CIBBER'S LOVE'S LAST SHIFT

AN INTRODUCTION TO

COLLEY CIBBER'S

LOVE'S LAST SHIFT (1696)

BY

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PREFACE

Cibber as a subject is a rather limited one, and all studies so far have tended to be general and hence repetitious. This study is limited to an analysis of the first of his plays. An attempt has also been made to give a picture of Cibber himself, with a brief resumé of his more than forty successful years in the theatre.

Any discussion of Love's Last Shift necessarily entails the fitting of the play into its literary and social contexts: this has been essayed in Part Two, with a survey of comic theory and practice from the Restoration to the early years of the eighteenth century. With this is given the reaction of society away from Restoration libertine comedy to a more consciously exemplary type of play.

I must acknowledge a great debt to my supervisor, Dr. William Cameron, for his encouragement and corrective advice on several matters.

Without doubt also, some acknowledgement must be made to Colley Cibber himself, without whom this study would have been impossible.

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Ille velut fidis arcana sodalibus
olim credebat libris; quo fit ut
omnis votiva pateat veluti descripta
tabella vita senis.[1]

Horace, Satires, II, 1, 30-34.

I have observed, that a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure 'till he knows whether the writer of it be a black or fair man, of a mild or cholerick disposition, married or a bachelor, with other particulars of the like nature, that conduce very much to the right understanding of an author.

--Spectator. No 1 (March 1, 1711).

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[1] He used to entrust his secrets to his books, like loyal friends; and so it happens that the whole life of that old man lies plain, as though painted out on votive tablets.

PART ONE: MAINLY BIOGRAPHICAL

Childhood and Adolescence

Colley Cibber[1] is best remembered as the "hero" of the Dunciad, the king of the dunces, a title which the irate Pope bestowed upon him in an excess of spleen; and the word "Cibberian" has been understood to represent impenetrable dullness. By damning Cibber as a dunce, Pope meant to expose him as a corrupter of literature. And it may well be admitted from the outset that Pope was right in his assessment; for Cibber tinkered with Molière, "improved" upon Shakespeare, and denigrated the poetic art by writing trumpery and execrable verse. Also, it appeared to Pope that Cibber, instead of attempting to raise public taste (as he was undoubtedly in a position to do), deliberately pampered the audiences by reducing the intellectual content of his dramatic fare. What probably infuriated Pope the most, however, was Cibber's reaction to his critics: he met their contumely with a bland insouciance, an insufferable indifference which Dr. Johnson dubbed as "impenetrable impudence."[2]

Yet Johnson, who was in no way given to praising him, nonetheless allowed: "Cibber was by no means a blockhead."[3]

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[1] Susie Tucker, "A Note on Colley Cibber's Name", N&Q, CCIV (1959), 400, adduces evidence to show that contemporaries pronounced the surname Kibber.

[2] Life of Pope. In Works (London, 1818), VII, 353.

[3] Hill and Powell, eds. Boswell's Life, I, 401.

Cibber has a secure, if minor, place in the history of English literature. He was a playwright, an actor, a manager of Drury Lane theatre, Poet Laureate of England, and the writer of a delightful masterpiece in biography -- the Apology for his life: a book which Dean Swift stayed up all night to read, so engrossing were its contents.[4] Goldsmith, in his Life of Nash, remarks: "There are few, who do not prefer a page of Montaigne or Colley Cibber, who candidly tell us what they thought of the world and the world thought of them, to the more stately memoirs and transactions of Europe."[5] Horace Walpole further assures us that the Apology "...[doth] deserve immortality."[6] The Apology is important also in that it is a major source of the theatrical history of the early eighteenth century, and it was written by a man who had first-hand experience of what he wrote.

The Apology is, of course, the ultimate source for facts concerning Cibber. It is also Cibber's answer to his detractors, and he places himself quite firmly as the hero of his own narrative. Stylistically, the book is defective on several occasions; but more serious still are Cibber's inaccuracies, especially in the matter of dates. As his most distinguished editor has declared, "the charm of its author's ingenuous frankness has been unable altogether to overweigh the inaccuracy and vagueness of his treatment of matters of fact."[7] But apart from passages which need

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[4]Thomas Davies, Dramatic Miscellanies (London, 1783-84), III, 447. Quoted in Barker, Mr. Cibber of Drury Lane, p. 201.

[5]Works, ed. Arthur Friedman, III, 291.

[6]Correspondence, ed. W. S. Lewis, X, 298.

[7]Apology, ed. Robert Lowe, I, VII. Hereinafter referred toas Lowe.

correction or supplementation, and Cibber's attempt at viewing his own actions in the most charitable light possible, the events described in the Apology are substantially correct.

Colley Cibber was born in London, on November 6, 1671, in Southampton Street. His father, Caius Gabriel Cibber,[8] a native of Flensburg, in Holstein, had settled in England where he pursued his occupation of sculptor. On November 24, 1670 he had married Jane, daughter of William Colley of Glaston in Rutlandshire. The Colleys appear to have been an established country family, sending representatives to Parliament from the reign of Henry VII. Sir Anthony Colley, Cibber's great-grandfather, supported Charles I during the Civil War, reducing his estate thereby from £3,000 to £300 a year.[9] Jane Colley, however, on her marriage to Caius Gabriel, was able to bring with her a dowry of £6,000.[10]

Colley remembers that as a child he saw Charles II feeding the ducks in St. James Park; on another occasion, he was carried by his father to Whitehall where he observed the King and James, Duke of York at divine service in the chapel.[11]

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[8] "Caius Gabriel Cibber, or Cibert, son of a cabinet-maker to the King of Denmark...came to England, not long before the Restoration, and worked for John Stone, son of Nicholas, who going to Holland, and being seized with a palsy, Cibber his foreman was sent to conduct him home." -- Horace Walpole, Anecdotes of Painting in England (London, 1782), III, 145.

[9] Cibber, Apology (1740), p. 5.

[10] Joseph Knight, article "Cibber", Dictionary of National Biography, X, 352.

[11] Apology, p. 19.

In 1682 he was sent to the free school at Grantham in Lincolnshire.[12] He appears to have displayed a great deal of insensibility in his treatment of his schoolmates; his life at this time, he tells us candidly, was characterised by "giddy negligence", "unskilful openness", and "indiscretion". He was, moreover, by his own admission, "giddily forward" and "thoughtless of consequences". Two episodes of his school-days attest to this: on the death of Charles II in 1685, the pupils were asked by the master to compose a funeral ode; all declined save Colley, who was set at the top of the form for his efforts. But it was a "preferment dearly bought", since the boys, annoyed at the master taking him for rides on horseback, jeered at him for being a "pragmatical bastard."

On April 23, Colley, not learning from past experience, produced an ode on the coronation of James II, which he had composed in half an hour. The school received a holiday as the result of his efforts, but his ungrateful fellow-pupils refused to include him in a party they had to celebrate the occasion.[13]

After five years at Grantham, Cibber was sent to stand election for Winchester College; Colley claimed relationship with William of Wykeham, the founder of the college, on his mother's side. With only this "pompous pedigree" to recommend him, Colley not unexpectedly failed to win a place. This later taught his father wisdom -- when Colley's brother Lewis went to Winchester, "a present of the statue of the founder" also accompanied him; and "it was no sooner set up than the door of

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[12] Ibid., p. 5.

[13] Ibid., p. 19-21.

preferment was open to him."

Cibber, however, was happy at this "reprieve" and hastened to London to see a play ("then my darling delight") before his mother could demand him to give an account of his travel expenses.

Caius Gabriel was at this time employed at Chatsworth in Derbyshire, seat of the Earl (later Duke) of Devonshire. Colley wrote to him, asking to be sent to university. His father had hopes of settling him at Cambridge, where, indeed "he had contracted some acquaintance with the heads of houses." But after some time idling in London, Colley received a summons to join his father at Chatsworth. Before he could do so, however, the "glorious revolution" occurred -- William of Orange had landed in England with his troops. Young Cibber, arriving at Nottingham, found his father there in the troops the earl had raised "for the redress of our violated laws and liberties." Colley joined the army in his father's stead; and to Nottingham, too, came the Princess Anne. The earl provided entertainment that night for the Princess and her two companions, the ladies Churchill and Fitzharding.

Cibber's army career was brief, however, and ended when it was discovered that James II had fled to France. The army was quickly disbanded, and he accompanied his father back to Chatsworth, where he presented a petition to Devonshire. The petition was kindly received, Devonshire remarking to Cibber senior that he should send Colley to London, "where he would consider of some provision" for him.

For five months Cibber remained in London, as a member of the noble lord's household.[14]

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[14] Ibid., p. 34-45.

The Actor

During those five months Cibber was a constant frequenter of the playhouses. "I saw no joy in any other life than that of an actor," he tells us. "...'Twas on the stage alone I had form'd a happiness preferable to all that camps or courts could offer me." Devonshire had talked of recommending Cibber to Lord Shrewsbury, the Secretary of State; his intentions were now frustrated by Colley's "inconsiderate folly", as the young man now made the momentous decision of joining the acting troupe at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane. The year was 1690, and Colley was nineteen years old.[15]

For nine months Cibber worked without pay, learning the actor's craft; he was then given a salary of ten shillings a week. He apparently did not mind this lowly wage -- "Pay was the least of my concern; the joy and privilege of every day seeing plays for nothing, I thought was sufficient consideration for the best of my services."[16]

Although he was later to become "the greatest actor of his day in comic roles"[17], Cibber had a very inauspicious beginning on the stage. His first acting part was that of a servant in Thomas Southerne's Sir Anthony Love; he muffed his lines, causing even the veteran actor Betterton to be flustered. In 1691 also, he acted as Sigismond in Alphonso, King of Naples, and as a courtier in Chapman's Bussy d' Ambois. In 1692 came another series of small parts, and his performance as the chaplain

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[15] Ibid., p. 45.

[16] Ibid., p. 105-106.

[17] C. de Witt Croissant, Studies in the Work of Colley Cibber, p. 1.

in Otway's The Orphan won him the approval of an older actor, Cardell Goodman, who was moved to exclaim: "If he does not make a good actor, I'll be damned!"[18]

Cibber could hardly have dared hope to take the theatrical world by storm, since at Drury Lane, on his joining the company, were such professionals as Betterton, Montfort, Kynaston, Sandford, Nokes, Underhill and Leigh. The principal actresses were Mrs. Betterton, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Leigh, Mrs. Butler, Mrs. Montfort, and Mrs. Bracegirdle. He himself was aware of his deficiencies: "The first thing that enters into the head of a young actor, is that of being a hero. In this ambition I was soon snubb'd by the insufficiency of my voice; to which might be added, an uninform'd meagre person...and a dismal complexion. Under these disadvantages, I had but a melancholy prospect of ever playing a lover with Mrs. Bracegirdle, which I had flattered my hopes that my youth might one day recommend me to."[19]

To this candid description of himself, may be added one from the anonymous pamphlet, The Laureat; or, The Right Side of Colley Cibber:

> He was in stature of the middle size, his complexion fair, inclinable to the sandy, his legs somewhat of the thickest, his shape a little clumsy, not irregular, and his voice rather shrill than loud or articulate, and crack'd extremely when he endeavour'd to raise it. He was in his younger days so lean, as to be known by the name of Hatchet Face.[20]

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[18] L. R. N. Ashley, Colley Cibber, 172 note 1. Apology, p. 106.

[19] Apology, p. 59; 106.

[20] Lowe, I, 242, note 2.

It was in 1693 that Cibber married, or, as he puts it somewhat casually, "committed matrimony". His wife was Katherine Shore, daughter of William Shore, a musician.[21]

It was in the year following that his first really big opportunity came. Queen Mary had commanded a performance of Congreve's Double Dealer; Kynaston, who usually played the part of Lord Touchwood, was ill, and the author advised that the part be given to Cibber. The young actor was flattered by the distinguished author's attention, and gratified at the prospect of performing before the Queen, had his lines perfect before he slept that night. Congreve later complimented him on his acting, and recommended him to the attention of the patentees, who accordingly advanced his salary from fifteen shillings to twenty shillings a week.[22]

In 1695 Betterton and other leading actors deserted Drury Lane; this act led to improved treatment for the actors who remained -- Powell and Mrs. Verbruggen received advances in salary from forty shillings to four pounds a week. The other actors also received increases commensurate with their ability; Cibber observes that "without any further merit than that of being a scarce commodity, I was advanc'd to thirty shillings a week."[23]

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[21] Apology, 107; Barker, p. 17.
Except for the statement, "my muse and my spouse were equally prolifick" (Apology, 153), Cibber makes no mention of his immediate family in the Apology. Barker mentions him as having five children -- Theophilus, Anne, Elizabeth, Catherine and Charlotte. Later evidence accounts for a sixth, a boy called James, who was blind.
See F. S. Tupper, "Colley and Caius Cibber", MLN, LV (1940), pp. 393-96.

[22] Apology, p. 107-108.

[23] Ibid., p. 112.

Cibber's importance was however slowly growing. For the opening of the new season, Drury Lane decided to act Mrs. Behn's Abdelazar, or The Moor's Revenge. Cibber wrote a new prologue for the play, but was not allowed to speak it himself. Instead, he was given two guineas for his services, and Powell spoke the prologue. Peoples' opinion of young Cibber improved -- "...one of the patentees (who, it is true, knew no difference between Dryden and D'Urfey) said, upon the success of it, that insooth! I was an ingenious young man."[24]

Betterton, in his theatre at Lincoln's Inn Fields, opened the season with Congreve's Love for Love. The play had first been submitted to the players at Drury Lane; the rupture with Betterton had made Congreve pause, and then he had given it to the actors for whom he had written the parts, namely, those who had left Drury Lane at the Betterton secession. Congreve was offered a share in their profits, on the condition that he wrote one new play a year for them; this he accepted.[25]

Competition now began between the two playhouses; each strove to capture the other's audiences. Drury Lane learnt one Saturday that Betterton and his company were planning to produce Hamlet the Tuesday following. The actors resolved to steal a march on their rivals, and determined to give the play on Monday -- this was accordingly announced in the playbills. Betterton thereupon retaliated by deciding to play Hamlet on the Monday also. With the announcement of this plan, there was consternation at Drury Lane. Powell called the troupe together, and it was

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[24] Ibid., 113-114.

[25] Ibid., 115.

decided that they would give The Old Bachelor instead. Powell agreed to play the part of the old bachelor, and mimic the acting style of Betterton. The parts were hastily apportioned, and there then began a feverish studying of them, since not two in the company had ever acted in the play before. It was then discovered that nobody had been assigned the role of Alderman Fondlewife, a part that Doggett had been accustomed to play. Someone recalled that young Cibber had evinced a desire to play the role; and Powell thereupon rather uncharitably remarked: "If the fool has a mind to blow himself up, at once, let us ev'n give him a clear stage for it." The part was given to Cibber between 11 a.m. and 12 noon; but he had observed minutely Doggett's performance and style, and the reception he met with from the audience was encouraging.[26]

In 1696, Cibber wrote himself a play, Love's Last Shift, and gave himself the part of Sir Novelty Fashion. Apparently, however, there were still doubts concerning his acting abilities, since Thomas Southerne commented to the youthful author: "Young man! I pronounce thy play a good one; I will answer for its success, if thou dost not spoil it by thy own action." Sir John Vanbrugh in the following year wrote The Relapse as a sequel to Cibber's play, and the role of Lord Foppington was played by Cibber, whose reputation as an actor was firmly established by his treatment of the part.[27]

Cibber went on to act in Aesop, Iphigenia in Aulis (1699), The Modish Husband (1702), The Rival Fools (1709); and among his many acting

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[26] Ibid., p. 117-121.

[27] Ibid., 123-129; Erskine Baker, The Companion to the Play-House (London, 1764), I, article Love's Last Shift.

roles can be numbered Iago, Wolsey, Syphax, Richard III, Sir Fopling Flutter and Justice Shallow. His particular forte was comedy, and in tragedy he usually failed to please: as Scipio in Thomson's Sophonisha, he was hissed off the stage.[28] Contemporary references to his acting abound. The anonymous author of The Laureat announced that in Richard III, Cibber "screamed through four acts without dignity or decency...when he was killed by Richmond, one might plainly perceive that the good people were not better pleas'd that so execrable a tyrant was destroy'd, than that so execrable an actor was silent."[29]

Aaron Hill remarked that "in his face was a contracted kind of passive yet protruded sharpness, like a pig half-roasted; and a voice not unlike his own might have been borrowed from the same suffering animal while in a condition a little less desperate."[30]

John Dennis, the critic, whom Cibber had the misfortune to offend, was even more uncomplimentary, when he wrote:

> ...the truth of the matter is, that he acts nothing at all well. He sometimes appears pretty well upon the stage, when he is the real thing which the poet designs, as a ridiculous, incorrigible, impudent fop in comedy; and a bold, dissembling, dangerous, undermining villain in tragedy. And sometimes in tragedy he blends the fop and the villain together, as in Jago for example, in the Moor of Venice.[31]

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[28]Ashley, p. 29.

[29]Lowe, I, 199, footnote 1.

[30]Prompter. (November 19, 1734). Quoted by Ashley, p. 34-35.

[31]John Dennis, The Characters and Conduct of Sir John Edgar, Call'd by Himself Sole Monarch of the Stage in Drury-Lane; and His Three Deputy Governors. In Two Letters to Sir John Edgar. In Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. E. N. Hooker, II, 193-194.

John Downes, the prompter at Drury Lane, more justly summed up Cibber's acting abilities, when he wrote, in Roscius Anglicanus:

> Mr. Cyber has arriv'd to an exceeding perfection, in hitting justly the humour of a starcht beau, or fop; as the Lord Foppington, Sir Fopling and Sir Courtly, equalling in the last, the late eminent Mr. Mountford, not much inferior in tragedy, had nature given him lungs stremuous to his finisht judgment.[32]

A later critic agrees on Cibber's excellence in playing foppish roles, and adds that "for this type all his shortcomings became advantages; the lively, impudent face with the upturned snub-nose, the little mouth with the vapid smile, the slender figure, the thin shrill voice."[33]

Even after Cibber had officially quitted the stage in 1733, he still appeared several times on the boards. In 1745, he returned to play the papal legate Pandulph in his Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John. The play ran ten nights and made over £400 for Cibber.[34]

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[32]Quoted by D. M. E. Habbema, An Appreciation of Colley Cibber, p. 10.

[33]Karl Mantzius, A History of Theatrical Art, V, 353.

[34]Barker, p. 238.

The Playhouses

From the stage-struck youth who hung around the theatres in 1691, Colley Cibber by 1704 was in a position of some influence, and finally rose to be one of the actor-managers of Drury Lane. Since the life of Cibber is inextricably bound up with the theatre of the time, it will be necessary to trace briefly the beginnings and the development of the theatrical companies in London.

In the eighteenth century acting and actors were not considered to be quite respectable. This tradition had its roots way back in history, and was bolstered up by several Acts of Parliament. Under Elizabeth I, for example, an Act of 1571 decreed that companies of actors must be licensed, before they presumed to act. There were also several attacks on the stage, two of the more well-known being William Prynne's Histriomastix of 1633 and Jeremy Collier's Short View in 1698. During the Commonwealth, stage performances were banned.[35]

At the Restoration, there sprang up a number of acting companies, of which the more important were those of Killigrew and D' Avenant. In 1659 the bookseller John Rhodes collected a company of actors which included Betterton, Underhill, Nokes and Kynaston.[36] A theatre was built

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[35] Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Restoration Drama 1660-1700, p. 268. notes that "...surreptitious performances continued at the various theatres, whenever old actors were able to gather a company and an audience."

Before the Restoration, D' Avenant was allowed by Cromwell to perform some theatrical pieces. The Siege of Rhodes was acted in 1656.

[36] Arthur Nethercot, Sir William D' Avenant, p. 338-339.

in Vere Street, Lincoln's Inn; this troupe soon came under Thomas Killigrew, whose royal patent was ratified on April 25, 1662, and was known as the King's Men. In 1663 the King's Men removed to Drury Lane. Sir William D' Avenant's patent was ratified on January 16, 1662. His company, the Duke of York's men, opened a theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1662, but by 1671 had removed to the Duke of York Theatre in Dorset Garden; the theatre was designed by Sir Christopher Wren at a cost of £5,000. Both companies were patronised by the court.

In 1671 the original Drury Lane was destroyed by fire; it was rebuilt by Wren in 1674, at a cost of £4,000. The Dorset Garden theatre was under the management of Lady D' Avenant and Betterton.

