Historical study of eighteenth century European comedy

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AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY EUROPEAN COMEDY

By

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The eighteenth century has been termed, "a time of transition and somewhat blind experiments in drama."¹ It is the consensus of many scholars writing about the eighteenth century that these hundred years did indeed serve as a kind of transitional period, a period of gestation, in which the ideals of the seventeenth century were examined with the advantage of hindsight, debated, altered, re-examined, and finally, in the nineteenth century, emerged metamorphosed into Romanticism. It is also scholarly opinion that the seventeenth century had, in the inimitable dramatic creations of Molière, Racine, Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Calderon and their inferior emulators, exhausted itself, so that, in reaction to this effete condition, the eighteenth century, labeled experimental, chaotic, and transitional, often finds itself the object of rapid examination and dismissal.

In view of this condition, the purpose of this study is to examine one genre of the drama, comedy, during the eighteenth century in Europe with the expressed hope of creating a picture of the trends, styles, and functions of this genre emanating from each of the European countries. To achieve this picture, the study will present a compilation of the eighteenth century comic playwrights and their respective styles, subjects, forms and types, thus producing, through

this encyclopedic examination, a view of the most prevalent trends in
the genre of comedy during the century. Each chapter will examine a
nation or geographical group of nations. First, will be presented a
brief analysis of the dramatic, social, political, and cultural ele-
ments unique within that area, then a study of the native comic play-
wrights and their comedy and, finally, a summary of the general trends
in comedy of that area. Although this study is intended to be primarily
encyclopedic, there will be included, where possible, critical opinion
and judgment concerning the playwright, but this factor represents only
the consensus of opinion of historians writing about each man, and is
merely included to enhance the depiction of eighteenth century comedy
and comic playwrights. It should also be understood at the outset of
this study, that only those countries of continental Europe will be
considered, and of these nations, only a few possessed any recognizable
form of comedy. In addition, it must be noted that, of the countries
examined, there is more often than not only a few dramatists who are
deemed worthy of consideration or mention by anyone writing about this
period, so that some playwrights must necessarily receive more atten-
tion than others. Much of the cause of this condition lies in the fact
that, while eighteenth century Europe abounded in dramatists, few of
them created anything but trite, superficial, poorly constructed, and
easily forgotten plays. As Fred B. Millett and Gerald Eades Bently
write:

The eighteenth century is not a period of notable comedy. . . .
The plays are greatly inferior to Elizabethan, Restoration, and
Modern dramatic comedies. . . . The best eighteenth century plays
were written by men in open rebellion against the drama of their
time, by men who felt that contemporary comedies were trash and who tried to bring back to the stage plays of a type popular almost a century before.\(^2\)

Each country or area, except Spain and Portugal, possessed playwrights who are now considered the most important of the eighteenth century, and it is to these men that primary consideration will be given in each chapter, with lesser known writers only mentioned. The final chapter of this encyclopedic historical study will attempt to draw as many conclusions concerning eighteenth-century comedy as is possible from the information presented in the body of the examination.

The next chapter will briefly consider the social and dramatic tendencies of the eighteenth century as a whole, with the intention of introducing the cultural atmosphere which dominated the endeavors of the century.

CHAPTER I

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

As seventeenth century Europe merged with the eighteenth century, it found itself lurching along political, social, and economic highways the foundations for which were already established during its waning years. The most dominant feature of this burgeoning "Age of Reason" is the continued rise in importance, which had begun as early as 1550, of the middle-classes. This movement had become accelerated ever since the bourgeoisie determined that its native and collective perseverance and talent for making money at a fantastic rate had subsequently raised its social position, substantially increased its nation's economic position, and finally promoted for it more power politically than it had ever before experienced. The aristocracy, on the other hand, was lamentable experiencing a decline in those same areas where the middle-class was now intruding. This decline, emanating from what was later to be viewed as the gross profligacy and excesses of the seventeenth century, was surely inevitable, just as the surging ahead of the middle-classes was assured in view of their new found, yet assiduously earned, wealth. As Allardyce Nicoll points out:

While the young gallants busied themselves with pleasure, worthy and unworthy scions of middle-class houses occupied themselves with business less witty but more serious, so that the beginning of the
eighteenth century found the circle of the elite impoverished and a new circle of *Nouveaux riches* ready to pay attention to something more than their counting-houses.\(^1\)

Inevitable, then, was the immediate rash of young aristocratic gallants, dashing, gay, facing poverty, earnestly courting and marrying the sometimes pretty, rarely poised or polished, but undoubtedly rich daughters of the bourgeoisie. The scions of the upper-class were not particularly pleased or desirous of this merger, but the arrangement was quite necessary since their impecunity was surely increasing. To be sure, the middle-classes were going to take every advantage of this situation. However, instead of following a slow, natural course in their social climbing, a greedy desire for position forced them to attempt the prodigious step all at once. Consequently, in an effort to emulate the same social graces and *savoir faire* inherent in the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie created nothing but sham and appeared ludicrous in their imitative endeavors.

Because of this continuing gain in the affluence and influence of the bourgeoisie, the eighteenth century intellectual activity found itself geared to the middle-class viewpoint more than in any other period of history, and began to examine and question the very foundations of the society inherited from the "Age of Enlightenment." The entire intellectual process was geared to an almost pragmatic approach in the solving of the obvious and varied maladies inflicting contemporary society. Such reknowned thinkers as Cavendish, Priestly, Kant, Wesley, Rousseau, Locke, Hobbes, Voltaire, Diderot, and Montageau wrote

\(^1\)World Drama from Aeschylus to Anouilh, (New York, 1959), p. 353.
during this century, and their thinking must, in part, be attributed to a middle-class view of their milieu.

It is no wonder, then, that Eleanor F. Jourdain states: "the whole tendency of drama in the eighteenth century was to throw more light on the middle classes." The drama in general during the eighteenth century posed a confused, strange, and sometimes fantastic diversity of plays parading across the boards as if the art of drama was entirely formless and without reason (even though form and reason were paramount in the eighteenth century). This fact was due virtually to the transformation of the theatre from a highly refined, exact, formalized upper class entertainment to a more popular, less refined relaxation for the middle-class. Here was a firsthand example of the middle-class aping the upper-class, desperately striving, without fruition, to garner the same satisfaction and pleasure from the theatrical experience as they believed the aristocracy received. However, they did not possess the same tastes and refinement of the aristocracy which loved the form, order, and restraint of the drama which had been presented to them during the seventeenth century and the reign of the neo-classicists. Soon, through the evolution of more and more middle-class oriented dramatists to the stage, the bourgeoisie found delight in forms of drama which were less formal and more a combination of comedy and tragedy, and thus better suited to their orientation. Being less coherent and refined than the aristocrat, the bourgeoisie seemed to revel in seeing as much variety of form as possible presented for their

They constantly demanded, without conscious purpose, a realism which was at best artificial, yet proved to be a very powerful force in the theatre. Coupled with this artificial realism, was an ever increasing tendency to make the theatre a place for moralizing and propaganda. The middle-class audience: "Demanded from the theatre the inculcation of those virtues from which--despite attempts to embrace the code of aristocratic society--the bourgeoise could not escape." The outrageous vices and profligate lives of the aristocracy were anathema to the bourgeoise who had worked diligently and constantly for several generations to achieve their present status, and neither leisure time nor gross self-indulgence found a very large part in their scheme of things. The bourgeoise, in short, wished the drama to extol their real and supposed virtues, and heartily condemn the vices, real and supposed, of the aristocracy.

It is not difficult, then, to understand, given this general fluctuating picture of society, that Nicoll has found it necessary to divide the prevailing dramatic trends of eighteenth century Europe into different categories or forces which, separately or combined, form the theatrical picture of the century. The first is called "the traditional," which is really the continuation of the neo-classic tragedies and comedy of manners from the seventeenth century which, however, ultimately dwindle off toward the end of the eighteenth century. The


\[^{4}\]Ibid.

second is "the genteel," that drama influenced by the bourgeoisie, and was primarily an adaptation of the traditional comedy and tragedy into forms more desirable, understandable, and meaningful to the middle-classes. The third factor, more a force than a separate and distinct form, is "realism." The bourgeoisie found it hard to comprehend the formalism of the traditional stage, and instead demanded to see life as it really was, mixed with the comic and the tragic. This factor was later to make itself more manifest in the romantic movement. Finally, as has already been mentioned, "the philosophic" tendencies of the eighteenth century man pervade the drama in more specific terms than ever before:

In the past many critics and some playwrights had attempted to demonstrate the moral and even the social value of drama, but they did so only in the broadest and the most general of terms. When we enter the eighteenth century we begin to find, for the first time in modern Europe, a definitely propagandist theatre. Men were beginning in these days to think very seriously about social life: . . . the age showed itself 'philosophic' in this sense, displaying an almost pathetic belief in the power of reason.

In retrospect, it must also be concluded that out of these four predominant factors, rightly attributed to the bourgeoisie influence, emerged a definite "sentimental" quality in which much of the eighteenth century drama wallowed. However, the sentiment produced in these plays, although then a major trend in the theatre, was too saccharine and fatuous to be of any great dramatic significance.

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
It should also be noted that the drama in the eighteenth century became much more international than ever before. There was greater movement between countries, hence a definite increase in the exchange of ideas and innovations. This peripatetic nature of the drama, and in many other areas for that matter, was in fact so prolific that most of the dramatic patterns of the eighteenth century can be traced on a continental scale rather than of a smaller national scale as was the case in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. France was supposedly the arbiter of theatrical theory at the beginning and into the eighteenth century, so that it is perhaps only natural to present her with the lead part, supported by all the other European nations, in creating: "an age whose poetry was without romance and whose philosophy was without insight." While it should be noted in the previous quotation that Matthews speaks primarily of poetic drama, he made another concurrent statement which surely helps in understanding the century and its motivations:

The century itself, rather than the French example, is to blame if it has left so few poetic plays deserving to survive. What Lowell called its inefficacy for the higher reaches of poetry, its very good breezing that made it shy of the raised voice and the flushed features of enthusiasm,' enabled the century to make its prose supple for the elegancies of the social circle and for the literature which sought to reflect these elegancies.  

Comedy, as created in the eighteenth century, found expression in many forms and definitions, so that it is necessary to examine more specifically the nature of this genre. The term comedy, in and of itself, needs further definition for it has been found during the course


10 Ibid., p. 266.
of this study that, because of present day viewpoints, comedy must necessarily mean something humorous; yet, "the common equation of comedy equals laughter is dubious and hazardous. This has been the common supposition for very long now, but is not necessarily true, ... We must remain ever aware of its variety."  Edna C. Fredrick observes that:

The seventeenth century bequeathed to the eighteenth century the classical conception of comedy; this means, of course, comedy as conceived by Molière, comedy where the chief preoccupation was character-study and the portrayal of contemporary manners. ... what this meant in specific terms was a play developed around characters of low or middle-class birth (in this respect, the French created a little and said that the characters should not be of too humble a birth, and not necessarily vulgar or unpolished), subject matter limited to everyday occurrences, verisimilitude, and the teaching of a moral lesson. Since Molière was taken as the arbiter of this type of comedy, satirical and didactic comedy, it is interesting to read what he said on the matter:

In the function of comedy is to correct the vices of men, I cannot see why any should be exempt. ... We have seen that the theatre has a great power for correction. The finest moralizing is generally less effective than satire; and nothing reforms the majority of men better than the painting of their faults. It deals a great blow at vice to expose it to the laughter of everybody. People can easily endure rebukes but they cannot endure raillery; they like being evil well enough but they do not like being ridiculous. Satire and a type of comedy of manners, then, was the means of beginning


13 Tartuffe, (1664).
eighteenth century stage moralizing, yet the result was more often than not didactic rather than humorous, more satiric than witty, and, in fact, many dramatists felt that laughter was alien to their comedies. This factor is particularly interesting, considering Molière's acknowledged influence, when viewed in juxtaposition with a statement made by him in *La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*, 1663: "I am not at all sure if the great rule of all rules is not to please, and that a play which has achieved this aim has not followed the right road." And also remember that he asserted that comedy, "deals a great blow at vice to expose it to the laughter of everybody," \(^{14}\) It would appear that the imitators of Molière, given all their other faults, were also remiss in their interpretation of his intentions. However, it also can be noted that Molière was interested in the aristocratic theatre, a theatre of entertainment, and had no real desire to preach, whereas the eighteenth century bourgeois theatre was interested in the reformation of society, a purpose to which laughter would seem alien. The eighteenth century satirist desired only a smile and perhaps a chuckle or two while viewing on stage "type" characters representing particular egregious foibles of contemporary society; and, at the final curtain, the presentation of a morally uplifted, more responsible citizen to the world. For these dramatists, comedy was created if only the characters were of low or middle-class origin, and represented vice. This type of satire was for a long while critically reviewed without any reference to the comic qualities of it: the popular farces and low comedies were deprecated, and even Molière was slightly criticized as pandering to popular, \(^{14}\)Ibid.
vulgar taste. Allardyce Nicoll points out that satire:

is not well suited for the stage. Its atmosphere may successfully form an incidental part of a comedy, but its basis in a sense of self-conscious superiority, its openly expressed sense of purpose make it a dangerous style for any playwright to attempt.  

"Dangerous" or not, however, satire remained high on the list of popular forms of comedy during the eighteenth century.

As the century moved on some comic playwrights seemed to feel, as their public became satiated with satire, that greater success might be possible if more wit and genuine laughter crept into the basic form of the comedy. This incipient genre became more and more polished and popular until one found in it a far greater interplay of wit which:

subtly modifies the outward appearance of realism and delineates a world which is highly selective. . . . Where no attempt is made to move from the present society and thoughts of the present moment. This comedy depends on the interplay of a prevailing intellectual approach and an undercurrent of sensibility. . . . The comedy of wit exists for its delight rather than for any sense of moral purpose.  

There still remained a "moral purpose" in these comedies, as was to be the case throughout the century, but, with the increasing use of wit, laughter was becoming a more important element of comedy.

Contributing also to this awakened sense of the value of laughter in comedy were intermittent attempts at imitating the old Spanish comedy of intrigue. The eighteenth century, as pointed out, inherited Moliere's comedy of character, but, as the century progressed, the comic playwrights began to experiment with the construction of a more plausible, action-filled, suspenseful plot. This type of comic

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15 Nicoll, Theatre, p. 127.

16 Ibid., p. 126.
form began to find favor with the public, and it proved to be a versatile form, used correctly, for producing more humor using both wit and suspense; yet still could be a bit didactic. This is the form, especially in France, which ushers out the eighteenth century and prepares the way for the "well-made-play" of Eugene Scribe.

Worthy of mention in this discussion of forms is that particular form of drama, neither tragedy nor comedy, the *comédie larmoyante* or lachrymose comedy. The object of this unfortunate form was to present to the audience plays which would alternate tears with smiles and always end happily. The invention of this anomaly must again be attributed to the demands of the middle-class audiences which had come to increasingly dominate the theatre of the eighteenth century. This form found its progenator in the English Sentimental Comedy, but the French and ultimately Europe developed and refined it into almost Frankenstein proportions. The comedy implicit in this genre is almost nil, and for purposes of this study will not be given much attention.

Surely an apt and incisive summary of the eighteenth century is that one offered by Brander Matthews:

No doubt every century is more or less an era of transition; but surely the eighteenth century seems to deserve the description better than most. For nearly three quarters of its career, it appears to us prosaic in many of its aspects, dull and gray and uninteresting; but it was ever a battle-ground for contending theories of literature and life. In drama more especially it was able to behold the establishment and disestablishment of pseudoclassicism.

At its beginning the influence of the French had won widespread acceptance for the rules with their insistence on the three Unities and on the separation of the comic and the tragic. At its end every rule was being violated wantonly; and the drama itself seemed
almost as lawless as the bandits it delighted in bringing on the stage so abundantly. Throughout Europe, except in France, the theatre had broken its bonds; and even in France, the last stronghold of the theorists, freedom was to come early in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17}Matthews, pp. 294-295.
CHAPTER II

SCANDINAVIA

The Scandinavian countries, for centuries concerned only with mundane native affairs, emerged into an awareness of the rest of eighteenth century Europe from the relative literary and intellectual oblivion of prior centuries. For the first time they began to feel the intensive influence of highly developed France, England, Italy, and the impetuous, new born intellectuality of Germany. Slowly but steadily these Northern countries developed a social consciousness prompted and influenced by the sudden introduction of social, economic, and political situations, especially the bourgeoning bourgeoisie, prominent throughout the rest of enlightened Europe. That drama which existed in Scandinavia prior to the eighteenth century had only taken the form of secular pageants similar to those of the Middle-Ages, folk or popular drama similar to the late medieval farces, and, sporadically during the seventeenth century, some attempts at producing French drama.

