Although Farquhar, Mrs. Centlivre, Gay, Fielding, Murphy, Macklin and Colman, the elder worked in non-sentimental modes and kept true comedy alive, the sentimental comedy remained popular during their time. During the 1760s many playwrights (mentioned in Chapter 2, above) catered to popular taste by writing rather humourless comedies, stressing the moralizing and the sentimental issues. Samuel Foote, actor and dramatist, complained in 1768 that the drama was "directed by the genius of insipidity", and that the stage was "a kind of circulating library for the vending of dialogue novels". He himself wrote short dramatic sketches in which he pilloried the methods of the sentimentalists. His puppet-show, *Piety in Pattens* (1773), ridiculed the sentimental desire to idealize common life. In the opening speech the author asserted that "not a single expression shall escape from our mouths that can wound the nicest ear, or produce a blush on the most transparent skin". Foote might have discomfited the sentimentalists, but he could not expand his attacks into full-scale theatrical productions. Perhaps the first great playwright of the age to attack sentimental comedy consistently before composing his comedies of humour and character was Oliver Goldsmith (1730-74). It is important to note his critical observations

\(^1\) Cited by Muir, op. cit., p. 156.
Goldsmith's remarks show that he had a very low estimate of the critics, the drama, and the theatre-audience of his day. In Chapter IX of An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning (1759) he suggests that it is impossible to satisfy critics with the comedy designed to provoke laughter. He blames them for making poetry dull: "Does the poet paint the absurdities of the vulgar? then he is low. Does he exaggerate the features of folly to render it more thoroughly ridiculous? he is then very low". This points to the attack on sentimental comedy which was to come in his two plays and in his "Essay on the Theatre". In Chapter X he maintains that the British theatre shares in the general decline of European culture. The theatrical managers and the critics tend to discourage those who venture to write for the stage; the former are "for decoration and ornament"; the latter, "for regularity and declamation". He deplores the condition of the mid-eighteenth century London theatre by saying that instead of serving the people, the stage is made "subservient to the interests of avarice". For him, the public's lack of sound taste is indicated by the revival of "those pieces of forced humour, far-fetched conceit, and unnatural hyperbole" which have been attributed to Shakespeare. After these uncomplimentary observations on the taste

3 Ibid., p. 440.
4 Ibid., p. 441.
5 Ibid.
of the critics and the galleries he goes on to remark that "true taste, or even common sense, are out of the question".6

In Letter XXI of The Citizen of the World (1762), Lien Chi Altangi tells how the spectators were seated and how they behaved one evening at the performance of a five-act tragedy. His Companion in Black, speaking about those who sat in the pit, disclosed to him "that not one in a hundred of them knew even the first principles of criticism; that they assumed the right of being censors because there was none to contradict their pretensions ...".7 Such an audience could only have encouraged bad writing. The great secret of composing a successful tragedy, says Altangi, "is a perfect acquaintance with theatrical ah's and oh's; a certain number of these, interspersed with gods! tortures! racks! and damnation! shall distort every actor almost into convulsions, and draw tears from every spectator",8 and, in conclusion, he ironically remarks that all modern plays must be conceived in the most unnatural manner in order to keep the audience alive.9 In Chapter XVIII of The Vicar of Wakefield, the strolling player tells Primrose that the spectators have nothing to do with dialect, humour or character; "they only go to be amused, and find themselves happy when they can enjoy a pantomime,

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p. 117.
8 Ibid., p. 215.
9 Ibid., p. 216.
under the sanction of Jonson's or Shakespeare's name. As the theatrical public lacks proper taste, the "modern" dramatists, in his opinion, need not imitate anything at all; "it is not the composition of the piece, but the number of starts and attitudes that may be introduced into it, that elicits applause". The actor surely speaks for the author when he remarks that "the works of Congreve and Farquhar have too much wit in them for the present taste".

Goldsmith, however, did not compromise his artistic integrity by appeasing the contemporary taste. Professor Ferguson has quoted Goldsmith to show that he wrote She Stoops to Conquer, The Traveller, The Life of Nash, and The Vicar of Wakefield, while fully aware that these were contrary to the current fashion. Goldsmith's independence of mind is perhaps best shown in breaking away from the current vogue for sentimental comedy. Most of his contemporaries played safe by writing sentimental comedies in view of their popularity. Goldsmith's first play, however, is essentially an anti-sentimental comedy. In the preface, added to the published version of The Good-Natured Man (1767), he says that he "was strongly prepossessed in favour of the poets of the last age and strove to imitate them"; and that before the advent of

10 Ibid., p. 39.
12 Goldsmith's genuine admiration for "the poets of the last age" is shown by his remarks on Congreve, Farquhar and Vanbrugh in "Literature in the Reign of George I" in his History of England which appeared on 26 June 1764.
sentimental comedy, the audiences had looked only for "nature and humour, in whatever walks of life they were most conspicuous". After declaring his dramatic creed, he hopes that excessive refinement will not put away humour and character from the English stage as it has from the French.

It is, however, in his famous "Essay on the Theatre; or, A Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy", published in The Westminster Gazette in 1773 that Goldsmith states his dramatic purpose in detail and defines in specific critical terms his opposition to sentimental comedy. He opens by asserting that tragedy has "given way to comedy", and goes on to state the classical position by quoting Aristotle as saying that comedy is "a picture of the frailties of the lower part of mankind", while tragedy deals with "the misfortunes of the great". We need not stop here to question in detail the inadequacy of this criterion of comedy which, as a dramatic term, should mean any drama that lacks the seriousness of a tragedy and which does not invariably imply the presence of episodes designed simply to make us laugh. But Goldsmith is here primarily concerned with stressing his preference for the "laughing" comedy over the sentimental comedy. He asks: "... which deserves the preference, -- the weeping sentimental comedy so much in fashion at present, or the laughing and even low comedy which seems to have been last exhibited by

\footnote{Masson, p. 346.}
Vanbrugh and Cibber? This tends to suggest that sentimental comedy was the dominant genre during Goldsmith's time. He believes that true comedy should rouse our laughter "by ridiculously exhibiting the follies of the lower part of mankind". All ancient writers, except Terence, he affirms, aim only at rendering vice or folly ridiculous, "but never exalt their characters into buskined pomp". In spite of all this, he bemoans, "a new species of dramatic composition has been introduced, under the name of sentimental comedy, in which the virtues of private life are exhibited, rather than the vices exposed; and the distresses rather than the faults of mankind make our interest in the piece". He attacks the characters of sentimental comedy by saying that they are all good and extremely generous, that they lack humour, but have plenty of feeling and sentiment, and that the spectator is taught not only to overlook their defects of character but even to applaud them out of consideration for "the goodness of their hearts". This sentimental comedy commends folly instead of ridiculing it and "aims at touching our passions without the power of being truly pathetic". "In this manner", he adds, "we are likely to lose one great source of entertainment on the stage; for while the comic poet is invading the province of the tragic muse, he leaves her lovely sister quite neglected". Anticipating defence of the genre from its admirers, he feels that sentimental comedy, even if it often amuses us, should be rejected in favour

14 Ibid., p. 347.
of true comedy as the latter would amuse us more: "The question is whether a character supported throughout a piece with its ridicule still attending, would not give us more delight than this species of bastard tragedy, which only is applauded because it is new". He cannot reconcile himself to this so-called comedy which substitutes much of the pathetic for the truly comic.

Goldsmith seems all for the classical comedy which, by excluding the tragic element, remained comic from first to last. He would not have the tragic muse encroach upon the province of comedy. "If we are permitted to make comedy weep", he writes in his 'Essay on the Theatre' "we have an equal right to make tragedy laugh, and to set down in blank verse the jests and repartees of all the attendants in a funeral procession". He ironically observes that sentimental comedy has one argument in its favour; it "is, of all others, the most easily written", and he goes on to ridicule its familiar devices - decked heroes, titled heroines, dull dialogues, kind hearts, pathetic scenes and melancholy conversation. Given this, it is certain that "all the ladies will cry, and all the gentlemen applaud". The conclusion of the essay strikes a note of warning that humour is departing from the stage and the audience may soon "sit at a play as gloomy as at the Tabernacle".

As Goldsmith's style in this essay is designed to persuade the reader to his way of thinking, he makes several inaccurate statements. For example, sentimental comedy (as shown in Chapter 2)
was not really a dominant genre in his time. Secondly, it is difficult to see how a sentimental comedy like False Delicacy or The West Indian is a bastard version of tragedy, or exalts its characters into buskined pomp. Thirdly, the performance records in the recent volumes of The London Stage show that humour was not really disappearing from the stage. It may also be pointed out that Goldsmith's condemnation of sentimental comedy as an undesirable mixture of the comic and the tragic is not altogether without precedents. Two centuries earlier, Sir Philip Sidney had, in his Apologie for Poetrie, derisively referred to the pre-Shakespearean mixed drama as "mongrel tragi-comedy" which aroused "neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness", and had approvingly spoken of the ancients because "they never, or very daintily, match hornpipes and funerals". Then Dryden's Lisideius, the admirer of the French neo-classic drama, had spoken for a whole generation of neo-classic critics: "There is no theatre in the world has anything so absurd as the English tragi-comedy; 'tis a drama of our own invention, and the fashion of it is enough to proclaim it so; here a course of mirth, there another of sadness and passion, and a third of honour and a duel: thus, in two hours and a half, we run through all the fits of Bedlam". In 1723, John Dennis had argued in a similar vein in his "Remarks on

16 Ibid., p. 72.
The Conscious Lovers" (1723). And Bishop Hurd, in his Dissertation on the Province of the Drama (1753), had observed that "though mixed dramas may give us pleasure, yet the pleasure, in either kind, will be LESS in proportion to the mixture". Nor is Goldsmith right in saying that tragedy and comedy have always "run in different channels". Shakespeare himself includes tragic elements in his comedies, though these plays are essentially different from the eighteenth century sentimental comedies.

Goldsmith cannot, therefore, be credited with expressing original ideas on comedy; what he says about tragedy and comedy is derivative and obvious. But he does identify with admirable clarity the major weaknesses of this sentimental comedy—its pathetic scenes, insipid dialogue, and almost faultless characters. We need not be surprised that sentimental comedy was boldly attacked by none other than the sentimental author of The Deserted Village. Probably he would not have objected to genuine sentiment and even the kind of ingenious blending of the comic and tragic that we have in Shakespeare and which has been defended by such perceptive critics as Dryden and Johnson. But what he could not stomach was an extreme form of humourless sentimentality which characterized many plays of the age. He despised these comedies for their sighs, sobs and tears, finding them neither true comedies, nor true tragedies. Yet the sentimental comedy was so popular

17Works (London, 1811), II, 84.
that, as he writes in his dedication of *She Stoops to Conquer*, "The undertaking a comedy, not merely sentimental, was very dangerous". He protested against the English imitations of the French *comédie larmoyante* which often excluded "low" characters, and sought to teach men by depicting them not as they are but as they should be. He had in his library the plays of Brueys, La Chausee, Dancourt, and Destouches. He particularly despised the French comedy for excluding humour and substituting sentiment. This was perhaps his most reasonable objection to sentimental comedy. Laughter, we know, may not be the sole end of comedy, but it has been an outstanding element in our response to comedy from Aristophanes to Fry. The popular attitude to comedy has been well expressed by Nicoll: "It is the laughter that we look for in comedy, not the sense of moral right or of moral wrong, not the purpose or the significance of the play". Goldsmith's great friend, Dr. Johnson, believed that "the great end of comedy is to make an audience merry". In our own time Lane Cooper has stated the emotional effect of comedy: "The observable effects of comedy, are, on the one hand, a heightened sense of well being accompanied by a thrill of a joy and, on the other hand, a phenomenon of laughter".

Goldsmith earnestly pleaded the cause of laughter at a time when, he felt, genuine humour had almost vanished from the French stage.

---

and seemed to be departing even from the British theatre. He could not see laughter and amusement driven out of the theatre.

Goldsmith's contempt for sentimental comedy, his own idea of comedy, his opinion of contemporary theatrical audiences, and his remarks on English dramatists and on the contemporary English drama, are important in as far as they provide a background against which his dramatic achievement is clearly defined. We shall now see how the comic is defined in terms of his own creative art and how his dramatic practice was more or less in harmony with his dramaturgic theory.

Goldsmith wrote his first comedy, The Good-Natur'd Man, apparently in 1766 or 1767 and submitted it to Garrick, hoping to see it produced shortly at Drury Lane. That even this shrewd manager did not feel any enthusiasm about producing the play by the man who was one day to be recognized as one of the foremost dramatists of the period, might be called one of life's ironies. Refusing to revise the script of the play as suggested by Garrick, Goldsmith withdrew the manuscript and turned to Colman who was then in charge of the rival theatre, Covent Garden. Colman promptly accepted the play for production, but he started losing confidence in it, until Goldsmith's friends, especially Johnson, finally persuaded him to produce it in January, 1768. Goldsmith was disappointed on the first night when the opening of Act III, where Honeywood tries to pass off the bailiffs in his house as visiting friends, was hissed by the audience as "low". On the second night
this scene had to be omitted. What disappointed him all the more was the enthusiastic response to Hugh Kelly's sentimental comedy False Delicacy at the rival theatre in Drury Lane. Goldsmith, as we know, had nothing but contempt for sentimental comedy. He wrote his play with the avowed aim of presenting nature and humour by delineating character. What follows is a detailed analysis of the play to show that it is refreshingly different from the weeping sentimental comedy, because it rouses laughter by its comic situations, pleasing dialogue, and amusing characters. We shall quote from it very often because it is written in a delightful style. The dialogue is an important source of laughter and it creates the mood and atmosphere proper to the laughing comedy.