On Lady D' Avenant's death, her son Charles succeeded to the patent, and he transferred his interest in 1687 to Alexander D' Avenant. In March 1690, Alexander sold the patent rights to the entrepreneur Christopher Rich for £80.[37] Rich now became the sole ruler of the important London theatres. "Adventurers" were allowed into the management, who, "though utterly ignorant of theatrical affairs, were still admitted to a proportionate vote in the management of them; all particular encouragements to actors were by them, of consequence, look'd upon as so many sums deducted from their private dividends."[38]

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[37] For the facts in the preceding paragraphs, see Nicoll (1660-1700), 268-304; Ashley, 81-82; Dorothy Senior, The Life and Times of Colley Cibber, 15-18.

[38] Apology, 58. But John Genest, Some Account of the English Stage, II, 62, remarks: "The theatre in Dorset Garden had been built by subscription -- the subscribers were called adventurers -- of this Cibber seems totally ignorant -- that there were any new adventurers, added to the original number, rests solely on his authority, and in all probability he is not correct."

Such was the situation when Cibber joined the company in 1691. Rich was a particularly unscrupulous lawyer, out to make money and not caring at whose expense he made it. As a result, the actors were often poor, and in debt to him: two players, Goodman and Griffith, were reduced to sharing a shirt between them.

Rich's mean practices led in 1695 to Betterton's desertion, recounted earlier. Cibber gives a finely drawn picture of Rich:

> ...our good master was as sly a tyrant as ever was at the head of a theatre; for he gave the actors more liberty, and fewer days pay, than any of his predecessors. He would laugh with them over a bottle, and bite them in their bargains. He kept them poor, that they might not be able to rebel; and sometimes merry, that they might not think of it...[39]

Rich also, according to Cibber,

> had no conception...of theatrical merit, either in authors or actors, yet his judgment was govern'd by a saving rule in both: he look'd into his receipts for a value of a play, and from common fame he judg'd of his actors.[40]

Betterton, at Lincoln's Inn, failed to draw large enough audiences and turned over his interests to Congreve and Vanbrugh. These two built a new theatre in the Haymarket, which proved to be an architectural disaster -- it was too big, and the acoustics were bad. Congreve backed out, and in desperation Vanbrugh petitioned the Lord Chamberlain to unite the two companies.[41]

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[39] Ibid., p. 146.

[40] Ibid., p. 152.

[41] Ashley, p. 83-84.

At Drury Lane, Rich had been instituting various dubious stratagems in an effort to gain money. From 1695 onwards he had, in place of the legitimate drama, placed emphasis on operas and entertainments. He revived The Prophetess, and Settle's The World in the Moon. Neither was he averse to filling the stage with rope-dancers and harlequins; and "Signor Clementine, the famous eunuch, servant to the Elector of Bavaria," consented to grace the stage at Drury Lane, one among several other foreigners imported by Rich.[42] In addition, Rich hit upon another expedient to fill the seats of his theatre: he opened the upper gallery to footmen and servants. Before this, no footman had ever been allowed in until after the fourth act. Rich hoped that by doing this, the servants would recommend the play to their employers. But their loud and undiscriminating applause upset the performers and the more genteel audience -- "this riotous privilege, so craftily given, and which from custom, was at last ripen'd into right, became the most disgraceful nuisance that ever depreciated the theatre."[43]

As early as 1700, it seems, Cibber was becoming an important person in the theatre. He was consulted by Rich, and Barker adduces as evidence, a document from among the Lord Chamberlain's papers, which does in some measure confirm Cibber's status. The document is a protest by the actors of the company who complain of Rich's violations of certain agreements. It is signed by all the actors except Cibber; and Barker is of the opinion

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[42] Barker, p. 54-56.

[43] Apology, p. 135.

that Cibber was pro-management, if not actually on the management at this time.[44] This close relationship increased; Cibber was asked to give his opinion on the merits of the rival actors Powell (who helped direct rehearsals) and Wilks. This was a step up, indeed, since Rich was "a close subtle man" who "seldom made use of a confidant in his schemes of government."[45]

Rich seems to have developed a confidence in Cibber mainly because of the success of his first play, and the fact that Cibber knew more about the stage than Rich did. Cibber, realising that he "had more of [Rich's] personal inclination than any actor of the male sex; and so much of it, that [he] was almost the only one, whom, at that time, [Rich] us'd to take into his parties of pleasure," favoured Wilks over Powell; and the upshot was that a new agreement was signed with Wilks, by which he was to receive four pounds a week. From this time, Wilks "became first minister, or bustle-master-general of the company." He seems to have used his authority well -- he kept the actors to their business. Cibber considered Powell to be the better actor, but because of the "neglect and abuse" of his gifts, allowed that Wilks would be of more service to the company.[46]

If further proof were needed of Cibber's gradual rise, it is contained in Visits from the Shades (1704), in a dialogue between "Nat Lee, the tragedian, and Colley Cibber, the plagiary". Cibber points out that

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[44] Barker, p. 57-58.

[45] Apology, p. 147.

[46] Ibid., p. 148-52.

"the town has a [good] opinion of my parts, and my plays have raised me to a sort of viceroy in the theatres; for I try, acquit, or condemn, and there's nought to be represented but what is stamped by my approbation and tried by the touchstone of my own sense." Lee replies that "... Jonson, Shakespeare, Dryden and some others of us not long since were discoursing of the poor state of your theatre, and after several causes assigned, they all agreed the chief was owing to your mismanagement."[47]

The Ousting of Christopher Rich

In 1706 Owen Swiney, a former assistant of Rich's at Drury Lane, was persuaded by Rich to lease the Haymarket Theatre from Vanbrugh for seven years. By a verbal agreement, Swiney was to receive one hundred guineas a year, and as many of Rich's actors as he might want. Rich was to be nominal head of both theatres; in addition, the Haymarket was to give only plays. "The real truth was," Cibber reports, "that he [Rich] had a mind both companies should be clandestinely under one and the same interest; and yet in so loose a manner, that he might declare his verbal agreement with Swiney good, or null and void, as he might best find his account in either."[48] Swiney seems not to have had much choice in the matter -- he was debtor to Rich for £200.

Wilks, Estcourt, Keen, Johnson, Mrs. Oldfield and Bullock followed Swiney to the Haymarket. The first intimation Cibber received of the transaction was in a letter from Swiney, inviting him to join the company.

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[47] Quoted by Barker, p. 58.

Cibber wisely declined, realising that the new troupe had few prospects. Cibber was at the time in Gloucestershire, at the home of a friend, Colonel Henry Brett, hard at work on a new play.

Cibber returned to London, and offered his services to Rich. "But I found our company so thinn'd that it was almost impracticable to bring any one tolerable play upon the stage. When I asked him where were his actors, and in what manner he intended to proceed? he reply'd, 'Don't trouble yourself.'" Rich's idea was that "singing, and dancing, or any sort of exotick entertainments would make an ordinary company of actors too hard, for the best set, who had only plays to subsist on."

Cibber decided to speak frankly to his employer; his best actors were gone, and he (Cibber) had no intention of taking a cut in his income. Rich tried to fob him off by offering him whatever parts he might have a fancy for. Cibber "look'd gravely in his face" and told him bluntly what he thought of that proposal.

At the Haymarket, meanwhile, it seemed as if Swiney was riding on the wave of success. Audiences had increased, and the actors were being paid their full salaries. Swiney now pressed Rich to execute in writing the articles that had hitherto been agreed on verbally. Rich hesitated -- "rashness had never yet been imputed to the patentee". Swiney also insisted on having Cibber into the company; Rich refused, but Cibber now decided to accept the offer, since he was dissatisfied with Rich's behaviour and "indifference" towards him. The boom at the Haymarket continued, and Swiney was soon able to discharge his £200 debt. There were still, however, difficulties to encounter, the chief being the "immoderate

wideness of their house."[48]

Rich, facing competition from the Haymarket, resorted to his usual practices of abandoning straight acting for "singers, dancers, and other exotick performers". He pandered to the lowest taste of the crowds, and diverted them with spectacle, since the majority "could more easily comprehend anything they saw, than the daintiest things that could be said to them."[49]

A new turn was taken in the affairs of the theatres by the action of Sir Thomas Skipwith, Rich's "silent partner" in the patent. Skipwith had bought his interest in the patent also from Alexander D' Avenant;[50] he had, however, made little profit out of it, and he decided to turn it over to Colonel Brett for a nominal sum. Brett took Cibber into his confidence, and consulted him on how best to make the patent pay. Cibber was at this time acting at the Haymarket.

Cibber strongly urged that Brett should produce his deeds to Rich, and immediately enter into joint possession. He further advised that Brett should effect a union of both companies. Armed with this advice, Brett did as he was told, and further obtained a ruling from the Lord Chamberlain that one theatre would present plays, the other operas. Swiney was made sole director of opera at the Haymarket; the other actors were to return to Drury Lane, "there to remain (under the patentees) her majesty's only company of comedians."[51]

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[48] Apology, p. 187-193.

[49] Ibid., p. 195.

[50] Lowe, II, 32, footnote 1.

[51] Apology, p. 212-223.

The first opera produced by Swiney was Pyrrhus, and he had three good performers, Nicolini, Valentini and Mrs. Tofts to act in it. The novelty and general excellence of the performances drew large crowds, and Swiney grew prosperous. Drury Lane was also giving good performances, although Rich was annoyed at power escaping from him into the hands of Colonel Brett. In an endeavour to get rid of Brett, therefore, Rich relied upon his "adventurers", in an attempt to gain the majority of votes.

Rich also decided to demand a third of the money the actors received from their benefit performances. This goaded the long-suffering players to protest to the Lord Chamberlain, who ordered the patentees to show cause why they had exacted this cut in the actors' benefits. Another event of great importance was the behaviour of Sir Thomas Skipwith, who now demanded that Brett return his share in the patent, asserting that the conveyance had been made only in trust.

The scheme enjoined by the Lord Chamberlain of "separate interests" did not last long. Swiney began to treat with Drury Lane actors, and brought Wilks, Doggett, Mrs. Oldfield and Cibber into partnership with him at the Haymarket. Articles were signed secretly in March. Doggett objected to Mrs. Oldfield, on the grounds that affairs would never be on a "secure foundation" if women were allowed on the management. Mrs. Oldfield placidly agreed, therefore, to accept £200 a year, and a benefit "clear of all charges".

In June of the same year (1709), the Lord Chamberlain acted on the players' grievances against Rich, and he was dispossessed of the Drury Lane

theatre. Rich, undismayed, started to rebuild the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields (he had taken a lease on it, at a low rent, ever since Betterton's company had left it), but died before it was opened.[52]

Collier at Drury Lane

With Rich silenced, Sir William Collier, "a lawyer of an enterprising and jovial heart" who was also Member of Parliament for Truro in Cornwall, managed to obtain a new license through his influence at Court. He reopened Drury Lane on November 23, 1709, ejected Rich's men from the theatre, and scraped together an acting company from those players who had not gone over to Swiney at the Haymarket.[53]

Collier also used his influence to obtain support for another scheme -- "that in consideration for his giving up the Drury Lane cloaths, scenes, and actors to Swiney and to his joint sharers, he [Collier] might be put into an equal possession of the Haymarket theatre, with all the singers, etc., and be made sole director of the opera." The Lord Chamberlain consented, and an agreement was entered into. Cibber notes that there were two "hard articles" in the pact: since the licence for acting plays was deemed more profitable than that of acting operas, the comedians were required to pay £200 a year to Collier; secondly, Drury Lane was to be silent on Wednesdays, to give the opera a better chance.

Collier farmed out his interest to Aaron Hill for £600 a year; then he decided to resume it himself. This enterprising lawyer, like

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[52] Ibid., p. 224-240.

[53] Ibid., p. 245-246.

Rich, was determined to make as much profit from the theatre as he could; and enviously observing that Drury Lane was growing prosperous, despite the ban on Wednesday acting, he decided to exchange once more with Swiney, who declined the offer. Swiney was advised by Vanbrugh to accept, rather than be totally excluded from the management by refusing. The warning, it seems, came too late, as Collier procured a new licence for the acting of plays for himself, Wilks, Doggett and Cibber. By 1711 Swiney, burdened with debts, had fled to the Continent; and Cibber, Doggett and Wilks were secure at Drury Lane. Collier, who wanted the profits but scorned to work for them, demanded £700 a year as his share; the others were forced to submit, warned by the fate of Swiney. An offer that he accept equal shares, Collier turned down; by so doing, Cibber reports with glee, Collier was the loser, since the others made £1,000 a year each, between 1712 and 1714.[54]

On August 1, 1714 Queen Anne died. Collier's licence now came to an end, and a new one had to be obtained. The managers determined to be rid of Collier for good, and pressed Richard Steele to apply for a licence. Steele applied to the Duke of Marlborough, who obtained it for him. On October 18, 1714 Steele succeeded Collier as a partner at Drury Lane.[55]

The actor -- managers

On January 19, 1715 Steele was granted a patent to produce plays at Drury Lane;[56] it was to remain in force for Steele's life and for three

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[54] Ibid., p. 249-254.

[55] Lowe, I, 337, footnote 2.

[56] Ibid.

years after for the benefit of his heirs. Steele immediately assigned shares to Cibber, Wilks and Booth. Barton Booth was a rising player who had acted the part of Cato in Addison's tragedy of the same name. He had acquitted himself with such élan, that he had received a gift of fifty guineas from influential Tories, and had accepted a similar sum from the Drury Lane management. Booth, Cibber tells us, "would never be easy" until he obtained a share in the profits and management, and apart from his success as an actor, he had friends who were powerful enough to back up his demands. Doggett strongly objected, but the Lord Chamberlain decreed that Booth should be allowed to buy a share for £600.[57]

There was at this time too, friction between Doggett and Wilks. Doggett had a passion for economy, while Wilks was inclined to be lavish. There was bound to be a conflict between the two. One spectacular clash occurred when Wilks signed on two Irish actors without informing the other managers. On Booth's successful soliciting of a share in the management, Doggett was highly incensed and walked out of the company, utterly refusing to assist in the management of the theatre; still demanding, however, his full share of the profits. He instituted an action in Chancery against the others; the suit was subsequently heard before the Lord Chief Justice Cowper. Doggett was given fourteen days to return to Drury Lane and carry out his duties. He declared that he would rather be quit of Cibber and Wilks, and was accordingly awarded £600, plus "15 per cent interest, from the date of the last licence." Each side paid its own costs.

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[57] Apology, p. 268-270.

Doggett later repented of his rashness, but made no overtures to return. He however condescended to play in Mrs. Porter's benefit performance in The Wanton Wife. After this gesture, he never returned to the stage.[58]

On January 23, 1720 the managers of Drury Lane received a severe shock; the Lord Chamberlain closed the theatre, and revoked the licence. This was probably the result of Cibber's rashness the year before; he had been suspended for allegedly abusing the Crown in the Preface to his tragedy Ximena, and had refused also to further the advance of the actor Elrington, a protége of Lord Chamberlain Newcastle.[59]

Four days after the revocation of the licence, Cibber, Booth and Wilks received a new patent, after they had pledged obedience to the Lord Chamberlain and his officers. Steele was excluded from the patent, since he was not in favour with Newcastle -- they disagreed on political matters. But by May 2, 1721 Steele was back in favour; through the influence of Sir Robert Walpole he regained his share in the patent, and claimed from the managers his share of the profits during the months he had been out of office. Cibber came to terms with Steele -- he was to have an equal share in the patent and the profits. But by 1728[60] the managers and Steele were at law in a Chancery suit. Two years before the suit, Cibber and the other managers had been paying themselves £1.13s.4d. a day each, on the grounds that Steele's work was being done by them.

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[58] Ibid., p.255-288.

[59] Barker, p.122-123; Ashley, p.97-98.

[60] Cibber gives 1726; Lowe corrects the date to 1728.

Steele had not complained of this practice, and had continued to absent himself from Drury Lane.

The case came up before Sir Joseph Jekyll, the Master of the Rolls. The chief point at issue was the defining of the duties of a manager. Cibber spoke on behalf of his associates, and the gist of his pleading was as follows: Was Sir Richard Steele obliged to carry out the duties of a manager, along with Cibber, Booth and Wilks? Were the defendants justified in allowing themselves the disputed sum for carrying out Steele's duties? Cibber defined the managers' duties -- each manager was obliged to attend play rehearsals for two or three hours a day; he had to be present at every play reading; he had to oversee musicians, singers, dancers, door-keepers and under-servants. In addition, he had to use discretion, skill and patience in his dealings with the one hundred and forty employees of Drury Lane.

Cibber's eloquence won the day and the managers were held to be justified in their action. Both parties were required to pay their own costs.[61]

From Cibber's testimony, the managers made in the 1712-13 season, £4,000; and in the 1713-14 season, £3,500. (Between September 21 and December 17, 1714 the profits made had amounted to £1,700). But in the winter of 1714-15 the managers' profits dwindled. This slump was due in part to the competition mounted by John Rich (son of Christopher) at his theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. In 1715, Drury Lane was closed for alterations.[62]

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[61] Apology, p.307-315.

[62] Barker, p.99.

From 1718-22 the theatre had to battle with Rich's imported players, and also from 1723-30 had to contend with Rich's successful production of harlequinades and pantomimes. In 1727-28 Cibber's Henry VIII and The Provok'd Husband brought some measure of prosperity to Drury Lane.[63]

Feuds and Controversies

Colley Cibber, as is common with most successful men, had enemies. Some were motivated simply by envy; but others, more intelligent, attacked him because of his reputed dulness. Cibber notes: "...about this time [i.e., circa 1717], the publick papers, particularly Mist's Journal, took upon them very often to censure our management, with the same freedom and severity, as if we had been so many ministers of state."[64] Nathaniel Mist was the proprietor of this journal which assiduously attacked Cibber.

Cibber himself seems to have been unpopular with the actors, as Davies in his Dramatic Miscellanies asserts that he scarcely ever ventured to show himself in the actors' green-room.[65] In addition, his treatment of authors scarcely endeared him to them. The writer of The Laureat says that "...when the reading was finished, he made his proper corrections, and sometimes without any propriety; nay, frequently he very much and very hastily maimed what he pretended to mend; but to all this the author must submit, or he would find his work postponed to another

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[63] Ibid., p. 132.

[64] Apology, p. 292.

[65] Senior, p. 78-79.

season, or perhaps sine die."[66]

John Dennis also observed: "I am perfectly satisfied that any author who brings a play to Drury Lane, must, if 'tis a good one, be sacrificed to the jealousy of this fine writer [i.e., Cibber]."[67]

Cibber genially called his treatment of aspiring authors the "choaking of singing birds". Davies is more explicit:

> Colley Cibber, I believe, deserved many of those keen reproaches and bitter sarcasms, which are to be read in several pamphlets published during his administration of the stage; for his denial of a new piece was not attended with that delicacy and politeness which is so necessary upon an unwelcome repulse, and which must, however gently delivered, overwhelm an author who is obliged to hear it, with confusion and vexation.[68]

Davies, after citing one example of Cibber's overbearing manner, continues:

> When Mr. Fenton read his tragedy of Mariamne to Cibber, he not only rejected it, but spoke in the following insolent manner to the learned author: "Sir, will you take the advice of a friend? Apply yourself to some honest and laborious calling; the belles lettres and you will never agree, you have no manner of genius for poetry."[69]

It was a standing joke that Cibber only accepted plays which were "theatrical" -- that is, those with a great deal of "business" and with acting parts which would fit the abilities of the Drury Lane troupe. This sometimes led him into faulty judgments -- he refused Gay's Beggar's Opera, then realizing how successful it was when acted at the rival theatre, tried

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[66] Quoted by Barker, p. 112.

[67] Preface to The Invader of his Country. Quoted by Lowe, II, 231, footnote 1.

[68] Thomas Davies, Life of Garrick (Dublin, 1780), I, 170-171.

[69] Ibid., p. 171.

to cash in on its appeal by writing Love in a Riddle -- which was promptly damned by his critics.[70] In the Prologue to Ximena, Cibber complains of the "merry-making critics" who treat "the poor rogue the author...with the utmost insults, scandal, and malevolence..."

