Chapter -II

THE GEORGIAN COMIC TRADITION & SOME PLAYWRIGHTS
"Through the peculiar blight which has fallen on late eighteenth-century dramatic literature", write Allardyce Nicoll, "Goldsmith and Sheridan have tended to be considered the sole opponents of the sentimental play. It is as if they, and they alone, stemmed the torrent of a weeping age and taught men how to laugh once more. As a matter of fact they were but two among a large number of others who passed on to the nineteenth century the traditions of the comedy of earlier times."¹ They were neither the first nor alone in their attack against sentimental comedy. Many had already been raising their voice against it. In fact according to Ricardo Quintana, "From the days of Steele there had, indeed, been something of an anti-sentimental campaign under way which we may still follow in various farces, satires, and critical essays—there are moments in The Beggar's Opera when the satire has sentiment chiefly in view".² Moreover, most sentimental comedies are not wholly devoid of humour, and it is the very rare sentimental comedy which does not have something in a lighter vein. The anti-sentimental note in Hugh Kelly's False Delicacy has already been taken note of in the previous chapter. However, by virtue of their brilliance and superior dramatic gifts Goldsmith and Sheridan stand out from among others who had raised their voice against sentimental comedy. In their plays, it may be said, the anti-sentimental tradition reaches its culmination. However, some of the other anti-sentimental dramatists of the day who had been active in the theatre writing full-length comedies and afterpieces, are briefly noticed to serve as a background to Goldsmith.

Among the comic authors other than Goldsmith and Sheridan who were opposed to sentimental drama Charles Macklin (1699-1797), has to be mentioned first in chronological terms. This Irishman lived to be almost a centenarian, and his
life covered very nearly the whole of the eighteenth century. He was active in the theatre as actor and writer long before David Garrick, Samuel Foote, George Colman, entered the field. He befriended young Garrick when the latter was still obscure. And he introduced the redoubtable mimic Samuel Foote to the stage. He is said to have influenced British theatre from the days of the ballad opera to the dawn of melodrama. He periodically retired from the theatre and returned to it to act in his own plays and those of others. Eight out of his ten plays are comic, mostly farcical. It is said of him that in his first comedy *A Will and No Will; or A Bone for the Lawyers* (1746), he "does emerge ... as one of the few eighteenth-century playwrights whose approach to comedy was hard-nosed and unsentimental from prologue to epilogue". In another of his plays, *Covent Garden Theatre; or, Pasquin Turned Drawcansir* (1752), Macklin ventures to speak on behalf of traditional comedy, although he knew what the current fashion and taste was. In this play Sir Roger Ringwood, a character representing one type of spectators, warns the dramatist rather bluntly: "Be it tragedy or farce I don’t care a hare’s scut, so there is but fun in it... Give us a fair Burst of Fun ---- but if it is any of your New Moral Stuff, according to rule, I shall Tip it a dead Hollow ------ Think of that and be dull if you dare'. Macklin’s *Love a la Mode* (1759) also a farce, proved traditional laughing comedy of the humours variety. He handles better short comedies rather than full-length comedies. His legacy to comedy is rather modest but legitimate particularly because he was "a practitioner of the comic tradition during its most attenuated days".

