CHAPTER ONE

TOWARDS THE SENTIMENTAL COMEDY

After a period of decline in drama, the theatres were officially closed by the Puritans in 1642 during Cromwell's rule. With the Restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660, the theatres were reopened. The King and the younger generation of aristocracy had passed through a most demoralizing experience, having suffered during exile the break-up of their education and family life, and injustice done to them in the name of religion. Consequently, they had developed an attitude of general cynicism and hard disbelief in moral excellence. For some people the Restoration brought about a feeling of deliverance from religious and moral tyranny, from a gloomy and fanatical government. A strong reaction now set in against all that was held in esteem by the Puritans. Whereas they had forbidden all plays, however innocent; Charles II and his courtiers encouraged all, however indecent. The wisdom of sacrificing comfort to lofty aims was now doubted and there was a consequent lack of enthusiasm for impracticable ideals. The gay King and his courtiers mocked at the conventional moral code and became devotees of the cult of egoistic pleasure. The Second Earl of Rochester whose thoughts turned to serious matters in the late 1670s had earlier been a notorious libertine and a leader of Charles II's merry gang. In his stormy youth he believed in an uninhibited gratification of
the natural desires or appetites which, he felt, could not have been "put into a man only to be restrained, or curbed to such a narrowness".¹ The orthodox teachings of morality and religion were openly disregarded by the young aristocrats to whom a single-minded pursuit of pleasure was of paramount importance:

> Let us indulge the joys we know
> Of Musick, Wine and Love.
> We're sure of what we find below,
> Uncertain what's above.²

Sir George Etherege said the same when he wrote that the gay youngmen of the age spent their time "hunting whores and haunting play".³ Probably, this was due to the freedom enjoyed by the Stuart aristocracy after the Restoration.

These gay libertines happened to be the main arbiters of taste in the Restoration theatre, even though, as we now learn from The London Stage, audiences at all performances included some representatives from all levels of society and "the taste of the spectators as well as their motives in attending the playhouses varied considerably ..."⁴ An important factor added to the

²Cited by V. de S. Pinto, Sir Charles Sedley, A Study in the Life and Literature of the Restoration (New York, 1927), p. 52.
influence of the aristocratic audience. After the Restoration, London had only two playhouses as against fifteen in the Elizabethan times. These were Killigrew's Theatre Royal and Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, both owned by the courtiers and friends of the King. Even these had to be amalgamated into one in 1682 for financial reasons. Only two companies of players had the patent for performance in London. As the puritan attacks on the stage continued, the Restoration drama came to rely heavily on support from the court. And the playwrights were fortunate to have in the King their boon companion. The aristocratic audience, as suggested above, suffered from a sense of political and moral insecurity, and went to the theatre for entertainment, for a holiday from the pressure of reality.

Several of the contemporary writers indicate the usual attitude to comic drama in the period. Dryden, who does not merely interpret his age but reflects it, writes in his Preface to An Evening's Love (1671) that the chief end of comedy is "divertisement and delight", and that the poet's business is to make us laugh. In the preface to The Mock Astrologer (1668), Dryden does not accept any responsibility of the dramatist to point a moral. It is true that playwrights like Congreve and Vanbrugh, when driven to defend themselves, claim a moral function.


by asserting that they discourage vice by making it ridiculous. Shadwell proclaims the moral intention of his comedies in his preface to The Humorists. But it is difficult to take their statements at their face value, as in actual practice they write primarily for the sake of amusement rather than instruction. Mrs. Behn seems to feel the same about comedy as Dryden. In her prefatory remarks to The Dutch Lover (1673), she writes that she took care to make her comedy as entertaining as possible, believing that comedy is "the best divertisement". An anonymous contemporary pamphleteer also writes that the primary business of comedy is to divert the audience. "For my part", he adds, "when I go to the theatre, it is with this intention alone, viz: to unbend my thoughts from all manner of business, and by this relaxation to raise again my wearied spirits ...".

The aristocratic audience wanted the comedy to provide for it a release from all moral and social inhibitions rather than criticise its follies and vices. The playwrights, therefore, seem to handle the fashionable follies with indulgence. Satire, if any, is reserved for such fashionable vices as pretence, jealousy and hypocrisy. There is little satire for such attractive rakes as Etherege's Dorimant and Wycherley's Horner. What is satirized is, to use Krutch's words, "the failure to be graceful, failure to be witty, and failure in savoir faire, but not failure to be virtuous". That there is something unusual about Wycherley's ruthless exposure

of falsehood and infidelity in *The Plain Dealer* (1694) is borne out by Congreve in the prologue to his play, *Love for Love* (1695); "Since the Plain-Dealer's Scenes of Manly Rage/Not one has dar'd to lash this Crying Age". In the Epistle Dedicatory to his play, *The Double Dealer* (1694), Congreve expresses his desire to act the "Surgeon" and "paint the Vices and Follies of Human-kind". But it is only mild satire consistent with the polite manners. In no other play, however, does he venture to subject his age to moral satire. In his masterpiece, he gives up the satirical function of comedy for that of "divertisement". As he says in the prologue to *The Way of the World* (1700), "To Please, this Time, has been his sole Pretence,/He'll not instruct, lest it shou'd give Offence". Clifford Leech rightly remarks that Congreve usually lacks the "animus" of the serious satirist. And Farquhar, as shown in the prologue to *The Constant Couple* (1700), resigns himself to the taste of his audience: "Such as it is for your Delight design'd,/Hear it, read, try, judge, and speak as you find". Indeed, Dryden, in the prologue to *The Rival Ladies* (1664) seems to speak for most of his contemporaries: "He's bound to please, not to write well, and knows/There is a mode in plays as well as clothes".

The Restoration dramatists accepted the standards of the court, its cynicism, its gallantry, and manners. For them the fashionable world was the only world, and the frivolous,

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intriguing, leisured life of Restoration society was ultimately the only good life". Their main aim was to provide entertainment to their distinguished audience and they treated it to a comedy whose primary concern was with the fashionable manners. Aristocratic, cynical, gay, witty and elegant, this comedy of manners depicted the fashionable follies and fopperies, gallantry and sex-antagonism. Its themes, characters and language suited the taste of the aristocratic audience.