The critic Dennis also attacked Cibber with all the virulence of a disappointed playwright. Dennis had written Coriolanus, The Invader of his Country, and in 1718 had offered it to Drury Lane, who agreed to stage it. Rich, however, chose this moment to put on Shakespeare's Coriolanus, and Dennis' play was put aside to a more opportune time. When it was finally acted, it was withdrawn after only three nights' performance.[71] Dennis later published a scurrilous pamphlet attacking Cibber, accusing him of blasphemy, immorality, ignorance, and unconcern for his wife and family.[72]

In addition to the malicious gibes of Mist, and the rancorous fulminations of Dennis, Cibber also had to face the attacks of Henry Fielding and Alexander Pope. Fielding as a young unknown had been rebuffed by Cibber when he presented scripts to Drury Lane; no doubt he received the same treatment Cibber meted out to aspiring authors. He revenged himself by writing The Author's Farce, a satirical sketch poking fun at Wilks and Cibber. In Tumble-Down Dick, Fielding ridiculed Cibber's son Theophilus, and in Pasquin his butt was once more Cibber senior.

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[70] Barker, p. 150-152.

[71] Ibid., p. 118-123.

[72] Characters and Conduct of Sir John Edgar. Hooker, II, 188-189.

Ascribed to Fielding also is the anonymous Trial of Colley Cibber (1739), and the Apology for T... C... (1740). In 1741, a year after Cibber's Apology was published, Fielding produced An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews By Mr. Conny Keyber.[73]

The quarrel with Pope arose out of a play, Three Hours After Marriage, which Pope had written in collaboration with Gay and Arbuthnot. Included among the contemporary caricatures in the play were Cibber (as Plotwell) and John Dennis (as Sir Tremendous). Cibber, with perfect equanimity, accepted the piece for Drury Lane, and played the part of Plotwell himself. The play was a failure, and Cibber later, as Bays in The Rehearsal, made a trifling sally at the work, which was received with laughter. Pope was annoyed, and took his revenge in 1717 by producing The Plot Discovered, or A Clue to the Comedy of the Non-juror. This "proved" that Cibber's play was an attack on the Whig government. In 1727 Cibber was put in Pope's Art of Sinking in Poetry, and in 1728 he was again mentioned in the Dunciad. Cibber blandly refused to take offence -- he considered his enemies to be "piddlers in wit" who "may want bread". "When they confine themselves to a sober criticism of what I write; if their censure is just, what answer can I make to it? If it is unjust, why should I suppose that a sensible reader will not see it, as well as myself?"[74]

But Pope refused to be mollified by Cibber's silence; this indifference probably stung him harder than any reply Cibber might have made.

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[73] See H. W. Taylor, "Fielding upon Cibber", MP, XXIX (1931), 73-90; and C. B. Woods, "Cibber in Fielding's Author's Farce: Three Notes", PQ, XLIV (1965), p. 145-51.

[74] Apology, p. 26.
For the quarrel with Pope, see Barker, p. 204-220.

He sneered at Cibber's Henry VIII and in the New Dunciad of 1742 enthroned Cibber as King of the Dunces, replacing the pedant Theobald. Cibber had written in extenuation of Pope's attacks: "When I find my name at length in the satirical works of our most celebrated living author, I never look upon those lines as malice meant to me (for he knows I never provok'd it) but profit to himself."[75] But in 1742 he was forced to take action, and wrote an open Letter to Mr. Pope, which set the town tittering at the story it told of Pope's visit to a brothel. Cibber pushed on the attack with The Egoist, or Colley upon Cibber. In 1743 the revised Dunciad appeared, and Cibber issued another letter. Pope, who was ill, did not reply; and he died not long after.[76]

Last Years

It may seem somewhat absurd that Cibber, who knew his verses were halting, feeble things, and even asked Dr. Johnson to retouch them,[77] should have been appointed Poet Laureate in 1730. He himself ascribed his appointment to the favour The Non-Juror had received at Court; but a more likely explanation was his friendship with the Duke of Grafton. Cibber's appointment was greeted with satirical squibs in the Grub Street Journal,

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[75] Apology, p. 22.

[76] Politically, socially, and psychologically, Pope and Cibber were antipathetical. The matrix of their controversy was the London stage. Pope held Cibber guilty of the perversion of public taste, and of opportunism. Pope attacked, not Cibber the man, but Cibber the symbol. See Charles D. Peavey, "Cibber's Crown of Dulness: A Re-examination of the Pope-Cibber Controversy." Doctoral dissertation, Tulane University, 1963.

[77] Boswell's Life, I, 402.

the Gentleman's Magazine, and Mist's Weekly Journal. He had triumphed at the expense of Ambrose Phillips, John Dennis, Stephen Duck, and Theobald.[78]

In 1732 Cibber et. al. received a royal patent to last for twenty-one years. Wilks died the same year, leaving John Ellis to handle his share on behalf of his widow. The management was dissolved soon after. Booth sold half of his share to John Highmore, and Cibber sold his share to Highmore for three thousand guineas.[79]

Cibber spent his declining years attending routs and assemblies, being welcomed in the homes of Lord Chesterfield, and the Dukes of Richmond and Grafton. He acted occasionally -- he returned to the stage in 1741 to play Fondlewife in The Old Bachelor, and in 1745 at Covent Garden played Pandulph in his own play, Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John. He also found time to write The Character and Conduct of Cicero, and A Rhapsody upon the Marvellous. He struck up an acquaintance with the novelist Richardson: Cibber was interested in Richardson's heroine Clarissa, and Richardson in return paid tribute to Cibber's Cicero.[80]

In his livelier moments, Cibber pursued the "celebrated Miss

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[78]For the attacks on Cibber the laureate, see J. T. Hillhouse, The Grub-Street Journal, p. 188-193.

[79]Lowe, I, 359.

[80]Baker, p. 250-255.
The author of the article CIBBER in Biographia Brittanica (second edition, London 1784) observes acidly of Cibber's Cicero -- "this is a piece of little value; and indeed, Cibber was much better qualified to estimate the merits of his brother comedians, than to investigate the character or conduct of Cicero."

Chudleigh" at Bath; and carried on chaste liaisons with Peg Woffington the actress and Mrs. Pilkington the adventuress.[81]

In 1750 Colley Cibber was severely ill, but recovered. On December 11, 1757, he died. He was buried in the family vault in the Danish church, Wellclose Square, East London.[82]

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[81] Barker, p. 240; p. 244-250.

[82] Lowe, II, 291.

PART TWO: THEORIES OF THE COMIC

The business of plays, is to recommend virtue and discountenance vice, to show the uncertainty of human greatness, the sudden turns of fate, and the unhappy conclusions of violence and injustice.

-- Collier, A Short View.

...the businessof comedy is to show people what they shou'd do, by representing them upon the stage, doing what they shou'd not.

-- Vanbrugh, Vindication of the Relapse.

PART TWO: THEORIES OF THE COMIC

I

The Drama Before Cibber

Love's Last Shift is a play which belongs to two traditions -- the Restoration comic tradition, and the sentimental tradition.[1] Cibber's obvious model is the Restoration one, and the majority of the characters in his play are domesticated versions of Restoration types. A discussion of both these traditions is called for, to ascertain the basis of the conflict between the proponents of the old Restoration drama (such as John Dennis) and the proponents of the comedy of sentiment (such as Richard Steele).

Generally speaking, comedy nowadays is recognised as that kind of dramatic production whose function it is to provide amusement. Comedy, like tragedy, has its origins in ancient Greece, and Aristotle's formula for comedy was that of imitation. Comedy dealt with inferior types, and the essence of comedy was the ludicrous.[2]

In English drama, there occurs the spectacle of the genres mixing: Shakespeare frequently put comic scenes into his tragedies, which prompted Anthony Scoloker, in his Epistle to Daiphantus, to enthuse on "friendly Sharespeares tragedies, where the commedian rides, when the tragedian stands on tip-toe."[3] As a result of the mixture of the comic and the

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[1] Barker, p. 21.

[2] W. H. Fyfe, Aristotle's Art of Poetry, p. 13.

[3] Quoted by A. P. Rossiter, Angel With Horns, p. 257.

tragic, one finds the playwrights acknowledging the existence of a third genre, the tragi-comedy.

Comedy, to revert to the generalization given above, aims at producing laughter. It is not necessary here to go into discussion on what causes laughter, but it can safely be postulated that we laugh because we have the human instinct for laughter in us; and comedy does not really depend, as Aristotle would have it, on the follies of inferior people.[4]

The Restoration idea of what constituted the comic owed much to Aristotle. As early as 1595, Sir Philip Sidney had observed:

> Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he [the dramatist] representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be; so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one.[5]

Dryden expresses much the same idea when he points out that "comedy presents us with the imperfections of human nature", and that laughter is aroused "by the lively representation of folly and corruption."[6]

The theory of correction through satire was enunciated by Ben Jonson, who wrote dramas which excoriated human folly. Both Dryden and Shadwell attempted comedies in the Jonsonian manner. Shadwell pointed out that comedy should both inform and delight. He wrote, in the Prologue to The Humorists:

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[4] Ashley Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 15.

[5] An Apology for Poetry. Quoted by Ernest Bernbaum, The Drama of Sensibility, p. 8.

[6] Preface, The Mock Astrologer (1671). Dramatic Works, ed. Montague Summers, II, 241.

> Methinks a poet should never acknowledge this [i.e., that the sole purpose of comedy is amusement], for it makes him of as little use to mankind as a fiddler or dancing master who delights the fancy only, without improving the judgement.[7]

There seems to have been unanimity by the seventeenth century playwrights as to the aims and purposes of comedy. Congreve also wrote:

> It is the business of a comick poet to paint the vices and follies of humankind[8]

and

> Those characters that are meant to be ridiculed in most of our comedies, are of fools so gross that...they should rather disturb than divert the well-natured and reflecting part of an audience; they are rather objects of charity than contempt; and instead of moving our mirth, they ought very often to excite our compassion.[9]

The avowed aim of the Restoration dramatist was a moral one. He lashed human folly by holding it up to scorn and ridicule. Later critics who accuse the Restoration dramatists of being immoral are not viewing the plays in their seventeenth century context, but are approaching them with preconceived notions of what constitutes morality. Wycherley, for example, uses as his method a Juvenalian saeva indignatio which harshly satirises the society around him. In The Country Wife, he uses Horner to strip the

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[7] In J. E. Spingorn, Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, II, 153.

[8] Epistle Dedicatory, The Double Dealer. In Comedies, ed. Bonamy Dobree, p.116.

[9] Epistle Dedicatory, The Way of the World. In Comedies, p336-37.

mask from such women as Mrs. Fidget and Mrs. Squeamish, and shows them to the audience as essentially libidinous matrons, anxious to preserve their "reputations". Horner shows them to be basically hypocrites, and also shows that their notions of honour are scarcely tenable.

The non-juring clergyman Jeremy Collier attacked The Relapse in his inclusive onslaught on the stage, and its author was forced to reply by producing a vindication of his work. Vanbrugh points out that Collier seemed to be unable to understand the nature of comedy, and then proceeds to give a definition: "The business of comedy is to show people what they shu'd do, by representing them upon the stage doing what they shou'd not."[10] Vanbrugh goes on:

> The stage is a glass for the world to view itself in; people ought therefore to see themselves as they are; if it makes their faces too fair, they won't know they are dirty, and by consequence will neglect to wash 'em.[11]

Another playwright, Farquhar, defined comedy as nothing more than "a well-fram'd tale handsomely told, as an agreeable vehicle for counsel or reproof."[12] He points out that the stage and the playwrights are being attacked from all quarters:

> The scholar calls upon us for decorums and economy; the courtier cries out for wit, and purity of stile; the citizen for humour and ridicule; the divines threaten us for immodesty; and the ladies will have an intrigue.[13]

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[10] A Short Vindication of The Relapse. In English Literary Criticism: Restoration and Eighteenth Century, ed. Samuel Hynes, p. 134.

[11] Ibid.

[12] A Discourse Upon Comedy. In Works (1742), I, 96.

[13] Ibid., p83.

Farquhar shows how impossible it is to satisfy the requirements of all these factions. He points out also the absurdity of applying Aristotle's rules -- which Aristotle gleaned from an observation of the Greek theatre -- to the seventeenth-century stage. It is ridiculous to follow slavishly demands for unity of action, or to rely upon episodes, catastrophes, a chorus, and so on:

> Tho' the play be regular as Aristotle and modest as Mr. Collier cou'd wish, yet it promotes more lewdness in the consequence, and procures more effectually for intrigue, than any Rover, Libertine, or Old Bachelor whatsoever.[14]

The aim of comedy, in Farquhar's view, is that of "schooling mankind into better manners". However,

> to make the moral instructive, you must make the story diverting: the splenatick wit, the beau courtier, the heavy citizen, the fine lady, and her fine footman, come all to be instructed, and therefore must all be diverted; and he that can do this best, and with most applause, writes the best comedy, let him do it by what rules he pleases, so they be not offensive to religion and good manners.[15]

No dramatist, says Farquhar, will learn to write a good play by depending upon the dicta of the "authorities". Instead, he should study contemporary English writers, since Aristotle's "rules" do not apply to English comedy. This, however, is not to say that there are no rules. The necessary ingredients for a good comedy are these: each part of the plot must be relevant to the other parts; and the characters must not be

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[14] Ibid., p.86.

[15] Ibid., p.98.

"forc'd or unnatural", but must be as realistic as possible.[16]

Farquhar has presented a sound piece of criticism: no attempt should be paid to "rules" which hamper the playwright; comedy should excite laughter; and the characters of the comedy should be true to life. But by depicting in a naturalistic manner the society in which they lived, the Restoration dramatists provoked the ire of their critics. Addison, in 1712, remarked:

> ...Cuckoldom is the basis of most of our modern plays. If an alderman appears upon the stage, you may be sure it is in order to be cuckolded. An husband that is a little grave or elderly, generally meets with the same fate.[17]

This criticism is equally applicable to many of the Restoration comedies; and what is said later is also a valid statement on Restoration drama:

> The truth of it is, the accomplished gentleman upon the English stage, is the person that is familiar with other men's wives, and indifferent to his own; as the fine woman is generally a composition of sprightliness and falsehood. I do not know whether it proceeds from barrenness of invention, depravation of manners, or ignorance of mankind; but I have often wondered that our ordinary poets cannot frame to themselves the idea of a fine man who is not a whore-master, or of a fine woman that is not a jilt.[18]

But it was Richard Steele who attacked Restoration comedy, and his attack is concentrated specifically on Etherege's Man of Mode. Steele

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[16] Ibid., p.99.

[17] Spectator. No. 446 (August 1, 1712), ed. Donald F. Bond, IV, 68.

[18] Ibid.

begins by observing that a gentleman should be honest, and refined in language. Instead, Dorimant the hero of the comedy, "is a direct knave in his designs, and a clown in his language." Steele castigates the play for its crudity of language, says that Dorimant "tramples upon all order and decency" and observes:

> This whole celebrated piece is a perfect contradiction to good manners, good sense, and common honesty; and...there is nothing in it but what is built upon the ruin of virtue and innocence...[19]

Steele concludes:

> ...I think nothing but being lost to a sense of innocence and virtue can make any one see this comedy, without observing more frequent occasion to move sorrow and indignation, than mirth and laughter.[20]

John Dennis leaped to the attack. Dennis countered Steele's assertion that the play was "nature in its utmost corruption and degeneracy" by enquiring:

> Can anything but corrupt and degenerate nature be the proper subject of ridicule? And can anything but ridicule be the proper subject of comedy?[21]

Dennis defines comedy: it "is nothing but a picture of common life, or a representation of [peoples] own humours and manners."[22] Elsewhere, Dennis states that the instruction gained from comedy depended upon its realism.[23] He demolishes Steele's strictures by showing that Etherege was being

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[19]Spectator. No. 65 (May 15, 1711). Bond, I, 280.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Dennis, A Defense of Sir Fopling Flutter. In Hooker, II, 243.

[22]Ibid.,

[23]The Usefulness of the Stage, to the Happiness of Mankind. In Hooker, I, 185.

naturalistic in his portrayal of Dorimant -- who is "an admirable picture of a courtier in the court of King Charles the Second." He accomodated himself

> to that notion of a fine gentleman, which the court and the town both had at the time of the writing of this comedy. 'Tis reasonable to believe, that he did so, and we see that he succeeded accordingly.[24]

Dennis reiterates his view of comedy, in the manner of the Restoration dramatists:

> But as tragedy instructs chiefly by its design, comedy instructs by its characters; which not only ought to be drawn truly in nature, but to be the resembling pictures of our contemporaries, both in court and town...
>
> ...Laughter is the life, and the very soul of comedy. 'Tis its proper business to expose persons to our views, whose views we may shun, and whose follies we may despise; and by shewing us what is done upon the comic stage, to shew us what ought never to be done upon the stage of the world.[25]

This view is remarkably consistent with that of Vanbrugh's quoted earlier. Etherege's characters, says Dennis, not only please by their naturalism, but are useful for instruction. Steele had claimed, ironically, that when Dorimant spurned Mrs. Loveit, this was "another instance of his honesty, as well as his good nature."[26] But Dennis avers that what happens to Loveit,

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[24] Hooker, II, 244.

[25] Ibid., p. 245.

[26] Spectator, No. 65. Bond, I, 279.

> is a just caution, to the fair sex, never to be so conceited of the power of their charms, or their other extraordinary qualities, as to believe they can engage a man to be true to them, to whom they grant the best favours, without the only sure engagement, without which they can never be certain, that they shall not be hated or despis'd by that very person whom they have done everything to oblige.[27]

The essence of comedy is ridicule, and this is achieved by portraying Sir Fopling Flutter -- who is made to look ridiculous by his conduct, and his aping of foreign manners and customs. Therefore, in Dennis' view, Etherege has written an excellect comedy, consistent with the standards of Restoration comedy.

Other aspects of Restoration comedy, which have not been mentioned by Dennis, but which are present in The Man of Mode, call for some discussion. The first is that of wit. A wit is "a person of lively fancy, who has the faculty of saying smart or brilliant things."[28] Wit, the quality which sets him apart from his fellows, was "a propriety of thoughts and words; or in other terms, thought and words, elegantly adapted to the subject."[29] Bonamy Dobrée defines wit as "verbal pyrotechnics",[30] but this is only one of its manifestations. Restoration wit did not consist solely in the deft turning of an epigram, but had an intellectual theory behind it. Among those who discussed the nature of wit was Hobbes, whose

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[27]Hooker, II, 249.

[28]Oxford English Dictionary, XII.

[29]Dryden, State of Innocence, Apology for Heroique Poetry. Summers III, 424.

[30]Bonamy Dobrée, Restoration Comedy 1660-1720, p.36.

writings provided a powerful stimulant to the Restoration dramatists. Dividing the rational faculties into two, the fancy and the judgment, Hobbes arrived at three conceptions of wit: (1) as judgment, (2) as fancy, and (3) as fancy plus judgment. "Wit, in this general sense, implied intellectual superiority in perception and knowledge, and consequently, acumen, penetration, and sophistication."[31] Dorimant is a wit, and possesses all these characteristics. In addition, his principles are libertine, as befits a character based on the Earl of Rochester. Dorimant's cynical raillery is the outcome of his libertinism. Steele failed to appreciate the wit and the naturalistic characterisation in the play, and so dismisses Dorimant as a rake. On the contrary, Dorimant is Etherege's portrait of a Truewit, as opposed to the Witwoud or fop, Sir Fopling Flutter.

The point which Steele also fails to take into account, is that in the eyes of the Restoration dramatist and the Restoration audience, such characters as Dorimant or Horner were not vicious. They were the fine gentlemen of the day, whom the ordinary spectator in the pit would long to resemble. Judged by the morals of that section of the seventeenth century audience for whom these plays were written, such characters were not immoral. If Steele had read his history, he would have been forced to agree with Dorilant --

> Blame 'em not [the dramatists], they must follow
> their copy, the age.[32]

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[31] Thomas H. Fujimura, The Restoration Comedy of Wit, p. 18.

[32] Wycherley, The Country Wife, Act 3, Sc. 2. In Three Restoration Comedies, ed. G. G. Falle, p. 77.

Times change; and in reading Restoration comedy one must avoid Steele's error and realize that the dramatists were interested in naturalistic depictions of manners and characters.

