Lying Lover* (1703). This play, like *Love's Last Shift*, derives its dramatic interest from the pre-reform behaviour of its major characters. The repentant Bookwit and Penelope could hardly make for good comedy.

The more difficult task of writing a comedy where the hero as well as the heroine were morally exemplary figures throughout the whole play was left to Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). Steele explicitly states in his preface that in this comedy he meant to teach through 'Example and Precept'. His chief characters were to be models for imitation. Given Steele's ethical code, this involved certain problems of dramatic construction. The use of disguise, the tradition of dupery

and intrigue, the use of dissimulation were no longer readily available as plot devices, at least with respect to his exemplary characters. In fact, Steele does compromise to the extent of including a sub-plot which is based on deception.[1] In this plot, Myrtle attempts to break the proposed match between Lucinda and Cimberton. In the process he disguises himself first as the lawyer Bramble and then as Sir Geoffry Cimberton. As Shirley Strum Kenny has pointed out, however, the disguise scenes do not affect the actual outcome of the plot. In the world of Steele's moral comedy, characters are unable to take advantage of their trickery.[2]

It should also be noted that Steele's aim in constructing the plot of *The Conscious Lovers* was not to create situations which would provoke laughter. Laughter was regarded with suspicion by Steele and his fellow sentimentalists. Steele writes, for example, in his epilogue to *The Lying Lover*:

> For Laughter's a distorted Passion, born
> Of sudden self Esteem, and sudden Scorn;
> Which, when 'tis o'er, the Men in Pleasure wise,
> Both him that mov'd it, and themselves despise,
> While generous Pity of a painted Woe
> Makes us our selves both more approve, and know.
> (4-9)

Steele adopted the Hobbesian view of laughter and found it distasteful. He substituted as his chief dramatic aim the creation of situations which would excite 'generous Pity'. Nevertheless, as can be seen from the construction of *The Conscious Lovers*, the problem of generating plot complication is still relevant.

In the major plot of *The Conscious Lovers*, complication does still arise from the lack of understanding among characters when meanings are

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[1] It has been suggested, however, that the more overtly comic sections of this play were contributed by Cibber. See *The Plays of Richard Steele*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Oxford, 1971), pp. 277-8.

[2] *The Conscious Lovers*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (London, 1968), p.xxiii.

not plain or plainly expressed. Steele, however, tries to make the sources of such misunderstanding beyond reproach. Hence they arise from what Steele considers to be social virtues rather than social vices. From discretion rather than dissimulation, restraint rather than falsehood, and from an unwillingness to hurt or give offence. Certainly, this limits Steele's field somewhat and makes this play a rather laboured affair. Nevertheless, possibilities for misunderstanding still exist.

In his opening conversation with his servant Humphrey, Sir John Bevil mentions that he has always given his son liberty to behave as he would. He goes on, 'I knew not how, otherwise to judge of his Inclination; for what can be concluded from a Behaviour under Restraint and Fear?' (I.i. 32-3). But for all Sir John's good intentions, restraint proves to be the major determinant of his son's behaviour. Indeed, except for isolated incidents as that where Myrtle challenges Bevil junior (an event which, incidently, is seen as showing a deplorable lack of self-control) it is the sense of restraint which dominates behaviour in this play. In describing his son's virtues, Sir John adds that Bevil junior has never been 'guilty of that rough Sincerity which a Man is not call'd to, and certainly disobliges most of his Acquaintance' (I.i.46-7). Sir John himself is doubtless also innocent of this 'rough Sincerity'. The result is what Ian Donaldson has termed the 'delicate deadlock'.[1] The reluctance to disoblige, the concern for another's feelings necessarily eschews plain speaking. It inhibits clarification and causes mutual misunderstanding. As Humphrey comments of Sir John and his son, '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.i.116-8).

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[1] 'Drama from 1710 to 1780' in *Dryden to Jonson*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, History of Literature in the English Language, Vol. 4 (London, 1971), p.195.

The main plot of *The Conscious Lovers* centres upon the divided loyalties of its chief character, Bevil junior. His father has arranged a marriage for him with the rich heiress Lucinda, daughter of the merchant Mr Sealand. Bevil junior has, however, fallen deeply in love with a seeming orphan, Indiana, whom he has brought with him to England from Toulon. To complicate matters, Lucinda is in fact in love with Myrtle, Bevil junior's friend. Bevil junior, then, is caught between his regard for the wishes of his father, the obligations of his friendship with Myrtle, his duty of obedience, and his real love for Indiana.

The play opens with news of a discovery. Concerned for the welfare of his father, Bevil junior had been forced at a masquerade to threaten to fight in his father's defence. At this, the disguised Indiana swooned away. The circumstances cause Bevil junior to reveal feelings he would otherwise have kept in check. It is this 'unexpected and publick Discovery' (I.i.90) of Bevil junior's love for Indiana through an uncharacteristically spontaneous display of emotion that concerns his father at the beginning of the play and sets the plot in motion. In the meeting between Bevil junior and his father which follows, Sir John attempts to come to an understanding with his son and learn the extent of his commitment to Indiana. Earlier he had told Humphrey, 'by my insisting upon his marrying to-day, I shall know how far he is engag'd to this Lady in Masquerade' (I.i.104-6). This confidence, however, proves misplaced. At their meeting, Sir John does insist on his son marrying immediately. Bevil junior, however, makes no objection and responds as a dutiful son willing to fulfil his father's commands. Sir John suspects that his son is being 'Complaisant only' (I.ii.46) and when Bevil junior begins to speak flippantly comments, 'I am afraid, Son, there's something I don't see yet, something that's smother'd under all this Rallery' (I.ii.76-7). He is, of course, correct. Though Bevil junior refuses to actually lie,

his language masks rather than expresses true feelings. At the conclusion of their conversation, Sir John knows no more than he did at its outset and comments, 'So! I must even leave things as I found them' (I.ii.120-21). Clarification is not possible because Bevil junior's concern for his father's wishes and feelings prevents him from being frank. The last thing Bevil junior wants is an open argument with his father. He tells Humphrey later, 'don't let us come to the Necessity of a Dispute; for, if we should dispute, I must either part with more than Life, or lose the best of Fathers' (I.ii.145-7). Some such dispute may, however, be necessary for clarification.

If filial obediance causes Bevil junior to be less than frank with his father, it also prevents 'plain-dealing' between himself and Indiana. 'I never once directly told her, that I loved', he tells Humphrey, and continues, 'My tender Obligations to my Father have laid so inviolable a Restraint upon my Conduct, that 'till I have his Consent to speak, I am determin'd, on that Subject, to be dumb for ever' (I.ii.230-6). At the same time, Indiana suppresses expression of her real feelings for Bevil junior because of what she calls her 'Sex's natural Decency and Shame' (II.ii.36).

The interview between Indiana and Bevil junior in Act II Sc. iii parallels the earlier one between Sir John and his son in Act I Sc. ii. Like Sir John, Indiana, being uncertain of Bevil junior's true feelings, seeks some clarification. Again like Sir John, she proceeds indirectly. As Bevil junior is about to enter, she tells herself, 'I'll know the worst, at once; I'll lay such fair Occasions in his way, that it shall be impossible to avoid an Explanation — for these Doubts are insupportable!' (II.iii.7-9). Indeed, at the end of their conversation, Indiana does believe that she has discovered the truth, but what the evidence of Bevil junior's behaviour leads her to believe is in fact false. Indiana's tactic

is to initiate a debate on the question of how a woman should interpret generosity from a man. She hopes to learn, of course, that Bevil's extraordinary generosity to her is a sign of love. Bevil junior asserts, however, that giving can be a delight in itself and can be wholly disinterested. Indiana learns nothing of Bevil junior's real feelings. Just as in the scene with his father Bevil junior was anxious to avoid dispute, so here he is anxious to avoid an open declaration. Because of the restraints he has set upon his own behaviour, he must leave Indiana, as he says himself, 'before things are brought to an Extremity' (II.iii. 169-70).

The desirability of avoiding dispute and extremity is a recurring theme of this play. It arises again in Act IV Sc. i, the scene Steele considered to be the most important of his comedy, where Bevil junior avoids a quarrel with Myrtle over Lucinda. Myrtle is understandably suspicious of Bevil junior's relationship with Lucinda. In a fit of jealousy, he challenges Bevil junior to a duel and accuses him of double-dealing. Bevil junior has in his power the evidence to prove Myrtle's accusations false. He has a letter from Lucinda which could demonstrate his innocence. Once again, however, Steele contrives it so that clarification is delayed. Bevil junior feels obliged to keep a promise he made to Lucinda not to show Myrtle this letter. It is only after maximum dramatic capital has been extracted from the misunderstanding between Bevil junior and Myrtle that Steele has Bevil junior reveal the letter so as not to 'keep longer unexplain'd the false Appearances' (IV.i.169).

In *The Conscious Lovers*, then, Steele presents characters who, even though they have the best of intentions, find it impossible to deal frankly. The misunderstandings that arise in this way form the basis of his plot. Nevertheless, Steele cannot be said to have successfully dealt

with the problem of creating a dramatically effective plot while using exemplary characters. In the first place, the behaviour in this play which generates misunderstanding is not convincingly motivated. Secondly, it is still precisely those aspects of behaviour which create complication that are also morally questionable. Bevil junior calls his less than frank dealing with his father 'an honest Dissimulation' (I.ii.15) and adds, significantly, that he is not very good at it. The interests of strict morality and comedy are still, however, pulling apart. John Dennis went so far as to call Bevil junior an 'arrant ... Hypocrite'.[1] Certainly, it is behaviour which does not proceed from Steele's stated ideal of 'Simplicity of Mind'[2] which creates opportunities for misunderstanding.

So far, this chapter has discussed problems of constructing dramatically interesting plots and comic situations when one's use of the traditional sources of comic complication such as deception and intrigue is restricted by moral concerns and by the notion that comedy should instruct by presenting patterns for imitation. The relevance of Jeremy Collier's attack on the stage and the change in dramatic taste that it was both a symptom of and a force in developing, however, goes beyond this particular problem of dramatic construction. In earlier chapters it was noted that the complexity of the relationship between meanings and their outward manifestations is a major theme of Restoration comedy. This was also seen as their chief source of dramatic life. In his insistence that moral values must always be clear, Collier advocates a simplicity of signification which is not only antagonistic to the way

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[1] *The Critical Works*, Vol. II, p.272.

[2] See Steele's dedication to *The Lying Lover*. For a discussion of the importance of simplicity in eighteenth-century thought see Raymond D. Havens, 'Simplicity, A Changing Concept', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XIV (1953), pp. 3-32.

these comedies are structured but also to their dialogue and use of language.

Collier's attitude to signification, to naming, manifests itself in his preface to *A Short View*. He writes:

> *There's one Thing more to acquaint the* Reader *with; 'Tis that I have Ventured to* change *the* Terms *of* Mistress *and* Lover, *for* others *somewhat more* Plain, *but much more* Proper. *I don't look upon This as any* failure *in* Civility. *As* Good *and* Evil *are* different *in* Themselves, *so they ought to be* differently Mark'd. *To* confound *them in* Speech, *is the way to* confound *them in* Practise. Ill Qualities *ought to have* ill Names, *to prevent their being* Catching. *Indeed* Things *are in a great Measure* Govern'd *by* Words.[1]

One initially notes Collier's concern that words be 'plain' and 'proper'. There is no sense of ornament or display. Language should simply communicate as efficiently as possible. Language should, in fact, be a code expressing Collier's view or morality. Creative manipulations of language, pun, innuendo, finally even wit itself cannot be trusted. The notion is essentially antagonistic to the way characters in the comedies (albeit often affectedly) use language to display their personalities, use it not only as a vehicle for communication, but also as a way of being interesting and entertaining. It is also antagonistic to the way characters use language and names to define what they want to be or what role they want to play. For all of Collier's insistence that plain and proper titles should be used, a character like Mrs Foresight in Congreve's *Love for Love* will require that her daughter call her 'Madam' rather than 'Mother' (II.i.508-11). But perhaps the best example is provided by Celadon and Florimell, the witty lovers in Dryden's *Secret Love*. Towards the end of the play, this couple conclude their marriage contract with a 'proviso' scene. Each lays down the conditions upon which he or she is willing to embark upon marriage. One of the conditions, interestingly enough, is

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[1] (London, 1698).

almost an exact inversion of Collier's plan outlined above:

> *Celadon.* Lastly, Whereas the names of Husband and Wife hold forth nothing, but clashing and cloying, and dulness and faintness in their signification; they shall be abolish'd for ever betwixt us.
>
> *Florimell.* And instead of those, we will be married by the more agreeable names of Mistress and Gallant.
>
> (V.i.571-6)

The process of naming here is almost the exact antithesis of Collier's. Celadon and Florimell are not hamstrung by an insistence that the names reflect their official status. They are not concerned with words that are plain and proper. They want to redefine their roles, heighten experience, make it more exciting, and words are a key weapon in these efforts.

The second point to note about Collier's preface to *A Short View* is his concern that value terms should only be used in contexts which support and reinforce their moral senses. Elsewhere in his work he says, 'The Lines of Virtue and Vice are Struck out by Nature in very Legible Distinctions'. Words or the signs for Nature should reflect these clear and constant distinctions. They 'that endeavour to blot the Distinctions, to rub out the Colours, or change the Marks, are extreamly to blame'.[1] Characters in the comedies do, of course, in some senses 'change the Marks'. Jack Loveby in *The Wild Gallant,* for example, reconciles Bibber to the idea of being cuckolded by manipulating the meaning of the word:

> a Cuckold has the signification of an honest well-meaning Citizen; one that is not given to jealousies or suspitions; a just Person to his Wife.
>
> (III.p.101)

In *The Country Wife,* the phrase 'woman of honour' is used ironically with such consistency that it comes to mean a woman of loose morals. When Scandal in *Love for Love* comments that 'You never knew a Whoremaster, that was not an honest Fellow' (I.i.265-6), he uses the word 'honest' in a sense which Collier would hardly approve. An 'honest fellow' is one

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[1] *A Short View,* p.140.

who frankly recognises his physical desires. The meaning cuts directly across the sense of 'honest' as 'chaste'. It is a characteristic of Collier's interpretation of words and passages from the comedies that he disregards context, tone and the possibilities of irony. For him the signification of words is single and is defined by his moralistic stance. The zeal with which Collier judges language in Restoration comedy according to this single criterion produces evident absurdities. Collier points out that in Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* Lord Foppington 'laughs at the publick Solemnities of Religion, as if 'twas a ridiculous piece of Ignorance, to pretend to the Worship of a God'.[1] Certainly, Lord Foppington does do this, but Vanbrugh's defence is easy. Collier has failed to distinguish between Foppington's attitudes and those of his creator. Given Foppington's ridiculous character, it should be clear, Vanbrugh points out, 'that what he says of his church-behaviour is designed for [an audience's] contempt, and not for their imitation'.[2] More significant, however, is Collier's objection to the fact that in Congreve's *Love for Love*, Scandal tells Mrs Foresight that he will die a martyr rather than disclaim his passion for her. Says Collier, 'Here we have Adultery dignified with the Style of Martyrdom: As if 'twas as Honourable to perish in Defence of Whoring, as to dye for the Faith of Christianity'.[3] Collier insists that the religious use of words such as martyr, faith and worship should be exclusive. Hence he reacts to the use of religious imagery in the courtship of Angelica and Valentine by saying, 'you have the Language of the *Scriptures*, and the most solem Instances of Religion, prostituted to Courtship and Romance'.[4]

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[1] *A Short View*, p.78.

[2] *A Short Vindication*, p.384.

[3] *A Short View*, p.74.

[4] *ibid.* p.76.

Congreve defends himself by accusing Collier of distorting the 'genuine Signification' of his words. He warns his readers, 'not to consider any Expression or Passage cited from any Play, as it appears in Mr. *Collier's* Book; nor to pass any Sentence or Censure upon it, out of its proper Scene, or alienated from the Character by which it is spoken; for in that place alone, and in his Mouth alone, can it have its proper and true Signification'.[1] The appeal, that to ascertain the true significance of language it must be seen in its proper context, is timely. More fundamental, however, is Congreve's request that the 'Diversity of Signification' of words be recognized. Hence, in response to Collier's attack on his use of the word 'martyr', Congreve comments, 'The word Martyr is here used Metaphorically to imply Perseverence'.[2] His general point is that 'when Words are apply'd to sacred things, and with the purpose to treat of sacred things; they ought to be understood accordingly: But when they are otherwise apply'd, the Diversity of the Subject gives a Diversity of Signification'.[3]

Though Congreve's point about 'Diversity of Signification' is valid enough, his defence of his use of language seems unsatisfactory. His own interpretations of passages from his plays seem unnecessarily defensive and narrow. Hence Congreve completely rejects the religious connotations of the word 'martyr'. Collier had objected that in *The Old Batchelour*, Bellmour, when asked if he would like to go to heaven, commented, 'Hum, not immediately, in my conscience, not heartily'. In his defence, Congreve argues that Collier has misrepresented him by not quoting the passage in full. Bellmour went on to say, 'I'de do a little more good in my generation

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[1]*Amendments*, p.173.

[2]*ibid.* p.185.

[3]*ibid.* p.174.

first, in order to deserve it' (III.i.106-9). Congreve explains the full passage saying, 'I think the meaning of the whole is very different from the meaning of the first half of this Expression. 'Tis one thing for a Man to say positively, he will not go to Heaven; and another to say, that he does not think himself worthy, till he is better prepared'.[1] In this interpretation Congreve has himself completely ignored the context. Bellmour's comment is obviously meant facetiously. The 'Heaven' referred to is marriage and the 'good' Bellmour intends to do before marriage has more to do with the flesh than the spirit. The comment cannot be construed as a religious sentiment.

Congreve's defence of his use of words seems to be inadequate because it fails to recognize that in its language Restoration comedy does, from a strict moralist's point of view, 'Blot the Distinctions' and 'change the Marks'. Dale Underwood has pointed out how in Etherege's comedies the language is continually '"disturbing" the ordinary referential frames of meaning'.[2] Certainly Christianity does not provide the only set of values operating in these plays. Libertine and Machiavellian values are everywhere in evidence. Value terms are subject to more than one frame of reference. Underwood has outlined the effect of this on the word 'honour' while William Empson, in turn, has described various characteristically Restoration uses of the word 'honest'.[3] In Restoration comedy, value terms are complex in their meanings and our response to them is never as simple as Collier would like. The clarity of signification advocated by Collier is antagonistic to the way Restoration comedies work,

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[1]*ibid.* p.182.

[2]*Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners* (New Haven & London, 1957), p.96.

[3]*The Structure of Complex Words*, (London, 1952), pp. 185-201.

ultimately because the world of these comedies is not like Collier's world, one of fixed moral certainties.

The complexity of key value terms in Restoration comedy and the moral implications of Jeremy Collier's attitude to signification will be considered more fully in the remainder of this thesis. At this stage, the aim is simply to note that Collier's views are antagonistic to the creation of comic situations which arise from the inconstancy of signification of words, and to the creation of comic dialogue which proceeds via pun, innuendo and double entendre. Irony could be called the characteristic mode of the comic language. It characterizes, in particular, the language of the wit who can perceive the difference between reality and pretence in those about him. Irony is very aptly described by Hédelin in his *The Whole Art of the Stage* as 'a Drammatick Figure, and of its own nature very Theatral; for by saying in jest or scorn the contrary of that which it really means, it carrys a kind of disguise, and makes an agreeable Effect'.[1] This description, with its notion of language used as a disguise, would have been an anathema to Collier.

In his preface to *The Lying Lover*, Richard Steele expresses the hope that his play will 'strip Vice of the gay Habit in which it has too long appear'd, and cloath it in its native Dress of Shame, Contempt, and Dishonour' (32-5). The language and the sentiments remind one, of course, of Jeremy Collier's tract. Steele's views on language and signification, though clearly more moderate, are similar to Jeremy Collier's. In his dedication to *The Lying Lover*, Steele comments of his purpose in writing the play: 'The Design of it is to banish out of Conversation all Entertainment which does not proceed from Simplicity of Mind, Good-nature,

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[1] (London, 1684/New York & London, 1968), Book 3, p.55.

Friendship, and Honour' (4-6). This particular play is about courtship and the disasters that can arise if it proceeds with anything less than complete frankness and honesty. At the end of his play, Steele presents as an ideal the sentiments of the reformed Penelope and Bookwit. Penelope declares, 'Curses on him first flatter'd with his Tongue, on her that first dissembled in her Silence' (V.iii.104-6), and adds:

> Simplicity's the Dress of honest Passion,
> Then why our Arts, why to a Man enamour'd,
> That at her Feet effuses all his Soul,
> Must Woman cold appear, false to her self and him?
> (V.iii.109-12)

Bookwit, for his part comments:

> Let all with this just Maxim guide their Youth,
> There is no Gallantry in Love but Truth.
> (V.iii.344-5)

One can only comment that, from a dramatic point of view, it is as well that the repentence of Penelope and Bookwit comes only in the last Act. Certainly, the courtships of a 'masquerading Age' are more dramatically promising material than those of an age where the characters believe 'There is no Gallantry in Love but Truth'; a comic dialogue with wit, irony and raillery will be more lively than one where all conversation proceeds from 'Simplicity of Mind'. In Charles Sedley's *The Mulberry Garden* (1668), Olivia justifies her refusal to reveal her true feelings to her gallant saying, 'the great pleasure of Gaming were lost, if we knew one anothers hands; and of Love, if we knew one anothers Hearts' (I.iii.32-4).[1] Olivia seeks a stimulation and suspense in courtship that can only arise if there is uncertainty, and each player's hand remains hidden. There is an analogy, which is made explicit elsewhere in Restoration comedy (see, for example, Courtall and Freeman's dialogue in *She wou'd if she cou'd*, III.i.105-12), between the kind of excitement

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[1] *The Poetical and Dramatic Works of Sir Charles Sedley*, ed. V. De Sola Pinto, 2 vols. (London 1928/New York 1969), I, p.119.

Olivia seeks from living and the stimulation an audience seeks in the theatre. Just as for Olivia, life would become dull if everyone were completely frank, so for the audience, deception, dissimulation and pretence are a necessary source of dramatic interest.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROBLEMS OF JUDGEMENT

The previous chapters have attempted to describe some of the sources of dramatic interest and complication in Restoration comedy. They have discussed types of behaviour and modes of self-expression which can generate mistakes and misunderstandings. Behaviour has been discussed in terms of the relationship between outward manifestations and their true significance, and the source of dramatic interest was seen in the complexity of this relationship. Though judgements of characters may have been implied in passing, and the moral views of Steele and Collier were mentioned, the emphasis has been on the question of how plots, dramatic situations and confrontations between characters were constructed. Maskwell's scheming in *The Double Dealer*, say, was seen as the source of the confusions and perplexities other characters face in the comedy, rather than as evidence of his villainy. The relationship between outward manifestations and their true meanings or, to phrase it another way, between the outward aspect and the motives and feelings which underlie it clearly involves, however, questions of morality and value. Depending on the nature of the relationship, we call behaviour sincere or hypocritical, frank or deceitful, natural or artificial, plain or mannered. Nor can the questions of value raised by the relationship be adequately handled in terms of comfortable moral dichotomies. What, we might ask, is the opposite of plain-dealing? Is it simply double-dealing and hypocrisy, or does this opposite also include complaisance and good manners? At what point does restraint become dissimulation, embellishment become affectation? The answers involve difficult questions of judgement and interpretation, questions which are central to any critical approach to Restoration comedy. The following pages will consider some aspects of the criticism of Restoration comedy, particularly with regard to how it has judged the behaviour of the comedy's characters in terms of the natural/artificial and the honesty/deception dichotomies.

As at least one modern critic has remarked, Restoration comedy has, with almost equal frequency, been characterized as 'artificial' by some and as 'realistic' by others.[1] The responsibility for the vogue of calling Restoration comedy 'artificial' must, in some part at least, rest on the shoulders of Charles Lamb and his famous essay, 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century'. This essay was frequently referred to by the so-called 'manners' school of critics, the chief proponents of the notion of Restoration comedy as 'artificial'. There is little evidence to suggest, however, that these critics actually understood what Lamb meant by 'Artificial Comedy'.

Charles Lamb's essay on Restoration comedy is best understood when it is seen through the perspective gained by reading his later essay on the nature of stage illusion. This later essay begins with the statement that, 'A play is said to be well or ill acted in proportion to the scenical illusion produced.' Lamb, however, proceeds to question the validity of this statement, particularly with regard to comedy. Is the 'sense of reality' what is in fact sought for in comic acting? Lamb thinks not, and counters his opening statement with the proposition that, 'Comedians, paradoxical as it may seem, may be too natural'. Lamb emphasizes the importance in comedy of an audience's consciousness, a consciousness encouraged by the performer, of a 'being acted' element in the performance. Hence he writes,

> the pitiable infirmities of old men, which produce only pain to behold in the realities, counterfeited upon a stage, divert ... in part from an inner conviction that they are *being acted* before us.[2]

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[1] Norman Holland, *The First Modern Comedies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p.205.

[2] *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas, 7 vols. (London, 1903), II, pp. 163-4.

It was this 'being acted' element that Lamb enjoyed in Palmer's rendition of Joseph Surface in Sheridan's *School for Scandal*. It is,

> the gay boldness, the graceful solemn plausibility, the measured step, the insinuating voice — to express it in a word — the downright *acted* villany of the part, so different from the pressure of conscious actual wickedness, — the hypocritical assumption of hypocrisy, — which make Jack so deservedly a favourite in that character.[1]

When Lamb called Restoration comedy 'artificial', he was commenting on the nature of the dramatic illusion he thought it should involve; he was appealing for a style of presentation which would accentuate its 'being acted' element, exploit its theatrical richness. He asked that characters not be simply judged and damned by the dictates of strict morality.

Lamb, however, went too far. His insight into the 'being acted' quality of Restoration comedy is valuable, his appeal for dramatic and aesthetic values was timely; but, in decrying the tendency audiences of his day had for judging drama as if it were reality, Lamb, in fact, removed Restoration comedy from any contact with the real world whatsoever. Hence his famous comment on the world of Restoration comedy as 'the Utopia of gallantry, where pleasure is duty, and the manners perfect freedom. It is altogether a speculative scene of things, which has no reference whatever to the world that is'.[2] Instead of seeing that the 'being acted' quality of Restoration comedy complicates the relationship between the play and reality, that the interaction of dramatic and moral values complicates the nature of an audience's response, he assumed that it simplifies it.

John Palmer, in his *The Comedy of Manners*, ignored the importance of the nature of stage illusion in Lamb's concept of the artificial. Yet he

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[1] *ibid.* p.144.

[2] *ibid.* p.143.

emphasized the 'fairyland', escapist aspects of Lamb's thesis. In his own criticism, he combined this escapist response with the acknowledgement that the comedy reflects the manners of Restoration society. Hence his response to *The Man of Mode*:

> *Sir Fopling* is essentially a comedy of manners. Restoration society, viewed in Etherege's comic art, moves in our fancy as we read. We accept the laws of this strangely distant world; and fall, imaginatively, into the attitudes of its people.[1]

The assumption is that 'the laws of this strangely distant world' bear no relation to those of our own and cannot be validly criticized. This assumption finally leads to the absurdity of Bonamy Dobrée's comments on Etherege:

> Here we feel that no values count, that there are no rules of conduct, hardly laws of nature. Certainly no appeal, however indirect to our critical or moral faculties.[2] [Etherege] presented life purely as an appearance ... This sort of comedy, while it is realistic in semblance, and faithfully copies the outward aspects of the time, creates an illusion of life that is far removed from reality. Here is no sense of grappling with circumstance, for man is unencumbered by thoughts or passions. Life is a merry-go-round, and there is no need to examine the machinery or ponder the design.[3]

Such a comment is, of course, a direct descendant of Lamb's essay on Restoration comedy. What Lamb called an 'artificial' comedy because of the nature of the stage illusion it seemed to require in the acting, is now seen as 'artificial' because it supposedly presents an unreal, escapist view of life, presents only the appearances and has nothing to do with thoughts, passions, or values. A view that was an excess in Charles Lamb's essay of 1825 reappears, stripped of the arguments that supported it, as an absurdity in 1924.

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[1] *The Comedy of Manners* (New York, 1962 , repr.), p.83.

[2] *Restoration Comedy 1660-1720* (Oxford, 1924), p.14.

[3] *ibid.* pp. 76-7.

Kathleen Lynch, in her *The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy*, does allow that the comedy is concerned with standards of behaviour. She laments the fact that critics of Restoration comedy have been all too ready to judge the comedy only by the moral standards of their own time rather than to look to the plays themselves. She also criticizes the escapist element in Lamb's thesis. Her task is to find out whether the comedy, 'enforces harmonious standards of its own'.[1] She does indeed find these standards, but our suspicions are aroused when she comments that these standards are 'quite opposed to the standards of the normal outside world' (p.7). Why 'opposed', one wonders? All is explained, however, when one realizes that for Lynch, the only standards enforced in Restoration comedy are those of fashion, and she thinks of these as 'artificial' standards. Consequently, the word 'artificial' appears in Kathleen Lynch's criticism in a wide variety of contexts, describing different types of behaviour. Etherege's people of fashion have an 'artificial elegance' (p.149); indeed, they have an 'artificial life' (p.151). In Shadwell's *The Virtuoso*, the courtship scenes are 'rich in artificial dialogue' (p.176). Courtall and Freeman, in Etherege's *She wou'd if she cou'd*, have 'artificial standards' (p.150); Congreve's Vainlove, Mellefont and Mirabell have 'artificial habits of conduct' (p.194). For Kathleen Lynch the 'social mode' is synonymous with an 'artificial' mode.