The play opens with a conversation between Sir William and Jarvis, the faithful family servant. It soon becomes clear that the former's nephew, Honeywood, is open-hearted but foolishly good-natured young man. He went security for a stranger who has absconded. Sir William has taken up the security so that Honeywood now owes him the money. In order to cure his nephew of false benevolence, Sir William will have him arrested for debt and then let him see which of his friends come to his relief. Sir William leaves and what follows is a witty word-play that flashes between Honeywood and Jarvis, revealing that Honeywood gives away to the importunate what he owes to his creditors. The fact that his servants keep on complaining against one another prompts Jarvis to make an amusing generalization: "Ay, it's the way with them all,
from the scullion to the privy-counsellor. If they have a bad
master, they keep quarrelling with him; if they have a good master,
they keep quarrelling with one another". Then enters Butler,
drunk, to tell his master that he cannot stay in the family with
Jonathan, the footman. The nature of his complaint cannot but
provoke laughter. "Sir, he's given to drinking, sir", says he,
"and I shall have my morals corrupted, by keeping such company"(141).
Himself a drunkard, he says he hates a drunkard, and then remembers
that he came to say that Mr. Croaker is below. Asked why he did
not show him up, he makes his exit, saying, "Show him up, sir?
With all my heart, sir. Up or down, all's one to me". Mr. Croaker
is the guardian of Miss Richland whom he wants his son Leontine to
marry because of her wealth. Finding neither of the two really
enthusiastic about this prospect, he requests Honeywood to use his
influence with the lady to persuade her to marry Leontine, little
knowing that Mr. Honeywood himself loves her. When Honeywood asks
Croaker if this will not mean usurping an authority that rightly
belongs to Croaker himself, the doleful man amuses us by his tale
of woe: "My wife has so encroach'd upon every one of my privileges,
that I'm now no more than a mere lodger in my own house!" (143).
Honeywood suggests that a little assertion on his part might restore

---

20 Oliver Goldsmith: Poems and Plays, Everyman's Library (1910; rpt. London, 1944), p. 140. All page references to Goldsmith's plays are to this edition. In case of two or more consecutive quotations from the same page of a play, the parenthetical page reference follows only the first quotation.
his authority, but the incorrigible pessimist replies, "No, though I had the spirit of a lion! I do rouse sometimes. But what then? Always haggling and haggling. A man is tired of getting the better before his wife is tired of losing the victory".

Soon after Mr. Croaker leaves, Mrs. Croaker and Miss Richland show up. The conversation between Honeywood and the ladies is amusing throughout, especially after Mrs. Croaker remarks in a lighter vein that she knows of none having more friends among the ladies than Honeywood and that one Miss Biddy Bundle is his professed admirer. "The town, madam", Honeywood wittily replies to Miss Richland, "seldom begins to praise a lady's beauty, till she's beginning to lose it!" (146). Mrs. Croaker's comments on the lady in question are delightful. The lady, she says, seems resolved never to lose her beauty because "as her natural face decays, her skill improves in making the artificial one". Nothing amuses her more, she adds, than one who thinks to hide her age by exposing her person everywhere—projecting herself upwards in front of a sidebox at the theatre, trailing through a minuet at assembly rooms for balls and in such fashionable resorts as the public gardens decorated with painted romantic scenery. Honeywood humorously remarks that every age has its admirers, adding, "While you, perhaps, are trading among the warmer climates of youth, there ought to be some to carry on a useful commerce in the frozen latitudes beyond fifty" (147). Miss Richland in turn humorously continues his "nautical" metaphor of the marriage market, saying, "But then the mortifications they
must suffer before they can be fitted out for traffic". She has seen, she adds, one such lady fret a whole morning at her hairdresser when the whole fault lay with her own face. Honeywood is prepared to guarantee that the lady has carried that face at last to a very good market. "This good-natur'd town, madam", he continues, "has husbands, like spectacles, to fit every age, from fifteen to fourscore".

At this stage the main plot is complicated by a subordinate love affair between Leontine and Olivia. Their conversation reveals that Leontine was sent by his parents to France to bring home his sister who had been educated there for ten years. But he has brought back instead Olivia whom he loves and who personates the sister to prevent suspicion. By her father's will Miss Richland will forfeit half of her large fortune if she refuses to marry her guardian's son, Leontine. "So, if she rejects you", Mr. Croaker tells his son, "we seize half her fortune; if she accepts you, we seize the whole, and a fine girl into the bargain" (150). There is, thus, a good deal in Act I to amuse us.

Act II contains one of the most comic situations in the play. Leontine, in seeming compliance with his father's commands, is coming to propose to Miss Richland. Having come to know that Miss Richland's affections are fixed upon Mr. Honeywood, Leontine is convinced that she will refuse to marry him; then he may get his father's consent to choose for himself. But Miss Richland, having already learnt from her maid Garnet the truth about Olivia, has decided to accept
Leontine's proposal and thus throw the refusal at last upon him. Leontine, accompanied by his father, at first shows some hesitation in proposing to Miss Richland. We are much amused by the spectacle of an exasperated father pushing and prodding his unwilling son: "Lord! good sir, moderate your fears; you're so plaguy shy, that one would think you had changed sexes" (152). Finding his son annoyingly diffident, he has to speak to the lady for him several times. Iest she should take Leontine's silence to mean indifference to her, he is careful to assure her that his son loves her most ardently ("there he stands, madam; his very looks declare the force of his passion!"). When Miss Richland mischievously praises modest diffidence and describes a silent address as the genuine eloquence of sincerity, Croaker wittily remarks, "Madam, he has forgot to speak any other language: silence is become his mother tongue" (153). A non-plussed Leontine, thinking that his modesty tends to attract her, endeavours to look disgusting by being impudent. His disappointment is comic when even his impudence fails him, as, instead of prejudicing the lady against himself, he succeeds only in angering his father more. Miss Richland demurely leads them on, saying that Leontine's extraordinary ardour almost compels her to comply. In his utter confusion, Leontine, much to his father's exasperation, can do no better than tell the lady that there is nothing he would avoid so much as compulsion in such a matter, that he would be generous enough to leave her free to refuse. As he asks his father to consider the cruelty of constraining her
inclinations, Croaker burst out: "But I say there's no cruelty. Don't you know, blockhead, that girl have always a roundabout way of saying yes before company? So get you both gone together into the next room, and hang him that interrupts the tender explanation" (154). Seeing his reluctance, Mr. Croaker calls him stupid whelp, adding, "But I don't wonder, the boy takes entirely after his mother!" (155).

Next, a beaming Mrs. Croaker gives her husband a letter from his sister in Lyons. It says that his daughter and some rich English gentleman love each other and that she has already accepted his honourable proposal, though she kept it a secret. Mistaken identity now becomes source of laughter. While the spectator knows the truth about Olivia, Mr. Croaker mistakenly thinks her to be his daughter. He is happy that she is engaged to a rich gentleman but is understandably surprised that the "little baggage" should have kept them all so ignorant of this development. "Yet, I thought", says he, "I saw something she wanted to conceal". When Mrs. Croaker observes that though they have concealed their amour, their wedding would be public, Croaker replies, "I tell thee, woman, the wedding is the most foolish part of the ceremony" (156). Next, Mrs. Croaker tells her husband that but for her he would never have been known to Mr. Lofty who has undertaken Miss Richland's claim at the Treasury. Much of her large fortune consists in a claim upon government which Lofty has assured the Croakers the Treasury will allow. It becomes clear from the manner of Lofty's speech to his
servant that he is a vain person pretending to know important people. To our amusement, however, Mrs. Croaker is genuinely impressed by the impostor: "Sir, the happiness and honour are all mine; and yet, I'm only robbing the public while I detain you" (157). Here, as often elsewhere, Goldsmith skilfully uses the device of dramatic irony to obtain a comic effect. A little later Mrs. Croaker, speaking about Lofty, exclaims, "What importance, and yet what modesty!" (158). When the liar tells her that he spoke direct to the secretary about Miss Richland's case and insisted that her business must be done, a thoroughly impressed Mrs. Croaker observes in all seriousness: "This was going to the fountain-head at once, not applying to the understrappers, as Mr. Honeywood would have had us" (159). Then, commenting on Honeywood, he says that "the man was dull, dull as the last new comedy!" 21

A little later, the conversation between Olivia and Leontine, though of a serious nature, is yet amusing because of dramatic irony. Olivia, afraid of being exposed as deceiver sooner or later, is pleased when Leontine tells her that some remarks of his father have induced him to think that he knows the truth about them and that he hopes his father will pardon them. The spectator, however, knows that what Mr. Croaker knows of is not the affair between Leontine and Olivia, but his daughter's plans to marry. So he laughs in a state of superior enlightenment. A little later, the

21 It may be a reference to Kelly's sentimental play, False Delicacy, which was first acted at Drury Lane six days before The Good-Natur'd Man at Covent Garden.
conversation between Croaker and Olivia affords us great amusement. Here the device of dramatic irony has been used most effectively. Mr. Croaker mistaking her for his daughter speaks to her in the context of his sister's letter (of which Leontine and Olivia know nothing), telling him that his daughter is engaged to be married, and suggesting that she be forgiven for keeping it secret from her family. Olivia feels reassured, thinking that Mr. Croaker has come to know the truth about her but has chosen to be generous and forgiving. Their conversation is amusing because we know that both are deceived, though deceived differently. He complains to his supposed daughter of not being taken into confidence by her in the matter of her proposed marriage. As she refers to her offence, he says he already knows every syllable of the matter but regrets that he is not thought worthy of being consulted: "No, I'm nobody! I'm to be a mere article of family lumber; a piece of cracked china to be stuck up in a corner!" (162). When a considerably relieved Olivia explains that only the fear of his authority induced her to keep it secret from him, Mr. Croaker, resuming his earlier complaining tone, wittily remarks: "No, no, my consequence is no more; I'm as little minded as a dead Russian in winter, just stuck up with a pipe in his mouth till there comes a thaw ...

Olivia feels overwhelmed by Croaker's kindness when he declares that he forgives her all. He observes that every girl would dissemble for a husband, adding, "My wife and I had never been married, if we had not dissembled a little beforehand!" (163).
Leontine who has managed to overhear all this kneels promptly in
gratefulness for being forgiven by "the most indulgent of fathers". Mr. Croaker, however, is naturally at a loss to understand this
expression of gratitude. "And, good sir", says he, "who sent for
you, with that fine tragedy face, and flourishing manner? I don't
know what we have to do with your gratitude upon this occasion:"22
When the excited Leontine insists on enjoying the pleasure of being
grateful, Croaker replies: "Lord, sir, we can be happy enough,
without your coming in to make up the party. I don't know what's
the matter with the boy all this day; he has got into such a
rhodomontade manner all the morning:" It is only after Leontine
says, "Is the happiness of marrying my Olivia so small a blessing?"
that he realises that his father still takes Olivia for his daughter.
The old man looks surprised and shocked at his son speaking about
marrying his own sister. There follows an amusing conversation
between father and son:

**Croaker.**  What does the booby mean, or has he any meaning.
Eh, what do you mean, you blockhead, you?

**Leont.**  Mean, sir why, sir — only when my sister is to be
married, that I have the pleasure of marrying her,
sir; that is, of giving her away, sir — I have made
a point of it.

**Croaker.**  O, is that all? Give her away. You have made a
point of it .... (163-04).

22There are in this play many such lines of anti-sentimental intent.
Thus Mr. Croaker continues to mistake the lady for his daughter, while Leontine and Olivia are undeceived and will prepare for their elopement to Scotland.

The famous bailiff scene, the funniest of all, occurs in the beginning of Act III. Honeywood is a prisoner in his own house — in the custody of a bailiff and his assistant, clapped on him, the audience knows, by Sir William. We are amused at the bailiff's inability or unwillingness to give a direct answer to simple questions from Honeywood. In order to hide from the world the disgrace of having the bailiffs in his house, he would pretend that they are visiting friends until he has paid off his debt. We are amused by the bailiffs' legal and semi-legal jargon such as "capus" for "capias" (165), and "set in case" for "suppose" (167). What provokes most laughter, however, is the scene where Honeywood actually pretends to Miss Richland (who knows what has happened) that the strange persons in the house are visiting acquaintances. For this purpose he has promptly put Flanigan, the shabbier of the bailiffs, into a suit of blue and gold and has solicited their co-operation. "You officers", he tells the odd-looking creatures, "are generally favourites among the ladies"; and then, addressing the lady, remarks, "My friends, madam, have been upon very disagreeable duty, I assure you. The fair should, in some measure, recompense the toils of the brave" (168). In the course of conversation the bailiffs fall, much to Honeywood's discomfiture.
and to our amusement, into the talk peculiar to the navy. "Damn the French", says Flanigan, "the parle-vous, and all that belongs to them !" (169). Honeywood tells Miss Richland that Flanigan, being a true English officer, is not satisfied with beating the French; he will scold them too. She clarifies her point to Honeywood, saying, "It was our first adopting the severity of French taste that has brought them in turn to taste us". She has thus only accounted for the French taste for the English plays. But the bailiff greatly embarrasses Honeywood by taking the lady literally: "Taste us! By the Lord, madam, they devour us! Give Monseers but a taste, and I'll be damned, but they come in for a bellyful!" The lady finds this very extraordinary and Honeywood starts fearing that all will be out. We cannot help laughing when we find Honeywood, whenever his "friends" speak indiscreetly, trying desperately to clarify to Miss Richland their remarks so as to avoid suspicion. "I perceive only that you answer one gentleman before he has finished", she tells him, "and the other before he has well begun!" (170). In an aside Honeywood curses the bailiffs' explanations when, luckily for him, Leontine is announced and he finds an excuse to leave along with the bailiffs. The bailiffs, however, make sure that he does not escape by walking one in front and the other behind Honeywood: "Before and behind, you know" (171).

