Characterization in the comedies of Sir George Etherege

Leland Wayne Farley

The University of Montana

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/1779
CHARACTERIZATION IN THE COMEDIES OF
SIR GEORGE ETHEREGE

by

LELAND WAYNE PARLEY

B. A. Montana State University, 1963

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

1964

Approved by:

Walter H. King
Chairman, Board of Examiners

Frank C. Acheson
Dean, Graduate School

MAY 27 1964
Date
Introduction

A Critical Enigma
The comedies of Sir George Etherege (1634-1691) have experienced an unusual fate at the hands of critics, most of whom have refused to discuss them as artistic successes or failures. Etherege's plays have been alternately damned and praised for morally satirizing an immoral world, immorally delighting in an immoral world, and amorally portraying an immoral world. His sources have been traced to Molière, Ben Jonson, or such Caroline comic dramatists as Shirley and Webster; while they have been also recognized as the first products of a dramatic revolution which took place during the early years of the Restoration. His imagery and dialogue have been examined in the light of the philosophy of Hobbes, Machiavellianism, and Renaissance naturalism. His settings, the London society with which he was familiar, have been called realistic or unrealistic; and his characters have been variously described as artificial, typed, or realistically portrayed individuals. Strangely enough, only the most recent critics have actually examined the plays to see if they are genuinely comic, and if so, why.

Critics of Etherege can be divided into three broad groups: morals critics, who follow Jeremy Collier's example and condemn the plays for sympathizing with libertine attitudes toward sex which
later generations did not hold; manners apologists, who defend the plays as merely a reflection of Restoration life and thus part of an unreal world which has nothing to do with the moral codes of later generations; and very recent critics, who accept as genuine the accuracy of the manners which the plays portray and who prefer to examine the reasons for the moral attitudes the plays may or may not profess rather than take issue with Etheridge’s own moral predilections, whatever they were.

The first critics to comment on Etheridge’s dramatic talents were his contemporaries. His reputation as a gentleman and favorite at Charles II’s court has been too often documented to warrant discussion here. It is significant, however, that Etheridge was much admired by his fellow playwrights. John Dryden not only wrote a commendatory epilogue to The Man of Mode but also used Etheridge as a foil to Thomas Shadwell in MacFlecknoe (1682) in which he says:

Let gentle George in triumph tread the stage,
Make Dorimant betray, and Lovelace rage;
Let Cully, Cockwood, Popling charm the pit,
And in their folly show the writers wit.2

(II, 151-4)

Shadwell, the self-professed “Son of Ben Jonson,” had a great regard for Etheridge’s dramatic talents. In the preface to his play The Humorists (1671), he praised Etheridge’s second play, She Would


if She Cou'd, as "...the best Comedy that has been written since the Restoration of the Stage."\(^3\)

But in spite of compliments such as these, Etherege's reputation diminished rapidly in the eighteenth century. Jeremy Collier, whose *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* was published in 1698, lashed out eloquently at playwrights who "make their Principal Persons Vicious and reward them at the End of the Play."\(^4\) Whether Collier spurred the overwhelming reaction which was to follow against the kind of comedy Etherege wrote or whether his was the first reasoned puritan reaction to mirror in print what many people had thought before 1698 is a moot and debatable point.\(^5\) The fact remains that comedies in Etherege's tradition died with Vanbrugh and Farquhar and were replaced by sentimental comedy best represented by Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*, published in 1721.

Collier's thesis is simple: there is a clear distinction between virtue and vice which has been "struck out by Nature." The fault of the late seventeenth century dramatists is that he "blots the Distinctions" so "...vice is varnish'd over with Pleasure."\(^6\) The potential effect of these plays on their audience or readers is dangerous because "the Fancy may be gain'd, and the Guards corrupted, and the Pleasure bloated..."\(^6\)

---


\(^4\) Spingarn, III, 253.

\(^5\) See Joseph Wood Krutch, *Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration* (New York, 1949) for a complete analysis of the controversy caused by the publication of Collier's work.

\(^6\) Spingarn, III, 253.
and Reason suborn'd against itself. 7 Moreover, Collier extends this criticism to social considerations. If the stage has as one of its functions the Horatian notion of teaching as well as delighting, then the Restoration stage has failed to mirror manners that its audience should imitate. Indeed, the manners of the stage and its conception of honor are totally opposed to Collier's Puritan doctrine. His definition of a Restoration stage gentleman, Collier feels, is self-explanatory, and he offers it to "Sum up the Evidence."

A fine Gentleman is a fine Whoring, Swearing, Smutty, Atheistical Man. These Qualifications, it seems, compleat the Idea of Honour. 8

The notion that the dramatists he holds in contempt may have been satirizing and ridiculing the gentlemen in their plays never enters Collier's mind, and the fact that almost all Restoration comedies and with the hero submitting to and accepting the convention of marriage is not enough to satisfy Collier's sense of moral propriety. Collier wants retributive justice rather than converts to a belief in the validity of marriage as an institution.

In 1711 Sir Richard Steele chose Collier's definition of a gentleman in order to attack Etherege's most popular play, The Man of Mode. "I will take for granted, that a fine gentleman should be

7 Spingarn, III, 253.
8 Spingarn, III, 253.
honest in his actions, and refined in his language," wrote Steele who then proceeded to measure Etherege's hero, Dorimant, against this definition. His conclusion was that Dorimant is a "...knave in his designs, and a clown in his language," and that the play itself is "...a perfect contradiction to good manners, good sense and common honesty."

This kind of censuring of Restoration comedy in general—and of Etherege in particular—continued throughout the eighteenth century. It was not until 1819 that the comedies of the period were reconsidered and the moral question set aside. Charles Lamb, in his famous "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century" (1823) attempted to defend Etherege and his contemporaries as writers of immoral rather than immoral plays. The theater was for Lamb "...that happy breathing-place from the burden of a perpetual moral questioning." He argued that the characters and morals portrayed by Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve belonged to the seventeenth century, and not to nineteenth century England. The world of the stage was a "fairy land" whose morals were incapable of affecting the morals of the audience.

The Fainalls and the Mirabells, the Dorimants and the Lady Touchwoods, in their own sphere, do not offend my moral sense; in fact they do not appeal to it at all.

---

9 Spectator 65, Tuesday, May 15, 1711.
11 Lamb, pp. 174-5.
Unfortunately for Etherege's reputation, Lamb praises only Congreve and Wycherley in his essay; and while he at least buries the moral question, he nonetheless fails to mention Etherege as an important author of the earlier period. Lamb was not alone. Several years previous to his essay, William Hazlitt published his Lectures on the English Writers (1823) in which he asserts that the plays of the Restoration are moral rather than immoral, as Collier had suggested, or amoral as Lamb maintained. Hazlitt argues that the social manners and customs of the characters in Restoration comedy are accurate imitations of the real manners and customs of the period. This realism in the plays was used to good advantage by Restoration dramatists who satirized the conventions of their age. Hazlitt calls these plays social comedy, a genre whose function is to make its audience aware of the life around them and whose end it is to satirize that life. Because their end is satire these plays are moral; they attempt to show immorality as ridiculous. But in spite of these criteria, Hazlitt finds little worth in Etherege's comedies.

Those [Comedies] of Etherege are good for Nothing, Except the Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter which is, I think, a more exquisite and airy picture of the manners of that Age than any other extant. 12

Even though Lamb and Hazlitt neglected Etherege's plays, they did achieve one important goal; they shifted the emphasis of critical

comment about Restoration comedy from morality to manners. And while they may have disagreed about the real moral nature of the theater, they were in total agreement about what Restoration comedy did best. It captured the essence of Restoration upper class life, manners conventions, and speech. Nevertheless, Etherege's reputation still hung in abeyance. The last collected edition of his plays had been published in 1755, and when Leigh Hunt published his edition of Restoration drama in 1840 he published only the works of those playwrights whom Hazlitt called "...the four principle writers of this style of comedy (which I think the best)...Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar." The only advantage to being excluded from this collection was that Etherege escaped the vitriolic attack leveled at Hunt and the Restoration authors represented in his anthology by Lord Macaulay, who reviewed the work. This attack was as influential in Victorian English as Collier's had been a century and half earlier and effectively stifled the general reputation of Restoration Comedy for the next fifty years.

Edmund Gosse is usually credited with being the modern discoverer of Etherege. In 1883 he published his *Seventeenth Century Studies* in which he devoted a chapter to Etherege's life and comedies.


14 Hazlitt, p. 70.
Gosse deplored the neglect of Etherege's three plays and "...the singular part they enjoyed in the creation of modern English comedy." But like those of his predecessors who had mentioned Etherege, Gosse side-stepped serious discussion of the plays. His thesis that Etherege was more important for his influence upon later Restoration dramatists, notably Congreve, than for what he himself produced was to be a recurrent theme in later criticism. Gosse also inspired another trend in Etherege criticism which was to become widely accepted, although later debated. Even though Etherege's plays are revolutionary in English drama, says Gosse, they have roots in French comedy.

In his criticism of Etherege's plays Gosse notes these features which he considered unique: "The Comical Revenge...is strung on a very light thread of plot;" in The Man of Mode "...there is no plot." Like Hazlitt, he was struck by the realism in the plays. The subplot to The Comical Revenge is a series of "gay, realistic scenes," and "She Would if She Could gives us a faithful picture

---


16 Gosse, p. 267.

17 Gosse, p. 269.

18 Gosse, p. 278.

19 Gosse, p. 266.
of fashionable life." But the great Etherege play for Gosse was *The Man of Mode*, and its most engaging feature was "...the force of the characterization..." with characters which Dickens would have laughed at and commended."21

Gosse's essay stimulated new interest in Etherege, and in 1888 W. W. Verity published his edition of Etherege's works, the first edition in 153 years. In 1899, A. C. Ward commented on Etherege in his history of English drama before the reign of Queen Anne. Ward thought little of Etherege's work except for the character of Sir Fopling who, he agreed with Gosse, was definitely French inspired.22

In the nineteenth century the reputation of Restoration comedy swung like a pendulum. It was resurrected by the essayists Hazlitt, Lamb, and Hunt, condemned by Lord Macaulay, and restored to prominence in the last decades of the century. The widely divergent

---

20 Gosse, p. 272.  
21 Gosse, p. 278.  
22 A. C. Ward, A History of English Dramatic Literature (London, 1899), III, p. 446. In The Influence of Molière on Restoration Comedy (New York, 1910), Dudley Howe Miles draws so many parallels between Etherege and Molière that he can only conclude that the comedy of the whole period is an Anglicized reflection of the Frenchman's work. Both Kathleen M. Lynch in The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy (New York, 1926) and Alfred Harbage in Cavalier Drama (New York, 1936) show conclusively that the models and sources for Etherege's work existed in England before the closing of the theaters. On the basis of these two studies and in the light of his own work, John Wilcox, in his rebuttal to Miles, The Relation of Molière to Restoration Comedy (New York, 1938) is able to flatly assert, "Etherege secured little or nothing from Molière and hence transmitted nothing to his successors" (p. 81).
opinions about Etherege and his contemporaries of the nineteenth century critics caused and prefigured the similarly divergent opinions of twentieth century critics.

John Palmer's *The Comedy of Manners* (1913) was the first comprehensive—and surely the most influential--book on Restoration comedy to appear in the twentieth century. Palmer's criticism is an important one for several reasons. He was the first critic to produce a book-length study of Restoration comedy. (Miles' 1910 study is concerned primarily with Molière's influence on the period; he spends little time criticizing the comedies themselves.) Moreover, Palmer attempted to collect all the previous criticisms of the plays and answer them. His answer developed into the theory of "comedy of manners," a term which has become synonymous with Restoration comedy and which later critics have either defended or denounced. But Palmer's real contribution was the enthusiasm his book stimulated for the plays and the interest it generated in re-staging and critically re-examining them. Again, however, Etherege is omitted from the list of great comic writers of the Restoration, a list which duplicates the choices of Hazlitt and Hunt, and as in the case of Gosse, Etherege's importance is said to be mainly historical.

...we are here to be concerned with the origin and development of the English Comedy of Manners... Sir George Etherege is strictly necessary. He becomes, in fact, historically more important than Wycherley.

---

Palmer defines "comedies of manners" as plays which attempt to capture realistically the essence of the times in which they were written. His definition is not unlike Hazlitt's, and his conclusion about the morality expressed in the plays is similar. Etherege, who began the type, was:

...a man who in temperament and mind accurately reflected this period in his personal character, and received a sincere impulse to reflect it artistically in his comedies. His sincerity as an artist has met the inevitable reward. His plays are morally as well as artistically sound.24

Moreover, Palmer answers the critics who have found a kinship between Etherege and Molière with this flat assertion: "...there is no real kinship between the French and the English playwright."25

The critics who immediately followed Palmer almost totally agreed with him. Ernest Bernbaum asserts that Etherege was indeed moral and that after his first play in which "...the satirical portions especially admired confined himself to two comedy of manners."26 George Henry Nettleton was "charmed" by the plays and accepted both Palmer's thesis that the plays reflect the manners of the time and that Etherege's position is historically

24 Palmer, p. 292.
25 Palmer, p. 65.
26 Ernest Bernbaum, The Drama of Sensibility (Boston, 1915) p. 64.
important, though Nettleton thought he saw some French influences in the plays.\textsuperscript{27} In 1923 the moral issue was reopened by William Archer in his book \textit{The Old Drama and the New}. Archer not only deplored the morality of Restoration comedies but also the craft of the authors, especially their failure to fulfill successfully what was for him "...the very essence of social comedy, ...to present a certain criticism of life." Restoration comedy fails, he says, because

\begin{quote}
...its criticism of life, whether explicit or implied in action, is stupid, nauseous and abominable beyond anything else that can be found in the world's dramatic literature.
If this be thought too sweeping, let me say: beyond anything of which the rumour has reached me.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Archer criticized Etherege for his heroes and rakes; Dorimant exhibits "gratuitous and foul-mouthed ruffianism"\textsuperscript{29} and the whole Etheregean canon of rakes fail to be witty. "Considering the assiduity with which Etherege's fine gentlemen aimed at wit, it seems to me remarkable that they so seldom attained it."\textsuperscript{30}

Condemnation of the plays on moral grounds was continued by critics following Archer, in spite of the number of manners apologists who have defended the plays' morality. L. C. Knights has

\begin{quote}
\footnotesize
28 William Archer, \textit{The Old Drama and the New} (Boston, 1923), p. 123.
29 Archer, p. 190.
30 Archer, p. 183.
\end{quote}
focused his comments on the inanity of critics who in the past re-
jected the plays as art in order to discuss them as social codes.
Knights liked Restoration comedy as little as Archer, but his con-
cclusion may have at least changed critical approaches to the plays:
"The criticism that defenders of Restoration comedy need to answer
is not that the comedies are 'immoral' but that they are trivial,
gross, and dull."

Following the publication of Archer's book in 1923, other
volumes of critical importance were published year by year until
1930. The first two of these, Restoration Comedy by Bonamy Dobrée,
and The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama by Henry Ten Eyck Perry,
are largely continuations and reaffirmations of Palmer's position.
Like Palmer, critics in the twenties—Dobrée in particular—use the
terms "realistic" and "artificial" as a basis for their definition
of the comedy of manners. In order to understand these critics in
the tradition begun by Palmer, one must understand the specific ways
in which both terms are used.