DENMARK and NORWAY

Of primary importance to the study of Scandinavia during the eighteenth century is the fact that Norway and Denmark were politically united, making the recognized father of Scandinavian drama, Ludwig von Holberg, a native of both countries.
LUDWIG VON HOLBERG (1684-1754)

Holberg, born in Norway, applied himself to Danish drama and, more important to this study, to comedy and satire. His achievements, though relatively ignored now, cannot go unnoticed or dismissed with a cursory examination, for he is the major Scandinavian dramatist of the eighteenth century, and indeed prepares the way for Ibsen and Strindberg. Holberg came from a fairly large family, and, as was the custom of that time, seemed destined for a military career. As a young boy, however, Holberg showed a remarkable affinity for intellectual endeavors, so that he ultimately culminated a distinguished school career by graduating from Oxford. Leaving Oxford, he was afforded the unique experience of travelling around Europe, acutely observing the profound and sweeping changes taking place, and becoming painfully aware of the backwardness of his homeland. In the years 1719-1720, he initiated his first comic attempt by creating the epic Peder Pans which imitated the form of Homer and Virgil, but satirized the superstitions, pedantry, and insipience of his own people. His dramatic career really began, however, with the establishment of the Royal Danish Theatre, or Little Gronnegade, in 1722 for which Holberg was commissioned to write plays in the native language about native customs.

Oehlenschlager, an early nineteenth century Danish poet and playwright, said of Holberg:

He has known how to paint the bourgeois life of Copenhagen of his time so faithfully that if this city were to be swallowed up and if, at the end of two-hundred years the comedies of Holberg were
rediscovered, from these one would be able to reconstruct the epoch just as from Pompeii and from Herculaneum we know the times of ancient Rome.  

It would appear then, that Holberg possessed dramatic qualities and powers of observation which deserve a position alongside that of Molière.

It is, though, with more critical insight and impartiality than that of Oehlenschlager and his contemporaries that the twentieth century critic and historian, Allardyce Nicoll, can eulogize:

Holberg suffers from many defects. He satirizes broadly, but rarely does he exhibit any clear orientation in his satire. His mind is confused, and amid the changing social conditions of his time he finds it impossible to take a clear stand. Although we feel that in his comedies he desired to arouse his compatriots to improve their somewhat backward cultural state, and although we recognize that in this aim he was aligning himself with Molière, we are bound to confess that he shows himself wholly unsure concerning the nature and quality of the improvements to be sought. The same lack of certainty is exhibited both in the structure and in the characterization of his comedies... scenes are often ill-harmonized, and frequently opportunities for the enriching of the characters are sadly neglected.  

However, this statement seemed a little strong for other present-day critic-historians, who make such statements as Holberg possesses:

broad humor and his swift strokes quickly delineate character. He chose such subjects as Molière and Goldoni used, but his way of handling them was original. Whatever he borrowed he made his own, and this is the principle reason he is still liked in Scandinavia.

and:

Holberg's genius lay in his ability to paint such simple honest portraits in which real life was handled with a slightly comic

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2 World Drama from Aeschylus to Anouilh, (New York, 1950), p. 390

3 Freedley and Reeves, p. 265.
edge... and then he added critical ideas but kept them subordinate.

Whatever the opinions, Holberg attempted to produce satiric comedy, much in the manner of Molière, concerning particular incisive faults which he observed in the Danish society and particularly Copenhagen. He was quite popular and still is to some degree, however, this popularity was and is mostly indigenous with Denmark and Scandinavia.

To summarize, Holberg believed that the presentation of his plays would help to encourage social development in his newly awakened, backward nation, consequently, he chose satiric comedy mixed with comedy of manners as the form to ridicule the excesses and blunders of this society. All his comedies portray common Danish types, one of whom inevitably represents Holberg's opinions on some particular phase of social life, one who is made the object of the satire because of his opposition to the expressed standards of conduct, and minor characters who either aid in making the character who is the satiric object ridiculous, or who are concurrently made ludicrous with the antagonist. It also has been noted that on occasion Holberg presented a character who confusedly wavers between the right and wrong. Favored, too, was the comic servant who, through his intelligence and agility, was able to entertain the audience with intrigue and various disguises much in the same manner as Harlequin and Columbine of the Commedia dell'arte. In addition, it is noticeable that Holberg's comedies were of a much simpler form than those of France or Italy, yet he was highly conscious of his audience and knew that they were not on the same

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4Henry Ten Eyck Perry, Masters of Dramatic Comedy and Their Social Themes, (Cambridge, 1939), p. 207.
intellectual plane as those of Paris; so that, if his comedies were to attain their moral purpose, the form had to be simple and entertaining. It seemed apparent, too, that he:

wishes, not to be feebly dependent upon the tradition of the past, but to interpret its spirit in terms of existing conditions. His theory is an excellent one; unfortunately his practice falls short of it, and he often resorts to hackneyed horseplay and routine intrigues that end in marriage.⁵

In 1722 Holberg wrote five plays, the best of which is considered to be Jeppe of the Hill, and may even be Holberg's best play according to some critics. This play points out that social changes should not transpire too swiftly. Jeppe, a peasant, acquires sudden wealth and immediately decides to become a socially prominent city dweller, but he possesses neither the social graces nor the social contacts. In Jeppe, Holberg employed a favorite device of positioning his characters against the city background to sharpen individual characteristics and obscure the basic humanity of the comic characters. The theme of this play is that life is really more important than social position.

Two of the most pointed of Holberg's compositions of 1724 were Melampe and Ulysses of Ithaca. Melampe is a satire on war, a criticism of the decadent aristocracy, and, of all things, an impugning of the fashionable mania for owning Lap dogs. In 1724, Copenhagen had been host to numerous German comedies which proved to be quite popular with the public. Holberg, perhaps sensing undesired competition, immediately wrote Ulysses of Ithaca in which he burlesqued the style of these foreign comedies, the inherent insincere emotion, the neglect of the three Unities, and, generally, those who flaunt as art that which is really specious spectacle.

⁵Ibid., p. 217.
In the years 1727-1728, the Royal Danish Theatre presented The
Funeral of Danish Comedy which foretold the closing of the Royal Danish
Theatre in 1730-1731, and The Bustling Man in which one of Holberg's
finest characters, Vielgeschrey, is drawn. Vielgeschrey is the personi-
fication of all those people who constantly seem busier than they ever
really are, as Holberg has Vielgeschrey's brother remark, "You never
have leisure, although you never have anything to do."

Of the plays created before the Royal Danish Theatre was closed
in 1731 in Copenhagen, Don Ranudo de Calibrados manifested itself as
Holberg's most extensive, and elaborate comedy in which his mood of
attempted realism shows a definite softening in a desire to indicate
that all human endeavor is pathetic and absurd. The play is laid in
Spain to increase the detachment, but in his attempt at elevating the
comedy, Holberg was without great success. Also in 1731 came Erasmus
Montanus, considered by several critics to be Holberg's best, and in
which he came nearest to Moliere in his imitation of the classical form.
Erasmus is an excessively violent satirization of pedantry, academic
education, and the insanity of emphasizing the external, superficial
forms of education. However, Holberg also pointed out the limitations
of crude, uneducated common sense. In the play, Erasmus comes home to
the provinces after a formal education and immediately starts spouting
Latin phrases and complicated terminology to anyone in hearing distance.
With the theme of the play, however, Holberg never seemed to take a
stand as to whether he thought education was an advantage or a detri-
ment, or to what extent society was, like Erasmus, only a hollow sham.
One of Holberg's greatest defects is illustrated in this play, that of
not fusing idea with character and situation.
With the closing of the Royal Danish Theatre in 1731, Holberg seemed to become disenchanted with the playwrighting profession, for while he was writing he was also having to constantly defend his position as an honorable profession for an intelligent, educated man to occupy. This eternal bickering, coupled with the fact that the Danish public had not been so responsive to the theatre in the last few years, seemed to stifle Holberg's desire to write any more plays. However, after a new theatre was built in 1748 to replace one which was destroyed by fire, Holberg was persuaded to again write for its stage, and by 1754 he had completed his last six comedies. With these plays, which were inferior to his earlier creations, Holberg attempted to reincarnate the philosophical spirit of classicism, mostly because sentimental drama was at this time invading Copenhagen, and Holberg was not at all in favor of the intrusion. One of the best of these comedies, Republic, examines practical politics in the disguise of an ordinary love story, and another, Sanarel's Journey, seems to give some opinion, although very vague, that art is more noble than philosophy. In all of these last plays there was an attempt to emulate the classical in rising above the mundane and discussing matters of a more elevated, abstract nature.

Holberg, finally, must be viewed as a playwright of no great contributions to the world of dramatic comedy. He obviously and consciously drew his inspiration from Moliere, yet never succeeded in his emulation. However, he is surely important in the evolution of the drama in the North, for it was he who initiated the dramatic evolution which culminated in Ibsen.
Holberg seized upon many salient points in the confused life of his day. He depicted with fidelity, if not always with illumination, the humorous contrasts that are brought about by any period of rapid and widespread social change.®

After the death of Holberg, the Danish theatre no longer possessed the native qualities which had made it so popular among the people. There developed, through the court influence, a taste for French tragedies and Italian Operas, and what little native drama was produced found itself shunted to the background. Foreign influence and foreign visitors were also inundating the Scandinavian countries, becoming a cause for great distaste to most of the nationalistic population, for these visitors constantly ridiculed the native customs and relative lack of culture.

PETER ANDREAS HEIBERG (1758-1841)

Heiberg attempted to write satirical comedies and operettas during the last years of the eighteenth century. However, his attempts were inferior to Holberg, though he did show in his comedies a good sense of character development while attacking all existing institutions, the nobility, justice, government, thereby garnering a certain amount of notoriety and affection of the people. In 1799, however, because of his virulent attacks against the government, he was exiled from Denmark, and spent the rest of his life in Paris.

JOHANNES EWALD (1744-1781)

Ewald, although mostly a poet, did write a few tragedies, dramas, and satires. The most prominent of the latter being The Brutal Applauders (1772). Ewald was the first Danish playwright to show sympathy for the German influence which Golberg had detested so heartily.

Ibid., p. 235.
Although Bredal was primarily the director of a theatre in Copenhagen, he did write some farces.

**Johann Herman Wessel** (1742-1785)

Wessel, like Holberg, found his alliances divided between Denmark and Norway. He was a teacher of modern languages, when, in 1778, he was hired to translate for the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. Here Wessel started to write comedies satirizing the stilted, soulless tragedies of French neo-classicism. His most famous satire, *Love Without Stockings* is an hilarious parody on the pseudo-classic tragic form. It was written in Alexandrines, showed absurd regard for the unities, and presented a ridiculous conflict between virtue and love in which every character in the play is mixed with ludicrous action, pretentious language juxtaposed with crude colloquialisms and insignificant characters, all presented according to the exact rules of neo-classic art. When first presented, the people viewing this obvious parody did not know whether to laugh or cry, an obvious statement about the theatrical fare to which they were accustomed. Wessel also wrote *More Lucky Than Wise* (1776).

**Knud Lynne Rahbek** (1760-1830)
**Christen Hendrikse Frøam** (1756-1821)

Rahbek and Frøam received mention only as being comic playwrights of late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.

**Sweden**

The development in Sweden during the eighteenth century was much the same as previously described, however, she did not move as rapidly
as Norway and Denmark. The French also had a more profound early effect
on the culture of Sweden than they did on Denmark and Norway, but then,
Sweden did not have a man comparable to Holberg. The greatest period of
development in the arts during the early history of Sweden occurred in
the reign of Gustavus III (1746-1792). He was an ardent patron of the
arts, writing some tragedies himself, and demanded that the French model
be followed.

Though the last half of the eighteenth century, that of the
reign of Gustavus, produced playwrights of more reknown, there were a
few who are remembered as having written in the first half of the
century.

**OLOF DALIN** (1708-1763)

Dalin is considered to have been the most eminent and influen­
tial writer in Sweden through the middle years of the eighteenth century.
He wrote tragedies and comedies, the latter being primarily influenced
by Holberg and Molière. His best comedy seems to have been *The Jealous
Man* (1733).

**CARL GYLLENBORG** (1679-1746)

Gyllenborg wrote comedies modeled more after Holberg than any
of the French or English playwrights. His *The Swedish Fop* opened the
Royal Swedish Theatre in 1737.

**R. G. MODEL** (1593-1702)

Model wrote comedies in the classical style about contemporary
bourgeoise subjects.
ERIK WRANDEL (1696-1765)

Wrangel is on record as having written a comedy sometime between 1739-1748.

During the reign of Gustavus, despite his preference for drama written in the French manner, there were playwrights who created comedies of a more national character.

KARL ISRAEL HALLMAN (1732-1800)

Hallman wrote parodies on operas, tragedies in the French manner, and broad farces which were, perhaps because of their coarseness, the most popular. His best comedy was Opportunity Makes the Thief, which had verses set to music by Karl Michael Bellman.

OLOF KEXEL (1748-1796)

Kexel's most famous comedies are Kaptan Puff and Michel Wingler, both of which border on being farces rather than straight comedy.

JOHAN MAGNUS LANNESTJERNA (1758-1797)

KARL EVALLSON (1756-1806)

Lannestjerna and Evallson wrote comedies which are now forgotten, but were supposedly quite popular during the waning years of the eighteenth century in Sweden.

SUMMARY

Comedy in eighteenth century Scandinavia must be seen as the major dramatic force. The efforts of Holberg are primarily responsible for this fact, and it is his influence and manner which are at least personally experienced in Heiberg, Jessel, Ewald, and Hallman, and most other comic playwrights who follow him in this century. Holberg should
be considered as one of the most important European eighteenth-century playwrights. While his satiric comedy of manners and character held the stage, Scandinavia possessed a form of true national drama which was popular with the people, pictured and exposed the contemporary society, and superior to the efforts of most other European eighteenth-century comic playwrights. This fact is substantiated when one considers how translations of foreign plays and operas invaded the Scandinavian stage upon Holberg's death. The last half of the century was primarily devoted to the production of tragedy rather than comedy, with the native playwrights mimicking the French tragedies and Italian operas, or producing farce and inferior imitations of foreign satiric comedies.
CHAPTER III

THE GERMANIC COUNTRIES

GERMANY

Germany at the beginning of the eighteenth century was one of the most backward of all the nations in Europe. This fact was caused by inordinately long and bitter civil and religious wars which had kept the country in a state of constant disruption, without a national consciousness, and national drama. As Melnitz and MacGowan point out:

"It was not so much disunion as the cause of disunion that held back German theater until the middle of the eighteenth century."¹ Germany, until it was united by Bismark in 1870, remained a country divided into dukedoms, principalities, and free cities. It is no wonder, then, that no national culture and art had developed. Individual culture, however, had materialized and grown in certain of the cities and principalities such as Leipzig, Hamburg, Mannheim, Frankfurt, Vienna, Munich, Weimar, and Berlin. The drama developed in these centers was, for the most part, a drama limited in exposure and appeal to the citizens of each city or principality. This fact figured highly in the development of all phases of German drama and is indicative of the character of the German people, as Eleanor F. Jourdain makes clear:

Because of the fact that the drama is pre-eminently a social art: it is a stimulus to society and a criticism of it, but the tendency of the German mind is individual rather than social expression. Hence many German plays were written to give effect to the author's views, and many more without the imaginative realization of what

could or could not be successfully produced on stage. Thus even at
the time of her great dramatists, Goethe and Schiller, plays were
produced for the court theatres, and appealed to a very restricted
section of the people in some one province in Germany. Thus even at
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section of the people in some one province in Germany.

Without national unity there was not a viable national language in which
a national literature might be nurtured and developed.

When a traditional drama of any kind began to develop in Germany,
mainly through the efforts of Johann Christoph Gottsched and his suc­
cessors Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller, the efforts were mainly imitative
of all the foreign forms of drama to which they had been exposed during
the last few decades, or a reaction to those forms. James Russell
Lowell, American author and critic of the nineteenth century states:

There was 'in the national character an insensibility to proportion'
which would 'account for the perpetual groping of German imaginative
literature after some foreign mold in which to cast its though of
feeling, now trying a Louis Quatorze pattern, then something sup­
posed to be Shakesperian, and at last going back to ancient Greece.'

However, before there was any real attempt at copying the pseudo-classic
form of the French, Germany was enjoying a form of popular drama and
comedy which had been developed many years earlier and was given more
impetus by the traveling troupes of foreign actors which had begun to
invade Germany at the end of the seventeenth century and early years of
the eighteenth century.

It is important to examine the forms of this popular theatre,
for they play an important part in eighteenth and nineteenth century
comedy in Germany. Popular comedy also served as a basis for the

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2The Drama in Europe in Theory and Practice, (New York, 1924),
p. 39.

