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CONGREVE'S USE OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN PLOT MOTIVATION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF CONGREVE'S USE OF WOMEN CHARACTERS

However much they may disagree as to the morality of Congreve's plays, literary critics do agree that in his work we find the summation of that high type of Comedy of Manners perfected during the period of the Restoration writers. In a study of Congreve's plays, it is logical, therefore, to examine the materials and method used in producing this drama in which Congreve was to achieve such success.

This type of comedy had chosen for its purpose to depict life as the author saw it, and because of the condition of the country and the type of men doing the writing, it was clearly a reflection of the social life of the time. Under Charles I there had been a court comedy, which though suppressed under Cromwell, had managed to exist in secret.[1] When Charles II was restored to the English throne in 1660, a definite change was brought into London life. With the relegation of the old Puritanism into the past, the theaters were reopened legally, and a new note of gayety was noticeable everywhere. But just as the Cromwell regime represented gloom and sobriety, so now did the pendulum swing to the opposite extreme. Society became unlicensed, men and women attained reputations for scandalous conduct which carried over to the stage, and have given these plays an unsavory name even to this day.

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[1] Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Restoration Drama, 68-81.

The authors of this period were themselves young society men, and the theater was intended only for the people of their own class. These young men about town wrote of the only life they knew, a small, cramped, artificial sort of life, but it was sufficient for them and their audiences. To them London was the world, and society the one narrow stratum in which they moved. Their leading characters were heroes, wits, and gallants, all pictures of their contemporaries. As a foil for these wits they drew minor characters to serve as objects of ridicule -- scientists, religious, especially Puritans, learned ladies or those affecting to be learned, and foreigners, particularly the French. Thus, though distorted and exaggerated, we find these comedies a true reflection of the contemporary life of the time.[1]

It is only natural that these authors, being young men, and moving in a young crowd, should use only the escapades and pranks of young men and women in their plots. Youth, and only the youth of the upper class London society move through these comedies. Old age is neither respected nor enjoyed, and its only use is to show up its foibles or to ridicule its aping of younger companions in its foolish quest for a lover. Marriage was not wanted except as a guarantee of more liberty, children were absent except now and then, when an illegitimate offspring was used for a moment. It was clearly the day of youth, a sophisticated day, and youth made the most of it.[2]

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[1] Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 305.

[2] D. Crane Taylor, William Congreve, 3-5.

In construction as well as in material the Comedy of Manners had a very definite formula. Each play had the definite motif of the period, namely, sex intrigue and sex opposition. The plot relies mainly on these intrigues, with the humorous characterization incidental. There was generally a pair of decent lovers to indulge in sentiment rather than raillery, while a bewildering number of lovers battle their way through the play, resorting to all sorts of tricks and deceptions to gain their own ends.[1] To them, love was simply a battle of the sexes, which was not a strange conclusion to reach when one considers the social life of the day.

We have said that this type of comedy was perfected during the Restoration period, but like all other dramatic forms it was a thing of growth, and the Restoration with its letting down of barriers and its furnishing of material was merely the culminating point, in which the writers achieved a perfect copy. The Comedy of Manners was above all realistic in portraying men and manners, and the foundation of this growth toward realism was laid over sixty years before in the person of Ben Jonson. In his plays Jonson "mirrored what he saw of men and manners with an untiring fidelity,"[2] so it is with him we will begin, when we study the dramatists who developed the Comedy of Manners as a means of expression.

This, then, was the formula of the Comedy of Manners to

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[1] Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 305.
[2] Ashley H. Thorndyke, ibid., 189.

which Congreve fell heir. Using this, in each play the plot always concern a hero who is involved with several women, all of whom are in love with him, and at least one who is both able and determined to thwart his plans of marrying the one he loves. Through these women the play takes various twists and turns, and though true love at last rises triumphant, the series of episodes engineered by the plotting of the ladies gives them some part in the management of the play.

A little further study of these women used by Congreve to both help and hinder the plot, shows that they fall into very definite type characters. The first and most outstanding of these is the heroine. A lady of quality always, she is in love with the hero though she affects indifference. She is extremely witty, and in the exchange of repartee invariably comes off with the honors. She secures the man she wants in spite of her opponent's schemes and tricks, but to the last she maintains to her lover that she must be pursued.

Opposed to this heroine, we generally find at least one cast mistress. Motivated by jealousy she attempts to change the plot and wreck the course of the hero's romance, usually by the means of such trickery as forged letters, malicious gossip to discredit the gallant with his future father-in-law, or similar devices to break off the match. Though ultimately these tricks are discovered, in the meantine they supply motive power to carry the story toward a climax.

Less important to the main theme, but invaluable in the sub-plots are the "precieuse" portraits he uses. Whether a wife who rules her husband while she is deceiving him and enjoying her own liberty, an old lovesick woman, or an affected pretender to learning, each is perfect in her part. They also furnish opposition to the hero and help bewilder him. When he tries to inveigle her into something that will react to his advantage, she discovers his schemes much sooner than he finds out the plots of his enemies. These women furnish much of the comedy of the plays, and serve as excellent foils for the virtues of the heroine.

In addition to these, there is a class of women servants, who, though they are carrying out the directions of the leading characters of the play, nevertheless show such ingenuity and ready wit in extricating themselves and their mistresses from delicate situations that they deserve a word in themselves. Often, too, information given by them helps the hero or heroine to foil another plot, or reveals to them the trend events are taking.

With this knowledge of the type of women we find represented in the Comedy of Manners, it is interesting to note the ancestors of this type, those women who found a place in the early realistic comedies, when the first steps were being taken in the opposite direction from the romantic play then in existence. In these plays, as a character for portrayal the woman's part was negligible. This is easily understood

when we remember that the woman's parts must be played by young boys,[1] who, while competent, could hardly be expected to arouse the audience's enthusiasm. It was much more important for the author to put the emphasis on a staunch villain, a wily old rogue, or a blustering braggart.

As a part of the plot the women are used mostly to indicate the "humours" of the men, whether it be jealousy, avarice, greed for power, or any other quality that could be so designated. The jealous husband might be shown plotting because he suspected his wife of cheating him, or the brother using a weak sister as a pawn in his ventures, using her as security as he would any piece of property, even offering her in exchange for certain advantages given to him. Again the woman might be the butt of all the ridicule, placing her on a lower intellectual level, incapable of understanding the finer points of their manly jests. At all events, she was moved about at the behest of the men, seemingly meek enough, nor did she object strenuously, even when, as in one case, she was handed over to another man by her husband, that he might secure a better chance for an inheritance.

But as these women represented the first women characters in the realistic drama, so did their creator, Ben Jonson, represent the beginnings of a new comedy when he began his writings in the Elizabethan period. It was there that began

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[1]Walter P. Eaton, The Drama in English, 112.

the gradual shift in comic standards toward the more realistic type. This movement slowly asserted itself in the late Elizabethan comedy, gathered energy in the Court drama of Charles I, became more defined in the work of Etherege's immediate predecessors, and ultimately expressed that new spirit in Etherege's own work.[1] This final type was the true Comedy of Manners.

As the Comedy of Manners developed, women gradually won for themselves a more prominent place on the stage. By the time this comedy had achieved a definite formula in material and construction, women had also achieved a very definite status. Congreve, as the last of the great Comedy of Manners playwrights, if we except Vanbrugh and Farquhar who led its decline, fell heir to an established tradition. Just what this tradition consists of, and how he follows it, is the pleasure of this paper to trace.

To do this properly, it is first necessary to trace briefly the development of the comedy from Jonson's time to Congreve's own era, and side by side with that, to indicate the trend the writers of this period gave toward making women a more important part in plot motivation. Once having clearly formulated the basic plan of the heritage of plays to which Congreve had access, we are ready to analyze Congreve's own efforts.

In this analysis we shall show that Congreve adopted the

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[1] Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 2.

material, the social life of the day, the formula, that is placing in juxtaposition the true and false wits, the theme of sex antagonism, the intrigue plot, and finally the intellectual and moral equality status of woman.

We shall further show that to the traditional characters he added a new character, a charming, witty heroine, who matched the hero, sometimes outshone him, and always excelled in wit and intellect the other characters in the play.

We shall show his women to be fully equipped to direct the plot, pursue the men they want, rule their husbands, outwit their enemies, and hold off their lovers until it suits their purpose to accept their declarations of love.

For Congreve's portraits of his women are his special contribution to the Comedy of Manners. Through them, he reaches the heights in comic dialogue. Every sentence they speak exhibits them as spirited copies of the society ladies of the time, and every polished phrase used indicates the characteristics peculiar to the speaker. In this alone, this manner of drawing his women characters, Congreve could be rated superior to his fellow writers. As Palmer says, "It is a piece of genius in a writer to make a woman's manner of speech portray her."[1]

But Congreve's women are not merely brilliant portraits. Through them the formula for the Comedy of Manners is definitely changed. The formula, up to this time, was for the

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[1]John Palmer, Comedy of Manners, 200.

plot to be in full control of the true-wit of the play. In Congreve this control is imperiled by the interference of the women; and in the degree that they interfere, and to the extent they take over the plot, the Comedy of Manners formula is different in Congreve than in the other writers of this type of drama.

In attempting to show the part played by Congreve's women in the Comedy of Manners, we shall not only give a synopsis of their part in the plays, but shall quote directly from the text of each play under discussion, for only in their own words can you get an adequate picture of these famous women who "show up in solid relief against the dizzy world of Restoration comedy."[1]

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[1]Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy 1660-1720, 149.

CHAPTER II

JONSONIAN BEGINNINGS

When Ben Jonson began to write, the importance of the theater in the life of London had been rapidly increasing, and the drama had been gaining recognition as a form of literature. Shakespeare and his contemporaries had created a national drama that was both popular and political. They had broken away from classical modes, and each writer sought to simply meet the popular demand through dramatization of story. There was no attempt made to mirror life. The main tendency was romantic, but they had a few minor tendencies that could be carried over to plays based on realism and intrigue, or on manners. Its stock characters,clever servants, parasites, misers, and braggart soldiers, as well as its schemes of a series of tricks brought about through disguises, came to be widely adopted in English drama.[1]

When Jonson was writing for the stage in 1598, he attempted to recall comedy from its romantic aspects. He intended to alter his own practice and reform the stage. In him we find the reaction from the absurdities of the forms already existing, a return to more classical standards, and the establishment of a realistic and satiric comedy on a rational plan.[2] Here then was the leader in the movement, which gave to realistic and satiric comedy a new importance.

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[1]Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 13-14.
[2]Ashley H. Thorndyke, "Ben Jonson," Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. VI, Chap. I, 15.

In "Every Man in His Humour" he sets forth a definite programme in the prologue. It promises:

> "deeds, and language such as men do use:
> And persons, such as comedy would choose,
> When she would show an image of the times,
> And sport with human follies, not with crimes."[1]

This play was the first of this "comedy of humours," the "humour" applying to any follies and absurdities used to designate the prevailing traits of a number of distinctly defined characters, illustrative of London manners. The word "humour" in this sense does not mean humour as we know it today. Jonson considered that various vapours in the brain caused the various traits of character, or "humours."[2] His own definition of these is set forth in the Prologue to "Every Man Out of His Humour."

> "As when some one peculiar quality
> Doth so possess a man that it doth draw
> All his affects, his spirits, and his powers
> In their confluctions all to runne one way.
> This may be truly said to be a Humour,
> But that a Rooke in wearing a pide feather,
> The cabal hatband, or the three-piled ruffe,
> A yard of shoe-tie, or the Switzers knot
> On his French garters, should affect a Humour,
> O, 'tis more than ridiculous."[3]

Jonson had two aims in the construction of his plays. He wished to take a group of persons showing the humours of the time, and from these to build a plot exposing and ridiculing their excesses. Also he wanted to follow the models of Terence and Plautus in using the plots of tricks and types of character. We see this in the persons in his plays, the

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[1] Ben Jonson, Every Man in His Humour, Prologue, 5. Brinsley Nicholson and C.H. Hereford, ed.
[2] Walter P. Eaton, The Drama in English, 115.
[3] Ben Jonson, Every Man Out of His Humour, Prologue, 120. Brinsley Nicholson and C.H. Hereford, ed.

jealous husband, the braggart, the gulls, the confidential servant, as well as in the devices of disguise, but each is developed with abundant originality, and the persons in the play are given London manners. There is no sentiment or romance in the plays, and nothing marvelous or thrilling.[1] The first of these plays "Every Man in His Humour" was the basis of the comedy with which we are to deal, a play "that was destined for nearly two centuries to remain a model for the English Comedy of Manners."[2]

Four other comedies of Jonson that followed, "Volpone," "Epicoene," "The Alchemist," and "Bartholomew Fair" rank with "Every Man in His Humour" as masterpieces of comedy. Each is a humour comedy and satirizes the society of the time, but range from the farcical tone of "Epicoene" to the bitter satire of "Volpone." All are modeled on classical plays, but while "The Alchemist" is most Latin in situation and plot, "'Bartholomew Fair' is one of the most distinctly English of all our comedies."[3]

As we said before, Jonson starts with characters exhibiting certain traits, and builds a plot in which to give them a chance to be shown. Through trickery and deception the plots work out, and though London and contemporary manners are portrayed, the plays are neither comedies of intrigue nor manners, but more than anything they are comedies of character. In

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[1] Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 171.
[2] Ashley H. Thorndyke, ibid., 172.
[3] Ashley H. Thorndyke, ibid., 174.

these five masterpieces Jonson shows a dramatic vigour in character portrayal,[1] and while the people used in his plays are neither gay nor fine mannered, they represent the times, which offered many subjects for ridicule or satire.

"Volpone" is one of Jonson's most vigorous plays and exposes vice rather than folly. The story concerns a Venetian, Volpone, who pretends to be dying in order to receive gifts from those who wish to be his heirs. Aiding in this scheme is a clever servant who finally betrays his master, but both men go too far in their trickery and are punished at the last. During the course of the play, one would-be heir disinherits his son, and another offers his wife to Volpone in hopes of securing the fortune. Though to us the play seems lacking in laughter, the characters horrible, the language gross, and the play a portrayal of depraved human nature, it was one of the most popular plays of the time, and continued to be so even after the Restoration.

In "Epicoene" Jonson returns to his earlier idea of humour comedy, and returns also to London for the scene. Current fashions are portrayed, the characters speak in prose, and the play is more fittingly described as comedy than "Volpone." The character, Morose, hates noise so much that he takes the most absurd precautions to obtain silence. Through the plots of his nephew he is married to a "silent woman" who turns out to be a noisy shrew, and finally, to the

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[1]Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 174-175.

surprise of most of the characters, is found to be not a woman but a boy. The clever nephew wins a fortune, and the relieved uncle is free of a wife.

