

MRS. COWLEY'S COMEDIES

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

November 1972

MASTER OF ARTS (1972)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: Mrs. Cowley's Comedies

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SUPERVISOR: Professor R. E. Morton

NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 74.

ABSTRACT

Mrs. Cowley's plays have not previously been the subject of separate critical study, and this thesis is therefore mainly concerned with the establishment of some preliminary critical co-ordinates. With the exception of The Belle's Stratagem, none of the plays discussed has received more than incidental comment; two of them are still unpublished.

The Introduction supplies a brief chronological outline of her dramatic career, giving essential information on each of her plays. In the four chapters which follow, a topical approach is taken, each chapter being concerned with a leading critical theme:

II. Taste. Individual characters isolated by some excess or eccentricity of "taste" are considered, and the term "taste" is discussed. The roles played by the comedian John Edwin are selected for separate treatment.

III. Marriage. This chapter discusses Mrs. Cowley's ideal of marriage as it is presented in her comedies. Recurrent character patterns, and the roles played by Lewis and Miss Younge, are also considered.

IV. Society. Mrs. Cowley's satirical treatment of the follies of fashionable society is seen to be modified by her belief in the possible rational enjoyment of society, and in the

value of the traditional English virtues.

V. Patriotism. Mrs. Cowley's view of the corrupting influence of foreign manners on English society, together with the more positive side of her patriotism, are examined as the basis of her ideal of Englishness. This ideal is seen as the conceptual centre of her comedies.

PREFACE

There are no modern editions of Mrs. Cowley's plays. To have attempted a thorough textual study was no part of the plan of this thesis, and would have been beyond its scope, but many instances have been discussed of differences between editions (or rather versions) that are of considerable critical interest.

Three main classes of textual evidence have been used:

- I. Larpent MSS. Manuscripts of all plays to be performed were submitted to John Larpent, the Examiner of Plays in the Lord Chamberlain's office. These are now (since 1917) in the Henry E. Huntington Library. Photocopies of five MSS of Mrs. Cowley's comedies were obtained, including her two unpublished plays.
- II. Early printed editions. In general, these seem to derive from prompt copy; a detailed study would be needed to confirm this, and to resolve the exact status of the Dublin editions.
- III. Mrs. Cowley's Works, 1813. This posthumous collected edition claims to be based on her papers, and there is indeed much evidence of revision of a literary rather than theatrical kind.

This information is summarized here for convenience.

It was obviously not possible to use all the kinds of evidence for each play; a list of editions consulted will be found in the Bibliography. Some of the above statements are amplified in the chapters which follow, but all must be regarded as provisional, and subject to revision in the light of further study.

Because of the multiplicity of texts, and the variation in scene numbering, references are given to the page of the relevant edition or manuscript (The pagination of the Larpent World as it Goes, which is irregular, has been normalized). To avoid large numbers of short foot-notes, such references are incorporated into the text, in the form, (1782 ed., p. 36). The title is given only if this is not clear from the context. The same system has been adopted for the frequently cited London Stage, 1660-1800, and Genest's Some Account of the English Stage; volume and page numbers are incorporated into the text. Full details of these works will be found in the bibliography.

It is a pleasure to thank Professor R. E. Morton for his stimulating supervision, and Professor A. D. Hammond for his good offices at the Huntington Library and the British Museum.

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I

INTRODUCTION

In the year 1776, some years after her Marriage, a sense of mental power for dramatic writing suddenly struck her whilst sitting with her Husband at the Theatre.-- So delighted with this? said she to him-- why I could write as well myself! His laugh, without notice, was answered in the course of the following morning by sketching the first Act of THE RUNAWAY, and, though she had never before written a literary line, the Play was finished with the utmost celebrity. Many will recollect the extraordinary success with which it was brought out. It established the Author's Name at once, and caused incessant applications to her to continue to write. (Preface to Works, I, viii)

During the next twenty years, Mrs. Cowley (1743-1809) wrote another twelve plays, so successful were these "incessant applications". But these thirteen dramas are not remarkable for any striking sense of development in either intention or execution. This comment by Genest seems just: "Mrs. Cowley afterwards wrote other plays that were more successful [than The Runaway] . . . but she perhaps never wrote a better" (V, 490). With the obvious exceptions of her two tragedies, all her plays reflect the social world of contemporary fashionable, upper-class England, and whether set in Portugal, Turkey, or London, can without distortion be treated as a unit. In the four chapters which follow, therefore, each of which treats of a selected theme in her plays, no particular regard is paid to chronology. Instead,

an attempt is made to reconstruct the literary myth that informs the social pattern of her comedies. But since these plays may need some introduction, a brief chronological summary of her dramatic career is given here, to provide a context for the discussion of leading themes, and to avoid the repetition of essential material.

The Runaway, Mrs. Cowley's first play, was produced at Drury Lane on 15 February 1776 (London Stage, Pt. 4, III, 1952). It can hardly have been written the same year; the account quoted above must err in this respect. The play's success was probably helped by the interest which Garrick took in it; in Mrs. Cowley's words, he "nourish'd", "improv'd" and "embellish'd" it (Dedication, "To David Garrick", 1776 ed.). Beyond the epilogue, which is ascribed to him in the printed text, his share cannot now be known; but his patronage was at least a lucky chance for an aspiring author.

Who's the Dupe? was brought out, also at Drury Lane, on 10 April 1779 (London Stage, Pt. 5, I, 246). Mrs. Cowley's only afterpiece, it seems to derive from the sub-plot of Mrs. Centlivre's The Stolen Heiress (1703). The character of old Doiley, however, is largely hers, and Genest comments that she "has greatly improved what she has borrowed-- such sort of plagiarisms, from old plays hardly known and never likely to be acted again, are very fair, and rather credit-

able than otherwise" (VI, 83). It was frequently performed at least until the end of the century; in the period covered by The London Stage, it was most often performed of all Mrs. Cowley's plays, being given 126 times (Pt. 5, I, clxxii).

The tragedy of Albina, Countess Raimond must have been written soon after The Runaway if it was "placed in GARRICK'S hands in 1776" (Works, I, 144). He cannot have liked it as well as the earlier play, for it was not brought out until after his death, at the Haymarket, on 31 July 1779 (London Stage, Pt. 5, I, 268). "Tragedy", as Mrs. Cowley admits in the Preface to Albina, "is inconsistent with the sportive Genius of the Haymarket" (1779 ed., p. viii); but Albina had been refused by the managers of Drury Lane and Covent Garden. In this Preface, Mrs. Cowley impugns the motives for these refusals, and further charges Hannah More with plagiarising the manuscript of Albina for her Percy (1778) and The Fatal Falsehood (1779). This accusation led to an undignified exchange of public abuse.

If this disagreeable episode marked a temporary reverse in Mrs. Cowley's dramatic fortunes, it was amply compensated for by the exceptional success of her next play, The Belle's Stratagem. This was brought out at Covent Garden on 22 February 1780 (London Stage, Pt. 5, I, 319), and

marked the beginning of a long and successful association with that theatre, where all her best plays were performed. Lewis and Quick, Miss Younge (later Mrs. Pope) and Mrs. Mattocks, all created important roles in this and later of Mrs. Cowley's comedies. The Belle's Stratagem is her best-known play, and, much the most successful of her full-length plays in her own time, it survived on the stage for over a century-- Ellen Terry took the part of Letitia Hardy as late as 1883.¹ It had a run of twenty-eight performances in its first season, and its success persuaded Harris to pay Mrs. Cowley £100 "to suspend publication".

For all this, contemporary critical comment is often unfavourable or patronising. This comment, from the 1782 edition of the Biographia Dramatica, is typical:

To speak of it as a first-rate performance would be doing injustice to the piece, as it possesses little originality, either in plot, character, or situation. It however gives pleasure in the exhibition, and affords a hope that the stage may derive considerable support from the future productions of this ingenious writer. (II, 31)

Genest considered that "the success which it has met with, is perhaps greater than it deserved" (VII, 148). Her triumph as Letitia Hardy, whose behaviour is condemned everywhere as unnatural, is an eloquent tribute to Miss Younge's power.

An interlude, The School of Eloquence, was performed

1

R. Crompton Rhodes, "The Belle's Stratagem", Review of English Studies, V (1929), 129.

at Drury Lane on 4 April 1780, on Brereton's benefit night (London Stage, Pt. 5, I, 328). It was not performed again, and remains unpublished; a tedious-brief pantomime of national stereotypes, it is unlikely to add much to Mrs. Cowley's reputation.

The World as it Goes: or, A Party at Montpelier was performed at Covent Garden on 24 February 1781, but was damned. A revised version, under the title Second Thoughts Are Best, fared no better on 24 March (London Stage, Pt. 5, I, 411, 417). The reasons for this failure are not obvious, and cannot be laid entirely to the fault of the play itself. Discontent among the actors following Captain Cowley's criticism (in the Gazetteer) of a performance of The Belle's Stratagem may have been a factor.² It is an interesting and characteristic piece, arguably her most "representative" comedy.

Much more successful in popular esteem was Which Is the Man? Brought out at Covent Garden on 9 February 1782, it had a run of twenty-three performances (London Stage, Pt. 5, I, 496). The play seems to have made a considerable impression on the young Jane Austen, who saw a family performance at Steventon in 1787. In a letter of as late as 1816, she

2

C. H. Grey, Theatrical Criticism in London to 1795, pp.209-11, discusses Captain Cowley's criticism.

alludes in a tone of affectionate mockery to Lady Bell Bloomer's emotionally charged instruction to Beauchamp to "tell him what you will" (Letters, p.469).

A Bold Stroke for a Husband was seen at Covent Garden on 25 February 1783 (London Stage, Pt. 5, I, 594). It was Mrs. Cowley's first play to be set abroad-- in Spain. The antiquated marriage laws of Spain and Portugal offer Mrs. Cowley some convenience in plotting. Foreign settings in this and later plays allow her to anatomize more directly the evils of continental society (in particular, its treatment of women) which are so often alluded to in her "native" comedies; but in all her comedies, the motives and manners of her characters remain much the same.

More Ways than One was first performed at Covent Garden on 6 December 1783 (London Stage, Pt. 5, II, 663-4). The Larpent MS is titled "New Ways to Catch Hearts", but there are few other changes of significance between it and the printed text. It is one of the liveli^est of Mrs. Cowley's plays; it marks the close of a period of intense dramatic activity, with five full-length plays brought out in three years. Her next three plays are decidedly inferior to the work of this "major phase".

Nearly three years were to elapse before Mrs. Cowley's next play, A School for Greybeards, was performed at Drury Lane on 25 November 1786 (London Stage, Pt. 5, II,

934). In the Preface to the 1786 edition, Mrs. Cowley, never lavish with acknowledgements of her literary debts, admits to having taken the "idea" from "an obsolete comedy". The play she declines to mention is Mrs. Behn's The Lucky Chance (1687). Mrs. Cowley's play was nearly damned on account of "the indecency of some of the expressions" (1786 ed., p.iii); these were omitted on the second night, but restored in the printed text. One of the expressions objected to was this: "I confirm half your punishment; and a dark chamber she shall certainly have" (1786 ed., p.72). This is a facetious reference to the bridal chamber; but even spoken by the husband to be, it seems to have been too gross for the delicacy of some. In view of the pains Mrs. Cowley took to restore these expressions in the 1786 edition, it is interesting that the one quoted above is removed from the 1813 edition. Perhaps Mrs. Cowley had come to agree with her critics.

