CHAPTER FOUR

SENTIMENTAL COMEDY: THE CHIEF CHARACTERS

After examining the themes and situations of sentimental comedy, we shall now study its principal characters in order to bring out its true nature. We shall confine our attention to its three most important characters— the hero, the heroine, and an elderly benevolent person introduced for a special purpose.

The rake-hero of the Restoration comedy is poised, witty and skilled in making love. He conducts several love affairs simultaneously, but he keeps his head above his heart. Unlike the fop, he seldom boasts of his amours; he is too discreet to betray the confidence of any woman of his own class. Normally, he does not entertain a serious passion; if he does, he tries to conceal the fact by an affectation of indifference to the lady. If he gets married, he is rather unlikely to show any jealousy of his wife or betray his love for her. The heroine is often a coquettish lady who is perfectly familiar with the world of intrigue even if she is not actually involved in it. It is by no means certain that she will expect complete constancy from her husband. Her scruples, if any, seem to be based on prudence rather than virtue. As suggested in Chapter 1, this code was principally the creation of Charles II and his courtiers who, during their exile in France, had observed the elegance and
charm of life in the court of Louis XIV, and who later endeavoured to transplant that life in England. Deviations from this code provide much of the laughter in the comedy of manners. But its favourite situation is that in which the hero and the heroine, after they fall in love with each other, engage in a battle of wits, each trying to force the other to make the first admission of affection. Most of the scenes are remarkable for the witty dialogue between the flirting couples.

Such a popular conception of the gentleman and the lady did not, however, survive the reign of Charles II. As pointed out earlier, the stage began to rely after 1688 on the whole of London for its support; the movement for reform in life and drama gathered way, and Collier, Steele and others criticised the Restoration comedy for its lack of sense of ethical values. We have seen how the Restoration writers themselves recognized the need for improvement in the tone of comedy. They were particularly critical of the vices of its principal characters. Almost throughout the Restoration period, but especially after 1688, considerable unease had been expressed about the conduct of the hero and the heroine of the Restoration comedy.

Shadwell in his preface to *The Sullen Lovers* (1668) condemned its gay hero as "a Swearing, Drinking, Whoring Ruffian", and the gay heroine as "an impudent, ill-bred tomrig for a Mistress". Their chief subject of conversation was "bawdy and
profaneness". He made a similar protest in the preface to The Royal Shepherdess (1669): "It pleases most to see Vice encouraged, by bringing the Characters of debauch'd People upon the Stage, and making them pass for fine Gentlemen, who openly profess Swearing, Drinking, Whoring, breaking Windows, beating Constables, etc." In 1694, James Wright made one of his speakers in Country Conversations say that the common characters in this comedy are "two young debauchés" who at last marry two young ladies, "one of which is as wild as possibly can be, so as to 'scape the main chance, the other, more reserved, but really as forward to be marry'd as her sister". Richard Blackmore, in his preface to Prince Arthur (1695) bemoaned that such characters could never serve as "Patterns of Sense and Virtue" for the young persons. He complained that the heroines of these comedies entertained "the Audience with confident Discourses, immodest Repartees, and prophane Raillery", and that "The Man of Sense, and the Fine Gentleman in the Comedy, who, as the chiepest Person propos'd to the Esteem and Imitation of the Audience ... will appear a Finish'd Libertine ... these Characters are set up on purpose to ruin all Opinion and Esteem of Virtue ... whence the Youth of the Nation have apparently receiv'd very bad Impressions".

Collier in his Short View described the fine gentleman of

1Cited by Muir, Comedy of Manners, p. 16.
2Spingarn, III, 229-32.
this comedy as a "Whoring, Swearing, Smutty, Atheistical Man", and its fine ladies as "of the same Cut with the Gentlemen". He complained that the indiscretions of the heroines of this comedy were made attractive and hence morally dangerous. This is clear from his condemnation of the presentation of Wycherley's Olivia in The Plain Dealer, Congreve's Belinda in The Old Bachelor and of Miss Prue in Love for Love. In the fourth chapter of his Short View, Collier wrote that the playwrights made their principal characters vicious, and rewarded them at the end. Steele, likewise, objected to the presentation of the rake-hero as an attractive person. In The Lover No. 5, he wrote that many young members in the audience could not but be "secretly Envious of what appears so amiable to a whole Audience". In Spectator No. 446, he complained that "the accomplished gentleman upon the English stage, is the person that is familiar with other men's wives, and indifferent to his own; as the fine woman is generally, a composition of sprightliness and falsehoods" and bemoaned that the playwrights "cannot frame to themselves the idea of a fine man who is not a whore-master, or a fine woman that is not a jilt". In Spectator No. 65 he condemned Etherege's The Man of Mode, believing that its two most attractive characters (Sir Fopling Flutter and Dorimant) were in fact wicked knaves, while Harriet was everything she ought not to be. Such

3 Ibid., 225, 256.
a play, he thought, was likely to corrupt what he called the "sense of Innocence and Virtue". Collier and Steele could not believe that the spectators might respond to imaginative experience differently and that the dramatists might intend the audience to avoid the faults of the characters exhibited on the stage.

These days few of us will hold that the principal characters of the Restoration comedy are "bad" for the readers. But the neo-classical theory defined the function of literature in moral terms. It assumed that literature produced an effect on the readers, that the good books tended to civilize them while the bad ones tended to deprave them. It was the commonplace of the Augustan criticism that the value of literature was actually to be defined by its effects on the readers. And it seems to have been unanimously accepted in the Augustan age that the process by which the effects of the drama were brought about had to do with the direct imitation of examples of behaviour presented in the plays. Such an "example theory" is central in all the anti-stage writing after, and even before, 1688. There was hardly any other theory of how literature could function upon its readers. Both Steele and Johnson, for example, judged drama by its effects. According to Steele, as suggested above, the frequent reflections on love and marriage heard from the mouths of the Restoration heroes and heroines were bound to corrupt many of the play-goers.
Dr. Johnson, though he found Congreve's sparkling wit attractive, had no hesitation to disapprove of the general drift of his plays: "It is acknowledged, with universal conviction, that the perusal of his works will make no man better; and that their ultimate effect is to represent pleasure in alliance with vice, and to relax those obligations by which life ought to be regulated."  

As shown in Chapter 1, the chief characters in the comedies of Southerne, Vanbrugh and Farquhar, reveal that the vehemence of the first reaction against Puritanism had ended, and the rakishness had lost its original zest. The new trend towards sense, reform and the sympathetic mood after 1688 restrained the dramatists from depicting characters with an excessive inclination to wildness and frivolity. The eighteenth-century sentimental comedy rejected the principal characters of the early Restoration comedy as the latter symbolized those values in the Restoration culture which the new age saw as threats to well-ordered state. Steele and other sentimental playwrights rejected the cynical and libertine values of the Restoration world by presenting characters who were serious and moral rather than gay and wild, and who were guided more by emotion than by intellect. As an arbiter of the moral and social standards of his age, Steele declared, in The Guardian No. 34, at the beginning of the century: "When I

consider the frame of mind peculiar to a gentleman, I suppose it
gaced with all the dignity and elevation of spirit that human
ature is capable of". In his opinion, a rake was a man who
lived in the constant abuse of his reason. In this essay he
defines a fine gentleman as one who is "completely qualified as
well for the service and good, as for the ornament and delight
of society. ... He is properly a compound of the various good
qualities that embellish mankind". In the new climate, then,
Steele clearly indicated his inclination to replace the
Restoration rake-hero by the new man of sense and sensibility.

Before we examine the chief characters in sentimental comedy,
it may be pointed out that Aristotle's remarks on characters in
comedy and on the content of the ridiculous hardly apply to the
sentimental comedy. He suggests that comedy takes a partial view
of men and that it ridicules them by turning its searching light
only upon their defects. In a well-known passage of the Poetics
(Chap. 5) he distinguishes the characters in comedy from those
in tragedy: "Comedy is ... an imitation of characters of a lower
type, -- not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the
Ribicous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists
in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive".
The defect or mistake which for Aristotle constitutes the
ridiculous, has been identified by critics with various things.

Sidney, considering objections against various styles of
poetry in his *Apologie for Poetrie* suggests that it is the common 
errors of life which constitute the ridiculous.\(^5\) Congreve, in 
the Epistle Dedicatory to his *The Double Dealer*, points out that 
the subject-matter proper to comedy is folly: "It is the business 
of a comic poet to paint the vices and follies of mankind". Later, 
Goldsmith expresses a similar view in the fourth paragraph of 
his "Essay on the Theatre": "Comedy should excite our laughter 
by ridiculously exhibiting the follies of the lower part of 
mankind". Meredith calls folly "the natural prey of the comic".\(^6\) 
For Nicoll, too, comedy is concerned with the "permanent follies 
of mankind".\(^7\) Bergson holds that a character becomes ridiculous 
if he is unsociable.\(^8\) Smith expresses the same view when he 
reminds us that in a comedy "a moral flaw in individual character 
becomes ludicrous by its opposition to normal social exigencies".\(^9\) 
Potts, with slight variation of the "folly" theory, observes that 
"curable or manageable faults or maladjustments"\(^10\) are the subject-
matter of comedy.

Thus, Aristotle and others have recognized that most comedies 
have agents characterized by ridiculous qualities. Such an

explanation of the Ridiculous has given rise to the popular theory that the appeal of the characters of comedy is to the judgment, and not to sympathy. Bergson, Meredith, Smith and Potts have argued in favour of this theory. Bergson, for example, remarks: "The comic will come into being, it appears, whenever a group of men concentrate their attention on one of their number, imposing silence on their emotions and calling into play nothing but their intelligence". The sentimental comedy shows that the ridiculous characters cannot be adopted as the sole criterion of comedy. Even in the romantic comedies of Shakespeare the main characters like Rosalind and Orlando cannot be described as defective or ugly; they possess qualities of rare excellence.

Since sentimental comedy seems to regard laughter as a distorted passion, the ridiculous characters are relegated to a position of insignificance. There is little to laugh at its principal characters; they are presented as admirable. Secondly, they appeal mainly to sympathy and not to the judgment. It is because in this comedy it is the pathetic or serious rather than the comic which receives prominence. Its chief characters engage our sympathies rather than excite our laughter. Elizabeth Drew's remarks that the main characters of Shakespeare's comedies are of an idealized nature and that the appeal of his comedies is

11 Bergson, Laughter, p. 8.
emotional are even more relevant to the eighteenth-century sentimental comedy and its chief characters. Placed in emotional situations and uttering moral maxims, their appeal is mainly emotional.

The Augustan age being a period of comparative political stability, set a new fashion in public attitudes. It gave rise to an optimistic philosophy, not unlike that of Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss who holds that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. The cynicism of Hobbes's mechanistic philosophy had given way to the benevolistic philosophy of Shaftesbury under the influence of the Cambridge Platonists. Shaftesbury's philosophy, as we know, embraced a belief in the fundamental goodness of the average human being. It was possible to equate virtue with happiness in an age which could contemplate a future and resume an interest in long-term prospects. People could now be contemptuous of short-lived pleasure which was attractive in the Restoration period when long-term prospects of any kind were rather uncertain. In the eighteenth century, the popular assumption that human beings are perfectible, if not perfect, caused attention to be diverted from the rake-hero of the Restoration comedy and directed instead towards the sentimental hero who is virtuous, sensible, and free from all evil or licentious impulses.

Bevil Jr. in The Conscious Lovers is presented as an anti-
thesis of the Restoration rake. This comedy was conceived by Steele as an embodiment of his dramatic principles, and his hero was conceived as an alternative to Etherege's Dorimant. The conversation between Sir John Bevil and Humphrey in Act I, Scene ii reveals Bevil Jr. as a most unassuming young man, and brings out his absolute filial submission. This is seen when he argues to himself with great gravity, after calming his spirits for the vicissitudes of the day by reading the "charming Vision of Mirza". We learn about his religious vow not to marry without his father's approbation (558). He cannot love Incinda whom his father has chosen for him. But his filial submission forbids his revealing to Indiana that he loves her (559). Not sure of being able to marry her, he would not let her know his deep, enduring love for her. In reply to Humphrey he says, "My tender obligations to my father have laid so inviolable a restraint upon my conduct that till I have his consent to speak, I am determined on that subject to be dumb forever" (559).

Hare rightly observes that he is "literally constructed as a model, a pattern of filial duty". Humphrey endearingly calls Bevil Jr. "the most unfashionable lover in Great Britain" (559).

S.S. Kenny, "Richard Steele and the 'Pattern of Genteel Comedy'", MP, 70 (1972), 31. Kenny rightly sees The Conscious Lovers as the embodiment of Steele's philosophy of comedy.