Problems of terminology and definition associated with the natural/ artificial dichotomy are not restricted to Restoration comedy's literary critics. Discussions on the acting of Restoration comedy, whether they are about seventeenth century or modern day performance, are plagued by similar difficulties. This matter will be taken up here in the form of

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[1]*The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy* (New York, 1965, repr.), p.2.

a digression which, as well as contributing to this particular discussion, also makes a separate point relevant to this thesis as a whole.

A recent introduction to Restoration drama boldly asserts that on the Restoration stage, 'Except for the purposes of satiric portraiture — of persons or types — there was no such thing as "natural" acting'.[1] The comment is, of course, anything but self-explanatory. John Harold Wilson's views on Restoration acting must be quoted at some length before one can get his meaning. One realizes then, that this lack of '"natural" acting' is a matter of stage conventions:

> For the most part, stage speech and stage conventions followed rigid, long-established conventions ... There was a convention of rapid speech, brisk repartee, and vulgar dialects for comedy and farce ... Stage gestures were so conventionalized that the experienced spectator who could not hear well could get at least an inkling of the player's emotion. Thus to indicate that he had fallen in love an actor stared fixedly at the fair one who caused his pain, folded his arms, and sighed deeply. To show that she returned his passion, the lady reciprocated with a "broken sigh, joined with a fainting look". The posture of a dejected lover was like that of a man hanged, with his hands before him and his head on one side. Sometimes the unhappy lover wandered about the stage sighing, with his hand on his heart and his hat pulled down on his brows.[2]

Wilson goes on to outline appropriate gestures to denote thought, tenderness, pity, grief and so on. According to John Harold Wilson, then, Restoration actors communicated through formalized, 'unnatural' gestures and stances whose meanings for an audience were clear and unambiguous.

Wilson doesn't provide the sources for his information on Restoration acting techniques, but the most likely source is the notes attributed to the famous actor, Thomas Betterton, by Charles Gildon in his *The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton, the Late Eminent Tragedian.*[3] In his notes, Betterton

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[1]John Harold Wilson, *A Preface to Restoration Drama* (Boston, 1965), p.23.

[2]*ibid.* p.24.

[3](London, 1710/1970).

does outline a formal style of acting, whose emphasis is on grace, harmony, and agreeableness of action. He also outlines a language of gesture, giving appropriate gestures and stances for the various passions. Many of these are similar to Wilson's.

The essential characteristic of the acting style described by John Harold Wilson and Thomas Betterton is its clarity and simplicity of signification. For both, the meanings of the various gestures, expressions and stances of the actor are clear, unambiguous, and can be tabled. The style of acting suggested by such an approach, however, is inappropriate for Restoration comedy.

To be fair, Betterton doesn't pretend to be talking about the acting of comedy. Indeed, he makes it clear that his directives have been for tragedy.[1] Though he doesn't give us any details of comic acting, he does leave us with the impression that it was in a different mode. It may be that the formal, clearly signified acting style suggested by Betterton is suitable for Restoration heroic plays, where values are stable, and where modes of self-expression, themselves, are not a central thematic concern. John Harold Wilson, however, makes no distinction between the acting styles of comedy and tragedy. Both, we are lead to believe, had a similar degree of conventionalism.

Ironically, the example Wilson uses to illustrate and support his case for formalized acting in Restoration comedy, gives his assertions the lie. Wilson quotes the scene from *The Man of Mode* where Harriet and Young Bellair act out a scene of love so as to deceive their parents. Each gives the other instructions on how to behave and their gestures are

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[1]'The *Comedians*, I fear, may take it amiss, that I have had little or no Regard to them in this Discourse', he writes. *The Life of Mr. Betterton*, p.80.

indeed, conventional. But Harriet and Young Bellair are, of course, dissimulating. The joke is that their parents are completely taken in by these conventional manifestations of love. Certainly, true love in Restoration comedy does not manifest itself in this way. Our partly deaf spectator, who might be taken in by this display, would have no more inkling of the true emotions at play than Lady Woodvil or Old Bellair. Certainly, comic actors did have to master the formal gesturing of such a scene, but they also had to know how to parody it. The formality of Harriet and Young Bellair here, is obviously not a convention of performance, but a parody of a conventional means of self-expression.

A style of acting does, after all, imply a view of the world — a view of the relationship between inner realities and their outward manifestations. Betterton's view that 'Countenance, Sound and Gesture' are a true reflection of 'Passion or Emotion' (p.43) provides a convenient language in which actors might communicate with their audiences. But it is a language untenable in the world of Restoration comedy. As has been shown, the relationship between sign and meaning in Restoration comedy is complex and uncertain. The style in which it is acted must be able to accommodate this complexity. Certainly, the comedy can't be acted in a style whose theory of signification contradicts the comedy's basic tenets.

More relevant to the present discussion than the view of signification implied in Betterton's description of acting, however, is the way in which Thomas Betterton's and John Harold Wilson's differing approaches to a similar style of behaviour illustrate conflicting attitudes to the question of what constitutes 'natural' behaviour.

For Betterton, an emphasis on form does not render behaviour unnatural. Indeed, he insists that 'Nature' is his teacher (p.35). Behaviour which Wilson sees as 'unnatural' (p.25) is perceived by Betterton as 'derived

from the Nature of the thing represented' (p.50). Hence, Betterton interprets the stage direction that a character speak 'trippingly on the Tongue' (in Wilson's terms the 'convention of rapid speech, brisk repartee') as meaning, 'a clear and disembarras'd Pronunciation, such as is agreeable to the Nature and the Subject on which he speaks' (p.83). Betterton summarizes his section on gesture by commenting that, as a general rule, 'as much as possible every Gesture you use should express the Nature of the Words you utter' (p.76). Betterton does not feel that he is describing a set of 'unnatural' stage conventions. Rather, he is describing a phenomenon of nature. As he says, outlining the 'Signification of the various Natural Gestures' (p.43). His knowledge comes, not from observation of the theatre, but from the observation of life:

> And to express Nature justly, one must be Master of Nature in all its Appearances, which can only be drawn from Observation, which will tell us, that the Passions and Habits of the Mind discover themselves in our Looks, Actions and Gestures.
>
> (p.41)

Clearly, John Harold Wilson has applied the 'language of gesture' to Restoration acting in a more mechanical way than has Betterton. Nevertheless, the point remains, that a similar type of behaviour or mode of self-expression is seen by Wilson as 'unnatural' and was thought of by Thomas Betterton as 'derived from Nature'.

The problem is one of terminology and changing values. What does constitute natural behaviour? The answer could involve one in a dreadfully complex discussion of seventeenth-century thought on the subject. For the present, however, the obvious answer will suffice. What is thought to be 'natural' behaviour is variable; it varies from age to age, from culture to culture. 'The man of sensibility', comments the First Speaker in Diderot's *The Paradox of Acting*, 'obeys the impulse of Nature, and gives nothing more or less than the cry of his very heart; the moment he moderates or strengthens this cry he is no longer himself, he is an

actor'.[1] This comment can serve to define one extreme of what 'being onself' can mean. For this speakers 'man of sensibility' even an act of self-control is being false to oneself. The proposition would, no doubt, have seemed absurd to a Restoration gentleman; yet it does serve to remind us just how variable judgements of what constitutes 'natural' or 'unnatural' behaviour can be.

The shift in the significance and meaning of the natural/artificial dichotomy since the seventeenth century has been seen by N.W. Henshaw as the major problem in finding an appropriate modern acting style for Restoration comedy.[2] The modern American actor has too limited notions of what constitutes natural behaviour. Partly because of the dominance of psychological realism on the American stage, partly because of the influence of the 'pick-and-stutter' school of acting, the American actor has come to distrust the validity of 'style', polished speech or graceful action. Both N.W. Henshaw and Elizabeth Burns[3] see the problem as rooted in our culture's (Henshaw thinks this is particularly so with American culture) alliance of the notions of 'natural' and 'spontaneous', an alliance which did not necessarily hold in the seventeenth century. Writes Henshaw:

> Spontaneously expressed impulse is valued for its own sake in our culture, and we are accustomed to it in ourselves and in others. We show our emotions, we externalize our inner selves, and if the results are shuffling movement, dissipated gestures and blurred speech, they argue particularly well for our naturalness and sincerity.[4]

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[1] *The Paradox of Acting*, trans. Walter Herries Pollock, preface by Henry Irving (London, 1883), p.46.

[2] 'Graphic Sources for a Modern Approach to the Acting of Restoration Comedy', *Educational Theatre Magazine*, XX (1968), pp. 157-70.

[3] *Theatricality* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London, 1973), p.4.

[4] *Educational Theatre Magazine*, p.162.

One feels that Henshaw is exaggerating the case. Nevertheless, the general import of his statement is certainly valid.

In the previous pages, quotations have been given from seven different authors on Restoration comedy. Three have commented on acting styles, three have made critical comments on the comedies themselves, while Charles Lamb's comments were relevant to both acting style and criticism. All the comments have been related in some way to the natural/artificial dichotomy. Yet the comments have been, for the most part, at cross-purposes. Thomas Betterton and John Harold Wilson saw the same type of behaviour as 'derived from Nature' and 'unnatural' respectively. Charles Lamb sought an 'artificial' style for Restoration comedy, while Wilson saw no such thing as 'natural' acting on the Restoration stage. Yet there is no similarity between Lamb's 'artificial' and Wilson's 'unnatural'. The notions of 'artificial comedy' in the thinking of Palmer, Dobrée and Lynch, though they echo Lamb's sentiments, are derived from a different logical process. Clearly, the words 'natural' and 'artificial' have been of little service in the criticism of Restoration comedy. The problem is not, of course, unique to the twentieth century. Thomas Betterton himself commented, 'There seems a Necessity of some Marks, or Rules to fix the Standard of what is *Natural*, and what not, else it is a loose vague Word of no manner of Use or Authority.'[1] Betterton's wish for a strict definition is not, however, viable. The demarcation line between the natural and the artificial is a shifting one. Certainly, one can say that one should not judge the behaviour of any period as 'natural' merely in terms of a criterion of spontaneity. Rather, one feels, it is a question of conformity to social norms.

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[1]*The Life of Mr. Betterton*, p.88.

One useful way of approaching the distinction, however, is provided by Thomas Hobbes. He writes:

> A Person, is he, *whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of another man ... whether truly or by fiction.* When they are considered as his own, then is he called a *natural person*: and when they are considered as representing the words and actions of another, then is he a *feigned* or *artificial person.*[1]

The criterion is one of authorship of the words and actions of a person. Such a criterion could be of some use in looking at Restoration comedy. One could use it, for example, to distinguish between the behaviour of Dorimant and Sir Fopling Flutter in *The Man of Mode.* While Dorimant is the author of his own acts, Sir Fopling's behaviour is completely determined by what he considers to be fashionable. But Hobbes's distinction doesn't in any sense 'define the standard'. With the inclusion of the phrase 'when they are considered as' the decision is left firmly in the hands of the observer. The judgement must finally be a subjective one. In her discussion of 'theatricality', Elizabeth Burns notes:

> Theatricality is not ... a mode of behaviour or expression, but attaches to any kind of behaviour perceived and interpreted by others and described (mentally or explicitly) in theatrical terms.[2]

In a similar sense, a judgement that a certain type of behaviour is 'artificial' or 'affected' is more a mode of perception than a statement of a fact.

In the first three chapters of this thesis, the notion of 'subjectivity of perception' was used to describe one source of uncertainty and misunderstanding in Restoration comedy. The comedy highlighted just how variable different perceptions of words and actions could be. This

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[1] *Leviathan,* ed. Michael Oakeshott (Oxford, 1946), p.105.

[2] *Theatricality,* p.13.

concern with the subjectivity of perception also extends to the way characters judge each other's behaviour in terms of whether it is natural or artificial. Certainly, there are areas of agreement. Almost everyone would agree that Sir Fopling's behaviour is affected and in some sense artificial. The extravagance of his behaviour, his allegiance to the mirror, put this beyond question. The examples of varying judgements, however, are just as striking. In this sense, Restoration comedy itself anticipates Elizabeth Burns's remark quoted above, and, indeed, anticipates the difficulties twentieth-century critics have had in using the concept of artificiality.

In Farquhar's *The Beaux Strategem*, Aimwell is determined to make a striking impression on the rich and beautiful Dorinda. Adopting Archer's dictum, 'the exteriour part strikes first' (II.ii.p.138), Aimwell outlines the way he is going to behave at a church service:

> I pull out my Snuff-box, turn my self round, bow to the Bishop, or the Dean, if he be the commanding Officer; single out a Beauty, rivet both my Eyes to hers, set my Nose a bleeding by the Strength of Imagination, and shew the whole Church my concern by my endeavouring to hide it; after the Sermon, the whole Town gives me to her for a Lover, and by perswading the Lady that I am a dying for her, the Tables are turn'd, and she in good earnest falls in Love with me.
>
> (II.ii.p.138)

The whole point about this description is, of course, that Aimwell has planned his actions and gestures; he will perform an act, hoping that it has the desired effect on his audience. In this, he succeeds, and Dorinda falls in love with him. What is interesting, however, is the way in which Dorinda describes Aimwell's behaviour:

> No forward Coquett Behaviour, no Airs to set him off, no study'd Looks nor artful Posture, — but Nature did it all —
>
> (III.i.p.144)

The behaviour which Aimwell had planned so carefully is perceived by Dorinda as spontaneous and completely lacking art.

Dorinda's inability to perceive the art that underlies Aimwell's behaviour could be attributed to the fact that she lives in the country and is relatively unsophisticated. Even the most perceptive characters in Restoration comedy, however, don't pretend to clear judgements in this matter. In *The Way of the World*, Mirabell describes Millamant's behaviour saying, 'Her Follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her' (I.i.160-1). Recognizing the fact that to seem natural may require greater art than otherwise, Mirabell sees that the terms are ultimately interchangeable. The subjectivity of such assessments is, however, most heavily underlined in judgements of behaviour that are made in *The Man of Mode*.

In Act III Sc. i of the play, Harriet and her maid Busy discuss Young Bellair:

> *Busy*. Well, the man, in my mind, is a fine man!
> *Har*. The man indeed wears his Cloaths fashionably, and has a pretty negligent way with him, very Courtly, and much affected; he bows, and talks, and smiles so agreeably, as he thinks.
> *Busy*. I never saw any thing so gentile!
> *Har*. Varnish'd over with good breeding, many a blockhead makes a tolerable show.
>
> (III.i.42-9)

In Act III Sc. iii, Harriet and Young Bellair have a similar conversation about Dorimant, where Harriet makes judgements along the same lines:

> *Har*. He's agreeable and pleasant I must own, but he does so much affect being so, he displeases me.
> *Y. Bell*. Lord, Madam, all he does and says is so easie and so natural.
> *Har*. Some Mens Verses seem so to the unskilful, but labour i'the one and affectation in the other to the Judicious plainly appear.
> *Y. Bell*. I never heard him accus'd of affectation before.
>
> *Enter* Dorimant *and stares upon her*.
>
> *Har*. It passes on the easie Town, who are favourably pleas'd in him to call it humour.
>
> (III.iii.24-33)

The judgements here are clearly subjective. Whether Young Bellair is seen as a 'fine man' or a blockhead 'varnished over', whether Dorimant's behaviour is called 'affected' or 'natural' is a matter of predisposition.

Certainly, Harriet is shown to be more perceptive, at least more sceptical of surfaces, than Busy or Young Bellair, but she is also predisposed to criticism. The charge of affectation is used as a weapon in the battle of the sexes. It is a powerful weapon because it strikes at the integrity and individuality of personality. It is also a wide ranging weapon since it can be used in respect of almost any kind of behaviour.

Harriet is right. In one sense, verse that is easy and natural only seems so, since it has taken labour to achieve the effect. (Millamant's comment, 'Natural, easie *Suckling*!' (IV.i.106) is to the point.) Harriet points out that a similar logic applies to behaviour, but in doing so highlights the subjectivity of her judgement. In a society where the notion that natural behaviour has to be learned is not a self-contradiction, any behaviour can be called affected, provided one is willing to juggle the terms.

If Harriet's judgements of Young Bellair and Dorimant reveal the subjectivity of her perception, they also underline the importance and relevance of the natural/artificial dichotomy to Restoration comedy. These terms are not simply descriptive; they are terms which evaluate behaviour. Their usage with respect to Restoration comedy involves difficult problems. There is the subjectivity of the terms themselves, the shift in their significance since the seventeenth century, and the difficulties inherent in coming to terms with Restoration values and modes of behaviour. Yet, consideration of them is essential to a proper approach to Restoration comedy.

Norman Holland has derived from Restoration comedy a system of values which contrasts 'natural' behaviour, or behaviour which emanates from the 'real self', with behaviour which is in some sense 'artificial' because it is derived from what Holland calls the 'social self'. In his readings

of the comedies, Norman Holland finds that it is this 'natural' behaviour which embodies the positive values of a play (see above, p.117). The following chapter will take up the question of 'natural' and 'artificial' where it is left here, and consider some of the fundamental questions that are raised by Norman Holland's thesis.

The second dichotomy in terms of which behaviour in Restoration comedy is most often judged is that of honesty/deception. Here, one can happily say, there is not the confusion of terms which characterized natural/artificial. Nevertheless, the genuine problem, that of moral biases and predispositions, and of the difficulty of coming to terms with Restoration attitudes to various kinds of deception, can be seen as one of 'naming', of allocating the various categories encompassed by the honesty/deception dichotomy. The more stringent the moralist, the greater the area of behaviour that is categorized as 'hypocrisy'. Hence Tertullian writes, 'The Author of truth loves no falsehood; all that is feigned is adultery in His sight. The man who counterfeits voice, sex or age ... He will not approve, for He condemns all hypocrisy',[1] while Prynne asks rhetorically, what is hypocrisy,

> in the proper signification of the word, *but the acting of anothers part or person on the Stage*: or what else is an *hypocrite, in his true etymologie, but a Stage-player, or one Who acts anothers part*: ... And hence it is, that ... *sundry Fathers ... style Stage-players hypocrites; Hypocrites, Stage-players, as being one and the same substance* ...[2]

The more puritan the approach, the more extensive the use of the word 'lying' to describe types of self-expression. One can take as an example, a discussion of lying from one of Jeremy Collier's moral essays. The

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[1]*Apology: De Spectaculis*, trans. T.R. Glover (London & Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p.287.

[2]*Histrio-Mastix* (London, 1633/New York & London, 1972), Part I, pp. 158-9.

discussion takes the form of a dialogue between Philalethes and Philotimus:

> *Philal.* I had the Ill-luck to meet with a most tiresome Fellow: A Man that seems to have an Antipathy to Truth, and runs from it without Interest or Provocation. Now what can be more nauseous than to make Lying a Diversion, and talk at nothing ...
> *Philot.* Don't mistake his Character: He seems to be a Person of an unconfined Genius: Some Men, I must tell you love to go at large, and not be stak'd down to the Rules of other People's setting. Not to allow them the Range of their Fancy is to seize their Freedom: And if a Man can't talk without Chains about him; he had better sit still.[1]

The question in the above example is one of how to judge conversation which seeks to entertain, rather than merely convey information. Should such conversation be called 'lying' or recognized as an expression of 'Fancy'? To what degree should conversation confine itself to strict truth? Is exaggeration 'lying'? In the above example, the argument is already weighted in favour of Philalethes and as Collier's essay proceeds this becomes more pronounced. Clearly, Jeremy Collier had a very inclusive concept of 'lying'. The above example is, however, indicative of the kinds of questions, relating to the honesty/deception dichotomy, critics of Restoration comedy have to face.

Modern critics of Restoration comedy (one thinks particularly of Norman Holland and Rose A. Zimbardo) too often see deception in Restoration comedy as an exclusively negative quality. Rose Zimbardo almost always equates deception with the morally negative word 'hypocrisy'. Hence, for example, she calls Wycherley's servile fop Lord Plausible, 'the personification of hypocrisy'.[2] Norman Holland defines what he calls the 'wrong way' of Wycherley's *The Country Wife* as 'deception'.[3] As can be

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[1] *Essays upon Several Moral Subjects* (London, 1698-1709/Hildesheim, 1969), Part IV, pp. 131-2.

[2] *Wycherley's Drama* (New Haven & London, 1965), p.127.

[3] *The First Modern Comedies*, p.75.

amply demonstrated from the writings of seventeenth-century moralists and men of letters, however, attitudes towards deception and dissimulation in the Restoration period were far more ambivalent.[1] One recognizes the dangers of applying the values of moralists and courtesy writers to dramatic structures; deft quotation from some contemporary source or other could be used to justify or damn almost any kind of behaviour. Nevertheless, the ambivalent attitude towards dissimulation in the period alerts one to the fact that in Restoration comedy, the moral questions revolving around the honesty/deception dichotomy will be complex rather than straightforward.

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[1]For quotations from relevant seventeenth-century authors see, among others, D.R.M. Wilkinson, *The Comedy of Habit* (Leiden, 1964), pp. 1-78 and John G. Hayman, 'Dorimant and the Comedy of a Man of Mode', *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. 30 (1969), pp. 183-97. In his chapter 'Disguise, Comic and Cosmic' Norman Holland also quotes diverse attitudes towards deception and dissimulation. The perspective that these offer, however, does not carry over into his readings of the plays themselves.

CHAPTER SIX

REAL AND SOCIAL SELVES

When Norman Holland's *The First Modern Comedies* appeared in 1959, it was recognized as a new and important contribution to the criticism of Restoration comedy. Alfred Schwarz saw it as a successful refutation of L.C. Knights's charge that Restoration comedy was merely frivolous and lacked moral and intellectual substance.[1] Gerald Weales saw Holland's aims in similar terms, commenting that the 'book sets out to show that Restoration comedies are not simply the frothy or smutty plays that they are sometimes taken to be'.[2] Norman Holland's approach was seen as a peculiarly modern one by the T.L.S. reviewer in that it placed stress 'upon careful scrutiny of symbols, images, contrast and parallelism' and in so doing revealed 'subtle details and basic patterns' which otherwise might very well be missed.[3] Bonamy Dobrée began his remarks by saying, 'It is a pity that Mr. Holland should mar his excellent book ... by adopting what seems to be the fashion in America of decrying his predecessors in the same field', but went on to firmly assert that there is 'no doubt that this is a major contribution to the criticism of this particular phase of comedy'.[4] Since 1959, *The First Modern Comedies* has remained a very influential and probably the most oft-quoted work on Restoration comedy.

The original reviewers of the book were not, however, without their misgivings. The T.L.S. noted Holland's penchant for schematizing and recognized the resultant simplifications; Clifford Leech commented that, in Holland's treatment, 'each of the ... dramatists suffers some violence

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[1]*Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 75 (1960), pp. 708-11.

[2]*Hudson Review*, Vol. 13 (1960-1), p.139.

[3]*T.L.S.* (1959), p.672.

[4]*The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 12 (1961), pp. 83-4.

when an ethical principle is ... being deduced from a particular play',[1] while Gerald Weales commented succinctly, 'It is all too neat'.[2] Part of the weakness of Norman Holland's approach to Restoration comedy does lie in his penchant for neat, all-inclusive structures. He has a liking for diagrammatic representations of the plays. What these gain with respect to clarity, however, they lose through their inevitable simplifications. Nevertheless, Norman Holland remains one of the most interesting and provocative critics of Restoration comedy. His criticism bears re-appraisal in the first place, because he asks fundamental questions about how behaviour in the comedy should be judged and secondly, because one's disagreement with Norman Holland's views stimulates a re-appraisal of the comedies themselves.

Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of Norman Holland's approach to the characters of Restoration comedy is his assertion that there is a 'split in human beings between appearance and nature, between social requirements and "natural" desires' (p.28). In his fullest explication of the idea, he comments:

> The Restoration character ... is clearly divided into a nucleus of inner self or nature and the peripheral shell of appearances which may be the product of that inner self or may be a product of dissimulation, affectation or disguise. The central problem ... is how the nucleus of personality shows itself through the shell of appearances and how it gets to know other nuclei through their shells.
>
> (p.58)

One may wonder whether the distinction between this 'inner self' and the 'shell' is as clear as Norman Holland suggests. Certainly, the pattern applies more satisfactorily to the comedy's simpler characters than to its more important figures. Nevertheless, this aspect of Holland's

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[1]*Modern Language Review*, Vol. 55 (1960), p.593.

[2]*op. cit.* p.139.

approach, particularly in its emphasis on problems of 'knowing', is essentially sound. In Holland's thesis, however, the above contrast between a 'real self' and a 'social self' is combined with the view that Restoration comedies are structured in terms of a moral contrast. For Norman Holland, the comedies show a 'right-way' and a 'wrong way'. Moreover, the 'right' and the 'wrong' are defined in terms of the 'real' and the 'social'. Hence, after having dealt with the comedies of Etherege and Wycherley, Norman Holland writes:

> In the comedies we have considered so far, the right-way-wrong-way structure tends to identify society as the wrong (or at least limited) way and personal emotion as the right way. The wrong way tends to be identified with disguise and the separation of appearance and nature; the right way becomes identified with naturalness and complete candor. (p.116)

Norman Holland also uses these values in judging the characters of Congreve's comedies. Indeed, his thesis and its weaknesses become particularly apparent if one examines at some length Holland's reading of *Love for Love*.

According to Norman Holland, *Love for Love* is 'about three different kinds of knowledge, three ways of life — we might call them, presocial, social, suprasocial' (p.161). Holland classifies characters and describes movements of the plot in terms of these three levels. The 'suprasocial' plot deals with Valentine's courtship of Angelica. It involves a learning process for Valentine as he progresses from a point where he knows 'no effectual Difference between continued Affectation and Reality' (III.i. 40-1), and tries to win Angelica through show and affectation, to the point where he recognizes a 'higher kind of reality' which transcends 'ordinary social reality' (p.164), and wins Angelica by agreeing to ruin himself for her. Ben and Prue are the presocial characters, 'barely beyond the *tabula rasa* stage' (p.165). At the end of the play, Ben moves out of society, escaping back to the sea. Prue, however, becomes part

of the social world. The remaining characters of the play are on the social level. Scandal, however, is, at the end of the play, 'converted to the religion of love' (p.170), and hence deserves a last minute launching into the suprasocial level.

The important question that arises from this structure relates to what values Holland associates with his various levels. The social level, we learn, is characterized by the 'separation of appearances from nature' (p.167). The characters on this level are limited in their perception in that their only reality is 'continued Affectation'. In contrast, the presocial and suprasocial people are characterized by their naturalness. Ben is of the sea and hence associated with 'nature and sincerity' (p.165). Indeed, Holland sees him as an 'intellectual construct' acting as a 'symbol' in his role as 'natural man' (p.165). Prue, however, 'is of the land and hence more naturally inclined toward the social pretences to which the foppish beau Tattle introduces her' (p.166). During the course of the play, she sacrifices her presocial status. On the suprasocial level we have Angelica, who is 'free of the pretences of society' (p.166). Angelica establishes a naturalness like Ben's, when she says, 'Passions are unreasonable and involuntary; if he loves, he can't help it; and if I don't love, I can't help it; no more than he can help his being a Man, or I my being a Woman' (IV.i.86-9).

Norman Holland, in effect, summarizes his views on the positive values of this play, when he comments:

> There is a curious kinship between Ben and Prue, the presocial people, and Valentine and Angelica, the suprasocial people. Throughout the play, both Ben and Angelica are free of the pretences of society; Valentine becomes free at the end, and Prue is free at the beginning ... It is as though Congreve were saying the highest social wisdom is in the naturalness of those who never saw society.
>
> (p.166)

For Holland, then, the 'natural' is always positive, while society is in

some sense 'artificial' and therefore negative.

A consideration of the structural schema and system of values Norman Holland applies to *Love for Love* can begin with a look at his notion of Ben as a symbol of 'natural man'. Such a view of Ben's character seems particularly unconvincing when one recalls contemporary descriptions of the play. Dogget's handling of Ben was one of the most striking aspects of the first performance. Downes, in *Roscius Anglicanus* notes, 'This Comedy being Extraordinary well Acted, chiefly the Part of Ben the Sailor'.[1] The success of the part seems to have been a matter of the actor's naturalism and accurate representation of a sailor's mannerisms. *An Essay on Acting* (1744) notes, 'The late celebrated Mr. Dogget, before he perform'd the Character of Ben in *Love for Love*, took Lodgings in Wapping, and gather'd thence a Nosegay for the whole Town'.[2] This kind of approach is, in turn, reminiscent of Congreve's description of a character of 'Habit' in his well known letter to John Dennis of July 10, 1695. This character is envisaged by Congreve as a comic figure. The 'Poet has nothing to do, but to collect a few proper Phrases and terms of Art, and to make the Person apply them by ridiculous Metaphors in his Conversation, with Characters of different Natures'.[3] This aptly describes the language and characterization of Ben in *Love for Love*. This view of Ben as an essentially comic figure is, of course, incompatible with Holland's notion of him as a symbol.

Ben is, of course, 'plain and honest' (III.i.321-2), and this honesty is a virtue that sets him apart from the rest of society. No one would

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[1]Quoted in *The London Stage 1660-1800*, Part I, ed. William Van Lennep (Illinois, 1965), p.445.

[2]*ibid.* p.445.

[3]*William Congreve: Letters & Documents*, ed. John C. Hodges (London, 1964), p.181.

deny that Ben is used as a vehicle to satirize social hypocrisy. Rather, the objection is to Holland's view that Ben's 'naturalness' presents, in some sense, 'the highest social wisdom'.

