It cannot be denied that a new kind of comedy began to gain popularity as the seventeenth century drew to a close. Many scholars have called it sentimental comedy and, as shown below, rightly so. As the word "sentiment" and its derivatives will be used throughout this study, it is desirable to be broadly aware of the eighteenth century, as distinct from the earlier as well as the later, meanings of the term. Changes in historical perspective change the way we use literary terms. The different meanings of a word will depend on the intellectual milieu of those who use it. That underlines the need for development, on our part, of historical awareness of the sense in which technical concepts are used. The sense in which "sentiment" was used in the eighteenth century was much different from our present habit of usage.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "sentiment" is derived from the Latin sentire which means "to feel", and Chaucer used the word in this sense in his poem Troilus and Criseyde. In the seventeenth century the word denoted an amatory feeling or inclination, while in the Victorian age it meant a thought or reflection "coloured by or proceeding from emotion". In modern psychology, while "emotion" refers to feeling as it is actually experienced, "sentiment" denotes a disposition or tendency to feel
emotions, but is not itself experienced. Leaving aside "sentiment" in this particular sense, it may be noted that in our own day the word and its derivatives are chiefly used in a derisive sense, implying insincerity, mawkishness and a shallow romantic, even unbalanced, emotional attitude. A sentimental person is supposed to express a greater degree of feeling than a specific situation warrants; he tends to lavish disproportionate emotion on trivial matters.

In the eighteenth century, however, "sentiment" was by no means a word of disparagement. Though it meant various things, it was mostly used in a favourable sense. For example, Dr. Johnson, in Rambler No. 37 (1750), used the term to denote an emotional thought: "Either the sentiments must sink to the level of speakers, or the speakers must be raised to the height of the sentiments". In 1769 Smollett used the word to mean an emotion: "When thy soft heart with kind compassion glows, shall I the tender sentiment repress?" Some writers used the term to mean a reflection proceeding from emotion. For example, in 1762 L.D. Kames wrote that everything prompted by passion was termed a sentiment. The word also meant an epigrammatic expression of some pleasing or striking wish or thought. For instance, Sheridan's Charles Surface in The School for Scandal (III, iii) says, "Come, Mr. Premium, I'll 1

1 For various dates of the eighteenth-century usage of "sentimental" and its derivatives, see B. Sprague Allen, "The Dates of Sentimental and Its Derivatives", PMLA, 48 (1933), 303-07.
give you a sentiment, here's success to usury!" Some other well-known writers of the age also used the word approvingly. In the Oxford English Dictionary, Sterne, for example, is quoted as having written in 1768: "'Tis the monarch of a people ... so renown'd for sentiment and fine feelings, that I have to reason with". Thus the term "sentiment" was used in the eighteenth century to mean "refined and tender emotion; exercise or manifestation of sensibility; emotional reflection or meditation".

In modern psychology "sentiment" is defined as an emotional disposition centring round the idea of an object, while "sensibility" denotes the capacity of being stimulated by sense stimuli. The eighteenth century, however, was hardly conscious of any subtle distinction between the two terms. "Sensibility" then signified the power of feeling tender and refined emotions; of being moved by the pathetic in art and literature. This is best seen in the famous apostrophe to "Sensibility" in Sterne's Sentimental Journey (1768): "Dear Sensibility! source inexhausted of all that's precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows!" Sheridan used this term to suggest refined taste and feeling. In the opening scene of The School for Scandal, Joseph says to Lady Sneerwell, "Madam, it is impossible for me to suspect a man of Mr. Snake's sensibility and discernment". The word was also used to convey acuteness of apprehension or feeling. Addison, for example, wrote in Spectator No. 231: "Modesty ... is a kind of quick and delicate Feeling in
the Soul ... It is such an exquisite Sensibility, as warns a woman to shun the first Appearance of everything which is hurtful. Dr. Johnson's Dictionary (1755) gives "quickness of perception" among the meanings of the word.

Thus "sentiment" and "sensibility" meant almost one and the same thing in the eighteenth century. It could be an interesting exercise to show how the two terms were actually used by the writers of the period as interchangeable and synonymous. The sentimental comedy of the age, therefore, has sometimes been termed "comedy of sensibility". Even the history of the word "sensibility" is closely associated with that of "sentiment". Both came from France where sensibility was cultivated as a fine art before it became fashionable in England.

Today we think of a sentimental person as one addicted to indulgence in superficial emotion. But sentimentality need not be accounted a vice; it is often the trait of a young and vigorous people who are characterized by a heightened social consciousness and whose experience of life is not contaminated by frequent disillusionment. Security of life, more leisure, and relatively stable culture in the Augustan age proved conducive to the birth of a delicacy of sensation, a refinement of virtue and a sensitivity to the claims of others. Consequently, human sympathies had

a remarkably wide expansion. A man of sentiment or sensibility was supposed to be admirable. Only a truly cultured person was believed to be capable of reacting sentimentally and getting the highest pleasure from the tender and the pathetic. This is shown by the following lines from Hannah More's poem, "Sensibility: An Epistle to the Honourable Mrs. Boscawen" (1787):

Let not the vulgar read this pensive strain,
Their jests the tender anguish would prophane.
Yet these some deem the happiest of their kind,
Whose low enjoyments never reached the mind.3

Burgoyne, too, in the preface to his comic opera, Lord of the Manor (1780), suggested that only the "refined" could be susceptible to the appeals of the sentimental drama with its scenes of tenderness and sensibility.

That the term "sentimental" was quite fashionable, though it was loosely used, in the eighteenth century, is shown by the following passage (cited in The New English Dictionary) in Lady Bradshaigh's letter to Richardson in which she begged to be told the real meaning of the term: "Pray, sir, give me leave to ask you ... what, in your opinion, is the meaning of the word sentimental, so much in vogue amongst the polite, both in town and country? ... Everything clever and agreeable is comprehended in that word ... I am frequently astonished to hear such a one is

a sentimental man; we were a sentimental party; I have been taking a sentimental walk". Richardson's reply is not preserved, but he himself used the word in his novel Sir Charles Grandison (1754). Miss Harriet Byron, the heroine of this novel, wrote to Miss Lucy Selby: "And are there some situations in which a woman must conceal her true sentiments? ... Why was I born with a heart so open and sincere?" The novel also contains the memorable words: "The French only are proud of their sentiments at this day; the English cannot bear them. Story, story, story, is what they hunt after, whether sense or nonsense, probable or improbable". One recalls here Dr. Johnson’s familiar remark: "Why, Sir, if you were to read Richardson for the story, your patience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself". "But", he significantly added, "you must read him for the sentiment and consider the story as only giving occasion to the sentiment." Thus no suggestion of opprobrium attached to the eighteenth century use of "sentiment", and no hint of any undesirable lack of emotional control was associated with it.

The eighteenth century, by contrast with the Restoration period, was an age of enthusiasm, emotion and sentiment. The general opinion is that from 1660 for nearly a century it was an age of reason, satire and didacticism; that its literature was marked by coldness and want of feeling, being the product of

intelligence, wit and fancy rather than of emotion, passion and imagination. Such rigid and oversimplified generalizations are best avoided, as they overlook the complexity of the age. It is true that many of the intellectuals of the period accepted the notion that truth is a product of reason or common sense rather than of faith, difficult speculation or inspiration. Moreover, the intellectual triumphs of Newton and Boyle had been produced by reason as a measuring rod of the real world. But at the same time this was also an age of sentiment. Sentiment had become an important literary force long before Sterne wrote his Sentimental Journey (1768); and Henry Mackenzie, his Man of Feeling (1771). Certain sections of contemporary society indeed gave preference to rational thought and intellectual sophistication, to the elegance of manners and the refinement of urban civilization. But there was at the same time a strong reaction against the sophistication and artificiality of high life, against the rationalism, scepticism and materialism of the "Enlightenment" civilization.

While sentimental comedy is the earliest artistic expression of reaction against an epoch of dry matter-of-fact thinking, the aristocratic doctrine of sovereign reason came to be obscured by floods of sentiment in other forms of literature as well. As stated in chapter one, the middle classes, especially the upper middle class of rich merchants, acquired great importance after 1688. While they accepted the tone of the superior class, they did not feel in tune with it. The new elements of middle-class ethos
entered into the psychological and literary atmosphere of the classical age. Defoe chose to be the mouthpiece of the commercial middle class, and a sober emotion marks the pages of Robinson Crusoe. It was, however, the literary pair of Addison and Steele that entered for a definitely middle-class taste which had ever been scandalized by the sceptical materialism and the free behaviour of the aristocracy. The pages of the Tatler and the Spectator breathe with a moralizing sentiment which was calculated to lead the public back to the simple, emotional values. As educators of the middle classes, they achieved great success in their endeavour "to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality". In Spectator 10, Addison announced his moral and educational programme for the rising middle classes: "... I have resolved to refresh their memories from day to day, till I have recovered them out of that desperate state of vice and folly into which the age has fallen". He added: "I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffee-houses". In order to realize this aim, The Spectator covered many subjects, including the "pleasures of the imagination" in numbers 411 to 421 where Addison applied the ideas of Locke to develop a theory of beauty in both art and nature.