In "The Alchemist" Jonson again depicts a choice collection of dupes and dupesters. An alchemist, Subtle, with Dol Common and Face, the housekeeper, has set up a center for trickery in the house of Face's master. A long line of gulls come here, and the author has named them for their occupation. We find Dapper to be a lawyer's clerk, Drugger a tobacco man, while the Puritan Brethren are called Wholesome and Annanias. Kastrill, a foolish heir, and Dame Pliant, his widowed sister, are also important in the play. The exposure of their greed and the intanglements in which they are involved move the plot along, until the Master returns unexpectedly, and joins Face in keeping the spoils, including the widow, while the others find themselves outside. Alchemy and Puritanism are the main matters of ridicule, as they will be found also in some later plays, but this drama is one of Jonson's best for fun and elaboration.

The last of these comedies, "Bartholomew Fair" presents a conglomeration of characters, most of whom are fools or rogues, present at a Fair in Elizabethan London. Trickery is used throughout, and so many characters are shown that it is bewildering for the reader to follow them, but Ursula, the pig woman, a silly wife, a Puritan, and a reforming judge are the most outstanding. It is original in its plot, something new in comedy,

and certainly is an unvarnished presentation of human nature to an extent not allowed on our stage even today. As Jonson was aiming at realism, in this play he achieved the type of comedy of humours as he intended it to be written.

It is in these humour comedies that we must observe the beginnings of a new type of drama. The formula for this consisted of placing certain types of characters represented by "humours" into a scene of Latin intrigue. The scene was laid in London, and with the presentation of city life the problem of sex was more pronounced. Most important of all, they adopted a satirical and censorial attitude toward contemporary follies and vices.

We can see that these plays resemble other types of comedy in that they are comedies of intrigue and manner; they are like other attempts at satire and realism; they are based on systematic attempts at analysis of personality; they give little place to love or romance or sentiment. But in addition to this they endeavored to depict and criticize the actual life of the day. They mirrored men and manners and made their own interpretations of them.[1]

Hardly were these comedies written when they began to be imitated. Beaumont and Fletcher studied Jonson, as did Marston, Middleton, and Chapman. The comedy of humours became a model which few writers disregarded, and all realistic

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[1]Ashley H.Thorndyke, English Comedy, 188-189.

comedy was influenced by it. For Jonson had created a new realistic comedy, and in his "humours" anticipated the general methods of characterization used by comic dramatists of the Restoration which he foreshadowed. Restoration comedy was to owe much to this realistic pattern of comedy developed within the Elizabethan tradition. Therefore we may consider Jonson's greatest contribution to these Restoration comic dramatists to be his "humour" types, which we will find used over and over again, "a saving inspiration to the lesser Restoration dramatists."[1]

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[1] Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 14.

CHAPTER III

COMEDY FROM JONSON TO CONGREVE

The success met by Jonson's comedies led to an imitation of those features which appealed most to the audiences, and as a consequence we will meet, in most plays written at this time, stock characters bent on satirizing the age by making fun of the latest fads of the time. The first of Jonson's imitators was Fletcher, yet in his works we can trace a definite step toward the comedy used by the Restoration dramatists. The Jonsonian hero, the gruff soldier, the lustful tyrant are found in his plays, but along with them he uses two other types which achieve prominence. One is a scapegrace young hero, and the other a spirited, talkative heroine. This clever, resourceful, and slightly shrewish girl opposes the hero in the battle of love, and though they match their wits often and excellently, the woman is generally the winner of the contest, for Fletcher's young women cannot well be surpassed.[1]

These two types of characters predict in a way, the hero and heroine of the later Comedy of Manners. The women are particularly vacillating, changing rapidly from one mood to another, so that their instability confuses their lovers. Later heroines were also anxious that their gallants should not feel too sure of themselves. Amaranta in "The Spanish Curate," Celia in "The Humorous Lieutenant" and Oriana and

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[1]Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 211.

her two friends in "The Wild Goose Chase," are good examples of this new character. Oriana especially, in matching her wits against Mirabel, predicts something new in women, for to oppose the impudence, cynicism, and witty speech of Fletcher's gallants required capable and competent young women.[1]

But Fletcher, in spite of his successful characterization, made his characters secondary to plot and situation. His theme, the struggle for mastery between man and woman, is certainly nearer to Congreve than to the intrigues of Jonson. In his use of repartee, in exchange of lively wit, and in the presentation of sex relations on an entirely unsentimental basis, Fletcher opened a new way, although the old tricks and disguises are depended upon to see the plot through to completion.[2]

The three Elizabethans, Middleton, Massinger, and Shirley also show the influence of Jonson. In them we find his trick of naming characters after the characteristic they represent. In "A Trick to Catch the Old One" we see such names as Hoard and Lucre, in "A New Way to Pay Old Debts" are Overreach, Greedy, Wellborn and Allworth, while "The Lady of Pleasure" has Bornwell and Kickshaw. Likewise, in these plays, the methods of plot are obvious, as tricks, disguises and schemes succeed one another.

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[1]Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 20-21.
[2]Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 208.

Fletcher's work had been of the manners and intrigue type, but Middleton, like Jonson, was a leader in realistic comedy, in his less satirical, less moral representation of London manners. For the contemporary life of the city attracted his attention, and the trafficking which goes on between different social classes offered him vivid contrasts. Jonson still wrote after 1616, but was adding nothing new to the new comedy; it was during these years that Middleton wrote romantic tragedies and tragi-comedies in collaboration with William Rowley. During this period in his work, he used other characters than dishonest shopkeepers and lawyers, and other themes than bargains between men and women for their bodies.

But from 1600 to 1608 Middleton wrote a series of realistic comedies dealing almost entirely with city manners.[1] Realism and satire are found in them, in his attempt to make his persons and scenes as real and amusing as he could. He was on the lookout for every folly of fashion or new thing in religion. He was familiar with lawyers and saw in them possibilities of entertainment. He knew the phraseology of astrologers, and the oddities of speech of the ordinary man.[2] As a result, in his plays his characters talk as they would naturally talk in every day life. Like Jonson, Middleton was not interested in developing individual characters, but used mostly examples of fixed follies or "humours" to create

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[1]Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 220.
[2]Arthur Symons, "Middleton and Rowley," Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. VI, Chap. III, 64.

an effect of type.

In 1623, after having written other types of drama with Rowley, Middleton returned to his early manner of farcical comedy of city life in "Anything for a Quiet Life," with shopkeeping scenes of brilliance and interesting domestic situations. In this we see his real field of comedy, picturing ambitious London tradesmen seeking for themselves the privileges enjoyed by gentlemen. Success is spelled in social advancement, therefore, it was necessary for Middleton to picture a class to whom this was a real aim. As a result his pictures of London manners are restricted to the tradespeople rather than the higher classes of society.

Massinger also used the tradespeople, but more with the purpose of showing the commercial classes as threatening the place of the gentry. This gave him a formula for his plays, and a way to contrast the gallants and the ones who aped their way of living. These were the predecessors to those brilliant true and false wits of the Restoration dramatists.

"A New Way to Pay Old Debts" is a play indicating this new, wealthy class attempting to mingle with the gentry. Like Middleton's "A Trick to Catch the Old One," the hero, by means of a feigned marriage plans to gain funds to settle with his creditors. It gives a clear picture of Overreach, whose whole aim in life is to marry his daughter into the nobility. Yet in this same play we find Greed, who is as clear a representation

of a "humour" as anything in Jonson. All in all, the plays of Massinger show little that is new. He has simply continued the work of Jonson and Middleton, with the addition of adapting the ending of Fletcher, wherein the women win the men they want.

Shirley, the last of the trio, continued the practice of the writers of the early period, but began to make a change in his characters by leaving the tradesfolk for the gentry. Writing during the reign of Charles I, like Fletcher, he developed a Court comedy. The London merchants and their wives seldom appear, but his plays deal with courtiers and ladies seeking the gayety of fashionable life. He had this added advantage. When he wrote, Jonson, Fletcher, and Middleton were already in print. He tried to match the humours of Jonson, but his plays adapt themselves better to the modes of Fletcher and Massinger, so he carried on in their tradition, yet he is almost as close to the Restoration Comedy of Manners as to the romance and comedies of Fletcher.[1]

With Shirley we see the end of the romantic play, as it now has no further development of importance. From now on, Comedy of Manners moves toward Congreve in a direction beyond Jonson and Fletcher, though the line of demarcation between the two is still faint in Shirley. We note it most in the absence of the tradespeople, and in the introduction of more verbal wit. We find in "Hyde Park" a class of peo-

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[1]Ashley H. Thorndyke, Comedy of Manners, 235-236.

ple of leisure with certain social standards, and notice that in "The Lady of Pleasure," nobles and gallants furnish the characters. The basis of this last play is the story of a country gentleman married to a young wife, who insists on spending her time leading a gay life in London. The characters of Scentlove, Kickshaw, and Littleworth, though labeled with Jonson's tag names, suggest far more the elegant dandies of the later comedies. This play furnishes an apparently realistic satire of social customs in 1635, and undoubtedly was one of the plays that led to the closing of the theaters in 1642.

This closing of the English theaters brought to a close one of the most productive periods of the stage. In their effort to clean up the stage by making the acting of plays a crime,[1] the Puritans were only partially successful, for the darkening of the playhouses for a period of eighteen years, was sufficient to interrupt but not wholly break the chain of English drama. Private performances were given during this time, and served as a link between Elizabethan and Restoration drama.[2]

One of the first acts of Charles II after the Restoration of 1660, was the re-opening of the playhouses, and this year also marked the birth of the famous Restoration Comedy. Much has been written of the influence brought to bear on the

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[1] George H. Nettleton, English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, 14.
[2] George H. Nettleton, ibid., 20.

stage by Charles and the courtiers he brought with him from his French exile, and the added French influence of Moliere on the English writers. It is true that certain slight effects can be seen from these sources, but most critics agree that a comparison of the plays written before the Cromwell regime, with those produced during the Restoration, shows clearly how one drama evolved from the other. It was not necessary for these writers to go outside of the English tradition to secure their models.[1] Indeed, some of these writers who heralded the Restoration, while chronologically included in the group constituting Congreve's contemporaries, are much closer allied to the writers who closed the preceding era. In this group we find Dryden. For the year 1664, which marked the appearance of Dryden's "Rival Ladies," also saw the advent of Etherege's "The Comical Revenge or Love in a Tub." But Dryden and Etherege, while both Restoration dramatists, occupy different places within the Comedy of Manners. Dryden contributed little to the main course of its development, while Etherege was a very necessary part of it.

The year before this, in 1663, Dryden had produced his first comedy, "The Wild Gallant." The new social standards which we have observed in Shirley are found here, even while the plot is one of Elizabethan intrigue. The "precieuse" tradition which prevailed during the time of Charles I had

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1. Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy 1660-1720, 39-57.

been resumed with the opening of the theaters. The best features of this are found in this play, the same features which Etherege and Congreve were to use later. One innovation we do meet here, the witty, concise, language of Dryden, forerunner of the type of language employed by Congreve in form of epigrams and wit. The hero, Loveby, is a typical Restoration comedy type, and when given an opportunity to test his wit, never fails to respond as a gallant should.

Another important play of Dryden, important because it is said to have been the first worthy presentation of flirtation so much used in later comedies, was "Secret Love," although this play was really a tragi-comedy. It depicts the comic courtship of Celadon and Florimel, wherein the hero's escapades are made embarrassing by Florimel dressing as a young gallant and winning his mistresses' affections. These two finally compromise on the "provisos" of a marriage contract, wherein they set forth their expectations of a happy marriage.

In theme this was a typical Restoration play, and Congreve was to build one of the best scenes of "The Way of the World" around this "proviso" type of incident. A famous critic comments on the first appearance of this flirtation theme as a forerunner of Restoration theory of marriage.

> "This is the first worthy presentation of a main comic theme of Restoration drama -- flirtation. It differs from Elizabethan love-making, not so much because of its greater licentiousness as because of its recognition of a code and a manner. True love has little

> to do with the case, the young man always wants the young woman on first sight, and she is equally determined in her desire for him, and in the end they are usually safely and happily married. But that is not the comedy. They are young ladies and gallants of a leisure class playing a game of hide and seek. The code says that marriage is a dull bondage and love a dangerous disease and that either is intolerable without wit. The first duty is to flirt. Any result may be excused if the game is only well played."[1]

The next year Dryden returned to this theme in "An Evening's Love," and again, the year after in his comic masterpiece, "Marriage a la Mode." In this he continued the flirtation aspect, drawing a portrait of Melantha, one of the best of his characterizations, to exhibit humour and wit. After this, however, his works show little to further the Comedy of Manners, reverting rather to the Elizabethan type of drama.

On the whole, Dryden's comedies fall into the same classification as the other writers following Fletcher, whom Dryden had studied along with Jonson. His theme is always the intrigues of lovers mixed with the "humours" of ordinary life. But he is one step nearer the Restoration type and farther from the humouristic realism of Jonson in that he showed a sense of an established society, and a code of manners belonging to it. In this way he helped point the way to the Comedy of Manners as Etherege and Congreve finally developed it.

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[1]Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 282.

But from Jonson down, these writers of whom we have spoken were but stepping stones to the Restoration Comedy of Manners, as exemplified in Etherege and his successors. It was Etherege, with Wycherley and Vanbrugh, who entertained the theater-goers of the day. That he was "the first dramatist to express the Restoration comic spirit with artistic completeness is now very generally recognized."[1] "The Comical Revenge or Love in a Tub," his first play, produced four years after the Restoration was "to open a new period"[2] for the English stage. At this time the revolt against Puritanism was at its height. The court, composed of wits and fops, was devoid of all ethical sentiment. The theater was almost a club, a place to meet friends and gossip, and, as only the upper class attended, it had a great place in social life. A play was judged by its wit and repartee. Social life was the sole standard of judgment. The fops dreaded marriage, and as their code did not include the idea of faithfulness to one man or woman, they expected the stage to represent this idea. Their "society" talk was often vulgar, no delicacy was shown in choosing the topic for conversation, and so it was not expected to be on the stage. Relations between the sexes were unemotional, while woman's freedom was almost that of a man. Mistresses were not shunned, and were freely discussed in public. In conversation sex was a source for wit and

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[1] Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 137.
[2] John Palmer, Comedy of Manners, 64.

repartee, therefore was expected to be used in the play in the same way. The social and intellectual equality of men and women helped the wit in scenes where both sexes appear. The resulting comedies were a realistic and true picture of the society of the period.[1]

> "They are, briefly, comedies depicting realistically and in a sinister spirit, the life of the society of the city. The hero is ordinarily a man pursuing the pleasures of drink, play and love, with a complete disregard for the well being of others; and the heroine is a woman, whose scruples if she has any, are based on prudence rather than virtue. Great emphasis is laid on repartee for its own sake, and upon epigrams pro-pounding an elaborate and systematic code of immorality."[2]

This was the type of comedy that Etherege aimed to portray. Fletcher had developed the motif of the duel of the sexes, and Etherege seized it as the most promising material of the time. In "The Comical Revenge or Love in a Tub" he uses four distinct plots, but the one involving the courtship of Sir Frederick and the Widow is the real Restoration one, the others being of the Fletcher-Middleton type. The duel of the sexes between Sir Frederick and Widow Rich is most pronounced. The passages must be read to be appreciated.