Hare, op. cit., p. 34.
Indiana, aware of his love for her, appreciates the delicacy of his motives: "I know his virtue, I know his filial piety and ought to trust his management with a father to whom he has uncommon obligations" (562). He loves Indiana with sincerity and honour. She tells Isabella that "he has sense enough to make even virtue fashionable" (562). In Act IV, Scene i, we find that Myrtle, due to a misunderstanding over a letter, challenges Bevil to a duel. But Bevil rejects the challenge because he believes duelling to be a fashionable vice. Deeply impressed by Bevil's honourable bearing, Myrtle soon begs his forgiveness, admitting that Bevil's conduct has convinced him 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 play was written for the sake of the scene in which Bevil evades the duel with his friend. Myrtle acknowledges the preeminence of Bevil's virtue (584). According to Gay, Steele was the first to show that "devotion and virtue were anyway necessary to the character of a fine gentleman". Bevil's constancy in love is rewarded as he is eventually married to Indiana after she is revealed as Mr. Sealand's long-lost daughter. Sir John Bevil points out that the happiness of these lovers is due to their "constancy and merit".

The heroes of sentimental comedies often resemble Bevil Jr.

\[15\] Cited by Calverton, p. 177.
in being virtuous, contending against distresses, and being finally rewarded. Sir John Dorilant in The School for Lovers is the embodiment of selflessness, generosity and refinement. He loves his ward Caelia who, by her father's will, forfeits her estate if she marries anyone in preference to Sir John. Caelia is under many obligations to him. But Sir John is too good to force her inclinations. "I cannot think of marrying her", says he, "till I am sure she loves me" (236). Though his head and heart are full of her, he cannot persuade himself to propose to her, thinking that it is duty, not love, that actuates her behaviour towards him. His reluctance to tell Caelia that he wants to marry her baffles his sister, Araminta:

Sir John. Her gratitude may induce her to consent, rather than make me unhappy.

Araminta. You would absolutely make a woman mad.

Sir John. Why, could you think of marrying a man who had no regard for you?

Araminta. The case is widely different, my good casuistical brother; and perhaps I could not -- unless I was very much in love with him (237).

Lady Beverley, Caelia's mother, is herself interested in Sir John. Resenting his evident preference for her daughter, she tells him that Caelia's affections are engaged elsewhere. This reduces him to a pathetic figure. Considering Lady Beverley an abetter in the affair, he says, "O Madam, what unpardonable crime have I committed against you, that you should thus conspire my ruin?" (244).
Though himself utterly miserable, Sir John is only too willing to promote the happiness of others: "I feel the want of happiness too severely myself, to postpone it in others" (247). Before long he is shocked to learn that it is Modely (engaged to his sister) who has been courting Caelia and that her mother has been urging her to listen to Modely's addresses. Actually, Caelia looks upon Sir John as an elder brother and is too young to perceive the essential insincerity of Modely's attentions. But although Modely is thus responsible for making Sir John utterly miserable, the latter neither contemplates any revenge on him nor entertains any thought of ungentlemanly conduct: "Nor shall any misery which I may suffer, much less any prospect of a mean revenge, make me act unbecoming my character" (269). He refuses to take advantage of his position to marry Caelia: "Were I to seize the tender opportunity of her present disposition, the world would ascribe it to her fortune; and I am sure my deceased and valuable friend, however kindly he meant to me in the affair, never intended that I should make his daughter unhappy" (269).

We are intended by the dramatist to be filled with pity for Sir John in his misery. There comes a gentleman with whom he can make a very profitable bargain. Sir John, however, is too melancholy to speak to him and wants to be alone. "My head and heart", says he, "are too full now for any business which concerns my fortune" (272). Sir John tells Lady Beverley that he will
give his fortune to anyone who can engage him Caelia's affections. In his view her youth and inexperience extenuate her behaviour (273). Instead, he finds fault with his own conduct and shows great generosity towards her: "I am afraid mine was not so irreproachable. However, Caelia, I shall endeavour to make you all the amends in my power; and to show you that it is your happiness, not my own, which is the object of my anxiety" (274). He gives her the papers by which she gains unrestricted control over her estate. Sir John's unselfish generosity opens her eyes to the full meaning of true love. As she now hates Modely, Sir John, convinced of the sincerity of her love, marries her.

Belfield Jr. in *The Brothers* is a virtuous young man who arouses our sympathy for having been driven away from home and his sweetheart by his elder brother. He has been obliged to take to privateering, a hazardous occupation. A report of his death has been propagated by his elder brother who, after forsaking his wife, has been courting Sophia. Belfield Jr. has the qualities of courage and nobility. Though he does not know that Violetta is his brother's forsaken wife, he has rescued her from the jaws of death at the risk of his own life. She always remembers this with gratitude: "Can I forget when the vessel in which I had sailed from Portugal foundered by your side, with what noble, what benevolent ardour, you flew to my assistance. Regardful only of my safety, your own seemed no part of your
care" (VII, 258). Though exposed to innumerable hardships, his heart goes out in sympathy for her. "... it is so painful to be told of sorrows one has not power to relieve, that I have hitherto avoided the discourse" (VII, 258).

A victim of his brother's cruelty and injustice, he cannot but speak of monsters that disgrace humanity. But he does retain his faith in the general goodness of humanity: "... but this I will say for my countrymen, that where you can point out one rascal with a heart to wrong you, I will produce fifty honest fellows, ready and resolute to redress you" (VII, 259). His virtues have endeared him to those who are themselves good. His uncle, Captain Ironsides, calls him a lad of honour (VII, 265). The good Old Goodwin is beside himself with joy when he meets Belfield Jr. after the latter is shipwrecked on his coast. He shows his generosity when challenged to a duel by the cowardly Sir Benjamin Dove in order to impress his termagant wife. He allows the coward to build reputation with his wife by yielding to him and telling Lady Dove that her husband is the most reliant of defenders.

Belfield Jr. is different from the rake-hero of the Restoration comedy in his sincere love for Sophia (VII, 262); it has remained undiminished during his long absence from her. He is only speaking the truth when he says to his uncle, "You shall as soon reverse the operation of nature as wean my heart from my
Sophia" (VII, 260). His virtue is duly rewarded as he is
eventually united to her, and his brother's designs are frustrated.

In False Delicacy, two of the lead characters, Lord Winworth
and Sidney, are remarkably refined as well as serious. They try
to be scrupulously moral in whatever they contemplate or
accomplish. Like several other sentimental heroes, Lord Winworth
is a frequent mouther of morality. In his view, a woman of sense
must always despise coquetry or affectation (720). He believes
that while Lady Betty respects him, she does not love him. He,
therefore, decides not to trouble her with his solicitations and
would deem himself honoured with her friendship. He respects the
extraordinary delicacy on the part of Lady Betty and Miss
Marchmont, and his own dealings with them bear the stamp of a
similar refinement. When alone with Betty, he feels awed by her;
the lady herself finds him excessively confused (727). Supposing
that Lady Betty is unable to accept his addresses, he feels "the
anguish of a rejected passion" (727). But he shows no trace of
bitterness towards her. On the contrary, he regards her as his
estimable friend and solicits her to arrange his marriage with
the amiable Miss Marchmont. As the latter is unhappily
circumstanced, he would refrain from opening himself directly to
her. As he sententiously puts it, "... when virtue is unhappily
plunged into difficulties, 'tis entitled to an additional share
of veneration" (728).
A man of elevated rank and affluent fortune (728), he endears himself to others because of his amiability. According to Lady Betty, "there is not a man in England possessed of more personal accomplishments" (733). He seems to speak for the sentimental playwrights towards the close of the play: "The stage should be a school of morality; and the noblest of all lessons is the forgiveness of injuries" (744). At the end he is happy to be married to Betty.

Sidney is a highly grave character. In the opening scene he seems to have something upon his spirits. What continues to worry him throughout the play is his impending marriage with Miss Rivers, when he actually loves Miss Marchmont. As Winworth is anxious to marry Miss Marchmont at one stage, Sidney has to make a painful choice between giving up his hopes and opposing his friend's happiness. Mrs. Harley points out that he has a "funeral-sermon face", and speaks in "as melancholy a tone as a passing-bell" (720). In Act V, Scene i, when Colonel Rivers resents his refusal to marry his daughter, Sidney argues as a man of sense: "A man of common humanity, sir, in a treaty of marriage, should consult the lady's wishes as well as his own; and if he can't make her happy, he will scorn to make her miserable" (740). Knowing that Miss Rivers loves Sir Harry, Sidney tells the Colonel that there is something shocking about the union with a woman whose affections are engaged elsewhere. His wise decision
to decline marriage with Miss Rivers paves the way for Winworth's marriage with Betty, Sir Harry's with Miss Rivers, and his own with Miss Marchmont.

In The West Indian, Charles Dudley, the virtuous son of the impecunious Captain Dudley, is seen sad and serious most of the time. He loves, and is loved by, his rich cousin Charlotte, step-daughter of the unscrupulous Lady Rusport. In his poverty Charles does not confess his love to Charlotte who finds him "rich in every merit and accomplishment" (762). When he goes to Lady Rusport for financial help, she treats him harshly: "The distresses of your family, child, are quite out of the question at present. Had Sir Oliver been pleased to consider them, I should have been well content; but he has absolutely taken no notice of you in his will, and that to me must and shall be law" (753-54). Major O'Flaherty cannot help pitying Charles: "Upon my conscience, as fine a young fellow as I would wish to clap my eyes on. He might have answered my salute, however -- Well, let it pass. Fortune, perhaps, frowns upon the poor lad" (754). When Charles's father asks him how he was received by his aunt, he replies, "Cold as our poverty and her pride could make it" (756). Charles is often too depressed to respond to Charlotte's love: "There is no need of love to make me miserable. 'Tis wretchedness enough to be a beggar" (761). His constant love for Charlotte shows him to be the anti-thesis of the Restoration
"There is no such fair one for me to go to", he tells Charlotte, "nor have I an acquaintance amongst the sex, yourself excepted, which answers to that description" (762).

We often find Charles preaching at his sister, Louisa. "But have a care", he tells her, "there is a selfishness even in gratitude when it is too profuse; to be over-thankful for any one favour is in effect to lay out for another" (773). In this scene he again speaks in a melancholy strain: "We that are poor, Louisa, should be cautious .... Of this be sure: while I have life and you have honour, I will protect you or perish in your defence" (773). Later he challenges Belcour for having designs on Louisa's chastity (774), though they are prevented from fighting by O'Flaherty.

The virtuous Charles is rewarded at the end, as he turns out to be the real heir of his grandfather's estate which Lady Rusport tried to appropriate (783). This he owes to O'Flaherty for his role in exposing Lady Rusport. In his prosperity, however, Charles is too good to ignore his duty to his father or to O'Flaherty: "... after the happiness I shall have in sheltering a father's age from the vicissitudes of life, my next delight will be in offering you (O'Flaherty) an asylum in the bosom of your country" (783). He is happy to marry Charlotte whom he calls a "protecting angel" (784). Charles is too magnanimous to oppress the fallen; he will save his aunt in spite of herself.
Sir Charles Seymour in *The Runaway* is also highly serious, moral and reflective. He and Harriet are secretly in love with each other. When his friend George, Harriet's brother, comes to know of their love for each other, he, out of mischief, makes each believe that the other has different engagements. This keeps Sir Charles in very low spirits. A true lover, he cannot think of any girl other than Harriet, and so he cannot reconcile himself to her being in love with another. He looks utterly miserable while talking to George: "O George! I love -- I love your Sister -- to distraction, doat on her.... Oh, reproach me not, but pity me -- I love your Sister -- long have lov'd her.... my fortune was so small, that I had no hopes of obtaining your Father's consent -- and therefore made it a point of honour not to endeavour to gain her affection" (21-22). When his uncle's natural death ends his poverty, he can propose to her. But he would not marry her if her affections are engaged elsewhere (22).

Bella gives her cousin George a vivid picture of Sir Charles's melancholy state of mind: "... Sir Charles I just now saw in the Orange-walk, with his arms folded thus -- and his eyes fixt on a shrub, in the most penseroso style you can conceive -- Why -- he has no appearance of a happy youth on the verge of Bride-groomism" (24). Sir Charles sighs while talking to Harriet (27); her affected gaiety coupled with her indifference to him destroys his repose. As she leaves with Bella, he is left...
melancholy and brooding towards the close of the second Act:
"She flies from me, and talks of her company, and returning to
her society — Oh Harriet! oh my Harriet! thy society is
prized by me beyond that of the whole world; and still to possess
it, with the hope that once glowed in my bosom, would be a
blessing for which I would sacrifice every other, that Nature or
Fortune has bestowed" (28).