The Fate of Sparta: or, The Rival Kings, possibly Mrs. Cowley's weakest play, an inflated tragic showpiece for Mrs. Siddons, was brought out at Drury Lane on 31 January 1788 (London Stage, Pt. 5, II, 1038). The subject is the same as that of Southerne's The Spartan Dame (1719), which, however, Mrs. Cowley seems not to have used. Genest makes merry with some blunders which are: "so egregiously absurd, that no excuse can be made for Mrs. Cowley on the score of

her being a woman . . . that the very acme of absurdity may not be wanting, Amphares mentions 'night's still "sabbath"' (VI, 474-5). But it hardly needs such trifles for Genest to convince us that "she should not have meddled with tragedy" (VII, 207).

Mrs. Cowley returned to Covent Garden for A Day in Turkey: or, The Russian Slaves, a "comic opera" (i.e. comedy interspersed with songs) that was performed on 3 December 1791 (London Stage, Pt. 5, II, 1409). With a topical setting in the war between Turkey and Russia, and its allusions to the French Revolution, it is Mrs. Cowley's most "political" play (how far this term is appropriate to the play is discussed in chapter V).

After this succession of indifferent pieces, it is a pleasure to turn to The Town before you, her last play, brought out at Covent Garden on 6 December 1794 (London Stage, Pt. 5, III, 1709). In the Larpent MS, the title of the play is "The Town as it Is", and there are great differences between this manuscript and the printed text. These changes did not originate with Mrs. Cowley; in the Preface to the 1795 edition, she anatomises the taste of the town to please which they were introduced:

A popular Piece, where a great Actor, holding a sword in his left hand, and making awkward pushes with it, charms the audience infinitely more than he could do, by all the wit and observation which the ingenious Author might have given him.

(p. x)

The revisions to the play are discussed in detail in chapter II; the Preface is one of Mrs. Cowley's most important critical statements, espousing the ideal of the stage as "a school of morality"³ while admitting her failure to live up to it:

What mother can now lead her daughters to the great National School, THE THEATRE, in the confidence of their receiving either polish or improvement? Should the luckless Bard stumble on a reflection, or a sentiment, the audience yawn, and wait for the next tumble from a chair, or a tripping up of the heels, to put them into attention. Surely I shall be forgiven for satirising myself; I have made such things, and I blush to have made them. (p. xi)

In the same Preface, Mrs. Cowley concluded: "From a Stage, in such a state, it is time to withdraw" (p. x). This resolution to abandon a stage whose audience she could not please while pleasing herself, Mrs. Cowley strictly adhered to.

But for all her disenchantment with the theatres, there is some evidence that Mrs. Cowley continued to concern herself with her plays even after her retirement from active association with the stage. In 1813, four years after her death, a collected edition of her works was published; its Preface claims that: "All the retouchings to be found amongst her Papers have been introduced gradually as they

³ The phrase occurs at the end of Hugh Kelly's False Delicacy (1768), but the idea is a venerable one; see Dougald MacMillan, "The Rise of Social Comedy in the Eighteenth Century", Philological Quarterly, XLI (1962), 330-8.

have been discovered" (Works, I, xx). There is evidence of quite extensive revision of a "literary" nature, and of a graver moral tone. This would be consistent with a further suggestion in the same Preface (p. xix) that this revision came near the end of Mrs. Cowley's life. Some of the other statements in this Preface, especially about the theatre and Mrs. Cowley's dramatic reading, cannot be trusted; its anti-theatrical bias may derive from its author having known her in her last years, in retirement at Tiverton. With this reservation, the Preface is a valuable source.

Mrs. Cowley's place among the playwrights of her time is somewhere between men of outstanding stature, Sheridan and Goldsmith, and professional, prolific, writers such as Reynolds, Morton, and O'Keefe. With less genius than the first, but perhaps more artistic conscience than the second group, there is a marked tension in her work that comes from trying to please an audience that she also wants to instruct. She is not alone in this dilemma, but she is an interesting example of it in her time.

The Belle's Stratagem, in particular, would make an interesting case-study in the evolution of popular taste. It held the stage in Britain and America for over a century, during which period as it was successively adapted to the taste of new playgoers, so it grew more remote from what Mrs. Cowley originally wrote. The evidence for these slight but

often significant changes is in numerous editions that print "acting" texts, and actual promptbooks that survive.

The present study attempts merely to establish some preliminary critical co-ordinates. Primarily an account of Mrs. Cowley's plays as an expression of her personal vision of society, if it has a further aim, it is to establish them as worthwhile subjects of enquiry in the history and bibliography of the British drama.

II

TASTE

SIR SIMON.

What a taste!

PERKINS.

Dear sir, any taste is better than no taste, and a Lady who employs her thoughts and her chissel on works of art, is, at least, not idle; and therefore, as Doctor Johnson says, not in the way of being wicked. (1795 ed., p. 83)

In the schema of The Town before you, Perkins' comparative enlightenment stands between the contemptuously philistine attitude to art of Sir Simon Asgill, and the devotion to sculpture of Lady Horatia Horton (the subject of Perkins' philanthropic observation). Perkins' function in the play is slight, hardly more than reporting off-stage business to Sir Simon; but his speech on "taste" seems clearly intended to represent a normal point of view. It comes at the end of a scene (V, ii) in which Sir Simon and Lady Horatia have, due to a misunderstanding, confronted each other and parted in anger. With its appeal to the great English pragmatist of letters, it is a comic warning against both an excess of "taste" (Lady Horatia) and an absence of it (Sir Simon). Its combination of amused toleration and mockery make it typical of Mrs. Cowley's attitude towards the men and women of "taste" in her plays-- an attitude that can be thought of as characteristically English. In the

society that Mrs. Cowley depicts in her comedies, a little "taste" is very allowable; but a great deal of it is usually fatal. There seem to be two closely related reasons for this. One is the typically amateur nature of the English ideal, with its distrust of specialization. Thus doctors, lawyers, scholars, are often portrayed as figures of fun, understanding nothing beyond their narrow fields, and ludicrous if they attempt to enter the lists of marriage or of love. Their body of esoteric learning, which prevents lovers being doctors, equally prevents doctors being lovers. Secondly, such figures are generally not above suspicion of being charlatans; and these suspicions are often attached also to men of "taste". In Mrs. Cowley's (and other) comedies, these suspicions are usually justified.

Mrs. Cowley's comedies celebrate the triple blessings of being in love, married, and English, and the felicity that attends the fortunate beings who unite them. But before looking at these ideals, it is worth examining a group of characters outside their charmed circle, eccentric individuals isolated by some quirk or excess of "taste", who are an essential element in Mrs. Cowley's comic society.

What Perkins means by "taste" is clearly not what Addison defined as "that Faculty of the Soul, which discerns the Beauties of an Author with Pleasure, and the Imperfections with Dislike" (Spectator, No. 409). But the pejorative

sense evident in Perkins' use of the word is already evident in Pope's Epistle to Burlington:

For what has Virro painted, built, and planted?
 Only to show, how many Tastes he wanted.
 What brought Sir Visto's ill got wealth to waste?
 Some Dæmon whisper'd, "Visto! have a Taste."
 (lines 13-6)

Here Pope and the Demon obviously mean something different by "taste". Implicit in Addison's ideal is the ability to select, to make fine discriminations, and to make them oneself; Pope's Timon (again in the Epistle to Burlington) is a negation of this ideal, a buyer of second-hand, wholesale, "taste".

The Demon who whispered to Sir Visto may also have visited Timon, as we see in this description of the latter's study:

His study! with what Authors is it stor'd?
 In Books, not Authors, curious is my Lord;
 To all their dated Backs he turns you round,
 These Aldus printed, those Du Sueil has bound.
 Lo some are Vellom, and the rest as good
 For all his Lordship knows, but they are Wood.
 (lines 133-8)

The details change, but the satire on men like Timon, who confuse "taste" with material possessions, remains constant from Pope to Jane Austen-- one thinks of General Tilney in Northanger Abbey. An excessive solicitude about things, about personal possessions as an index of personal worth and "taste", is seen as a barrier to the existence or expression of real human feelings.

In his early farce Taste (1752), Foote satirizes the affected "taste" for antiquities of such as Lady Pentweazle, upon whom the tricksters Puff and Carmine impose such impostures as these:

The first Lot consists of a Hand without an Arm, the first Joint of the Fore-Finger gone, supposed to be the Limb of the Apollo Delphos-- The second, half a Foot, with the Toes entire, of the Juno Lucina-- The third, the Caduceus of the Mercurius Infernalis-- The fourth, the half of the leg of the Infant Hercules-- all indisputable Antiques, and of the Memphian Marble. (3rd ed., pp. 23-4)

This valuing of antiquities for their imperfections-- Novice admits that "if it had a Nose, I would not give Six-pence for it" (p.26)-- is on a par with the "taste" of the mathematician^{ci} who assured Addison that "the greatest Pleasure he took in reading Virgil, was in examining Aeneas his Voyage by the map" (Spectator, No. 409). Another variety of affected "taste" which Foote ridicules is the "excessive taste" (a paradox to Addison) of these transports:

Great? Amazing! Divine! Oh, let me embrace the dear dismember'd Bust! a little farther off. I'm ravish'd! I'm transported! What an Attitude? But then the Locks! How I adore the Simplicity of the Antients! How unlike the present, priggish, prick-ear'd Puppets! How gracefully they fall all adown the Cheek! so decent, and so grave, and-- Who the Devil do you think it is, Brush? Is it a Man or a Woman? (3rd ed., pp.25-6)

Mrs. Cowley uses eccentric or excessive "taste" (much in the sense Foote uses the word) to suggest a character's psychological or social maladjustment. In such men and women, "taste" has often become a substitute for personal feelings, and emotions and energies which ought to be

directed outward are instead channelled into their particular "taste". These characters are drawn with varying degrees of sympathy. Some, like Lady Horatia, are reclaimed, and enter into marriage; others, exposed as frauds, are expelled from the new society; while yet others are allowed to continue their isolated existence in an impenetrable limbo.

In seeing "taste" as potentially isolating, Mrs. Cowley is using a traditional theme. To Pope's *Timon*, one can add Sir Nicholas Gimcrack in *The Virtuoso* (1676) and Valeria in Mrs. Centlivre's *The Basset Table* (1706); in these cases, "taste" is an enthusiasm for science. If for Addison there is only "taste", and the more of it one has the better, for Mrs. Cowley "taste" is something with limits, that stops well short of the scholar's learning and does not pretend to it.

In *Who's the Dupe?*, "taste" (in this case for classical learning) is a central issue. Old Doiley, a rich but uneducated city merchant, has taken an uncritical passion for learning, and determines that his daughter shall marry a scholar. His daughter Elizabeth's lover, Granger, knows no more of such than a gentleman should; old Doiley selects instead Gradus, a fusty pedant from Oxford. These three men can be thought of as examples of "no taste", "taste", and "excessive taste" respectively. For Mrs. Cowley is careful to expose the shallowness of Gradus' scholarship. Charlotte

easily persuades Gradus to cast off his scholar's weeds and words in order to win Miss Doiley-- really of course as a service to rid her mistress of him. The instant metamorphosis of scholar into fop thus affected, which would be a liability in a more serious comedy, here suits the pace of the farce well, besides emphasising Gradus' superficiality. Rather baffled by Gradus' sudden transformation, and by Granger's appearance in donnish black, old Doiley sets the rivals to a flyting in Greek, with his daughter as the prize.