David Garrick (1717-1779) the playwright is obscured by Garrick the actor extraordinary and Garrick the manager of Drury Lane for three decades. In recent
times however scholars of Georgian drama have begun to take interest in his plays which are considerable numerically. But about half of them are alterations of plays by earlier dramatists, and spectacles. And his original comedies and farces are not particularly exciting, although they are clever and theatrically successful. Moreover they are highly derivative. Therefore it is difficult to say how effective were his plays in opposing and resisting sentimental drama, which enjoyed great box-office popularity. But he was the most eminent name in the theatre of his times. As actor he dominated the theatre and eclipsed the other professionals connected with the theatre, the author in particular. He cast such a spell on the audience that few could resist his charm. They all idolised him. His adulation continued even after his death. Some of the actor-writers of the late eighteenth century like George Colman, Arthur Murphy and others who were associated with him credited him with supporting legitimate drama including traditional comedy, as well as stemming the tide of illegitimate theatrical entertainment which after him swamped the stage. However, the current Georgian theatrical scholarship does not seem to endorse this view, and is rather critical of Garrick for compromising his convictions to gratify popular taste. His concessions to public taste, it is contended, led to an increase in spectacular shows. Kalman Burnim notes that throughout his career Garrick was increasingly preoccupied with scenery, and spent more on lights, scenes, and costumes than the rival theatre Covent Garden, notorious for extravaganzas.\(^5\) Leo Hughes concludes that Garrick's attitude towards spectacle was "exasperatingly ambivalent", and his attempt to champion legitimate drama against pantomime was a failure.\(^6\)
It would appear that nothing is staunch or clear-cut about Garrick's position regarding the current form of theatrical entertainment, and that commercial success seems to have outweighed other considerations. The kind of consistency in practice one would expect from a man of conviction is not found in Garrick. In his *Harlequin's Invasion* (December, 1759), an anti-pantomimical pantomime, he "visualizes the confrontation of the traditional and non-traditional theatre as an invasion of Parnassus by Harlequin who is put down by Mercury, as an agent of Shakespeare". It was such a success that ironically it contributed to the growing ranks of irregular drama. He was opposed to sentimentalism in drama, and ridiculed it in his prologues and epilogues. But when he adapted Thomas Southerne's *The Marriage* (1694) as *Isabella* (1758), he cut out the comic-bawdry sub-plot from the play and produced the moral and pathetic story of Isabella. In *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766), written by George Colman and Garrick in collaboration, to which Garrick's contribution was as important as Colman's there is nothing to distinguish the heroine Fanny from other heroines of sentimental comedy. Commenting on this aspect of the play Sherbo says: "Although Garrick was an enemy of sentimental comedy, he was also a shrewd man of the theatre - ... ready to serve the public the plays it called for, and not above pandering to this same sentimental rogue". Again, reviewing Colman's sentimental play *The English Merchant* (1767) for the *Monthly Review*, Garrick "laid aside his anti-sentimentalism for the moment, ... praised the play and remarked that though 'a vein of comedy runs through the whole play ... yet the distresses of Amelia and her father make the comic muse raise her voice in many of the scenes, and give a variety which is not to be met with in the lower species of the drama ...". 
Living, as he did, during times which were particularly known for their satiric temper, Garrick found himself in tune with it because of his own predilection for topical satire. Bevis observes that the only hard edge in his work is his penchant for the Horatian kind of satire, and throughout his career he satirised chiefly manners, sentimentalism, and his audiences. In his career he upheld laughing comedy but yielded to the current fashion for sentimentalism, and his performance was ambivalent. He can only be given qualified praise. Here is Bevis's balanced summing up of Garrick:

He was an actor of undoubted brilliance in what then seemed a naturalistic style, yet who was criticized for exaggerated and stylized effects. He was a manager who championed regular drama but staged pantomimes and processions, and during whose tenure the illegitimate began to dominate the repertoire. As a dramatist he seems to have preferred laughing comedy but flirted with sentimentalism, and his theoretical allegiance to legitimate drama was compromised by the spectacular entertainments he wrote. In order to maintain one's respect for Garrick's work in this area, it is necessary to concentrate on his eight or ten unpretentious contributions to the comic tradition.

Nicknamed as the "English Aristophanes" in the eighteenth century, Samuel Foote, a strange and hobbling figure, who began his dramatic career just before the 1750s, sustained the spirit of laughter in his satirical works. A confirmed satirist, he was the only notable playwright of the period still working the satirical vein of Henry Fielding ridiculing vices and follies in an age which demanded satire...
and whose temper was most suited to it. In spite of the control exercised by the Licensing Act of 1737, Foote managed to write many satirical sketches, which he gave the dignified label of comedy, based on the eccentricities of particular people and the social follies of London. By the time he retired from the theatre he had written about twenty actable comedies of his conception. His explicit desire was to create on the London stage topical satires on the model of Aristophanes and Old Comedy in general. On more than one occasion he explained his artistic principles. He praised the personal satire of Aristophanes as a public good and an inducement to virtue. In an early essay of his (The Roman and English Comedy Considered and Compared 1747), he defined the purpose of comedy as. 'the Correction of Vices and Foibles of an inferior sort' and teaching us by 'a Representation of fashionable foibles, and particular extravagant Humours, to shun Ridicule and Absurdity'. In 1752 in the 'Dedication' prefaced to his play Taste he asserted emphatically that 'the follies and absurdities of men are the sole objects of comedy'. Then again in 1760 in a pamphlet written in reply to a critic of his, Foote defined comedy as 'an exact representation of the peculiar manners of that people among whom it happens to be performed; faithful imitation of singular absurdities, particular follies, which are openly produced, as criminals are publicly punished, for the correction of individuals, and as an example to the whole community'.