> Sir Fred. Widow, I dare not venture myself in these amorous shades; you have a mind to be talking of Love I perceive, and my hearts too tender to be trusted with such conversation.
>
> Widow. I did not imagine you were so foolishly conceited; is it your Wit or your Person, Sir, that is so taking?[3]

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[1] Frances S. McCamic, Sir George Etherege, 38-39.
[2] Joseph Krutch, Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration, 6-7
[3] George Etherege, The Comical Revenge or Love in a Tub, II, 1, 14. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, ed.

But Sir Frederick watches his chance and takes it soon.

> Sir Fred. By those lips,--
> Widow. Nay, pray forbear, Sir.
> Sir Fred. Who's conceited now, Widow? Could you imagine I was so fond to kiss them?
> Widow. You cannot blame me for standing on my guard so near an Enemy.
> Sir Fred. Let us join hands then, Widow.
> Widow. Without the dangerous help of a parson I do not fear it, Sir.[1]

In "The Man of Mode" sex antagonism is especially strong, amounting almost to spite. In this play also, the relative position of the true and false wit is most clearly indicated, and the verbal duels resulting from these tendencies show in its best form Etherege's chief contribution to comedy.

There were eight years between these two plays, and in the meantime Wycherley's four comedies had appeared, as well as Dryden's "Marriage a la Mode." "The Man of Mode," however, is nearer to Congreve than any of the others, as it is a fine example of a pure Comedy of Manners. It contains no impossible tricks, and its only "humour" is Sir Fopling Flutter, the first but by no means last French fop on the English stage. The hero has admirable manners, while his wit is superior to any emotions. He discards his mistresses coolly, and carries off the heiress in spite of opposition. The wits and fools of the play are well balanced, and there are several other sets of lovers, all ladies and gentlemen, representative of the society for which it was written.

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[1] George Etherege, The Comical Revenge or Love in a Tub, II,1, 16. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, ed.

In the juxtaposition of Dorimant, the true wit, with the fool who merely apes the other, Etherege was setting a model for Mirabell and Witwoud in "The Way of the World." These represent the spirit of the age, good and bad form. It was the duty of man to find one and avoid the other, for style was the man.[1]

In the same class are Wycherley's plays, for they were intended to give a realistic picture of the manners of the age, emphasized by wit. But Wycherley observes a larger part of London life, showing the city as well as the court. His plays are more indecent, showing a long line of rakes and harlots and immoral characters, but also he shows one example of unselfish love in the affairs of Valentine and Christina in "Love in a Wood." In this same play is Dapperwit, the successor to Sir Fopling and the predecessor of Witwoud. His next play "The Gentleman Dancing Master" is intended more to ridicule imitations of foreign manners, and is little more than a farcical exaggeration of manners.

Two other of his plays "The Country Wife" and "The Plain Dealer" are rather disgusting pictures of society, and yet their coarseness and indecency were representative of the age in which they were written.

But regardless of the morality of these plays, it is easy to see the trend their production gave to the Comedy

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[1]John Palmer, Comedy of Manners, 86.

of Manners. Between Wycherley's first play in 1671, and Congreve's in 1693, no great writer of drama appeared, so we may safely consider the plays of Etherege and Wycherley the models for comedy of manners and wit, and the true predecessors of Congreve's great comedies.

On the basis of the tradition established by these writers, every Comedy of Manners must now contain certain characteristics. It must be built on an intrigue or trick, most Restoration comedies containing several. The humouristic characterization is only incidental to the intrigue, but there must be as much wit and reflection of current manners as possible. These tricks generally center about a gallant's attempts to marry an heiress or fool a husband. The difficulties encountered make for other lesser plots, and their success or failure make up the play.. Certain absurd persons are used as foils for the ready wits of the leading characters. Indeed, the difference between good and bad manners was to form a very important part in depicting the manners of the day. Affectation, foppery, and coquetry were themes for plays which attained their heights in discriminating between imitations of false wit and polished phrases that denoted true wit.

Thus, twenty years after the Restoration, we find a definite type of comedy had emerged on the English stage. Fletcher's type had been midway between Jonson and the Comedy of Manners, and the drama for which they had laid

the foundations was now destined to present itself on the stage for the next two decades.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN FROM JONSON TO CONGREVE

In the preceding chapters we have used Jonson's plays as the basis of the Comedy of Manners with which we are to deal. From Jonson to Congreve, comedy grew and developed a certain trend, but strangely enough women's part in the plot development does not follow such a logical growth.

In the "humour" plays of Jonson, the women seem to appear for two purposes. The first of these is as a necessary part of the plot as planned by the men characters. Of such kind are the women in "Every Man in His Humour," where the wife is necessary to indicate the jealousy of which the husband is a victim. In the same way we find Celia in "Volpone" necessary to her husband if he is to gain a share of the inheritance. She is strictly his property, and though she pleads and protests against being used in such fashion as her husband proposes, still she does little to prevent its accomplishment. There is certainly nothing in this timid, spineless creature to foreshadow the heroine of the Restoration comedy.

Similar to her is Dame Pliant of the "Alchemist," a weak sister abused and ordered about by her foolish young brother. She acquieses willingly to all his plans, seeming to have no mind of her own. Dol Common, in this play, starts off well in having a share in the plots of Face, yet

when the plot is discovered, she too is out-tricked by her erstwhile partner, while he and his master share the spoils for which she worked.

The second way in which Jonson uses his women characters is as the butt of the jests of the wits of the play. Such are the Ladies Collegiate, Mistress Otter, and Mistress Trusty in "Epicoene." Mistress Otter is especially drawn for ridicule. In her we see the first attempt of the women to follow a social code. Her two aims in life are, first, to keep her husband "under correction," and secondly, to get herself admitted into this group of fashionable ladies.[1] In spite of his ridicule of them, the nephew plans to use these ladies in his plot against his uncle, Morose. He does all the planning, however, and right up to the end of the play the women are not taken fully into his confidence, and are not aware that Epicoene is a boy.

In Jonson's plays then, we can detect none of those heroines who dominate the later plays. His great contribution to the Restoration comic dramatists was his "humour" types, which serve as model to so many of the succeeding playwrights, but his women characters are so negligible that they could not be used as models by other writers of this period, even in the formula which used women only as automata.

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[1]Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 18.

His contemporary, Fletcher, as we noted before, used for his theme the struggle for mastery between men and women. In his battle between the sexes we are surprised at the modernness of his scornful ladies. They pick out the lovers they want, go after them, and after they have secured them as husbands, proceed to tame them. Always they are outspoken and determined in the interests of their sex.[1]

The fact that Fletcher used a heroine opposite his hero is a decided departure from Jonson. Add to this the victory of this same heroine when keenness of wit is tested, and Fletcher's women characters have made a great advance over those of "Volpone" and "Epicoene." No longer the property of the men, they have developed a personality of their own. They do not lend themselves to be ordered or directed about, for they are well able to look out for themselves. The plots of the comedies are composed of tricks and mistakes, and these tricks for the most part are perpetrated by the women. In "The Wild Goose Chase," Mirabel, the Wild Goose has successfully eluded women until Oriana decides she will have him. With the help of her tutor she plots to trap him, and though failing several times, and seeming on the verge of giving up, she finally succeeds in her plan. In going after what she wants, she is helped by several men who lend themselves to her plotting. In one instance her brother disguises himself as a suitor in order to arouse Mirabel's jealousy. Oriana is quite shameless when her plans go wrong

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[1] Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 208.

and she is discovered, but undaunted by this she tries again.

In this same play, Roselura and Lilia-Bianca lead their lovers a merry chase, and though the lovers are at last triumphant, it is only because that was what the girls intended all the time. They seem to delight in quarreling with these gallants, who are bewildered at the change in the girls each time they meet. Nor are the girls ever at a loss for words. In this play, probably more than in any other, the manner and subject matter of the dialogue approaches nearer to Restoration comedy.[1]

But all Fletcher's women, whether wronged or victorious, are able to speak for themselves. Estefania in "Rule a Wife and Have a Wife" is one of the best examples of this. She is always mistress of the situation, and controls the plot with confidence and ability. She makes her first appearance in the play as a veiled lady. Perez immediately woos and wins her, and is especially pleased at the thoughts of her money and large house. When it is discovered that she is merely a maid and not the mistress, he, angered at her deception, makes ready to kill her. Estefania meekly asks permission to pray a moment from her prayerbook, which turns out to be a concealed pistol. With this in her hand she directs the plot to a happy ending. Perez recognising her ability to twist him around her finger, expressed his weakness in these words, "I see I am an ass when thou art near me."[2]

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[1] Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 214.

[2] John Fletcher, Rule A Wife and Have a Wife, V, 4, 455. W. W. Greg, ed. Vol. 3.

We see a further example of this in "Wit Without Money," where capable, witty Mary is a match for Thomas; Celia, in "The Humourous Lieutenant" is also well able to care for herself.[1]

It would be a nice, logical development if each succeeding writer would now take these women characters as Fletcher produced them, and develop a new trait or characteristic, until finally the perfection of Congreve should be achieved. But strangely enough, it is Fletcher, the contemporary of Jonson, who produces the women nearest to Congreve, nearer than any of the Restoration writers, though Shirley was to borrow these women of Fletcher for his plays, and Massinger used the Fletcherian ending where the women win the men they want.

Middleton and Dekker first began to have the women assert themselves in "The Roaring Girl." Here Mistress Openwork leads Goshawk on and makes an appointment to meet him. When he comes she denounces him to her husband, and reviles him for trying to take advantage of her. In this same play Moll Cutpurse moves among the men dressed in male attire, and battles her way with words and the sword, and is not the loser in either case. Yet compared with the men characters, the women's parts are insignificant as far as the actual directing of the plot is concerned.

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[1]Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 211.

In "A Trick to Catch the Old One," we find what is probably the best and most typical of all Middleton's plays. It shows the plotting of Witgood, who has wasted his fortune and is deeply in debt. His uncle, Lucre, has the greatest hold on Witgood's possessions in the form of a mortgage on his lands, but many other creditors are pressing him for their pay. A Courtesan, Witgood's cast mistress, and Joyce, a niece of Lucre lend themselves to Witgood's plans, and as a result the uncle surrenders the mortgage, the Courtesan secures a husband, and Joyce is married to Witgood. Witgood has his debts paid, his land back again, and is the richer by many gifts from the uncle. Though the Courtesan, by her part in the trickery, helps materially in the solution of Witgood's difficulties, the schemes and plots originate with him, and while she at times helps direct the plot, at no time is she in control of the action of the play.

Very similar in plot is Massinger's "A New Way to Pay Old Debts." Again an uncle is plotting against a spendthrift nephew, and again the pretense of a coming marriage to a woman of property gives the hero new standing in the community. In this play, however, the woman is a lady, a person of real importance. But the women serve the same purpose, that of preventing the completion of the plots of the villain of the play. Wellborn is forced to plot against his uncle in order to save himself, but only through Lady Allworth lending herself to his schemes is he successful in gaining his

purpose of recovering his estate and paying his creditors. Also unique in family relationship at this time, is the fact that Lady Allworth dictates to her son with whom he shall associate, and he obeys her.

In this same play we see the father-daughter relationship advance a step. In the early part of the play, Overreach is the heavy father, dictating his daughter's line of conduct, even though it mean her ruin, so intent is he on marrying her into the gentry. Later Margaret tricks him, through the plans of Lord Lovell, and marries the hero of her choice, Tom Allworth. However, one feels that without the guidance and support of the men, Margaret would have acquiesed in her father's wishes. The men in Massinger's plays are much more adept at conceiving and executing plans of action than are his women.

Shirley's play, "The Witty Fair One" used this theme of the tyrannical father, who, in his eagerness to marry his daughter attempts to dictate her suitors, only to be duped in the end. Using the court comedy of Fletcher, it was only natural that his women be of the Fletcherian type, in whom we saw the forerunners of Congreve's heroines. In order to make this court comedy realistic, it was necessary to people his scenes with resourceful, witty ladies of fashion. London merchants and their wives could scarcely be used in fashionable life.

Two heroines are found in "The Witty Fair One." Violetta,

the "fair one," is betrothed against her will to Sir Nicholas Treedle, and Brain, a servant is set as a guard by her father, to watch her and outwit her attempts to favor her lover, Aimwell. Several plots of Violetta and Sensible, her maid, go astray through Brain's watchfulness. But Violetta out-tricks him at last, marries Aimwell, and through trickery, Sir Nicholas finds himself wedded to the maid.[1] The other heroine, Penelope, is kept busy in tricking and reforming, Fowler, a libertine, and the man of her choice.

In this play the women are treated as though they had a mind equal to that of man, and use it to achieve their goal. They are not regarded too idealistically, but their use is to serve rather as a companion to man. We find Fowler saying to Penelope in expression of this, "Come, remember you are imperfect creatures without a man; be not you a goddess; I know you are mortal, and had rather make you my companion than my idol; this is no flattery now."[2] Woman was to be neither the goddess of one age, nor the useful creature of another, but a rational human being.

