

WILLIAM CONGREVE

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
HIS DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE

by

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University of Cape Town

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NOTATION AND ABBREVIATIONS

Arabic numerals have been used throughout in the references to indicate the number of an Act, a Scene, pages and lines.

The symbol A. stands for Act, S. for Scene, p. for page or pages, l. for line or lines in the references only.

A date of publication in parenthesis () occurring in the imprint of a book means that the date does not appear on the title page.

n.d. in the imprint of a book implies that its date of publication cannot be established.

Univ. means University.

(etc.) after the place of publication in the imprint of a book means that more than two places of publication appear on the title page.

. . . indicates that the lines quoted have been extracted from a sentence and that other words precede or follow those quoted, depending on the position of the dots. If three dots are used within a quotation, they indicate the omission of words judged to be irrelevant. In quotations from plays dots have been used to indicate the omission of preceding or following lines of dialogue which would be spoken consecutively by the actor or actress, even though the sentence may be complete.

The number of a page within brackets, e.g. (p.115), indicates that the page is unnumbered but its number would be that appearing in brackets if it had been printed on the page.

(sic. i.e.) indicates a printer's error. The word or numeral following "i.e." must be substituted to correct the error.

Tr. means translated or translator.

ed. means edited, editor, edition, depending on its position.

A word inserted to clarify the meaning of a quotation is placed within brackets, e.g. (Mirabell).

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PREFACE

William Congreve's love for the beautiful actress, Anne Bracegirdle, may clarify some aspects of his dramas, but it does not wholly explain why The Way of the World seems to be so much better than most other comedies of that age. I therefore determined to examine the available evidence to form an opinion of my own, especially since the lack of consensus among dramatic critics with regard to the comedies of the period continues to the present day. I considered it necessary to relate Congreve to his period before I attempted to trace the development of his dramatic technique, as he appears originally to have profoundly influenced by the theories of his day.

I have tried to show how his technique matured by examining different parts of his dramas and have also attempted to find some evidence of a basic idea underlying all his plays, which evolved into something new when he wrote The Way of the World.

In the final section I have attempted to estimate the value of his new technique and the nature of his achievement.

PART I

WILLIAM CONGREVE AND THE DRAMATIC IDEA

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. PLAN OF STUDY:

To be praised by a few and scorned by many is often the fate of genius. What more need be said to explain the triumphant failure of William Congreve's masterpiece, The Way of the World.

Congreve, however, knew the meaning of success. Lord Macaulay tells us that after the success of his only tragedy, The Mourning Bride, "Congreve was . . . allowed to be the first tragic, as well as the first comic dramatist of his time".¹ The interesting feature of his popular success is that he had not yet written The Way of the World.

Today, when we hear the name of William Congreve, we immediately remember The Way of the World. D. Crane Taylor, when he wrote: "his genius, working within its narrow limits, places him as much above his contemporaries as Shakespeare's towers above his",² was basing his judgement primarily upon this comedy. Even that adverse critic of Restoration drama, George Meredith, made an exception when he considered it, because "of the remarkable brilliancy of the writing, and the figure of Millamant".³ Yet William Congreve, the father of social comedy, knew it would fail. "That it succeeded on the Stage", he wrote in The Dedication, "was almost beyond my Expectation; for but little of it was prepar'd for that general Taste which seems now to be predominant in

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- 1 Macaulay, T.B. The Dramatic Works of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar. With biographical and critical notices by Leigh Hunt. Edinburgh Review, 1840-41 Vol.72. London, 1840. p.517.
 - 2 Taylor, D.C. William Congreve. London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1931. p.10.
 - 3 Meredith, G. An Essay on Comedy. London, Constable, 1913. p.35.

the Pallats of our Audience".¹ Why, then, did he write this play? The answer appears to be: because, as an artist, he knew he had not yet written the "one Comedy true in all its parts"² which his aesthetic sense urged him to create.

To appreciate Congreve's achievement it is necessary to know how comedy had evolved, so as to understand why certain ideas were current, how these ideas originated and why technique was so important when he wrote his plays. The emphasis will be on comedy and I will consider The Mourning Bride only in so far as it helps us to trace the development of dramatic technique. Various aspects of the plays will be dealt with separately, an attempt being made to trace the development of each up to the crowning achievement in The Way of the World. These aspects are:

- (1) Structural Technique
- (2) Stage Technique
- (3) Diction
- (4) Theme
- (5) The Comedy
- (6) Actors and Characters

Because we must know something about the man who wrote these plays, my immediate task will be to trace the vicissitudes of Congreve's life from birth until the day he died in 1729.

- 1 Congreve, William The Dedication of The Way of the World to the Right Honourable Ralph, Earl of Montague (In: Comedies by William Congreve. Ed. . . by Bonamy Dobrée. London (etc.), Oxford Univ. Press, (1949)), p.336.
- 2 Congreve, William Concerning Humour in Comedy (In: Comedies by William Congreve. Ed. . . by Bonamy Dobrée. London (etc.), Oxford Univ. Press, (1949)) p.10.

B. LIFE AND WORK OF WILLIAM CONGREVE

The Congreve family remained staunch Royalists throughout the Commonwealth period of English history. William Congreve the dramatist was the son of William Congreve and Mary, née Browning, and his date of birth has been established as "the twenty-fourth day of January, 1670".¹

A few years later, 1674, William Congreve senior, an officer in the army, was appointed to command the garrison at Youghal,² and for fifteen years the family lived in Ireland. When the Catholic Earl of Tyrconnel, Richard Talbot, replaced Clarendon as Lord Deputy of Ireland, however, a number of Protestant families returned to England.³ The family of Congreve settled at Stretton Hall in Staffordshire towards the close of 1688 or early in 1689.

While living in Ireland, William Congreve attended the preparatory school at Kilkenny, which he entered towards the end of 1681.⁴ Jonathan Swift, Congreve's senior by two years, was a pupil at the same school, but there is no record that the two boys met at that time.⁵ It was at Trinity College, Dublin, which Congreve entered in April, 1686 and where, like Swift, he was a pupil of St. George Ashe, that they formed an enduring friendship.

Dublin, it is interesting to note, was the only city besides London where "distinguished companies

1 Hodges, J.C. William Congreve the Man. New York, Modern Language Association of America, 1941. p.6.

2 Ibid. p.2.

3 Macaulay, T.B. The History of England. Popular ed. in 2 vols. London, Longmans, Green, 1895. Vol.I. p.404-405.

4 Hodges, J.C. William Congreve the Man. New York, Modern Language Association of America, 1941. p.12.

5 Taylor, D.C. William Congreve. London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1931. p.14.

of professional actors were encouraged and supported during the seventeenth century".¹ In the Irish theatre, sponsored by James Shirley the dramatist, the plays of Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, Shirley himself and others were produced. That Congreve was interested in studying dramatic technique at this time is suggested by three works on the subject, printed in 1684, each bearing his signature. These were found in June 1930 when the library of the Duke of Leeds was sold. The books are: Dryden's Of Dramatick Poesie; Horace's Art of Poetry, translated by the Earl Roscommon; and Francois Hedelin's The Whole Art of the Stage, in two volumes.² It is safe to assume from this evidence that Congreve frequently attended the Dublin theatre during his College years, and that the influence of Ben Jonson as well as Thomas Middleton and their followers would have assisted in moulding his ideas on drama and the stage.

Professor Howarth believes that Congreve must have written his first comedy very soon after arriving in England. The evidence appears in Congreve's own Dedication of The Old Bachelor to Charles Lord Clifford of Lanesborough when the play was printed, in 1693. There Congreve quite clearly states that the play was written four years previously, making the date of its composition "the spring of 1689".³

Southerne, Mainwaring and Dryden read the comedy and under Dryden's direction Congreve reshaped and polished it. Professor Howarth suggests that it was

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- 1 Hodges, J.C. William Congreve the Man. New York, Modern Language Association of America, 1941. p.27.
 - 2 Isaacs, J. Congreve's Library. The Library, 4th Series Vol.XX 1939-1940, p.41-42.
 - 3 Howarth, R.G. The Date of "The Old Bachelor". The Times Literary Supplement. June 13, 1936. p.500.

Congreve's "revision of Incognita for the press"¹ and "the author's own fastidiousness"² which accounted for nearly three years which elapsed before The Old Bachelor was produced in January, 1693, having been accepted some months previously.

Before it was produced Dryden pronounced it "the best first play he had ever seen",³ and the management granted Congreve the privilege of the house for six months prior to its being acted - a very great compliment.

There is a tradition that Congreve wrote his novel Incognita under the pseudonym Cleophil when he was aged 17 years. If true, it must have been written at Trinity College, Dublin, but the affectation of being a youthful prodigy was common in those days, so that the date of licensing, 22nd December, 1691, is more reliable. At that date he had already entered the Middle Temple as a law student, his date of entry being the 17th March, 1691.

The success of The Old Bachelor, acted in January, 1693 and printed in December of the same year, no doubt encouraged William Congreve to persist with a second play he was writing - The Double-Dealer. Professor Howarth has shown that no longer "is it necessary to believe . . . that The Double-Dealer . . . took less than a year to compose. It may have been begun even before Congreve's first piece was accepted for performance",⁴ in September, 1692. The play was produced at Drury Lane in November, 1693 and published "on the 4th December,

1 Howarth, R.G. The Date of "The Old Bachelor". The Times Literary Supplement. June 13, 1936. p.500.

2 Howarth, R.G. Congreve's First Play. Addendum. Publications of the Modern Language Association of America Vol.LXI June, 1946. No.2. p.596.

3 Dictionary of National Biography. Ed. by Leslie Stephen. London. Smith, Elder, 1887. Vol.XII. p.7.

4 Howarth, R.G. Congreve's First Play. Addendum. Publications of the Modern Language Association of America Vol. LXI No.2 June, 1946. p.597.

1693 with the date 1694 on the title-page".¹

It was not a great success. John Dryden in a letter to William Walsh Esq. (undated but probably written in December, 1693) makes this comment:

"His Double Dealer is much censur'd by the greater part of the Town: and is defended onely by the best Judges, who, you know, are commonly the fewest. Yet it gets ground daily, and has already been acted Eight times. The women thinke he has exposed their Bitchery too much; & the Gentlemen, are offended with him; for the discovery of their follies: & the way of their Intrigues, under the notion of Friendship to their Ladyes² Husbands".

Dryden's extravagant praise of the young dramatist, in his poem entitled: To my Dear Friend Mr. Congreve, On his Comedy, call'd The Double-Dealer, which compared him to Shakespeare ("Heav'n, that but once was Prodigal before, to Shakespear gave as much; she cou'd not give him more")³ was not accepted by 'the greater part of the Town'.

Congreve tried over-enthusiastically to answer the criticism of his play in The Epistle Dedicatory written To the Right Honourable Charles Montague, showing not only his youthfulness but also the impatience which he seems always to have felt on being criticised for what he believed was careful art. It is interesting

1 Gosse, Sir Edmund Life of William Congreve. London, Heinemann, 1924. p.44.

2 Dryden, John Letter 28. Dryden to Walsh. (In: The Letters of John Dryden: with Letters Addressed to him. Collected and Ed. by Charles E. Ward. (Durham, N.C.), Duke Univ. Press, 1942). p.63.

3 Dryden, John To my Dear Friend Mr. Congreve, On his Comedy call'd The Double-Dealer. (In: Comedies by William Congreve. Ed. by Bonamy Dobrée. London, etc., Oxford Univ. Press, (1949)). p.119. l. 62-63.

to note that he used an argument imitated from the Explorata: or, Discoveries of Ben Jonson to appease the offended ladies :

"They who are Virtuous or Discreet, should not be offended, for such Characters as these distinguish them, and make their Beauties more shining and observ'd: And they who are of the other kind, may nevertheless pass for such, by seeming not to be displeas'd, or touch'd with the Satire of this Comedy". 1

On January 13, 1694 Queen Mary commanded that The Double-Dealer "be acted before her". 2 It was revived again on March 4th, 1698/9, as we learn from a letter written by John Dryden to Mrs. Steward:

"This Day was playd a reviv'd Comedy of Mr. Congreve's calld the Double Dealer, which was never very takeing; in the play bill was printed, - Written by Mr. Congreve; with Severall Expressions omitted: What kind of Expressions those were you may easily gness; if you have seen the Monday's Gazette, wherein is the Kings Order, for the reformation of the Stage". 3

Congreve's third comedy, Love for Love, was acted on the opening of Betterton's new theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, April 30th 1695. It was a great success and the actors were so delighted that they offered Congreve a share in the profits of the theatre if he would undertake to write for them one play every year. Indeed Colley Cibber says that the play was an "extraordinary success" and he adds that Congreve "bound himself" to give the King's Company of players "two plays every season", 4 but this in fact was not done.

1 Congreve, William The Epistle dedicatory of The Double Dealer To the Right Honourable Charles Montague. (IN: Comedies by William Congreve. Ed. . . by Bonamy Dobrée. London (etc.), Oxford Univ. Press (1949)), p.117.

2 Taylor, D.C. William Congreve. London, Oxford Univ. Press. 1931. p.53.

3 Dryden, John Letter 59. Dryden to Mrs. Steward. (In: The Letters of John Dryden: with Letters Addressed to him. Collected and Ed. by Charles E. Ward. (Durham, N.C.) Duke Univ. Press, 1942) p.112-113. "The order, dated February 18, was printed in the London Gazette for Monday, February 27, 1698/9".

4 Gosse, Sir Edmund Life of William Congreve, London, Heinemann, 1924. p.52.

have not ambition, I have other passions more easily gratified".¹

The year 1698 was a year of crisis. In April was published A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage,² by the non-juror clergyman, Jeremy Collier. Details of the controversy will appear later when I consider Congreve's literary opinions and beliefs.

On the 12th May, 1698 Mr. Betterton and Mrs. Bracegirdle of the Kings Company of players were fined by the Justice of Middlesex for using profane language and Mr. Congreve was prosecuted for writing The Double-Dealer. The prosecution of actors continued for some years and on the 20th November, 1701, Luttrell records, Mrs. Bracegirdle, Mrs. Barry, Mr. Betterton, Mr. Verbruggen and eight other players were brought before the Kings Bench for using indecent expressions. Similarly, on Tuesday the 17th February, 1701-2, "the actors at the new playhouse in Lincoln's Inn Fields were tried in the Kings Bench bar for uttering several blasphemous expressions".³ In other words, the prosecutions aimed primarily to discourage a certain mode of expression without prohibiting the matter expressed. It was prudery without morality.

This inquisition was eventually stopped in the reign of Queen Anne, but some time before that happened William Congreve replied to Collier's attack in his Amendments of Mr. Collier's false and Imperfect Citations, etc. from the Old Bachelor, Double-Dealer, Love for Love, Mourning Bride. It was published on the 12th July, 1698,⁴ but Congreve was no match for his opponent, who also had the support of public opinion.

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- 1 Lynch, Kathleen M. Congreve's Irish Friend, Joseph Keally. Publications of the Modern Language Association of America. Vol.53. 1938. p.1084.
 - 2 Hodges, J.C. William Congreve the Man. New York, Modern Language Association of America, 1941. p.62.
 - 3 Summers, Montague Introduction to the Complete works of William Congreve, Soho, Nonesuch Press, 1923. Vol.I. p.49.
 - 4 Gosse, Sir Edmund Life of William Congreve, London, Heinemann, 1924. p.108.