Foote expressed such views consistently and in his practice adhered to them. It is but natural that his plays were almost extremely topical and hence stood the risk of being evanescent. Foote defended his idea that the plays of Aristophanes also were topical. It has been suggested that his plays have to be
judged by the lights of Old Comedy. What is of particular interest for the present study is that his plays are all satirical and satire by nature is anti-sentimental. *The Knights* (1749) one of his early plays, reveals traits characteristic of most of his works, strong satirical portrayal of character and weak plots. In this particular play the story of which is ostensibly concerned with the attempts of Hartop to discharge his mortgage to the miserly Sir Penurious Trifle by marrying his daughter Sukey, actually Foote's interest is in satirising two knights, Sir Penurious and Sir Gregory Gazette. Therefore he handles indifferently the fate of Hartop. At the end of the play what happens to poor Hartop remains doubtful.

*The Author* (1757), which was a big success, some critics have found to be a sentimental comedy. But actually what Foote does is to use a favourite device of sentimental playwrights, the benevolent incognito relative, for purposes of the laughing comedy. Governor Cape, who has recently retired as the ruler of a British Colony, returns home to London after a long absence to see his son, who has been made to believe that both his father and mother are dead and that he is being educated by a foreign friend of his father's. The father, before revealing his identity, wants to test whether his son is worthy of an inheritance. Governor Cape makes his servant, Robin seek out young Cape who is found to be a poor though virtuous author. Up to this point it looks very much like a sentimental play. But Foote uses the situation mostly for satire and laughter, and to expose the miseries of Grub Street authors. His principal target of satire is Cadwallader, an eccentric, whose sister the heiress Arabella is courted by Young Cape. The young man's strategy to obtain Cadwallader's consent, without which he cannot marry Arabella, misfires. However the father, who feels that his son has passed his test, comes to his rescue. This play was a big success and it was largely due to its witty dialogue.
The urge behind Foote's plays is the felt compulsion to satirise some current folly or vice and ridicule it through laughter. In *The Orators* (1762), wholly in the Aristophanic vein, he satirises the current vogue of oratory, making a living individual his target and a concrete example of the folly. In his next play *The Mayor of Garret* (1763), the satire is directed against the caprices of the campaign for the mayoralty of Garret, a village. In *The Patron* (1764), based on a French original, he energetically exposes 'the frivolity and ignorance of the pretenders to learning (and) the insolence and vanity of their superficial, illiberal protectors'. Though the satire is wide-ranging and includes patrons, antiquarians, poets and publishers, the chief target of attack is Sir Thomas Lofty, who is surrounded by his sycophants who feed him with flattery. The most amusing part of the comedy is the pursuit of Sir Thomas's niece Juliet Lofty by a young man called Bever, who earns her as his reward for publicly acknowledging that he is the author of an execrable play about Robinson Crusoe, which is actually authored by Sir Thomas.

In 1773 Foote brought out two plays, *Piety in Pattens* and *The Bankrupt*, the former regarded as "a pre-Goldsmith assault on sentimental comedy" and the latter "held to be as sentimental as anything Foote ever wrote". Perhaps even Foote, the determined enemy of sentimental drama could not wholly avoid or escape the sentimental. However his attitude to sentimental comedy was quite clear from the start of his theatrical career. *Piety in Pattens* is actually the middle section of a puppet show, *The Primitive Puppet-Show* which was first staged with puppets and only later on human actors took their place. The first section is an "Exordium" spoken by Foote himself. The last section consists of some concluding by-play in which the puppets are arrested. The "Exordium" is spoken by the dramatist with his tongue in his cheek and consists of a pretentious history of puppet-shows, and an unflattering comparison between the puppets and live actors.
of the town. And then the speaker announces a 'sentimental comedy' entitled *The Handsome Housemaid*, or, *Piety in Pattens*. The curtain rises at this point to reveal the puppets; and the show begins.

*Piety in Pattens* seems to be a parody of Richardson’s *Pamela* and Isaac Bickerstaffe’s *The Maid of the Mill*, a musical version of *Pamela*. Foote takes their characters, gives them different names, adds a little of stupidity and self-interest to them, and emphasises their so-called benevolence. Squire Thirdle, educated up to the fourth form in Westminster School, rich as a nabob, has designs on the honour of his good-looking and 'vartuous' housemaid Polly Pattens. Thomas, the butler and her self-proclaimed and sentimental friend, too is interested in Polly and fills her with apprehension. When she attempts to flee, to escape from them, the squire to prevent her from going away offers 'a thousand pounds a year' for life if she consents to be his mistress in London. Polly admits to a liking for him, but she is also drawn to Thomas the butler who offers her lawful matrimony. The Squire is thrown into a dilemma. Her virtue 'astonishes' him, and her beauty 'enchants' him. Could he, belonging as he does to a noble family, dare being the 'Butt for the Finger of Scorn' by making her his wife? But shall he not have 'dear domestic Delights', 'rocking the cradle, or warming the Pap' at his own Country House? Finally 'Reason wins and the Squire offers to make Polly his 'acknowledged Wife'. Now, it is the housemaid's turn to be in a dilemma. While she is pleased with the Squire's offer, she reflects that her 'virtue' is preserved because of the butler. So she accepts his offer of lawful marriage instead of the Squire's. But the magnanimous Thomas refuses to stand in the way of her 'preference' for the Squire and steps aside. Now it is the turn of the 'benevolent' in the squire to strike a pose:
Matchless Pair! And shall these poor people, little better than Peasants, the one just able to write, and the other not able to read, shew such dignified sentiments, and shall I, who reached the fourth Form in Westminster school, jade and tire in the Horserace of Glory? No. down love, up Honour. Ye noble minded Pair approach, and let me join those Hands, whose Hearts so exactly agree. I will stock Nettle Bed Farm, which is Ten Pounds a Year, and settle it on you for both your lives.