It is curious that Holland mentions a moral and structural kinship between Ben and Angelica, yet fails to consider the scene in which they come into contact. When Ben first arrives from the sea, he immediately addresses the ladies present in his 'direct' manner. Hence, he tells Mrs Frail:

> Marry and I shou'd like such a handsome Gentlewoman for a Bed-fellow hugely, how say you Mistress, wou'd you like going to Sea? Mess you're a tight Vessel, and well rigg'd, an you were but as well Mann'd.
>
> (III.i.324-8)

Angelica's reaction to Ben's behaviour is hardly one of 'mutual kinship':

> *Angelica.* I swear, Mr. *Benjamin* is the verriest Wag in nature; an absolute Sea-wit.
> *Sir Sampson.* Nay, *Ben* has Parts, but as I told you before, they want a little Polishing: You must not take any thing ill, Madam.
> *Ben.* No. I hope the Gentlewoman is not angry; I mean all in good part: For if I give a Jest, I'll take a Jest: And so foresooth you may be as free with me.
> *Angelica.* I thank you, Sir, I am not at all offended; — but methinks sir *Sampson*, You shou'd leave him alone with his Mistress. Mr. *Tattle*, we must not hinder Lovers.
>
> (III.i.336-46)

Angelica is not in the least interested in being 'free' with Ben; nor does she wish to pursue their acquaintance. Rather, she regards him as an amusing curiosity. Valentine calls Ben that 'Booby-Brother of mine, that was sent to Sea three Years ago' (I.i.332-3). Ben, for all his admirable honesty, remains a 'Booby', someone to be laughed at.

If Norman Holland's notion that Ben embodies this play's positive values seems unconvincing, so does the way he singles out Angelica from the rest of the social world and calls her 'suprasocial'. Holland argued, it will be recalled, that 'Angelica establishes a naturalness like Ben's',

particularly with her comment that 'Passions are unreasonable and involuntary'. An examination of the context of this comment, however, shows that, rather than suggesting Angelica's 'naturalness', the comment in fact shows us Angelica controlling the way her feelings manifest themselves.

Angelica has just been almost tricked by Valentine's pretence of madness into revealing her love for him to Scandal. She decides to pretend to fall for the trick and seemingly reveal her love for Valentine only so that she can deny it all the more vehemently when Scandal thinks that she has been caught:

> Acknowledgement of Love! I find you have mistaken my Compassion, and think me guilty of a Weakness I am a Stranger to. But I have too much Sincerity to deceive you, and too much Charity to suffer him to be deluded with vain Hopes.
>
> (IV.i.68-72)

Angelica pretends an indifference to Valentine so as to revenge herself on him for his attempt to force her to a declaration; she claims that she is 'sincere' so as to make her dissembled indifference seem more convincing. It is in this context of deliberately hiding one's true emotions that Angelica uses the argument that 'passions are unreasonable and involuntary'. The statement in no sense argues for her 'naturalness'. Angelica may be free of the pretensions that so often characterize social behaviour, but not of the pretences that characterize courtship. Angelica uses the social mask as most Restoration heroines do; she wishes to hide her true emotions lest she give herself away too cheaply.

Implied in Norman Holland's outline of Valentine's learning process in the course of the play is the view that everything Valentine does before he consents to ruin himself at the end of the play is affected; that Valentine is placing barriers between himself and Angelica. In fact, Valentine tells Angelica in IV.i.:

> Nay faith, now let us understand one another, Hypocrisie apart, — The Comedy draws toward an end, and let us think of leaving acting, and be our selves; and since you have lov'd me, you must own I have at length deserv'd you shou'd confess it.
>
> (IV.i.706-10)

Holland, however, suggests in a rather forced reading that, 'In effect, Valentine still keeps a distance between them, revealed by his speaking of "acting"' (p.163). Valentine may be presuming too much about Angelica's affection for him and about his own rights in this regard, but surely he is not being indirect. It is Angelica who wishes to keep the distance between them because she is not yet certain of Valentine's sincerity.

Holland's whole interpretation of Valentine's position in this play rests on what I feel is a too literal view of the meaning of Valentine's statement, 'I know no effectual Difference between continued Affectation and Reality'. Holland argues:

> When Scandal suggests to Angelica that her indifference to Valentine is an affectation of ill nature, Valentine ruefully makes a remark which is a key not only to this play but to all of Restoration comedy: "I know no effectual Difference between continued Affectation and Reality" ... His failure to realize that outside society there is a difference and his related failure to seek Angelica through something other than a show or "affectation" are what keep him from winning her.
>
> (p.162)

Does Valentine's remark really suggest that he has so limited a perception that he can see no difference between reality and continued affectation? Is he saying that there *is* no difference or rather, that Angelica, because she masks her true emotions, will not allow him to know any difference, in the sense of experiencing any difference, in his relationship with her. Is it not the point that Valentine realizes that there *is* a difference between what Angelica really feels and what she continually affects, yet recognizes that Angelica will not allow him to see through her mask? After all, if Angelica will not allow him to see

her real self, there is no *effectual* difference. The question really rests on the weight that is given to the word 'know'. Does it mean 'there is no' or rather, 'you don't allow me to experience any'? In my opinion, the latter meaning fits the context better.

Norman Holland's structural schema for *Love for Love*, then, is clearly inadequate. Though the notion of three levels of characterization — presocial, social and suprasocial — seems initially attractive, its inadequacy becomes apparent when we look at the behaviour and standing of individual characters more closely. In his attempts to place characters into abstract categories, Holland is lead into misinterpretations. Moreover, Holland's categories preclude the use of finer distinctions. As was noted in the discussion of *Love for Love* earlier in this thesis, Valentine's love for Angelica does become more profound in the course of the play. His grand, verbal declaration of love for Angelica (IV.i.700-4) doesn't ring true, while his regret at the end of the play, when he thinks he has lost Angelica, seems deeply-felt. Yet to call Valentine's behaviour towards Angelica throughout most of the play all 'show or "affectation"' is to put him in the same category as Tattle or, for that matter, Sir Fopling Flutter, a classification he hardly deserves. Another aspect of Holland's approach that should be noted, is his interest in moral and abstract relationships rather than in dramatic ones. The connection he makes between Angelica and Ben, for example, is his own; it is simply not realised dramatically, and any director of the play would be hard put to bring it out.

More important than the above, however, is the question of the values Holland brings to bear on this play. In the first place, there is the fact that Holland uses a single criterion to judge characters. It will be argued later, that major characters in Restoration comedy elicit diverse, often contradictory responses. A single value scale (in this

case 'natural' versus 'artificial') is inadequate when considering these characters. The second point relates to the way Holland applies the 'natural'/'artificial' value scale to this play, and throughout his consideration of Restoration comedy. Underlying Holland's equation of Ben's social ineptness with the highest social wisdom, and his view that behaviour on a social level is 'wrong' or, at least, 'limited', is what amounts to a critical bias. One aspect of this bias is in Holland's view that the 'natural' is always positive. In the previous chapter, some aspects of the confusion that has surrounded the concept of natural behaviour were discussed. One notion of the real or natural self which was current in the seventeenth century and which was clear, at least to the Puritan mind, was the concept of absolute identity. Prynne, for example, writes in his *Histrio-Mastix:*

> God, *who is truth it selfe, in whom there is no variablenesse, no shadow of change, no feining, no hypocrisie* ... hath given a uniforme, distinct, and proper being to every creature, *the bounds of which may not be exceeded: so he requires that the actions of every creature, should be honest and sincere, devoyde of all hypocrisie,* as all his actions, and their natures are.[1]

Given the range of behaviour that Prynne would include under the heading of hypocrisy, one would not want to suggest that his view of the 'natural' is the same as Holland's, that Holland is, in effect, ascribing Puritan values to Restoration comedy. Nevertheless, in response to Holland's assertion that Congreve's ideal is the 'natural man', it should be emphasized that the values inherent in the concept of a 'uniform, distinct, and proper being ... the bounds of which may not be exceeded' — the idea that any attempt to extend or 'heighten' one's personality is a self-falsification — have no place in the judgement of characters in Restoration comedy.

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[1] *Histrio-Mastix* (London, 1633/New York and London, 1972), Part I, p.159.

Restoration comedies often deal harshly with those characters who attempt to play roles they are simply incapable of. Sir Fopling Flutter, who tries to be the 'Pattern of modern Gallantry', is unceremoniously dubbed by Dorimant as, 'the pattern of modern Foppery' (I.i.369-70). In Act III of *The Man of Mode*, Harriet and her servant Busy discuss the behaviour of Lady Dapper:

> *Har*. She is indeed most exact! nothing is ever wanting to make her ugliness remarkable!
> *Busy*. Jeering people say so!
> *Har*. Her powdering, painting, and her patching never fail in Publick to draw tongues and Eyes of all the men upon her.
> *Busy*. She is indeed a little too pretending.
> *Har*. That Women should set up for beauty as much in spite of nature, as some men have done for Wit!
> *Busy*. I hope without offence one may endevour to make oneself agreeable.
> *Har*. Not, when 'tis impossible. Women then ought to be no more fond of dressing than Fools should be of talking; Hoods and Modesty, Masques and Silence, things that shaddow and conceal; they should think of nothing else.
>
> (III.i.13-28)

Harriet's reference to men who want to be wits 'in spite of nature' echoes Horner's reaction to Sparkish in *The Country Wife*:

> A Pox on 'em, and all that force Nature, and wou'd be still what she forbids 'em; Affectation is her greatest Monster.
>
> (I.p.265)

Another type who is repeatedly ridiculed in the comedy is the character who refuses to accept that he is old and still tries to play the young spark or mistress. Old Bellair in *The Man of Mode* and Sir Sampson in *Love for Love* attempt to court Emilia and Angelica. Because of their false expectations, they expose themselves to ridicule. In *The Way of the World*, Lady Wishfort has 'the craving of a false Appetite' (II.i.315), and will do anything to get a man. She refuses to accept a role proper to her age and is obsessed with seeming young and beautiful. Here dependence on 'paint' is more than a mere affectation; 'paint', in fact, creates her identity. Foible comments to her mistress,

> I warrant you, Madam; a little Art once made your Picture like you; and now a little of the same Art, must make you like your Picture. Your Picture must sit for you, Madam.
> (III.i.151-4)

In Lady Wishfort, the roles of art and nature are inverted.

The important point about the above examples is that they concern characters who use art 'in spite of nature' or, alternatively, 'force Nature'. Such 'affectation' should be distinguished from the use of art to show oneself off to advantage or (to use Dryden's phrase) present an 'ingenious flattery of nature'.[1] In *The Man of Mode*, Dorimant comments contemptuously of Sir Fopling, 'That a man's excellency should lie in neatly tying of a Ribbond, or a Crevat! how careful's nature in furnishing the World with necessary Coxcombs!' (I.i.357-9). Yet, at the same time, the first act of *The Man of Mode* shows us Dorimant in the process of dressing. Young Bellair tells him, 'No man in Town has a better fancy in his Cloaths than you have' (I.i.362-3), while Dorimant himself admits, 'I love to be well dress'd ... and think it no scandal to my understanding' (I.i.350-1). Clearly, Dorimant's dress is an important aspect of his overall elegance. Though Dorimant is careful not to appear affected, he also doesn't want to be merely 'plain'. A similar point can be made about Millamant's behaviour in *The Way of the World*. As one of his provisos, Mirabell comments,

> I Article, that you continue to like your own Face, as long as I shall. And while it passes Current with me, that you endeavour not to new Coin it.
> (IV.i.245-7)

To this end, Mirabell prohibits the use of all masks and cosmetics. Millamant reacts to Mirabell's conditions with, 'O horrid *proviso's*!' (IV.i.278), as if she would never dream of using cosmetics. Yet, at the

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[1] *Defence of Essay of Dramatic Poesy* in *John Dryden Selected Criticism*, eds. James Kinsley and George Parfitt (Oxford, 1970), p.80.

same time, Millamant's manner reveals a consciousness of an audience, and a concern to show herself off to advantage. She is also, naturally enough, concerned for her appearance. 'Is not all the Powder out of my Hair?', she asks her servant after Petulant's raillery ruffles her composure (III.i.289). Like Dorimant, Millamant would not want to be merely 'plain'.

The Puritan ideal of 'plainness' extends, of course, beyond dress and general appearance to personality. For the Puritan, mimicry and conscious self-presentation are always associated with deception. As an example from *The Man of Mode* can illustrate, however, characters in Restoration comedy can exult in the theatrical aspects of social living.

In Act III, Sc. i of *The Man of Mode*, Harriet and Young Bellair act out a scene of love aware that they are being observed by Old Bellair and Lady Woodvil. Young Bellair makes his motives for the deception clear when he comments, ''twill make some dilatory excuses we may feign, pass the better' (III.i.118-9). His behaviour is honourable in the sense that he must deceive his father so as to preserve his true love for Emilia. Harriet, however, retorts, 'Let us do't, if it be but for the dear pleasure of dissembling' (III.i.120-1). Before one too readily adopts a moralistic stance and decries the perversity of calling dissimulation a pleasure, however, it is as well to consider the nature of Harriet's enjoyment. Harriet's regard for her aunt, Lady Woodvil, becomes evident in the final act of the play. Her pleasure in dissembling here is unlike that of the villain who exults in his ability to deceive and make fools of others. Rather, it is like the pleasure of the actor who frankly enjoys his mimetic powers. Harriet's dissimulation is, in the first place, a legitimate display of her wit and personality. It is also an attempt to enliven conversation and heighten experience.

In the social world of Restoration comedy, characters do not feel restrained in their conversation and behaviour by the pressure of continually having to be sincere or 'natural'. Indeed, degrees of insincerity are inherent in conversations characterized by raillery and repartee. Such liberty is what makes the town an entertaining and stimulating area. It is not, however, without its dangers. In *The Man of Mode*, Emilia comments of the entertaining Mr Medley, 'I love to hear him talk o' the Intrigues, let 'em be never so dull in themselves, he'l make 'em pleasant i' the relation'. The more experienced Lady Townley replies, however, 'But he improves things so much one can take no measure of the Truth from him' (II.i.95-9). Such 'improvement' can become genuine deception, just as embellishment can become affectation. In the Puritan mind, however, there is no distinction between 'jest' and 'earnest'.[1] Whether behaviour is motivated by malicious deceit or by the wish to entertain, it is all one — damnable hypocrisy. Indeed, it will be argued later in this thesis that there is a similar misplaced all-inclusiveness in the attitude towards deception in the judgements of the 'plain-dealers' of Restoration comedy.

The corollary to Holland's view that the 'natural' is always positive is his implication that social behaviour is always a barrier preventing genuine self-expression. This negative view of society is reminiscent of Kathleen Lynch's criticism. She writes of *She wou'd if she cou'd*, for example, 'The love affairs of Courtal and Ariana, Freeman and Gatty are ... embarrassed by social convention. The girls fall in love with their gallants at first sight, but are obliged to rail furiously at them throughout the play'.[2] Holland has a similar view that social behaviour

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[1]Writes William Prynne, 'The Scriptures know no such distinction betweene jest, and earnest.' *Histrio-Mastix*, Part I, p.85.

[2]*The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy* (New York, 1965, repr.), p.152.

and social requirements only interfere, and present a series of obstacles to the forming of genuine relationships. But behind the social requirement that love be not immediately declared are very good practical reasons. See, for example, Halifax's *Advice to a Daughter*, in particular on 'Behaviour and Conversation'.[1] Moreover, Ariana and Gatty enjoy their raillery and revel in the physical and verbal masks associated with their love game.

Norman Holland's implication is that, because society is characterized by 'the separation of appearance and nature', characters can only truly become themselves when they leave society. Yet society itself can be an area of self-realization and self-definition. Congreve's Millamant, for example, fears that to marry and to no longer be courted will reduce her personality:

> O, I should think I was poor and had nothing to bestow, if
> I were reduc'd to an Inglorious ease; and free'd from the
> Agreeable fatigues of sollicitation.
> (IV.i.167-9)

Millamant's self-image and sense of self-esteem is dependent upon her social position and her admirers. Behaviour on the social level should be seen in both its aspects. Certainly, the fact that one isn't always sincere can generate difficulties of understanding. At the same time, however, the games and pretences of courtship provide an avenue of self-expression and self-display. They are also a source of excitement and stimulation. The importance of this latter aspect of social living will be emphasized in the discussion of Dryden's comedies and Congreve's *The Old Batchelour* which largely comprises the second half of this chapter.

In Act IV Sc. i of Congreve's *Love for Love*, Valentine attempts to come to a clear understanding with Angelica and hopes to gain an unequivocal

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[1]*Halifax Complete Works*, ed. J.P. Kenyon (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 271-311.

declaration of love from her. When Angelica is about to leave without making any such commitment we have:

> *Valentine.* You are not leaving me in this Uncertainty?
> *Angelica.* Wou'd any thing, but a Madman complain of Uncertainty? Uncertainty and Expectation are the Joys of Life. Security is an insipid thing, and the overtaking and possessing of a Wish, discovers the Folly of the Chase. Never let us know one another better; for the Pleasure of a Masquerade is done, when we come to shew Faces ...
>
> (IV.i.784-90)

In this particular play, the above is only a passing comment. Angelica is feigning an indifference towards Valentine so as to punish him for his earlier attempt to force a declaration from her through his disguise as a madman. The happiness of this play's ending is the pleasure of complete understanding and security between Angelica and Valentine. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that Angelica's sentiments are an important gloss on behaviour in Restoration comedy.

Earlier in this thesis, one aspect of the notion of society as masquerade was explored. The 'masquerade' was seen as the source of undesirable mistakes and misunderstandings, of the difficulty of attaining knowledge. This was also the aspect that Norman Holland emphasized. Angelica's sense of 'the Pleasure of the Masquerade', however, alerts one to the other side of the coin. Many characters in Restoration comedy feel that the joys of society lie precisely in those aspects of social living which allow one to compare it to a masquerade. There is the feeling that complete understanding can very readily become familiarity, that security can lead one to take others for granted. As well, there is the sense that while the games and uncertainties of courtship are interesting and mentally stimulating, the reality of marriage quickly becomes dull and satiating. This attitude to marriage can be seen as an aspect of what can properly be called the Hobbesian approach of many Restoration gallants to experience and pleasure.

In his *The Aesthetic Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, Clarence DeWitt Thorpe discusses aspects of Hobbes's notion of what pleases which seem strikingly familiar to the reader of Restoration comedy. He notes, for example, that Hobbes attaches little importance to repose or contemplation as sources of pleasure.[1] Rather, he notes that in Hobbes's view pleasure is derived from appetite, motion and agitation.[2] Hence Hobbes writes, 'As for those objects, if there be any such, which do not at all stir the mind, we are said to contemn them.'[3] Moreover, in Hobbes's view, the chief source of man's pleasure is in novelty and variety and the desired agitation of the spirit is achieved through 'a contunuall progresse of the desire from one object to another'.[4] The pleasure does not lie in the attainment, but in the process. Hence, Hobbes asserts, 'Seeing all delight [is appetite], and appetite presupposeth a farther end, there can be no contentment but in proceeding',[5] and later, 'Felicity ... consisteth not in having prospered, but in prospering.'[6] Hobbes's whole emphasis is on the process rather than the achievement, and upon the excitation of the mind which arises from new experiences.

In his comments on pleasure and its causes, Hobbes is not primarily concerned with human and social relationships. Indeed, Clarence DeWitt

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[1] (New York, 1964, repr.), p.145.

[2] *ibid.* p.135.

[3] *Elements of Philosophy*, IV, xxi, 13, in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London, 1839-45) (quoted by DeWitt Thorpe, pp. 138-9).

[4] *Leviathan*, ed. Ernest Rhyes (London, Toronto and New York, 1914), I, xi, (quoted by DeWitt Thorpe, p.137).

[5] *The Elements of Law*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (Cambridge, 1928), I, vii, 7, (quoted by DeWitt Thorpe, p.135). The quotation has been corrected.

[6] *The Elements of Law*, I, vii, 7, (quoted by DeWitt Thorpe, p.136).

Thorpe notes, 'Hobbes excludes from the factors contributing to man's good the pleasures and appetites of sensuality.'[1] Nevertheless, his ideas on pleasure contribute to an understanding of those characters in Restoration comedy who advocate inconstancy or who attach more importance to courtship that to its supposed end, and who see in the permanence and sameness of marriage inevitable dullness. In particular, Hobbes's ideas illuminate John Dryden's comedies, a central concern of which is this seeming conflict between the permanence of marriage and the fact that variety and novelty are a chief source of pleasure.

Celadon and Florimell, the chief characters in the comic plot of Dryden's *Secret Love*, are wild, witty, gay and energetic. Both proclaim the pleasures of variety and novelty. 'Marriage is poor folk's pleasure that cannot go to the cost of variety', says Celadon (I.i.29-30), while Florimell comments, 'an old Mistress or Servant is an old Tune, the pleasure on't is past, when we have once learnt it' (I.i.154-6). Both characters clearly enjoy their witty raillery and their game of courtship and wish to avoid the dullness suggested by the 'serious' approach to love which Melissa, in her concern for her daughters, advocates (IV.i.1-58). When Florimell's friend Flavia suggests that Florimell should part with Celadon because he is inconstant, she retorts:

> There's the more hope he may love me among the rest: hang't, I would not marry one of those solemn Fops; they are good for nothing but to make Cuckolds: Give me a servant that is an high Flier at all games, that is bounteous of himself to many women ...
>
> (III.i.295-9)

Yet for all Florimell's seeming unconcern at Celadon's adventures with Olinda and Sabina, she does finally become genuinely vexed at Celadon's behaviour. She recognizes that she is, in fact, jealous (III.i.441-5).

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[1] *op. cit.* p.136.

At the same time Celadon, while he still advocates variety, recognizes that he loves Florimell better than any other (III.i.426-8). Despite the raillery, the courtship games, the efforts to avoid seriousness, a genuine affection has developed. The couple are destined to become married.

The problem for Florimell and Celadon at the end of *Secret Love*, however, is that the notion of marriage and the roles indicated by the words 'husband' and 'wife' suggest a dull and boring existence. Marriage, after all, seems irreconcilable with the needs of novelty and variety. In the 'proviso' scene which concludes the play, the couple hammer out new and unconventional marital roles in an effort to make marriage acceptable:

> *Florimell.* But this Marriage is such a Bugbear to me; much might be if we could invent but any way to make it easie.
> *Celadon.* Some foolish people have made it uneasie, by drawing the knot faster then they need; but we that are wiser will loosen it a little.
> *Florimell.* 'Tis true indeed, there's some difference betwixt a Girdle and an Halter.
> (V.i.530-7)

In an effort to avoid familiarity, the couple intend to maintain some distance between each other, and respect each other's individuality and right to privacy. Significantly, the couple will refuse to regard each other as 'Husband' and 'Wife':

> *Celadon.* Lastly, Whereas the names of Husband and Wife hold forth nothing, but clashing and cloying, and dulness and faintness in their signification; they shall be abolish'd for ever betwixt us.
> *Florimell.* And instead of those, we will be married by the more agreeable names of Mistress and Gallant.
> (V.i.571-6)

The couple seek in marriage a perpetuation of the vitality and exhilaration they find in the social games associated with courtship. They do not wish to transcend the social level and find some 'suprasocial' happiness. Rather, they will seek within society the stimulation required to prevent

their marriage becoming a matter of 'clashing and cloying, and dulness and fainteness'.

Dryden's *An Evening's Love* is, like *Secret Love*, concerned with love and pleasure, and with the feeling that while the process of courtship and the battle of the sexes it involves is stimulating, its culmination will prove an anticlimax. To use Hobbes's precept, 'there can be no contentment but in proceeding'. The part of the play which concerns the present discussion is the relationship between Bellamy and Wildblood, two young gallants who are part of the English ambassadors retinue in Spain, and Jacinta and Theodosia, the daughters of a strict Spanish gentleman.

While the two gallants are discussing their progress after an initial encounter with the ladies, Bellamy makes a revealing comment about his attitude to love. He comments:

> I love only that I may keep my heart warm; for a man's a pool if love stir him not; and to bring it to that pass, I first resolve whom to love, and presently after imagine I am in love; for a strong imagination is requir'd in a Lover as much as in a Witch.

Bellamy, like Orsino in *Twelfth Night*, is in love with love. For Orsino, love is the product of 'fancy', for Bellamy, a product of the imagination. For Orsino it produces the sweet melancholy of a romantic lover, whereas Bellamy seeks through love the emotional excitement, heightened awareness and agitation of the mind that Hobbes speaks of. 'Love' involves the intellect as well as the body. It is stimulated, not so much by a regard for a particular person, nor by physical desire, but rather by the desire for adventure, activity and the sense of competition with others. If we look at 'love' in this light, the behaviour of Bellamy and Wildblood and their reactions to Theodosia and Jacinta become comprehensible. Wildblood is disappointed when his servant Maskall informs him that after a first meeting Jacinta is 'out of her depth' in love with him already. 'That's very hard, when I am scarce knee-deep with her', he comments (II.i.9-11).

It is the pleasure of the chase that he enjoys:

> Why 'tis the nature of all mankind: we love to get our Mistresses, and purr over 'em, as Cats do over Mice, and then let 'em go a little way; and all the pleasure is, to pat 'em back again ...
>
> (II.i.31-5)

Bellamy, in turn, finds that his interest in Theodosia is stimulated by the fact that she loves elsewhere and hence seems unattainable.

In Act II of the play, Jacinta and Wildblood make a pact, whereby they decide to avoid becoming too deeply involved with each other. Jacinta suggests that, to the purpose, they could begin 'disobliging one another' (II.i.141-2). Wildblood retorts with another suggestion:

> Or let us encourage one another to a breach by the dangers of possession: I have a Song to that purpose.
>
> (II.i.145-6)

The dangers of possession are the dangers of surfeit. Love is a conquest and the pleasure is in the battle. Once the battle has been won the fighting naturally loses its zest. As Wildblood says in his song:

> *First mad with hope we undertake*
> *To pull up every barr;*
> *But once possess'd we faintly make*
> *A dull defensive warr.*
>
> (II.i.157-60)

Both Jacinta and Wildblood are acutely aware of the transience of love. Surfeit is an ever present possibility. 'I have stay'd too long with you', says Jacinta to Wildblood after their second meeting, 'and would be loth to surfeit you at first' (II.i.177-8). Wildblood objects that as yet he has only been tantalized; he would have 'A hand, or lip' or at least some satisfaction. Jacinta replies with, 'Well, Here's my Picture; to help your contemplation in my absence' (II.i.182-6). By offering her picture instead of herself, by emphasising contemplation rather than satisfaction, Jacinta demonstrates an understanding of Wildblood's approach to experience and shows her ability to retain his interest.

Wildblood's imagination is stirred by what is unknown and unpossessed. He revels in the uncertainties and challenges of social living. A masked lady is particularly attractive since she offers the imagination unlimited scope. When Jacinta disguises herself as Fatyma so as to test Wildblood's constancy, she refuses, for obvious reasons, to unmask her face. The mask also, however, works as a stimulus. Comments Jacinta:

> I'll reserve my Face to gratifie your imagination with it, make what head you please, and set it on my Shoulders.
> (III.i.480-2)

The tactic contributes to Wildblood's attraction for Fatyma. Just as the physical mask stimulates curiosity and presents a challenge, so too does the psychological masking that characterizes social living.

As with Celadon in *Secret Love*, Wildblood's attitude to pleasure seems incompatible with marriage. He comments at one point, 'gayeties are all nipt, and frost-bitten in the Marriage-bed' (II.i.169-70). Yet at the end of the play, Jacinta and Wildblood arrange to marry. Like Dryden's earlier gay couple, however, they seek to preserve in marriage the activity and vigour that characterized their courtship.

During their courtship, Jacinta and Wildblood were forever quarrelling, largely because of Wildblood's inconstancy. As they decide to marry, Maskall comments,

> You have quarrell'd twice to night without bloodshed, 'ware the third time.
> (V.i.526-7)

Jacinta responds by producing an old song about a lover who was always quarrelling with his mistress. She offers it to Wildblood as a suitable epithalamium and suggests that they sing it together. Significantly, the couple are unable to strike up a harmony and in their singing compete rather than complement each other. Among the verses of the song there is:

Love as dull and muddy is,
As decaying liquor:
Anger sets it on the lees,
And refines it by degrees,
Till it works it quicker.
(V.i.561-5)

and

Anger rouzes love to fight,
And his only bayt is,
'Tis the spurre to dull delight,
And is but an eager bite,
When desire at height is.
(V.i.571-5)

Anger is to be 'the spurre to dull delight'. Wildblood and Jacinta do not expect to live harmoniously, and the rivalries of courtship will continue into marriage. This is all for the best, since harmony can become tedious and dull. Rivalry and argument will provide the agitation of the mind necessary for happiness.

Dryden's best play, *Marriage a-la-Mode,* is in many respects a continuation of *Secret Love* and *An Evening's Love.* It is concerned with many of the same themes, though the focus has shifted from courtship to marriage. Dryden's gay couples, Celadon and Florimell, and Jacinta and Wildblood both ended in marriage. The conditions of their marriages, however, suggested that they might escape drifting into the dullness and boredom the notion of marriage suggested to them. Rhodophil and Doralice, the married couple of *Marriage a-la-Mode,* have not been able to escape this fate.

As in *An Evening's Love,* Dryden uses a song to introduce major themes of his play:

Why should a foolish Marriage Vow
Which long ago was made,
Oblige us to each other now
When Passion is decay'd?
We lov'd, and we lov'd, as long as we cou'd,
Till our love was lov'd out in us both:
But our Marriage is dead, when the Pleasure is fled:
'Twas Pleasure first made it an Oath.
(I.i.4-11)

The conflict is between the permanence of the institution of marriage and the transience of love, its original cause. The situation described in the song approximates to that between Doralice and Rhodophil at the beginning of the play. Their passion is fled and it is only the marriage that survives.