The most common themes of this comedy are sex and the manners of the contemporary society. Gallantry and sex-antagonism find their consummate expression in the encounters of Etherege's Dorimant and Harriet in *The Man of Mode*, and of Congreve's Mirabell and Millamant in *The Way of the World*. The gallants do not believe in constancy in love. In making love, they are no different from Charles II of whom Halifax wrote: "It may be said that his inclinations to love were the effects of health and a good constitution, with as little mixture of the seraphic part as ever a man had". Mrs. Loveit is mistaken in taking Dorimant's love seriously in a society where the object of life is pleasure. What Etherege says to Celia seems to illustrate the accepted mode:

Then, since we mortal lovers are,
Ask not how long our love will last;
But while it does, let us take care
Each minute be with pleasure pass'd.  

11 "To a Lady, Asking him how long he would Love her", Verity, op.cit., p. 391.
Dormant in *The Man of Mode* acts on this principle. He tells Dove that "in Love there is no security to be given for the future".\(^\text{12}\)

Next to "the coming to a good understanding with a new Mistress", he loves "a quarrel with an old one" (II, 195). Belinda permits him to take the last liberty with her and even helps him in getting rid of Mrs. Loveit. She realises her mistake, but not before he renounces her for Harriet. Love is treated flippantly in the Restoration comedy of manners; it has none of the seraphic part.

The wits regard it as a physical appetite which it is only natural to gratify. In vain does Etherege's Lady Woodwill in *The Man of Mode* bemoan: "Lewdness is the business now, Love was the business in my Time" (II, 245). Love and lust have become almost synonymous.

Congreve's *Heartwell* in *The Old Bachelor* appears to be ashamed that his lust should threaten to degenerate into love. In most comedies of the period love is represented primarily as a concern of the body and not of the heart; it is, as Vanbrugh's Sir Charles in *A Journey to London* says, a thing of "Idleness and the fashion".\(^\text{13}\)

Wycherley's *Sparkish* in *The Country Wife* tells us that the gallants make love only to "show (their) parts".\(^\text{14}\) Each one of them follows several mistresses at the same time. Love is thus treated merely as a fashionable pastime.

\(^{12}\) The Dramatic Works of Sir George Etherege, ed. H.P.B. Brett-Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1927), II, 216. All volume and page references to Etherege's plays are to this edition.


Marriage is dreaded by the gallants as an encroachment on their liberty. Congreve's Ben in *Love for Love* shows his disinclination towards matrimony, saying, "I love to roam about from Port to Port, and from Land to Land". He suggests that to marry is to be "Port-bound". Before long the wife ceases to be interesting. "No, no, to marry is to be a Child again", says Tattle to Miss Prue in the same play, "and play with the same Rattle always" (319). Parquhar's Mirabell in *The Inconstant* regards marriage as a matter of great boredom because even a likable bride this night becomes less so next night: "And what next night the same, and what next night the very same, Soop for breakfast, Soop for dinner, Soop for supper, and Soop for breakfast again". The lovers in this comedy fear marriage as something soon likely to degenerate into a tedious drudgery. The husbands find it almost impossible to stand for long the stagnation complained of by Rhodophil:

> If thou couldst make my enjoying thee but a little less easy, or a little more unlawful, thou shouldst see what a termagant lover I would prove. I have taken such pains to enjoy thee, Doralice, that I have fancied 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; thou art a wife, and wilt be a wife, and I can make thee another no longer (Act III, scene 1).


Wycherley's Lucy in *The Country Wife* warns Alithea against the folly of marrying for love: "No, madam, marrying to increase love is like gaming to become rich; alas! you only lose what little stock you had before" (308).

The fashionable theory is that the love of the couple for each other is bound to diminish after marriage. Dryden's Rhodophil does not take long to be disenchanted with his beautiful wife, Doralice. When Palamede observes that Doralice has "good qualities enough for one woman", Rhodophil replies, "Ay, too many, Palamede. If I could put them into three or four women, I should be content". In *The Country Wife*, Pinchwife holds it for a maxim that "he's a fool that marries; but he's a greater that does not marry a fool" (262). According to Sparkish, the wits "condole for" their "deceased brother in marriage, as much as for one dead in earnest" (271). As marriage is at odds with a gallant's love of liberty and desire for indulgence, it is shunned and ridiculed. Dryden begins his *Marriage a la Mode* with a song that captures the tone of the entire tradition:

Why should a foolish Marriage Vow
Which long ago was made,
Oblige us to each other now
When Passion is decay'd?

The psychology of women characters in the Restoration comedy of manners is hardly any different. They look upon husbands as
great impediments in the way of their pleasure. "If you were my husband", says Lydia to Ranger in Wycherley's *Love in a Wood*, "I could not take your absence more kindly than I do" (78).

Wycherley's Olivia in *The Plain Dealer* has just thrust her husband out and eagerly expects her lover: "Go, husband, and come up, friend; just the buckets in the well; the absence of one brings the other. But I hope, like them too, they will not meet in the way, jostle, and clash together" (470). The very name of a husband is despised. After coming to London even Margery, the country wife of Pinchwife, finds her husband "musty" (359).

Most women are presented as having no belief in real virtue. According to Congreve's *Scandal in Love* for *Love*, women's desire to preserve their honour is due to fear, because "why shou'd a Man court Danger, or a Woman shun Pleasure ?" (281). Wycherley's Lady Fidget, Mrs. Squeamish and Mrs. Dainty Fidget in *The Country Wife* tell Horner that the reputation for virtue in their case is only a convenient cloak to avoid suspicion. "Our virtue is like the statesman's religion", says Lady Fidget to Horner, "the quaker's word, the gamester's oath, and the great man's honour; but to cheat those that trust us" (349-50).

The whole concern of these ladies is to maintain a pretence of virtue and to avoid scandal. Professor Croissant is sceptical of any abiding virtue even in the heroines of these plays. He thinks that though they may keep their virtue until married, they
will be likely to slip once the ceremony is performed. As husbands in this comedy are despised by the wives, cuckoldry occurs as the natural consequence of marriage. The Restoration audience seems to have enjoyed its exhibition on the stage. "A Play without a Beau, Cully, Cuckold or Coquette", says Farquhar in his preface to The Twin-Rivals, "is as Poor an Entertainment to some Palates, as their Sunday's Dinner would be without Beef and Pudding".