Instinct with a middle-class spirit, the essays of Steele are particularly remarkable for their sentimental interpretation
of life, for reproving social vices and follies in touching appeals to virtue. For example, careless husbands and wives are sought to be reformed through remarkably tender descriptions of conjugal happiness (Tatler nos. 85, 149 and 150). Besides, he wrote some extremely sentimental short narratives. Referring to the sad tale of domestic life in Tatler 114, a correspondent wrote appreciatively in Tatler 118: "I have perused your Tatler of this day, and have wept over it with great pleasure; I wish you would be more frequent in your family pieces...". Most of his tales are as moving as domestic tragedies of Rowe and Lillo. By showing virtuous persons in distress, Steele's tales introduced sentimental literature to a public much larger than the play-house audiences. It was almost a century later that Wordsworth presented in his Lyrical Ballads, deeply moving tales of woe, and characters as objects of sympathy and humanitarian feeling. One could say of Steele's tales, as Wordsworth said of his poems, that "the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling". It is the feeling that matters most in both cases. Steele, thus, revealed to his generation the sweet charm of tender sentiments, of family affections, and of the simple joys of the heart.

If Addison and Steele, through their moral and sentimental essays, widely influenced the nouveaux riches and the rising middle

5See, for example, Tatler Nos. 94, 95, 114, 198; Spectator Nos. 190, 375.
classes in particular, it was Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, who was eminently qualified to gain the attention of the aristocratic classes yet untouched by sentimentalism. His sentimental philosophy placed the rising sentimental drama in a stronger position. Ironically, the person responsible for his education and upbringing was John Locke whose Some Thoughts Concerning Education was largely the result of his reflections during the period he resided as tutor in the house of Shaftesbury's grandfather, Dryden's "Achitophel". According to Shaftesbury, whose collected works were published in 1711 as Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, man has natural goodness; he is endowed with moral sense which enables him to distinguish between right and wrong, and instinctively to prefer the right. It is natural for him to feel sympathy and love for his fellowmen, to be prompted by an instinctive pity for their misfortunes. Instinctively, he finds virtue beautiful and is drawn towards it by a natural attraction, unless he happens to be depraved by a wrong kind of education. What normally impels him to lead a virtuous life is the attractive beauty of virtue itself. He finds his highest happiness in exercising his natural instincts of pity, love, gratitude and benevolence. On the other hand, "by having self-passions too intense or strong, a creature becomes miserable". Hence the need for educating the instincts, training the feelings.

6 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, 3 vols. (London, 1727), II, 243.
and cultivating good taste. In this way man can pursue with a "disinterested" affection what his moral sense, when allowed to develop naturally, recognizes as right.

Shaftesbury does not believe in any conflict between the interests of an individual and those of society, because the individual's own good is included in the good of society. In his Essay on Man Pope expresses the same idea by saying that "God and Nature link'd the general frame,/And bade self-love and social be the same". The happiness to be obtained from the exercise of this instinct of social love by performing benevolent deeds was soon to become one of the commonplaces of literature. According to Shaftesbury, man is instinctively prompted to act virtuously by his natural affections, and in their exercise he finds his greatest happiness. He has, therefore, no use for the belief that postulates an omnipotent God dispensing rewards and punishments in a future life. He makes fun of the Established Church for reducing virtue to a merely prudential, mercenary quality by employing the method of "the rod and sweetmeat". Though an opponent of the selfish theory of conduct advocated by Hobbes, Shaftesbury does not deny the existence in man of the self-regarding instincts which he classes self-affections, and even of those instincts which are not "tending either to any good of the public or private", which he calls unnatural affections. But he emphasises that while anti-

7 Ibid., II, 163-69. Ernest Tuveson, "The Importance of Shaftesbury", ELH, 20 (December, 1953), 267-99, argues that a great portion of Shaftesbury's work is devoted to the study of evil in human nature.
social passions like malice and misanthropy are not natural to man and put him at odds with himself, his benevolent and altruistic emotions are innate. The human heart is as good and beautiful as the spirit of Nature that binds all things in natural coordination, in peace and loveliness. He believes in the divine perfection of Nature, that is, the whole order of God's creation. This brings to mind what Addison says in Spectator No. 393: "... Providence has imprinted so many Smiles on Nature, that it is impossible for a Mind which is not sunk in more gross and Sensual Delights to take a survey of them without several secret Sensations of Pleasure".

This perception of universal harmony, proportion and goodness in all nature gave a great fillip to ethical nature poetry, which Shaftesbury indeed forestalled in the nature worship of the "Apostrophe" in the Moralists. Many poets in the middle decades of the century, such as Thomson, Akenside, Henry Needler, John Gilbert Cooper and James Harris responded to the appeal of his benevolism and attitude towards Nature. The extent of this indebtedness has already been commented upon at length in a valuable article by Moore, and we need not cover this ground again.

A belief in the essential goodness of man can, one may think, too easily lead to a contempt for the control of reason over the feelings. By an easy transition it develops into the cult of primitivism and the idealization of the "noble savage". But nothing

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could be more remote from such idealization than Shaftesbury's idea of the cultured "Virtuoso". It is true that this school of sentimental philosophy encouraged the mawkish cult of sensibility. But it was also a powerful incitement to humanitarian action and it had a humanizing effect on society. It challenged not only the cynicism of Hobbes, but also the callousness of the Church which "defended all inequalities as part of a divine dispensation".  

One may perhaps trace the great increase in philanthropic activity in this age to the impulse given by Shaftesbury's theories: "A keener sensitiveness to the needs and sufferings of others, particularly of the poor, was not only reflected in literature but was seen in the lives of philanthropists and in the successive activities of the age—the foundation first of Charity Schools; then of Hospitals; and, in the last years of the century, of Sunday Schools ...". It should be remembered, however, that Shaftesbury's system was largely the assimilation of ideas of the seventeenth century divines of the Latitudinarian school, who had preached to their congregations the ethics of benevolence, good nature, and "tender sentimental feeling". Their teachings gave active encouragement to the eighteenth century cult of sensibility, with

10 Moore, Shaftesbury and the Ethical Poets, p. 321.
11 Trevelyan, op. cit., p. 347.
its exaltation of the "man of feeling" and its emphasis on the
cultivation of emotions as the highest aim of education.

R.S. Crane has shown with many citations from the
Latitudinarians that there was a definite strain of anti-stoicism
in their ethical and psychological teachings. He does not minimize
Shaftesbury's influence in the preparation for sentimentalism but
shows how the earliest impulse leading to its popular triumph in
the eighteenth century is to be sought in the influence of these
divines due to their propaganda of benevolence and tender feeling
during the period from about 1660 to 1725. Struggling against the
stoic stress on insensibility, these preachers disseminated a creed
of sensibility, and asserted that so far from suppressing the
tender emotions "we ought rather to look upon them as the marks
which distinguish men of genuine goodness from those who are merely
righteous or just". This was quite different from the Stoic
injunction. While Seneca recommended every help to neighbours in
distress, he urged upon his ideal man the necessity of doing this
"with a peaceable minde, and without change of countenance. He
will not therefore be moved ...". But the anti-Stoic and anti-
Hobbesian Latitudinarians put special emphasis on the emotional
satisfaction and keen pleasure that man, being naturally benevolent,

12 R.S. Crane, "Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of
Feeling'", EIIJ, 1 (1934), 205-30.
13 Ibid., pp. 216-17.
14 Cited by W.L. Ustick, "Changing Ideals of Aristocratic Character
and Conduct in the Seventeenth Century England", MP, 30 (1932),
147-66.
obtained by commiserating with the wretched and helping them. Later Shaftesbury laid a similar emphasis on the reality of the altruistic instincts in man and on the pleasure to be obtained from compassionate feelings and acts of benevolence, combatting the influence of the school of thought led by Thomas Hobbes, which had asserted that our natural passions "carry us to Partiality, Pride, Revenge, and the like". Here also, even before Shaftesbury, the mechanism of Hobbes had been opposed by a group of philosophers in the middle of the seventeenth century, who came to be known as the Cambridge Platonists. The chief members of this group were Cudworth, Henry More and John Smith. They had found that Hobbes's philosophy denied the possibility of moral and spiritual experiences which they found real and important. They had therefore been led to stress the importance of retaining the fundamental truths of Christianity which, they felt, gave a really satisfactory explanation of the whole of man's experience. Shaftesbury also detested Hobbes's doctrines which turned morality into mere expediency and which undermined the artistic impulses and achievements of mankind.