Shirley's later comedies continue in this same way. When Carol matches her wits with Fairfield in "Hyde Park," they are both equal to one another. As a scornful lady she repulses all her suitors, but when Fairfield asks one favor of her, that she will not see him again, she feels differently, and after a series of tricks on both sides she marries him. Two other women carry out affairs with their lovers, but Carol

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[1] Felix Schelling, Elizabethan Drama 1558-1642, 289.
[2] James Shirley, The Witty Fair One, I, 3, 15. Edmund Gosse, ed.

is the real heroine. She is "an excellent example of the sprightly, witty, virtuous, but free-spoken young woman of fashion. She and her lover, Fairfield, conduct their courtship by the process of a trial of wit and become each other's by right of mutual conquest."[1] As a study in social affectation, she shows the tendencies of the women to be absorbed in social pleasures.[2] In this social affectation, we see Congreve's heroines, and by many she is considered to foreshadow Millamant. Her speech on marriage in which she recounts all the pleasures of single life and questions whether it is wise to exchange suitors for husbands is very similar to Millamant's views on keeping lovers as she expresses it in "The Way of the World." Carol says,

> "I
> Dispose my frowns and favours like a princess;
> Deject, advance, undo, create again;
> It keeps the subjects in obedience,
> And teaches 'em to look at me with distance."[3]

Millamant says of lovers--

> "Why, one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases; and, then, if one pleases, one makes more."[4]

But it is in "The Lady of Pleasure," that we find an interesting study of a woman type to be found later in many comedies. Celestina, a widow of sixteen, maintains her good sense in the midst of fashionable life, and helps Sir Thomas in his plot to cure his wife. He is in despair over her ex-

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[1]Felix Schelling, Elizabethan Drama 1558-1642, 291.
[2]Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 41.
[3]James Shirley, Hyde Park, I, 2, 195. Edmund Gosse, ed.
[4]William Congreve, The Way of the World, II, 2, 347. A. C. Ewald, ed.

travagances, and decides to cure her by outrivaling her. Lady Bornwell, the wife, is strongly contrasted with Celestina. The latter not only helps Sir Thomas in his affairs, but cures her own suitor of libertinism. She is the last word in fashionable manners, even toward the suitors at whom she laughs in private. Her affectations too, are merely the following of a definite social code of behavior.[1]

Although Shirley does not approach as near to Restoration comedy in his handling of women characters as does Fletcher, yet his men and women play a game of wits in a manner that points toward the new comedy. And his women do attempt to be both witty and fashionable, as we have seen in Violetta, Carol and Celestina. As one critic says,

> "His humour is personified in his sprightly ladies; they desire pleasure, employ what wit they possess, and put a little vivacity into the game of existence without losing a saving quantity of good sense."[2]

But the new comedy, heralded by the Restoration, was new in only a few details. It really picked up the comedy where it had left off eighteen years before, but there is one point to be noticed here that helped in focusing attention on the women characters of the drama. When the theaters reopened in England, women appeared regularly for the first time on the English stage.[3] Previous to this time, young boys had taken the parts of women, and now with the larger

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[1]Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 40.
[2]Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 245.
[3]George H. Nettleton, English Drama of the Restoration, 3.

opportunities offered these character parts by the employment of actresses,[1] it would be a natural thing for the author to give more prominence to these parts in his plays.

> "It was also inevitable that with real actresses on the stage, there would be more parts written for women, a less masculine type of drama, and in time distinct emphasis on the suffering heroine. . . ."[2]

Certain actresses of the day became very popular with the audience, and playwrights often wrote a part for some particular idol of the stage to portray. Nell Gwyn, Moll Davis, Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Bracegirdle are names that occur over and over in accounts of famous actresses. Mrs. Barry became the idol of Otway, and was his model and inspiration of Monimia and of Belvidera, and by her acting helped establish heroic tragedy in a place of popularity. Congreve is said to have written his addresses in his Valentine to Mrs. Bracegirdle as Angelica, in "Love for Love," and intended her as Millamant in "The Way of the World."[3] Another critic asserts that "Congreve wrote the heroine's part in each of his plays specifically for her."[4]

Dryden, the first of the Restoration dramatists, was a link between the two periods, belonging neither to one nor the other. His first play is, of course, nearest to Jonson, but even it shows traces of its own age. In "The Wild

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[1]William Archer, The Old Drama and the New, 144.
[2]Walter P. Eaton, Drama in English, 158-159.
[3]Allardyce Nicoll, History of Restoration Drama, 72-73.
[4]D. Crane Taylor, William Congreve, 37.

Gallant" we find Isabelle, the first of those wards of old uncles whom we find so often in Restoration comedy. She has for her chief aim the social life, and explains the modern young woman's code of etiquette to her uncle and country lover. She is determined to capture a rich husband by her wit. She promotes the love affair of her cousin, Constance, with Loveby, and soothes the uncle's anger at the match. Like Congreve's Millamant, she cannot bear to think that a mere husband should put an end to her freedom, so she announces her provisos as to marriage, lest it interfere with her liberty.[1]

Constance and Loveby match wits again and again in this play, yet she is thoroughly in love with him and is simply testing his wit, and he is simply responding as a witty young lover should.[2]

"The Wild Gallant" is said to be the last comedy in the "precieuse" manner before Etherege wrote his first play. In this play "Dryden renews with charm and animation the best features of earlier 'precieuse' comedy, and in doing so defines, to a considerable degree, the comic program of Etherege and of Congreve."[3]

Another of Dryden's characters that might well be a model for Congreve's Millamant, is Melantha in "Marriage a La Mode."

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[1] Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 132-133.
[2] Kathleen Lynch, ibid., 134.
[3] Kathleen Lynch, ibid., 136.

She is the "Frenchified feminine fop" who "haunts the court"[1] hoping to be taken for one of the intimates of royalty. Rhodophil, who is in love with her is already the husband of Doralice, who in turn, finally directs the solution of the play. Palamede, who is betrothed to Melantha, loves Doralice, but she will not have him for a lover, though she does carry on a flirtation with him. She is pictured as a woman of much good sense and self assurance, while Melantha is a rather silly, affected creature, much given to using French phrases and airy manners. We see Millamant most clearly in the scene where Melantha accepts Palamede.

> "Hold, hold; I am vanquished with your gaite d'esprit. I am yours and will be yours, sans nulle reserve, ni condition. And let me die, if I do not think myself the happiest nymph in Sicily -- My dear French dear, stay but a minute, till I raccammode myself with the princess, and then I am yours, jusqu'a la mort. Allons donc--"[2]

Later we shall see Congreve's heroine using much the same tactics in her acceptance of Mirabell.

Writing his first play in the same year as Dryden, Etherege, sometimes called the "father of the Comedy of Manners,"[3] also returned to Fletcher in using feminine plotting to help the design of the play. His first play, "The Comical Revenge or Love in a Tub" exhibits women who match the men in wit, but the men direct the course of the plot. The wit and gayety of Sir Frederick and the valet give a hint of the new development that is to be a reflection of the manners

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[1] Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy, 113.
[2] John Dryden, Marriage a la Mode, V, 1, 319. Geo. Saintsbury, ed.
[3] Walter P. Eaton, The Drama in English, 160.

and wit of the London circle he frequented, but in every other way it was no different from other plays of the period.[1]

In Etherege's other plays, the women attempt the direction of the plot, but are unsuccessful in achievment. Lady Cockwood is an example of this in "She Would if She Could." She is the unpleasant character who gives the play its title." She was eager for amorous adventure and equally eager to preserve her honour."[2] She pursues Courtal ferociously, though he found her "the very spirit of impertinence, so foolishly fond that no man above sixteen is able to endure her."[3] He, a self-contained and cynical gentleman, really directs the tricks and the wit, and besides escaping Lady Cockwood, captures for himself and his friends the two young heiresses.

Lady Cockwood does provide fun for the play, and keeps Courtal busy thinking up evasions of her addresses to him. Like Oriana in "The Wild Goose Chase," she does the pursuing, but unlike Oriana, her plans are not successful, and while Oriana wanted Mirabell for a husband, Lady Cockwood has other motives, as she already possesses Sir Oliver. The ready wit of the women is noticeable in the scene at the eating house, where Courtal and Freeman escort the three ladies, leaving Lady Cockwood's husband at home. Sir Joslin lures Sir Oliver to the same place, but when discovered there,

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[1]Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 294.
[2]Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy, 66.
[3]George Etherege, She Would if She Could, I, 1, 98. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, ed. Vol. 1.

Lady Cockwood, rather than offering excuses, bursts forth in a spirit of offended virtue.

> "Perfidious man, I am too tame and foolish - were I every day at the plays, the Park, and Mulberry Garden, with a kind look secretly to indulge the unlawful passion of some young gallant; . . . . . but who out of a scrupulous tenderness to my honour, and to comply with thy base Jealousie, have deny'd my self all those blameless Recreations, which a vertuous Lady might enjoy, to be thus inhumanely revil'd in my own person, and thus unreasonably rob'd and abus'd in thine too!"[1]

At the end of the play she has failed to secure her lover, and so decides to become reconciled with her husband. Her first plan is clearly a failure, and she is merely an object of ridicule, especially so, since her plans to deceive her husband are so plainly revealed to the audience.

In "The Man of Mode," Dorimant, the hero, has admirable manners and a wit equal to any occasion. He handles the women in a high-handed manner, dismissing two mistresses casually, and even in a rather cruel way, and captures an heiress in spite of her mother's objections and her own defense.[2] But Harriet is a match for him, and equally harsh to his discarded lady loves. She tells her former rival in public - -

> "Mr. Dorimant has been your God Almighty long enough; 'tis time to think of another."[3]

Dorimant, who really loves Harriet, tries to cover it by satire, saying,

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[1]
[2]George Etherege, She Would if She Could, III, 3, 139.
Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 295.
[3]George Etherege, The Man of Mode, V, 2, 286. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, ed. Vol. 2.

> "I observed you were pleased when the fops cried, 'She's handsome, very handsome, by God she is', and whispered aloud your name, the thousand several forms you put your fac into; then, to make yourself more agreeable, how wantonly you played with your head, flung back your locks, and looked smilingly over your shoulder at 'em."

She retorts,

> "I do not go begging the men's as you do the ladies good liking with a sly softness in your looks, and a gentle slowness in your bows, as you pass by 'em - as thus, Sir --- Is not this like you?" (Acts him)[1]

She is not too easily won, though she intends to be from the beginning. The real plot of the play hinges on Dorimant and his loves. He casts them aside when he is ready to move on to another, until he meets Harriet. She, in turn, is forced to carry on some deception with Bellair, for both her mother and his father are opposed their child's choice of a lover. Yet with all Harriet's planning to secure Dorimant, she never admits to him that she is agreeable to his advances. Even at the end of the play, her invitation for him to visit her in the country is used to give her a chance to warn him of her inaccessibility.

> "To a great rambling lone house that looks as if it were not inhabited, the family's so small; there you'll find my mother, an old lame aunt, and myself, sir, perched up on chairs at a distance in a large parlour, sitting moping like three or four melancholy birds in a spacious vollary."[2]

In both "The Man of Mode" and "She Would if She Could" we see the same sort of situation that Etherege used in "Love in a

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[1] George Etherege, The Man of Mode, III, 3, 236.
[2] George Etherege, ibid., V, 2, 287.

Tub." In this last mentioned play the Widow gives in to Sir Frederick, though she has spurned his advances and matched him in wit throughout the play. Likewise Harriet is pursued by Dorimant, as are Gatty and Ariana by Courtall and Freeman. But the interesting thing is that each of these had fallen in love with the man first, and attempted to tantalize his interest until she can secure a declaration of love from him. She then accepts him, not too easily, leaving the man the apparant victor. As such, we must consider the men as achieving the purpose of all their scheming and plotting, but the women's achievement, though not so obvious, must also be given recognition. This was the formula that Congreve was to perfect with his Mirabell and Millamant. In each of his comedies, the figure of a charming woman dominates the piece. Dorimant was the finest gentleman that had yet appeared on the Restoration stage, but in all of these plays the heroine runs away with the audience's heart. Always a young, beautiful, wealthy woman is pursued by a courtly gentleman, and in every case the woman comes off with the laurels.[1]

Wycherley carried on as later Congreve did, in depicting the society life of the day through showing its manners and wit. His men and women follow the definite social code, but it is only Hippolita of "The Gentleman Dancing Master" who brings her plots out into the open. At the advanced age of fourteen, she completely runs the play. She chooses her man, persuades her cousin to send him to her, teaches him how to deceive her

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[1]Henry Ten Eyck Perry, Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama, 30-31.

father and aunt, and, at the end, wins everything, as her father does not wish to admit he has been tricked.

Wycherley's other women take part in the plots as do all the other women of the period, but in a minor way, and in the usual devious method. That seems to be the women's place in the Comedy of Manners up till now. They secure the man they want, but leave the planning and directing of the plot to the men. Because of this, and as they always affect not to be willing to take the men for husbands, the men always seem to be the victors in the battle between the sexes.

In tracing the change in women's part in drams from the time of Jonson, we saw her change from the acquiescent tool of husband, father or brother, to the forward miss of Fletcher. Then, though she is intellectually the equal to her men companions on the stage, she assumes a minor part in plot development, more satisfied to lend her wit, or help the plots of the men than to direct the course of events. In Shirley, she again makes a bid for controlling the action, and Dryden's Doralice in "Marriage a la Mode," helps control the plot in solving it. In Etherege and Wycherley, who wrote the Comedy of Manners Congreve was to use, the men do the planning, though along the lines desired by the women. They are content to let the men receive the credit for carrying out a successful plot, as long as it coincides with the women's wishes. With the exception of Wycherley's Hippolita, in the Comedy of Manners the formula is for the true-wit to direct the plot of the play.

CHAPTER V

CONGREVE'S COMEDY OF MANNERS

William Congreve, coming at the end of the Restoration period, produced his four comedies within the years 1693 and 1700. In his plays, the Comedy of Manners attained its most brilliant polish, and to study his comedies is to study this style at its best.[1] When he began to write, the play had already developed into the realistic type of drama. The whole aim of the stage, now, was to present contemporary life with knowledge and keen appreciation, and this became his standard for writing a realistic drama. Yet, Paradoxically enough, Congreve is not only termed a realistic writer, but has been acclaimed a master of artificial comedy.[2] Artificial, "not in tampering with essential facts concerning society it pictures, but in the charming artificial atmosphere and mood which suffuses these facts in scenes otherwise impossible of presentation."[3] Another critic has called Congreve's world a paradox, neither a world of fancy nor of realism. It is "realistic because it is artificial, universal because limited, convincing because improbable, faithful because exaggerated."[4]

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[1] Walter P. Eaton, The Drama in English, 165.
[2] B. V. Crawford, "High Comedy in Terms of Restoration Practice," Philological Quarterly, Oct. 1929, Vol. VIII. 343-4.
[3] B. V. Crawford, ibid., 344.
[4] Harrison Dale, "The Comedies of Wm. Congreve," Fortnightly Review, January, 1929. 57.

This artificiality was the basis Charles Lamb used to defend Congreve's plays from the charge of indecency, but Macauley was equally emphatic in asserting them to be all too realistic. We do know that they picture truthfully and realistically the manners and life of fashionable London. The philosophy of living portrayed in the drama was synonymous with the life of the time. The aim of society was the pursuit of the pleasure of the moment, and the drama was successful in portraying this on the stage.[1]

For motif, Congreve uses the true Comedy of Manners basis, sex antagonism. In the treatment of this theme, the equal intellectual status of the women, which Meredith declares requisite for true comedy, is especially noticeable. Closely related to this is the advanced treatment of sex morals. There is one standard for both, with the result we find men and women on an intellectual and moral level, and as such the men treat the women as moral and mental equals.[2]

Congreve also fell heir to the Restoration Comedy of Manners formula. We have shown this to have had its beginnings in Jonson's comedy of humours, and so gradual had been the steps toward a different method that most writers saw no difference in their work, believing themselves to be using the humours of Jonson. The difference is hard to see, probably being

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[1]Frances Smith McCamic, Sir George Etherege, 39-40.
[2]B. V. Crawford, "High Comedy in Terms of Restoration Practice," Philological Quarterly, Oct. 1929. Vol. VIII, 343.

expressed best in that there is a lighter handling of personalities, a gayer dialogue, and a more intellectual and cynical quality in the Comedy of Manners.[1] Through a refining process, the humour characters have emerged with little more than their names to denote their Jonsonian beginnings. Rather than their personal peculiarities, the characters show the foibles common to their class, emerging finally as the true wit versus the false wit so dear to the Restoration comedy writers.