Later, the love-lorn Sir Charles haunts the garden in
search of his Harriet, taking a picture from his bosom and
kissing it (35). His conversation with George further stresses
his melancholy state of mind:

Geo. And how many times a day dost thou break the
decalogue in worshipping that Image?

Sir Ch. Every hour that I live. I gaze on it till I think it
looks, and speaks to me; it lies all night on my
heart, and is the first object I address in the
morning.

Geo. Oh, complete your character, and turn Monk — 'tis
plain you're half a Papist (36).

Eventually, as his misunderstanding about Harriet is removed, and
his marriage with her looks certain, the sentimental Sir Charles
is "speechless with joy, and with amazement" (44), and he leaves
George, saying, "I'll fly and pour out my joy and gratitude, at
the feet of my charming Harriet" (45).

Many heroes of sentimental comedies, then, are presented as
grave and highly moral. The playwrights attempt to embellish
them with those qualities which Steele and Addison praised in
their periodical essays. Free from all licentious impulses, they are very different from the rake-heroes of the Restoration comedies, who moved above the sphere of emotion, sorrow and suffering. Apparently, they are the embodiments of honesty, constancy, modesty, compassion and benevolence. It may be pointed out here that contemporary criticism appeared to favour such ideal, "unmixed" characters in literature. For example, the critic for The Adviser No. 5 (11 March 1797) wrote: "That good may ensue from the perusal of a Novel, let the hero be superior to vice; let benevolence be perceptible in all his actions and let him be distinguished by every human virtue".16 Even Fielding declared, at the beginning of Joseph Andrews, that a novelist might do great service to mankind by depicting eminently good characters.

Steele and other sentimental playwrights endeavour, by placing their heroes on a lofty moral plane, to recommend integrity of mind and uprightness of conduct, and instruct their readers in the art of life. Bevil Jr., Sir John Dorilant, Lord Winworth and Charles Dudley are offered as models of exemplary propriety. Having all the fine qualities which, according to their creators, the typical Restoration hero lacked, they are intended to demonstrate proper morals and manners to the

susceptible minds in the audience. Placed in delicate predicaments, these exceptionally moral and refined heroes are made to vent their feelings at great length. They are supposed to have the qualities which, according to Adam Smith, "consist in that degree of sensibility which surprises by its exquisite delicacy and tenderness". They believe in honourable love and sanctity of marriage, and regard moral obligations as of primary importance. They are guided by "reason" which Steele constantly recommended in his essays as the panacea for all human ills and problems. They have the virtues which, as Steele remarks, distinguish men from brutes (Tatler No. 134).

Instead of provoking laughter by showing weaknesses and comic contradictions in human nature, sentimental comedy gives us virtuous characters who embody "True Worth, Integrity, and Honour" demanded by James Wright in 1694. They are, therefore, held up for admiration and emulation. In the eighteenth century Hobbesian ridicule was largely supplanted by benevolent sympathy. Ordinary human nature was not supposed to be a target for derision. The sentimental comedy works not by exciting ridicule for low characters, but by arousing admiration for its virtuous characters, offered as patterns for imitation. We are encouraged to sympathize with them in their misery and to rejoice in their

success. By creating paragons of virtue, the sentimental playwrights try to express in their work a better code of human behaviour than that in effect in real life.

The virtuous heroes of the sentimental comedy are finally rewarded as they always triumph over villainy or wickedness. It may be pointed out that the presence of evil characters in a sentimental comedy contradicts the fundamental assumption of benevolism concerning man's goodness. But concessions had to be made in sentimental plays because the goodness of their heroes could not really triumph without something to triumph over. These exemplary heroes were popular in their time because they gratified an ingrained desire in the audience to atone for their past levity. The modern reader, however, would feel bored in their company, as they are used primarily for conveying edification. Though a sickly sensibility prompts them to an impractical idealism, they provide the playwrights opportunities for a good deal of indirect sermonizing. However, their aim to recommend lofty ideals would have been better realized if, instead of rewarding their virtuous heroes in terms of material comforts and pleasures, they had shown that virtue was its own reward, that the sense of having acted rightly brought with it "the sweets of a self-approving mind".

Not every sentimental comedy, however, presents its hero

18 Bernbaum, p. 147.
exactly like those considered above. Sometimes the lead character, during most part of the play, does not seem to be much different from the Restoration gallant. A close examination, however, will reveal that the presentation of the rake-hero in sentimental comedy differs from that of the Restoration hero. He may behave like the Restoration gallant, but he is not allowed to make the general atmosphere immoral and the play itself shows no signs of approbation for any immorality or indecency. None of the sentimental heroes is involved in actual seduction during the course of the play. In fact, there are no seductions or cuckoldings in these plays. Secondly, the rakish hero of sentimental comedy is not intended to be admired for what he shares with the Restoration rake, but for his essential goodness. His appetite for variety is shown as rendering him pathologically restless and insatiable. He is made to pay the price in terms of disquiet, unhappiness and embarrassment. Although he is not without a stain, yet his heart is benevolent. What Stockwell in *The West Indian* says about Belcour applies to every rake in sentimental comedy: "... I have discovered (in him) through the veil of some irregularities, a heart beaming with benevolence" (786). As we know, Shaftesbury had called it a very fine state to be in. This kind of hero in sentimental comedy is finally shamed into repentance and reformation in order to satisfy the demands of morality.
Sir Charles Easy, the hero of The Careless Husband, is by no means above reproach from the point of view of morality, as he intrigues with Lady Graveairs and his wife's maid, Edging. When Mrs. Edging finds a letter addressed to Lady Graveairs by Sir Charles, she blames him for not being constant to her. He comments: "What an unlimited privilege has this jade got from being a whore!" (404). As he is seldom serious about anything, and often talks and sings, Lady Easy remarks in an aside, "This excess of carelessness to me excuses half his vices" (405-06). When Lady Easy finds him asleep with Edging, she discreetly leaves a steinkirk over his head. Waking, he curses his own carelessness: "How careless have I been! ... how low an hypocrite to her must that sight have proved me! -- the thought has made me despicable ev'n to myself" (429). He repents and reforms: "... your wondrous conduct has waked me to a sense of your disquiet past, and resolution never to disturb it more" (431).

Anxious to atone for injuries done to her, Sir Charles asks his wife to discharge her woman forthwith (431), and he also breaks with Lady Graveairs (435). Even before his conversion we realise that he understands there is something wrong about his way of life and that this awareness may bring about his reformation after some time. For example, in the opening scene he philosophizes about life: "So! the day is come again. Life but rises to another stage, and the same dull journey is before
us. How like children do we judge of happiness:” (403-04). He wonders why he does not appreciate the goodness of his wife whom many people call the best woman in the world (404). That he is reclaimable is suggested by Lady Easy’s remark that his reformation "is not yet impossible — for while his humane nature is not quite shook off, I ought not to despair" (430). His errors are from want of thinking, from failure to exercise his reason. If Lady Easy can "make him once think seriously", he will be reformed. So there is nothing astonishing about his fifth-act conversion following his disgust at his old ways.

Young Bookwit, the hero of The Lying Lover, behaves like a typical town-spark in London and speaks like Congreve’s Bellmour in The Old Bachelor. For example, in the opening scene, he says to his friend Latine, who is posing as his footman, "No, hang Business, — hang Care, let it live and prosper among the Men; -- I'll ne'er go near the solemn ugly things again, -- I'll keep Company with none but Ladies, -- bright Ladies: -- Oh London! London! Oh Woman! Woman! I am come where thou livest, where thou shinest" (120). He tries to impress Penelope with imaginary tales of his martial exploits. His unreal accounts of a splendid water gala which he arranged in her honour, excite the jealousy of her lover Lovemore who breaks with her and thirsts for revenge on Bookwit. When the two young men meet at midnight in Covent Garden, they have a duel in which Lovemore is
supposedly killed. Bookwit is arrested by the watch and lodged with Latine in Newgate. Now we see a new Bookwit. Remorseful of having killed Lovemore, he condemns himself for drinking and duelling (175). In Act V, Scene i, when Latine justifies duelling by saying that Bookwit's "Honour was concern'd", he denounces the evil practice in no uncertain terms (176).

When Bookwit's old father weeps for what has happened to his son, the latter exclaims, "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); and when his father swoons, he curses himself:

He faints, he's cold, he's gone.
He's gone, and with his last Breath call'd me Parricide,
You've broke your Father's Heart! Oh killing Sound!
I'm all Contagion, to pity me is Death (184).

In the preface, Steele sums up his hero's role in the play, saying that he "makes false Love, gets drunk, and kills his Man; but in the fifth Act 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" (115).

George Brilliant in The Lady's Last Stake is an amusing coxcomb who often expresses the sentiments of a Restoration rake. His new chariot is "positively the prettiest that ever rolled in the Rear of Six Horses". Though his real affections are centred on Mrs. Conquest, he plans to seduce the virtuous Lady Gentle
whom he calls "all one fragrant field of charm, to pamper up the blood of wild desire" (213). Aware of her addiction to card-playing, he would like her to lose to him more than she can pay so that he can force her to compromise her honour. He is also quite intimate with Miss Notable. In a soliloquy he boasts:

"Who says I am not a provident lover? For now by that time my harvest of Lady Gentle is over, the early inclination I have sown in this girl will be just ripe and ready for the sickle" (272). He tries to seduce Lady Gentle as the latter becomes heavily indebted to him, but fails due to the timely intervention of Mrs. Conquest. As the wild spark repents and reforms after his exposure, Mrs. Conquest forgives him, and marries him. He also apologizes to Lady Gentle: "And now, madam, to let you see you have as much subdued my follies as my heart -- First, let me humbly ask a pardon for offences" (298).

Young Belmont, the hero of The Foundling, is a good-hearted rake. He has been generous enough to rescue Fidelia from a ravisher and bring her to his lodgings. But he himself intends to seduce her. "Why", says Colonel Raymond in the opening scene, "what a devil are you, Charles, to speak so feelingly of virtues, which you only admire to destroy?" Here he also calls Belmont a wild fellow, serious only about his own pleasures. When the Colonel advises him to marry Fidelia in view of her many qualities, Belmont sneeringly answers, "And hang myself in her garters the
next morning, to give her virtues the reward of widowhood. — Faith, I must read Pamela twice over first". He says he will swear that she is a whore so that he can make her one. In Act II, Scene i, Sir Charles calls him a licentious young fellow. Belmont is disappointed to find it impossible to dishonour Fidelia while she stays with his family. In order to have her removed to private lodgings, he bribes Faddie to write to his sister Rosetta anonymously, accusing Fidelia of being a woman of the town. It must be remembered, however, that after having her accused of looseness, he starts feeling some twitches of conscience. In Act III, Scene i, he soliloquises: "Why, what a rogue am I! Here have I thrown a whole family, and that my own too, into perplexities that innocence can't oppose, nor cunning guard against". But he excuses himself, saying that he is under the direction of his appetites.

Faddle, however, betrays Belmont to Sir Charles Raymond who forces him to reveal the whole truth about that vile letter. In Act IV, Scene ii, Sir Charles confronts Belmont, upbraids him for his design to slander Fidelia, get her dismissed and then ravish her in private lodgings. Now repentant, Belmont says, "Go on with your upbraidings, sir. ... I have deserved shame, and am taught patience". Towards the conclusion of Act IV, he soliloquises: "Why, what a thing am I! — But 'tis the trick of vice to pay her votaries with shame; and I am rewarded amply".
In Act V, Scene ii, during the time of confession of his roguery, he says to Fidelia, "You have touch'd me, Fidelia; and my heart yields to your virtues. Here, then, let my follies have an end; and thus let me receive you as the ever-lasting partner of my heart and fortune". He will atone for the injuries done to her by marrying her. Belmont's last speech towards the conclusion of the play confirms his conversion: "... I have at last learnt, that custom can be no authority for vice; and however the mistaken world may judge, he who solicits pleasure, at the expense of innocence, is the vilest of betrayers".

Lord Eustace, the hero of The School for Rakes, is described by Sir William Evans as a rakish lord (12). He has clandestinely married the innocent Harriot, after getting the wedding ceremony conducted by a sham clergyman. Frampton resents his baseness in betraying the innocent girl: "The man who could first injure and then forsake such a woman, deserves to be marked as the most infamous, because he must be the most cruel of his sex" (24). However, Lord Eustace is not at all an irredeemable villain. In reality he loves Harriot, but finds it difficult to disobey his father who directs him to pay his addresses to a rich lady Anne. As he tells Frampton, "By Heaven, my heart bleeds for the unhappy Harriot!" (25). In Act II, Scene i, he exclaims: "Cursed ambition! detested pride of family! that makes us sink the man to aggrandize the peer" (30). He is disinclined to conclude his
marriage with Lady Anne. He is challenged to a duel by Harriot's father, but he is determined not to return his fire. His grief is so deep that Harriot forgives his offence, and consents to marry him. Her father has no objection because, as he says, "the man who sincerely repents of error, is farther removed from it, than one who has never been guilty" (109).