In Act I and again in Act III, Rhodophil discusses his marriage, firstly with Palamede and then with Doralice. He gives us an insight into the cause of its decay. Rhodophil admits to Palamede that his wife is young, beautiful and has a pleasant humour. Nevertheless, he considers himself 'wretchedly marry'd' (I.i.139-40). 'Ask those, who have smelt a strong perfume two years together, what's the scent', he explains (I.i.154-5). At first, he loved his wife passionately, but then, he says, 'At last, we arriv'd at the point, that there was nothing left in us to make us new to one another' (I.i.170-1). This is the point where, to use Hobbes's phraseology, objects no longer 'stir the mind'. It is the point of satiety where everything is known and predictable and there are no new adventures, excitements or conquests.

Once again the predictable and 'known' nature of the relationship between husband and wife is implicitly contrasted with the uncharted pleasures of a masquerade. Says Palamede in Act IV, 'We shall have noble sport to night, *Rhodophil*; this Masquerading is a most glorious invention' (IV.i.120-1). Rhodophil explains how its use was originally functional, but how it has become a pleasure for its own sake. They continue:

Rhodophil.	I am sure 'tis extremely pleasant; for to go unknown, is the next degree to going invisible.
Palamede.	What with our antique habits, and feign'd voices, do you know me? and I know you? methinks we move and talk just like so many over-grown Puppets.
Rhodophil.	Masquerade is onely Vizor-masque improv'd, a heightening of the same fashion.
Palamede.	No; Masquerade is Vizor-masque in debauch;

> and I like it the better for't: for, with a Vizor-masque, we fool our selves into courtship, for the sake of an eye that glanc'd; or a hand that stole it self out of the glove sometimes, to give us a sample of the skin: but in Masquerade there is nothing to be known, she's all *Terra incognita*, and the bold discoverer leaps ashoar, and takes his lot among the wild *Indians* and *Salvages*, without the vile consideration of safety to his person, or of beauty, or wholesomeness in his Mistris.
>
> (IV.i.128-44)

The pleasure of the masquerade is the pleasure of the new, the exciting and the unknown. Courtship in masquerade completely frees the imagination. It allows Palamede to imagine himself a heroic figure in an unknown land. It also involves the pleasure of being an actor, of adopting 'antique habits' and 'feign'd voices'; it enables Palamede to transcend his own limitations and those of the real world around him.

Between the reality of a dull marriage and the ideal of a life in masquerade, lie other possibilities. The imagination can be used to enliven marital relations. Rhodophil, however, has already exhausted this possibility. He frankly confesses to his wife:

> I have taken such pains to enjoy thee, *Doralice*, that I have fanci'd thee all the fine women in the Town, to help me out. But now there's none left for me to think on, my imagination is quite jaded.
>
> (III.i.89-92)

Another possibility lies in mistresses. The gallants argue that some extra-martital relations would be beneficial not only to themselves but also to their wives. Comments Rhodophil:

> This were a blessed Doctrine, indeed, if our Wives would hear it; but, they're their own enemies: if they would suffer us but now and then to make excursions, the benefit of our variety would be theirs; instead of one continu'd, lazy, tyr'd love, they would, in their turns, have twenty vigorous, fresh, and active loves.
>
> (II.i.122-7)

It is in fact this last course of action, the taking of a mistress, that Rhodophil adopts in an attempt to enjoy life.

Although Palamede is unmarried, his situation is similar to Rhodophil's. Under the threat of losing his inheritance, Palamede has agreed to an arranged marriage with Melantha. He has no illusions about marriage and even before he meets his future wife tells Doralice, 'I will love my Wife as little, as I perceive you do your Husband' (I.i.82-3). Palamede is also involved in a conflict between marriage and love and, like Rhodophil, decides to embark on an adventure with a mistress. For him it is a last fling before marriage.

The central complication in this play is in the fact that Palamede's intended mistress turns out to be Rhodophil's wife, Doralice while Rhodophil in turn, is courting Palamede's intended wife, Melantha. This situation readily generates comic embarrassments and near discoveries. More importantly, however, it is a situation which tests the viability of the gallants' avowed attitudes towards love and marriage.

When Palamede and Rhodophil discover that each has been poaching in the other's territory, their reactions are unexpectedly emotional. The theorizing on the desirability of extra-marital relations gives way to frank jealousy. In theory, the wife-swapping of Palamede and Doralice should be mutually rewarding. In practice, however, Rhodophil angrily accuses Palamede of trying to seduce his wife. Palamede retorts by accusing Rhodophil of attempting to debauch Melantha. They are about to draw on each other when Doralice interrupts crying:

> Hold, hold; are not you two a couple of mad fighting fools,
> to cut one another's throats for nothing?
>
> (V.i.355-6)

In the conversation that follows, Palamede and Rhodophil realize that they are not in fact fighting for nothing. Rhodophil discovers a renewed interest in Doralice, as does Palamede in Melantha:

> *Palamede.* How for nothing? he courts the woman I must marry.

Rhodophil. And he courts you whom I have marri'd.
Doralice. But you can neither of you be jealous of what you love not.
Rhodophil. Faith I am jealous, and that makes me partly suspect that I love you better then I thought.
Doralice. Pish! a meer jealousie of honour.
Rhodophil. Gad I am afraid there's something else in't; for *Palamede* has wit, and if he loves you, there's something more in ye then I have found: some rich Mine, for ought I know, that I have not yet discover'd.
Palamede. 'S life, what's this? here's an argument for me to love *Melantha*; for he has lov'd her, and he has wit too, and, for ought I know, there may be a Mine: but, if there be, I am resolv'd I'll dig for't.
Doralice (to Rhodophil). Then I have found my account in raising your jealousie: O! 'tis the most delicate sharp sawce to a cloy'd stomach; it will give you a new edge, *Rhodophil.*
(V.i.357-76)

Palamede's interest in Doralice makes Rhodophil feel that there may be new aspects of his wife's personality that he had not as yet discovered. Palamede, in turn, finds that he values Melantha more, because of Rhodophil's interest in her. This is partly a simple matter of the influence of what others think. Early in the play, Rhodophil had confessed that 'a certain shame of being out of fashion' had contributed to his rejection of his wife (I.i.169). The fact that Doralice is 'fashionable' after all, could contribute to his renewed interest. More relevant, however, is the Hobbesian emphasis on activity, rivalry and pursuit as sources of pleasure. At the beginning of the play, Rhodophil was completely secure in the faithfulness of his wife, while Palamede didn't even feel he had to court Melantha since the marriage was arranged. The consciousness that they have rivals, however, makes Rhodophil and Palamede recognize that Doralice and Melantha are worthy of pursuit and are a prize worthy of being defended. This generates the 'agitation' necessary to pleasure.

In his commendatory verses to William Congreve printed with *The Old Batchelour,* Thomas Southerne named him as Dryden's rightful literary

successor. As John C. Hodges has credibly suggested, Southerne was probably moved to declare this succession because of Dryden's high regard for Congreve's first play.[1] Moreover, according to Thomas Southerne, Dryden had a considerable role in preparing this play for the stage. Southerne writes that Dryden,

> upon reading it sayd he never saw such a first play in his life, but the Author not being acquainted with the stage or the town, it would be pity to have it miscarry for want of a little Assistance: the stuff was rich indeed, it wanted only the fashionable cutt of the town. To help that Mr Dryden, Mr Manwayring, and Mr Southerne red it with great care, and Mr Dryden putt it in the order it was playd.[2]

Just how large Dryden's contribution to *The Old Batchelour* was, is impossible to judge. Herbert Davis has suggested that the play contains echoes of words and images from Dryden's *Amphitryon* which played in 1691.[3] One can add, however, that Congreve's first play also recalls many aspects of Dryden's comedies. In particular, the character of Vainlove can be called a successor to Dryden's Bellmour and Wildblood in *An Evening's Love*.

One section of the plot of *The Old Batchelour* is concerned with the way one of Vainlove's admirers, Silvia, attempts to revenge herself upon him because he has lost interest in her. In Act III Sc. i she plans some way of ruining the developing relationship between Vainlove and Araminta. She suggests to her servant that they might try to convince Vainlove that Araminta is in fact in love with someone else. Lucy, however, retorts:

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[1]*William Congreve: Letters & Documents*, ed. John C. Hodges (London, 1964) p.75.

[2]*ibid.* p.151.

[3]*The Complete Plays of William Congreve*, ed. Herbert Davis (Chicago and London, 1967) p.25.

> No, you're out; could we perswade him, that she doats on him, himself — Contrive a kind Letter as from her, 'twould disgust his nicety, and take away his Stomach.
> (III.i.40-3)

It is the latter plan that is adopted, and Lucy correctly predicts Vainlove's reaction. When Vainlove receives the forged letter, which has Araminta declare her passion and availability, Vainlove feels that as far as he is concerned the relationship is finished. It is the pursuit and the challenge that Vainlove finds stimulating. After receiving Araminta's letter, he comments:

> I have to be cram'd — By Heav'n there's not a Woman, will give a Man the pleasure of a chase: My sport is always balkt or cut short — I stumble ore the Game I would pursue. — 'Tis dull and unnatural to have a Hare run full in the Hounds Mouth; and would distaste the keenest Hunter — I would have overtaken, no have met my Game.
> (IV.i.174-80)

Moreover, the value of the prize is judged according to the difficulty of the chase. The declaration has lowered Araminta in Vainlove's esteem.

The above sequence of events recalls the scene from *An Evening's Love*, where Wildblood is disappointed when his servant tells him that Jacinta has fallen in love with him at first sight. Like Vainlove, Wildblood was disappointed in the discovery because his pleasure was in the uncertainties of courtship rather than in the final victory. In *The Old Batchelour*, Vainlove is described as one who is 'ever embarking in Adventures, yet never comes to harbour' (I.i.199-200). His pleasure is in the process rather than in the attainment. In this respect, he is contrasted to Bellmour. As Vainlove tells him, 'my Temper quits an Amour, just where thine takes it up' (I.i.77-8). Bellmour sees courtship as a means to an end. He comments:

> Courtship to Marriage, is but as Musick in the Play-house, till the Curtain's drawn; but that once up, then opens the Scene of Pleasure.
> (V.ii.384-6)

Though he is not fully aware of it himself, Vainlove's inclinations are

more in sympathy with Belinda's retort that, 'Courtship to Marriage, as a very witty Prologue to a very dull Play' (V.i.387-8).

It is significant that while Belinda and Bellmour decide to marry at the end of the play, the relationship between Araminta and Vainlove remains unresolved. Vainlove does in fact propose, but Araminta declines. It is not mere caution, however, that guides Araminta's decision; nor is there any question of her not loving Vainlove. Rather, she recognizes that Vainlove is not as yet ready to come to terms with the realities of marriage. Araminta is easily the most intelligent and perceptive character in this play. She fully understands Vainlove and her comments and behaviour show insight into an important aspect of relations between the sexes.

In Norman Holland's discussion of *The Old Batchelour*, he presents Vainlove as the most admirable character in the play. For Holland, Vainlove is an idealist who refuses to compromise. He is, in Holland's terms, the 'highest character' (p.141), and this is indicated by his constant use of neoplatonic imagery. So as not to compromise his ideals, Vainlove, writes Holland, 'refuses to marry his sweetheart Araminta at the end' (p.136).

Holland is, of course, mistaken about the ending. He has also, however, misunderstood Vainlove's character. Certainly, Vainlove does constantly use neoplatonic imagery. He calls marriage with Araminta, 'Heaven' (III.i.105); Araminta's consent to marry him would be a 'Blessing' (V.ii.171). Indeed, Vainlove's whole conception of courtship is dominated by platonic and *précieuse* notions. Woman is a deity, the lover is her humble servant. He can only hope to gain a woman's favours after great difficulties and privations. It is this approach to relations between the sexes that causes Vainlove to attach such importance to the

chase. Vainlove should not, however, be seen as one who perceives valid and admirable ideals. He is deluded and, in fact, preoccupied with surfaces.

Vainlove explicitly states his view of women in II.ii. The discussion among Araminta, Belinda, Bellmour and Vainlove in this scene, concerns how a gallant should behave towards his mistress:

> *Araminta.* Favours that are got by Impudence and Importunity, are like Discoveries from the Rack, when the afflicted Person, for his ease, sometimes confesses Secrets his Heart knows nothing of.
> *Vainlove.* I should rather think Favours, so gain'd, to be due Rewards to indefatigable Devotion — For as Love is a Deity, he must be serv'd by Prayer.
> *Belinda.* O Gad, would you would all pray to Love then, and let us alone.
> *Vainlove.* You are the Temples of Love, and 'tis through you, our Devotion must be convey'd.
> *Araminta.* Rather poor silly Idols of your own making, which, upon the least displeasure you forsake, and set up new — Every Man, now, changes his Mistress and his Religion, as his Humour varies or his Interest.
> *Vainlove.* O Madam —
> *Araminta.* Nay come, I find we are growing serious, and then we are in great danger of being dull ...
> (II.ii.135-52)

Vainlove may be an idealist, but his ideals are merely illusions. His concern with 'Deity', 'Prayer' and 'Devotion' is meant to seem extravagant; his expectations are clearly false. This is what Araminta recognizes. Vainlove's 'Temples of Love' have nothing to do with what women are really like; they are products of his imagination. Moreover, in that Vainlove is concerned with *précieuse* forms rather than with real persons, his interest is restricted to surfaces.

Araminta understands Vainlove and behaves accordingly. Bellmour describes her behaviour towards Vainlove saying that she is 'a kind of floating Island; sometimes seems in reach, then vanishes and keeps him busied in the search' (I.i.205-7). Silvia's maid Lucy, less generously suggests that Araminta retains Vainlove's interest through a 'dissembled

Coyness' (III.i.37). Araminta refuses to allow Vainlove to become secure of her love. She recognizes that she cannot live up to Vainlove's inflated expectations; hence he cannot be allowed to see what she is really like. At the end of the play, Araminta refuses to accept Vainlove's proposal because he still expects marriage to be a 'Heaven'. She declines saying, 'We had better take the Advantage of a little of our Friends Experience first' (V.ii.173-4). Perhaps observation of how his friend's marriage works out will alert Vainlove to realities.

In the course of the play, Araminta expresses her opinion of the male attitude to women in a song:

> Men will admire, adore and die,
> While wishing at your Feet they lie:
> But admitting their Embraces,
>   Wakes 'em from the golden Dream;
> Nothing's new besides our Faces,
>   Every Woman is the same.
> (II.ii.196-202)

The song accurately sums up Vainlove's attitude to love. Its last lines also, however, alert one to the important part surface manner and art play in attraction in Restoration comedy and, indeed, in life. George Etherege, in one of his letters from Ratisbon, describing his reaction to a young lady he has met, underlines this point. She is physically attractive and Etherege quips:

> No grape was ere so kindly ripe,
> So plump, so smooth, so full of juice.[1]

Yet Etherege himself, doesn't feel attracted. It is a question of the young lady's manners. With great insight, Etherege comments:

> I must confess I am a fop in my heart; ill customs influence my very senses, and I have been so used to affectation that without the help of the air of the court what is natural cannot touch me. You see what we get by being polished, as we call it.[2]

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[1] *The Letter-book of Sir George Etherege*, ed. Sybil Rosenfeld (Oxford, 1928), p.308.

[2] *ibid.* p.309.

Etherege's use of the labels 'fop' and 'affectation' indicate his awareness of the positive value of being natural and artless. Yet he is aware that the senses and affections are not controlled by one's sense of how things ought to be. It may seem a pity, but art is necessary; the natural can be colourless and insipid.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DECEPTION AND SOCIETY

The opening scene of George Etherege's *She wou'd if she cou'd* creates, through its structure and dialogue, a hierarchy of knowledge among the characters it involves, and reveals to the audience the deceptions, delusions, and the playing of social roles which characterize the society of the play. The scene is symetrically structured around the hiding and revealing of Sentry and Freeman in a closet and in a wood-hole respectively. A brief outline of the events which occur in the scene will help clarify the points I wish to make about the opening of this play.

The scene opens with Mr Courtall and Mr Freeman ('Two honest Gentleman of the Town', Etherege calls them in his *dramatis personae*) on the stage discussing how they might spend the day. The possibility of 'some lucky Adventure' (I.i.31) suggests itself when a servant announces that a Gentlewoman desires to speak with Courtall. For 'decency sake' (I.i.40) Courtall has Freeman hide in a closet. Sentry arrives to tell Courtall the good news that her mistress Lady Cockwood has arrived from the country. She suggests that Lady Cockwood would doubtless be pleased to see Courtall. She insists that Lady Cockwood didn't send her with this message but rather, that she wished to oblige Courtall herself. She also asks, that Courtall not reveal to Lady Cockwood the source of his information. At this moment, unluckily, Sir Oliver Cockwood is announced. Sentry, for fear of being exposed, creeps into the wood-hole. Sir Oliver and Courtall embrace each other (Courtall gives Sir Oliver a particularly hearty embrace so that Sentry has ample time to crawl into the wood-hole) and begin a conversation about 'Gentleman-like recreations' (I.i.81-2) and the pleasures of the town as compared to the country. The conversation turns to problems Sir Oliver has with such a 'virtuous' and 'loving' wife as Lady Cockwood. The two establish an easy *camaraderie*, men of sense and experience discussing the world together. They part, planning to dine together later. When Sir Oliver leaves, Sentry is able to come out of her

wood-hole. Having heard Sir Oliver talk of the pleasures of the town, she comments, 'Ah! 'tis a vile dissembling man; how fairly he carries it to my Lady's face!' (I.i.194-5). After Courtall promises to pay his respects to Lady Cockwood, Sentry leaves and Freeman is able to emerge from his closet. 'How hast thou been able to contain?', asks Courtall. 'Faith, much ado', he replies 'the Scene was very pleasant' (I.i.205-7). The two go on to discuss the scene Freeman has observed and particularly Courtall's behaviour in it.

This opening scene, then, introduces deceptions and delusions which are central to the play. In the first place, as Courtall very well knew, the behaviour of Sentry was a complete act. Lady Cockwood did send Sentry to invite Courtall. Her indirection was in the interests of preserving her 'honour' or public reputation. Lady Cockwood's protestations of virtue are all a ruse, another fact which Courtall very well knows. Lady Cockwood has, however, also been deceived. She has made the mistake, often referred to in Restoration comedy, of misinterpreting Courtall's civility for a genuine interest in her. The other character chiefly involved with the deceptions is, of course, Sir Oliver. Firstly, he believes that his wife is genuinely virtuous. He also believes, however, that it is he who is deceiving his wife. After Sir Oliver outlines some of his 'gentleman-like recreations' to Courtall, we have:

> *Cour.* I see, Sir *Oliver*, you continue still your old humour, and are resolv'd to break your sweet Lady's heart.
> *Sir Oliv.* You do not think me sure so barbarously unkind, to let her know all this; no, no, these are secrets fit only to be trusted to such honest Fellows as thou art.
> (I.i.92-6)

Sir Oliver believes that he is deceiving his wife out of consideration for her. That she knows the true state of the case and the limits of Sir Oliver's ability to play the rake becomes obvious later in the play when she tells Sentry, 'Aye, Aye, *Sentry*, I know he'll talk of strange matters

behind my back; but if he be not an abominable Hypocrite at home, and I am not a Woman easily to be deceived, he is not able to play the Spark abroad thus, I assure you' (I.ii.44-8). Indeed, as later events show, instead of being a rake, Sir Oliver counterfeits his sins so as to live up to the image of what he thinks a gentleman should be like.

In his dialogues with both Sentry and with Sir Oliver, Courtall knows the truth. He is in a position to undeceive Lady Cockwood about his feelings towards her, and Sir Oliver about the virtue of his wife. In fact, however, Courtall takes his cues from Sentry and Sir Oliver and adopts the roles his companions in conversation expect of him. He does not expose, but supports the illusions. Freeman suggests one set of motivations for this dissimulation. Thinking that Sir Oliver is Courtall's cuckold, he comments, 'above all, I admire thy impudence, I could never have had the face to have wheadl'd the poor Knight so'. Courtall, however, has no interest in Lady Cockwood and replies, 'Pish, Pish, 'twas both necessary and honest; we ought to do all we can to confirm a Husband in the good opinion of his Wife' (I.i.208-12). Indeed, later he refers (without irony) to 'my sincere dealing with my friends' (I.i.229). Courtall's motive in not undeceiving Sir Oliver is social rather than self-interested. Courtall is not 'wheadling' the knight. By confirming Sir Oliver's good opinion of his wife he is, in fact, maintaining social harmony. Courtall's reasons for not revealing his true inclinations to Lady Cockwood can also be construed as 'social'. Complete frankness to Lady Cockwood would result in Courtall's banishment from a social group which contains the prospect of meeting two young heiresses of fortune.

Dale Underwood, in describing Lady Cockwood's use of the word 'honor' as meaning 'reputation', goes on to say that the usage 'becomes synonymous with hypocrisy, with appearance which conceals reality. It is this honor which the heroes so sardonically expose, not only in the marriage hypocrisies

of the Cockwoods but in the world at large'.[1] Of Sir Oliver he comments, 'Not only is he married, but he further succumbs to convention and custom by hypocritically concealing from his wife his libertine aspirations'.[2] The judgements Underwood makes of characters here, seem rather too harsh. The way Sir Oliver exposes himself when he is drunk should at least relieve him of charges of competent hypocrisy. Also, however, there is no reason to dispute Sir Oliver's claim that he deceives his wife out of consideration for her. Certainly, Lady Cockwood can be called a hypocrite, but her deceptions are so gross and unconvincing (no-one other than Sir Oliver and Sir Joslin are taken in) that she becomes a comic rather than a satirical figure. To say that the heroes 'sardonically expose' hypocrisy is to give their role in the play a satirical force which seems unwarranted.

The opening scenes of *She wou'd if she cou'd* present us with a harmonious social situation. Doubtless the system has important faults, but nevertheless, it seems to be working. It provides avenues through which characters can fulfil their social and sexual needs. Certainly, one has to tread carefully. Courtall in particular, will be presented with socially awkward situations. And it is also true that the system is based on deception. To fulfil her sexual desires and still retain social respectability Lady Cockwood must needs be a hypocrite; to fulfil the role he wants to play, Sir Oliver must deceive his wife; to continue with his sexual and social aims Courtall must deceive Lady Cockwood. Nevertheless, the opening of the play presents pleasing prospects both for the new arrivals from the country, and for Courtall and Freeman.

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[1] *Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners* (New Haven and London, 1957), p.62.

[2] *ibid.* p.63.

During the course of the play, various discoveries are threatened or made, which could disrupt the social system by exposing the deceptions which underlie it. The first of these relate to Courtall's pretended love of Lady Cockwood. In Act II Sc. ii and again in Act III Sc. i Ariana and Gatty, much to Courtall's consternation, almost discover to Lady Cockwood their earlier meeting with Courtall and Freeman in the Mulberry Garden. Such a revelation would certainly have exposed Courtall's addresses to Lady Cockwood as a sham. More comic mileage, however, is made from the difficulties inherent in Courtall's relationship with Lady Cockwood. Courtall must simultaneously seem intent on making a private assignation with Lady Cockwood yet be certain to avoid it. He achieves this in the best possible way, through a pretended scrupulous concern for the lady's 'honour'. Hence, on his first visit to Lady Cockwood he complains that he has to leave quickly since Sir Oliver and Sir Joslin expect him. 'No consideration, Madam, could take me from you, but that I know my stay at this time must needs endanger your Honour; and how often I have deny'd my self the greatest satisfaction in the world, to keep that unblemished, you your self can witness' (II.ii.37-41). Indeed, Courtall uses the same ploy once again in Act III Sc. i so as to avoid a private meeting with the lady. Courtall, then, avoids a situation where he could be exposed, through skilful manipulation of Lady Cockwood's concern for her reputation.

The second 'discovery' of the play involves the exposure of Sir Oliver. At the end of their meeting at The New Exchange, Courtall invites Lady Cockwood, Ariana and Gatty 'to accept of a Treat and a Fiddle' at the Bear (III.i.194). As Courtall's group enter the Bear, Lady Cockwood is, as ever, concerned for her reputation:

> *Court.* Pray, Madam, be not so full of apprehensions; there is no fear that this should come to Sir *Oliver's* knowledge.
> *La. Cock.* I were ruin'd if it shou'd, Sir! Dear, how I tremble!
>
> (III.i.1-5)

Coincidently, however, Sir Oliver and Sir Joslin have arranged to meet wenches at the same place. On learning this, Lady Cockwood cries, 'Oh *Sentry*! Sir *Oliver* disloyal! My misfortunes come too thick upon me' (III.iii.39-40). If a discovery is to be made, however, it must be mutual. As Lady Cockwood comments, 'I know not what to do, Mr. *Courtall*, I would not be surpriz'd here my self, and yet I would prevent Sir Oliver from prosecuting his wicked and perfidious intentions' (III.iii.43-6). Courtall, however, manipulates the situation so that the discovery is one-sided. He has the women in his group disguise themselves as the wenches that Sir Oliver and Sir Joslin are expecting. The situation of mutual discovery is hence replaced by one which can be construed as Lady Cockwood testing Sir Oliver's faithfulness.

Disguised as a whore, Lady Cockwood sees a side of Sir Oliver's personality of which she pretends to have had no previous knowledge. Shocked by what she sees, she reveals her true identity, counterfeits a fit and pretends to be dying. The merriment that both groups expected to find at the Bear becomes instead, a scene of social disorder. Sentry accuses Sir Oliver, 'Out upon thee for a vile Hypocrite! thou art the wicked Author of all this; who but such a reprobate, such an obdurate sinner as thou art, could go about to abuse so sweet a Lady?' (III.iii. 320-3). Lady Cockwood, reviving a little, also passionately accuses Sir Oliver of treachery. The discovery seems to have caused irreparable social disruption. At this point, however, Sir Oliver appeals for help from the social group crying, '*Ned Courtall*, *Frank Freeman*, Cousin *Ariana*, and dear Cousin *Gatty*, for Heavens sake joyn all, and moderate her passion' (III.iii. 363-5). The characters do in fact all join in to help. Courtall tells Lady Cockwood, 'Compose yourself a little, pray, Madam; all this was mere Raillery, a way of talk, which Sir *Oliver* being well bred, has learned among the gay people of the Town' (III.iii.377-9). The rest of the

characters also swear that Sir Oliver has been constant. Such assurances from the social group allow Lady Cockwood to discount her 'discovery'. She no longer feels the need to seem shocked so as to emphasize her own strict virtue. Finally, Sir Joslin sums up with the comment, 'Come, come, Madam, let all things be forgot; Dinner is ready, the cloath is laid in the next Room, let us in and be merry' (III.iii.413-5). The disruption is averted and the characters can be merry once again. Of course, Lady Cockwood's 'discovery' of Sir Oliver's unfaithfulness was really false all along and per passion was pretended. The next discovery of the play, however, has more serious results as genuinely disruptive passions are released.

Suspecting that Courtall's interest in her is a sham, Lady Cockwood decides to clear all doubts counterfeiting letters from Ariana and Gatty to Courtall and Freeman. She comments, 'the Letters I have counterfeited in these Girls Name will clear all; if he [Courtall] accept of that appointment, and refuses mine, I need not any longer doubt' (IV.i.5-8). Lady Cockwood discovers the truth and reacts violently saying, 'How am I fill'd with indignation! To find my person and my passion despis'd, and what is more, so much precious time fool'd away in fruitless expectation; I wou'd poyson my face, so that I might be reveng'd on this ingrateful Villain' (IV.i.57-61).

The way Lady Cockwood decides to revenge herself upon Courtall can best be described as anti-social. The deceptions involved in her procedure can in this sense be contrasted with the dissimulation of Courtall throughout the play. In the first place, Lady Cockwood seeks to have Courtall banished from the social group, and disrupts the good relations between Sir Oliver and Courtall by telling Sir Oliver that Courtall has attempted to seduce her. Significantly, she advises Sir Oliver how to react by suggesting, 'You may decline your friendship, and by your coldness

give him no incouragement to visit our Family' (IV.i.105-7). In the second place, Lady Cockwood seeks to disrupt the developing relationship between Courtall and Freeman, and Ariana and Gatty. Having already counterfeited letters from the ladies to the gallants, Lady Cockwood proceeds to further exploit her ruse, telling the ladies, 'Mr. *Courtall* told Mrs. *Gazet* this morning, that you were so well acquainted already, that you wou'd meet him and Mr. *Freeman* any where, and that you had promis'd 'em to receive and make appointments by Letters' (IV.i.144-8). The suggestion is, of course, that the gallants have looked upon the ladies as easy prey and have already begun bragging of their successes. It is also suggested that the gallants have counterfeited the letters themselves. Lady Cockwood comments, 'I have heard this is a common practice with such unworthy men: Did they not threaten to divulge them, and defame you to the World?' (IV.ii.300-3). As the result of Lady Cockwood's tactics, misunderstandings arise between the gallants and their mistresses, and between Courtall and Sir Oliver. Social harmony is destroyed.

The social disruption that is caused by Lady Cockwood's deceptions is vividly dramatized in the conclusion to Act IV of the play. A drunken Sir Oliver enters to find Courtall in the company of Lady Cockwood. Feeling that he has to defend the honour of his wife, Sir Oliver draws on Courtall. To the cries of 'Murder! Murder!' (IV.ii.359), the characters on stage scatter in various directions, as Sir Oliver and Courtall begin to fight. In short, everything is in uproar. Later, Freeman significantly describes how events were concluded, saying, 'We all divided' (V.i.82). Lady Cockwood is, of course, anxious to perpetuate this division. The last act of the play, however, sees all the characters meet again and is concerned with their reconciliation.