When Hazlitt called Restoration comedies "imitations of real
life," he meant something quite different from the realism of Dreiser,
Steinbeck, or Sinclair Lewis. Indeed, Hazlitt probably meant only a
capturing of social manners, customs, pastimes, fashions, and speech

31 L. C. Knights, "Restoration Comedy: The Reality and the
Myth." Scrutiny (September, 1934). This essay is reprinted in
Henry Ten Eyck Perry, The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama: Studies
in the Comedy of Etheridge, Dryden, Congreve, Vanbrugh and
Farquhar (New York, 1925).
conventions which appealed to the Restoration theater audience because of their topicality. The characters created within this realistic framework were not believable human beings. The frequent comment by Gosse, Nettleton, and Palmer that the characters in Etherege's plays are inhumanly devoid of emotion supports this idea. Thus Lamb felt justified in calling the world of the plays a "fairy land" which in spite of its accurate portrayal of the outward appearance of a society has characters whom he can laugh at but with whom he cannot sympathize. The plays can be alternately moral and amoral, realistic and artificial for critics within this "manners" category because they serve as a picture of a society which could be morally condemned, if it were real. But the characters within this realistically portrayed society are not real. They are artificial and do not resemble real human beings. Therefore, the manners critics argue, such characters cannot be censured for their immorality because moral standards apply only to real human beings. Dobrée redefines comedy with such artificial characters set against a realistic background by calling it "free comedy." They are, he explains,

...comedies in which we feel no superiority, and which inculcate no moral but in which we seem to gain a release, not only from what Lamb called the burden of our perpetual moral questioning, but from all things that appear to limit our powers....The plays of Etherege are perhaps the best examples....Here we feel that no values count, that there are no rules of conduct, hardly laws of nature. Certainly no appeal, however indirect, is made to our critical or moral faculties. 33

33 Dobrée, pp. 13-14.
Dobree makes no distinction between the characters and their actions in Restoration comedy. Dorimant's seductions are no more reprehensible than is the character himself because both character and seduction exist in a world apart from that of the audience. These seductions might deserve the reader's condemnation if they took place in a world governed by twentieth century Christian ethics. But they do not; they take place in a world in which "no values count," where the values of the real world are neither understood nor allowed, where indeed no values have been violated.

Two questions must be answered if this "manners" interpretation is to be accepted. Can these unreal characters, devoid of emotion and living in a society which does not recognize any moral or ethical code, emerge from the plays as truly individualized characters? Must each remain within the confines of a loosely defined stereotype, the Rake-Hero, the fop, the sexually frustrated middle-aged woman? If these characters are unreal enough to escape our moral judgment, exactly what criteria do we use in order to make an aesthetic judgment of them? The manners critics of the 1920's, who besides Dobree and Perry include Kathleen Lynch, Allardyce Nicoll, and Malcolm Elwin, are not in agreement about answers to these questions as their comments on Etherege's characters indicate. 34 In She Would if She

Could, Perry argues, Etherege's characters "...become mere puppets and no longer bear much resemblance to live men and women."\(^{35}\) She Would if She Could, says Elwin, is "...peopled by real persons such as those in whose company he passed his own life.\(^{36}\) Says Nicoll: "She Would if She Could...passed beyond mere humorous types to a realm of living human beings."\(^{37}\) To Elwin, Lady Cockwood, for whom the play is named, is "a consummate creation,"\(^{38}\) but to Dobrée she is "an unpleasant character, not clearly conceived,"\(^{39}\) while to Miss Lynch, she is "a complete and brilliant portrayal."\(^{40}\) Sir Fopling Flutter, the fop in Etherege's last play, is to Elwin "an affected fool, and his conversation is conceived to suit his character,"\(^{41}\) while to Dobrée he is "without affectation."\(^{42}\) Dorimant, the rake-hero in this play, Dobrée goes on, is "cruel...a outrageous bully,"\(^{43}\) but to Miss Lynch he is "superlatively well-bred, witty,...the finest of all fine gentlemen in Restoration comedy."\(^{44}\)

---

36 Elwin, p. 64.
37 Nicoll, p. 236.
38 Elwin, p. 65.
39 Dobrée, p. 66.
40 Lynch, p. 154.
42 Dobrée, p. 74.
43 Dobrée, p. 69.
44 Lynch, p. 177.
In spite of their disagreements, however, all these critics were responsible for important influences on later critics. Etherege is no longer considered just historically important. If he is not granted the esteem accorded Congreve, he at least is admitted into a coterie which includes besides himself only Congreve and Wycherley. Miss Lynch's study is extremely valuable because it shows Etherege and his contemporaries as belonging to and developing out of the mainstream of English drama rather than being influenced only by French comedy.

Since World War II four major studies of Restoration comedy have appeared, all of which demonstrate a reaction to both manners and moral criticisms. Elisabeth Mignon accepts the theses of Palmer, Dobrée, and Lynch, who, she says, have "distinguished the social pattern of this comedy." But, she continues, "There is still need for detailed examination of the constituents in the pattern."45 Her examination consists of looking at the attitudes expressed by the playwrights toward old age. She concludes that a kind of cult of youth dominates the comedy of manners, a cult which is an artistic expression of the rejection of Cromwellian mores and customs by the ridiculing of people who had accepted them:

...there are two periods: youth and senescence, the latter, beginning when the individual becomes physically and psychologically unfit for the social game.46

45 Elisabeth Mignon, Crabbed Age and Youth, the Old Men and Women in the Restoration Comedy of Manners (Durham, 1947), p. vii.
46 Mignon, p. 39.
Curiously enough, Miss Mignon never mentions whether or not she likes Etherege's plays, but she does explain his characters in terms of her thesis, and because in The Comical Revenge "there is no figure in or approaching the senile state," Etherege seems to her to be "only anticipating...comedy of manners."^47

Thomas Fujimura presents the first total break with the "manners" school. In fact, he proposes that the term "manners" in the descriptive title given to Restoration comedy be changed to "wit."

It is my belief that the morality of Restoration comedy is naturalistic, and that the dramatists dealt with moral issues, though wittily rather than soberly. The "manner" interpretation, which is really a variation on the theory of art for art's sake disregards the place of morality in art, and consequently emasculates the literary work that it is intended to justify."^48

Because of the temper of the times, says Fujimura, Restoration dramatists accepted a kind of Hobbsian belief in naturalism, in which the individual is responsible only for what nature prompts him to do. An Etherege hero is portrayed "realistically as a young man true to his own libertine and egoistic nature."^49 Conversely those characters who are ridiculed have "deviated from nature." Moreover, Fujimura extends this theory to the language of the plays. Etherege accepted

^47 Mignon, p. 37.


^49 Fujimura, p. 54.
the "egoistic theory of laughter...expounded by Hobbes, according to which men laughed from a sudden realization of their superiority over someone else," states a superiority which depended upon a correct use of wit.

According to this point of view, the experience of wit is a titillation of the mind arising from the novelty of the idea (a similitude, paradox, antithesis etc.)

In the light of this theory, Etherege's plays become increasingly better from the first to the last because in each the characters are more clearly defined and differentiated in terms of their use of wit. Sir Frederick in *The Comical Revenge* displays more "false wit" than real wit, and so he fails to fulfill his role as rake-hero; his antics are "sophomoric." Dorimant in *The Man of Mode,* however, is a perfect wit because "...his gallantry...is more predatory than courtly."

Dale Underwood examines the internal unity of Etherege's plays in his book-length study of this Restoration comic dramatist. Underwood recognizes that previous critics "...have added much to our understanding of this body of drama," but his concern is

...what the nature of that comedy is and how, if at all, the several elements of manners, wit, realism, artificiality, and style constitute aspects of a unified comic expression.53

50 Fujimura, p. 9. 51 Fujimura, p. 32.
52 Fujimura, p. 106.
In order to analyze that nature, Underwood examines the relationship of Hobbsian philosophy and naturalism to Etherege's comedy. However, he also looks at earlier seventeenth century comedy, its traditions and customs, and relates these to Etherege's work. Underwood uses his conclusions in close readings and analyses of the plays. Thus after expounding the idea that "philosophically the libertine was an antirationalist denying the power of man through reason to conceive reality," Underwood is able to show that The Comical Revenge is not merely a series of unrelated scenes, as earlier critics had believed, but rather an attempt to define the antirationalist in conflict with a traditional rational ethical code. The attempt at definition gives the play its cohesiveness, and Underwood concludes that the play is unified.

Each of the three plots in the prose portion of the play supplies its own opposition to this heroic courtly world. But the contrast is more sharply focused, as we expect from the exposition, in the central character, Sir Frederick, who becomes thereby the play's comic hero.

This idea, here artistically ill-conceived, is repeated in Etherege's other two plays where the characters serve as foils and contrasts to each other.

Norman Holland, the most recent critic of Restoration comedy, follows Underwood's lead in attempting to find unity in Etherege's plays. He announces in his introduction that the unity of each play

54 Underwood, p. 13.  
55 Underwood, p. 46.
is expressed by the recurrent theme of "nature" and "appearance," "...the conflict between 'manners' (i.e. social conventions) and antisocial 'natural' desires."56 Holland, for whom these plays represent a "silver age of English comedy"57 attempts to analyze the plays without the restrictions of either a "manners" or a "morals" thesis. Each analysis

...attempts to show first how the various parts of each play--plots, characters, events, and language--all fit together into one unified whole, and second, to show how that whole reveals certain aspects of reality.58

Like Underwood, Holland sees part of this unity through Etherege's use of contrasting characters. In The Comical Revenge, for instance, Sir Frederick is a foil to Beaufort and Cully; Sir Frederick's servant Dufoy in turn serves as a foil to his master. Again, like Underwood, Holland concludes that the several plot lines in the play do comment on one another, although the play is awkwardly organized. The failure of the play is that it is "not overpoweringly funny."59 Holland concludes that Etherege's use of contrasting characters is most successful in The Man of Mode "...the sleek competence of Dorimant contrasts with the strained effects of Sir Popling."60 Unity is achieved because both plots in the play are resolved by means of some phase of Dorimant's actions.

——

57 Holland, p. 8.
58 Holland, p. 7.
60 Holland, p. 81.
Why then another study of Etherge's plays? Because, though the studies by Professors Fujimura, Underwood, and Holland offer penetrating analyses of Etherge's art as a comic dramatist, they do not concentrate on Etherge's immense talent for characterization. Fujimura has purposely limited his book to a study of language in Restoration comedies. Underwood limits his study in another way. He convincingly demonstrates the ways in which Etherge's comedies are artistic reflections of philosophical thought in the tradition of Hobbsian naturalism, and he shows how the various characters in these plays demonstrate various facets of that philosophy. But he fails to say whether or not the plays are artistically successful. In addition, he does not explain why some of Etherge's characters do not fulfill their comic potential. For instance, Underwood correctly shows that Sir Frederick Frollick in *The Comical Revenge* embodies the Restoration libertine ideal, but he does not show why Sir Frederick is an unsuccessful portrayal of that ideal. Holland, who takes into account the careful scholarship of both Fujimura and Underwood, gives a rather general analysis of each Etherge play; his study is particularly valuable for his brilliant insights into the imagery of these comedies. But, he spends little time on detailed study of characterization.

The scope of this paper is, therefore, apparent; it will focus on Etherge's characterization in his three comedies, and thereby delineate an aspect of his talent which has never been sufficiently examined. Specifically, this paper has four purposes: to show what
certain stereotyped Restoration characters are like in each play, the libertine hero, the witty heroine, and the fop; second, by analyzing these characters and their relationships to one another in each play, to demonstrate the improvements in Etherege's ability to portray characters who are successful; third, to suggest how Etherege's characters become more individual within the confines of their typed roles in each successive play; and finally, to perhaps contribute to a more provocative reading of all three plays.

To accomplish these ends, I have divided Etherege's characters into two broad classes: those with intelligence and those without. In the first class are the heroes and heroines of his comedy. Each hero conforms to libertine values and is, therefore, a type: Sir Frederick Frolick in *The Comical Revenge*, Courtall and Freeman in *She Would if She Could*, and Dorimant in *The Man of Mode*. The heroines also belong to a type because they too work in terms of a common value system: the Widow in *The Comical Revenge*, Gatty and Ariana in *She Would if She Could*, and Harriet in *The Man of Mode*.

Those characters who lack intelligence are also types. In each play they clarify the values of the heroes and heroines by serving as contrasts to them. The male characters in this group are fops because they attempt to emulate the libertine behavior of the heroes: Sir Nicholas Cully in *The Comical Revenge*, Sir Oliver Cockwood and Sir Joslin Jolly in *She Would if She Could*, and Sir Popling Flutter in *The Man of Mode*. Similarly, the female characters in this group (who fail to control their passions and cope successfully with the
machinations of the rake heroes) contrast with the heroines: Lady Cockwood in *She Would if She Could* and Mrs. Loveit in *The Man of Mode*.

The central conflict in which all these characters are involved is always the same in Etherege's plays. The libertine hero is attracted to the heroine because of her wealth, beauty, and wit. He attempts to seduce her but is unsuccessful and so he agrees to marry her. This conflict is represented as a contest; the hero exercises his wit and charm in an attempt to overcome the heroine. She, in turn, asserts her wit and charm in an attempt to resist the hero's advances. If she succumbs to her passion before he gives in to her appeal, the heroine loses the game and is seduced. If she wins, the libertine hero agrees to marry her, and no seduction takes place. In Etherege's three comedies, the hero is always defeated.

Obviously, a study focusing on characterization cannot provide an explication of every aspect of any one comedy. Consequently, this study does not analyze Etherege's superb sense of comic rhythm or his ability to manipulate convincingly the coming and going of a large number of characters through an intricate plot. It cannot show the qualities of Etherege's prose or his facile use of language. This study also excludes his mastery of paradox and imagery which was both topical and fascinating to seventeenth century audiences. Indeed, Professors Fujimura and Holland have quite ably analyzed the plays from this standpoint. Similarly, there is no need to duplicate the scholarship of Fujimura and Underwood who have traced out once and for all the sources of and the values implicit in the libertinage
typical in all these plays. One must take for granted critical conclusions about the libertine tradition in seventeenth century. However, it is possible to go beyond Holland and Underwood in one important critical matter. The need now is to realize that in the three plays of Etherege are three different kinds of libertine: Sir Frederick in *The Comical Revenge* is not really a successful libertine at all because of his ineptitude at seduction; Courtall and Freeman in *She Wou'd if She Cou'd* are successful libertines who are so carefully presented that they suggest that libertinage is a genuine ideal; Dorimant in *The Man of Mode* is a libertine who is presented so realistically that it is fair to assert that in his last play Etherege is showing how grimy libertinage really is.
Chapter II

The Comical Revenge or Love in a Tub
The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub, Etherege's first comedy, was produced in March, 1664, and published in July of that year.\footnote{H. F. B. Brett-Smith (ed.), Introduction to The Dramatic Works of Sir George Etherege (Oxford, 1927), I, xv.}

The play is an artistic failure not because it has several apparently unrelated threads of plot, as earlier critics have suggested, but because its major characters, the rake Sir Frederick Frollick, the heroine the Widow Rich, and the fop Sir Nicholas Cully, are poorly portrayed. Sir Frederick is a poor rake because, for one thing, he does not possess the intelligence one expects in a Restoration libertin. His frequent references to sex are more gross than witty, and his behavior is adolescent rather than sophisticated. The Widow serves only as a foil to Sir Frederick and so has no particular dimensionality. As a fop Sir Nicholas Cully vacillates between simple gullibility and vulgar affectation, and since each of these faults comes to the fore in separate episodes, it is impossible to form a single, cohesive impression of him. As a result of these failures in characterization, this comedy is little more than an occasionally funny series of farcical episodes.