Granger knows not an iota of Greek, but impresses Doiley with a collocation of polysyllables gleaned an hour earlier from a dictionary:

Yon lucid orb, in æther pensile, irradiates th' expanse.
 Refulgent scintillations, in th' ambient void opaque, emit
 humid splendor. Chrysalic spheroids th' horizon vivify--
 astifarious constellations, nocturnal sporades, in refrang-
 erated radii, illumine our orb terrene. (1779 ed., p. 25)

Gradus' real Greek seems tame by comparison, and old Doiley awards Granger his daughter. Thus is he duped by his own foible, his uncritical admiration for something he can neither understand, nor even recognize.

If we compare this ending of Who's the Dupe? with the the outcome of the comic subplot in Mrs. Centlivre's The Stolen Heiress, Mrs. Cowley's "source" for the farce, her intentions can be more clearly seen. Larich (= old Doiley), cured of his fondness for the mere impedimenta of scholarship, accepts Francisco (= Granger) in his own character as

a worthy husband for Lavinia. Don Sancho, the rejected pedant, is left wifeless, but determined to reform his bookish image in search of one. Mrs. Cowley rewards Gradus, who equally renounces scholarly pursuits, with the maid Charlotte. Old Doiley, however, still thinks he has found the better scholar, and therefore satisfied his whim. He is left in a bliss that is ignorance, while Gradus concludes that it is folly to be wise. Gradus is cured and initiated into the social round; old Doiley is left isolated by his strange "taste".

Mrs. Sparwell, in The World as it Goes, is a more extensive exploration of a character of "excessive taste". Mrs. Sparwell shares the artistic and antiquarian tastes of Lady Pentweazle, although she poses as a more serious amateur; she has "traced the Catacombs, measured the Pyramids with her own hands" (Larpent MS, pp.7-8). Mrs. Cowley shares the distrust of the "learned lady" that is evident in Mrs. Centlivre's portrait of Valeria in The Basset Table. In The Belle's Stratagem and A Day in Turkey particularly, she insists on the need for lovely woman to have a lively mind; but specialization she regards as not the province of a gentleman, and certainly not of a lady. Mr. Hargrave, in The Runaway, shows more sense than old Doiley when he asks his son:

Have the musty old Dons tired you with their Greek and their Geometry, and their learned Experiments to shew what air,

and fire, and water, are made of? (1776 ed., p.4)

The blind antiquarianism, valuing the rust above the gold, and the affected raptures which are satirised in Foote's Taste, are both present in Mrs. Sparwell's character. Her ignorant credulity is the part that Mrs. Cowley first chastises. As a ploy in his attempt to seduce Mrs. Sparwell, Sir Charles Danvers pretends to have discovered some hieroglyphs, and gains a private interview with her in the guise of a cognoscento. Reproductions of old inscriptions are to be found in the Gentleman's Magazine; Mrs. Sparwell is wrong only in making them the main interest of her life. For through her character as a woman of taste, her character as a woman of virtue is threatened. Because of a cross-purpose which it is needless to detail here, Mrs. Sparwell is saved from the dangerous situation. But if Mrs. Cowley takes an almost sympathetic attitude where Mrs. Sparwell's credulity only is concerned, she is more severe in the exposure of her virtuosa's vanity. Determined to cure his wife of her excessive devotion to objects of age and art, Colonel Sparwell arranges with Fairfax for a small exhibition in the latter's lodgings. Fairfax takes her on a guided tour, while she freely criticizes such modern dunces as Raphael and Tintoretto. Puffed by Fairfax's assumed deference, her remarks become bolder, until she asserts of a statue of Hercules:

This can be no Antique, -- no, -- no Antique . . . the chiselar of that figure, knew nothing of Attitudes; . . . nay 'tis

Clear to me he was ignorant of Anatomy . . . nothing like it in Nature;-- If it were possible to make a Man from that Model he could never move. (Larpent MS, pp. 66-7)

Hercules steps down, and the critic is confuted; Mrs. Cowley deserts her when her love of knowledge is overcome by her love of ostentation. In a fit of pique, Mrs. Sparwell determines to be revenged; the mechanics of the plot require this, but in the last scene she is redeemed and included in the homegoing party of English expatriates, renouncing her former excesses of taste in favour of her husband and common sense.

The World as it Goes, and the revised version Second Thoughts Are Best, were both damned. The play was never published, and without a text of the revised version we can only speculate about the changes that were made. But it is certainly interesting that Mrs. Mattocks, who played Mrs. Sparwell on both occasions, was the only actress so to retain her part. Indeed, no better proof of the theatrical effectiveness of the statue scene could be given than that Mrs. Cowley apparently thought it good enough to use again, in her last play, The Town before you.

In the Preface to this play, Mrs. Cowley complains that "the following is rather the Comedy which the Public have chosen it to be, than the Comedy which I intended" (p. ix). The comedy was played on 6, 8, and 9 December, and advertised for 10 December; but, apparently due to the illness of Mrs. Pope, Grief a la Mode was substituted on the

last occasion (London Stage, Pt. 5, III, 1709-10; Mrs. Pope's illness is mentioned in Mrs. Cowley's preface). The play was not seen again until 18 December; the playbills for this and subsequent occasions omit Bernard, Miss Hopkins, and Mrs. Platt from the cast of the first three nights. These three played the parts that are in the Larpent MS but not in the printed edition, and since in her Preface Mrs. Cowley definitely assigns two new scenes with Tippy to this period, we may take the Larpent MS to represent roughly Mrs. Cowley's intentions, and what was performed on the first three nights; and the printed text, the subsequent theatrical version which she disowns.

Tippy, a plausible rogue, was played by Lewis, one of the theatre's leading actors, and a veteran creator of leading roles in Mrs. Cowley's comedies. His Tippy must have stolen the show, for all the significant changes seem to have been made for his benefit. Two scenes were added for him; Acid was cut out, one of his scenes being omitted, and his part in the other being transferred to Tippy. The parts of Lady Elizabeth and Mrs. Clements were cut, to provide time for the new scenes.

Acid's part was small but interesting. A disgruntled painter, in the first of his scenes he rails against the injustice of the Royal Academy, and its inability to recognize talent such as his. In the second, he visits Lady Horatia's

studio, and we see the critic in action:

A mere wax Doll! Where are the inflections. A human figure made on this principle cou'd never move. Now I'll convince you-- Observe the muscle of this foot. (Larpent MS, p.23)

Georgina Floyer, who has disguised herself as a statue to tease her lover, steps down, and Acid is exposed. Acid has no further part to play, but this apparent lack of unity is by no means a fault; the way he bounces in and out of the action, exposed by the childlike Georgina (rather as Puff is exposed by Caleb in Taste), strongly suggests the isolating quality of his humour. Lacking the resources that enable Mrs. Sparwell finally to overcome her infirmity, once Acid's surface is punctured, he disappears; there is nothing more to him. Thus he acts as a foil to Lady Horatia's deep commitment to her art.

Giving the part in the statue scene to Tippy, a more versatile pretender, makes for a tighter structure, but at the expense of Mrs. Cowley's main point. Tippy is a resourceful and resilient, even attractive rogue. The episode of the statue becomes one of a series of scrapes from which he emerges more or less intact (less in this case) to fight again. The isolation of Acid is lost.

Lewis' previous parts in Mrs. Cowley's comedies were such virtuous young men as Doricourt, in The Belle's Stratagem, and Beauchamp, in Which Is the Man?; one can readily appreciate Mrs. Cowley's chagrin at his taking the role of Tippy and then expanding it to fill the centre of the play

and divert the attention of the audience. A sympathetic Tippy makes nonsense of the moral scheme of the play, however pleasing it may have been to the popular taste:

LAUGH! LAUGH! LAUGH! is the demand: Not a word must be uttered that looks like instruction, or a sentence which ought to be remembered. (Preface, 1795 ed., p. x)

In the same Preface, Mrs. Cowley announce her intention of writing no more plays, a decision to which she adhered. The changes made to The Town before you were probably the determining factor, but this was not the first occasion on which Mrs. Cowley found herself at odds with the players. Especially relevant to this discussion of Mrs. Cowley's pretenders to taste are the parts played by the low comedian John Edwin, who seems to have been something of the popular stereotype of the feckless, drunken, actor, and a difficult man to discipline; Genest gives a prudent appraisal of his talents and limitations (VII, 5-12). He was in the original cast of four of Mrs. Cowley's plays, as Silvertongue in The Belle's Stratagem, Bronze in The World as it Goes, Don Vincentio in A Bold Stroke for a Husband, and Sir Marvel Mushroom in More Ways than One. The part of the brazen servant Bronze shows how easily the manners of fashionable life are imitated; the other three are all studies in the isolating effect on the individual of an excess or eccentricity of taste.

Don Vincentio's taste is musical (here Mrs. Cowley is using Edwin's particular talent to advantage- he was a

popular burletta singer), and his passion for it invades his vocabulary at the expense of intelligibility:

VINCENTIO.

I left off in all the fury of composition; minims and crotchets have been battling it through my head the whole day, and trying a semibreve in G Sharp, has made me as flat as double F.

CAESAR.

Sharp and flat!-- trying a semibreve!-- oh-- gad, Sir! I had like not to have understood you; but a semibreve is something of a demi-culverin, I take it; and you have been practising the art military. (1784 ed., p. 27)

Here, the specialist finds himself isolated in a very real way. When he pays his addresses to Olivia, she affects the "trick of singularity" to keep him off (playing the shrew to preserve herself for her real lover-- this is the "Bold Stroke" of the title). But singularity proves attractive to Don Vincentio, and Olivia can only repel him by pretending to prefer a Jew's harp above any other instrument. This stratagem is a conscious use of the isolating effect of an excessive "taste"; Olivia senses that this is one point on which Vincentio will not give in. In this contest of singularity, Vincentio's real love of music proves his salvation (or his undoing, depending on one's viewpoint):

I wou'd have allowed Donna Olivia a blooming garden in winter; I wou'd even have procur'd barrenness and snow for her in the dog-days;-- but-- to have my band insulted!-- to have my knowledge in music slighted!-- to be rous'd from all the energies of composition by the drone of a Jew's harp! I cannot breathe under the idea. (1784 ed., p.32)

The dramatic conflict here is between two eccentricities:

Olivia's attempt to rebel, rather than attract, would-be

suitors, and Vincentio's all devouring interest in music. Olivia comes out best from the encounter because hers is an assumed oddity, so that she can change tactics and strategy as the situation demands. Vincentio, limited to a stock response by his ruling passion, is inevitably outmanoeuvred.

Sir Marvel Mushroom, Edwin's last role in Mrs. Cowley's comedies, is perhaps her most memorable character. A former merchant who has acquired wealth and title and who pretends to taste, wit, and learning, he makes ludicrous blunders of fact, anecdote, and quotation that keep him in mind after the *Arabella's* and *Belvilles* have faded into the generality of their species. Sir Marvel, too busy quoting ever to be in risk of coming into contact with others, is effectively isolated from all except his French valet, Le Gout, from whom he derives equally his wardrobe and his wit.

Sir Marvel is saved from being a variant on Mrs. Malaprop by a reserve of generosity and good intentions which we are occasionally allowed to glimpse. Also, much of his absurdity is seen to derive from Le Gout, so that he is partly the amiable Englishman exposed to the corrupting continent. Neither Don Vincentio nor Sir Marvel catches a heart, but neither are they excluded from the final scene of happiness, where they remain to remind us that although eccentricity is tolerated, it has its dangers for the individual. The price of Sir Marvel's quotations may be eternal bachelor-

hood.