Polly is deeply moved by this gesture of 'exalted generosity'. But not to be outdone in benevolence, she declares that as the merits of her two suitors now appear equal and cannot in justice reject either, she will marry neither. At this announcement all three let out cries of delight in a benevolent ecstasy.

In this play packed with satire Foote dissects the stock situation, characters, and speeches of sentimental drama. As a master caricaturist he deliberately exaggerates its convention to expose the contradictions inherent in it. All the typical sentimental characters - the heroine, the rake who reforms at the last minute, the benevolist, and the 'friend' - are mocked and flayed, and the dramatic sentiment is reduced to nonsense. The use of puppets brilliantly brings out the mechanicality of the characters in sentimental drama. "Piety", says Bevis, "is a satisfying riposte to the Muse of the Woeful Countenance, more forceful, accurate, and unalloyed than any work by Goldsmith or Sheridan". However the fact remains that this play did not or could not overthrow the sentimental tradition, which continued to flourish. Viewed as a whole Foote remains "the principal dramatic satirist of the Garrick era, an upholder of the oldest Western comic
tradition during the doldrums of the fifties... For the most part (his) work is unsentimental or even anti-sentimental, and he completely eschewed writing in illegitimate forms.... For all his posing, he enriched and enlivened the tradition of earlier comedy for transmission to better playwrights".¹⁷

It is said of Arthur Murphy (1727-1805) that it was he "who most persistently, from the sixth to the last decade of the eighteenth century, led the fight against sentimental comedy".¹⁸ Even before his first play was produced, he had expressed himself against 'sentimental pathetic comedy'. Like Goldsmith and Sheridan he too was an Irishman. He played several roles indicating the variety of his talents: Political journalist, literary critic, biographer (who wrote Garrick's biography), banker, lawyer, actor for a brief stint and playwright. In theory and practice he was an advocate of the older comic traditions of laughter, manners, and farce. His very first work, The Apprentice acted in 1756 though written in 1753, was a farce designed to make fun of the stage-struck men of the time. Though the term 'farce' does not generally rouse respect, it has to be admitted that much of the comic power of the age finds expression in its afterpieces and farces which are after all roughened forms of comedy. 'Farcicality' may be Murphy's "weakness" as Bevis contends.¹⁹ But he was certainly one of those in the century to raise farce to a higher level, to the level of short comedy, and took care to avoid the excesses of satirical farce though he was associated with Samuel Foote for a while. For him the business of comedy was to make a striking exhibition of inconsistent circumstances, to display foibles and oddities, mixed with a vein of ridicule, in order to excite laughter and a gay contempt that would make us despise and laugh at an object at the same time. Bevis observes: "To a
greater extent than any comic playwright of the period except perhaps Macklin, he kept within an inner circle of saturnalian laughter and shunned its dangerous periphery. Murphy showed no concession to sentimental drama, nor did he ever write burlettas, spectacles or comic operas in spite of their popularity.