The Hobbes school, however, found a brilliant exponent in Bernard Mandeville, the author of The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices, Public Benefits (1714). He sought to demolish the arguments


of the Shaftesbury school by means of a trenchant raillery and cynical dissection of men's motives. He ridiculed the philosophy that found in pity, love and benevolence the fundamental human instincts and set out to demonstrate that all human actions, motivated as they were by such evil passions as pride, fear, envy, shame, or love of self, were essentially vicious. However, as such actions of an individual contribute to the public good, we are faced with a paradox: "private vices are "public benefits". In the short verse satire, The Grumbling Hive, or Knaves Turn'd Honest which forms the preliminary part of his book, Mandeville points out the absurdity of attempts "to make a Great an Honest Hive". 17

This is followed by a series of "Remarks" numbered A to Y, and a number of essays, meant as annotations to the verse fable, in which he expounds his theory of human nature. According to him, all human actions and impulses have their origin in self-love. Men give money to beggars "from the same motive as they pay their corn-cutter, to walk easy". 18

The rationalist and sophisticated sections of the Enlightenment society seem to have been convinced by the force of the Mandevillean school of thought. Chesterfield, the virtuoso of the graces, preached to his son the doctrine of enlightened self-interest in those letters which many parents put into the hands of their


18 Ibid., I, 255-59.
children as the hook of wisdom. Perhaps it is not without significance that the literary masterpieces, which appeared during the years when Mandeville was engaged in stressing the bestial character of humanity, excluded the sentimental spirit. Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, his translation of the *Iliad*, and the *Dunciad* are classical, intellectual and satiric. Swift declared that he always hated all societies, professions and communities, but "principally hated and detested the animal called man". In the first two parts of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) he ruthlessly exposed the discrepancy between man's gigantic pretensions and dwarfish merits.

Mandeville's cynical appraisal of humanity could not, however, retard the progress of sentimentalism in life and literature of the age. It provoked bitter opposition from Shaftesbury's disciple, Francis Hutcheson, who cogently recast his master's doctrines in his *The Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725). That we do feel for or against those who cannot affect us personally, that we rate virtue higher than success, and that we lose with honour rather than win with dishonour, are not based on reason. Such preferences, he maintained, arose from moral sense or sentiment, an intuition (Shaftesbury's "moral sense") unaffected by considerations of advantage. Moral judgment was to him a matter of feeling or sentiment. He went beyond the traditional five senses to include "Public Sense" or sympathy, the "Moral Sense", the sense of honour, and imagination, which he called the pleasant
perceptions arising from "regular, harmonious, and uniform objects". Besides Hutcheson, prominent leaders of public opinion like Bishop Butler, and the influential religious leaders like William Laud and John Wesley, despite their divergencies from Shaftesbury, rejected Mandeville's cynical view of human nature. Indeed, as Willey observes, "on the whole the eighteenth century thought well of human nature, and it was generally believed that men were 'by nature' sociable, sympathetic, and benevolent. Good results, therefore, were to be expected from the nature of man, and as for vice ... the wise ordinances of Providence could be relied upon to turn it to good ends ... On the whole, man's 'good nature' was supposed to be a part of the beneficent automatism of things".19

As for the Chesterfieldian system of education, if any one book is to be selected to represent opposition to its aims and methods, the choice must fall on Rousseau's Emile (1762), translated into English in the same year. It was so popular that two further translations appeared in the following year. "Few books", it is said, "have had a greater immediate effect on English educational thought".20 Anxious to preserve Emile's innocence, Rousseau snatched him away from Paris in protest against its values: "Then

farewell Paris ... With all your noise and smoke and dirt, where
the women have ceased to believe in honour and the men in virtue.
We are in search of love, happiness, innocence; the further we go
from Paris, the better". Rousseau preached a natural, simple life,
recommended faith in mankind and the ability to display sensibility
and to shed tears, and taught that the laws of politeness were to
be found in a benevolent heart. He warned the man in pursuit of
success, glory and sophistication that he was but making ready to
"devour his gold on a dunghill", that he would never know what it
was to live. He advocated the teaching of benevolence, and happily
spoke about his Emile: "The good he does comes from his heart,
not his purse. He gives the wretched his time, his care, his
affection, himself; and when he reckons up what he has done, he
hardly dares to mention the money spent on the poor". England was
already emotionally prepared to respond spontaneously to Rousseau's
glorification of natural man, and of the innocence and happiness
to be found in the state of nature. His protests against the
Enlightenment civilization and his ideas about the natural man
reinforced the popular doctrines of the Shaftesbury school. He
thus gave further impetus to the rise of sentimentalism in
literature, or rather to the whole sentimental movement in thought
which was the manifestation of the psychological need of the age
in an atmosphere of emotional starvation.

According to Shaftesburian philosophy, then, nature as a whole
is beneficent; man is by nature inclined to good, not evil; it is
society which corrupts his instinctive preference for truth, beauty and goodness. These ideas which attained wide popularity furnished a philosophical basis for a new emphasis on feeling, natural dignity and simple virtue — the values that constituted the nucleus of sentimentalism. Consequently, the literature of the age idealizes the simple, honest man with a kind heart. Pope proclaimed that the honest man was "the noblest work of God", and Edward Young whose Night Thoughts, animated by passionate feeling, tended to bring about the overthrow of the barriers of intellectuality, asserted: Th' Almighty from His Throne, on earth surveys/ Nought greater, than an honest, humble heart. Henry Brooke in his Universal Beauty (1735) urged mankind to abandon the artificial and to be guided by natural instinct. Mark Akenside's Pleasures of the Imagination (1746), coloured by a certain idealistic emotion, presented a sentimental kind of aesthetics. In The Seasons (1726-30) Thomson who called Shaftesbury the friend of Man celebrated with a remarkable intensity of feeling, the charm of the English countryside, away from the overheated artificiality of towns. The hymn which closed The Seasons represented Nature as the product of God to whom we owed "Such beauty and beneficence combined". Collin's odes sprang from his spontaneous sensibility and were marked by a tender melancholy. Cooper, Joseph Warton, and Gray disseminated various tenets of the sentimental faith — the moral power of natural beauty, the innocence of the state of nature, the superiority of emotion to intellect, and the inhumanity of cruelty towards God's
creation. Describing luxury as "curst by heaven's decree", Goldsmith declared his preference thus: "To me more dear, congenial to my heart, One native charm, than all the gloss of art".

The major novelists of the period advocated the cultivation of a feeling heart with an abandoned fervour. The proof of such a heart was required to be given by the weeping eye. In the eighteenth century tears were regarded as a definite symptom of sensibility. A person of sentiment or sensibility would take every opportunity to burst into a flood of tears as they were deemed to be sanctifying. The cult of distress was indeed an important aspect of the cult of sensibility. The eminent writers of the age used such significant expressions as "Never before have I revelled in such luxury of tears"; "pity the greatest luxury the soul of sensibility is capable of relishing"; "voluptuousness of sorrow"; and "a pleasing kind of distress". Sir Richard Steele, in the epilogue to his play, The Lying Lover (1703), wrote that to excite mirth was a lower achievement than "with pity to chastise delight". In Tatler No. 89 he spoke about "that calm and elegant satisfaction which the vulgar call melancholy" but which "is the true and proper delight of men of knowledge and virtue". In the preface to The Conscious Lovers (1722) he spoke of a "joy too exquisite for laughter". With many writers of the age, pathos became a highly desirable element, and they tried to evoke from their readers a

sentimental response which was characterized by an element of enjoyment as well as of grief or pity. According to Sir Leslie Stephen, such a response is the name of "the mood in which we make a luxury of grief". 22

Richardson's Clarissa referring to the pleasure that accrues from sensibility, says, "... for ten times the pain that such a sensibility is attended with, would I not part with the pleasure it brings with it". In one of his letters, Sterne spoke of "some tender-hearted damsel on whose cheeks some bitter affliction has placed a tear", hoping that after her story "you shall take a white handkerchief from your pocket and wipe the moisture from her eyes and your own". Tears gushing forth for the miseries of the people indicated the happiness of the soul. Mackenzie in the essay entitled "Advantages to be drawn from Scenes of Sorrow", in The Mirror No. 72 (1780), asserted: "There is a sympathetic enjoyment which often makes it not only better, but more delightful, to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting". Such an attitude is found in numerous novels and plays of the period, portraying characters with their faces bathed in tears while they listen to stories told by the insulted and the injured. Prévost, starting the fashion in Europe, had written in the person of his Man of Quality: "If tears and sighs are not to be described as

pleasures, it is true nevertheless that they have infinite sweetness for a person in mortal affliction. The moments that I devoted to my grief were so dear to me that to prolong them I abstained from sleep". It was, however, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) which must be acknowledged as the culminating example of the literature of feeling. Thousands sent Rousseau ecstatic letters as this novel made them drink *la coupe amère et douce de la sensibilité*; it expressed to perfection feelings for the simple virtues, for nature, and for elementary conflicts between sobriety or duty, and passion or pleasure. In England, as stated above, the Latitudinarian divines as well as Shaftesbury had already given a religious and philosophical basis to sentiment.