In its structure, the last act is, in many respects, similar to the first. Once again, a closet and (this time) a table are used to hide

characters. Once they are hidden, these characters over-hear what is going on on stage. The act is set in Sir Oliver's dining room where Lady Cockwood and Sentry are discussing the day's events. The first visitor is Freeman, with whom Lady Cockwood has arranged a secret assignation. They are interrupted, however, by Courtall's arrival and Freeman is forced to hide in the closet. Courtall has arrived to seek some explanation for Sir Oliver's behaviour, but before long Sir Oliver's arrival is announced. Lest his presence be misconstrued, Courtall is also forced to hide. Later in the act, however, Courtall and Freeman reveal themselves to Ariana and Gatty and are discovered by Sir Oliver. The result is uproar once again:

> *La. Cock.* What's the matter with you here? Are you mad, Cousins? bless me, Mr. *Courtall* and Mr. *Freeman* in our house at these unseasonable hours!
> *Sir Oliv.* Fetch me down my long Sword, *Sentry*, I lay my life *Courtall* has been tempting the Honour of the young Ladies.
> *La. Cock.* Oh my Dear!
>
> (V.i.353-8)

But Courtall and Freeman are not the only ones in danger. In the course of her deceptions, Lady Cockwood has over-reached herself and this threatens another discovery — the exposure of Lady Cockwood's own treachery and the true nature of her virtue. If Gatty were to see one of the counterfeit letters she would recognise the handwriting as Sentry's and hence the letter would be traced back to Lady Cockwood. It was only the entry of Sir Oliver that prevented this happening at the end of Act IV. As well, Sir Oliver is clearly becoming suspicious of his wife's attitude towards Courtall. Truth threatens on all sides. At this point, however, Courtall takes control over events and evidence.

In the first place, Courtall invents a plausible explanation for his presence at Sir Oliver's. Keen on knowing what Ariana and Gatty really thought of them, the two gallants bribed Sentry into hiding them where they might over-hear their private conversation. Recognising its necessity,

Sentry goes along with the lie. Lady Cockwood, grateful that she has been let off the hook, goes on to retract her allegation against Courtall (''twas only a harmless gallantry, which his French breeding has us'd him to' V.i.402-3) and hence enables a reconciliation between Courtall and Sir Oliver. Sir Oliver tells Courtall, 'Well, the Devil take me, if I had the least unkindness for thee-prithee let us embrace and kiss, and be as good Friends as ever we were, dear Rogue' (V.i.410-13). Lady Cockwood's penance, however, is not yet over. Freeman hands Ariana one of the counterfeit letters and she immediately recognises the hand as Sentry's. 'Oh Heavens!', exclaims Lady Cockwood, 'I shall be ruin'd yet' (V.i.418). Courtall, however, skilfully manipulates the import of the letter so that, instead of its being evidence of Lady Cockwood's treachery, it is seen as confirmation of her virtue. He tells Ariana and Gatty:

> My Lady being in her Nature severely vertuous, is, it seems, offended at the innocent freedom you take in rambling up and down by your selves; which made her, out of a tenderness to your Reputations, counterfeit these Letters, in hopes to fright you to that reservedness which she approves of.
> (V.i.426-31)

Courtall confirms Sir Oliver in the good opinion of his wife.

Towards the end of the play, Sir Joslin arrives and, not knowing what has passed, is surprised at the presence of Courtall and Freeman. Sir Oliver, however, explains, 'Oh man! here has been the prettiest, the luckiest discovery on all sides! we are all good Friends again' (V.i. 505-7). What Sir Oliver calls discoveries have, of course, been deceptions, but they are deceptions which do allow everyone to be friends again. When Sir Joslin asks, 'How stand matters between you and your Lady, Brother *Cockwood*? is there peace on all sides?', he can reply, 'Perfect concord, man ... Never man was so happy in a vertuous and loving Lady!' (V.i.547-52).

But if deception is shown to be necessary for the Cockwoods so that reconciliation and social harmony can be achieved, it must also be noted

that the concord between Sir Oliver and Lady Cockwood at the end of the play, based as it is on delusion, is unfavourably contrasted with the understanding, based on the recognition of truths, that the gallants and their mistresses achieve. While hiding in Sir Oliver's closet, Courtall and Freeman do hear a frank confession that their mistresses love them. Unlike Lady Cockwood, the young ladies are not habitual dissimulators. As Gatty says, 'I hate to dissemble when I need not; 'twou'd look as affected in us to be reserv'd now w'are alone, as for a Player to maintain the Character she acts in the Tyring-room' (V.i.325-8). The 'lucky discovery' (V.i.344) that Freeman and Courtall make is genuine and the couples can come to an agreement based on realities. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that deception is not entirely negative in this play. A distinction must be drawn between those deceptions which are self-interested and socially disruptive and those which contribute to social harmony. The latter type can be a necessary part of social living.

The contented cuckold or the cuckold who is content to deceive himself about his own status is a familiar enough figure in Restoration comedy. Like Sir Oliver Cockwood, Mr Lovely in John Crowne's *The Married Beau* (1694) believes that he is getting repeated confirmation of his wife's virtue when in fact she has completely contrary inclinations. At the end of the play, Mr Lovely celebrates the faithfulness of his wife, not knowing that he has been cuckolded. The plot of Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckolds* (1681) involves three aldermen, each of whose schemes to keep their wives to themselves, backfires. Yet at the end of the play they all refuse to believe (at least publicly) the clear evidence that their wives have been unfaithful. In Congreve's *The Old Batchelour* (1693), Fondlewife catches Bellmour in his wife's bedroom. Bellmour proceeds to admit that it was his intention to cuckold Fondlewife but asserts that his wife is completely innocent as he hasn't had time to perform the deed. Fondlewife comments,

'Ha! This is Apocryphal; I may chuse whether I will believe it or no' (IV.iv.217-8). In fact, after Bellmour mentions some of the social difficulties of parting with his wife and Laetitia puts on a show of affection for him, Fondlewife chooses to believe in his wife's innocence despite the contrary evidence commenting, 'Here, here, I do believe thee. — I won't believe my own Eyes' (IV.iv.262-3). Bellmour concludes the scene saying:

> See the great Blessing of any easy Faith: Opinion cannot err.
> No Husband, by his Wife, can be deceiv'd:
> She still is Vertuous, if she's so believ'd.
> (IV.iv.271-4)

She wou'd if she cou'd, however, did more than present the laughable figure of a cuckold content in being deceived. The theme of the relationship between social harmony, deception and discovery was more fully developed. This can also be said of Wycherley's *The Country Wife*. Like *She wou'd if she cou'd*, *The Country Wife* is concerned with deception and social living; central critical questions revolve around one's response to the various deceptions of the play.

Both Norman Holland and Rose A. Zimbardo have seen *The Country Wife* as a play with a clear moral message.[1] Holland terms it a 'right-way-wrong-way play' (p.73). The right way is defined by the Harcourt/Alithea plot and is contrasted with the wrong way as seen in the Pinchwife/Margery/Horner and the Sir Jaspar/Lady Fidget/Horner intrigues. For Zimbardo, the issues raised and the moral judgements made in this play are quite straightforward. Wycherley's method is the traditional method of the satirist. The play,

> allows the eye to range from one to another scene of moral decay, each an aspect or dimension of the vice under consideration ... The vice in question is lust, but not

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[1] *The First Modern Comedies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp. 73-85. *Wycherley's Drama* (New Haven and London, 1965), pp. 147-65.

> lust simply. Rather, it is lust that disguises itself, assuming one or another mask, not out of deference to morality, not out of shame, but that it may under the protection of a disguise enjoy greater freedom to operate.
>
> (p.154)

For Zimbardo, *The Country Wife* ranges over the four faces of disguised lust. Horner is lust disguised as impotence; the 'ladies of honour' are lust disguised as modesty and virtue; 'Pinchwife hides and indulges his gross carnality under the socially acceptable facade of marriage'; Margery is lust disguised as innocence (pp. 156-7). The opposition to all this lust and hypocrisy lies, of course, in Harcourt and Alithea. 'Alithea ... is the truth that opposes hypocrisy; Harcourt is the romantic love that stands against lust' (p.161). Holland sees the play in much the same way, though he is less insistent on its having a rigid satirical design. He writes that 'the Horner plot and the Pinchwife plot, define the play's "wrong way" - deception' (p.75).

In Rose Zimbardo's view, the 'wrong way' characters degenerate in the course of the play. She writes,

> In their first appearance the four aspects of the vice are almost purely comic — Horner's knavery, Fidget's affectation, Pinchwife's jealousy, Margery's rusticity are at first follies. However, at each successive appearance they assume more serious proportions, and by gradual stages the comic tone fades, to be replaced by the satiric.
>
> (p.158)

Hence, Zimbardo writes of Horner's behaviour, that his 'knavery, at first so devilishly clever that it escapes our censure, degenerates into mean knavery when at last he sacrifices Alithea's true honour to the preservation of his false disguise' (p.161). The degeneration of these characters can be contrasted with what Holland calls the 'conversions upward' of Harcourt and Alithea (p.78). The imagery associated with these characters suggests the ideals they represent. Harcourt calls Alithea a 'Divine, Heavenly Creature' (IV.p.315) and a 'Seraphick Lady' (IV.p.316). 'It is symbolic', writes Holland, 'that Harcourt disguises himself as a

priest to court her' (p.78).

In the view of these two critics, then, *The Country Wife* presents the audience with the alternatives, ugly vice and beautiful virtue. The play's conclusion is, however, open-ended. Alithea and Harcourt will presumably live happily ever after in their virtue. But the other characters are not punished. They can continue in their vice. Wycherley offers the alternatives but leaves the choice to the audience.

One would not want to argue with the basic proposition in the above readings. The play does present two different modes of behaviour, and the Alithea way is morally preferable to Horner's. One must object, however, to the degree to which these critics have pushed this moral contrast. Three things are worth noting about the way Norman Holland and Rose A. Zimbardo approach this play. Firstly, deception is seen as completely negative. It is called 'hypocrisy'. Secondly, the moralising is heavy-handed. Of the famous 'china' scene in this play, a scene which must be among the funniest in Restoration comedy, Rose Zimbardo comments, 'We must not allow the comedy of the scene to blind us to the realization that it is a hair's breadth short of presenting the sexual act on stage' (p.159). One can't help feeling that Wycherley was rather more amused than this. Thirdly, the above critics are so intent on giving a neat, coherent view of the play that they are led into misinterpretations. Does Horner really degenerate into mean knavery, and sacrifice Alithea's honour to the preservation of his false disguise? A brief look at the relevant scene will show that this is an exaggeration.

Through various plot complications, Margery Pinchwife ends up being taken to visit Horner while she is disguised as Alithea. Later in the scene, Horner is confronted by the real Alithea who, of course, denies that she has ever visited Horner. Horner is in a dilemma. Should he

support the truth or should he protect Margery's 'honour'? He decides on the latter. It is simply not true that Horner, 'sacrifices Alithea's true honour for the sake of his false disguise'. Rather, he is protecting Margery's honour ('false' though it may be). Nor is Alithea's honour sacrificed; it is only compromised for the moment. Horner does not act with a 'mean knavery' but, rather, as he says himself, 'I must be impudent, and try my luck, impudence uses to be too hard for truth' (V.p.355). Impudence, in fact, ends up being successful whereas the truth may have generated even greater difficulties. Zimbardo clearly makes too much of the moral censure Horner deserves for his behaviour in this scene. And it is, indeed, on the basis of this scene that she makes her most forceful indictment of Horner.

One's scepticism with regard to Horner's degeneration in the course of the play also holds with respect to the so-called 'conversions upward' of Harcourt and Alithea. What of Harcourt's 'symbolic' disguise as a chaplain? Symbolic of what, one might ask? Alithea's maid Lucy, judges the effectiveness of the disguise saying, 'I'll be sworn he has the Canonical smirk, and the filthy, clammy palm of a Chaplain' (IV.p.315). This surely doesn't symbolise the quality of Harcourt's love. In fact, Harcourt's use of disguise in this scene, moves him closer to the world of Horner rather than further away from it. In all the scenes between Harcourt, Alithea and Sparkish, Harcourt uses tactics that are inspired by Horner. Earlier in the play, Harcourt had complained to Horner of Sparkish, 'But I cannot come near his Mistriss, but in his company.' Horner had replied, 'Still the better for you, for Fools are most easily cheated, when they themselves are accessaries' (III.pp. 295-6). In his efforts to court Alithea, Harcourt does in fact make Sparkish an accessory.

In my view, then, *The Country Wife* is not a play with a thesis/ antithesis moral framework. Nor can its characters be neatly grouped in

terms of a wrong way/right way pattern. It is a play which exposes and gives insight into the way society works rather than one which attempts to overtly instruct by providing unequivocal moral judgements. An analysis which judges behaviour only according to whether it is honest or deceptive, and sees only negative aspects of deception unnecessarily limits the range of response the play can elicit. A different view of *The Country Wife* becomes apparent if one looks more closely at the way the play ends.

'So all will out now', says Horner in an aside towards the end of *The Country Wife* (V.p.353). To Mrs Pinchwife he says of her husband, 'he'll now discover all' (V.p.354). The plot has reached a point where discoveries are imminent on all sides. The three 'sharing sisters', Lady Fidget, Mrs Squeamish and Mrs Dainty Fidget, with the help of a few bottles, are speaking with 'openness and plain dealing' (V.p.359). Hence, they will soon discover that Horner has used the same technique with all of them. Up till this point each had thought that Horner had reported himself a eunuch for her sake alone. More importantly, however, Mrs Pinchwife is in the next room dressed in Alithea's clothes. She refuses to leave and is certain to be discovered by her husband. Such a discovery will almost certainly reveal Horner's disguise as a eunuch and this in turn will expose the protestations of 'honour' and 'virtue' of Lady Fidget and her cohorts for the shams that they are. In short, the audience is led to believe that the deceptions and disguises which have characterised the play are about to be publicly exposed.

But what in fact happens? The 'sharing sisters' do find out that Horner has cheated them. They decide, however, that for the sake of their 'honours' they must not 'fall out' with each other (V.p.353). The secret that each of them had kept before must now be shared by all three of them, and their affairs with Horner will be able to continue. Pinchwife

does discover his wife in Alithea's clothes and realises that he has been cheated. He draws his sword, firstly on his wife and then on Horner, but Harcourt is able to stop him. At this point, with the stage already in a state of confusion, Sir Jaspar Fidget, Old Lady Squeamish, Mrs Dainty Fidget, and Mrs Squeamish all enter:

> *Sir Jaspar.* What's the matter, what's the matter, pray what's the matter Sir, I beseech you communicate Sir.
> *Pinchwife.* Why my Wife has communicated Sir, as your Wife may have done too Sir, if she knows him Sir —
> *Sir Jaspar.* Pshaw, with him, ha, ha, he.
> *Pinchwife.* D'ye mock me Sir, a Cuckold is a kind of a wild Beast, have a care Sir —
> *Sir Jaspar.* No sure, you mock me Sir — he cuckold you! it can't be, ha, ha, he, why, I'll tell you Sir. [*Offers to whisper.*
> (V.p.357)

Up till this point, of course, Mr Pinchwife had been unaware of the general belief that Horner was a eunuch. Sir Jaspar tries to disabuse him. At the same time, however, Pinchwife tries to disabuse Sir Jaspar and proves successful up to a point:

> *Pinchwife.* I tell you again, he has whor'd my Wife, and yours too, if he knows her, and all the women he comes near; 'tis not his dissembling, his hypocrisie can wheedle me.
> *Sir Jaspar.* How does he dissemble, is he a Hypocrite? nay then — how — Wife — Sister is he an Hypocrite?
> *Lady Squeamish.* An Hypocrite, a dissembler, speak young Harlotry, speak how?
> *Sir Jaspar.* Nay then — O my head too — O thou libidinous Lady!
> *Lady Squeamish.* O thou Harloting, Harlotry, hast thou don't then?
> *Sir Jaspar.* Speak good *Horner*, art thou a dissembler, a Rogue? hast thou —
> (V.p.357)

Total discovery seems inevitable. Lucy, Alithea's maid, however, intervenes and tries to bring everyone off by providing plausible alternative explanations for the evidence. In the first place, she takes the blame for causing the suspicious situation (in this respect her role is similar to Mrs Sentry's in *She wou'd if she cou'd*) and explains Mrs Pinchwife's lies about Alithea as an attempt to break the mismatch between

Alithea and Sparkish. At this point the Quack arrives and reassures Sir Jaspar and attempts to convince Mr Pinchwife that Horner is in fact a eunuch. Finally, everyone is convinced or at least pretends to be convinced of the innocence of the ladies and the socially disruptive discoveries are averted.

In this conclusion to the play the characters are not really interested in discovering the truth. Mr Pinchwife is willing to deceive himself. The alacrity with which Sir Jaspar and Old Lady Squeamish accept the Quack's confirmation that Horner is in fact a eunuch testifies to their reluctance to discover the truth. All they require is that the females still *appear* to be chaste. Sir Jaspar is only too pleased to be able to call Lady Fidget his 'virtuous Lady' and 'dear of honour' once again (V.p.358). What characters want at the end of the play is social harmony, and even Alithea is willing to suppress the doubts she must have about Margery's innocence and say to Pinchwife, 'Come Brother your Wife is yet innocent' (V.p.359). Horner's second last speech of the play in a sense goes to the heart of the matter. He tells Pinchwife:

> Now Sir I must pronounce your Wife Innocent, though I blush whilst I do it, and I am the only man by her now expos'd to shame, which I will straight drown in Wine, as you shall your suspition, and the Ladies troubles we'l divert with a Ballet, Doctor where are your Maskers.
> (V.p.360)

Here we have a new version of the celebration which traditionally concludes a comedy. Certainly, there is the proposed marriage between Harcourt and Alithea, but the celebration is really a blind. The diversions suppress troubles and suspicions. The double perspective, the sense of social harmony coupled with our knowledge that it is based upon deception is eloquently expressed in '*A Dance of Cuckolds*' which concludes the play. The dance itself, in which all would participate, suggests the harmony which is only possible because Sir Jaspar and Mr Pinchwife are deceived. The music, presumably, would be recognized by a contemporary audience as

appropriate for cuckolds and hence would point towards the reality of the situation.

In Act III of the play, Mrs Pinchwife describes her plight in these terms: 'Wou'd it not make anyone melancholy, to see you [Alithea] go every day fluttering abroad, whil'st I must stay at home like a poor lonely, sullen Bird in a cage?' (III.p.290). It is no accident that it is Alithea, who can take the freedom of the town, who is the most virtuous female in the play and who can deal plainly with other characters. It is the woman who is 'kept up' either by lock and key as with Mrs Pinchwife or by marriage and a concern for reputation as with Lady Fidget who needs to use deception. Though we recognize the hypocrisy of the 'sharing sisters', it should also be noted that deception is necessary if natural desires are to be satisfied. Lucy comments at the end of the play, 'And any wild thing grows but the more fierce and hungry for being kept up, and more dangerous to the Keeper' (V.p.360). If natural desires are to be satisfied (and it is emphasised in the play that Mr Pinchwife and Sir Jaspar can't satisfy them) duplicity is necessary. The immediate aim of duplicity is, in Mrs Pinchwife's case, to escape from her prison, and for the 'sharing sisters', to have sex while maintaining what they call their 'honour'. In a larger sense, however, it could be argued that duplicity is necessary so that natural desires can be satisfied without disrupting social harmony. Indeed, Mrs Squeamish's notion, 'the crime's the less, when 'tis not known', and Lady Fidget's, ''tis not an injury to a Husband, till it be an injury to our honours; so that a Woman of honour loses no honour with a private Person' (II.p.284) are both ironically affirmed by the ending of the play. The dictums may be pernicious, but they recognise social realities. This recognition of social realities is contrasted with the innocence and social naivety of Mrs Pinchwife.

When we are first introduced to Margery Pinchwife she is innocently frank in her dealings with her husband. She hates London and wishes to be back in the country, admits to her husband that she liked the players in the theatre, and is openly pleased when Pinchwife tells her a gallant has admired her. Under the unwitting instruction of her husband, however, she learns how to deceive in the course of the play. First of all, Margery deceives her husband by substituting her own letter to Horner for the one he forced her to write. This can, however, be seen as an 'honest' deception. The letter Margery contrives to send to Horner is a true expression of her feelings, whereas the one Pinchwife forced her to write was full of untruths. When Margery is caught by Pinchwife writing a second letter to Horner she extricates herself from a nasty situation by signing Alithea's name to it rather than her own. This deception can also be seen as a necessary response to a threatening situation. Up till this point, Margery only deceives so as to satisfy her own immediate needs. She has no concern for honour and reputation.

In the final act of the play, Margery displays an honesty which threatens social harmony. In the first place, she refuses to leave Horner's lodgings and is content to be discovered by her husband:

> *Horner.* ... yet pray my Dearest be perswaded to go home, and leave the rest to my management, I'll let you down the back way.
> *Mrs. Pinchwife.* I don't know the way home, so I don't.
> *Horner.* My man shall wait upon you.
> *Mrs. Pinchwife.* No, don't you believe, that I'll go at all; what are you weary of me already?
> *Horner.* No my life, 'tis that I may love you long, 'tis to secure my love, and your Reputation with your Husband, he'll never receive you again else.
> *Mrs. Pinchwife.* What care I, d'ye think to frighten me with that? I don't intend to go to him again; you shall be my Husband now.
> *Horner.* I cannot be your Husband, Dearest, since you are married to him.
>
> (V.p.354)

Horner wants Margery to behave as a mistress should. Though she wants

Horner, she should see to it that there is no irrevocable split with her husband. Horner appeals to 'reputation'. Mrs Pinchwife, however, has no such concern and, in her social naivety and emotional honesty, wants to separate from her husband and bring her relationship into the open. Mrs Pinchwife is the only character who wants the truth asserted in the final scene of the play. In that scene, Lucy tries to explain Margery's action to Pinchwife saying, 'I assure you Sir, she came not to Mr. *Horner* out of love, for she loves him no more'. Margery, however, objects, 'Hold, I told lyes for you, but you shall tell none for me, for I do love Mr. *Horner* with all my soul, and no body shall say me nay; pray don't you go to make poor Mr. *Horner* believe to the contrary, 'tis spitefully done of you, I'm sure' (V.p.358). Margery again attempts to assert the truth when the Quack falsely confirms that Horner is a eunuch:

> *Mrs. Pinchwife.* 'Tis false Sir, you shall not disparage poor Mr. *Horner*, for to my certain knowledge —
> *Lucy.* O hold —
> *Squeamish.* Stop her mouth — [*Aside to Lucy.*
> (V.p.359)

Margery's resistance is, however, finally broken by the pressure of numbers and she is coerced into accepting the lie:

> *Lucy.* [to Mr. Pinchwife.] Indeed she's Innocent Sir, I am her witness, and her end of coming out was but to see her Sisters Wedding, and what she has said to your face of her love to Mr. *Horner* was but the usual innocent revenge on a Husbands jealousie, was it not Madam speak —
> *Mrs. Pinchwife.* Since you'l have me tell more lyes —
> [*Aside to Lucy and Horner.*
> Yes indeed Budd.
> (V.p.360)

This last lie can be contrasted with Margery's earlier deceptions in that it does not fulfil any personal needs. Rather, the lie is necessary so as to avoid social disruption. With this lie and with the recognition of the social role of deception that it involves, Margery is truly initiated into London society. This is not to say that one doesn't admire

Margery's honesty and the way she resists social pressure. Nevertheless, one recognizes that her honesty springs from a social naivety, and that some compromise with strict truth is ultimately necessary.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PLAIN-DEALERS AND PLAIN-DEALING

A recent investigation into moral attitudes reflected in Restoration comedy, begins its discussion of 'plain-dealing' with the comment that plain-dealing is 'a term often used in the plays and always with favourable connotations'.[1] It is not very difficult to refute such a sweeping assertion. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning the fate of poor James, a servant in Thomas Shadwell's *The Miser* (1672).

James is disgusted by the way Bellamour ingratiates himself with Goldringham through flattery and servility. He tells his master, 'Sir, I cannot endure these Flatterers, and Pickthanks, I speak my mind plainly; and it made me mad to hear him say things to your Face, of you, that none of all mankind besides will say' (III.iii.p.57). Goldringham urges James to speak plainly and tell him what the world actually says of him. 'Truly I must deal plainly with one I love', replies James and proceeds to catalogue his master's faults (III.iii.p.58). The result is predictable. James later exclaims, 'A pox on all sincerity, and plain dealing for me, I have had a couple of good substantial beatings' (III.iii.p.59). Plain-dealing may be morally praiseworthy, but it is certainly highly inadvisable if one happens to be a servant of Goldringham. The moralist may assert that 'Plain dealing is a jewel'; the more practical minded, however, would sympathize with the proverb's extension — 'Plain dealing is a jewel, but they that use it die beggars.' But the fact that servants must play up to their masters and are rewarded for flattery says little about the general status of plain-dealing in Restoration comedy. The response of Goldringham to plain-dealing is, after all, being satirized and he is punished at the end of the play. The question of plain-dealing in Restoration comedy must be looked at in a wider context.

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[1] Ben Ross Schneider, Jr., *The Ethos of Restoration Comedy* (Urbana, Chicago and London, 1971), p.96.

Ben Ross Schneider's general point is that, taken as a whole, Restoration comedies 'recommend Plain-dealing' (p.98). The first and most obvious difficulty associated with such an assertion is that of definition. Schneider maintains his thesis by extending the notion of 'plain-dealer' to include not only Wycherley's Manly but also Congreve's Mirabell (pp. 96-7). Indeed, he even suggests that Dryden's Bellamy in *An Evening's Love* is a plain-dealer even though this character spends a great part of the play disguised as an astrologer (p.102). For Schneider, the use of 'strategic deception' does not necessarily disqualify a character from being called a 'plain-dealer' (p.105). Such extension of meaning makes Schneider's concept of plain-dealing a very slippery one indeed, and makes discussion difficult. Nevertheless, there is common ground in that Schneider takes as the starting point for his discussion of plain-dealing the behaviour of Wycherley's Manly, behaviour which, consistent with his thesis, he finds entirely admirable (pp. 97-103). Any discussion of plain-dealing in Restoration comedy must, of course, attempt to come to terms with Wycherley's difficult and complex comedy.

The critical controversy surrounding *The Plain Dealer* has essentially revolved around the question of whether Manly is the hero of the play or its comic gull. This question, in turn, has been viewed in terms of the relationship between Wycherley and Manly. Is Manly Wycherley's spokesman, or should the identities and views of Wycherley and Manly be separated? Henry Ten Eyck Perry succinctly stated his point of view in the 1920's:

> in *The Plain Dealer* Manly is the honest figure and the rest of the world is wrong. Wycherley sympathizes with his chief character and speaks through his mouth, as the author's contemporaries at once recognized. They nicknamed him "Manly" Wycherley and the "Plain Dealer", probably much to his gratification, for in the person of his hero Wycherley has embodied all that he supposed best in his own character.[1]

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[1] *The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama* (New York, 1962, repr.), pp. 49-50.

The view is essentially the same as that adopted by Ben Ross Schneider in the 1970's. On the other hand, critics like Alexander H. Chorney, Norman Holland and Rose A. Zimbardo have attempted to distinguish between the views of Wycherley and Manly and have seen Manly as a victim of Wycherley's satire. Chorney emphasises the 'humours' aspect of Manly's character and sees Manly as a version of Earle's 'Blunt Man'. He assumes Wycherley's attitude towards Manly is similar to that of Earle towards his characters and hence views Manly as an object of satire.[1] Manly 'diverges from the norm and is therefore ridiculous'.[2] Norman Holland also argues that Manly should be seen as a comic dupe. In fact he goes so far as to say, 'we would have to assume Wycherley was a fool to identify him with Manly, for Manly is actually not heroic at all, but blundering, blustering, and self-deceived'.[3] Most recently, we have Rose A. Zimbardo's view that this play should be seen as a formal satire exposing the vice of hypocrisy. Manly, though he is Wycherley's satiric spokesman, is also an object of satire. He degenerates throughout the play and is shown to be infected with the very vices that he is satirizing.[4]

That *The Plain Dealer* and particularly the character of Manly should elicit such diverse, often contradictory responses testifies to the difficulty of the play and to the complexity of the moral questions it raises. Who would, after all, bother to argue about Steele's view of the morality of Bevil junior's behaviour in, say, *The Conscious Lovers*. The structure of that play and the moralising it contains speak for themselves

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[1] 'Wycherley's Manly Reinterpreted' in *Essays Critical and Historical Dedicated to Lily B. Campbell* (New York, 1968, repr.), pp. 159-169.

[2] *ibid.* p.162.

[3] *The First Modern Comedies*, p.98.

[4] *Wycherley's Drama*, pp. 127-47.

and leave the audience with a clear view of at least how it is meant to judge behaviour. *The Plain Dealer*, however, is fraught with critical difficulties. The attempts to categorize Manly as either gull or hero can be seen as a response to the difficulties. They are attempts to discover an ordering principle which might generate a coherent reading of the play. In fact, however, neither the view of the play which casts Manly as a hero nor that which calls him a dupe seems entirely convincing. Manly does not fit comfortably into either category and while the former view minimizes Manly's unpleasantness, the latter has difficulty accounting for the admiration Fidelia has for him. In fact, Manly elicits complex and mixed responses. As Ian Donaldson has noted, one's response to Manly is characterized by a shifting and reshifting of sympathies. The play arouses conflicting feelings and is characterized by a feeling of contradictoriness. Ian Donaldson has seen this as the major strength of the play.[1] The power of many of its scenes notwithstanding, however, *The Plain Dealer* is finally unsatisfactory as a coherent whole. The conflicting responses that the play generates arise from the fact that its satiric, comic, realistic and romantic elements are finally irreconcilable.