Congreve was not slow to make use of these, but to this formula he adds a heroine, one who outshines all the men. The place of women on the stage was finally secure, and it was the women in the plays who were to capture the hearts of the audience. Congreve uses his Tattle, Brisk, and Witwoud, as foils for Valentine, Mellefont, and Mirabell, but it is Angelica, Cynthia, and Millamant who capture our attention and outshine all the others in the play. Though all his characters are gifted with brilliant expression, speech precisely fitting thought, and a manner of speech portraying their characters, the women, whether the heroine, the affected "precieuse" he delighted to draw, or a foolish old woman like Lady Wishfort, dominate the scene when they speak.

Nor are the women content with speeches - the action is also taken into their capable hands. Rather than the men handing the women about as they choose, the women pick out the men they want and pursue them, though they would not have them know it. They pretend indifference, or hold them off, but

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[1] Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy 1660-1720, 31.

capitulation finally comes as they had intended from the beginning. Husbands already possessed are regarded as useful items, but are allowed in no way to restrict the women's freedom. Lovers, however impetuous, are forced to wait and prove themselves, uncertain as to outcome. Fletcher had predicted this in his "Wild Goose Chase," and Etherege, in "The Men of Mode," but the other dramatists of the Restoration had used a heroine more eager for amatory affairs, and it was left for Congreve to return to the Fletcherian model.

As the love scenes are purely verbal duels between hero and heroine, Congreve's plays develop witty, exquisite wordings. His epigrams are pointed and noteworthy for their lack of superfluous words. His characters are more intelligent than those of Etherege, his ladies and gentlemen are as highly entertaining, and much more vividly drawn.[1] They are remembered as individuals, and in our next chapters we shall find it interesting to trace these individual characters and see how they live up to the Restoration tradition, and how they are used to develop the plot of Congreve's plays.

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1 D. Crane Taylor, Wm. Congreve, 9.

CHAPTER VI

THE OLD BACHELOR

Congreve's first play "The Old Bachelor," though inferior to his later plays, indicates his formula for comedy almost full formed. It is very close to the plays of Etherege, and follows the tradition already established for the Comedy of Manners. The familiar plot and persons are, however, treated with a finesse peculiar to the author. We can note, too, faint indications of the effort that Congreve was to make later in his comedies to make his characters consistent and individual, in spite of a general distribution of wit.[1]

The substance of the play can be told in a few words. Two gentlemen of wit marry two heiresses; a cast mistress entices a surly bachelor who hates women, and is only saved from marrying her through the efforts of his friends. The false wit of the play is married to this mistress; one of the wits seduces the wife of a prominent citizen. It was a theme that had been used over and over in previous comedies.[2]

In spite of the old theme and stock characters, this play indicates Congreve's style, already capable of a dialogue superior to Dryden, Etherege or Wycherley. It also indicates his tendency to make his women characters as strong as the men. Up till now the formula for the Comedy of Manners was for the true wit to control the plot. The women may have chosen the men they wanted, but left it up to the men to arrange things so

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[1]
[2]Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 316-17.
[2]Ashley H. Thorndyke, ibid., 316.

as to carry the story to a happy conclusion. Even in this first effort of Congreve, the women are not content with this formula. Belinda and Araminta, the heiresses, Silvia, the cast mistress, and Laetetia, the citizen's wife, "who humors her husband, but watches her chance to shame him"[1] are the women in the play. Silvia tries to block the plans of the true wit, while the other women, in a minor way, attempt to take over the control of the plot by plans of their own.

Evidence that the women are to attempt to direct the play into certain situations appears in the very first scene. Here we find Bellamour and Vainlove, the two wits, discussing some letters. One is from Silvia, and gives the audience an inkling of her feelings regarding Vainlove. The other is that of Laetetia, advising Vainlove that her husband is to be out of town and has asked the Reverend Spintext to spend the evening with her. This letter gives Bellamour the idea of impersonating the reverend gentleman, an idea which fits in perfectly with the plans of the lady. In carrying out this idea, the husband returns home unexpectedly, but even though caught, Laetetia is able to pacify her husband with stock tears, and a pretended faint, plus protestations of innocence, helps her to carry off the situation. Her power over her husband was well shown in the ludicrous Nyken-Cocky scene, where he is saying good bye - while her only fear is that he won't go.

Silvia enters into the plot in trying to divert the course of Vainlove's courtship of Araminta. To do this, she sends a

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1 Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 189.

note in Araminta's name, in which she protests her love for him. As Silvia intended, Vainlove is extremely annoyed.

> "I hate to be crammed. By Heaven! there's not a woman will give a man the pleasure of a chase. My sport is always balked or cut short. I stumble over the game I would pursue. 'Tis dull and unnatural to have a hare run full in the hound's mouth, and would distaste the keenest hunter. I would have overtaken, not have met my game."[1]

The trick is discovered later in the play, but meantime it has the effect of Vainlove assuming too much with Araminta, and she orders him off in no uncertain terms. Even when Silvia's plotting is discovered, the effects remain. Araminta feigns indifference when Vainlove explains, telling him,

> "There's no need to forgive what is not worth my anger."[2]

Yet it seems to make her slower to consent to Vainlove's proposal. In the end, her nearest acceptance is,

> "We had better take advantage of a little of our friends' experience first."[3]

With that Vainlove must be content.

The contrast between the two heroines is marked. In Bellinda we can see "a first rough outline of Millamant."[4] Her assurance and pertness, her ready tongue, her quick, abrupt manner of speech are all fore-runners. She is a wit who is "a match for any man."[5] This resemblance is most notable in her

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[1]William Congreve, The Old Bachelor, IV, 2, 56. A. C. Ewald, ed.
[2]William Congreve, ibid. V, 4, 84.
[3]William Congreve, ibid. V, 5, 90.
[4]Charles Whibley, "The Restoration Drama," Cambridge History of English Literature Vol. VIII, Chap. 6, 148.
[5]D. Crane Taylor, Wm. Congreve, 33.

meeting with Araminta in Saint James Park.

> Belin. Lard, my dear, I am glad to have met you! - I have been at the Exchange since, and am so tired.
> Aram. Why, what's the matter?
> Belin. Oh, the most inhuman barbarous hackney coach! I am jolted to a jelly! - Am I not horribly toused?
> Aram. Your head's a little out of order.
> Belin. A little! O frightful! what a furious phiz I have! O most rueful! ha! ha! ha! O gad, I hope nobody will come this way, till I have put myself a little in repair. Ah, my dear, I have seen such unhewn creatures since! ha! ha! ha! I can't for my soul help thinking that I look just like one of them. Good dear, pin this and I'll tell you. - Very well - so, thank you, my dea. - But as I was telling you - pish! this is the untowardest lock - So as I was telling you - how d'ye like me now? etc.[1]

Is not this similar to Millamant?

> Mill. Long! Lard have I not made violent haste? I have asked every living thing I met for you; I have enquired after you as after a new fashion. . . . . .
> Mrs. Fain. You were dressed before I came abroad.
> Mill. Aye, that's true. Oh, but then I had - Mincing, what had I? Why was I so long?
> Min. O mem, your la'ship stayed to peruse a packet of letters.
> Mill. O ay, letters - I had letters - I am persecuted with letters - I hate letters - Nobody knows how to write letters, and yet one has 'em, one does not know why. They serve to pin up one's hair.[2]

On the other hand, Araminta is more natural and human, "the loveliest heroine in Restoration Comedy to her time."[3] She is not so ready in speech, nor so witty, and she lacks that pertness we find in Bellinda, but she has more sentiment, and heart. She expects more from her lover than the usual

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[1] William Congreve, The Old Bachelor, IV, 4, 59-60.
[2] William Congreve, The Way of the World, II, 2, 345.
[3] D. Crane Taylor, Wm. Congreve, 33.

heroine up to this time.

In adapting the Comedy of Manners formula, the sex antagonism so necessary to its theme is clearly indicated in "The Old Bachelor." In each set of lovers, they rail at their partners, especially at the times that they fear they are revealing their real feeling. When Bellinda is afraid Bellamour has discovered that she loves him, she interrupts his speech, and the following dialogue ensues.

> Belin. Prithee, hold thy tongue. Lard, he has so pestered me with flames and stuff I shan't endure the sight of fire this twelvemonth.
> Bel. Yet all can't melt they cruel frozen heart.
> Belin. O gad! I hate your hideous fancy. You said that once before. If you must talk impertinantly, for Heaven's sake let it be with variety; don't come always like the devil, wrapped in flames. I'll not hear a sentence that begins with an 'I burn' or an 'I beseech you, madam!'
> Bel. But tell me how you would be adored; I am very tractable.
> Belin. Then know, I would be adored in silence.
> Bel. Humph, I thought so, that you might have all the talk to yourself.[1]

Bellamour had been silent long enough, and in that last speech found his chance to retaliate.

Bellinda eventually wins a proposal from Bellamour, and accepts him in this fashion.

> "O' my conscience, I could find it in my heart to marry thee purely to be rid of thee. At least thou art so troublesome a lover there's hopes thou'll make a more than ordinary quiet husband."[2]

A few minutes later she voices the prevalent opinion of marriage when Bellamour speaks of it in pleasing terms.

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[1] William Congreve, The Old Bachelor, II, 2, 33.
[2] William Congreve, ibid. V, 4, 84.

> Bell. Alas, courtship to marriage is but the music in the playhouse, till the curtain is drawn: but that once up, opens the scene of pleasure.
> Belin. Oh, foh, no: rather, courtship to marriage is a very witty prologue to a very dull play.[1]

In the affair of Silvia with the bachelor Heartwell, we find this antagonism to be much more direct. Heartwell expresses his opinion of women freely and directly. Silvia, the former mistress of Bellamour, angles for this wiley old bachelor and snares him, only the intervention of Bellamour preventing the marriage. To make up for this disappointment, however, a masked marriage is arranged by which she is able to secure Sir Joseph, while her maid, Lucy, is joined to the "brave" Captain Bluffe.

Thus, while not Congreve's most representative comedy, his first effort shows the line his women characters were to take. Though Silvia's plots both go astray, she achieves a husband. Araminta and Belinda secure the men they had chosen. Mrs. Fondlewife is able to rule and deceive her husband, and even that most prejudiced of Bachelors, Heartwell, succumbs to the women's charms. Silvia's attempts to interfere with the plot of the true-wit were to have their counterparts in Congreve's succeeding comedies.

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[1] William Congreve, The Old Bachelor, V, 4, 85.

CHAPTER VII

THE DOUBLE DEALER

Congreve followed this success with three other comedies "The Double Dealer," "Love for Love," and "The Way of the World." Two of these were not stage successes, but in each play we see women given more and more power to change the plot. In two of them, we find a hero involved with some other woman, or women, besides the one with whom he is in love. In each we find a heroine equal to the hero, or one on whom it is impossible not to focus your attention. These form the famous trio, Cynthia, Angelica, and Millamant, "truly charming women, warm hearted, conpanionable, and direct in their dealings."[1] Here is no stooping to forged notes nor bribed servant women to achieve their goal. They are not interested in blasting reputations, in posing as wits nor in dangling lovers until they can reach the one they want. They fall in love, and, while in true Restoration fashion this must be concealed by clever repartee, they are faithful to the man of their choice.

But these three do not constitute the gallery of Congreve's women as exhibited in these last three plays. He also followed the "precieuse" tradition, and with what results! We have many women of this type in earlier comedy, but none attain the individual character of these. One of the critics of this period says of them,

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[1]Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy, 149.

> "Congreve has drawn three remarkable full length portraits of extravantly affected 'precieuses', Lady Froth, and Lady Plyant in 'The Double Dealer' and Lady Wishfort in 'The Way of the World'. These three character studies manifest powers of penetration and insight in which Congreve easily outstripped earlier Restoration dramatists."[1]

In addition to these portraits we find these outstanding characters; those incomparable sisters, Mrs. Foresight and Mrs. Frail; the country hoyden Prue, who is such an apt pupil in city ways; the villainess Lady Touchwood, Foible, Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood.

Each of these comedies follows the formula that Congreve had adapted.

False-wits	True-wits	Heroine who outshines them all
Brisk	Mellefont and Careless	Cynthia
Tattle	Valentine and Scandal	Angelica
Witwoud	Mirabel and Fainall	Millamant [2]

The first of these three comedies, "The Double Dealer," has a very complex plot. Two women claim the hero and almost prevent his love affair with the heroine. One of these is Lady Touchwood, aunt by marriage to Mellefont, and in love with him. Mellefont in turn, in in love with Cynthia, daughter of Sir Paul. His sister, Lady Touchwood, has been having an affair with Maskwell, pretended friend to Mellefont, but really an enemy, as he also desires Cynthia. Lady Touchwood and Maskwell are the villains of the play. They accuse Mellefont of trying

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[1] Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 208.
[2] Henry Ten Eyck Perry, Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama, 79.

to seduce his aunt, while Maskwell, unknown to Lady Touchwood, plans to marry Cynthia. Only through Cynthia and Careless are these plans discovered. Lady Plyant, wife of Sir Paul and the other claimant to Mellefont, affects to think he is courting Cynthia to abtain access to her, and, in an amazing scene with Mellefont, accuses him of such thoughts. She also accuses him of misconduct to Sir Paul, hoping in this way to break up his match with Cynthia.

Even in a brief resume of this type, it is evident that Lady Touchwood and Lady Plyant are bent on interfering with the direction of the plot as planned by the true-wit, Mellefont. His aim is to become his uncle's heir and to marry Cynthia. But the only wit shown by him is in his speeches with Cynthia. In his dealings with the other characters, he is content to follow the directions of Maskwell. Only once does he attempt to help his own affairs, and that is when he asks Careless, in the opening scene of the play, to keep Lady Plyant engaged so that Lady Touchwood will not get a chance to talk to her. He is planning on Maskwell doing the same for Lady Touchwood. Careless warns him, then, that he has "the weakest guard where the enemy is strongest,"[1] but Mellefont refuses to believe Maskwell anything but a friend. Right up to the last act he is the victim of the plots of Maskwell and the two women.