The engaging absurdity of a Sir Marvel or a Don Vincentio seems exactly calculated for Edwin's talents. In The Belle's Stratagem, he seems to have been less happily cast. His part was Silvertongue, the auctioneer, who appears only in the auction scene (II, ii). This scene presents a textual problem of some difficulty. R. Crompton Rhodes, in his article on the play,¹ quotes from the introduction to an edition by T. H. Lacy, which claimed to print from Mrs. Cowley's original draft; the auction scene is omitted in this edition. I have not been able to locate a copy of this text: the only edition by Lacy in the British Museum (2304. f. 17) has no such preface, and seems to be an acting version. On the basis of Lacy's claim, Rhodes assigns the scene to a playhouse reviser. That Edwin was new to Covent Garden that season lends some support to the idea that the part was written with him in mind; it is not strictly necessary to the plot.

The scene does not, however, seem to have pleased in the theatre. Edwin left the cast after the first performance, and in the edition of 1782, the scene is much shorter than in the Larpent MS. The early Dublin editions also have great variations in the scene; this suggests local playhouse attempts to improve it. Tom Davies, the well-known bookseller,

¹ "The Belle's Stratagem", Review of English Studies, V (1929), 132-134. Rhodes does not give an exact reference.

in his Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick, made two criticisms of the play; one was of the auction scene, which he wanted omitted entirely (1784 ed., II, 316).

But the scene can be defended as an integral part of the play; and it does not in fact seem a very suitable part for Edwin, whom, if the cast list were lost, one would more naturally suppose to have played Flutter. Structurally, the scene is an effective counterpoint to the masquerade in the second half of the play; in both these public scenes, Mrs. Cowley attempts to portray the magnetism and the emptiness, the surface and the substance, of the gay social whirl. In the auction scene, Mrs. Cowley tries to place the satire on false taste (such has already been noticed in the auction in Foote's Taste) in a more general framework of moral values, as Fielding does in the Historical Register for the Year 1736 (1737), and as Sheridan does in Charles Surface's "auction" of his pictures in the School for Scandal (1780).

For to the extent that it brings people together while keeping them apart, an auction is a microcosm of the superficial life of the social round. Some of the play's most trenchant social criticism is put in Silvertongue's mouth; after Flutter's earlier description of the nabob's behaviour at an auction, it comes to typify the social waste of which "taste" is an example and a symptom:

There was the divinest Plague of Athens sold yesterday at Langford's! the dead figures so natural, you would have

sworn they had been alive! Lord Primrose bid Five hundred-- Six, said Lady Carmine.-- A thousand, said Ingot the Nabob.-- Down went the hammer.-- A rouleau for your bargain, said Sir Jeremy Jingle. And what answer do you think Ingot made him? . . . Sir, I would oblige you, but I buy this picture to place in the nursery: the children have already got Whittington and his cat; 'tis just this size, and they'll make good companions. (1782 ed., p. 13)

An auction is seen as rather a dubious occasion for Silvertongue's moral reflections; while the conversation at the beginning of the scene between him and his puffers compromises his personal integrity. From Edwin, his remarks could hardly have been taken seriously at all. This may not have been Mrs. Cowley's intention; in the 1813 text, which is marked by a graver moral seriousness, the puffers are omitted. Silvertongue's honesty is unimpaired, and the auctioneer's rostrum becomes a pulpit. Here, perhaps, is another example of the crucial difference that casting could make. Played by Edwin, Silvertongue took on the character of a rogue, and the comic incidentals of the scene became emphasised at the expense of its real function and meaning in the play.

This discussion could be extended to include other characters, such as the freethinking Lady Dinah in The Runaway, whose exclusion from the happy society is not directly concerned with "taste"; but most often it is some quirk of "taste" that Mrs. Cowley uses to isolate the imperfectly adjusted character. We have seen a variety of such, but common to Mrs. Cowley's presentation of them all is her sense of the greater importance of people over things. In

Sir Marvel, and the unreformed Mrs. Sparwell and Gradus, the dead weight of intellectual pretensions hinders or prevents the expression of real personal feelings. Acid and Don Vincentio are examples of the isolating effect of the dangerous narrowing of specialization. In Silvertongue, we see the glib exploiter of ignorant "taste". But the exposure of such false "taste" is only an incidental aim of Mrs. Cowley's comedies; their central concern is with defining an ideal of marriage and an acceptable social context for it. In these, she is of course conventional; her treatment of "taste" has been discussed at more length because it is more distinctive.

III

MARRIAGE

MRS. RACKET.

Is there not something odd in his character?

VILLERS.

Nothing, but that he is passionately fond of his wife;-- and so petulant is his love, that he open'd the cage of a favourite Bullfinch, and sent it to catch Butterflies, because she rewarded its song with her kisses.

(1782 ed., p.12)

The scene in The Belle's Stratagem (II, 1) in which Sir George Touchwood (who is the subject of the above exchange) tries to prevent Doricourt seeing his wife, strongly recalls Pinchwife trying to keep his country wife out of sight. The situation and the comedy are much the same, yet the difference between Pinchwife's motivation and Sir George's could hardly be more marked, and it is a measure of how far social comedy has changed in less than a century. In Mrs. Cowley's first play, The Runaway, Mr. Drummond wishes the young couples "the blissful envied lot of-- Married Lovers!" (1776 ed., p.72), and this lot is an ideal that runs through all Mrs. Cowley's comedies. Although Lady Frances Touchwood is persuaded to join Mrs. Racket and her rout for some taste of fashionable amusements, she is no Mrs. Pinchwife. Indeed, after the attempt on her honour (Sir George's fears prove justified, although the danger is not

from Doricourt), and the frenzied futility of the life of fashionable gaiety have inspired her with disgust, Lady Frances returns to the matrimonial nest, convinced by experience of the rightness of her husband's judgment. Here is the most complete contrast to the humiliation of Pinchwife and the thwarting of his designs to preserve his wife from the corrupting influences of the town.

But although Mrs. Cowley insists on the need for love as a basis for marriage, and Sir George's foible seems forgivable (since it tends towards incorporation rather than exclusion, if too narrow a togetherness), she does not endorse the dangerous and irrational extremity of his passion. In some significant alterations in the last act, made between the Larpent MS and the edition of 1782, we can see Mrs. Cowley clarify her presentation of the Touchwoods. The changes are in the direction of reducing Sir George's passion, and underlining the importance of his social obligations.

In the Larpent MS, this is how Sir George describes to his wife his feelings about Saville, who has just saved her from Courtall's clutches:

SIR GEORGE.

I am impatient to see him-- -- for I must either shoot him, or make him my brother.

LADY FRANCES.

Heavens!

SIR GEORGE.

Don't let the Sentiment startle you! I hate him for deserving too much of your regard. But I love him for having snatch'd thee from a horror.-- -- Oh! Fanny! (p. 87)

In the 1782 edition (and here the Dublin editions of the previous year are in substantial agreement), this is replaced with the following exchange:

SIR GEORGE.

I am impatient to see him. The adventure of last night--

LADY FRANCES.

Think of it only with gratitude. The danger I was in has overset a new system of conduct, that, perhaps, I was too much inclined to adopt. But henceforward, my dear Sir George, you shall be my constant Companion and Protector. And, when they ridicule the unfashionable monsters, the felicity of our hearts shall make their satire pointless. (p. 69)

In the Larpent MS, this speech by Lady Frances occurs at a later point (p. 95); the effect of the change is to replace Sir George's transports by a more rational accord between the married lovers.

When Sir George meets Saville, in the Larpent MS (p. 95) he invites him to his country house and offers him his sister's hand with an importunity not perfectly consistent with Mrs. Cowley's ideal of the marriage of true minds. In the 1782 edition, Sir George is considerably more restrained; there is no mention of his sister's fortune, and he merely observes: "I know no one, to whose heart I would so readily commit the care of my Sister's happiness" (p. 77). To conclude the encounter, the speech by Lady Frances, quoted above, is replaced by one by Saville, in which he accepts Sir George's invitation, to Hampshire if not his sister, but warns him that such rural retirement can only be temporary, because:

Lady Frances was born to be the ornament of Courts. She is sufficiently alarmed, not to wander beyond the reach of her Protector;-- and, from the British Court, the most tenderly-anxious Husband could not wish to banish his wife. Bid her keep in her eye the bright Example who presides there; the splendour of whose rank yields to the superior lustre of her Virtue.
(p. 77)

Sir George agrees. The corresponding speech in the Larpent MS is rather different, and is assigned not to Saville but to the old family friend Villers. It comes almost at the end of the play:

Society would be in a pretty State, if ev'ry man, who marries a fine Woman, was to whisk her off, and immure her. No, no, Sir, we want Lady Frances at Court, we want her at our public places-- we want her to shine upon the world, with the rest of her Sister Stars. She has been alarm'd, She has learn'd how dangerous it is to tread the wilds of life, without her Protector-- -- and, to one so taught the World has no dangers.
(p. 101)

Sir George is allowed no reply, and Doricourt cuts in with his closing speech (which is essentially the same in both versions). This change has three main effects. It ties up the subplot a few minutes earlier, emphasizing its subordination to the marriage between Letitia and Doricourt. It also supplies a more positive note: the reminder of a distasteful episode in Lady Frances' past is replaced by a forward-looking reference to her future life at court, the mention of which reminds us that there is more to fashionable life than the auction and the masquerade we have seen (as well as providing a suitable compliment to the Queen, to whom the comedy was dedicated). Thirdly, it is more appropriate that Saville, a former admirer of Lady Frances and more

recently her saviour, should express such sentiments, than Villers-- a minor character with no place in the scheme of the play, who was omitted altogether in the 1813 version.

To examine such details is often to discover the rationale behind what may seem at first merely a "trap-clap", and to show that a comedy which was often praised for its theatrical effectiveness, can also meaningfully be discussed in terms of its ideas.

The main plot of The Belle's Stratagem is concerned to unite Letitia and Doricourt in an ideal marriage that will combine love with economic security. In this case, there is, exceptionally, no parental opposition to overcome, for the match was arranged by their parents. Instead, the match has to survive internal tensions, for neither partner is content to accept it as an advantageous arrangement without testing the emotional response of the other. Letitia's behaviour, often condemned as "unnatural" (which indeed it is) seems intended to represent a middle way between the timid, complaisant behaviour of Lady Frances, and antics of the gay widow, Mrs. Racket.

Because reserve and delicacy are not exciting dramatic virtues, and because we see Letitia mostly in her assumed character, when we read Mrs. Cowley's description of her (in the Dedication "To the Queen" in the 1782 edition), it seems hardly the same woman as we meet in the play:

My purpose was, to draw a FEMALE CHARACTER, which with the most lively Sensibility, fine Understanding, and elegant Accomplishments, should unite that beautiful Reserve and Delicacy which, whilst they veil those charms, render them still more interesting.

The paradox of Letitia's character is that Doricourt learns to value this reserve only as a result of her throwing it off. Her "stratagem", turning his indifference to aversion as a prelude to converting it into passion, would be unnecessary if she were not reserved, and therefore the cause of his indifference; but it would be hardly possible if she truly were. Nor is Doricourt without some speck of imperfection; when Hardy pretends to be dying, he is ready to marry Letitia, although at the time he thinks himself violently in love with another (luckily, Letitia in disguise). In fact, the actions of neither principal will bear too nice an examination. Mrs. Cowley allows her lovers to triumph, for this is comedy, but they are no paragons, and they triumph over themselves as much as over external obstacles.