Even so, recent critics have propounded a theory about Sir
Frederick's function in *The Comical Revenge* that deserves more than passing attention. Dale Underwood sees Sir Frederick as a link between the world of courtly love, represented by the play's upper plot, and the world of carnal sexuality, represented by the lower plot. Sir Frederick's marriage to the Widow is symbolic of a reconciliation of the best elements of these two worlds, and Sir Frederick himself becomes a golden mean:

At its worst [his marriage] is a compromise with the ineluctable desires of natural man in an unnatural society. At its best it possesses the essential foundations for fulfillment at a level above the libertine but below the romantic reaches of courtly assumption.2

Norman Holland, in his provocative study of Etherege, agrees with Underwood. The world of the upper plot substitutes for physical love a "kind of religious devotion to the loved one," while in the lower plot "the basest motives are tricked out as love, friendship, or honor."3 Consequently, because Sir Frederick "partakes of both sides," Holland also sees him as "a golden mean [who] casts a comic perspective on the doings of all the characters, both high and low."4

One would like to agree with Holland and Underwood, but to do so means to shut one's eyes to the fact that this rake's actions do not comply with the usual criteria for a golden mean. Sir Frederick is quite plainly a stupid, dull-witted, poorly-conceived libertine, incapable of understanding the comic compromise that results in his

---

2 Dale Underwood, p. 64.
3 Norman Holland, p. 25.
4 Norman Holland, p. 25.
marriage at the end of the play.

Assertions such as these are, of course, meaningless until substantiated by close analysis of crucial episodes in the play. And close analysis in this instance will be meaningful to the general reader only if he has a synoptic knowledge of the plot of the play, texts of which are not always easy to obtain.

The three strands of action in this comedy are quite uncomplicated. (1) Sir Frederick, a debauched libertine, sets out to seduce the Widow Rich, an intelligent, obviously attractive upper-class matron. His several attempts are unsuccessful; to win her favor he is forced to propose marriage and swear fidelity to her, an outcome she has sought throughout the play. (2) Graciana, the Widow's niece, is secretly in love with Lord Beaufort, but their love affair is complicated by Braciana's engagement to Colonel Bruce, a loyalist soldier who has been captured by Cromwellian forces and freed. Graciana vacillates between the two men; duty and honor demand that she marry Bruce, while true love demands that she marry Beaufort. After a duel between the rivals, Beaufort wins Graciana's hand, and Bruce is pledged to her sister, Aurelia. (3) Concurrently, Sir Nicholas Cully, a country gentleman knighted by Cromwell, is duped in a card game by two confidence men, Wheadle and Palmer, and loses a thousand pounds. In a related episode, Wheadle suggests that Cully woo a lady pretending to be the rich Widow but who is actually Wheadle's mistress. Sir Frederick prevents that marriage and subsequently tricks Cully, Palmer, and Wheadle into marriages
with women of questionable reputation.

These three plots do not have equal significance in the total action. The episodes involving Beaufort and Graciana, which are set in heroic couplets, are not intended to be humorous and therefore contribute little to the comic tone of the play. Since neither these serious characters, nor their language and their sentimental entanglements reoccur in subsequent comedies by Etherege, they are omitted from the following analysis. But, the courtly world of these episodes is important for two reasons in a discussion of Sir Frederick and the Widow. First, the Widow, like Beaufort and Graciana, believes in traditional Christian values, the validity of marriage, and spiritual love. Second, Beaufort's courtly love values are contrasted with Sir Frederick's values in the scenes in which the two appear together.

The most important strand of action in The Comical Revenge is the conflict which takes place between the Widow and Sir Frederick, a game of wits in which Sir Frederick pits his libertine skills against the wileness of the Widow. Because this situation occupies much of the play (and is a situation repeated in the two subsequent comedies of Etherege) it is the most important of the three plots in The Comical Revenge. Comical here are the complicated attempts of each protagonist to win the battle of the sexes. In each of their several skirmishes, the Widow reduces Sir Frederick from his pose as a witty libertine to a vindictive and petulant fop. Eventually, to
win anything, Sir Frederick is obliged to propose marriage. Consequently, because Sir Frederick is so easily conquered and is reduced to much less than the ideal libertine, it is hard to consider him an ideal golden mean, as Holland and Underwood suggest.

II

Before commenting on the episodes leading up to Sir Frederick's humiliating defeat, one must explain the ideal of the Restoration libertine from which he deviates so obviously. In general, the libertine rejects moral and religious traditions and institutions which he either believes no longer valid or which he cannot rationally justify. He believes only in the reality of his physical appetites which must be gratified rather than denied. Consequently, the libertine is preoccupied with the pleasures of drink, food, and sex. In part his belief that these hedonistic pleasures are justifiable stems from his observance of the hypocrisy of those who pretend to uphold orthodox Christian moral beliefs which they do not, indeed cannot, practice. Unlike such hypocrites, the libertine recognizes the absurdity of trying to meet traditional morality's requirement that appetite be denied and simultaneously the demands of his physical self which cries out for satisfaction, for both demands cannot be satisfied at once. Religion, then is unimportant to the libertine except when on occasion he must profess a belief in traditional moral values in order to trick a hypocrite into helping him satisfy his physical desires. The libertine's deviations from
his assaults upon traditional moral codes are usually sexual, and apart from his beliefs, he is wealthy, handsome, and courageous. But above all he must be intelligent; he must be able to demonstrate his intelligence in witty dialogue and subtle plots whose end is seduction.5

Accordingly, the point I have been moving toward is this: Sir Frederick deviates in too many significant ways from this definition to be considered a successful rake. The first two scenes of The Comical Revenge show conclusively that Sir Frederick embodies some of these libertine values, but the remainder of the play demonstrates that he lacks the single most important trait of the rake—intelligence. For without it, Sir Frederick is neither a convincing libertine nor a satisfactory character.

III

The first two scenes of The Comical Revenge dramatize the world, the values, and the limitations of Sir Frederick Prollick, who is first discussed by his servant Dufay. Sir Frederick, who had been drinking the night before, had cracked open Dufay's head. Such drinking bouts occur regularly in Sir Frederick's life. Dufay's speech also divulges another of Sir Frederick's important characteristics. He behaves impulsively, rather than rationally. Yet contrary

5 For a more detailed explanation of the values of the libertine see Thomas Fujimura, The Restoration Comedy of Wit (Princeton, New Jersey, 1952), Chapters I and II; and Underwood, Chapters I and II.
to expectation, when Sir Frederick does appear he is humble and apologetic rather than pugnacious.

Dufoy: Good-mor, good-mor to your Vorshippe; me am alvay ready to attende your Worshippe, and your Vorshippe's alvay ready to beaté and to abuse mé; you were drunke de lasté nighté, and my head aké to day morning;...

Sir Fred: Prethee Forbear; I am sorry for it.

(I, ii, 1-14)

An important characteristic of Sir Frederick's world is its lack of order and apparent chaos. In addition to Dufoy, Clark (Beaufort's servant), and Beaufort, fiddlers and coachmen soon arrive to demand payment for the damage done during the previous night's debauch. Jenny, servant to Grace, Wheadle's mistress and owner of the house where the drinking party took place, also appears to criticize Sir Frederick's wildness. Again he appears humble and apologetic, but because he does not believe that what he has done is morally wrong, his apology is insincere. As a libertine, Sir Frederick has not sinned because he does not admit that fulfilling natural appetite is sinful. Thus his hangover, his scolding servant, his angry debtors, and the furious Jenny are only physical discomforts. He will not argue, accepts their rebukes, and offers apologies simply to rid himself of nuisances.

Sir Frederick's world, we learn, is peopled by characters of inferior social class who are intimately connected with vice. Dufoy has a venereal disease; Grace runs a house of prostitution; Wheadle is

6 All citations to the plays of Etherege refer to The Dramatic Works of Sir George Etherege, ed. with intro. and notes by H. P. B. Brett-Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1927).
a thief. Excessive drinking is their major recreation, and in this corrupt atmosphere, Sir Frederick is thoroughly at home.

In the second scene of Act I we are introduced to another significant characteristic of Sir Frederick. No matter what the topic, his speeches consistently contain sly references to sex; in fact, Sir Frederick cannot refer to a woman without alluding to sex. Thus, in an attempt to describe his hangover, he says:

"Now do I feel more Qualms than a young woman in breeding" (I, ii, 26-27). He follows this comparison with a gross reference to Beaufort's relationship with Graciana. "Mrs. Graciana has flung a squib into his Bosome, where the wild-fire will hugee for a time, and then crack; it fly's out at's breeches" (I, ii, 196-8).

His actions as well as his language in this scene again indicate Sir Frederick's central preoccupation. After a denunciation of his tactlessness by Jenny, Sir Frederick tries to dispell her fury with an embrace--hardly a tactful act and not what one would expect from a paragon of libertine subtlety and craft. But more important, his actions are not those of a character symbolizing a golden mean that links his depraved world with the courtly world of Beaufort and the Widow.

Sir Fred. ...trust me not if thou are not grown most wondrous pretty.

Maid. [Offers to hug her] Stand off, or I protest I'le make the people in your Lodging know what a manner of man you are.

Sir Fred. You and I have been intimate acquaintances; why so coy now, Jenny?

(I, ii, 92-97)
As a representative of a more cultivated world than that to which Sir Frederick is accustomed, Beaufort is a discordant note in this scene. Although his love for Graciana is honorable and apparently follows traditional values, his romance is parodied and reduced to sexual terms in Sir Frederick's first mention of it,

"...how thrive you in your more honourable adventures? Is harvest time near? When is the Sickle to be put i'th' Corn?" (I, ii, 170-1).

The difference between the two worlds becomes explicit in Beaufort's reply which equates happiness with marriage. Beaufort at least professes reverence for the traditional mores Frolick defies.

Sir Frederick's reply to Beaufort establishes once and for all his attitude toward women. He suggests that Beaufort reveres Graciana "unnaturally" since she is mortal.

I mistrust your Mistresses Divinity; you'l find her Attributes but Mortal; Women, like Juglers' tricks, appear Miracles to the ignorant; but in themselves th'are mere cheats,

(I, ii, 179-181)

The sense of superiority over women which the Restoration rake typically feels is obvious in this statement. The rake has this attitude because he thinks of women as irrational and incapable of coping with life. As Sir Frederick notes, "...men are now and then subject to those infirmities in drink, which women have when th' are sober" (II, ii, 60-62). Ironically, these statements and his preoccupation with sexuality indicate the limits of Sir Frederick's knowledge of women, for Sir Frederick's failure in his conflict with the Widow stems from the paucity and inaccuracy of that knowledge.
Sir Frederick himself recognizes that he is not a golden mean. When Beaufort invites him to dine at "My Lord Bevill's table," he replies that he will accept only "...upon condition you'll excuse my errors; you know my conversation has not been amongst ceremonious ladies" (I, ii, 189-190). This statement indicates Sir Frederick's recognition of the gulf between his world and that of society, and such a recognition would be valuable to Sir Frederick if he were bright enough to operate in terms of it. But unfortunately, in his battles with the Widow, he forgets the gap between their respective worlds. How foreign the world of Lord Bevill's table and Beaufort's romance is to that of Sir Frederick really becomes apparent when Beaufort hints that the Widow has become interested in him. "What?" replies Sir Frederick, "the Widow has some kind thoughts of my body?" (I, ii, 204-5). How gauche is this reply! But it is typical. Sir Frederick has the idiotic pride of those who can think only in terms of their own sexual attractiveness.

That he believes the Widow is seeking only sexual gratification and will be easy prey is indicated in his last speech in scene ii. "Well, since 'tis my fortune, i'le about it. Widow, thy ruine lie on thy own head: Faith, my Lord, you can witness 'twas none of my seeking" (II, ii, 214-218). Sir Frederick reveals his own stupidity by simplifying the situation between himself and the Widow. By assuming that she is physically attracted to him, and that there is no other reason for her interest in him, he imposes on her the attitudes which he associates with the women he has
known intimately, like Wheadle's mistress Grace, Grace's maid, and his own current wench, Lucy. Thus he sets out to seduce the Widow Rich without realizing that she may not be amenable to seduction.

The first two scenes of this comedy demonstrate that Sir Frederick enters the lists with the Widow severely handicapped by two misconceptions about women he has developed as a result of his previous experiences with them. Because the women Sir Frederick knows intimately are all accustomed to vice and sexuality, he assumes that all women are sexually motivated; and because he has mastered the women in his world, he assumes that he is superior to all women. If Sir Frederick were truly as intelligent as the ideal libertine, he would not attempt to transfer his knowledge of how to seduce lower class women to an attempted seduction of an upper-class woman; he would recognize that approaches which succeed with Grace or Jenny are not apt to succeed with the Widow.

IV

The scenes between the Widow and Sir Frederick are repetitive. Three times he attempts a trick which he hopes will result in the Widow's admission of her desire for him. Each trick fails either because it does not appeal to her or because he is foiled by extraneous circumstances. Moreover, each trick is more ludicrous than the last. First Sir Frederick storms her house with a retinue of musicians and servants. Next he plays dead and is carried into her home on a bier. Finally, he sends her a note telling her he is
imprisoned and requesting bail. It is noticeable that in each incident he depends on mechanical devices rather than wit to gain the Widow's favor and that each succeeding incident more emphatically develops the idea that Sir Frederick cannot cope with the Widow in a face-to-face confrontation.

The failure of each trick is followed by an attempt by Sir Frederick on the Widow's person, her rejection of him, and his angry exit. Accordingly, a detailed explication of one such episode is sufficient to demonstrate the nature of all of them. The first encounter differs from the others in one important respect: Sir Frederick here learns enough about the Widow's character so that he ought to realize that all his ridiculous tricks will inevitably fail. The fact that he never does makes his stupidity clear.

On first meeting the Widow, Sir Frederick is obviously feeling his way. "Whither, whither do you draw me, Widow? What's your design?" (II, i, 18-19). He recognizes that she is strangely different from other women he has encountered, and he lets his guard down by showing that he is mystified about how she should be treated. His attempt to use the language of love that Beaufort uses with Graciana is a failure. The Widow replies on a witty level and calls Sir Frederick "foolishly conceited." Sir Frederick's vaunted superiority begins to disappear rapidly:

Sir Fred. Faith I wou'd have thee come as near as possible to something or other I have been us'd to converse with, that I may better know how to entertain thee.
Widow. Pray which of those Ladies you use to converse with, could you fancy me to like?
Be merry and tell me.
Sir Fred. Twere too great a sin to compare thee to any of them; and yet th'ast so incens'd me, I can hardly forbear to wish thee one of 'em.