Sir William soon finds that his plan to reclaim his nephew has been upset by Miss Richland who has undertaken to set him free without informing Honeywood of it. He is, however, glad that his
nephew has at least one real friend in the world. He discloses his identity to her as also his purpose in remaining a concealed spectator of his nephew's follies. He also tells her that, having learnt that she had some demands upon government, he has been her solicitor there and that Lofty, employed by her guardian for this purpose, is quite contemptible among men in power and is utterly incapable of serving her. This prepares us for the next amusing dialogue between them and Lofty because he does not know that they know everything about him. When Miss Richland ironically tells Lofty that he has the art of making others' misfortunes his own, the impostor says: "My dear madam, what can a private man like me, do? One man can't do everything; and then, I do so much in this way every day: Let me see, something considerable might be done for him by subscription; it could not fail if I carried the list. I'll undertake to set down a brace of dukes, two dozen lords, and half the lower house, at my own peril!" (173). He pretends that Sir William is a particular friend of his. About Honeywood, he frankly told his uncle, he says, that "there's no procuring first-rate places for ninth-rate abilities" (174). We are much amused when the liar, not recognizing Sir William, tells him to his face that he procured him his place, adding that "no man was fitter (than Sir William) to be toast-master to a club, or had a better head". He calls Sir William's place "a mere trifle", as he "wanted dignity" to occupy a higher one. The following dialogue delights us because of dramatic irony:
Sir Will. Dignity of person, do you mean, sir? I'm told he's much about my size and figure, sir.

Lofty. Ay, tall enough for a marching regiment; but then he wanted a something -- a consequence of form -- a kind of a -- I believe the lady perceives my meaning.

Miss Rich. O perfectly! you courtiers can do anything. I see!

Sir William, pretending to be employed in Miss Richland's affairs, requests Lofty to introduce him to Sir William who, he says, has arrived from Italy. We are much amused by the liar's desperate attempt to wriggle out of tight corner.

In the beginning of Act IV Lofty is surprised to see Honeywood set at liberty. It is amusing to find Lofty hinting at himself as his benefactor. "I suppose, now, Mr. Honeywood", says he, "you think my rent-roll very considerable, and that I have vast sums of money to throw away; I know you do. The world, to be sure, says such things of me" (178). The credulous Honeywood soon feels so overwhelmed by Lofty's generosity that he would even use his influence with Miss Richland to persuade her to love Lofty. Meanwhile Honeywood has offered financial help to Leontine and Olivia for their elopement to Scotland but his cheque has been found not worth a straw. In her despair Olivia makes Garnet write to Leontine for money. The wording of the letter is amusingly ambiguous. It contains such words as "Expedition", "blown up" and "all of a flame" (182). Honeywood's butler who is "drunk and sober ten times a day", is deputed to deliver it, but he drops it
before going ten yards from the door. The letter is picked up by Mr. Croaker, who now looks upon himself as the intended victim of "gunpowder-plots, combustibles and conflagration!" (134). He calls the letter badly spelt and crookedly written ("all in the genuine incendiary spelling, and as cramp as the devil").

His interpretation is that certain inhuman monsters with low pockets will blow his house up and then burn it. In reply to Miss Richland, he says, "Murder's the matter. We shall be all blown up in our beds before morning!" (185). He is critical of the family for not feeling duly alarmed. "My insensible crew could sleep", says he, "though rocked by an earthquake, and fry beef steaks at a volcano!" He later tells Honeywood that while the incendiary letter will freeze him with terror, there is Mrs. Croaker who can read it and laugh. It is amusing to find both husband and wife trying to convince Honeywood how each is right, and each being supported by Honeywood. For example, he agrees with Mrs. Croaker that the best thing would be to laugh off their fears and that it is most absurd "to double our distresses by our apprehensions" (139). But then he also agrees with Mr. Croaker that the best course would be to meet the enemy in the field and that it is utterly absurd "to despise the rattle till we are bit by the snake". "A plague of plagues", Croaker cries out, "we can't be both right. I ought to be sorry, or I ought to be glad. My hat must be on my head, or my hat must be off" (190). Honeywood, gathering that the incendiary letter requires twenty guineas to
be left at the bar of the Talbot inn, suggests that he and Croaker seize the writer as soon as he comes there to have the expected booty. The suggestion greatly appeals to Croaker whose reply is amusing: "My dear friend, it's the very thing; the very thing. While I walk by the door, you shall plant yourself in ambush near the bar; burst out upon the miscreant like a masked battery; extort a confession at once, and so hang him up by surprise".

In the opening lines of Act V, there is an amusing conversation between Olivia and Jarvis who has been borrowed from Honeywood to accompany the young lady to Scotland in the absence of Leontine who is obliged to take a different road. The lady is anxious to run away from the inn to Scotland in a post-chaise. But, says Jarvis, "The horses are just finishing their oats; and, as they are not going to be married, they choose to take their own time" (191). Again, commenting upon her resolution to leave for Scotland, he remarks that "resolutions are well kept when they jump with inclination". Next, humour arises from the landlady's belief that Olivia is going to marry Jarvis. Leontine turns up at the inn in his great anxiety to see Olivia set out safely. While they are speaking, Croaker enters in pursuit of the author of that incendiary stuff. He is surprised to notice from behind his son and "daughter" talking to the landlady about their expedition. The traditional device of eavesdropping is effectively used here for comic effect. Leontine tells Olivia that there is nothing to
fear if Honeywood observes his promise of keeping his father employed till they are out of danger. Just as Olivia tells him that his father's temper sometimes "makes him look most shockingly", Mr. Croaker appears dramatically, saying, "How does he look now? -- How does he look now?" (194). The lovers stand amazed and shocked, but Mr. Croaker, hearing cries without, soon leaves, thinking that Honeywood and others have seized the incendiary.

Soon we behold the extraordinary spectacle of the post-boy dragging in Jarvis, and calling him the incendiary dog. It becomes clear to everyone that it was all an error. Croaker also comes to realize the whole affair between his son and the lady. Later, Sir William, still in disguise, tells Croaker that the young lady belongs to a respectable family and has happily been rescued by Leontine from the authority of her guardian whom he calls a mercenary wretch. Then he confers with Croaker to convince him how he is deceived in Lofty. This prepares us for an amusing scene in which Lofty is exposed by Sir William. After keeping Miss Richland in suspense for a short while, Lofty tells her with his usual assumption of importance that her claim has been examined and found admissible. Sir William, pretending as Miss Richland's employee, takes the earliest opportunity to inform him that his letter to Sir William was received by him "with the most mortifying contempt" and that he was assured that Sir William knew no such person as Lofty. The impostor laughs and then tells all present that he was in Sir William's house at that time and
that he himself sent such an answer to his own letter. When Croaker asks him why he did so, Lofty replies: "In one word, things between Sir William and me must be behind the curtain. A party has many eyes. He sides with Lord Buzzard, I side with Sir Gilbert Goose. So that unriddles the mystery" (201). When Croaker says his suspicions are now over, Lofty is quick to take strong exception to having been suspected. In vain does Croaker try to pacify him.

The opportunity is now ripe for Sir William to prick the balloon of his vanity. He amusingly exposes him before all by telling him who he is: "A gentleman, as well acquainted with politics, as with men in power; as well acquainted with persons of fashion, as with modesty; with Lords of the Treasury, as with truth; and with all, as you are with Sir William Honeywood. I am Sir William Honeywood!" (202). Croaker and Honeywood are astonished to discover Sir William. As for "Mr. Importance", his exposure is complete. A wiser Croaker now decides to pardon Leontine and Olivia. Mrs. Croaker asks her husband to forgive the lovers, adding, "Our own was a stolen match, you know, my dear; and we never had any reason to repent of it" (203). Croaker does not take long to declare that, "if the two poor fools have a mind to marry, I think we can tack them together without crossing the Tweed for it". Sir William has taught a lesson to his nephew who now perceives his errors and would mend his ways. He is also awakened to Miss Richland's true love for him and united to her
by Sir William.

The Good-Natur'd Man, thus, not only eschews the excesses of sentimentality, but is full of humour. To be sure, its exposition lacks that brisk vivacity with which Goldsmith's masterpiece, She Stoops to Conquer, opens. The latter shows improvement over the first play in dramatic structure. In both plays we laugh most of the time because we recognize incongruities of which the characters themselves are not aware. This ironic atmosphere keeps these characters from being really mawkish. But The Good-Natur'd Man, as Professor Quintana shows, successfully employs only irony in elementary fashion; its truly operative ironies are not apparent -- they are "never underscored and thrust at us". In She Stoops to Conquer, Goldsmith shows greater skill in handling the various ironies that are at work. But although The Good-Natur'd Man is thus inferior to She Stoops to Conquer, it makes a skilful use of the familiar ingredients of old comedy -- concealed identities, misunderstood letters, and scenes at cross-purposes. Goldsmith has handled the complications of plot, the complex twists and turns of circumstance with a remarkable deftness. He not only arouses our curiosity, but also sustains and satisfies it. In lesser hands the characters caught in the tangled web of deception

24 B.E. McCarthy, "The Theme of Liberty in She Stoops to Conquer", Univ. of Windsor Review, 7 (1971), 1-8, examines in some detail Goldsmith's conscious draftsmanship in this play.

25 R. Quintana, "Goldsmith's Achievement as Dramatist", Univ. of Toronto Quarterly, 34 (1965), 166.
could not have extricated themselves with such naturalness as here. Goldsmith deserves a full measure of credit for his skill in stage-craft that brings these characters triumphantly through to their respective happy endings without straining our sense of probability.

The wood-Natur'd Man has sufficient humour to separate it from comedie larmoyante. False sensibility and superficial refinement have been rejected in favour of humorous delineation of manners. Sentimental or "genteeel" comedy had, as a rule, excluded "low" and "mean" characters. But Goldsmith has introduced the drunken butler and the two bailiffs. On the first night, the audience, accustomed to sentimental writings, expressed disgust for the bailiffs and their vulgar language. William Cooke has thus described the episode in European Magazine (1793):

"... in vain did the bailiff scene mark with true comic discrimination the manners of that tribe, with the elegant and embarrassed feelings of the benevolent man. The predominant cry of the prejudices and illiterate part of the pit was, "it was low -- it was damn'd vulgar, etc." and this barbarous judgment had very nearly damned this comedy the very first night ...".  

The play is said to have been saved from disaster by the line performance of Shuter who played Mr. Croaker. On the second night, the offensive scene had to be omitted "in deference to the public

taste, grown of late perhaps too delicate"; as Goldsmith wrote in his preface. Today we look upon this scene as the high-water mark of the comedy. It is wrong to be critical of the bailiffs' lack of refinement. As they are supposed to "serve in the Fleet", an occasional "damn" is in order. Moreover, if they had scrupulously avoided vulgarity in their conversation with the heroine, Goldsmith would have failed to arouse her suspicions.

The fact that *The Good-Natur'd Man* is a gay comedy has often been ignored. Indeed, the traditional Goldsmith criticism views this play as sentimental. Gosse, for example, remarks that the play "shows to a considerable extent this sentimental quality" 27, though he does not illustrate this point. Nicoll complains that "elements of sentimentalism mar its general tone" 28, but offers no details in explanation. In the same way, Thorndike remarks that the play has a great deal of sentimentality, as its main plot "celebrates the loveliness of virtue". 29 Even a modern critic has pointed out that the play is "seriously spoilt by the prevailing mode" and that "the comic muse takes flight" 30 in the moralistic last scene of the play. Such remarks are unsatisfactory in as much as these tend to equate the play with sentimental

28 Late Eighteenth Century Drama, pp. 158-59.
comedy by laying misplaced emphasis on certain elements.

A play may, after all, have a few sentimental elements and yet remain on the whole a gay comedy. We have to look to its pervasive spirit to decide whether it is gay or sentimental. The Shakespearean comedy itself does not altogether exclude the serious and the emotional. One could trace, for example, several streaks of sentiment in *As You Like It*. It depicts sudden repentance and reformation of the villain, Oliver. And yet it will be ridiculous to term it sentimental, because the spirit informing it is one of joy and merriment. Similarly, the dominant spirit of Goldsmith's play is, as shown above, not of tears or seriousness but of laughter and amusement. Here there is no "repetition and prolongation" of potentially sentimental situations and characters which were drawn out at length in the sentimental comedies of the age. Goldsmith has concentrated on arousing our laughter, and not on wringing sympathetic tears from the sentimental audience. Sir William Honeywood secretly keeping watch over the conduct of his prodigal nephew and revealing his identity at the proper time of curing him of his extravagance; Miss Richland overlooking young Honeywood's improvidence in view of "his tenderness, his humanity, his universal friendship" (172), showing tenderness in releasing him from the debtor's prison, and then marrying him after he is repentant of his folly; and young

---

31 Sherbo, *English Sentimental Drama*, p. 32.
Honeywood feeling remorse and vowing reformation, can by no means be called entirely novel characters. But they do differ in several shades from those of sentimental comedies of the period. It is false sentimentalism that Sir William cures his nephew of, and he exposes Lofty in a remarkably delightful manner. Miss Richland, though somewhat colourless as compared with Kate Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer* is not merely another Indiana -- utterly pathetic and passive. She has talent for irony as is shown in her conversation with Leontine and Lofty after she knows the truth about them. Indeed she provokes our laughter at their expense. Again, she takes initiative in rescuing the man she loves, forestalling Sir William Honeywood. And it is to her that we largely owe that delicious scene in which the unwilling Leontine proposes to her. As for Honeywood, his extreme sensibility is ridiculed rather than applauded, as shown below.