Having written a couple of farces and adapted Voltaire's tragedy as *The Orphan of China* (1759) and *The Desert Island*, a three-act entertainment, Murphy attempted in *The Way to Keep Him* (1760) a short three-act comedy in the manner of Molière. It proved such a success that the next year he reworked it very successfully into a five-act mainpiece comedy (1761) with the hope of transcending farce. The play is built on the familiar erring-husband theme, and Murphy gives it a new twist in that it is not only the rake that reforms but the wife also is made to learn that the way to keep her husband requires a return to the liveliness of spirit with which she had first attracted him. The play is neatly organised as a dramatisation of tensions which disrupt married life and as an exposition of the means to correct them. Murphy depicts in the play complementary kinds of marital mal-adjustments. If Lovemore is bored with his wife and desires adulterous intrigue Sir Benjamin Constant fears that his constant but unfashionable devotion to his wife would make him ridiculous in London society. In his amorous adventures he pays attention to 'Mrs Bellamour, a widow, disguising himself for this purpose as Lord Etheridge, and also attempts to flirt with Lady Constant. The play moves through a succession of extra-marital intrigues, approaching but never reaching adultery. All comes well in the end. The attractive, amiable and virtuous widow Bellamour plays a prominent part in the climactic embarrassment and reclamation of the rake Lovemore, who suffers humiliation
in his pretentions to her. Widow Bellamour also warns Mrs Lovemore, 'It is much more difficult to keep a heart than to win one', and that she had erred by failing to exert her charms upon her husband. A second but related moral furnished by the play relates to the sub-plot which is concerned with the Constants. In fact the sub-plot was added when the play was expanded into a five-act play. It is done so skilfully that it fits smoothly into the original action and becomes integral to it. Not only does it provide one more instance of Lovemore's roguery but it conveys the moral that it is not enough if one loves his spouse, but he must show it, letting the town laugh if it chooses to. Perhaps Murphy expected that the audience would expect a touch of pathos, and therefore to the enlarged version he provides a sentimental moment by making Mrs Lovemore tearfully tell her 'painful' story, of course briefly to widow Bellamour.

The Way to Keep Him reminds us of Restoration comedies. The general resemblance between Murphy's theme and the themes of the Restoration masters is quite evident. And his attempt is clearly to recreate the world and atmosphere of Restoration comedy. In the last act of the play Mrs Lovemore is heard saying; 'that would be the impolitest thing'. A married couple to be interfering and encroaching on each other's pleasures. Oh hideous! 'it would be Gothic to the last degree' (V.1). One may catch here an echo of Congrevean heroines. The play also calls up echoes of the French master. Molière and Wycherley. However, Murphy who writes competent witty dialogue, cannot achieve the unexpected turns of phrase that one finds in Congreve. The play is coherent, well contrived, and witty. Like many Restoration plays in its subject it approaches the parochial, as its focus is on a narrow range of the experience of persons from a narrow range of English
society. On the similarities between this play and Restoration plays John Lofls writes: "If Murphy is more explicit and emphatic in recommending matrimonial fidelity than most of the seventeenth century dramatists had been, he yet writes on a pattern that is a recognizable extension from Restoration comedy: in his satirical conception of his carefully named characters, in his focus on the love affairs of the gentry, in the nature of the episodes which complicate his slender plot lines, and even in the texture of his dialogue."²¹

Murphy's attempt to repeat the success he had achieved in *The Way to Keep Him*, (in which he had successfully not only lengthened a short comedy, an afterpiece, into a mainpiece by ingenious plotting, but given it the body of a manners comedy) in his next mainpiece comedy *All in the Wrong* (1761), does not quite succeed. For, he tries to draw out a slight farce by Molière into a five-act play, a manners comedy, of improbable incidents almost entirely relying on situation exalting it over character. The plot is a comedy of errors built on baseless suspicion and jealousy. Sir John Restless is suspected by Lady Restless who sees him comforting Belinda Blandford in a situation of distress. Sir John sees his wife admiring a picture of Beverly dropped by Belinda who loves him, and begins to suspect her. The lovers Belinda and Beverly join the jealous crew by suspecting each other. The plot is further complicated by Belinda's parents who plan her for Bellmont. Fantastic complications arise because of mutual suspicion. Of course everything is resolved satisfactorily as all the right people love each other who realise that misinterpreted circumstances is the real villain. As the play relies entirely on its improbable plot, little thought is bestowed on realistic characterisation. As Bevis has said, "a weakness for overly ingenious plotting betrays him (Murphy) in all his mainpiece comedies except in *The Way to Keep Him*".²²
After *All in The Wrong*, Murphy busied himself writing afterpiece comedies, all confirming his penchant for situational laughing comedy. Ambitious of trying his hand a five-act laughing comedy once again, he produced in 1767 *The School for Guardians*, most of the incidents of which are drawn from three plays of Molière. Bevis makes the wry comment that "the play reads like a garbled index to that playwright". The action is so complicated and moves at such pace that it becomes farcical. Murphy's intent throughout is laughter. In *Know Your Own Mind* probably written in the 1760s but staged in 1777, Murphy attempts once again a comedy in the manners style. He compounds it with all the familiar devices found in comedies early as well as late that it looks as though Murphy's play is "a compendium of cliches" of comedy from time immemorial. Summing up Murphy's career as a dramatist for more than two decades, Bevis says: ".... his most artistic and satisfying creations were the afterpieces....; his long comedies, however laudable the effort that went into them, were futile attempts to recapture a lost chord. In the farces and short comedies - *The Apprentice, The Upholsterer, The Way to Keep Him, What We All Come To* - where direct observation of his own society was called for and made, Murphy was most in his element". It is also necessary to add his plays held their own ground with the sentimental comedies of the period.