In More Ways than One, Carlton attacks the haughty Miss Archer by pretending an aversion to her, hoping that this "way" will succeed better in subduing her heart than the incessant flattery of the generality. This is a reversal of the situation in The Belle's Stratagem, but Carlton's aim is the same as Letitia's: to uncover the depth of personal feelings beneath the surface of the public persona. This is how Carlton describes his ideal:

But give me a woman whose soul is all inform'd, and alive to every enjoyment of taste and feeling! I would rather my wife should join in conversation with grace, than shrink from it, overpowered by her blushes; and that she should make the men afraid of her wit, rather than allure them by her simplicity. (1784 ed., p.15)

Carlton has Miss Archer in mind here. The contrast in the play is between her and Arabella, the charming (but naive and uneducated) lover of Bellair. This grouping is typical in Mrs. Cowley's comedies. In The Town before you, Lady Horatia Horton is a model of decorum and delicacy; Georgina Floyer is the boistrous hoyden. In this case, the relative importance of the two women is reversed, with the quiet Lady Horatia taking first place. The men are less easy to distinguish; often it is by their taste in women that we tell them apart.

In each case, Mrs. Cowley seems to try to make some difference between the pairs. Enough has been said about Sir George Touchwood to show that he is a less balanced character than Doricourt. He and Lady Frances Touchwood seem significantly less close to Mrs. Cowley's ideal than Doricourt and Letitia; in this way, they serve as a kind of "bridge" between them and the frankly eccentric characters discussed in chapter II.

Thus Mrs. Cowley avoids too complete a contrast between "humours" characters, or rather caricatures, and the more complex, more rounded, characters at the centre of her plays. These gradations of character can be illustrated by

examining the succession of parts Lewis played in her comedies. A comment by Genest is relevant here:

When Lee Lewes left C. G. in 1783, Lewis gradually threw himself into a different line of acting, and at the last played all the extravagant parts which Morton and Reynolds thought proper to write for him. (VII, 137)

In The Belle's Stratagem (1780), he played Doricourt, the more balanced of the lovers, and a similar part, Beauchamp, in Which Is the Man? (1782). In 1783, between Don Julio in A Bold Stroke for a Husband, and Bellair in More Ways than One, we can observe the change, for Bellair is the more "eccentric" of the lovers, and, with his feigned sickness, the more colourful part. In 1794 he played not one of the lovers at all, but the rogue Tippy, in The Town before you, to what effect has been discussed in chapter II. Although these parts show a decline in dramatic importance, Lewis' name and part head the cast list in the printed editions and playbills, suggesting a widening gap between Mrs. Cowley's intentions and the theatrical execution of them.

In Which Is the Man? the more usual quartet is replaced by a quintet, with Lady Bell Bloomer presented with a choice between the virtuous, but poor, Beauchamp, and the rich but vicious, lively but debauched, Lord Sparkle. Belleville and Julia, who complete the quintet, are already secretly married. Lord Sparkle's attempt on Julia's honour (IV, ii) is frustrated by Beauchamp. Since he is rewarded with Lady Bell, the result is a neater pattern than at the

end of The Belle's Stratagem, where Saville is left in an awkward limbo (Mrs. Cowley's attempt to remedy this has already been discussed). Lord Sparkle, who seems a real threat to Lady Bell, stands between the successful lovers and the rustic Bobby Pendragon, who briefly pretends to Julia, and his sister Sophy, who pretends to Lord Sparkle.

As a bumpkin who apes fashionable manners, Bobby Pendragon belongs in the group of caricatured eccentrics; this description by him of how a gentleman can do without "good taste" would be enough to place him there:

A Gentleman's friends can furnish his house, and chuse his books, and his pictures, and he can learn to criticise them by heart.-- Nothing is so easy as to criticise;-- people do it continually. (1783 ed., p.27)

As an example of the revisions Mrs. Cowley made, it is worth looking at the version of this speech in the 1813 edition:

He can get his friends to furnish his table, his house, his books and his pictures, and he can learn, by heart, to criticise them;-- nothing is so easy as to criticise-- at least as far as finding Fault goes-- the dullest people do it continually. (Works, I, 355-6)

The ease with which Mrs. Sparwell in The World as it Goes "criticised" after this notion has already been discussed; but the part played by Sir Charles Danvers in the play deserves attention here. Sir Charles is as fond of his wife as Sir George Touchwood, but he has the opposite way of showing it, thinking:

It's a plagy thing to have a wife one's fond of, the little vulgar feelings of one's heart make it almost impossible to keep up the polite Indifference of a Gentleman.

(Larpent MS, p.29)

Although he has no interest in Mrs. Sparwell, Sir Charles attempts to seduce her in pursuit of his mistaken idea of what belongs to a gentleman. Not before Lady Danvers, whose forbearance has been exemplary, has retired to a convent, been assaulted by a monk, and been rescued by Sir Charles, does the latter forswear "the affectations that had nearly deprived me of the most Valuable of her Sex", and decide "to return to England, & love my Wife, and enjoy my Fortune in the face of the World" (Larpent MS, p. 95). This comes immediately after Mrs. Sparwell's declaration:

Then here I forswear all affectation. I will henceforward improve myself in the accomplishments suited to my Sex, & leave criticism & the arts to those to whom they belong.
(Larpent MS, p. 95)

The key term here is "affectation". In curing these two troubled marriages, which flank the main romantic interest between Fairfax and Sidney Grub, Mrs. Cowley emphasises the need for mutual understanding and frankness. If she is prepared to allow "stratagems" before marriage, the end justifies the means; but since the end is a marriage of mutual love and respect, they have no place after it.

There is this severe account of The World as it Goes in the Biographia Dramatica:

The present hasty, indecent, and worthless composition received its sentence from a very candid and impartial audience, who appeared to condemn with reluctance what it was impossible to applaud. (1812 ed., III, 424)

The nunnery scene is certainly rather strong for the taste

of the time, but otherwise this condemnation is hard to understand. Miscasting may well have played a part in the failure. Fairfax, the leading male part, was played by Lee Lewes, normally a broad comedian (Flutter in The Belle's Stratagem). Lewis played Sir Charles, and Miss Younge, Lady Danvers; the effect must have been to focus attention on this couple. On the second performance, Miss Younge played the part of the ugly sister Molly Grub; why she did not play Sidney is a mystery.

In plotting her ideals of marriage, Mrs. Cowley carefully provides variety and contrast, avoiding placing the paragon against the paramour, but rather showing degrees of imperfection. The lovers who most nearly approach this ideal are drawn with the conventional attributes; her eccentrics are more distinctive. Her lovers have youth and beauty, virtue and liv^eliness of mind. Her ideal of woman can perhaps best be seen in this speech by Zilia in A Day in Turkey. It comes from a part added in the 1813 edition; Zilia is contrasting eastern and western women:

The women's faces are pretty, but, they are without expression. Their Forms are regular, but their Action conveys no Sentiment, and, ungifted with Taste, they study Dress only to bedizen themselves. Whilst, excluded from rational society with men, and unrespected by them, their Minds are uninformed, and their Manners ungraceful. In short, in the follies abroad there is a play of Mind that renders them interesting; your follies here-- create but listlessness and Disgust!
(Works, II, 264)

This is rather general, but it stresses the notion of equality of mind that is so important to Mrs. Cowley, in whose

Turkey the mutual love and respect, which we have seen to be an essential part of her ideal of marriage, are impossible, or nearly so. In the following exchange between the Bassa Ibrahim and his slave Azim, Ibrahim shows the glimmer of a western sensibility. This passage, like that quoted above, seems to be a late addition; it is not in the 1792 edition:

IBRAHIM.

Accustomed but to Eastern Slaves, you are incapable of discerning the SOUL that animates Alexina.

AZIM.

Thanks to our Prophet, for denying Women the privilege of Souls. This is the first I have met with that makes any pretensions to one, and it seems given her only to plague every one about her!

IBRAHIM.

I am disgusted with the abject submission of our Eastern Captives, and rejoice that I have at length found a being who will excite in me the sensations of Hope and Despair.

(Works, II, 266)

This attempt to show east meeting west will be discussed further in chapter V.

There are several superannuated would-be lovers in Mrs. Cowley's plays, and they are invariably unsuccessful; but she never asks us to laugh at them merely because they are old. Instead, their failure is the just reward for the trickery they employ in the hope of gaining a much younger partner. Here again, Mrs. Cowley stresses the need for personal integrity and mutual accord. Lady Dinah, in The Run-away, descends to intrigue with her servants in order to dispose of her young rival. Mr. Hargreave, who from pecun-

ary motives had designed her for the wife of his son, is disgusted at this and relents. This is a specimen of Lady Dinah's sentiments:

Nothing gives a Woman so fine an opportunity of plaguing her Lover, as an affectation of jealousy: if she feels it, she's his slave; but whilst she affects it-- his Tyrant.
(1776 ed., p. 64)

The gouty Evergreen in More Ways than One pretends to be a Lord in order to attract Arabella (destined by Mrs. Cowley for the youthful Bellair). In this design he is aided, again for pecuniary motives, by her guardian, Dr. Feelove, whose name is his character. Bellair outwits them both, pretending to be ill in order to gain access to Arabella. At the end of the play, he asks Feelove to "pardon the innocent stratagems of love" (1784 ed., p. 94), and so by comparison they seem.

A blacker villain than Evergreen is Don Gaspar in A School for Greybeards, who tells Donna Antonia that her young lover, Don Henry (temporarily in hiding as the result of a duel), is dead, in order to persuade her to marry him. The folly of marriage between youth and crabbed age is a major theme in the play. Don Alexis has married a young wife, and he speaks to Don Gaspar from experience:

I wish the day I left my bed to marry, I had been confined to it with a gout, an asthma, and a dropsy. Oons man, there's no end of your plagues from this moment! . . . Why, you'd find it easier to spin cables out of cobwebs; or to pierce thro' the earth, and swim out at the Antipodes, than to manage a young rantipole wife . . . (1786 ed., p. 11)

But Mrs. Cowley has too much respect for the institution of marriage to permit a wife to think lightly of her virtue; Donna Seraphina, Don Alexis' "young rantipole wife", although she intrigues against her husband to save his daughter from an unwanted match, preserves her own fidelity. Here Mrs. Cowley's attitude to marriage is that prevention is better than cure. As an example of the graver moral seriousness which is characteristic of the 1813 edition of Mrs. Cowley's works, it is interesting to examine two speeches in the 1786 and 1813 versions. They are part of an ill-tempered exchange between Don Alexis and Donna Seraphina:

ALEXIS.

The devil's in it if stone walls won't keep ye! What stronger security could my honour have?

SERAPHINA.

My honour! Rely on that, and I swear to you by every thing sacred, that no vestal's life shall be more blameless. It is due to my own feelings to be chaste-- I don't condescend to think of you in the affair. The respect I bear myself, makes me necessarily preserve my purity-- but if I am suspected, watch'd, and haunted, I know not but such torment may weary me out of principles, which I have hitherto cherish'd as my life. (1786 ed., p. 19)

ALEXIS.

What stronger security could my honour have?

SERAPHINA.

My honour! Your effectual guard over me is my Sense of Duty; rely on this, and I swear to you that no Vestal's life shall be more blameless. This is due to my own feelings, even without the delightful task of thinking of you.

(Works, II, 112)

Seraphina's threat is removed, and her antipathy to her husband considerably softened. In the 1786 edition, she

seems anxious to preserve rather the surface than the substance of matrimonial fidelity; in the 1813 text this is a good deal corrected.