Several characters, however, are novel and comically conceived, thus contrasting sharply with the stock gloomy characters of the sentimental comedy.

Mr. Croaker, for example, is the perennial well-to-do pessimist who delights us by thriving on woe. In Act I Jarvis aptly calls his voice a passing bell i.e. a mournful bell rung at the moment of a person's death. He is likened to a raven (a bird of ill omen), a bundle of rue (symbol of woe) and sprig of deadly night shade (142). "His very mirth", Honeywood wittily remarks, "is an antidote to all gaiety, and his appearance has a stronger
effect on my spirits than an undertaker's shop". This is confirmed by Croaker's own remarks. It gives him pleasure to speak sorrowfully about "Taxes rising and trade falling. Money flying out of the kingdom and Jesuits swarming into it". Though without any real sorrow, he says, he has cares which "would break a heart of stone" (143). His favourite pastimes are bewailing life's misfortunes, writing about the latest public disaster and seeing a corpse lying in state. Olivia, he is sure, would get much pleasure by seeing old Ruggins, the curry-comb-maker, lying in state, because, he has learnt, "he makes a very handsome corpse, and becomes his coffin prodigiously" (150-51). In Act II, Mrs. Croaker has for him a letter from his sister in Lyons. She tells him excitedly that she has something that will make him smile. But the mournful Croaker seems to know better as he says, "I'll hold you a guinea of that, my dear" (155). If he amuses as pessimist, so does he as an alarmist. He smells blood and gunpowder in things too ordinary to be taken seriously. We have seen how in Act IV he misinterprets a letter for Leontine to the extent of saying that they all will be blown up in their beds before morning. Miss Richland tells him how he has alarmed the house so often in the past by speaking about all kinds of calamities. "You remember, sir," says she, "it is not above a month ago, that you assured us of a conspiracy among the bakers, to poison us in our bread; and so kept the whole family a week upon potatoes" (185). Though admitted to have been based on

32 See Friedman, Collected Works, V, 24, n.i.
Johnson's "Suspirius" (Rambler No. 59) the character of Croaker has been so amplified as to impart to it the force of an original conception. Boswell, writing in the Life of Johnson for 1768 reveals that Johnson declared that The Good-Natur'd Man was the best comedy that had appeared since The Provoked Husband, "and that there had not been of late any such character exhibited on the stage as that of Croaker".

Mrs. Croaker is her husband's exact opposite: "she all laugh and no joke; he always complaining, and never sorrowful" (142). In Act I she laughs at an old deaf dowager whom she has seen at the auction "bidding like a fury against herself" (145). Laughing at the old lady's great interest in antiques, she describes her as "Herself the most genuine piece of antiquity in the whole collection!" And when Honeywood expresses his inability to share in this "good humour", Mrs. Croaker says, "I vow he seems as melancholy as if he had taken a dose of my husband this morning". Then, she amuses us by indulging her sharp tongue at the doubtful charms of a fading beauty. "On my conscience", says her ever-mourning husband, "I believe she could spread a horse-laugh through the pews of a tabernacle" (149). In Act IV, she laughs away her alarmist husband's extravagant apprehensions due to the incendiary letter in his possession. When Croaker, mimicking her laughter, asks her if it is her supreme pleasure to give him no better consolation, she says, "Positively, my dear, what is this incendiary stuff and trumpery to me? Our house may travel
through the air like the house of Loretto, for aught I care, if I'm to be miserable in it" (188). And when her husband says that possibly the tragedy is just beginning, she replies characteristically: "Then let us reserve our distress till the rising of the curtain, or give them the money they want and have done with them".

Goldsmith's amusing satirical portrait of Lofty is one of the delights of the play. This poseur and bluffer is very much like Goldsmith's Beau Tibbs in The Citizen of the World. He never tires of boasting of his influence with highly influential people most of whom he has never even so much as met. He has undertaken Miss Richland's claim at the Treasury for which Mrs. Croaker, much to our amusement, claims the whole credit. In Act II, speaking to his servant before Mrs. Croaker, Lofty says, "And if the Venetian Ambassador, or that teasing creature the Marquis, should call, I'm not at home. Damme, I'll be pack-horse to none of them!" (157). Poor Mrs. Croaker is considerably impressed by his ability to pull strings with the great to secure favours for his friends, little realizing that his ambassadors, ministers and marquises are the gasconader's own inventions. He pretends to be an eternally sought-after person—"solicited for places here, teased for pensions there, and courted everywhere" (158). When Mrs. Croaker quotes Waller, he says that men of business like him

33 Byron Gassman, PQ, 39 (1960), 59-62, argues that in the creation of Lofty Goldsmith is indebted to a comedy by David Augustin de Brueys entitled L'Important (1694).
despise the modern writers and are too busy to read the ancients. Poetry, he adds, "is a pretty thing enough for our wives and daughters; but not for us". It is amusing to find in Act V Sir William leading the boaster on to utterly absurd fabrications and then revealing him in his true colours, despite his ingenuity in making excuses to wriggle out of tight corners. This puts an end to his hour of strutting about the stage in borrowed plumes. And a little later when he makes his final exit, it is not without a touch of self-mockery. "I now begin to find", he admits, "that the man who first invented the art of speaking truth was a much cunninger fellow than I thought him" (204).

Young Honeywood, the "good-natured" hero of the play, is undoubtedly a sentimentalist. His maxim is that "universal benevolence is the first law of nature" (190). Instead of paying any money owing to a money-lender, he sends ten guineas to a poor gentleman and his children starving in a debtor's prison. He justifies this act of benevolence: "Must I be cruel because he (the money-lender) happens to be importunate; and, to relieve his avarice, leave them to insupportable distress?" (139). Again, he refuses to have a servant hanged for stealing his plate in the pantry, saying, "...it's enough that we have lost what he has stolen, let us not add to it the loss of a fellow-creature!" (140). Earlier, Goldsmith had portrayed such a character in his essay, "On Justice and Generosity" where Lysippus is generous to everyone but does not pay his debts, and in The Life of Nash, where Nash
lends twenty pounds to a friend instead of paying the same amount as a debt. Again, while looking for a suit, he discovers that most of his suits have been either given away or sold. Hardly has Miss Richland cleared him of his debts when he offers help to Leontine and Olivia for their elopement to Scotland. An embodiment of warm-hearted kindness, he looks upon all with an attitude of sympathetic tolerance. He does not join Mrs. Croaker in ridiculing an old deaf dowager at the auction, or husband-hunting ladies of advanced years. Miss Richland recalls how once at a ball he chose to dance with a most awkward woman in company because none else will. He not only does not get angry with his servant, the tipsy butler, but listens with amusement to his strange complaint that the footman's drunkenness will corrupt his morals. Goldsmith has thus created in Honeywood a figure worthy of sentimental comedy.

It is, however, very difficult to understand those writers who regard Honeywood's sentimentalism as Goldsmith's surrender to the prevailing mode. For Bernbaum, for example, Honeywood seems to offer nothing but "the commonplace traits of sentimental literature." Netleton also finds sentimentalism in Honeywood's lapses into gloomy aphorisms and his sigh in the opening scene. He also points out that in the end Honeywood draws a moral from the error of his ways.

35 Netleton, The Drama of Restoration, p. 281.
Now Goldsmith might have put much of his emotional self into Honeywood but he certainly does not like his audience to be pleased with that part of himself. Honeywood is not intended as an object of sympathy or admiration on our part; he is satirically conceived. Himself said to have been reckless in generosity, Goldsmith has satirized this very shortcoming in Honeywood whose fault is that he loves all the world -- every card sharper and conceited dandy finds an easy entrance to his heart. Commenting on his nature Sir William says that it "arises rather from his fears of offending the importunate, than his desire of making the deserving happy" (138). As Jarvis says, he "calls his extravagance, generosity; and his trusting everybody, universal benevolence". By giving credence to every plausible hard luck story, he becomes an easy victim of a pack of false friends and pressing creditors. For Bernbaum this constitutes sentimental praise of Honeywood's qualities; actually Goldsmith is ridiculing his sentimental hero most of the time. A few examples will suffice. Honeywood's aphoristic utterances look ridiculous in the bailiff scene as the bailiff himself takes them up:

"Humanity, sir, is a jewel. It's better than gold. I love humanity" (166). He completely fails to mislead Miss Richland into regarding the bailiffs as his visiting friends. Even her maid knows the truth: "These people he calls officers are officers sure enough: Sheriff's officers; bailiffs, madam" (171).

In Act IV his credulity is simply ridiculous. Though he owes his
release from arrest to Miss Richland, he is easily duped by Lofty into believing that he is his rescuer. Honeywood feels grateful for this to the extent of recommending to the heroine the suit of this impostor. Mr. Croaker ridicules Honeywood's foolish benevolence in the concluding lines of Act IV. Again, his anxiety to court popularity by being "too much everyman's man" brings trouble to several of his friends and offends them. Despised by all, he is obliged to curse his folly: "How have I sunk by too great an assiduity to please! How have I overtaxed all my abilities, lest the approbation of a single fool should escape me!" (199). By now he has become despicable even to himself. Convinced of his folly, he cannot but agree with what his uncle says about him: "Your charity, that was but injustice; your benevolence, that was but weakness; and your friendship but credulity" (204). He admits his vanity and meanness, and resolves to save his pity for "real distress" and his friendship for "true merit" (205).

Thus Goldsmith ridicules rather than idealizes Honeywood's sentimentality. Indeed the scrapes into which his sensibility leads him are an attack on sentimental comedy. Sir William is made to remonstrate against his nephew's improvidence. Through Honeywood, as through Dr. Primrose earlier, Goldsmith has emphasized the failure of a benevolent man who is too generous to be prudent and too credulous to see through the guiles of the cunning. His characterization of Honeywood should be interpreted
as an attack on sentimental idealism, culpable imprudence and facile optimism which characterized several of the "admirable" characters of sentimental comedies of the period. According to Goldsmith, a morbid sensibility renders good-natured persons like Honeywood incapable of distinguishing between the genuine and the spurious. They become, as the Man in Black points out, "mere machines of pity", and their so-called benevolence is "rather the effect of appetite than reason". Again, in the essay "On Justice and Generosity", speaking about the qualities of charity, generosity, candour and fortitude, Goldsmith says that these are not, in their own nature, virtues; and, if ever they deserve the title, it is owing only to justice, which impels and directs them. Honeywood's benevolence, since it is not impelled by justice nor disciplined by reason, is a vice rather than a virtue. In Act III Sir William condemns Honeywood's false benevolence. Speaking to Miss Richland he says, "They who pretend most to this universal benevolence, are either deceivers, or dupes" (172). Heilman, recognizing the similarity between "On Justice and Generosity" and Goldsmith's satire on Honeywood, perceptively observes:

In The Good-Natur'd Man Goldsmith dramatizes the generalities of The Bee: Young Honeywood is prodigality, disguised as

---

37 Ibid., Masson, p. 126.
38 The Bee, No. 3, Masson, p. 373.
generosity and justified with magniloquence. So close is the parallel that it is difficult to imagine Goldsmith's writing the play without having in mind the earlier essay. It is so tonic and unsentimental that Goldsmith could hardly now turn sentimental or fall short of his intention to use the materials of sentimental plays for the sake of ridiculing them. What he attacked so often, he could hardly yield to, even unconsciously.  

Goldsmith is said to have been a highly emotional man. There is Thackeray's well-known description of him as "tracked by bailiffs and reproachful creditors, running from a hundred poor dependents, whose appealing looks were perhaps the hardest of all pains for him to bear". Davies too has described him as excessively benevolent and compassionate like Honeywood.  

But Goldsmith must have realized how this kind of sentimentality often lands one in difficulties and embarrassments. Professor Friedman shows that Goldsmith had portrayed a man of excessive benevolence on a number of earlier occasions and goes on to remark, "It is not unlikely that Goldsmith's preoccupation with the dangers of good nature came from a recognition of his own excessive benevolence". Indeed, Goldsmith's characterization of Honeywood embodies his disenchantment with, and intellectual condemnation of, such a philosophy. In his maturity, he appears to have come to prefer an enlightened mind to a merely generous heart. Gallaway shows in

40 Thomas Davies, Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick (London, 1780), II, 162.
41 Friedman, Collected Works, V, 3.
detail how an anti-sentimental habit of mind exists consistently in Goldsmith's work and concludes that though "Goldsmith was instinctively sensitive, and, in the non-technical sense of the word, sentimental, he was able to keep from being entangled in the doctrinaire sentimental movement of Shaftesbury, Richardson, and Rousseau". Goldsmith's presentation of Honeywood illustrates the truth of this remark. He is a sentimental character but not the one that leaves us moved. Goldsmith's satire is directed against indiscriminate benevolence and perhaps even against the Shaftesburian benevolism. Thus, far from celebrating "the loveliness of virtue" in Honeywood, Goldsmith has ridiculed a typical sentimental hero in this "good-natur'd" man.