Until he was forced by circumstances to seek his livelihood on his own and choose the theatrical profession, George Colman the Elder (1732-1794) could in his plays (a mainpiece and three afterpieces) spoof sentiment and hold firmly to the laughing tradition of comedy. Like Samuel Foote or Arthur Murphy he could be a traditional farceur and satirist. Probably the success of his early plays
encouraged him to choose the theatre for his profession. From 1767 till the end of his life he was managing one of the two theatres, Covent Garden and the Haymarket. By then he had become, like Garrick, a "careful compromiser" ready to provide the audience what it wanted. Obviously he had realised that he must "please to live". But when he wrote as a bright young lawyer his first play Polly Honey Comb (1760), 'a dramatic novel in one act', he was under no such constraints and could afford to "let off a spirited blast at the sentimental novel and, by implication, at its cousin the sentimental comedy". That he likens himself in the prologue to Cervantes in his onslaught on sentimental novels is an indication of his confidence if not conceit. In using the descriptive phrase 'A Dramatic Novel' for this play of his, Colman probably intends to suggest the target for his satire, not different in kind from that of Cervantes or that of Charlotte Lennox in her novel The Female Quixote (1752).

Polly the heroine is so much addicted to reading romantic sentimental fiction that she looks at every crisis of her life through the distorting mirror of that fiction. It turns her head so much that it betrays her into the hands of a scoundrel, and makes her break up the match her parents have arranged. The satire of the play is directed against the circulating library, that 'evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge' which generously supplies sentimental romantic novels to the young. The satirical intention of Colman is made explicit by the final remark of Polly's father, Honeycomb: 'a man might as well turn his daughter loose in Covent Garden as trust the cultivation of her mind to A CIRCULATING LIBRARY'. But there is something more in the play, which rouses one's sympathy for Polly, the inveterate reader of sentimental fiction. It is time that in her folly she alienates not
only Ledger a young businessman, and her fiancé, but also Scribbler the attorney's clerk whom she prefers who observes all the forms of romance for her sake but whose affection for her is not strong enough to survive a confrontation with her father and also to give him the courage to elope with her as she expects (to complete all the forms of romantic fiction). Thus she loses both her fiancé and her suitor. However it is clear from the play that she lives in circumstances that stifle the imaginative side of her nature. What kind of a man is her old father is revealed by her telling remark to him: 'you would dispose of your daughter like a piece of merchandise.' The youngman Ledger, her fiancé, is so unimaginative that she tells him that he is 'more tiresome than the multiplication table'. The satire in the play seems to touch every one, not Polly only. In the words of Bevis. (Eighteenth century Drama : Afterpieces, 1970) "while (the play) purports to castigate the circulating library, it half sympathises with the Pollys and ridicules their oppressors". "The result is" as Loftis says, "a curiously bitter if psychologically convincing denouement for a semi-farcical afterpiece".

**Polly Honeycomb** was so successful that Colman felt encouraged to write a full length comedy, **The Jealous Wife** (1762), helped by Garrick. Garrick was to help him a few years later to write **The Clandestine Marriage**. But the kind of help Garrick rendered and its extent, is not known. This play is an adaptation of Fielding's **Tom Jones**. And it was one of the greatest successes of its own time and continued as a stock piece until well into the nineteenth century. It was also the most successful play of his career. Like its predecessor, this play also suggests Colman's preoccupation with the novel. He himself acknowledges in the 'Advertisement' prefixed to the first edition of the play, that he has used 'Fielding's admirable Novel **Tom Jones**' in this comedy. However the play is not a mere dramatization of the novel, though it retains a good deal of the plot and spirit of the novel. It has lines of action, including that from which the title is drawn, for which
there is no parallel in Fielding's novel. Hints from the *Spectator* and Terence's *Adelphi* are also taken. Resemblances have been traced to Congreve's *Love for Love* and Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia*.