3Brander Matthews, The Development of the Drama, (New York,
criticism and praise of those who initiated the movement toward a more regular form of drama later in the century. **Haupt-und Staatsaktionen**, which were mainly melodramas with interspersed comic scenes, and harlequinades were the typical fare of popular theatre. These plays, developed from medieval drama, were filled with immorality, disorder, bombast, vulgarities, showed no regard for probability or decency, and indicated no desire to point out a moral, a fact which became important when regular comedy began to oppose this popular variety. Usually these pieces were extemporized, although some were written down. The harlequinades came to be known as **Nachspiele**, **Fastnachtsspiel**, or "carnival play." Even though the lewd comic scenes, which seemed to be the most popular, were quite offensive to the middle-classes, this form of comedy amused them enough to warrant returning for more. Lady Mary Wortley Montague in a letter to Pope from Vienna dated Sept. 14, 1716, speaks of a version of **Amphytrion** which she had just seen:

> . . . I never laughed so much in my life . . . but I could not easily pardon the liberty the poet has taken of larding his play with, not only indecent expressions, but such gross words as I don't think our mob would suffer from a mountebank. Besides, the two Sosia's very fairly let down their breeches in the direct view of the boxes, which were full of people of the first rank that seemed very well pleased with their entertainment, and assured me this was a celebrated piece.\(^4\)

The **Haupt-und Staatsaktionen**, which means plays about heads of government, usually made use of plots taken from Italian plays, and then, Hanswurst, Germany's Harlequin, was added to provide the laughs. The very popular interludes, which appeared inserted in the Haupt pieces were modeled after the Italian **Commedia dell'Arte** and also contained

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Hanswurst since he had developed into the German audience's favorite character and the theatre's biggest attraction. These Interludes finally attracted so much attention, that, although inserted into the Haupt pieces at various intervals, they had nothing whatever to do with the plot of the main play and each one developed a story of its own. All the vulgar humour inherent in these interludes was embodied in the one main character, Hanswurst, who was avaricious, lusty, an extreme glutton, braggart, and a coward. However, the dramatists or actors extemporizing the part were well in tune with their audiences, for they also made Hanswurst an amiable dupe who "tumbles through the play in a continual state of bewilderment and good-natured perplexity." This device won for Hanswurst undeniable popularity from his audiences for more than a century to follow, and he is, in fact, still in evidence today. With his jokes he gave voice to many dissatisfactions which the populace felt, but because of government or church suppression they could not safely broadcast their own unrest.

The Haupt-und Staactsactionen comedy seemed to find its motivation in presenting the constant struggle between man's spiritual desires and carnal demands. In the process of these pieces, the audience would witness grand, sublime, ethereal emotions on the part of some of the characters, but this mood of divinity was constantly interrupted by the gross action and lewd comments of Hanswurst. He was forever found echoing the heavenly sentiments of his lord or master (Hanswurst, as the Commedia's Harlequin, is usually a servant), but always in as profane a manner as possible. There was in these plays a perpetual

descent from the sublime to the ridiculous, from decorous to the obscene, and constant parody by Hanswurst on the grandiloquent speeches of his master. **Haupt- und Staatsaktionen** plays by a German named Strazinsky and Karl XII are extant, but most are untitled.

**J.J.F., VON KURZ (1715-1784)**

Von Kurz was a very popular successor to Strazinsky, and created a new comic character in the manner of Hanswurst called Bernardon. Von Kurz's plays were different from the regular **Haupt** form in that they were produced in a mock-opera style:

> with only the arias written in full, and the rest extemporized... were wholly comic without the mixture of any serious action and the awe-inspiring, melodramatic effects of the **Haupt- und Staatsaktionen** which were replaced by spectacular effects, dances, ballets and tumbling.\(^6\)

Two of the most popular of this type were entitled **Die Judenhochzeit**, which concerned a typical parent-children conflict, with the unpleasant parents tricked by the children; and **Bernardon der ABC-Schütz**, which was about a peasant turned rich man and his ridiculous pretences.

The **Nachspiele** or **Fastnachsspiele** were one-act farces usually presented at the end of a **Haupt** piece. These farces are believed to have been every bit as scurrilous as the main play, except that they were perhaps a little more fanciful and a bit more bucolic. This point is hard to surmise, however, for most **Nachspiele** exist only in title and scenario. Many are thought to have been translations of foreign comedies, both contemporary and classical, without any acknowledgement to the author. However, in these translations, the piece took on a

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distinct German character with the cast voicing prevalent German sentiments and complaints. Harlequin, the perennial favorite, also romped through these farces. Only two Nachspiele have been traced by plot; one is called Issac und Rebecca (1772), and the other is Die Franzosen in Bohmen (1743), the plot of which is:

Harlequin complains of his wife's infidelity: the judge, who is a Frenchman, takes the wife's side; Finally Harlequin is condemned to keep house for his unfaithful wife, who goes out with the judge while he is doing the housework and looking after the children. In the final scene, the curtain goes up and shows Harlequin, with horns on his head and a cradle at each side, singing.  

These forms of popular comedy were highly deprecated by Germany's rising new core of intellectuals, all advocates of regular drama, like Johann Gottsched and Carolina Neuber, who, in her farewell address to the Citizens of Hamburg in 1740 said: "Take Harlequin as your model, perhaps he will benefit you more than I . . . for your intention is to patronize nothing good."8 Haupt-und Staatsactionen, comic interludes, and Nachspiele received an increasing amount of critical abuse as the eighteenth century progressed, yet the popular comedy remained as attractive as it ever was in spite of the vituperations heaped upon it. Betsy Aikin-Sneath explains this popularity most succinctly:

The reformers of the early eighteenth century did not realize that the drama they fought had a basic appeal to the audience. The popular comedies had a view of primitive, spontaneous humour, that did not fail to arouse amusement. Experience taught actors, authors, and producers the response they might expect from the spectators. The theorists who had not this direct contact with the audience were out of sympathy with their emotion, their hopes, fears, desires and disappointments.  

7Ibid., p. 56  
9Aikin-Sneath, p. 60.
Is is believed, with obvious justification, that eighteenth century Germany was more a country of notable dramatic theorists than playwrights. To be sure, there were many playwrights who attempted to follow the precepts and theories advanced, but there were few who are remembered today. Two of the earliest and most influential theorists in the field of regular comedy were Johann Gottsched and Johann Schlegel. Both men were intensely concerned with the state of German theatre, and created theories of comedy, tragedy, and drama for Germany at a time when she possessed nothing but the popular comedy. Each man, however, presented a basic difference in his view of the purpose of comedy.

**Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766)**

Gottsched believed, with the French dramatists, that comedy must be didactic and teach a moral before it deserved to be called a comedy, but Schlegel felt that the drama and comedy needed only to bring pleasure to its audience and not necessarily preach a lesson. In his *Critische Dichtkunst* (1730), Gottsched delineated what he believed were the principles of a good comedy, and for that matter, all drama, for most of his ideas on comedy applied to drama in general. He believed adamantly that anyone with a clear view of society could write a comedy, that no talent other than a critical faculty was required. He said that, "the comic writer points out to other men where their reason has failed, and the ensuing laughter is an intellectual process, consisting in the mental comparison of some eccentricity with a norm."¹⁰ As has been pointed out, Gottsched was appalled at the lack of decorum

¹⁰Ibid., p. 11.
in the popular comedies, so that he chose as his example, and emulated with an almost fanatic zeal, the neo-classical style of the French, and the classical form dictated by Aristotle. It was his desire to create a national literature and drama, and he decided that comedy was just the form to use to point out where the German nation was failing. He was also a great admirer of the French attempt to put as much realism as possible into their dramas, and consequently stressed this point, for he believed that realism was in fact furthered by the application of the classical rules. He felt that comedies should present a moral, but be fictitious (present no personal satires); show simple, "type" characters; be written in a realistic style, preferably prose, in five acts; follow the Unities; and dispense with prologues and monologues.

Gottsched further said that the comedy must be satirical, but that the audience must be forced to laugh at, not with the characters who represent only unimportant, culpable faults; and he impugned all comic touches which did not enhance the vices and virtues of the characters. Believing that comedy comes out of character, he did not endorse the comedies of intrigue and plot, for it was more difficult to point out a moral in these plays, and not as many vices could be castigated. Laughter, he stated, was also not really essential to a comedy as long as it pointed out a moral lesson and the characters were "types." However, this did not mean that he approved of the sentimental being mixed with the comic. He felt that comedy demanded a detached intellectual process on the part of the audience and that empathy and one's emotions should not be invoked. All of these demands of course hindered as much
as they helped the development of comedy in Germany, perhaps because of a lack of good comic playwrights, but then, rules similar to these also contributed to the inhibition of French comedy.

Johann Elias Schlegel (1719-1749)

The greatest distinctions, other than that of purpose, between Gottsched and Schlegel were, that Schlegel felt that laughter was not as essential to comedy as did Gottsched, and that it was acceptable to present a comedy in which there was a touch of sentiment. He also felt that comedy did not need realism, nor be written in prose: that the plays should appeal to a large cross-section of the population, and thus should be in agreement with public opinion. In this manner, he, too advocated a national drama that presented problems and manners of contemporary Germany, for he said that an audience had little interest in the manners and morals of other countries. Schlegel agreed with Gottsched that the "love and marriage" motif was used far too much and that comedies should be based on character. He desired a smile rather than a laugh, and agreed that most comedies did present a moral, finally, but that this was secondary to the solicitation of pleasure. He demanded that comedy be free from burlesque, obscenity, and absurdity, just as Gottsched had theorized, stating that: "The true joke does not depend on a mere surprise or sudden shock, but can be laughed at in recollection."\[11\]

Primarily in the first half of the eighteenth century, and to a lesser degree the last half, then, comedies were written according to

\[\textit{Ibid.}, p. 38.\]
the neo-classic precepts of Gottsched, and to a lesser degree, Schlegel. The comic playwrights were not, on the whole, very careful in their construction of these comedies and seemed often to tumble into the pitfalls which Gottsched had warned against. Most of these comedies were satires, although some comedies of intrigue did sneak into the repertory despite their depreciation. Of these comedies of intrigue, three should be mentioned as having the most significance.

J. C. Kruger, n.d.
A. G. Uhlich, n.d.

Two are by a man named Kruger, Der blinde Ehemann, and Der Teufel ein Barenhauter, and one is written by Uhlich, Der Mohr. These three presented their intrigues before exotic, Oriental backgrounds, yet they still contained topical events and comments concerning the German society. All three showed some sentimental elements. These comedies of intrigue, and all the others written at this time, feature common traits of: (1) farce or burlesque and, in fact, noticeably avoided the conventions of the popular comedy; (2) use of dramatic irony as a source of humour; (3) a more sophisticated humour and intellectualized sexual element; and (4) frequently a servant endowed with the brunt of the comedy.

C. P. Hunold, n.d.
Franz Callenbach, n.d.

Two early comic satirists were Hunold and Callenbach, a Jesuit priest who mixed German and Latin. Many of the better extant early satires are anonymous, one of the most renowned being Der schlimme
Causeneicher (1701), which takes as the object of its satire the dishonesty of lawyers. However, the intent is obviously critical, that humour is almost non-existent.

NENRICI-PICANDER (ca. 1726)

In 1726, Henrici-Picander presented three plays under the title of Picanders Teutsche Schau-Spiele. These satires ridiculed common vices, using comic devices of mistakes, fights, and vulgarity written into comic servants who only help to confuse the already confusing plots.

J. U. VON KONIG, n.d.

One of the best satirists was von König, who is remembered for Die verkehrte welt, and Der dresdener Schleuderian. His plays seem to have made better than average use of realistic incidents from German life without confusion from immoderate employment of comic devices. He resembled Holberg in that he was more interested in social satire and presenting common human foibles than in creating only character. He seemed to have delighted in presenting descriptions of ludicrous social customs. It is also important to note that most of the satires created during this period, Gottsched's notwithstanding, contained some elements of the popular comedy, for the playwright found a much more willing audience if he included some bits of vulgarity.

Satires created in the early eighteenth century can be grouped into three types; "satires on character, satires on professions, and satires on social background."\(^\text{12}\) The satire on character was the most

\(^{12}\text{Ibid., p. 76.}\)
prevalent form thanks to the influence of both Gottsched and J. F. Schlegel, who was also the chief creator of this form.

**J. F. SCHLEGELE (1719-1749)**

Schlegel showed the influence of Shakespeare, and drew simple, strong characters who are dominated by some overwhelming passion. These characters were intended to be comic in their malady, but often lacked any semblance of moderation or proportion. His best comedies of character are *Der geschäftige Hausherr* (1793), which ridiculed a man who possesses a very absent mind and an acute lack of social consciousness; *Der Geheinmisvolle*; a group of one act comedies, *Der gute Rat* and *Die Stumme Schönheit* which presented pleas for more and better education for women and a parody on shortsighted provincialism; and finally *Der Triumph der guten Frauen* which was the most mature and skillful of the group. Others who wrote poor comedies of this type were Gottlieb Fuchs, A. C. Uhlich, and J. T. Guistorp. In all these satires on character, the playwright based his plot on one character, his flaw, and its effect on the individual and society. Usually the central character is supported by characters who are either like him or exactly opposite, as in the manner of Holberg.

**J. C. KRUGER (ca. 1743)**

Kruger, mentioned as a writer of comic intrigues, also satirized the corrupt clergy in *Die Geistlichen auf er Lande* (1743) which was first published anonymously and resembles Tartuffe.
CHRISTLOB MYLIUS (ca. 1745)

Mylius' Die Aermte (1745) ridiculed doctors, but was very brutal and obscene and presented only a middle-class point of view.

J. T. QUISTORP (ca. 1744)

Quistorp attacked lawyers in Der Bock im Processe (1744).

FRAU GOTTSCHED (ca. 1745)

Frau Gottsched wrote Herr Witzling (1745) to ridicule Herr Gottsched's opponents. She also wrote two comedies of note which were satires of social background, one being Harsfranzosinn (1744), which attacked a French governess and tutor of a German middle-class family who is very repulsive in her manner; and the other is Die ungleiche Heirath which showed the middle-class to be industrious and honest and the aristocracy to be vain, greedy, and insensible. The plot concerns a planned marriage between the two classes which failed. This was one of the few comedies which didn't end in a marriage. Most of the comic effects in the German comedies, whatever their purpose, were achieved through disguises, misunderstandings, cross-purposes, repetition, and comic servants. Wit was rarely present in German comedies of the eighteenth century, because the language was not developed enough yet to produce genuine comic repartee and easily fell into the crude and gross.

The foregoing is a discussion of the theories and types of comedy presented along with a cross-section of the dramatists who were practicing, more or less, the ideas and precepts of Gottsched.
GOTTHOLD EPFRAM LESSING (1792-1781)

As the century passed the median, however, comedy of satire and intrigue dwindled into unpopularity, mainly because of the publication in 1769 of the Hamburgische Dramaturgie in which the ideas and criticism of the German stage by Gotthold Lessing, critic and playwright, served as the motivating force and starting point from where German national drama must be dated. Eleanor F. Jourdain states that:

Germany owes Lessing the inauguration of a national dramatic spirit, and a deliberate attempt to recover natural and simple lines of structure for the play in opposition to the artificiality which invaded German versions of French Neo-classic plays.  

Lessing refuted Gottsched's worship of the French pseudo-classic form and turned instead to the English and especially Shakespeare for inspiration.

Important primarily as a critic and writer of domestic tragedy, Lessing began his dramatic career as a playwright of comedies, turning only later in his development to the genre of the drama and domestic tragedy. His early comedies show him to have been a follower of Holberg and Goldoni and, in fact, borrowed some of their plots. This influence is primarily felt in his first two comedies Damon, or True Friendship and The Young Scholar, which more than any of his other works show touches of the satiric rules laid down by Gottsched. However, even these comedies attempt to mix the sentimental with the humorous. Three other early comedies show that he intended to borrow the plots of famous English Restoration comedies, but that all the characters would be more humanized and less profligate to conform to

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Lessing's own convictions about comic characters. The Credulous Man was supposed to develop the subplot of Wycherly's The Country Wife; The Good Man was to come from Congreve's The Double-Dealer; and The Would-be Wits was drawn from Shadwell's Bury Fair. Other early comedies were The Jews, which foreshadowed Nathan the Wise, and is a light comic slap at anti-semitism, the first in dramatic literature; and The Freethinker (1749), an attack on those who believed that freethinking was heresy. It was with this play that Lessing for the first time made humour secondary:

In all Lessing's early comedies there is an evident struggle between the traditionally comic view and what may be called a nonimaginative attitude towards human nature. Lessing draws the hypocritical friend, the pedantic scholar, the woman-hater, the old maid, but beside them are to be found the true friend, the noble lover, the understanding woman and the honest old bachelor. Sometimes sentiment prevails, and sometimes comedy; occasionally an almost exact balance between the two moods is achieved, but rarely a convincing one.¹⁴

There should also be mention of The Treasure (1750) in which Lessing attempted to imitate the Latin form of comedy, and adapted Plautus' Trinummus to point out a universal moral of human understanding. However, he could not produce the impartial spirit of true classicism, a fact which made him increasingly aware of his essential gift for representing the sentimental side of man. Lessing's final attempt at comedy was his best, Minna von Barnhelm, which still is the "most successful comedy and most substantial comedy that German literature can claim."¹⁵ Minna came out of Lessing's own experience and critical

¹⁵Ibid., p. 292.
standards, and even the central character of Maj. Tellheim was based on a real life friend. With this comedy, Lessing wanted to offer suggestions for certain political and social changes which he felt would basically improve the situation of his fellow men in eighteenth century Germany. Lessing definitely intended Minna didactic, but, in an inspiration of creative genius, he was able to keep the play from becoming just another sermon through the application of clever comic techniques and the creation of unique, amusing characters. After the publication of Minna von Barnhelm, Lessing created nothing more in the field of comedy. His natural talents lay more in the production of dramas and domestic tragedies such as Nathan the Wise, and Emilia Galotti, which stress Lessing's intense humanistic nature. He initiated the establishment of a true form of German literature and was to be followed by the two outstanding personages of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and Johann Christoph Fredrich von Schiller (1759-1805), but these men were not especially interested in comedy, and will not be further mentioned.