The Good-Natur'd Man is, then, in conformity with Goldsmith's theoretic ideals. Gay and unsentimental, it contrasts sharply with the tearful comedies of the period. None of them has its comic and satirical characterization, nor its amusing misunderstandings, comic entanglements and ludicrous scenes, nor its lively dialogue which is, in several scenes, in Goldsmith's happiest vein.

Sentimental comedy (as shown in Chapter 3, above) often ends in repentance, the erring hero vows reformation, and a couple of moral reflections precede the final curtain. To be sure, Sir William reads his nephew a lecture in the final scene, Honeywood

42 W.F. Callaway, Jr., "The Sentimentalism of Goldsmith", PMLA, 48 (1933), 1180.
repents his folly, and he resolves to save his "pity for real
distress". But here there is no lachrymose emotion and there is
nothing "forced and vapid" about Goldsmith's conclusion, as it
states only what has already become evident dramatically. Despite
its moralizing finis, *The Good-Natur'd Man* is gay and unsentimental,
because it is "wholesome and cheery". Thorndike\(^43\) calls attention
to the resemblance of Goldsmith's sub-plot, the Leontine-Olivia
action, to the main situation of Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*.
But we must remember that while Steele arouses our compassion for
the lovers in distress, Goldsmith involves Leontine and Olivia in
several comic entanglements. This shows how a different technique
can produce an altogether different effect. Indeed, it is to
Goldsmith's sub-plot that we owe most of the funny scenes. As
Professor Quintana points out, "it is a true comedy and a fitting
prelude to *She Stoops to Conquer*".\(^44\)

Written in the tradition of true comedy, *She Stoops to
Conquer* stands out glittering from among the many faded comedies
of the eighteenth century. Dealing with the artificial and
fashionable foibles of human nature as Goldsmith found it in
English country, it is full of humour because of its delightful
incidents, characters and dialogue. "I know of no comedy for
many years", said Dr. Johnson, "that has so much exhilarated the


audience". We may add that it has also continued to delight its audiences ever since the Doctor made that remark. And when some critics try to suggest that even this play is not really free from sentimentalism, it becomes necessary to make a detailed analysis of this comedy to show how it is singularly free from sickly sensibility, melting pity and pompous moralizing which characterized many sentimental comedies of the age.

The opening dialogue between Mr. Hardcastle and his wife is both amusing and informative. Mrs. Hardcastle complains that while even insignificant countrified persons go to London to take a month's polishing every winter, they continue to live in their house which is "an old rumbling mansion, that looks for all the world like an inn" (217). This prepares us for the later misunderstandings. The lady also indicates their lack of company in the country which prepares us for the special preparations made later by Mr. Hardcastle to receive his guests. Then, we are amused when Mrs. Hardcastle resents being called old by her husband. She tries to make out that she is only forty ("Add twenty to twenty, and make money of that"), but Mr. Hardcastle gives her age as fifty-seven ("twenty added to twenty, makes just fifty and seven!"). She protests, saying that she was but twenty, when Tony, the child by her first husband, was born. And Tony, she adds, is yet to reach "years of discretion", i.e. twenty one. In fact, it suits her always to remain forty, as Tony, on being major, will inherit his late father's money, leaving his mother
in no control of it. She will always be seen as treating him like a child and concealing his age from him. We are also amused by her doting on Tony. When Hardcastle describes him as a "mere composition of tricks and mischief", she defends him, saying, "Humour, my dear: nothing but humour. Come, Mr. Hardcastle, you must allow the boy a little humour" (218). Soon when he laughs at her hopes of Tony learning Latin, she appeals to his sense of pity by saying that anyone who looks in the boy's face may see that he is consumptive. Their divergent remarks about Tony are quite amusing:

**Hard.** Ay, if growing too fat be one of the symptoms.
**Mrs. Hard.** He coughs sometimes.
**Hard.** Yes, when his liquor goes the wrong way.
**Mrs. Hard.** I'm actually afraid of his lungs.
**Hard.** And truly, so am I; for he sometimes whoops like a speaking-trumpet (219).

Tony enters the scene rumbustiously and is in a hurry to reach the alehouse, The Three Pigeons. When Mrs. Hardcastle urges him to disappoint his companions there for one night at least, he replies, "As for disappointing them, I should not much mind; but I can't abide to disappoint myself!" She tries to detain him, but he soon leaves the stage, hauling her out.

Left alone, Mr. Hardcastle calls them a pair that only spoil each other, and bemoans that in fact the whole age is conspiring to drive away sense and discretion. His daughter Kate enters, making him uneasy at the "superfluous silk" worn by her. She,
however, promises to put on her housewife's dress in the evening to please him. This concession to his wishes is an important factor in the plot, as it prepares us for the mistake of Marlow about regarding her as a barmaid. There is a lively conversation between father and daughter after the former describes Marlow as generous, young and brave:

**Miss Hard.** I'm sure I shall like him.

**Hard.** And very handsome.

**Miss Hard.** My dear papa, say no more (kissing his hand), he's mine, I'll have him!

**Hard.** And, to crown all, Kate, he's one of the most bashful and reserved young fellows in all the world.

**Miss Hard.** Eh! you have frozen me to death again. That word reserved has undone all the rest of his accomplishments. A reserved lover, it is said, always makes a suspicious husband (221).

Hardcastle thinks differently but he soon leaves to make arrangements for receiving his guests. His servants, he says, "want as much training as a company of recruits the first day's muster". Kate's friend, Constance Neville, enters and Kate discovers that Marlow is the most intimate friend of Mr. Hastings, Constance's admirer. She is somewhat intrigued by the news that Marlow is "the modestest man alive" in the company of ladies of his own class, though he is all different while among women of "another stamp" (222). Next we learn of the complications. Mrs. Hardcastle has decided that Tony shall marry his cousin Neville who possesses jewels, but she loves Mr. Hastings, though she
pretends to be in love with Tony to keep peace with her aunt.

The second scene of Act I is set in the local ale-house. Tony, seated at the head of the table, is drinking with his companions and singing a self-composed song on the ale-house. It is followed by comments from Tony's "low" companions who significantly show off their learning and refinement:

Omnes. Bravo, bravo!
First Fellow. The 'Squire has got spunk in him.
Second Fellow. I loves to hear him sing, beksays he never gives us nothing that's low.45
Third Fellow. O damn anything that's low, I cannot bear it!
Fourth Fellow. The genteel thing is the genteel thing at any time. If so be that a gentleman bees in a concatenation accordingly (224-25).

Their merriment is interrupted by Stingo, the landlord, who tells Tony that two gentlemen have come in a post-chaise and are talking something about Mr. Hardcastle. Tony feels that one of them must be the man who is coming to "court" his sister. He asks the landlord to send the gentlemen to him and then dismisses his companions. He thinks of avenging himself on his father for his grumbling at him: "Father-in-law has been calling me whelp, and hound, this half year. Now, if I pleased, I could be so revenged upon the old grumbletonian" (226). It soon becomes clear that Marlow and Hastings have lost the way to Mr. Hardcastle's and look

45Goldsmith, as stated above, strongly disapproved of this particular form of disparagement on the part of the sentimentalists.
already exhausted. Finding that they know nothing of the country through which they are travelling, Tony irritates them by stating the obvious after questioning them a good deal. "Why gentlemen", says he, "if you know neither the road you are going, nor where you are, nor the road you came, the first thing I have to inform is, that -- you have lost your way". Marlow, echoing lines from Hamlet (I, v) replies, "We wanted no ghost to tell us that". When Tony wants to know the place they have come from, Marlow says, "That's not necessary towards directing us where we are to go" (227).

Not knowing Tony, Marlow, when induced by the former to give particulars of the Hardcastle family, says that Hardcastle's daughter is said to be beautiful and well-bred; the son, "an awkward booby, reared up and spoiled at his mother's apron-string". This is enough to provoke Tony into beginning the practical joke around which this comedy revolves. "... then gentlemen", says he, "all I have to tell you is, that you won't reach Mr. Hardcastle's house this night, I believe". He makes the way to that house seem very long, dirty, dark, dangerous. The travellers, he says, will have to cross Quagmire Marsh, Squash Lane, Crack-skull Common and farmer Murrain's barn, before they can discover the house. Marlow remarks in sheer desperation, "Zounds, man! we could as soon find out the longitude!" (228). The landlord, prompted by Tony, tells them that there is no room in the ale-house. Tony, however, offers to direct them to the Buck's Head. He calls it
one of the best inns in the whole country, but in reality it is Mr. Hardcastle's house. Tony adds to his practical joke by telling them that the rich landlord is going to leave off business, wants to be thought a gentleman and will inflict his company on them. We are much amused when Tony says that this landlord would try to stress that his relations held impossibly high positions ("he'll persuade you that his mother was an alderman, and his aunt a justice of the peace!"). Tony's host calls this landlord "A troublesome old blade" but suggests that they will be assured of a good reception. Like him, we chuckle over Tony's mischief as Marlow and Hastings leave for the supposed inn.

The second Act opens with Mr. Hardcastle instructing his awkward servants on their duties at table. "When company comes", he tells them, "you are not to pop out and stare, and then run in again, like frightened rabbits in a warren" (229). We find much amusement in the way he teaches them how to behave. Roger whom he has "advanced from the plough" (230) is told to place himself behind Hardcastle's chair. He is asked not to stand with his hands in his pockets. Diggory is instructed "to make a show at the side-table" and forbidden to be too talkative: "... you must hear us talk, and not think of talking; you must see us drink and not think of drinking; you must see us eat and not think of eating". Diggory, however, finds it impossible not to think of eating since,

---

46 Mark Schorer, *MIN*, 48 (1933), 91-94, suggests that Goldsmith was possibly influenced by a rather similar situation in Mrs. Centlivre's comedy, *The Man's Bewitch'd* (1709).
as he admits, whenever he finds yeating going forward, he always wishes for a mouthful himself. He is advised to resist the temptation with the reflection that a bellyful in the kitchen is no worse than a bellyful in the parlour. "Eecod, I thank your worship", says Diggory, "I'll make a shift to stay my stomach with a slice of cold beef in the pantry". And when Hardcastle asks his servants not to burst into laughter should he tell a good story at table, the irrepressible Diggory requests his master not to tell the story of Ould Grouse in the gun-room as he cannot help laughing over that. He does not move when asked by Hardcastle how he will behave if one of the country should call for a glass of wine. "Eecod, your worship", says Diggory, "I never have courage till I see the eatables and drinkables brought upo' the table, and then I'm as bauld as a lion" (231). Soon the servants, unused to visitors, look completely bewildered when Hardcastle leaves the stage to receive his guests at the gate. They seem to have learnt nothing from a three-day training, as we find them scattering confusedly, as if frightened, to their posts when Marlow and Hastings are shown in.

This delightful interval of rustic clowning is followed by a discussion between Marlow and Hastings. We are amused by Marlow's inability to talk to ladies of his own class, though he can get on well with females of another class, e.g. the barmaids of inns. He admits that he can never expect to marry unless he were to marry like a medieval king who would win a bride by sending some
courier to ask for her hand. The second possibility, he says, lies in following the custom in the East where marriages are arranged by the bridegroom and the bride's father — an arrangement that does not oblige the bridegroom to see the bride at all until the wedding day. "But to go through all the terrors of a formal courtship", he adds, "together with the episode of aunts, grandmothers and cousins, and at last to blurt out the broad staring question of, madam, will you marry me? No, no, that's a strain much above me, I assure you :" (233). He even says that he has come to the country in order, mainly, to introduce Hastings to the family as his friend and thus help him in courting Neville. This shows that they are unknown to the Hardcastles — a fact that prepares us for Marlow's first subsequent meeting and his amusing conversation with Kate Hardcastle. They are interrupted by Mr. Hardcastle who is naturally taken by them for the innkeeper. This occasions a most amusing ironic conversation between the old man and his guests. His persistent welcome leaves them somewhat untouched. Desired to be under no constraint and to treat the house as Liberty Hall, they treat it as an inn. When Hardcastle begins to tell his story about the Duke of Marlborough, the guests rather speak about the suits they should wear. It is amusing to find the old man resume his favourite story after every interruption until Marlow cuts him short by asking for a glass of punch. Hardcastle says in an amusing aside, "This is the most

47 The previous act has prepared us for the joke.

48 These delightful asides, though designed for the intimate Covent Garden stage of the time, are fully integrated with their situations.
unaccountable kind of modesty I ever met with :" (255). This is treating his house as Liberty Hall with a vengeance ! However, he remains polite and offers them a "cup" -- a hot drink flavoured with herbs and fruits.