The greatest plotters against him are Maskwell and Lady Touchwood. It is hard to tell which is the greater villain, though he is deceiving even her, while attempting to gain his

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[1] William Congreve, The Double Dealer, I, 1, 109. A. C. Ewald, ed.

own ends. Together they plan to ruin Mellefont's marriage, by working on Lady Plyant to make her believe that Mellefont is in love with her rather than Cynthia. Next, Maskwell plots to get Mellefont to go to his aunt's room and has the uncle surprise him there. Lady Touchwood rises to the occasion then, and, knowing her husband is listening, proceeds to accuse the astonished Mellefont of attempting to seduce her. She had accused him of this to her husband previously, but had begged him to ignore it, as she was afraid Mellefont might convince the uncle of his innocence. Now this episode would furnish sufficient proof to her husband. By this stroke of cleverness, she interferes with Mellefont's plan to be his uncle's heir, and also upsets Maskwell's plot against her.

In the last act, Maskwell and Lady Touchwood openly plot against one another. He attempts to get Lord Touchwood to make him his heir, and to promise to help get Cynthia for him. Lady Touchwood plots to prevent this and threatens Sir Paul if he should break the match between Cynthia and Mellefont in favor of Maskwell. Thus, at the last, to revenge herself on Maskwell, she is forced to interfere with the plot in behalf of the hero, whom she has been thwarting throughout the play.

Lady Plyant is able to complicate matters for Mellefont, and interferes with his plan of marrying Cynthia when she tells her husband that Mellefont is really interested in herself, and only uses Cynthia as a pretext to visit her. As a consequence, Sir Paul declares the match is off, much to Mellefont's dismay. Later, Careless works on Lady Plyant,

and, to please him, she changes sides, and, of course, this is the same as Sir Paul changing his mind, for he has no plans of his own. This hold on her poor, foolish husband is similar to that of Lady Cockwood in "She Would if She Could," except that it is more good natured. In each case the husband is completely under the wife's thumb. Witness this scene, when a boy enters with a letter directed to Sir Paul.

> Lady Plyant. (to Boy) How often have you been told of that, you jackanapes?
> Sir Paul. Gad so, gadsbud. Tim, carry it to my lady first.
> Boy. 'Tis directed to your worship.
> Sir Paul. Well, well, my lady reads all letters first. Child, do so no more. D'ye hear, Tim?
> Boy. No, and please you. (Carries letter to my lady)
> .....
> Lady Plyant. Here, Sir Paul, it's from your steward. Here's a return of six hundred pounds. You may take fifty of it for the next halfyear.[1]

When Lady Touchwood had persuaded Lady Plyant, who needed little persuasion, that Mellefont loved her, the scene where Lady Plyant accuses him of his purpose, shows his great bewilderment. It also shows her up to best advantage. After taxing him with wanting the daughter to procure the mother, she says,

> "And nobody knows how circumstances may happen together. To my thinking, now, I could resist the strongest temptation. But yet I know 'tis impossible for me to know whether I could or not. There's no certainty in the things of this life.
> . . . . . .
> O name it no more. Bless me, how can you talk of Heaven and have so much wickedness in your heart? Maybe you don't think it a sin. Maybe it is no sin to them that don't think so.

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[1]William Congreve, The Double Dealer, III, 2, 142.

> Indeed, if I did not think it a sin. But still, my honour, if it were no sin! But then to marry my daughter for the convenience of frequent opportunities! I'll never consent to that. As sure as can be, I'll break the match."[1]

But it is Cynthia who sees through all the scheming and plotting, and is able to place an estimate on the people around her, as Mellefont is unable to do. Nor has she much faith in his ability to outwit Lady Touchwood, even after her plots against him are evident to everyone. When he says,

> "But I shall counter-work her spells and ride the witch in her own bridle,"

Cynthia answers,

> "It's impossible. She'll cast beyond you still. I'll lay my life it will never be a match."[2]

But though she loves Mellefont and is eager to marry, she insists that he must give a demonstration of his wit before she will accept him. How he is to do this she reveals in this scene with him.

> Mel. To run most wilfully and unreasonably away with me this moment and be married.
> Cynth. Hold. Never to marry anybody else.
> Mel. That's but a kind of negative consent. Why, you won't baulk the frolic?
> Cynth. If you had not been so assured of your own conduct I would not. But 'tis reasonable that since I consent to like a man without the vile consideration of money, he should give me a very evident demonstration of his wit. Therefore let me see you undermine my Lady Touchwood, as you boasted, and force her to give her consent, and then - - -
> Mel. I'll do it.
> Cynth. And I'll do it.

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2William Congreve, The Double Dealer, II, 2, 127.
William Congreve, ibid., IV, 1, 150.

> Mel. This very next ensuing hour of eight o'clock is the last minute of her reign, unless the devil should assist her in propria persona.
>
> Cynth. Well, if the devil should assist her and your plot miscarry -
>
> Mel. Aye, what am I to trust to then?
>
> Cynth. Well, if you give me very clear demonstration that it was the devil, I'll allow for irresistible odds. But if I find it to be only chance, or destiny or unlucky stars, or anything but the very devil, I'm inexorable. Only still I'll keep my word, and live a maid for your sake.[1]

But in spite of Mellefont's desire to outwit Lady Touchwood, it is Cynthia who overhears Maskwell's plans and has Lord Touchwood listening in secret to the plotting. The result is that the villains are discovered and Cynthia is given a chance to marry Mellefont without breaking her promise.

But aside from participation in the direction of the plot, the women presented in this play are outstanding individuals. Cynthia, the heroine, for example, is a charming young woman. Her humanness and good sense are never more evident than when contrasted with Lady Froth, that many sided character, "one of the best and most complex characters that Congreve has created."[2] A coquette, Lady Froth welcomes the attentions of Brisk and enjoys his love making. Yet she is proud of her nine months old daughter, and brags that "she has a world of wit and can sing a tune already."[3] Her pretended knowledge of poetry and learning is aired on every available occasion, affording the contrast needed to show up Cynthia's sensibility.

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[1] William Congreve, The Double Dealer, IV, 1, 151-2.
[2] Wm. Gosse, Life of William Congreve, 43.
[3] William Congreve, The Double Dealer, III, 3, 149.

In the second act we find these two discussing love, or at least Lady Froth is.

> Lady F. . . . . But I'm more amazed to find you a woman of letters and not write! Bless me! How can Mellefont believe you love him?
>
> Cynth. Why, faith, madam, he that won't take my word shall never have it under my hand.
>
> Lady F. I vow Mellefont's a pretty gentleman, but methinks he wants a manner.
>
> Cynth. A manner! What's that, madam?
>
> Lady F. Some distinguishing quality, as for example the bel air or brilliance of Mr. Brisk, the solemnity, yet complaissance of my lord, or something of his own that should look a little je-ne-sais quoi-ish. He is too much a mediocrity in my mind.
>
> Cynth. He does not indeed affect either pertness or formality, for which I like him. Here he comes.
>
> Lady F. And my Lord with him. Pray observe the difference.
>
> (Enter Lord Froth, Mellefont and Brisk)
>
> Cynth. (aside) Impertinent creature! I could almost be angry with her now.[1]

In that aside remark we see that, though Cynthia tolerates the foolishness of those who surround her, she is human enough to resent any slur that Mellefont is not perfection. A few minutes later she revenges herself when Lord Froth speaks of Mellefont as a husband.

> Lord F. I hope Mellefont will make a good husband, too.
>
> Cynth. 'Tis my interest to believe he will, my lord.
>
> Lord F. D'ye think he'll love you as well as I do my wife? I'm afraid not.
>
> Cynth. I believe he'll love me better.
>
> Lord F. Heavens! that can never be. But why do you think so?
>
> Cynth. Because he has not so much reason to be fond of himself.[2]

After much more of this sort of thing among the Froths

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[1] William Congreve, The Double Dealer, II, 1, 119.
[2] William Congreve, ibid., II, 1, 121.

and Brisk, Cynthia, rather weary of it all discusses marriage with Mellefont.

> Cynth. I'm thinking, though marriage makes man and wife one flesh, it leaves 'em still two fools, and they become more conspicuous by setting off one another.
>
> Mell. That's only when two fools meet and their follies are opposed.
>
> Cynth. Nay, I have known two wits meet, and by the opposition of their wit, render themselves as ridiculous as fools. 'Tis an odd game we're going to play at. What think you of drawing stakes and giving over in time.
>
> Mell. No hang't, that's not endeavoring to win because it's possible we may lose. Since we have shuffled and cut, let's e'en turn up trump now.
>
> Cynth. Then I find it's like cards. If either of us have a good hand it is an accident of fortune.
>
> Mell. No; marriage is rather like a game of bowls. Fortune indeed makes the match and the two nearest and sometimes the two farthest are together, but the game depends entirely upon judgment.
>
> Cynth. Still, it is a game, and consequently one of us must be a loser.[1]

This is but one sample of the way in which these two lovers match their wits on every occasion when they meet. She seems determined that he shall prove his wit to her, but she is always equal to him. We feel sorry for both of them, when we see how Maskwell and Lady Touchwood and Lady Plyant are making Mellefont the victim of their schemes. Cynthia and Mellefont are as honest and likeable as the other pair are treacherous and disgusting.

All in all, we find "The Double Dealer" an advance over the "Old Bachelor" in its use of women characters. Where Silvia attempted to thwart the plan of the true-wit in the first

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1. William Congreve, The Double Dealer, II, 1, 110.

play, we now see two women using their power in this one. In addition, we find a heroine who helps direct the plot to a happy ending. All the hero's troubles came from his relations with intriguing women. This was to be one of the main ingredients in Congreve's formula, strong women who prevent the true-wit from carrying out the plans he has in mind. Probably one reason the play was not favorably received was because of this very thing. The audience saw Mellefont patterned after the mode of the true-wit. They felt cheated when he was deceived and made a fool.[1]

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1 D. Crane Taylor, William Congreve, 48.

CHAPTER VIII

LOVE FOR LOVE

In the second of this trio of comedies notable for their feminine characters, we find another group of Congreve's incomparable women. The plot of the play is inspired by less unpleasant motives then "The Double Dealer," so there are no real scoundrels exhibited. Valentine, the hero, really loves Angelica and she loves him. The plot hinges on the attempts of Sir Sampson to make Valentine, his eldest son, give up his inheritance in the interests of a foolish younger brother. If this happens, Valentine will not only lose the money but will be unable to marry Angelica. The hero then plans a counter-plot by feigning madness to avoid signing the deed. With the help of Scandal, his friend, and Jeremy, his devoted servant, he is in a fair way to succeed, when Angelica takes a hand in the matter. Annoyed at Valentine not taking her into his confidence, she does a little plotting of her own and ruins Valentine's plans, though, in her own way, she helps him to remain heir and achieve a wife.

This heroine, Angelica, is "almost the ideal match for any Restoration comedy hero."[1] A good description of her may be gained from the words of a famous critic.

> " To me she is one of the most delightful of all comic heroines; refined and distinguished in nature, she refuses to wear her heart upon her sleeve, and her learned young spark, with

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[1] D. Crane Taylor, Wm. Congreve, 71.

> his airs of the academic beau, has to deserve her, before she yields to his somewhat impudent suit. If she tricks him it is only when she finds him tricking her and the artifice in neither case is very serious. No, Angelica is charming in her presence of mind and lady-like dignity, and reigns easily first among the creations, not only of Congreve, but of post-Restoration comedy down to Goldsmith. She is the comic sister of Belvidera and these two preserve that corrupt and cynical stage from moral contumely." [1]

In the play we find her self reliant, dignified, and able to meet any situation with poise. In contrast to her is Prue, a new type of woman character, the country hoyden, first suggested by Belinda's description of her encounter of two such girls in "The Old Bachelor." Through Prue, we hear the typical Restoration opinion of women of that age, in the scene where Tattle teaches her the art of love-making.

In the opening act, the first scene shows Valentine being pressed by his debtors; in the second scene we have him consenting to his father's plan to sign his inheritance over to his younger brother in return for a stated sum of money to pay his debts. Thus, at the very beginning of the play, we are made aware of the theme of the plot. In this same act Mrs. Frail, one of the flighty sisters of the play, is briefly introduced, but in act two all of the women who are to plot and counterplot throughout the play are brought on the stage.

Mrs. Frail and Mrs. Foresight, the sisters, are first seen together when Mrs. Foresight taxes her sister with being seen with men at rather disreputable places, one in particular,

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[1] Wm. Gosse, Life of William Congreve, 64.

called "The World's End."

> Mrs. Fore. I suppose you would not go alone to the World's End?
> Mrs. Frail. The world's end! what, do you mean to banter me?
> Mrs. Fore. Poor innocent! you don't know there's a place called the World's End? I'll swear you can keep your countenance purely, you'd make an admirable player.
> Mrs. Frail. I'll swear you have a great deal of confidence, and in my mind too much for the stage.
> Mrs. Fore. Very well, that will appear who has most; you were never at the World's End?
> Mrs. Frail. No.
> Mrs. Fore. You deny it positively to my face?
> Mrs. Frail. Your face! What's your face?
> Mrs. Fore. No matter for that, it's as good a face as yours.
> Mrs. Frail. Not by a dozen years wearing - But I do deny it positively to your face then.
> Mrs. Fore. I'll allow you now to find fault with my face;- for I'll swear you impudence has put me out of countenance;- but look you here now - where did you lose this gold bodkin? O sister, sister!
> Mrs. Frail. My bodkin?
> Mrs. Fore. Nay, 'tis yours, look at it.
> Mrs. Frail. Well, if you go to that, where did you find this bodkin? O sister, sister! - sister every way.[1]

This comic scene is the best introduction the sisters could have, and both having given themselves away, join forces to get a husband for Mrs. Frail.

> Mrs. Frail. Sir Sampson has a son that is is expected tonight; and by the account of his education I have heard, can be no conjurer; the estate you know is to be made over to him; now if I could wheedle him, sister, ha? you understand me?
> Mrs. Fore. I do; and will help you to the utmost of my power.- And I can tell you one thing that falls out luckily enough; my awkward daughter-in-law, who you know is designed to be his wife, is grown fond of Mr. Tattle; now if we can improve that, and make her have

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[1] William Congreve, Love for Love, II, 2, 232. A.C.Ewald, ed.

> an aversion for the booby, it may go a great way towards his liking you. Here they come together; and let us contrive some way or other to leave 'em together. [1]

Thus was begun one of the minor intrigues of the plot, the scheme to secure Ben for Mrs. Frail, and to marry Tattle off to Prue. This plan works out very well, for hardly had Tattle been left alone with Prue, when he begins to instruct her in city ways regarding suitors, and she profits by his instructions. Later, when Ben appears, Prue quarrels violently with him, while Mrs. Frail is able to elicit a proposal from him, stipulating, however, that it is to be kept a secret until the estate is settled. When Valentine pretends to be unable to sign the papers that will make his brother the heir, Mrs. Frail stages a quarrel with Ben, and attempts to gain the attention of Sir Sampson, who has threatened to get married. Mrs. Foresight has still another plan, and that is to capture Valentine for her sister, so she plots with Jeremy to secure this result.