After Lessing, German drama experienced little comedy other than that which had already been created, and, of course, the popular comedy which existed along side the more important dramatic achievements well into the nineteenth century.

**FRANZ HIERONYMUS BROCKMANN (1745-1812)**

Brockmann was an actor who also attempted to emulate the English comedies in an effort to depict the private lives of the German middle-class, but his plays were not popular.
ERNST THEODOR AMADEUS HOFFMANN (1766-1822)

Hoffmann wrote Nachepiele; possessed a brilliant wit when drunk, but couldn't transfer it to the stage.

AUGUST FREDRIC VON KOTZEBUE (1761-1819)

Kotzebue spent a very interesting life, being first a civil servant in St. Petersburg, then worked with a theatre in Vienna where he was arrested and sent to prison in Siberia, and finally ended back in Petersburg. During his career as a playwright, he produced over two-hundred plays which were fantastically popular all over Europe. Kotzebue, the father of melodrama, was even more popular than Schiller during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. He possessed an unerring perception for knowing what the public liked, and spent his life giving it to them by the hundreds. His plays were popular with the actors of that era, for the characters he created were excellent vehicles. His best comedy is Die deutschen Kleinstädter, which was a satire on provincialism. Kotzebue appealed to the baser instincts of his audiences, and he always vitiated major virtues to provide thrills and excitement. All his plays lack depth of feeling, are hollow, risque, and are now all but forgotten.

AUGUST WILHELM IFFLAND (1759-1814)

Iffland, an actor as well as a playwright, had a large part in the management of the theatrical affairs of the National Theatre at Mannheim. He produced his own plays there with great success, and was, in fact, also more popular than Schiller. He was best at creating simple, unsophisticated characters; well-made plots; and pleasant
humour. He later left Mannheim to tour and act in his own plays. He finally settled at Wienermar with Goethe, where he continued to write comedies and act.

This apparent drought in German comedy was not really too surprising in light of the fact that Germany was, in the last decades of the eighteenth century, in the midst of the "storm and stress" movement which surely demanded anything but a comic approach. In addition there existed the fact of Goethe's and Schiller's awesome influence, along with that of Lessing, all of whom desired a truly German dramatic literature and turned to the more serious examples of Shakespeare and the Greeks and Romans for their inspiration. Finally, there is the reason of the German personality, itself, for the Germans, points out John Gassner, "have not been remarkable for their sense of humor."\(^{16}\)

AUSTRIA

Because of the close proximity of Germany and Austria, comedy in eighteenth century Austria followed the influence of, and, in fact, produced the dramatists of Germany. However, as Germany moved into the period of Lessing and his revolutionary changes, Austria remained under French influence and produced nothing but comedies, tragedies, and dramas of French origin. Also popular were the Nachspiele, burlesques, and farce of the popular theatre. The court theatres also made Italian opera fashionable later in the century, thus decreasing the popularity of comedy. Austrian comic writers worthy of mention are: Gottfried Frehouser (1699-1769) who wrote for the popular theatre;"
Joseph Felix von Kurtz (1715-1784) who created Hanwurst's rival comic servant, Bernardon, for the popular theatre; Philip Hafner, n.d. who wrote satire on the Bohemians and Hungarians, again in the popular old form; and Cornelius Hermann von Ayrenhoff (1733-1819) who wrote the more formal French form of comedy, the best being Die Postkutsche.

SUMMARY

The Germanic Countries, dominated by Germany, presented a comedy trend in the eighteenth century which began under the influence of the popular comedies, Haupt-und Staatsactionen, the comic interlude, and Nachspiele; moved rapidly from comedies written under the neo-classic precepts of Gottsched and Schlegel to the early comic attempts of Lessing; and finally, after the creation of Minna von Barnhelm, remained at a standstill because the native drama found its primary outlet in the plays of the "Storm and Stress" movement and the offerings of Goethe and Schiller. The popular comedy remained well liked during the whole of the eighteenth century, but it seemed to exist and prosper separately and independently from the more traditional or regular forms of comedy. The playwrights who followed the theories of Gottsched and the neo-classicists primarily created comedy of satire, but also wrote some comedies of intrigue. Lessing, desiring to break the hold which Gottsched and his followers maintained on German drama, pictured his own society and customs, but, unlike the "German neo-classicists," he created his own style, one which was more suitable to the German character and tastes.
CHAPTER IV
THE BALKANS
RUSSIA

For all practical purposes, Russian native drama was not born until the eighteenth century, although there did exist, previously, some forms of theatre. Religious mysteries were presented by the monasteries, yet these were not allowed to be publicly displayed until 1603; and a type of marionette theatre called the Vertep was produced at fairs and on holidays. However, it was not until Peter the Great (1672-1725) ascended the throne in 1689 that any significant progress was made toward a stable national drama. Like the Scandinavian countries, Russia had been in a kind of cultural vacuum for many hundreds of years, but with Peter, the country began to expand in every area of endeavor at an enormous rate. Peter's first concern was to build his country economically, setting as his paramount purpose the multiplying of his nation's wealth by every means possible. Wars for just this purpose ensued until 1722 when the peace of Neistadt was signed, Peter was made emperor of Russia, and St. Petersburg became the nation's capitol. Peter then immediately began to amplify his program of reconstruction. However, he was so vague in explication of his operations, that many of his reforms were not really understood by the people. Being an educated man, Peter expected his people to act in the manner
of an educated person and display the comprehension of an education, but this was impossible, for most of his people hardly were literate. He patronized the arts much more than had ever been attempted in the past, but in his primary concern for the country's economy, the arts were relegated to a place in the background. Peter died in 1725, but during his reign the Russian economy and social progress were so firmly established that no decline was possible. What was more important, however, was the fact that through his endeavors, Peter had created in his people an acute sense of national pride and had united them under one capitol.

With the accession of Catherine the Great (1729-1796) to the throne, an era of intense intellectual and literary activity intruded upon the Russian culture. Catherine was an empress extremely sensitive to public opinion both at home and abroad. She created a court and society that was reminiscent of the exterior splendour of Louis XIV, for she desired an external beauty and glory that would be admired all over Europe. She possessed a great proclivity for intellectual and literary endeavors, encouraging all forms of this type of activity wherever it chanced to spring up. Under her authority French philosophy and literature invaded Russia, exerting the same influence as in the rest of Europe, and perhaps even greater. Catherine encouraged satire and criticism of society and government, even allowing satirical magazines to be organized, and plays satirizing anything to be presented at her own private theatre in the Hermitage.
ALEXANDER SUMAROKOFF (1718-1777)

Into this atmosphere came the man who was to be regarded as the founder of Russian playwrighting, Alexander Sumarokoff. Having received high praise and encouragement for his dramatic attempts while at school, Sumarokoff decided to make playwrighting his profession. He was a very vain and vindictive man, regarded as an absolute tyrant when he managed a theatre in St. Petersburg. He possessed an exaggerated sense of his own abilities, and felt that he was the "Racine of the North." Sumarokoff was the first Russian playwright to completely adopt the rules of Racine and the neo-classicists, and was vain enough to desire to see only his plays produced on the stage of his theatre. He was once quoted as saying, "Not alone in the drama, but in every kind of poetry, I am the only author in Russia,"¹ however, about the same time Catherine was heard to remark about him, "the man is out of his mind, and will always be a conceited ass."²

Prior to Sumarokoff, the only comedies playing in Russia were translations of foreign works. Sumarokoff, however, soon began to write comedies in the Russian language about Russian people. In effect, Russian comedy began with Sumarokoff. He, like the rest of the eighteenth century writers of comedy desired to reform society and thus created his comedies solely to ridicule and satirize the manners and morals of his fellow citizens. He believed in his self appointed mission whole heartedly, even remarking after arriving in Moscow to write

²Ibid.
for a theatre there: "Alas! Moscow requires a hundred Molières, and I am alone." He made a valiant attempt, however, and perhaps would have produced miracles if he had not died a few years later.

Sumarokoff's contributions to the drama of Russia cannot be denied, perhaps deserving a place alongside Molière to read what some of his supporters like I. A. Demitrevsky wrote:

He was the first among those sweet-voiced singers, who, by their enchanting melodies, have lured all the muses to Russia, who have raised Helicon in the Petropolis, and who have fused the sprightly waters of Hippocrene with transparent streams of the Neva.

Sumarokoff, not surprisingly, perhaps phrased his adulation best:

That which Athens once possessed, Russia now enjoys, thanks to my labors. That which Germany, spite of her many writers, has not obtained—a national drama—I alone have created in a country where the art of literature is only beginning to be understood, and whose language has now only acquired purity and polish.

However, there were those who disagreed, such as Belinsky, one of Russia's greatest critics, who states that Sumarokoff was:

a poor litterateur; a conceited, talentless versifier; a weak, contemptible thinker, utterly ignorant of the higher laws of art.

Whatever the opinions, Sumarokoff must be considered as good as, if not the best, comedy playwright of the Russian eighteenth century.

As a writer of comedy, Sumarokoff fell into the same ruts as did most of the eighteenth century comic playwrights—most of his comedies were not really funny, but merely didactic, moralizing satires, often

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3Ibid.


5Ibid., p. 20.

6Ibid.
vicious, ridiculing common foibles of his society. Most of his plots were poorly constructed, weakly characterized, excessively repetitious and monotonous, pointedly moralized, and highly inactive. He did, however, exhibit a fine sense of prose dialogue which was spirited and animated. The most frequent objects of his satire were bureaucracy, injustice, ignorance, ill-treatment of serfs, greediness, and pseudo-learning. Perhaps he expressed the purpose for his comedies best in a poem which he wrote:

The comedy is called to better life through laughter; //
It must make people laugh, and let them think thereafter. //
Think of a soulless clerk who sits in his prikaz,
Or of a judge who can't make sense of an ukaz,
Or take that dandy with his silly haughty air,
And lifelong dream about the beauty of his hair,
Who thinks he was born for naught but amours,
And hopes to catch a wench who for the same thing clamors; //
Or take a Latinst who in his dissertation
Must use that ergo word in ev'ry fool citation,
Or next—a prouling ass inflated as a frog,
Or else—a miser who will suffer as a dog
To save his penny. Or—a gamester.

The best of Sumarokoff's comedies are considered to be The Usurer, which was a satire on usury; The Guardian, which ridiculed the miser; and Tressotinius, or the Pedant, which lampooned pedantry. The plots of all Sumarokoff's comedies invariably, "are limited to a strictly circumscribed set of episodes revolving around a rather simple love intrigue which invariably ends in a happy marriage." The names which he chose for his characters are interesting and unique, for they usually cannot be associated with any specific social or foreign

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7Brasol, p. 129.
8Ibid., p. 130.
national group, or described the character's particular vice; but rather were ordinary conventional names. This practice had its advantages in aiding the creation of a national drama, and was followed by most of his emulators.

DENIS IVANOVITCH VON VIEZIN (1744-1792)

Von Viezin must be ranked with Sumarokoff in the vanguard of eighteenth century Russian comic playwrights. His comedies, according to Belinsky, "slaughtered the savage ignorance of the older generation and the crude gloss of the superficial half-education of the younger generations."9 Von Viezin was working for the Russian Foreign office when he created his first comedy The Brigadier in 1776. The play was met with such acclaim that he retired from his job with the government to travel around Europe, sending back letters which revealed an extreme narrow-minded view of the world, and very harsh judgments of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot. All of his comedies were directed against the same foibles as were those of Sumarokoff, the abuses of serfdom, coarseness and ignorance of the landowners, the corruption of the courts, the superficiality of education; but, according to B. V. Varneke, von Viezin is "the first to satirize sufficiently well to assure a lasting life for his plays."10 The characters he created became so well known that their names were used to typify anyone who demonstrated the same foible or vice as did that character. His language was always most

9 Ibid., p. 143.
10 Ibid., p. 141.
pointed and spirited, rivaling that of Sumarokoff, and was perhaps
even more highly developed, for each of his characters possessed his
own personal speech trait. Von Viezin showed himself an excellent
observer of Russian life, which he represented with some degree of
realism. His plays were structured along the classical dictates of
the French school, adhering to the three Unities with great diligence.

Along with The Brigadier, The Minor is considered to be his
best comedy. The Brigadier is the weakest in plot and action; the
entrances and exits are not motivated; and the moral theme becomes
paramount instead of secondary to the characters and action. The
language is often sententious, with von Viezin's own opinions obviously
thrust upon his characters, often without reason. This comedy is now
considered to be the first one concerning Russian bourgeois life, and
is probably the reason for its notoriety. One of von Viezin's con­
temporaries, Count N. I. Panin, wrote to him concerning The Brigadier:

I see that you are well acquainted with our ways of life; every
one of us has a close relative like the Brigadier's wife; no one
could say that he has no such grandmother or aunt or distant rela­
tive as Akulina Timofeyevna. This is an outstanding comedy of our
mores.11

The Minor is von Viezin's masterpiece. In it he severely chastises
superficial education and doting parents, but in so doing presented co
more of the ill-placed witticisms, sententiousness, exaggerations, and
weak structure of The Brigadier. It is an excellent sketch of province
life in which the characters are extremely well drawn, so well, in fact,
that they are still admired today. The moral intention of his plays is

11Ibid., p. 146.
still evident, but it now comes out of the action and characterization, rather than in pretentious speeches.

CATHERINE THE GREAT (1729-1796)

Catherine deserves some mention as a writer of comedy, for she produced fourteen plays, some opera texts, short plays, and proverbs among all her other literary endeavors. She perhaps characterized these comedies best herself:

In the composition of my comedies I have taken all my conceptions of character exclusively from my own country, and thus, without quitting home, have found in it alone material for satire sufficiently abundant for a pen far more practised than I can ever hope to wield.12

She also pointed out that her plays were weak in plot and in intrigue. Best known of her comedies are Mrs. Grumble's Birthday and O Tempora, the latter criticizing education and those who maintain old prejudices and oppose the new learning. The plot construction is weak, not supporting the action well, but the characters are well delineated. Mrs. Grumble's Birthday is concerned with satirizing the broadly affected and artificial habits of the higher, more educated class, and praising the government's efforts to enlighten people through closer contact.

IVAN ANDREEVITCH KRILOV (b. 1764 or 1768)

Krilov was educated and lived in a provincial town, and was primarily known for his burlesque-dramas concerning life in the provinces.

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12 Bates, p. 46.
NICHOLAS PETROVICH NIKOLEV (1758-1815)

Nikolev wrote typical comedies of intrigue which had their humour embodied in lackeys and soubrettes who had nothing in common with Russian life. Among his comedies are Tested Constancy; An Attempt Brings No Harm, or the Successful Experiment; and probably the finest, The Ambitious Versifier (1775).

V. U. KAPNIST (1757-1824)

Kapnist wrote a comedy entitled The Slanderer in 1798 which is now considered, along with The Minor, to be the finest comedy to come out of Russia in the eighteenth century. The moral of the play was set forth by Kapnist:

With Thalia's brush I pictured for my nation Vice, calumnies, and graft, in their abomination, And let the world now laugh at its ugly face.\(^\text{13}\)

He did his job so well, that those he criticized forced the play to be censored.

YAKOV BORISOVICH KNAYAZHNIN (1742-1791)

Knyazhnin, although more renowned as a writer of tragedy, did write some satire in the manner of Sumarokoff and von Viezin. His greatest asset seemed to be an ability to sharply portray people whom he had observed in everyday life. His best comedies are considered to be The Braggart, and The Queer Fellows.

\(^{13}\text{Brasol, p. 146.}\)
LUKIN (1737-1794)

Lukin was primarily a writer of bourgeoise drama, but his one-act play The Peddler became famous because it managed to parody many different types of Russian citizens. He made a strong attempt in his character of the peddler to reproduce the idiom of the Russian peasant, but his own moral preachings stood in the way of real success.

HUNGARY, POLAND, BULGARIA, RUMANIA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, YUGOSLAVIA

All of the above countries must be grouped together and dismissed, for all the sources of this study either do not mention them, or state that there was no national drama emanating from them in the eighteenth century.