As Hardcastle drinks with them, Marlow calls him in an aside a very impudent fellow. Regarding him as a character, however, he decides to humour this eccentric "inn-keeper". The irony continues as the conversation proceeds. He is addressed by Marlow as "old gentleman", and by Hastings as "my philosopher". When he is about to begin his another favourite story of Prince Eugene, Marlow interrupts him again, enquiring about the menu for supper :

"What has your philosophy got in the house for supper ?" (236). Completely taken aback by this most impudent behaviour, Hardcastle declares in an aside, "Was ever such a request to a man in his own house !" And again : "Such a brazen dog sure never my eyes beheld" (237). However, he apparently keeps his cool and, when Hastings too asks for his list of the larder, calls for it from the kitchen. The manner of Hastings, says Hardcastle, reminds him of his uncle Colonel Wallop's saying that no man was sure of his supper till he had eaten it, thus adding to the credibility of what Tony has told the visitors about their present landlord. Much to our amusement, Hastings observes in an aside, "All upon the high ropes ! His uncle a colonel ! We shall soon hear of his mother being a justice of peace". The visitors find the menu much too complicated to select easily from. "The devil, sir", says
Marlow, "do you think we have brought down the whole Joiners' Company, or the Corporation of Bedford, to eat up such a supper? Two or three little things, clean and comfortable, will do". This is one of the most delightful scenes in which Hardcastle's guests dismiss the items of the elaborate menu not only unceremoniously but contemptuously. "Let your brains be knocked out, my good sir; I don't like them" (238), says Hastings; and Marlow eventually asks his host to send them what he pleases, and then insists on going upstairs to see that their beds are aired. Hardcastle feels he has never met such impudent young men, but he controls his temper and accompanies Marlow upstairs.

Miss Neville now enters to tell Hastings that the supposed inn is in fact the Hardcastle house. Their conversation serves to remind us that Mrs. Hardcastle wants Tony to marry Miss Neville who has her fortune in jewels. She is hoping to get them soon from her aunt, and the moment they are in her possession, she will be ready to run away with Hastings to France where they can be married. Hastings persuades her not to undeceive Marlow about the house they are in. "I know the strange reserve of his temper is such", he says, "that if abruptly informed of it, he would instantly quit the house before our plan was ripe for execution" (240). When Marlow enters, Hastings tells him that a most fortunate accident has occurred -- that Miss Neville and Miss Hardcastle have called at the inn. We laugh over the abnormal shyness displayed by Marlow at the very thought of meeting Kate Hardcastle.
In vain does he seek to postpone the meeting. Hastings and Neville try hard to make him take courage to face her. When Kate enters with a demure face to meet her modest gentleman, Hastings helps Marlow with the conversation and reassures him, saying, "Cicero never spoke better. Once more, and you are confirmed in assurance for ever" (242). But as soon as Hastings departs to have a tête-à-tête with Neville, Marlow relapses into timidity. No amount of encouragement from an understanding Kate helps; his answers become ridiculously incoherent and his anxiety to escape becomes only too apparent. To his great relief, he is beckoned off stage by Neville. Kate, left alone, reflects upon this "sober sentimental" interview during which Marlow scarcely looked at her face. "If I could teach him a little confidence", she soliloquises, "it would be doing somebody that I know of a piece of service" (244). She then leaves the stage, and Tony and Neville enter, followed by Mrs. Hardcastle and Hastings.

There is soon an amusing conversation between Mrs. Hardcastle and Hastings who mocks her pretensions to a knowledge of London and the fashions. She feels highly flattered when he says he believed her to have been brought up all her life at Ranelagh, St. James's, or Tower Wharf, and "admires" the elegance of her

49 This scene is obviously intended as a burlesque upon the insipid exchanges found in the plays of Hugh Kelly and Richard Cumberland.

50 Here Hastings is making use of her ignorance of London because, as Professor Friedman points out, "St. James's clearly represents high life and Tower Wharf low life".
hair-dress. "Such a head in a side-box, at the Play-house", says he, "would draw as many gazers as my Lady Mayoress at a City Ball" (245). Charmed by the mocker's agreeable manner she starts criticising her old-fashioned husband saying, "Yet, what signifies my dressing when I have such a piece of antiquity by my side as Mr. Hardcastle : all I can say will never argue down a single button from his clothes...." (246). The irony continues as she points out to him that Tony and Constance are contracted to, and fond of, each other. She even places them back to back to show they are the same height. In the process Tony bumps Neville's head and is scolded by his mother. There follows an amusing dialogue between mother and son during which Tony complains of her excessive care and coddling of him. When she suggests it was all for his good, Tony protests, saying, "I wish you'd let me and my good alone, then" (247). Mrs. Hardcastle soon retires with Neville and there follows an amusing discussion between Hastings and Tony about Neville. Tony's remarks about her provoke laughter. He points out that "there's not a more bitter cantankerous toad in all Christendom:" (248). Hastings in an aside says, "Pretty encouragement, this, for a lover". Tony goes on to remark that Neville "has as many tricks as a hare in a thicket, or a colt the first day's breaking", that her play-mate will find her "as loud as a hog in a gate", and that she kicks up at times. She is, he affirms, nothing as compared with his Bet Bouncer, a country beauty with her "two eyes as black as sloes, and cheeks as broad
and red as a pulpit cushion" (248-49). Hastings does not feel discouraged but offers to take Neville off Tony's hands, thus leaving him free to pursue his Bet Bouncer. Tony in turn gladly offers to assist Hastings and Neville in their elopement plans by getting them fresh horses and also the jewels from his mother.

The third Act, the centre of the plot, is remarkably delightful. It commences with Hardcastle musing in his house on the unaccountable impudence of Marlow: "To me he appears the most impudent piece of brass that ever spoke with a tongue" (250). When Kate enters, it is amusing to find them talking at cross-purposes about Marlow. But it is natural since each has formed a very different impression of the young man. While Kate speaks about his awkward manner and timidity, her father calls him an exceptionally "bouncing, swaggering puppy" (251); while she recalls his stammering voice with a look fixed on the ground, he recollects his "loud voice, a lordly sir, and a familiarity that made my blood freeze again". Only in one thing do they agree -- to reject him; but Kate remarks that if her father should find him less impudent to him and she less timid to her, he could do as a husband. "Certainly", she adds, "we don't meet many such at a horse race in the country" (252). They agree to make further discoveries about Marlow. As soon as they leave the stage, Tony enters with a casket of jewels which he gives to Hastings. He has removed it from his mother's bureau "by the rule of thumb" (253). Hastings, however, fears that Mrs. Hardcastle will discover her
loss of jewels as Neville is already asking her for them, not knowing that they are hers already. The plotters' divergent plans threaten to go astray. Mrs. Hardcastle and Neville enter, discussing jewels. The former would not leave possession of jewels until she sees Tony married to Neville. Tony advises his mother to tell her that they are missing, which she does. When she leaves to bring her own garnets for Neville in view of her "loss", Tony tells his cousin that Hastings has the jewels and that she should vanish. Discovering the empty jewel-box, Mrs. Hardcastle returns in a distracted state, crying, "Confusion! thieves! robbers! We are cheated, plundered, broke open, undone!" (255).

Tony causes great amusement by pretending to believe that she is merely pretending to be ruined in earnest, that she is only carrying through the original plan. "By the laws", says he, laughing heartily, "I never saw it better acted in my life". In vain does she try to be taken seriously by Tony. Like Tony we thoroughly enjoy the irony of the situation.

When mother and son leave, Kate enters with the maid. She has discovered by now the trick her brother has played upon Marlow and Hastings. She also learns from the maid that Marlow has mistaken her for a barmaid. His mistake is understandable as Kate was dressed entirely in her country clothes. She decides to keep up the delusion. "But my chief aim is to take my gentleman off his guard", says she, "and like an invisible champion of romance examine the giant's force before I offer to combat" (257). She
can do this because, as the maid says, Marlow does not remember her appearance from their first interview, and because Kate can act the barmaid's part effectively. What follows marks the height of Goldsmith's comic ingenuity. Marlow enters musing on his disturbing experience at the supposed inn. We are greatly amused to find a completely different Marlow as soon as he sees the attractive Kate, mistaking her for a bar-maid. He begins a very flirtatious conversation with her, showing no trace of his earlier timidity before Miss Hardcastle. Drawing close to her to ascertain her age, he attempts to kiss her. "Pray, sir", says Kate, "keep you distance. One would think you wanted to know one's age as they do horses, by mark of mouth" (259). Pretending to have no inclination to be acquainted with him, she reminds him of how he conducted himself before Miss Hardcastle a short while ago. "I'll warrant me", she says, "before her you looked dashed, and kept bowing to the ground, and talked, for all the world, as if you was before a justice of peace". But Marlow now presents himself as quite capable of dealing with Miss Hardeastle whom he calls an "awkward, squinting thing". The irony of their different versions of their earlier interview makes this scene highly entertaining. He is led on by Kate to describe himself as a great favourite among the ladies. His real name, he says, is Solomons, though at the Ladies' Club in town he is known as "their agreeable Rattle". The lively girl thus manages to mock him all through this conversation.51 Saying that he must see her embroidery, he

51 The élan of this scene alone is almost sufficient to suppress any incipient sentimentality in the final happy union of Kate and Marlow.
abruptly seizes her hand. About to snatch a kiss, he is
interrupted by Hardcastle. He retires hurriedly, but Kate is
reproached by her father for misrepresenting Marlow's behaviour
to her: "So, madam! So I find this is your modest lover" (260).
He is not convinced when Kate says that Marlow's faults will pass
off in due course. "He has scarcely been three hours in the
house", says he, "and he has already encroached on all my
prerogatives" (261). Reluctantly, however, he agrees to give
Kate an hour in which to prove that Marlow is really modest.

The fourth Act opens with the news that Marlow's father,
Charles Marlow, is expected to arrive at Hardcastle's house the
same evening. As Sir Charles knows Hastings, the latter tells
Neville they must press on with the elopement. He informs her
that he has sent the jewels to Marlow for safe keeping and that
Tony has promised to provide a pair of fresh horses for their
elopement. There is, however, a further complication. As soon
as they leave the stage, Marlow enters with a servant and
discloses that he has got the jewels deposited with the "land-
lady" to make them more secure. We laugh over the conspirators'
deception now recoiling upon them. Marlow is musing on the
charms of the "barmaid" when Hastings enters and realizes what
has happened to the jewels. There follows a delightful piece of
cross-talk as Hastings struggles to conceal his uneasiness at
this revelation. He goes off stage, deciding to set off without
the jewels. Meanwhile Hardcastle's patience is being exhausted;
he cannot tolerate Marlow's servants, drinking freely in his house. When he demands from him an explanation for their insufferable conduct, he is amazed to learn that they have only obeyed their master's orders to drink freely. Marlow cannot understand why the "landlord" should object when he is being helped by increasing his bill. "Were you not told to drink freely", he asks his drunken servant, "and call for what you thought fit, for the good of the house?" (265). Unable to contain himself any longer, Hardcastle asks Marlow to leave his house directly along with his "drunken pack". Much to our amusement, Marlow still at a loss to understand it all, says, "Leave your house! -- Sure, you jest, my good friend! What, when I'm doing what I can to please you!" (266). A little later he speaks to Hardcastle in a serious tone, saying, "This is my house. Mine, while I choose to stay. What right have you to bid me leave this house, sir? I never met with such impudence, curse me, never in my whole life before!" Hardcastle soon tells him exactly what he feels about his insolence and banters him a good deal. An angry Marlow calls for the reckoning. Hardcastle, however, leaves, saying he will report this impudence to Marlow's father. Only now does it begin to dawn on Marlow that the house may not be an inn. Soon he is undeceived by Kate, though not entirely. She says she is a poor relation of the Hardcastle family, "appointed to keep the keys, and to see that the guests want nothing in my power to give them" (267). She laughs at
Marlow for calling Hardcastle’s house an inn. Marlow curses his stupidity: “So then all’s out, and I have been damnably imposed on. O, confound my stupid head, I shall be laughed at over the whole town. I shall be stuck up in caricature in all the print-shops” (267-68). He decides to leave the place immediately.

Though reluctant to leave Kate ("you are the only part of the family I leave with reluctance"), Marlow reminds himself of his duty to his father and bids her farewell. Kate, realizing he really loves her, determines to detain him. "I'll still preserve the character in which I stooped to conquer", she soliloquises, "but will undeceive my papa, who, perhaps, may laugh him out of his resolution". Tony now enters with Neville and tells her that his mother has got the jewels again, though she believes it was a mistake of the servants. Neville fears that if her plot is found out she will be locked up or made to stay with her aunt Pedigree. They pretend to fondle each other when Mrs. Hardcastle enters. We enjoy the irony when she expresses her pleasure, saying, "Ah! have I caught you, my pretty doves: What, billing, exchanging stolen glances, and broken murmurs! Ah!" (270). Tony and Neville keep up before her the pretence of being in love with each other. She assures the girl that she will have her jewels soon and declares that Tony and Neville will be married next day. At this point Diggory brings Tony a letter which, Neville alone knows, is from Hastings. Anxious that her aunt should not see it, she engages her in conversation, hoping
that Tony will soon make out the letter himself. But Tony makes neither head nor tail of the letter with "such handles, and shanks, and dashes" (271). When his mother offers to help him, Neville manages to take it first. We cannot help laughing when she pretends that it is from one of Tony's friends and is only about cocks and fighting. She urges Tony to put it away as of no consequence. But Tony, anxious to hear it all, hands it to his mother to finish. She becomes beside herself with rage as the note reveals the plan for elopement. She decides to take the girl away to her aunt Pedigree's house and orders Tony to escort them. She leaves to prepare for the journey and what follows is a most amusing period of recrimination. Neville calls Tony a stupid fool for failing to understand her nods and signs. But Tony says that the real source of trouble was her own cleverness. Hastings enters angrily and demands from Tony an explanation for what has happened. He is followed by Marlow who blames everyone for making a fool of him. Tony says, "Here's another. We shall have old Bedlam broke loose presently" (273). For a moment he alone becomes a target of abuses from all, and is called an idiot, a poor contemptible booby and an insensible cub. A provoked Tony says to Marlow and Hastings, "Baw! damme, but I'll fight you both one after the other, — with baskets". Ignoring him, Marlow demands from Hastings an explanation as to why he was kept ignorant of his mistake. But Hastings blames Marlow in turn for delivering the jewels to another person. They are, however,
pacified by Neville before she is summoned by Mrs. Hardcastle. Blamed by Marlow for the results of his folly, Tony, until now lost in reverie, suddenly jumps to life, asking them to meet him in two hours at the bottom of the garden. He has an idea for dealing with the situation: "... if you don't find Tony Lumpkin a more good-natur'd fellow than you thought for, I'll give you leave to take my best horse, and Bet Bouncer into the bargain!" (275).