(II, i, 40-48)

Then, in keeping with his character and in spite of his tacit recognition that she is different from his usual tavern wench, Sir Frederick attempts to mollify the Widow in the same way he tried to temper Jenny's anger: "By those lips..." and then Sir Frederick, rejected physically, resorts to the first of many petulant retorts about the nature of his opponent's sexuality: "Widows must needs have furious flames; the bellows have been at work and blown 'em up." (II, i, 94).

Sir Frederick's wish that the Widow might be the kind of woman he has known is changed to compulsion in succeeding scenes. He indicates twice that he recognizes the gulf between the Widow and himself, and implicit in this recognition is the knowledge that to seduce her he must use tactics different from those he has used in the past. Also implicit is Etherge's need as an author to show that Sir Frederick gradually recognizes his inability to seduce the Widow and his growing love for her. And so Sir Frederick becomes increasingly anxious to gain the Widow's favor, for only in this way can Etherge prepare for Sir Frederick's sudden shift from a lascivious rake to a doting lover at the play's conclusion. However, either Etherge or Sir Frederick has forgotten his recognition of
the Widow's special qualities because when Sir Frederick approaches her in later scenes, his actions reveal a memory lapse.

One speech in these episodes deserves consideration because it points out Etherege's failure to give Sir Frederick any awareness of how grotesque his failure is. After the Widow has sent the bail to release Sir Frederick from his feigned imprisonment—an apparent victory for him—he taunts and ridicules her before his servant.

Kind Widow, thank thee for this release; ha, ha, ha; where is your counterplot, Widow? Ha, ha, ha, Laugh at her, Dufoy. Come, be not so melancholy; we'll to the Park; I care not if I spend a piece or two upon thee in Tarts and Cheesecakes. Pish, Widow, why so much out of humour? 'Tis no shame to love such a likely young fellow.

(V, ii, 145-151)

This speech more than suggests Sir Frederick's stupidity. The attitude he displays is not that of an artful and successful seducer. It is the attitude of a coarse and revengeful child. Sir Frederick actually believes the Widow has been competing with him on his own level and is now going to submit to his desires. However, the Widow reacts differently and sends him away.

By this point in the play it is impossible to conceive of Sir Frederick as a golden mean. All he does is a reflection of the disordered, vice-corrupted world of which he is a part. To truly be a golden mean, he must combine the best of the libertine world—its vitality and lack of hypocrisy—with the best in the Widow's world. Sir Frederick cannot accomplish this feat; nothing he has said indicates that he has learned anything at all about the Widow's world.
Consequently, when Sir Frederick is finally willing to accept the Widow's conditions about marriage and fidelity, he does so in a way that belies consistency in characterization. Marriage in Sir Frederick's code is not a natural state, yet he now accepts without hesitation this institution. His acceptance is not believable. All Etherege has shown us in the character of Sir Frederick is his failure to recognize that his knowledge of women is incomplete.

Only on the level of language does Etherege satisfactorily show how the positions of the Widow and Sir Frederick have been reversed. She is his superior at the end of the play. In Act I Sir Frederick could state that the conflict between a man and a woman is like that of a man fishing:

> Some women, like fishes, despise the Bait, or else suspect it, whilst still its bobbing at their mouths; but subtilly wav'd by the Angler's hand, greedily hang themselves upon the hook. There are many so critically wise; they'll suffer none to deceive them, but themselves. (I, ii, 207-211)

In the last scene the metaphor is reversed, and the Widow can say of Sir Frederick, "when your gorge is empty you'll come to the lure again" (V, v, 51-2). But this reversal does not work. Sir Frederick simply has not grown enough to make his comic fall acceptable. He will never succeed as a true libertine; he has neither the intelligence nor the cunning. As a rake, his only sterling characteristic is a lack of conscience.

The Widow's sole function in the play is to serve as a foil to Sir Frederick, and this she does admirably. Fujimura claims that
the Widow "...shows a lack of the perspicacity and the malice of a true wit, so that she is no ready match for Sir Frederick" but quite the contrary is true. The Widow successfully counters Sir Frederick on an intellectual level in all of their exchanges. She is not, however, a credible character because her failure to be totally repulsed by Sir Frederick belittles the judgment and intelligence which she shows throughout the rest of the play. As a woman in love she is not a sympathetic character. She has little depth as a character simply because Etherege tells only enough about her to satisfy the demands of his plot. Consequently, she shows none of the complexity of personality of Etherege's later heroines.

V

The most obviously unsuccessful character in *The Comical Revenge* is Sir Nicholas Cully, the Cromwellian knight. Indeed, there are two Cullys, or so it seems from the different pictures Etherege gives of him in the two episodes in which he is involved. Cully is the fop, a type which in Restoration comedy usually has one quality which never varies: the attempt in some way to emulate the manners and actions of the libertine hero. He thus becomes an important figure in the plays, because his presence reinforces through contrast the position of the hero, because he is an example of what is ridiculous in the libertine code and because his purpose in the play is to serve as a butt of derision. The laughter accorded him is cruel. He may, however, transcend

---

7 Fujimura, p. 91.
the audience's contempt and become, like Sir Popling Flutter in Etheredge's last play, a character who is compelling because of the individual qualities he possesses.

Typically, then, Cully's function in *The Comical Revenge* is to serve as a foil to Sir Frederick. One expects, therefore, that Cully's behavior will indicate both his stupidity and his affectation so strongly that the reader can react to him with contempt. Such, however, is not the case, because there are two Cullies. The first is gullible and innocent, and does not deserve our contempt while the second is stupid, gross, and extremely affected. Only the second Cully truly follows the requirements for the fop as a type in Restoration drama.

The first Cully episode presents the gullible side of his character and scarcely hints at his contemptible aspects. He is flattered by Wheadle who pretends to be his friend, but who plans to exploit him instead. In his first appearance Cully makes only perfunctory remarks, none of which indicate his stupidity. His eager reaction to Wheadle's proposal of an affair with some "Loyal-hearted Ladies" displays less foppishness than naivete. In the next scene, Wheadle, having received a false note from the woman Cully was to meet, feigns anger at her being unable to meet them. Innocent of the plot being carried out against him, Cully breathes the only air of common sense in the scene.

*Come, Come, Wheadle, another time will do; be not so passionate man. Pish, 'tis an accident: Come, let us drink a glass of Wine, to put these Women out of our heads.*

(II, iii, 29-34)
In spite of Cully's apparent greed in the gambling scene, he is guilty of none of the maliciousness of his companions. What is again more obvious than Cully's stupidity is simply his gullibility. In the duel scene, Etherege shows us an aspect of Cully's character which does indeed make him a contrast for Sir Frederick. Cully is a coward who prefers not to fight for his honor. However, Cully readily admits this trait while at the same time professing fear for Wheadle's safety because he thinks him a true friend. Because of his cowardice, Cully cannot fight; he rationalizes the situation and announces that his conscience keeps him from fighting in a "wrong Cause." Even in this scene, Cully is not contemptible; he only deserves pity.

The second Cully to appear is a more recognizable fop; in fact, he is a wholly different character. Thinking that through Wheadle he has made an assignation with the Widow, Cully sets out to imitate Sir Frederick. His speech lacks the sense and restraint it showed earlier, and his actions show that his naivete has been replaced by affectation:

Sir Nich. Wheadle and what think you of this Habit? Is it not very modish?
Whead. As any man need wear: How did you furnish yourself so suddenly?
Sir Nich. Suddenly? I protest I was at least sixteen Breakers, before I cou'd suit my self exactly into the fashion; but now I defie Sir Frederick! I am as fine as he, and will be as mad as he, if that will carry the Widow, I'le warrent thee.

(IV, ii, 11-19)
The contrast is obvious. This Cully, by assuming the dress and behavior of Sir Frederick, thinks he will be as appealing as he assumes Sir Frederick is. Instead, Cully only appears ludicrous. His toast to the "Widow," who is actually the prostitute Grace in disguise, shows Cully at his worst: "Here's a Brimmer then to her, and all the Fleas about her" (IV, iii, 23-4). He adds, "Shall I break the windows?" Sir Frederick had broken the windows at Grace's house out of a kind of exuberance that pervades all his actions. But his waggery, however sophomoric, is free from affectation. What Sir Frederick does, he does because he wants to, not because he is anxious to conform to a certain code. Cully, however, acts not because of an exuberant spirit but rather because he must conform to a rigid code in order to win the Widow, and more specifically the Widow's fortune. The second Cully behaves according to the way he believes Sir Frederick would behave. What is self-expression for the latter becomes prescription for the former. In summary, while Cully does serve—as on occasion—as a foil to Sir Frederick, he is not a credible character. His shift from simple gullibility to gross affectation is so rapid and inexplicable that the reader is confused and dissatisfied and is willing to believe that Etherege was wretchedly inept in his characterization of Cully. It is only the second Cully that anticipates the Etheregean fops in She Would if She Could and The Man of Mode.
Chapter III

She Would if She Could
She Would if She Could, Etherge's second comedy, did not appear until 1668, four years after the production and publication of The Comical Revenge.¹ This play is superior in every way to its predecessor and, although several elements have been retained from the first comedy (notably the machinations of a naturalistic man in a hypocritical society and the use of characters as foils and contrasts to one another), they have been worked into a pattern which is more unified and more meaningful, and far more complex.

In The Comic Spirit of the Restoration, Henry Ten Eyck Perry states, "It is significant how in each of Etherege's comedies the figure of a charming woman dominates the piece."² Yet, in his discussion of She Would if She Could, Perry admits that Lady Cockwood, a decidedly uncharming woman "...herself is the central figure of the piece, an object for mirth because she does not deceive her husband as she hopes and plans to do."³ His assessment of Lady Cockwood is essentially correct; she is the focus not only of many

¹ H. F. B. Brett-Smith, I, xxvii.
³ Perry, p. 15.
of the play's events but also of the theme: honor in conflict with sexual desires. She is more than this, however; she is a complete and compelling study of frustrated sexuality whose unique personality contributes to the overall success of the play.

The chief characters in *She Would if She Could* repeat, with one exception, roles Etheredge established as typically his own in *The Comical Revenge*. Sir Frederick Frolick's role as a libertine has been taken over by two protagonists: Courtall and Freeman. Sir Nicholas Cully's role as dupe and fop is repeated by Sir Oliver Cockwood and Sir Joslin Jolley. The Widow in *The Comical Revenge* has no exact counterpart in this play. In fact, her role as foil to the libertine hero seems to have been split in two. Ariana and Gatty, the unmarried, attractive, and witty young naturalistic heroines of the play, assume only part of the Widow's role. Lady Cockwood, a new type, a female dupe to be contrasted with the young ladies, just as her husband and kinsman are to be contrasted with Courtall and Freeman. She is--like the Widow--a woman who has once satisfied her sexual desires but who now has an established social reputation for honor and chastity which restrains her from further satisfactions. The use of two characters for each typed role enable Etheredge to be more explicit in his development of the values and ideals of each role. Courtall answers questions put to him by Freeman, so that their dialogue is a way of defining their libertine ideals. Similarly, Ariana asks Gatty questions about the nature of their values. Sir Joslin is little more than a plot
contrivance for aiding and encouraging Sir Oliver's insane attempts at debauchery, which hardly need definition.

Though the several plot lines of the earlier play have been replaced with a single plot in this comedy, the action is not less but more complicated. Lady Cockwood returns to London, after an absence of five months, with her husband Sir Oliver, her kinsman Sir Joslin, and Sir Joslin's nieces, Ariana and Gatty. Lady Cockwood hopes to renew an unconsummated affair with Courtall, a young town rake and an acquaintance of her husband. Courtall and his friend Freeman, however, are attracted to Sir Joslin's nieces, whom throughout the play they are anxious to seduce. As a consequence, Lady Cockwood's attempts at a successful assignation with Courtall are continually thwarted, since Courtall uses his friendship with the Cockwoods only as a means of arranging an assignation for himself and Freeman with the young ladies. But Ariana and Gatty thwart the rakes even when leading them on, and by the end of the play have forced them into sincere proposals of marriage. Throughout, Sir Oliver and Sir Joslin consider themselves the epitome of wicked town gallants, even to the point of employing a certain Mr. Rake-Hell, a procurer. But they are foiled at every sexual attempt by the unexpected presence of the rest of the characters who, in turn, are frustrated in their own assignations.

Etherege's theme of honor in conflict with desire is characterized by the two sets of opposing values, at polar extremes from one
another. Lady Cockwood and her husband profess a belief in orthodox Christian morality, symbolized by their alleged belief in marriage. In reality, they believe only in adhering to the accepted moral code of a hypocritical society in order to protect their own reputations from criticism, and so they adhere to the obligations of formal marriage vows only outwardly. Consequently, the word "honor" has meaning for the Cockwoods only in its social context. For Lady Cockwood honor has become synonymous with reputation; to her, honor can only be violated if her sexual variances from the mores permitted by the social code should become publically known.

In contrast, Courtall and Freeman believe in a libertine code which allows them to gratify their sexual appetite without compunction. They do not accept orthodox belief in marriage because such beliefs would impede the satisfaction of their healthy sexual appetite. Thus, honor for them means the abjuration of honor as understood by the Cockwoods and by orthodox Christianity. To do so would be to accept hypocrisy as moral behavior. Nevertheless they are willing to work within the boundaries of the agreed social code, if by so doing they can satisfy these desires. Moreover, their honor can be violated only when adherence to the hypocritical social code becomes necessary. Consequently, the comedy implicit in the situation lies in the fact that the proponents of both sets of values are in different ways hypocrites.

Lady Cockwood is torn between two desires: her fervent wish to maintain her reputation as an honorable woman and her equally
intense desire to gratify her overdeveloped libidinous instincts. Courtall is similarly, if less furiously, driven by two desires: his wish to be true to his libertine beliefs by achieving sexual union with Gatty outside the bonds of marriage, and his desire to find out why he is attracted to Gatty by feelings which are not just sexual. By the denouement, each of these characters has a comic fall. Lady Cockwood is forced to choose between her reputation and her passion; she is comic because she chooses reputation and honor, a code which in reality she does not understand and would not accept in her heart, if she did. Courtall is forced to repudiate his rejection of the validity of marriage—a fundamental principle in the libertine code—by agreeing to marry Gatty, with whom he has fallen in love.

The chief difference between these two characters is their intelligence. Lady Cockwood's comic fall and compromise, her final decision to seek sexual gratification only in marriage and thus preserve her honor, is less valuable because of the nature of what she considers to be honorable. She is exposed as a stupid woman, for she never recognizes that honor and integrity ought to be inseparable and that to be truly honorable she must appear honorable to herself as well as to society. Thus her reformation is not a reformation at all. By choosing reputation over passion, she remains a hypocrite in terms of the code she professes to respect; she has simply substituted pride for passion.