SUMMARY

Russian native drama, like the Scandinavian drama, was born in the eighteenth century. This was a century of Renaissance for Russia, yet, unlike Germany, she was able to perpetrate a native drama because Peter the Great had united the country under a single capitol. Catherine the Great, in turn, promoted the inception of literary and dramatic endeavors which greatly influenced the development of a national form of drama. Sumarokoff, influenced by the French, created the first comedies endemic with Russia. He, and all other Russian comic playwrights of the eighteenth century, wrote satires on the contemporary Russian society in an attempt to reform the morals and manners of their people. However, most of his comedies, as with the rest of Europe, were
not funny. The other comic playwright, ranked with Sumarokoff as the best of the eighteenth century, is von Viezin. He, too, satirized the manners and morals of contemporary society, but seemed to have been more adept at creating viable characters and genuine humor than Sumarokoff.
CHAPTER V

ITALY

Italy in the eighteenth century cannot be discussed in terms of a national consciousness or national literature, because she had not as yet become united under one capitol or even developed a true national language. The predominant eighteenth century atmosphere of scepticism, unrest, middle-class invasion of culture, and aristocratic profligacy is common with Italy as with the rest of Europe, but the prime outlet for intellectual and dramatic examination of these conditions was Venice. Venice to the rest of the world appeared as an Utopia, for, while many European countries and parts of Italy felt the ravages of war, Venice remained aloof from the physical struggles, preferring to indulge in more refined intellectual amusement. To be sure, the Venetian oligarchy was feeling the bite of social criticism, for the middle-class merchants were demanding more voice in social matters, but this struggle was more of a passive one. The aristocracy was continually showing itself to be the ostentatious, vitiating, prurient animal that the bourgeoisie thought it to be; and the bourgeoisie, now overwhelmingly affluent, demonstrated the same lack of taste and bumptious social climbing that made it so ridiculous to the aristocrat. The artistic attempts, on the whole, were still dominated by the taste for spectacle and opulence whetted in the Renaissance.
Even considering the social unrest which was surely experienced, the general intellectual tone was one of artificiality. The majority of the people were primarily indolent, even in their collective desire for more wealth and prestige, so that frivolity had taken the place of serious reflection. Also, in spite of their rising position, the bourgeoisie did not rule Venice yet, and faced sure reprisal if their vituperations became too loud or too pointed. The situation was primarily as Joseph Spencer Kennard points out:

The Romantic school has painted the Venetian government under dark colors. . . . Venice was not a hell of denunciations, secret judgments, darksome prisons, and horrors. But, about certain topics, Venetians talked in whispers. Life was pleasant; the government worked smoothly; there was little enticement to rebellion, even though the problems agitating the intellectual life of Europe found some echo in Venice.¹

Gambling was one of the most serious vices of this society, gambling, and vanity which dictated the decorous use of masks so that one might remain officially incognito when indulging in some imbroglio which required discreet deportment. Self-indulgence was the key word then, an occupation to which everyone gave his complete attention.

CARLO GOLDONI (1707-1793)

There were some who saw through this glare of frivolity and desired a way of life more respected and dignified for their people. One of these persons was Carlo Goldoni, a man who created dramatic comedies renowned all over Europe and who revolutionized Italian theatre. Prior to the presentation of his plays, only translations of French and Classical comedies and the extemporizings of the Commedia

¹The Italian Theatre, (New York, 1932), p. 80.
dell'Arte had been seen on the Venetian stage. Goldoni, however, 
effected what amounted to a dramatic rejuvenation of the Italian 
theatre, as Henry Ten Eych Perry states:

There was not seventeenth century Italian dramatist to give expres-
sion to the diverse problems confronting the new world, as did 
Wolliere, or any early eighteenth century dramatist who concerns 
himself with social upheaval as did Holberg. The field is clear 
for Goldoni, who, from 1748-1774, pictures the effect of these 
changes in the Venice of his day and to treat with urbanity and 
kindness the new society that had developed.\(^2\)

The comedies of Goldoni were different from any ever written of Italy 
for the Italian stage. Their greatness lies in the fact that Italian 
social life and manners were pictured so brilliantly and clearly. 
Goldoni presented a view of the old Italian social customs and environ-
ment juxtaposed with the rising new society of the bourgeoisie. He was 
also fighting to create a form of national drama which was not cor-
ruped by the crudeness of the Commedia dell'Arte, or the spectacular 
display of the Renaissance inspired drama. That Goldoni stands out as 
being so great in the eighteenth century because there was no one else 
to oppose him in Italy in the theatre may be true, but the fact that 
his plays are still produced and loved is surely some indication of 
his abilities.

Goldoni showed an early proclivity for the theatre, apparently 
writing a comedy at eleven years of age; then running away from school 
at fourteen to join a troupe of strolling players. He returned, how-
ever, to become a law student, diplomat of the Venetian government, 
and, also, a playwright. From the beginning he showed a great dislike

\(^2\)Masters of Dramatic Comedy and Their Social Themes, (Cambridge, 
of the Commedia dell'Arte, though he would not openly condemn it, as was his nature with everything of which he disapproved. Goldoni seems to have been slow to realize his own talent, for initially, he never would work very long as a playwright, always retiring to some other field of endeavor for a few years. In 1744, however, he was persuaded to write for a Venetian theatre, where he remained many years. He was, as a man, lacking in introspection; he seemed not to be interested in psychology or man's inner soul, but rather only in observing life's external behavior. He was "happier in catching the manners living as they rise, than laying bare the depths of the heart." All of his plays exhibit this trait and are rather shallow because of it. Because he did show a great desire to reform the Italian theatre, primarily through the example of his use of language and form, Goldoni took many of the Commedia dell'Arte scenarios and developed them into full length plays. John Allen points out concerning Goldoni:

And so he persisted in trying to free drama from what he considered to be the anarchy of improvisation. In his next plays he lessened the importance of improvised characters, the masks, and gave the lovers, who had a subsidiary role in genuine improvised performances, a dominating part in the plot. For many years he continued to use the four main masks, Harlequin, Brighella, Pantalone and the Porter, but never again did he make them protagonists. Comparing The Servant of Two Masters with Il Bugiardo (The Liar) we find Harlequin, the most demonically zestful character in dramatic literature, reduced to the role of an unimportant servant.

Goldoni said that his plays could be best categorized into comedies of character and comedies of intrigue; however there also can be found some of manners and wit. As with Molière in France, all


Goldoni's comedies are pictures of Venetian society and family life, or studies of either the aristocrats or the middle and lower classes. He was an astute observer of the excesses of the aristocracy, but regarded the bourgeoisie with more obvious indulgence. His talent was considerable, for he rarely let the plays become episodic or trivial. He did not flatly dictate correct behavior, nor rashly condemn vices, but rather seemed to feel a genuine pity and love for his fellow man that intruded even when he was chastizing some egregious folly. Because of this benevolent nature, Goldoni never achieved the same harsh satire which was quite prolific in France in the early eighteenth century, and, to a lesser degree, Germany. His moral standards were no different from those of his own society; he even seemed to respect the artificiality and false appearances with which he was greeted in everyday intercourse; and never did he satirize the still powerful, but often corrupt clergy. He said he did not expose the men of the church, "because they are protected by their robes." In fact, he showed more good nature, indulgence, and a sense of personal dignity and respect than did most of his fellow citizens.

In his plays, Goldoni made use of the same stock character again and again, but in each play, the character was confronted with a different set of circumstances, so that the audience was able to see many aspects of the same personality. Bowing to popular taste for the Commedia dell'Arte in at least one respect, Goldoni presented his audience with characters derived from the extemporaneous stage, but in so doing he often changed the basic personality of this character. La Cortesan remained a man of the world, but usually was not seen as
dissolute or dishonest; Pantalone was the ancient, honest merchant, but who does not exercise domineering dictatorial power over his children, and is the personification of common-sense; the Miser remained an excellent comic type; Goldoni's women were perhaps the most varied, for he presented all types in all walks of life, although he seemed to have excelled in the depiction of lower and middle-class types. Goldoni was one of the few dramatists of the eighteenth century who could portray with any sense of honesty and feeling the lower class characters, as well as the upper class characters, and make their lives as important as those of the upper class. His characters possessed another fascination, unique with Goldoni, which Eleanor F. Jourdain points out:

Goldoni's plays do not feature the detailed character who comments on the other characters as in Molière. The Italian characters in his comedy turn upon themselves and laugh at their own mistakes as well as at those of others. Everyone is perpetually becoming conscious of himself and therefore also humorous.5

His plays, although a welcome deterrence in the eighteenth century and were, at that time, considered great, now are viewed as repetitive, full of shallow intrigues, lack of definite purpose, hasty in construction and form, and occasionally long on sentiment, although this was rare. Most of the plays were written not in Italian, but in the Venetian dialect which was more suited to him. Those he attempted in Italian were too stilted and formal. John Allen writes of his comedies:

Plays of supreme good humor, delightedly observed plays, plays of small but amusing people who stroll through the streets of Venice

5The Drama in Europe in Theory and Practice, (New York, 1924), p. 89.
with an eye for a pretty girl, arguing with the gondoliers, and stopping for coffee in a shop that's a centre of local intrigues. Goldoni was the opposite of a man like Strindburg who had genius but small talent. He had enormous talent and in no way did he demonstrate it more clearly than in his ability within himself, to understand and accept the nature of his talent and develop it to the full.

Primarily, the comedies of Goldoni satirized the duel, the cowardice of the nobles, moral cowardice, the profligacy of the upper-class, and militarism and war. He also gently poked fun at the middle-class and their foibles. However, Goldoni felt that the aristocrats were the prime moral offenders in society and satirized them, in his own affable manner, the severest. Most of his plays deal, in one way or another with the family relationship and the fact that, through the family, society could be reformed. The woman had a primary place in this scheme of things, for in her Goldoni saw the saving grace. He constantly argued that the woman was not given a rightful place in society, that she was not only as good as the man, but perhaps even better. In several of his comedies, he also made a strong point for the servant as an agent for strengthening family ties, and thus bringing more harmony into society. However, his manner of presenting this thesis was not overt, and he used no violent language or vituperations. He felt an affinity for those who were preaching social justice, and democracy, and tried in his own manner to aid in this struggle, but he was not by nature equipped to give these aspirations any strong motivation.

Goldoni accepted what was in Italy the traditional three-act division of comedies, but in so doing, he seemed to make this division

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*Primarily, the comedies of Goldoni satirized the duel, the cowardice of the nobles, moral cowardice, the profligacy of the upper-class, and militarism and war. He also gently poked fun at the middle-class and their foibles. However, Goldoni felt that the aristocrats were the prime moral offenders in society and satirized them, in his own affable manner, the severest. Most of his plays deal, in one way or another with the family relationship and the fact that, through the family, society could be reformed. The woman had a primary place in this scheme of things, for in her Goldoni saw the saving grace. He constantly argued that the woman was not given a rightful place in society, that she was not only as good as the man, but perhaps even better. In several of his comedies, he also made a strong point for the servant as an agent for strengthening family ties, and thus bringing more harmony into society. However, his manner of presenting this thesis was not overt, and he used no violent language or vituperations. He felt an affinity for those who were preaching social justice, and democracy, and tried in his own manner to aid in this struggle, but he was not by nature equipped to give these aspirations any strong motivation.

Masters of European Drama, p. 102.
arbitrarily, with no conscious purpose. He was also fond of changing
rapidly from a scene inside a house to one outside, as in Roman Comedy.

Of his comedy Henry Ton Tik Perry points out:

his methods of getting his comic effects is unobtrusively to con­
trast virtuous people with scoundrels, whom he does not wish to
expose straight-forwardly and to punish justly. The evil-doers
generally die or repent; occasionally they are dismissed from
honorable society in a harmless, salutary way. Goldoni often
makes his offenders against decency too villanious to be good
humorous material. He exaggerates the weaknesses of human nature
until they appear more dangerous than absurd.7

The best of his early comedies are The Clever Woman, concerning patriotism
and constant love; The Antiquary’s Family, or The Mother-in-Law and the
Daughter-in-Law, which satirized the passion for collecting antiques on
the part of a person who knows little about them; and both The Feigned
Invalid and Love as a Doctor amiable parodied the shortcomings of the
medical profession, but not nearly as well as did Moliere. In support
of his reform of the Italian stage, Goldoni also wrote, in 1750, a play
entitled The Comic Theatre which, in the guise of the sentiments voiced
by the players of an acting troupe, explained his views on the theatre
and comedy. Anselmo is the voice of Goldoni:

Anselmo: And I’ll also give you the wherefore of it. Comedy has
been invented to correct vice and ridicule bad customs;
then when the ancients did comedies in this manner, the
common folk could participate, because seeing the copy of
a character on stage each found the original either in
himself or in someone else. But when comedies became
merely ridiculous, no one paid attention anymore. . . .
Now that we have returned to fish comedies out of the
Mare Magnum of nature, men feel their hearts tickled and,
identifying themselves with the characters or passions
that are represented, can discern whether the character
is well observed and created, and whether the passion is
well carried out.8

7Masters of Dramatic Comedy, p. 244.
In these statements, it is easy to see Goldoni passing innuendoes at the Commedia dell'Arte, and praising himself. In The Coffee Shop, Goldoni created one of his most successful characters, Don Marzio, a thoughtless, self-centered egoist who is constantly expressing his opinions to everyone no matter how ridiculous he appears to them in these opinions. Many think that The Vistress of the Inn is Goldoni's best play. In it he portrays his most famous character, Mirandolina, who plays the major part in illustrating that love and sexual attraction between people of different ranks in life is undignified and laughable. The other candidate for the title of best play is considered to be The Godess which represents the bourgeoise, and good-naturedly chastizes men who are harsh in their family relationships and charming in general society. The Public Square is one of the few plays which Goldoni wrote in verse form, but it is not up to his usual standards because the verse form did not suit either the Venetian dialect or Goldoni, who characterized much better in prose.

In One of the Last Evenings of the Carnival, Goldoni says goodbye to his native city through the character of a designer of silk fabrics who has such an attractive offer from another country that he feels that he must accept, though reluctantly. What really precipitated Goldoni's departure to France, however, was a very bitter feud with Carlo Cozzi, another Venetian playwright who hated Goldoni's attempt to bury the Commedia dell'Arte. Goldoni spent the remaining years of his life in Paris writing for the Comédie Italienne company there. This climax was paradoxical for the old man, though, for the Italian company expected him to write only scenarios because they were not used
Goldoni had the creative energy to picture the social confusion of the modern world under many different guises, and he had the extreme facility in transporting the characters of his imagination to the boards of a theatre. He failed to perceive that good intentions are not powerful enough to overcome vital antagonisms in principle. He lacked the constructive wisdom to take a broad view of the hostile elements present in a social organism. Goldoni's genial gaiety is so infectious that his comedies exert a strong temporary fascination, but his conception of human relationships is so shallow that, on continued acquaintance, his plays often seem disappointing. . . . He lets high spirits and enthusiasm for morality take the place of a constructive intelligence. His comedy is seldom well-balanced, but it is always charming.

CARLO GOZZI (1720-1806)

It was indeed a blind form of justice and whim which made the people of Venice side with Carlo Gozzi in his successful attempt to ridicule Goldoni out of Venice. The fact is, that Gozzi probably would never have attempted writing comedies for the theatre if Goldoni had not placed upon the stage his attempted reform of the Commedia dell'Arte and his somewhat anemic attacks against the aristocracy. Gozzi, descendent of an aristocratic family, made no secret of the fact that he loved the Commedia dell'Arte and was also painfully aware of the slow crumbling of aristocratic supremacy. A morose, sardonic, bigoted man, Gozzi was one of the leaders in the establishment of the Academia

Masters of Dramatic Comedy, p. 274.
Granellesca (Academy of Simpletons), which took as its mission, the promotion of the best Italian authors and the development of a pure and simple style of writing. Under the auspice of this academy, Gozzi wrote his first comedy La Tartana degli Inflessi (1747), which was nothing more than a malicious but clever attack on Goldoni, charging him with plagiarism and a slovenly style, and accusing him as an enemy of the established government. He followed this with another satire, Il Teatro Comico all'osteria del Pellegrino (1750), in which he called Goldoni a "three-headed monster," drunkard, and buffoon who spouted three different styles of writing from each of his three mouths.

In 1761, however, Gozzi produced the scenario for the first of his famous fiaba, or fairy tales, L'Amore delle tre Melance, which was another vicious attack on Goldoni, and also a promotion for the Commedia dell'Arte style of play production. The fickle audience, for years Goldoni supporters, immediately loved this new style of drama, and laughed with Gozzi at Goldoni, forcing him to retreat to Paris.

The fiaba of Gozzi were nothing more than glorified fairy tales which Freedley and Reeves describe as a cross between "the English Christmas Pantomime and Arabian Nights Entertainment." These strange, weird pieces were completely alien to native Italian drama, had no chance of surviving for very long, and in fact Gozzi retired from the stage with them in 1765. Perhaps the best way to describe these fiaba, which depended for their comedy almost entirely on the improvised lazzz of the Comedia players, is to recount the plot of one, Zobeide:

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A princess is carried off by a wicked enchanter, who, impostin
upon her by his magic art, has inspired her with a passion for
him. This enchanter, King Sindab, never retains the same wife
longer than forty days, after which he transforms her into a
heifer, and carries off another, those who resist him being tor-
mented in a dismal cavern with all the cruelties he can inflict.
Zobeide has already reached the fortieth day, and Sindab is re-
solved to destroy her. But, meanwhile, she has made an impression
on the heart of Abcalac, the high priest, who is no less powerful
as a magician than the king himself, and endeavors to make the
infernal incantations of the latter recoil upon his own head. He
reveals to Zobeide the character of her husband, and the fate
which is in store for her. He shows her, among the wretched
prisoners in the cavern, her own sister and her half-sister, and
the scene represented on the stage strongly resembles Dante's
hell. One of these unfortunates is seen pacing the winding
cavern with her head in her hand, suspended by the hair; at the
bosom of another serpents are perpetually gnawing; a third is half
metamorphosed into a monster, and all exclaim with horror against
the cruelty of Sindab. No longer under delusion, Zobeide tears
the image of the king from her heart, but in order to escape his
fury she is obliged to conceal from him the discovery she has
made. Her father and brother arrive with an army, for her rescue;
when Sindab, by a new enchantment, so far changes their appearance
that, ignorant of each other's identity, they engage in single
combat, and the father is killed by his own son. Zobeide still
disguises her feelings, and is invited by Sindab to partake of a
collation, where he proposes to give her the fatal cake which is
to transfer her into a heifer. But she adroitly substitutes one
of the cakes for another, and Sindab himself is now transformed
into a monster, whereupon Abdalac avails himself of the opportunity
to break all his enchantments and to restore his captives to
liberty.\(^1\)

Gozzi knew that his fiaba would probably not last, consequently
he later produced \textit{Il Corvo}, in which he tried to make the \textit{lazzi}
and spectacle secondary to some kind of aesthetic theory, but in this he
was a failure. The characters were still involved in incidents placed
before an Oriental background and played the traditional pranks and
read the traditional jokes of the \textit{Commedia dell'Arte}. His final
offerings were \textit{I Pitocchi Fortunati} and \textit{Turandot}, which he described
as tragi-comedies, but were again nothing but ordinary comedies written
\(^1\)Bates, pp. 96-97.
part in heroic verse and part in prose. *Turandot*, as well as many of his *fiaba*, was praised highly by the German dramatists who were now rebelling against the French pseudo-classic style, and many were even adopted by the "storm and stress" writers. Other than this instance, however, Gozzi's plays were probably not played, much less heard of, outside Italy.