The ending of *The Plain Dealer* is at once its most straightforward yet disturbing feature. In a quick succession of events, Manly exposes the treachery of Vernish and Olivia, Fidelia's true sex and identity is revealed, Manly is rewarded with Fidelia's love, the return of his jewels and with the sum of two thousand pounds a year, and, finally, Manly proclaims that he is reconciled to the world and confirms a friendship with Freeman. The moral significance of the ending seems straightforward enough. The fact that Manly is so clearly rewarded implies a moral statement. There is no sense in which Manly can be said to have 'reformed'

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[1] *The World Upside-Down: Comedy from Jonson to Fielding* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 99-118.

during the course of the play. Hence we conclude that Manly's behaviour throughout the play and the quality of 'plain-dealing' he embodies are meant to be given our unequivocal approval. Taken in isolation, then, the significance of the ending of *The Plain Dealer* seems straightforward enough. When we look at the play as a whole, however, the ending seems disturbing. It generates more critical problems than it solves. Rather than clarifying the moral issues raised in the play, it oversimplifies them and the ending is romantic in a way which falsifies.

The ending of *The Plain Dealer* can be contrasted with that of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Towards the end of *Love's Labour's Lost*, Marcade enters with the news that the Princess's father is dead. A sense of the reality of death pierces the illusory, happy world of the Pageant of the Nine Worthies and of life in the park. As Anne Righter puts it, 'The life of the park, forced into conjunction with death, has been revealed as artificial and illusory. Now, as this life comes to an end, Berowne describes it as a comedy interrupted by reality, its plot unresolved.'[1] Berowne comments, 'Our wooing doth not end like an old play; /Jack hath not Jill' (V.ii.866-7).[2] The ending of *The Plain Dealer* works in an almost exactly opposite way. Here we have had a play filled with realism, a play where the impulse has been to strip characters of illusions and expose them for what they are. Yet the ending is clearly fabricated; the problems of life do resolve themselves as if they were part of a play. The sense of a dramatist manipulating events is all too evident. The prologue suggests that Wycherley may have been aware of this:

> *And where else, but on Stages, do we see*
> *Truth pleasing; or rewarded Honesty?*
> (p.386)

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[1]*Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London, 1962), p.111.

[2]*Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. Richard David, The Arden Shakespeare (London, 1968).

It could be argued that this is just the point that Wycherley is trying to make. Wycherley has created an 'unreal' ending and hence reminds the audience that truth and honesty are not rewarded in the real world. Such a reading does not, however, render the ending any more acceptable. The real problem is that one feels most reluctant to equate Manly's behaviour and the nature of his 'plain-dealing' with truth and honesty. It is the unequivocal support that Manly seems to be given at the end of the play to which one objects.

The opening of *The Plain Dealer* is structured around a series of debates which raise the central issue of the play. The debate begins with Manly and Lord Plausible:

> *Manly.* Tell not me (my good Lord *Plausible*) of your *Decorums*, supercilious Forms, and slavish Ceremonies; your little Tricks, which you the Spaniels of the World, do daily over and over, for, and to one another; not out of love or duty, but your servile fear.
>
> *Plausible.* Nay, i'faith, i'faith, you are too passionate, and I must humbly beg your pardon and leave to tell you, they are the Arts, and Rules, the prudent of the World walk by.
>
> (I.p.389)

An immediately effective contrast is created. Manly, forceful, plainly dressed, and direct in his speech on the one hand, and Lord Plausible, always accommodating, foppish, elaborately dressed, and ceremonious on the other. It is clear that we admire Manly here. Nevertheless, it is important that the 'debate' structure of the dialogue be recognized. Lord Plausible is allowed some points:

> *Plausible.* ... I will not disparage any man, to disparage my self; for to speak ill of people behind their backs, is not like a Person of Honour; and truly to speak ill of 'em to their faces, is not like a complaisant person: But if I did say, or do an ill thing to any Body, it shou'd be sure to be behind their backs, out of pure good manners.
>
> *Manly.* Very well; but I, that am an unmannerly Sea-fellow, if I ever speak well of people, (which is very seldom indeed), it shou'd be sure to be behind their backs; and if I would say, or do ill to any, it shou'd be to their faces ...
>
> (I.p.390)

While it must be allowed that Lord Plausible's comment is less an argument than an unwitting self-exposure, it must also be acknowledged that the way the dialogue is structured shows us Manly adopting an extreme point of view and in this sense also exposing himself. Manly pursues an argument which is the exact antithesis of Plausible's. Hence, while Plausible would only say an ill thing of someone behind his back, Manly asserts that he would never say a good thing about anyone except behind his back. Neither insists on frankness. The structure of the dialogue suggests two extreme points of view.

The sense of debate, a sense that there are two sides to the argument and no one point of view presented is necessarily entirely correct, becomes even more marked in Manly's dialogue with Freeman:

> *Manly.* ... Ceremony, and great Professing, renders Friendship as much suspected, as it does Religion.
> *Freeman.* And no Professing, no Ceremony at all in Friendship, were as unnatural and as undecent as in Religion.
> (I.p.395)

One recognizes the validity of both points of view. 'Wou'd you have a man speak truth to his ruine?', asks Freeman (I.p.396). Manly answers in the affirmative. One may admire the uncompromising nature of such a stance, but one can simultaneously recognize its practical limitations.

In speaking of the conversations between Manly, Lord Plausible and Freeman as a 'debate' it is not meant to undercut the force and validity of Manly's attack on hypocrisy. Act III of the play, set in Westminster Hall, for example, is particularly effective satire. Rose A. Zimbardo aptly describes it when she comments that, 'the scene answers to perfection the demand of the satiric form for a crowded, moving background presenting one after another scrambling knave to provoke and to justify the satiric spokesman's fiery outbursts. The seat of justice, we find, is the scene of the greatest of all hypocrisies'.[1] The key point, however, is that in

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[1]*Wycherley's Drama*, p.135.

this particular scene Manly's outbursts are demonstrably justified and strike home. In other scenes, Manly's railing is completely indiscriminate. His style of plain-dealing is the product of a very limited perception. If one allows that the activities of Westminster Hall in Act III provide a background which is appropriately satirized, it must also be recognized that much of Manly's railing in Act I of the play is completely misplaced. There is the evidence of one of his sailors. ''Tis a hurry-durry Blade', he tells his friend, 'dost thou remember after we had tug'd hard the old leaky Long-boat, to save his Life, when I welcom'd him ashore, he gave me a box on the ear, and call'd me a fawning Waterdog?' (I.p.393). When Fidelia, at not being believed that she is willing to die for Manly, begins to weep, Freeman comments to Manly, 'Poor Youth! believe his eyes, if not his tongue: he seems to speak truth with them.' Manly's reaction is, 'What, does he cry? A pox on't, a Maudlin Flatterer is as nauseously troublesom, as a Maudlin Drunkard' (I.pp. 399-400). In the main body of the play, plain-dealing as we see it in the character of Manly is not unequivocally endorsed. We are allowed to see its limitations, its excess and its simple-mindedness.

One of the least attractive aspects of Manly's plain-dealing is that it eschews any possibility of viewing the world with anything less than a zealous seriousness. Manly's lack of any sense of humour and intolerence of jokes, particularly if they are at his expense, is clearly emphasised. When, in Act I, the sailors make a joke about Manly's fighting he reacts with, 'Rogue, Rascal Dog' and kicks them out. Freeman is, as one would expect, much more reasonable:

> *Freeman.* Nay, let the poor Rogues have their Forecastle jests; they cannot help 'em in a Fight, scarce when a Ship's sinking.
>
> *Manly.* Dam their untimely jests; a Servant's jest is more sauciness than his counsel.
>
> (I.p.395)

This is immediately followed by Freeman's comment to Manly, 'But what, will you see no Body? not your Friends?'. Manly's lack of any sense of humour is an aspect of his general anti-socialness. A joke is, after all, only worthwhile if it is shared, as Freeman points out: 'the pleasure which Fops afford, is like that of Drinking, only good when 'tis shar'd; and a Fool, like a Bottle, which wou'd make you merry in company, will make you dull alone' (I.p.394). This lack of any sense of humour (a trait, incidentally, that Manly shares with other 'plain-dealers' in Restoration comedy such as Stanford in Shadwell's *The Sullen Lovers* (1668) and Heartwell in Congreve's *The Old Batchelour* (1693)) can also, however, be directly associated with the zeal with which Manly attacks hypocrisy and ceremony. One recalls, in this context, a conversation from Etherege's *The Man of Mode* about Sir Fopling Flutter:

> *Emil.* Company is a very good thing, Madam, but I wonder you do not love it a little more Chosen.
> *L. Town.* 'Tis good to have an universal taste; we should love Wit, but for Variety be able to divert our selves with the Extravagancies of those who want it.
> *Med.* Fools will make you laugh.
> *Emil.* For once or twice! but the repetition of their Folly after a visit or two grows tedious and unsufferable.
> *L. Town.* You are a little too delicate, *Emilia*.
> (III.ii.129-37)

In the context of this play, Lady Townley's mild rebuke of Emilia is well-founded. Emilia, in her implied wish that Sir Fopling should be excluded from the social group which gathers at Lady Townley's, is too intolerant. As Old Bellair tells Lady Townley of Emilia earlier in the play, 'Advise her to wear a little more mirth in her face; a Dod, she's too serious' (II.i.53-4). Emilia should be able to appreciate the comic aspect of Sir Fopling's affectation. ''Tis good to have an universal taste', as Lady Townley says. One would not, of course, want to judge Manly by Lady Townley's standards. Nevertheless, a comparison between the above dialogue and Manly's attitude to fools highlights one of the important limitations of his plain-dealing. For Manly, of course, a fool

could never be something to 'sport with' or laugh at. He is too single-minded to see any fun in pretence.

One of Wycherley's maxims can be used to provide a telling comment on Manly's plain-dealing. Writes Wycherley, 'Every Man is a Player on the Stage of the World, and acts a different Part from his own natural Character, more to please the World, as more he cheats it.'[1] The maxim shows a recognition that the image of the player is double-edged. The player is a cheat, yet he gives pleasure. Deception can be hypocrisy, but it is also the basis of theatre. Manly, one feels, fails to make the distinction. His values are those of the Puritan. He not only objects to hypocrisy, but also to the theatrical and entertaining aspects of social life.

Another unpleasant aspect of Manly's character which is associated with his 'plain-dealing' is the physicality of his language. This is particularly significant if we recall the insistence in dramatic theory of the Restoration period that physical defects are not proper subjects for satire. In this respect, Olivia is the worst offender. She refers to an acquaintance as, 'the very disgrace to good cloaths, which she alwayes wears, but to heighten her deformity, not mend it' (II.p.414). And again, 'the ill-favor'd of our Sex are never more nauseous than when they wou'd be Beauties, adding to their natural deformity, the artificial ugliness of affectation' (II.p.414). Manly's disgust of the world, however, also finds expression in physical and animal terms. Lord Plausible is a 'Spaniel' (I.p.389), he has a 'stinking breath' (II.p.425), the fops are, 'fluttering Parrots of the Town, Apes and Echoes of men only' (I.p.407), and later, 'impudent, intruding, buzzing Flies and Insects'

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[1] *The Complete Works of William Wycherley*, ed. Montague Summers, 4 vols. (London, 1924), IV, p.117.

(V.p.499). In Manly's rage, there is always the potential viciousness that comes to the fore when his jealousy and revenge are finally aroused by Olivia's behaviour. Demanding a report of Fidelia's visit to Olivia, he threatens:

> But, what, did she not kiss well, Sir? I'm sure I thought her Lips — but I must not think of 'em more — but they are such I could still kiss, — grow to — and then tear off with my teeth, grind 'em into mammocks, and spit 'em into her Cuckolds face.
>
> (IV.p.467)

Manly's 'plain-dealing', in many respects, anticipates the unsavoury and gratuitous derisiveness of Beaugard and Courtine in Otway's *The Souldiers Fortune* (1681). These characters express their resentment of the world by declaring that man is merely a 'moving lump of filthiness' (II.353-4). Their 'raillery' proceeds from this assumption.

In response to a bout of detraction by her cousin Olivia, Eliza comments: 'So, Cousin, I find one may have a collection of all ones acquaintance Pictures as well at your house, as at Mr. *Lely's*; only the difference is, there we find 'em such handsomer than they are, and like; here, much uglier, and like.' Olivia responds: 'I draw after the Life; do no Body wrong, Cousin.' (II.p.414). The nature of Olivia's raillery, however, confirms that Eliza's assessment is correct. Whereas the fops habitually flatter, Olivia's forte is detraction. One feels, however, that Eliza's assessment of Olivia applies to Manly as well. Certainly, his railing is not as blatantly hypocritical as Olivia's. It does, however, make things uglier than they are rather than 'draw after the Life'.

Manly's 'plain-dealing', then, generates a mixed response. We recognize the truth and validity of much of his attack on hypocrisy, yet at the same time recoil from its excess. We have a similar dual response to other aspects of Manly's character.

Manly is perhaps at his most sympathetic when, in Act I, he hopelessly romanticises Vernish and Olivia. He describes Vernish saying,

> Friends — I have but one, and he, I hear, is not in Town; nay, can have but one Friend, for a true heart admits but of one friendship, as of one love; but in having that Friend, I have a thousand, for he has the courage of men in despair, yet the diffidency and caution of Cowards; the secresie of the Revengeful, and the constancy of Martyrs: one fit to advise, to keep a secret: to fight and dye for his Friend. Such I think of him ...
>
> (I.p.395)

and Olivia,

> She has Beauty enough to call in question her Wit or Virtue, and her Form wou'd make a starved Hermit a Ravisher; yet her Virtue, and Conduct, wou'd preserve her from the subtil Lust of a pamper'd Prelate. She is so perfect a Beauty, that Art cou'd not better it, nor Affectation deform it; yet all this is nothing. Her tongue as well as face, ne'r knew artifice; nor ever did her words or looks contradict her heart: She is all truth ...
>
> (I.p.406)

When we first meet the actual Olivia and Vernish there is genuine shock. Olivia's first comment of the Manly who thinks so well of her is to casually wish him dead. 'I always lov'd his Brutal courage, because it made me hope it might rid me of his more Brutal love' (II.p.423). Vernish, Manly's only friend, instructs Olivia with regard to Manly's jewels, 'Part not with a Seed Pearl to him, to keep him from starving' — 'Nor from hanging', adds Olivia (IV.p.480). Manly's mistakes about Vernish and Olivia are not petty. They do not make him a comic dupe. In fact, Manly is so hopelessly wrong that he gains stature by it. It may be an overconfidence in his own judgement, a belief that he can't be deceived, that causes Manly's mistake. But it is also an aspect of what even Olivia allows to be his 'great spirit' (IV.p.480), in this case an excess of faith and confidence in those he loves. Manly is perhaps least sympathetic in the scenes where he becomes a hypocrite himself and when the violence of his lust and revenge becomes evident. Yet one must allow that even Manly's lust and jealousy testify to a depth of feeling that other characters in this play simply do not have. Manly may become an

unsympathetic figure but he remains a formidable one.

The notion of 'debate' with which we began our consideration of this play, then, can be extended beyond the arguments about plain-dealing that the play contains. It can also serve as an image for the double-sidedness of our own response to Manly. We recognize, both that the question of plain-dealing in social living is a complex one, and that the plain-dealer himself is a complex figure. It is this recognition that makes the simplicity of the play's ending and, indeed, the role of Fidelia throughout the whole play so unpalatable.

Fidelia is, of course, in love with Manly and has followed him to sea, dressed in a man's clothes. Her love and admiration for Manly is absolute, as the judgements she makes about him in the play testify. When Manly objects that Fidelia's comment on his love for truth and honour is flattery, she responds, 'You, dear Sir, shou'd not suspect the truth of what I say of you, though to you; Fame, the old Lyar, is believ'd when she speaks Wonders of you; you cannot be flatter'd, Sir, your Merit is unspeakable' (I.p.399). As well, she calls Manly 'the bravest, worthiest of Mankind' (I.p.399). When Manly expresses the wish to tear off Olivia's lips and 'grind 'em into mammocks', Fidelia merely remarks, 'Poor man, how uneasie he is!' (IV.p.467). Later, she describes Manly to Olivia as 'a Man of that sence, nice discerning, and diffidency, that I shou'd think it hard to deceive him' (IV.p.482). Courage and love of truth we might allow Manly, but hardly discernment! It is tempting to say, simply, that Fidelia's judgements of Manly are coloured and distorted by her love for him. To say, in other words, that we should allow for Fidelia's limited perception. Fidelia, however, holds a unique place in this comedy. She is a figure from romance, an idealised embodiment of virtue who seems out of place in the realistic world of London. Because of her unique position, her judgement cannot, in a sense, be questioned. When

she unreservedly praises Manly, one does not merely feel that her perception is limited. One also feels that the play lacks coherence, that the audience is being directed to judge Manly in terms which conflict with the way he is presented in other parts of the play. This is also the feeling one gets with the play's ending. Throughout the play, Manly's character and the plain-dealing for which he stands, generate moral and emotional debate. Fidelia's judgements and the play's ending seem unfair and rather too overt attempts to manipulate the results of this debate.

In turning from Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* to Congreve's *The Old Batchelour*, one recognizes in the character of Heartwell a reduced version of Wycherley's Manly. Heartwell, like Manly, sees 'plain-dealing' as his most characteristic feature. He defines his stance saying, 'I am for having everybody be what they pretend to be' (I.i.253-4), and later, 'My Talent is chiefly that of speaking truth, which I don't expect should ever recommend me to People of Quality — I thank Heaven, I have very honestly purchas'd the hatred of all the great Families in Town.' (I.i. 302-5). The similarity between Manly and Heartwell, however, is really only superficial. Heartwell is a far less complex figure than Manly and, while we have mixed feelings about Manly's status, there is little doubt that Heartwell is meant to be a comic dupe.

The two 'plain-dealers' can be initially contrasted in terms of the way they are introduced. The opening of Wycherley's play establishes Manly as its chief figure. It is set at Manly's lodgings and is constructed around the visits lesser characters wish to pay him. Congreve's play, however, opens with a meeting between Bellmour and Vainlove, two young wits of the town. As they discuss their adventures and intrigues, the conversation turns to Silvia, a discarded mistress of Vainlove's, and her relationship with Heartwell:

Bellmour.	... But do you know nothing of a new Rival there?
Vainlove.	Yes, *Heartwell*, that surly, old, pretended Woman-hater thinks her Vertuous; that's one reason why I fail her: I would have her fret herself out of conceit with me, that she may entertain some Thoughts of him. I know he visits her ev'ry day.
Bellmour.	Yet rails on still, and thinks his Love unknown to us; a little time will swell him so, he must be forc'd to give it birth, and the discovery must needs be very pleasant from himself, to see what pains he will take, and how he will strein to be deliver'd of a Secret, when he has miscarried on't already.

(I.i.117-128)

Before his first entrance, then, Heartwell is characterized as a 'surly, old pretended Woman-hater'. We learn of his attempt to hide his love for Silvia, and his position as a dupe who will provide sport for the wits is established. The above conversation effectively prepares us for Heartwell's entrance and places the 'plain-dealing' that is to follow in a comic perspective. When Heartwell does make his entrance, the dialogue is, in its debate over plain-dealing, reminiscent of Wycherley's play:

Bellmour.	... How now *George*, where hast thou been snarling odious Truths, and entertaining company like a Physician, with discourse of their diseases and infirmities? What fine Lady hast thou been putting out of conceit with her self, and perswading that the Face she has been making all the morning was none of her own? for I know thou art as unmannerly and as unwelcome to a Woman, as a Looking glass after the Small-pox.
Heartwell.	I confess I have not been sneering fulsome Lies and nauseous Flattery, fawning upon a little tawdry Whore, that will fawn upon me again, and entertain any Puppy that comes; like a Tumbler with the same tricks over and over. For such I guess may have been your late employment.

(I.i.180-93)

We notice, however, that Bellmour is given the initial speech, and that his lines are more rhetorically forceful than Heartwell's. More importantly, we know that Heartwell's charge that Bellmour has been 'fawning upon a little tawdry Whore' is more properly applicable to himself than to Bellmour. Throughout the scene, Heartwell is the victim of dramatic irony. He rails against love and its gallantries without realizing that Bellmour knows of his relationship with Silvia.

The scenes which follow confirm Heartwell in his role as comic dupe and expose his 'plain-dealing' as a sham. In his courtship of Silvia, he attempts to exploit Silvia's supposed innocence and naivety. Silvia, dissembling an innocence she knows Heartwell will find attractive, pretends to distrust his intentions and comments, 'I dare not speak till I believe you, and indeed I'm afraid to believe you yet' (III.ii.53-4). In reply, Heartwell declares his sincerity:

> Lying, Child, is indeed the Art of Love; and Men are generally Masters in it: But I'm so newly entred, you cannot distrust me of any skill in the treacherous Mystery — Now by my Soul, I cannot lie, though it were to serve a Friend or gain a Mistress.
>
> (III.ii.56-60)

It is certainly true that Heartwell is unable to hide his passion for Silvia. It is equally clear, however, that he wishes to exploit her. When Silvia objects, 'Nay, but if you love me, you must Marry me', he responds, 'Ay, ay, in the old days People married where they lov'd; but that fashion is chang'd, Child' (III.ii.100-04). 'The more is the pity', comments Heartwell in an aside when Silvia protests that she doesn't want to become a whore (III.ii.90). Heartwell's honesty seems more a matter of lack of skill than want of inclination. Indeed, it becomes apparent in this scene that Heartwell's earlier objection to courtship and its gallantries was less a moral stance than the product of his own lack of skill and success in these areas. For his courtship of Silvia, Heartwell hires singers and dancers. When Silvia comments, 'If you could Sing and Dance so, I should love to look upon you too', he objects, 'Why 'twas I Sung and Danc'd', referring to the fact that he had paid for the entertainment. One suspects that Heartwell's earlier criticism of Bellmour was prompted by envy. At the conclusion of *The Plain Dealer*, Freeman offers the opinion that 'most of our quarrels to the World, are just such as we have to a handsom Woman: only because we cannot enjoy her, as we wou'd do' (V.p.515). Heartwell's dissatisfaction with the

world should be seen in this light. It does not stem from any moral concern but rather from a sense of his own inadequacy and the feeling that he has been hard done by.

Congreve's Heartwell, then, can be seen as a simplified and overtly ridiculous version of Wycherley's Manly. The figure of the 'plain-dealer' undergoes another transformation as one turns from *The Old Batchelour* to Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife* (1697). Here, he reappears as Heartfree. Whereas both Manly and Heartwell were, in many respects, anti-social and misanthropic, however, Heartfree is a well adjusted member of the social group of the play. Nevertheless, *The Provok'd Wife* continues the 'debate' over plain-dealing and its relationship with social living. It is a measure of the changed terms of the debate, however, that the plain-dealer's adversary is no longer a sensible and practical minded Freeman, or a witty gallant like Bellmour. Instead, he is opposed by the affected and vain Lady Fancyful.

Vanbrugh introduces Lady Fancyful in the company of her servants. Like Etherege in his presentation of Dorimant in *The Man of Mode*, Vanbrugh uses Lady Fancyful's conversation with, and reaction to her servants to delineate important features of her character. As well, he introduces the important theme of the relationship between good manners, honesty and flattery:

> *Lady Fan.* How do I look this morning?
> *Cor.* Your ladyship looks very ill, truly.
> *Lady Fan.* Lard, how ill-natured thou art, Cornet, to tell me so, though the thing should be true ... Hold the glass; I dare swear that will have more manners than you have. — Mademoiselle, let me have your opinion too.
> *Mad.* My opinion, pe, matam, dat your ladyship never look so well in your life.
> *Lady Fan.* Well, the French are the prettiest obliging people; they say the most acceptable, well-mannered things, — and never flatter.
> (I.ii.1-13)

As we expect, the plain-dealing Cornet is summarily dismissed, while Mademoiselle is rewarded for her flattery with a present of Lady Fancyful's nightgown. Significantly, Lady Fancyful equates Cornet's honesty with ill-nature and bad manners. As well, she not only thinks that Cornet's comment is false, but also adds that it would be impolite even if it were true. In Lady Fancyful's opinion, good manners rather than honesty should dictate one's conversation. It must be noted, however, that Vanbrugh presents Lady Fancyful's stance as a ridiculous extreme. Lady Fancyful is one of the many characters in Restoration comedy in whom vanity colours perception. Hence, she naturally mistakes Mademoiselle's gross flattery for honest assessment, and tells her servant, 'Nay, everything's just in my house but Cornet.' (15-16). The audience, of course, recognizes that all is flattery but for Cornet.

Using a technique which is again reminiscent of *The Man of Mode*, Vanbrugh develops his theme of the relationship between honesty and good manners through Lady Fancyful's receipt of two contrasting letters. The first is a flattering song which casts Lady Fancyful as Philira, in whose arms heaven lies and whose eyes are of fire. The second letter is from Heartfree, the 'plain-dealer' of this comedy. Anticipating its contents, Lady Fancyful comments, ''tis an unutterable pleasure to be adored by all the men, and envied by all the women' (I.ii.97-8). The letter itself, however, is in a different vein:

> *If you have a mind to hear of your faults, instead of being praised for your virtues, take the pains to walk in the Green — walk in St. James's with your woman an hour hence. You'll there meet one who hates you for some things, as he could love you for others, and therefore is willing to endeavour your reformation.*
>
> (I.ii.101-6)

It should be noted, first of all, that this is not 'plain-dealing' in the style of Manly. While Heartfree intends to point out faults, he also allows that there are virtues. Nevertheless, Lady Fancyful finds the

letter 'strangely familiar' (I.ii.108) and calls its author 'ill-bred' (I.ii.150). Her curiosity is, however, aroused and Act II of the play opens with the meeting between Lady Fancyful and Heartfree.

The meeting between Heartfree and Lady Fancyful becomes an argument over honesty, manners and affectation. In a phrase which clearly establishes Heartfree as a descendant of Congreve's Heartwell, Lady Fancyful refers to him as 'a professed woman-hater' (II.i.4) and goes on to tax him with 'ill manners' (II.i.14). Heartfree, in turn, calls Lady Fancyful affected and goes on to argue that she is ungrateful to nature because she has attempted to destroy by art the qualities that nature has given her:

> It [nature] made you handsome; it gave you beauty to a miracle, a shape without a fault ... There is not a feature in your face but you have found the way to teach it some affected convulsion; your feet, your hands, your very fingers' ends, are directed never to move without some ridiculous air or other; and your language is a suitable trumpet, to draw people's eyes upon the raree-show.
> (II.i.64-76)

What Heartfree calls truth, however, she views as detraction; what he calls affectation she sees as good breeding. Hence she responds to his criticism: 'Every circumstance of nice breeding must needs appear ridiculous to one who has so natural an anti-pathy to good manners.' (II.i.87-9). Lady Fancyful leaves in a huff. Heartfree, remaining on stage, is given the last word, and is allowed to summarize and interpret the scene that has occurred:

> Well, this once I have endevoured to wash the blackamoor white; but henceforward I'll sooner undertake to teach sincerity to a courtier, generosity to an usurer, honesty to a lawyer, nay, humility to a divine, than discretion to a woman I see has once set her heart upon playing the fool.
> (II.i.102-7)

The audience naturally agrees with Heartfree's interpretation. Lady Fancyful is a fool and Heartfree's attempt at reformation has been motivated by a genuine desire to help Lady Fancyful. Heartfree has been

frank rather than ill-mannered; Lady Fancyful is ridiculous rather than attractive. To put it another way, Lady Fancyful's behaviour is characterized by affectation rather than 'heightening'.

The conversation between Heartfree and Constant which follows Lady Fancyful's exit serves to outline more fully the nature of Heartwell's plain-dealing and his attitude to women and their affectations. In the course of the scene, Heartwell describes how he avoids falling in love:

> I always consider a woman, not as the tailor, the shoemaker, the tire-woman, the sempstress, and (which is more than all that) the poet makes her; but I consider her as pure nature has contrived her, and that more strictly than I should have done our old grandmother Eve, had I seen her naked in the garden; for I consider her turned inside out. Her heart well-examined, I find there pride, vanity, covetousness, indiscretion ... and an everlasting war waged against truth and good-nature ... Then for her outside, I consider it merely as an outside; she has a thin tiffany covering, over just such stuff as you and I are made on. As for her motion, her mien, her airs, and all those tricks, I know they affect you mightily. If you should see your mistress at a coronation, dragging her peacock's train, with all her state and insolence about her, 'twould strike you with all the awful thoughts that heaven itself could pretend to from you; whereas I turn the whole matter into a jest, and suppose her strutting in the self-same stately manner, with nothing on but her stays, and her under scanty quilted petticoat.
> (II.i.171-197)

The important point to note about Heartfree's speech is that it views personality and behaviour in terms of an 'inside' and an 'outside'. Like Manly, Heartfree professes to judge according to 'intrinsick worth' (*The Plain Dealer*, I.p.394), and claims to be unaffected by attractive exteriors. The 'outside' is all show and affectation and in this sense worthless. Heartfree's professed view of behaviour counters Araminta's notion that what men really find attractive is the face rather than what lies behind it (*The Old Batchelour*, III.i.196-206). Heartfree claims to be immune to such superficial attractions. Hence, one can add, his reaction to Lady Fancyful, and his reputation as a woman-hater.