A proclamation of William III against vice and profaneness appeared in the London Gazette, No. 3557 of Thursday December 14, 1699 to which Dryden refers in a letter to Mrs. Steward.¹

There is a brief reference to William Congreve in another letter from John Dryden to Mrs. Steward dated March 12th, 1699 (which is 1700 new style). Dryden wrote: "Congreves New Play has had but moderate success; though it deserves much better".² This is a reference to The Way of the World. It must have been acted prior to that date, probably in early March.

Congreve's career as a dramatist lasted for only seven years, between 1693 when The Old Bachelor was acted and 1700, when The Way of the World was produced. He did not, however, entirely abandon the stage in 1700. In March, 1701, his masque The Judgement of Paris,³ in which the part of Venus was played by Mrs. Bracegirdle, was performed at the Queens Theatre, Dorset Gardens. This masque, and the Ode for St. Cecilia's Day, were produced in 1701.⁴

It is said that Congreve collaborated with Walsh and Vanbrugh in translating Molière's Monsieur de Fourceagnac into English under the title Squire Trelooby. Though Montague Summers accepts the extant copy of the play as the work of these three dramatists, there appears to be good reason to believe that it was in fact a translation by some other hand, possibly John Ozell.⁵ For

1 Gosse, Sir Edmund Life of William Congreve, London, Heinemann, 1924. p.108.

2 Dryden, John Letter 74. Dryden to Mrs. Steward. Tuesday March the 12th 1699/1700. (In: The Letters of John Dryden: with Letters Addressed to him. Collected and ed. by Charles E. Ward. (Durham, N.C.) Duke Univ Press, 1942), p.134.

3 Gosse, Sir Edmund Life of William Congreve, London, Heinemann, 1924, p.119.

4 Ibid. p.129.

5 Ibid. p.131.

instance, Jacob Tonson would surely have published the work of Congreve, Walsh and Vanbrugh, yet the extant copy was published by Bernard Lintot.

On December 14, 1704 Queen Anne granted a licence to Sir John Vanbrugh and William Congreve for a new playhouse which was opened on April 9th, 1705. The venture was not successful. Colley Cibber explained:

"... in Queen Anne's reign, the stage was in such confusion, and its affairs in such distress, that Sir John Vanbrugh, and Mr. Congreve, after they had held it for about one year, threw up the management of it, as an unprofitable post, after which a licence for acting was not thought worth any gentlemen's asking for" 1

When his comedy Love for Love was revived on 1st June, 1704 by Mrs. Bowman, Congreve wrote a new Prologue and a song called The Misses Lamentation "in which the Ladies deplored their inability to come any longer to first-night performances in vizard masks". 2 The practice had been stopped by an edict of Queen Anne on the 17th January, 1704.

A more elaborate work, his opera Semele, was first printed in the collected edition of Congreve's Works in 1710. Its scenery was considerable and use was made of spectacle for effect. For example, the stage directions for Act I, Scene I, read:

"The Scene is in the Temple of Juno, near the alter is a Golden Image of the Goddess. Priests are in their Solemnities, as after a Sacrifice newly offer'd: Flames arise from the altar, and the Statue of Juno is seen to bow".

Congreve also wrote a number of songs, ballads and other poems including translations into English from Homer and Ovid.

Congreve lived for forty years in the Strand, London, first in Arundel Street and later in Surrey

1 Cibber, Colley An apology for the life of Mr. Colley Cibber. London, Dent; New York, Dutton, 1938. p.146.

2 Gosse, Sir Edmund Life of William Congreve. London. Heinemann, 1924, p.138.

Street.¹ He was a member of the famous Kit-Cat Club where the literary gentlemen of London assembled and he must there have heard many interesting conversations and ideas which may have helped to guide his thoughts on drama and technique. Among the older members of the club were John Dryden and William Wycherley. As we read the fluent dialogue in his plays it is difficult to realise that Congreve was himself a poor speaker, shy and hesitant in his utterance.

The beautiful actress, Anne Bracegirdle, lived in Howard Street, which is also in the Strand, close to Congreve's home. Different opinions have been expressed as to the relationship between Congreve and Anne Bracegirdle. Professor Hodges has expressed the view that Anne, who was noted for her chastity, eventually yielded and became Congreve's mistress, but that her affair with the Earl of Scarsdale disappointed him and that he repudiated her in a poem which had hitherto been unpublished, beginning: "False tho' you've been to me and Love".² It is preserved in the poet's own hand-writing. The less personal version of the first two quatrains published by Congreve in 1710 opened with the line "False tho' she be to me and love". This was clearly the original line, changed in the manuscript to "you've been", "she" being deleted with "you've" written above it and "be" altered to "been", the "en" obviously having been added, since the "n" actually touches the letter "t" of the word "to".³ This however, in no way proves Professor Hodges' conjecture. Professor Howarth has refuted it by pointing out that the underlying theme of all Congreve's plays - The Old Bachelor excepted - "is Congreve's own love for Anne Bracegirdle",⁴ and that in The Way of the World "far from there being any note of consummated love, the wooing is more

1 Hodges, J.C. William Congreve the Man. New York, Modern Language Association of America, 1941, p.78.

2 Ibid. p.88.

3 Ibid. Facsimile of original manuscript poem opposite p.88.

4 Howarth, R.G. Congreve and Anne Bracegirdle. English Studies in Africa. September 1961. Vol.4. No.2. p.159.

protracted and, right to the end, more uncertain than ever".¹

Professor Howarth has, similarly, refuted Professor Hodges' insinuations that Congreve was the father of a daughter born to Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough, after twenty years of sterility, by arguing that "a last child to a husband and wife, after a long period of childlessness, is no new phenomenon and need not be accounted for by supposing it to have been the result of a love affair on her part",² and, that, although Congreve and the Duchess are known to have been intimate friends until the time of his death; "he early grew corpulent, gouty and almost blind, so that it seems he lost any physical vigour he once had".³

Congreve's physical health was indeed poor. As early as the summer of 1693, he had been forced by attacks of gout to resort to Tunbridge Wells and later to Epsom to seek "relief from the waters there".⁴ In 1705 he began to be troubled by his eyes. Jonathan Swift visited him on October 26th, 1710 and found him "almost blind with cataracts growing on his eyes; and his case is that he must wait two or three years, blind, and then he must have them ~~co~~ouched; and besides he is never rid of the gout, yet he looks young and fresh, and is as cheerful as ever. He is younger by three years or more than I, and I am twenty years younger than he".⁵ Pages 41, 203, 312 and 406 of Swift's Journal to Stella show his friendship with Congreve and an increasing concern in his health.

These circumstances alone are sufficient to refute the insinuations of Professor Hodges even if

1 Howarth, R.G. Congreve and Anne Bracegirdle. English Studies in Africa. September 1961. Vol.4. No.2. p.160.

2. Ibid. p.159.

3. Ibid. p.160.

4. Hodges, J.C. William Congreve the Man. New York, Modern Language Association of America, 1941. p.54.

5 Swift, Jonathan Journal to Stella. A.D. 1710-1713. Ed. by Frederick Ryland. London, Bell, 1897. p.38.

"documentary proof of Anne's innocence"¹ had not been found to correct a false impression. Furthermore it is interesting to note that Professor Hodges has tacitly withdrawn his previous insinuation by writing of Anne Bracegirdle in his recent edition of the Letters and Documents of William Congreve:

"We cannot be sure just what her response² was to Congreve's ardent wooing".

Congreve's friendship with the Duchess of Marlborough lasted to the end of his life. Tradition has it that after his death the Duchess had a wax image of her old friend made and placed it in his favourite chair where it would sit and nod when addressed. This "probably represents pretty well the full extent of his vitality"³ in the latter years of his life.

Congreve died early on Sunday morning, January, 19th, 1729.⁴ "The following Saturday The Daily Post-Boy reported: "The Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey is now hanging with Black for the Funeral of Mr. Congreve, who is to be interred from thence next Sunday near the Cloister Door at the farther End of the South Isle".⁵

The aim of this survey of Congreve's life has been to follow his career as a dramatist and to establish as accurately as possible the relevant dates of his dramatic works.

Perhaps it should also be mentioned that he

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- 1 Howarth, R.G. Congreve and Anne Bracegirdle. Readers' Forum. English Studies in Africa. September, 1962. Vol.5. No.2. p.218.
 - 2 Hodges, J.C. William Congreve: Letters and Documents. Collected and Ed. by John C. Hodges. London, Macmillan, 1964. p.248.
 - 3 Howarth, R.G. Congreve and Anne Bracegirdle. English Studies in Africa. Vol.4. No.2. Sept.1961. p.160.
 - 4 Hodges, J.C. William Congreve the Man. New York, Modern Language Association of America. 1941. p.121.
 - 5 Ibid. p.121

did not depend entirely upon the stage for a living, but held in addition six government posts from which he derived a small but steady income.¹

Congreve did not live by his pen alone so that his artistic sense was not subordinated to the needs of daily living and he was therefore free to devote the time and care to dramatic technique which is so necessary to create an aesthetically satisfying drama.

Technique, however, is subject to current dramatic theory which, in turn, derives from the dramatic heritage of the age. To discover the nature of this heritage will be the purpose of my next chapter.

1(a) Hodges, J.C. William Congreve in the Government Service. Modern Philology. Vol.27. 1929-30. Note on p.185.

1(b) Hodges, J.C. All information in paragraph 1 above will be found in Fresh manuscript sources for a life of William Congreve, Publications of the Modern Language Association of America. Vol. 54. 1939. p.435.

The subject-matter of the New Comedy "was taken almost exclusively from the everyday life of the upper middle class of Athens", ¹ but it also contained certain "stock types, Old Man, Old Woman, Youth, Maiden, Soldier, Miser, Cook, Slave, Courtesan, Wife, Husband, Boaster, Thief, Parasite, and so forth". ² Further, Roman drama, both comedy and tragedy, was modelled on Greek drama. Of the two greatest Roman comic dramatists - Plautus and Terence - Terence should be mentioned because he modelled his plots and characters on Menander, and Plautus deserves mention for the manner in which he adapted the Greek originals, inserting scenes from other plays where it served his purpose and introducing contemporary Roman customs and manners.

By the end of the last century B.C., farce, based on the Fabula Atellana had largely replaced true comedy, while tragedy had dwindled to an entertainment for a small, intellectual group. Unlike the source of intrigue, these farces were constantly based upon the theme of marital infidelity. Among the stock characters of the Roman mimus, or actor of farce, were the learned but obtuse Doctor, the Rustic, the bald Fool, the shy Slave, the Parasite, the Bawd, the Sailor, the Guileless young Man, and so on. ³ When the religion of Rome became Christian, the authoritarian Church condemned the theatre so that by the seventh century A.D. "mimes and pantomimes were forced to become nomads". ⁴

It was Seneca who said: ". . . the mimes fail in reproaching the rankness of this age. Verily they omit much more than they put on the stage. Such a heap of incredible vices is to be found in this age of ours that the mimes may even be accused of negligence". ⁵ The

1 Robertson, Pamela E.C. The Commedia dell'arte. Natal, University Press, 1960. p.12.

2 Ibid. p.12.

3 Ibid. p.17.

4 Ibid. p.20.

5 Ibid. p.19.

function which comedy had assumed in the hands of Aristophanes is stated as though it were a duty of the comic stage.

The stage had mirrored aspects of the times ; now it was forbidden. Human failings were no longer subject to "one of man's most powerful catharses - laughter".¹

B. THE REBIRTH OF DRAMA

"Modern drama", wrote Sir Edmund Chambers in The Mediaeval Stage Vol. I, "arose, by a fairly well defined line of evolution, from a threefold source, the ecclesiastical liturgy, the farce of the mimes, the classical revival of humanism".² We shall trace each of these in turn.

(1) The Classical Revival

When the classical revival of humanism took place during the 15th Century Renaissance, attention was focused, amongst other things, upon the writings of Aristotle. In his Treatise on the Poetic Aristotle had discussed ancient Greek drama, systematically enumerating the salient features of tragedy. Because Aristotle's promised treatise on comedy has not been found, we have to rely on the few sentences on the subject contained in his Treatise on the Poetic.

Aristotle found that comedy differs from tragedy as follows: "the one seeks to imitate worse, but the other better men than they are".³ He later remarks that Homer "first demonstrated the figures of comedy, not dramatically exhibiting invective, but ridicule".⁴ In

1 Robertson, Pamela E.C. *The Commedia dell'arte*. Natal, University Press, 1960, p.19.

2 Chambers, Sir E.K. *The Mediaeval Stage*. (London), Oxford Univ. Press, (1948) Vol.I. p.182.

3 Aristotle. *Treatise on Rhetoric . . . and . . . also The Poetic*. Tr. by Theodore Buckley. London, Bell, 1888. p.410.

4 Ibid. p.413.

Chapter V he couples the foregoing by saying: "But comedy is, as we have said, an imitation indeed of bad characters, yet it does not imitate according to every vice, but the ridiculous only; since the ridiculous is a portion of turpitude. For the ridiculous is a certain error, and turpitude unattended with pain, and not destructive".¹

When Aristotle again refers to comedy in his Treatise on the Poetic it is during a discussion on the universality of poetry as opposed to the particularity of history. Tragedy is based on historical truth, comedy on universal human nature, and "In comedy . . . this is now become evident. For comic poets having composed a fable through things of a probable nature, they thus give whatever names they please to their characters, and do not, like Iambic poets, write poems about particular persons. But in tragedy they cling to real names".² It is a very interesting statement, as English comic drama during the seventeenth century was profoundly influenced by this idea.

At the end of Chapter XIII Aristotle points out that comedy always ends happily; and that is all there is about comedy in his Treatise on the Poetic. It is slender information to be sure. When coupled to these words of Seneca - "the mimes fail in reproaching the rankness of this age"³ - it does point to the conclusion that originally comedy was accepted as a means of reproaching society by exposing current vices to public ridicule.

(2) The Italian Popular Farce

From Aristotle we now pass to the second source

1 Aristotle Treatise on Rhetoric . . and . . also The Poetic. Tr. by Theodore Buckley. London, Bell, 1888. p.415.

2 Ebid. p.424.

3 Robertson, Pamela E.C. The Commedia dell'arte. Natal, University Press, 1960. p.19.

of modern drama, according to Sir Edmund Chambers, namely the Italian popular farce, known since the 18th century as the Commedia dell'arte.¹ These farces were revived in the 15th century. Stock characters and traditions from the Roman Fabula Attellana had remained intact through the long years of the Christian anathema and now they were free to emerge into the open once more. So many stock characters closely resembling types from the Italian farce occur in English comedies, especially those of the Restoration period, that it is necessary to know something about the proto-types. There are instances, too, where persons in serious drama, unrelated to farce, show character traits of an Italian stock type. Instances are: Polonius, the busy-body in Hamlet by William Shakespeare, who has many character traits resembling Pantaloon; his advice to his son and to King Claudius; his self-importance, and so on;² Falstaff, who reasons with himself about honour as Harlequin reasons with himself on suicide;³ Lancelot Gobbo the starved servant of Shylock who resembles the starved servant of Pantaloon;⁴ but, in fact, the differences in Elizabethan drama are more important than the resemblances. Ben Jonson certainly must have had the Italian proto-type in mind when, in Everyman in his Humour, he created Captain Bobadill, the boastful, chicken-hearted swaggerer, and the couple Cob and Tib who might well be based upon Punchinello and his wife.