Gozzi ended his life quite a miserable man; he was watching his beloved aristocracy crumble and could do nothing about it; his dramatic attempts reflected the decadence rather than helped bolster the disintegration. Joseph Spencer Kennard best describes Gozzi, the man, as he perhaps finally saw himself and his world:

Perhaps in the melancholy of his declining years, in the dim consciousness of a mind tormented by incipient mania and fervid imagination, strained to the breaking point by his ambition and jealousy, perhaps the son of Venice, the lover of all that was the greatness and splendour of his city, realized that in her hour of utmost need he had given his beloved Venice nothing more than foolish nursery tales and farcical representations of masks; then, indeed, the end of Carlo Gozzi was sad enough to cancel all the petty malice and venomous attacks of his jealous temper.12

ALBERGATI CAPACELLI (1663-1735)

Capacelli was one of the minor dramatists who wrote pure comedy and some farce during the early eighteenth century in Italy. His farces were considered the best in the country, for in them he seemed to be able to combine the slapstick of the old comedy and the elegance of the manners peculiar to the high comedy. His most successful play apparently was *Convulsions*, which ridiculed those people who were making affected disorders of the nerves quite fashionable in contemporary society.

12 *The Italian Theatre*, pp. 103-104.
FRANCESCO ANTONIO AVELLONI (1756-1837)

Avelloni was surnamed *Il Poetino* for his great faculty to create comedies of extremely agile wit. He borrowed much from Caron de Beaumarchais, but was never able to match the polish of *Le Barbier de Seville*. Avelloni's best play was *Magic Lantern*, in which he created the character, Cianni, who was the counterpart of Beaumarchais' Figaro.

CAMILLO FREDERICI, n.d.

Frederici produced farces as well as acted. His chief asset was the creation of good humour with cleverly contrived incidents and comic situations. His plots were often striking and new, but he showed no gift for dialogue, his attempts being stilted and monotonous. The *Pretended Men of Worth* is considered to be one of his most popular plays, probably because it was filled with large amounts of suspense and surprise.

GERARDO PI ROSSI, n.d.

Di Rossi, a native of Rome, was a playwright of the eighteenth century who attempted to emulate Goldoni with his comedies. However, possessing little of Goldoni's gentle nature, he chastised the vices of men so vehemently and bitterly, that most of the humour was lost. He was not popular because of this trait.

COUNT GIRAUD (1776-1834)

Giraud was also a playwright from Rome who depicted manners and morals of contemporary Roman life. His style is mostly characterized by
the spirit and urbanity native to the Italian personality, tempered with a dignity which always showed itself, even in the most ridiculous situation.

ALFERI (1794-1803)

Alferi, renowned for his tragedies, also attempted a few comedies, six to be exact, but these were not really acceptable for the stage. In these comedies, two of which are *The Antidote* and *Finestrina*, he apparently desired to present the comic and ridiculous side of the same heroic personages who populated his tragedies. His downfall, as with di Rossi, was the creation of more malice than levity.

SUMMARY

Italy presented two main trends, outside that of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, in comedy during the eighteenth century. The first was the comedy created, in a reaction against the style of the *Commedia*, by Goldoni. He wrote satires on the manners of his own Venetian society, especially the aristocracy, but his satire was never harsh, always gentle and pleasing. Goldoni hated the extemporaneous, lewd style of the *Commedia*, and attempted to bring to the Italian stage a more traditional form of comedy. Gozzi represented the other trend in the Italian comedy. He loved the style of the *Commedia*, and began writing his *fiabe* in an attempt to ridicule Goldoni from the Venetian stage. He succeeded, but his comedies, nothing more than glorified, inane fairy tales dependent upon the *lazzi* of the *Commedia dell'Arte* for comedy, were
soon removed from the Italian stage. Italy, however, continued to play and imitate the comedies of Goldoni, for in them was created perennially delightful and pleasing pictures of contemporary eighteenth century society, and a form which was native to Italy.
CHAPTER VI

THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

SPAIN

With the death of Calderon in 1687, the drama of Spain is all but interred with him. Instead of attempting new ways of dramatic expression, the myriad number of Spanish playwrights who followed Calderon were content to write nothing but highly inferior imitations of the comedy of intrigue of Tirso de Molina, Lope de Vega, and Calderon. Most of these imitations were written in verse, made no attempt at probability or novelty of character, and contained the same crude jokes and action already so familiar to the Spanish public. Yet, the public could be blamed, at least partially, for this decline, for it was they who demanded to see only this type of drama.

Much of the blame, also, must be levied on two sources which had, for sometime, been producing a vitiating effect on the whole social, economical, political, and cultural atmosphere of Spain. The first of these influences in the Inquisition, which held such a powerful grasp on the Spanish people and monarchy, that it virtually governed the country. The Inquisition had a profound effect on the dramatic endeavors of Spain to the point of dictating what could and would not be produced on the stage. Tirso de Molina, Calderon, and Lope de Vega survived the wrath of the Inquisition because they were both lucky and clever in the creation of their plays. Important, also
is the fact that these men were so enormously popular with the people, that the Inquisition, perhaps attempting to appear benevolent in the eyes of the people, let them create without great interference. Most other playwrights, however, were not as fortunate, consequently not daring to produce anything which could in any way be considered heretical; and most anything, at whim, seemed anathema to the members of the Inquisition. It is not hard to understand, then, that a force as prodigious and omnipotent as the Inquisition could almost completely stifle any genuine flowering of creative art, and why those who desired to write for the stage chose Calderon, de Vega, and de Molina to be their models.

The other luminous fact is that of the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. This disaster can be seen as the beginning of the decline of Spain's "Golden Age." By the time that the eighteenth century manifested itself, then, Spain was well into a depression that was sorely felt in every area of endeavor. The boundless national spirit, which had been a primary factor in the creation of Spain's position as the major power in the world, began, after the realization that defeat was possible, a decline from a height that it would not again attain. Given the factors of the Inquisition and the lamentable descent of Spain as the world power, it is surely easier to comprehend the lack of substantial dramatic production in the eighteenth century.

This non-creative situation permeated the Spanish theatre into and out of the eighteenth century. The position was really one of exhaustion in dramatic form and style, but this condition was never truly examined by those who were then writing because the old comedies
were still apparently making money. Most of the comedies produced
during this century were not published, primarily because no one
seemed to think it important. Then, too, the troupes of players which
proliferated throughout Spain had their own writers and repertory of
plays which they knew from memory, and did not want any other company
to produce. "Those that were printed, now in a collection called
Comedias varias, were printed without correction, criticism, or judg-
ment."1 In fact, it has been said that all the plays which were
written during this period were so similar that they could be attri-
buted to one man. While it was true that the reign of Louis XIV had
greatly impressed some of the Spanish people to the point of imitation,
the majority of the population still preferred the old comedies of
intrigue.

The stage, therefore, remained during the eighteenth century, on
the same footing as in the time of Calderon, except that a few
new pieces appeared, but such as were of a religious tendency,
as in those, it was imagined, faith might supply the want of
talent. 2

In these religious pieces appeared some comic buffoonry, just
as was evidenced in the Medieval religious plays, but they in no way
could be called comedies. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, a
few playwrights can be mentioned who have somehow gained the recognition
of posterity.

1 Alfred Bates, ed., The Drama, vol. VI: Spanish and Portuguese

2 Ibid., p. 195.
VINCENT GARCIA DE LA HUERTA (1734-1797)

De la Huerta was a writer of tragedy as well as comedy, and also produced the sixteen volume Teatro Espanol which included criticisms of the Spanish stage. All of his comedies, the most outstanding of which is La Raquel (1778), are said to be of the cloak and dagger variety.

LEANDRO FERNANDEZ DE MORATIN, THE OLDER (1737-1780)
DON LUCIANO FRANCISCO COMELLA (1751-1812)

Both de Moratin and Comella produced some comedies apparently written in the Classical style, but are now considered worthless.

RAMON DE LA CRUZCANO (1731-1794)

Cruzcano published comedies, dramas, short farces, and interludes which pictured the manners and vivacity of the people who inhabited southern Spain. He apparently showed a fine imagination, acute observation, and was able to recreate the language native to this part of Spain quite well.

LEANDRO FERNANDEZ DE MORATIN, THE YOUNGER (1760-1828)

De Moratin, the younger, seems not to have liked the comic attempts of Comella, for he delighted in writing parodies of Comella's plays. He showed the influence of the neo-classicists, however, for the Unités were always observed; the plays exhibited much economy of form, were written with evident sincerity, and showed good powers of observation. His comedies attempted to combine both native and foreign elements, with the moral theme determined more by sentiment and romance
than by satire. His best comedies are considered to be El Café, La Comedia Nueva (1792), both of which parody Comella; and El Si de las Niñas, which is assumed to be his most mature play.

Clearly, Spain, flaunting her moribund condition, contributed little or nothing to the drama and even literature of the eighteenth century.

But the feeble efforts of Luzan, of Huerta, of Yriarte and Melendez, the latter two being poets, and Luzan a critic, the only boast of their nation for more than a century, serve only to convince us how low their country had fallen. The inspiration of the earlier ages is extinct, and modern culture has been too imperfect and too restricted to supply the place of the riches no longer accorded by genius.

PORTUGAL

In the eighteenth century, Portugal possessed almost no native drama whatsoever, the bulk of theatrical entertainment being of Spanish origin.

ANTONIO JOSE (d. 1745)

Comic operas were written during the early part of the eighteenth century by a Jew named Antonio Jose. These were in the manner of the French vaudeville, but were full of good humour, well written language, and subjects concerning the Portuguese people. With these comic operas, Portugal seemed on the point of developing a national type of drama, but, in 1745, Jose was burned by the Inquisition.

3 Ibid., p. 206.
CORREA GARCAO, n.d.

Garcao is mentioned as attempting to move the Portugese stage away from the Spanish influence by presenting comedies in the manner of Terence. One was entitled Theatro Novo, which was mostly a sketch of his dramatic principles, and another was called Assemblies, a parody on the world of high fashion.

SUMMARY

Spain's offerings of the eighteenth century differ little from the type of comedy created during the seventeenth century. The Spanish playwrights of the eighteenth century, wishing to present the public with only imitations of the great Calderon and Lope de Vega, were not cognizant of the banality and position of inferiority into which the drama of Spain had declined. This condition was so overwhelming, and the playwrights who stimulated it so numerous, that little remains of the actual plays produced at that time. That which is extant, according to the critics, lamentably indicates the inferiority of the comedies which exemplify eighteenth century Spain.
CHAPTER VII

FRANCE

France must be seen as the center of all theatrical activity in the eighteenth century. In the dramatic compositions of her playwrights can be found the basis of inspiration for almost all the dramatic literature then produced in Europe. The theatrical and social conditions in France during the eighteenth century have already been described in chapter one, so that there is no need here to reiterate these trends. What has been further described in the other European countries was the special social and dramatic situation endemic to each.

France in the eighteenth century, more than any other European country, should be viewed as a nation in the throws of transition. Scandinavia, Germany, Russia, and Italy at this time were in the process of discovering a national form of comedy, and it was primarily through the imported influence of French eighteenth century comedy and Moliere that they began. However, France, feeling the exhaustion of the "age of Moliere," was almost frantically searching for some new form of comedy that would be as acceptable to the more unlimited, less formal bourgeois audiences. This search continued through the whole of the eighteenth century, with the audience and author experiencing many diverse forms of the comedy; forms which seemed to be as individual and numerous as the playwrights. The best means for examining French comedy
in this century, therefore, is by looking at the styles of the most prominent playwrights of comedy. In this examination, however, it will also be necessary to remember that: (1) each playwright was writing to please his primarily middle-class audience, which was the largest body of theatre-goers; (2) that, because of the bourgeois desire, an attempt to depict manners and morals of the society was the primary purpose of the comedy; (3) that, as the century progressed, each playwright became increasingly aware of the value of a well constructed, suspenseful plot, and each, in his own way, attempted to incorporate this trend into his plays; (4) that, in spite of the eighteenth century's desire to satirize society in its comedies, the "sentimental" tastes of the audiences did often necessarily intrude upon what should be a detached quality in comedy.

JEAN FRANCOIS REGNARD (1655-1710)

Regnard was one of the comic writers who made the transition from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century. He took as his model, Moliere, but was "fantastic and arbitrary in the conduct of his plots; and he lacks the truth to life and the penetration which characterize Molière." All of his comedies were written in either one, three, or five acts, the length apparently depending on the scope of his theme. The form employed was not always conventional, for he made great use of the Commedia dell'Arte techniques as well as the prevalent French dramatic rules. The plays were written in verse or prose, and always seemed to be constructed with more haste than concern.

Regnard's characters inevitably assumed the conventional names of Lisette, Senor, Isabelle, Valere, Dorante, and Crispin in their representation of contemporary citizens and their foibles. He also insisted upon using valets, soubrettes, and an ever-present comic character who was a native of the provinces. Lawyers and usurers receive the bulk of his satire and sarcasm, though he was not afraid to parody those personages higher up in the government. Acute psychological and external description, and clever use of surprise in his plots were Regnard's strong points. He was not able, however, to combine the character's motivations with the over-all action of the play, and rides over this defect by constantly keeping his audience guessing about the denouement. He also did not make the didactic intent of his plays primary, but preferred to just amuse his audience. *Democrite* (1700) began the eighteenth century for Regnard, and was at the time thought highly original in its imitation of the Don Quixote theme. However, *Le Legataire Universal* was probably his most popular comedy, for in this play he came closest to the wit of Moliere.

**Jean Palaprat** (1660-1721)
**David Auguste de Brueys** (1640-1723)

De Brueys wrote comedies whose chief claim to importance is that they were highly pleasing to Voltaire who consequently overrated them when recommending their performance. Palaprat is known because he collaborated with de Brueys.
CHARLES REVIRE DUFRESNY (1654-1724)

Dufresny apparently was regarded almost as highly as Regnard, and is among the transitional writers who bridge the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century. One of his most distinguishing traits occurs in the titles of his plays which take the form of a paradox pointing out the theme of each play. His plays were written in prose, employing wit and sometimes vaudevilles and songs to alleviate any monotony which may have settled upon his audiences. Dufresny apparently trusted "to brilliance of dialogue to carry off his pieces" and "enhanced this effect by the introduction of some character who is acutely aware of the motives and absurdities of the others."^2

L'Esprit Le Contradiction (1700), and La Joueuse (1709) were his best attempts at depicting the primarily inconsequential, but humorous happenings in his own society.

FLORENT CARTON DANCOURT (1661-1725)

Dancourt wrote constantly for the French stage from 1685-1718, attempting to emulate Molière in portraying the social life of eighteenth century Paris. His characters did not possess the same depth of personality as those of his model, however. Dancourt used the traditional contemporary comic form to portray the eighteenth century society as self-interested, avaricious, pleasure-seekers. In his plays,

"Dancourt lifts the veil that obscures low motives, and thus his drama is an account not so much of what people were accustomed to say, but of what they actually thought."\(^3\) However:

While the attack on the vices of the time is as sharp as Balzac’s . . . there is no trace of resentment in Dancourt. He writes in a detached and good-humored way that at first hides from the reader the selfishness and brutality of the human nature he exposes to view.\(^4\)

Two of his plays, Le Chavalier a la Mode, and Les Bourgeoises de qualité, in illustrating Dancourt’s ability to fill a play with large amounts of detail without being monotonous, parody a decadent society in which the aristocracy is crumbling, and the middle-class is, in its ungainly effort to imitate the manners of the aristocracy, losing its essential quality of simplicity.

**MARC-ANTOINE LÉGRAND (1673-1728)**

LeGrand is remembered only as an inept actor and light comic playwright who wrote a few mediocre afterpieces, and some traditional comedies which played at both the Comédie Italienne, and the Comédie Française. King of Lubberland remains to be considered as his best comic attempt.

**ALAIN RENÉ LE SAGE (1668-1747)**

Le Sage apparently wrote only two plays which were ever seen on the eighteenth century stage, Crispin rival de son Maître (1707), and Tucaret (1709). However, the world of the novel was also graced by his talents; Gil Blas, and Le Diable boit-cœux show that he possessed

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\(^3\)Ibid., p. 12.