Referring to the contemporary state of morals, Sir William Temple says in his essay "Of Poetry" that there were nowhere else to be found "more Abandoned Libertines, more Refined Luxurists, Extravagant Debauches, and Conceited Gallants". Connelly shares this view as he remarks that during the Restoration, cuckoldry was "the badge of fashion" and "infidelity the boon of marriage". So the contemporary aristocratic audiences would have found nothing strange about wanton wives in the plays. They could not be much different from Charles II who, to use Burnet's words, "did not think there was either sincerity or chastity in the world out of principle". Several plays of the eighth decade contain risqué scenes. In The Country Wife Wycherley brought the cuckolding play to perfection. Through Horner he mercilessly exposes such women as talk virtue without having it. The gallant succeeds in cuckolding Sir Jasper Pidget almost in his presence. Calling attention to

19 Cited by Krutch, op. cit., p. 29.
the cynical sex intrigues in such plays as D'Urfey's *A Fond Husband*, Rawlin's *Tom Essence* and Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*, Smith rightly observes that in comedies from 1677 to 1687, "cuckolding and seduction are the dominant themes; the heroes, who dominate the action, are patterned either after Horner or after Dormant". Horner shows that virtue is woman's greatest affectation. Farquhar's Roebuck in *Love and a Bottle* desires Leantha to discard love and honour as mere "old bombast" (I, 35). No wonder that most wives in these comedies make a sport of cuckolding their husbands.

As for the gallants, they are as anxious to cuckold husbands as husbands to avoid being cuckolded. Etherege's Medley in *The Man of Mode* thinks it necessary to say to Bellair who is contemplating marriage, "... were I so near Marriage, I shou'd cry out by Fits as I ride in my Coach, Cuckold, Cuckold, with no less fury than the mad Fanatick does Glory in Bethlem" (II, 199). There is a whole crowd of cuckolds and whores of quality in these comedies. Etherege's Sir Oliver and Lady Cockwood in *She Would if She Could*; Wycherley's Sir Jasper and Lady Fidget in *The Country Wife*; and Congreve's Lord and Lady Touchwood, Sir Paul and Lady Flyant, Lord and Lady Froth in *The Double Dealer* are the outstanding examples. In *The Country Wife*, Horner's clever device of pretended impotence throws the husbands off their guard. He whispers his secret to Lady Fidget who invites him to do his worst to her.

Before long, he extends his clientage to Mrs. Squeamish, Mrs. Dainty, and others. Pinchwife cries out in agony to his wife: "What a swarm of cuckolds and cuckold-makers are here!" (294).

In vain does he curtail her liberty as he is neatly cuckolded by Horner. Wycherley's purpose is to represent an aspect of the contemporary scene, to expose its vice and folly. Horner is used as an instrument "to show the meanness of women of quality, as the author knew them". 21

In the world of this comedy, "keeping" is something fashionable, as it satisfies the gallants' need for variety and pleasure. Wycherley's Dorilant in The Country Wife voices the prevalent attitude towards keeping. "A mistress", he says to Horner, "should be like a little country retreat near the town; not to dwell in constantly, but only for a night and away, to taste the town the better when a man returns" (256).

Just as the writers of the comedy of manners chose themes and characters that pleased their aristocratic patrons, similarly they suited their mode of expression to their audience. In this age wit, defined by Dryden as propriety of words and thoughts, was cultivated among fashionable circles as the most important of social graces. Lee observed in his prologue to Gloriana (1676) that "Wit which was formerly but Recreation,/Is now become the Business of the Nation". The King and the courtiers were reputed

for their wit and for their appreciation of this quality in others. Moreover, several of the Restoration playwrights moved in the highest society, and they were men of great wit and refinement. They found a standard for their dialogues in the polite conversation of the fashionable set at the court. So their comic speech is characterized by wit, ease, and polish. Aphra Behn, in the prologue to The Rover (1677), emphasizes the distinguishing quality of this comedy: "In Short, the only Witt that's now in Fashion,/Is but the gleanings of good Conversation". According to Dryden, repartee is the soul of conversation, and the greatest pleasure it can provide is that of "chace of wit, kept up on both sides, and swiftly managed". In his Defence of the Epilogue Dryden argues that it is necessary for the dramatists of the time to write witty dialogues for their characters. The audience must have thoroughly enjoyed such scenes of brilliant repartees and wit-combats as those between Harriet and Dorimant, and Millamant and Mirabell. Thomas Fujimura regards wit as the very quintessence of the Restoration comedy.

There is much to suggest that the fashionable audience liked bawdy. Orrery is afraid of a play being damned due to inadequate bawdy: "Allow it pretty, 'tis confounded chaste,/And contradicts too much the present taste". The reaction of a gallant to a copy of Motteux' "Gentleman's Journal" is fairly symptomatic: "Here take your book Mr.", said he, "there is not a word of bawdy in't. How

in the devil can it be a journal fit for a gentleman?" No wonder that the Restoration comic playwrights took care to present many scenes of obscene conversation. Whereas the witty ladies and gentlemen try to hide the grossness of their thoughts under the cloak of refinement, the speeches of the fops and the other grotesques are often openly licentious. There are in these plays many descriptions of seductions or near-seductions. Vanbrugh's mildly protesting Berinthia in The Relapse is carried by Loveless in his arms into the dark closet. Wycherley's Sir Simon in Love in a Wood describes to Mrs. Joyner, how he found that Lady Flippant is "naught". He further tells her that he "threw her down upon the bed : but, in short, all that I could do to her would not make her squeak" (83). Even more licentious is the conversation between Lady Flippant and Sir Simon in the Park when she urges him to deal freely with her (36), or the one in which Lady Fidget challenges Horner to do his worst to her (283). Then there is Congreve's melting Lady Plyant in The Double Dealer who is curious to know from the gallant, Careless, when, where and how she can be kind to him (173). There is quite an indelicate conversation between Sir Frederick and Widow Rich in Etherege's Love in a Tub (I, 62). Even more immodest is the talk of Lady Fidget and her companions after they visit Horner in a masquerade (346-52). There is indeed no limit to the frankness of the dialogue in the Restoration comedy. The lewdness of language could not shock the

\[23\] Cited by Krutch, op. cit., p. 32.
audience, because these comedies, as Dennis wrote, were only a faint representation of actuality and one could hear more profanity in one evening in a tavern than on the stage in a year.