Sentimentalism became in the eighteenth century, against the background of its many crudities and barbarities, part of a larger process by which life and literature were being made more human and humane. There was an increasing realization of the hardships which the majority of mankind had to suffer. This could be seen in men's changing attitudes towards one another. In France, the effects could be seen in the decline of religious fanaticism. The Huguenots who had survived Louis XIV's terrible persecutions in the seventeenth-century France were now treated with understanding and sympathy. Voltaire exposed the cruelty of criminal trials with

the result that torture and mutilation became rare. In Prussia, refugees from religious persecution in other countries were made welcome by its rulers like Frederick William I and his famous son, Frederick the Great. In England, Roman Catholics and Protestant dissenters who had earlier suffered most annoying civil disabilities could now lead relatively peaceful lives. The principal leaders of the Methodist movement opposed the apathy of the Church of England that prevailed in the early part of the eighteenth century. Whereas previously petty crimes against property were punishable by death, juries now often refused to convict the accused criminals. The educators inveighed against callous teachers, and benevolent citizens donated money to foundling hospitals. Henry Fielding praised in *The Champion* (February 16, 1740) the vogue of charity ("this virtue hath shown brighter in our time than at any period which I remember in our annals"); and in *Covent-Garden Journal* (May 5, 1752), he mentioned a very large number of schemes for helping the poor. Dr. Johnson, in *The Idler* (May 6, 1758), wrote that whenever people in general were asked to help in a good cause, they were ready to contribute something. Goldsmith's Chinese sage in *The Citizen of the World* spoke of England's exalted virtue in the cause of charity. The French social critic Abbé de Saint-Pierre described this new spirit as "bienfaisance", while Fielding called it "goodness of heart".

Perhaps it would be an exaggeration to say that the goodness of heart governed all human relations in England where the children
were still made to drag buckets of coal in the mines. But even there the seeds of decency were being planted. Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* (1776) declared that the prosperity of society depended on the prosperity of its workers, and his own sympathies lay more with the labourers than with their masters. Earlier, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) he had called sympathy the amiable virtue of humanity. Observing that the unfortunate renewed their grief by relating their sorrows, he added: "They take pleasure, however, in all this, and it is evident, are sensibly relieved by it, because the sweetness of the bystander's sympathy more than compensates the bitterness of their sorrow" (I, i).

Distrustful of reason, he spoke up for feeling. Expressing his sentimental view of moral judgments, he remarked: "If virtue therefore pleases for its own sake, and if vice as certainly displeases the mind, it cannot be by reason, but immediate sense and feeling, which reconciles us to the one and alienates us from the other" (VII, iii). David Hume, in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) went so far as to affirm that "Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (II, iii). Here he argued that reason, so much deified by the intellectualists, was quite fallible, that it led us to nothing ultimately certain, and that to rely too much on it was to fall into an abyss of scepticism. He admitted the primacy of feelings. Even moral judgments were to him, as they were to Shaftesbury and Adam Smith, a matter of feeling or
sentiment. For him, the qualities really entitled to the approbation of mankind were beneficence, friendship, gratitude and a generous concern for humanity. Even Alexander Pope, in *Spectator* No. 408, observed that our actions "can never proceed immediately from reason", and that the Passions "are to the Mind as the Winds to a Ship", without which it could not move. Later he expressed the same idea in his *Essay on Man*:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{The rising Tempest puts in act the soul,} \\
\text{Parts it may ravage, but preserves the Whole} \\
\text{On life's vast ocean diversely we sail,} \\
\text{Reason the card, but Passion is the gale.}
\end{align*}\]

Most English novelists of the eighteenth century laid emphasis on the cultivation of the feelings as though in sentiment, pity and tears they recognized the most effective teachers. The capacity to feel became the supreme test of character. Richardson's insistence on feeling put him at the head of the sensibility movement. His perfect man, Sir Charles Grandison, is so framed that he is bound to pity and suffer. "The heart rather than the head" is his criterion for judging men. Clarissa, the heroine of *Clarissa Harlowe*, is described as "of great Delicacy, mistress of all the accomplishments, natural and acquired, that adorn the Sex". She believes in a feeling heart even if it is attended with grief. Richardson's readers possessed a high degree of sensibility since

they implored him, as the novel was in progress, to rescue his heroine from her tragic fate. Allworthy in Fielding's Tom Jones is constantly "meditating in what manner he might render himself most acceptable to his Creator, by doing most good to his creatures". In The Champion (January 3, 1740), Fielding declared: "I do not know a better general definition of virtue, than that it is a delight in doing good". He believed that an individual performing benevolent actions experienced supreme happiness. Sterne, the author of Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey, idealized feeling or sensibility, showing that sensibility alone made man generous, and enabled him to respond to the joys and sorrows of his fellow-creatures. Man was most God-like, not when he thought, but when he felt. Sterne pictured the world mainly to draw from it suggestions for certain moods and feelings. This attitude became almost a leading fashion in mid-eighteenth-century literature. Smollett's Matthew Bramble, watching the tearful reunion of the members of a poor family, "sobbed and wept, and clapped his hands", and declared to the weeping family, "I would have travelled a hundred miles to see this affecting scene". Smollett's Roderick is also endowed with the laudable ability to weep with a weeping heroine in the theatre. Goldsmith's Man in Black is heard professing himself a misanthrope, though actually his cheek glows with compassion. Mackenzie thought that the most important part of education was the development of sensibility. In The Man of Feeling he stressed the importance of cultivating the innate
benevolent feelings of the heart: "... let the feelings be awakened, let the heart be brought forth to its object, placed in the light in which nature would have it stand, and its decisions will ever be just" (lx). Harley, the hero of this novel, is a man of "extreme sensibility", presented in a series of sentimental sketches. In his next novel, The Man of the World, Mackenzie was roused to describe the true pleasure to be obtained from benevolent feeling acts: "I see the purpose of benevolence beaming in his eye! — its throb is swelling in his heart—he claps her to his bosom—he kisses the falling drops from her cheek—he weeps with her; — and the luxury of his tears baffles description" (I, xviii). Such an emotional expression was regarded as an estimable quality by many writers of the period.

The popular poets and novelists of the age, thus, reflected the spirit of the contemporary sentimental movement. There existed between their works and their public a common bond of sympathy due to their quality of sensibility. This is often manifested in the readiness with which the characters possessing this precious quality could shed tears. These writers placed accent on simple piety and natural feeling, on the "softest benevolence" and the "tenderest sentiments". In view of this sentimentalism in life and literature, 25

it is misleading to call eighteenth century the age of reason, or savage pessimism, or enlightened scepticism. It was no less an age of sentiment. Professor Wood even thinks that sentimentalism grew from the essential temper of the Augustan age. He points out that "the thought of the early eighteenth century was based on Reason, and sentimentalism is closely connected with rationalism. The doctrine of the essential goodness of mankind was the corollary of the Augustan belief that Reason was a gift granted impartially to all men by Nature, without distinction of class or nationality."26 We have seen how there was enough even in the first half of the eighteenth century to link it with its latter half which Frye has aptly termed "the age of sensibility".27

The drama of the age was as much influenced by the social and literary phenomenon of sentimentalism as by the movement to reform the morals and manners of the nation. It became both "pure" and sentimental. The recognition of this fact after this survey should prepare us for the great popularity of sentimental comedy in the eighteenth century. Also as some of the traits of sentimentalism have been suggested above we can readily see the justification for calling this comedy sentimental. It is difficult to agree with Professor Loftis when he asserts28 that there was no

27 N. Frye, "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility", ELH, 23 (June 1956), 144.
28 J. Loftis, Comedy and Society, p. 127.
such thing as sentimental comedy but only sentimentalism in comedy. He can be answered by saying that it should be called sentimental comedy because it is the quality of sentimentalism that really differentiates it from the Restoration comedy. It is, however, true that "sentimental" includes too many qualities to have a specific meaning. Critics have not been able to offer a clear and comprehensive definition of the term. Ward and Nettleton find the root of sentimental drama in pity. Bembaum finds it in a certain belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature which he calls "the mainspring of sentimentalism" and the fundamental assumption of the sentimental playwrights. Nicoll seems to find its quality in pathos and in a moral problem. An adequate definition of sentimental comedy must cover these important points and perhaps even more in order to specify its distinguishing features. The difficulty with these definitions is that none of them is quite applicable to every sentimental comedy of the age. We may have ten sentimental comedies, each stressing different sentimental elements. So, instead of defining sentimental comedy, it may be more helpful to say that a play becomes sentimental if it emphasises one or more of the various sentimental elements (stated below).