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 13.
considerable talent in this area. It is said that he turned away from
the theatre because of the unfair royalty laws of his day which per-
mitt ed the production of an author’s plays without remuneration.
Le Sage could be the first man to campaign for a more carefully and
consciously constructed plot. In his plays, he imitated the seven-
teenth century Spanish comedy of intrigue, wishing to elicit a great
deal of pleasure from the well-constructed plots, rather than from
the characters. He desired to discard the unities of place and time
because he felt that they were too restrictive to the production of a
pleasing plot. His main talent lay in the fact that he could create
an exciting plot, but he also showed that he could produce well drawn
characters, and when compared with Dancourt, “is nearer in knowledge
of human nature and appreciation of its frailties, but this is best
shown in his novels.” In his two plays, Le Sage employed a technique
which was rare in French comedy up until his time: he ended each of
his scenes on a level of excitement and suspense which prepared the
audience for what was to happen next.

Crispin Rival de son Maitre presented a comedy in which there
appeared a comic servant in the tradition of the Commedia dell’Arte.
Crispin, who, through clever devices, attempts to traduce away his
master’s mistress in an effort to marry her. In Crispin, Le Sage
“applauds the triumph of audacious knavery... exhibits good comic
fancy, lively action, and originality.”

Matthews, p. 270.

Tucaret:

Introduced a direct kind of social satire into eighteenth century theatre. Here Le Sage aimed at the long-standing abuse of farming out the provinces to financiers who collected revenue for the government at a profit. Tucaret is a satirical portrait of one of these cordially detested traitants or 'farmers of revenue' who waxed rich at the expense of the state and the people.7

This play was so bitterly true, that many of the "traitants" tried to bribe Le Sage to keep him from mounting his play, but Le Sage felt too strongly about his cause to renege. It is unfortunate that Le Sage gave up his blossoming theatrical career, for his two plays showed promise of great talent had it been developed.

PHILIPPE NERICAULT DESTOUCHES (1680-1754)

Destouches' comedy really belongs in the category described as the Comedie larmoyante, or "tearful comedy," for there is actually little or nothing to laugh at in most of his comedies. It is, in fact, Destouches who first created any serious interest in the comedy lachrymose. He had lived in England from 1717-1723, where he experienced and developed a great interest in the Sentimental Comedy of Colley Cibber and Richard Steele. He returned to France full of praise for this form of "comedy," and immediately started to develop it for the French stage. These comedies were of the five-act variety, exhibiting a very noticeable lack of vitality, humour, originality, or insight into the human mind or human affairs. However, The Drama, vol. VIII, French Drama quotes Voltaire as calling Destouches: "his dear

Terence, his illustrious friend,"® and as saying of Le Glorieux (1732),
the play in which the real transition from comedy to lachrymose comedy
is said to have occurred:

Solid and ingenious author, master of the theatre, it will be in
your power, who wrote the Glorieux, to be yourself glorious.®

Comedy was still present in these "comedies" of Destouches, but it was
interspersed between true sentimental elements so that the whole play
had no unity and presented merely little episodic vignettes which con­
cerned the same characters. With Le Glorieux, then, there was created
the basis for a new type of bourgeoise comedy, and all that remained
was for someone to place primary emphasis on the sentimental nature of
the play, and completely subjugate the humor.

PIERRE CLAUDE NIVELLE DE LA CHAUSSEE (1692-1754)

Increasing the sentiment was exactly what la Chausée did in
his "tearful comedies." He composed his plays in verse and, "filled
them with virtuous women who had to undergo countless misfortunes in
order to woo the sentimental tears of the audience."® La Chausée
felt that these "comedies" should be a series of emotional, sentimental
crises, in which the characters were based on the typical contemporary
playgoer, however, the situations he created for his characters were
not those faced under ordinary circumstances. This seemed to be no
concern of the bourgeoise audience, for they made his and the
"comedies" of the other lachrymose comedy writers extremely popular,

®Ibid.

10George Freedley and John A. Reeves, A History of the Theatre,
even to the point of almost obliterating the more traditional comedy 

inherited from Molière and Regnard.

There was, of course, a great deal of criticism from the ranks 
of the eighteenth century dramatic critics, but the supporters of this 
"maverick" genre cited Terence as the authority for existence; yet:

Only the super-sentimentalists of the eighteenth century, whose 
sensibility could be excited by the sight of a dead donkey, could 
really malign Terence by asserting that his plays are the justifi-
cation of tearful comedy.11

La Chaussee's plays consist of plots which are more strange than 
real, unmotivated characters, unbelievable mistakes of identity, and:

In all his dramas the comic is episodic. He presents the problem 
of family life and marriage. He differs from modern writers of 
serious drama in the fact that he is prone to surround his problems 
with the dramatic atmosphere of concealed relationships of people 
who have changed their names. . . . Much of the technique of these 
plays depends upon the unveiling of the past, not merely for 
exposition and denouement, but for the purpose of developing the 
action. Plot unfolds swiftly. The spectator is kept in suspense 
by an air of mystery surrounding each character. Each disclosure 
is interesting and brings in its wake a development of the plot. 
The scenes are carried on by the chief characters, and the roles 
of the servants are materially reduced.12

Two of his best known "comedies" are La Préjugé à la Mode (1735), which 
is the story of a man who would be a faithful husband, but the dictates 
of the fashionable world demand that he be a libertine; and Melanide 
(1741), which concerns a woman who had become estranged from her 
husband, about to fight a duel with his own son, is stopped by his 
wife as she recognizes him just in the nick of time. It also should be 
noted that La Chaussee shared in the development of the popularity and

11Donald Clive Stuart, The Development of Dramatic Art, 

12Ibid., pp. 428-429.
refinement of plot as a chief means of comedy, however, "La Chausée will
take plot, action and its perfect construction serving as a means to an
end, and makes the means the end and create the *comédie larmoyante.*"13

CARLET DE CHAMPERLAIN DE MARIVAUX (1688-1763)

Marivaux is the last among the most renowned writers of the
comedy of sentiment, which was the most popular form because the
bourgeois made it so. Yet, he has also been called, "the most original
French dramatist of the eighteenth century."14 It is pointed out that
his comedies concerned subjects not previously used by playwrights,
and that he employed a style of writing that was unique with him. He
is also said to rank fourth among classical authors in total number of
plays performed by the *Théâtre Français*, and right behind Molière as
the classical writer most performed at the *Comédie Française*. Much of
this notoriety prevails because of his innovation of "la surprise de
l’amour," in which, "Marivaux leads his young lovers through the en-
chanting mysteries of l’amour naissant, subjects them to tender and
heart-searching trials, and leaves them rapturous on the threshold of
avowed love."15

However, the fact still remains that Marivaux depended mostly
on sentiment to motivate his plays, and in this most important sense
belongs to the school of writers of the lachrymose comedy, as opposed


15Ibid., p. 16.
to the more traditional laughing comedy of manners and wit of Moliere, Regnard, and later Beaumarchais. Eleanor F. Jourdain states:

Marivaux' drama reflects a sheltered hothouse condition of society which was even then rapidly becoming extinct. . . . Marivaux, then, without touching any very vital chord, reflects social life within conditions that artificially limited, and however true the feelings of his characters, the mere fact of the positions in which he places them with regard to the world and with regard to one another prevents him from dealing with any problems beyond those of a delicate sentiment. His plays are an attempt at realism within ideal imaginary conditions, what he takes for the world is frankly called a salon by later writers.16

In creating his comedy, Marivaux innovated a style which soon bore his name, "marivaudage." This style, best suited to the almost ethereal, unreal world in which his characters moved, is described by John Allen as, "strangely attractive genre, nostalgic, brittle, heavily scented, intensely stylish, surprisingly sensitive to psychological movement, and a little decadent."17 His most renowned and popular plays are supposed to be Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard (1730), La Seconde Surprise de l'amour (1727), and Le Legs (1736). Marivaux also placed a great deal of emphasis on the construction of his plots, a factor which is one of his strong points.

JEAN DE LA NOUE (1701-1761)

La Noue wrote light, spirited, amusing verse comedies in which he created characters who live in the same type of world as that of Marivaux. These characters, however, seem to be more life-like, possess more force, vitality, and spirit. His best play is considered to be


La Coquette corrigée, which takes as its theme; affection will expose
the real character of a woman and render her unable to play at love
or to tolerate the enforced artificiality of society.

ALEXIS PIRON (1689-1773)

Piron created in 1738 one of the then most important plays of
the first half of the eighteenth century, La Metromanie, which took as
its object of satire a young man who is obsessed with a passion for
writing poetry. However, in retrospect, this play was found to be far
overrated, for, although written as a traditional comedy of satire,
there is no real humour in the play. Piron was thought to have been
writing about himself, so that the play appeared too magnanimous in
its attitude toward the obsession of the young man, and thus almost
sentimental.

JEAN BAPTISTE LOUIS CRESSLT (1709-1777)

Le Méchant (1747) of Cresset was considered at the time of
production as important as La Metromanie. The play was based on the
plot of Congreve's The Double Dealer, but never matched the acute wit
which was Congreve's forte. La Méchant is a dark, cloudy comedy which
presents an odious old man who takes perverse pleasure in disrupting a
respectable household. With the advantage of hindsight, this play,
lke La Metromanie, must also be viewed as being highly overrated.

COLLIN D'Harleville (1755-1806)

D'Harleville seems to have been, in his attempt to imitate
the style and form of Marivaux, more successful than La Noue. His
plays are not as artistic or polished as those of Marivaux, yet he
was able to restrict the frame of his plays, and concentrate his interest on the psychological analysis of the moods and sentiments of his characters. He also pointed out the transition from the first half of the eighteenth century to the second half, in that he concentrates his comedy with the middle-class rather than the more fashionable upper class of Marivaux.

However, there is in d'Harleville's plays a genuine attempt to move away from the saccharine sentimentalism in which so much of the comedy was floundering:

D'Harleville's characters are of the old historic type. . . . He makes a most ingenious attempt at producing comedy that is gay and rational, and includes a criticism of human nature as well as the small foibles of his day. . . . d'Harleville's comedies show us that the writer of comedies must use satire and employ it like Molière as a moral corrective of society.18

L'Optimiste (1788) was a satire on a man who believes he is living in a virtual benevolent society in which no harm can befall him. This play seems to have been d'Harleville's criticism of his age: most people live in a dream world, constantly evading the bitter facts of contemporary life in their euphoristic private worlds. Le Vieux Celibataire (1789) indicated a more polished plot, dialogue, and characterization than did his earlier works. This play is again concerned with the democratic principles which were proliferating in France, and demands that the riches of the nation should be distributed to the poor in an effort to alleviate some of the omnipresent poverty. Present, also, in d'Harleville's comedies were slight touches of the melodrama which would invade France after the Revolution.

18Jourdain, p. 34.
DENIS DIDEROT (1713-1784)

Although Diderot wrote "dramas," he should receive some consideration in this study, for his theories of the drama, developed out of the earlier works of the eighteenth century playwrights, and the opinions and theories of such prior critics as Riccoboni and Freron, were considered all important in the evolution of the comedy of plot or intrigue from its incipient stages in Le Sage, to its final fruition in Beaumarchais. Basically, in his theories, Diderot:

1. subordinates his interest in the characters of a play to his interest in its construction.
2. restricts the moral aim of the theatre through aesthetic considerations.
3. gives equal measure of praise to the dramatist capable of producing a perfectly constructed plot.
4. lets his interest in play-construction lead him to disapprove of the current practice of contrasting characters.
5. protests against the writer who will disfigure the construction of a plot to please a popular actor.
6. is inclined to control and check the spontaneity of the gifted dramatist for sake of studied play technique.\(^{19}\)

Diderot also suggested that the dramatist devote a large amount of time:

1. to preparing for the events of his play.
2. to balancing extraordinary events by apparently insignificant details.
3. to striving for some ingenuity in the arrangement of successive incidents.
4. to keeping his characters in a constant state of turmoil by the play and interplay of action.
5. to replacing the surprise technique by one of suspense.
6. to accelerating and concentrating the action of his play by the elimination of extraneous material.\(^{20}\)

These "rules" became increasingly important from the time they were conceived and postulated (1758), for in them the order-conscious French, as with the Neo-Classicists, had again found didactic precepts by which

\(^{19}\) Fredrick, p. 74.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.
they could not only write, but also judge a play. Diderot’s contribution to promotion in importance of the well-constructed plot in comedy was perhaps the only impetus needed for this form to become paramount.

**Jean François Cailhava** (1731-1813)

Cailhava was an advocate of the comedy of intrigue in the last years of the eighteenth century, writing many pieces of this type, notably *Le Tuteur dupe*. His influence was also considerable in the promotion of this type of comedy, and it is interesting to read what he said about comedy in *L’Art de Comédie* written in 1772:

> An author in developing his plot, must arrange it in such a manner that the situations which he creates, by being comic in themselves, exempt him from having recourse to flashes of wit, to insanities, epigrams, and puns when he wishes to render his dialogue amusing. I do not say that he may not include subtle and cunning remarks, but all comedy which results from their subtlety and nastiness must come from the comedy of the situation and, apart from it, must not have the same value.

**Michel-Jean Sedaine** (1719-1797)

Sedaine was one of the most diligent followers of Diderot, although his play, *Le philosophe sans savoir* (1765), is primarily a sentimental comedy which criticises the practice of duelling.

**Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais** (1732-1799)

It is the considered judgment of most historians and critics of the drama that Beaumarchais produced the two best comedies to come out of the eighteenth century, *Le Barbier de Seville* and *Le Mariage de Figaro*. Beaumarchais led as colorful and exciting a life as perhaps any man in history. His experiences in and out of the French court were so many and so varied, that there is no room in this study even to
begin to enumerate them and their importance to his comedies. Playwriting to Beaumarchais was secondary in his many interests, and he followed the art only as a serious pastime when he could afford to leave his other interests as shipowner, exporter, ally of the American Revolution, court advisor, publisher, diplomat, secret agent, pamphleteer, and lover.

Beaumarchais' dramatic interests followed those of the last half of the eighteenth century. His first attempts were in the serious drame genre of Diderot, Eugénie (1767) and Les deux Amis (1770), which failed, but, "Beaumarchais had little aptitude for the pathetic, and these two serious efforts were of use to him only as technical exercises in the dramatic creation of a play." As with the majority of the writers of the last decades of the eighteenth century who were perhaps giving form to the incipient spirit of revolution pervading the atmosphere, Beaumarchais was interested in promoting the bourgeois life, as opposed to the increasingly decadent and decrepit life at court. He agreed with Diderot that there was a definite moral aim in the theatre, that of exposing the evils and vices of society to public ridicule. However, since he was unable to accomplish this aim in the drame, Beaumarchais turned to comedy, concurrently asserting his talents to prying comedy from the depths of sentimentality in which it was still suffocating:

Beaumarchais, Goldsmith, and Sheridan all attempted to grapple with the dilemma in which a writer of comedy found himself at the close of the eighteenth century. During the course of that one-hundred years the aristocratic tone of feudal society had almost disappeared.

Class and sex distinctions were dissolving. Literary categories were becoming less inflexibly rigid; comedy could scarcely expect to escape the influence of the 'goddess of the solemn countenance—the sentimental muse.'

Beaumarchais commented several times on this deplorable condition, consequently applying through a comedy of intrigue based on the precepts of Diderot, his talents for the construction of a suspenseful, comic, witty plot to the reform of comedy. He possessed a rare gift for the observation of society and its foibles, a gift that he was able to transfer to the boards of a theatre in a manner which no one before him in the eighteenth century had been able to accomplish.

At the outset, given the desire of Beaumarchais to present a moral theme, it should be seen that he also was attempting just as diligently to amuse his audience, and that his satire on society was half-serious, half-humorous. He wanted to recreate in the theatre the light-hearted gaiety which had been absent for so long, and he chose as his vehicle the comedy of intrigue. However:

Beaumarchais . . . saw that plot for its own sake is not the highest aim of dramatic art. The eighteenth century as a whole lacked this vision. Had Beaumarchais been able to rise in practice above this general conception to the ideal which he himself expressed a desire for, he might have succeeded in diverting the eighteenth century's attention from the purely mechanical side of a play to something deeper.

Because Beaumarchais' efforts in the area of the comedy of intrigue were so popular, a whole rash of playwrights immediately began to imitate him, but with decidedly inferior results. Edna C. Fredrick says of this trend:

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23 Fredrick, p. 194.
It is to the credit of the eighteenth century that it defined in theory and illustrated in practice the value and importance of a well-constructed plot. It is to its discredit that this secondary element should have been made the chief aim of dramatic art.  

In his comedies, Beaumarchais attacked the old ruling class as a whole, for:

He knew how to profit by the scandal aroused by the scathing insinuations against the established order. Yet he was not dependent on these factitious aids, and his solidly constructed comedies reveal remarkable dramaturgic felicity. They have established themselves firmly on the French stage, where they are still seen with pleasure, although certain comic passages here and there strike us now as extraneous and over-vehement.  