Heartfree's attempt to catalogue the faults of women so as to avoid falling in love anticipates a scene from Congreve's *The Way of the World.* In that play, Fainall remarks that for a passionate lover Mirabell is somewhat too discerning in the failings of his mistress, Millamant. Mirabell responds:

> And for a discerning Man, somewhat too passionate a Lover; for I like her with all her Faults; nay, like her for her Faults. Her Follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her; and those Affectations which in another Woman wou'd be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable. I'll tell thee, *Fainall*, she once us'd me with that Insolence, that in Revenge I took her to pieces; sifted her Failings; I study'd 'em, and got 'em by rote. The Catalogue was so large, that I was not without hopes, one Day or other to hate her heartily: To which end I us'd my self to think of 'em, that at length, contrary to my Design and Expectation, they gave me every Hour less and less disturbance; 'till in a few Days it became habitual to me, to remember 'em without being displeas'd. They are now grown as familiar to me as my own Frailities; and in all probability in a little time longer I shall like 'em as well.
>
> (I.i.158-74)

The techniques and aims outlined by Heartfree and Mirabell are almost identical. Both emphasize the faults of women with a view to avoiding love. The conclusions that each draws, however, are completely opposed. Heartfree is confident that his reason and his moral stance will govern his emotional reactions. Mirabell, with the help of hindsight, has a more complex perception. He recognizes that, in theory at least, affectation is a folly; that if he were a reasonable man he would find it unattractive. Yet he implicitly recognizes the inadequacy of both the reasonable man's and the strict moralist's stances. One's emotional reactions are not governed simply by one's sense of what is a virtue and what is a fault. Heartfree's attempt at objectivity is doomed to failure. The truth of Mirabell's comment on his mistress, 'those Affectations which in another Woman wou'd be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable' undercuts any such attempt at objectivity.

The experience with his mistress that Mirabell outlines to Fainall provides an accurate commentary on Heartfree's development in *The Provok'd Wife*. In his confrontation with Lady Fancyful and in his conversation with Constant we have seen Heartfree as the plain-dealer and satirist, confident enough in his moral judgement to adopt the role of 'reformer'. In the remaining scenes, Heartfree becomes less the reformer than the one who reforms. Experience tempers his judgements. Before going on to consider these scenes, however, an important aspect of the characterization of Lady Brute and Belinda should be noted.

Act III Sc. ii of *The Provok'd Wife* consists of a private conversation between Lady Brute and her niece, Belinda. Just as William Wycherley, in *The Country Wife*, includes a scene of 'openness and plain dealing' (V.i.p.349) where Lady Fidget and her cohorts admit to each other that all their concern for 'honour' is hypocrisy, so in this play, Vanbrugh includes a scene where Lady Brute and Belinda determine to 'hide nothing' (III.iii.61) and openly discuss their affectations:

> *Lady Brute.* Why, then, I confess that I love to sit in the fore-front of a box; for, if one sits behind, there's two acts gone perhaps before one's found out. And when I am there, if I perceive the men whispering and looking upon me, you must know I cannot for my life forbear thinking they talk to my advantage. And that sets a thousand little tickling vanities on foot —
>
> *Bel.* Just my case for all the world; but go on.
>
> *Lady Brute.* I watch with impatience for the next jest in the play, that I may laugh and show my white teeth. If the poet has been dull, and the jest be long a-coming, I pretend to whisper one to my friend, and from thence fall into a little small discourse, in which I take occasion to show my face in all humours, brisk, pleased, serious, melancholy, languishing. — Not that what we say to one another causes any of these altercations; but —
>
> *Bel.* Don't trouble yourself to explain; for, if I'm not mistaken, you and I have had some of these necessary dialogues before now, with the same intention.
>
> (III.iii.63-81)

The behaviour to which Lady Brute and Belinda confess associates them with Lady Fancyful. The real difference between this couple and Lady Fancyful is not in their attitude to affectation but in the effectiveness of their self-presentations. What seems ridiculous affectation in Lady Fancyful because of its inexpert execution becomes an attractive 'heightening' or a 'showing oneself off to advantage' in Lady Brute and Belinda. The important point that Vanbrugh, by his inclusion of III.iii., does not let us miss is that Heartfree's criticism of affectation in women logically applies, not only to Lady Fancyful, but also to Lady Brute and Belinda.

Heartfree and Belinda first meet in Act III of the play. Heartfree confidently proclaims that he is in no danger of falling in love, yet refrains from dissecting Belinda's behaviour. When Lady Fancyful relates how Heartfree had attempted her reformation and suggests that Belinda should also employ him, Heartfree significantly comments, 'I thank you, madam, for your recommendation: but hating idleness, I'm unwilling to enter into a place where I believe there would be nothing to do' (III.i. 284-6). Heartfree has no intention of exposing Belinda's affectation. Belinda does engage Heartwell as her 'reformer'. But the relationship is rather different to that between Heartfree and Lady Fancyful. As Heartfree is leaving he tells Belinda, 'I hope, madam, you won't forget our bargain; I'm to say what I please to you.' She responds, 'Liberty of speech entire, sir' (III.i.331-4). But Belinda is clearly admitting Heartfree as her gallant, and the 'Liberty of speech' that she allows refers less to Heartfree's plain-dealing than to the fact that any future addresses Heartfree wishes to make to her would be welcome.

Act IV Sc. ii discovers Heartfree in soliloquy quarrelling over the disquiet the meeting with Belinda has caused him. He tries to convince himself that he is not in love. The scene is, of course, reminiscent of

Heartwell's struggle to get Silvia off his mind in Act III Sc. ii of *The Old Batchelour*. Unlike Heartwell, however, Heartfree does not become ridiculous. Though he initially denies that he is in love, he is essentially honest with himself and before long admits his fate even to Constant. Constant naturally enquires how, with all his defences, Heartfree has managed to fall in love:

> *Const.* ... But tell us a little, Jack, by what new-invented arms has this mighty stroke been given?
> *Heart.* E'en by that unaccountable weapon, called *Je-ne-sais-quoi*: for everything that can come within the verge of beauty, I have seen it with indifference.
> *Const.* So in few words then; the *Je-ne-sais-quoi* has been too hard for the quilted petticoat.
> *Heart.* Egad, I think the *Je-ne-sais-quoi* is in the quilted petticoat; at least 'tis certain I ne'er think on't without — a — a *Je-ne-sais-quoi* in every part about me.
> *Const.* Well, but have all your remedies lost their virtue? have you turned her inside out yet?
> *Heart.* I dare not so much as think on't.
>
> (IV.ii.72-84)

Certainly, Heartfree does not admire Belinda because he recognizes in her an 'intrinsick worth' that he hasn't found in other women. As he admits himself, it is not for any reasonable motive that he is attracted to her. Rather, it is her '*Je-ne-sais-quoi*'. In its literal translation, the phrase highlights the fact that Heartfree cannot control or account for his emotions. Generally, however, the phrase is used in Restoration comedy to suggest some indefinable charm or attractive manner. Certainly, qualities that have little to do with 'intrinsick worth'.

As a 'plain-dealer' and a 'reformer', Heartfree was convinced that his affections and behaviour could be governed by his reasonable principles. He claimed that those aspects of personality he called 'outside' could not affect him. Experience, however, exposes the 'theoretical' nature of Heartfree's approach to human relations. Feelings do not await reason's go-ahead. The confident moral stances of Manly and Heartwell underwent similar testing. Manly raged against hypocrisy and double-dealing, only to become a hypocrite himself when his passions

demanded it. Heartwell accused Bellmour of servile gallantries, of 'fawning upon a little tawdry Whore'. This is, in fact, what he does himself when he develops a passion for Silvia. But what can the above consideration of three 'plain-dealers' from Restoration comedy tell one about the status of plain-dealing in Restoration comedy as a whole?

This chapter began with the statement from Ben Ross Schneider that, taken as a whole, Restoration comedies 'recommend Plain-dealing'. Once again, one comes up against the problem of definition. Wycherley's Manly, Congreve's Heartwell and Vanbrugh's Heartfree have, in this chapter, all been called 'plain-dealers'. Yet they are very different characters who are certainly not equally sympathetic. One can say, however, that the stances of these characters have all been inadequate in some way. Manly was too indiscriminate and uncontrolled in his satire; Heartwell's railing sprang from his sense of inadequacy, rather than from any moral conviction; Heartfree was proved wrong in his assumption that his sense of 'intrinsick worth' could govern his emotional reactions towards people. All one can say of Schneider's statement is that it is a gross simplification. With respect to 'plain-dealing' as such, the best one can do without over-generalizing, is suggest some of the factors which make it such a complex and important idea in Restoration comedy, and make the 'plain-dealer' such an interesting and morally ambiguous figure.

When Manly declares in the prologue to *The Plain Dealer*, '*I The Plain Dealer am to Act to Day*', he is not merely saying that he will be an honest man. He declares his role as a satirist. His will be a 'rough Part' and his aim, to expose the hypocrisies of society. Much could be said of the motives that underlie the satiric impulse. In Restoration society, raillery had become a common conversational mode. Eliza comments in *The Plain Dealer*, 'Railing now is so common, that 'tis no more Malice, but the fashion' (II.p.410). Such raillery had no corrective intent; it

was merely a display of wit and one-upmanship. But the more serious satirist is also a suspect figure. Alvin Kernan has noted that the role of the satirist comprises a series of tensions. The satirist asserts that he shows the world as it actually is, yet it is clear that he deliberately distorts and slants so as to present his case forcefully. So as to attack vice effectively, he must vividly portray it; hence his own moral probity is compromised. Because he presumes to judge others, the satirist is particularly vulnerable to accusations of pride and self-righteousness. The satirist is almost always a double-sided figure. In his public pose, he is an honest and straightforward man. Yet there is often a darker, misanthropic dimension to his personality.[1]

Manly and, to a lesser extent, other 'plain-dealers' in Restoration comedy share this morally ambiguous position with their fellow satirists. The position of the plain-dealer in Restoration comedy is, however, further complicated by the fact that the ideal he espouses is that of strict honesty. He makes absolute judgements in a moral area which becomes particularly complex when viewed in relation to social living. Considered in a vacuum, plain-dealing may be a fine ideal. Restoration comedy, however, deals with society.

In Mademoiselle de Scudery's *Conversations*, which were printed in England in 1683, Padilla responds to an exhortation to sincerity by commenting, 'But if we carry Sincerity so far ... we must renounce Society'.[2] As was argued in Chapter Seven of this thesis, social living inevitably involves some compromise with strict honesty, and places restraints on freedom of action. Hence Shadwell's Stanford in *The Sullen*

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[1] *The Cankered Muse* (New Haven, 1959), pp. 14-30.

[2] *Conversations upon Several Subjects*, trans. Ferrand Spence, 2 vols. (London, 1683), I, p.170.

Lovers (1668) and Wycherley's Manly declare a preference for the uncivilized. Stanford, whose 'very Principles are against all Society' (III.p.50), wishes to find, 'Some uninhabited place far from Converse. Where I may live as free as Nature made me' (I.p.17). Manly comments that rather than live in society he would 'choose to go where honest, downright Barbarity is profest; where men devour one another like Crocodiles; where they think the Devil white, of our complexion, and I am already so far an *Indian*' (I.p.408).

The jolting assertion that civilized man is baser than the animals, that the laws of animal life are more honest than those of man is repeatedly used in Restoration satire and can forcefully convey an indictment of society.[1] The assertion is, however, rhetorically rather than philosophically impressive. 'Downright Barbarity' may be 'honest', but it has little else going for it. Manly's stance, like that of most satiric spokesmen, is clearly a limited one; he is obsessed with honesty in human relations to the exclusion of all other desirable qualities. Consistent with his stand, Manly sees only the negative aspects of ceremony, social forms and politeness. His view is similar to that of the protagonist of Rochester's 'A Satyr against Mankind', who prefers wild beasts because they frankly kill 'with Teeth, and Claws' (133), and contrasts man's hypocritical behaviour saying, 'But *Man*, with smiles, and embraces, Friendships, praise, Unhumanely his Fellows like betrays' (135-6). Ceremony and politeness are merely a cloak which disguises vicious intent.

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[1]See, for example, Rochester's 'A Satyr against Mankind' in *Poems*, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto (London, 1953), pp. 118-24 and Wycherley's '*Upon the Impertinence of* Knowledge, *the Unreasonableness of* Reason, *and the Brutality of* Humanity; *proving the Animal Life the most Reasonable Life, since the most Natural, and most Innocent*', in *The Complete Works of William Wycherley*, ed. Montague Summers, 4 vols. (London, 1924), III, pp. 149-54.

It is instructive to contrast this negative view of manners with the constructive and civilizing role attributed to them by the Earl of Chesterfield in the mid-eighteenth century. Chesterfield saw as one important function of manners the prevention of precisely the kind of barbarity that Manly advocates. Writing of the importance of politeness and good breeding at court, he comments, 'Those who now smile upon and embrace, would affront and stab each other, if manners did not interpose'.[1] In another letter to his son he writes, rather more seriously,

> No, be convinced that the good breeding, the *tournure, la douceur les manieres* which alone are to be acquired at courts, are not the showish trifles only which some people call or think them; they are a solid good; they prevent a great deal of real mischief; they create, adorn and strengthen friendships; they keep hatred within bounds; they promote good humour and good will in families, where the want of good breeding and gentleness of manners is commonly the original cause of discord.[2]

In considering behaviour in Restoration comedy with respect to plain-dealing and good manners, both Manly's and Chesterfield's approaches should be kept in mind. Manners can be potentially hypocritical and inevitably involve some degree of falsification, but they can also be a 'solid good' and a necessary aspect of social living. The fact that the demands of good manners and those of strict honesty inevitably clash, creates a moral dilemma which is a central concern of Restoration comedy. The dilemma is perhaps best illustrated by one of Dorimant's comments in *The Man of Mode*. At the height of an argument between Dorimant and his mistress Mrs Loveit, she accuses Dorimant of being a 'Dissembler, damn'd Dissembler!'. He replies, rationalizing his behaviour,

> I am so, I confess; good nature and good manners corrupt me. I am honest in my inclinations, and wou'd not, wer't

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[1] *The Letters of the Earl of Chesterfield to his Son*, introd. by Charles Strachey, notes by Annette Calthrop, 2 vols. (London, 1901), I, pp. 354-5.

[2] *ibid.* I, p.161.

> not to avoid offence, make a Lady a little in years believe I think her young, wilfully mistake Art for Nature; and seem fond of a thing I am weary of, as when I doated on't in earnest.
>
> (II.ii.199-204)

In its context, the above statement is not itself sincere. Yet it succinctly states the problem. Dorimant justifies his dissimulation on the grounds that it is prompted by good manners and a good natured wish not to be offensive. Yet he simultaneously recognizes that such behaviour is a corruption and falsification of his true inclinations.

Just as Restoration comedy ridicules those characters that 'force Nature' and become grossly affected, so it exposes those for whom ceremony and politeness become mere hypocrisy. In *The Plain Dealer*, Lord Plausible makes an entrance just after Novel has described him as a 'cringing, grinning Rogue'. Novel, of course, does a complete about face and greets Plausible with 'My dear Lord, your most humble Servant' (II.p.416). In *The Way of the World*, Witwoud declares Petulant to be his friend, yet has no qualms about ridiculing him behind his back (I.i.285-380). Restoration comedy is full of characters whose affectation is that of excessive politeness and concern for ceremony. The polite declarations of these characters are meaningless. At the same time, however, a character can become ridiculous or offensive because of a lack of manners and emotional restraint. In *The Man of Mode*, Dorimant's mistress Mrs Loveit has a reputation for emotional extravagance. Medley describes her saying, 'She's the most passionate in her Love, and the most extravagant in her Jealousie of any Woman I ever heard of' (I.i.182-4). Lady Townley comments, 'How strangely love and Jealousie rage in that poor Woman' (II.i.126-7). In her emotional excess, Mrs Loveit becomes a ridiculous figure. Medley describes her relationship with Dorimant saying, 'She cou'd not have pick'd out a Devil upon Earth so proper to Torment her; h'as made her break a dozen or two of Fans already, tare half a score Points in pieces,

and destroy Hoods and Knots without number' (II.i.128-31). The fact that Loveit's emotion manifests itself in the destruction of her clothing and accessories accentuates its comic nature. One does not sympathize with such 'emotional honesty'.

Just as excessive emotion can become ridiculous, so lack of restraint in language and behaviour can be offensive. In *The Old Batchelour*, for example, Heartwell's excesses of language deprive him of any sympathy as far as Belinda and Araminta are concerned (V.ii.49-62). In *The Provok'd Wife*, Belinda warns Heartfree against such offensiveness and suggests that the ideal manner of speaking can be achieved through a simultaneous concern for truth and good manners. She comments, 'I'd have men talk plainly what's fit for women to hear; without putting 'em to a real or an affected blush' (IV.iv.140-2). One may speak plainly, but only 'what's fit for women to hear'. Certainly, coarse and offensive remarks must be avoided. Congreve's Mirabell adopts a similar stance. His relationship with Millamant is characterized by 'plain Dealing and Sincerity' (II.i.466). Yet he recognizes that speaking 'unseasonable Truths' can be a fault (I.i.337), and, in particular, criticizes the kind of raillery and satire that Petulant indulges in. Referring to the way Petulant offends through his 'senseless Ribaldry' and so-called 'severity', Mirabell tells him, 'hast not thou then Sense enough to know that thou ought'st to be most asham'd thy Self, when thou hast put another out of Countenance' (I.i. 533-5). One should be concerned not only with the truth of what one says, but also with whether or not it offends.

The extremes suggested above, an excessive politeness which is either meaningless or hypocritical on the one hand, and an ill-mannered bluntness which shows no regard for another's feelings on the other, are most vividly presented, not in the courtship scenes for which Restoration comedy is best remembered, but in the comedy's depiction of married life.

At one point in Congreve's *The Double Dealer*, the play's heroine, Cynthia, becomes somewhat depressed about the prospect of marriage. Though she loves Mellefont, she is not at all certain that their marriage will be a success. She tells Mellefont, 'I'm thinking, that tho' Marriage makes Man and Wife One Flesh, it leaves 'em still Two Fools; and they become more Conspicuous by setting off one another' (II.i.155-7). She goes on to compare marriage to a game of cards, where success is merely 'an Accident of Fortune' (II.i.163), and one player 'must be a Loser' (II.i.168-9). It is not surprising that Cynthia and most other young women in Restoration comedy have reservations about marriage and its supposed happiness, and are reluctant to commit themselves too readily. One has only to consider the examples of married life they have before them. In *The Double Dealer*, Lady Touchwood systematically deceives her husband throughout the whole play. Lady Plyant avoids any sexual relations with her husband by pretending to a scrupulous concern for her spotless honour. Yet she only too readily consents to Careless's advances. In most marriages depicted in Restoration comedy, the ceremony and public display of affection is all that remains. These surfaces disguise either animosity or mutual indifference.

In Act III of Dryden's *Marriage a-la-Mode*, for example, Rhodophil meets his wife Doralice and another lady of the court, Artemis. Rhodophil and Doralice immediately embrace. 'My own dear heart!', exclaims Rhodophil. 'My own true love!', Doralice responds (III.i.1-2). Artemis is moved to remark, 'Why, this is love as it should be, betwixt Man and Wife' (III.i.11-12). Rhodophil and Doralice continue to behave so affectionately towards each other that Artemis quietly leaves so as not to 'interrupt Lovers' (III.i.35-6). The whole display was, however, for Artemis's benefit. When she leaves, Rhodophil and Doralice discard their poses and show themselves for the bored, loveless couple that they are.

Ceremony, then, can disguise lack of feeling. In more extreme cases it can even become a substitute for feeling as is the case with Lord and Lady Froth in *The Double Dealer*. Lord and Lady Froth are forever publicly displaying their love and esteem for each other. When we first meet Lady Froth in Act II, for example, she is telling Cynthia how deeply she loves her husband. Moreover, she attempts to convey the depth of her feelings by describing the extraordinary ways her love has manifested itself. At one time Lady Froth 'did not sleep one wink for Three Weeks together' (II.i.3-4). A more significant manifestation of her prodigious love, however, was in her writings. Lady Froth gave vent to her passions in her 'Songs, Elegies, Satyrs, Encomiums, Panegyricks, Plays, or Heroic Poems' (II.i.16-17). These remain an enduring testimony to her love for Lord Froth. Lord Froth, in turn, displays his affection for his wife through the gallantry of his behaviour towards her, through the 'Charming Softness' of his 'Mien' and 'Expression' (II.i.72), through his profound bows and chivalrous compliments. The exaggerated claims Lord and Lady Froth make for their love of each other and, of course, the self-conscious ways in which they attempt to display it betray its superficiality. Lord and Lady Froth are concerned with ceremony for its own sake. Their marriage and 'love' merely provide a pretext for their self-display.

One can agree, then, with Manly's comment in *The Plain Dealer* that 'Ceremony, and great Professing, renders Friendship ... suspected'. At the same time, however, the validity of Freeman's view that 'no Professing, no Ceremony at all' is 'unnatural' and 'undecent' should be recognized (I.p.395). One should also add that even in relationships where there is no underlying genuine feeling or regard, good manners and politeness can be a positive good. They can at least help make such an unhappy situation tolerable. Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife* and Farquhar's *The Beaux Stratagem* present marriages where there is not only a lack of feeling,

but also of manners. This lack of politeness and pretence worsens both situations.

The marriage between Lady Brute and Sir John in *The Provok'd Wife* could never have been a complete success. In her soliloquy in Act I, Lady Brute admits that she never loved her husband and that she married him because of his estate. Sir John tells Constant and Heartfree that he married Lady Brute because he 'had a mind to lie with her' (II.i.277-8). Genuine love seems never to have entered the picture. Yet, given that Sir John and Lady Brute are married, their situation could be made tolerable. Lady Brute is willing to remain faithful to her husband and there seems no reason to doubt her sincerity when she claims that she wishes to please Sir John and make life comfortable for him (I.i.17-45). In return, she expects not so much love, as kindness and consideration (I.i.76-8). Sir John, however, is unwilling to keep to his half of the bargain.

The Provok'd Wife opens with Sir John Brute in soliloquy, reviewing the state of his marriage. The audience learns that, after two years of marriage, Sir John has come to loath his wife. The important point is that when, at the end of the soliloquy, Lady Brute enters, Sir John makes no effort to hide or moderate his feelings. They frankly manifest themselves in his conversation and manner:

> *Lady Brute.* Do you dine at home to-day, sir John?
> *Sir John.* Why, do you expect I should tell you what I don't know myself?
> *Lady Brute.* I thought there was no harm in asking you.
> *Sir John.* If thinking wrong were an excuse for impertinence, women might be justified in most things they say or do.
> *Lady Brute.* I'm sorry I've said anything to displease you.
> *Sir John.* Sorrow for things past is of as little importance to me, as my dining at home or abroad ought to be to you.
>
> (I.i.18-29)

Lady Brute's conciliatory tone and manner is contrasted with Sir John's rude surliness. Sir John is unwilling to answer even the simplest enquiry

politely; his dislike for his wife permeates every level of conversation. He makes no effort to control his feelings either in conversation with his wife or when in company. It is this lack of restraint, rather than the lack of love, which makes the marriage between Sir John and Lady Brute finally intolerable.

The marriage between Sullen and his wife in *The Beaux Stratagem* is in a similar state to that between Sir John and Lady Brute described above. There is little chance of the marriage being genuinely happy. Sullen and his wife are simply incompatible. Mrs Sullen would, however, be content with a little kindness, even if it were dissembled. She comments:

> I own it, we are united Contradictions, Fire and Water: But I cou'd be contented, with a great many other Wives, to humour the censorious Mob, and give the World an Appearance of living well with my Husband, cou'd I bring him but to dissemble a little Kindness to keep me in Countenance.
>
> (II.i.p.137)

Sullen, however, refuses to 'dissemble a little Kindness'. His animosity towards his wife displays itself both in private and in public. One of the reasons Mrs Sullen married in the first place was 'to enjoy the Pleasures of an agreeable Society' (V.iv.p.189). She finds, however, that her marriage, rather than being a social asset, is a social liability and embarrassment. It is Sullen's refusal to dissemble at least to the extent of making marriage socially bearable for Mrs Sullen that finally makes their separation necessary.

Animosity and indifference in marriage, then, can either disguise itself in excessive ceremony or openly manifest itself in one's behaviour. The latter may be more honest, but the former is surely preferable. At least good breeding would ensure against such excesses as Sir John Brute's display in Act V of *The Provok'd Wife*, where he insists on kissing his wife despite his drunken and filthy state. Moreover, ceremony and

politeness shows at least some respect for another's individuality and right to privacy. It is a measure of Sullen's lack of respect for his wife as an individual that he feels that, because Mrs Sullen is his wife, he has the right to sleep with her no matter what time and in what state he returns home at night (V.i.p.175). The habit of good manners can be a positive good even if no genuine feelings of good-will underlie them.

To the extent that good manners and ceremony preserve mutual respect, they are necessary even in marriage, the most intimate of human relationships. This is what Congreve's Millamant recognizes in the provisos she makes before consenting to marry Mirabell in *The Way of the World*. She insists that even in marriage she has a right to her own private life. Among her conditions she wants, 'liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I please, to write and receive Letters, without Interrogatories ... To wear what I please; and choose Conversation with regard only to my own taste ... Come to Dinner when I please ... To have my Closet Inviolate' (IV.i.212-21). In his behaviour towards Millamant, Mirabell must allow these rights. Millamant insists that she will be 'sole Empress' of her 'Tea-table' and tells Mirabell, 'you must never presume to approach [it] without first asking leave'. She adds, 'where ever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in' (IV.i. 222-5). Manners can preserve and safeguard individual rights.

In her suggestions about how she and Mirabell should behave towards each other in public, Millamant shows an awareness of both the extremes — excessive ceremony and rude bluntness — outlined above. She insists that she will not be called 'Names', and continues:

> Ay as Wife, Spouse, My dear, Joy, Jewel, Love, Sweet heart and the rest of that Nauseous Cant, in which Men and their Wives are so fulsomely familiar, — I shall never bear that, — Good *Mirabell* don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady *Fadler* and Sr. *Francis*: Nor goe to *Hide-Park* together the first *Sunday* in a New Chariot, to provoke Eyes and Whispers.
>
> (IV.i.197-203)

For Lady Fadler and Sr. Francis, Millamant could have replaced Lord and Lady Froth of *The Double Dealer*. Millamant wants to avoid such public demonstrations of affection. As far as they convert love into a public exhibition, they suggest its superficiality. As well, terms of endearment are so abused that they are meaningless. The more important point, however, is that Millamant values emotional restraint. 'Let us be very strange and well bred', she tells Mirabell (IV.i.207). Excess should be avoided not only in such emotions as anger and jealousy, but also in love. It is as if excessive emotionalism will cause the genuine feeling to be spent. There is also the feeling that any need to be demonstrative would suggest that the emotions are not deeply felt anyway. Though good manners and ceremony can be seen as a falsification of one's genuine feelings, they can also be viewed as the embodiment of this sense of the value of emotional restraint. This double perspective is what the 'plain-dealer' lacks, and also what the critic who asserts that Restoration comedies 'recommend Plain-dealing' neglects to take into account.

CHAPTER NINE

THE SIGNIFICATION OF MORAL QUALITIES

'As Good *and* Evil *are* different *in* Themselves, *so they ought to be* differently Mark'd', wrote Jeremy Collier in his preface to *A Short View.* This comment is elaborated upon and we are given a succinct statement of Collier's attitude towards the signification of moral qualities at the beginning of Chapter IV of this treatise where Jeremy Collier writes:

> The Lines of Virtue and Vice are Struck out by Nature in very Legible Distinctions; they tend to a different Point, and in the greater Instances the Space between them is easily perceiv'd. Nothing can be more unlike the Original Forms of these Qualities: The First has all the sweetness, Charms, and Graces imaginable; The other has the Air of a *Post* ill Carved into a *Monster,* and looks both foolish and Frightful together. These are the Native Appearances of good and Evil: And they that endeavour to blot the Distinctions, to rub out the Colours, or change the Marks, are extreamly to blame.

In Chapter Four of this thesis, Jeremy Collier's objections to Restoration theatre were used to highlight some aspects of its structure and use of language. It was noted that characters in Restoration comedy do in fact 'change the Marks'. Restoration comedies are concerned with the redefinition of moral terms in a way which Collier would find morally subversive. In Crowne's *Sir Courtly Nice* (1685), Farewel inverts Collier's view of the relationship between virtue and beauty, and describes the unattractive Surly to Violante saying,

> Mr Surly, Madam, is a mystical piece, to be understood like a prophesy, where rams and he-goats stand for Kings and Princes. Mr Surly's rank expressions must signify virtue and honour.
>
> (II.p.281)

Etherege's Dorimant emphasizes the changeable nature of moral values when he comments that constancy is 'not a Vertue in season' (II.ii.191). When Craffy in Crowne's *City Politiques* (1683) is accused of wishing to commit incest, he attempts to rationalize his behaviour by commenting, 'Incest? Prithee don't trouble me with hard names. I don't think it is any more incest to lye with the same woman my father does, than to drink in the

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[1] *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage* (London, 1698), p.140.

same glass, or sit in the same pew at church' (I.p.113). In *The Provok'd Wife*, Constant redefines virtue in the hope that this will influence Lady Brute's reaction to his advances. He tells Lady Brute, 'Virtue, alas, is no more like the thing that's called so, than 'tis like vice itself. Virtue consists in goodness, honour, gratitude, sincerity, and pity; and not in peevish, snarling, straitlaced chastity'. He goes on to call continence that 'phantom of honour' (III.i.393-9).