William Congreve himself, particularly in The Old Bachelor, has several characters, apart from Captain Bluffe, who seem to have Italian blood. When Pantaloon is a reputable, married merchant, he always has a young and pretty wife who deceives him like Fondelwife and his

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- 1 Robertson, Pamela E.C. The Commedia dell'arte, Natal, University Press, 1960. p.25.
 - 2 Ducharte, P.L. The Italian Comedy. Tr. from the French by Randolph T. Weaver. London (etc.), Harrap, 1929. p.185.
 - 3 Ibid. p.150.
 - 4 Ibid. p.184.

pretty young spouse Laetitia.¹ At other times Pantaloon loves a young flirt who demands gold for her love and then mocks him when he is out of her presence;² a situation similar to that in which Heartwell is trapped and mocked. Indeed Sylvia herself might be a descendant of Fiorennetta,³ the cultivated courtesan. Franca - Trippa, who speaks the Bolognese dialect mixed with the Tuscan dialect; Brighella, the light-fingered, hard-drinking swaggerer; Pangrazio, the yokel come to the city; Pagliaccio, the low comedian, these and many other types from Italian farce might be found in English comedy but usually they have been transmuted, as in Shakespeare's plays, and have become English characters, or even English types, developing according to the English comic tradition.

The common feature of all the Italian low comedies was a love intrigue⁴ and the same is true of the English Restoration comedy; but then there are the gay lovers Beatrice and Benedick in Much Ado about Nothing who are too human and too English to be classified as stock types imported from Italy, and is it not more probable that the gay lovers of the English comedy of manners descended from them? While it is patent, therefore, that ideas from the Italian popular farce were adapted to the English stage, it is difficult to determine how great was that influence.

A feature of Restoration comedies, however, which appears to have originated in Italy, was the impromptu dialogue of the actors. The Commedia dell'arte was a spontaneous performance by skilled groups of actors, many of whom had been born to the tradition of the popular stage. These men and women would improvise their dialogue as the action developed, usually free from the curb of

1 Ducharte, P.L. *The Italian Comedy*. Tr. from the French by Randolph T. Weaver. London (etc.), Harrap, 1929. p. 181-182.

2 Ibid. p.182.

3 Ibid. p.271.

4 Ibid. p.51.

moral restraint, and the spontaneity of the performance in the hands of skilled actors would create a verisimilitude which a written script might scarcely equal. It was customary for actors on the Restoration stage to follow the example of these Italians. The written script would serve as a guide, but the actor of traditional comedy was permitted to interpret his part with the freedom of an Italian mime. In this way, lines of dialogue which now appear dull and lifeless might suggest an extempore performance both sparkling and vivacious.

(3) The Christian Church

The anathema of the Christian church had closed the theatres in the 7th century A.D. That the new birth of drama should take place in the ritual of the Christian church itself ¹ is not at all surprising. Apart from its ritualistic origin, drama offered a potential attraction to the populace which the clergy might not continue to ignore with impunity. Here was a means of bringing many stray sheep to the fold. First it was the miracle play and then the morality play that was developed. The purpose of these dramatizations was moral - through spectacle, to teach the gospel.

The third influence on drama prior to the days of William Congreve was, therefore, the Christian Church. By the 14th century, drama had passed out of the hands of the clergy into those of the laity and its performance had moved from the naves and choirs to the market-places. It was no longer intended for devotion and edification but for mirth, wonder and delight. ² From now on its evolution may be traced through the pageants to the sudden blossoming of dramatic art in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

1 Chambers, Sir E.K. *The Mediaeval Stage*. (London), Oxford Univ. Press, 1948. Vol. II. p.2.

2 Ibid. Vol. II. p.69.

In the plays produced by the Christian church the importance of individual characters took precedence over the action. Christopher Marlowe developed the idea, making the climax of his great tragedies dependent upon the free choice of the protagonist himself - a choice between right and wrong. Above all is this development clear in The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus. Instead of the tragic hero being overwhelmed by events resulting from an act repugnant to divine ethics over which he had no control, like Oedipus or Orestes, a flaw in the character of the hero himself, a faulty choice or a mistake in judgement, but always owing to character, was the direct cause of a tragedy. We need only think of the famous tragedies of William Shakespeare to realise how the stress in tragedy had shifted from divine ethics to human ethics. It is a development which influenced tragedy in the seventeenth century and appears to be relevant to an appreciation of The Mourning Bride by William Congreve.

C. BEN JONSON AND THE COMEDY OF HUMOURS

The opinions of Ben Jonson produced a substantial change on the English comic stage. Explorata: or, Discoveries is a collection of his thoughts and opinions on various subjects. It includes ideas which, he believed, would save English drama from the imaginative extravagance of Elizabethan romanticism, and many of those ideas had a profound influence on generations that followed. It is an important document.

Firstly, let us consider Ben Jonson's interpretation of the work 'imitation'. In his own words:

"The third requisite in our Poet, or Maker, is Imitation, to be able to convert the substance, or Riches of an other Poet, to his owne use. To make choise of one excellent man above the rest, and so to follow him, till he grow very Hee: or; so like him, as the Copie may be mistaken for the Principall. Not, as a Creature, that swallowes, what it takes in, crude, raw, or indigested; but that feedes with an Appetite, and hath a Stomack to concoct, divide and turne all into nourishment.

Not, to imitate Servilely as Horace saith,
and catch at vices, for vertue: but, to
draw forth out of the best, and choisest
flowers, with the Bee, and turne all into
Honey, worke it into one relish, and savour:
make our imitation sweet: observe, how the
best writers have imitated, and follow them". ¹

With epigrammatic genius Alexander Pope expressed
a similar thought in a rhyming couplet in 1711:

"True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd" ²

Here is the essence of 17th century dramatic practice
and there need be no doubt that Jonson's advice had a
profound influence upon William Congreve.

When Aristotle considered the question of unity
in drama, he allowed dramatists considerable latitude.
The compass of the action should not be too large or too
small; the time of its duration should be "such as to
render it probable". ³ The Italian critics of the 16th
century restated his theory and Ben Jonson followed their
interpretation. In this way the idea, that the duration
of the action in both tragedy and comedy should be so
conceived "that it exceed not the compasse of one Day", ⁴
was born. The action, too, "should be one, and intire". ⁵
These curbs, Jonson must have believed, would produce
better art while restraining the 'fruitfulness' of
romantic imaginations.

1 Jonson, Ben *Explorata: or, Discoveries*. (In: Ben Jonson.
Ed. by C.H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson. *The
Poems, The Prose Works*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1947).
Vol. VIII. p.638-639.

2 Pope, Alexander *Essay on Criticism*. (In: *The English
Parnassus*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, (1947)). p.205.
1. 297-28.

3 Aristotle *Treatise on Rhetoric . . . and . . . also The
Poetic*. Tr. by Theodore Buckley. London, Bell, 1888. p.421

4 Jonson, Ben *Explorata: or, Discoveries*. (In: Ben Jonson.
Ed. by C.H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson. *The
Poems, The Prose Works*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1946).
Vol. VIII. p.647.

5 Ibid. p.647.

When Ben Jonson wrote Explorata: or, Discoveries, drama as a secular art had existed for many years. Like Seneca, he believed that comedy had a moral function to perform. For instance, comedy should expose vice:

"I'll strip the ragged follies of the time
Naked as at their birth". 1

Its function was not only to entertain but also to teach:

"The parts of a Comedie are the same with a
Tragedie, and the end is partly the same. 2
For, they both delight and teach".

A little later he explains how the teaching is effected:

". . . the wise, and vertuous, will never thinke
any thing belongs to themselves that is written,
but rejoyce that the good are warn'd not to
be such; and the ill to leave to bee such". 3

Finally, Ben Jonson tried to explain why certain characters appear to be ridiculous. He found that it was caused by humours. In the Prologue to his comedy Every Man out of his Humour the presenter, named Asper, described a 'humour':

"When some one peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,
In their confluitions, all to run one way, 4
This may be truly said to be a humour".

The word 'humour' was derived from the same stem as the modern word 'humidity' and originally implied something wet or fluid. Hippocrates believed that the

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- 1 Jonson, Ben Every Man out of his Humour. (In: The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson. London, Dent; New York, Dutton, (1950). Vol. I. p.61.
 - 2 Jonson, Ben Explorata: or, Discoveries. (In: Ben Jonson. Ed. by C.H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson. The Poems, The Prose Works. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1947). Vol. VIII. p.634.
 - 3 Ibid. p.634.
 - 4 Jonson, Ben Every Man out of his Humour. (In: The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson. London, Dent; New York, Dutton, (1950)). Vol. I. p.62.

human body contained four chief fluids or humours: phlegm, blood, choler and black bile. A similar concept appeared in the science of Aristotle. There are four primary and opposite qualities, he wrote - hot and cold, wet and dry - and these combine to form the essences which constitute all matter. The four essences or elements were said to be earth, air, fire and water. Thus water was wet and cold, fire hot and dry, air hot and moist and earth cold and dry. Later writers combined this idea with the Hippocratic theory. Fire was said to produce choler, air blood, water phlegm and earth black bile. Differences in human temperament were explained in terms of a disproportionate mixing of the humours. For instance, if there was excessive phlegm in the body the person was said to be of a phlegmatic temperament and he would lack vivacity, though he was calm and strong. Similarly a preponderance of blood gave rise to a sanguine temperament which predisposed a person to pleasant emotions, though he was weak and changeable. An excess of yellow bile produced a choleric temperament which was quick to anger, though strong. Finally, a disproportionate quantity of black bile caused a melancholic temperament which was slow and weak with sad emotions.

The complete theory of humours is much more complicated than this brief resumé suggests, the various temperaments being governed by astrological concepts of nativity under different signs of the zodiac, the influence of planets and so on, but it was the idea of an ingrained and unbalanced temperament which Ben Jonson adapted to form the basis of his theory of humours in comedy.

Ben Jonson believed that comedy ought to be realistic not romantic. He had a methodical mind and a theory of comedy in keeping with contemporary medical ideas was admirably suited to his purpose. Instead of commencing with a plot as Shakespeare usually did, Ben Jonson assembled a number of ideas exemplified in characters each with a distinctive and dominant trait or passion and thus created the situation. From the conflict and contrast of these characters arose the comedy and the interest

be accepted as the norm in numerous Restoration comedies.

(2) John Fletcher

The 'rake-hero' reappears in The Wild-Goose Chase by John Fletcher, but other resemblances to Middleton's drama are negligible. The scene is set in Paris and the characters belong to the upper class. This play was acted at Court in 1621 and it was produced many times up to the closing of the theatres in 1643. Moreover it was one of the first plays to be revived when the theatres reopened after the Restoration.

One is immediately struck by the vivacious witty style of The Wild-Goose Chase and its lack of Jonson's serious moral purpose. The light, youthful gaiety and carefree thrill of life inject a fresh spirit into the comic love theme, a spirit reminiscent of Shakespeare's Beatrice and Benedick, which foreshadows the style of Sir George Etherege. Though written in blank verse, the dialogue resembles fluent prose. Here is an example (Oriana's opinion of 'the people'):

"What woman is, or has been ever, honest?
Give 'em but ten round cups, they'll swear Lucretia
Di'd not for want of power to resist Tarquin,
But want of pleasure, that he stay'd no longer;
And Portia, that was famous for her piety
To her lov'd lord, they'll face ye out, died o' 1
th' pox".

In imagery, idea, diction and style this is a comedy of manners. Oriana's gay 'chase' after Mirabel, the Wild Goose who has an aversion to marriage, leads to scenes of verbal sparring and sex antagonism, like Act II Scene I (Mirabel and Oriana), Act II Scene II (Pinac and Lillia Bianca), and Act II Scene III (Mirabel and Belleur against Rosalura and Oriana), which adumbrate the future stage. Here is a gay life of love and intrigue where

1 Fletcher, John The Wild-Goose Chase. (In: Elizabethan Plays. Ed. by Hazelton Spencer. Boston, Heath Co., (1933)). A.L. S.L. p.885. l. 117-122.

Mirabel is tricked into marrying Oriana by her disguising herself as a rich Italian lady - a rather unsatisfactory foundation for marriage one would imagine, but in keeping with the youthful spirit of the whole. In all these comedies, as in later Restoration comedies, there are music, song and dance.

John Fletcher holds an important place in the development of the comedy of manners. He raised it from the back-streets of London and its sordid intrigues to the realm of fashionable and courtly life; he introduced the rivalry of the sexes and the pursuit of love as its dominant motif and he steeped it in a gay spirit of wit which persisted in the vivacious diction of Sir George Etherege and William Congreve himself. The world of The Wild-Goose Chase is a world of fantasy, to be sure, not the fashionable society of London, but the contribution to the development of the comedy of manners is unmistakable.

(3) James Shirley

When the theatres were closed by the Puritans, Shirley was conceded to be the leading dramatist of London. Perhaps it was for this reason that about eight of his plays were revived when the theatres reopened. He was a staunch royalist and in 1633 he is said to have written a play The Gamester, based on a plot outline supplied by King Charles I.

Shirley is an important link between the period of Ben Jonson and the Restoration. The development is particularly clear in his comedy The Lady of Pleasure of which it has been said that "the cool and calculated intrigue of Aretina is thoroughly typical of the degradation of love in the seventeenth-century comedy of manners".¹

1 Hartnoll, Phyllis. Ed. *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*. London (etc.), Oxford Univ. Press. 1951. p.738.

In the world of The Wild-Goose Chase mundane considerations of money and the cares of daily living had no part. The Lady of Pleasure, however, has its scene set in London, but, unlike Middleton's drama, its characters belong to an idle and sophisticated upper class who game and drink and pursue loose women with impunity. Theirs is a world of pleasure and intrigue for pleasure's sake. They are concerned with food, drink, money and the events of daily life which must have been familiar to Londoners of that time. But this is not a comedy of humours: it is a comedy of human behaviour in an over-sophisticated society.

Among the characters are a Lord, Gentlemen and Gallante as well as a young scholar who is corrupted by the gay town life. There are Aretina, the wife of Sir Thomas Bornwell, who is bored by life in the country and desires the pleasures of the town, and also Celestina, a young widow of high moral principles. Finally there is Madam Decoy the procuress.

The plot is an intrigue and a counter-intrigue so that the resemblance to the Restoration comedy of manners is striking indeed. Where it differs from the later comedy is in the repentance of Aretina and the Lord in the final scene. The fact that Shirley, like Fletcher, employed a form of blank-verse is scarcely noticeable since it is prosaic in the choice of words. To illustrate this I shall quote one example:

Aretina: "I am to sit this morning.

Bornwell: Do, while I give new directions to my steward.

Kickshaw: With your favor, we'll wait on you; sitting's
but

A melancholy exercise without
Some company to discourse.

Aretina: It does conclude
A lady's morning work. We rise, make fine,
Sit for our picture, and 't is time to dine.

Littleworth: Praying's forgot.

Kickshaw: 'T is out of fashion". 1

1 Shirley, James *The Lady of Pleasure* (In: Elizabethan Plays. Ed. by Hazelton Spencer. Boston, Heath Co., (1933)). A.1. S.1. p.1140. l. 311-318.