It is not easy to suggest a satisfactory substitute for the term "sentimental comedy" while referring to such plays as The


30 Bembaum; op. cit., p. 2.
Careless Husband, The Conscious Lovers, The Foundling and The West Indian. Their principal appeal is not to the sense of the comic, but to more serious emotions. They substitute sentiment for laughter; they make their audiences experience the gentler emotions and witness the triumph of virtue; they radiate a new sentimental and humanitarian zeal. It is difficult to admire the substitute "Exemplary Comedy", suggested by Mr. Smith. This nomenclature gives no adequate idea of the most distinguishing feature of this comedy; - it is, after all, its marked emphasis on the element of sentiment or sensibility that gives it its distinctive tone and mood. This comedy endeavours to give "tender and tearful joy" instead of a comic dénouement. Intent upon raising a sigh and calling forth a tear like many sentimental novels of the age, it leaves its audience rather with a warm glow than with a laugh or smile. It contains a sympathetic, serious, and emotional treatment of a serious subject, though it ends happily. Its action is often mixed with expressions of "tremulous emotion and intense pathos", and its principal characters show remarkably tender minds and soft hearts and are at times on the verge of permanent distress. It has, therefore, been aptly termed sentimental comedy by such scholars as Ward, Waterhouse, Nettleton, Bernbaum, Krutch and Nicoll. Aply because, it may be repeated, the humour of the early comedy

31 Smith, The Gay Couple, p. 231. This term (as opposed to "sentimental") is again proposed by him in his article "Shadwell, the Ladies, and the Change in Comedy", MP, 46 (1943), 22-33.
gives place here to sentiment or feeling as the predominant element. The sentimental comedy appeals to the heart rather than intellect; it stresses human nature rather than social manners; it evokes pity for virtue in distress. It is serious and didactic. It may be said that it is sentimental due, to some extent, to its conscious expression of a moral precept. Professor Wood rightly observes that "as morality enters in to any marked degree, intellect must yield up its place to sentiment, and we immediately begin to move away from the comic spirit".32

The sentimental comedy was written first in reaction against the bawdy and inhuman comedy of the early Restoration period. The demands of the bourgeois audience caused it to become "decorously moral and gentle". Its writers made a clear profession of writing with a definite moral purpose. They often appealed to their patrons to note that their plays complied with the new ideas of stage morality. Gibber, for example, proclaimed that his Careless Husband (1704) was written in answer to the best critics who "have long and justly complain'd that the coarseness of most characters in our late comedies have been unfit entertainments for people of quality, especially the ladies". It was Steele, however, who was the foremost theoretical advocate of this moral, sentimental comedy. He actively campaigned for this new drama. In Tatler No. 3 he answered the author of The Country Wife because he "condescends to

represent the insults done to the honour of the bed without just reproof". In Tatler No. 8 he referred to Ravenscroft's *The London Cuckold* as a "heap of vice and absurdity". In Spectator No. 51, he spoke of the smuttiness that marred so many dramatic compositions. He hit at the kind of play in which "a fine Gentleman ... lies with half the women in the play, and is at last rewarded with her of the best character in it". He suggested a new way of writing in which there was no place for the bawdy. In Spectator No. 65, Etherege's *The Man of Mode* was condemned as "a perfect contradiction of good manners, good sense, and common honesty". He wanted such plays "whence it is impossible to return without strong impressions of honour and humanity". In Spectator No. 525 he wrote that the writings of the Restoration period "are such as would tempt one to think there had been an association among the wits of those times to rally legitimacy out of our island", but as for himself, "I must confess it has been my ambition, in the course of my writings, to restore, as well as I was able, the proper ideas of things".

Sentimental comedy, as stated above, is based on sentiment or emotion rather than reason or intellect. It is thus different from the Restoration comedy which excluded sentiment, keeping emotional idealism well outside its sphere of hard realism. While Collier had protested only against the indecency of the Restoration comedy, Steele and others had also been shocked at its "singularly inhuman spirit". Indeed, the Restoration writers, like Hobbes, had viewed emotion with dislike and contempt. Steele, however, strongly
defended sentiment in the new comedy. In the preface to The Living Lover (1702), speaking of his remorse-stricken hero, he wrote: "The anguish he there expresses, and the mutual sorrow between an only child and a tender father in that distress are, perhaps, an injury to the Rules of Comedy; but I am sure they are a justice to those of Morality". In the epilogue we are told that laughter is despicable, "a distorted passion"; while pity is of divine origin, and "made us ourselves both more approve and know". Pity is equated with benevolence and hailed as something which Nature gave "for man to man". Such grave sentiments were expressed again and again by this most prominent practitioner of the sentimental comedy in the early eighteenth century. In Tatler No. 8, he voiced the hopes of sentimental dramatists: "What may not be brought to pass by seeing generous things performed before our eyes?" His ideals were satisfied by such serious comedies as Cibber's Lady's Last Stake and The Careless Husband. In Tatler No. 8, he wrote: "The grave and serious performances of such as write in the most engaging manner by a kind of divine impulse, must be the most effectual persuasives to goodness". "To be apt to shed tears", he wrote in Tatler No. 68, "is a sign of a great as well as little spirit". Again, in Tatler 134, he pointed out that tenderness, compassion and humanity were, as much as reason, attributes which distinguished men from brutes. Steele, thus, kept up a constant propaganda to influence public literary taste and to establish the sentimental
tradition. He strengthened the theoretical basis of the moral, sentimental comedy by praising or blaming in his essays the current plays in accordance with his principles.

Advocated by Steele, favoured by the sentimental middle classes, and supported by a contemporary sentimental movement in thought that was encouraged by ethical theories assuming human benevolence, the sentimental comedy became a popular form of drama in the eighteenth century. Coming into existence even before the beginning of the century, it was the earliest expression of that sentimental view of life which, as shown above, found expression in several forms of the eighteenth century literature. "It was not, indeed, in the theatre", says Bateson, "but in the essays of Steele and Shaftesbury and the novels of Richardson and Sterne that 'sentimentalism' received its fullest and perfected expression". But perhaps it is nearer the truth to say that it was in the theatre that sensibility found the largest scope.

As we shall see below, every decade of the century saw the successful production of plays which portrayed characters whose joys and sorrows were productive of heart-stirring emotions, whose problems were treated without shocking decorum, and whose exemplary conduct contributed to the edification of souls. These also depicted certain erring characters (as shown in Chapter 4, below) who finally showed goodness hidden in the depths of their

35Bateson, English Comic Drama, p. 12.
souls, thus revealing human nature as essentially good and generous. The contemporary audiences seem to have been in no mood to forego pleasure that accrued from the shedding of gentle tears; they enjoyed the pathetic scenes in these comedies, and wept with their characters, thus exhibiting a becoming sympathy for their species. As Nicoll remarks, "'sympathetic' tears and 'sentimental' tears were almost synonymous terms for the eighteenth century". The "honest" tears which Tom Davies says the spectators shed at Cibber's Love's Last Shift were "sympathetic" tears and thus highly commendable. In the preface to The Conscious Lovers, Steele approvingly refers to a certain general who wept over the distresses of Indiana, the virtuous heroine of this play. Sentimentalism, thus, meant "the return of what we may call sympathy to the theatre; it restored to comedy the humanity which the Restoration had suppressed".

We shall now see how in every decade of the century the playwrights wrote comedies containing sentimental elements, showing various degrees of sentimentalism in their treatment of themes and characters. The London Stage makes it plain that most of them were quite popular in their time. In the first decade, Farquhar wrote several such comedies (as shown in Chapter 1, above).

35 Bateson, op. cit., p. 7.
Richard Estcourt's comedy The Fair Example (1703) has a significant title. The "fair example" is set by its virtuous heroine, Lucia, who remains steadfast in her fidelity to her wicked husband, though her heart "bleeds with tenderness and pity". The prologue declares that "some mirth, some pity, would our action move".

Steele's The Funeral (1701), though written mainly in an amusing style, contains several sentimental elements. For example, Trusty, the honest steward of Lord Brumpton, sentimentalizes over the virtuous Lord Hardy, the disinherited son of his master:

"Forgive me, my honoured master (Jeeps ... and hug him). I've often carried you in these arms that grasp you; they were stronger then, but if I die to-morrow, you're worth five thousand pounds by my gift - 'tis what I've got in the family, and I return it to you with thanks. But alas! do I live to see you want it?"