Donna Seraphina is hardly older than the step-daughter whom she saves from an unwelcome suitor. Mother figures are rare in Mrs. Cowley's plays (it is curious that there is no mention of her mother in the Preface to the 1813 Works, although there is a sympathetic account of her father). Mrs. Fancourt, in The Town before you, plays a similar role to Donna Seraphina; but again, she is Fancourt's second wife, and not the mother of his child. Deceived into marriage by the adventurer Fancourt, she counterplots against his attempt to seduce Georgina Floyer, but she does so in disguise, and considers it her duty to remain with him, even after his arrest. But although Mrs. Cowley never permits herself to dissolve a marriage, in this case she allows Mrs. Fancourt a welcome release, when Fancourt reveals that they were never properly married-- that the ceremony was performed by the versatile Tippy. In making Georgina welcome her saviour as "mother, sister, friend" (1794 ed., p. 99), Mrs. Cowley recognises the ambiguous role that Mrs. Fancourt plays.

The promotion, or prevention, as they deserve, of marriages is the central concern of Mrs. Cowley's comedies. But the marriages discussed in this chapter do not exist in

a void. Mrs. Sparwell, for example, was an important figure in the discussion of Mrs. Cowley's satirical treatment of false taste, and also relevant to a consideration of her ideas of marriage. Such divisions are at best matters of convenience, serving to focus discussion rather than to delimit it. Sir George Touchwood's sentiments on his wife, with which this chapter began, will serve as an admirable link to an examination of Mrs. Cowley's presentation of the society in which her "married lovers" must live:

I married Lady Frances to engross her to myself; yet such is the blessed freedom of modern manners, that, in spite of me, her eyes, thoughts, and conversation, are continually divided amongst all the Flirts and Coxcombs of Fashion.
(1782 ed., p. 21)

IV

SOCIETY

I penned a note ten minutes since to my steward, to raise the poor devils rents. Upon my soul, I pity 'em! But how can it be otherwise, whilst one is obliged to wear fifty acres in a suit, and the produce of a whole farm in a pair of buckles?
(1783 ed., p.25)

The would-be philanthropist of these sentiments is Lord Sparkle, in Which Is the Man? In a society where Lord Sparkle can be "the general favourite of the Ladies, and the common object of imitation with the men" (1783 ed., p. 5), the natural inclination of men like Sir George Touchwood, in The Belle's Stratagem, is retirement. This is Sir George's anatomy of "society":

A mere chaos, in which all distinction of rank is lost in a ridiculous affectation of ease, and every different order of beings huddled together, as they were before the creation. In the same select party, you will often find the wife of a Bishop and a Sharper, of an Earl and a Fiddler. In short, 'tis one universal masquerade, all disguised in the same habits and manners.
(1782 ed., p. 27)

The "affectation" of which Sir George speaks here is only a wider manifestation of the particular affectations which have been discussed above-- Mrs. Sparwell's affectation of taste, for exemple, or Lady Dinah's of jealousy. Fielding's dictum that affectation is "the only source of the true Ridiculous" applies very well to Mrs. Cowley's comedies, where the knaves are often such as the fools would be.

Lord Sparkle, seeking to pass lightly over his attempt to seduce Julia Manners, claims that what would be "effrontery" in others, in him is only "the Ease of Fashion". The general social malaise which Lord Sparkle represents is the willingness of "society" to condone, and even applaud, folly and vice when in pleasing forms, to value a suit over the produce of many acres, and the showy exterior of the man who wears it above the virtues of the less ostentatious. Lady Bell Bloomer can see through Lord Sparkle's borrowed wit and glitter, but she recognizes: "Tinsel is just as well for shew.-- The world is charitable, and accepts tinsel for gold in most cases." (1783 ed., p. 12).

Fancourt makes a similar point in The Town before you:

Pho! what men are diamonds in the way of reputation? French paste does as well, and one is not so much afraid to damage it. If I were such a fellow as you, with a character of the true water, I should be in eternal anxiety-- never dare to turn to the right or the left-- fearful of a speck here, of a flaw there; as it is, I brush on through the world-- my French paste makes a shew, and if I lose it-- why I lose a thing of no value. (1795 ed., p. 14)

This is exactly the spirit of Lord Sparkle, less successful and operating in a lower level of society. Men like Fancourt and Lord Sparkle can only survive in society because there are fools for them to feed on. One of Fancourt's victims is Sir Robert Floyer, whose vanity and credulity make him an easy prey. A newly rich country knight, Sir Robert, whose "grandfather was the first man of his family who ever went

to bed, or got up his own master", has acquired a quantity of old furniture:

SIR ROBERT.

I like antiquities.

SERVANT.

So I guess'd, Sir, by the vast quantity of old worm-eaten furniture you have at home, which you never make any use of, but to shew to strangers. All from the old castles belonging to your forefathers, Sir, I take it?

(1795 ed., p. 8)

Having canvassed for the government in an election, Sir Robert has come to town in hope of high office. Tippy, who has found his close resemblance to Lord Beechgrove a means of obtaining easy credit, has no difficulty in imposing on Sir Robert and cheating him of £1,000. The ease with which the versatile Tippy poses as a connoisseur, until he is discomposed by the statue coming to life, has been discussed in chapter II. In both cases, it is clear that the relationship of rogue to victim is a symbiotic one; in accepting tinsel for gold, accepting surface appearances without close scrutiny, society is asking to be gulled.

Another example of the ease is the way the servant Bronze, in The World as it Goes, passes as his master, Fairfax. This is a familiar theme. Fownley's High Life below Stairs (1759), which is largely concerned with servants imitating their "betters", ends with this moral reflection:

If persons of Rank would act up to their Standard, it would be impossible that their Servants could ape them-- But when they affect every thing that is ridiculous, it will be in

the Power of any low Creature to follow their Example.
(1759 ed., p. 54)

The "ridiculous affectation of ease" of which Sir George Touchwood spoke is also well illustrated by the Cornish rustics, Bobby and Sophy Pendragon, who have, like Sir Robert Floyer, come to town after taking election promises too seriously-- in their case, those of Lord Sparkle. It is interesting to notice that both Bobby Pendragon and Sir Robert were played by Quick; twelve years separate the plays, and Sir Robert is Bobby grown older but scarce wiser.

In Bobby Pendragon, Mrs. Cowley is not only satirizing the ease with which the most vacuous mind can catch the tone of social inanity, in which people rarely mean what they say, and often mean nothing at all. The Pendragons' dissatisfaction with their country existence, and their unwillingness to return to it once they have tasted the delights of the metropolis, are seen as symptomatic of the breaking up of the order of society that seems to follow the new freedom of manners. Sir George Touchwood's ideal (which in this respect seems close to Mrs. Cowley's) is of a "quiet society", in which people are content in their several social situations, and in which they are not engaged in the perpetual motion of a constant search for elusive amusement.

This literal mobility, the round of constant visits,

seems symptomatic of the larger unquietness of modern life:

SIR GEORGE.

Well, Fanny, to-day you made your entree in the fashionable World; tell me honestly the impressions you receiv'd.

LADY FRANCES.

Indeed, Sir George, I was so hurried from place to place, that I had not time to find out what my impressions were.

SIR GEORGE.

That's the very spirit of the life you have chosen.

(1782 ed., p. 47)

In this social whirl, the credentials of men like Tippy, Fancourt, or Lord Sparkle, pass unscrutinized.

In Retirement and The Task, poems that are contemporary with Mrs. Cowley's middle plays, Cowper expresses a mood that is close to Sir George Touchwood's. In describing (in Retirement) the new fashion for the sea-side, for example, Cowper sees this literal kind of movement as suggestive of a deeper social unrest:

Your prudent grand-memmas, ye modern belles,
Content with Bristol, Bath, and Tunbridge-wells,
When health requir'd it would consent to roam,
Else more attached to pleas res found at home.
But now alike, gay widow, virgin, wife,
Ingenious to diversify dull life,
In coaches, chaises, caravans, and hoys,
Fly to the coast for daily, nightly joys,
And all, impatient of dry land, agree
With one consent to rush into the sea.--
(lines 515-24)

But finally, Mrs. Cowley takes a less gloomy view of society than Cowper. In chapter III, we saw Saville persuade Sir George not to retire with his wife to the country. Partly this is an act of faith in the goodness of society, and partly a necessity for Mrs. Cowley, since a large part of

her audience was the fashionable society whose excesses she ridicules, without questioning its existence.

In making Sir George Touchwood opt for "society" rather than the introspective retirement that Cowper espouses and Sir George's own inclinations seem to prefer, Mrs. Cowley suggests that a rational enjoyment of social pleasures is possible without compromise of virtue or integrity. The possibility seems to lie somewhere between Sir George's satirical portrait of the "fine lady", and Mrs. Racket's reply:

She is seen every where, but in her own house. She sleeps at home, but she lives all over the town. In her mind, every sentiment gives place to the Lust of Conquest, and the vanity of being particular. The feelings of Wife, and Mother, are lost in the whirl of dissipation. If she continues virtuous, 'tis by chance-- and if she preserves her husband from ruin, 'tis by her dexterity at the Card-Table!-- Such a woman I take to be a perfect Fine Lady!

Now, Sir, hear my definition of a Fine Lady:-- She is a creature for whom Nature has done much, and Education more; she has Taste, Elegance, Spirit, Understanding. In her manner she is free, in her morals nice. Her behaviour is undistinguishingly polite to her Husband, and all mankind;-- her sentiments are for their hours of retirement. In a word, a Fine Lady is the life of conversation, the spirit of society, the joy of the public!--

(1782 ed., p. 25)

If we judge Mrs. Racket by her own ideal, she hardly comes up to it; but then neither is she guilty of all Sir George's charges.

An excellent embodiment of Mrs. Cowley's ideal of the society woman is Lady Bell Bloomer in Which Is the Man? Two other characters in the play, the retiring Julia, and

the social butterfly Clarinda, form, with Lady Bell, a pattern similar to the group that Letitia, Lady Frances, and Mrs. Racket form in The Belle's Stratagem. Lady Bell (whose understanding of society was evident in her remark on Lord Sparkle's tinsel, quoted above) wins this praise from the censorious Fitzherbert:

A charming woman, Julia! She conceals a fine understanding under apparent giddiness; and a most sensible heart beneath an air of indifference. (1783 ed., p. 13)

Clarinda makes an interesting contrast. We first meet her reading an auction catalogue:

Poor Lady Squander! So Christie has her jewels and furniture at last!-- I must go to the sale.-- Mark that Dresden service, and the pearls . . . It must be a great comfort to her to see her jewels worn by her friends.-- (1783 ed., p. 8)

This pity is as affecting as Lord Sparkle's concern for his tenants. Clarinda's concern with things rather than people allies her with the characters whose "tastes" were discussed in chapter II; again, the auction comes to typify the waste and folly of fashionable society. The unjust society values people for what they have, and what they seem to be, rather than for what they are. Clarinda prides herself:

My next-door friend, Mrs. Saffron, always wheels into the country on my public nights,-- on pretence of her delicate nerves; but the truth is, her rooms will hold but six card-tables, and mine thirteen. (1783 ed., pp.47-8)

It is amusing to observe the ravages of inflation in the 1813 edition, in which Clarinda has nineteen tables, and her neighbour a mere ten (Works, I, 380-1).