II

Drama and Society

Why did sentimental comedy replace the libertine Restoration comedy of wit? The answer lies in the combined assault upon the stage by the exponents of a new morality, by the rise of criticism, and by the changing tastes of audiences. John Dennis thought that since Charles II's days, the court had become a duller place -- the result of the departure of the wits. He depicted the Restoration court as one that had been

> more gallant, and more polite, than ever the English court perhaps had been before: Where there were at court the present and the late Duke of Buckingham, the late Earl of Dorset, Wilmot Lord Rochester, famous for his wit and poetry, Sir Charles Sedley, Mr. Savil, Mr. Buckley, and several others.[1]

Dennis is dogmatic in his assertions; he declares that under Charles, the arts had flourished, while "in the reign of King William things began apace to degenerate."[2] He was not alone in his belief. Robert Shirley, in a letter to Thomas Coke, on January 21, 1696, observed: "I must agree with you that wit and sense seem...to have suffered an eclipse, and the dramatic writers more especially have showed how little they consulted either. ...I am satisfied wit...has forsaken the stage."[3]

Nicoll says that "the whole of sentimentalism and of the bourgeois

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[1] Remarks Upon Mr. Pope's Translation of Homer. Hooker, II, 118.

[2] The Causes of the Decay and Defects of Dramatic Poetry. Hooker, II, 275.

[3] Quoted in The London Stage 1660-1800, ed. W. Van Lennep, Part 1, 458.

tragedy is...to be associated with [the] rise of the middle classes."[4] Tradesmen took their place alongside the older nobility; and, not content with being spectators of the drama, tried their hand at producing plays. Few of them had any pretensions to literary eminence, and destroyed the brilliance of the Restoration wit comedy as they introduced new themes and new motives.[5]

Dennis thought that the Charles II audiences had been more discriminating. In 1702, he remarked:

> ...the taste of England for comedy...was certainly much better in the reign of King Charles II, than it is at present. For it was then extreamly good, and now it is excessively bad.[6]

Charles II audiences, influenced as they were by courtiers and wits, had the education and the critical acumen necessary to judge poetry and drama. The present audiences, said Dennis, could not, since they were composed largely of nouveaux riches, who "from a state of obscurity, and perhaps of misery, have risen to a condition of distinction and plenty."[7] Such audiences had no discernment. They had neither fancy nor judgment, and so intellectual comedy would hardly have appealed to them; whereas sentimental comedy which inculcated solid middle-class virtues and facilely appealed to their emotions, they could understand. Dennis points out that the "confirmed stupidity" of authors proceeded "from the degeneracy, the

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[4] Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Early Eighteenth Century Drama 1700-1750, p3.

[5] Ibid., p.7-8.

[6] A Large Account of the Taste in Poetry, and the Causes of the Degeneracy of It. Hooker, I, 289.

[7] Ibid., p.293.

want of judgment and the want of taste of the readers and spectators."[8] Theatrical audiences may have increased, but they had no judgment -- "they goe not thither [i.e., to the theatre] because tis just and reasonable, but because tis become a fashion."[9]

Steele came to much the same conclusion concerning the decay in taste: At the Restoration there had been a widespread interest in literature; the men who had frequented the theatres then excelled in "songs, epigrams, and satyrs", while present audiences made do with "a pack of cards."[10]

During the years 1698-1700, there was an intensification of the attack upon wit, wit comedy, and the wits. It was this, probably more than anything else, which paved the way for the rise of sentimental comedy. The onslaught, coinciding as it did with the new moral awakening, centred its forces against the libertine wit which laughed at sex, religion, and morality.

Sir Richard Blackmore, a doctor and a solid member of the middle class, produced in 1699 his Satire Against Wit:

> The mob of wits is up to storm the town
> To pull all virtue and right reason down;
> Quite to subvert religion's sacred fence
> To set up wit, and pull down common sense.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> For next to virtue, learning they abhor,
> Laugh at discretion, but at busines more.
> A wit's an idle wretched fool of parts,
> That hates all liberal and mechanick arts.

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[8] Decay and Defects of Dramatick Poetry. Hooker, II, 275.

[9] Ibid., p. 278.

[10] Tatler. No. 1 (April 12, 1709). The Tatler; or, Lucubrations of of Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq. (1759), I, 12.

> Wit does enfeeble and debauch the mind,
> Before to business or to arts inclin'd.
> How useless is a sauntring empty wit,
> Only to please with jests at dinner fit![11]

The objection to wit was that it was a disruptive force, which led to irreligion and vice. Thus Samuel Parker wrote:

> Dissoluteness and irreligion are made the livery of wit, and no body must be conscious of good parts, but he loses the credit of them unless he take care to furnish 'em with immoralities.[12]

Wit, it was claimed by an anonymous writer, was also a threat to decency:

> To be witty, if a man knows how, is the only way to please. Wit is the salt that gives a goût to any carrion: nothing so profane, or lewd, but shall be relish'd if it pass for wit.[13]

Wit could lead to scepticism, cynicism, and irreligion:

> But that which is most opposite to the efficacy of the Grace of Christ, is that which in the language of the world is call'd wit; for the better the imagination is furnish'd, the more dangerous it is; subtilty, delicacy, vivacity and spaciousness of imagination, great qualities in the eyes of men, are the most prolifick and the most general causes of the blindness of the mind and the corruption of the heart.[14]

The attack seemed to be not against wit per se, but against the

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[11] In Spingarn III, 325-333.

[12] Six Philosophical Essays (1700). Quoted by E. N. Hooker, "Pope on Wit: The Essay in Criticism". In The Seventeenth Century. Studies in the History of English Thought and Literature from Bacon to Pope, ed. Richard Jones, p 230.

[13] An Enquiry After Wit (1709). Quoted, Hooker, Pope on Wit, p. 229.

[14] Malebranche, A Treatise of Morality, trans. James Shipton (1699). Quoted by Hooker, Pope on Wit, p. 228.

abuse of it, and was therefore a foreshadowing of the position the Spectator was to take up later, as it endeavoured to discriminate between true and false wit. But underneath this attack on wit, was a more deadly undercurrent, which is exemplified in Jeremy Collier's vehement onslaught on the stage. Collier aimed, not at purifying the stage, but at destroying it, and thus directed a blow at literature itself, and at artistic creativity.

Collier probably had no real influence on Cibber's work, since the latter in 1696, gauging the temper of the new age, had written a play which was consciously moralistic. However, since Collier is credited by some with the single-handed reformation of the English stage, it will be rewarding to examine his Short View, as it was the most important contribution to the stage controversy.

One critic says Collier "did yeoman's service to good feeling and good manners."[15] Another observes that "vagaries of individual criticisms blend curiously with sound general truths. Collier has much of the Puritan intolerance of William Prynne's Histriomastix and much of the inartistic obtuseness of Thomas Rymer's Short View of Tragedy."[16] Krutch admits that Collier's "was the genuine and irritating zeal of the reformer. From this fact arose his greatest merit and greatest defects."[17]

Collier's first chapter is concerned with supporting his contention that the plays were immodest and indecent. English drama he castigates

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[15]William Archer, The Old Drama and the New, p. 204,

[16]G. H. Nettleton, English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, p. 142.

[17]J. W. Krutch, Comedy and Conscience After the Restoration, p. 102.

as "a new world of vice found out, and planted with all the industry imaginable."[18] He finds lewdness in the language of the plays, and objects to obscenities in the mouths of the women. His second chapter is concerned with the profaneness to be encountered in the drama. He condemns the use of oaths as "an ungentlemanly, as well as an unchristian practice."[19] In chapter three, Collier shifts from the purely moral to the social point of view. He objects to the bringing of clergymen into plays, because the playwrights "strain their invention and their malice"[20] to make the clergy ridiculous. Collier says the protrayal of priests on the stage degrades "the profession of a gentleman."[21]

In chapter four, Collier claims that the vicious persons in the comedies are the ones who are rewarded in the end by the playwright. His fifth chapter concentrates on attacking several specific plays, including Vanbrugh's Relapse. Finally, Collier brings forward the opinions of various authorities in a culminating attack upon the stage, thereby bidding fair "to challenge comparison even with the inimitable prolixity and absurdity of Prynne's Histriomastix."[22]

Collier was essentially a moralist -- "indeed to make delight the main business of comedy is an unreasonable and dangerous principle," he wrote. "It opens the way to all licentiousness, and confounds the dis-

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[18] Jeremy Collier, A Short View (London, 1699), p. 55.

[19] Ibid., p. 59.

[20] Ibid., p. 98.

[21] Ibid., p. 136.

[22] Nettleton, p. 143.

tinction between mirth, and madness."[23] His purpose was not to reform, but to eradicate comedy. Some of his criticisms are slight; he fails to distinguish between immorality and indecency; he does not distinguish between morality and art. "Collier was constitutionally incapable of distinguishing a mote from a beam,"[24] and he

> shares to the fullest extent the ascetic Christian hatred of all art...the authority of Ben Jonson, or Dryden, was appealed to only because it happened to suit his purpose, and not because he could possibly have had any sympathy with either of them.[25]

Collier's attack came at an opportune moment, but it is far from proved that he personally effected a literary change. He contributed to this change, undoubtedly, and was the most important figure to write on the controversy. But in view of Steele's lamentations in 1712, one cannot agree with Davies that "the physic he [Collier] administered, was so powerful, that a sudden and almost effectual reformation took place."[26] Collier undoubtedly erred, moreover, in putting the cart before the horse. "Being convinc'd that nothing has gone farther in debauching the age than the stage-poets and play-houses," he wrote, "I thought I could not employ my time better than in writing against them."[27] Cibber's view presents a wholesome corrective to Collier's prejudging of the issue:

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[23] Collier, p. 161.

[24] Krutch, p. 112.

[25] Ibid., p. 114.

[26] Thomas Davies, Dramatic Miscellanies, III - Quoted by Krutch, p. 150.

[27] Collier, Preface.

> It is not to the actor...but to the vitiated and low taste of the spectator, that the corruptions of the stage (of what kind soever) have been owing.[28]

In other words, "the drama's laws the drama's patrons give", as Dr. Johnson remarked.

We allow his contemporaries to have the last word on Collier. In A Comparison Between The Two Stages, occurs the following dialogue:

> Sullen: ...notwithstanding the raillery we have put upon Mr. Collyer, it must be confest, that he has done the stage good service in correcting some of its errors.
>
> Critick: I' me sure 'twas high time to preach up reformation, when the stage was sunk to such a pitch of infamy; 'twas a noble and an ample subject, and not ill manag'd...[29]

It must not be assumed that there had been no criticism of Restoration drama under Charles II. "Collier himself was less the prophet of an unrealized evil than a voice through which revolt against the...stage became fully articulate. Other voices had been raised in partial protest."[30] As early as 1665, John Evelyn had noted: "Plays are now with us become a licentious excess, and a vice, and need severe censors that should look well to their morality, as to their lines and numbers."[31]

The playwrights themselves took notice, Dryden complained:

> Oh Gracious God! how far have we
> Profaned Thy heavenly gift of poesy!
> * * * * * * * *

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[28] Apology, p 68.

[29] A Comparison, ed. Staring B. Wells, p. 52.

[30] John Loftis, Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding, p. 24.

[31] Letter to Viscount Cornbery, February 1665. Quoted by Krutch, p. 93.

> O wretched we! Why were we hurried down
> This lubrique and adulterate age
> (Nay, added fat pollutions of our own)
> T' increase the steaming ordures of the stage?[32]

Sir Richard Blackmore, in his Preface to Prince Arthur (1695), had written against the heroes of Restoration comedy. He claimed that

> The man of sense, and the fine gentleman in the comedy...you will find to be a derider of religion, a great admirer of Lucretius, not so much for his learning as his irreligion, a person wholly idle, dissolv'd in luxury, abandon'd to his pleasures, a great debaucher of women, profuse and extravagant in his expences; and, in short, this finish'd gentleman will appear a finish'd libertine.[33]

A better writer than Blackmore, Thomas Shadwell, had also attacked the Restoration playwrights. Shadwell considered himself to be the successor to Ben Jonson, and he championed the "humours" concept of comedy against the concept of the "comedy of wit". In his Preface to The Royal Shepherdess (1669) he anticipates both Blackmore and Collier, when he writes:

> I find, it pleases most to see vice incouraged, by bringing the characters of debauch'd people upon the stage, and making them pass for fine gentlemen, who openly profess swearing, drinking, whoring, breaking windows, beating constables, etc.[34]

In another attack upon the Restoration dramatists, Shadwell repeats the same charges:

> ...but in the plays which have been wrote of late, there is no such thing as a perfect

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[32] Ode to Mrs. Anne Killigrew, Stanza IV. In Poems, ed. James Kinsley, I, 461.

[33] In Spingarn, III, 230.

[34] Works, ed. Montague Summers, I, 100.

> character, but the two chief persons are most commonly a swearing, drinking, whoring ruffian for a lover, and an impudent, ill-bred tomrig for a mistress and these are the fine people of the play; and there is that latitude in this, that almost any thing is proper for them to say; but their chief subject is bawdy and profaneness, which they call brisk writing, when the most dissolute of men, that rellish those things well enough in private, are chok'd at 'em in publick....[35]

It was largely owing to the indifference of the monarch to the theatre that the critics were led to speak out against it. William, a Dutch Lutheran, betrayed no interest in the theatre, which now had to look for other support, deprived as it was of the royal favour. Theatrical audiences, as John Dennis complained, were becoming more numerous and less discriminating, but they were more representative of society.

Although his personal life might leave much to be desired (he kept a mistress, Elizabeth Villiers, later Lady Orkney), William's influence on the court was remarkable:

> His majestie yesterday checkt a young lord from swearing in his hearing: telling him the court should give good examples, and reformation should begin there first, and then others would follow.[36]

The king and queen worked tirelessly away at their mission of reform.

In July 1691, Mary ordered the Middlesex justices of the peace to enforce rigorously all laws against "profaning the Lord's day, drunknenness, profane swearing and cursing, and all other lewd, enormous, and disorderly

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[35] Preface to The Sullen Lovers. Works, I, 11.

[36] Narcissus Luttrel, A Brief Relation. Quoted by A. Ward, English Dramatic Literature, III, 509, foot note I.

practices."[37] On January 21, 1692 was issued a proclamation "against vicious, debauched and profane persons" and on February 26 appeared an "Act for the more effective suppressing of profaneness, immorality and debauchery." In 1697 and again in 1698 orders were issued forbidding the acting of anything contrary to good morals or manners.[38] The reform movement continued under Anne, who never attended the theatre, but had the actors perform at court. She also vigorously issued proclamations against immoral plays, masked women, and the admittance of spectators behind the scenes, culminating in her general proclamation of 1702 "for the encouragement of piety and virtue." The clergy also lent their support -- Archbishop Tillotson's sermon, On the Evil of Corrupt Communication, fulminated aginst plays, which were designated "intolerable, and not fit to be permitted in a civilized, much less in a Christian nation."[39]

The Church of England made itself felt in the movement for reform. In 1687, Anthony Horneck had drawn up rules for young churchmen. He later became one of William's chaplains, and organised various societies which encouraged religious conferences and daily prayer. By 1699, these societies were flourishing in London, Nottingham and Gloucester. In 1699 also was founded the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, which concentrated its efforts on the charity schools, placing charity children in occupations such as apprentices and servants.[40]

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[37] H. D. Traill, Social England, IV, 808.

[38] Krutch, p. 166-167.

[39] Croissant, p. 33-34.

[40] Traill, p. 811.

The rapid growth of societies for the reformation of manners also helped the movement for reform. Under William and Mary, there was a growth of a number of societies, whose aims were religious and philanthropical.

It was in 1692 that the title Society for the Reformation of Manners was first used. The members of the society informed against those who broke the penal laws. They paid to charity the fines collected, and paid the expenses of prosecutions out of their own pockets. Defoe in 1698 wrote his Poor Man's Plea, under the mistaken belief that the laws were directed against the poor. In 1702 he returned to the attack, in his Reformation of Manners, A Satire.

He also suggested that "as to vices of every kind, the lord have mercy upon the magistrates and clergy of this nation" and "...fewer houses of correction would serve if none of the poor are to be punished till the magistrates and rich people are reformed."[41]

By 1699, "diverse persons of quality" joined the reforming societies, whose main duties included giving lectures, informing on transgressors, and sponsoring the preaching of sermons. In 1699 also, societies were flourishing in London, Leicester, Coventry, Shrewsbury, Hull, Newcastle, Liverpool and Chester. In 1706 we find Defoe acknowledging that the growth of the forces of reformation had been unparalleled "in such a time and in such circumstances."[42]

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[41] Review. No. 85 (December 26, 1704). In The Best of Defoe's Review, ed. William L. Payne, p. 205-208.

[42] Traill, pp. 810-811.

III

Sentimental Comedy

Critical opinion has been divided over who should be adjudged the originator of that literary genre known as sentimental comedy. Ward avers that Steele's Lying Lover (1704) is "remarkable as the first instance of sentimental comedy proper."[1] Bernbaum is just as definite in assigning the dubious honour to Colley Cibber. He asserts that Love's Last Shift signalizes "the beginning of a new epoch in English dramatic history."[2] Bateson calls Cibber's play the first sentimental comedy,[3] and Croissant is just as emphatic in championing Cibber's cause: "Colley Cibber was the most important writer of comedy in preparing the way for the new form, and practically every element of the later sentimental comedy is found in his work."[4]

The critics are also divided in assigning a date for the emergence of this type of comedy. Usual critical thought places the date at the junction of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Bernbaum categorically assigns the date to 1696 -- "the appearance in 1696 of sentimental comedy was in the true sense of a much abused term, revolutionary."[5]

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[1] Ward, III, 495.

[2] Bernbaum, p. 1.

[3] F. W. Bateson, English Comic Drama 1700-1750, p. 20.

[4] Croissant, p. 29.

[5] Bernbaum, p. 71.

However, Nicoll points out that attempts at chastening the drama had been made during the Restoration period;[6] and traces of sentimentality have been discovered in some plays by Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists.[7]

With such a diversity of critical opinion, it might appear rather pointless to attempt to give a specific date to the emergence of sentimental comedy; as Birkhead also points out, "sentiment and sensibility are as old as human nature."[8] No literary genre has ever sprung fully fledged into being at a specific point in history. What was present in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as undercurrents, and later blossomed into fruition in the eighteenth, had already in some measure been adumbrated in the medieval church drama. One critic says that "the first traces of sentimental comedy are to be found as far back as the morality plays."[9]

The eighteenth century sentimentalists went even further back, attempting to find classical precedents to justify the genre, and hopefully dissected the works of Plautus and Terence for examples.[10] It is probably best to accept Wood's theory, since the classical plays produced as evidence of sentimental comedy are not very good examples of the genre. Wood points out that sentimentalism came into prominence during the eighteenth century, "owing to peculiar social conditions which made the moment a particularly propitious one for its rapid development, but it was

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[6] Nicoll (1660-1700), p. 252.

[7] Edith Birkhead, "Sentiment and Sensibility in the Eighteenth Century Novel", in Essays and Studies by the Members of the English Association, XI (1925), 97-98.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Frederick T. Wood, "The Beginnings and Significance of Sentimental Comedy", Anglia LV (1931), p 373.

[10] Bernbaum, pp. 11-26.

born long before."[11]

This is neither the time nor the place to give an extended treatment of the rise and fall of sentimental comedy. It only remains therefore to allude briefly to the history of the genre. It flourished in the eighteenth century, was attacked by Goldsmith and Fielding, revived in a wilted fashion in the plays of Mrs. Inchbald and Cumberland, and then gradually declined. It flourished in the eighteenth century because it was supported by a climate of opinion, to which one refers as the "Augustan sensibility." It did not develop under the Elizabethans "because Elizabethan society...was essentially a 'manly' society, and because it was rarely shocked by the brutal or obscene."[12]

So far, the words "sentiment" and "sentimentalism" have been used, without a meaning being assigned to them. Following the Aristotelian demand for a definition of terms, some attempt will be made to find out what is meant by the words. Like many other words -- such as, for example, "democracy" or "romanticism" -- the exact meaning of sentimentalism is elusive.

Sherbo deduces that in 1749 the term meant no more than "everything clever and agreeable." He cites what he considers to be the first usage of the term sentimental, Lady Bradshaigh's letter to the novelist Richardson.[13] But Horace Walpole, in a letter to Henry Seymour Conway in 1746, uses the word "sentimentally", which seems to imply that the word

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[11]Wood, p. 373.

[12]Ibid.,

[13]Arthur Sherbo, English Sentimental Comedy, p. 2.