While Mrs. Frail and Mrs. Foresight are scheming to secure one of these men for a husband, Jeremy, in turn, is plotting with Tattle for a supposed marriage to Angelica. Tattle, highly elated at such a prospect, refuses Prue's invitation to marry.

The characters, around which this sub-plot is built, show most clearly Congreve's adherence to the Restoration's contemptuous attitude toward certain classes of persons thought to be subjects for ridicule. Foresight, father of Prue and

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[1] William Congreve, Love for Love, II, 2, 233.

uncle of Angelica, is one of these, for astrology was his main thought in life. Typically a "humour" character, he is one of Congreve's best creations. He regards the signs of the zodiac as his commandments, and governs every action of his life by them. Prue represents the unsophistication of the country folk, Tattle the class of men who aped society.

There is one other character in this play, who is something of an oddity in the Comedy of Manners. His clownish manners and clumsy method of courtship ally him with the country gulls we find in Jonson's humours, but at the same time he possesses blunt common sense. He is a new type, and "enjoys the distinction of being the first complete and realistic portrayal of a sailor in English Literature."[1] Tradition has it that Congreve spent six weeks at Portsmouth among the sailors so that his character would be realistic. Whether this is true or not, we find in Ben a convincing realism and much wit. He had no predecessors which Congreve could copy, nor was he a type the author met socially. His nearest model would be the type Congreve might see on the London docks. A splendid creation, though out of his sphere in this play, he hints a reality a little out of place in the hard glitter of Restoration comedy.[2]

The dialogue in which these minor plots are conducted is witty and sparkling, even sailor Ben showing himself a good hand at making epigrams in sailor fashion. Every character

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2 D. Crane Taylor, William Congreve, 73.
D. Crane Taylor, ibid., 73-75.

shows the sex antagonism we expect to find in Comedy of Manners, as well as the prevalent attitude toward marriage as a matter of convenience tather than for sentimental reasons. They present clearly the immorality of the day.

In the meantime, while all this is taking place, the hero and heroine have not been idle. From the formula Congreve used in his first two plays, we expect that the true-wit's plans will be upset by some intriguing woman or women. In this case the formula is altered to some extent. The hero's plans are interfered with, but no cast mistress or scorned love is responsible. It is the heroine herself who manages to change the direction of the plot. When Valentine feigns madness, he kept Angelica in ignorance of his plan, hoping his condition will force her to admit her love for him. But instead she is suspicious of him, and, annoyed that he should attempt to deceive her, sets up a counterplot opposed to Valentine's own scheme.

Her plan is very simple. She must force Valentine to admit he is sane. Her first step is to pretend that she believes him to be really out of his senses. When he attempts to tell her of his plan to counterfeit madness to save his fortune, Angelica chooses to regard this as another sign of mental weakness. She then allows Tattle to make love to her, and during this time is also encouraging the advances of Sir Sampson. Finally, to force Valentine to throw off his pretence of madness, she proposes that a match between Sir Sampson and herself should be announced.

As Angelica expected, When Valentine hears of her plan to marry his father, he comes forward and announces that he was never mad, and is now ready to sign the paper which will disinherit him.

> " I never valued fortune, but as it was subservient to my pleasure; and my only pleasure was to please this lady; I have made many vain attempts, and find at last that nothing but my ruin can effect it; which, for that reason I will sign to. Give me the paper."[1]

Such a declaration was all Angelica wanted, so she tears the bond to prevent his signing it. She announces that she has tricked Sir Sampson to test the affection of Valentine, whom she has always loved. Through her, neither Sir Sampson nor Valentine are successful, though Valentine is able to achieve his purpose as it is identical with hers. In this same scene the minor plots also come to a climax. Ben is unsuccessful in attaining a fortune, and Mrs. Frail, while she is tricked into marriage with Tattle, and Prue finds herself without a husband. Jeremy is the only other besides Angelica who is successful, and he is unusually witty for a servant.

But we are especially pleased when Angelica is successful, as she is intent on helping her affair with Valentine and not in harming others, a radical departure from the Silvia and Lady Touchwood of Congreve's earlier comedies. She is a match for her uncle, Foresight, for Tattle and Sir Sampson, while Jeremy and Scandal are anxious to save her for Valentine, as they appreciate the difference between her and the other women of the play.

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[1] William Congreve, Love for Love, V, 2, 303.

The play is full of comic effect, the wit is sparkling, the men and women battle verbally with good humour, and none of the characters are actually villainous, even in the midst of their trickery. It contains all the elements of a true Restoration Comedy of Manners, and though Congreve diverged somewhat in that the heroine was the woman to interfere with the hero's plans, his formula remains unchanged in the power he gave the women to change the course of the plot. Not only in Angelica do we see this, but in the minor characters as well. It was the plans of Mrs. Foresight and Mrs. Frail that Ben should not find Prue suitable, though both Foresight and Sir Sampson planned a match between them. Again, Mrs. Frail is able to attract Ben's attention to herself, then leave him in search of better prey. Though she herself is cheated at the last, she has furnished motivating force for the minor intrigues of the play.

Following "Love for Love," it was five years before the appearance of Congreve's last comedy, "The Way of the World." In this, his most finished production, he perfected his formula, and achieved a perfect copy of a Comedy of Manners.

CHAPTER IX

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

Congreve's last effort, "The Way of the World," was his masterpiece. It also marks the summit, as it were, of Restoration Comedy. Vanbrugh and Farquhar were to write comedies of this same type, but their works mark the beginning of the downfall of the Comedy of Manners. Beyond Congreve, Restoration Comedy of Manners could not advance, for in his work its essential excellences and its essential weaknesses were completely realized.[1] In his dramas we find a style and a natural dialogue unmatched in other English plays. The perfection of his dialogue lies in the rapier like wit which thrust at the opponent in every line. The wits may be affected, but not a word is used unnecessarily in their manner of speaking, though the perfection of their speeches at times amounts almost to a fault. Yet through all this witty dialogue runs social satire, never before equalled by his predecessors and never equalled by his followers.[2]

If the other plays of Congreve had given a prominent place to women of the stage, this piece may be considered to be built to exhibit several of the most brilliant, witty, women characters matching one of the most intelligent men in the Comedy of Manners. It deals with this witty gentleman, Mirabell, who wins the hand of Millamant, in spite of the plots of his cast-off mistress and her new lover, and in spite of the fact that

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[1] Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 217.
[2] Harrison Dale, "The Comedies of William Congreve," Fortnightly Review, Jan. 1929, p. 57.

his plans to lure Lady Wishfort, Millamant's guardian, into a mock marriage, fail miserably. Two women servants, Mincing and Foible, lend themselves to his plans, as does his former mistress, Mrs. Fainall.

The two false wits, Witwoud and Petulant, are present and afford much of the humour, for they are excellent comic inventions, and bear out the idea Congreve explained in his Dedication of the play.

> " This reflection moved me to design some characters which should appear ridiculous, not so much through a mutual folly as through an affected wit; a wit, which at the same time that is affected is also false." [1]

But it is in the hero and heroine that we see the complete refinement of the Restoration character. In this pair we can see all the wits and coquettes that had preceded them. Witty, ironic, and self possessed, Mirabell was fair game for the equally witty and self possessed Millamant. Their entire courtship on the stage is intellectual, not one emotion or embrace or feeling is allowed to show. In the sense that love is a game of wits, they are the perfect lovers.[2]

Mirabell is a rather serious hero, and intent on his plans, but gay, charming Millamant is the crowning achievement in the way of heroines. She is "an admirable, almost a lovable heroine."[3] Like Lady Wishfort, her manner of speaking portrays

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[1] William Congreve, The Way of the World, Dedication, 313. A. C. Ewald, ed.
[2] Ashley H. Thorndyke, English Comedy, 324.
[3] John Palmer, Comedy of Manners, 199.

her. In bellinda of "The Old Bachelor," we had her rough outline, now we have the finished portrait. She upholds every tradition of the Restoration heroine. She loves Mirabell, but conceals it with raillery; she never gives in to him, but to the last maintains that she must be pursued; she upholds her notions of sex equality, insisting that the provisos of freedom be discussed before agreeing to accept Mirabell's proposal. The first time she meets him the verbal fencing starts. She teases him, laughs at him, and leaves him with a final sally.

As in "The Old Bachelor," the women do not make their appearance until the second act. When Millamant does make an entrance, the whold cast is on hand to great her. Mirabell announces her coming.

> " Here she comes, i' faith, full sail, with her fan spread and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders; Ha, I cry her mercy!" [1]

She is in a gay mood, and when Mirabell tries to talk seriously she will have none of it, telling him not to

> " - - - look with that violent and inflexible wise face, like Soloman at the dividing of the child in an old tapestry hanging." [2]

She laughs at his love sick face and tells him to woo her now if he is to win her. She announces that she knows his plot to marry his servant to Lady Wishfort's maid, then have the same servant make love to her ladyship. When, surprised at her knowledge, he asks how she knows all this, Millamant walks out

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[1] William Congreve, The Way of the World, II, 2, 344.
[2] William Congreve, ibid., II, 2, 348.

on him with this retort.

> " Without the help of the devil, you can't imagine; unless she should tell me herself. Which of the two it may have been I will leave you to consider; and when you have done thinking of that, think of me."
> (Exit)

Poor Mirabell cannot understant this lightness and gayety, for he is in sober mood most of the time. Millamant's elusiveness beffles him. He attempts to talk with her, but she is gone before he can say what is on his mind.

> " I have something more. - Gone! Think of you? think of a whirlwind." [1]

But Millamant does not confine her witty battles to Mirabell. She rallies Witwoud and Petulant, and in the same scene holds forth with Mrs. Marwood. She is not backward in telling that everyone knows why Mrs. Marwood discovered Mirabell's love for her to Lady Wishfort, nor does she hesitate to affirm that everyone knows the reason for Mrs. Marwood's actions. She taunts her and laughs at her until that lady is furious. When she replies to Millamant that she hates Mirabell, this answer only furnishes more matter for merriment.

All these examples of wit lead up to and culminate in the famous proviso scene. In the character of Millamant we find humour, intelligence, honesty, refinement, delicacy and womanliness. In this scene she is all this. It is as if Congreve were trying to picture in Millamant a conflict of desires - the desire to maintain one's own personality struggling with the

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[1] William Congreve, The Way of the World, II, 2, 349.

desire to love wholeheartedly. This he believed to be a conflict common in all marriages.[1]

It is in this scene that Millamant insists that she must be pursued to the last, for she will not be Mirabell's for the taking.

> Mir. Do you lock yourself from me, to make my search more curious? or is this pretty artifice contrived to signify that here the chase must end, and my pursuits be crowned? For you can fly no further.
> Mrs. Mill. Vanity! no - I'll fly, and be followed to the last moment. Though I am upon the verge of matrimony, I expect you should solicit me as much as if I were wavering at the grate of a monastery, with one foot over the threshhold. I'll be solicited to the very last, nay, and afterward.[2]

She then proceeds to lay down the provisos as to what she will do after marriage, in what is "perhaps the most perfect scene in English Comedy,"[3]

> Mrs. Mill. - - - positively, Mirabell, I'll lie abed in a morning as long as I please.
> Mir. Then I'll get up in the morning as early as I please.
> Mrs. Mill. Ah! idle creature, get up when you will - and d'ye hear, I won't be called names after I'm married; positively I won't be called names.
> Mir. Names!
> Mrs. Mill. Ay, As wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweetheart, and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar - I shall never bear that - good Mirabell, don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, nor go to Hyde Park together the first Sunday in a new chariot to provoke eyes and whispers, and then never be seen there together

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[1]Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy, 147.
[2]William Congreve, The Way of the World, IV, 1, 378.
[3]John Palmer, Comedy of Manners, 181.

> again; as if we were proud of one another the first week and ashamed of one another ever after. Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together; but let us be very strange and well-bred; let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while; and as well bred as if we were not married at all.[1]

Mirabell finds these provisions pretty reasonable, but Millamant is not through. Her next list represents rights which she thinks should be hers, a social equality and independence of action due her intelligence.

> Mrs. Mill. Trifles! - As liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I please; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or wry faces on your part; to wear what I please, and choose conversations with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation upon me to converse with wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance; or to be intimate with fools, because they may be your relations. Come to dinner when I please; dine in my dressing room when I'm out of humour, without giving a reason. To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea-table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly, wherever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in. These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may be degrees dwindle into your wife. [2]

Mirabell responds with some provisos of his own, and finally Millamant admits she has a mind for him, though Mrs. Fainall must urge her to do this.

> Mrs. Fain. Fy! fy! have him, have him, and tell him so in plain terms; for I am sure you have a mind to him.
> Mrs. Mill. Are you? I think I have - and the horrid man looks as if he thought so too - well, you ridiculous thing you, I'll have

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[1] William Congreve, The Way of the World, IV, 1, 378.
[2] William Congreve, ibid., IV, 1, 379.

> you - I won't be kissed, nor I won't be thanked - here kiss my hand though. So, hold your tongue, now don't saw a word.[1]

Once she has capitulated, the play goes on without her. The last act discloses Mirabell's plot to Lady Wishfort, and Fainall's plot against his wife. When these are all cleared up and explained, Millamant, somewhat bored with all the explaining of what everyone knew before, helps her lover, saying,

> " Why does not the man take me? Would you have me give myself to you over again?"[2]

Millamant's dictation of her rights in marriage and then the impatience on her part to finish up the actual taking of her by Mirabell, is explained by one critic in this fashion.

> " For Millamant is a woman; she has the inestimable power of giving, but she is rightly jealous of herself and is not to be undervalued. She is alive and breathing, hiding a real personality behind the only two necessary artifices of her sex. Once assured of Mirabell's love, she divests herself of her armour and shows a perfect frankness."[3]

From these excerpts, it can be seen that the hero and heroine of "The Way of the World" left nothing to be desired in the way of fulfilling the parts Congreve had assigned them. Millamant is the ideal heroine, and Mirabell the witty lover. Their part in the play was to match wits, so they proceed to do so on every possible occasion. The scene of the provisos

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[1] William Congreve, The Way of the World, IV, 1, 381-2.
[2] William Congreve, ibid., V, 3, 410.
[3] Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy, 147.

has been called "one of the summits of English prose. - - - a thing, in its way, as perfect as Hamlet's 'What a piece of work is man.'"[1]

In addition to the true-wit, and the heroine, are the conventional false wits, Witwoud and Petulant. They, also, occupy with honor the parts planned for them by the author. In this play the antithesis between the true wit and the false reached the highest expression found in the drama.[2]

Having assembled this brilliant cast of characters, Congreve could have proceeded to follow the conventional formula for Comedy of Manners. However, in his three preceding comedies, we have seen a stronger development on the part of women in influencing the direction of the plot. Now, in "The Way of the World," he again introduces some women characters who are to interfere to a great extent with the plans of the hero.