Though Shirley always introduced a repentance scene and advocated morality at the end of his comedies, his contribution to the development of the Restoration comedy of manners should not be ignored. In most other respects the later comedy was contained in his comic drama.

Perhaps a few examples which recur in the comedies of William Congreve should be noted before I end this discussion. The first is the character Caperwit in Shirley's Love in a Maze. He is the type of inadequate person who is a social failure and who tries to hide his inadequacy by boasting of his prowess with women. Caperwit is a ridiculous counterpart of Congreve's Petulant in The Way of the World. In the same play there is a tricked marriage, a situation which frequently occurs on the Restoration stage and which Congreve twice employed. My final example is found in The Constant Maid. There Playfair advises Hartwell to make love to the mother in order to disguise his love for the daughter. In both The Double-Dealer and The Way of the World Congreve uses this idea dramatically.

Examples like these may be multiplied, but no useful purpose will be served in doing so. The development of the particular type of comedy which was resumed by Sir George Etherege after the Restoration appears to be quite clear. The line seems to run from Middleton to Fletcher culminating in the social comedy of manners by James Shirley.

E. THE INTERREGNUM

In 1642 English theatres were closed by order of the Commonwealth Parliament which gave expression to the disapproval of Christian Puritanism. Just as seven dark centuries of the Christian anathema had not destroyed the art of the ancient mimus, so Puritan intolerance again failed to destroy the dramatic art. Indeed there is no evidence whatever to suggest that the conventions of the Caroline stage were altered. Professor Harbage appends to his book *Cavalier Drama* a list which

contains about 157 titles of plays written between the years 1643 and 1659.¹ In this way the Caroline tradition remained alive.

An important development occurred in the year 1656. Sir William Davenant was able to evade the ban on play-acting by producing a kind of opera, The Siege of Rhodes, which he termed 'music and instruction'.² Despite Puritan protests, this was followed by The Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru in 1658 and History of Sir Francis Drake in 1659. The setting for these operas was elaborate as the directions for the first entry in The Siege of Rhodes illustrate:

The curtain being drawn up, a lightsome sky appears discovering a maritime coast, full of craggy rocks and high cliffs, with several verdures naturally growing upon such situations; and, afar off, the true prospect of the city of Rhodes, when it was in prosperous estate; with so much view of the gardens and hills about it, as the narrowness of the room will allow the scene. In that part of the horizon, terminated by the sea, is represented the Turkish fleet, making towards a promontory, some few miles distant from the town. The entry is prepared by instrumental music.

It was the beginning of a movement away from a simple setting towards elaborate spectacle on the Restoration stage, particularly in tragedy. William Congreve employed this technique in his tragedy, The Mourning Bride.

Though Professor Dobrée does not agree that the Restoration comedy of manners was influenced by the French variety and expressly states in his booklet on William Congreve "this is a false view",³ the possible influence of Molière on dramatists like Sir George Etherege and William Wycherley, who spent several years in France

1 Harbage, A. Cavalier Drama. New York, Modern Language Association of America; London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1936. Appendix.

2 Hartnoll, Phyllis. Ed. The Oxford Companion to the Theatre. London (etc.), Oxford Univ. Press, 1951. p.181.

3 Dobrée, Bonamy. William Congreve. (London), Longman's, Green for The British Council, (1963). (Writers and their work series, No. 164). p.12.

during the Interregnum, should not be overlooked. Molière at that time by his own efforts had raised French comedy from an impromptu performance of farce based on the commedia dell'arte to the status of a respectable drama acceptable at Versailles and the English Cavaliers must certainly have seen these comedies during their exile. It is not easy to determine, however, to what extent the English dramatists were influenced.

Instances which may be attributed to the French influence are Margery Pinchwife in Wycherley's comedy The Country Wife, who may have been the prototype of Congreve's Miss Prue, and who bears a certain resemblance to Agnes in Molière's L'Ecole des Femmes; a similarity may be seen in the endings of L'Ecole des Femmes and Congreve's novel, Incognita; when Sganarelle's wife expresses a wish that there was a law which allowed one to change husbands as often as one changes one's linen, we think of Millamant's words that one should be allowed to choose one's acquaintance as one does one's clothes; Mascarille's discussion of his doggerel verse in Les Précieuses Ridicules resembles the discussion between Lady Froth and Brisk in The Double-Dealer and even the idea of a servant personating a Marquis may be the source of Mirabell's intrigue to win Millamant, but to multiply instances of this nature, as I said when discussing James Shirley, serves no useful purpose. The importance of Molière to French comedy is that he initiated a new genre of comedy, a satire of current social follies and behaviour, and it is this species of comedy, the comedy of manners, that the Cavalier dramatists developed in England after the Restoration. It is a comedy of the gay and witty upper-class society and of those who aspire to be accepted as the social elite. Les Précieuses Ridicules in particular satirises the affectations of this society.

One other point should be mentioned before I pass to the Restoration itself. Molière was a master at constructing a single plot. Like Congreve, he borrowed from many sources, but everything in his comedies revolved about a central idea. It is this type of comedy, as we

shall see later, which Congreve aspired to construct.

When the theatres again opened after the Restoration and dramas by Fletcher and Shirley were revived, English comic tradition was once again free to develop. In 1664 the first comedy by Sir George Etherege was performed on the Restoration stage. "Nothing", writes Professor Harbage, "gives greater significance to the courtly invasion of the theatre after 1633 than the courtly conquest of the theatre after 1660".¹ The theatre of the Cavaliers was inherited by Cavaliers - men gay, cynical and living life to the full. Love, wit, intrigue, folly, vice, all the trappings of fashionable and sophisticated society, its tensions and insincerities, indeed, the artificiality of fashion as it is in the world around us which we accept without question and often without thought, these were shown with coarse frankness on the Restoration comic stage.

F. THE RESTORATION

I have already mentioned that Ben Jonson developed the comedy of humours to its greatest strength and, by saying that he would 'scourge' the extravagant fashions of society, he laid the foundation of the comedy of manners as well. Although I traced the development of a new trend on the English stage which virtually became a Restoration comedy of manners in the hands of James Shirley, it seems necessary at this point to distinguish clearly between the comedy of humours and comedy of manners before I proceed to discuss those dramatists who wrote this type of play in the years prior to William Congreve.

I have said that the purpose of the comedy of humours was to expose vice and human folly by creating caricatures of people whose 'humour' compelled them to

1 Harbage, A. Cavalier Drama. New York, Modern Language Association of America; London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1936. p.237.

critical of social follies. After Sir Oliver Cockwood has trapped his wife alone with Courtall, she later defends herself by accusing Courtall of an attempt upon her honour. Lady Touchwood in Congreve's comedy The Double-Dealer similarly accuses Mellefont when speaking to her husband. Both accusations are false, but Etherege immediately prevents any suggestion of malice by Lady Cockwood's words when Sir Oliver leaves: "I know he has not courage enough to question Courtall".¹ Congreve, on the contrary, is revealing the depths to which a licentious woman may sink and he intends to evoke feelings of disgust.

In his final comedy The Man of Mode ; or, Sir Fopling Flutter, licenced in 1676, Sir George Etherege created a social fop who was to have many descendants - Sir Fopling Flutter. This may have been an attempt to satirise the extravagantly affected man who aspired to be accepted by the social elite but only to the extent that he appeared ridiculous in an over-sophisticated society who lived by artificial norms. No satire appears to be directed against the society itself.

Dorimant, the rake 'hero', like Witgood in Middleton's A Trick to catch the Old One, is intended to win our sympathy despite his heartless treatment of Mrs. Loveit and his cynicism. It is Lady Woodvill's prejudice against Dorimant that is laughable in the scene where she speaks to him without knowing his identity, and Lady Townly's remark near the end of the play can only be taken to mean that rakes are misjudged. "Men of Mr. Dorimant's character", she says, "always suffer in the general opinion of the world".²

In the structure of all his comedies Sir George

1 Etherege, Sir George She wou'd if she cou'd. (In: The Dramatic Works of Sir George Etherege. Ed. by H.F.B. Brett-Smith. Oxford, Blackwell, 1927). Vol. II. A.4. S.1. p.147. 1.128-129.

2 Ibid. The Man of Mode ; or, Sir Fopling Flutter. Vol. II. A.5. S.2. p.283. 1.311-312.

Etherege was closer to the English tradition than Molière's single plot. Several threads of interest are woven together, providing variety and movement. Above all, his light, easy style was admirably suited to the type of comedy he wrote. One is tempted to think that Congreve may have studied and imitated this literary style.

(2) Sir Charles Sedley

Sir Charles Sedley may appear to be out of place in the company of dramatists I have selected. He was not a very successful play-wright and may scarcely be said to have developed the comedy of manners. He is interesting because the plots of his two best comedies were adapted from Terence and to these he applied the method of Plautus by referring to or introducing episodes based on contemporary events. It is because Congreve, particularly in The Old Bachelor and Love for Love, refers several times to contemporary London life that I feel Sedley deserves mention.

A few lines spoken by Merryman in Sedley's comedy Bellamira; or, The Mistress are of particular interest because they refer unmistakably to the ideas of the contemporary English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes. These lines are :

" . . . in matter of women, we are all in the State of Nature, every man's hand against every man, Whatever we pretend".

Congreve, as we shall see later, appears similarly to have used the ideas of the philosopher John Locke, though in a more subtle way.

There is also a scene in Bellamira which appears to be relevant. The idea of a betrothed lady demanding certain liberties after marriage will be found in The City Madam by Philip Massinger and a similar idea of a

1 Sedley, Sir Charles. Bellamira: or, The Mistress. (In: The Poetical and Dramatic Works of Sir Charles Sedley. Collected and Ed. by V. de Sola Pinto. London, Constable, 1928). Vol. II. A.3 S.4 p.54. 1.115-117.

pre-marital bargain occurs in some of Dryden's comedies, particularly Secret Love: or, The Maiden Queen, but the spirit of Sedley's 'bargain' for ". . . our future Peace and Quiet"¹ seems to resemble the proviso scene in The Way of the World more closely than do the others and it may have been the 'copy imitated' by William Congreve.

(3) John Dryden

John Dryden, like Sir George Etherege, wrote comedies chiefly to entertain. His wit has been said to lack humanity and he never achieved the lightness of touch associated with the dialogue of Etherege or Congreve, but his position as poet laureate and his friendship with Congreve justify his inclusion in this discussion. His views on comedy were quite clearly stated in the Preface to An Evening's Love: or, The Mock Astrologer, which I shall quote:

"But in comedy it is not so; for the chief end of it is divertisement and delight: and that so much, that it is disputed, I think, by Meinsius, before Horace his Art of Poetry, whether instruction be any part of its employment. At least I am sure it can be but its secondary end: for the business of the poet is to make you laugh: when he writes humour, he makes folly ridiculous; when wit, he moves you, if not always to laughter, yet to a pleasure that is more noble. And if he works a cure on folly, and the small imperfections in mankind, by exposing them to public view, that cure is not performed by an immediate operation. For it works first on the ill-nature of the audience; they are moved to laugh by the representation of deformity; and the shame of that laughter teaches us to amend what is ridiculous in our manners. This being then established, that the first end of comedy is delight and instruction only the second; it may reasonably be inferred that Comedy is not so much obliged to the punishment² of faults which it represents, as Tragedy".

John Dryden was an influential figure in the

1 Sedley, Sir Charles Bellamira: or, The Mistress. (In: The Poetical and Dramatic Works of Sir Charles Sedley. Collected and Ed. by V. de Sola Pinto. London, Constable, 1928). Vol. II. A.3 S.3 p.49. 1.147-148.

2 Dryden, John Preface to An Evening's Love: or, The Mock Astrologer. (In: Dryden's Essays. London, Dent; New York, Dutton, 1954). p.83.

literary circles of his day and his opinion would carry great weight. It is, therefore, important to note a criticism of Ben Jonson contained in his Defence of the Epilogue to the second part of his drama, The Conquest of Granada. Ben Jonson had advised dramatists to read the classics. The origin of classical comedy was the komos, or revel, followed by gamos, or union of the sexes. Most of Jonson's comedies, however, were not about love. The theory of humours embraced all human vice and folly and might scarcely be confined to love alone. Yet, according to John Dryden, love "is the foundation of all comedies in other languages".¹ Dryden's conclusion was, therefore, that dramatists should not think Ben Jonson "a perfect pattern for imitation".² It was an important development as it confined the subject of comedy to the relation of the sexes in society.

There need be no doubt that William Congreve studied the comedies of John Dryden very carefully, so carefully indeed that phrase after phrase in The Old Bachelor echoes his master's words. The influence diminished in the later comedies, but even there one is occasionally reminded of John Dryden by an expression which seems familiar. It is most probable, therefore, that William Congreve's novel, Incognita, was based on Dryden's play, The Assignation: or, Love in a Nunnery, and even the suggestion that the prototypes of Mirabell and Millamant were Celadon and Florimel in Secret Love: or, The Maiden Queen may not be lightly dismissed, though the resemblance is slim indeed. It is true, however, that some of the provisos of Celadon and Florimel do resemble those of Mirabell and Millamant.

John Dryden's comedies, as I said, were not outstanding and they cannot be said to have added anything to the comedy of manners as a genre. They usually follow the English tradition by having diverse strands of action.

1 Dryden, John The Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age: Defence of the Epilogue to the Second Part of "The Conquest of Granada". p.107. (In: Dryden's Essays.

2 Ibid. p.107. London, Dent; New York, Dutton (1954)).

They rely chiefly upon amusing situations or affected characters, like Melantha in Marriage a la Mode, and appear to have no purpose beyond light entertainment. If their appeal to an audience may be judged by the comments of Samuel Pepys, they were not all popular. He greatly admired Sir Martin Mar-all¹ but dismissed An Evening's Love: or, The Mock Astrologer as "smutty".²

(4) William Wycherley

William Wycherley, whose father remained a Royalist, was sent to France in 1655 at the age of fifteen years so as not to be educated by the Puritans in England. There he was introduced into the précieuse circle of Mme. de Montausier, the social circle satirised by Molière in Les Précieuses Ridicules. He returned to England and entered Oxford in 1660, but did not take a degree. He then settled in the Inner Temple where he led a gay life without applying himself to the law. In 1671 his first play, Love in a Wood: or, St. James's park was produced.

A new development in the comedy of manners may be seen in the dramas of William Wycherley. Perhaps owing to the influence of Molière, he used the English comedy as a vehicle for satire. His style, however, remained individual and his own. Molière's influence was, therefore, indirect, though there is some evidence of an influence on Wycherley's ideas. The character of Mrs. Pinchwife in his comedy The Country Wife, for instance, was, as I have already mentioned, probably suggested by the artless girl, Agnes, in L'Ecole des Femmes, and there are passages in The Plain Dealer, Act I, Scene I, Act II, Scene I and Act V, Scene I resembling lines from Act I, Scene I, Act II, Scene V and Act III, Scene V of Le Misanthrope respectively. The Gentleman Dancing Master

1 Pepys, Samuel The Diary of Samuel Pepys. Ed. by H.B. Wheatley. London, Bell, 1896. Vol. VII. p.260-261. Jan. 1st, 1667/8.

2 Ibid. Vol. VIII. p.54. June 20th, 1668.

same as that of Wycherley.

