The controversy over the stage about 1700 raged around the moral function of the stage and how it could fulfil this function. Indeed, sentimental comedy grew partly as the result of discussion about morals in general and about those of the theatre in particular. Though the Restoration dramatists felt obliged at times to defend their plays by arguing that they intended the audience to avoid the faults which were exhibited, they failed to satisfy the moralists. For the latter that work alone was moral which consciously strove to raise the ethical standard of the play-goers. Collier and Steele wanted the new drama to elevate human nature by depicting moral excellence. The assumption was that the spectators tended to imitate what they saw on the stage. Steele, for example, thought it necessary to stress the point in Spectator No. 446: "Whatever vices are represented upon the stage, they ought to be so marked and branded by the poet, as not to appear laudable nor amiable in the person who is tainted with them". In his Short View (1698), Collier had lamented that the Restoration comedy not only represented vice but also rewarded it: "To what purpose is Vice thus preferr'd, thus ornamented, and caress'd, unless for Imitation?" Even according to the Upper House of Convocation the corruption of the age "hath been
much increased by the licentiousness of the stage, where the worst examples have been placed in the best lights and recommended to imitation". ¹ How, the new moralists asked, could such plays as The Man of Mode and The Country Wife teach an ideal, or inspire a desire for ideal excellence?

As we know, Steele demanded that comedy must reward virtue and punish vice. In the sentimental comedies, virtue never goes unrewarded, and vice is always frustrated. Collier had attacked some of the Restoration dramatists for not observing "a just Distribution of Rewards and Punishments". This poetic justice was, however, by no means an innovation made by Collier and Steele to dramatic theory; it was, in fact, a Renaissance creed. In his apologie for Poetrie, Sidney remarks that in the poet's world the heroes are always perfect in behaviour and successful in fortune, and the villains are always thoroughly villainous and doomed to be punished. Tragedy shows the awful consequences of tyranny and thus "maketh kings fear to be tyrants". ² He demands that poetry should show virtue exalted and vice punished. This, he says, persuades us to be virtuous more certainly than historical truth. It may be mentioned in passing that in the Renaissance poetic justice was hardly more than a mere

theoretical creed; it was seldom observed in actual practice. Though George Chapman, in the Dedication of *The Revenge of Bussy d' Aubois* (1613), professes as his purpose "elegant and sententious excitation to virtue, and deflection from her contrary", the divine justice mirrored in Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, as Leech says, "is an indifferent justice, a justice which cares no whit for the individual and is not concerned with a nice balance of deserts and rewards". Jonson in the Dedication of *Volpone* defends the punishment of the evil character in this comedy, saying that it is "the office of a comic poet to imitate justice and instruct to life". Dryden, in his preface to *An Evening's Love*, maintains that while poetic justice is applicable to tragedy, it cannot be extended to comedy: "In Tragedy where the actions and persons are great, and the crimes horrid, the laws of justice are more strictly observed; and examples of punishment (are) to be made, to deter mankind from the pursuit of vice". But as the main purpose of comedy is to give delight, it is "not so much obliged to the punishment of faults which it represents". As the vices and faults in a comedy are "but the sallies of youth, and the frailties of human nature", these can be forgiven, and not punished.

tragedy, though not in comedy. In The Tragedies of the last age (1678), he writes that the ancients rightly rejected history for the sake of a tragedy because they found that in history wickedness was often triumphant and virtue oppressed. He regrets that the theatre has ceased to be the school of virtues because poetic justice is neglected. Some writers of the period, however, want poetic justice to be extended to comedy. Blackmore, for example, remarks in his preface to Prince Arthur (1695) that tragedy shows "the Vengeance that at last overtook the (Impious), and the Rewards and Praises that crown'd the (Generous)", while comedy renders vice ridiculous and brings it into general derision and contempt. Farquhar also believes that poetic justice should be observed both in comedy and tragedy. In his Discourse upon Comedy (1702) he condemns dramatists for leaving "Vice unpunished, Virtue unrewarded, Folly unexpos'd, or Prudence unsuccessful". Poetic justice was observed in tragedy, in the Restoration period. In Dryden's The Conquest of Granada and Aureng-zebe, Rymer's Edgar, Settle's Cambyses and Congreve's The Mourning Bride, the virtuous characters are rewarded by a just Providence, while the wicked are ruthlessly disposed of. But the comedy of the period flouts poetic justice in the interest of realism. "The Stage-poets", says Collier in chapter 4 of his Short View, "make their principal personages vicious and
He seems to believe that the immoral influence of the Restoration comedies consists mainly in their association of vice with beauty and reward, and of virtue with ugliness and deformity. Shadwell, in his preface to The Royal Shepherdess points out that Dryden has encouraged vice in his comedies "by bringing the Characters of debauch'd people upon the Stage, and making them pass for fine Gentlemen". Collier attacked Vanbrugh's The Relapse in which the rake gets the bride: "It points the wrong way, and puts the prize into the wrong hand. It seems to make lewdness the reason of desert, and gives Young Fashion a second fortune, only for debauching away his first". Wycherley finds poetic justice against the facts of human life. In the prologue to The Plain Dealer he asks his readers whether they have found honesty rewarded anywhere except on the stage. He exhibits a section of contemporary society as he finds it without caring for rewarding virtue and punishing vice.

In the eighteenth-century sentimental drama, however, poetic justice is employed in comedy, and not in tragedy. The sentimental tragedy treats pity as a noble pleasure and as a moralizing force. Instead of instruction through example, it provides instruction through compassion and tenderness by making innocence bleed. Addison rejects poetic justice in tragedy. In Spectator No. 40, he says that since "good and evil happen alike

to all men on this side the grave", poetic justice has no foundation in nature. He adds that as the essence of tragedy lies in pity, and as poetic justice tends to defeat this purpose, it must be rejected.

The sentimental comedy, however, invariably observes poetic justice. It endeavours to elevate human nature by inspiring a desire for moral excellence. Its chief design is instruction rather than entertainment, and it employs poetic justice to fulfil this design. The pleasure, if any, arises from the spectacle of virtue finally triumphant. It attempts to show, as a rule, that the virtuous persons triumph over all obstacles, while the wicked are exposed at the end. The virtuous person may be a faithful lover, or a wronged wife, or a lost child. In The Conscious Lovers, it is the true lover Myrtle, and not the avaricious Cimberton, who is made to marry the virtuous Lucinda. In The School for Lovers, it is the noble Lord Dorilant, not the unscrupulous Modesty, who finally weds the virtuous Caelia. In The Brothers it is Belfield Junior, and not his villainous elder brother, who is rewarded at the end with the hand of Sophia. Whosoever seeks marriage for purely material gains is shown as badly failing in his designs. Lady Easy in The Careless Husband, Violetta in The Brothers, and Mrs. Belville in The School for Wives remain constant to their husbands even though they suffer much because of them. To the sentimentalist, as Gallaway points
out, "virtue is not only admirable, it is victorious". The virtuous wives feel amply rewarded at the end as the erring husbands become remorseful and promise constancy in future. Again, the virtuous maidens like Indiana in The Conscious Lovers, Fidelia in The Foundling, and Emily in The Runaway, though they have to suffer much, are finally rewarded and united with their true lovers in the midst of emotional speeches. The wild heroes of sentimental comedy, such as Lord Eustace in The School for Rakes, Belcour in The West Indian, and Belmont in The Foundling are finally rewarded, but not like the Restoration rake who takes advantage of all the freedom available to him and yet receives as a reward the woman most prized by all. As shown in the next chapter, they must first undergo reformation which they do, often as a result of the increased depth of their love for the heroines. Not before they sincerely repent of their follies and apologize to the virtuous ladies are they forgiven and accepted by them. None can stay a villain here, and yet keep prospering; nor can the evil practices be concealed indefinitely.

Speaking of Steele, Calverton says that in his plays "he projected his good characters to the foreground, and relegated the bad to the rear. Virtue was rewarded with a caress and vice with castigation." In fact, virtue is rewarded with much more

6 W.P. Gallaway, Jr., "The Sentimentalism of Goldsmith", PMLA, 48 (1933), 1174.
than a mere caress not only in Steele's comedies but in the sentimental comedy in general. No sacrifice is allowed to go unrewarded and it always receives payment in material currency. Such a consistent employment of poetic justice tends to reduce everything to a neat, but artificial and tiresome pattern. What Schorer says of Hugh Kelly applies to the sentimental playwrights in general: "an earthly reward for sweetness, tenderness, generosity, and moral excellence, and a reward that comes in the terms of a substantial fortune is this sentimentalist's easiest and most damnable assumption". 

The themes of sentimental comedy arise from a general protest against unethical attitude towards literature and from sensitivity to changes in patterns of behaviour due to new ethical theories. Whereas the Restoration comedy mocks at the conventional moral code, the sentimental comedy upholds traditional values. Its themes and the treatment they receive read like protests against the "immoral" atmosphere of the plays of Etherege and Wycherley. Cuckoldry, inconstancy and jealousy are either abandoned or treated differently. Love and marriage are no longer treated flippantly, nor shown as incompatible. The themes of sentimental comedy are easily adapted for the introduction of emotional situations, lofty sentiments, tender

8 M. Schorer, "Hugh Kelly: His Place in the Sentimental School", Pq, 12 (October 1933), 396.
expressions, and moral teaching. It presents conventional virtue in a favourable light, puts its moral on emotional or sentimental basis, and contains the expression of noble thought. What is glorified is moral excellence rather than flippancy, sentiment rather than wit. In this and the next chapter I shall try to prove my main points by examples from the twelve chief sentimental comedies of the eighteenth century — Richard Steele's *The_Lying_Lover* (1703) and *The_Conscious_Lovers* (1722), Colley Cibber's *The_Careless_Husband* (1704) and *The_Lady's_Last_Stake* (1707), Edward Moore's *The_Foundling* (1747), William Whitehead's *The_School_for_Lovers* (1762), Mrs. Elizabeth Griffith's *The_School_for_Rakes* (1769), Hugh Kelly's *False_Delicacy* (1768) and *The_School_for_Wives* (1773), Richard Cumberland's *The_Brothers* (1769) and *The_West_Indian* (1771), and Mrs. Hannah Cowley's *The_Runaway* (1776).