Mr. Belville in The School for Wives is a gallant with a virtuous heart. He is, as Schorer says, "a rake who is happily married and yet finds the spice of his life in the variety of females he can manage to seduce". He involves himself in affairs of gallantry, though no seduction takes place in the course of the play. In the fictitious character of an Irish manager he amuses himself with Miss Leeson who is anxious to become an actress. His conversation with Captain Savage testifies to his passion for variety: "Possession, Savage! O, possession, is a miserable whether of the appetite in love! and I own myself so sad a fellow, that though I wou'dn't exchange Mrs. Belville's mind for any woman's upon earth, there is scarcely a woman's person upon earth, which is not to me a stronger object of attraction" (247). Mr. Belville, however, is not without redeeming features. Captain Savage credits him with many qualities "to counterbalance this single fault of gallantry, which

19 M. Schorer, "Hugh Kelly : His Place in the Sentimental School", Pp, 12 (1933), 399.
contaminates his character" (237). Despite his levity, he loves his wife with great warmth. Later he goes to meet Miss Walsingham at a masquerade but is astonished to find, instead, Mrs. Belville as his masked partner. Redeemed from his career of profligacy, he says to his wife, "My love, this is a surprise, indeed; but it is almost agreeable one, since you find me really ashamed of my former follies, and cannot now doubt the sincerity of my reformation" (326). Mrs. Belville feels convinced of his reformation and expresses happiness, saying that "this single moment wou'd overpay a whole life of anxiety" (326). Mr. Belville makes his exit from the play uttering virtuous sentiments.

Belfield Sr. in The Brothers is a wicked man who, after forsaking his wife and driving his younger brother from home, plans to marry Sophia due to her rich estate. He has also been merciless to his principal tenant, Old Goodwin, by driving him and family from his estate to sea for their habitation and subsistence. In the opening scene Philip, Goodwin's son, says, "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" (VII, 257). Goodwin's only fault was that his son loved Lucy Waters towards whom Belfield Sr. had no honourable designs. He promised to marry her but engages himself in courting Sophia.

It is persons like Belfield Sr. who, according to his younger
brother, disgrace humanity (VII, 259). Obliged by his brother to take to privateering, Belfield Jr. speaks in anguish, "Those rocks -- that have thus scattered my treasures -- those waves, that have devoured them, to me are not so fatal as hath been that man whom nature meant to be my nearest friend" (VII, 259). Lucy threatens to expose him to Sophia and disclose the devices adopted by him to estrange her from his younger brother. But he continues to persist in his evil ways, believing that whosoever "is checked by the rubs of compunction, can never arrive at the summit of prosperity" (VII, 261). His eventual reformation is anticipated by his early reflection on his own villainy: "I know not what to think; this I know, that love is a deity, and avarice a devil; that Violetta is my lawful wife; and that Andrew Belfield is a villain". Before long he is duly exposed as Lucy Waters apprises Sophia of his treachery, and Paterson learns that he is already married to Violetta. "Paterson", says Belfield Sr., "I am struck to the heart; I cannot support my guilt! I am married to Violetta. ... This dishonourable engagement for ever I renounce; nor will I rest till I have made an atonement to an injured wife" (VII, 275). Finding his repentance sincere, Violetta forgives him.

Belcour, the hero of The West Indian, is an adventurous rake with a generous heart. Coming from Jamaica to London, he falls in love at first sight with Louisa Dudley. As the girl gives him
the slip, he curses London: "If every handsome girl I meet in this town is to lead me such a wild goose chase, I had better have stayed in the torrid zone" (757). Bewitched by her, he says to Stockwell, "Oh, sir, if this is folly in me, you must rail at nature; you must chide the sun, that was vertical at my birth and would not wink upon my nakedness but swaddled me in the broadest, hottest glare of his meridian beams" (764-65). He is beguiled by Mrs. Fulmer into thinking Louisa the mistress of Charles who is really her brother. He is no unprincipled libertine, but, under a mistaken idea of her character, he makes rudely disrespectful addresses to him. "Give me pleasure", he urges her, "give me love, free, disencumbered, anti-matrimonial love" (774). Louisa resents this affront and her brother challenges Belcour to a duel, but O'Flaherty throws up their swords. Utterly disappointed, the rake curses his lot: "O my cursed tropical constitution! Would to heaven I had been dropped upon the snows of Lapland and never felt the blessed influence of the sun, so had I never burnt with these inflammatory passions!" (778).

As soon as Belcour discovers his mistake, his real and better nature triumphs over the veneer of vice and gallantry. He apologises to Louisa: "No man in his senses would offend you. I forfeited mine and erred against the light of the sun when I overlooked your virtues; but your beauty was predominant and hid
them from my sight" (782). At this Louisa forgives him and marries him. Belcour's good nature is no less stressed than his rakishness. When he learns that Captain Dudley badly needs money, he promptly leaves him two bank-notes of a hundred pounds each in a sealed paper, with the writing: "Accept this trifle; pursue your fortune and prosper" (759). He seems to derive genuine pleasure from rescuing a fellow creature from distress. As he tells Stockwell, "I am the off-spring of distress, and every child of sorrow is my brother. While I have hands to hold, therefore, I will hold them open to mankind" (751). Hazlitt rightly says about him, "There is something interesting in seeing a young fellow of high animal spirits, a handsome fortune, and considerable generosity of feeling, launched from the other side of the world ... to run the gauntlet of the follies and vices of the town".20 Cumberland himself summed up his characterization of Belcour:

To the West Indian I devoted a generous spirit, and a vivacious giddy dissipation; I resolved he should love pleasure much, but honour more; but as I could not keep consistency of character without a mixture of failings, when I gave him charity, I gave him that, which can cover a multitude, and thus protected, thus recommended, I thought I might send him out into the world to shift for himself.21

Belcour is rewarded at the end as he marries Louisa and is recognized by Stockwell as his son: "Yes, Belcour, I have

watched you with a patient but enquiring eye; and I have
discovered through the veil of some irregularities, a heart
beaming with benevolence, an animated nature, fallible indeed,
but not incorrigible; and your election of this excellent young
lady makes me glory in acknowledging you to be my son" (786).

"Fallible indeed, but not incorrigible" are the words that
come to mind again and again as we think of this second kind of
heroes in sentimental comedies. Instead of being constantly
virtuous, genteel, sympathetic and benevolent like Bevil Jr. and
Sir John Dorilant, they are good natured prodigals temporarily
led astray. It is seldom that they act as thoroughly depraved
persons; their errors are of the mind rather than of the heart.
They stray from the path of reason and sense till they come to
realize the impropriety of their conduct, and repent and reform.
Someone has only to make them "think seriously" in order to
secure their reform and to make them realize that virtue alone
leads to happiness, whereas vice can only lead through temporary
pleasure to ultimate misery. This is how a virtuous wife like
Lady Easy shakes her husband out of his wiliness and shames him
into virtue. Through their willingness and ability to achieve
nobility and transcend ignoble desires, these reformed rakes
provide the audience a second kind of example of the fundamental
goodness of human nature in the sense of their capability of
being recalled to goodness. A distinguishing characteristic of
the sentimental drama, says Berribaum, is its implication that "human nature, when not, as in some cases already perfect, was perfectible by an appeal to the emotions". The sentimental playwrights try to show, through such characters as Sir Charles Easy, Belmont, Lord Rustace and Belcour, that human nature is often reclaimable, if not perfectible, by an emotional appeal.

The conversion of the rake was by no means an innovation of sentimental comedy. Perhaps the earliest traces of such conversions are to be found as far back as the Morality Plays. Here Everyman or some other abstract hero is, to begin with, a model of virtue, but soon he is beset by pleasure and sensuality, thus starting on the downward grade. He continues to live an evil life until he is finally reclaimed, thus showing the essential goodness of human nature, and the triumph of virtue over Vice. The Elizabethan playwrights also deal with the theme of the reformation of the accomplished rake. Shakespeare's Bertram in All's Well That Ends Well maltreats and deserts his virtuous wife, and is apparently unfaithful to her. Finally, however, he is filled with remorse, and is reunited to her. The situations in which Bertram and the many errant husbands of the eighteenth-century sentimental comedies find themselves have definite points of similarity. But despite Bertram's fifth-act conversion, Shakespeare's play cannot be claimed for the canon

of sentimental comedy, as it does not assume "fundamental goodness of human nature as a postulate". Secondly, it disposes of the whole business of the rake's conversion (V, iii) in a few lines. But the eighteenth-century sentimental playwrights, in order to stress the essential goodness of mankind, endeavour to exploit the sentimental possibilities of similar situations "by repeated and prolonged emphasis".23

The penitent rake was a familiar stock character in Restoration comedy. Berkeley24 lists many actual rakes who undergo conversion in the Restoration plays. But, as Professor J.H. Smith has pointed out, the reformation of these rakes is perfunctory and unconvincing, because it often comes about at the wave of a wand. But this is not quite true of the rakes in sentimental comedies. As already shown, there are hints that they are only sowing their wild oats, that they are actually cloaking their good nature under the guise of roguery. In view of such prior hints of their reclamation, it is difficult to agree with Williams that "In single speeches these flexible folk throw off the habits of a lifetime".25 The fact is that there is hardly any occasion in sentimental comedy for excessive

23 Sherbo, English Sentimental Drama, p. 35.
24 D.S. Berkeley, "The Penitent Rake in Restoration Comedy", MP, 49 (1952), 223-33.
25 S.T. Williams, "English Sentimental Drama", p. 409.
astonishment, when we witness the hero's conversion brought about by a disgust at his old ways. Secondly, the rake in sentimental comedy may contemplate seduction, but he does not accomplish it in the course of the play. In fact, he does very little that is really immoral; his promiscuity seldom goes beyond remarks shot through with extravagance of speech. He cannot match the Restoration rake in the wildness of his actions or his complete inability to withstand temptation. The latter is irrepressible, reckless spark in pursuit of wine, woman and song; he gives expression to quite outrageous libertine sentiments on love and marriage; and he actually indulges in sexual irregularities and riotous living.

The reformed rake in sentimental comedy stays on the stage for a longer time than the Restoration rake, and delivers speeches of repentance with greater sententiousness. He makes his exit after tasting the raptures of repentance and repeatedly extolling a virtuous life in passages of emotional speech. The modern reader is likely to find something disgusting about the sententious and sentimental nature of his repentant, pious utterances. But these reformed rakes made contemporary audiences shed tears of joy. Indeed, if some of the spectators failed to weep, they were suspected of a deficiency in sympathy for their species. The sentimental comedy treats its rakish hero sympathetically, and it lays great stress on repentance,
reform and forgiveness. Here we do not see as much variation in the presentation of the rake as in Restoration comedy.\textsuperscript{26}

The eighteenth-century sentimental comedies present their lead characters contending against distresses and finally rewarded for their virtue. This is perhaps best seen in the case of the heroines and other chief female characters in these comedies. The spectators are expected to sympathize with them in their woes and to rejoice in their eventual happiness. A forlorn virtuous maiden is the frequent member of the \textit{dramatic personae} of these plays. She is rewarded for her virtue, but not before her suffering adequately arouses our compassion for her. In her distress she exhibits that excess of emotionalism which, more than anything else, makes the sentimental comedy "tearful".

Indiana, the heroine of \textit{The Conscious Lovers}, is typical of the sentimental heroines. Bevil's lengthy description of her before Humphrey in the beginning of the play is intended to move the audience to tears. Her father, initially an eminent merchant, was forced by repeated misfortunes to go to the Indies. His wife who followed him with her daughter Indiana and her sister-in-law, became sick during the voyage and died at sea. Humphrey exclaims: "Poor soul! 0 the helpless infant!" (559).

After some time the wicked brother of the Captain of the ship found the blooming girl completely at his mercy. His account of many hardships endured by her on land and sea till he rescued her from the oppressor, is calculated to arouse a feeling of pity for her (559). Indiana's virtue is no less stressed than her distress. Bevil calls her a woman of honour and virtue (553), and Sir John refers to her "uncommon air, her noble modesty, the dignity of her person" (553). The conversation between Isabella and Indiana reveals that the latter is deeply grateful to Bevil for saving her from the utmost misery; she regards him as one to whom she owes her life and "the support of it" (562). She feels pained as her aunt refers to him as a base dissembler. She has no doubt that Bevil loves her with sincerity and honour but she also appreciates his sense of filial piety and his "uncommon obligations" to his father who wants his son to marry elsewhere. In her pathetic state, she remarks: "My lesson is very short. If he takes me forever, my purpose of life is only to please him. If he leaves me (which Heaven avert) I know he'll do it nobly, and I shall have nothing to do but to learn to die, after worse than death has happened to me" (562). In Act V, Scene iii, she calls herself a "wretched, helpless, friendless" orphan, and then starts weeping.