Courtall's comic fall and compromise is quite another thing.
By marrying Gatty he is, it is true, moving away from his libertine position. But one cannot assume that his fall represents an acceptance of traditional values or a substantiation of them on the part of Etherege, any more than one can assume that the implied condemnation of Lady Cockwood is a Christian indictment of a hypocrite. Eventually, Etherege condemns Lady Cockwood for her failure to recognize the nature of the system of values she espouses. But this condemnation does not imply that those values are wrong or right. Thus, her role in the play is finally negative. Courtall's fall and compromise is actually an indication of growth in his perceptiveness. While Lady Cockwood is denied both sexual satisfaction and honor, Courtall is rewarded by being given the object of his desires, although not on his own terms. His growth depends on his recognizing that perhaps with Gatty he can achieve a reasonable kind of sexual satisfaction within marriage.

To make a moralistic philosopher out of Etherege, to say that he affirms the conventions of marriage by comically re-defining them, would be then, an indefensible position. But to say that he attempts to find some sense in marriage in terms of the libertine code is, I think a statement wholly defensible in terms of this play. For this reason, the characters in this play must be examined in the light of the theme of honor versus natural desires and in the light of the various attitudes they express toward marriage.
II

Courtall and Freeman, although they appear almost always together and subscribe to libertine beliefs, are not equally important in the play. It is Courtall for whom Lady Cockwood has a compulsive desire, and for whom Sir Oliver has the greatest regard. While talking with Courtall in the first scene of the play, Sir Oliver gives his impression of Freeman: "There cannot be a better—well--Servant, Ned, Servant, Ned" (174-5). Indeed, all the characters in this comedy consider Freeman subservient to Courtall. Courtall arranges all the plots in the seduction attempts as well as the attempts to manipulate Lady Cockwood. Freeman recognizes his own dependence on Courtall's intelligence in Act III.

Free. Well! what counter-plot?...I am ready to receive your orders.
Cour. Faith, things are not so well contriv'd as I could have wish'd 'em, and yet I hope by the help of Mrs. Gazet to keep my word. Franck.
Free. Nay, now I know what tool thou hast made choice of, I make no question but the bus'ness will go well forward,...
Cour. Leave all things to me, and hope the best; be gone...

(III, i, 91-113)

Courtall is thus the leader of the pair. But this preceding bit of dialogue is also important for another reason. Courtall will

---

4 The names of many characters in this comedy are significant because they indicate their bearer's characteristics. Courtall implies sexual freedom. Freeman's name indicates his belief in liberty and freedom from moral restrictions. Oliver recalls Puritanism and thus has unpleasant connotations. Sir Joslin Jolley is always good-natured. Cockwood, besides the obvious sexual pun, recalls "Woodcock," a species of bird noted traditionally for its stupidity.
indeed "keep his word," because he and Freeman share the libertine belief in not keeping their word; the rake who violates the sexual ethics condoned by a hypocritical code feels no regret at lying to people who believe in that code. Since he holds such people in contempt for violating their own code, the rake feels justified in hoodwinking them in order to achieve his own satisfaction. However, to lie to or cheat one who shares his beliefs would be anathema to the rake. To do so would be to commit the worst kind of hypocrisy, for it would amount to a denial, paradoxically, of the libertine code itself. Thus Courtall establishes a kind of honor within the libertine code by being honest in his conduct with his friend Freeman.

Since as typical rakes Courtall and Freeman love the chase, a new affair always seems better to them than an old one. Consequently, their boredom in the opening scene establishes another important aspect of the libertine code, the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake.

Court. Well, Franck, what is to be done today?  
Free. Faith, I think we must e'ne follow the old trade; eat well, and prepare our selves with a bottle or two of good Burgundy, that our old acquaintance may look lovely in our Eves; for, ought as I see, there is no hopes of new.  
(I, i, 3-8)

This scene also explains Courtall and Freeman's eagerness for affairs with Ariana and Gatty who have all the attraction of the unknown.

Desire and intelligence are considered inseparable by the libertine. Thus, for a seduction to be truly satisfying, the libertine
must be pitted against an opponent who will test his intelligence and finesse. Success in a seduction becomes then a total success of the will; the libertine has satiated not only his sexual desire but also affirmed the egoistic demands of his intelligence. Since seduction requires plots and counterplots, demands intelligent strategy, and is a game, success signifies that the libertine has won a signal contest. Accordingly, his comic fall, being forced into marriage, is the penalty for having lost the sexual game.

Now one way of looking at the compromise in each character who loses this game is to say that he is willing to accept that penalty good-naturedly because he recognizes that he has lost according to rules he knows. In The Comical Revenge Sir Frederick appears to be playing such a game with the Widow because he indulges in plots and attempts her seduction. He fails as a character because Etherege fails to give him enough intelligence to make him a worthy participant in the game. His sudden willingness to accept the Widow at the end of the game is unconvincing. The success of Courttall and Freeman in She Would if She Could depends on Etherege’s making them intelligent enough to qualify for the wit combat with Ariane and Gatty and also making their comic fall believable by the end of the play. Courttall and Freeman must therefore demonstrate that they have definite opinions about marriage which have changed by the end of the play. Similarly, Etherege must demonstrate that they recognize superior qualities in Ariane and Gatty which convince the spectator that the heroes’ change in attitude is an intelligent
Courtall gives his opinion of marriage to Sir Oliver at the beginning of the play. The two have been discussing the horrors of being yoked to one woman. Sir Oliver blames marriage on the church and the clergy; Courtall replies:

I do not conceive it to be much for their profit, Sir Oliver, for I dare lay a good wager, let 'em allow Christian Liberty, and they shall get ten times more by Christenings, than they are likely to lose by marriages.

(I, i, 140-143)

In addition to sacrilegiously implying here that the clergy are motivated more by economics than by morals, Courtall also ably demonstrates how little he thinks of an institution which hampers sexual freedom. The irony here comes from the yoking of "Liberty," a term Courtall and Freeman frequently use to mean libertinage, and "Christian," a term antithetical to the idea of libertinage. Nevertheless, Courtall goes out of his way to persuade Sir Oliver that he is lucky to be married to a virtuous woman. His explanation of this lie to Freeman reveals something more about the libertine attitude toward marriage: "We ought to do all we can to confirm a Husband in the good opinion of his wife." (I, i, 210-212)

Since the rake does not recognize the bounds of marriage, he considers all women, married or not, possible targets for seduction. Courtall's emphasis on "we" in this statement further illustrates the antagonism the rake feels toward people who support the institution of marriage.
Courtall and Freeman have the same feelings of superiority as Sir Frederick. However, these rakes neither assert their feelings as much as Sir Frederick nor are they so lax as to underestimate the intelligence of the women they are pursuing. Thus, in his first encounter with Ariana and Gatty, Courtall indicates his own intelligence by recognizing the intelligence of the girls. His statement to Gatty, tempting her to remove her kirtzard, is ironic:

Now would not I see thy face for if it should but be half so good as thy humour, thou woudst dangerously tempt me to doat upon thee, and forgetting all shame, become constant.

(II, i, 145-148)

Although he does not mean what he says, his statement raises this question: Can the rake really become enamoured of a woman who combines intelligence with physical attraction? But what proves Courtall’s intelligence is his ability to recognize his opponent's goals. Sir Frederick thinks that the Widow desires him physically; consequently he is mystified when she rebuffs him. Courtall realizes, however, that when an unmarried woman like Gatty or Ariana becomes involved in the love game, she is interested in her opponent only to the extent that she can "tame him" (III, i, 105). But because Courtall does not believe in marriage, he does not believe that he can be tamed. Consequently, his next statement about marriage indicates that even in marriage a man has sexual freedom, "...for a Wife’s a dish of which if a man once surfeit, he shall have a better stomach to all others ever after" (III, iii, 280-2). One does not
know whether to believe Courtall or not at this point. He is talking to Sir Oliver, to whom he usually lies. If, however, this statement does possess a measure of truth, then Courtall has moved considerably away from his original libertine position. If he really thinks marriage is conceivable on these terms, then he becomes the same kind of hypocrite as the Cockwoods. Freeman makes a similarly ambiguous statement later in the scene when he attempts to explain Sir Oliver's wild conduct to Lady Cockwood: "If you did but know, Madam, what an odious thing it is to be thought to love a wife in good company, you would easily forgive him" (III, iii, 380-3). Is Freeman serious? Is it merely to fool Lady Cockwood that Freeman admits that a worthy man only appears not to love his wife? These statements suggest Courtall's and Freeman's limitations as well as what they have yet to learn and will learn in spite of themselves.

That they indeed have shifted ground on the subject of marriage is indicated in Act IV. Lady Cockwood has begun to suspect Courtall's feelings for the young girls, and so she counterfeits similar letters of assignation and sends them to both Freeman and Courtall. She intends to spy on Courtall to see if he comes to the meeting place, and thus confirm her suspicions. When the two rakes do appear, they are startled by each other's presence. The former camaraderie between them disappears. Each is jealous—certainly a libertine vice—that the other will find out about his assignation, and they exchange insults and retorts in order to force one another to leave. Their embarrassment and the deception that they practice indicates, too,
that they have moved partially away from the libertine code.

Freeman also suggests that Courtall should consummate his affair with Lady Cockwood, but Courtall has already explained that since Lady Cockwood is willing to accept him but not willing to play the game, she is hardly desirable; her lack of wit reduces her appeal. Freeman then becomes as coarse as Sir Frederick and belies the libertine belief that sexuality and intelligence are inseparable.

Thou should'st fast thyself up to a stomach now and then, to oblige her, if there were nothing in it, but the hearty welcome; methinks 'twere enough to make thee bear sometimes with the homeliness of the Fate.

(IV, ii, 145-9)

When Gatty and Ariana do appear, following Freeman's speech, the rakes are not prepared to meet them on the level of intelligence of their earlier confrontations. Etherege ably prepares us for their comic fall by showing how their intelligence in conversation falters, their plans fail, and their eagerness to consummate the affairs defeats their own libertine game; their conversation is gross, and their actions are flustered. Only once does Courtall's wit rise above grossness, and then it is in a new statement of his attitude toward marriage, a ridiculous if clever similitude equating friendship and promiscuity.

A Friend that bravely ventures his life in the field to serve me, deserves but equally with a Mistress that kindly exposes her honour to oblige me, especially when she does it as generously too, and with as little ceremony.

(IV, ii, 227-230)
But this speech only emphasizes Courtall's loss of composure. The ritual of the love contest is equated with the ritual of marriage in the pun on the word "ceremony." In addition, since Courtall has already recognized the intention of the women to seek the "ceremony" and since he himself has admitted delight in the game, his repetition of that recognition here only emphasizes his lust. Subsequently the young ladies defeat all the rakes' proposals, and Courtall's confusion becomes apparent in a way Sir Frederick's never does. He has lost a letter and exclaims "S' death! I am so dis-composed, I know not where I have put it" (IV, iii, 341-2).

In the last scene the rakes apparently realize that they have lost the game, and therefore enter into negotiations with the young ladies. Courtall admits that he might be coerced into promising marriage for "a valuable consideration." He then confesses that he has luckily escaped marriage but that he might be forced into it:

'Tis a mercy we have 'scap'd the mischief so long, and are like to do Penance only for our own sins; most families are a wedding behind hand in the World, which makes so many young men fool'd into Wives, to pay their Father's debts! all the happiness a Gentleman can desire is to live at liberty, till he be forc'd that way to pay his own. (V, ii, 465-9)

Much of this speech is sheer insouciance, but it is important for the ways in which Courtall equates happiness and liberty and marriage itself with mischief, but at the same time equates his unmarried conduct with sin and marriage with penance for those sins. The first set of comparisons are typical libertinage; the second set implies a
movement away from libertinage. Later Courtall admits metaphorically that he is tempted by Gatty in a way that ladies of the town have never tempted him. He contrasts the dullness of a town tenement with the pleasures of a country estate, and by implication contrasts the sterility of lives led by affected women with the fertility of the lives of natural country girls.

In the dialogue which follows the rakes' attempt to save face while submitting to the girls' terms and agree to be loyal suitors for a month before. Freeman's skepticism softens the compromise: "A month is a tedious time, and will be a dangerous tryal of our resolutions; But I hope we shall not repent before marriage, what're we do after." Thus, the way is open for the rakes to betray their marriages and return to their libertine beliefs. But they are trapped. If they treat their marriages as the Cockwoods have treated theirs, then the rakes will violate their honor as libertines by becoming hypocrites. But if—and this is comic irony—if they accept marriage and remain sexually constant, they will have abandoned their libertine beliefs about complete sexual freedom.

III

Turning now to the heroines, Gatty and Ariana, we can add to their intelligence other qualities that make them desirable opponents in the Restoration love game. They are also "Heiresses of very good fortune," young, and attractive. Unlike the Widow, however, Gatty and Ariana seek to fool and plot against men without sexual union in
mind, either in or outside marriage: "... whatsoever we do, prithee now let us resolve to be mighty honest." Gatty aptly characterizes the habits of a town gallant in a speech whose detail recalls Freeman's opening speech in the play. The gallant, she says, goes:

From one Play-house to the other Play-house, and if they like neither the Play nor the Women they seldom stay any longer than the combing of their Perriwigs, or a whisper or two with a friend; and then they dock their caps, and out they strut again.

Later when Ariana, who is less intelligent than Gatty, asks: "I wonder what they think of us!" Gatty replies:

You may easily imagine; for they are not of a humour so little in fashion, to believe the best: I assure you the most favourable opinion they can have, is that we are still a little wild, and stand in need of better manning.

Nevertheless, in spite of her lesser intelligence, it is Ariana who defines the girls' attitude toward marriage in her speech to the heroes in Act V. "I know you wou'd think it as great a Scandal to be thought to have an inclination for Marriage, as we shou'd to be believ'd willing to take our freedom without it." (V, i, 455-458)

Ariana and Gatty live by a set of values which differs in many respects from both the poles represented by the Cockwoods on one side and Courtall and Freeman on the other. These young ladies believe in maintaining their honor according to Lady Cockwood's system, yet simultaneously enjoying themselves much as do the heroes. Both girls enjoy plots and plans and the display of their wit, and they
also understand this contest—the battle of the sexes—its objectives and its rules. But their objective is different from that of the rake. By refusing to be seduced, they not only prove their superiority in the game but also cause their suitors to eventually "doat" on them. For the girls to give in to their natural desires and allow themselves to be seduced would be to admit defeat and lose face. However, giving in to passion is also a violation of their honor. For Ariana and Gatty honor means the preservation of their virginity until marriage especially in a contest of wits with men who feel, as the libertine does, a natural superiority to all women. Their ultimate goal is to reduce men from their so-called natural superiority ["...privileges which custom has allowed"] to the position of servants. "And if we find the Gallants like lawless Subjects, who the more their Princes grant, the more they impudently crave...we'll become absolute Tyrants, and deprive 'em of all the privileges we gave 'em" (I, ii, 165-9).5

Thus when the girls fall in love with Courtall and Freeman, their values have not really changed. What does change is the ultimate goal the girls have in mind. Marriage only ends the game for Gatty and Ariana; it does not mean that they will lose the contest with the heroes or that they will undergo a comic fall.