The sentimental comedy deals primarily with matters of private life, the problems of love, courtship, and marriage. It emphasises the sanctity of matrimony, discarding mere gallantry or sex-antagonism or love-chaise. An erring husband or a wronged wife is not allowed to cause breakdown of marriage. The reconciliation of an estranged husband and wife is a prominent theme of this comedy. In *The_Careless_Husband* Sir Charles Easy wrongs his virtuous wife, Lady Easy, by carrying an intrigue with Lady Graveairs, and having an affair with his wife's maid,
Mrs. Edging. The wronged wife knows all this, but does not upbraid him, fearing that the "uneasy thought of my continual jealousy may tease him to a fixed aversion". In the climactic scene of the play, she has the mortification of discovering her husband and her maid, both asleep in two easy chairs, in Sir Charles's room. In a Restoration comedy such a wronged wife might well have been provoked into seeking divorce or even committing adultery. But to Lady Easy, marriage seems to mean a certain commitment to an ideal; it is not something to be trifled with. Instead of reproaching her husband, she hastens to put her own steinkirk upon his head lest he should catch cold. Realizing his wife's considerateness, and her long-suffering love, Sir Charles is shamed into turning over a new leaf. A little later, he tells Lady Graveairs that in order to make amends to his excellent wife for injuries, he must part with her as well as "all the inconvenient pleasures of my life" (435). Presumably, he will never commit again any offence against his wife and there are bright prospects for their domestic felicity. This theme was also treated by Cibber in Love's Last Shift (1696) in which the virtuous Amanda is callously ignored by her unfaithful husband, Loveless. She, however, continues to be faithful to him despite provocation to the contrary until,

9British dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan, ed. G.H. Nettleton and A.E. Case (Boston, 1939), p. 405. All page references to this play are to this edition.
eventually, her misery ends with Loveless feeling ashamed of having maltreated her "for the abandoned pleasures of deceitful prostitutes". In each play, marriage is thus saved from ruin by a virtuous wife.

The Lady's Last Stake presents Lady Wronglove often squabbling with her husband, who is fond of the pleasure-loving, baby-faced Miss Notable. The jealous wife endeavours to reform the roving husband merely by dogging him in his amours. "You may wrong me", she declares, "but you can never blind me". At one time they even agree to part with each other to solve their difficulties and decide to a kind elderly man, Sir Friendly Moral, as umpire of the conditions. There is, however, no place for such separation in the world of sentimental comedy. Here marriage is not to be disrupted on any account. Sir Friendly who is the dramatist's spokesman of the values of this world, speaks to Lady Wronglove of the miserable consequences of separation and ardently impresses upon her the desirability of closing up this "unprofitable breach". As she sits down weeping, the kindly man starts addressing himself to Lord Wronglove. He mildly reproaches him for being unkind to his wife when she "deserved a tender care". With an ease characteristic of a deus ex machina he succeeds in convincing them of the folly of

10. The Dramatic Works of Colley Cibber, 5 vols. (London, 1777), II, 241. All page references to this play are to this edition.
contemplating divorce as a solution to their difficulties. Lady Wronglove entreats her husband's pardon for "the late uncurb'd expressions of a disorder'd mind" (280). As Lord Wronglove is equally anxious to forget and forgive, Sir Friendly succeeds in bringing about their reconciliation.

In *The School for Wives*, Belville cannot resist pursuing fresh game, though he "wou'dn't exchange Mrs. Belville's mind for any woman's upon earth". His wife surprises him while in the company of his sparkler, Miss Leeson. His exposure causes him embarrassment, but does not put an end to his gallantries. This is shown by his reaction to the letter which he believes is from Miss Walsingham, inviting him to the masquerade. Actually, it is Lady Rachel Mildew who has written to Mr. Belville as from Miss Walsingham in order to ascertain whether he is really reformed. The rake persuades himself to meet "the ripe, the luxurious" Miss Walsingham, thus abusing the goodness of his wife. As he discovers his masked partner to be his own wife, he promises to give up his bad ways, and Mrs. Belville is happy to look forward to a period of conjugal happiness.

In *The School for Rakes*, Lord Mustace, having drawn the virtuous Harriot into a feigned marriage before the play begins, is prepared to marry the rich Lady Anne Mountfort. Ignorant of

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11 The *School for Wives* in *The Modern Theatre: A Collection of Successful Modern Plays ... Selected by Mrs. Inchbald, 10 vols.* (London, 1811), IX, 247. All page references to this play are to this edition.
his intended marriage, Harriot tries in vain to persuade him to reconcile her father, Sir William Evans, to their marriage of which he knows nothing. Later, she confesses to her father that she is already married to Lord Eustace. He tells her that she is ruined by her villainous husband. But in the world of sentimental comedy, as already suggested, no husband is too villainous to repair an error. At the end it becomes clear to everyone that Lord Eustace has all along had honourable intentions towards Harriot and that he was being obliged to marry Lady Anne Mountfort by "the vile trammels of family and dependence".12 Anxious to atone the wrongs he has done to Harriot, he is finally united to her in real wedlock.

In The Brothers Belfield Sr. has forsaken his wife Violetta and driven his younger brother from his sweetheart Sophia before the play begins. He is seen courting Sophia, because she has "fifty thousand pounds in her lap".13 The unexpected arrival of Violetta and Belfield Jr., however, frustrates his designs and his exposure awakens him to a sense of responsibility towards his lawful wife. In this way husband and wife get finally united.

12 The School for Rakes by Mrs. Elizabeth Griffith (London, 1795), p. 25. All page references to this play are to this edition.

13 The Brothers by Richard Cumberland in The British Drama (London, 1871), VII, 281. All volume and page references to this play are to this edition.
The sentimental comedy is free from the spirit of cynical abandon and immorality which marked the Restoration comedy. At best, it is purged of whatever might be objected to on the grounds of morality or delicacy. Seductions may be contemplated, but these are not accomplished. The virtuous ladies in the sentimental comedies never harbour any thought of compromising their honour even when they are brutally treated by their husbands.

Allied to the theme of reconciliation of estranged husband and wife is that of the reformation of an erring but good-hearted character. It is often a wayward, if not libertine husband, who is reformed by the patient, uncomplaining forbearance and considerate attention of his virtuous wife. In the sentimental comedy, there is always much hope for an erring character; indeed, it finally shows him turning away in disgust from his old ways. The plots are managed, though not always convincingly, to show him reclaimed. This favourite theme of sentimental comedy will be treated at length in the next chapter. A few illustrations should, therefore, suffice here. Charles Easy in *The Careless Husband* wrongs his wife by carrying intrigues with other women. But he realizes that there is something wrong in what he is doing. It is in the Steinkirk Scene (V, v) that he realizes his wife's goodness and the wrong he has been doing her. "And how often have these empty pleasures", he asks, "lulled my honour and my conscience to a lethargy, while I grossly have abused her, poorly
skulking behind a thousand falsehoods:"

In The Lying Lover, the gallant, Young Bookwit, reckless of the consequences, endeavours to win his way to female hearts in London through persistent lying. This causes him to excite the jealousy of, and fight a duel with, his friend Lovemore, a suitor to Penelope. As Lovemore is believed to be killed in the duel, Bookwit is sent to prison where his better self is aroused. Now he condemns duelling in strongest terms: "Honour: the horrid Application of that sacred Word, to a Revenge 'gainst Friendship, Law and Reason, is a damn'd last shift of the damn'd envious Foe of Human Race. The routed Fiend projected this but since th' expansive glorious Law from Heav'n came down -- Forgive".  

In The Lady's Last Stake Lord Wronglove is the erring husband who, irritated by his wife's jealousy and reproaches, chooses to persist in his course of gallantry. When the differences drive the couple to the edge of divorce, Sir Friendly Moral explains to them the error of their ways with the result that both are reformed and reconciled. Others reformed in the play are Lady Gentle and Lord George. The former is essentially a virtuous woman, but her addiction to card-playing involves her in heavy debt to Lord George, a rake, who thus feels encouraged to try to force her to his will. But Mrs. Conquest who loves the

Lord disguises herself as her own brother and, aided by Sir Friendly Moral, succeeds in preventing him from carrying out his plan. Lady Gentle, dreading the scandal which she happens to have created, realizes her folly: "Oh miserable wretch! To what a sure destruction has thy folly brought thee?" (289).

Lord George is ashamed of himself on discovering that the defender of Lady Gentle is none other than Mrs. Conquest in male disguise. Considering himself responsible for her supposedly fatal injury, he falls at her feet. Mrs. Conquest who has only pretended to be injured finds his grief sincere and accepts him.