The hero of this comedy is a gay, wild and free gallant conducting his amours with exquisite skill and grace. The ladies find him attractive as he is well bred. In his amours he is discreet enough not to cause any discomfiture or embarrassment to a "kind" lady. He is libertine both in speech and action like Dryden's Rhodophil, or Etherege's Dorimant, or Shadwell's Longvil. Sometimes he is allowed to be "monstrous" lewd as Wycherley's Horner. It should not be an exaggeration to say that just as the period is dominated by the figure of the absolute monarch newly returned to power, so the plays are dominated by the figure of the rake-hero. His constant pursuit of lawless gallantry is understandable in a comedy patronized by the court, and written by some of the court wits. Debauchery was fashionable within the court circles. Actresses who appeared for the first time in female roles were not only admired but openly courted by the aristocratic members of the audience. The King's love for a famous actress, Nell Gwyn, was common knowledge. It cannot be said that the rake-hero is satirically conceived; indeed, the playwright's view of the rake appears to condone his abuse of aristocratic privilege. This may be due to the rake's relation to the aristocrat of real life who suffered from a sense of moral insecurity. "It was natural", says John Wain in Preliminary Essays (1957), "that he
should enjoy seeing plays in which men like himself were automatically wittier, handsomer and more successful than his anti-type the 'cit'. He liked watching himself being a devil with the women, too clever for the merchant, superior to the Puritan, and occasionally dressing up as a clergyman as a means to seducing someone's wife ..." As we shall see (in chapter four, below), the rake-hero of this type almost disappears in the sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century due to the new social and moral urges of the time.

The heroine of this comedy is gay, pretty, gossipping, though perhaps morally above reproach. She meets the gallant on terms of equality, and talks of love and sex without inhibition. She is "a little laughing, gigling, highty, tighty, pratling, tatling, gossipping" mistress. Etherege's Harriet in The Man of Mode will be glad to have the pleasure of conversation with the gallants in Hyde Park even if such conversations have been fatal to some of her sex (II, 234). The Restoration heroine exhibits an unrestrained frankness in sexual matters. We must remember, however, that whereas the hero is a libertine, a rake, the heroine is only gay and frolicsome and does not lapse from virtue into vice. The hero tries hard to possess her without marrying her, but she refuses to yield. This provides the basis for sex-antagonism and wit-combats in this comedy. The two wage a war of wit against each other till they finally dwindle into husband and wife. Their wit is seen in their ridicule of the fops and wit-wounds, and in their comments on men and manners.
The Restoration comedy of manners has provoked drastically divergent interpretations in recent years. Its detractors have tried to show that its concerns are "trivial, gross, and dull", and that the type as a whole is dedicated to "the repudiation of all standards". According to its defenders, however, its seemingly trivial sex jokes have a serious social function, and its "naturalism, libertinism and scepticism" have a peculiar moral and intellectual vitality. Dale Underwood even claims that this comedy deals with "problems fundamental not only to the seventeenth century but to the nature of man". These conflicting views obviously depend upon generalizations that cannot perhaps be made to hold good for the output of the entire period.

It becomes particularly hard to understand some recent, post-Knights, critics who endeavour to rescue this witty, gay, cynical and "immoral" comedy by making claims for profundity and high seriousness. To say that its controlling concern is the quest for reality, or that it offers a serious and consistent criticism of contemporary life is to make an exaggerated claim for this drama.


While many of these plays do reflect social and intellectual issues of the time, they almost invariably aim more at entertainment than at any deep meaning. They are certainly not concerned with presenting any profound ideas, or probing character deeply. But they do entertain us by their rousing action, risqué wit and a sort of boisterous energy. Broadly speaking, the world of this comedy is one of dalliance, leisure, and amusement. Congreve's Belmour in *The Old Bachelor* (1693) aptly voices its spirit: "Come, come, leave Business to Idlers, and Wisdom to Fools ... Wit, be my Faculty, and Pleasure, my Occupation; and let Father Time shake his Glass" (25-26). Most of these characters seem to live in a world described by Charles Lamb (in his essay "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century") as a "Utopia of gallantry, where pleasure is duty, and the manners perfect freedom".

The Restoration comedy owes its characteristics to the actual life of the upper class that it depicts. The code of behaviour expressed in it was the code actually operative in this society. This comedy could hardly have been anything but what it is. Perhaps of no other theatre could it be said with greater truth that "the drama's laws the drama's patrons give". In his well-known essay on the comic dramatists of this period, Macaulay is unfair in his severe censure because he does not judge their work in the spirit of the age in which it was produced.

It is, however, clear that the Restoration comedy does not depict the society as a whole in the modern sense. Not the whole
nation was impregnated with the spirit of the dissolute court of Charles II. For example, people flocked in their thousands to the churches to hear the sermons of men like South, Barrow and Stillingfleet. Also, it was in this age that Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress was so popular that before his death in 1688, ten editions had been sold. The middle classes lived as decent lives even now as they had done during the commonwealth. But they were not yet in a position to determine the course of drama, as the Restoration had placed supreme power in the hands of the merry King, the chief patron of the dramatists.

Soon, however, as the influence of the court wanes it will become impossible for this comedy to preserve its peculiar artificiality. In the changed situation its "ideal" world will provoke a powerful reaction. During the reign of Charles II, the nation had continued to be split up into two hostile camps as during the Civil War earlier. Indeed there was an almost complete severance between the life at the court and life in the city, as the latter was the stronghold of Puritanism. The Puritans had, of course, always regarded the drama and other forms of entertainment as the Devil's work. Much earlier than Collier, John Stockwood had in 1578 thundered at Paul's Cross: "Will not a filthy play with the blast of a trumpet sooner call thither a thousand than an hour's tolling of a bell bring to the sermon a hundred?" A year later, Stephen Gosson had directed his School of Abuse against all secular literature and made no distinction
between "Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters and such like Caterpillars of a Commonwelth". In 1583, Philip Stubbs had claimed biblical support for condemning drama and, in 1632, William Prynne had attacked the stage in no uncertain terms. In the Restoration the powerful influence of the court made it impossible for the Puritans to protest effectively against the licentious drama. The Restoration comedy received its nurture and inspiration from the court. That it was thus a class comedy accounts for its narrow interests, its partial vision of life and the general impoverishment of which Knights complains. The King and his courtiers, determined to enjoy to the full all pleasures now available, could relish this comedy with its scenes of lewd conversation, of husbands cuckolded and of wives seduced. But obviously such a comedy could flourish only so long as its indecency could look for support and example at court. Given a different social and cultural climate, it was bound to provoke reaction.