Shadwell expressed his beliefs in the Preface to his comedy The Humourists as follows :

"And for the reformation of Fopps and Knaves, I think Comedy most useful, because to render Vices and Fopperies very ridiculous, is a greater punishment than Tragedy can inflict upon 'em. There we do but subject 'em to hatred, or at worst to death ; here we make them live to be despised and laugh'd at, which certainly makes more impression upon men, 1 than ever death can do".

Whether or not one agrees with his beliefs, his intention is quite clear. It is significant also that The Squire of Alsatia is an adaptation of Molière's L'Ecole de Maris.

Like Middleton, he often employed crude realism, and the underlying message of his comic dramas appears to be a warning against extremes of all kinds. To this extent he may have influenced Congreve who also appears to have advocated a more balanced social system based on reason. One example of Shadwell's plea for social reform will be found in the final Act of Epsom Wells. A discussion is concluded by a few significant lines which suggest that divorce should be permitted to end an unhappy marriage :

"Is not this better than to live and quarrel,²
and to keep a pother with one another".

Congreve, as we shall see, appears to have advocated an ante-nuptial contract.

Thomas Shadwell professed to be a follower of Ben Jonson, but the debt which Congreve owed to the

1 Shadwell, Thomas. Preface to The Humorists. (In: The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell. Ed. by Montague Summers. London, The Fortune Press, 1927). Vol. I. p. 184.

2 Ibid. Epsom Wells. Vol. IV. A.2 S.2 p.37-38.

famous Elizabethan was perhaps as great. He modelled his technique by studying not only the classics but also his immediate predecessors, until his powers matured in that final expression of himself - The Way of the World.

G. RESTORATION TRAGEDY

Having followed the evolution of the English comedy of manners up to the last decades of the 17th century, let us glance at tragedy in that age in order to appreciate Congreve's technique in The Mourning Bride. I wish to stress, and it cannot be too strongly emphasised, that what follows is merely a selection of opinions from the essays of John Dryden which appear to have influenced Congreve profoundly, and that no claim to completeness is made or intended. The opinions to be expressed are my own and they derive from a brief study of a few Restoration tragedies.

Aristotle said that "... tragedy is an imitation not of men but of actions".¹ To describe the great tragedies of the Elizabethan stage, Aristotle's sentence might still be used but with the words 'men' and 'actions' transposed, thus: tragedy is an imitation not of actions but of men. The idea of divine wrath had been superseded by a belief in free human choice and the fatal error. In other words, divine ethics had been replaced by human ethics.

Dryden's view of tragedy appears to be much more direct than I believe Aristotle's to have been. It seems to be based on simple concepts, such as punishment deters, heroic characters are admired, admiration leads to imitation, and so on. To Dryden the chief end of tragedy was: "by example, to instruct".² It is a very interesting idea.

1 Aristotle. Treatise on Rhetoric . . . and . . . also The Poetic. Tr. by Theodore Buckley. London, Bell, 1888. p.418.

2 Dryden, John On Comedy, Farce and Tragedy. The Preface to An Evening's Love: or, The Mock Astrologer. (In: Dryden's Essays. London, Dent; New York, Dutton, (1954)). p.83.

In Book III of Plato's The Republic, Socrates said that the guardians of the ideal state ". . . should imitate from youth upward only those characters which are suitable to their profession - the courageous, temperate, holy, free, and the like" because "imitation, beginning in early youth and continuing far into life, at length grow into habits".¹

Dryden, in his essay on Virgil and the Aeneid, wrote: "we are naturally prone to imitate what we admire; and frequent acts produce a habit".² The similarity to Plato's judgement appears to be more than coincidental. Yet Dryden still believed in Aristotle's catharsis through pity and terror.³ This is important and here is the distinction: the shift of stress had tended to move from the action to the admirable character. And because the character, not the act, was of primary importance, a new reason had to be found to explain why pity and terror should instruct. Ironically, Plato's theory of imitation supplied the reason, and so the ideas of two ancient Greeks who held opposing views on poetry and drama were merged into what appears to be the 17th century theory of tragedy. Even the human ethics of free choice and the fatal error, the backbone of Elizabethan tragedy, seems to have been subordinated, in Dryden's view, to the heroic nature of the protagonist.

This, however, was an extreme view. In Suckling's Aglaure, popular, according to Samuel Pepys,⁴ on the Restoration stage, Venice Preserved, by Thomas Otway and John Dryden's own All for Love, a fatal error, induced by love, brings tragedy. But even in these genuine tragedies,

1 Plato The Republic. Tr. into English by B. Jowett. New York, Random House, n.d. Book III. p.96.

2 Dryden, John Virgil and the Aeneid. (In: Dryden's Essays. London, Dent; New York, Dutton, (1954)). p.210.

3 Ibid. Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy. The Preface to Troilus and Cressida. p.135.

4 Pepys, Samuel The Diary of Samuel Pepys. Ed. by H.B. Wheatley. London, Bell, 1896. Vol. VIII. Jan. 10th, 1667/68. p.276.

the fact that the fatal error is caused by love echoes the fashionably established Platonic nature of the heroic theory of tragedy. There is a certain idealism of character in them all not to be found in Elizabethan tragedies. It is a different species of drama.

We are also able to realise in terms of this theory of tragedy how the apparent contradiction in Dryden's saying that a drama which ended happily might legitimately be called a tragedy if the action was brought to "the last extremity and then by probable means"¹ the calamity was averted, may be reconciled. A happy ending would not minimise the admiration felt for the hero and the pity and fear experienced while he was in the 'last extremity' might even increase the desire to imitate him if he lived.

One is able to understand, on reading these views, why the serious drama of the 17th century did not outlive its ethos, which in turn partly explains why Congreve's The Mourning Bride should have failed the test of time and yet been declared by Sir Richard Blackmore "the most perfect Tragedy that has been wrote in this Age".²

1 Dryden, John Nature and Dramatic Art. To the Right Honourable John Lord Haughton. Epistle Dedicatory to "The Spanish Friar: or, the Double Discovery". (In: Dryden's Essays. London, Dent; New York, Dutton (1954)). p.159.

2 Blackmore, Sir Richard (In: Hodges, J.C. William Congreve the Man. New York, Modern Language Association of America, 1941). p.59.

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM CONGREVE : THEORY AND CRITICISM

A. TRAGEDY

Our chief source of information on William Congreve's tragic drama is the brief Epistle Dedicatory of The Mourning Bride To Her Royal Highness, The Princess. Being addressed to the future Queen Anne, the Epistle is loaded with flattery, but there are sentences which enable us to perceive the trend of Congreve's thought. For instance, he says that The Mourning Bride was : "constituted on a Moral, whose End is to recommend and to Encourage Vertue".¹

Congreve appears to accept John Dryden's theory of instruction by example, which I discussed in Chapter II. "'Tis from the Example of Princes", he writes, "that Vertue becomes a Fashion in the People, For even they who are averse to Instruction, will yet be fond of Imitation".² The Epistle continues as follows :

"But there are Multitudes, who never can have Means nor Opportunities of so near an Access, as to partake of the Benefit of such Examples. And to these, Tragedy, which distinguishes it self from the Vulgar Poetry, by the Dignity of its characters, may be of Use and Information. For they who are at that distance from Original Greatness, as to be deprived of the Happiness of Contemplating the Perfections and real Excellencies of Your Highness's Person, in your Court ; may yet behold some small Sketches and Imagings of the Vertues of Your Mind, abstracted, and represented in the Theatre.

Thus Poets are instructed, and instruct ; not alone by Precepts which persuade, but also by Examples which illustrate. Thus is delight interwoven with Instruction ; when not only Vertue is prescribed, but also represented.

1 Congreve, William The Epistle Dedicatory To Her Royal Highness, The Princess. The Mourning Bride. London, Jacob Tonson, 1697. (Page unnumbered).

2 Ibid. (Page unnumbered).

But if we are delighted with the Liveliness of a feign'd Representation of Great and Good Persons and their Actions; how must we be charm'd with beholding the Persons themselves? If one or two excelling Qualities, barely touch'd in the single Action, and Small Compass of a Play, can warm an Audience, with a Concern and Regard even for the seeming Success and Prosperity of the Actor: With what Zeal must the Hearts of all be fill'd, for the continued and Increasing Happiness of those who are the true and living Instances of Elevated¹ and Persisting Vertue?"

Stripped of its adulation, it is the theory of instruction by example. One seems justified in believing, therefore, that William Congreve based his interpretation of tragedy upon certain opinions of John Dryden.

B. COMEDY

The most important document is William Congreve's letter to John Dennis Concerning Humour in Comedy. It was written in reply to a letter from Dennis and there appears to be some confusion as to the precise meaning of the word 'humour'. Dennis appears to have used it as a quality defined by the Oxford Dictionary as 'less purely intellectual than wit, and often allied to pathos', which meaning dates from 1682. When Congreve expresses the opinion that 'humour' is as difficult to define as 'wit', he seems to refer to the same quality, but what he calls 'true humour' is the Jonsonian interpretation of the word as it is used in the 'comedy of humours'. He does say that "there is a great Difference between a Comedy, wherein there are many things Humorously . . . spoken; and one, where there are several Characters of Humour",² but the distinction he draws between humour and other qualities is an interpretation of Jonson's theory and does not appear to be a direct answer to Dennis's question. Nevertheless it is an interesting interpretation in terms of the Restoration stage and it gives us a good idea of the characters we may expect to find in his comedies. The method he employs is "to shew

1 Congreve, William The Epistle Dedicatory To Her Royal Highness the Princess. London, Jacob Tonson. 1697.

2 Congreve, William Concerning Humour in Comedy. (In: Comedies by William Congreve. Ed. by Bonamy Dobrée. London (etc.). Oxford Univ. Press. (1949)), p.2.

something which is not Wit or not Humour; and yet often mistaken for both".¹

Congreve finds that five qualities are sometimes mistaken for humour, and these are: wit itself, folly, personal defects, habit and affectation. Humour is exclusive of neither wit nor folly, but both should be only such "as Mens Humours may incline 'em to".² Physical infirmities, he declares, are never comic and even Jonson sometimes erred in this respect. Habit he defines as: "a Singularity of Manners, Speech and Behaviour, peculiar to all, or most of the same Country, Trade, Profession or Education".³ It results from use or custom and may be changed by other customs. Affectation, he explains, most resembles humour because people often affect the peculiarities of those they admire. The distinction is that "Humour is the Life, Affectation the Picture".⁴

Some examples to illustrate the difference between affectation, habit and humour, qualities which, Congreve explains, are very similar, clarify his earlier statements. A character of affectation is one who, say, affects learning when the audience knows he is ignorant, or pretends to courage when he is obviously a coward. A really valiant person who boasts of valour, however, is a character of humour. People of habit are listed as "Country-clowns, Sailors, Tradesmen, Jockeys, Gamesters and such like, who make use of Cants or peculiar Dialects".⁵ They are characters "Painted without much Art or Labour".⁶ Finally Congreve tells John Dennis what he takes humour to be. It is "A singular and unavoidable manner of doing, or saying any thing, Peculiar

1 Congreve, William Concerning Humour in Comedy. (In: Comedies by William Congreve. Ed. by Eonamy Dobrée London (etc.) Oxford Univ. Press, (1949)). p.2.

2 Ibid. p.3.

3 Ibid. p.4.

4 Ibid. p.4.

5 Ibid. p.7.

6 Ibid. p.7.

" . . . of Homely Fair we make the Feast, ¹
Yet you will find Variety at least".

Nevertheless, Love for Love has been proclaimed Congreve's best comedy. This does not imply that it is his greatest comedy; only that it is the most suitable play to produce upon a stage. It appears, therefore, that although Congreve made no claim that he had improved his technique, his 'homely fair' showed an advance. The final spur, which urged Congreve to yet greater perfection, was Jeremy Collier's attack upon the English stage.

C. JEREMY COLLIER'S ATTACK UPON THE ENGLISH STAGE

Jeremy Collier was not alone. He was the mouth-piece of a growing discontent with the comic stage which had been swelling to the bursting point since the accession of King William III and Queen Mary to the English throne. Puritanism was once again able to express its thought after about thirty years of uncertainty.

Collier's views were extreme, though in fact it was really the old story of the Christian anathema and the sinful stage once more. "Profaneness, tho' never so well corrected, is not to be endured", he wrote in Chapter II of his Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage. "It ought to be Banished without Proviso, or Limitation". ²

Jeremy Collier was a clergyman and a non-juror, and his arguments, as we may expect, were biased by morals with a Puritan flavour. Had an able controversialist, like John Dryden, been willing to answer him, his dogmatic assertions about drama and its function, and other ineptitudes, might have been turned against him, - but this is doubtful. The public wanted Collier.

1 Congreve, William Prologue to Love for Love. (In: Comedies by William Congreve. Ed. by Bonamy Dobrée. London, (etc.), Oxford Univ. Press, (1949), p.217.

2 Collier, Jeremy A short view of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage. 3rd Ed. London, S. Keble, 1698. p.96.

Dryden may have realised it and he was unwilling to defend the stage.

Congreve's plays were heavily censured in the Short View . . . : The 'Old Batchelour' for its "foul and nauseous" characters; ¹ the Old Batchelour, Double-Dealer and Love for Love for the cursing and swearing, the abuse of religion and holy scripture. ² Congreve, however, was a poor controversialist and although Collier had overstated his case in regard to the dramatic unities ³ and had bluntly declared: "Instruction is the principal Design of both" ⁴ tragedy and comedy, Congreve was no match for him.

Apparent truth often appears to be the whole truth and Collier exploited the half-truth: "It may not be amiss to observe", he wrote, "that there are no Instances of Debauching Married Women, in Plautus, nor Terence, no nor yet in Aristophanes. But on our Stage how common is it to make a Lord, a Knight or an Alderman a Cuckold?" ⁵ The truth of this statement cannot be refuted. His clinching blow about the English stage, however, which followed towards the end of the chapter, namely: "It has not so much as the poor Plea of a Precedent", ⁶ was false. (The mimes, whose function, Seneca claimed, was to 'reproach the rankness' of the age, continually portrayed marital infidelity which provided the precedent).

Another argument apparently true was: "The Satyr of the Stage upon the Clergy is extremely Particular. . . . They shoot Chain'dshot, and strike at Universals. They play upon a character, and endeavour to expose not only the Men, but the Business". ⁷ Aristotle said that

1 Collier, Jeremy A short view of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage. 3rd Ed. London, S. Keble, 1698. p. 4.

2 Ibid. p.57.

3 Ibid. p.228-229.

4 Ibid. p.157.

5 Ibid. p.24.

6 Ibid. p.54.

7 Ibid. p.97.

comedy is concerned with universals, tragedy with particular characters. Ben Jonson had ridiculed universal types and Congreve himself explained that a character of habit was one with a 'Singularity of Manners, Speech, and Behaviour, peculiar to all, or most of the same Country, Trade, Profession, or Education'.¹ Ridicule of a character of habit would thus be ridicule of the 'Profession' to which that character belonged, because the behaviour is peculiar to all, or most, of the same profession. But the answer is a bit more subtle than Collier inferred.