In The Foundling Young Belmont has rescued Fidelia, a virtuous maiden of unknown parentage, from an attempted rape. Bringing her home, he gives her out to be the daughter of a dead college friend bequeathed to his guardianship. But he himself has designs upon her virtue. Prevented from executing his plan by Sir Charles Raymond, Belmont repents and reforms and is forgiven by Fidelia.

In The School for Lovers Mr. Modely, though engaged to Araminta, pays his attentions to Sir John Borilant's young ward, Caelia. Though Caelia's father in his will has left Sir John his estate if she, on coming of age, should decline to marry him, he is too good to use this advantage to force her inclinations. He places her in unrestricted control of her property and leaves her free to marry where she likes. But Sir John's magnanimity fills her with love for him and she tears in Modely's presence the papers that set her free. Araminta, knowing the truth about
Modely, sheds the tears of resentment, and makes an angry exit, leaving him dumb and confounded. Modely now realizes that he has "sinned beyond a possibility of pardon", and looks anxious to repair the injuries he has done to Sir John's family.

Belfield Sr. in The Brothers, as stated above, undergoes reformation and is forgiven by his long-suffering wife, Violetta. Belcour in The West Indian is infatuated with the beautiful Louisa Dudley, sister to Charles Dudley. Believing her to be Charles's mistress, he takes hold of her, asking for "love, free, disencumbered, anti-matrimonial love". Later he discovers the truth about her, and sincerely repents his impudence.

One of the recurring themes of sentimental comedy is the triumph of pure and ardent love over villainy and wealth. In The Conscious Lovers Bevil has brought Indiana from France, and he maintains her in London in the strictest respectability. Not sure of obtaining his father's consent to marry her, he would not even let her know his deep, enduring love for her: "... though I dote on her to death and have no little reason to believe she has the same thoughts for me; yet in all my acquaintance and utmost privacies with her I never once directly told her that I

15 The School for Lovers: A Comedy. As it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane by His Majesty's Servants (London, 1762), p. 285. All page references to this play are to this edition.

Indiana, aware of his love, appreciates the delicacy of his motives. She looks upon him as one who loves her with sincerity and honour. Their deep love for each other culminates in honourable marriage. Sir John Bevil approves their union, saying that they have set a fair example. He attributes their happiness to their "constancy and merit" (584). In The School for Lovers Sir John Dorilant's love for his ward Caelia is above all material considerations. When he learns that her affections are fixed upon another, he has no thought of blackmailing her. On the contrary, he gives her documents, leaving her free to possess her estate and marry where she likes. The innocent girl now awakens to the full meaning of true, unselfish love and marries Sir John.

In False Delicacy, Lord Winworth loves Lady Betty who, though she loves him, lacks candour to accept his proposal forthwith. Miss Marchmont has a similar delicacy in relation to her lover, Sidney. The loving pairs are eventually united in wedlock after the resolution of the complications caused by the "false delicacy" of the ladies. In The West Indian Belcour falls in love with Louisa Dudley whom he describes as "this little nimble-footed Daphne" (757). Under a mistaken idea of her character he addresses her impudently. When he realizes his mistake, he humbly entreats her pardon. Finding that his love for her is sincere, Louisa

\[17\text{Ibid., p. 559. All page references to The Conscious Lovers are to this edition.}\]
marries him. But even more pertinent to the theme under discussion is the true love of Charles and Charlotte in this play. At one stage Charles, conscious of his poverty, requests Charlotte to banish him and his misfortunes for ever from her thought. But she offers to help him by giving her ear-rings and some other baubles (762). Fortunately, Charles turns out to be the real heir of his grandfather's whole estate which his aunt has tried to appropriate. Charles and Charlotte are happily united in wedlock. In The Brothers true love triumphs over all obstacles. Belfield Jr.'s love for Sophia is sincere and ardent. But his elder brother has driven him from her and also propagated a report of his death. His unexpected arrival, however, exposes the villain, though not before fresh complications are introduced and resolved, and leads to his marriage with Sophia.

In The School for Wives Captain Savage and Miss Walsingham love each other. But a complication is introduced as Mr. Belville, always in pursuit of fresh game, tells Captain Savage that she has been listening to his addresses with "every degree of approbation" (248), though actually she has only been making a fool of Mr. Belville. Eventually, Savage's misunderstanding is removed and he is "overjoyed at this discovery of Miss Walsingham's innocence" (327). He apologizes to her saying that his mistake "proceeded only from an extravagance of love" (329). She forgives him and consents to marry him. The Runaway affords better
example of the exaltation of true love. George Hargrave and Emily triumph mainly due to the efforts of Mr. Drummond who saves them from the worldly designs of those "on whose hearts Nature has graven duties, which they wilfully mispel". In the Restoration comedy love is rather a game than an experience, and is often spoken of with flippancy. The lovers seldom sigh and they never languish. If they talk of flames and darts, it is no more than a convention. But in the sentimental comedy the lead characters speak of love with reverence. True love leading to marriage, not the amour, comes to be the ideal.

Another favourite theme of sentimental comedy is that of innocent virtue in distress, finally triumphing over male libertinism. The pathetic plight of a maltreated wife or maiden in distress gives the plays a pathetic tone. In fact, there is no sentimental comedy which does not show some leading character in distressful situations. The virtuous Lady Easy in The Careless Husband soliloquises in the opening scene that her spirit is broken by an injurious husband. However, her faith in the inherent excellence of virtue is too strong to be shaken by her adversity. She never entertains any thought of deviating from the path of virtue. In The Conscious Lovers Indiana, a virtuous maiden, has been found homeless and miserable by Young Bevil while on a

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18 The Runaway, A Comedy: as it is acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane (London, 1776), p. 69. All page references to this play are to this edition.
continental tour. In Act I, Scene ii, Bevil gives Humphrey a
detailed account of her repeated misfortunes till he rescued her
from an oppressor in France and brought her to London. But
actually her distress is still not over; the warnings of her aunt
against the wiles of men keep her in a state of painful uncertainty.
Her troubles end when she is discovered to be Mr. Sealand's
long-lost daughter, and is married to Bevil.

Fidelia in The Foundling is a virtuous maiden of unknown
parentage like Indiana. Belmont rescues her from her rakish
guardian, but it does not mean an end to her misery. As Belmont
himself intends to seduce her, she has her falsely accused of
looseness by Paddle. In Act III, Scene i, she exclaims, "I have
wandered from my cradle, the very child of misfortune. To retire
and weep, must now be my only indulgence". Finally, Sir Charles
discovers her as his long-lost daughter and Belmont, repentant,
obtains her forgiveness and marries her. In The School for Rakes
we cannot but sympathise with the innocent heroine, Harriot Evans,
in her unrelieved sorrow. Having married her secretly, the rakish
Lord Eustace avoids making his marriage a matter of public
knowledge. She seems disordered when she learns that she was
drawn into a feigned marriage and that Lord Eustace intends to
marry another. She is thus reduced into a thing of sighs and
tears. Her goodness and devotion, however, cause him to regret
his deceit. He obtains her forgiveness and legalizes his
relationship to her.
In the prototype the virtuous Violetta remains sorrow-stricken most of the time, having been forsaken by her husband, Belfield Sr., who is going to marry Sophia. Violetta and Belfield thus stand in somewhat the same relationship to each other as Harriot and Mustace in The School for Fakes. Violetta, we learn, has been twice shipwrecked and twice rescued from the jaws of death. Her constancy is finally rewarded as Belfield realizes his error and she is reunited to him. The theme of virtue in distress is also treated in The School for Wives and The West India. In the former Mrs. Belfield had to suffer patiently the pecuniaries of her husband for a long time until he is reformed, while in the latter the virtuous Louisa再也, is much disturbed by the wild Belmour who continues to address her in a licentious mode until, realizing his mistake, he apologizes to her and marries her. Thus, all these suffering heroines are eventually rewarded for their virtue. They are either reconciled to their reformed husbands, or restored to their long-lost parents and united to their lovers. As Parnell points out, "sentimental heroines may be abused, scorned, or even violated; but whatever happens, they die or live triumphant, and work to reclaim the errant".19

The theme of filial duty is also often treated in the sentimental comedy. In The Conscious Lovers, Devil loves India but he cannot think of disobeying his father who wants him to

19F.E. Parnell, "The Sentimental Mask", Phœbe, 78 (1903), 330.
marry Sealand's daughter, Lucinda: "Did I ever disobey any command of yours, sir? Nay, any inclination that I saw you bent upon?" (557). He tells Humphrey that he will never marry without his father's consent. In this case, the filial respect for his father is carried rather too far. Finally, as Indiana is discovered to be the long-lost daughter of Sealand, Bevil can marry her with his father's consent. In the sub-plot of "False Delicacy" Miss Rivers plans to elope with her lover, Sir Harry Newburg, as her father seems bent on bestowing her hand upon another. Her father is shocked at this, but instead of preventing the elopement, he hands over her fortune to her. Pierced to the very soul by his sorrow and generosity, she relinquishes her plan. Through her contrition, however, she finally wins her father's consent to marry her lover.

In *The School for Rakes* Harriot, secretly married to Lord Eustace, is greatly distressed by her father's ignorance of her situation (19). She earnestly requests Lord Eustace to reconcile her father to their union (32). She curses herself for betraying her father: "Wretch that I am, how did I dare to break that first of moral ties?" (63). Finding Lord Eustace ready to desert her, she confesses the truth to her father who challenges Lord Eustace to a duel. "... should Lord Eustace arm his hand against your life", she says to her father, "no power on earth shall ever make me his" (100). She finally accepts the repentant Eustace when
her father forgives him and even recommends him to her. In The Lying Lover Young Bookwit, while in prison for supposedly killing Lovemore, finds it almost impossible to bear the sight of his weeping father: "Oh best of Fathers! Let me not see your Tears, don't double my Afflictions by your Woe -- There's Consolation when a Friend laments us, but when a Parent grieves, the Anguish is too native, Too much our own to be called Pity" (182).