In the 1680s the process of emergence of a new social and moral climate was hastened by two groups of historical circumstances. The one was the gradual reappearance of political strife even before the reign of James II, and the emergence of a spirit of opposition. The other, of course, was the Revolution of 1688, resulting in the establishment of a new regime. This was, indeed, a grand triumph of revolt of national instinct against the absolutism of the Stuarts. The Revolution drove out James II who threw the Great Seal

29 Knights, Explorations, p. 149.
into the Thames and the old struggle for supremacy between the King and Parliament was settled in favour of the latter whose power to make or unmake kings became now an established fact. This remarkable victory against the abuse of Royal Power brought to an end the period in which monarchy had enjoyed the heyday of its glory. The power of the King was considerably curtailed and he became the servant of the people. Aristocracy in the old sense was thus dead or dying. "The Whitehall of the Merry Monarch", says Trevelyan, "now lay in ruins, never to rise again". During the reign of Charles II, while the fashionable London had prided itself upon the near presence of the Sovereign and acquired the courtier's tone, the remote provincial England did not participate in the life around Whitehall. This had encouraged the constitution of an exclusive, aristocratic literature. But after the Revolution, the keynote of English literature, as of life, was changed. "The new centre of literary culture after the Revolution", Pinto rightly says, "was no longer the court but the 'Town', the society of the coffee-houses and the taverns that was already flourishing in the reign of Charles II".

The Revolution enabled the upper middle classes to rise into social prominence by associating themselves with the nobility in

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the exercise of power and political influence. The great merchants and financiers who now participated in directing culture were the wealthy descendants of the "citizens" of the Puritan Republic. While their moral temperament remained subdued in the reign of Charles II they had not abjured their emotive powers, their deep-rooted needs and tastes, and their instinctive respect for moral laws. And they must have looked with horror upon his world in which moderation and decency were spurned, moral ideals of Puritanism were ridiculed, and infidelity and profligacy were fashionable. They could not possibly have associated themselves with a stage that exhibited such a life and on which they had not been represented except, perhaps, as an object of ridicule. But by giving them a new importance in government, the Revolution helped them to a voice in literary matters. In his excellent study, Professor Loftis has given a detailed account of the increasing importance of the bourgeois component in the audience after 1688. Books and theatre no longer remained an exclusive affair of the aristocracy. It now became possible for this great body of respectable Englishmen to assert its influence effectively against the corruption of the times as of the stage. It made a determined effort to reform the contemporary manners and morals and gave support to the reformers of the stage. In the nineties the Societies for the Reformation of Manners were doing an active work. Burnet remarks that even before the Revolution of 1688

\[^{33}\text{John Loftis, Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding (Stanford, 1959).}\]
there were certain Religious Societies which later determined to bring to the notice of magistrates the names of those who indulged in drunkenness, swearing and public indecency, and that later these came to be called Societies for Reformation. As Professor Krutch has shown, they worked for repressing verbal indecency or profaneness upon the stage. William III and Queen Anne did not forgive wanton indecency and they encouraged the efforts of these Societies by issuing proclamations against profligacy and irreligion. On January 21, 1691-92, William and Queen Mary, commanded all Justices and Sheriffs to execute the laws against lewdness and indecency. On March 26, 1702, Queen Anne issued a proclamation for the promotion of piety and morality, declaring that "We will, upon all occasions, distinguish persons of piety and virtue by marks of our royal favour".

With this encouragement and support from the government in their crusade against immorality, the Societies for Reformation brought to the public notice all kinds of evils wherever they existed. This is well illustrated by a letter published in Spectator No. 50, purporting to be from a person actively associated with these Societies. "I can tell you", he writes, "the progress that virtue has made in all our cities, burroughs, and corporations, and know as well the evil practices that are committed in Berwick and Exeter as what is done in my own family -- I can describe every parish by its impieties, and can tell you in which of our streets lewdness prevails; which gaming has taken the
possession of, and where drunkenness has got the better of them both". In this general reform movement, opposition to the licentious stage was inevitable. But even before the Revolution of 1688, opposition was by no means entirely inactive. John Evelyn complained to Viscount Cornby in 1664: "You know, my Lord, that I ... am far from Puritanism; but I would have no reproach left our adversaries in a thing which may so conveniently be reform'd. Plays are now with us become a licentious excess, and a vice, and need severe censors that should look as well to their morality, as to their lines and numbers". In the same year Richard Flecknoe, in his *Short Discourse of the English Stage*, complained of that "witty obscenity", first introduced by Fletcher, which "like poison infused in pleasant liquor is always the more dangerous the more delightful". Thomas Shadwell, in the preface to *The Sullen Lovers* (1668) wrote that "if there were nothing but the ill manners of it, it should make poets avoid that indecent way of writing". In 1673 Richard Baxter, a presbyterian divine, complained that the plays of his age were "heinous aggravated sins". Such sporadic attacks on the stage did not, however, count for much during the reign of Charles II when the influence of the court was strong.

34 Cited by Krutch, op. cit., p. 93.
After the Revolution, the climate of the age had changed and a strong reaction against the indecency and immorality of the comedy of manners set in. Some even advocated the complete suppressing of the theatre. Dennis wrote that "there was a warm report about town, that it had been twice debated in council, whether the theatre should be shut up or continued". While that did not happen, there were cases of actual trial and arrest of actors and playwrights. In the new climate the protests against the libertine ethic of the Restoration comedy gathered strength. James Wright in his *Country Conversations* (1694) complained that the comedies of his age generally depicted two young men who were notorious for excessive drinking and immoral behaviour. We shall refer (in chapter 4, below) to more of such contemporary attacks on the lead characters of this comedy. Sir Richard Blackmore, in the preface to *Prince Arthur* (1695) blamed the Restoration playwrights for writing immoral plays. "Our poets", he wrote in anguish, "seem engaged in a general confederacy to ruin the End of their own Art, to expose Religion and Virtue, and bring Vice and Corruption of Manners into Esteem and Reputation".  