Jeremy Collier's attitude to signification and his objections to Restoration comedy, however, have relevance beyond the question of actual 'naming'. Collier also demands that in their presentation of characters dramatists reinforce orthodox morality and that they clearly signify a character's moral standing. This demand raises not only questions of morality but also of dramatic technique. How does the dramatist manipulate our perspective? Does he clearly 'place' characters for us? Are our responses towards characters directed so that they are clear and unambiguous?

In Act I of *The Country Wife*, Harcourt describes the fool Sparkish as 'One, that by being in the Company of Men of sense wou'd pass for one.' Horner replies, 'And may so to the short-sighted World, as a false Jewel amongst true ones, is not discern'd at a distance' (I.p.265). The failure of the world to distinguish between wits and pretenders to wit is commonly remarked upon in Restoration comedy. Certainly, however, there is little danger of an audience making this mistake in respect of Sparkish's behaviour in this play. Sparkish's errors of perception in Act III are just too gross. More importantly, Wycherley uses the Jonsonian method of introducing character. As Neander in Dryden's *Of Dramatic Poesy: An Essay* comments, Jonson 'left it ... almost as a rule' that the entrance of a new character should be prepared for 'by a pleasant

description ... before the person first appears'.[1] The effect is not only as Neander says, to alert the audience and raise their expectations, but also to largely determine an audience's reaction to the character.

In *The Country Wife*, a servant announces that Sparkish has arrived and is about to join the company. Hence, Harcourt, Horner and Dorilant have the opportunity to discuss Sparkish before his entrance. Horner can provide him with the damning entrance cue, 'your noisy pert Rogue of a wit, [is] the greatest Fop, dullest Ass, and worst Company as you shall see: For here he comes' (I.p.266). Most fops in Restoration comedy are similarly introduced. Sir Fopling Flutter doesn't make an appearance in *The Man of Mode* until Act III Sc. ii. He is effectively characterized by Medley and Dorimant as 'the pattern of modern Foppery' (I.i.370), however, by Act I of the play. Just before Tattle makes his first entrance in *Love for Love*, Scandal gives an extended description of his character concluding, 'In short, he is a public Professor of Secresie, and makes Proclamation that he holds private Intelligence. — He's here' (I.i.378-80).

In Restoration comedy, then, the distinction between wit and fool is clearly made. The categories are fairly stable and the values one uses to place characters into the different classes are well established. Indeed, a simple reading of the names dramatists give to characters can often give us this information. Congreve does complain with respect to the reaction to *The Way of the World* that his 'Play had been Acted two or three Days, before some of these hasty Judges cou'd find the leisure to distinguish betwixt the Character of a *Witwoud* and a *Truewit*'.[2] One

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[1]*John Dryden Selected Criticism* eds. James Kinsley & George Parfitt (Oxford, 1970), p.62.

[2]Dedication to *The Way of the World*.

feels, however, that these judges must have been particularly hasty and imperceptive. As with the earlier fops, the dramatist does clearly direct our response to Witwoud.

A recent attempt to objectively define the ethos of Restoration comedy has assumed that major characters in the comedy are also fairly obviously labelled by the dramatists for approval or disapproval. Ben Ross Schneider in a computer based investigation of 83 plays (1,127 characters were each made to fill out a form so as to count the frequency of a fixed set of characteristics) uses the playwright's approval or disapproval of a character as the basis for establishing the ethos of the comedy as a whole. Assuming that 'there are always two fairly clear-cut sides in a comic conflict',[1] characters and hence the moral characteristics they embody were classified as either protagonistic or antagonistic according to four criteria. Protagonistic characters were those, 'whose enterprises succeeded at the end of the play, whose behaviour was praised by a reliable character, whose efforts were rewarded, or who ... participated in the victory of the protagonists in some way or other ... When opposite conditions held, a character fell into the antagonistic group.'[2]

Even if one were to accept the obviously over-simplified notion that 'there are always two fairly clear-cut sides in a comic conflict', Ben Ross Schneider's criteria for classifying a character as protagonistic demand serious qualification. With regard to his second criterion, one wonders what Schneider would make of the following discussion of Dorimant's behaviour in Act III of *The Man of Mode:*

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[1] *The Ethos of Restoration Comedy* (Urbana, Chicago & London, 1971), p.19.

[2] *ibid.* p.19.

Bell.	Well, that *Dorimant* is certainly the worst man breathing.
Emil.	I once thought so.
Bell.	And do you not think so still?
Emil.	No indeed!
Bell.	Oh Jesu!
Emil.	The Town does him a great deal of Injury, and I will never believe what it says of a man I do not know again for his sake!
Bell.	You make me wonder!
L. Town.	He's a very well bred man.
Bell.	But strangely ill-natur'd.
Emil.	Then he's a very Witty man!
Bell.	But a man of no principles.
Med.	Your man of Principles is a very fine thing indeed.
Bell.	To be preferr'd to men of parts by Women who have regard to their Reputation and quiet. Well, were I minded to play the Fool, he shou'd be the last man I'd think of.
Med.	He has been the first in many Ladyes favours, though you are so severe, Madam.
L. Town.	What he may be for a Lover I know not, but he's a very pleasant acquaintance I am sure.

(III.ii.18-40)

The point is not merely that there is a diversity of opinion about Dorimant's behaviour. The judgements made are also ironic. Belinda, who morally damns Dorimant, is about to become his mistress; Emilia, who defends and praises him, is the most virtuous character in the play. Clearly, none of the characters is the 'reliable' one. Each has his own perspective depending on his experience. The judgements are subjective. Moreover, the passage as a whole invites an audience to judge Dorimant not in terms of a single value scale but in terms of a multiplicity of standards.

One must also seriously qualify Schneider's total acceptance of 'poetic justice' as a device which morally labels characters. As Joseph Wood Krutch has observed, whether or not the notion of poetic justice should apply in comedy as well as tragedy was hardly a clear cut matter in Renaissance and Restoration dramatic criticism.[1] Indeed, of the

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[1] *Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration* (New York, 1957, repr.), pp. 77-8.

proposition that it is the business of comedy to 'reward virtue and punish vice' Dryden asserted, 'I know no such law to have been constantly observ'd in Comedy, either by the Ancient or Modern Poets.'[1] It is only with the criticism of Richard Steele that the view that poetic justice is desirable in comedy is firmly established.

More important than the above, however, is the fact that an approach which seeks to outline appropriate responses to characters merely in terms of poetic justice seems inadequate when one looks at the comedies themselves. Congreve's *The Double Dealer*, for example, clearly fits the poetic justice pattern. Indeed, Congreve comments in his dedication to the play, 'I design'd the Moral first, and to that Moral I invented the Fable'. At the end of the play, Maskwell's villainy is exposed and Lord Touchwood concludes, 'We'll think of punishment at leasure'. Turning to Mellefont and Cynthia, he comments, 'let me hasten to do Justice, in rewarding Virtue and wrong'd Innocence' (V.i.581-3). Yet even with regard to this play, Harriett Hawkins's appeal for the recognition of dramatic as well as moral values is appropriate.[2] Maskwell may be morally damned at the end of the play but our response to his behaviour throughout the play is not only governed by the perspective we are given at its conclusion. Certainly, the ending emphasises the moral aspect, but this is not the whole story. The inventiveness and intelligence Maskwell displays in his villainy can be admired.

This question of the relationship between the conclusion of a play and one's response to its chief character is even more interesting with regard to *The Man of Mode*. Jocelyn Powell, in his excellent essay 'George

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[1]Preface to *An Evening's Love*.

[2]*Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama* (Oxford, 1972), p.108.

Etherege and the Form of a Comedy', investigates the relationship between moral values and dramatic form. Distinguishing between two types of comedy, Powell writes:

> objectivity is built into the neoclassical theories of comedy. The conception that comedy corrects the vices and follies of men by rendering them ridiculous and contemptible presupposes an objective idea of vice and folly; it is essentially critical, and criticism demands a structure based upon a determined morality. What is more, the conventions of such comedy assist this objectivity; for a comedy of the classical tradition does not use a plot to represent life, but to provide a series of images that bring out the moral implications of experience. The comic devices of disguise, mistaken identity, trickery, and triumph in marriage are not literal redactions of experience, but analogies ... The weddings that close the plays are frequently more important as symbols of attainment and unity than as comments upon human relationships.[1]

Powell contrasts this type of comedy, which originates from an objective critical perception and seeks to bring out the moral implications of experience, with the play which seeks to 'communicate the texture of existence'.[2] He persuasively argues that *The Man of Mode* is a comedy of the latter type. Etherege's play seeks to make an audience experience what it is like to be in its situations. Its 'characters quickly become our acquaintances and our interest and sympathy is with them; but it is with all of them, for the naturalism engages us with them all'. We see the characters in human rather than moral terms. Powell continues:

> The essential difference between the comedy of criticism and the comedy of experience is that in the former, though a good character may be given faults and a bad character virtues, there is never any serious doubt as to the category to which each character belongs; whereas in the latter there are no categories. Criticism sees characters from one angle, but experience is constantly modifying the angle from which a character is seen, so that, like a shot silk, his color changes with the light.[3]

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[1] In *Restoration Theatre*, eds. John Russell Brown & Bernard Harris (London, 1965), pp. 43-4.

[2] *ibid.* p.44.

[3] *ibid.* p.60.

In practice, it would be impossible to completely distinguish between these two types of comedy. In his discussion of *The Man of Mode*, Powell in fact applies the distinctions somewhat too rigidly. Sir Fopling, for example, is clearly labelled by the dramatist, while Powell's sympathy for Mrs Loveit seems misplaced. John Dennis makes the point that,

> When Sir *George Etherege* ... shews *Loveit* in all the Height and Violence of Grief and Rage, the Judicious Poet takes care to give those Passions a ridiculous Turn by the Mouth of *Dorimant*. Besides that, the Subject is at the Bottom ridiculous: For *Loveit* is a Mistress, who has abandon'd her self to *Dorimant*; and by falling into these violent Passions, only because she fancies that something of which she is very desirous has gone beside her, makes herself truly ridiculous. Thus is this famous Scene in the second Act ... by the Character of *Loveit*, and the dextrous handling the Subject, kept within the Bounds of Comedy.[1]

Dennis is not simply making a judgement of Loveit's character; he also notes that in his handling of her character, Etherege ensures that she is seen in a comic light. Nevertheless, Powell's comments on *The Man of Mode* are a significant insight into the structure of the play. Indeed, his distinction between the comedy of criticism and the comedy of experience could provide a useful starting point for an investigation into the struggle between inherited dramatic forms, theories of comedy, and dramatic practice that characterizes comedy in the Restoration period. Certainly, major characters in *The Man of Mode* are not clearly labelled by the dramatist through the structure. There is scope for individual responses. In fact, the resolution of the play is left to the audience. As Powell puts it, 'the conventional finale has become an impertinence'.[2] Etherege's play can be said to spring from a subjective approach to good and evil, and for this, if for no other reason, the approach of Ben Ross Schneider is inappropriate.

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[1] 'Remarks on *The Conscious Lovers*' in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, 2 vols. (Baltimore, 1939), II, p.260.

[2] *op. cit.* p.44.

One would not want to push the point too far and say that because the dramatist does not overtly signal appropriate moral responses, all responses are equally valid, that there are as many viable reactions to this play as there might be to a slice of life. Such a statement would suggest that the play is completely formless. Rather, it can be firmly asserted that it is inappropriate to approach the play and judge its characters in terms of a single criterion of judgement, and to claim that characters and the moral qualities they embody can be simply judged as either protagonistic or antagonistic.

Critical evaluations of major characters of Restoration comedy like Dorimant, Manly, Maskwell and Valentine have shown diverse, often contradictory responses. This in itself suggests that in these plays either overt moral signposts do not exist or are not entirely convincing. Thomas Fujimura has noted approvingly that, 'Dorimant embodies all the virtues of a masculine Truewit'. He is genteel, libertine in his principles and 'values intellectual distinction above all other virtues.'[1] Dale Underwood, however, has seen in Dorimant 'a Hobbesian aggressiveness, competitiveness, and drive for power and "glory"; a Machiavellian dissembling and cunning; a satanic pride, vanity and malice.'[2] Similar disagreement has characterized responses to Maskwell. He has been seen as a villain who 'can be classed only with Iago as a subtle evil genius, a sadist'.[3] A rather different response, however, is suggested by Harriett Hawkins's comment that, 'The fun of *The Double Dealer* comes from watching Maskwell's manipulations, manoeuvrings, and improvisations.'[4]

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[1]*The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (New York, 1968, repr.), p.106.

[2]*Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners* (New Haven and London, 1957), p.73.

[3]D. Crane Taylor, *William Congreve* (New York, 1963, repr.), p.50.

[4]*Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama*, p.108.

John G. Hayman has suggested that the problem with judging a character like Dorimant is 'disagreement about the relevant standards against which Dorimant should be viewed'.[1] In fact, however, the play itself suggests a multiplicity of standards and a complexity of response. At one point, Dorimant's mistress exasperated by his behaviour comments, 'I know he is a Devil, but he has something of the Angel yet undefac'd in him, which makes him so charming and agreeable, that I must love him be he never so wicked' (II.ii.17-9). This comment, I think, approximates to our own attitude towards Dorimant. It also suggests the kind of response characters like Dorimant demand. Jeremy Collier demanded, we will recall, that virtue should be presented with all the 'sweetness, Charms, and Graces imaginable', while vice should appear as a '*Monster*' looking 'both foolish and Frightful together'. This play shows that a man may be attractive and yet morally reprehensible, that moral codes do not necessarily determine emotional reactions. There is a similar kind of dual reaction to most other important characters in Restoration comedy. Horner is brilliant in his manipulation of appearances. Yet the limitations of his position become evident when one compares his plight at the end of the play with that of Harcourt and Alithea. Manly may be admirable in his stand against dissimulation and dishonesty, but his excesses often deprive him of an audience's sympathy. Maskwell, for all his scheming, displays an energy and intelligence which make him the hero of the play. Mellefont, for all his virtue, is rather dull. In a morally ideal world, in a world not as it is but as it ought to be, moral qualities would be manifestly signified through their outward appearances; virtue would have all the charms and graces, vice would appear as a monster. In the real world, however, in the way the world is, this is

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[1]'Dorimant and the Comedy of a Man of Mode', *Modern Language Quarterly*, XXX (1969), p.183.

simply not the case. As Harriett Hawkins has seen, this is in fact a point made in Congreve's *The Way of the World.*[1]

As has often been noted, it is difficult to distinguish Mirabell and Fainall according to their behaviour in the opening scenes of *The Way of the World.* Both seem accomplished wits and, their names apart, one is given no signs which could guide one's judgement of them. It is only when the play is well into its second act that the audience is given a full description of Fainall as a man 'lavish of his Morals, an interested and professing Friend, a false and a designing Lover; yet one whose Wit and outward fair Behaviour have gain'd a Reputation with the Town' (II.i.270-3). In his reply to Collier's attacks upon his play, Congreve enlarges upon this description commenting,

> As the outward Form of Godliness is Hypocrisie, which very often conceals Irreligion and Immorality; so is Wit also very often an Hypocrisie, a Superficies glaz'd upon false Judgement, a good Face set on a bad Understanding.[2]

As the real world goes, outward behaviour is not an indication of true moral value.

The complexity of response generated when morally reprehensible behaviour is associated with wit and beauty is also an explicit theme of Vanbrugh's *The Relapse.* In that play, the virtuous Amanda is propositioned by the affected and ridiculous Lord Foppington. Her reaction is immediate and straightforward:

> *Lord Fop.* [*To* Amanda, *squeezing her hand.*] I am in love with you to desperation, strike me speechless!
> *Aman.* [*Giving him a box o' the ear.*] Then thus I return your passion, — An impudent fool!
> (II.i.343-6)

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[1] *op. cit.* pp. 115-38.

[2] *Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations* in *The Complete Works of William Congreve*, ed. Montague Summers, 4 vols. (London, 1923), III, p.202.

The spontaneity of Amanda's response is later emphasized when she explains, 'the fool so surprised me with his insolence, I was not mistress of my fingers' (II.i.425-6). This response can be contrasted with Amanda's reaction to Worthy's advances. Though Worthy has the same intentions and is as morally reprehensible as Foppington, Amanda is far less immediate and unequivocal in her response. She later confesses to Berinthia, 'what I wonder at is this: I find I did not start at his proposal, as when it came from one whom I contemned' (II.i.577-8). This situation raises a moral problem which is a central concern of the play. Amanda asks,

> whence it proceeds; that vice (which cannot change its nature) should so far change at least its shape, as that the self-same crime proposed from one shall seem a monster gaping at your ruin; when from another it shall look so kind, as though it were your friend, and never meant to harm you.
>
> (II.i.579-84)

The language and the statement of the problem anticipates the passage from Jeremy Collier quoted earlier (below, p.209). But whereas Collier feels that drama should present vice in its 'Native Appearances', Vanbrugh's play is designed to 'blot the Distinctions' to some extent, so that moral virtue can be tested against the temptations of the real world. Amanda's reactions to Foppington and Worthy are, of course, part of the larger theme developed through the relapse of Loveless. Over-confidence in one's moral fortitude and ability to resist temptation can be self-deceiving.

Elkanah Settle may have had *The Relapse* in mind when, in his *A Defence of Dramatick Poetry*, he attempts to morally justify the fact that the villains of Restoration comedy are not always ugly and ridiculous. Noting Collier's objection to the fact that 'Modern Plays make our Libertines of both Sexes, Persons of Figure and Quality, Fine Gentleman and Ladies', he goes on to assert:

> Now this is so far from a fault in our Comedies, that there's a necessity of those Characters, and a Vertue in that Choice ... the Instructive Design of the Play must look as well to the Cautioning of Virtue from the ensnaring Conversation of Vice, as the lashing of Vice it self. Thus the Court Libertine must be a Person of Wit and Honour, and have all the accomplishments of a Fine Gentleman ... Besides there needs no cautioning against a *Don John*; every Fool would run from a Devil with a *visible* Cloven-foot.[1]

The statement provides a good commentary on Worthy's position in *The Relapse*. In its mention of a '*visible* Cloven-foot', however, it also recalls the more complex figure of Dorimant. In *The Man of Mode*, the Orange-woman describes Lady Woodvil to Dorimant saying, 'as for your part, she thinks you an arrant Devil; shou'd she see you, on my Conscience she wou'd look if you had not a Cloven foot' (I.i.112-15). The point is, of course, that Dorimant has no cloven foot and for all the moral censure his behaviour might provoke, his charm and grace is undeniable. Indeed, it is finally his charm that allows Dorimant to reconcile Lady Woodvil to his courtship of Harriet.

As Elkanah Settle recognized, the mixed response one has towards the major characters of Restoration comedy is in one sense a problem of aesthetic versus moral values. He writes,

> 'Tis not the Lewdness it self in a Vicious Character, that recommends it to the Audience, but the witty Turnes, Adventures and Surprises in those Characters that give it Reception. For without this, the play drops and dies ... There's a great deal of difference betwixt likeing the Picture and the Substance. A Man may be very well pleas'd with a Forest work piece of Tapestry, with the Lyons, the Bears, and the Wolves, *&c.* but not over fond of their Company in Flesh and Blood; and consequently the very worst Jilt may be the Minion upon the Stage, and ... our Aversion off it.[2]

In the above comments, however, Settle's complete separation of moral and

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[1] (London, 1698/New York and London, 1972), pp. 89-90.

[2] *ibid.* pp. 87-8.

aesthetic responses seems rather arbitrary. Settle attributes a moral orthodoxy to Restoration comedy which seems misplaced and hence denies any interaction between aesthetic approval and moral response. In fact, though the complexity of response generated by characters can be seen as a problem of aesthetic versus moral values, it is in another sense the product of complex attitudes towards the moral problems themselves.

Some aspects of this moral complexity, particularly those which were related to the honesty/deception and natural/artificial dichotomies, were discussed in the central chapters of this thesis. It was argued that critics like Norman Holland and Rose A. Zimbardo were too limited in the values they brought to bear on the comedies. A similar weakness — the assumption that characters in the comedy can be morally 'placed' in terms of a single and stable set of values, and that comic conflicts can be seen in terms of a 'rightway/wrong way' or 'protagonistic/antagonistic' pattern — underlies the approach of Ben Ross Schneider. Lest it be thought, however, that this type of limitation is confined to critics who emphasize a play's moral aspect, the weaknesses of Harriett Hawkins's approach to *The Man of Mode* should be noted. Denouncing what she calls the 'righteous solemnity' of recent critics of *The Man of Mode*, Harriett Hawkins counters one excess with another of her own. Hawkins is right in asserting that it is too restrictive to see the character of Dorimant simply in moral terms. But in her exclusive use of Ovidian rules of conduct from *The Art of Love* to judge Dorimant's behaviour, she proves equally restrictive. Her denial of the relevance of moral responses tends to trivialize the play.[1]

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[1]*Likenesses of Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama*, pp. 79-97.

It has been argued in this thesis that major characters of Restoration comedy cannot be judged in terms of a single value scale and that they are most often not overtly labelled for approval or disapproval. This has been seen as a major strength of the comedies. In this regard, however, mention must be made of John Wain's evaluation of Restoration comedy.[1] John Wain has argued that it is difficult to take Restoration comedy seriously because of the 'frightful confusion it exhibits whenever a moral attitude is to be taken up'. He laments the fact that the comedies fail 'to take up a consistent attitude towards problems of conduct'.[2] It must be allowed that there are times when the failure by the dramatist to adopt a clear moral stance is confusing or merely annoying. The moral inconsistencies of *The Plain Dealer* are at the heart of its failure as a comedy; Valentine's attitude towards his children from Twitnam in *Love for Love* provides an unnecessarily disturbing slant on his character. There is also a kind of complexity which is finally counter-productive. An example from *The Way of the World* can illustrate the point. In the opening scene of the play, Mirabell describes to Fainall the lengths he has gone to to convince Lady Wishfort that he is interested in her. He comments, 'I did as much as Man cou'd, with any reasonable Conscience; I proceeded to the very last Act of Flattery with her, and was guilty of a Song in her Commendation ... The Devil's in't, if an old woman is to be flatter'd further, unless a Man shou'd endevour downright personally to debauch her; and that my Virtue forbad me' (I.i.67-79). The difficulty which arises relates to what weight should be given to Mirabell's final remark, that it was a concern for virtue that prevented him from debauching Lady Wishfort. Is Mirabell genuinely concerned for virtue? Certainly,

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[1] 'Restoration Comedy and its Modern Critics', in *Preliminary Essays* (London, 1957), pp. 1-35.

[2] *ibid.* p.14.

he had few qualms when it came to debauching Mrs Fainall. Is Mirabell using the word 'virtue' with a kind of self-conscious irony? Is Mirabell simply attempting to deceive Fainall about his moral attitudes? There seems little way of choosing between such alternative readings. Moreover, the various readings are mutually exclusive. The comment, rather than suggesting Mirabell's complex position, rings hollow and tells the audience very little.

The failure to adopt a clear moral stance can, then, be a dramatic weakness. Nevertheless, it is still true (and John Wain allows this up to a point) that the most interesting and dramatically effective features of Restoration comedy arise from the fact that its comic world is morally complex, rather than one of fixed moral certainties. Certainly, this becomes apparent if one compares the sentimental comedy of the early eighteenth century.

In comedy written around the turn of the century and in the early eighteenth century there is growing concern that moral qualities should be clearly and conventionally signified and that characters and their behaviour be placed in overt moral perspectives. The scenes where such characters as Loveless, Worthy, Young Bookwit and Sir Charles Easy recognize the error of their ways and take to singing the praises of a virtuous life should suffice to illustrate the point, as should the overt moralizing of such virtuous heroines as Amanda, Indiana and Lady Easy. There are, however, some rather more interesting examples. In *Love's Last Shift*, for example, Cibber ensures that Loveless's behaviour is seen in a moral light through his use of Loveless's servant Snap. Snap is a moraliser and, in his new dramatic role, not only advises and reprimands Loveless but also creates the moral perspective for the audience. Young Bookwit's servant, Latine, in *The Lying Lover* fulfils a similar function. In comedy written in this period there is also a recognizable tendency

towards the realignment of beauty and virtue. In Farquhar's *The Constant Couple*, for example, Wildblood thinks that the beautiful Angelica is a whore. When he first sees her he comments, 'How innocent she looks! how wou'd that Modesty adorn Virtue, when it makes Vice look so charming!' (II.ii.p.106). Wildblood is, however, mistaken about Angelica's character. In this play, Angelica's beauty does adorn virtue. Indeed, one can go further. Angelica's beauty is a sign of virtue. That Wildblood fails to recognize this, shows that he has a base and corrupt perception. Hence, Angelica's reaction to Wildblood's mistaken view of her character: 'What Madness, Sir *Harry*, what wild Dream of loose Desire could prompt you to attempt this Baseness? View me well. — The Brightness of my Mind, methinks, should lighten outwards, and let you see your Mistake in my Behaviour. I think it shines with so much Innocence in my Face, that it shou'd dazzle all your vicious Thoughts' (V.i.p.140-1). Angelica's face is meant to be seen as an image of her moral worth. But perhaps the most interesting attempt to make comedy morally innocuous is in the way dramatists seek to redefine and simplify moral labels so that they reflect only orthodox morality. In *The Relapse*, for example, Vanbrugh has the libertine minded Berinthia comment in soliloquy of her designs on Loveless and Amanda, 'I begin to fancy there may be as much pleasure in carrying on another body's intrigue as one's own. This at least is certain, it exercises almost all the entertaining faculties of a woman: for there's employment for hypocrisy, invention, deceit, flattery, mischief, and lying' (III.ii.255-9). Vanbrugh, in effect, has Berinthia damn herself, and attach moral labels to her behaviour which clearly cast her as a villain. Instead of justifying her behaviour, Berinthia effectively admits that she is at fault. Berinthia accepts the validity of the moral system she transgresses. But the most obvious example of a dramatist attaching simple moral labels to behaviour is provided by Richard Steele's *The Lying Lover*. As the title suggests, Steele's concern is to redefine

the dissimulation and want of plain-dealing that characterized courtship in Restoration comedy as 'lying'.

In his preface to *The Lying Lover*, Steele echoes Jeremy Collier and states as his moral purpose, to 'strip Vice of the gay Habit in which it has too long appear'd, and cloath it in its native Dress of Shame, Contempt, and Dishonour'. He achieves this, largely through the moral design of the plot. The misunderstandings generated by Young Bookwit's falsehoods and Penelope's reticence are shown to have disastrous consequences. Steele also, however, provides a moral commentary which takes the form of the question, what is the label which most appropriately attaches to Bookwit's behaviour?

In the first act of the play Young Bookwit, newly arrived from Oxford, attempts to impress the ladies and gallants of London by pretending to be a soldier and by vividly describing his heroic participation in various campaigns. He also tells the gallants that, though newly arrived in London, he has already had considerable success with the ladies. At the end of the act, Bookwit's servant Latine objects, 'Do you walk abroad and talk in your Sleep? or do you use to tell your Dreams for current Truth?' (I.429-30). When Latine attempts to call this behaviour 'lying', however, Bookwit refuses to accept the description:

Latine. 'Tis fine, but may prove dangerous Sport, and may involve us in a Peck of Troubles: Prithee, *Tom*, consider that I am of Quality to be kick'd or cain'd by this L —

Young Bookwit. Hush, hush, call it not Lying, as for my waging War it is but just I snatch and steal from Fortune that Fame which she denies me Opportunity to deserve ... Then as to my lying to my Mistress, 'tis but what all the Lovers upon Earth do. — Call it not then by that Name a Lie. 'Tis Wit, 'tis Fable, Allegory, Fiction, Hyperbole, or be it what you call it — The World's made up almost of nothing else.

(I.458-68)

As the play proceeds the debate over whether Bookwit's behaviour should be called 'lying' continues. Old Bookwit calls his son's adoption of a soldier's dress an 'Affectation' rather than a deception (II.ii.39); when Young Bookwit falsely tells his father that he is married, he describes his behaviour as 'Wit', though Latine once again reminds him that it could also be called lying (II.ii.141-6); in Act IV, the question arises of whether Bookwit's conversation is lying or whether he 'enlivens a mere Narration with variety of Accidents' (IV.iv.32-3). The upshot of the debate is, however, the simple conclusion that Bookwit's behaviour is morally damnable and should in fact be called lying. As the result of his behaviour, Bookwit becomes involved in a duel with Lovemore and finds himself in prison. Latine underlines the moral, commenting, 'I fear'd some Ill from a careless way of talking'. Bookwit, recognizing his own folly, responds, 'Oh this unhappy Tongue of mine!' (V.i.70-7). Bookwit's final comment in the play is the recognition that, '*There is no Gallantry in Love but Truth*' (V.iii.346).

Through the moral design of his plot and the inclusion of a moral commentary, then, Steele ensures that his characters and their behaviour are seen in a proper moral light. Certainly, moral clarity is achieved. Such moral clarity, however, is accompanied by a gross simplification of the issues that are involved. In *The Lying Lover*, Steele ultimately reduces the complex questions involving courtship in Restoration comedy to the simple question of whether behaviour is honest or false. Behaviour is viewed in terms of a single moral dichotomy. Dramatists like Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve refused, in the main, to make such easy moral simplifications. It is this that finally leads one to take these dramatists more seriously than one can take such a clear thinking moralist as Richard Steele.

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