The theme of filial duty was later treated by Holcroft in one of the best sentimental comedies of the age. In The Road to Ruin Harry Lornten, an extravagant youth, loves Sophia, a girl of angelic innocence and purity. But in Act IV, Scene i, we find him a transformed person as he realizes that his prodigality has brought misery to his father. In order to procure money for his father, he is even prepared to marry Sophia's widowed mother, a ridiculous lady of forty. At the end, however, Harry is able to marry Sophia after the exposure of the real villain, Silky, in the last scene.

The themes of sentimental comedy are such as can easily be adapted for the introduction of moral teaching and emotional or sentimental situations, two important features of this sentimental comedy. The second point I will take up in detail while discussing the pathetic elements in sentimental comedy. The first has already been made to some extent in Chapter 2. What remains to be stressed is that the sentimental playwrights clearly maintain
the importance of a moral purpose and consciously design their plays to recommend virtue and discourage vice. For example, Hugh Kelly concluded *The School for Wives* with the following remarks:

**Lady Fuch.** Instructive! Why the modern critics say that the only business of comedy is to make people laugh.

**Bel.** That is degrading the dignity of letters exceedingly, as well as lessening the utility of the stage. -- A good comedy is a capital effort of genius, and should therefore be directed to the noblest purposes.

**Miss Wal.** Very true; and unless we learn something while we chuckle, the carpenter who nails a pantomime together will be entitled to more applause than the best comic poet in the kingdom (336).

The cardinal maxim of sentimental comedy was even more clearly expressed earlier by Winworth at the end of *False Delicacy* : "The stage should be a school of morality; and the noblest of all lessons is the forgiveness of injuries".  

Sentimental comedy contains only too obvious moral lesson or lessons, often expressed sententiously near its conclusion. The moral of *The Lying Lover* is that even a well-educated person can suffer grievously if he does not behave with circumspection. Young Eookwit weeps over his plight after his duel with Lovemore under the influence of drink : "Thus for the empty Praise of Fools, I'm solidly unhappy" (175). Having learnt his lesson, he closes the play with the couplet : "Let all with this just Maxim guide

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their Youth;/There is no Gallantry in Love but Truth". In *The
Careless Husband*, as also in *Love's Last Shift*, the moral is that
pure, long-suffering affection eventually triumphs. In the former,
the virtuous Lady Easy succeeds in reforming her erring husband
through her generosity and tolerance in suffering. In Act V,
Scene vi, Sir Charles admits to his wife, "... your wondrous
conduct has waked me to a sense of your disquiet past, and
resolution never to disturb it more" (431).

The moral of *The lady's last Stake* is that the husband and
wife should not be driven by any trifling irritants to obtain
divorce as a solution of their difficulties. Helped by Sir
Friendly Moral to patch up their differences, Lord and Lady
Wronglove express their gratitude to him: "But let the kind
physician that restor'd us", says Lady Wronglove, "be for ever in
our thanks remember'd" (280). The moral of the other plot of the
play is that gambling is a ruinous folly. Lady Gentle's addiction
to card-playing not only involves her in heavy debt to Lord George,
but exposes her to loss of honour. She bemoans her folly:
"Oh miserable wretch! To what a sure destruction has thy folly
brought thee!" (289).

In *The Conscious Lovers* the moral is expressed by Myrtle in
the first scene of Act IV by saying that "there is nothing manly
but what is conducted by reason and agreeable to the practice of
virtue and justice" (574). Steele declares in the preface that
the whole play was written for the sake of showing the hero's resistance to the temptation of fighting a duel with his friend, and expresses the hope that "it may have some effect upon the Goths and Vandals that frequent the theatres, or a more polite audience may supply their absence". Sir John Bevil sees a moral in the pairs of lovers being united at the end. Saying that constancy and merit lead to happiness, he adds in the concluding lines of the play: "Whate'er the generous mind itself denies,/The secret care of Providence supplies" (584). In view of the moral and serious tone of this play, Hare rightly remarks that "parts of it might have been written by Mr. Barlow, the preceptor of Sandford and Merton". Indeed, there are many sentimental comedies of the age which have similar preceptual dialogues and "moral" endings.

In The Foundling, the prodigal Belmont, badly fails in his designs upon Fidelia's virtue, and is exposed by Sir Charles Raymond. In Act IV, Scene ii, Belmont expresses the moral of the play: "... 'tis the trick of vice to pay her votaries with shame; and I am rewarded amply". But perhaps according to Edward Moore, the main moral is stated in the last two lines of the Prologue: "And female virtue was by Heaven design'd/To charm, to polish, and to bless mankind". In The School for Lovers the moral is that true love wins, while false love is exposed. Modelly, the false

21 M.E. Hare, "Steele and the Sentimental Comedy", in Eighteenth Century Literature: an Oxford Miscellany (1909), p. 32.
lover of Caelia, calls himself a miserable dog after his exposure. Dorilant tells him that "the man who even slightly deceives a believing and a trusting woman, can never be a man of honour" (290). In The School for Rakes Sir William points out the moral of the play when he says towards its conclusion that "the man who sincerely repents of error, is farther removed from it than one who has never been guilty" (109). This he says after Lord Bostace realizes the error of his ways and accepts Harriot, his forsaken wife. Another moral is also expressed by Sir William in the last lines of the play: "Some power divine conducts her (virtue's) swelling sails, /And of her due reward she seldom fails.

In False Delicacy the moral seems to be that excessive delicacy in the matter of marriage is both undesirable and ridiculous. Lady Betty and Miss Marchmont create many amusing complications because of their "false delicacy". "Well", says Mrs. Harley, "the devil take this delicacy; I don't know anything it does besides making people miserable" (725). Winworth's remark that the stage should be a school of morality causes Colonel Rivers to mouth another moral of the play in its concluding lines: "... those who generously labour for the happiness of others, will, sooner or later, arrive at happiness themselves".

The moral of The School for Wives is that persons like Belville who don't control their passion by reason earn only
ridicule and humiliation. The play also contains a direct condemnation of duelling. When Mrs. Belville hears that her husband has engaged in an affair of honour with Leeson, she asks why some effective method is not contrived to prevent the evil practice of duelling. "No law will ever be effectual", she says, "till the custom is rendered infamous. Wives must shriek, mothers must agonise, orphans must multiply, unless some blessed hand strips the fascinating glare from honourable murder and bravely exposes the idol who is thus worshipped in blood ...".

In The Brothers the main idea is that wickedness is immoral and ultimately harmful. When Belfield Sr. tries to justify his evil ways as necessary for arriving at the summit of prosperity, Paterson hints at the moral of the play: "And do you dream of ever reaching your journey's end by such crooked paths as these are?" (VII, 261). The West Indian embodies several moral lessons. It shows that a prodigal can be reformed through love for a virtuous girl as Belcour is reformed by Louisa Dudley. It also shows that avarice is outwitted while honourable simplicity is rescued from distress and rewarded. The wicked Lady Rusport is finally exposed, while the virtuous Charles Dudley is duly rewarded. In The Runaway the main moral is that ardent and uncalculating love triumphs over all obstacles. The pure and unselfish love is shown as defeating villainy and wealth, as Lady Dinah badly fails in her designs to blast Emily's reputation and
prevent her union with George Hargrave.

Sentimental comedy centres itself around moral problems; it aims at arousing admiration for virtue. This is understandable in a comedy written in reaction against the "immoral" drama of the Restoration and in response to the new needs of an increasingly bourgeois audience. The Restoration dramatists had forfeited the guidance of a moral standard of which the best of that age had retained a consciousness. The immorality or amorality of the Restoration comedy sprang from an essentially shallow and cynical view of life on which no truly great art could be founded. The sentimental comedy is, as Ricoll points out, an attempt to dramatize a moral problem. But its morality, as suggested above, is not adequately realized in the texture of the work as a whole. As shown in the next chapter, it stresses morality by a frequent uttering of moral platitudes by the good characters. One cannot help becoming aware of the preacher in the playwright. But a real artist does not seem to thrust upon us a particular view of life. As true comedy appeals to the intellect, there can be no direct morality in it, because morality is mainly a question of the emotions. But the sentimental comedies are consciously instructive; their plots are designed to work out pre-conceived moral aims. This often mars them as works of art.

In sentimental comedy, it is the pathetic element rather than the comic which dominates. Edmund Burke, commenting upon the
pathos in sentimental comedy, wrote in *Reformer* No. 10 (1743):

"Our Authors reverse the Business of the Drama and are fond of introducing scenes of distress in comedy. Who were the first Inventors of this Weeping Comedy, I cannot tell". This statement cannot, however, be accepted without qualification. While sentimental comedy does give prominence to pathetic scenes, it is by no means a "weeping" comedy from first to last. Even French sentimental comedy which excluded, as a rule, farcical low comedy is not wholly devoid of humour. La Chaussée's most tearful comedy, *Mélancolide* (1741), which deals with the reunion of a long-separated husband and wife, has amusing passages as well. The English sentimental playwrights favour the scenes of distress which offer rich opportunities for emotional effects. But in spite of the attendant strain of melancholy, their comedies are, to some extent, enlivened with some laughable situations and humorous personages. Many instances can be cited to illustrate this.