Clarinda has no concern for the substance of morality, but she is "the nicest creature breathing in my reputation" (1783 ed., p. 41). Lord Sparkle, on the other hand, openly flaunts his prodigality and debauchery, declaring that " 'tis the fashion to have mistresses from higher orders than sempstresses and mantua-makers" (1783 ed., p. 23). He instructs Julia's maid, Kitty, to woo her mistress for him in these terms:

Tell her of my fashion, my extravagance; that I play deepest at Weltjie's, am the best-drest at the Opera, and have half ruined myself by granting annuities to pretty girls.-- Goodness and fondness are baits to catch old prudes, not blooming misses. (1783 ed., pp. 22-3)

Lord Sparkle and Clarinda successfully impose on society at large; Mrs. Cowley allows them to thrive in the world of the surface, but denies them the bliss of "married lovers". But Lady Squander, and Lord Sparkle's tenants, the objects of their abstract compassion, are reminders of the darker underside of a society in which parasitism and poverty, waste and want, flourish together. Mrs. Cowley puts much of her social criticism in the mouths of characters who are themselves morally suspect, or worse. This is like Dryden's idea that "men aim rightest when they shoot in jest." Figures like Sir George Touchwood, or Fitzherbert, seem prejudiced and soured, and their reflections on the decline of the times lose in effectiveness from their predictability and their prejudice. But when Lord Sparkle,

or Clarinda, makes such an observation, though without implying that anything is wrong, its effectiveness is doubled. Its casualness underlines the lack of personal and social feelings in a society where such events pass as commonplace; and it exposes the speaker's callousness. Lord Sparkle's exposure of himself in his instructions to Kitty, quoted above, are a more deadly indictment of himself and the society in which he lives than the bitter satires of Fitzherbert.

Flutter and Silvertongue perform similar roles in The Belle's Stratagem. In the masquerade scene, Flutter claims:

In the next apartment, there's a whole family, who to my certain knowledge have lived on Cow heel, and Water cress this month, to make a figure here to night-- but to make up for that, they'll cram their Pockets with cold Ducks and chickens for a Carnival to morrow. (Larpent MS, pp. 66-7)

Flutter is himself a social parasite, and a proverb for inaccurate stories like the above, or the account of the nabob at the auction, quoted in chapter II. Most of Flutter's stories are no more than a reminder of a world elsewhere, but the dangerous possibilities of his inaccurate scandalmongering are evident when he describes the disguised Letitia to Doricourt as Lord George Jennet's kept woman, and providing her with a whole genealogy of previous affairs. Like an oral epic poet, Flutter is here improvising on his stock of formulas, drawing on familiar themes.

In his particulars he may be wrong, but Flutter describes the kind of things that exist and happen. He may have got the family wrong, and the woman; but there are such families, and some woman at the masquerade may be kept by Lord George.

The false scale of values of the family living off cow-heel and water-cress to attend the masquerade is part of a wider pattern of social inequality. The scandalmonger Crowquill tries to bribe Doricourt's porter into revealing his master's secrets, offering a bottle of wine:

PORTER.

Oh, oh! I heard the butler talk of you, when I lived at Lord Tinket's. But what the devil do you mean by a bottle of wine!-- You gave him a crown for his retaining fee.

CROWQUILL.

Oh, Sir, that was for a Lord's amours; a Commoner's are never but half. Why, I have had a Baronet's for five shillings, though he was a married man, and changed his mistress every six weeks. (1782 ed., pp. 5-6)

There is another argument about the wages of sin when Mrs. Fag, one of Silvertongue's puffers, demands five shillings a day. This is Silvertongue's indignation:

Five Shillings a day! what a demand! Why, Woman, there are a thousand Parsons in the town, who don't make Five Shillings a day; though they preach, pray, christen, marry, and bury, for the Good of the Community.-- Five Shillings a day! why, 'tis the pay of a Lieutenant in a marching Regiment, who keeps a Servant, a Mistress, a Horse; fights, dresses, ogles, makes love, and dies upon Five Shillings a day.

(1782 ed., pp. 30-31)

One of Silvertongue's lots is the model of a city in wax. In the Larpent MS, this provides the theme for a train of moral reflections in this fashion:

There's the Theatre, not a Roman Theatre, a mere modern Playhouse, you may fancy a new Tragedy or Comedy going forward. Observe the audience, did you ever see a more agreeable Group? If you want to form a Judgment of the Piece, examine the Critics, if they sit with a satisfied Eye, and contented face, you may swear they are gormandizing on faults; if restless, and uneasy, their appetites find little food, and the piece will have a Run. (p. 43)

In the printed text of 1782, Silvertongue's reflections are curtailed; the above passage is among the excisions. The character of Silvertongue was one of Edwin's parts discussed in chapter II; here we need only notice it as part of Mrs. Cowley's technique of suggesting a wider social framework for her comedies than she actually depicts on stage, and of using morally dubious characters to suggest the very standards they flout.

Neither the objects of Mrs. Cowley's satire, nor her moral viewpoint, are new. Both are traditional, and even commonplace. She prefers honesty, sense, virtue, to affectation, hypocrisy, vice. But one element of her social criticism which has not been discussed so far, because it demands separate treatment, and because it ties up the themes already treated, is her nationalism. Silvertongue says of his wax city:

Call it Rome, Pekin, or London, 'tis still a City; you'll find in it the same jarring interests, the same passions, and the same vices, whatever the name. (1782 ed., p. 32)

but this is far from Mrs. Cowley's point of view. She writes from a strong sense of national superiority, and many of the excesses of contemporary British society she

ascribes to the influence of foreign manners. Many of Mrs. Cowley's patriotic sentiments are likely to draw a smile to-day, but this should not tempt us to dismiss them as something irrelevant to an understanding of her work, an unpalatable sauce that can be scraped off an otherwise acceptable fish. The virtuous society which is celebrated at the end of Mrs. Cowley's comedies, such as The Belle's Stratagem or Which Is the Man? is English, and proud to be so.

V

PATRIOTISM

My charming Bride! It was a strange perversion of Taste, that led me to consider the delicate timidity of your deportment, as the mark of an uninform'd mind, or inelegant manners. I feel now it is to that innate modesty, English Husbands owe a felicity the Married Men of other nations are strangers to: it is a sacred veil to your charms; it is the surest bulwark to your Husband's honour; and cursed be the hour-- should it ever arrive-- in which British Ladies shall sacrifice to foreign Graces the Grace of Modesty!
(1782 ed., p. 82)

Doricourt's sentiments, which conclude The Belle's Stratagem, contain many of the themes of this study in a nutshell. If we compare the last lines with the version in the Larpent MS, we see how Mrs. Cowley has strengthened the explicit comparison between British and foreign graces:

. . . and cursed be the hour, shou'd it ever arrive-- in which British Ladies are polished out of their reserve.
(p. 102)

The specifically English nature of Mrs. Cowley's ideal, which has been glanced at several times, may here be considered in more detail. In his article on The Belle's Stratagem,¹ R. Crompton Rhodes, basing his claim on a statement by T. H. Lacy (this is discussed above, p. 26), assigned such patriotic sentiments as these to a playhouse reviser:

¹ "The Belle's Stratagem". Review of English Studies, V (1929), 129-142.

I have never yet found any man whom I could cordially take to my heart, and call Friend, who was not born beneath a British sky, and whose heart and manners were not truly English. (1782 ed., p. 10)

These lines are not in the Lacy edition I have seen (see above, p. 26), but its cuts seem intended to shorten the play (it is rearranged into three acts instead of five) for its Victorian audience. In fact, there is surely no reason to doubt that these are Mrs. Cowley's sentiments; they are an integral part of the play's thematic structure. In the Preface to The Town before you (1795 ed.), Mrs. Cowley speaks of the theatre as "the great National School" (p. xi), and embraces a didactic ideal.

It is important that Doricourt should learn to value Letitia after he has seen "the resistless charmers of Italy and France" (1782 ed., p. 9). For Doricourt's travels have neither opened his mind nor modified his patriotism:

I swear to you, Saville, the air of the Continent has not effaced one youthful prejudice or attachment. (1782 ed., p. 10)

The reservations Doricourt makes are in respect of servants and ladies. His opinion about ladies he is to reverse; his reason for keeping foreign servants is already, perhaps, patriotic enough:

Englishmen make the best Soldiers, Citizens, Artizans, and Philosophers in the world; but the very worst Footmen. I keep French fellows and Germans, as the Romans kept slaves; because their own countrymen had minds too enlarged and haughty to descend with a grace to the duties of such a station. (1782 ed., pp. 7-8)

The virtuous society which Mrs. Cowley celebrates at the end of The Belle's Stratagem is unashamedly English. The excesses of social debauchery are clearly associated with European, and in particular French, influence. When the villain Courtall's base design on Lady Frances is brought to light, his thoughts turn naturally to France as the natural refuge of vice: "There's no bearing this! I'll set off for Paris directly." (1782 ed., p. 63).

In Which Is the Man? Fitzherbert proposes a tax to restrain travellers, because:

Our travelling philosophers have done more towards destroying the nerves of their country, than all the politics of France. Their chief aim seems to be, to establish infidelity, and to captivate us with delusive views of manners still more immoral and licentious than our own.

(1783 ed., p. 15)

In The World as it Goes Mrs. Cowley depicts a number of such "travelling philosophers", an accidentally assembled party of English at Montpellier. It is curious that this setting (for which there is no obvious reason) was also used by Southerne for Sir Anthony Love (1691). A comparison of the two plays shows how far the national stereotype has changed; Southerne's Englishmen are out to swindle the gullible foreigners, whereas Mrs. Cowley's are the victims of a series of plots to trick and swindle them. The three chief crooks in Mrs. Cowley's play are Le Rouge, von Irkin, and the "Countess"; there is also a Le Gout who

tries to sell Mrs. Sparwell a urinal from Pompeii. The countess tries to sell her favours to Mr. Grub (a rich citizen), while von Irkin and Le Rouge attempt his elder daughter. Lady Danvers is assaulted in the nunnery to which she retires from the cares of the world and her husband, by a monk. That the innkeeper fleeces his ignorant English customers is a matter of course. These various plots are foiled by Colonel Sparwell, Sir Charles Danvers, and Fairfax, a triumvirate of sensible Englishmen who determine at the end of the play to return to England to enjoy their new, or renewed, conjugal felicity.

The social microcosm of Montpellier comes close to being what Sir George Rouchwood called "an universal masquerade". Le Rouge, von Irkin, and the Countess all have shady pasts and play assumed roles. It is a society inimical to frankness and reserve, two "English" qualities which Mrs. Cowley seems especially to admire, together with the discretion to employ each in the proper situation. It is therefore a suitable place to chastise a man like Sir Charles Danvers, who assumes indifference to his wife for the sake of fashionable appearances, or Colonel Sparwell, who plots against his wife. The third member of the trio, Fairfax, pretends to be a French count, and puts von Irkin to shame at his own game of ludicrously affected love-making. Because the end is obtaining Sidney Grub from her

mean and unwilling father, Mrs. Cowley permits this deception, as she permits Bellair, in More Ways than One, his feigned sickness to gain his Arabella.

In his pretended character, Fairfax affects to recall a countess who had "eleven lovers in Six Months, as her time was so much engage, her husband us'd to write her Billet doux" (Larpent MS, p. 48). The countess in the play is a character of coquetry and dissimulation, who pretends to be virgin, widow, wife, as she thinks each role can be turned to her profit.

In preferring the English character. Mrs. Cowley makes it clear that it is a matter of rational choice as well as national pride, as this exchange in The Belle's Stratagem makes clear:

LEPITIA.

You see I can be any thing; chuse then my character-- your Taste shall fix it. Shall I be an English Wife?-- or, breaking from the bonds of Nature and Education, step forth to the world in all the captivating glare of Foreign Manners?