5 Ariana and Gatty are essentially feminists. One senses in their first appearance that they mean to prove their equality with men in a cold, calculated way, and that the prospect of marriage is of little importance to them.
Ariana and Gatty are believable characters because, like Freeman and Courtall, they can be tempted to question their conception of honor. Thus Gatty's song in Act V not only summarizes the girls' actions in the play, but also describes that temptation. She is pulled in two directions by her desire and her values. "My passion shall kill me before I shall show it." Fortunately for Gatty she will not be killed; the heroes willingly capitulate to marriage. The marriage both girls seek will have to be founded, of course, on the love which Courtall and Freeman must prove during their month's probation. But the girls have the last word in establishing the terms of the agreement in their replies to Freeman's last plea for an instant marriage and instant consummation:

Cat. Marrying in this heat wou'd look as ill as fighting in your Drink.
Ari. And be no more a proof of love, than t'oither is of Valour.

(V, ii, 622-5)

IV

All the twisted and contradictory ways the characters in this comedy use the term "honor" are presented indiscussions involving Sir Oliver and Lady Cockwood. Sir Oliver is a well-developed portrait of a fool; his most obvious flaw is his failure to distinguish between the values of the libertine and those of the conventional social code. He aspires to libertine values, but at the same time calls them "sins" and "vices," names which no real libertine would agree to. He finds pleasure in satisfying his desires
only if by satisfying them he can feel wicked. Thus in his language drunkenness is a synonym for value; he is in "...love with vice," and he categorizes Sir Joslin as "as arrant a sinner as the best of us" (I, i, 104). Consequently, Sir Oliver also subscribes to what seems to be a libertine denial of marriage: "a pox of this tyring man and woman together, for better, for worse" (I, i, 135-6). Contrariwise, Sir Oliver believes his wife to be madly in love with him and flatters himself on this "fact." (He is, of course, the only one in the play whom Lady Cockwood fools.) Thus he wishes to protect his social reputation by deceiving his wife and trusting the knowledge of his sins to real libertines like Courtall, whom Sir Oliver calls, "Honest Ned."

Sir Oliver's values are thus inverted. A man who hypocritically sins, he says to Courtall, is "...a man of Honour" (I, i, 164). Courtall reinverts this word by denying honesty and by calling himself a "Poor Sinner" (I, i, 97). Sir Oliver is not "honest" in terms of the code he recognizes, and Courtall is not a sinner in terms of his libertine code. Consequently, because Sir Oliver is a hypocrite according to traditional Christian virtues and only a pretender to libertinism, he suffers pangs of conscience, throughout the play. To let Lady Cockwood discover his real nature would be "...barbarously unkind." He, in fact, tells his wife "...thou shalt never have any just cause to accuse me of unkindness" (I, ii, 51-2). His ludicrous point of view is pinpointed by his remorse in Act III.
Sir Oliver is surprised by his wife while he is drinking in a tavern and about to entertain a group of prostitutes. Lady Cockwood pretends to faint; her maid, Sentry, condemns Sir Oliver as a "...wicked hypocrit."

"Dear Sentry," replies the accused, "do not stab me with thy words, but stab me with thy Bodkin rather, that I may here dye a Sacrifice at her feet, for all my disloyal actions" (IV, iii, 323-326).

Sir Oliver's stupidity is accentuated by his conviction that he is extremely appealing. He also is proud of his gross attempts at wit, none of which are funny. He is unsubtle in his plots and insincere in his repentances. Worst of all, he enjoys being a hypocrite. But in spite of all his bad qualities, Etherege does not seem to have the contempt for Sir Oliver he has for Sir Nicholas Cully in The Comical Revenge. Sir Oliver emerges from the play a pathetic fool. He does nothing which is worth contempt; he is not intelligent enough to realize how badly he blunders in terms of both Christian and libertine values. His imperceptiveness is captured effectively in his speech in the tavern (while he waits for the prostitutes) when he shows confused allegiance to both codes and understanding of neither. "'Tis a barbarous thing to abuse my Lady, I have had such a proof of her vertue,...But Where's Madam Rampart, and the rest of the ladies, Mr. Rake Hell?" (IV, ii, 29-32).

The irony behind his situation is that Lady Cockwood cannot be abused by her husband. She not only knows what he does, she does
not care, except when his actions reflect on her own reputation.
But just as she is not fooled by her husband, so also does she fail
to fool anyone in the play but her husband. Lady Cockwood is a
fascinating character. She can lie to her husband, or to her maid,
or to Courtall, can send her maid as an envoy to arrange assigna-
tions, can tempt Courtall and Freeman, and still protest to any one
of them that she is an honorable woman! Her sexual compulsions war
against her desire to maintain her reputation so that she is con-
stantly in an emotional frenzy. Yet her reputation, well known to
the rest of the characters, is quite opposite from what she hopes
and her vaunted attractiveness to men simply does not exist. Courtall
characterizes her as "...the very spirit of impertinence, so foolish-
ly fond and troublesome that no man above sixteen is able to endure
her" (I, i, 240-2). Her sexual needs are so great, continues
Courtall, that "she would by her good will give her Lover no more
rest than a young Squire that has newly set up a Coach, does his only
pair of horses." (I, i, 252-4)

Lacking honor herself, Lady Cockwood therefore trusts no one.
In her first speech she laments bitterly her maid's taking so long
to arrange an assignation with Courtall, and suspects the girl of
arranging an affair of her own with him. But: "Sure...he has more
honour than to attempt any thing to the prejudice of my affection"
(I, ii, 3-4). This statement is only the first in which Lady
Cockwood uses "honor." In this instance, honor means Courtall's
fidelity to her in a dishonorable alliance. Later she turns on
what must be a very confused Sentry, who has left Courtall and her Lady alone together: "I protest if you serve me so agra, I shall be strangely angry: you should have more regard to your Lady's Honour" (II, ii, 99-101). Here she means that her honor is actual virtue.

She subsequently conjectures that Joslin's nieces may be reckless, and that their conduct might "bring an unjust Imputation on my Honour" (II, ii, 116). Honor here assumes its most important usage for Lady Cockwood; it becomes synonymous with reputation. In those statements which she intends as confirmation of her good reputation Lady Cockwood is most comic. At one point she has arranged to sneak away with Courtall in his two-seated chariot. Sentry the maid who accompanies her to the meeting place, knows her intentions; only these three characters are aware that the meeting is taking place and that Lady Cockwood will ride away with Courtall. Yet Lady Cockwood has the effrontery to make a ritualistic statement about her honor which neither of the other characters can possibly believe.

O Heaven! you must excuse me, dear Sir, for I shall deny my self the sweetest recreations in the world, rather than yield to any thing that may bring a blemish on my spotless Honour.

(III, i, 135-138)

Her "spotless Honour" is her comic flaw. Lady Cockwood not only fails to realize her own sexual griminess, and her lack of true honor and reputation; she also fails to see that her preoccupation with sexuality and honor cancel out all hope of winning through to satisfaction by means of either one or the other. But ironically
Lady Cockwood is committed to choosing one of them to rely upon when she sees all hope disappear from the other. When she has proved to herself that her suspicions about Courtall are true—she has violated his "honor" to her by meeting Catty—he condemns him to her husband for having made "...a foul attempt upon my Honour... in most unseemly Language" (IV, i, 97-98). Lady Cockwood feels no jealousy; she only desired Courtall; she did not love him. All she now wants is revenge on Courtall but what a strange reason she gives; "...so much precious time fool'd away in fruitless expectation" (IV, i, 59-60). She wastes little time, however, in arranging a new set of assignations with Freeman, whom she thinks "a man of Honour."

By the end of the play Lady Cockwood is forced into a reconciliation with Courtall because he has lied to protect her reputation in a series of episodes which she has badly bungled. She is finally forced to make a choice between preserving her reputation and gratifying her passion, in spite of the fact that she can do neither. Herein lies her comic compromise—a delicious irony in itself. By choosing reputation she attempts to save face by affirming the importance of honor. At the same time she implicitly shows that she is aware of her failure to satisfy her passion. The whole series of events, she says:

...has made me so truly sensible of those dangers to which an aspiring Lady must daily expose her Honour, that I am resolv'd to give over the great business of this Town and hereafter modestly confine myself to the humble affairs of my own Family.

(V, i, 598-602)
Courtall's reply, although apparently genteel, is actually his wittiest statement of the play, a suggestion as to how Lady Cockwood can satisfy both her reputation and her passion. "Tis a very pious resolution, Madam, and the better to confirm you in it, pray entertain an able Chaplain" (V, i, 603-4).

Even though she has the morals and intelligence of a rabbit, Lady Cockwood gives this comedy its pace, its joie-de-vivre, and its interest. Etheredge makes her sweep across the stage, her speeches incoherent and disruptive. Her flashes of anger and jealousy give way to self-righteous proclamations of her honor or libidinous admissions of her sexual passion. The result is that whoever she speaks with is thoroughly confused. She is so torn between her desire to be socially admired for her honorable reputation and her desire to be seduced that she lives at a frenetic pace. She perfectly fulfills what one expects from a character of her type and because of that fact she is a fascinating character study. Yet, here perhaps lies the major fault of the play. One's attention is supposed to be drawn throughout the comedy to the conflict between Courtall and Freeman, and Gatty and Ariana. But these characters, while successfully delineated, are overshadowed by the characterization of Lady Cockwood. Nevertheless, She Wou'd if She Cou'd succeeds as a good comedy because the key characters are more successfully developed than those in The Comical Revenge, even if not as successfully developed as those in The Man of Mode.
Chapter IV

The Man of Mode or Sir Fopling Flutter
The central problem in characterization in Etherege's third and last comedy, The Man of Mode or Sir Fopling Flutter (staged and printed in 1676\(^1\)) is the comic fall of Dorimant, the libertine hero. Dorimant is a vicious, insulting, malicious, promiscuous rake in the opening scenes of the play, yet in the comedy's last scene he pledges his love and constancy to Harriet, the play's heroine and promises to court her in the country. To engineer this acceptance of love, marriage, and constancy, as he had that of Dorimant's libertine predecessors, Sir Frederick, Courtall and Freeman, Etherege had first to show that this character is capable of love in spite of his cynical attitude toward women, and second that Dorimant's wit can be matched and his affectation discerned and cured by Harriet. Finally, Etherege must show that in spite of Dorimant's apparent indifference to the feelings of others, his delight in hurting other people, and his calculated manipulation of them, he has both attractive and comic qualities. How debauched and villainous can a libertine be and still undergo some kind of believable reformation? Etherege answers this question admirably in his hero Dorimant.

\(^1\) Bret-Smith, I, lxvii.
Dorimant is the center of the plot conflicts in *The Man of Mode* and, like Lady Cockwood in *She Wouldn't if She Could*, he is also the most compelling character in the play. At the play's opening, Dorimant is ending his affair with Mrs. Loveit so that he can begin a new liaison with Bellinda, whose help he has enlisted in making the break with Mrs. Loveit as nasty and revengeful as possible. Dorimant wants Mrs. Loveit to know that he has been flirting at playhouses with a certain "wizard-mask," in reality Bellinda. Mrs. Loveit's jealousy and rage are to be further magnified into intense indignation at being accused of enjoying a liaison with Sir Fopling Flutter, a foolish pretender to libertine values. Dorimant's success in making this quarrel as vicious as possible depends on his making Mrs. Loveit appear a fool in the eyes of his friend Medley. To accomplish these goals he tricks Mrs. Loveit into becoming the victim of her own passions. In a second, lesser, and unrelated plot, Dorimant encourages another of his friends, Bellair, to marry Emelia, a chaste and virtuous young lady who appears unseducable. Dorimant's rationale is that after she is married to Bellair, Emelia will be an easier target for Dorimant's charms. Bellair's father, Old Bellair, complicates this action by thinking he loves Emelia himself, and--unaware of his son's inclinations--making a match for the latter with Harriet Woodvil, a rich and attractive young woman from the country.

The third plot line involves Harriet and Dorimant. Harriet has no desire to marry Young Bellair; in fact, she has been attracted by Dorimant's reputation as an intelligent gallant and seems eager to
engage him in a combat of wits. Dorimant is attracted to Harriet because of her reputation as an attractive, witty, country heiress. But unlike Courtall, Freeman, and Sir Frederick Frolick in Etherege's other comedies, he does not attempt to seduce the woman who eventually traps him. Partially his restraint is due to the exigencies of the situation. He can approach Harriet only in a disguise, since she is ostensibly committed to Ballair, and since her mother hates Dorimant by reputation. This restraint is also due to Dorimant's fascination with Harriet's obvious wit and naturalness. By the end of the play, this fascination has become love; Dorimant agrees to follow Harriet into the country, there to court and marry her, and presumably to be constant to her.

This plot description indicates that Etherege has retained in The Man of Mode elements from his other two comedies. The use of multiple plot lines, as in The Comical Revenge, has been revived, although The Man of Mode is more unified than is Etherege's earliest effort. The character of the female dupe, such as Lady Cockwood, has been retained in Mrs. Loveit. Similarly, the roles of libertine, heroine, and fop have been retained respectively in Dorimant, Harriet, and Sir Fopling Flutter. Finally, Etherege has once more made use of the plot action which is typical of all his comedies: a libertine who believes himself superior to all women behaves in comic fashion by falling in love with and agreeing to marry a woman who destroys his preconceived notions about women as well as his sense of superiority.
Dorimant is also the thematic center of the comedy, and all the other characters are characterized by their thematic relation to him. One major theme in the play is affectation or artificiality in conflict with naturalness, and Dorimant shows his intelligence by finally recognizing affectation in himself as well as in others. All the rest of the characters, except Harriet, are incapable of recognizing affectation except in its most extravagant forms, i.e. that of Sir Fopling Flutter. A subsidiary theme is knowledge opposed to passion. Harriet controls her passion for Dorimant because she recognizes his affected dress and insincere charm. Loveit and Bellinda, however, cannot control their passion for Dorimant although they recognize the faults in his character.

II

The character of Dorimant is clearly delineated in the comedy's opening scene. His conversation with the affected, slightly effeminate Medley reveals that he values clothes, reputation, and promiscuity. His low associates, including Foggy Nan--the Orange Woman--and the shoemaker parade through the scene. Dorimant has had a number of mistresses because he pursues women indiscriminately, caring less about the object of the pursuit than about numerical achievements in the love game. Consequently, he never loves his inamorata; he enjoys quarreling with women and the challenge of beginning a new affair. He, of course, abhors marriage. Dorimant is no more loyal to male acquaintances than to
female ones. He uses his friendship with Bellair to further his own social reputation, yet treats him with condescension. He sneers at the stupidity of Sir Fopling and violently insults his own servants. However, Dorimant is not a total blackguard; he was wit, charm, intelligence, and—_one assumes—an attractive appearance.

In spite of his boredom and Machiavellian qualities, Dorimant's delight in women and the plots he contrives make him appealing partly because of the lure of the wicked, perhaps, but more importantly because his is the appeal of a lusty human being. His values, his gross associates, his lack of loyalty, and his temper, may all be deplorable, but Dorimant is vividly alive from the moment he steps onto the stage.