In the opening scene of Act V Hastings' discussion with a servant reveals that Mrs. Hardcastle and Neville have gone off in a coach attended by Tony on horseback, that Sir Charles Marlow has arrived in the house and that both he and Hardcastle have been laughing at Marlow's mistake. Hastings leaves to keep his "fruitless" appointment at the bottom of the garden. The amusing confusion is still kept up, as Hardcastle tells Sir Charles that Marlow and Kate do like each other. It will be recalled that earlier in the evening Mr. Hardcastle interrupted Marlow's advances to Kate as the supposed barmaid, and that Marlow already believes her to be a poor relation of the family. Marlow enters to ask pardon for his insolent conduct. Hardcastle, however, needs no such apology; he is quite prepared to match him with his daughter. To our great amusement, Hardcastle can hardly believe his ears when Marlow emphatically denies having been intimate with Kate. "Sure, sir," he tells him, "nothing has past between us but the most profound respect on my side, and the most distant
reserve on her's" (277). Hardcastle thinks that Marlow, in
trying to be modest, is over-acting. He desires him to be open,
adding, "your father and I will like you the better for it".
But Marlow protests that he and Kate "had but one interview, and
that was formal, modest and uninteresting". It should be noted
how effectively Goldsmith has used the device of dramatic irony
to obtain a comic effect. The spectator fully enjoys the situation,
knowing that Marlow remembers only his first bashful interview
with Kate, while Mr. Hardcastle remembers his own interruption of
Marlow's flirtatious advances to Kate in her barmaid capacity.
Reiterating that he "saw the lady without emotion, and parted
without reluctance" (278), Marlow hopes that he will not be
prevented from leaving the house where he has suffered numerous
embarrassments. The astonishment of the two fathers when Marlow
makes his exit, is very amusing. Kate enters and tells them that
she and Marlow have had several interviews in which he talked
much of love. But she takes care not to mention that on such
occasions he never knew she was the Miss Hardcastle he had come
down to see for himself. She persuades them to conceal themselves
behind a screen in about half an hour, asserting that they will
hear him declare his love for her.

The second scene, set in Hardcastle's garden, is again one
of the most amusing. Here Hastings hears from Tony how he has
driven his mother and cousin round and round the neighbourhood in
the dark only to land them finally in the horse-pond at the bottom
of their garden. Hastings leaves to relieve Neville, desiring Tony to keep his mother occupied. Mrs. Hardcastle appears exhausted because, as she says, she "never met so many accidents in so short a journey" (231). In the darkness she looks terrified as Tony persuades her they are upon Crackskull Common, some forty miles from home. He causes us great entertainment by playing upon her fears of the robbers. "Don't be afraid, mamma", says he, "don't be afraid. Two of the five that kept here are hanged, and the other three may not find us. Don't be afraid. Is that a man that's galloping behind us? No; it's only a tree. Don't be afraid". Tony, however, soon finds to his own shock that his step-father, out for his evening stroll, is approaching them. Telling her that he is a highwayman, a "damned ill-looking fellow" with long pistols, he persuades her to hide behind a tree, instructing her to stay hidden. Mr. Hardcastle is surprised to find Tony so soon back from his journey. Tony tells him he has returned after leaving his mother and cousin at his aunt Pedigree's. It is a ludicrous scene with Tony speaking loudly to his father to drown his mother's exclamations of fear from behind. He does his best to prevent discovery, but Mrs. Hardcastle, fearing his son will be murdered by the highwayman, comes running to intercede for his life. Distracted by the events of the evening, she kneels before her husband, begging him to be merciful: "Take compassion on us, good Mr. Highwayman. Take our money, our watches, all we have, but spare our lives. We will
never bring you to justice, indeed we won't, good Mr. Highwayman" (283). Realizing that the "robber" is really her husband, she says her fears blinded her but wonders how he could reach "this frightful place, so far from home". She realizes she is in her own garden only when her amazed husband says, "Don't you know the gate, and the mulberry-tree; and don't you remember the horsepond, my dear?" Tony's trick is revealed, and she pursues her unrepentant son off the stage. Meanwhile Hastings has failed to prevail upon Neville to leave with him at once without jewels. He reluctantly consents to her decision to appeal to Hardeastle for justice.

The final scene, set in Hardeastle's house, clears up all complications in a highly entertaining manner. It opens with conversation between Kate and Sir Charles. She has directed him how to conceal himself along with her father in order to overhear Marlow declare his love for her. As he leaves to fetch Hardeastle, Marlow enters to take leave of Kate whom he still believes to be the poor relation of the family. Though in love with her, he sees little possibility of marrying one so inferior to him in rank. Kate accuses him of having no real love for her, saying, "I must have only the mockery of your addresses, while all your serious aims are fixed on fortune" (285). At this point Sir Charles and Hardeastle are seen concealing themselves behind the screen. They soon overhear Marlow admiring Kate's beauty and declaring his love for her. "By all that's good", says he, "I
can have no happiness but what's in your power to grant me" (236). He will even stay in the house to atone for the levity of his conduct. When he goes on his knees to press his point, the old men, amazed at his conduct, appear to reproach him for having deceived them. Marlow now realizes the real identity of the "poor relation". Highly embarrassed by his impudence and teased by the lively Kate, he thinks of making his escape but is prevailed upon by Hardcastle to stay, and all is forgiven. Mrs. Hardcastle enters with Tony to say that by eloping with Hastings Neville has forfeited her right to her fortune. She can have her jewels only if Tony, when of age, refuses to marry her. But Mr. Hardcastle resolves this complication soon after Hastings and Neville return unexpectedly. He declares that Tony is already of age. The first use Tony makes of his liberty is to refuse to marry Neville so that he can marry his Bet Bouncer. As Kate will marry Marlow, she has successfully "stooped to conquer". The mistakes of the night thus end in rejoicing for everybody. The "laughing" comedy ends with Hardcastle's saying to Marlow: "... so boy, take her (Kate); as you have been mistaken in the mistress, my wish is, that you may never be mistaken in the wife".

Thus, She Stoops to Conquer is throughout a hilarious comedy eschewing tears and reforms. Laughter, as Thorndike says, "shifts from one person to another like the box of Miss Neville's jewels, which is ever being won and lost". The chief diversion
arises, of course, from Tony's clever stratagem on Marlow. But
how many can really make this humorous incident the mainspring
of such a laughing comedy? Sick of the weeping comedies of the
period, Goldsmith's primary aim was to amuse; he has done it by
means of a most skilful manipulation of plot, a gay and racy
dialogue and, as shown below, highly entertaining characters.
The amusing situations are incorporated into an inevitable plot.
The dialogue, as we have seen, is singularly free of the maudlin
verbiage of the sentimentalists.

Someone in quest of sentimentality may claim to notice it
towards the conclusion of the play where Hastings and Neville
decide against elopement and appeal to Mr. Hardcastle for mercy.
"But I'm now recovered from the delusion", says Neville, "and
hope from your tenderness what is denied me from a nearer
connection" (288). This causes Mrs. Hardcastle to remark, "Pshaw,
pshaw! this is all but the whining end of a modern novel". As
shown above, Hardcastle promptly brings about a happy resolution
by declaring Tony to be of age. It will be absurd to single out
such an incident as evidence of Goldsmith's sentimentalism from
a play in which the spirit of merriment is never extinguished.
The psychology of comedy requires that all should be set rightly,
and Goldsmith cannot be accused of sentimentalism for using one
of the traditional devices to produce the maximum of joy.

The detective of sentimentalism may also find a sentimental
bias where Marlow's intentions towards Kate are revealed as
honourable when he still believes her to be Hardcastle's poor relation: "By heavens, madam", he tells her, "fortune was ever my smallest consideration. Your beauty at first caught my eye; for who could see that without emotion? ... What at first seemed rustic plainness, now appears refined simplicity. What seemed forward assurance, now strikes me as the result of courageous innocence, and conscious virtue" (285). But actually it is comic rather than sentimental because of our constant awareness that Hardcastle and Sir Charles are eavesdropping upon the scene. Soon Kate laughs at him by declaring that she is Hardcastle's daughter whom he "addressed as the mild, modest, sentimental man of gravity" (287). Earlier, in Act IV, Marlow expresses his affection for Kate with "By heaven, she weeps" (268). But here we should not forget that Kate is peeping through her fingers at him and is only pretending to cry.

What remains to be stressed is Goldsmith's characterization which, perhaps more than any other thing, separates the play from the sentimental comedy. There are no serious, gloomy, weeping or moralizing characters; all are comically conceived and it is through speech that they reveal so much of themselves. We laugh with Tony and Kate, especially with the former; we laugh at Mrs. Hardcastle and Marlow, especially the latter. Amusing, too, are Mr. Hardcastle, Hastings and Neville. But it is important to stress that Goldsmith, as Forster has pointed out, "does not snatch a joke out of a misery, or an ugliness, or a
mortification, or anything that, apart from the joke, would be likely to give pain ...". It will be remembered that Aristotle had said, "It (the ludicrous) consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive".

Mr. Hardcastle, the plain country gentleman, is not likely to give up his old-fashioned ideas. Living in his old-fashioned house, he says in the opening scene, "I love everything that's old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine ..." (218). We laugh over his talkativeness, his elaborate instructions to servants and his fondness for long-winded stories. What amuses us most, however, is his utter astonishment at the strange behaviour of Marlow whose error he does not perceive. Commenting on his impudence he remarks in an aside, "This may be modern modesty, but I never saw anything look so like old-fashioned impudence" (239). Later, of course, he laughs heartily over Marlow's mistake.

Mrs. Hardcastle, so different from her husband, is presented as a ridiculous lady. She complains of a life spent in the country and would, if she could, "take a trip to town now and then, to rub off the rust a little" (217). She complains to her husband that their entertainment is confined to his old stories of Prince Eugene and the Duke of Marlborough. We have seen her being completely taken in by the flattery of Hastings who knows

her eagerness to follow the London fashions. Indulgent to her son, she wrongly thinks he is consumptive, and would give him no education for fear of damaging his health. Education, she thinks, is even unnecessary in his case. "I don't think", she says in the opening scene, "a boy wants much learning to spend fifteen hundred a year" (218). We laugh at her gullibility. Tony and Neville, especially the former, often deceive her easily. Again, though she stands on her own ground, she is duped by Tony into believing that she is upon Crackskull Common, the most notorious spot in the country. She provokes our laughter by kneeling before her husband, taking him for a highwayman.

Hastings and Neville, while they are dramatically less interesting than Marlow and Kate, are much more interesting than the gloomy, moralizing lovers of the sentimental comedy. They decide not to disabuse Marlow of the real identity of the supposed innkeeper. Hastings, says Marlow, has "talents and art to captivate any woman" (233). He is amused by Marlow's awkwardness during his first interview with Kate, but helps him with the conversation for some time, making delightful comments in the process. He also amuses us by his clever mockery of Mrs. Hardcastle's pretensions to a knowledge of London, as the flattered lady does not realize he is simply making a fool of her. As for Miss Neville, though prudence dictates her conduct, she is much different from the pathetic heroines of the sentimental comedy. She practises dissimulation to avoid oppression. She befools her
aunt by making a show of affection for Tony. She amuses us by taking Hastings' letter from Tony, pretending before her aunt that it comes from one of Tony's friends, and inventing material as she reads it. Tony tells his mother that he "always loved cousin Con's hazel eyes, and her pretty long fingers ..." (270).

The delightful Kate offers a refreshing contrast with the bloodless heroines of the sentimental comedy. We have already seen how her enthusiasm for Marlow is dampened on learning that he is also bashful and reserved, and how she laughs heartily over Marlow's "sober, sentimental interview" with her. She has, like Shakespeare's Rosalind, a keen sense of fun coupled with a clever brain. She shows a ready wit and a lively sense of humour in her role as barmaid and thoroughly enjoys the comedy of curing Marlow of his timidity. In Act III when she finds that Marlow has mistaken her for a barmaid, she resolves to keep up the delusion: "Tell me, Pimple", she asks the maid, "how do you like my present dress? Don't you think I look something like Cherry in the Beaux' Stratagem?" When Marlow, finding her vastly handsome and taking fancy to her sprightly malicious eye, asks for the nectar of her lips, she looks remarkably natural in her pretence that he is asking for some kind of liquor: "Nectar! nectar! that's a liquor there's no call for in these parts. French, I suppose. We keep no French wines here, sir" (253).