From her very appearance Indiana looks so noble that Mr. Sealand wonders how Bevil could be so monstrous as to injure
such a woman. Then she pathetically blames herself for nursing
the illusion that Bevil designed to make her the partner of his
heart. When Mr. Sealand says that Bevil will never have his
daughter Lucinda, Indiana replies: "Let not me, miserable
though I may be, do injury to my benefactor. No, sir, my
treatment ought rather to reconcile you to his virtues". Hazlitt
who seems to have had some preconceived prejudice against Steele
was certainly right in finding Indiana "as listless and as
insipid as a drooping figure on an Indian screen". 27 For
example, she speaks at great length about her miserable life:
"What have I to do but sigh and weep, to rave, run wild, a
lunatic in chains or hid in darkness, mutter in distracted
starts and broken accents my strange, strange story!" When
Mr. Sealand asks her to take comfort, she says, "All my comfort
must be to expostulate in madness, to relieve with frenzy my
despair and shrieking to demand of fate why -- why was I born
to such variety of sorrows!" (582). And so forth, till Mr.
Sealand recognizes her as his long-lost daughter and gladly allows
her to marry her noble lover, Bevil.

Many generic daughters of Indiana sighed and wept through
most distressing situations in the sentimental comedies of the
eighteenth century. Fidelia, the heroine of The Foundling, is
presented as an object of pity and compassion. She continues

27 English Comic Writers, p. 219.
to be sad and depressed even after being rescued from a ravisher by Belmont. In Act I, Scene ii, asked by Rosetta what she dreamt last night, she replies, "O, nothing -- A confusion of gay castles built by Hope, and thrown down by Disappointment". In Act I, Scene i, Belmont gives a poetic description of her unknown parentage, saying that she is "A sister of the Graces, without mortal father or mother; she dropped from the clouds in her cradle, was lulled by the winds, christened by the rains, fostered by a hag, sold for a whore, sentenced to a rape, and rescued by a rogue ...". She feels herself under an obligation to Belmont though he has no honourable designs towards her.

In Act II, Scene i, Sir Roger Belmont calls Fidelia good and sweet though he will not allow his son to marry this poor girl. We also learn that Sir Charles finds her irresistibly amiable. Moved with compassion, he speaks of "her cheeks covered with blushes, and her eyes swimming in tears". He fears that some mother may be feeling most miserable for this lost daughter. The poor girl is vilified by Faddie who is bribed by Belmont to do so. In Act III, Scene i, she is pathetic in her confession before Rosetta: "No sister of Mr. Belmont's friend kneels to you for pardon -- but a poor wretched out-cast of fortune, that with an artful tale has imposed upon your nature, and won you to a friendship for a helpless stranger that never knew herself". Asked by Rosetta not to weep, she says, "If you would dry up my
tears, call forth your resentment — Anger might turn me into stone — but compassion melts me". In the same scene, the virtuous Fidelia cannot control her anger when Faddle insinuates that she is a woman of the town: "Hold your licentious tongue, sir! Upon my life, Rosetta, 'tis all malice. 'Tis his own contrivance. I dare him to produce another villain, that's base enough to say this of me".

Fidelia is pitiable in her helplessness to reveal the truth even to vindicate her honour and in her vain hope that Belmont will defend her promptly against false accusations. A little later, she desperately requests Belmont to tell Rosetta that she is not dishonest. Finding him unwilling to defend her, she soliloquizes: "Then I am wretched! But that's no novelty. I have wandered from my cradle, the very child of misfortune. To retire and weep, must now be my only indulgence". In Act III, Scene ii, she expresses her gratitude to Sir Charles who feels for her distresses: "Still, Sir Charles, my tears are all that I can thank you with — for this goodness is too much for me". In this world she finds nothing lasting except misfortune. Towards the conclusion of Act IV, Sir Charles upbraids Belmont for asking Faddle to slander her and thus robbing her of her quiet. He urges him to dry up her tears immediately by doing her justice. In Act V, Scene ii, when Belmont requests her to forgive him, she says that she "can feel in this breast a sense
of injuries, and spirit to resent them". Her virtue is rewarded as Belmont, repentant, yields to her virtues, and will atone for injustice by marrying her. In the concluding scene of the play, she is recognized by Sir Charles as his own long-lost daughter. She is filled with joy: "And were all my sorrows past meant only to endear the present transport -- 'Tis too much for me".

Caelia, the heroine of The School for Lovers, is presented as very innocent, incapable of understanding the true nature of such a fop as Modely. "On my soul", says Modely, "if one was to make love to her, she would hardly understand what one meant" (213). Due to her inexperience, she is easily impressed by the attentions of Modely who wants to marry her because of her fortune, pursuing at the same time his affair with Araminta. As Sir John remarks, this is due to Caelia's youth, inexperience and goodness of heart (273). She is not aware that her noble guardian, Sir John, loves her to distraction, though she is conscious of having all the obligations in the world to him: "My esteem, my gratitude overflows towards him. I consider him as a kinder father, with all the tenderness, without the authority" (229).

Caelia is actuated by duty, not love, in her behaviour towards him. Sir John, however, wonders at her choice and her mistake: "... is it possible, that an acquaintance of a few
days should entirely obliterate attentive assiduity, the tender anxieties, which I have shown for years!" (261). Caelia weeps as she finds Sir John depressed on her account. To his "What a heart have I lost!" she replies, "you cannot, shall not lose it; worthless as it is, 'tis yours, and only yours, my father, guardian, lover, husband!" (263). After a prolonged tender, melancholy conversation between Sir John and Caelia (273-74), the former gives her the documents, leaving her free to marry where she likes. Now she realizes her error and has nothing but contempt for Modely. She rejects him with the scorn that "added charm to virtue" (291). During conversation with Sir John (296-98) she speaks, to use Modely's words, "like a queen in a tragedy, or at least like a sentimental lady in a comedy" (218). This is a significant observation because it is often difficult to distinguish these sentimental heroines from the pathetic queens in tragedies. To her great joy, Sir John, "the real passion of her soul", marries her in the end.

Louisa Dudley, the heroine of The West Indian, resembles the above-mentioned heroines in being virtuous in distress, and being eventually rewarded. A daughter of an impoverished captain, the distresses of her family are mentioned several times in the play. She is beautiful as well as virtuous. Belcour calls her "little nimble-footed Daphne" (757). He finds her the embodiment of "undescribable grace" (758). Suspecting
Belcour of having no honourable designs towards her, Louisa says, "I must have better proofs of your generosity than the mere divestment of a little superfluous dross before I can credit the sincerity of professions so abruptly delivered" (767). It is under a mistaken idea of her character that Belcour addresses her with all the license of a profane admirer and asks her for "anti-matrimonial" love. "... had I not had good assurance of her being an attainable wanton", he says later, "I declare I should as soon have thought of attempting the chastity of Diana" (778). As Stockwell tells Belcour, Louisa "has beauty enough to inflame your desires, but she has honour, innocence, and simplicity to awe the most licentious passion" (779). Belcour apologizes to her by saying that he erred against the light of the sun. She forgives him for the libertine addresses he has paid her and accepts his honourably proffered hand, though not before she delivers herself of the following: "... but if hereafter, as you range through life, you should surprise her in the person of some wretched female, poor as myself and not so well protected, enforce not your advantage, complete not your licentious triumph, but raise her, rescue her from shame and sorrow, and reconcile her to herself again" (782). There is a "healing virtue" in her eyes which, Belcour asserts, will be the best guarantee of his reformation.

Emily, the heroine of The Runaway, is not unlike the
virtuous Indiana or Fidelia in her silent suffering. She has taken refuge from a marriage to which her uncle was going to force her. She has put herself under the protection of noble-hearted Mr. Drummond who has her lodged in Mr. Hargrave's house. George Hargrave who first saw her in a masquerade is happy that she is full of joy as she is placed in his father's house (16). Her situation, however, is uncertain as her uncle can come any moment to snatch her from George. Secondly, Emily arouses the jealousy of Lady Dinah when she finds her looking at George with eyes that are "downright gloating" (37). Emily requests George not to pay his attentions to one of whose name and family he is ignorant. But there is something in her face that attracts him. She looks pensive as George is required by his father to marry Lady Dinah (52). Mr. Drummond tries to raise the spirits of this weeping beauty. Harshly treated by Lady Dinah, she requests him to take her from that place.

Like Fidelia, she becomes a victim of cruel slander spread by Susan at the instance of Lady Dinah. Like Fidelia, too, she does not try to vindicate her honour: "Astonishment has kept me silent till now, Sir", she tells Mr. Hargrave, "and I must still be silent -- for I have not yet been taught to make defences" (57). Even in the face of these accusations, she seems to be under some obligation to conceal the name of her family (58). In her silent suffering, she thinks of living single since George to whom her heart is devoted.
seems certain to marry another (61). Her uncle, Mr. Morley, presses her to marry a certain Baldwin despite her pathetic protests: "His person is ungraceful, his manner assuming, and his mind effeminate" (61). But her uncle looks too hard-hearted to be moved by her "melancholy air". George and Drummond, however, are determined not to have her sacrificed to the man she despises. As Morley drives her to Scotland, she faints in the chaise, but George manages to rescue her and carry her to Mr. Drummond's. Mr. Drummond has no difficulty in exposing Lady Dinah who, in league with her servants, has tried to injure Emily's reputation and drive her from the protection of Mr. Hargrave's family (68). He has also discovered Emily to be the daughter of Major Morley, a friend of his youth. He becomes "a father to his orphan Emily" and relieves her from her distresses by obtaining her uncle's consent for her marriage to George.

What is said above about the sentimental heroines applies to a limited extent, to Miss Marchmont and Lady Betty in False Delicacy, and to Sophia in The Brothers. Miss Marchmont is "unhappily circumstanced". She looks pensive as Sidney whom she loves is engaged to be married to Miss Rivers. She says to Cecil, "You see ... how utterly improper it would be for me to give a lifeless hand to another while he is entirely master of my affections" (732). She is incapable of such an act of
meanness. Her unusual delicacy ranks her with many heroines of true sensibility. Like Indiana and Fidelia, she tells the story of her pathetic life: "My life was marked out early by calamity, and the first light I beheld, was purchased with the loss of a mother. The grave snatched away the best of fathers, just as I came to know the value of such a blessing; and hadn't it been for the exalted goodness of others, I, who once experienced the unspeakable pleasure of relieving the necessitous, had myself, perhaps, felt the immediate want of bread ...." (732-33). This is the usual language—genteel, refined and rhetorical—in which the sentimental comedy as a whole is clothed.

Lady Betty despises coquetry and affectation. But she is also a lady of excessive delicacy which induces her to refuse when Winworth proposes to her, though actually she likes him. Finding her pensive after this, Mrs. Harley wonders why, if he was so dear to her, she could so prodigally trifle with her own happiness. Lady Betty states her reasons for doing this: "... my unhappiness in my first marriage, you know, made me resolve against another. And you are also sensible I have frequently argued that a woman of real delicacy should never admit a second

---


impression on her heart" (724). Her utterances often take the form of apothegms. For example, she says, "The woman that wants candour, where she is addressed by a man of merit, wants a very essential virtue; and she who can delight in the anxiety of a worthy mind, is little to be pitied when she feels the sharpest stings of anxiety in her own" (728). Lady Betty cannot think of violating the laws of delicacy or using chamber-maid artifices for a husband. As Mrs. Harley says repeatedly, she suffers due to her own false delicacy. Betty feels miserable at the prospect of Winworth's marriage to Miss Marchmont: "... I am a woman, and feel this unexpected misfortune with the keenest sensibility. It kills me to think of his being another's ..." (729). All ends well, however, as Miss Rivers marries Sir Harry, making it possible for lady Betty and Miss Marchmont to be united to Winworth and Sidney respectively.