"sentimental" had already been in use. It was not until 1768 however, with the publication of Sterne's Sentimental Journey, that the word attained general currency.[14] And when it was employed by Sterne, the word was used in an approving sense -- it had not yet deteriorated into the semantic obloquy which is its lot today. Sentimental nowadays designates that which is mawkish and insincere, and is associated with an unjustified overflow of emotion; sincerity is therefore called into question. But in the eighteenth century, the term embraced the elements of thought and reflection. Johnson defined sentiment as

> 1) Thought; notion; opinion.
>
> 2) The sense considered distinctly from the language or things, a striking sentence in a composition.[15]

The first definition is more relevant to the discussion, and one must therefore be on guard against using a twentieth century meaning to refer to an eighteenth century attitude. It is obvious that one can find both true and false sentiment in the eighteenth century; but this is also true of other epochs in history -- the "sob stories" and "soap operas" which abound on radio and television today are examples of the latter.

Steele was not the originator of sentimental comedy; and even if the honour for doing so is ascribed to Colley Cibber, it must be borne in mind that he might never have written as he did, had there not already been a movement tending in the direction of sentimentalism.

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[14] See B. Sprague Allen, "The Dates of Sentimental and its Derivatives," PMLA XLVIII (1933), 303-307.

[15] Dictionary, 8th edition, (London: 1879).

Theory and Practice

Sentimental comedy had a theory behind it. It is worthwhile to examine just what this theory was, since the critics do not seem to have come to any conclusion on the matter. Bernbaum sees the roots of sentimental comedy in a "confidence in the goodness of average human nature";[16] Ward observes (of Steele) that this author provokes "a response from the emotion of pity";[17] and Nicoll says that sentimental drama is "distinguished by the presentation of a moral problem".[18] These definitions supplement each other; each of them contains an aspect that is relevant. Sentimental comedy appeals to the heart, its interest lies in human nature and the aim is a moral one. Cibber always maintained that his aim in writing was a moral one, and Steele also aimed at morality and didacticism.

Cibber did not lay down any explicit rules for the genre, and it was left to Steele to provide them. Since Steele was the chief apologist for the drama of sentiment, and his play The Conscious Lovers is the sentimental comedy par excellence,[19] it is to this play that one should turn to find out what precisely were the theories of an author who wrote sentimental comedy. Also, it is over this play that Dennis and Steele clashed once more; and when the dispute between the two is analysed, it

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[16] Bernbaum, p. 2.

[17] Ward, III, 495.

[18] Nicoll, (1660-1700), p. 252.

[19] Thorndike, p. 343.

will be discovered that the two men agreed basically on general principles, but differed in the application of these general principles to specific points at issue. The following quotation will show the position which Steele adopts:

> Whatever vices are represented upon the stage, they ought to be so marked and branded by the poet, as not to appear laudable nor amiable in the person who is tainted with them.[20]

It was Steele who in his critical writings and plays put morality and deliberately expressed "sentiments" to govern the comic muse, thereby contributing to the debate on the scope and function of comedy. In his Apology he writes: "I was a great admirer of his [Collier's] work, and took it into my head to write a comedy in the severity he required."[21]

The Conscious Lovers was the result. Of the play, he wrote that "the chief design was to be an innocent performance"; and he further acknowledged:

> Anything that has its foundation in happiness and success must be allowed to be the object of comedy; and sure it must be an improvement of it to introduce a joy too exquisite for laughter.[22]

In Steele's play (based on Terence's Andria), we are presented with a priggish hero, so given to filial duty that although he loves Indiana, he bows to his father's wishes and consents to marry Lucinda, daughter of the merchant Sealand. In the fifth act, it turns out that Indiana is

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[20] Spectator. No. 446. Bond, IV, 67.

[21] Quoted by G. A. Aitken ed., Plays of Richard Steele, XVIII-XIX.

[22] Preface, Conscious Lovers. Aitken, pp. 269-270.

Sealand's lost daughter by a former wife; Sir John Bevil raises no objection to his son's marrying Indiana, and so the play ends happily. In addition, Young Bevil avoids a duel, and the merchant Sealand corrects Sir John's false ideas about honour. Sealand is a worthy middle-class merchant, and has no use for the pretensions of rank.

Young Bevil conducts himself meritoriously in his love-affairs -- he tries not to betray his passion for Indiana, as he knows that his father is set on his marrying Lucinda. Steele provides the happy ending by having Sealand fortuitously discover his daughter's identity, and Sir John Bevil himself provides the moral of the fable, when he tells Indiana and Young Bevil:

> You have set the world a fair example; your happiness is owing to your constancy and merit.
>
> (Act V, Sc. 3)

Steele had thought that "anything that has its foundation in happiness must be allowed to be the object of comedy". But the essential weakness of his case was summed up in an anonymous pamphlet, The Censor Censured (1723):

> That which has its foundation in happiness and success will be allowed the object of comedy, and passions of all kinds may be represented in comedy as well as in tragedy; but then they must be expressed in a different manner, not in the tragical style and tone; nor must the distress be so exquisite as to melt the heart with sympathetic grief and render it incapable of relishing the approaching joy.[23]

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[23] Quoted by Bernbaum, p. 135.

Dennis also gives the then orthodox view of comedy, as against Steele's innovations, when he asserts that "violent transports of grief... are inconsistent with comedy."[24] Dennis was not alone in his belief; he cites Boileau:

> Le comique, enemi des soupirs et des pleurs,
> N' admet point en soi des tragiques douleurs.
>
> (L'Art Poetique, Canto III, ll 401-402)

In the Comparison Between The Two Stages, the same point of view is put forward by Critick: he points out that images which are too afflicting "do not agree with the nature and gayety" of comedy. "All ideas of distress are to be banish'd, and our lives only to be represented with the humours, vices and vicissitudes of men."[25]

Dennis' Remarks On the Conscious Lovers makes tedious reading, but it is an important analysis and indictment of what Steele was doing. Dennis attacks the patent improbabilities of the play, and it must be allowed that this is a valid objection. Bevil's absurd deference to his father is but one example. Dennis complained that the characters were not natural, neither were they just depictions of contemporaries; the subject of the play was not a suitable one for comedy; the sentiments expressed were false; and the dialogue was awkward.[26]

Steele had striven, as he says in the Prologue to The Conscious Lovers,

> with breeding to refine the age,
> To chasten wit, and moralise the stage.

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[24] Remarks on a Play, Call'd, The Conscious Lovers, A Comedy. Hooker, II, 259.

[25] Wells, p. 88.

[26] Hooker, II, 251-274.

Dennis had no objection to the stage being moral, since both he and the Restoration dramatists had decided that this was to be the function of the drama. As Farquhar had observed, the chief duty of the playwright was "schooling mankind into better morals." Where the main area of conflict lies, is in this: Steele was bent on depicting ideal characters, upon whom members of the audience were expected to model themselves. The Restoration dramatists declined to do this, but drew their characters from life. Dennis was voicing their opinion when he averred that the proper business of comedy was not that of "setting us patterns for our imitation."[27] Dennis' idea was that the ridiculum is the essence of comedy; and "where there is none of that, there can be no comedy."[28]

Steele, by setting up in comedy patterns for imitation -- the righteous man, the virtuous maid -- and by attempting to evoke pity for the unfortunate, was undermining the foundations of the critical theories of the Restoration dramatists. Dennis pointed out that it was not the virtuous, but "...your witty fools [who] are very just subjects of comedy, because they are more troublesome and shocking in conversation to men of sense, than any other sort of fools whatsoever."[29]

Steele's type of comedy lends its support to idealism. He believed that the smutty language of the Restoration playwrights had a deleterious effect on the audience; and he tried to correct this by writing plays with virtuous characters and genteel dialogue. It is difficult to say whether

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[27] Hooker, II, 250.

[28] Ibid., p. 249.

[29] Letters on Milton and Wycherley. Hooker, II, 233.

he was right or wrong in his beliefs: the dispute over the effects upon the reader or spectator of a literary work is still far from settled.

Steele insisted on dragging in his "sentiments". Restoration comedy instead used the device of irony and satire. Steele's type of comedy, and that supported by Dennis, both had a common aim, which was moral. But they both set about it differently. Farquhar puts one side of the case, when he makes the following remarks upon The Way of the World:

> Aesop improved men by the policy of beasts, so we endeavour to reform brutes with the example of men.
>
> Fondlewife and his young spouse are no more than the eagle and the cockle; he wanted teeth to break the shell itself, so somebody else run away with the meat --. Here are precepts, admonitions, and salutory innuendo's for the ordering our lives and conversations couch'd in these allegories and allusions.[30]

Despite what its critics aver, then, Restoration comedy had a moral aim. Where it differs from Steele's concept of comedy, however, is that it does not consciously parrot these "sentiments", as Steele does. For Steele, a play had not only to be moral, it had also to be seen to be moral. But Steele did have a case: he saw the danger inherent in Restoration comedy. Dryden's Mr. Limberham is a suitable example to elucidate this. Robert Gould has this to say of the play:

> ...but when his Limberham I name,
> I hide my head and almost blush with shame,
> * * * * * *
>
> So bawdy it not only sham'd the age,
> But worse, was ev'n too nauseous for the stage.
> If witty 'tis to be obscene and lewd,
> We grant for wit in some esteem it stood;

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[30] Discourse Upon Comedy, p. 97.

> But what is in it for instruction good?
> And that's one end for which our bards should write,
> When they do that, 'tis then they hit the white;
> For plays shou'd as well profit, as delight.[31]

Here we see the ambiguity which surrounds Restoration comedy; Gould sees the play as bawdy, obscene, and not conducive to instruction. But Dryden, on the contrary, said that the play had a moral purpose -- "'twas intended for an honest satyre against our crying sin of keeping";[32] and Limberham, the timorous keeper of the strumpet Tricksy, is made to look ridiculous. Dryden himself puts his finger on the root of the defect in Restoration comedy, when he says of Limberham, "it express'd too much of the vice which it decry'd."[33]

Theoretically, perhaps, the Restoration dramatist was right in presenting realistic, satirical, just portrayals of men and morals. Steele, too, was perhaps right in insisting that all ambiguity be removed; but he went wrong in emphasising primarily morality, didacticism, and social criticism. He presents characters who strain our credulity, and plots which ask us to accept the improbable. Cibber himself saw the defects in The Conscious Lovers, realized that it was dull stuff for an audience to swallow, and prevailed upon Steele to introduce some comic characters. "Mr. Cibber's zeal for the work, his care and application in...altering the disposition of the scenes"[34] undoubtedly was of benefit to Steele.

The Conscious Lovers is a fine example of sentimental comedy -- fine in the sense that it shows up both the good aspects and the bad of

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[31] The Play-House. A Satire (1685). Quoted, Summers, IV, 267.

[32] Epistle Dedicatory. Summers, IV, 271.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Quoted, Aitken, lx.

the genre. Steele's chief purpose for writing was moral reformation -- he admits that the whole point of the play is the scene in the fourth act, where Young Bevil refuses to fight a duel with Myrtle. Thus the design of the play was not comic in itself. Some of the sentiments expressed by the characters also bear the stamp of Spectator morality. Young Bevil himself is too perfect: his views on filial duty are stretched too far, when he determines to give up his hopes of happiness to follow the demands of his father. Steele, unlike Cibber, does not present characters in need of reformation. Young Bevil is much too virtuous to be other than a prig. If a Restoration dramatist could have conceived of such a character, he would have depicted him as a butt for laughter. The concept of the perfect person just does not ring true; as Dryden dogmatically asserts: "As for a perfect character of virtue, it never was in nature."[35]

The sentimentalist appeals to the emotions. This Steele does, in having Indiana recount her pathetic career. The tearful lamentations to be found in sentimental comedies, caused Goldsmith to sneeringly dub the genre "bastard tragedy" and to point out: "If we are permitted to make comedy weep, we have an equal right to make tragedy laugh, and to set down in blank verse the jests and repartees of all the attendants in a funeral procession."[36]

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[35] Preface, Troilus and Cressida. Summers, V, 16.

[36] Essay on the Theatre; or, A Comparison Between Sentimental and Laughing Comedy (1773). In Hynes, 289. In the Prologue to She Stoops To Conquer, Goldsmith writes: "The comic muse, long sick, is now adying/To her a mawkish drab of spurious breed,/Who deals in sentimentals will succeed."

In dealing with sentimental comedy, one faces certain inescapable questions. Should morality venture into the sphere of aesthetics? Can anything be called good art which has a palpable moral design upon us? Can there be a direct morality in comedy? It must be allowed that as soon as morality intrudes too far, the comic spirit is lessened. The Restoration comic tradition had treated life objectively, Steele treats life subjectively; and sentiment therefore creeps in. One might go so far as to say that sentimental comedy can therefore never be good comedy. Indeed, one wonders if the classification "sentimental comedy" to describe that kind of play which hovers embarrassingly between comedy and tragedy, is not a contradiction in terms.

The most glaring defect of the sentimentalist, as is shown in Steele, is that the virtuous characters are always made happy in the end. Granted, that what distinguishes comedy from tragedy is its happy ending; still, the facility with which happiness embraces the virtuous in plays of sentiment is false to actual experience.

The sentimental play centred around a code which was devised as a deliberate counter to the Restoration one. As such, theplays produced could never have attained to any excellence, built as they were upon a theory of negation.

However, it must be remembered that the genre was responsible for at least three things, the first of which was the reformation of the debauched hero (used by Cibber as a theme: Steele's heroes are in no need of reformation). In addition, there was presented a changed attitude to

marriage. Cuckoldry in Restoration comedy served only to elicit the lewd chuckle and the knowing snigger. It happened every day -- it was the way of the world -- and if a citizen was cuckolded, presumably it was his own fault entirely. Now, however, the dramatist is found setting out to win the approval of Cibber's "kind city gentlemen o' th' middle row."[36] Thirdly, the language of the play, although it tended to be artificial and stylised, was altered in the interests of decency. In Love's Last Shift, which was an experiment, however, there is language which would have made Steele shudder.

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[36]Epilogue, Love's Last Shift.

PART THREE: LOVE'S LAST SHIFT

Illud genus narrationis, quod in personis positum est, debet habere sermonis festivitatem, animorum dissimilitudinem, gravitatem, lenitatem, spem, metum, suspicionem, desiderium, dissimulationem, misericordiam, rerum varietates, fortunae commutationem, insperatum incommodum, subitam letitiam, jucundum exitum rerum.[1]

-- Cicero, Rhetor ad Herenn. Lib. 1.

A good play shu'd be like a good stuff, closely and evenly wrought, without any breakes, thrums, or loose ends in 'um, or like a good picture well painted and designed; the plot or contrivement, the writing, the coloris, and counterplot, the shaddowings, with other embellishments: or finally, it shu'd be like a well-contriv'd garden, cast into its walks and counter-walks, betwixt an alley and a wilderness, neither too plain nor too confus'd.

-- Richard Flecknoe, A Short Discourse of the English Stage.

[1]The kind of narrative which is presented on the stage ought to be marked by gaiety of dialogue, diversity of character, seriousness, tenderness, hope, fear, suspicion, desire, pity, variety of events, changes of fortune, unexpected disaster, sudden joy, and a happy ending.

PART THREE: LOVE'S LAST SHIFT

Cibber's Place in English Literature

For a man whose occupation was the time-consuming business of managing a theatrical company, Colley Cibber still found time to write several farces, masques, operas, comedies, tragedies, and prologues to plays. Concerning his odes, there has been a unanimity of critical execration; and except for one haunting poem, The Blind Boy (which has in modern times been reprinted in Palgrave's Golden Treasury), Colley's poetic effusions will lie forgotten. The laureates of the eighteenth century were not men of any great poetic merit, but Cibber, at least, had the honesty to write his own odes.

His dramatic works can be divided into two groups -- plays of sentiment, which are fairly original items, and plays of intrigue closely resembling the Restoration comedies. The latter are usually adaptations of older plays.

Bonamy Dobrée in his study of the literature of the century, devotes a few paragraphs to Cibber, but damns him with faint praise indeed when he writes:

> Cibber...need not detain us long. His comedies have, it is true, vestiges of ideas. His main theme throughout was the marriage, basically sound enough, broken by the 'affected' humour of the typical Restoration hero or heroine

> healed by experience on the one hand, and devotion on the other. All the time, in effect, he is vulgarizing Dryden's Marriage-à-la-Mode, adding for irrelevant relief the egregious fop, here vulgarising Etherege's Sir Fopling Flutter, his first re-creation, Sir Novelty Fashion, being his best. But he had a sense of the stage, and had he been less pleased with himself might have penetrated deeper. The attraction of most of his comedies must have been the blatantly fleshly treatment of sex combined with a briskness of movement that masks the improbability of the action...[1]

Cibber, a man of the theatre, knew well how to turn a plot or the germ of an idea into a fully realized play. This caused Mrs. Inchbald to observe: "Whilst many a judicious critic boasted of knowing what kind of drama the public ought to like, Cibber was the lucky dramatist generally to know what they would like, whether they ought or not."[2]

Cibber's four operas are: Venus and Adonis (1715); Myrtillo (1716); Love in a Riddle (1729); and Damon and Phillida (1729), which is largely the sub-plot of the failed Love in a Riddle.

The farces include The Rival Queans, probably written in 1703 (it received its best publicised performance in 1710); and Bulls and Bears, acted at Drury Lane on December 2, 1715. Designated a tragical-comedy, the former was a parody of tragedian Nat Lee's The Rival Queens (1677).

Cibber wrote seven tragedies. Xerxes (1699) was not successful; Richard III, produced on July 9, 1700 at Drury Lane, proved to be a popular adaptation of Shakespeare's play; Perolla and Izadora (1705), was not a success, and endured the attacks of Pope and Dennis. Ximena (1712), Cinna's Conspiracy (1713), and Caesar in Egypt (1725) were all adaptations

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[1] English Literature in the Early 18th Century 1700-1740, pp. 229-30.

[2] Cited in Habbema, p. 58.

of Corneille. Finally, Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John (acted, Covent Garden, February 15, 1745) was also an adaptation of a Shakespeare play. Cibber's habit of adapting old plays to suit his needs was severely criticised, but Cibber's attitude to the matter is summed up in the Prologue to The Double Gallant:

> Nay, even alter'd plays, like old houses mended,
> Cost little less than new, before they're ended;
> At least, our author finds the experience true.

Love's Last Shift, Cibber's first play and first comedy, was produced in 1696; in 1697 followed Woman's Wit -- this was not a success, and from its comic scenes Cibber rewrote The School-Boy, or The Comical Rival, (1702). In chronological order, the other comedies follow:

1701 Love Makes a Man, an adaptation of Fletcher's The Elder Brother and The Custom of the Country. Cibber wrote the part of the "pert coxcomb" Clodio for himself.

1702 She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not. This was acted at Drury Lane, November 26, 1702.

1704 The Careless Husband, acted December 7, at Drury Lane. Published 1705, it received the admiration of Pope.

1707 The Double Gallant was produced at the Haymarket on November 1. This was adapted from Susannah Centlivre's Love at a Venture, and Charles Burnaby's The Ladies' Visiting Day and The Reformed Wife.

1707 The Comical Lovers, or Marriage à la Mode, derived from Dryden's play, was acted at the Haymarket on February 4.

1707 The Lady's Last Stake was acted at the Haymarket on December 13.

1709 The Rival Fools, borrowed from Fletcher's Wit At Several Weapons, was produced at Drury Lane on January 11.

1717 The Non-Juror was given at Drury Lane on December 6. The play, based on Molière's Tartuffe, was designed to show up the perpetrators of the "desperate folly" of Jacobitism.

1721 The Refusal, or The Ladies' Philosophy, based on Moliere's Les Femmes Savantes (1692), was produced at Drury Lane on February 14.

1728 The Provok'd Husband, a completion of Vanbrugh's unfinished The Provok'd Wife, was given at Drury Lane on January 10. Various other works are ascribed to Cibber.

Erskine Baker gives a eulogistic view of Cibber's dramatic works: "...they always tend to the improvement of the mind as well as entertainment of the eye; and...vice or folly, however pleasingly habited, are constantly lashed, ridiculed, or reclaimed in them, and virtue as constantly rewarded."[3] Baker adds:

> ...his plays have merit enough to speak in their own cause, without the necessity of begging indulgence. His plots, whether original or borrowed, are lively and full of business; yet not confused in the action, nor bungled in the catastrophe. And if he has not the intrinsic merit of a Congreve or Vanbrugh, yet there is a luxuriance of fancy in his thoughts, which gives an almost equal pleasure, and a purity in his sentiments and morals, the want of which in other authors, has so frequently and so justly been censured. In a word, we think the English stage as much obliged to Mr. Cibber, for a fund of rational entertainment, as to any dramatist this nation has produced, Shakespeare only excepted; and one unanswerable evidence has been borne to the satisfaction the public have received from his plays, and such an one as no author besides himself can boast, viz. that the

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[3] Companion to the Play-House, II, article CIBBER. ($F2^v - G1^r$).