In the first scene Dorimant reveals that he is involved in affairs with five different women; each affair is in a different stage. He announces almost at once that he is tired of his affair with Mrs. Loveit, an unappealing and rather jealous woman.

Next to the coming of a good understanding with a new Mistress, in love a quarrel with an old one; but the devils isn't there has been such a calm in my affairs of late, I have not had the pleasure of making a woman so much as break her fan, to be sullen, or forswear her self these three days.

(I, i, 220-205)

Mrs. Loveit is much like Lady Cockwood, but Dorimant is unlike Courtall, who could not make love to a woman who did not test his wit. Dorimant has not only seduced Mrs. Loveit, but also charmed Bellinda, who is so in love with him that she conspires to help
him hurt her friend, Mrs. Loveit. Dorimant brags:

She means insensibly to insinuate a discourse of me, and artificially raise [Loveit's] jealousy to such a height that transported with the first motions of her passion, she shall fly upon me with all the fury imagincable, as soon as I enter. (I, i, 237-241)

Dorimant's treatment of Bellinda in this affair is as cruel as his treatment of Loveit; he enjoys making Bellinda betray her friend.

The third affair concerns his ex-mistress, Molly, whom he calls, "a true bred whore" and who writes him a rather pitiful letter begging for money. Dorimant is not touched by the letter, but contemptuously agrees to send her enough money so that she can practice her trade at the theaters. His affairs do not end with these three.

Dorimant also plans a future affair with Emilia because "I have known many Woman make a difficulty of losing a Maidenhead, who have after [marriage] make none of making a Cuckold" (I, i, 457-9).

Finally, from the Orange Woman Dorimant learns of Harriet who is "lately come to Town [and] is so taken with you" (I, i, 445), and therefore will be a good prospect for a new affair.

In this scene Etheredge also makes clear Dorimant's recognition of his affectation and its purposes. He admits, "I love to be well-dress'ed" (350) and acknowledges that his clothes are an unfortunate necessity in his pursuits: "That a man's excellency should lie in neatly trying of a Ribband, or a Crevat! how careful's nature in furnishing the World with necessary Coxcombs!" (357-60). Similarly, Dorimant knows that his affectation is a kind of hypocrisy when he
treats Bellair as a friend. His intelligence also enable him to see Bellair's limitations.

Dor. He's Handsome, well bred, and by much the most tolerable of all the young men that do not abound in wit.
Med. Ever well dress'd, always complaisant, and seldom impertinent; you and he are grown very intimate I see.
Dor. It is our mutual interest to be so; it makes the Women think the better of his Understanding, and judge more favourably of my Reputation; it makes him pass upon some for a man of very good sense, and I upon others for a very civil person.

(I, i, 424-434)

Thus, from the beginning of the play, we are aware of Dorimant's perceptiveness about himself and other people.

The complexity of characterization in The Man of Mode is apparent in another way. Each of these three male characters represents some facet of the libertine code. Medley is a gossip and can please women only with his witty stories and revelations.
Dorimant says about him, "A Flea or a Maggot is not made more monstrous by a magnifying Glass, than a story by his telling it" (II, i, 100-1). This statement perhaps explains Dorimant's relationship with Medley, who loves exaggeration, enjoys creating mischief with his stories, but who is still a reliable source, for Dorimant, of names and information about young women. But Dorimant may be friendly to him because Medley is an older man who offers no sexual competition, indeed who prefers gossiping
with women as he does throughout The Man of Mode.²

If Medley is older than Dorimant, then Bellair must be younger. Bellair, in fact, seems very much like Courtall in She Would if She Cou'd; each has a good reputation, each has fallen in love and intends to be married, and each is considered a town gallant. But Bellair lacks the intelligence that is necessary for a true rake. His failure to see through Dorimant's insincere friendship for him, and to recognize Dorimant's affectation mark the limitations of his perception and by contrast re-enforce the impression of the whole scene that Dorimant is in fact a very perceptive man.³

This first scene, then, like the first scenes in Etherege's earlier comedies, establishes the values and limitations that the hero brings to his confrontations with the heroine. Actually, Dorimant's values are also his limitations since each of them (clothes, reputation, promiscuity) are part of or prompt affectation. Harriet, his opponent in the love game, recognizes his affectation and deals with Dorimant in terms of it. His values are also for Dorimant's major limitation, his tendency to underestimate women. He has a supercilious attitude toward women because they are simply

² Old Bellair substantiates the fact that Medley is older than Dorimant and Bellair when he says, "Stay, Mr. Medley, let the young fellows do that duty;" we will drink a glass of wine together. "Tis good after dancing." (IV, i, 379-381)

³ Young Bellair's ignorance, illustrated by his reply to Harriet's calling Dorimant's manners and clothes "laboured," indicates that the thought had never before entered his head. "I never heard him accus'd of affectation before" (III, iii, 51).
the object of the chase or, once the pursuit had ended, an individual
to infuriate. If he treats women contemptuously, it is because they,
like Bellinda and Mrs. Loveit, believe in his affected manners and
even when they see through his guise, cannot refuse him.

II

Dorimant's three affairs in this comedy are significant because
each reveals his character and his limitations, and each prepares for
the denouement. He is not as clever and superior to women as he sup­
poses. All three women best Dorimant, and each of these triumphs
contributes to his comic fall.

Mrs. Loveit quite correctly calls Dorimant a "false man," a
"perjur'd Man," "horrid and ingrateful." She tells him that he has
"more pleasure in the ruine of a woman's reputation than in the in­
dearments of her love" (V, i, 193-4). This estimate conforms exact­
ly to the picture of Dorimant given the reader in the first scene.
However, throughout the play Mrs. Loveit follows his accusations
and condemnations by pleading with Dorimant for his love. Since
she does not act in accord with her knowledge, she becomes ridicu­
lous when she expects Dorimant to transcend the character traits
she has perceived in him.

Dorimant's quarrel with Mrs. Loveit is comically malicious.
He does not want simply to break off the affair; this libertine must
satisfy his ego by making Loveit admit her jealousy and love for him.
He also wants to make her behave according to his wishes. Thus, to
feed her anger he freely admits that he has been carrying on with a
masked woman at the play and has lied to Mrs. Loveit in the notes
he has sent her about business obligations. He even flirts with
Bellinda in Loveit's presence. He then accuses Mrs. Loveit of being
unfaithful to him and thus guilty of the very sin he himself has
committed.

_loveit_. What fashionable Fool can you lay
_to my charge?
_dor_. Why the very Cock-fool of all those
_fools, sir fopling flutter_.

(II, ii, 236-8)

Dorimant succeeds in this scene by making Mrs. Loveit fly into a
rage.

But Dorimant's vaunted supremacy begins to deteriorate rapidly
when Loveit fails to condemn publicly Sir Fopling's foolishness.
Instead, Loveit attempts a counterplot to make Dorimant jealous;
she openly flirts with Sir Fopling. Mrs. Loveit is not then as
stupid as Lady Cockwood, although she displays the same uncontrolled
passion and anger. Loveit's plot to make Dorimant angry partly works,
because she has recognized his pride. However, Dorimant is not
jealous of her love; he simply fears her ability to sully his reputa-
tion. "She cannot fall from loving me to that!" (III, ii, 296).
Forced to beg Medley not to spread his humiliation to the town un-
til he can succeed in a counterplot, Dorimant confronts Loveit in
order to win her back, but she offers the reasonable argument that
it is better to love a faithful fool than an inconstant wit.
Dorimant's humiliation would be complete except that his physical
presence stimulates Mrs. Loveit's passion until foolishly she admits she does not love Sir Fopling. "Y'had rais'd my anger equal to my love, a thing you ne're could do before, and in revenge I did--I know not what I did; Would you not think on 't any more" (V, i, 226-8). Loveit depends on her passion being reciprocated. It is not. Instead, Dorimant tells Loveit that she must again confront Sir Fopling in public, and that she must "...handle [the] Coxcomb as he deserves....'Tis necessary to justify my love to the World" (V, i, 241-3).

Dorimant is never able to bring his quarrel with Mrs. Loveit to a head until the last act when he is forced to confront Bellinda, Harriet, and Mrs. Loveit simultaneously. By this point in the play, Dorimant's values have changed. He would rather marry Harriet than argue with Mrs. Loveit and since he fears a scene with her, he is forced to placate his former mistress by telling her his match with Harriet is only "to repair the ruines of my estate." He also implies that he is still in love with her but must end their affair because of Harriet. Thus, to get rid of Mrs. Loveit, Dorimant is forced to lie to make her happy, which is just the opposite of his goal throughout the play. His plans have failed, and the audience knows that Dorimant is not the crafty genius he has imagined himself.

Dorimant treats Bellinda much as he treats Loveit. He bullies her into helping expose Mrs. Loveit as a fool and makes her watch while he insults and lies to his old mistress. When Bellinda chides
him and admits her fears, Dorimant lies again. He professes love for her and asks that she come to his quarters at five the next morning. She cannot resist his insistence and his charm.

Dor. Be sure you come.
Bell. I sha'n't.
Dor. Swear you will;
Bell. I dare not.
Dor. Swear, I say.
Bell. By my life! by all the happiness I hope for--
Dor. You will.
Bell. I will.
Dor. Kind.

(III, ii, 75-85)

This scene is effective because it firmly establishes Dorimant's immense power over passionate, susceptible women. Further, he insists that Bellinda continue to help him in his defamation of Mrs. Loveit. However, Bellinda is like Mrs. Loveit because she too is motivated by jealousy as well as by love. She agrees to Dorimant's demands because she imagines that he is breaking his affair with Loveit in order to be faithful to her.

Bellinda leaves Dorimant's quarters—their affair just consummated—with the understanding that Dorimant will be faithful and protect her reputation. But like Mrs. Loveit, Bellinda knows that Dorimant is wicked and she too fails to use her knowledge of the libertine's character to temper her passion for him. However, when she watches Dorimant maliciously insult Loveit, Bellinda fears him. Twice in the play she makes long asides about her fear that she will become, like Mrs. Loveit, the butt of this libertine's sadistic behavior.
Bell. He has given me the proof which I desire of his love.
But 'tis a proof of his ill nature too;
I wish I had not seen him use her so.
I sigh to think that Dorimant may be,
One day as faithless, and unkind to me.

(II, ii, 289-93)

Belinda's fears are essentially confirmed by the end of the play when she and Mrs. Loveit converge on Dorimant in the last act. She realizes that Dorimant has been courting Harriet; she knows she has been taken in. When Dorimant attempts to placate her by arranging another assignation, she vows never to see him again. Bellinda's rejection of Dorimant's last advance is also a rejection of the physical attractive, as persuasive as he has fancied himself. His failure to captivate Bellinda is just as serious a defeat as his failure to end his relationship with Mrs. Loveit on his own terms.

Dorimant's meetings with Harriet make his coming shift from villain to comic figure apparent early in the play. When Dorimant first meets Harriet he is struck by her beauty and wit and plies her with typical libertine love language. "I have been us'd to deep Play, but I can make one at Small Game, when I like my Gamester well" (III, iii, 74-5). He tells her he could be constant to gain her favor—an obvious lie he has already used on Bellinda and Mrs. Loveit. But after their next encounter when Harriet accuses him of affectation and displays her wit and intelligence, Dorimant begins to fear her. "I love her, and dare not let her know it, I fear sh'as an ascendant o'er me and may revenge the wrongs I have done her sex" (IV, i, 150-3).

This is Dorimant's most crucial speech in the play. His speeches
on love to Medley have equated love with sexual passion, but here is Dorimant's first honest admission of love. Moreover he notes correctly that Harriet's wit does at least equal and perhaps exceeds his. The love-fear, attraction-repulsion which Dorimant feels parallels that which Bellinda feels, and the similarity effectively diminishes his stature as a wicked rake; he becomes comic because he is subject to the same weakness which in others he has used to advance his own selfish ends. This speech does one more important task in altering Dorimant's position. By recognizing that his treatment of women has been "wrong" and that perhaps not all women are seduceable, Dorimant implies that he may have a conscience and that his knowledge of women is incomplete.

Dorimant quickly becomes even more of a comic figure in the rest of the exchange. He equates love and sickness and admits, "I never knew what 'twas to have a settled Ague yet, but now and then have had irregular fits" (157-158). As if to prove his statement, he confesses in an aside, "I feel the disease now spreading in me--" (161-162). Because of his love, Dorimant decides to profess his feelings to Harriet, but he cannot because she makes fun of him and will not listen. Ironically Dorimant cannot speak truthfully the words he has misused so often. Because of his failure with Harriet in this scene, Dorimant becomes ridiculous while in earlier situations of this type he was ominous. Etheridge has successfully taken away Dorimant's hauteur and makes him seem as ineffectual as Sir Frederick Prollick.
Harriet differs from Bellinda and Mrs. Loveit in her ability to control her passion and in her use of her understanding of Dorimant's weaknesses. The reader knows from the beginning that Harriet is fascinated by Dorimant—the Orange Woman tells him so. But Harriet refuses to show Dorimant that she is attracted to him. When they first encounter one another (III, iii) she admits in an aside, "I feel...a change within; but he shall never know it" (66-67). Later (V, ii) she says, "My love springs with my blood into my face, I dare not look upon him yet" (95-97). She must reform Dorimant before she can admit her love. In addition, that reform must be on her terms.

Harriet's first appearance is significant because it contrasts with Dorimant's first appearance and establishes the values which Harriet will use in her attempt to reform him. His concern for his fashionable appearance is opposed by Harriet's apparent indifference to hers. She says to her maid, "Women then ought to be no more fond of dressing than fools should be of talking" (III, i, 23-5). Harriet hates affectation because it confuses modishness with natural beauty, because it equates wit and intelligence with manners and breeding, and because affectation confuses appearance with reality. Furthermore, Harriet recognizes that Dorimant is judged only on the basis of his reputation for charm and fashion and that he uses his affectation to manipulate other people. She tells Bellair that Dorimant is "agreeable and pleasant I must own, but he does so much affect being so, he displeases me" (III, iii, 24-5). And in her first
conversation with Dorimant himself, she mimics him and says she does not desire his insincere flattery.

The dialogue between Dorimant and Harriet in Act IV is especially crucial to the theme of affectation. Dorimant accuses Harriet of being affected because she plays at being demure:

Har. Affectation is catching I find...
Dor. Where had you all that scorn and coldness in your look?
Har. From nature, Sir, pardon my want of art; I have not learnt those softnesses and languishings which now in faces are so much in fashion.
Dor. You need 'em not; you have a sweetness of your own, if you would but calm your frowns and let it settle.
Har. My eyes are wild and wandering like my passions and cannot yet be ty'd to Rules of charming.

(IV, i, 110-120)

How ironic it is that here these characters' roles are apparently reversed; Harriet is accused of affectation. However, Dorimant's definition of affectation differs from Harriet's. He explains that a woman is affected when she does anything which reduces her potential for appearing beautiful to other people. Thus he suggests that a woman who is judged beautiful by the "critics of the Court" is to be admired. Harriet's answers imply that being so judged is wrong because such a judgment confuses outward appearances with an individual's worth. The subject of their conversation changes from beauty to love, and here Harriet implies what is the matter with Dorimant. For him love must be dealt with in terms of its appearance in society, and since it is not fashionable to show one's love publicly, Dorimant
laughs at that emotion. Harriet insists that his protestations of love cannot be considered honest unless he is willing to be laughed at by society as unfashionable. "When your love's grown strong enough to make you bear being laugh'd at, I'll give you leave to trouble me with it. Till then pray forbear, Sir" (IV, i, 81-3).