Sophia, the heroine of The Brothers, is a virtuous girl who loves, and is loved by, the younger Belfield. Unfortunately, she is kept away from him by his villainous elder brother. She has been made to believe her lover to be dead. Later she has the mortification of learning how she was driven away from Belfield Jr. whose affections to her were "pure, honest, and sincere" (VII, 262). Engaged to be married to the elder Belfield, she does not know how to extricate herself from the embarrassments of her situation (266). When her father
persuades her to marry the elder Belfield, the unhappy girl replies, "I talk of the qualities of a man, you of his possessions; I require in a husband, good morals, good nature, and good sense; what has all this to do with contiguous estates, connected interests, and contested elections?" (VII, 274). Later, miserable on account of her lover's supposed faithlessness, she remarks: "Age, ugliness, ill-nature, bring anything to my arms rather than him". In the end, however, Paterson removes her misunderstanding about Belfield Jr., saying that it is the elder brother who is already married. She is rewarded as the villain is exposed and she can marry her lover.

Not every sentimental comedy, however, depicts a virtuous maiden in distress, finally married to the man she loves. In many cases, the heroine is an "abused" wife — a virtuous lady who suffers the infidelity of her husband for a long time. She finally brings about the reformation of her libertine husband through great loyalty and devotion. Lady Easy, the heroine of The Careless Husband, suffers because of her husband Charles Easy, a vile, licentious man. She presents her sad case to the audience in the opening scene. Though she knows her husband carries an intrigue with her woman, Mrs. Edging, she does not reprove him lest her jealousy should "tease him to a fixed aversion" (403). Her eyes and tongue, she says, "shall yet be blind and silent to my wrongs ... till by some gross apparent
proof of his misdoing he forces me to see — and to forgive it" (403). Sir Charles himself wonders how such a fine lady could remain satisfied with having so many useless good qualities. Even in the face of greatest provocation from him she can suffer without protest: "Then I should cry myself sick in some dark closet, and forget my tears when you spoke kindly to me" (405). Sir Charles calls her the most convenient piece of virtue. He is particularly conscious of her inclination to indulge him: "... for though she can't make me happy in her own person, she lets me be so intolerably easy with the women that can that she has at least brought me into a fair way of being as weary of them too" (406).

Being serious-minded, Lady Easy pulls up Lady Betty for going ecstatic over her new scarf from London, having six thousand yards of edging in it: "Why truly, I'm half angry to see a woman of your sense so warmly concerned in the care of her outside; for when we have taken our best pains about it, 'tis the beauty of the mind alone that gives us lasting value" (408). In this kind of moralizing, she is no different from other sentimental heroines. She also shares their remarkable capacity for suffering silently and patiently. In Act V, Scene 5, shocked at discovering her husband and her woman asleep in two easy chairs, she exclaims: "Protect me, virtue, patience, reason! / Teach me to bear this killing sight, or let/Me think my dreaming
senses are deceived." For a moment she is rather inclined to
wake him in his guilt but soon drops the idea:

... The ease of a few tears
Is all that's left to me --
And duty, too, forbids me to insult,
Where I have vowed obedience ... (429).

She endures injuries, finding satisfaction in what she calls the
melancholy of a quiet conscience. Though she knows the whole
truth about her husband's gallantries, yet she is too tender to
reproach him. In this way she reforms her husband who says,
"Receive me then entire at last, and take what yet no woman ever
truly had, my conquered heart" (431). She feels herself amply
rewarded: "Thus, thus to have you mine is something more than
happiness, 'tis double life, and madness of abounding joy" (431).
In her, as Waterhouse remarks, "Cibber has portrayed a character
quite different from the heartless coquettes which are found in
the Restoration comedies: a woman of fine sensibility and
capable of true sympathy". 30

Harriot, the heroine of The School for Rakes, has the familiar
melancholy air and often talks in a doleful strain. Asked why
she is so grave, she tells her father that she feels tired after
the journey to London. But the real cause of her worry is
different. Duped into marrying Lord Eustace secretly, she now
finds him rather unwilling to have his marriage legalised. She

30. Waterhouse, "The Development of English Sentimental Comedy
in the Eighteenth Century", Anglia, 30 (1907), 165.
feels greatly distressed at his changed attitude: "O, no! he was all tenderness; he wept our parting: I wept too, yet found a pleasing softness in that grief he seemed to share. — What a change!" (21). Lord Eustace's steward, Frampton, cannot help pitying this innocent girl for being drawn into a feigned marriage. He exclaims, "What a delicate sensibility in her countenance! What softness in her voice!" (24). Just as a Gentleman gives Kent a touching account of Cordelia in King Lear, similarly Frampton gives Lord Eustace a moving account of the injured Harriot: "The tears which seemed to have dimmed her lovely eyes, reproached you silently; but not an angry word escaped her lips" (25). She pathetically entreats Eustace to remove the veil of mystery about their marriage and sheds "tears of joy" as she finds him somewhat reassuring (34).

Harriot is, however, soon disconcerted to hear about his approaching marriage to Lady Anne. After Eustace explains away this report, she says to her aunt, "... I should have fainted, if the tenderness of my lord's looks, even more than his words, had not convinced me of his love and truth" (39). Frampton regards her as a lady of unblemished character and calls her "amiable unfortunate" (44). Then, she learns that Lord Eustace is actually going to marry Lady Anne. Distracted with grief, she exclaims, "Gracious heaven! Where shall I hide my head!" (50). And again: "'Tis too true! Undone, unhappy Harriot!" (51).
She finds it impossible to endure the agonies she suffers. Her fainting (52) greatly distresses her father. In one of the most pathetic scenes of the play (III, ii), she reveals her secret to her father who says in anguish that she is undone, because "there is very little prospect of happiness for a virtuous woman, who is connected with a libertine" (65). A little later when he reproaches her, she says, "I only fear to live, not die -- Let loose your rage upon me ... I will endure it all" (74). At last, her grief and tenderness subdue Eustace's heart. Convinced of his contrition, Harriot forgives and marries him.

The virtuous Violetta in The Brothers suffers no less than Harriot in The School for Rakes. Deserted by her husband, she has been twice shipwrecked and twice rescued from the jaws of death. In her sorrow and despair she seems to regret her existence (258). She happens to be cast near her husband's mansion when a privateer carrying her is wrecked on the coast. She feels suddenly disordered as "Lewson" makes a contemptuous reference to the possessor of that mansion. In a soliloquy she gives expression to her utter misery and loneliness: "Once more am I alone. How my heart sunk when Lewson pronounced the name of Belfield! It must be he: it must be my false, cruel, yet (spite of all my wrongs) beloved husband!" (VII, 259). Later Violetta is shocked to learn that her husband is going to marry Sophia Dove who knows little about his treachery. In her utter
misery, she soliloquises thus:

Let me reflect upon my fate — wedded, betrayed, abandoned! At once a widow and a wife, all that my soul held dear, in the same hour obtained and lost. Oh, false, false Belfield! Strong, indeed, must be that passion, and deeply seated in my heart, which even thy treachery could not eradicate! Twice shipwrecked! twice rescued from the jaws of death! Just heaven! I do not, dare not, murmur; nor can I doubt but that thy hand invisibly is stretched forth to save me; and, through this labyrinth of sorrow, to conduct me to repose (VII, 273).

As Paterson and Sophia discover the truth about her, they manage to expose Belfield Sr. who apologizes to his faithful, forsaken Violetta: "Oh, take me to your arms, and, in that soft shelter, let me find forgiveness and protection" (VII, 276). Violetta finds his repentance sincere and they are reunited.

Mrs. Belville in The School for Wives does not suffer as much as Harriot or Violetta. But she does experience considerable uneasiness because of her husband's passion for variety, his pursuit of fresh game, and the contradiction between his professions and practice (247). She finds him in the company of Miss Leeson, posing as the manager of a play-house in Ireland (271). Like Lady Easy, Mrs. Belville is forgiving about her husband's amorous proclivities, and she pity's his distresses (272). Actually, Mr. Belville has warm affection for her: "If wives knew the omnipotence of virtue where she wears a smile upon her face, they'd all follow your bewitching example, and make a faithless husband quite an incredible character" (272). Mrs. Belville loves him to the point of ignoring his irregularities.
and even believes that her generous conduct at Miss Leeson's will make an end of his gallantries (276). Mr. Belville himself acknowledges the angelic sweetness with which "she bore the mortifying discovery" (284).

When her husband is challenged to a duel by Mr. Leeson, Mrs. Belville earnestly requests Captain Savage to run to Hyde-Park to prevent the combat and thus save her from desperation" (297). Her anxiety and distress are intended to arouse our feeling of pity:

Mrs. Bel. 0, Matilda! -- my husband! my husband! my children! my children!
Miss Wal. Don't weep, my dear, don't weep; pray be comforted, all may end happily. Lady Rachel, beg of her not to cry so.
Lady Rach. Why, you are crying yourself, Miss Walsingham; and though I think it out of character to encourage her tears, I can't help keeping you company (298-99).

Even after Captain Savage ascertains that Mr. Belville and Leeson parted without fighting, Mrs. Belville continues to be oppressed by dark forebodings like the Queen in Shakespeare's Richard II:
"I am, nevertheless, torn by a thousand apprehensions, and my fancy, with a gloomy kind of fondness, fastens on the most deadly .... Perhaps I am a wife no longer; -- perhaps, my little innocents, your unhappy father is at this moment breathing his last sigh, and wishing, 0, how vainly! that he had not preferred a guilty pleasure to his own life, to my eternal peace of mind,
and your felicity!" (309). When he returns safe, she faints with joy. As she revives, Mr. Belville exclaims, "The angel-softness! how this rends my heart!" (310). She entreats him to avoid duelling in future in view of the agonies she has had to endure. Finding him safe, she sheds tears of joy. "Excuse these foolish tears", she tells him, "they gush in spite of me" (310). Her husband, however, is not entirely reformed as he later succumbs to the temptation of meeting Miss Walsingham in a masquerade. Again exposed, he assures his wife that henceforth she need not doubt the sincerity of his reformation. Full of joy, Lady Belville exclaims, "I am too happy: this single moment would overpay a whole life of anxiety" (326).

Lady Wronglove in The Lady's Last Stake feels much disturbed on account of her husband's gallantries. "Not a day passes", she complains, "without some fresh discovery of his perfidiousness ... Sure men think that wives are stocks and stones, without all sense of injuries, or only born and bound to bear them!" (205). She is, however, different from Lady Easy or Mrs. Belville, as she boldly resents her husband's gallantries, regards his violation of the marriage vow as a foul injury to her, and often flies into a violent passion. The implacably virtuous lady dogs her husband in his amours in order to show him that she knows his baseness. Finding him incorrigible, she even decides upon divorce as the only possible solution of their difficulties. But
although the heroine of sentimental comedy may seek divorce, she is not allowed to obtain it. Advised by Sir Friendly Moral, Lady Wronglove realizes her mistake and, like many other sentimental heroines, sits down weeping (279). Sir Friendly then asks Lord Wronglove to remember "the long-watch'd, restless hours" which Lady Wronglove has endured because of him. As her "tender" silence and softening tears make him repentant of his follies, Lady Wronglove exclaims, "What means this soft effusion in my breast? An aching tenderness ne'er felt before!" (280). Reconciled to her husband, she thanks Sir Friendly: "But let the kind physician that restor'd us, be for ever in our thanks remember'd. Had not his tender care observ'd the crisis of my distemper'd mind, how rashly had I languish'd out a wretched being!" (280).

The heroine of sentimental comedy, then, is often either an impoverished orphan who maintains an impregnable chastity in the most alarming circumstances, or abused wife who stays virtuous in her distress till her errant husband is reformed. Thus she is the exact antithesis of the gay heroine of the Restoration comedy. Her plight is melancholy enough for a tragedy. The pensive softness of her mind was admired by the generation that seldom found appealing what was not muted by the soft haze of sentiment. In order to evoke the requisite sympathy and admiration for the virtuous maiden in distress, the playwright
hardly misses any opportunity to include references to her miserable state, to her parent or parents of whom she knows nothing, to the dangers by which she is beset, and to her noble perseverance in preserving her chastity. Such references are not only frequent but also long drawn out. If an abused wife, the heroine is presented as an exceptionally virtuous lady, careful of her honour and often suffering in silence.

Though the heroine of sentimental comedy tries to maintain her composure in her trials, her sorrow often bursts through the restraints of her gentility. Like a queen in tragedy, she discusses her mournful life with such exalted sorrow that the spectators must presumably weep. Indeed, it is rare that she does not vent her feelings in many exclamatory sentences. The most emotional lines of the play are usually reserved for her. The pathos of her situation and the melancholy mode of her expression account in no small measure for the prevailing sentimental mood. However, she finally emerges morally triumphant, and is restored to her benevolent parent, or married to her noble lover. If an abused wife, she is likewise rewarded by being happily reunited to her husband whom she has, through her great loyalty and devotion, converted to a virtuous life. Rewarded for their virtue they are supposed to draw from persons of sensibility tears that flow from reason and good sense, generosity and goodness of heart. The triumph of their virtue will cause such persons, to
use Steele's words, "a joy too exquisite for laughter".