Congreve answered him adequately, though perhaps not lucidly. His defence was that Ben Jonson said: ". . . the business is to expose and reprehend Folly and Vice in general, no particular person ought to take offence. And such business is properly the business of Comedy. . . . Actions are in their own nature separate and very far remov'd from his function, and when such a one is brought on the Stage, the folly is expos'd, not the function; the Man is ridicul'd, and not the Priest".² It is the word 'Man' which might obscure the point he is making. Instead of the sense being all men who behave thus foolishly are ridiculed whether or not they are priests, which appears to be what Congreve intended, it might be interpreted as: the particular man portrayed is ridiculed, which contradicts the universal principle in comedy. Congreve should have explained that an erring priest would be a character of folly, not a character of habit, in which case the universal folly, not the trade, profession or education, was ridiculed.

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- 1 Congreve, William Concerning Humour in Comedy. (In: Comedies by William Congreve. Ed. by Bonamy Dobrée. London (etc.), Oxford Univ. Press, (1949)). p.2.
 - 2 Congreve, William Amendments of Mr. Collier's false and Imperfect Citations, etc. from the Old Bachelour, Double Dealer, Love for Love, Mourning Bride. (In: The Complete Works of William Congreve. Ed. by Montague Summers. Soho, Nonesuch Press, 1923). Vol. III, p.190.

But, as I said, the public wanted Collier, and Congreve destroyed his defence before it was in fact begun by a petty personal attack upon his critic: "Mr. Collier, in the high Vigour of his Obscenity, first commits a Rape upon my Words, and then arraigns them of Immodesty; he has Barbarity enough to accuse the very Virgins that he has deflour'd, and to make sure of their Condemnation, he has himself made 'em guilty: But he forgets that while he publishes their shame he divulges his own".¹ It was not the way to convince, not to gain support for his cause, and it invited Collier's retort that: "Railing is a mean, and unchristian Talent, and oftentimes a sign of a desperate Cause, and a desperate Conscience".² Collier had won.

Despite its weakness as a controversial document, Congreve's defence of the stage contains some useful passages on the nature of comedy. He appears to be more composed when he starts to discuss drama and what he says is certainly of greater value. He first states what he calls 'Aristotle's Definition of Comedy'. It is "the Compass by which all the Comick Poets, since his time, have steer'd their course".³ He then explains that what Aristotle meant by 'the worse sort of People' was worse 'in respect of their Manners:' not crimes, but "the Vices most frequent, and which are the common Practice of the looser sort of Livers, are the subject Matter of Comedy".⁴ Congreve then continues his exposition of Aristotle: "He tells us further, that they must be exposed after a ridiculous manner; For Men are to be laugh'd out of their Vices in Comedy; the Business of Comedy is to delight, as well as to instruct; And as

1 Congreve, William Amendments of Mr. Collier's false and imperfect Citations, etc. from *The Old Bachelour*, *Double Dealer*, *Love for Love*, *Mourning Bride*. (In: *The Complete Works of William Congreve*. Ed. by Montague Summers. Soho, Nonesuch Press, 1923) Vol. III, p. 172.

3 Ibid. p. 173.

4 Ibid. p. 173.

2 Collier, Jeremy A Defence of the Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage, etc. Being a Reply to Mr. Congreve's Amendments, etc. And to the Vindication of the Author of the Relapse. London, Keble (etc.), 1699. p. 5.

vicious people are made asham'd of their Follies or Faults , by seeing them expos'd after a ridiculous manner ; so are good people at once both warn'd and diverted at their Expense".¹ It is a judicious mixture of Aristotle and Ben Jonson, but there is no reason to believe that Congreve was not sincere.

His second point is that in order to achieve 'the true end and purpose of comedy', which he has just explained, the 'Comick Poet' is compelled by the laws of comedy 'to represent vicious and foolish Characters'. This does not mean that the poet approves of these characters or of their behaviour: the purpose of comedy requires it.

Congreve's third point is sound criticism. He demonstrates that to cite passages out of their context, as Collier did, without taking cognizance of the character and situation as a whole, is misleading.² It is, of course, another example of Collier's exploitation of the half-truth.

Other passages, however, are of doubtful validity. His explanation that the 'instruction' is "Comprehended in a few lines, and put into Rhyme, that it may be easy and engaging to the Memory"³ is unconvincing. What sort of instruction is:

"Ay there's my Grief ; that's the sad Change of Life ;
To lose my Title, and yet keep my Wife. "

And these lines appear in The Way of the World. Likewise, when he says: "Indeed when Men neither prevaricate, nor do any thing unbecoming their Office in the World, they ought not to be represented otherwise on the Stage:

1 Congreve, William Amendments of Mr. Collier's false and Imperfect Citations, etc. from the Old Bachelour, Double Dealer, Love for Love, Mourning Bride. (In: The Complete Works of William Congreve. Ed. by Montague Summers. Soho. Nonesuch Press, 1923), Vol.III. p.173.

2 Ibid. p.173-174.

3 Ibid. p.174.

4 Congreve, William The Way of the World. (In: Comedies by William Congreve. Ed. by Bonamy Dobrée. London (etc), Oxford Univ. Press. (1949)), A.2 S.8 p.377 l.15-16.

PART II

WILLIAM CONGREVE AND THE TECHNIQUE OF DRAMA

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CHAPTER IV

GRADUAL IMPROVEMENT IN STRUCTURAL TECHNIQUE

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

To ascertain how Congreve's technique matured, I intend to trace the development in various aspects of drama which were listed in Chapter I under Plan of Study. For convenience I shall repeat them here briefly as:

- (1) Structural Technique
- (2) Stage Technique
- (3) Diction
- (4) Theme
- (5) The Comedy
- (6) Actors and Characters

The regular comedy, as we saw in Chapter III, had to be true in all its parts, so it is essential to examine the process before estimating the quality of the product. An attempt then will be made to assess Congreve's achievement in a final chapter.

A. INCOGNITA

Incognita is a novel, but its conception is basically dramatic, as Congreve's words show:

"... I resolved in another beauty to imitate dramattick writing, namely, in the design, 1
contexture and result of the plot".

This rudimentary structure is interesting because it is an early unassisted attempt to apply dramatic principles. To ignore the novel would be to overlook the birth of Congreve's structural technique.

1 Congreve, William Preface to the Reader. Incognita; or Love and Duty Reconciled. London, Wellington, 1713. (In: Shorter novels, Jacobean and Restoration. London, Dent; New York, Dutton, (1949)). p.242.

rôle in all but one: he woos Belinda, saves Heartwell from marrying a courtesan, has an amour with Laetitia, and his promise to Lucy ensures a tricked marriage to end the farce. His friendship with Vainlove associates him with the remaining action, though he does not actively motivate it. Lucy acts as a second connecting link. Sylvia's scheme to trap Heartwell in marriage and the forged letter sent to Vainlove are both suggested by her, and because she accepts a bribe from Bellmour, the tricked marriage of Sir Joseph Wittol and Captain Bluffe is made possible. Vainlove's nature initiates two actions. His dislike of amorous advances by women makes him hand Laetitia's letter to Bellmour which introduces the traditional comic action, and it also leads to his being so readily deceived by Lucy's forged letter, the source of a misunderstanding between him and Araminta. Finally, Sir Joseph Wittol's letter of credit to Fondlewife is a contributory cause of the old banker's returning home early and trapping Bellmour with his wife, and, had Belinda and Araminta not met Sir Joseph Wittol and Captain Bluffe in the Park, Setter may not have found suitable husbands for Sylvia and Lucy. These, however, are slender threads which show contrivance rather than construction.

As one might expect from an unskilled dramatist, the exposition is at first hurried and then intermittent. In the first scene the audience is told that Vainlove has abandoned Sylvia because Heartwell is courting her and that Bellmour plans to ridicule Heartwell for his foolishness; that Bellmour will have an amour with Fondlewife's spouse, Laetitia; and that Vainlove and Bellmour love Araminta and Belinda respectively. Act I, Scene V is reached before the farcical action is mentioned, and only in Act III, Scene I is Lucy's plot against Vainlove introduced.

Another sign of poor technique is the excessive use made of coincidence. The meeting of Sharper and Sir Joseph Wittol in Act II, Scene I is a miraculous coincidence and may only be excused on the ground of its

being farce. To this may be coupled the ability of other characters to overhear words spoken in soliloquy, a structural device employed to buttress the plot.

Congreve, however, showed some ability at the structural technique of foreshadowing. In Act I, Scene II, Bellmour says:

" . . . I must take up, or I shall never
hold out; Flesh and Blood cannot bear
it always". 1

This thought points to the union of Bellmour and Belinda in the last scene of the play. There is also the remark which Bellmour makes to Vainlove in Act I, Scene I:

" . . . it lies convenient for us to pay
our Afternoon Services to our Mistresses." 2

We expect them to visit Belinda and Araminta, as they do in Act II, Scene IV. Sir Joseph Wittol, in his drunken exuberance (Act IV, Scene IX) tells Captain Bluffe:

" . . . I'll go to Alderman Fondlewife by
and by, and get 50 pieces more from him" 3

In Act IV, Scene XVIII Fondlewife returns unexpectedly with Sir Joseph Wittol and traps Bellmour with Laetitia. Vainlove's meeting with Belinda and Araminta in St. James's Park is foreshadowed in Act IV, Scene III, when he says to Sharper:

" . . . Yes I will go too - and she shall
see her Error . . . " 4

It is therefore not a coincidence that, on the approach of Sir Joseph Wittol and Captain Bluffe, Araminta should say:

All quotations from the Comedies, Dedications, Prologues and Epilogues of William Congreve will be found in: Comedies by William Congreve. Ed. by Bonamy Dobrée. London, etc., Oxford Univ. Press, (1949).

- 1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor A.1 S.2 p.29 l.9-11.
- 2 Ibid. A.1 S.1 p.29 l.48-49.
- 3 Ibid. A.4 S.9 p.77 l. 5-6.
- 4 Ibid. A.4 S.3 p.72 l. 36.

"No matter - I see Vainlove coming this
Way . . . " 1

Congreve was particularly careful to stress the unity of time in the plot of The Old Bachelor. The play commences fairly early in the morning:

Bellmour: "Vainlove, and abroad so early! . . . " 2

Bellmour and Vainlove are to pay "Afternoon Services" 3 to Delinda and Araminta. Heartwell tells Sylvia to expect him "in the Evening" 4 and Laetitia's letter inform Vainlove that Fondlewife will be "Out of Town this Evening". 5 We must assume, therefore, that Bellmour's amour with Laetitia takes place in the early evening, leaving him sufficient time to conduct the faked marriage ceremony between Heartwell and Sylvia before it is very late. Heartwell tells Sharper that he has been married "these two Hours" 6 and he immediately goes home to find Sylvia gone. He is then ridiculed, so that the final scene, in which Bellmour and Delinda agree to marry takes place that night. This is confirmed when Bellmour says to Vainlove:

". . . Well, we shall have your Company to
Church in the Morning . . . " 7

The entire action covers one day only, but its complexity considerably strains this structural convention. In each of his comedies Congreve stressed the passage of time in this way so that I shall merely note improvements or variations without repeating his method.

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- 1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor. A.4 S.9 p.78 l.22-23.
 - 2 Ibid. A.1 S.1 p.(25) l.1.
 - 3 Ibid. A.1 S.1 p.29 l.149.
 - 4 Ibid. A.3 S.10 p.66 l.135.
 - 5 Ibid. A.1. S.1. p.27 l.39-90.
 - 6 Ibid. A.5 S.8 p.100 l.40.
 - 7 Ibid. A.5 S. The Last p.103 l.87-88.

C. IMPROVED STRUCTURE OF THE DOUBLE-DEALER

There is some evidence to show that Congreve wished to improve his technique when he wrote The Double-Dealer. In the Epistle Dedicatory of The Old Bachelor To the Right Honourable Charles Lord Clifford, of Lanesborough, he wrote: "I think there are no Faults in it, but what I do know; which, as I take it, is the first step to an Amendment".¹ When he dedicated his second comedy To the Right Honourable Charles Montague, he confessed the 'imperfect performance' of his design, but expressed the opinion that the 'mechanical part' was regular. He qualified his opinion by saying:

"I made the Plot as strong as I could, because it was single, and I made it single, because I would avoid Confusion, and was resolved to preserve the three Unities of Drama".²

If one reads The Double-Dealer carefully it is apparent that Congreve's opinion is not accurate. Only eight of the eleven characters play an active part in the central action. An independent comic action is provided for Lord Froth, his wife and Brisk, who seem to have been introduced to contrast with the sincere love of Mellefont and Cynthia and, perhaps, to afford the author an opportunity to satirise a certain type of social behaviour.

The intrigue of Careless and Lady Plyant is a similar digression. It is relevant up to a point, since it resolves the first complication of the action, but when it changes to a traditional amour - an echo of the Bellmour - Laetitia - Fondlewife episode in The Old Bachelor - it detracts from Congreve's purpose to produce a strong and single plot.

1 Congreve, William To the Right Honourable Charles Lord Clifford of Lanesborough, (etc.) p.17.

2 Congreve, William To the Right Honourable Charles Montague, one of the Lords of the Treasury. p.113.

It is true that the light comedy of the Froths and Brisk, the Flyants and Careless relieves the sombre greed and malice of a central action which is rather heavy and melodramatic, but this function depends chiefly upon a skilful ordering of the Scenes, Congreve's arrangement is not wholly satisfying. In Acts I and II the balance between light and heavier scenes is fairly well maintained, but from Act III; Scene V to Act IV, Scene XI the action is predominantly light comedy and this is followed by a period of unrelieved tension from Act IV Scene XII to Act V Scene VII. Act V Scenes VIII and XX are cleverly introduced to break the tension and the high emotional pitch of the two concluding Scenes is suddenly reduced to the level of comedy by Brisk's unexpected remark: "This is all very surprising, let me perish", ¹ but in general the arrangement is not skilful.

A more serious criticism is that the climax is vague and the dénouement is ponderous and too long. The emotional pitch of the Scene where Lord Touchwood traps Mellefont in Lady Touchwood's chamber is so high that one is apt to lose sight of the fact that Maskwell's plot has not reached a climax before Lord Touchwood promises to disinherit his nephew, making Maskwell his sole heir and awarding Cynthia as his bride. In other words, an emotional climax precedes and obscures the real climax.

I feel obliged to include soliloquy in structure because here, as in The Old Bachelor, Congreve employed it to buttress his plot. Although he avoided the absurdity of allowing other characters to overhear words spoken in soliloquy, the twelve soliloquies (excluding asides) which occur in The Double-Dealer are chiefly designed to explain and foreshadow the plot and thus reveal an inadequate structure.

Despite these defects, there is a great improvement. Unity of place is ensured by the scene

1 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer. A.5 3. The Last p.210 l.12.

If one compares The Old Bachelor with Love for Love one cannot fail to notice the improvement in structural technique. With remarkably similar ingredients for the action, Congreve wove a plot which almost produced the unity he desired. It had even more unity than the total action of The Double-Dealer, though like his second Comedy, the light traditional episodes were not sufficiently assimilated into the central action to produce a unit.

E. THE MOURNING BRIDE

Congreve's next play was a tragedy, The Mourning Bride. It is a structure without traditional farce, and, therefore, its plot should not be ignored.