It was, however, Jeremy Collier who, in his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) attacked with the utmost vigour the comedy of manners at its vulnerable points. He vehemently denounced it for its immodesty, its profanity, its abuse of the clergy, and its encouragement of immorality. He

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37 Spingarn, III, 229.
found in it "nothing but a little Whoring, Pimping, Gaming, Profaneness". His remarks show a hidden link connecting this indictment with the feeling which the middle classes had of their growing influence. Known for their earnest, practical, moral attitude to life, and for their inclination to care more for the value of subject-matter than for the polish of expression, they had all along felt uneasy at vices and follies of the courtiers as also at the immorality of the Restoration drama. With their instinctive preference for good sense over "small trifling forms", they were fortunate to find at last their strident spokesman in Collier, who declared in his *Short View*: "The stage seldom gives Quarter to anything that is serviceable or Significant but persecutes Worth and Goodness under every Appearance ... How often is Learning, Industry and Prugality ridiculed in Comedy? ... In short, Libertinism and Profaneness, Dressing, Idleness and Gallantry are the only valuable Qualities". He condemned the playwrights for flouting all principles of conventional morality in their mode of expression. In his view, "goats and monkeys, if they could speak, would express their brutality in such language as this". He seemed to excite the ladies' opposition to the licentious plays: "To treat the ladies with such stuff ... supposes their Imagination vithious, and their Memories ill-furnished".

He attacked Dryden for insinuating that a poet's chief business

38 Ibid. III, 263.
39 Ibid. III, 256.
was to delight, without correction or instruction. For him, as he remarked in the opening sentence of his Short View, the business of drama was to discourage vice and recommend virtue. An exponent of moral function of comedy, he angrily declared: "Indeed, to make Delight the main business of Comedy, is an unreasonable and dangerous Principle. It opens the way to all licentiousness, and confounds the distinction between Mirth and Madness".40

Today many of us will find the general tone of Collier's book intemperate, if not absurd. But its immediate influence cannot be over-emphasized. Collier encouraged the rallying of general opinion to the necessity of reform in comedy. Macaulay thought that he was practically responsible for reforming the English Stage. Krutch quotes Nichols as saying that "it is allowed on all hands, that the decorum which has been for the most part observed by the later writers of dramatic poetry is entirely owing to the animadversions of Collier".41 Dr. Ward shows how, after the Short View, the attitude of the law and government towards the stage showed a marked change:

The censorship of the Master of the Revels began to be exercised more strictly; actors were prosecuted for the use of profane language, and the playhouses were once more presented as nuisances by the grand-jury; the admission of women wearing masks into any of the theatres was prohibited; and Convocation occupied itself with the condition of the stage as a matter of moment to be pressed upon the consideration of the Crown.42

40Ibid., III, 266-67.
That Collier should have thus succeeded despite the fact that he had only followed the arguments of Richard Blackmore, and that he had been well anticipated by Shadwell, should not cause surprise. The reason for his great success was that his attack on the stage came at a time when a general movement for the reformation of manners and morals, and for ethical attitude towards literature, had already started. Its extraordinary success was a clear indication of the changed temper of the age, of the impulse to retreat from the looseness and cynicism of Rochesters and Sedleys of real life, or of their literary counterparts, Horners and Dorimants, and of the triumph of morality and sentiment over wit and fashion.

Another influence that worked for the reform of drama has been stressed by Smith. The ladies pulled their weight decisively on the side of virtue and grew to be a formidable force not to be ignored by the playwrights around the turn of the century. Even before 1688 they had been protesting against the cuckolding plays. They resented such plays as The Country Wife for giving free rein to the gallant, emphasizing female frailty, and mocking at true love and matrimony. Ravenscroft whose The London Cuckolds had offended the ladies, actually cut his next play Dame Dobson (1683)
to suit them. Especially after 1688 the dramatists found it necessary to give no offence to this important component of the audience. To give only one example, the prologue to Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia* says, "Bawdy the nicest ladies need not fear,/The quickest fancy shall extract none here". Smith shows how in 1693 Higden's *The Wary Widdow* and D'Urfey's *The Richmond Heiress* were intended to please the ladies with their serious heroines who value the heroes' sincerity. He thinks that the ladies played a significant role in paving the way for "exemplary" comedy (his term for "sentimental" comedy), and that by the turn of the century, they had "won their battle and were getting what they wanted". 43 In Chapter VIII of his book, Krutch gives many quotations from prologues, epilogues, prefaces and dedications to illustrate how self-conscious was the movement for a reformed drama, and how constantly the playwrights thought it necessary to appeal to their audiences to note that the play about to be presented or read complied with the new ideas of stage morality and hence had a right to favour.

The Restoration comedy of manners had come into existence in order to satisfy certain specific needs of a decadent aristocracy. It flourished till the social realities that justified it continued to exist. As it was incapable of satisfying the moral

43 Smith, *The Gay Couple*, p. 135. The point that ladies wielded an influence which made for less immorality in drama is again developed by Smith in "Shadwell, the Ladies and the Change in Comedy", *MP*, 46 (1948), 22-23.
and social needs of the age of William and Anne, it provoked a
reaction which, as stated above, gained in strength as the years
grew by. The merit of polish ceased to be a sufficient excuse
for all things. Truth could not be neglected in the worship of
epigram and paradox because, as Richard Blackmore wrote in his
"A Satyr against Wit" (1700), "who can forbear and tamely silent
sit; and see his native land undone by wit". Defoe in his The
History of the Devil referred, in a chapter heading, to the wits
as the devil's "particular modern privy councillors". For Steele,
whatever was blamable in itself became still more so "by the
success in the execution of it". The dramatists of the reign of
William III (1688-1702) reflected awareness of the new realities.

Congreve, for example, tried to meet the demands of the new
audience. In the prologue to his Love for Love, he wrote:

There's Humour, which for cheerful Friends we got,
And for the thinking Party there's a Plot.
We've something too, to gratifie ill Nature
(If there be any here) and that is Satire.

Farquhar in his Discourse upon Comedy (1702), indicated the mixed
composition of the new audience, and recognised the need for a
new type of entertainment: "... the Spleenatick Wit, the Beau
Courtier, the heavy Citizen, the fine Lady, and her fine Footman,
come all to be instructed, and therefore must all be diverted;
and he that can do this best, and with most Applause, writes the
best Comedy, let him do it by what Rules he pleases, so they be
not offensive to Religion and good Manners." In the preface to The Twin-Rivals (1701), he owned that he had written the play with Collier in mind: "I have... endeavoured to show that an English Comedy may Answer the strictness of Poetical Justice". He significantly ensured that at the end of the play the characters received their due rewards and punishments. Vanbrugh whose Relapse, a sequel to Colley Cibber's Love's Last Shift (1696), had been torn to pieces by Collier in his Short View (Chapter V), declared in his prologue to The False Friend (1701) that he had written the play to please the moral critics: "To gain your favour, we your rules obey,/And treat you with a moral piece today".