As shown above, she makes him look ridiculous throughout this scene. In Act IV, seeing that Marlow has begun to realize his
mistake, she tells him that he is at Mr. Hardcastle’s house and not at an inn. But as it is still too early to undeceive him about her identity, the gay girl displays a ready inventiveness by telling him she is a poor relation of the family. She knows how to deal with the situation she has brought about out of a sense of fun. We see this (act V, Scene iii) in the way she enables her father and Sir Charles to overhear Marlow’s declaration of love for her. In the same scene she shows a sheer genius for teasing Marlow when he discovers her identity. She banters him about his dual character, tormenting him to the back scene.

We are much amused by Marlow as he is a very singular character indeed. Bashful before ladies of his own class, he is extremely forward with those of a lower class; he is quite aware of his curious lack of assurance when dealing with the former. In Act II, he admits to Hastings that women of reputation "freeze" and "petrify" him; a modest woman in her gay and elegant dress is to him "the most tremendous object of the whole creation" (232). Nor does he ever quite hope to marry unless it is to be a marriage by proxy. "This stammer in my address", he tells Hastings, "and this awkward prepossessing visage of mine, can never permit me to soar above the reach of a milliner’s apprentice, or one of the duchesses of Drury Lane" (233). We laugh at his awkward mauvaise honte in his first interview with Kate during which he desperately relies on Hastings to save
himself from looking confoundingly ridiculous. Left alone with Kate, he is overcome with a strange nervousness and his powers of conversation desert him. This bashfulness contrasts sharply with his subsequent boldness in relation to the same girl when he mistakes her for a barmaid. We see him hauling his "pretty maid" before he is interrupted by an amazed Hardcastle. Like Mrs. Hardcastle, he is the gull of the comedy. The dupe of Tony, he continues to treat Hardcastle as innkeeper until his host threatens to report his impudence to his father. He is equally easily duped by Kate whom he first believes to be a barmaid, and later, a poor relation of the Hardcastle family. Finally, when he is completely undeceived, it is in a manner most embarrassing to him. Bantered by Kate, he curses his noisy head, adding, "I never attempted to be impudent yet, that I was not taken down" (287).

It is in Tony, however, that the heart of the comedy beats. We owe him most of the fun and mirth of the play which revolves around his practical joke on Marlow and Hastings. The central positioning of such a character in the action of any play will act as a sufficient check upon mawkishness. Full of mischievous humour, he is accurately described by Mr. Hardcastle as "a mere composition of tricks and mischief!" (218). The old man himself is one of his victims. "It was but yesterday he fastened my wig to the back of my chair",54 he tells Mrs. Hardcastle, "and when

54 J. Forster, The Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith (London, 1877), II, 363n., says that Lord Clare's daughter played this trick on Goldsmith.
I went to make a bow, I popped my bald head in Mrs. Frizzle's face." (218). He has been spoilt by the excessive mothering of Mrs. Hardcastle who has been as Neville says, "setting off her pretty monster as the very pink of perfection" (223). He spends most of his time with his pot companions in the alehouse. Money is no problem for him. "If I had not a key to every drawer in mother's bureau", he tells Hastings, "how could I go to the alehouse so often as I do?" (253). As he resents his stepfather's grumbling at his drinking habits, he directs Marlow and Hastings to his house as to an inn. His mother is another prominent victim of his practical joking. He conspires against her by working for the elopement of the lovers, Neville and Hastings. He removes from her bureau the casket containing Neville's jewels, encourages her to pretend that they are missing and, when she discovers that they have really vanished, he pretends that she is pretending they are missing. When his mother discovers the whole conspiracy and orders him to escort her and Neville to Neville's aunt Pedigree, he hits on a most amusing stratagem. He drives his mother and cousin round and round the neighbourhood in the dark and finally lands them in the horsepond at the bottom of their garden. We have seen how he alarms his mother into a hysterical state with a variety of roguish tricks. We don't sympathise with her because she has been presented as a foolish and vain woman prompted by ignoble motives. Tony's deception revealed, he justifies his conduct...
before his mother, saying, "Ecod, mother, all the parish says you have spoiled me, and so you may take the fruits on't" (283). Mr. Hardcastle significantly remarks that there is morality in Tony’s reply. Tony does not mind offending her: "I don't value her resentment the bounce of a cracker". At the end, thanks to Mr. Hardcastle, he frees himself from her apron-strings and can pursue his Betty Bouncer. It is very largely Tony and Kate who keep the comedy in the Shakespearean tradition.

The total impression of She Stoops to Conquer as a result of its situations, characters and language is, thus, one of laughing comedy as opposed to that of weeping comedy which Goldsmith attacked in his "Essay on the Theatre". The opinion of contemporaneity can sometime be so faulty as to seem grotesque to later generations. The aristocratic Horace Walpole, in a letter to his friend Mason, delivered himself of a judgment which most of us will find hard to understand. Calling the play "the lowest of all farces", he condemned the "execution" of Goldsmith’s plan: "The drift tends to no moral, no edification of any kind; the situations, however, are well imagined, and make one laugh in spite of the grossness of the dialogue, the forced witticisms, and total improbability of the whole plan and conduct. But what disgusts me most is that, though the characters are very low, and aim at low humour, not one of them says a sentence that is natural, or marks any character at all".55 Perhaps nothing more is needed

55 Cited by Rousseau, Goldsmith, p. 118.
to prove Walpole's partiality to sentimental comedy of which Goldsmith's play is the direct opposite. Goldsmith had anticipated such criticism as Walpole's. In an epilogue at one time intended for the play, he wrote:

Without a star, a coronet or garter,
How can the piece expect or hope for quarter?
No high-life scenes, no sentiment: -- the creature
Still stoops among the low to copy nature.

The last line defends Goldsmith's approach; his drama, as of course Shakespeare's, holds the mirror up to nature.

She Stoops to Conquer cannot be labelled low farce, even if several of its incidents look farcical and Tony is a "low" comic creation. Goldsmith's dramatic construction of incident is admirable. As Dr. Johnson said, "the incidents are so prepared as not to seem improbable". The characters are by no means superficial; well thought out, they show natural consistency. We can recognize, and identify ourselves with, Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle, Tony and Marlow. While the play makes us roar with laughter, it is free from any slapstick buffoonery. Goldsmith's comic muse is not easily definable. She is neither satirical like Jonson's, nor sentimental like Cumberland's, nor even romantic like Shakespeare's. As Thorndike points out, "She has a special fondness for practical jokes but she is not merely a romp". Unlike the sentimental playwrights, Goldsmith has no

56 Thorndike, p. 429.
didactic intention. This lack of edification of which Walpole complains, and a humorous view of life separate Goldsmith's comedy from those mawkish comedies of the age, which are heavy with dull moralizing. Again, Walpole's complaint of "low" characters is ill-founded. As Goldsmith aims at drawing nature and character, he boldly puts the "low" upon the stage. In The Good-Natur'd Man, the bailiff scene best expresses Goldsmith's disapproval of the sentimental mode, though it was hissed as "low" by its audience at Covent Garden. Tony, Diggory, and the companions of the Three Pigeons also would be "low" to an audience used to sentimental comedies. We, however, find Tony the most delightful character in the play and we recognize his as the prime part in the play. Like Shakespeare's Puck he laughs heartily at the follies of his victims. It is significant that he is not held as an example of bad behaviour or finished as a reformed character. Nor would we like the play to be without honest Diggory who asks for his accustomed licence to laugh at Hardcastle's story of Old Grouse in the gun-room. Also, Goldsmith's is not Walpole's "nature". For Goldsmith, "the natural" means "the avoidance of anything like falsification and affected sophistication in art". There is also another critic, William Woodfall, who condemned Goldsmith's play. He wrote in irritation in the Monthly Review (March 1773): "The fable of She Stoops to Conquer is a series of blunders, which the Author calls the Mistakes of a Night; but they are such mistakes as
never were made, and we believe, never could have been committed". He went on to list several incidents of the play as most improbable. But this is to forget that Goldsmith adequately hints in the beginning at whatever happens later. Again, it hardly needs to be stressed that the conventions of comedy seldom coincide with those of real life. Woodfall found almost all the incidents at the supposed inn most improbable. We, however, find them no more improbable than those numerous blunders and involvements which comedy has often exhibited. Those who accuse Goldsmith's plot of straining the bounds of probability would do well to remember that its most preposterous incident, the mistaking of a country gentleman's house for an inn, was suggested, according to Goldsmith's sister, Mrs. Hodson, by an actual experience of Goldsmith. In any case, the so-called improbabilities of She Stoops to Conquer do not detract from its effectiveness as a stage play.

Goldsmith's theory of drama, as stated in his "Essay on the Theatre" underlies She Stoops to Conquer which is suffused with a spirit of merriment, the foe of didactic sentimentality. It is a true comedy of humour and character because it has amusing situations, lively characters and pleasing dialogue instead of the pathetic scenes, serious characters and moralizing speeches. Even The Good-Natur'd Man is free from the emotional excesses of sentimental comedy, because Goldsmith abandons sentiment for

humour in the traditional manner of true comedy. And if it was not quite successful as a protest against sentimental comedy, this cannot be said of *She Stoops to Conquer*. Ironically, Colman, the manager of Covent Garden Theatre, feared it would not please its audience and did not stage it until he was persuaded to do so by Dr. Johnson "by much solicitation, nay, a kind of force".\(^5\) As the curtain rose, Woodward repeated in simperingly pathetic tones Garrick's mock monody on the imminent death of comedy:

"... Pray, would you know the reason why I'm crying? / The Comic Muse, long sick, is now a dying..." Cumberland, the leader of the sentimental school, tells us in his *Memoirs* how the formidable Doctor was set in the front of a side-box, because, such was his reputation, "when he laughed, everybody thought themselves warranted to roar". Goldsmith reached the theatre only to hear a hiss (at the improbability of Mrs. Hardcastle, in her own garden, supposing herself at Crackskull Common). When Goldsmith asked the reason, Colman replied, "Pshaw! Doctor, don't be terrified at squibs when we have been sitting these two hours upon a barrel of gunpowder". But the play was, contrary to Colman's apprehensions, a complete success. "Pit, boxes and galleries", says Macaulay, "were in a constant roar of laughter. If any bigoted admirer of Kelly and Cumberland ventured to hiss or groan, he was speedily silenced by a general cry of 'Turn him out', or 'throw him over'. Two generations have since confirmed

\(^5\) Friedman, *Collected Works*, V, 89.
the verdict which was pronounced on that night".  

As already shown, Goldsmith's rhetorical "Essay on the Theatre" cannot be treated as a highly reliable account of contemporary dramatic trends. Professor Friedman\(^{60}\) rightly says that many of the plays which Goldsmith would apparently designate as "weeping sentimental comedies" were not intended to produce tears throughout and they contain only a negligible number of sentimental scenes. The gloomy picture of the English comic drama drawn in the essay and in Garrick's prologue for *She Stoops to Conquer* is certainly inaccurate. Despite the vogue for sentimental comedy, the laughing comedy was far from disappearing from the English stage. In his scholarly study of the afterpiece tradition, Bevis\(^{61}\) shows that many of the afterpieces are satirical, laughable and farcical. As regards the mainpieces we cannot ignore many successful laughing comedies of Murph, Colman and others throughout the later 1750s and 1760s. In Quintana's opinion\(^{62}\), Goldsmith's play, especially *The Good-Natur'd Man*, conform, if only in basic structure, to the usual comic pattern, observing the various conventions that governed the construction of the Georgian plays. Quintana does not, however, make much specific reference to these Georgian plays. More recently, Professor Hume,  

\(^{59}\)Cited by Rousseau, *Goldsmith*, p. 351.  

\(^{60}\)A. Friedman, "Aspects of Sentimentalism in Eighteenth Century Literature", p. 252.  


\(^{62}\)Quintana, "Goldsmith's Achievement as Dramatist", p. 166.
drawing upon the best of recent Goldsmith scholarship, has shown that critics have greatly overrated Goldsmith as a "revolutionary" against sentimental comedy. Though he himself makes no analysis of Goldsmith's plays, he presents convincing evidence from the performance records in The London Stage to prove that both Goldsmith and Sheridan "inherited a thriving comic tradition which continued full blast around them".63

Goldsmith was not the first or the only writer of laughing comedies, as others also wrote them about the same time. Nor did he lay the ghost of sentimental comedy as it continued to be popular after him. But it must be acknowledged that Goldsmith, as critic, was unusually conscientious, frank and consistent in his disapproval of the sentimental comedy -- its pathetic scenes, genteel characters, insipid dialogue and excessive emphasis on sensibility. And, as dramatist, he consciously eschewed its artificial refinement and gushing sentiment to treat John Bull to truly laughing comedies. Written in accord with the traditions of "the last age", his unsentimental plays are remarkable for their quality of comic invention and the wealth of imaginative dramatic material. His early death deprived England of a most promising comic dramatist. However, his lead in countering the sentimental vogue was followed by the brilliant Sheridan who consciously wrote in the laughing comedy tradition.