The third prominent type of character found in sentimental comedy is an elderly person who is emotional and moralizing. He is the embodiment of benevolence, good nature and tender sentimental feeling. His benevolence springs from the tender emotion of pity which Steele, in the epilogue to *The Lying Lover*, hailed as something which Nature gave "for man to man". Often he acts as a *deus ex machina* to clear up the difficulties of the virtuous characters. He looks anxious to relieve the distresses of others and seems to get great satisfaction from acts of charity and benevolence. He is seen as a benevolent guide and friend to the virtuous, apparently seeking nothing for himself. His function is to end marital discords, settle differences between his friends and acquaintances, extend moral support to the deserving, frustrate villainy and smoothe the path of distressed virtue.

Sir Friendly Moral in *The Lady's Last Stake* and Mr. Drummond in *The Runaway* are the best examples of this type of character. The former, whose name is an adequate description of his character, miraculously succeeds in bringing about the reconciliation between Lord and Lady Wronglove. His ward, Miss Notable, speaks about his penchant for moralizing. She tells

Smith, *The Gay Couple*, pp. 204-11, argues that "benevolence" was an important element in the concept of an ideal person in many plays after 1700.
Lady Wronglove that he gives her a daily lecture against "lightness and gadding abroad" (219). He loses no occasion for talking on questions of duty, right and wrong. "'Tis, in my opinion", he tells Lord Wronglove, "as dishonest for a man of quality to converse with a well-bred rogue, as 'twere unsafe for a woman of reputation to make a companion of an agreeable strumpet" (248). A little later he admonishes both Lord Wronglove and Lord George: "Fortune has given you titles to set your actions in a fairer light, and Nature understanding, to make 'em not only just, but generous. Troth! it grieves me to think you can abuse such happiness, and have no more ambition, or regard to real honour, than the wretched fine gentlemen in most of our modern Comedies!" (249).

Sir Friendly Moral preaches to Lady Gentle and Lord George against the vice of gambling: "And 'tis amazing, that so many good families shou'd daily encourage a diversion, whose utmost pleasure is founded upon avarice and ill-nature; for those are always the secret principles of deep play" (273). His sententiousness, however, gives no offence to anyone. Lord Wronglove concedes that his manner of speech makes even the "most severe reproofs an obligation" (248). He helps Mrs. Conquest to marry her lover, Lord George, after preventing him from seducing Lady Gentle. But his main contribution lies in ending the marital discord of Lord and Lady Wronglove after the
two have agreed upon a separation by mutual consent. He warns Lady Wronglove against the dreadful consequences of separation, and advises her to "lure him home with soft affection, to lull him into blushes, peace, and envied happiness" (278). Then, as she weeps, he turns to Lord Wronglove and stresses his "cruelty beyond a humane nature" (279). As the husband and wife are reconciled to each other, Sir Friendly speaks in a voice touched with emotion: "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). He is, like Sir Patrick Worthy in Charles Shadwell's *Irish Hospitality*, the embodiment of Shaftesburian benevolism (discussed in Chapter 2, above). His faith in the essential goodness of human nature is vindicated as the erring characters repent and reform. "I knew you both had virtue", he tells Lord and Lady Wronglove, "and was too far concern'd indeed to see 'em lost in passion" (281).

Mr. Drummond in *The Runaway* is a highly benevolent middle-aged person. He saves young Emily from a marriage to which her uncle is going to force her. He maintains her in strict respectability, and endeavours to raise her spirits. George Hargrave is shocked to know that his father wants him to marry the fifty-year old Mrs. Dinah in view of her riches. Only Mr. Drummond, he thinks, can save him from such a union: "He is, indeed, my only resource -- I'll fly to him this instant, and if
it fails me, I am the most miserable man on earth" (47). Mr. Drummond appreciates George's sentiments, saying, "... twenty years ago, I might have been tempted to enter the lists with you, myself" (50). Then he asks Mr. Hargrave why his son must be sacrificed to his ambition. When Mr. Hargrave says that George will not get an acre of his land in case he does not marry Lady Dinah, Mr. Drummond replies, "and he shall never possess a rood of mine, if he does" (52). He defends Emily from harm by exposing the jealous Lady Dinah who has conspired to injure her reputation (68). He discovers Emily to be the daughter of Major Morley, one of the earliest friends of his youth. So when her cruel uncle seizes her arm to take her away, Mr. Drummond says: "He (Emily's father) would not have borne the distress she now endures -- I will be a father to his orphan Emily, and ensure the felicity of two children, on the point of being sacrificed to the ambition and avarice of those, on whose hearts Nature has graven duties, which they wilfully mispel" (69). When Mr. Morley, Lady Dinah and Mr. Hargrave resent his intervention on behalf of George and Emily, Mr. Drummond asserts himself: "Mistaken Men! into what an abyss of misery -- perhaps of guilt, would you plunge them! -- they claim from you happiness, and you withhold it -- they shall receive it from me" (70). It is mainly to Mr. Drummond that George and Emily owe their final union.

Frampton in *The School for Rakes* detests his patron, Lord...
Eustace, for using vile artifices to draw innocent Harriot into a feigned marriage (26). Though loyal to his master, he is candid in expressing disgust at his villainies. He is not prepared to minister to his rakish patron's vices for his subsistence. "Beauty, that makes most men knaves", says he, "makes me honest; for I hold it the lowest baseness to be capable of admiring and betraying an innocent creature in the same moment" (22). He objects to his decision to marry Lady Anne after involving Harriot in ruin. Usually, he gives a sententious utterance to his feelings. When Lord Eustace says that his father will disinherit him unless he marries Lady Anne and that he hopes to persuade Harriot to return into the country before she learns of his intended marriage, Frampton replies, "It is rather shameful, my lord, to erect a sanctuary for our vices, upon the virtues of others" (27). And when Eustace says that he can have no rest until he sees Harriot, he says, "Peace and guilt seldom cohabit, my lord" (29). When Eustace seems to realize that vice is often attended with pain, Frampton sententiously remarks that "being sensible of our errors, is the first step to amendment" (29), and later advises him to repair the injuries he has committed in this case (56).

At one stage Eustace tells Frampton that the latter is hardly different from the former. Frampton replies, "... the laws of hospitality, I never violated; nor did I ever seek to
injure or seduce the wife or daughter of my friend" (58). He breaks with him but soon returns to say that he finds it impossible to desert him in his difficulties (59). Eustace is grateful to Frampton and feels the force of his sentiments. The contemporary Critical Review admitted that "the sentiments of honour and virtue, which fall from the mouth of Mr. Frampton, are such as ought to reform the manners of the most dissolute". Frampton's efforts to get Harriot's father reconciled with Eustace meet with success in the end, as the remorseful Eustace is forgiven and accepted by Harriot.

The Irish Major O'Flaherty in The West Indian pays court to Lady Rusport. Later, however, he is shocked at her hard-hearted treatment of her kinsfolk. "You preach and you pray", he tells her, "and you turn up your eyes, and all the while you're as hard-hearted as a hyena. A hyena, truly! By my soul there isn't in the whole creation so savage an animal as a human creature without pity" (763). He forsakes her house. Later when Belcour and Charles start fighting over a misunderstanding, Louise requests O'Flaherty to stop the fight. He promptly knocks up their swords, saying, "Can't you leave off cutting one another's throats and mind what the poor girl says to you?" (774). Then, recognizing Charles as the son of an old

companion-in-arms, he advises him never to draw his sword before a woman (775). He overhears a lawyer, Varland, informing Lady Rusport that Sir Oliver Roundhead left in his last illness a second will by which his grandson, Charles Dudley, inherits his whole property. When Lady Rusport promises to offer Varland a bribe of five thousand pounds, he agrees to let her destroy the will. As Lady Rusport leaves, O'Flaherty asks Varland to surrender the will: "... if you do not give me up that paper this very instant, by the soul of me, fellow, I will not leave one whole bone in your skin that shan't be broken" (777). When Varland asks him to give, if he is an honest man, the will to Charles Dudley, the Major retorts, "An honest man! Look at me, friend. I am a soldier. This is not the livery of a knave. I am an Irishman, honey; mine is not the country of dishonour. Now, sirrah, be gone. If you enter these doors or give Lady Rusport the least item of what has passed, I will cut off both your ears and rob the pillory of its due" (777-78).

Major O'Flaherty feels contempt for Belcour for attempting the sister of a man of honour (779). When Belcour and Charles become reconciled after a misunderstanding is cleared up, O'Flaherty expresses happiness and remarks that "... a quarrel well made up is better than a victory hardly earned" (781). It is because of him that Charles gets his grand-father's will which makes him heir to his whole estate, with a fortune of fifteen
thousand pounds to Louisa (783). He exposes Lady Rusport's conspiracy against her nephew Charles in collusion with Varland, saying: "Your ladyship now was to have paid him five thousand pounds for it. I forced him to give it to me of his own accord for nothing at all, at all" (785). After making this happy discovery, Major O'Flaherty looks forward to a retreat in his native country which he thinks "worth all the rest of the world put together" (783).

Paterson in The Brothers is the steward of Belfield Sr., who has been unfair and cruel to his wife and his younger brother. When Paterson learns from Belfield himself that the latter has driven his younger brother from his sweetheart Sophia, and even propagated a report of his death in order to facilitate his own marriage with her, he replies, "I am sorry for it, Mr. Belfield; I wish nothing was convenient that can be thought dishonourable" (VII, 261). And when his master says that his acquaintance with life has shown him that high ideals are quite impracticable, Paterson says, "And do you dream of ever reaching your journey's end by such crooked paths as these are?" (VII, 261). When Belfield fights with Philip only because the latter is determined to defend Lucy Waters against him, Paterson beats down their swords, saying, "For shame, Mr. Belfield! What are you about -- tilting with this peasant?" (VII, 269). When Paterson discovers that Violetta is the Portuguese lady whom Belfield married and
then forsook her, he calls him base and perfidious and offers to help Violetta out of her misery: "Now, madam, if you will trust yourself to my convoy, I'll bring you into harbour, where you shall never suffer shipwreck more" (VII, 273). He loses no time in informing Sophia, when she is about to marry Belfield, that the man is already married to Violetta. He also tells her how he has put Violetta under safe convoy and arranged to lodge her privately in the closet of her bed-chamber. It is thus largely because of Paterson that Sophia eventually marries her true lover, Belfield Jr., and Violetta is reunited to her reformed husband.

Torrington in The School for Wives is an unusually noble and benignant lawyer. In many comedies of the age the lawyer's profession has been exposed to scorn. This is shown by the portraits of Sergeant Flower in Colman's The Clandestine Marriage (1766), written in collaboration with Garrick, Furnival in Kenrick's The Widowed Wife (1767), Sergeant Circuit in Foote's The Lame Lover (1770), and Varland in Cumberland's The West Indian (1771). But Torrington, as Mrs. Belfield tells her husband, "is one of the best creatures existing: he's a downright parson Adams in good nature and simplicity" (239). He modestly believes that he has no attraction for any woman in the world. Belfield, however, knows that Lady Rachel not only loves Torrington but is "deeply smitten with him" (239). Torrington disapproves of General Savage's plan to marry his son to Miss
Moreland only because she has thirty thousand pounds. "Ay", he tells the General, "but a marriage merely on the score of fortune, is only gilding the death-warrant sent down for the execution of a prisoner" (253).

Even as a lawyer Torrington expresses his confidence in the goodness of human nature. When General Savage and his son find fault with Miss Walsingham, Torrington remarks that "in this land of liberty, none are to be pronounced guilty till they are positively convicted" (312). When the father and son, convinced of her scandalous appointment with Belville, again criticize her baseness, Torrington says, "Mistakes have already happened, mistakes may happen again; and I will not give up a lady's honour upon an evidence that would not cast a common pickpocket at the Old Bailey" (313). When Captain Savage unmasks the lady with Mr. Belville in the masquerade, she turns out to be Mrs. Belville rather than Miss Walsingham. Torrington's confidence in human nature is thus vindicated by Captain Savage's discovery of Miss Walsingham's innocence. Later the dialogue between Torrington and Leeson (332-33) further emphasizes the former's nobility and benevolence. "I mean to give my friends", says Torrington, "but little trouble about my affairs when I am gone. -- I love to see the people happy that my fortune is to make so; and shall think it a treason against humanity, to leave a shilling more than the bare expenses of my funeral" (333).
About, but not quite, on a par with Torrington is Connolly, the honest and devoted clerk of Leeson, in *The School for Wives*. In him Kelly idealizes the Irish character as Cumberland does in *Major O'Flaherty*. With little propensity for injudicious fighting, Connolly objects to his master's decision to fight a duel with Mr. Belville: "Why you know so; you have broke the laws of heaven and earth, as nobly as the first lord in the land, and you have convinced the world, that where any body has done your family one injury you have courage enough to do it another yourself, by hazard ing your life" (303). It is, however, in the admirable Torrington, as already shown, that Kelly has created a truly sentimental character in the play.