As a result of general disenchantment with aristocratic debauchery, and a growing spirit of rationality, there was, about the turn of the century, a marked improvement in the tone of comedies. Artistic traditions often show a tendency to survive for some time the needs that brought them into existence. But the comedies of the transitional writers are remarkable for their comparative purity and their freedom from coarseness and cynicism that mark the plays of Etherege and Wycherley. With Congreve, Southerne, Vanbrugh and Farquhar, especially with the last two, the comedy of manners undergoes a gradual transformation. Several characters in their plays illustrate the beginning of

disintegration of its comic pattern. Though Congreve displays
the narrow world of fashion and gallantry, he expresses to some
extent the spirit of the transitional period. His characters
certainly do not ring with quite the same note as, say, those of
Etherege. For example, Bellmour in The Old Bachelor indicates
his disillusionment with unrestrained debauchery. His speech
after Vainlove has requested him to visit Mrs. Fendlewife in his
stead, shows the rake's sense of exhaustion and weariness ("Flesh
and Blood cannot bear it always"). Congreve shows his awareness
of the new demands of morality in The Way of the World (1700),
written after Collier's attack on him. In his relative sobriety
and sententiousness Mirabell is different from the early
Restoration heroes, and anticipates the heroes of the eighteenth
century sentimental comedy. He is, as Fujimura remarks, "the
Restoration rake in the process of being transformed into a Wit
of the age of sense and sensibility".\textsuperscript{45} And Jean Gagen\textsuperscript{46} even
believes Mirabell to be an exemplary character, though this can
always be debated.

Southerne's The Wives' Excuse (1691) adequately expresses
the spirit of the closing years of the century. Its virtuous
heroine, Mrs. Frien dall, anticipates the heroines of the later

\textsuperscript{45}Thomas H. Fujimura, The Restoration Comedy of Wit (Princeton,
1952), pp. 185-86.

\textsuperscript{46}Jean Gagan, "Congreve's Mirabell and the Ideal of the Gentleman",
sentimental comedy. She is married to an impertinent coxcomb who neglects her and is unfaithful to her. In a previous Restoration comedy she could well have been made to find a gallant "to supply the defects of a husband". In fact, her brother, Springtime, considers it a satisfactory solution. "She has satisfied her Relations enough in marrying this Coxcomb", he remarks, "now let her satisfie herself, if she pleases, with anybody she likes better". She is loved by a young and handsome gallant, Lovemore, who is thrown into her company by the foolishness of Mr. Friendall. Lovemore makes two attempts to seduce her, but she repulses him on both occasions. She reprimands him at one stage (IV, i) and asks him why he has been pursuing her. "Perhaps 'tis from the general encouragement of being a Marry'd Woman," she remarks, "supported on your side by that Honourable Opinion of our Sex, that because some Woman Abuse their Husbands, every Woman may". But her own reaction to the situation is different. She will stay virtuous despite a strong provocation to the contrary. She suffers the "hard condition of a Woman's fate" (V, iii) and the mortification of her husband's exposure with Mrs. Witwoud. "I must be still your wife", she tells her husband, "and still unhappy" (V, iii). And in reply to Lovemore's "Some can't get husbands, and others can't get rid of 'em", she says, "Every woman carries her cross in this world : a husband happens to be mine, and I must bear it as well as I can". Smith rightly regards this scene as an outstanding example in the
drama of the age of a virtuous woman resisting a seducer. And for Dodds, Mrs. Friendall, the virtuous wife in distress, "links the play directly with later sentimental drama". The Wives' Excuse is a good example of the transitional comedy. A grossly neglected wife in the earlier Restoration comedy would not perhaps have thus repulsed the advances of an attractive gallant.

Vanbrugh's Amanda in The Relapse (1697) is much different from the previous Restoration heroines. Extremely unhappy, even angry, with her unfaithful husband, Loveless, she never entertains any thought of avenging herself by taking a lover. Berinthia fails to help Worthy to have "one short campaign with Amanda". "I can spare him nothing", replies Amanda, "but my friendship; my love already's all disposed of: though, I confess, to one ungrateful to my bounty" (I, 120). Later when she looks disordered after her discovery of Loveless's falsehood, Worthy makes a vain attempt to persuade her to make him an instrument of justice. Her steadfast virtue finally shames Worthy into repentance: "Behold this raging lion at your feet struck dead with fear, and tame as charms can make him. What must I do to be forgiven by you?" At the end of this emotional scene (V, iv) Worthy remarks: "Sure there's divinity about her. And Sh'as dispensed some portion on't to me. Far what but now was the wild flame of love, or ... the

vile, the gross desires of flesh and blood, is in a moment turned to adoration". Amanda has much in common with the sentimental heroines of the next century.

Vanbrugh's gallants are much less wild and much more serious and sentimental than the earlier Restoration gallants. Heartfree in his Provoked Wife and Young Fashion in The Relapse are no match for Dorimant or Horner in rakishness. Heartfree thinks that "to be capable of loving one, doubtless is better than to possess a thousand". Surely it is a devastating judgement on the licentious comedy of manners. While Horner and Dorimant would have allowed no conscientious scruple to restrain their way of life, Young Fashion fears that he may feel qualms of conscience and may not be able to cheat his elder brother, Lord Foppington, of his proposed bride. "Why, faith, Lory, though I am a young rakehell, and have played many a rogueish trick", says he, "this is so full grown a cheat, I find I must take pains to come up to 't, I have scruples -" (I, 35). While the previous Restoration heroes were heartless and they regarded any sign of emotion as weakness, Vanbrugh "permitted his heroes to use the word 'heart' without apology because they were beginning to think in different terms from those of Horner".48

Farquhar came under the influence of that new wave of sentimentalism which was gradually entering into literary

sensibility. In his comedies sentimentalism expresses itself in several forms. Their situations and characters are calculated to produce sentimental effect and extol morality. Farquhar's women are serious and consciously moral. Angelica in *The Constant Couple* values real love, and not mere gallantry:

*Angel.* Hold, Sir,—one Question, Sir Harry, and pray answer plainly: d'ye love me?

*Sir Har.* Love you! Does Fire ascend? Do Hypocrites Dissemble? Usurers love Gold, or Great Men Flattery? Doubt these, then question that I love.

*Angel.* This shows your Gallantry, Sir, but not your Love (I, 120).