Many sentimental comedies of the period are replete with such pathetic expressions. Lord Hardy, Lady Sharlot, and Trusty are the exemplary characters of the play. Through Sable, an undertaker, Steele seems to denounce "the wits who take the liberty to deride all things that are magnificent and solemn". Virtue is rewarded, and vice is duly exposed at the end. In the preface to the play Steele says that its "innocence" moved the Duke of Devonshire "to

36 The dates are of the first performances, given in the play-lists in Nicoll, Early Eighteenth Century Drama and Late Eighteenth Century Drama.
the humanity of expressing himself in its favour. The Funeral long remained a stock play.

It is The Lying Lover (1703) which is Steele's first real sentimental comedy. In the preface Steele remarks that the pathetic scenes have often been applauded on the stage. For him it is time to assail debauchery, not with ridicule, but by causing the public to tremble with horror at its grievous consequences. In the prologue he says that he wrote this play "with just regard to a reforming age". The Dedication to the Duke of Ormond further testifies to his distinct moral purpose. His intention, he says, is "to banish out of conversation all Entertainment which does not proceed from Simplicity of Mind, Good Nature, Friendship and Honour". The scene in which Young Bookwit is comforted by his weeping father (V, iii) is the most serious and sentimental portion of the play, as it deliberately appeals to pity instead of laughter. Steele complains that this play was "damn'd for its Piety". Its sentimentalized morality reminds one of Hazlitt's remarks that Steele's plays are "rather homilies in dialogue". In view of the extremely serious nature of the last act of The Lying Lover, Dr. Ward sees in it "the first instance of Sentimental Comedy proper". 37

Cibber's The Careless Husband (1704) is a conscious attempt at meeting the demands of the new comedy. The Dedication to John Ward, English Dramatic Literature, III, 495.
Duke of Argyle, decries coarseness and shows Cibber's anxiety to reform contemporary comedy. Cibber writes that he "was long in hopes, that some able pen ... would generously attempt to reform the town into a better taste, than the world generally allows 'em"; but, as that did not happen, he himself struck the first blow. Carried by the current of sentiment and morality, he treats his patrons to a moralizing, sentimental comedy. It is dominated throughout by its sentimental heroine, Lady Easy, who undergoes much suffering because of her erring husband. There is a sentimental scene (V, v) in which he repents and reforms, and is forgiven by his wife who weeps with joy. Sensibility colours the whole piece and determines both the characters and their actions. The play was a great success and took its place among favourites in the standard repertory of the theatre. During the next five years four comedies produced with distinct success are of the sentimental type. These are Mrs. Centlivre's The Gamester (1704), Steele's The Tender Husband (1705), Farquhar's Beaux' Stratagem (1706), and Cibber's The Lady's Last Stake (1707). The Gamester attacks the vices of the gaming table. When Valere loses Angelica's gift, he is filled with remorse. Angelica breaks her engagement with him, but his humility acquired in his adversity causes her heart to beat as if "the strings were breaking". After his reformation, she forgives and marries him. The last two acts contain many serious passages. There is thus a good deal of sentimentalism in this comedy. The Beaux' Stratagem, though mainly
a gay comedy, contains several sentimental elements (as shown in Chapter 1, above).

The Tender Husband which Bateson calls Steele's dramatic masterpiece might look unsentimental when placed beside The Lying Lover. But it is not altogether without sentimental touches. Steele's Dedication to Addison declares that he took care "to avoid everything that might look Ill-natur'd, Immoral, or prejudicial to what the Better Part of Mankind hold Sacred and Honourable". In this play Clerimont Senior succeeds in making his too free a wife realize the error of her ways. There is a sentimental scene (V, i) in which she kneels, weeps, and is forgiven. The moral is that happiness between man and wife can be established only on the basis of love. Such an emphasis on domestic virtues shows a genuine intrusion of the middle-class values into the drama of the age.

The Lady's Last Stake is quite a sentimental comedy. Bernbaum rightly says that "the general trend and the denouement of both (its) plots are exceptionally serious" (103). Cibber declares in the Dedication that "A Play, without a just Moral, is a poor and trivial Undertaking; and 'tis from the Success of such Pieces, that Mr. Collier was furnish'd with an advantageous Pretence of laying his unmerciful Axe to the Root of the Stage". In this play, Cibber exposes the evil of gambling in its most hideous form. All the erring characters finally repent and reform, thanks to Sir
Friendly Moral who has great belief in the goodness of human nature. There are many long passages of emotional speech, especially in the last act. In view of its conspicuous sentimentalism, Professor Wood says, "If The Tender Husband marked a retrogression in the march of sentimentalism, The Lady's Last Stake represented a decided advance". The play remained a favourite through the first half of the century, and was performed as late as 1760.

Charles Shadwell's comedy, The Fair Maker of Seals (1709) is sentimental as its lead characters undergo reformation, and its last scene gives importance to benevolence and forgiveness. The play was a great success.

Evan Addison, the author of the neo-classic tragedy, Cato (1713), found himself persuaded by Steele to write a sentimental comedy, The Drummer, or The Haunted House (1715). It has a pathetic character, Lady Truman, who believes her husband to be dead and sincerely mourns him. Addison, thus, violated one of the principles of "classic" drama that a comedy should be a comedy from first to last, that it is not to allow any pathetic element to enter into its composition. Addison's purpose is stated in the epilogue: "No man need blush though true to marriage-vows, nor be a jest though he should love his spouse". If the response of the Drury Lane audience to this comedy was discouraging, it was only.

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38 Wood, op. cit., p. 369.
because its plot lacked novelty, and not because it was sentimental. Steele, however, hoped that "the reader will see many beauties that escaped the audience; the touches being too delicate for every taste in a popular assembly".

Charles Johnson wrote a sentimental comedy, *The Masquerade* (1716), in imitation of Gibber's *The Lady's Last Stake*. Its principal character, Lady Frances Cabre, is addicted to gambling like Gibber's Lady Gentle. She is saved from ruin and brought to repentance by her devoted husband. As the play lacked originality, it was a failure. The year 1720, however, saw a much better sentimental comedy in Charles Shadwell's *The Irish Hospitality*. Its central character, Sir Patrick Worthy, is a perfect embodiment of Shaftesburian benevolism. "I think myself an earthly steward", says he, "deputed by Heaven to distribute that fortune it has entrusted me with, on my fellow creatures". In many sentimental comedies of the age there are benevolent characters who express similar sentiments and philosophize about moral and social ideals.

Steele's another successful play, *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) is one of the most distinguishing examples of sentimental comedy. The title itself suggests sentimentalism, as "conscious" means "conscientious". Its main interest is sentimental as there is much of pathos and moralizing. In the preface Steele proclaims that its chief intention is to be an "innocent Performance". He is glad to inform the reader that the distresses of the heroine, Indiana, drew tears from a General. Parson Adams in Fielding's
Joseph Andrews owns that this play has some things "almost solemn enough for a sermon". The Conscious Lovers, thus, makes a clear departure from the Restoration tradition. It was so popular in its time that it ran for twenty-eight consecutive nights. This extraordinary success meant a considerable triumph for sentimentalism. Kies has shown that the German dramatist, Lessing, was influenced by Steele, and that The Conscious Lovers was the specific model of Lessing's two sentimental comedies, Die Verirrte (1749) and Die Juden (1749).

In 1728, Cibber completed an unfinished manuscript of Vanbrugh's play, A Journey to London, but changed the title of the produced version to The Provok'd Husband (1727). Always alive to the currents of the public taste, Cibber recast the original play from a sentimental standpoint. He writes in the preface that Vanbrugh intended the provoked husband to turn his frivolous wife out of doors. Cibber, however, found this too severe for comedy and, therefore, preserved the lady's chastity to facilitate reconciliation between the husband and wife. The play is given a happy ending through the sentimental device of repentance and reform. Probably, Vanbrugh never contemplated the reformation of Lady Tomly as in Cibber. Cibber also cut out the bawdy from the original fragment in keeping with the current trend towards a moral comedy. This sentimental comedy was so popular that it had

an initial run of twenty-eight nights and remained a stock play for nearly a century.

Even Henry Fielding, who, as a dramatist, is better known for his literary and political burlesques such as Tom Thumb (1730), Pasquin (1735), and The Historical Register (1736), did not remain unaffected by the vogue for sentiment. Bernbaum brings out the sentimental elements of The Modern Husband (1731) in order to show that Fielding did not devote himself to true comedy consistently. The Licensing Act of 1737, however, made him abandon the stage and write novels which themselves were not free from sentimentality, though he avowedly disapproved of Richardson’s sentimentalism.