Sometimes such a benevolent figure coalesces with the devoted father of a suffering, long-lost child. Sir Charles Raymond in *The Foundling* is so kind and compassionate as to be fit to be classed with Sir Friendly Moral. He is deeply moved by the misery of Fidelia, the foundling. In Act II, Scene i, speaking to Sir Roger about her, he says, "... I saw her cheeks covered with blushes, and her eyes swimming in tears — But my life upon't, they were the blushes and the tears of innocence!" He is filled with concern about her family. "For who knows", he continues, "while we are delaying, but some unhappy mother, perhaps of rank too, may be wringing her hands in bitterness of misery for this lost daughter". When the worthless Faddle
accuses Fidelia of being a low woman, Sir Charles is not satisfied with giving her moral support. Towards the close of Act III, the benevolent man asks Fidelia to feel free to live in his apartments after saying, "... I have a heart that feels for your distresses, and beats to relieve them". He asks her to dry up her tears and then resolves to establish her innocence. Before long he obliges Faddle to confess that Belmont offered him a bribe to defame Fidelia so that he might get her driven from his house to private lodgings. In Act IV, Scene ii, outraged by Faddle's baseness, Sir Charles delivers himself of his opinion of the man: "Thy life is a disgrace to humanity. A foolish prodigality makes thee needy; need makes thee vicious, and both make thee contemptible. Thy wit is prostituted to slander and buffoonery; and thy judgments, if thou hast any, to meanness and villainy". He goes on to sound a note of warning: "Those who caress thee are enemies to themselves; and when they know it, will be so to thee: in thy distresses they will desert thee, and leave thee, at last, to sink in thy poverty, unregarded and unpitied. If thou canst be wise, think of me, and be honest".

Sir Charles reprimands Belmont for defaming the innocent Fidelia in order to be able to dishonour her. Finding Belmont ashamed of his conduct, he asks him to dry up her tears immediately. Charles who has been ignorant of the identity of Fidelia is filled with joy when he discovers her (V, ii) as his own long-
lost daughter: "To find thee thus virtuous", he tells her, "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!"

Stockwell, the worthy and sententious merchant in *The West Indian*, confides to his clerk Stukely in the opening scene that Belcour is his unacknowledged son. As Belcour has just arrived in London as inheritor of great estates in Jamaica, Stockwell decides to keep him still ignorant of their relationship, hoping to discover much more of his real character as his merchant than as his father (750). Some of his utterances are designed to have an effect upon our feelings. For example, when a letter from Belcour says that he will soon pay him his devoirs, Stockwell remarks, "He writes at his ease, for he's unconscious to whom his letter is addressed; but what a palpitation does it throw my heart into, a father's heart! 'Tis an affecting interview. When my eyes meet a son whom yet they never saw, where shall I find constancy to support it?" (750-51). A little later, during his conversation with Belcour, Stockwell says in an aside, "How gladly I could fall upon his neck and own myself his father" (751). In another aside he remarks, "How difficult it is to counterfeit indifference and put a mask upon the heart" (765), and in a
soliloquy he says, "O Nature, what it is to be a father;" (765).

When Stockwell learns that Belcour gave Captain Dudley two hundred-pound notes to meet his necessary expenses of travel, he is overwhelmed with emotion: "I must disclose myself to Belcour. This noble instance of his generosity ... allies me to him at once. Concealment becomes too painful" (778). Finding him agitated, Stockwell exclaims in an aside, "Alas! my heart bleeds for him" (778). Later he is shocked to hear that Belcour has tried to attempt the honour of the virtuous Louisa. "If you have done that, Mr. Belcour", he says, "I renounce you, I abandon you, I forswear all fellowship or friendship with you forever" (779). But when he finds that he is the victim of a trap laid for him, he becomes indulgent towards him. Later Stockwell exposes the Fulmers for defaming Louisa and tells Belcour that she is not the mistress, but the sister, of Charles. Finding Belcour genuinely repentant and anxious to atone for his misconduct by marrying Louisa, Stockwell is happy to disclose to him that he is his father (786).

The sentimental benevolence of this comedy, then, often personifies Shaftesburian faith in the natural goodness of man. He seems to be characterized by humanity, good nature and universal benevolence — the ideals preached by the anti-Hobbesian divines of the Latitudinarian School, and later
eulogized by Shaftesbury. His faith in the goodness of humanity and the glory of benevolence is vindicated in the course of the play. He seldom fails to utter edifying moral maxims and precepts in sober earnest, and even with a reformer's zeal. The speeches through which he exhorts the errant characters to just deeds and benevolent feelings are often charged with emotion and seasoned with aphorisms. In fact, his sententious utterances constitute an important feature of sentimental comedy. As "friend of mankind", he gets the erring characters reformed and the virtuous rewarded, thus playing an important role in resolving the complications of the plot.

In this and the preceding chapter I have tried to investigate the nature of the eighteenth-century English sentimental comedy by examining its principal themes and characters with special reference to the outstanding examples of the genre. We may now well sum up its main points. It avoids the licentiousness of the Restoration comedy which gave offence to the rising middle classes. It is above moral reproach as it has no cuckolded husbands, no adulterous wives, no smutty prologues, and no pornographic thrusts. Free from bawdry or indecency, the dialogue is either preceptual or emotional. Its noble hero or the benevolent elderly man

33 See Moore, "Shaftesbury and the Ethical Poets", pp. 264-325, and Crane, "Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling'", pp. 205-30.

rarely opens his mouth without dropping some moral aphorism. Its
distressed heroine accounts for some of the most emotional lines
of the play. In the concluding scenes of this comedy, the dialogue
is liberally sprinkled with sententious pronouncements.

Sentimental comedy aims mainly at ethical effect rather than
mere entertainment. Its plots are planned to provide opportunities
for scenes of virtuous conduct and to emphasize some moral truths.
Its moralizing scenes contain many sermonizing passages with a
view to promoting the cause of virtue and wisdom. It treats
such themes as facilitate the introduction of moral teaching as
well as pathetic situations. It brings out the worth of the
traditional values like fidelity, charity and love. In the
nineteenth century, Ibsen and Shaw brilliantly exposed the
inadequacy of these values and introduced new ones. The plots
of sentimental comedy are calculated to show good characters
rewarded and bad frustrated. This poetic justice is sometimes
achieved through its benevolent elderly gentleman who acts as
deus ex machina.

As the main plots of sentimental comedy are designed to
emphasize moral truths, its chief characters are drawn to
exemplify virtue. Uttering pious sentiments, these characters
easily fit the plots which are obviously designed to work out
pre-conceived moral aims. Its heroes are sought to be presented
as models of decency and probity, and its heroines are made to
have rather strict standards of fidelity, love and truth in order to serve as moral examples. As the action of sentimental comedy is manipulated to illustrate the Shaftesburian belief in the essential goodness of the human heart, some of its characters are made to exemplify such an optimistic belief, while others are made to express it repeatedly. The moral reformation of the rakes of this comedy further serves to confirm assumptions about goodness of heart, and to reveal the possibility of reclamation of human nature by an appeal to the emotions. It is, therefore, understandable that playwrights like Kelly and Cumberland present in a sympathetic light the traditional victims of national, professional and religious prejudices. They are intended to arouse our admiration and engage our sympathies rather than excite our laughter.

Sentimental comedy lacks humour because its main purpose is to arouse emotion which, as Bergson has pointed out, is antithetical to laughter. The sentimental playwrights do not accept the standard critical dogma that the essence of comedy is ridicule. Comedy, they feel, need not arouse laughter by exposing a person's follies and vices to ridicule and derision. By arousing pity for distressed innocence, sentimental comedy is supposed to produce higher pleasure than laughter can give. While it is never entirely devoid of humour, many of its scenes

Bergson, *Laughter*, pp. 4-5.
seem to be designed to cause weeping rather than laughter. Often it is with the suffering heroine that the audience is called upon to weep. As this comedy emphasizes the didactic and sentimental elements, it has very few scenes of joy and exhibition of high spirits. Thus, the sentimental playwright discards the classical view, that comedy, through "pleasure" and "laughter", effects a catharsis of the said emotions. The sentimental comedy contains pathetic elements which Otway and Southerne used in their tragedies to arouse in the spectator "generous Pity of a painted Woe". Though its ultimate impression is not really one of tragic suffering, waste and emptiness, yet the emotional response that many of its scenes produce is undoubtedly one of sorrow. Indeed, its spirit is at times so serious as to make it "almost solemn enough for a sermon".

The eighteenth-century audiences liked sentimental comedy for revealing harmony underlying life's disharmony, for reinforcing the traditional values, for emphasizing the natural goodness of man and the ultimate joy of our earthly existence. They experienced joy by participating in the situations leading to the eventual success and happiness of the virtuous characters. They liked the heroes of sentimental comedy for their marked sensibility

36Lane Cooper, Aristotle on Comedy (New York, 1922), p. 224. W.P. Ker, On Modern Literature (Oxford, 1956), p. 196, endorses the classical view: "The effect of it (Comedy) is indeed a purification of pleasure and laughter and so, to think of it is itself a pleasure".
and refinement, and its heroines for being strictly virtuous. They relished its emotional and preceptual dialogue as well as its scenes of repentance and forgiveness. To be sure, this kind of comedy satisfied the contemporary taste for tears and didacticism, and it replaced the licentiousness and cynicism of the Restoration comedy by its humanity and decency.

Many of the modern readers, however, would find it hard to respond to sentimental comedy just as its original audiences did. For many of us the old values have become a "heap of broken images" in these troubled times. Shocked at external conditions and realities, we are likely to feel that the optimism of sentimental comedy is uncritical, that its morality is shallow, that its characters are rather ridiculous in their benevolence and insincere in uttering moral sentiments, and that its scenes of reconciliation are often mawkish. We cannot easily admire its characters full of sensibility, the virtue which was so popular in the eighteenth century. Nor can we share the sentimental playwright's pride in making the stage "a school of morality".

We no longer admire a play for "the mere moral Delight received from its Fable", as Cibber's contemporaries did. What Congreve said about Love's Last Shift seems to apply to most sentimental comedies of the eighteenth century: "... it had only in it a great many things that were like wit, that in reality were not wit". The action of these comedies is often interrupted
with lengthy homilies upon moral topics and frequent displays of pity. Usually a heavy tone of piety dampens them. The comic elements supplied by a few scenes is too thin to relieve their gloomy atmosphere. We find them, to use Hazlitt's well-known phrase, "do-me-good, lack-a-daisical, whining make-believe comedies ... where the author tries in vain to be merry and wise in the same breath". It is, therefore, understandable that twentieth-century critics do not fail to mention, in their brief discussions of sentimental comedy, its artistic blemishes. For example, Daiches, speaking about the sententious speeches of its characters, remarks that they "are not artificial enough for a purely formal style and not natural enough for the illusion of realism".³⁷ "Who can read", asks another critic, "Cumberland's The West Indian (1771), or Lillo's The London Merchant (1731) and forget that mawkish sweetness, that unctuous virtue, those interminable repentances?"³⁸ In sentimental comedy, according to Professor Quintana, "there is exaggerated emphasis upon the fundamental nobility of human nature, unworthy acts are too speedily followed by remorse, and remorse leads too promptly to reformation and general happiness for everybody. And it preaches insistently and indulges in a characteristic rhetoric of sententiousness and emotionalism".³⁹

³⁸ Parnell, "Sentimental Mask", p. 529.
³⁹ R. Quintana, "Goldsmith's Achievement as Dramatist", University of Toronto Quarterly, 34 (1965), 165.
And a more recent critic speaks of "the single-minded artificiality" of the sentimental comedy.

There was little difference between sentimental comedy and pathetic tragedy except that the former ended happily. Though the practitioners of sentimental comedy defended it in the prefaces and prologues to their plays, it did not find adequate warrant in contemporary critical theory. Nor did it stay unchallenged in its time. Several contemporary playwrights regarded it as too tearful and didactic to be genuine comedy. According to them, the primary business of true comedy was to amuse, though it might incidentally teach. But perhaps the most determined opposition that sentimental comedy met with came from Goldsmith and Sheridan who felt that genuine comedy was characterized by a spirit of amusement and laughter. As shown in the following chapters, they not only ridiculed the prominent features of sentimental comedy but also wrote unsentimental, non-exemplary comedies which have always delighted the play-goers.

40 Donohue Jr., Dramatic Character, p. 122.