Oddly enough, Dorimant does just what Harriet demands of him. He not only publicly offers his love to her but also reiterates that he is not being affected or insincere: "...the inimitable colour in your cheeks is not more free from art than are the sighs I offer" (V, ii, 135-7). Is this the admission of honest love that Harriet desires? Apparently, but even so Harriet admits only that when Dorimant can be as sincere at her country home as he is in town will she believe that he is honest.

The play actually ends ambiguously. Dorimant agrees to court Harriet in Hampshire, and Harriet admits that she hopes for marriage. Dorimant announces that "this day my soul has quite given up her liberty" (V, ii, 428-9). But has Harriet truly reformed him? Or does he simply feign the appearance of love in order to seduce Harriet?

One's feelings about the characterization are likely to become subjective at this point. One might like to believe Dorimant because one likes Harriet and cannot sympathize with Dorimant's treatment of women in the play. But one must remember that the play is a comedy, and that Etherege makes Dorimant appear ridiculous by having him use his charms one last time on Bellinda while he is simultaneously professing his love to Harriet. But the ambiguity is necessary if Etherege
is to succeed in making Dorimant's fall believable. Too obvious an acceptance of marriage, or an immediate marriage, would simply be too much. Dorimant's fall must be qualified if his shift from cynic to genuine lover is to be accepted.\footnote{The ambiguity of this play's ending has been applauded by Holland and Underwood. Underwood says about the last scene, "It is part of the comedy of the hero and of the play that neither we nor perhaps the hero himself can be entirely certain as to what his real intentions have by this time come to be" (p. 90). Holland says the ending must be the way it is because, "The play bristles with so many ironies, all undercutting one another, that it is difficult to say what, if anything, Etherege wants us to take seriously. Virtually every action of every character becomes a gambit in a great and meaningless social game" (p. 95).}

IV

Throughout the play Sir Fopling Flutter is contrasted with Dorimant. Sir Fopling lacks intelligence; his wit fails; he is unsuccessful in seducing Mrs. Loveit; and his affectation is painfully obvious. Yet Sir Fopling is a thoroughly delightful character. He is good-natured about everything he attempts, no matter how badly he fails, and his good nature contrasts well with Dorimant's sullen malice and cynicism.

Sir Fopling is different from the fops in Etherege's other two comedies in one respect: he is not a country gentleman attempting to emulate city manners. Rather he is a traveled gallant who tries to make himself especially fashionable by emulating French customs in speech, dress, and manner. He also differs from his predecessors in an even more significant way. Sir Nicholas Cully is tricked into
a marriage with Sir Frederick Frollick's old mistress; Sir Oliver
Cockwood is ridiculed and forced into a reconciliation with his wife,
but Sir Fopling remains the same throughout the play, and suffers no
comic consequences because of his foppishness.

Sir Fopling is the least perceptive and most affected character
in the comedy; his wit and dress fool no one, not even young Bellair.
Dorimant, Bellair, and Medley describe him in great detail in the
first scene.

Bel. He thinks himself the Pattern of
modern Gallantry.
Dor. He is indeed the pattern of modern
Foppery.
Med. He was Yesterday at the Play with a
pair of Gloves up to his Elbows, and a
Periwig more exactly Curl'd than a Ladies
head newly dress'd for a Ball.
Bel. What a pretty Lisp he has!
Dor. Ho, that he affects in imitation of
the people of quality of France.
Med. His head stands for the most part on
one side, and his looks are more languishing
than a Lady's when she loo's at stretch in her
coach, or leans her head carelessly against
the side of a Box i' th Playhouse.
Dor. He is a person indeed of great acquired
Follies.

(I, i, 369-381)

Sir Fopling cannot recognize his own affectation or that of others.
Instead he values his ability to imitate the French and thus be
artificial, and he applauds the same quality in Dorimant. Sir
Fopling says, "Dorimant, let me embrace thee; without lying, I have
not met with any of my acquaintance, who retain so much of Paris as
thou dost" (III, ii, 151-3). As a result, Sir Fopling has little
substance as a person; his imagination and his catalog of French
accessories take the place of intelligence and understanding. While Dorimant uses fashion to further the exercise of his wit, Sir Fopling uses fashion to replace wit, and he delights in displaying his "French" manner.

Emil. He wears nothing but what are
Originals of the most Famous hands in Paris.
Sir Pop. You are in the right, Madam.
L. Town. The Suit?
Sir Pop. Barroy
Emil. The Garniture?
Sir Pop. Le Gras—
Med. The Shoes?
Sir Pop. Piccar
Dor. The Perriwig?
Sir Pop. Chedreux.

But in spite of his affected French ways, Sir Fopling is not a successful rake or lover, and he serves as a butt for the derision of others. Eventually he is even bested in his knowledge of France when he overhears Harriet and Medley talking about Bussy Rabutin, "He who writes the loves of France." Sir Fopling can only remember the English Bussy—Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois, and his mistake causes Medley to denounce him as "a brisk blockhead." Sir Fopling is similarly scorned when he tries to dance, sing, or make love; but he is always undaunted by criticism.

He is the only male in London that Mrs. Loveit would not have an affair with, and even though he is thoroughly rejected in his attempts to become intimate with her Sir Fopling shrugs off his disappointment and announces his plans for the conquest of all women: "An intrigue now would be but a temptation to me to throw away that Vigour on one, which I mean shall shortly make my Court to the whole sex in
"a Ballet" (V, ii, 374-376). This attitude is not the brazen one of a Dorimant nor does it have Lady Cockwood's sheer gall. Sir Fopling simply exists in a world apart, and this is finally what makes him a delightful character. He defeats the abusive laughter of his detractors in the comedy by being impervious to their derision; criticism cannot effect Sir Fopling. He impresses the reader as nothing more than a collection of follies and affectations. Without his "equipage in the French manner," Sir Fopling would not exist. As a contrast to Dorimant, Sir Fopling is perfect; everything he does and says is comically inappropriate. His only function in the play is to be the comic epitome of affectation, and this function he admirably fills.

The Man of Mode is the most successful of Etherege's three comedies, and its characters are superior to their earlier counterparts. Dorimant's comic fall—if indeed it is a comic fall—is successful because of the ambiguity which surrounds it. The libertine may be sincere in his desire to marry Harriet and live in the country, or he may be merely biding his time until Harriet will become, like Mrs. Loveit and Bellinda, a victim of her passions. Etherege has put material in the last scene of the comedy that enables the reader to defend either position.
Conclusion
Etherege's three comedies are not equally successful, primarily because the three main character types (the libertine, the heroine, and the fop) which appear in all three are not always characterized with equal skill. The Comical Revenge is the least satisfactory because its libertine hero cannot be considered witty, sophisticated, or intelligent, although the role he plays demands exactly these qualifications. Consequently, Sir Frederick is not the golden mean which Holland and Underwood say he is. Because the characterization of Sir Frederick is inept, the play's comic compromise (Sir Frederick's marriage to the Widow) does not successfully link together the worlds of sentimental love and Renaissance naturalism. Sir Frederick's vulgar and adolescent behavior and his willing acceptance of marriage although his actions and speeches have in no way indicated that such an acceptance is possible, betray his complacent stupidity. The Widow, his foil in the love intrigues, is too shallow to be really interesting. Cully, the fop, is imperfectly portrayed. Scenes which should demonstrate Cully's stupidity merely show that he is simple-minded or gullible. Moreover, Etherege presents Cully's two comic characteristics, stupidity and affectation, in different episodes so that Cully seems to be two characters. One is apt to be confused by this
inconsistent characterization which does not contribute to the comedy's success.

The characters in She Would if She Could are more successfully delineated and, consequently, this comedy is much better than The Comical Revenge. Here the libertines, Courtall and Freeman, undergo a comic fall which is believable, whereas Sir Frederick's was not. Gradually these rakes recognize that they are attracted to Ariana and Gatty by impulses which are not just sexual. These impulses justify for them, and for the reader, their agreement to marry the girls. Satisfying also is the fact that these rakes clearly possess the wit, intelligence, and urbanity demanded by their libertine code. Ariana and Gatty charm the reader as well as Courtall and Freeman, because they are developed in depth, as the Widow was not. Natural, intelligent, and witty, these young ladies are realistically presented. In Sir Oliver, Etheredge has created a fine picture of a hypocritical, affected fool, one not disfigured by the inconsistencies that make Cully unsuccessful as a character. Lady Cockwood, Sir Oliver's wife, is the most fascinating character in the play, because her frenetic actions and brazen assertions about her honor make her consistently comic. She has absolutely no conception of herself; she is utterly self-deceived.

In The Man of Mode Etheredge exceeds his achievement in She Would if She Could. None of the characterizations in the earlier comedies are as forceful and brilliant as those of Dorimant, Harriet, and Sir Fopling Flutter. An added dimension of reality has been included in
this play which demonstrates the jaded, seamy aspects of libertinage. Dorimant is complexly presented as witty, intelligent, and sophisticated but at the same time diabolically malicious. Beneath his suave veneer is a callous devotion to satisfying his lusts. Yet Dorimant's ability to understand his own affectation as well as that of others deserves respect, and his characterization commands belief because he is neither totally good nor totally bad. One aspect of Dorimant's comic failing, his belief that he is superior to all women, is illustrated by each of his three affairs in the play, in which the comic compromise is prefigured. Mrs. Lovelit and Bellinda are women whose passion triumphs over their reason and while they are not as stupid and ludicrous as Lady Cockwood, their comic flaws are effectively satirized. Harriet is more vivid than Ariana and Catty because she has a biting tongue and a wit even more ready than theirs. Harriet struggles against showing her love for Dorimant while demanding from him a sincere admission of love on her terms. Sir Fopling Flutter, unlike the other characters in the play, is not at all complex. Rather he is the picture of a totally affected individual, whose good nature overshadows his stupidity and whose delight in his affected French ways is not offensive. The obvious superiority of The Man of Mode to Etheredge's earlier comedies is due to the intricate relationships between its characters and to its masterful examination of characters who cannot be considered mere types; they are individuals.

The most important character in each of Etheredge's comedies is the libertine; the heroine and fop are subsidiary to him. Thus, the
primary function of each heroine is to foil the libertine's attempt to once more prove his superiority over women. Similarly, the primary function of each fop is to serve as a contrast to the hero so that the values and the intelligence of the rake-hero stand out in relief. Although each of Etherege's heroes conforms in some way to ideal libertine values, each represents a different kind of rake. Sir Frederick's exuberance, his delight in pursuing the Widow, and his compulsion to fulfill his natural appetites are the only qualities of libertinage he possesses. While his desires are clear, his ability to fulfill them is not, because he is the rake without intelligence. Courtall, and to a lesser extent Freeman, represent the ideal in libertinage. They are neither as adolescent as Sir Frederick nor as cynical as Dorimant. Instead, they follow a system of values and profess a code of honor within the framework of libertinage. Dorimant is jaded and rather bored with his libertine existence. In fact, he is so plainly accustomed to debauchery that one is forced to assume that he has lived as a rake for a rather long time.

The point I have been driving at is this: one might be tempted to assume that Etherege meant to show in each of his comedies a different aspect of libertinage or that he wished to show how three different men might behave in terms of that belief. This assumption, however, will not do. A more likely assumption is that Etherege reflected in each comedy some of his own attitudes and feelings at different times in his life. In 1664 when The Comical Revenge was
written, Etherege was about 29 years old. Little is known about him before he wrote this play, but his earliest biographer, Oldys, conjectures that he had traveled for some years "into France, and perhaps Flanders also," and had returned to England shortly after the Restoration.\(^1\) Since by March 1664 he probably had been in England no longer than three years and was himself a young man, and since the only English comedies he could have seen were those written before the Civil War and revived for the Restoration stage, his beliefs about libertinage were perhaps as unfixed as those of Sir Frederick. By 1668 when Etherege wrote his second play, he had had time to establish patronage, win influence at the court, and make acquaintance with other wits and men of letters. He had also had opportunities to see the dramatic expressions of libertine beliefs by genuinely Restoration playwrights like Dryden and Sedley. Furthermore, by this time Etherege probably had formulated his own beliefs about libertinage. He could have found a kind of honor in libertinage and, like Courtall, could have tried to live in terms of that honor. When *The Man of Mode* was published in 1676, Etherege was 42 years old and, according to his biographers, had an established reputation for debauched living. His attitude at that time might have been very similar to that of Dorimant. Libertine beliefs would

\(^1\) *Biographia Britannica* (London, 1750), III, 1841. Quoted in Brett-Smith, I, xiv. Sybil Rosenfeld, using biographical information discovered in 1920, suggests the interesting theory that Etherege was born in Bermuda and came to England after the death of his father in 1651. *The Letterbook of Sir George Etherege*, ed. with intro. and notes by Sybil Rosenfeld (London, 1928), p. 6. Edmund Gosse supposes Etherege to have been in France from 1658-1663. (p. 262)
no longer be a carefree ideal; instead they would be just another way of life.

In each of Etherege's plays, then, this factor must be considered in any examination of the artistic merits of his characterizations. Sir Frederick is a poor rake not only because he is ineptly characterized but also because Etherege himself had no firm notion of what a libertine should be. Courtall is an ideal libertine not only because he fulfills this function in the play, but also because he is invested with what may well have been Etherege's own idealism. Dorimant is realistic not only because Etherege had had years to perfect his dramatic talent but also because he expresses a vitriolic cynicism which might probably be a concomitant of Etherege's own growing disillusionment—assuming that he did grow disillusioned, a possibility, but in the absence of any authentic biographical information by no means certain.

What is certain is that Etherege chose to write no more comedies, even when persuaded. In his Letterbook, which he kept while diplomatic envoy to Ratisbon, is recorded a letter from John Dryden praising him as "the undoubted best author of [prose] which are nation has produced," and condemning him as an "immortal source of Idleness."^2 In his reply Etherege acknowledges his idleness but also implies that writing plays had been little more than a pastime in which he no

---

^2 Letterbook, February 1686/7, p. 355.
longer wished to indulge:

Though I have not been able formerly to forbear playing the fool in verse and prose, I have now judgement enough to know how much I ventured, and am rather amazed at my good fortune than vain upon a little success...3

---

3 Letterbook, 10/20 March, 1686/7, p. 168.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bernbaum, Ernst. The Drama of Sensibility. Boston, 1915.


British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan, ed. by Arthur E. Case and George H. Nettleton. Boston, 1939.


Crawford, Bartholomew V. "High Comedy in Terms of Restoration Practice," Philological Quarterly, VIII (October, 1929), 339-347.


Debroy, Bonamy. Rochester, A Conversation Between Sir George and Mr. Fitzjames. London, 1926.


Thorne, Ashley H. *English Comedy.* New York, 1929.