It is rather curious that the sentimental comedy fell into a decline during the fourth and fifth decades, though the temper of the age was quite favourable to its advancement. In fact, sentimentalism had become by this time a strong force and appeared prominently in the poetry and the novel. One reason for the decline of sentimental comedy may be the poverty of any persuasive English dramatic criticism after the death of Steele, the greatest theoretical advocate of sentimental comedy. Another could be the Licensing Act which accounted for a general decline in drama by driving potential playwrights out of the theatre. During this period, the French comédie larmoyante was definitely superior to the English sentimental comedy, though these two schools of comedy arose out of similar influences. As shown by Bernbaum (Chapter 10),
the English sentimental comedies before 1750 did not display the easy assurance of manner and refinement of feeling possessed by the plays of de la Chaussee, Molière, Voltaire, and Grosset. The French dramatists obtained new effects from familiar themes, bringing out the emotional values more convincingly. Their sentimental comedies were often adapted by the English writers after 1750.

In England, sentimental comedy did not, however, disappear altogether during this period. Besides minor sentimental comedies such as Topple's *The Lady's Revenge* (1733), Jacob's *The Prodigal Reformed* (1737), James Dance's *Pamela* (1741), there were three of real merit. These were John Kelly's *The Married Philosopher* (1732), Benjamin Hoadly's *The Suspicious Husband* (1747), and Edward Moore's *The Foundling* (1748). Bernbaum shows that Kelly's play, an adaptation of Besouches' *Le Philosophe Marié* (1727), omits many sentimental lines and passages in the original, and it lacks the delicacy with which the French dramatists of the age generally described the sentimental emotions. Hoadly's sentimental comedy deals with Strictland, the suspicious husband of a young wife, though it eschews bawdry. It remained immensely popular for a long time. In the prologue to *The Foundling*, Henry Brooke states the sentimental aim of the author:

He rather aims to draw the melting sigh,  
Or steal the pitying tear from Beauty's eye,  
To touch the strings that humanize our kind,  
Man's sweetest strain, the music of the mind.
The scene in which the virtuous Fidelia, supposed to be a foundling, is restored to her parents, is thoroughly sentimental. This play is the culmination of the sentimental comedies of the early eighteenth century. Nicoll looks upon it "as the connecting link between the sentimentalism of the early and the sentimentalism of the late eighteenth century." The play met with great success at its first performance. It was, however, criticised for its vulgar top, Faddle, in the March number of the Gentleman's Magazine for 1748.

The sentimental comedy, thus, suited the popular taste of the age in the early eighteenth century. It may be added that the type of tragic drama which provided real emotional sustenance to this age was also pathetic and sentimental. In the early years of the Restoration period the heroic play, often tragic, was very popular because it met the special needs of a decadent aristocracy. The chief emotion it aroused was not pity or terror, but "admiration", that is, teaching through example, that was admired and imitated. But as the century drew to a close, it faded, yielding place to pathetic tragedy, as the latter alone, with its emphasis on pity, could satisfy the new demands of a changing society for sentiment instead of heroic action. Thomas Otway's The Orphan (1685) and Venetia Restored (1682), and Thomas Southerne's The Fatal Marriage (1694) and Cymon (1695) are tragedies based

40 Nicoll, Early Eighteenth Century Drama, p. 207.
upon pity. Each puts emphasis on a pathetic woman who is a victim of circumstances for which she is not responsible and over which she seems to have no control. This is clear from what happens to Monimia in *The Orphan*, Belvidera in *Venice Preserved*, Isabella in *The Fatal Marriage*, and Isinda in *Cranoipo*. As this type of tragedy appeals to pity, Professor Nettleton remarks, "Perhaps the real origin of sentimental comedy should be sought not simply in the moralized comedy of Cibber but in the somewhat sentimentalized tragedy of Otway and Southerne".  

Nahum Tate took many liberties with the Shakespearean drama in the name of pity. Today we may ridicule him for distorting *King Lear*, but Dr. Johnson spoke for a whole century when he expressed his gratitude to him. Sentimental tragedy was the only acceptable type of tragedy in the eighteenth century. Colley Cibber in his prologue to *Perdolla and Izabella* (1705) thought it necessary to apologize for having "neglected too, tho' much in fashion, To further innocence to move Compassion". Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* (1705) a domestic tragedy, is "a melancholy Tale of private Sins." The opening lines of the prologue are significant:

> Long has the fate of kings and empires been  
> The common business of the tragic scene,  
> As if the miserable made the throne her seat,  
> And none could be unhappy but the great.

41 Nettleton, *English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, p. 139. He also makes this point in "The Drama and the Stage", CRHL, 10 (1912), 315.
In the Dedication to the Duchess of Ormond, Howe contends that
distress and misfortunes are among the main designs of tragedy and
that "to excite this generous pity" is a sign of success in the
dramatist. The popular success of this sentimental tragedy
encouraged its author to write a similar play, Jane Shore (1713).
The prologue says that it is about "A tale which, told long since
in homely wise, Hath never failed of melting gentle eyes". Dr.
Johnson, in his Life of Rowe, testifies to the popularity of Jane
Shore: "This play, consisting chiefly of domestic scenes and
private distress, lays hold upon the heart ... This therefore is
one of those pieces which we still welcome on the stage". He
particularly liked\(^\text{42}\) the heroine's last moving appeal, "Forgive
me! - but forgive me", as she dies in her husband's arms.

The popularity of Howe's sentimental tragedies and Steele's
pathetic tales appears to have encouraged Aaron Hill to write a
domestic tragedy, The Fatal Intravagance (1721). The following
lines of its prologue bring to mind those of The Fair Penitent
(cited above):

> Empires o'erthrown, and heroes held in chains,
> Alarm the mind but give the heart no pains.
> To ills remote from our domestic fears,
> We lend our wonder, but withhold our tears.

This moral, sentimental tragedy was quite popular in its time and
was later borrowed from by Edward Moore for his well-known domestic

\(^{42}\) E. Hill, ed., Johnsonian Miscellanies (Oxford, 1897), I, 283-84.
tragedy, *The Gamester* (1755). Even, more popular was Lillo's sentimental, domestic tragedy, *The London Merchant* (1731). Instead of dealing with the fall of an illustrious person, Lillo portrays George Barnwell, a merchant's clerk, as being led astray by a heartless courtesan to rob his employer and murder his uncle. He is sincerely penitent before being brought to execution. The play attained enduring recognition; it was translated into French, German, and Dutch. In the preface to the translation into German of *Shannon's Tragedies* (1790), Lessing expressed his preference for *The London Merchant* over *Hainden's Cato*, because the former was a more moving one.

The preference in this period for plays that slighted the neo-classical rules of decorum and the three unities, is significant. It shows that the eighteenth century dramatists did not desist from taking such liberties as were in accord with the national temperament. And this would have happened even if Dryden, the liberal classicist, had not paid a spontaneous homage to Shakespeare and put forward, in his *Dream of Dramatic Poetry*, a defence of the irregular Elizabethan drama as opposed to the regular classical French drama. These pathetic tragedies pleased the beholders with sentiments of pity and compassion. In these popular sentimental tragedies and comedies of the period, the emphasis was on sympathy and pity and emotion. The contemporary audiences enjoyed weeping for the virtuous character as victim; they took great pleasure in showing benevolence in pitying another man's distress.

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43 This is well discussed by A. O. Aldridge, "The Pleasures of Pity", *MLI*, 18 (1949), 70-97.
The sentimental comedy was also popular during the latter half of the century, though Nicoll perhaps exaggerates when he remarks that "the whole of the dramatic literature of this time is influenced directly or indirectly, by sentimentalism". In the sixth decade of the century hardly any really good sentimental comedies appeared. While the atmosphere was quite favourable to the progress of the genre, it just happened that no playwright of the calibre of Gibber or Steele tried his hand during this period at the sentimental comedy, perhaps because the novel was thought to satisfy much better the emotional needs of the time. Playwrights like Foote and Colman tried at times to ridicule the excesses of sentiment in the drama, but they also thought it expedient at times to surrender to the popular taste for anything of emotional appeal. For example, Foote's *The Minor* (1760) is full of sentimental motives and actions; and Colman who had attacked sentimentalism in *Folly Honeycomb* (1760) and written *The Jealous Wife* (1761) in the old comic tradition, introduced sentimental elements in his best play in order to keep in touch with the current fashion. *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766) which he wrote in collaboration with that expert judge of the current mood, David Garrick, sought to give pleasure "reaped from the tender emotions of the heart". Despite its comic portions, it is, as Bernbaum shows, sentimental in its main plot and principal characters.