There are no digressions, and the action seems to move relentlessly forward to the climax at the end of the last Act, but once again analysis discloses that Congreve failed to achieve a perfect unity. The revolt against King Manuel, which saves the lives of Alphonso and Almeria, has an external cause. King Manuel's avarice has nothing whatever to do with his tragedy. His death results from malice, the ambition of Gonzalez, and the fact that he struck Perez. Yet his avarice causes the revolt.

Unity is found in Zara's tragedy which is caused by her passionate love for Alphonso. Her fatal error is her blind acceptance that the headless body is indeed Alphonso. The fact, however, that one is able to distinguish ^{the} parts from the whole implies disunity in the total structure. Congreve's failure to construct a unified plot, therefore, may not be solely attributed to the traditional element in comedy.

The unity of time is not repeatedly stressed in The Mourning Bride as it is in his earlier comedies. There is sufficient evidence, nevertheless, to prove that the action covers about twenty-four hours. In Act I,

King Manuel says :

" . . This Day we triumph ; but to morrow's Sun, 1
Shall shine on Garcia's nuptials".

In Act III, Heli tells Osmyn that Almeria will visit him when the king and Garcia have retired "at Midnight". 2
It must be the following morning, therefore, when King Manuel says to Almeria : "Why this, on the Day which was design'd to celebrate thy Nuptials?" 3

The place is King Manuel's court in Granada, though the setting varies considerably within the limit imposed. From a room of state it shifts to the aisle of a temple, then to Anselmo's tomb, followed by a prison, before it returns again to the room of state. The final scene is in the prison once more, but the limits prescribed are sufficiently narrow to be comprehended in the classical definition of the unity of place.

Only once does coincidence mar the inevitability of the action and that is when Zara's mute, bearing her letter to Alphonso, is seen by the King and pursued. The Mourning Bride, therefore, approaches closer to a regular structure than any of Congreve's earlier plays but, as I said, it did not quite succeed.

F. THE WAY OF THE WORLD

There need be no doubt that Jeremy Collier's attack upon the stage urged Congreve to exercise great care when constructing The Way of the World. ~~There is no doubt that~~

1 Congreve, William. The Mourning Bride. London, Jacob Tonson. 1697. A.1 S.1 p.10.

2 Ibid. A.3 S.1 p.28.

3 Ibid. A.4 S.1 p.46.

I think, however, that something more than care resulted. Congreve, as an artist, must have realised that if a drama was to live greater unity than he had achieved in the past was essential, and Collier had stimulated his desire to write such a comedy. The truth he had been seeking, perhaps ineffectually, was suddenly revealed in this unexpected manner and he became aware of a deeper, more mature purpose, a need to produce a regular structure so that the comedy would live. I think this may explain his words in The Dedication which clearly indicate that he did not expect the comedy to succeed on the contemporary stage. What is certain, however, is that he was not pandering to current taste. At the present juncture, however, it would be rash to assume that he was doing more than attempting to satisfy a sense of aesthetic honesty and so to fulfil a desire he expressed in The Dedication of The Double-Dealer. My immediate purpose is to examine the structure of The Way of the World.

The action of The Way of the World forms a satisfying unit. There is a single problem binding it together - how will Mirabell win Millamant? The time is said to be 'equal to that of Presentation' and the place is Lady Wishfort's home in London and its immediate vicinity - a chocolate-house and St. James's Park. Moreover, the setting shifts from the chocolate-house to St. James's Park and then remains constant in Lady Wishfort's home.

One might, of course, question a part of Fainall's plot to induce Millamant to reject Sir Wilfull Witwoud, in which three characters, Witwoud, Petulant and Sir Wilfull himself, are quite sober at the commencement of Act IV, become very drunk before the end of the same Act and then are sober again toward the end of

Act V. Even though they slept, the change in their condition is near miraculous if the time represented is the time taken for the presentation. Nevertheless, it does not disturb the illusion of truth on a stage. Nor would an objection that Congreve has used an external Deed of Conveyance to unravel the plot and dispose of Fainall's claim be valid. The exposition explains how intimate were Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall and the circumstances of her marriage. What is more probable than that she should safeguard her property? or that the man she entrusted it to should be Mirabell? Moreover, she says to Mirabell: "I ought to stand in some Degree of Credit with you, Mirabell".¹ It is an infinitely subtle suggestion, to be sure, but the words acquire an additional meaning when the whole truth is known.

A notable achievement is the way in which every character, even the insignificant Mincing, has some part to play in the dénouement. Foible, Waitwell, Mincing and Sir Wilfull Witwoud have important rôles. The foolish wits, Petulant and Witwoud, signed the Deed of Conveyance as witnesses.

Foreshadowing is often too subtle to be appreciated on a stage, but at times it is clear. Lady Wishfort's hatred of Mirabell and the rumour repeated by Petulant and Witwoud foreshadow Mirabell's intrigue and the amusing love scenes between Sir Rowland and Lady Wishfort. Fainall's undertaking to make Sir Wilfull drunk posits a drunken scene to follow.

Examples of subtle foreshadowing are Mrs. Fainall's remark about standing in some degree of credit with Mirabell, quoted earlier, the gambling scene and its promise of another meeting with which the play commences, foreshadowing, as it does, the plot where Mirabell and Fainall gamble for Millamant's inheritance, and Mrs. Marwood's desire not to provoke Foible, expressed in

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.2 S.3
p.368. 1.33-34.

Act III Scene XVIII, which foreshadows the revelation in Act V.

There is no coincidences throughout the action and the few soliloquies express the thoughts and emotions of characters in a natural way.

Traditional incidents are integrated with the central action and appear in a new guise. The tricked marriage between Sir Rowland and Lady Wishfort never takes place; the attempted disinheritance of Mrs. Millamant is a plot, not the indignation of an outraged father or uncle; the country squire, the would-be wits, the clever servant are all introduced, but as an integral part of a unified action.

The exposition is not too leisurely yet not hasty, the climax occurs at an appropriate place in the action and the dénouement is neither too concise nor tedious. Congreve's structural technique in The Way of the World is fitting for a regular comedy, true in all its parts.

G. SOME CONCLUSIONS

What does the growing unity of structure signify? The Old Bachelor was so loosely constructed that it appeared to be in danger of falling apart into five separate comedies. Yet it was a great success upon the Restoration stage. Study reveals that Love for Love is carefully constructed, but my opinion is that its presentation would obscure the structure behind the kaleidoscopic effect of traditional, or conventional, scenes. It combines the spirit of The Old Bachelor with the greater unity of The Double-Dealer disguised. Love for Love was also a very successful play on the Restoration stage.

In The Double-Dealer John Dryden saw perfection. It failed upon the stage. I suggested that there were

faults in its structure, but, structurally, it was superior to The Old Bachelor, which was acclaimed. The reason for its failure seems to be that it was a different kind of structure. It was an inadequate attempt to achieve artistic perfection, not merely an entertainment.

The enigma of The Double-Dealer following the popular success of The Old Bachelor impels one to believe that the real Congreve was an artist, not a time-server. If popularity was all he was seeking it is difficult to explain The Double-Dealer and, above all, The Way of the World after the popular acclaim of Love for Love.

I have suggested that Congreve wrote The Mourning Bride because his aesthetic nature forbade him to take a retrograde step. To fulfil his contract with Thomas Betterton, which I mentioned in Chapter III, he would have to write one drama each year and he may have realised that another comedy, hurriedly conceived and jotted down, would not permit the careful craftsmanship his fastidiousness demanded if he were to improve upon Love for Love. Tragedy was a new dramatic form and would not detract from his achievement on the comic stage.

Another reason, equally probable, is that he longed to be able to produce a unified dramatic structure. Public taste for traditional comedy made it very difficult to succeed in that field. In tragedy a unified purpose and structure would improve the chance of its success. It was a test of Congreve's structural ability.

I have already explained why The Mourning Bride was structurally imperfect. The absence of farce alone was not enough to overcome an inherent tendency he had shown from the time when he wrote Incognita, a tendency to digress from the central plot.

It is impossible to say whether Congreve realised his fault in the structure of The Mourning Bride. The tragedy was acclaimed a great success in the theatre, and,

Bridges Street, four in the second Theatre Royal and more in the Vere Street theatre.¹

There was a convention in Restoration plays that when a door was used as a street door of a house it could not be used for any other purpose until the close of the scene. Where the proscenium doors represented street doors of two or three separate houses, they must be used only for an entrance to or exit from these houses and all departures from the stage had to be made through other doors or through the wings. If the scene was in a house, only one door would be used and the others ignored, unless an actor departed to an inner closet.²

A large box at the very top of the proscenium arch housed the orchestra.³ Their duties chiefly consisted in playing the Preludes and tunes between the Acts. When an incidental song or dance was introduced into a play, the musicians came onto the stage itself.⁴

The main source of light came from pendant chandeliers hung from the proscenium arch in front of the curtain. These chiefly illuminated the apron.⁵ Wax candles were also used.⁶ Towards the end of the century footlights, consisting of oil lamps or floats - cotton wicks running through cork and floating on oil - were introduced. A tin reflector screened the naked light from the spectators. These floats usually occupied the front centre of the stage.⁷ The floats, however, were merely additional and did not supersede the chandeliers.⁸ The illusion of darkness on the

1 Summers, Montague The Restoration Theatre. London, Kegan Paul, (etc.), 1934. p.126.

2 Ibid. p.140.

3 Nicoll, Allardyce The English Theatre. A short History. London, (etc.), Nelson, 1938. p.85.

4 Summers, Montague The Restoration Theatre. London, Kegan Paul, (etc.), 1934. p.114.

5 Ibid. p.271.

6 Ibid. p.270.

7 Ibid. p.273.

8 Ibid. p.274.

stage was conventionally produced by the actors taking away candles and bringing them on again when light was required.¹

Any furniture needed during a scene, such as tables, chairs, etc., was carried on and off the stage in full view of the audience.² The method of clearing the stage to indicate the end of an act was for one of the actors to come forward and speak a rhyming tag of a few lines, after which all the actors went off the stage.³

B. THE STAGE TECHNIQUE OF WILLIAM CONGREVE

Congreve consistently employed the traditional rhyming tag to clear the stage at the end of each act. This usually, though not necessarily, also indicated a change of setting. The Double-Dealer is an exception, since the setting is constant throughout the play, the only alteration being in Act IV, Scene XV where a flat is drawn to reveal Lady Touchwood's chamber. At the end of the act a stage direction reads: 'Scene shuts'. An apparent exception is the end of Act II in Love for Love, where, instead of a tag being spoken by a single character, alternate lines of dialogue rhyme. Examination shows, however, that what has been printed as three lines of dialogue is, in fact, two lines of iambic verse:

Miss Prue: "Well, now I'll run and make more
haste than you.

Tattle : You shall not fly so fast, as I'll 4
pursue."

¹ Summers, Montague The Restoration Theatre. London, Kegan Paul, (etc.), 1934. p. 1274.

² Ibid. p. 148.

³ Ibid. p. 153.

⁴ Congreve, William Love for Love. A.2 S.11 p. 261
1. 87-89.

Another tradition which Congreve introduced quite naturally into all his comedies was the song and dance. The Old Bachelor has two songs, The Double-Dealer two, Love for Love has two and a ballad, and The Way of the World has one and some drunken snatches of song from Sir Wilful Witwoud. All the comedies, except The Double-Dealer end with a dance.

The printed text of Restoration plays is confusing because the later publishers employed the term 'Scene' to denote the entrance or exit of characters during the course of a continuous action. New characters might introduce a new phase of the drama, such as farce, ridicule, or wit, but invariably the setting remained constant. A skilled dramatist would move his characters in such a way that a clear stage never occurred within an act, the presentation being a continuous flow and changing from farce, or an amusing situation, to witty dialogue, or an emotional episode, in a natural sequence of events.

This constant flow of the action throughout each of the five acts must have taxed the ingenuity of every young dramatist. Congreve was no exception. He stumbled several times in staging The Old Bachelor.

The end of Act I Scene V is the first instance. Sir Joseph Wittol and Captain Bluffe have crossed the stage and Sharper remarks: ". . . I'll endeavour his acquaintance - ".¹ The act ends and the stage is cleared with the traditional rhyming couplet. But the next act begins with Sharper meeting Sir Joseph. It appears to follow so naturally upon the preceding scene that the long break and the interlude of music seem to be unnecessary. Unfortunately the action is so arranged that the end of Act I may neither be shifted forward nor backward without causing a further problem. If

1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor. A.1 S.5 p.36.
1.52.

Act I Scene V were to become Act II Scene I, Bellmour would leave the stage at the end of Act I, since he is talking to Heartwell and Sharper in Act I Scene IV, he would return briefly for the new Act II Scene I and would then retire again - an awkward situation. To shift the end of Act I to the end of the farce between Sharper, Sir Joseph Wittol and Captain Bluffe, would place it at a natural break in the action and a change of setting, but this would make Act I too long and Act II very short. Its present position is, therefore, the only one possible because of inadequate stage technique.

The resultant compromise causes a break in the flow of action midway through Act II. The men make their exit through a proscenium door and flats are drawn to reveal Araminta's apartment.

A similar break occurs at the end of Act III Scene IX, also after an interlude of farce, when the stage is momentarily cleared and flats are drawn to reveal Sylvia's apartment.

The greatest flaw on the mechanical side of Congreve's stage technique will be found in Act IV. It is the result of an overloaded action which a novice would be unable to handle adequately. Opening with a street scene, the action breaks off and the stage is cleared with a rhyming couplet at the end of Scene V. Flats are drawn and the setting becomes a room in Fondlewife's house, but, after two brief scenes, the flats are closed and the setting is St. James's Park. At the end of Scene XIV flats are again drawn and the scene becomes Fondlewife's house once more.

Even Act V has a change of setting after a clear stage at the end of Scene XI. Flats must be drawn to disclose Sylvia's Lodgings in which the closing scenes take place. It is only Act I of The Old Bachelor, therefore, which retains a constant setting throughout.

The Double-Dealer is a remarkable example of development in the mechanics of the stage. In The Epistle Dedicatory Congreve expressed the belief that "the Mechanical part of it is regular"¹ and, to a large extent, this is true, but he had overlooked a few defect. I mentioned that in Act IV Scene XV a flat is drawn to reveal Lady Touchwood's chamber. It is obvious at this point that the stage has been cleared, since Mellefont is in the chamber, and if Maskwell and Lord Touchwood, who were speaking in the previous scene, had not left the stage before the drawing of the flat, the situation would be absurd.

Perhaps, however, it is time that I distinguished between a break in the flow of action and a dramatic pause. The above instance may scarcely be called dramatic, because the interruption adds little if anything to the drama of the situation. It is rather a difficulty which could not be circumvented in another way. One of the three breaks in the flow of action in Act IV of The Old Bachelor is dramatic because the situation necessitates a pause. The amour between Bellmour and Laetitia Fondlewife has proceeded to a point where Bellmour pretends to be ill. He says to Laetitia:

" . . . Let me lye down upon the Bed ;
- the Fit will soon be over".²

A break here, at the end of Scene VII, is therefore, both necessary and dramatic. Similarly, two further pauses which occur in the action of The Double-Dealer are necessary for dramatic reasons. The first occurs after Act V Scene V when Maskwell has suggested to Mellefont that they speak to Cynthia. The audience knows it is his final plot to cheat Mellefont. When the two men make their exit, a good stage producer would allow a pause before Lord and Lady Touchwood enter, to

1 Congreve, William The Epistle Dedicatory of the Double-Dealer To the Right Honourable Charles Montague . . . p.113.

2 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor. A.4 S.7 p.75.
1. 86-87.