It is in the plot of this play that we are most interested. Mirabell, the true-wit, as in all Comedy of Manners, directs the original plot. His first plan was to affect a fondness for Lady Wishfort to disguise his love for Millamant. Failing in this, his next plan was to play a prank on Lady Wiashfort, which, if known, would make her the laughing stock of the town. To prevent this, he believes she will consent to his marriage with her niece, Millamant. It is interesting to trace how the feminine characters in the play help and

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[1] William Archer, The Old Drama and the New, 187.
[2] John Palmer, Comedy of Manners, 157.

hinder these plans.

For all during the play Mirabell is in the hands of three women, not counting the heroine, and only one of the three is willing to aid him in his affairs. The other two do all in their power to oppose his plans. Mrs. Fainall, a sincere and self-sacrificing woman, is his ally. Although a former mistress of Mirabell, who marries her to Fainall to escape the consequences of their love, she aids him in the escape from the plots of her husband and Mrs. Marwood, who also loves Mirabell, though she is mistress to Fainall. Both these women are realistic figures, and Mrs. Fainall has double reason to be jealous of Mrs. Marwood. Still, she remains loyal to Mirabell and helps him in his advances to Millamant.

Mrs. Marwood is the first of the women who is to interfere with the hero's plans. She affects his suit to Millamant by informing Lady Wishfort he is making love to her merely to have access to her niece. Incensed by this, the aunt forbids Millamant to marry him, and plans her marriage instead with Sir Witwoud, her nephew, who is a country squire. As Lady Wishfort is guardian of Millamant's estate, she can hold half the fortune if the heiress marries against her wishes. Thus Mrs. Marwood's disclosure of Mirabell's trickery has a serious effect on his plans.

Closely connected with the women we have just mentioned, is Fainall. He is the villain of the play, yet not in the way that Maskwell was in "The Double Dealer." Yet his plot is as despicable, though he and Mrs. Marwood remain in the spirit of

comedy and are not so melodramatic as their predecessor. They retain that light touch, and their plots are more in the nature of the game of wits that we expect in Comedy of Manners. He is not at all backward in expressing his opinion of his wife. When the women make their first appearance in the play, he encounters his wife with Mrs. Marwood and Mirabell, and the antagonism between him and his wife is clearly expressed.

> Mrs. Mar. What ails you?
> Mrs. Fain. My husband. Don't you see him? He turned short upon me unawares and has almost overcome me.
> - - - - -
> Fainall. You don't look well today, child.
> Mrs. Fain. D'ye think so?
> Mir. He is the only man that does, madam.
> Mrs. Fain. The only man that would tell me so at least; and the only man from whom I could hear it without mortification.
> Fainall. O my dear, I am satisfied of your tenderness; I know you cannot resent anything from me; especially what is an effect of my concern.[1]

After more of this kind of exchange, Mrs. Fainall leaves with Mirabell and Fainall says to Mrs. Marwood.

> Fainall. Excellent creature! Well, sure if I should live to be rid of my wife, I should be a miserable man.
> Mrs. Mar. Ay!
> Fainall. For having only that one hope, the accomplishment of it, of consequence must put an end to all my hopes; and what a wretch is he who must survive his hopes; Nothing remains when that day comes, but to sit down and weep like Alexander, when he wanted other worlds to conquer.[2]

Mrs. Marwood seems to be the particular evil genius bent on interfering with Mirabell's plans. When he plans his prank

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[1]William Congreve, The Way of the World, II, 1, 337-8.
[2]William Congreve, ibid., II, 1, 338.

on Lady Wishfort, after the failure of his first plot, it is necessary for him to have his servant Waitwell marry Foible, Lady Wishfort's maid. Waitwell is then to disguise himself as Sir Rowland and make love to Lady Wishfort. Mirabell meets Foible in the park to discuss plans, and it is Mrs. Marwood who sees them and suspects a new plot. Later, hidden in a closet in Lady Wishfort's house, she overhears Mrs. Fainall and Foible discuss the plan, so she is able to disclose the entire scheme to Fainall. But she remains the leader even then, and gives Fainall advice as to how he should act, while he asks definite instructions of her.

> Mrs. Mar. - - - you have often wished for an opportunity to part - and now you have it. But first prevent their plot - the half of Millamant's fortune is too considerate to be parted with, to a foe, to Mirabell.
> - - - - - - - - - You married her to keep you; and if you can contrive to have her keep you better than you expected, why should you not keep her longer than you intended.
> Fainall. The means, the means.
> Mrs. Mar. Discover to my lady your wife's conduct; threaten to part with! my lady loves her, and will come to any compsition to save her reputation. Take the opportunity of breaking it, just upon the discovery of this imposture. My lady will be enraged beyond bounds, and sacrifice neice, and fortune, and all, at that juncture. And let me alone to keep her warm; if she should flag in her part I will not fail to prompt her.
> Fainall. So, so, why this point's clear - well, how do we proceed?
> Mrs. Mar. I will contrive a letter which shall be delivered to my lady at the time when that rascal who is to act Sir Rowland is with her etc. [1]

From this scene we can see that it is Mrs. Marwood who leads the attack against Mirabell's plan to play his prank on

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[1] William Congreve, The Way of the World, III, 3, 370-1.

Lady Wishfort. Also, she is to have Fainall disclose his wife's former relations with Mirabell, and force Lady Wishfort to pay him her fortune, including Millamant's half, to buy his silence. She is motivated mostly by jealousy, and Fainall, while more than willing to aid her plots and carry out some of his own, is nevertheless guided by her and dependent on her for advice.

Lady Wishfort, the third of the women who have Mirabell's affairs in their hands, is the second woman to affect his plans by her opposition. Enraged by Mrs. Marwood's disclosures, she exercises her perogatives as guardian of Millamant. Under the terms of the guardianship, Lady Wishfort may retain half the fortune if her neice marries against her wishes. The threat of carrying out this condition if Millamant marries Mirabell, is sufficient to prevent the marriage. Thus, Lady Wishfort is a real stumbling block to the plans of Mirabell.

His second plot, as we have mentioned before, was to have his servant, disguised as Sir Rowland, court Lady Wishfort. When the plot is discovered, Mirabell believes Millamant's guardian will consider his proposal of marriage as the price to keep the story of her foolishness from the gossips of the town. Again, informed of Mirabell's plans by Mrs. Marwood, Lady Wishfort ruins all his plans of capitalizing on his carefully carried-out plot. Waitwell, the servant, is arrested, and Lady Wishfort is threatening Foible with the same punishment. Though eventually Mirabell wins Lady Wishfort's consent to wed Millamant, throughout the play she is an efficient

means of preventing his achieving his plan of marriage with her niece.

As a character, Lady Wishfort is deserving of special attention. With Millamant and Mirabell joined with her, a trio is formed that would raise this play above the level of the usual Restoration comedy. These three have been called "the three most brilliant and equally sustained figures of the Restoration Theatre."[1] The comic style of the passages in which they appear seem perfect, and the courtship scenes of both women show them to best advantage.

Lady Wishfort is the "precieuse" grown old and ugly.[2] Like Lady Loveyouth in Dhadwell's "The Humourists," and Loveit in Etherege's "The Man of Mode," her name betrays her tastes. She displays many moods and we react to her in many ways. We see her in relation to her maids, when her shrewdness and keen sense of humor is displayed, showing the old coquette was not unmindful of her foolishness. For example, she refers to her complexion thus.

> " Let me see the glass. - Cracks, sayest thou? why I am errantly flayed - I look like an old peeled wall - Thou must repair me - -"[3]

Besides this side of her character, we see her indulgence of her nephew, and her ardent friendship with Mrs. Marwood. We witness her affectations of love with Sir Rowland, and her very manner of speech denotes her character. Meredith says of

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[1] John Palmer, Comedy of Manners, 199.
[2] Kathleen Lynch, Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, 210.
[3] William Congreve, The Way of the World, III, 1, 352.

her manner of talking that

> " The flow of boudoir Billingsgate in Lady Wishfort is unmatched for the vigour and pointedness of the tongue. It spins along with a final ring, like the voice of nature in a fury, and is indeed the racy eloquence of the elevated fishwife." [1]

But the scene between her and Sir Rowland is glorious farce, with the original of Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop in full blast.

> Lady Wish. Well, Sir Rowland, you have the way - you are no novice in the labyrinth of love - you have the clue. - But as I am a person, Sir Rowland, you must not attribute my yieldings to any sinister appetite, or indigestion of widowhood; nor impute my complacency to any lethargy of continence - I hope you do not think me prone to any iteration of nuptials -
>
> Wait. Far be it from me -
>
> Lady Wish. If you do, I protest I must recede - or think that I have made a prostitution of decorums; but in the vehemence of compassion, and to save the life if a person of so much importance -
>
> Wait. I esteem it so
>
> Lady Wish. If you think the least scruple of carnality was an ingredient - - -
>
> Wait. Dear madam, no. You are all camphor and frankincense, all chastity and odour. [2]

This addition of humor to the comedy we cannot fail to appreciate, even though we are more interested in Lady Wishfort's other purpose in the play. For her ability to interfere with Mirabell's plans, places her among those women who show most clearly the change made by Congreve in the Comedy of Manners.

The formula that we saw him using in his previous comedies

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[1] George Meredith, "Essay on Comedy," quoted in Notes to Wm. Congreve, The Way of the World, 310.

[2] William Congreve, The Way of the World, IV, 2, 388-9.

is perfected here. In Millamant, we see a heroine who matched and excelled the men in the battle of wits, and achieved the purpose she had in mind from the beginning. She insisted on her social and mental equality, and carried off the whole thing with the lightness and airiness that delighted her admirers and infuriated her enemies. In Mrs. Marwood, we find a worthy successor to Silvia and Lady Touchwood, while Lady Wishfort, in a lesser way, furnishes opposition to the true-wit, Mirabell. More than in any of his other plays, the women in "The Way of the World" take over control of the play, and, in that way, interfere with the formula of the Comedy of Manners as established by Congreve's predecessors.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

In analyzing the plots of the women characters Congreve used in his comedies, two questions naturally presented themselves. First, did he keep to the dramatic tradition set up by his predecessors in the field of comedy? Secondly, how did his work differ from theirs? In attempting to answer these, we have tried to show that Congreve did use the mechanical plot and character types characteristic of the true Comedy of Manners, but that he was indifferent to this plot, more intent on having his characters achieve the purpose he had in mind for them. For his plays depended on characterization, and the characters he made strongest, strong enough to cover plot deficiencies, were his famous women.

To show how Congreve wrote his work in the tradition of the earlier comic drama, it was necessary to review the important writers of comedy from the time of Jonson, and endeavor to find in their work those vital elements which make up the inheritance to which Congreve fell heir.

In this realistic comedy we were able to trace the development of a social consciousness from the time of Jonson's interest in the individual's adjustment to society, through Fletcher's first sketches of society, Middleton's mixed group of tradesmen and gentry, down to Shirley's people of fashion following a definite social code. After the Cromwell regime, when the comic spirit was silenced, we saw Dryden beginning

and Etherege enlarging on wit and love intrigue as the social habit of the day.

As these writers were developing a formula for their plays, a place for women in drama was also being defined. From a negligible shadow in Jonson's plays, the woman character had achieved some importance in Fletcher, dwindled to a minor part in the late Elizabethans, except for a brief prominence in Shirley, and ultimately found her place as the automata of the Comedy of Manners. She was to be won by the hero and might help his plot machinations, but always the plot was to be in the control of the true-wit. This was the accepted formula when Congreve began to write his drama.

As it would be impossible to determine the intentions of the author without knowing the situations, characters, and dialogue of these plays, we found it useful to present many extracts from the author's works, illustrating characteristics under discussion. But, in our attempt to give a brief glimpse of the individual characters who move through these plays, we have not lost sight of the contribution their author was making toward the maintenance of the Comedy of Manners standard. He adopted the traditional formula of true and false wits, and the theme of sex antagonism. He followed the practice of women choosing the men they want and securing them, while announcing always that the lover must do the pursuing. All this was strictly within the tradition of the Comedy of Manners.

But now begins Congreve's divergence from the established rule. Even in his first play, "The Old Bachelor," we see

evidence of the line he was to follow. We note the women characters to be as strong as the men. Bellinda can battle Bellamour for the last word, and Silvia can manage Heartwell. But Silvia begins something else, much more important in the development of comedy. She makes the first attempt to block the plans of the hero of the play. That her intrigue is finally discovered and comes to naught is of little importance, for she does manage to upset the true-wit's plans to some extent. Moreover, instead of having punishment meted out to her at the end of the play, she is rewarded with a husband.

In "The Double Dealer" Congreve again develops this sort of plot motivation, where the women furnish the impediment to true love, only instead of one, there are two women interfering with the plots of the true-wit. In addition, there is a heroine, Cynthia, who helps to discover the cause of Mellefont's troubles and to disclose the villains. Without her help, the hero would have hopelessly entangled himself in the meshes of their plots. In this play, too, the characterization of his women grows stronger, and it is the women whom we remember longest when the play is finished.

The part played by women's interference is very evident in "Love for Love," not only in the main plot, but in the subplots as well. We see Angelica, the heroine, outwit Valentine, the true-wit, and threaten to marry his father. Valentine had planned to secure help in his financial difficulties and a confession of love from Angelica. Through her plans he is successful in neither. The minor intrigues are managed by Mrs. Frail

and her sister, and they afford sufficient reason why the men's plans are unavailing.

Finally, in "The Way of the World" the central theme of the hero's misfortunes in love is increasingly dependant on the interference of the women. It is noticeable that the number of women involved in the plots has increased with each play. We now see three women, Mrs. Fainall, Mrs. Marwood, and Lady Wishfort, who can affect the hero's suit, in addition to Millamant, an admirably portrayed heroine.

We have seen that each of these plays shows definitely the same characteristics. Each had added a brilliant heroine and outstanding portrayals of other women to the straight Comedy of Manners formula. But these women were not mere portraits. Their greatest use was in interfering with the plots of the true-wits of the play. This in itself was a great departure from the formula being used at the time. Always, till now, the true-wit had remained in full control of the plot. Congreve had now changed this formula, and this change, effected by the women controlling the plot, was to be his greatest contribution to the Restoration Comedy of Manners.

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