*The Lying Lover* which, according to Steele, was "damn'd for its piety" contains several diverting things. In the opening scene there is an amusing conversation between Young Bookwit and Iatine, and then between the former and Penelope. Near the end of the scene we are again diverted by Young Bookwit's imaginary accounts before Lovemore of a magnificent water gala arranged in honour of Penelope (128). We are also greatly amused by Old

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Bookwit's flattery of Penelope whom he wants to marry his son. "Oh fie! Pray, good Sir", says Penelope, "you'll leave nothing for your Son to say" (134). In another scene (II, ii), the gaiety with which Young Bookwit talks to his father causes the latter to remark to our amusement: "In you my Youth and gayer Years me thinks I feel repeated" (144). In the same scene we are greatly amused when Young Bookwit, the liar, surprises his father by pretending that he is already married:

Old Bookwit. Married without my Consent!

Young Bookwit. There was a Force upon me; you'll easily get all annul'd if you desire it: -- It was the crossest, most unhappy accident. -- Yet indeed she is an excellent Creature! (145).

But perhaps the most diverting scene (III, i) is that in which the two loving cousins, Penelope and Victoria, spoil each other's beauty a little before their meeting with Young Bookwit by applying excessive powder and patches under a pretence of friendly help. This is done after jealousy has arisen between them. After powdering Victoria, Penelope observes in an aside, "Now she looks like a Spright" (152).

In The Conscious Lovers the dialogue between Tom, a coxcomb, and the coquetish Phillis takes on a racier tone. In an amusing scene (III, i) the latter makes play with the former: "... since I'm at leisure, you may tell me when you fell in love with me, how you fell in love with me, and what you have suffered or are
ready to suffer for me" (566). Then Tom begs her to shorten his torment: "Oh, Phillis, you don't know how many china cups and glasses my passion for you has made me break. You have broke my fortune as well as my heart" (567). It is believed that Colley Cibber, after perusing the manuscript of *The Conscious Lovers*, had suggested either the addition or the extension of the diverting parts of Tom and Phillis. Cibber's *Careless Husband* has a comic sub-plot in which Lord Morelove pursues the scornful Lady Betty Modish. By coqueting with Lord Foppington, an affected coxcomb, Lady Betty exasperates Morelove. As suggested by Sir Charles Easy, Morelove seeks to excite her jealousy by courting Lady Graveairs, and feels reassured: "So! she's stirred, I see, for all her pains to hide it: she would hardly have glanced an affront at a woman she was not piqued at" (424). This causes Lady Betty to relent and she finally yields to him. The play also contains several diverting scenes in which Foppington boasts of the success of his amours. The fop also expresses dissatisfaction with his wife ("for she is positively of no manner of use in my amours"). In Act II, Scene ii, he tells Sir Charles and Lord Morelove with an air of superiority that "courage is the whole mystery of making love, and of more use than conduct is in war" (413).

*The Lady's Last Stake*, essentially a serious play, is not without a vein of humour. The humour is provided by George Brilliant, an amusing coxcomb like Lord Foppington. Lady Gentle's normal civility to him sends him into raptures; he hastens to tell
Lord Wronglove that his "faculties are drown'd in joy" (211). Before sipping the tea offered by Wronglove, he exclaims, "Tea! thou soft, thou sober, sage, and venerable liquid, thou innocent pretence for bringing the wicked of both sexes together in a morning; thou female tongue-running, smile-smoothing, heart-opening, wink-tippling cordial ..." (211). Laughter is also aroused by the high-spirited Mrs. Conquest and the mirthful Miss Notable. In love with Lord George, Mrs. Conquest disguises herself as Sir John to take "innocent revenge" on him. Miss Notable falls in love with Sir John at first sight: "I must have a friendship with him, that's poss" (277).

The Foundling is by no means without comic touches. Rosetta loves Colonel Raymond, but, in order to tease him, pretends to encourage the advances of Faddle, the fop whom the gay coquette actually finds downright ridiculous. In Act I, Scene ii, she expresses her opinion that men are the "gentlest creatures" in the world if they are subjected to ill usage. In the same scene she amuses us by irritating the Colonel by reading out from Faddle's letter to her: "Since I saw you yesterday, time has hung upon me like a winter in the country; and unless you appear at rehearsal of the new opera this morning, my sun will be in total eclipse for two hours". In another scene (II, i) Faddle amuses us by his elaborate descriptions of Rosetta and Fidelia. The scene also contains the amusing passages in which
Belmont and his sister Rosetta talk about rake and coquette.

In The School for Lovers, Modely has been trying to marry Caelia for money while at the same time making love to Araminta. When Caelia finally rejects him in favour of Sir John Dorilant, he goes back to Araminta, little knowing that she already knows the truth about him. Their conversation, therefore, becomes amusing because of dramatic irony (283). Exposed by Araminta, the boaster stands confounded when his friend Belmouir enters and comments: "Caesar ashamed! — And well he may, i'faith. Why, man, what is the matter with you? Quite dumb? quite confounded? Did not I always tell you that you loved her?" (282-83). The School for Rakes has Mrs. Winifred, whose pride in Ap Evans' genealogy is ridiculous enough. But more so is her absurd pride in her own ability and common sense: "It is happy for my family that I have a little sense, brother, though I do not boast of it" (82). When her brother, Harriot's father, decides to meet Lord Eustace in a duel, she remarks, "This self-will'd man distresses me extremely, he is for ever disconcerting my schemes — There never was such a race of idiots as the family of the Ap Evans', myself excepted — there is not a head in the house but my own" (84). Another character, Captain Lloyd, amuses us with his nautical terms. This is well illustrated by his conversation with Sir William and his sister (II, iii), and later, with Colonel Evans (IV, i).
In False Delicacy Mrs. Harley and Cecil are quite lively characters who often make delightful comments about the sentimental lovers. For example, Mrs. Harley mocks at the delicacy of the lovers: "Oh, I always said that you grave, reflecting, moralizing damsels, were a thousand times more susceptible of tender impressions than those lively, open-hearted girls who talk away at random, and seem ready to run off with every man that happens to fall into their company" (740). About Lady Betty and Lord Winworth, Cecil says in a similar vein: "Your people of refined sentiments are the most troublesome creatures in the world to deal with, and their friends must even commit a violence upon their nicety, before they can condescend to study their own happiness" (740-41).

Hugh Kelly seems to call our attention to the incongruity of pathos in comedy when Lady Rachel Mildew in The School for Wives tells Mrs. Belville (I, iii) that sentimental comedy, written in praise of virtue, has been refused by the managers of both houses as "They allege that the audiences are tired of crying at comedies; and insist that my despairing shepherdess is absolutely too dismal for representation" (245-46). In his preface to this play, Kelly states his aim "to steer between the extremes of sentimental gloom and the excesses of uninteresting levity". General Savage, an amusing character in the play, insists on being obeyed unquestioningly in all domestic matters:
"When I issue my orders, I expect them to be obeyed; and don't look for an examination into their propriety" (253). But the formidable Mrs. Tempest, his kept mistress, disputes his orders eternally. As Torrington tells the General, "Mrs. Tempest is your fate, and she reverses your decrees with as little difficulty as a fraudulent debtor now-a-days procures his certificate under a commission of bankruptcy" (251). In vain does he dream of parting with her for ever, and of "perpetual imprisonment in the arms of Miss Walsingham" (252), who loves his son, Captain Savage. When in a delightful scene (II, ii) General Savage proposes to her, she accepts, thinking he is proposing for his son. The jubilant General desires her to keep everything a profound secret (266). This accounts for several delightful passages because of dramatic irony. Later, the General's misconception is amusingly cleared (330-31). There is another highly diverting scene (II, ii) in which Miss Walsingham befools Mr. Belville by saying that he is irresistible (257). Soon, however, the rake discovers the truth: "Laughed at, by all the stings of mortification!" (258).

The Brothers contains one comic sub-plot, showing a henpecked husband who finally rebels against his wife successfully. In a highly amusing scene (IV, ii) Sir Benjamin Dove, the cowardly husband, challenges Belfield Jr. to vindicate the honour of his family. As the latter realizes that Sir Benjamin
only wants to build some reputation with his wife by challenging him, he generously allows his opponent to impress his termagant wife with his bravery. "You are happy", he says to Lady Dove, "in the most valiant of defenders, gentle as you may find him in the tender passions; to a man, madam, he acquits himself like a man" (VII, 271). Sir Benjamin now hastens to assert himself before his wife: "I am unalterably resolved, from this time forward, Lady Dove, to be sole and absolute in this house; -- master of my own servants, father to my own child, and sovereign lord and governor, madam, over my wife!" Later he orders her to give up Paterson's company: "... but leave me to Mr. Paterson, and Mr. Paterson to me" (VII, 274). There are several other comic touches. In Act II, Scene iii, Lady Dove goes to meet her lover in the garden, but finds instead Belfield Jr. kneeling, and embracing her step-daughter, Sophia. She exclaims, "Heyday! What's here to do with you both?" (VII, 263). Again, there is an amusing conversation between the servants, Jonathan and Francis (II, iv), during which the former says about his master, "... you never saw two people more different than I and Sir Benjamin Dove. He, lord help him! is a little peaking, puling thing; I am a jolly ... man, as you see" (VII, 263).