Le Barbier de Séville (1775), was not remarkable because the plot was new, but, rather, because Beaumarchais had taken a plot concerning the guardian and his ward, perhaps borrowed from Plautus, Plautusville, or Cailhava, and characters which, for the most part, were of Commedia dell'Arte origin, and reworked them into a play where the action was swift, sure, exciting, and suspenseful; and the wit was sharper and more humorous than had been experienced in decades. The old stock personalities of the Commedia took on characters and sentiments which were entirely new and fresh, especially when they were juxtaposed with the plot which kept them in a constant state of turmoil.

Le Mariage de Figaro (1781) is a more mature work of art than Le Barbier. The plot was, for the most part, original, but the characters were mainly drawn from Le Barbier. It is in this play that Beaumarchais harshly ridicules and scorns the aristocracy. His comic character, Figaro, pointedly questions the Count:

24 Ibid., p. 119.
Because you are a fine gentleman you think you are a genius... What have you done to merit this splendor? You made the effort to be born, and that is all. You are a very ordinary fellow, while I, an obscure man in the crowd, required more wit and knowledge to rise in the world than has been invested in recent years in the government of all the Spanish provinces. (Le Mariage de Figaro, III, iv)

It was in the creation of the unique comic character, Figaro, that Beaumarchais perhaps achieved his greatest fame. Figaro is a servant, a man of low birth, who possesses an eloquence and sharpness of wit that no aristocrat ever dreamed existed, and:

appears to be the only role which lends itself to different interpretations. And does Figaro himself attain that quality of universality which we usually attribute to a dramatic character, to Harpagon? For example, Is he not rather pure incarnation of his author's esprit? With an egoism that approaches that of romantic writers Beaumarchais delights in projecting his own personality on the stage. That his own distinguishing characteristic to him than the psychological study of a given character's reactions to a given situation. The possible identity of Moliere with Alceste does not lessen the fact that Alceste is the misanthrope par excellence. Figaro is Beaumarchais, and Beaumarchais alone.

Beaumarchais, then, because of his nature development of the comedy of intrigue, and because the eighteenth century was virtually devoid of meritorious comic playwrights, stands at the vanguard of eighteenth century comedy, and, in Le Mariage de Figaro:

produced a masterpiece because he combined wit, clever characters and skillful plotting in a play which contains a vital theme: The conflict between traditional authority and the rights of the Third Estate. There is no finer example of a comedy founded upon an important theme, yet containing, at the same time, a complicated plot which does not obscure the basic idea.

26 Fredrick, p. 58.
27 Stuart, p. 450.
FRANCOIS G.J.S. ANDRIEUX (1759-1833)

Andrieux was one of the foremost transitional writers of comedy to bridge the gap from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century. He was an exponent of the techniques of Diderot, and Beaumarchais, exhibiting his strongest traits in sharp, witty dialogue, and adroit characterization. His plays were of one or three-acts, and primarily in verse. Les Etourdis (1787) was his best known play, satirizing the "evils of extravagance and dishonesty in matters of money." After 1789, d'Harleville and Andrieux were the only prominent writers of comedy who still used verse.

L. B. PICARD (1769-1828)

In 1791, Le Passe, le Present, l'Avenir of Picard depicted his views on the past, present and future social systems, and illustrated his faith in the creation of an economic, political, and social utopia out of the cacophony of the Revolution. He, also, was a transitional writer into the nineteenth century, who presented prose comedies, in the manner of Beaumarchais, which primarily portrayed and satirized the still decadent society, and was also concerned with the degradation present in provincial life.

SUMMARY

France demonstrated in the comic creations of her eighteenth century playwrights more variety in form and style than any other European country. The century began with comedy of satire in the manner of Moliere, but, as the bourgeoisie became more powerful, the

28 Jourdain, p. 36.
satire became more pointed and harsh, especially against the aristocracy. These early satires were also comedies of character, but later there developed a trend to promote more suspense, order, and form until the comedy of intrigue became dominant over comedy of character and found its culmination in the creations of the greatest of the eighteenth century playwrights, Beaumarchais. Comedy, humorous comedy, also gave way, for a period of time, to the middle-class inspired lachrymose comedy of Destouches, la Chaussee, and Marivaux. However, satire did not die, and again, its promotion was found in the comedies of intrigue of Beaumarchais. The eighteenth century was a time when thinkers were examining the ills of society, and there was no better way to accomplish this endeavor than to preach reform from the stage of a theatre. Consequently much of the comedy in France, as in the rest of Europe, was not humorous, but, rather, the didactic offerings of moralizers who truly had no business in the theatre except as members of the audience.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

In a final analysis, the eighteenth century comedy must be looked upon as unstable in form, almost infinite in variety, and transitory in nature. Yet, at the same time there are a number of trends and conclusions which surely can be drawn.

First, the eighteenth was a century of more prolific activity in the genre of comedy than of any other form. Brander Matthews states that the eighteenth century dramatists, "are now remembered by their comedies rather than their tragedies." To be sure, many of the so-called "comedies" had little to do with the creation of humour and laughter on the stage, nevertheless, comedies they were considered then, and comedies they are still called now.

Second, the comedy of France, perhaps more than that of any other European comedy, can be called "transitional," for the forms experimented with during the eighteenth century were mainly a reaction to the classical type of comedy as developed by Moliere, and an attempt to discover new means for comic expression. The main thread which holds the comedies of France together, at times very timorously, is that of an increasing tendency to move from the comedy of character of Moliere, to the comedy of intrigue of Beaumarchais. No matter

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what form the comedy took, from that of vicious satire to the maudlin lachrymose comedy, the desire to see a more perfectly constructed plot wends its way tenaciously through the century from Le Sage to Diderot to Beaumarchais, and is the primary legacy passed on to the nineteenth century. It is also certain that the trends in comedy inevitably reflected the society in which they were conceived, and:

The first part of the nineteenth century was dominated by the ideal of the eighteenth century even as the latter had once been dominated by the classical ideal of the seventeenth century. The ideal of one age, however, cannot indefinitely dominate the ideal of another. Comedy, like any other art, depends for its very existence upon endless renewal, endless transformation, endless adaptation to the demands of a constantly changing order. The ultimate ideal of the eighteenth century coincided admirably with the spirit of the epoch which formulated it, for the eighteenth century, in contradistinction to the seventeenth, was largely concerned with the political and social welfare of man and curiously indifferent to the rational analysis of his moral struggles and the psychological study of his character.®

Comedy in the nations of Scandinavia, Germany, Russia, and to a certain extent, Italy, does not take its impetus from quite the same background or reasons as did that of France. To be sure, similar social conditions were being felt all over Europe, but each of these nations, during the eighteenth century, was laboring to establish its own form of national drama, and more important, comedy. The comedy evidenced in these countries, instead of being transitional, must really be considered initial. France had already established a national form of comedy in that produced by Moliere, and was, in this century, reacting against this classic form, for it had fairly exhausted itself by the end of the seventeenth century. The nations of Scandinavia,

Germany, Russia, and Italy, however, were still or had recently been without any sense of national character which was primarily caused by internal conflicts, so that, in the creation of their comedy, they used primarily the French models to begin the foundations for the development of the comic genre which, it was hoped, would eventually become identified with that particular nation. They all were, in this sense, seeking an identity, a personality for their nation and its achievements.

Spain, on the other hand, had inherited a similar legacy from its "golden age," as had France from the reign of Louis XIV, but instead of realizing that the form of comedy as practiced by Lope de Vega and Calderon was exhausted, as had France, the Spanish eighteenth century dramatists continued to produce primarily nothing but effete imitations of the masters. Hence the Spanish comedy of the eighteenth century was completely ignored by critics and historians alike.

Perhaps the major trend, if one can be determined, connecting all the comedies created during the eighteenth century is that of satire and an effort to depict the manners and foibles of contemporary society. No matter what form the comedies assumed, from the lachrymose comedy of la Chaussée to the unique style of Lessing, the desire to, in some way, examine society remained paramount, as perhaps is the case during any period of comedy. This trend must surely be traced to the influence and demands of the bourgeois audience. The satire was sometimes harsh and lacking in humor, sometimes pleasing, and sometimes effete, but always prevalent was the attempt to picture the ideals,
precepts, morals and customs of the middle-class. Also popular, though perhaps not as prolific, was the attempt to deprecate the profligate, excessive, and self-indulgent habits which the aristocracy constantly exhibited.

The comedy produced in the eighteenth century, while admittedly inferior to that created by Molière, Shakespeare, some of the Restoration playwrights, and some Modern comedy, should not be entirely overlooked as unimportant, for it is, largely, to the eighteenth century, which produced primarily comedy, that most of the important dramatic trends and playwrights of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries trace their origins.
APPENDIX I

Compilation of Comedies Alphabetized by Author

ALPERI

1. One, Few, Too Many
2. The Antidote
3. La Finestrina
4. The Divora

FRANCOIS G.J.S. ANDRIEUX

1. Les Etourdis

FRANCESCO ANTONIO AVELLONI

1. Magic Lantern

PIERRE AUGUSTIN CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS

1. Le Barbier de Séville
2. Le Mariage de Figaro

HINRICH BORKENSTEIN

1. Der Booksbental

JEAN FRANCOIS CAILHAVA

1. Le Tuteur dupé

ALBERGATI CAPACELLI

1. The Malicious Busybody
2. Convulsions

CATHERINE THE GREAT

1. O Tempora
2. Mrs. Grumble's Birthday
3. A Pretty Basketful of Linen
4. The Saint's Day of Mrs. Vorchalkina
5. Mrs. Vestinkova and Her Family
6. The Antechamber of a Prominent Sorcer
7. The Deceiver
8. The Duped
9. The Siberian Sorcerer

CLOF DALIN

1. The Jalous Man

FLORENT CARTON LANCOURT

1. Le Tuteur
2. La Chalaiier à la Mode
3. Les Bourgeoises de qualité
4. Les Bourgeoises à la Mode
5. La Foire de Bezons
6. Les Vendanges de Suresnes
7. Le Moulin de Javelle

PHILIPPE NERICAULT DESTOUCHES

1. Le Glorieux
2. Le Curieux Impertinent
3. L'Obstacle Imprevu
4. Le Philosophe Marie

CHARLES REVIERE DUFRESNY

1. L' Esprit Le Contradiction
2. La Joueuse

JOHANNES EWALD

1. The Fisherman
2. The Brutal Applauders

CAMILLO FEDERICI

1. The Pretended Men of Worth

GOTTLIEB FUCHS

1. Die Klagliche

CORREA GARCAO

1. Teatro Novo
2. Assemblea
CARLO GOLDONI

1. The Comic Theatre
2. The Liar
3. The Coffee House
4. Il Voltaire
5. The Mistress of the Inn
6. The Fan
7. The Impresario from Smyrna
8. The Good Wife
9. A Curious Accident
10. The Nobleman and the Lady
11. MOMOLo the Gentleman
12. The Clever Woman
13. Prudent Lady
14. Love as a Doctor
15. The Antiquary's Family, or the Mother-in-Law and the Daughter-in-Law
16. The Punctilious Woman
17. The Feigned Invalid
18. The Fanatical Post
19. The Women of Small Talk
20. The Inquisitive Ladies
21. Pamela Married
22. The Public Square
23. A Sojourn in the Country
24. A Strange Accident
25. The Lovers
26. The Boors
27. The New House
28. The Squabbles at Chioggia
29. One of the Last Evenings of the Carnival
30. The True Friend
31. The Marriage by Competition
32. The Kindly Bear
33. The Ostentatious Miser

FRAU GOTTSCHEID

1. Die ungleiche Heirath
2. Der verlohrne Craniz Der geuosenen Jungfer Berg op Zoon.
3. Der Gotterkrieg
4. Hausfranzosinn
5. Herr Witzling
6. Die Poetau

CARLO GOZZI

1. La Tartana degli Influssi
2. Il Teatro Comico all’osteria del Pellegrino
3. La Marfisa Bizzarra
4. Gli Amori delle tremellarance
5. Il Corvo
6. Il No Cervo
7. La Turandot
8. Le Drohe d'Amore
9. Blue Monster
10. Woman Snake
11. Pretty Green Bird
12. I Pitocchi Fortunati
13. Zobeide

JEAN BAPTISTE LOUIS GRESSET

1. Le Mèchant

CARL BYLLENBOURG

1. The Swedish Fop

KARL ISRAEL HALLMAN

1. Opportunity Makes the Thief

COLLIN D'HARLEVILLE

1. L*Inconstant
2. L*Optimiste
3. Monsieur de Crac
4. Le Vieux Célibataire

HENRICI-PICANDER

1. Picanders Teutsche Schau-Spiele

LUDWIG VON HOLBERG

1. Jean de France
2. Jeppe of the Hill
3. The Eleventh of June
4. The Lying-in-Room
5. The Arabian Powder
6. Christmas Party
7. Masquerade
8. Jacob von Tybse, or the Boasting Soldier
9. Ulysses of Ithaca, or a German Comedy
10. The Journey to the Spring
11. Melamps
12. Without Head and Tail
13. Henrich and Pernille
14. Diderich Menschen-Skrack
15. The Pawned Peasant Boy
16. Pernille's Brief Position as a Lady
17. The Bustling Man
18. The Funeral of Danish Comedy
19. Witchcraft, or False Alarm
20. The Fortunate Shipwreck
21. Erasmus Montanus, or Rasaus Berg
22. The Unseen Ladies
23. Honest Ambition
24. Don Ranudo de Calibrados, or Poverty and Haughtiness
25. Plutos, or Lawsuit between Poverty and Riches
26. House-Ghost, or Abracadabra
27. The Transformed Bridegroom
28. Philosopher in his own Imagination
29. Republic, or the Public Good
30. Sganarel's Journey to the Land of Philosophy

C. F. HUNOLD

1. Der thorichte Pritschmeister

V. U. KAPNIST

1. The Slanderer

OLOF KLEXEL

1. Kapten Puff
2. Michel Wiegler

S. XNYAZHNIN

1. The Braggart
2. The Queer Fellows

J. U. VON KONIG

1. Die verkehrde Welt
2. Der dresdencher Schleendran

AUGUST FREDRICH VON KOTZEBUE

1. The German Provincials

IVAN ANDREEVITCH KRILOV

1. Prince Trumps

KRIUGER

1. Die Candidateu
2. Die Geistlichen auf dem lande
3. Der blinde Ehman
4. Der Teufel ein Barenhauter
PIERRE CLAUDE NIVELLE DE LA CHAUSSÉE

1. La Préjugé à la Mode
2. Mélanide
3. Fausse Antipathie
4. Mélanide

VINCENT GARCIA DE LA HUERTA

1. La Raquel

JEAN DE LA NOUE

1. La Coquette corrigée
2. L'Obstine

NARCISSE-LUCIEN LEGRAND

1. King of Lubberland

ALAIN RENÉ LE SAGE

1. Crispin rival de son Maître
2. Tucaret

GOTTHOLD EPHRAM LESSING

1. Damon, or True Friendship
2. The Young Scholar
3. The Woman Hater
4. The Old Maid
5. The Credulous Man
6. The Good Man
7. The Would-be Wits
8. The Freethinker
9. The Jews
10. The Treasure
11. Women will be Women
12. Minna von Barnhelm

LUKIN

1. The Peddler

CARLETON DE CHAMBERLAIN DE MARIVAUX

1. Les Acteurs de bonne foi
2. La Surprise de l'amour
3. La Double Inconstance
4. Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard
5. L'Epreuve
6. Les Fausses Confidences
7. La Seconde Surprise de l'amour
8. Le legs
9. Arlequin poli par l'amour
10. L'Ecole des Mères

LEANDRO FERNANDEZ DE MORATIN, THE YOUNGER

1. El Café
2. La Comedia Nueva
3. El Si de las Ninas

CHRISTLOEB MYLIUS

1. Die Ärzte
2. Der Unertragliche

N. P. NIKOLEV

1. Tested Constancy
2. An Attempt Brings No Harm, or The Successful Experiment
3. The Ambitious Versifier

L. B. PICARD

1. Le Passé, le Present, l'Avenir

ALEXIS PIRON

1. La Metromanie

J. T. QUISTORP

1. Der Bock im Processe
2. Der Hypochondrist

JEAN FRANCOIS REGNAR

1. Le Divorce
2. La Coquette
3. La Fausse Frude
4. La Serenade
5. La Foire Saint-Germain
6. Le Joueur
7. Les Menschmen
8. Le Legataire Universal
9. Democrite

JOHANN KLAUS SCHLEGEL

1. Der geschafftige Aussigganger
2. Der Geheimnisvoller
3. Der gute Fath
4. Die Stumme Schönheit
5. Der Triumph der guten Frau

NICHOLAS-SERGEI SERAINE

1. Le philosophe sans savoir

ALEXANDER SUMAROKOFF

1. The Usurer
2. The Guardian
3. Tersotinius, or the Pedant
4. The Monsters
5. Narcissus
6. A Petty Quarrel
7. The Mother Rival
8. The Grafters

A. G. UHLMICH

1. Der Unempfindliche
2. Der Mohr

CORNELIUS HERMANN VON AYRENHOFF

1. Die Postkutsche

DENIS IVANOVITCH VON VIEZIN

1. The Brigadier
2. The Minor
3. The Choice of a Tutor
4. Coryon

JOHANN HERMAN WESSEL

1. Love Without Stockings
2. More Lucky than Wise
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