> number of his dramatic pieces is very extensive, a considerable part are now, and seem likely to continue, on the list of acting and favourite plays.[4]

Placing Cibber second to Shakespeare is perhaps to betray a glaring lack of critical acumen, but Baker does make the valid points that Cibber's plays are lively, and provided a good evening's entertainment. Yet Cibber will never be more than a minor figure in English literary history, despite the kudos of Baker. Pope pointed out, in his controversy with Cibber, that the latter was a writer who was responsible for the decay in art. The court also failed in its duty as an arbiter of taste and culture by appointing Cibber, with his nondescript poetic gifts, to the post of laureate. Cibber also corrupted the drama: Pope depicts him in the Dunciad as a Midas sitting "Lord-Chancellor of plays."[5] Cibber had no great esteem for literature as such; to him a play was a piece of merchandise, to be bought and sold. His summary treatment of other authors' work has already been mentioned. In Chapter six of The Art of Sinking in Poetry, there is mention of writers who, like Cibber, adapted others' plays; and thus are like parrots, who could merely "repeat another's words, in such a hoarse, odd voice, that makes them seem their own."[6] In the Dunciad, Pope again attacks Cibber for unoriginality. Pope's objections have a great degree of validity; Cibber was a desecrator of the creative act, a vulgarizer of dramatic literature, a provider of shows lacking in intellectual content, and a laureate without inspiration.

But, "for all its intrinsic weakness, Cibber's work cannot be denied a brittle vivacity."[7]

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Dunciad (1743), III, 324. Poems, ed. James Sutherland, V, 335.

[6] Works (1806), ed. W. L. Bowles, VI, 207.

[7] Dobrée (1700-1740), p. 230.

Cibber's Theory of the Drama

Cibber, like almost any other playwright, had theories which accounted for the work he produced. Scattered throughout the Apology and in the various Epilogues and Prologues to his plays can be found the germs of critical theory; and Cibber's theories deserve attention, if for no other reason than that he was a successful writer. He advises the would-be dramatist:

> ...before you set pen to paper, think well and principally of your design, or chief action, towards which every line you write ought to be drawn, as to its centre. If we can say of your finest sentiments, this or that might be left out without maiming the story you would tell us, depend upon it, that fine thing is said in a wrong place; and though you may urge that a bright thought is not to be resisted, you will not be able to deny that those very fine lines would be much finer if you could find a proper occasion for them...[8]

Cibber continues:

> Compliment the taste of your hearers as much as you please with them, provided they belong to your subject, but don't, like a dainty preacher who has his eye more upon the world than the text, leave your text for them. When your fable is good, every part of it will cost you much less labour to keep your narrative alive, than you will be forced to bestow upon those elegant discourses that are not absolutely conducive to your catastrophe or main purpose. Scenes of that kind show but at best the unprofitable or injudicious spirit of a genius. It is but a melancholy commendation of a fine thought,

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[8] Apology, p. 201.

> to say, when we have heard it, "Well! but what's all this to the purpose?[9]

Cibber describes the ideal play thus:

> His plot and persons he from nature takes;
> Who for no bribe of jest he willingly forsakes.
> His wit, if any, mingles with his plot,
> Which should on no temptation be forgot:
> His action's in the time of acting done,
> No more than from the curtain, up and down.
> While the first music plays, he removes his scene
> A little space, but never shifts again.
> From his design no person can be spar'd
> Or speeches lopt, unless the whole be marr'd.
> No scenes of talk for talking's sake are shewn,
> Where most abruptly, when their chat is done,
> Actors go off, because the poet --- can't go on.
> His first act offers something to be done,
> And all the rest but lead the action on;
> Which when pursuing scenes i'th'end discover,
> The game's run down, of course the play is over.[10]

Although Ward claims "there is no reason to disbelieve the honesty of purpose which Cibber claims for himself as an author"[11], an element of doubt does creep in. Still, Cibber was vehement and prolix enough in his protestations of writing to inculcate morality:

> I cannot find...from what reason satire is allowed more licence than comedy, or why either of them (to be admired) ought not be limited by decency and justice.[12]

Again:

> Whatever any of my productions might want of skill, learning, wit, or humour, or however unqualify'd I might be to instruct others, who so ill-govern'd myself; yet such plays (entirely my own) were not wanting, at least, in what our most admired writers seem'd to neglect, and without which I cannot allow the most taking play to be intrinsically good, or to be a work upon which a man of sense or probity should value himself. I

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[10] Prologue, She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not. Dramatick Works, (1736), I, 225-26.

[11] Ward III, 486.

[12] Apology, p. 24.

> mean when they do not, as well prodesse, as delectare, give profit with delight. The utile dulci was, of old, equally the point, and has always been my aim, however wide of the mark I may have shot my arrow.[13]

Cibber then remarks:

> It has often given me amazement, that our best authors...could think the wit and spirit of their scenes could be an excuse for making the looseness of them public. ...If then...to have had the interest and honour of virtue always in view, can give merit to a play; I am contented that my readers should think such merit, the all, that mine have to boast of. Libertines of mere wit, and pleasure, may laugh at these grave laws, that would limit a lively genius; but every sensible honest man, conscious of their truth, will give these ralliers smile for smile, and shew a due contempt for their merriment.[14]

If, however, it be protested that these views were put forward in a book whose sole design was to "puff" Cibber, one should look at a few of the plays, where he also makes the same points. In the Dedication to The Lady's Last Stake, or, The Wife's Resentment, Cibber observes: "A play without a just moral is a poor and mercenary undertaking."[15] He confesses that he wrote Love in a Riddle in the hope of "recommending virtue and innocence, which I ignorantly thought might not have a less pretence to favour than setting greatness and authority in a contemptible, and the most vulgar vice and wickedness in an amiable light."[16]

He cites Addison's Cato as breathing "the noble spirit of patriotism" and points out. "...I allow nothing is more liable to debase, and corrupt the minds of a people, than a licentious theatre;...under a just and proper management, it [is] possible to make it...the school of manners and

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[13] Ibid., 154.

[14] Ibid., 154-55.

[15] Dramatick Works, III.

[16] Apology, p. 141.

virtue".[17] He admits, however, that "to preserve a theatre in this strength, and purity of morals, is, I grant, what the wisest nations have not been able to perpetuate, or to transmit long to their posterity."[18]

From such airy (and no doubt spurious) moralisings, Cibber strikes a more down-to-earth and utilitarian note:

> my sole dependance being the judgment of an audience, 'twere madness to provoke them.[19]

And in the Dedication to Love's Last Shift he admits: "I first considered who my guests were, before I prepared my entertainment".

Cibber does not appear to have paid much attention to those critics who insisted that the "rules" be followed. He himself had no great love for the unities; he thought they held back the creative imagination of an author, and, what was more to the point, did not always ensure success. He attacked the "rules" in his Prologue to Ximena:

> So plays are valued; not confin'd to rules,
> Those prudes, the critics, call them feasts for fools;
> And if an audience 'gainst those rules is warm'd,
> Or by the lawless force of genius charm'd,
> Their whole confederate body is alarm'd:
> Then every feature's false, though ne'er so taking,
> The heart's deceiv'd, though 'tis with pleasure aking.[20]

In the Epilogue to The Non-Juror, Cibber is even more openly contemptuous:

> As for the critics, those, he owns, may tease him,
> Because he never took such pains to please them,
> In Time, Place, Action, rules by which old wits
> Made plays, as -- dames do puddings, by receipts.[21]

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[17] Ibid., p208.

[18] Ibid., p209.

[19] Preface to Woman's Wit. Dramatick Works V.

[20] Works, II.

[21] Ibid.

Cibber also thought that a good plot was more important than style. Even if a play is wretchedly written, its plot and the total action can still hold an audience; it is a gross error

> To think in plays, that language is the whole.
> The stile is but the body -- fable is the soul;
> * * * * * * * * *
> No big-mouth'd words the want of thought supply,
> Nor scale the ransack'd heavens for simile.[22]

Love's Last Shift -- Reception and Stage History

The date of the premiere performance is not known; but Cibber says the play was first acted in January 1695. Barker, however, points out that "Cibber had no memory for dates and probably adopted January 1695, because the preface to the first edition of the play was written in that month."[23] Sybil Rosenfeld quotes an advertisement for the play in the London Gazette of February 10-13, 1696:

> Love's Last Shift; or, The Fool in Fashion. A comedy. As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal, by His Majesty's Servants. Written by C. Cibber.[24]

The play was probably written late in 1695, and acted early in 1696. That it was produced at all, was entirely owing to the interest taken by the dramatist Thomas Southerne, who seemed always quite willing to help aspiring authors -- he introduced Richard Norton's Pausanias to the Drury Lane stage in the same year.

Southerne had stated that the play would be a success, and Lord Dorset, the then Lord Chamberlain, complimented Cibber by observing that

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[22] Prologue, Perolla and Izadora. Works, III.

[23] Barker, p. 28, note 22.

[24] Rosenfeld, "Dramatic Adverstisements in the Burney Newspapers 1660-1700", PMLA, LI (1936), p. 140.

"it was the best first play that any author in his memory had produc'd; and that for a young fellow, to show himself such an actor, and such a writer, in one day, was something extraordinary."[25]

Cibber took it as a compliment when it was reported that he had not written the play, but had stolen it. John Dennis, who accused both Cibber and Steele in the following terms:

> You have both of you, for several years together, been the celebrated authors of other peoples' works.[26]

and

> You (Steele) and your viceroy (Cibber) bravely and boldly seize upon other men's plays; cause new title pages to be printed; and see: to the amazement of some few readers, they pass with the rest of your own.[27]

specifically denied that Cibber had written the play:

> ...I am told lately by one of my acquaintance that I have been too severe upon the understanding of... Cibber. And the reason that was given me was, that Cibber writ The Fool in Fashion, which, says my friend, you have often said is a good comedy. To which I answer, that 'tis true, I have often said 'tis a good comedy, but I had always much ado to believe that Cibber writ it, and that since I have seen the Non-Juror and the Heroick Daughter I do not believe it at all. For which I shall give my reasons. ...When The Fool in Fashion was first acted, Cibber was barely twenty years of age. Now could he at the age of twenty write a comedy with a just design, distinguished characters, and a proper dialogue, who now at forty treats us with Hibernian sense and Hibernian English? Could he, when he was an arrant boy, draw a good comedy from his own raw uncultivated head, who is now at forty able to do nothing but what is poor and mean, when

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[25] Apology, p. 124.

[26] Characters and Conduct of Sir John Edgar. Hooker, II, 190.

[27] Ibid., p. 191.

> he is supported by two such masters as Molière and Corneille?[28]

Dennis adds cynically:

> ...Cibber's name is prefix'd to The Fool in Fashion. They nothing know of Mr. Cibber, who in the least wonder at that. He who, now he is turn'd of forty, sets his name, without any manner of scruple or ceremony, to what all the world knows was writ by Fletcher and Dryden, could not his vanity, when he was a boy, prevail upon him to own what an unknown tho' a very ingenious gentleman writ?[29]

Cibber in his first Letter to Pope claimed that "my first comedy was an original", but even at this time it was still rumoured that the play was not his. The anonymous author of a pamphlet which purports to be a verbal match between Cibber and Pope, asserted that "modest R---rs" had written both play and prologue.[30]

Love's Last Shift, despite the scoffers, was a success. In A Comparison Between The Two Stages (1702), it is reported: "It's often acted now a daies, and by the help of the author's own good action, it pleases to this day."[31] Cibber in his first Letter to Pope also remarks: "It is now forty-seven years since its first appearance upon the stage, where it has kept its station, to this very day, without ever lying one winter dormant."[32]

In Appendix A is a list of the performances of the play, from 1696 to its last performance in 1767.

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[28]Letter "To Henry Cromwell, Esq., of an Expression in Shakespeare; and of the Comedy of the Non-Juror." In Hooker, II, 408.

[29]Ibid., pp. 408-09.

[30]Sawney and Colley (1742). Augustan Reprint Society, Publication No. 83, p. 8.

[31]Wells, p. 16.

[32]A Letter from Mr. Cibber To Mr. Pope, Inquiring into the Motives That Might Induce Him in His Satyrical Works, To Be So Frequently Fond of Mr. Cibber's Name. (1742), p. 33.

The Style of the Play

Cibber was no great stylist, and he knew it. In the Apology he had declared that his style was "unequal, pert, and frothy, patch'd and party-colour'd, like the coat of a harlequin; low and pompous, cramm'd with epithets."[33] He was, furthermore, accused by his contemporaries of making an assault upon the English language "with a certain weapon called a goose-quill, value one farthing...and so...the said English language did murder."[34] Pope ridiculed his "prose on stilts" and his "poetry fall'n lame".[35]

The style of the play is in some parts defective. The dialogue is lively, but sometimes unskilfully managed. Davies says that "Cibber was the first who introduced men and women of high quality on the stage, and gave them language and manners suitable to their rank and birth",[36] but in the park scene of the fourth act, where the two cousins and the Worthy brothers are commenting on the people they meet, the two ladies seem to be acting out of character. Barker notes that "elsewhere in the play they are represented as fine ladies, and here they are given the manners of the tavern brothel. It is curious that Cibber, who was soon to become famous for his scenes from high life, should in his first play have shown so little regard for the niceties of polite conversation."[37]

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[33] Apology, pp. 26-27.

[34] Tryal of Colley Cibber. Cited in Senior, pp. 275-80.

[35] Dunciad, I, 190.

[36] Dramatic Miscellanies, III, 414. Cited by W. W. Appleton, ed. The Careless Husband, XIV.

[37] Baker, p. 27.

Loveless' speech in Act V

> Oh! thou has rouz'd me from my deep lethargy
> of vice! For hitherto my soul has been enslaved
> to loose desires, to vain deluding follies, and
> shadows of substantial bliss

strikes one as not being a piece of dialogue, but a homily directed towards the audience. Most of Amanda's speeches to him in the same act employ an extended use of apostrophe and exclamation. Normal means of communication seems deliberately to have been avoided:

> One kind, one pitying look cancels those wrongs
> for ever: And oh! forgive my fond presuming
> passion; for from my soul I pardon and forgive
> you all: All, all but this, the greatest, your
> unkind delay of love.
>
> (Act V)

The speech has a false quality about it, and is most probably directed towards the emotions of the play-goers.

When the sentiment becomes too much for the speech, the prose falls into a kind of weak blank verse; Loveless' speech: "Oh! I have wander'd like a benighted wretch, and lost myself in life's unpleasing journey", could have been written thus:

> Oh! I have wander'd like a benighted wretch,
> And lost myself in life's unpleasing journey.
>
> (Act V)

Similarly, another of his speeches becomes:

> By my example taught, let every man,
> Whose fate has bound him to a marry'd life
> Beware of letting lose his wild desires.
>
> (Act V)

Cibber's dialogue frequently approaches the witty or epigrammatic, but never quite attains it. Loveless explains his poverty thus:

> I pawn'd it [his estate] to buy pleasure, that is old wine, young whores, and the conversation of brave fellows as mad as myself.

and advises Young Worthy against marriage:

> Ah! Will, you'll find, marrying to cure lewdness is like surfeiting to cure hunger: for all the consequence is, you loathe what you surfeit on, and are only chaste to her you marry.
>
> (Act I)

Or take Sir Novelty Fashion's soliloquy:

> Demmit, 'tis mechanical to marry the woman you love: Men of quality shou'd always marry those they never saw.
>
> (Act III)

Such bits of dialogue cannot match up to the hard, polished turn of a Wycherley or a Congreve. Indeed, as Congreve remarked, the play has in it a great many things that are _like_ wit, which in reality are _not_ wit. And as Cibber himself confesses, it contains "a great deal of puerility and frothy stage-language."[38]

The Characters

When one is confronted with characters whose names are Loveless, Worthy, and Forge, one naturally thinks of the Jonsonian idea of the humours, in which a person is distinguished by some peculiar quality, which the fictive name is intended to convey. But Cibber's characters, although they owe much to conventional types, are yet lively entities, with personalities of their own. Cibber is also deliberately modifying the stock characters

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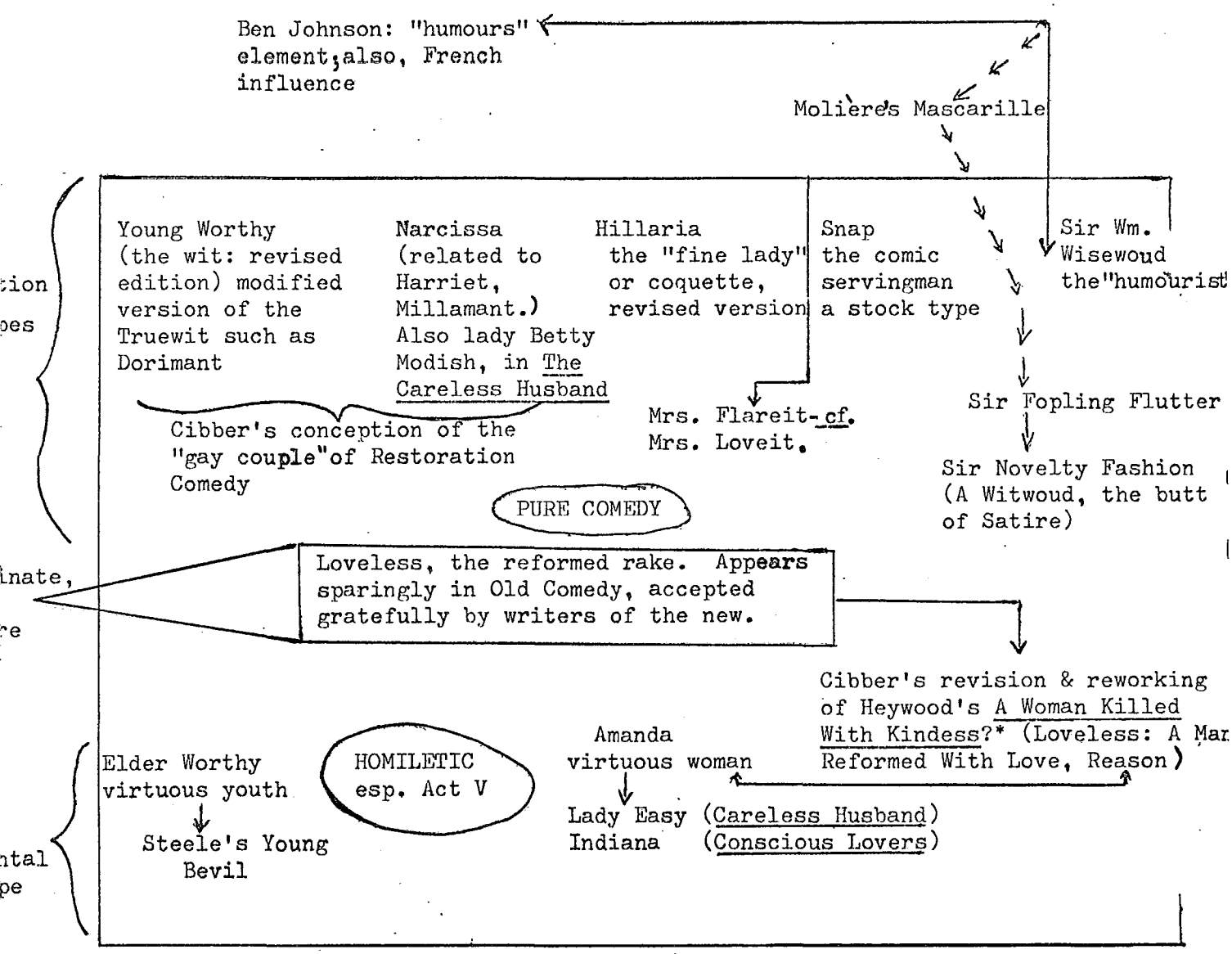
[38] _Apology_, p. 128.

The Characters: An Elucidatory Diagram



*I owe this suggestion to W. W. Appleton.

of Restoration comedy, and presenting revised or domesticated versions of them. Like Shadwell, he seems to draw the line at "whoring ruffians" and "ill-bred tomrigs."