In The West Indian Major O'Flaherty is quite an entertaining character. In one of the scenes (IV, viii) he steps behind a screen to overhear the conversation between Lady Rusport and the
lawyer Varland. "A good soldier", he reflects, "must sometimes fight in ambush as well as open field" (777). In the next scene the wicked Varland comments in a soliloquy on his decision to hand over a document to Lady Rusport for 5000 pounds: "'Tis a good round sum to be paid down at once for a bribe, but 'tis a damned rogue's trick in me to take it" (777). The overhearing Major O'Flaherty expresses himself in amusing asides: So, so! this fellow speaks truth to himself, though he lies to other people .... These lawyers are so used to bring off the roguries of others that they are never without an excuse for their own" (777).

The Runaway contains several comic scenes. Mr. Hargrave, anxious to secure Lady Dinah's forty thousand pounds, tries hard to persuade his son George to agree to marry her. But he speaks in such a manner that George thinks it is his father himself who wants to marry this middle-aged lady. George, therefore, tells his father that he has no objection whatsoever. This misunderstanding occasions a highly amusing dialogue between father and son (23). Confident of marrying George, Lady Dinah finds it hard to understand Emily looking at George "with eyes that were downright gloating", and George pressing Emily's hand to his lips "with an ardour that is inconceivable" (37). Later she takes the trouble of hiding behind a bush to overhear the conversation between the lovers (37-38). When George learns that
his father intends Lady Dinah to be his (George's) wife and not his mother, his lively cousin, Bella, laughs at his situation: "...fling yourself at her feet, tell her you had no idea of the bliss that was designed you -- and that you'll make her the tenderest, fondest Husband in the world" (46).

Thus, the eighteenth-century English sentimental comedy does not altogether disregard the comic aspect of life. Though fundamentally serious, it always contains some comic scenes. It is, therefore, misleading to suggest that this comedy relies on pathos from first to last, and that it is comedy only because all complications are finally resolved in a happy ending. It seems that the sentimental playwrights did not deem it safe to write exclusively in the sentimental vein; they introduced some comic elements in their work. But although it is seldom that a sentimental comedy entirely lacks humour, it must be stressed that it is the pathetic rather than the humorous element which is dominant in most of the sentimental comedies. Indeed, the legitimacy of pathos in comedy is one of the basic assumptions of the sentimental playwrights. Comedy, according to Steele, need not arouse laughter by exposing a person's vice or folly to ridicule. He even despises laughter and ridicule as weapons of comedy. In the epilogue to The Conscious Lovers he expresses his dissatisfaction with the comedy which provokes laughter. In the epilogue to The Trysting Lover, Steele extols pity but despises
laughter which he calls the issue of "sudden self-esteem and sudden scorn". For him, to excite laughter is a lower achievement than with pity to chastise delight. The follies and vices are to be attacked not with ridicule, but by causing the public to contemplate with horror their grievous consequences. He indicates his preference for the pathetic in comedy: "Generous pity of a painted woe/Makes us ourselves both more approve and know". He wants comedy to give "a joy too exquisite for laughter".

Steele as well as other sentimental playwrights include in their comedies many scenes or situations designed to arouse emotion, and even draw forth tears. As already stated, humour is not totally absent, but its marked subordination to the sentimental, serious, and pathetic is perhaps the most important feature of sentimental comedy. For this reason Ward and Nettleton define it as that type of comedy which arouses pity in the mind of the spectator.23 The general impression is that laughter is a prominent ingredient in the comedic effect, even if it does not constitute its sole appeal. The other elements like hope and joy also play a vital role in determining the characteristic appeal of comedy. Its spirit is one of amusement and laughter, of joy in man and the natural order. "Comedy", says Thorndike, "has often been amusing because it was joyous and merry".24

23 Ward, English Dramatic Literature, III, 495; Nettleton, English Drama of the Restoration, p. 264.
24 Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 11.
surely this is not true of the sentimental comedy. Its conscious moral aim is fundamentally serious, and it appeals to the emotion of pity.

What is remarkable about sentimental comedy is not that it contains the pathetic element, but that this serious element receives much greater prominence than the comic one. It is, however, certain that the sentimental comedy cannot be equated with tragedy, because the main emotional response that it produces is not one of any profound sorrow, tragic suffering, waste and emptiness. It rewards virtue and closes with everyone rejoicing in the benevolent rule of the universe that works out all things for the good of man. But it invariably contains pathetic scenes which are to be applauded on the stage. As Bernbaum points out, the sentimental playwrights "destroyed for ever the tradition that the pathetic must be excluded from comedy".\(^25\)

Professor Croissant remarks that in The Conscious Lovers "the action is centred around a pathetic situation".\(^26\) In fact, the central situations are pathetic in most sentimental comedies, and their plots are designed to claim our sympathy for the heroes and heroines. The outstanding examples are The Careless Husband, The Foundling, The School for Rakes and The Brothers. In any


\(^{26}\) Croissant, Studies in Colley Cibber, p. 62.
case, every sentimental comedy contains several tearful scenes. The sentimental possibilities of such situations are fully exploited by the sentimental playwright by according them a prolonged treatment. This is obviously done with a view to evoking the maximum of emotional response from the audience. In this section it will be necessary to quote at length and in full. But we shall have to be content with one or two most illustrative instances from each sentimental comedy. The extracts that follow will give us some idea of the stilted elegance of the style, and the mawkishness of sentiment.

The Lying Lover contains a pathetic scene (V, iii) that shows the hero, Young Bookwit, lying in prison for supposedly killing Lovemore in a duel. His father weeps, believing him to be in danger of losing his life for homicide. A part of the lengthy, pathetic dialogue between father and son may be quoted:

**Old Bookwit.** ... Oh, my Son! my Son! rise and support thy Father! I sink with Tenderness, my Child, come to my Arms while thou art mine.

**Young Bookwit.** Oh best of Fathers! Let me not see your Tears, don't double my Afflictions by your Woe -- There's Consolation when a Friend laments us, but When a Parent grieves, the Anguish is too native, Too much our own to be called Pity ....

**Old Bookwit.** Oh my Child, my Child! -- I cou'd hear thee ever. 'Twas that I lov'd thee, that I turn'd away, To hear my Son persuade me to resign him. I can't, I can't. The Grief is insupportable (182-83).

and so forth, till Old Bookwit swoons. It is in such passages
that sentimentalism is seen at its worst. Steele, like other sentimental playwrights, is not content with fewer words to evoke the emotional response from his readers. Such a reluctance to regard enough as enough is seen in almost every sentimental comedy. As suggested earlier, Steele regarded the serious portion as the best part of this comedy. In the preface, saying that his hero "awakes from his Debauch, with the Compunction and Remorse which is suitable to a Man's finding Himself in a Gaol for the Death of his Friend, without His knowing why", he goes on to justify such pathetic scenes in comedy on the grounds of morality. "And Passages of such a Nature being so frequently applauded on the stage", he adds, "it is high time that we should no longer draw Occasions of Mirth from those Images which the Religion of our Country tells us we ought to tremble at with Horrour" (115).

The Conscious Lovers has several emotional, serious and tearful scenes. One scene of emotional intensity follows close upon another. Such scenes often contain most emotional, moralizing passages. In Act I, Scene ii, Young Bevil gives Humphrey a very lengthy account of the sufferings of Indiana, which continued until "Providence at the instant interposed and sent me, by miracle, to relieve her" (559). Another pathetic scene shows Indiana distracted with grief when Bevil looks certain to marry another girl. While enumerating her woes to
Mr. Sealand, she happens to drop a bracelet by which he recognizes her as his long-lost daughter. Having aroused our pity for her, Steele makes it a point to capitalize on the emotion by making the reunion scene unnecessarily lengthy:

Mr. Sealand. Ha! What's this? My eyes are not deceived. It is, it is the same! The very bracelet which I bequeathed my wife at our last mournful parting.

Indiana. What said you, sir? Your wife! Whither does my fancy carry me? What means this unfelt motion at my heart? And yet again my fortune but deludes me, for if I err not, sir, your name is Sealand but my lost father's name was--

Mr. Sealand. Danvers, was it not?

Indiana. What new amazement! That is indeed my family.

Mr. Sealand. Know then, when my misfortunes drove me to the Indies, for reasons too tedious now to mention, I changed my name of Danvers into Sealand. ... O my child, my child!

Indiana. All-gracious heaven! Is it possible? Do I embrace my father!

Mr. Sealand. And do I hold thee--These passions are too strong for utterance. Rise, rise, my child, and give my tears their way. O my sister! (582-53).

Steele has thus exploited the situation for all the emotion he could get out of it. In such scenes the dialogue becomes dull, because the playwright gives full rein to sentimentalism. In the final scene, however, all sighs change to cries of joy.

The opening scene of The Careless Husband in which Lady Easy, the heroine, soliloquises that her spirit is broken by an
injurious husband, Sir Charles, gives some idea of the serious tone of the play. In a later scene, she is shocked to find her husband and her woman, Mrs. Edging, asleep on two chairs. The sight draws out tears from her. When Sir Charles discovers that she has been forgiving and generous to him despite her knowledge of his relations with her woman, he repents and reforms. The tender reconciliation scene is clearly calculated for evoking a sentimental response:

Sir Cha. ... let me beg you would immediately discharge your woman.

L. Ea. Alas! I think not of her (weeping.) Oh, my dear! distract me not with this excess of goodness.

Sir Cha. Nay, praise me not, lest I reflect how little I have deserved it. ... Receive me then entire at last, and take what yet no woman ever truly had, my conquered heart.