The gay heroine of the early Restoration comedy could hardly have made such subtle distinctions. Later Angelica's righteous appeal to Sir Harry Wildair is made in a voice which belongs to the moral and sentimental eighteenth century: "I conjure you, Sir, by the sacred Name of Honour, by your dead Father's Name, and the fair Reputation of your Mother's Chastity, that you offer not the least offence!" (I, 140). The appropriately named Constance in *The Twin-Rivals* (1702) remains steadfast in her faithful love for Wouldbe. "Here let me worship that perfection", says Hermes Wouldbe about her, "whose virtue might attract the listening angels, and make 'em smile to see such purity, so like themselves in human shape!"

In her serious single-minded choice of Captain Plume, Silvia, the heroine of *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), is different from the previous Restoration heroine. "It was the 'natural' woman,"
says William Connelly, "whom he had discovered during his country life, and now brought into Restoration comedy as something distinctly new". Mrs. Sullen in The Beaux' Stratagem decides to give a rival to her brutal husband, as "Security begets negligence in all people". But it is significant that she would not actually cuckold him. Failing to awaken love in her husband, she thinks of separation rather than adultery. She tells Dorinda that "Nature is the first Lawgiver; and when she has set Tempers opposite, not all the golden Links of Wedlock nor iron Manacles of Law, can keep 'em fast" (I, 159).

Farquhar's gentlemen, too, give expression to sentiments entirely foreign to their predecessors in the early Restoration comedy. Captain Plume is really much better than his reputation. "No, Faith, I'm not that Rake that the World imagines", he says to the disguised Silvia, "I have got an Air of Freedom, which People mistake for Lewdness in me, as they mistake Formality in others for Religion" (I, 82). The gay and attractive Archer in The Beaux' Stratagem, though he tries to seduce Mrs. Sullen, is essentially different from the gentlemen of Etherege.

There are in Farquhar's comedies sentimental scenes of remorse and conversion. Aimwell in The Beaux' Stratagem (1707) has passed himself off as his elder brother, Lord Aimwell, and obtains Dorinda's consent to marry him. But at the time of the

wedding ceremony, in his sudden remorse for having deceived the innocent and trustful girl, he confesses the fraud. "I am no Lord", he says to her, "but a poor needy Man, come with a mean, scandalous design to prey upon your Fortune" (I, 135). Again, in The Twin-Rivals, Richmore, a professed rake who has forsaken his mistress Celia, repents of his villainy, thanks to the wholesome change produced in him by a true gentleman. "Your youthful Virtue warms my Breast", he says to Trueman, "and melts it into Tenderness" (II, 346). He would now make amends for his past villainies by marrying Celia. There is in this play a tearful scene in which Wouldbe who has been thrown into prison, is consoled by the virtuous Constance.

Congreve, Southerne, Vanbrugh and Farquhar, thus, introduced in their comedies some touches with a view to moral and sentimental effect. This trend can be ascribed to their desire to meet the new demands of the middle-class public. It is true that The Way of the World, The Recruiting Officer, The Beaux' Stratagem and The Relapse cannot be termed moral or sentimental comedies. But their authors were certainly not attempting to write the same kind of plays as those of Wycherley and Etherege whose heroes were notorious for their illicit amours, and the heroines for their coquetry. In the nineties there was a tendency to moderate the tone of comedy, to avoid excessive indecency. The rake was no longer presented as a model of perfection. The earlier intellectual, cynical and perverse comedy was gradually yielding place to a new
kind of comedy that contained the elements of emotion, sentiment and moralizing. While Congreve's departures from the dominant practice do not amount to much, that is not true of Southerne, Vanbrugh and Farquhar. Their comedies are remarkable rather for simple and natural expression than for brilliance and dazzle of wit. In them the situations often hover on the verge of the emotional; the heroines are moral and sentimental beings; and the rakes are vastly improved creatures, capable of being captivated by virtue and innocence, and of speaking in a seriously penitent strain. Sometimes their plots seem to be designed to provide opportunities for scenes of virtuous conduct or pathetic emotion.

The year 1696 had seen the production of Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* which has been claimed as the first sentimental comedy by Professor Bernbaum. As it retains some of the elements of the old comedy, it would be misleading to call it a purely sentimental comedy. Its heroine is a sorely tried wife, the virtuous Amanda. She has been forsaken by her husband, Loveless, who was led astray into fashionable dissipation. However, all ends well, with Loveless realizing at last the error of his ways and being reunited.

50 The importance of differentiating the drama of the nineties from that of the seventies is well recognized by A.H. Scouten, "Notes Toward a History of Restoration Comedy", *Pe*. 45 (1966), 62-70.
52 See Paul E. Parnell, "Equivocation in Cibber's *Love's Last Shift*", SP, 57 (1960), 519-34.
to her. The rake is reformed and reclaimed and virtue made triumphant through the appeal to the emotions of pity and gratitude. The sentimental element is mainly in the spectacle of a rake brought to see the errors of his ways by a virtuous wife. Its immediate success shows how in that age a certain strain of pathos and a conscious attempt at moralizing could exercise a tremendous hold over middle-class feelings. The pleasure they felt from the shedding of gentle tears at the sight of conjugal reconciliation in this comedy has been recorded for us by Thomas Davies. "The joy of unexpected reconcilement, from Loveless's remorse and penitence", he writes, "spread such an uncommon rapture of pleasure in the audience, that never were spectators more happy in easing their minds by uncommon and repeated plaudits". Later Cibber stated in his Apology (1740) that the success of his play was due to the "mere moral delight received from its fable". He gave his conventional plot a new emphasis by introducing the elements of sentiment and morality. As we shall see (in chapter 3, below) the triumph of female virtue over male libertinism is one of the recurring themes of the eighteenth century sentimental comedy.

It should be remembered that Love's Last Shift was written before Collier's Short View. Professor Krutch has mentioned a 


few more plays written in 1696, which are relatively free from
cynicism and perversity and which, like Love's Last Shift, have
repentant, moralizing heroes, and sentimental scenes. So Collier
cannot be credited with causing disintegration of the pattern of
the Restoration comedy; he only hastened it. In the new climate,
the playwrights of the period had to meet the demands of an
increasingly bourgeois audience for a "decorously moral and
genteel" comedy.

By the end of the century, then, the Restoration comedy of
manners had run its full course. As a result of a new upsurge
of morality and sentiment, it lay dying, leaving the stage clear
for a new kind of comedy that would harmonize with the new
ethos. In the next chapter we shall see how this new comedy
became a popular form of drama in the eighteenth century.