Harriot Russet loves Charles Oakly. But disappointed with Charles and pressed by her father old Russet to marry the well named Sir Harry Beagle who loves his horses and dogs more than the young woman, she leaves her father's house and seeks refuge in the house of her dubious aunt Lady Freelove. Old Russet, Sir Harry, Charles and his parents pursue her to that place. With Lady Freelove's connivance Lord Trinket makes an assault on her honour. At a crucial moment in her distresses, Charles Oakly fails her once again, not succumbing to another woman as on an earlier occasion but to the bottle. Without being dispirited, Harriot turns for shelter to Charles's uncle and guardian. Fresh complications arise because Lady Freelove cleverly turns Mrs Oakly's suspicions and jealousy against Harriot. It is her absurd suspicions that make her the 'jealous wife' of the title. Lord Trinket, in his turn, plans to remove Charles through impressment into the navy, but some lucky and comical accidents frustrate him. When Lord Trinket renews his designs again on Harriot, Charles saves her. Now she runs to her father's lodgings where she has to encounter the importunities of Sir Harry. The setback Beagle has to suffer because she rejects his importunities, makes him trade his rights over Harriot to Lord Trinket in exchange for a horse. When old Russet comes to know about it and Lord Trinket's designs, he has to change his mind, and allow the young lovers to be united with his blessings given rather wearily. But it is only after Charles convinces Harriot that he is a reformed man and after she has extracted from him a full measure of contrition and confession that the two are united. It is the only sentimental scene in the play. This is only part of the story.
There are the Oakly's whose misunderstandings of each other have to be cleared, and who have to be reconciled to each other. Mrs Oakly's jealousy is actually a deceptive covering for her warm love for her husband. He loves her with as much ardour. Their marital problem is actually this excessive love. Oakly is told by his brother: 'Mrs. Oakly would make you an excellent wife, if you did but know how to manage her.' Appropriately the husband and wife confront each other, clear their misunderstandings with mutually enlightening explanation, renew their vows, and pledge never to be jealous again. The characters in the play are of course from among the well born and rich. But they are, as Loftis points out, "singularly free of a preoccupation with social decorum. Colman writes with a satirist's attention to absurdities of behaviour, above all that of the 'jealous wife'. Yet his evaluation of his characters turn on their qualities of heart, and ... he is most severe with the character of highest rank, Lord Trinkel". Loftis goes on to point out further: "The love of Charles and Harriot has less of financial calculation in it than is customary in the matchings of Restoration comedy.... for Harriot at least the marriage involves financial sacrifice.... it is a symptom of the difference in emotional tone of eighteenth - century as opposed to Restoration comedy".29

In *Polly Honeycomb*, an afterpiece, Colman could unhesitantly oppose sentiment, and a sentimental afterpiece is a rarity. But the dramatist perhaps felt obliged to accommodate some sentiment in *The Jealous Wife*, a mainpiece comedy. In the reform of Charles Oakly and the general tone of relationships and characterisation, some compromise with sentiment may be seen. However the pathetic tendencies are kept in perspective by Lady Freelove's deliberately hurtful remarks. "The overall effect", Bevis observes, "is that of an intrigue comedy in the laughing mode, with a genial atmosphere and one sentimental scene".30
In *The Deuce Is in Him* (1763), a two-act farce, Colman renews his attack on sentiment. He turns to ridicule the theme of the lover insisting on testing his beloved that Ovid and Chaucer earlier had handled. To make sure that his wife Emily loves him for his essential self, Colonel Tamper pretends to have lost an eye and a leg. Colman associates this morbid restlessness with sentimentalism. Colonel Tamper who admits to have in his temper 'an excess of sensibility', wants to be assured that his wife, in spite of his 'disability', retains her affection for him. Major Belford, who presents the voice of reason, has no sympathy for either Tamper or his wife Emily who talks of 'pure and disinterested passion'. Tamper is made to repent and seek forgiveness, which is given no sooner than asked. This short play shows once again how the afterpiece was discharging the old comic functions.

Opinion is divided regarding the exact nature of *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766) in writing which Garrick had a share. Ernest Bernbaum found it to be 'sentimental in its main plot and chief characters'; Eugene Page saw in it 'a compromise between the old and the new'; Bevis, "on balance" finds it to be "a laughing comedy". The distress of the lovers Fanny Sterling and Lovewell, her father's clerk, who are secretly married, arises actually not from their precarious financial position, but from their silly fumbling and blundering, and therefore becomes comical, even farcical. Satire upon sentimental reticence, false delicacy, is inherent in the plot, and the two sentimental lovers do look very ridiculous. This play, which was very popular, "illuminates the social world of Georgian drama", says Loftis. The characters, as representatives of social and occupational groups, serve a satirical function.