L. Ea. Oh, the soft treasure! Oh, the dear reward of long desiring love! ... Thus, to have you mine is something more than happiness, 'tis double life, and madness of abounding joy. But 'twas a pair intolerable to give you a confusion (431).

The Lady's Last Stake contains a very tender, tearful scene in which Sir Friendly Moral brings about a reconciliation between Lord and Lady Wronglove after they have agreed to divorce to solve their problems. He asks Lady Wronglove to treat him with soft affection and assures her that Lord Wronglove has a soft, generous and tender nature. At this the lady sits down weeping, depending wholly on him to set matters right. Then he asks Lord Wronglove how his wife's softening tears
reproach him. Lord Wronglove is deeply moved by her tears:

**Id. Wrong.** Now, I shou'd blush ever to have deserv'd these just reproachful tears; but when I think they spring from the dissolving rock of secret love, I triumph in the thought; and in this wild irruption of its joy, my parching heart cou'd drink the cordial dew.

**La. Wrong.** What means this soft effusion in my breast? An aching tenderness ne'er felt before!

**Id. wrong.** I cannot bear that melting eloquence of eyes. Yet nearer, closer to my heart, and live for ever there -- Thus blending our dissolving souls in dumb unutterable softness.

**Sir Fr.** age has not yet so drain'd me, but when I see a tenderness in virtue's eye, my heart will soften, and its springs will flow (280).

And so forth, in this vein. An emotional situation, thus, receives a prolonged treatment to evoke a thoroughly sentimental response from the reader. In such scenes, it has been rightly said, "All weep together. And surely if the reader is a man of tender heart he will weep also".27 There is another emotional scene in which Lady Gentle curses herself for having brought her to the verge of ruin due to her addiction to gambling (289-90).

The central situation of *The Foundling* is pathetic. Its innocent heroine Fidelia, the foundling, suffers the pangs of sorrow in many scenes of the play. Bernbaum remarks that Moore failed to take advantage of the opportunities for emotional scenes and that he slighted the sentimental for the comic.28

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27 S.T. Williams, "The English Sentimental Drama from Steele to Cumberland", *Sewanee Review*, 33 (1925), 410.
But although *The Foundling* is not as deeply imbued with sentimentality as *The Conscious Lovers*, it has many emotional, pathetic scenes. By depicting Fidelia's distresses the dramatist attempts to arouse the reader's genuine pity for her. The most tearful scene is that of her reunion with her father, Sir Charles, who has been comforting her in her sorrow, though without recognizing her as his own long-lost daughter.

It is only towards the close of the play that he has a definite proof of being her father. Even a part of this unduly prolonged tearful scene will illustrate how the sentimental playwrights linger over emotional situations until the last extractable essence of emotion is wrung from them:

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Sir Char. ... My heart dotes upon her! Oh, I can hold no longer! -- My daughter! my daughter!

Fid. Your daughter, sir!

Sir Char. Oh, my sweet child! -- Sir Roger, Mr. Belmont, my son! -- These tears! -- these tears! -- Fidelia is my daughter! ... 'twas a hard trial! and while my tongue was taught dissimulation, my heart bled for a child's distresses.

Bel. Torture us not, sir, but explain this wonder!

Sir Char. My tears must have their way first -- O, my child! my child! ... My child was taught to believe she was a foundling -- her name of Harriet changed to Fidelia -- and, to lessen my solicitude for the theft, a letter was dispatched to me in France, that my infant daughter had no longer a being. Thus was the father robbed of his child, and the brother taught to believe he had no sister!

Fid. Am I that sister, and that daughter? -- O, Heavens! ...

Sir Char. Rise, my child! To find thee thus virtuous, in the midst of temptations, and thus lovely, in
the midst of poverty and distress -- after an absence of eighteen melancholy years, when imaginary death had torn thee from my hopes ... is happiness that the uninterrupted enjoyments of the fairest life never equalled?

Moore's deliberately prolonged treatment of this emotional situation is obvious. What is quoted above hardly constitutes even one-third of this tearful and weakly mawkish scene. Moore is not satisfied with throwing in a few and brief passages of sentimental dialogue. The sentimental playwrights linger over such situations not because they need to gain credibility for them, but because they wish to capitalize on the emotions they have aroused. This reunion scene in The Foundling shows the relevance of Mr. Brooke's remark in the prologue to the play: "He rather aims to draw the melting sigh,/Or steal the pitying tear from beauty's eye". The modern reader may dismiss such a scene as mawkish, but contemporary critics praised the play for the tender touches in this scene.

The prologue to The School for Lovers, as it was intended to have been spoken, declared that the play would provoke tears as well as smiles. The scenes immediately preceding the conclusion of this comedy are marked by emotional fervour; they provoke more tears than smiles. In Act IV, the good-hearted Sir John is shocked to find Caelia disposed to marry the superficial gallant Modely. Though by her father's will she loses her estate
if she refuses to marry Sir John, the latter hands her papers that leave her free to follow her own inclinations. This occasions several tender, melancholy scenes. Later, in act V, disgusted with Modely, and not hopeful of being accepted by John, Caelia decides not to stay any longer with Sir John's family. Sir John walks up to her and the following melancholy, tender dialogue occurs between the two:

**Sir John.** ... My very roof is grown irksome to you; and the innocent pleasure I received in observing your growing virtues, is no longer to be indulged to me.

**Caelia.** O, Sir, put not so hard a construction upon what I thought a blameless proceeding. Can it be wondered at, that I should fly from him who has twice rejected me with disdain? ... Who has withdrawn from me even his parental tenderness, and driven me to the hard necessity of avoiding him? ... I know how much my inexperience wants a faithful guide; I know what cruel censures a malicious world will pass upon my conduct; but I must bear them all. For he who might protect me from myself, protect me from the insults of licentious tongues, abandons me to fortune.

**Sir John.** O, Caelia! -- have I, have I abandoned thee? -- Heaven knows my inmost soul; how did it rejoice but a few moments ago, when Modely told me that your heart was mine! ... O, he breathed comfort to a despairing wretch; but now a thousand, thousand doubts crowd in upon me. He leaves my house this instant; nay, may be gone already. Caelia too is flying from me -- perhaps to join him, and, with her happier lover, smile at my undoing! -- (leans on Araminta).

**Caelia.** ... Can you, Sir, who know my every thought, harbour such a suspicion? -- O, Madam, this contempt have you brought upon me. A want of deceit was all the little negative praise I had to boast of, and that is now denied me. ... O, Sir, if you ever loved my father, in pity to my orphan state, let me not leave you. Shield me
from the world, shield me from the worst of misfortunes, your own unkind suspicions (295-97).

In False Delicacy there is a similar situation which Kelly has treated in the same manner as Whitehead. In Act IV, Scene ii, Miss Rivers decides to elope with her lover Harry after her father, Col. Rivers, resolves to marry her to Sidney. Aware of her plan, Col. Rivers meets her when she is ready for elopement. This results in an exceedingly emotional scene that is too long\textsuperscript{29} for quotation. A part of the lengthy dialogue between the father and daughter may be quoted:

\textbf{Miss Rivers.} Hear me, dear sir, hear me! --
\textbf{Rivers.} I do not come here, Theodora, to stop your flight, or put the smallest impediment in the way of your wishes. ... Go to him boldly, my child, and laugh at the pangs which tear this unhappy bosom. Be uniformly culpable, nor add the baseness of a despicable flight to the unpardonable want of a filial affection. (Going)

\textbf{Miss Rivers.} I am the most miserable creature in the world! --
\textbf{Rivers.} (Returns) One thing more, Theodora, -- and then farewell forever. Though you come here to throw off the affectation of a child, I will not quit this place before I discharge the duty of a parent, even to a romantic extravagance, and provide for your welfare, while you plunge me into the most poignant of all distress. In the doting hours of paternal blandishment, I have often promised you a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, whenever you changed your situation. This promise was, indeed, made when I thought

\textsuperscript{29} Alfred Harbage, \textit{As They Liked It} (New York, 1947), p. 178, shows how Shakespeare's treatment of a sentimental situation differs from the sentimental playwright's treatment of the identical situation, and suggests that in Shakespeare any suggestion of sentimentality is eliminated by the brevity and spontaneity in the treatment of potentially sentimental situations.
you incapable either of ingratitude or dissimulation... But still it was a promise, and shall be faithfully discharged. Here then in this pocket-book are notes for that sum. (Miss Rivers show an unwillingness to receive the pocket-book) Take it, -- but never see me more. Banish my name eternally from your remembrance; and when a little time shall remove me from a world which your conduct has rendered insupportable, boast an additional title, my dear, to your husband’s regard, by having shortened the life of your miserable father (737-38).

As the central situation of The School for Rakes is pathetic, it has many emotional and serious scenes. For example, in Act II, Scene iii, Harriot, who is clandestinely married to Lord Eustace, is shocked to hear Captain Lloyd telling her father, Sir William, that Lord Eustace is to be married shortly (49). She faints, supposing that he is going to marry another (52). In Act III, Scene ii, Harriot pathetically confesses to her father that she’s Lord Eustace’s wife:

Har. O, sir!
Sir W. What ails my child?
Har. (Falls at his feet.) My father!
Sir W. What is the matter? You amaze me, Harriot!
Har. I am --
Sir W. What?
Har. You see before you, sir --
Sir W. Don’t distract me! whom do I see?
Har. I am ... Lord Eustace ... my father! --
Sir W. Speak; go on ... Lord Eustace ... What of him?
Har. I am his wife! --
Sir W. What -- Lord Eustace’s wife! -- Then you are a wretch, indeed! (65).
In Act V, Scene ii, there is a melancholy, tender conversation between Sir William and Harriot, a little before the former is to meet Lord Eustace in a duel (100). Then, of course, there is the last tender scene in which the contrite Lord Eustace accepts Harriot as his wife (109). In all these scenes the air is thick with pity, sympathy and emotion.