44 Nicoll, *Late Eighteenth Century Drama*, p. 124.
45 Bernbaum, p. 218. Some critics, however, believe that this play maintains the comic tradition. See, for example, Nettleton, *English Drama of the Restoration*, pp. 257-63.
Speaking of Fanny in this play, Elizabeth P. Stein says that her "excess of sensibility, because it forces itself continuously upon our attention, becomes ridiculous". But as we shall see (in Chapter 4, below), it is precisely this excess of emotionalism or sensibility which is an important feature of the sentimental comedy. Such an excess of sensibility, delicacy or refinement does not seem to have appeared ridiculous to the contemporary audiences. The Clandestine Marriage was a tremendous and lasting success. This seems to have induced Colman to write another comedy, The English Merchant (1767), which is conspicuously sentimental. It is based on, though inferior to, Voltaire's sentimental comedy, L'Écossaise (1760). In Colman's play, a character describes the meeting between father and daughter in these words: "First they wept for grief; then they wept for joy; and then they wept for grief again" (IV). Interestingly, the drama critic for the March number of the Gentleman's Magazine (1767), chose this feature of the play for comment, speaking of "a luxury in tears that laughter can never taste". The play was moderately successful and revived occasionally.

There are many sentimental comedies, some containing both pathetic and comic elements, written during and after the seventh decade of the century. It will be tedious and unnecessary to discuss at length their sentimental elements. What is important for our purposes is the extent of the immediate, even subsequent,

popularity of such sentimental comedies as are of a less alloyed or mixed character.

William Whitehead's The School for Lovers (1762), an adaptation of Fontenelle's Le Testament, is one of the outstanding sentimental comedies of the period. According to Bernbaum, it inaugurates the revival of sentimental comedy. The dramatist's sentimental aim is stated in the prologue:

Plain comedy to-night, with strokes refined,  
Would catch the coyest features of the mind,  
Would play politely with your hopes and fears,  
And sometimes smiles provoke, and sometimes tears.

He distrusted laughter, because "That eager zeal to laugh the vice away/May hurt some virtue's intermingling ray". He, therefore, dwells upon the depiction of distress and emotions. The play was favourably reviewed by Dr. John Hawkesworth, the dramatic critic for the Gentleman's Magazine. He described its sentiments as chaste and elegant, and some of its situations as "touching and tender in the highest degree". The London Magazine referred to its plot as full of "delicacy and sentiment". This play had a good run of thirteen nights in its first season and was a steady success for several seasons.

Mrs. Frances Sheridan's The Discovery (1763) depicts a son sacrificing his love to save his father from ruin. Some of its scenes (IV, i and ii, for example) approximate to those of the French comedie larmoyante. This sentimental comedy was a

47 Cited by Sherbo, p. 148.
considerable success in its first season, achieving seventeen performances. Isaac Bickerstaffe's *The Maid of the Mill* (1765), is a dramatization of Richardson's sentimental *Pamela*, with Mr. B. converted into Lord Aimworth, a model of propriety. This sentimental piece was so successful that it achieved twenty-nine performances in the first season, and was revived frequently throughout the period. In Mrs. Elizabeth Griffith's *The Double Mistake* (1766) the sentimental heroine, Emily, is presented as an innocent sufferer. Bernbaum calls attention to the artistic blemishes of the play and concludes that its success "shows how completely sentimentalism had for the time being recaptured the theatrical public" (213). According to *The London Stage*, however, this play ran a few nights in its first month, and was not revived.

Mrs. Elizabeth Griffith's *The School for Rakes* (1769) portrays the innocent heroine, Harriot, whose sufferings are calculated to melt the hearts of the tender and sensible. The prologue, spoken by Mr. King, speaks of tears as well as laughter: "Sigh when you laugh, and laugh whene'er you cry". Dr. John Hawkesworth, in his review of the play in the *Monthly Review*, remarked: "This piece is not much calculated to excite laughter, but it produces higher pleasure than laughter can give". The play ran well for a year and then achieved two performances.

The popular sentimental comedies of Hugh Kelly and Richard Cumberland merit special mention. Though Kelly was critical of "the extremes of sentimental gloom", he himself wrote plays cast
in the sentimental mode. Dibdin, historian of the stage, thought it necessary to criticise him for taking advantage of "the rage that then prevailed for sentiment". But this remark might as well have been directed to many other dramatists of the age. In the preface to his sentimental comedy, The School for Wives (1773), Kelly supports the sentimental school of dramatic composition. Speaking of himself in the third person he says that "he has some laugh, yet he hopes he has also some lesson; and fashionable as it has been lately for the wits ... to ridicule the Comic Muse, when a little grave, he must think that she degenerates into farce, where the grand business of instruction is neglected". The play deals with the reclamation of a prodigal husband, Mr. Belville, and shows in Mr. Torrington a benevolent figure who has a strong faith in the goodness of human nature. The play enjoyed great success.

Kelly's earlier play, False Delicacy (1768), written in rivalry to Goldsmith's unsentimental play, The Good-Natur'd Man, is serious in tone. It is characterized by didactic moralizing dear to sentimental comedy. Though its characters, Lady Betty and Miss Marchmont, carry sentimental delicacy to false extremes, it cannot be denied that the appeal of the dramatist is to sentimental emotion. Kelly was shrewd enough to know that it paid to strike the popular chords of sentiment. The play was a tremendous success.

Bernbaum says that sentimental comedy suffered attack in the period 1768-72. But this did no real damage to the genre. This is shown by the popularity of Richard Cumberland's comedies, The Brothers (1769) and The West Indian (1771). In its sentimental theme The Brothers is similar to Mrs. Griffith's The School for Rakes. It deals with the sufferings of the virtuous wife, Violetta, deserted by her husband, the elder Belfield. She is finally reunited to him as he repents his folly and reforms. The immediate success of The Brothers was great, and it was revived several times. Its success, however, was far surpassed by that of The West Indian which has been called the "culmination" of the "sentimental epoch", and "the extreme example of English sentimental comedy".\footnote{Stanley Williams, "The English Sentimental Drama from Steele to Cumberland", Sewanee Review, 33 (1925), 406; an unidentified critic, cited in F. S. Boas, An Introduction to Eighteenth-Century Drama (Oxford, 1953), p. 305.} It deals with the reformation of Belcour and the distresses of Captain Dudley and his virtuous daughter, Louisa, the heroine. The play was a smash hit. Mrs. H. Cowley's The Runaway (1776) is a sentimental comedy, exalting true love of George Hargrave for Emily and showing their eventual triumph, made possible by Mr. Drummond, a middle-aged benevolist. Its great success showed that sentimental comedy continued to be as popular as before. Mrs. Elizabeth Griffith's The Times (1779) contains substantial elements of sensibility. Bedford, engaged to be married to Sir William...
Woodley's niece is generous enough to withdraw his suit, knowing that the girl's affections are placed elsewhere. The play also deals with the reformation of Sir William's married nephew, Woodley. The *Town and Country* critic found *The Times* altogether destitute of comic situations and "by far too sentimental for the stage". Despite this, the play was a moderate success.

Some writers have exaggerated the sentimentalism of the eighteenth century comedy. De Witt Croissant, for example, says that sentimental comedy was dominant throughout the eighteenth century.\(^{50}\) Kenneth Muir asserts that in the middle of the century "the new plays were all sentimental".\(^{51}\) Another writer expresses the same view when he states that Goldsmith's *The Good-Natur'd Man* (1768) "did not begin to stem the tide of sentimental comedies then gushing across the English stage".\(^{52}\) Such statements tend to suggest that there was a virtual disappearance of non-sentimental or laughing comedy in the age. The performance records now finally available in *The London Stage* show that both sentimental and non-sentimental comedies were mounted with varying success. This is also shown by Sherbo (Chapter 7) who, working from John Genest's *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to*

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\(^{51}\)The *Comedy of Manners* (London, 1970), p. 156.

1830 (1832), compares the runs and revivals of selected sentimental and non-sentimental plays of the period 1750-80. George Winchester Stone, Jr., in his introduction to Part 4 of The London Stage, shows that during the period 1747-76, "Manners" comedy, Shakespeare's comedies, and Intrigue comedy also flourished along with the sentimental comedy. The productions of Gay, Fielding, Murphy, Colman, Foote, Goldsmith and Sheridan, show that laughing comedy was never really eclipsed by the sentimental comedy.

But although the sentimental comedy was not dominant throughout the eighteenth century, it was, as shown above, quite a popular form of drama in the age. From Sherbo's examination (Chapter 7) of the contemporary critical reaction to key plays in the sentimental canon (written between 1750 and 1780) in the four leading periodicals, we learn that the critics, by and large, praised the sentimentally conceived plays, though they were also conscious that comedies should excite laughter. Goldsmith and Sheridan who reacted against sentimental comedy could not really ridicule it out of fashion.53

53 See below, pp.