DORICOURT.

You shall be nothing but yourself-- (1782 ed., p. 81)

Fairfax's servant Bronze, discovered by the countess in the act of trying on his master's coat, is mistaken by her for his master. Bronze is an illustration of Doricourt's observation:

A Frenchman neither hears, sees, nor breathes, but as his master directs; and his whole system of conduct is compris'd in one short word, Obedience! An Englishman reasons, forms opinions, cogitates, and disputes; he is the mere creature of your will: the other, a being, conscious of equal import-

ance in the universal scale with yourself, and is therefore your judge, whilst he wears your livery, and decides on your actions with the freedom of a censor. (1782 ed., p. 8)

These are Bronze's reflections:

Damn fortune . . . I am as tall, as well made, and have as much impudence as my Master, and why the devil should he be gone abroad in Embroidery, whilst I am brushing his Cloaths in Scurvy Livery . . . / tries on Fairfax's coat / . . . hang it, it won't do, there must be something in birth after all! Spite of affectation and Lace, Silk, I look no more like a Gentleman than Peter Pelican. (Larpent MS, p. 53)

That Bronze should be able to impose on the countess, but not on himself, is a neat comment on the two societies. In the light of Doricourt's remarks, it is interesting to compare Bronze with some of the French characters (mainly valets) in Mrs. Cowley's plays.

The Frenchman in The School of Eloquence, that pantomime of national stereotypes, is a fair specimen of servility, though not a servant:

One little compliment to de great judgment of your antagonist shall convince him dat he be wrong, sooner den all the opposition in de varld . . . But ven all this vill not do, and noting remains but de downright arguement and opposition.-- de Frenchman always give up the point. (Larpent MS, pp. 12-3)

Buck, a John Bull character, perhaps caricatures English bluntness:

For my part I hate all arguement, and admire short disputes. If any man contradicts me you lie that's my Major, if he meets that-- shoot him through the head that's my Minor-- and damme who dares dispute my conclusion (Larpent MS, p. 17)

More serious criticism is contained in the portraits of two French servants, Sir Marvel Mushroom's Le Gout, and Orloff's A La Greque in A Day in Turkey. Le Gout, in More

Ways than One, is preoccupied with details of dress and the technique of social hypocrisy. Le Gout gives this deadly (but unconscious) exposure of mercenary condescension:

SIR MARVEL.

Why! should I receive him?

LE GOUT.

Sans doute-- receive every body. De great people make all dere power dat way. In Grosvenor-Square, a citizen send his name to a lord;-- "damn de greasy soap boiler-- send him up!" He fly to receive him, catches his hand-- "My dear Mr. Pearlash, how I am oblige for dis honour!-- where have you been dis age? can I do any ting for you?-- make use of me-- give me de happiness to serve you!"

SIR MARVEL.

Do they condescend so much?

LE GOUT. Condescend!-- pshaw! dat idea is banish de world-- dere is no condescension. De canaille is de fountain of riches, derefore de lords treat dem vid respect, and tell dem of dere majesty: in return, de Canaille, bursting vid vanity and gratitude, let de Lords drain dere purses, and so bote sides rest satisfie. (1784 ed., p. 28)

In putting this in Le Gout's mouth, Mrs. Cowley makes a malaise in English society seem something of course to a Frenchman. It is also an example of her favourite technique of expressing social criticism through morally suspect characters-- as has already been noticed in the case of Silver-tongue in The Belle's Stratagem.

In contrast to the scheming and stratagems of Le Rouge and von Irkin, Bronze makes "a bold stroke for a wife"; Le Rouge and von Irkin, exposed, are forced to flee empty-handed, but Bronze may have succeeded. Le Gout's thoughts extend no higher than taking credit for his master's coiffure:

De quality will not say of you-- "Oh, what Burgeois be dat! ah, mon Dieu, quelle bete!" dey will say who drest dat man? he be as mal adroit as a Flemish boor-- send him a new valet,

he be dress by a Dutch barber." My reputation be concern'd,
monsieur. (1784 ed., p. 26)

Mrs. Cowley is said (Works, I, xviii) to have spent much of the year before the French Revolution in France. If so, this might easily account for the character of A La Greque in A Day in Turkey (1791), who is far less sympathetically portrayed than Le Gout, who is the object of more ridicule than contempt. A La Greque shows himself more slavish than the slaves, not only cowardly and effete but perfidious. This is his obsequiousness to his new master:

Oh Sir, as to chains, I value them not a rush; if it is your highness's sweet pleasure to load me with them, I shall be thankful for the honour, and dance to their clink-- Bless ye, Sir, chains were as natural t'other day to Frenchmen as mother's milk. (3rd ed., p. 19)

In the Preface to A Day in Turkey, Mrs. Cowley defends herself against the imputed political content of the play.

After denying the alleged political references, she adds:

True comedy has always been defined to be a picture of life-- a record of passing manners-- a mirror to reflect to succeeding times the characters and follies of the present.

This seems just. Nowhere does Mrs. Cowley concern herself with political systems; in A Day in Turkey and elsewhere, her interest is in the social and moral aspects of national character. She seems to have had at least the idea for A Day in Turkey before either the Revolution or the war between Russia and Turkey. In the Preface to Albina, she writes:

I had indeed made some progress in writing a Piece founded on Turkish manners, the scene of which is laid in Asia, and flattered myself with success from the novelty of the attempt; (1779 ed., p. v)

Mrs. Cowley's main purpose in A Day in Turkey is concerned with the effect on the Bassa Ibrahim of meeting Alexina, a captive Russian. Mrs. Cowley's comments on the position of women in Turkish society were discussed in chapter III. A La Greque is not essential to the plot, and presumably he was added after the Revolution; but he forms a useful contrast with Orloff, the bold Russian (and by an easy transference, English) gentleman-officer. In A La Greque's chauvinism, Mrs. Cowley presents the reverse of the combination of dignity and respect that she admired in Bronze:

Oh, Paris, Sir, Paris, I travell'd into Russia to polish the brutes a little, and to give them some ideas of the general equality of man; but my generosity has been lost;-- they still continue to believe that a prince is more than a porter, and that a lord is a better gentleman than his slave. O, had they but been with me at Versailles, when I help'd to turn those things topsy turvey there! (3rd ed., p. 18)

The contrast between A La Greque's libertarian theory and his servile behaviour is complete; in the 1813 edition, it is made even more incongruous by combining the two in one speech:

Oh, Paris Sir, Paris-- a Frenchman! I just travelled into Russia out of kindness, to polish the Brutes a little, and to give them french ideas. But, finding I could not re-model their heads, I took to their heels, and would have taught them dancing; they were as incapable however of improving below as above, so I betook myself to conducting the affairs of this Gentleman. The result has been that I have been led by him to dance in your chains, in which if I can but caper myself into your favour, I shall deem my last step the best I ever took! (Works, II, 265)

Here "french ideas" need no elaboration. It is interesting that the second version, with the idea of dancing running through it, has a distinctly literary rather than theatrical

flavour.

In the earlier version, at the end of the play, when he hears that his master Orloff is to be freed, A La Greque makes this request:

Fellow slaves, I perceive, we shall be no longer-- so there goes my dignity! I'll make a bold push for a new one though. Azim, I find-- pardon me, my Lord, . . . Azim I find, is out of place, will your mightiness bestow it on me, and make me your principal slavedriver? (3rd ed., p. 83)

A La Greque the friend of liberty is exposed. One of the less happy, but not untypical, revisions in the 1813 text, makes this point much more heavily:

What ups and downs there are in this world! My Lord, (to Orloff) I am once again your most duteous Servant! Fellow Slaves we shall be no more-- so here ends the Tyranny of Equality! (Works, II, 319)

In A School for Greybeards and A Bold Stroke for a Husband, which are set in Portugal and Spain respectively, the same concern for the moral rather than the political aspects of differences between societies is evident. Mrs. Cowley is not concerned with absolutism in government (the Bassa was sympathetically drawn) so much as the greater opportunities for the exercise of parental tyranny.

In Mrs. Cowley's ideal England, social distinctions are observed, but servants are not slaves, and there is respect for the rights of the individual of whatever rank. In A La Greque's rejoicing at his master's enslavement, the levelling down effect of the French Revolution is observed; Mrs. Cowley is much more sympathetic to Bronze's attempt to

improve his social position.

So far Mrs. Cowley's patriotism, her attempt to identify what is best in Englishness, has been seen in a negative way, in terms of her distrust of continental, and in particular French, influence. Its more positive side is evident in her appeal to an implied ideal of "traditional" English virtues, rather nebulously defined, but strongly contrasted with French decadence and debauchery. An example is this remark by Mr. Grub in The World as it Goes:

I always likes to be in the Tone wherever I goes;-- you surely wou'd not have me be brimful of honour, or ashamed of Cuckoldom here in France. (Larvent MS, p. 33)

This is Fitzherbert's ideal of the British soldier, from

Which Is the Man?:

Intrepid spirit, nice honour, generosity, and understanding, all unite to form him.-- It is these which will make a British soldier once again the first character in Europe.-- It is such soldiers who must make England once again invincible, and her glittering arms triumphant in every quarter of the globe. (1783 ed., p. 53)

Fitzherbert's words proved prophetic, for in the 1813 text, the last lines are in the present tense:

By these the British Soldier continues the First Character in Europe, makes England for ever invincible, and her resplendent arms triumphant in every quarter of the Globe. (Works, I, 388)

It is fascinating to imagine Mrs. Cowley in seclusion at Tiverton penning such a sentence upon receipt of news of some particular British triumph.

Since Mrs. Cowley's comedies are inevitably concerned with the lighter side of social life, such off-stage drum-

beating serves as a useful reminder of the more serious side of English life. As means of making their fortunes in honourable callings, Beauchamp (in Which Is the Man?) and Asgill (in The Town before you) become a soldier and a sailor respectively. Even when economic necessity is removed, and both heroes have obtained their fair ladies, they do not renounce their noble vocations, but resolve to share their love with their country. These are Asgill's sentiments:

Yet the enthusiasm which seized me when I trod the Deck of the victory can never be chill'd. In the glorious tars around me, valour, intrepidity, heroism shone forth with all their fires-- they flash'd thro' my heart! And I swear, that shou'd my Country need my Assistance; I will again resume the Trowsers & sail before the Mast, wherever she bids her Cannon roar, or her proud Pendants fly! My Horatia herself shall applaud the dedd and Love the Hero in her Husband.

(Larpent MS, p. 92)

Asgill's sentiments may draw a smile to-day. To compare them with the ending of Persuasion, which is similar in content but more tactfully managed, is a refreshing reminder of genius after a volume of talent:

His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less; the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than its national importance. (Vol. II, ch. 12)

Jane Austen and Mrs. Cowley have in common a sense of national optimism, in which the achievements of the armed forces, and the man of action rather than reflection, seem to typify the national ideal; and this sense allows them to temper their

criticism of domestic English society.

Mrs. Cowley's national ideal is essentially an amateur one, and within the common reach. It depends on the willingness of men like Beauchamp and Asgill to fight for it. This ideal is at the centre of her plays, sometimes implicitly, sometimes too explicitly for our taste, perhaps. It is the positive side of Mrs. Cowley's warning against the isolating effects of eccentricity, and the natural context for her emphasis on the need for personal feeling and frank understanding as the basis for the social contact of marriage. To preserve it, and correct the excesses of society, the individual must take his part in the social process. The traditional virtues of the sober English are the true basis of national identity and a justified sense of national pride.

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