Just as Cibber picked up hints for dialogue from the fine people with whom he associated, it is possible that he also received hints from them for his character portrayals. When writing The Careless Husband, he drew on the former Countess of Macclesfield's manner and behaviour in portraying the character of Lady Betty Modish, and for his depiction of young men about town, Cibber was also indebted to his friend, Colonel Henry Brett.[39]

LOVELESS

"I have measur'd half the world in search of pleasure"

His character is succinctly summed up in the description given by Cibber. Loveless is "of a debaucht life, grew weary of his wife in six months, left her, and the town, for debts he did not care to pay; and having spent the last part of his estate beyond sea, returns to England in a very mean condition." We see him at first displaying a cynicism worthy of a Dorimant, and his views on matrimony display a sceptical libertinism -- "the world to me is a garden stockt with all sorts of fruit, where the greatest pleasure we can take, is in the variety of taste: but a wife is an eternal apple-tree; after a pull or two, you are sure to set your teeth on edge."

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[39]See Ashley, pp. 56,93.

Cibber was not the first to portray the rake who repented; he had already appeared as Don Ferdinando in Thomas Porter's The Carnival (1664); and neither was he the only playwright to use the character, who "would seem to have become somewhat more popular during the last two decades of the Restoration, particularly in the years between 1696 and 1700."[40] Loveless from the outset is presented as a rake, guilty of sexual misdemeanours, riotous living, and wasting of money. His conversations with his servant Snap are invariably cynical: asked why he had given a valuable pearl necklace to a Venetian courtesan he replies: "I knew I could not have her without it, and I had a night's enjoyment of her was worth a Pope's revenue for't." There is a vein of callousness in him; told of his wife's supposed death, he merely retorts that she was "a good-natured fool", but does not appear to be much moved. He refuses to believe in love, since "contancy in love is all a cheat." He seems to be also entirely lacking in conscience.

His reformation is brought about by an appeal to reason, and by Amanda's devotion and selflessness. He is depicted as essentially a man of sense, who has been led astray by libertinism. He is restored by the use of Reason, to Amanda; as he himself puts it:

> 'Twas heedless Fancy first that made me stray,
> But Reason now breaks forth, and lights me on my way.

His recall to his better self is the triumph of right action over wrong choice, or reason asserting its primacy over the emotions. This doctrine is later succinctly put by Steele: "He that governs his thoughts with

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[40] See David S. Berkely, "The Penitent Rake in Restoration Comedy", MP, XLIX (1952), p. 224.

everlasting rules of reason and common sense, must have something so inexpressibly graceful in his words and actions that every circumstance must become him."[41]

Loveless, by letting the emotions triumph over the will, is by Steele's definition a rake; that is, a "man who lives in the constant abuse of his reason."[42] By thinking seriously on Amanda's argument, his better nature reasserts itself.

Loveless' situation is analogous to that of Sir Charles Easy in The Careless Husband. Lady Easy says, of the philandering Sir Charles, that if she could "make him once think seriously" she could reform him. Both Cibber and Steele seem to be saying that one's conduct should be regulated by reason, since want of thinking leads to libertine behaviour.[43]

Since Loveless' conversion appears at the end of the last act, and he would not be on stage long enough for the audience to witness him in his new role, Cibber perforce has to stress that the reformation has occurred. He does this by making Loveless deliver a speech of repentance, and utter edifying words on the purity of the married state and on virtue.

Loveless also shows that he has changed for the better by ordering his servant Snap to marry the maid with whom Snap had spent the night.

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[41] Spectator. No. 75 (May 26, 1711). Bond, I, 325.

[42] Tatler. No. 27 (June 11, 1709). I, 242. "A rake is a man always to be pitied; and, if he lives, is one day certainly reclaimed." Ibid., p. 238.

[43] For the importance which reason plays in the rake's conversion, see J. H. Smith, The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy, pp. 172-3, 204-5.

AMANDA

"To me the rules of virtue have been ever sacred".

Amanda belongs more to the realm of romantic comedy than contemporary life of the 1690's. One is tempted to say that she is not so much a character, as the embodiment of virtue. Her sobriety, her chastity, and her virtuous conversation all support this view. But although she is the pathetic heroine, embodying patience and unyielding virtue to a supreme degree, there is another aspect of her which must be stressed. Snap tells us that she was a celebrated beauty, who was the toast of the town, and had to ward off the unwelcome attentions of the fops and beaus. That she is still beautiful, is evidenced by the fact that Loveless (mistakenly taking her for a woman of easy virtue), enthuses that she is "the most charming of her sex." Apart from her beauty and her patience, she is good to her inferiors. Her servants remark of her that "she's certainly the best mistress living."

In Sir William Killigrew's comedy, Pandora; or The Converts (1665), occur these lines:

> Pandora tells, how vertuous women may
> Make vitious men, cast all their ills away.

The basis of the conversion of the rake lay in the "charm" of a virtuous and beautiful woman. The more beautiful and virtuous the woman was, the greater was her power to convert.[44] Cibber seems to have followed this convention when portraying the character of Amanda.

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[44] See Berkely, p. 230.

SIR NOVELTY FASHION

"...a true original, the very pink of fashion."

Sir Novelty is the Witwoud of Restoration comedy, the character deficient in wit. He has obviously been created for the purpose of social satire. He is a man of mode, with pretensions of being a leader in fashion and taste. He is however an intellectual nonentity, and as such is exposed to the laughter of the others; as Sir William Wisewoud observes, he takes such an extravagant care in his clothing, that his understanding goes naked.

There is a great deal of variety in Sir Novelty: we see him as the lover, paying his unwelcome attentions to Hillaria; as the fool in fashion, exhibiting his preposterous dress; and finally we see him made to look ridiculous, but managing to brazen it out with a matchless impudence. Altogether it is a good part for the versatile actor, and no doubt Cibber enjoyed playing the role immensely.

Sir Novelty has obviously been taken over from Etherege's Sir Fopling Flutter. Indeed, when one compares The Man of Mode, Act 3, Scene 2, where Sir Fopling is complimented on his clothing, with Cibber's Act 2, Scene 1, one can easily see Cibber's indebtedness. But both characters ultimately derive from Mascarille in Molière's Les Precieuses Ridicules.[45]

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[45] See Kathleen M. Lynch, The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, p. 180-81.

Sir Novelty is proud of the fact that "the cravat-string, the garter, the sword-knot, the centurine, bardash, the steinkirk, the large button, the long sleeve, the plume, and full peruque, were all created, cry'd down, or reviv'd" by himself. "There has never been anything particularly taking or agreeable for these ten years past, but your humble servant was the author of it." He gives this as sufficient reason why Hillaria should marry him, in a scene that is superbly comic.

Sir Novelty is the complete fop, with his three-inch button, his sleeves reaching to his knuckles, and his fashionable oaths -- "Burn me", "Stop my vitals", and "Demme". He is consummately vain, so that when Flareit calls him "a miserable conceited wretch", she is not far wrong in her summary. He is careful to leave the playhouses in the middle of an act, in order to be the centre of attention, and so preserve his reputation of a man of fashion.

A senseless, conceited person who shows up his ignorance by his taste for foreign fashions, Sir Novelty is one of those characters who go in Restoration comedy under the generic name of coxcomb. He compliments himself on being "the first person in England" to be given the name of beau; but we realise that, all unaware, he is sketching his own character when he proposes "to write a play, where my chiefest character shall be a downright English booby that affects to be a beau, without either genius or foreign education."

All in all, Sir Novelty bears out Hillaria's statement that "he is as full of variety as a good play."

NARCISSA

"a strange affected piece"

Narcissa is the accomplished coquette. She is obviously in love with Young Worthy, but is determined to toy with him for as long as possible before marrying him. She doesn't object to marriage, but tells him he has not loved her long enough to make their marriage the talk of the town -- "for 'tis the fashion now to be the town-talk; and you know, one had as good be out of the world, as out of the fashion." She similarly thinks that "it looks too credulous and easy in a woman, to encourage a man before he has sigh'd himself to a skeleton."

Narcissa and youngWorthy are Cibber's modified version of the "gay couple" of Restoration comedy. The "gay couple" have been defined as "that pair in comedy who begin their relationship as antagonists rather than collaborators, whose attraction for each other develops in the course of a sprightly courtship game, and who, even when caught by love and about to be married, still persist in seeming not to take the situation seriously."[46]

The Restoration concept of the "sex-game", the idea that love is a duel between the sexes, is embodied in the relationship between Narcissa and young Worthy. The exchanges between Sir Frederic Frolick and the widow in Etherege's Love in A Tub, or the battles between Mirabell and Millamant, are examples of the "sex-game" played between two sparring partners. The situation is a similar one between Narcissa and Young Worthy. No sooner

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[46]Harrington Smith, p. 3.

does Young Worthy make a move, than it is immediately countered by Narcissa. She encourages the attentions of Sir Novelty Fashion, because she quite rightly fancies that this will make Young Worthy jealous. Besides, she wants to be fought over, since "Narcissa would sound so great in an expiring lover's mouth." There is a touch of malice about her -- she thinks " a little railing's half the pleasure of one's life."

Narcissa and Young Worthy are perhaps modelled on the young couple in Carlile's Fortune Hunters.[47]

HILLARIA

"... [she] has some good qualities..."

Hillaria seems to be a more mature woman than her flighty cousin, Narcissa. She has wit, beauty, and sense; but Elder Worthy adds to this list pride and vanity. However, Elder Worthy's views are slightly biased, since he is jealous of her encouragement of Sir Novelty Fashion.

Hillaria is the Restoration fine lady, resolved "to be mistress of my actions before marriage and no man shall usurp a power over me 'till I give it him." In such a manner might a Hariet or a Millamant have spoken. In typical Restoration comedy, Hillaria would have had no censure attached to her for her coquettish attitude. Cibber however seems to disapprove -- and so makes her aware of her "crime" in trifling with Sir Novelty, and in the end she is "reformed."

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[47]Croissant, p. 17.

"Sex-antagonism" is displayed in Hillaria's tormenting Elder Worthy by listening to the blandishments of Sir Novelty. Furthermore, her desire to tyrranize over Elder Worthy is "corrected" by Cibber, who makes Amanda and Young Worthy censure her folly -- "Oh madam! no juggler is so deceitful as a fop; for while you look his folly in the face he steals your reputation with more ease than the other picks your pocket."

ELDER WORTHY

" I had need to have the best goods, when
I offer so great a price as marriage for them."

Elder Worthy is a man embodying the new moral sense -- he is a "man of sensibility", perilously close to being a prig. He does not possess wit, but has instead gravity and high seriousness. Amanda finds in him "nothing...but what is some part of a good man's character."

His first appearance shows him engaged in prosy moralisings on women in general, and Hillaria in particular. He is not a very successful lover, since his younger brother has to do the job for him -- Young Worthy also points out that it never pays to preach to women. Elder Worthy is presented as having little experience of, or love for, the fashionable world; he heartily despises the coxcomb Sir Novelty. In Act 3, Scene 2, he distinguishes himself from the other members of the group by affirming his distaste of gossip. The crude speeches attributed to him later in the same scene are probably the result of a confusion of speech-prefixes, and should be given to Young Worthy. Otherwise, Elder Worthy would be speaking entirely out of character; and such a switch in and out of character would be

too sudden, even for Cibber.[48] Honest Tom Worthy is also devoid of humour. Sir Novelty remarks of him that he can, with an "unmoved countenance" hear "a thundering jest [probably lewd?] in a comedy."

Richard Steele depicted a similar character, Young Bevil, in his Conscious Lovers.

YOUNG WORTHY

"he has a very good periwig"

The play revolves around the stratagems of this gay young spark. He thinks up the plot to save Amanda's marriage; he attempts reconciations between Hillaria and his brother; he woos and wins Narcissa; and finally he dupes the avaricious Sir William Wisewoud. He is altogether a livelier person than his staid, respectable elder brother. There is much of the rake about him, and Loveless recognises this. Young Worthy tells with disarming candour how he squandered £3,000 left him by his father. He puts Amanda in mind of Loveless -- both have "beauty, wit and falsehood." She characterises Young Worthy as "a wild young fellow, that loves everything he sees." He has, however, not descended to the depths of degradation reached by Loveless, and has achieved this by his prudence. He tells Loveless: "Faith, Ned, I'm as much in love with wickedness as thou canst be, but I'm for having it at a cheaper rate than my ruin." Like any other

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[48] See P. E. Parnell, "An Incorrectly Attributed Speech-Prefix in Love's Last Shift", NεQ, CCIV (1959), pp. 212-13.

rake-hell, this Worthy is "determined to purge out his wild humours with matrimony", but shrewdly resolves to "have the dose well sweetened with a swinging portion."

Young Worthy is Cibber's domesticated version of the "wit" or superior man of Restoration comedy. In such a typical comedy, Young Worthy would have been a rake, a cynic, an intriguer and a cuckold-maker. In Cibber, he retains his cynicism, but the other characteristics are excised. Young Worthy is also a "wit" in the same sense that Horner is a wit -- Horner has the intelligence to set a plot in motion by pretending to be impotent; Young Worthy also has the intellect to instigate a stratagem, which however, differs from the intrigue of Restoration comedy.

Young Worthy is also a gallant, but without the bad habits of gallants such as Woodvil in Dryden's Limberham. As a younger son (with all its implications of primogeniture), Young Worthy has to make his living by his wits, and he has a cynical intelligence which helps him admirably. He makes no bones of the fact that he is as much attracted to Narcissa's fortune as to Narcissa herself -- "the wise and grave may tell us of strange chimeras called virtues in woman, and they alone are the best dowry; but faith, we younger brothers are of a different mind."

He might be a cynic, but at the end of the play his nobility asserts itself, and he offers to return the bond he had tricked Sir William Wisewoud into signing. Elder Worthy also thinks that his brother has atoned "for the looseness of his character" by thinking up the stratagem to aid Amanda.

SNAP

"no whores before dinner, I beseech you."

Snap is a minor figure in the play, and is distinctly related to the cynical serving-man of Restoration comedy. He is the "pimp in ordinary", the witty rogue who is at the same time intensely practical -- Loveless might not be interested in knowing where the next meal is coming from, but this is a very important subject to Snap. This part is an excellent one, well tailored to fit the farcical actor Will Penkethman, who probably did credit to the role -- peering from under the table in the scene in Act 5, delivering bawdy, pointed remarks, and then retreating with an item of food and drink. Loveless might repent and be converted, but Snap's point of view is summed up in the lines:

> Marry her [Mistress Anne]! O Lord, sir, after I have lain with her? Why Sir! how the devil can you think a man can have any stomach to his dinner, after he has had three or four slices off the spit?
>
> (Act V)

Or, more cynically still:

> I thank heav'n, that I have so much grace left, that I can repent, when I have no more opportunities of being wicked.
>
> (Act V)

SIR WILLIAM WISEWOUD

"...nothing makes a man lose himself like passion."

Just as Ben Jonson's Sir Politick Would-be thought that he was extremely knowing in matters of state, Sir William Wisewoud thinks that he is wise in matters pertaining to social conduct -- he decides that all

that is necessary is for passion to be avoided. Cibber says he "fancies himself a great master of his passion, which he only is in trivial matters." When it is revealed that he has been duped by Young Worthy, his choler quickly rises.

Sir William is an avaricious old fool, a minor character who is slightly uninteresting.

MRS. FLAREIT

"my jealousy will not let me rest till I am revenged."

The cast-off mistress of Sir Novelty is integrated into the play by the role she plays, which hinges on the two motifs of disguise and separation. By pretending to be Narcissa, she effects a confrontation with Sir Novelty.

The separation motif allies her to a character such as Loveit, who is thrown over by Dorimant. The theory was that if one party became tired of an affair, it should end. It is useless for the other to object; and the man of fashion (Dorimant, Sir Novelty) when faced with the recriminations of the thwarted party, always remained calm and imperturbable.[49]

Flareit is also used for moral purposes by Cibber, since she is made to look slightly ridiculous. A type of the scorned woman, she is chiefly

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[49]See Etherege's To a Lady, Asking Him How Long He Would Love Her:

It is not, Celia, in our power
To say how long our love will last,
It may be we within this hour
May lose those joys we now do taste.

Quoted, The Works of Sir George Etherege, ed. H.F. Brett-Smith, I, lxxix-lxxx.

noted for the line "He shall find no fiend in hell can match the fury of a disappointed woman", later neatly paraphrased by Congreve.

The Plot

Aristotle maintained that the life and soul of tragedy was the plot;[50] this dictum is equally applicable to comedy. Aristotle further defined plot as the combination of the incidents or things done in the story.[51] Dennis observed similarly that "...action is the business of the stage. The drama is action itself, and it is action alone that is able to excite in any extraordinary manner the curiosity of mankind."[52] Cibber himself, as we have discovered, was of the opinion that "fable is the soul." Plot, considered as an abstract, scene by scene, of the action of a play, embraces much more than Cibber's definition, which is rather limited to "fable" or "story".

The "last shift" of the play is Amanda's stratagem, by means of which she regains her erring husband; the "fool in fashion" of the subtitle is of course the egregious fop, Sir Novelty Fashion.

The main action of the play is the reformation of the wandering husband, Loveless, who has returned to London after several years of loose living on the Continent. By means of a plan devised by Young Worthy, Loveless makes love to his wife under the impression that she is a new

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[50] Fyfe, p. 19.

[51] Ibid., p. 17.

[52] A Large Account of the Taste in Poetry. Hooker, I, 280.

mistress. Later, Amanda reveals who she is, and reasons with her husband about virtue. He is brought to see the error of his ways, and promises sincere amendment of life.

In addition, there are at least four sub-actions involving lively, disconnected incidents which would go down well on the stage. An artificial unity is given to these various actions, since Cibber makes his characters either friends, relatives, or dependants of each other.

Two sub-actions run parallel to each other. The two Worthy brothers woo and win the cousins Hillaria and Narcissa, but not without some struggle on their part. Young Worthy is blocked in his affair with Narcissa by the intervention of Sir William Wisewoud, who wants her to marry Elder Worthy. Matters are complicated by the fact that the elder brother is in love with Hillaria, who is at first averse to giving up her freedom by marrying. A solution is devised by the quick-thinking younger brother; he tricks Sir William into signing marriage contracts, in which Narcissa is promised to himself, and Hillaria to his elder brother.

The third and fourth sub-actions are comic. One deals with the affair between Sir Novelty Fashion and his mistress, Flareit. Hillaria, who had incurred the censure of the two Worthies for her encouragement of the fop, devises a scheme for his mortification. Sir Novelty is sent a letter, which purports to be from Narcissa, setting out an assignation. He keeps the assignment with a masked lady, and is considerably and unpleasantly surprised to discover that "Narcissa" is in reality, Mrs. Flareit. All the main characters are at hand to witness his discomfiture, but Sir Novelty has the presence of mind to play down the matter. This he does, with a rather grim heartlessness.

The last episode is that between Loveless' serving-man Snap, and Amanda's maid, Mrs. Anne; this takes place in Act V. The maid, to protect herself from Snap's advances, causes him to fall through a trap-door into the cellar beneath. She exults over his down-fall, but her triumph is of short duration, since Snap manages to pull her into the cellar, where they spend the night together.

These sub-plots are all necessary to the play, which is episodic in structure. Indeed, the main Loveless — Amanda action would hardly have been enough to fill out five acts. But Cibber does not forget his main action; he interweaves comic (and extraneous) scenes with the main (and serious) action. A close scrutiny of the play shows that this seems to be a deliberate action by Cibber.

In Love's Last Shift, the classical five-act structure is followed.[53] In the first act, the main action is presented at the outset, and a move is made to resolve the problem of Loveless. The intervening acts and scenes are given over to the sub-actions, but with frequent allusions to the main-action, which is finally settled in the fifth act. The play falls into three broad phases:

EXPOSITION: Act I. An introduction to the Loveless-Amanda situation. Also puts into perspective the relationship between Elder Worthy and Hillaria, Young Worthy and Narcissa.

INCIDENTS: Act II -- the advent of the fool in fashion. This includes a scene of broad farce, in which Young Worthy tumbles Sir Novelty upon his back.

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[53] "Neve minor neu sit quinto productior actu." Horace, Ars Poetica, l. 189.

INCIDENTS: Act III -- includes a serious scene between Hillaria and Amanda, which soon gives way to comedy when Sir Novelty presents himself to Sir William Wisewoud as a prospective son-in-law.

Sc.ii is taken up with a lively scene in the park. This does not advance any of the actions, but is given over to a keen, if uncharitable, observation of men and matters.

Act IV includes three comic scenes. It opens with low comedy, with Sir William meeting three bullies, and being saved from a ducking in the pond by the timely intervention of the Worthy brothers.