The School for Wives contains some revealing remarks on the nature of the sentimental comedies of the age. In Act III, Scene i, one of the characters, Lady Rachel, who writes sentimental comedies, seems to believe that Miss Headstrong in her comedy will be played admirably by Miss Leeson. The following dialogue suggests the serious, tragic tone of the sentimental comedy:

Miss Lees. ... I have no turn for comedy; my forte is tragedy entirely.

Alphonso: — O Alphonso! to thee I call, etc.

Lady Rach. But, my dear, is there none of our comedies to your taste?

Miss Lees. O, yes; some of the sentimental ones are very pretty, there's such little difference between them and tragedies (267-68).

As shown above, the sentimental comedies invariably contain many, though not all, scenes which tend to suggest that there is little difference between them and tragedies. The Brothers, like many sentimental comedies, takes on some of the functions of tragedy. It opens with a serious scene which stresses the
misfortunes of Old Goodwin and his family as victims of the elder Belfield. This is shown by the following dialogue between Old Goodwin and his son, Philip:

**Phil.** Nay, never droop; to be sure, father, the squire has dealt hardly with you, and a mighty point, truly, he has gained -- the ruin of an honest man. If those are to be the uses of a great estate, heaven continue me what I am!

**Pan.** Ay, ay, brother; a good conscience in a coarse drudgeet is better than an aching heart in a silken gown.

**Old G.** Well, children, well, if you can bear misfortunes patiently, 'twere an ill office for me to repine; we have long tilled the earth for a subsistence; now, Philip, we must plough the ocean; in those waves lies our harvest; there, my brave lad, we have an equal inheritance with the best (257).

This is soon followed by a pathetic scene between Belfield Jr. and Violetta, both victims of the elder Belfield. During their melancholy conversation, Belfield Jr. has to say, "Madam! for heaven's sake, what ails you? You seem suddenly disordered" (259). This leads to a serious, sentimental scene between Belfield Jr. and Old Goodwin (259). The play ends with a usual sentimental scene of reunion between the repentant, reformed Belfield and his faithful, forsaken wife, Violetta (276).

The West Indian, too, opens with an emotional situation as Stockwell eagerly awaits his only son (issue of a private marriage) who has been kept ignorant of his father out of necessity. In Act I, Scene iv, while reading Belcour's letter, Stockwell remarks, "... what a palpitation does it throw my heart
into, a father's heart!" (750). In the following scene, during his conversation with Belcour, Stockwell remarks in an aside, "How gladly I could fall upon his neck and own myself his father" (751). In the other plot, the situation of Charlotte and Charles remains pathetic almost till the final scene. As shown in Act II, Scene vi, both of them owe their miserable state to the hard-hearted Lady Rusport, Charlotte's step-mother. A highly emotional scene (V, v) shows Louisa reconciled to Belcour after his annoying advances to her (782-83). Even more sentimental is the scene (V, viii) of Stockwell finally revealing himself as Belcour's father:

Stockwell. Hold for a moment! I have yet one word to interpose. — Entitled by my friendship to a voice in your disposal, I have approved your match. There yet remains a father's consent to be obtained.

Belcour. Have I a father?

Stockwell. You have a father. Did not I tell you I had a discovery to make? Compose yourself; you have a father, who observes, who knows, who loves you.

Belcour. Keep me no longer in suspense. My heart is softened for the affecting discovery, and nature fits me to receive his blessing.

Stockwell. I am your father.

Belcour. My father! Do I live?

Stockwell. I am your father (785).

To be sure, Cumberland does not linger over this emotional situation, as Stockwell asks all present to repair to the supper room to hear his mysterious story (786). But it is not because
Cumberland is really opposed to a prolonged treatment of the emotional situation. As Bernbaum remarks, his plots are so much crowded with incidents, and the characters having conspicuous parts are so numerous that he had not leisure to express the emotions of his characters in detail.

In The Runaway, several of the scenes in which the lovers, Sir Charles Seymour and Harriet, appear are marked by an air of gloom, as each believes that the other is going to marry another. This misunderstanding they owe to George, Harriet's brother: "Seymour and my Sister doat on one another -- I have made each believe, that the other has different engagements" (24). A playwright like Goldsmith would have effectively used dramatic irony to gain comic effect. The final act is throughout serious. Emily's uncle Morley tries to snatch her away from her lover George, insisting to have her married to one Baldwin whom she hates. "Oh Sir", says Emily, "allow me to live single, I have no wish for the married state -- since he to whom my heart is devoted must be the husband of another" (61). Most of the time the lovers look pensive and emotionally disturbed until they unite with the aid of the benevolent Mr. Drummond.

Thus, the themes that compose the plots of the sentimental comedies are easily susceptible of emotional treatment. The playwrights take pains to exploit the emotional possibilities of

30 Ibid., pp. 234, 237.
the situations. The extracts cited above contain most emotional passages from the tender and touching scenes. These show that often the writing becomes dull when the emotions are intensified in the interests of moral purpose. A heavy tone of piety marks sentimental comedy. Its didacticism becomes evident from the fifth-act moralizing, often dull. Sometimes one feels with Waterhouse that these plays are neither true tragedies nor true comedies. Williams remarks that in sentimental comedy humour and satire "seem like forbidden guests in a house of mourning". Though humour, unlike satire, does creep in, this form of comedy places accent on pity. It solicits our tears for the suffering characters, and admiration for the virtuous. That it was quite popular in its time shows to what extent the play-goers were fond of being crammed with sentiment and capable of being delighted by pathetic pieces.

The fifth acts of these comedies throb with pathos. The pathos of sentimental comedy was defended in its time. Bishop Hurd, for example, wrote that "all distresses are not improper in comedy". Cumberland's first biographer addressed himself to all those critics of sentimental comedy who regarded ridicule and laughter as the only legitimate weapons of comedy: "... if virtue can be inculcated through the soft influence of tears; if,

31 Williams, "English Sentimental Drama", p. 409.
by awakening the heart to tenderness, we can dispose it to the admission of moral truth, he who would deny to comedy this privilege may be pronounced an enemy to human happiness." In the next passage he again defends the pathetic situations of the sentimental comedy by saying that "while tragedy ... calls forth our tears alone, let it be the province of comedy to mingle them with our smiles, to awaken the serious as well as the cheerful affections of our nature, and to enforce the practice of virtue, by making us laugh at folly, and weep for the consequences of vice."  

Dryden's Lisideius argued that mirth and compassion were things incompatible, that a mixture of the ingredients of comedy and tragedy did not leave a single, unalloyed impression, and was likely to confound the reader. Though in certain cases, the mixture of the pathetic and the comic may destroy the unity of effect, Lisideius's observation is not universally true. The plays of Shakespeare show that the opponents may not necessarily destroy unity of effect. The comic scenes in his tragedies enhance the total tragic effect. Similarly, in comedies like As You Like It and Twelfth Night Shakespeare does not allow the serious to destroy the "magic circle" in which comedy moves. Here suffering and bitterness are mere suggestions of pleasing

33 W. Mumford, The Life of Richard Cumberland ... (London, 1812), I, 281.
34 Ibid., I, 283.
35 English Critical Texts, p. 72.
melancholy because the essence of this comedy is "the deliberate blocking off of overtones suggestive of the transience of life or its insoluble problems".  

The eighteenth-century sentimental comedy, however, despite its pathos, cannot be equated with the twentieth-century "dark comedy" which presents a mixture of laughter and tears. Professor Styan has shown how the plays of Chekhov, Pirandello, Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett, Tennessee Williams, and Pinter defy the traditional pigeon-holes of tragedy and comedy. They contain some scenes which are grimly realistic, and others that border on pure fantasy. But the plays such as The Conscious Lovers, The West Indian, The Careless Husband, The Foundling, and The School for Lovers cannot be said to defy classification. Though a mixture of the comic and the pathetic, they are essentially different from the dark comedy which concentrates on boredom, doubt and disappointment, and lacks conclusiveness.

Whereas the modern dark comedy is essentially a drama of dismay and despair, the tearful scenes of the sentimental comedy eventually lead to a happy resolution of all complications. Those who look in comedy mainly for the light, the gay, the playful, the farcical, the laughter-provoking, will be disappointed like D. Daiches, Critical Approaches to Literature (New Delhi, 1967), p. 237.


F.H. Ristine, English Tragicomedy (New York, 1910), pp. 194-95, remarks that many of the essentials of tragí-comedy were adopted into sentimental comedy, and discusses the latter's "generic resemblance" to the former.
Goldsmith and Sheridan. Indeed, it is rare that laughter which is really gay and unrestrained penetrates any situation in sentimental comedy. Many of its scenes are, to use Fielding's words, "without anything which could provoke a laugh". It was due mainly to the playwright's repugnance for anything "low" and their naive trust in art as an instrument of moral improvement. One would like to agree with Wood when he says, "Sentimental comedy stands on the border line where comedy and tragedy merge one into the other. It is an attempt to write a comedy by the methods of tragedy". Many a sentimental comedy might well have become a tragedy merely by the alteration of its concluding scene.

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