The tensions and complications in the play arise from two sources: first the 'clandestine' marriage of Fanny and Lovewell, which they hesitate to reveal to
Fanny's mercenary father Sterling who is a rich merchant; second, the visit to his country estate, of Lord Ogleby, a vain and fatuous person, and his colourless nephew Sir John Melvil. Sir John expected to sign a marriage contract between himself and Miss Sterling, Fanny's older sister, for whom her father is to provide an enormous dowry. The timid and impecunious Lovewell, who also happens to be a relation of Ogleby, hopes to obtain this nobleman's approval of his secret marriage and protection. On arrival at the estate of Sterling, Melvil finds Fanny more attractive than her sister and offers to accept her for a much smaller dowry. Dismayed by his interest in her, Fanny turns to Ogleby for help. Ironically, before she can explain properly her predicament to him the foolish lord falls in love with her. Both uncle and nephew open negotiations with her father who would do anything for money. The distress of the secretly married couple is prolonged by their feeble and ineffective attempts to reveal their true condition. However the secret is out when on a night Lovewell is discovered in Fanny's bedchamber, both preparing to elope. Surprisingly Ogleby comes to his nephew's help and successfully persuades Sterling to accept the couple.

The satire in the play is directed against both the groups. If money is the spring of all actions of Sterling, the noblemen are not very different because Ogleby, whose estate is deeply encumbered, hopes to repay his debts with the dowry Sterling offers to give. As Loftis points out, "An insight into the times is provided by Lovewell's remark to Mr. Sterling, in urging his suit for Fanny, that he hopes 'by diligence' to increase his own modest fortune. It is difficult indeed to encounter a gentleman in Restoration comedy who alludes to the possibility of making money".32
Colman's next play, *The English Merchant* (1767), is very much a sentimental comedy. It is based on Voltaire's *L'Ecossaise* and dedicated to him. Allardyce Nicoll says that it is "one of the most representative sentimental dramas of the age". It was praised for its 'delicacy and sentiment' by many contemporary periodicals. As theatre manager Colman knew what the audience wanted and in this play he capitalised on the popularity of sentimental drama and gratified popular taste. In outline, the plot is simple. Amelia is the daughter of the outlawed Sir William Douglas who is implicated in the Rebellion of 1745. She is befriended by Freeport, an eccentric merchant, as well as by Lord Falbridge. Falbridge loves her. When the life of Sir William is in danger imperilled by the machinations of Lady Alton and the journalist Spatter, Freeport and Falbridge save both father and daughter. As in a typical sentimental comedy Amelia the heroine is an allegory of Virtue in Distress, Lord Falbridge stands for Insulting Wealth Reformed, and Freeport, the 'Merchant' of the title of the play, is the unusual merchant-benevolist-eccentric, frank and above social custom, who claim to 'befriend all mankind'. He not only aids Amelia in distress, but obtains a Royal pardon for her father. The father and daughter are tearfully united. The emphasis in the play is on reunion and sententious reform. Whatever humour there is in the play is provided by Spatter and Lady Alton, who are ridiculous characters and who are finally ejected.

In the context of this play, Loftis's observations on the "social orientation" of Georgian comedy deserve to be noted. He says that in this respect "comedy is remarkably constant. Georgian like Restoration comedy is the preserve of the fashionable of the gentry, the squirearchy, and the lesser nobility. Some changes there are. Dramatists may be less reluctant to introduce lords into comedy, but even so not many of them appear... The most noticeable difference in the social
world of comedy appears in the attitude towards businessmen... rich merchants, with assured place in fashionable society, often figure as the generous protectors or patrons of the young lovers". Freeman in *The English Merchant* is "one of many such characters ... the pugnacious and defensive tone that animated Steele’s defence of the social pretensions of the businessmen has vanished".34

Colman presents merchants favourably in his *The Man of Business* (1774) also, a much later play, and a mainpiece comedy. His interest in social class problems, seen in the earlier plays, becomes conspicuous. In his later plays comedy as such becomes less important than his concern into the real life problems of the bourgeois element in the audience. As a professional man of the theatre he mixed styles and genres like Garrick, and as a compromiser accommodated music, dance and scenery in his stage entertainments to hold the attention of the audience. He wrote sentimental comedy, satire on sentiment, and plays in which laughter and sentiment are mixed. When his work is viewed as a whole, his role in "the laughing tradition in comedy" would seem to be that of "an occasional retainer".35
NOTES AND REFERENCES


4. Ibid., p.137.


7. Bevis, p.64.

8. Ibid., p.145.


10. Ibid., p.150.


12. Ibid., pp.148-149.

13. Ibid., p.151.


15. Ibid., p.170.
17. Ibid., pp.173-74.
20. Ibid.,
23. Ibid., p.198
24. Ibid, pp.200-201
25. Ibid., p.175.
26. Quoted by Loftis, p.50
27. Ibid., p.50.
28. Nicoll, pp.167-68
29. Loftis, pp.28-29.
32. Loftis, p.36.
33. Nicoll, p.140.
34. Loftis, p.35.
35. Bevis, p.188.