[Sc. ii] Is concerned with the discomfiture of Sir Novelty Fashion, while [Sc. iii] is given over to Snap and the maid.

DENOUEMENT: Act V. The main action receives prominent treatment, and is resolved by Loveless' promise of amendment. In addition, all loose ends are tied up.

The only act in which the main action is not considered is Act II, which is given over entirely to the Worthy brothers, their lovers, and Sir Novelty Fashion.

Although Cibber assures us in the Dedication to the play that "the fable is entirely my own; nor is there a line or thought throughout the whole, for which I am wittingly oblig'd either to the dead, or living," yet there are scenes and situations in his play which had been used before by other dramatists. The main borrowing or analogue is the subterfuge by which Loveless is led back to his deserted wife, under the pretence of her being a new mistress. Cibber probably took this, via Shakespeare, from Italian sources. Shakespeare used the situation in Measure for Measure, where Mariana substitutes herself for Isabella, and Angelo makes love to her thinking she is Isabella. A similar situation is encountered in

All's Well That Ends Well, with Helena substituting herself for another woman in Bertram's bed. Just as there was a struggle for Bertram between Helena (good angel) and Parolles (bad angel) for Bertram, so too is there a struggle between Amanda (virtue) and vice (libertine principles) for Loveless. Bertram's suddenness of conversion, and his

> I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly

has its counterpart in Loveless' rapid reformation. Similarly, with Cibber, all ends "well".

There are also similarities in the situations and characters of Cibber's play and Carlile's Fortune Hunters (1689). Carlile's Elder Wealthy and Young Wealthy are close enough to Cibber's Elder Worthy and Young Worthy. Carlile's Shamtown, in addition,

> belongs to the same family as Sir Novelty Fashion, though he is much more crudely portrayed. So too, the jealousy of Elder Worthy in regard to Hillaria and Sir Novelty is very much like that of Elder Wealthy in regard to Sophia and Shamtown. So great is the similarity that, notwithstanding his denial, one must believe that Cibber deliberately used the situation and characters as a basis for his own, though he did not copy the language, and has made an entirely new and original thing out of his source.[54]

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[54] Croissant, p. 17.

Critical Appreciation

In the Comparison Between the Two Stages, Sullen praises Love's Last Shift for its "purity of plot, manners and moral";[55] and Gildon, in his Dramatick Poets, remarks on its "beauty of incident, and the excellent moral that flows from it."[56] Thomas Davies enthuses: "To a player we are indebted for the reformation of the stage. The first comedy, acted since the Restoration, in which were preferred purity of manners and decency of language, with a due respect to the honour of the marriage bed, was Colley Cibber's Love's Last Shift."[57] Cibber, however, makes no claim to decency of language; he could hardly have done this, since some of the dialogue is as coarse as any to be found in Restoration comedy. Davies further records that at the reconciliation of Loveless and Amanda, "the joy of unexpected reconcilement, spread such an uncommon rapture of pleasure in the audience that never were spectators more happy in easing their minds by uncommon and repeated plaudits and honest tears."[58] It must be remembered, however, that Davies was writing nearly a hundred years after the event he so glowingly describes.

It seems quite clear that Cibber's contemporaries regarded the play as something quite new in English drama. As pointed out earlier,

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[55]Wells, p. 16.

[56]Quoted, Ibid., p. 128.

[57]Quoted, Croissant, p. 44.

[58]Quoted, Bernbaum, p. 1.

however, this does not mean that no author before Cibber had attempted to do the same; but it is apparent that Cibber was the first to make his purpose quite clear. Bernbaum writes:

> On an evening in January, 1696, the usual audience at Drury Lane Theatre gathered to attend the first performance of a comedy by a new author. They saw nothing in its title...to pique extraordinary curiosity. They expected to be entertained by some ingenious lover's trick, and by the manners of some sort of modish coxcomb, -- in any case by something that reflected the absurdities and intrigues of London society. They had no warning that they were to witness the beginning of a new epoch in English dramatic history. Since the play was not a tragedy, nor a romantic drama, they could not suppose that their sensibility, their sympathy for the virtues and distresses of beings like themselves, would be appealed to. They came, as usual, to laugh; they remained to dissolve in tears.[59]

Love's Last Shift is important, then, not only because it is Cibber's first play, but because it was considered to be something new in comedy. Collier could not have claimed that the vicious were rewarded, since Loveless had obligingly repented and shown a different side to his character; Vanbrugh, it is true, thought that the reformation could not last, and wrote the Relapse to prove it.

It may be argued that the play is a Restoration comedy to which a new element has been added. But it is precisely this new thing which makes the play important. In accordance with the current idea that a play should entertain and instruct, Cibber has done both. In his Epilogue he

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[59] Bernbaum, p. 1

makes this quite explicit; the play had a two-fold appeal, to the fine gentlemen who would relish a tale of intrigue, and to their womenfolk who desired to be moved to pity by the sight of virtue in distress:

> Now, gallants, for the author. First, to you
> Kind city-gentlemen o'th' middle row;
> He hopes you nothing to his charge can lay,
> There's not a cuckold made in all his play.
> * * * * * * * * * * * *
>
> Now, sirs, to you whose sole religion's drinking,
> Whoring, roaring, without the pain of thinking,
> He fears he's made a fault you'll ne'er forgive,
> A crime beyond the hopes of a reprieve:
> An honest rake forego the joys of life!
> His whores, and wine! t' embrace a dull chaste wife.
> Such out-of-fashion stuff! But then again,
> He's lewd for above four acts, gentlemen!
> * * * * * * * * * * *
>
> Four acts for your coarse palates were design'd;
> But then the ladies taste is more refin'd,
> They, for Amanda's sake, will sure be kind.

Cibber was no fool; he was shrewdly experimenting. He was giving his audience a typical Restoration comedy, with its libertine hero, cynical servingman, fine coquettish ladies, a sprinkling of indecent conversation, some bawdy, cynical wit, and a fop without sense; and to this he added an explicitly stated moral precept. Frederick Wood observes that "many of the early so-called sentimental comedies were nothing more than comedies of manners warped in the fifth act."[60] Can this statement be applied to Loves Last Shift? Nicoll says it

> is merely the first play written consciously to express a feeling which subconsciously had been present in the theatre for more than a decade previously. This comedy marks the beginning of a

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[60] Wood, p. 380.

> long series of similar dramas to which may be given the title "moral-immoral". It displays, that is to say, the ordinary licentious comic characters and themes of the day with a would-be moral ending in which rapid conversions are attributed to those who had been in the earlier acts presented as sinners. Nothing shows better the hypocritical veneer which spreads over the age. The reformers were satisfied because virtue triumphed in the end; the pleasure-loving spectators were willing to witness the wholly artificial conversions for the sake of the careless intrigue and loose dialogue of the preceding scenes.[61]

But in Cibber's play, the only licentious character would seem to be the servingman Snap, since Loveless basically is a reasonable man led away by libertine principles. In addition, the Restoration intrigue has been replaced by Young Worthy's laudable (from the moral point of view) stratagem; and virtue in Cibber's play does not only triumph in the last act. From early in the play it is certain that virtue is going to win out. We are presented with Amanda, "a woman of strict virtue", as early as the first scene in the first act, and it is fairly obvious that we are expected to respond to her plight; people in the audience could find her situation analogous to theirs. As Cibber puts it in the Prologue:

> What tho' no master-stroke in this appears,
> Yet some may features find resembling theirs.
> Nor do the bad alone his colours share;
> Neglected virtue is at least shewn fair.

It must be borne in mind that Love's Last Shift is the first play of an aspiring dramatist; and more than that, it is largely an experiment

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[61] British Drama: An Historical Survey from the Beginnings to the Present Time, p. 281.

designed to test the temper of the times. Eight years later, a more assured and conscious craftsman, Cibber wrote The Careless Husband, from which the manners element is substantially pruned, and the play is more obviously pervaded by sentiment. The denouement, in which Sir Charles Easy is reconciled to his wife, is given more probability of treatment. Indeed, The Careless Husband may be said to be a reworking of Love's Last Shift, since both plays deal with marital infidelity and the return of the wandering husband to the domestic hearth. But the characters and incidents in the latter play are more probable than those in the earlier. However, following Nicoll's own definition of a sentimental play as one which deals with a moral problem, then Love's Last Shift is a sentimental play, and bases its appeal to the fact that Loveless prossesses a "good heart".

The question still remains: how sincere was Cibber, despite his protestations in dedications, prologues, and the Apology that he was writing with a moral purpose? Do not the very words

> He's lewd for above four acts, gentlemen .

referring to Loveless, and the lines which follow

> For faith, he knew, when once he'd chang'd his fortune,
> And reform'd his vice, 'twas time-to drop the curtain

display a lubricity which is inconsistent with Cibber's avowed purpose? One critic points out that "in their conscienceless pandering they are surely among the most indecent ever written. And they are among the most permanently offensive -- the very spirit of what is meretricious, and calculating, and mercenary, the epitome of all the crocodile tears and sanctimonious head-shakes that crowd upon four acts of titillation and

suggestiveness."[62]

In The Lady's Last Stake,[63] Cibber takes for his theme the evils of gambling. Yet a doubt remains as to his moral earnestness: for in one scene of this play, Cibber seems to be laughing at the sentimentalists in the audience, and also to be showing what he thinks of the morality expressed in his plays. The excerpt is from Act IV, Sc 1: it is a dialogue between Lady Wronglove and Mrs. Hartshorn:

> Lady W: What is the play today?
>
> Mrs. H: The -- the -- Husband, something -- the Careful Husband, I think, madam.
>
> Lady W: The Careful; the Careless Husband, you mean sure -- tho' I never saw it.

Mrs. Hartshorn repeats the plot to her lady: how Sir Charles was recovered out of his folly by his wife's gentle behaviour. Lady Wronglove then replies:

> Foh! were I an husband, a wife with such a tame enduring spirit would make me scorn her, or, at best, sleep at her grovelling virtue -- .

Cibber in the Dedication to the play had pointed out that gambling was "a vice that has undone more innocent principles than any folly that's in fashion." In the production of the play, he himself played the part of the gamester, Lord George Brilliant. Now Cibber himself was known to be an insatiable gambler. Dennis, no doubt exaggerating, accuses him of squandering, "in the compass of two years, six thousand pounds at the

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[62] Louis Kronenberger, The Thread of Laughter (New York, 1952), p. 149. Quoted by Ashley, p. 176.

[63] Dramatick Works, III.

Groom Porters."[64] It is impossible not to draw the obvious conclusion: the audience was expected to see something comic in the fact that a well-known gamester played the part of a gambler in a play whose avowed intention was to show up the evils of gambling.

To look for consistency in Cibber is perhaps to ask for too much; yet Sherbo persists in asking the question: if Cibber had been a true sentimentalist, would he have introduced these thrusts at his own avowedly sentimental plays?[65] The answer simply, is that Cibber does not seem to have been sincere; he knew he must please his audience, and so tailored his plays to suit public taste. But did Cibber write sentimental comedy? Undoubtedly he did; one does not have to be a moralist to write moral plays, nor a sentimentalist to write sentimental plays -- though, of course, it would perhaps be more effective. In fact, Cibber's life is not that of a man who had an intense desire to reform anything. His morals were not of the very best, if one accepts Davies' testimony:

> So well did Cibber, though a professed libertine through life, understand the dignity of virtue, that no comic author has drwn more delightful and striking pictures of it. Mrs. Porter, on reading a part, in which Cibber had painted virtue in the strongest and most lively colours, asked him how it came to pass, that a man, who could draw such admirable portraits of goodness, should yet live as if he were a stranger to it? -- "Madam", said Colley, "the one is absolutely necessary, the other is not."[66]

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[64] Characters and Conduct of Sir John Edgar. Hooker, II, 189.

[65] Sherbo, p. 117.

[66] Quoted, Croissant, p. 37.

This shows that sentimental plays were written largely because of public demand for such plays; sincerity or conviction rarely went into the making of them.

Sherbo lays down certain canons for determining sentimentality. Two of them are the eschewal of the bawdy and the comic. What this seems to imply, then, is that sentimental comedy, in that it aims more at tears than at laughter, is a contradiction in terms. But since Sherbo also points out that "the purpose of sentimental drama is to arouse emotion: pity for distress and admiration for virtue,"[67] by this definition Cibber has written a sentimental play.

The criticism of Loveless' conversion as improbable has already been mentioned, and it was observed that the conversion was not so improbable after all. It is not entirely unexpected. At heart, Loveless is not all bad; as Young Worthy perceptively notes, he left his wife and embarked on a career of dissipation out of "an affectation of being fashionably vicious." There is a possibility of reform, and he is reformed.

Baker notes that "there is some degree of improbability in Loveless's not knowing his own wife after a very few years absence from her."[68] Cibber surmounts this difficulty by having Amanda facially changed -- though not for the worse -- after a bout of small-pox. An ingenious, if not quite credible solution to the problem. But it does show that Cibber was thinking ahead, and was aware of this problem.

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[67] Sherbo, p. 73.

[68] Companion to the Playhouse, I, article Love's Last Shift.

A conjecture has been made that Cibber took the idea of the reformed rake from Thomas Southerne. Cibber had known Southerne, had acted in his Sir Anthony Love, and it was through Southerne's help that Love's Last Shift had been brought to the stage. In one of Southerne's comedies appears a character, Mrs. Friendall, a type of the wronged wife. Sherbo observes: "What suggests itself is that Cibber either recognized that the right moment had come for the introduction of the elements which he had observed in Southerne's dramatic work of the period, or that Southerne himself gave the young author some suggestions which developed into or gave more prominence to Loveless' reform in Act V."[69] But, as has earlier been pointed out, the penitent rake had already appeared in several comedies before this, and Cibber may only have been following the pattern set. Berkely's list, although as he confesses, incomplete, includes at least fifteen cases of such reformations before Cibber's play appeared.

In his play, Cibber is concerned with the problems of contemporary life, and with questions of virtue and vice. He attempts to regulate sexual conduct. His main argument seems to be that pleasure can be gained in a legitimate way, by means of marriage. This is better than pursuing illicit affairs of doubtful morality. Thus Snap, who seduces Amanda's maid, has to put things right by marrying her. The marriage between Young Worthy and Narcissa takes place, despite parental opposition; that between Elder Worthy and Hillaria is also brought about, despite Elder Worthy's suspicions, and Hillaria's coquettish actions. It is significant that the affair between Sir Novelty and Flareit is made to look ridiculous, and

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[69] Sherbo, p. 105. See also Appendix B.

both are punished by Cibber accordingly. In addition, there are no cuckolded husbands or sexual intrigues in Love's Last Shift.

In Cibber's play is a humanitarian spirit that is lacking in Restoration comedy -- it is impossible to conceive of a Wycherley or Congreve ending the play as Cibber did. Cibber has taken a social problem, and analyzed it, though in a superficial manner. The play is sentimental in the original eighteenth century sense of the word -- it treats of a serious subject and a moral problem in a thoughtful way. Cibber is interested in the effect of various personalities upon each other, which is a basic requirement of all drama. He has introduced a humane element -- comedy no longer entails jeering laughter at the expense of the cuckolded husband. Cibber (whatever may have been his private views on marital fidelity) has Loveless end the play by remarking:

> And sure the nearest to the joys above,
> Is the chaste rapture of a virtuous love.

Cibber's sincerity, or lack of it, is surely irrelevant. Like any other sentimental writer, he has replaced callous laughter with tender feeling.

When he wrote The Careless Husband, Congreve remarked ironically: "Cibber has produced a play, consisting of fine gentlemen and fine conversation altogether; which the ridiculous town for the most part likes; but there are some that know better."[70] No doubt he expressed similar unrecorded sentiments of Love's Last Shift; but Cibber's play "occupies historically the same leading position that the Tatler holds among moral

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[70]Quoted, Krutch, pp. 236-37.

periodicals, and Pamela among sentimental novels."[71] It may not be the very best of plays, but at least it does have a reasonable plot, characters well created, brisk dialogue, and a certain liveliness.

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[71] Bernbaum, p. 76.

APPENDIX A

A list of performances of *Love's Last Shift*, from 1696 to 1767 (the last performance):

Year	Times Acted
1696	1
1697	1
1701	1
1703	3
1704	2
1705	2
1706	1
1707	2
1708	1
1709	2
1710	1
1711	2
1712	1
1714	3
1715	6
1716	7
1717	2
1718	2
1719	3
1720	3
1721	8
1722	6
1723	3
1724	3
1725	6
1726	4
1727	2
1728	5
1729	3
1730	6
1731	6
1732	5
1733	5
1734	6
1735	8
1736	10
1737	7
1738	6
1739	8
1740	8
1741	5

Year	Times Acted
1742	4
1743	3
1744	3
1745	6
1746	2
1747	2
1748	2
1749	3
1750	3
1751	4
1752	6
1753	2
1754	2
1756	1
1763	7
1764	2
1765	2
1766	5
1767	1

Compiled from The London Stage 1660-1800.

APPENDIX B

Southerne and Cibber

Whether Cibber owes anything to the dramatist Thomas Southerne remains largely conjectural. In the 1690's the leading playwrights were Southerne and Congreve. Southerne helped struggling young playwrights -- he brought Norton's Pausanias, Cibber's Love's Last Shift, and Fenton's Mariamne on the boards.

Cibber may have gained from Southerne the idea of writing sentimental comedy; Southerne himself sometimes treats of sentimental themes. Of his play, The Wives' Excuse, one critic notes:

> Southerne twists into the fabric of Restoration comedy one character that links the play directly with later sentimental comedy. Mrs. Friendall, the wronged wife, courageously patient and unwaveringly pure, is a moral type strangely incongruous in her setting, and blood sister to the sentimentalized heroines who were to follow her.[1]

The Wives' Excuse was noted by contemporaries as "a play abounding with gay, lively conversation, genuine wit, and less licentiousness intermingled with that wit, than in the comedies of [the last] age."[2]

Dryden acknowledges Southerne's purity, and wrote of the above-mentioned play:

> Like his [Terence's] thy thoughts are true, thy language clean,
> Ev'n lewdness is made moral in thy scene.[3]

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[1] John W. Dodds, Thomas Southerne, Dramatist, pp. 87-88.

[2] An Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Southerne, Esq. Prefixed to Works (1774), I, A3R-A3V.

[3] To Mr. Southerne, On His Comedy, Called The Wives Excuse. In Southern's Works, II, B4R.

In the Epilogue to his Disappointment (1684), Southerne addresses the audience:

> You saw our wife was chaste, yet throughly try'd,
> And, without doubt, y' are hugely edify'd;
> For like our hero, whom we shew'd today,
> You think no woman true, but in a play.[4]

It is seen, therefore, that some of the characteristics later stressed by the sentimentalists were to be found in Southerne -- purity of language, a toning down of licentiousness, and the portrayal of the virtuous woman. Another aspect of Southerne's work was his appeal to tears. Dr. Hawkesworth, who in 1759 altered Southerne's Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave by excising the comic scenes, said in a Prologue:

> --Your tributary tears we claim,
> For scenes that Southerne drew; a fav'rite name.
> He touch'd your fathers hearts with gen'rous woe,
> And taught your mothers youthful eyes to flow:
> For this he claims hereditary praise
> From wits and beauties of our modern days.[5]

Southerne's contribution to sentimental drama is summarised thus:

> Southerne's place in dramatic history is linked with the emergence of sentimental drama... The early appearance of sentimental tendencies in comedy...was decidedly ephemeral, limited to a few chance moralizing phrases or the inclusion... of a character whose sensibilities were in advance of his time. Southerne donated his portrait to such a gallery in the character of Mrs. Friendall in The Wives' Excuse, a wife consciously moral and virtuous, repelling with elevated utterances the siege against her chastity.[6]

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[4] Ibid., H4R.

[5] Quoted, An Account of the Life and Writings, I, A4V.

[6] Dodds, pp. 212-213.

Dodds also cites The Disappointment:

> ...in...the entire main plot is expressed the moralized emotions later known to sentimental drama. In The Disappointment were anticipated the characters that Cibber and Steele were to make famous: the loyal wife whose virtue triumphs in the end; the man and maid whose love was untouched by any cynical contempt of marriage; the faithful friend; ...and the rake purged just in time for the fifth-act curtain.[7]

It is quite possible then, that Cibber, if he did not receive direct advice from Southerne, at least modelled his plays on the work produced by his patron.

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[7] Ibid., p. 213.

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