Mirabell in St. Jame's Park. Lady Wishfort asks Mrs. Marwood to wait in her closet while she interviews Foible. After the interview, Lady Wishfort leaves the stage and Foible is joined by Mrs. Fainall. They discuss Mirabell's intrigue near the closet door behind which Mrs. Marwood is concealed. When Foible and Mrs. Fainall leave the stage, it should remain unoccupied for a few dramatic moments before Mrs. Marwood emerges from the closet and speaks her malicious thoughts in soliloquy. Then Lady Wishfort returns, followed shortly by Foible who brings a message, in response to which the old Lady departs once more. Soon Millamant and her maid join Mrs. Marwood. Petulant and Witwoud enter after the ladies have conversed for some time and eventually Sir Wilfull Witwoud arrives at his Aunt's home. Scenes of traditional comedy are interrupted by the return of Lady Wishfort, who is accompanied by Fainall. Then all except Mrs. Marwood and Fainall leave to dine. The act ends as Mrs. Marwood and Fainall follow the company after a revealing conversation.

The four remaining acts are handled with equal dexterity, the stage at no time remaining unoccupied within an act. Only once is it necessary to interchange characters, and then Fainall says :

" . . . 'S death they come, hide your Face, your
Tears - You have a Mask, wear it a moment. This way, this way, be persuaded".¹

The mechanical part of Congreve's stage technique in The Way of the World was excellent. He did not rely upon coincidence in moving his characters, despite an intricate plot, yet he achieved a natural sequence of events, one episode leading to another with the inevitability of an accurate clock.

Besides the accomplished mechanical technique, The Way of the World has a planned arrangement of the action which is superior to all the preceding comedies.

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.2 S.2
p.367. l. 164-166.

It opens in a chocolate-house where the opposing characters in the plot, Mirabell and Fainall have been gambling. It is an excellent stage setting for the exposition. Messengers come and go in a natural way, each conveying some relevant information, while the two rivals discuss the situation. When sufficient information has been communicated to the audience, Witwoud enters from another room and some light comedy is woven into the fabric of the plot. Petulant joins the company and more important information is passed to the audience.

Fashionable society of the Restoration period were wont to stroll in St. James's Park, so the setting of Act II establishes the tone of the comedy while continuing the exposition. The first to enter the Park are Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood. They are the partners of Mirabell and Fainall respectively in the great gamble for Millamant's fortune. The men meet the ladies in the Park and separate into significant couples, Fainall walking aside with Mrs. Marwood and Mirabell accompanying Mrs. Fainall. Their conversation completes the exposition and with consummate skill Congreve introduces the central figure of the comedy, Mrs. Millamant. It is mature stage technique.

Even the final episode in the Park, in which Mirabell is joined by Waitwell and Foible soon after Millamant departs, is fine staging. They are the chief agents in Mirabell's intrigue against Lady Wishfort, and the end of Act II leads inevitably to the scene in Lady Wishfort's house, with which Act III commences and which remains constant to the end of the play.

It seems correct to say that in this part of his comedy as well, Congreve had mastered the true technique.

I feel that even this cursory glance at Congreve's staging ability adds another dab of colour to the picture of what Congreve implied by a regular comedy. His stage technique is similar to that of the

Elizabethans, where a continuous flow within an act marks the skill of a dramatist. Pauses should be dramatic and significant so that the comedy is in fact divided into five Scenes called Acts. The method is admirably suited to the gaiety and movement of social comedy which depends so much upon the impression it creates.

To add to this impression, a vivacious dialogue is essential, so the next chapter will be devoted to a study of Congreve's diction.

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CHAPTER VI

THE DRAMATIC DICTION OF WILLIAM CONGREVE

John Dryden stated, amongst other things, that characters in tragedy should be "exalted above the level of common converse".¹ This probably explains why, in The Mourning Bride, Congreve employed blank-verse as the medium for his dialogue. Its function is so different from the prose dialogue of the comedies that I have excluded the diction of The Mourning Bride as being irrelevant to the present enquiry. The tragedy will be mentioned again when I discuss Congreve's intention revealed by his dramas.

Sparkling dialogue is quite as important in a comedy as a careful structure or able stage technique. The dialogue should be both easy and subtle, rhythmical without monotony, and it should combine sound with sense. I shall attempt to estimate the quality of Congreve's diction by selecting passages at random which, I hope, will illustrate his use of imagery, rhythm and sound. I shall then examine his diction at specific points in the structure, namely the opening dialogue, the climax and the conclusion, which should enable one to reach a decision as to its literary merits.

A. IMAGERY

Congreve employed images in several ways. Similes and metaphors, which abound in The Old Bachelor, And are often associated with wit, are the most common. Those which occur frequently relate to sport - either a game or hunting and fishing - animals, and the sea. There are also numerous images of food, particularly

1 Dryden, John An Essay of Dramatic Poesy. (In: Dryden's Essays. London, Dent; New York, Dutton, (1959)). p.54.

fruit, legal comparisons, or some aspect of war. A typical example from The Old Bachelor is Vainlove's reply to Sharper :

". . . My

Sport is always balkt or cut short - I stumble over the Game I would pursue - 'Tis dull and unnatural to have a Hare run full in the Hound's Mouth; and would distaste the keenest Hunter - I would have overtaken, not have met my Game". 1

No specific function is performed by the lengthy metaphor, since Vainlove's character is already well known. This irrelevance, however, is not always true. In The Way of the World an image of fruit serves to illumine the characters of Witwoud and his brother Sir Wilful :

Fainall: ". . . . Witwoud grows by the Knight, like a Medlar grafted on a Crab. One will melt in your Mouth, and t'other set you Teeth on edge; one is all Pulp, and the other all Core.

Mirabell: So one will be Rotten before he be Ripe, and the other will be Rotten without ever being Ripe at all". 2

Images may be confused, though functional. The jumbled images in Heartwell's soliloquy (Act III Scene II) an amalgam of Circe, Hercules and, perhaps, a calenture, convey the turmoil of his mind at that moment. A sudden clear emotion may also be conveyed through an image :

"There's Comfort in a Hand stretch'd out, to one that's sinking; tho' ne'er so far off". 3

Some other categories are (1) the amusing image :

". . . and there he lies with a great Beard, like a Russian Bear upon a drift of Snow". 4

1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor A.4 S.5 p.72 1.25-31.

2 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.1 S.5 p.350 1.30-36.

3 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer A.2 S.7 p.147 1.10-11.

4 Ibid. A.3 S.5 p.158 1.32-33.

(2) the image which consistently conveys a specific idea, like the idea of evil in The Double-Dealer, where Sir Paul Plyant says :

"Thou Serpent and first Tempter of Womankind" ¹

and later Maskwell says :

"... if they will not hear the Serpent's Hiss, they must be stung into Experience, and future Caution". ²

(3) the farcical image :

"I was born, Sir, when the Crab was ascending, and all my Affairs go backward"; ³

(4) the extravagant image which reveals the insincerity of the speaker :

"... I feel my Spirits faint, a general Dampness over-spreads my Face, a cold deadly Dew already vents through all my Pores, and will to Morrow wash me for ever from your Sight, and drown me in my Tomb"; ⁴

and many more of the same genre, all showing materialistic realism as opposed to romantic idealism.

The most important function of imagery in Congreve's dramas, however, is to reveal the mental calibre of the character speaking. The dull, foolish image is characteristic of Petulant :

"... A Gemini of Asses split, would make just four of you". ⁵

Incessant similes of contemporary life establish Witwoud

1 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer A.2 S.4 p.143 1.56-57.

2 Ibid. A.5 S.11 p.200 1.3-5.

3 Congreve, William Love for Love A.2 S.11 p.241 1.13-14.

4 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer A.4 S.2 p.172 1.51-55.

5 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.4 S.9 p.411 1.19-20.

as a pretender to wit who is basically ignorant :

" . . . you know she hates Mirabell,
worse than a Quaker hates a Parrot, or
than a Fishmonger hates a hard Frost . ." 1

The frustrated malice of Mrs. Marwood's nature is shown in an image like : "I wou'd have him ever to continue upon the Rack of Fear and Jealousie", 2 and Fainall, the shrewd gambler who lives for money alone, is revealed in an image like : "'tis against all rule of Play, that I should lose to one, who has not wherewithall to stake". 3

In contrast are the images of the intelligent, sophisticated society gentleman, Mirabell. A good example is the imagery descriptive of Millamant on her first entry, echoing as it does the entry of Delilah in Milton's Sampson Agonistes and conveying in its overtones a hint of Mirabell's amused appreciation of the lady :

"Here she comes i'faith full Sail, with her
fan spread and Streamers out, and a Shoal of 4
Fools for Tenders "

Millamant, too, the intelligent lady of fashion, employs many delightful images like : "you are more Censorious than a decay'd Beauty, or a discarded Toast", 5 but it is their variety and content which reveals her mental calibre. One more example may be cited as an illustration. She says to Mirabell :

" Prithee don't
look with that violent and inflexible wise Face,
like Solomon at the dividing of the Child in an old 6
Tapestry Hanging".

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.1 S.9 p.358
1.115-117.

2 Ibid. A.2 S.1 p.361. 1.70-71.

3 Ibid. A.3 S.18 p.399. 1.68-70.

4 Ibid. A.2 S.4 p.370. 1.1-3.

5 Ibid. A.3 S.10 p.387. 1.49-51.

6 Ibid. A.2 S.5 p.374. 1.43-46.

Functional imagery of this kind enriches the diction and is partly responsible for the vivacious sound of the dialogue when spoken upon the stage.

It is the total, though abstract, image of the marriage bargaining scene, however, where two concepts of liberty are juxtaposed, that illumines the mental calibre of Mirabell and Millamant. Millamant expresses the idea of personal liberty for women after marriage in clear, simple language :

"As Liberty to pay and receive
Visits to and from whom I please ;
to write and receive Letters," . . . etc. ¹

In contrast Mirabell's conditions have a firm legal tone :

"I thank you. Imprimis then, I covenant
that your Acquaintance be general ; that
you admit no sworn Confident, " . . . etc. ²

The distinction appears to be subtle but the phraseology suggests that Millamant is determined to ensure her own liberty after marriage, whereas Mirabell, though he agrees with Millamant, insists on containing her liberty within lawful bounds to prevent its becoming license. The final contrast of liberty and law at the end of the scene seems to confirm this interpretation :

Millamant : " . . . I hate your odious Provisos.
Mirabell : Then we're agreed. Shall I kiss
your Hand upon the Contract? . . . " ³

It is, however, an imaginative and abstract image which allows of different interpretations, but this does not reduce its value as an example of Congreve's diction. It is the kind of intellectual concept that places Mirabell and Millamant well above all the Witwouds, Fainalls and other characters in the play.

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.4 S.5 p.407
1.69-71.

2 Ibid. A.4 S.5 p.408. 1.94-96.

3 Ibid. A.4 S.5 p.409. 1.149-151.

B. RHYTHM

The dialogue I have selected is spread over three consecutive scenes in Love for Love (Act IV, Scenes XVIII - XX). What immediately becomes apparent is that Congreve is using language with finesse. To begin with, Valentine's smooth complacency is echoed in an Aside by Angelica which has a subtly different rhythm. It immediately suggests antagonism. Valentine, however, continues complacently.

His speech beginning: "You see what Disguises Love makes us put on" ¹ has varied pauses and stresses producing an impression of contentment. It is a rounded whole, the sound of the opening words 'you see' being echoed in the final word 'Beauty'.

Valentine is obviously quite unprepared for Angelica's comment: "Mercy on me, how he talks; poor Valentine". ² His speech-rhythm changes abruptly becoming jerky with short syllables and contrasting sharply with his earlier contented rhythm. Surprise becomes incredulity as Angelica continues to 'misunderstand' him:

"What sad Effects? - What's too late? my seeming Madness has deceived my Father, and procur'd me time to think of Means to reconcile me to him; and preserve the right of my Inheritance to his Estate; . . ."

Note the incredulous questions followed by a stream of words with few pauses.

Angelica, however, has a purpose for behaving as she does:

1 Congreve, William Love for Love A.4 S.18 p.308. 1.4-9.

2 Ibid. A.4 S.18 p.308. 1.10-11.

3 Ibid. A.4 S.18 p.308. 1.22-26.

Fainall, however, prefers to stop for the moment, saying: 'I'll give you your Revenge another time, when you are not so indifferent'. These words are prophetic. Why is Mirabell, the 'losing Gamester', indifferent 'to his ill Fortune' at cards? Surely because the 'game' he and Fainall will play 'another time' is for a great 'Fortune', the fortune of Millamant? In that game Mirabell is given his 'Revenge'. The name Fainall itself inevitably suggests the meaning 'feign all', so that we gain the impression, perhaps subconsciously, that all is not well, that Mirabell has been gambling with the devil, or, at least, his servant. The name may also suggest 'fain have all', with equally sinister overtones. Even the phrases 'make Love to a Woman' and 'a Taste extremely delicate' create impressions which foreshadow the atmosphere of scenes to follow.

It is an extremely subtle dialogue, its significance being conveyed chiefly by the selection of words, but it is certainly the best introductory passages to be found in Congreve's dramas. It immediately places The Way of the World above the normal run of Restoration comedy, including Congreve's earlier plays. The promise of The Old Bachelor reached fruition in The Way of the World.

E. THE CLIMAX

In three of his four comedies Congreve manipulated the climax by a skilful variation in the quality of the spoken phrase. The Double-Dealer has no especial merit in this respect and I intend to omit it from the discussion.

Bellmour's puckish nature causes a sharp climax in the main action of The Old Bachelor. Heartwell, believing himself married to Sylvia, is stung by the laughter of the young town people, especially Bellmour and Belinda. His words are interesting:

" . . . For you, Sir, I shall find a time ;
but take off your Wasp here, or the Clown ¹
may grow boistroous, I have a Fly-Flap".

One cannot fail to sense the menace behind the cool phrase 'For you, Sir, I shall find a time' which suddenly mounts to fury, like the sweep of a sword, in the word 'Wasp'. Eventually, taunted beyond endurance, he cries: "Damn your Pity . . ." ². For a moment he ceases to be a comic figure. His defiance is almost tragic. Then it happens :

" . . . How have I deserved this of you?" ³

His words become self-pitying and scurrilous. A deft alteration in the quality of the phrase spoken immediately reduces Heartwell to a mere comic figure and one feels that, perhaps, he deserves to be ridiculed. It is certainly the most skilful dialogue in The Old Bachelor.

Love for Love has a similar climax. When Angelica suddenly rejects the egocentric Sir Sampson Legend and proclaims her love for his son Valentine, our pleasure at the happy union of the lovers is offset by a painful feeling that there will be a violent scene, especially after her speech beginning: "Well, Sir Sampson, since I have plaid you a Trick . . ." ⁴ in which her words were carefully chosen to whip him into a fury. His swelling rage ending in a bark of "Oons you're a Crocodile" ⁵ threatens the worst. At this point Congreve, with consummate skill, introduces a sentence for the foolish mock-astrologer, Mr. Foresight: "Really, Sir Sampson", he says, "this is a sudden Eclipse". ⁶

1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor A.5 S.13 p.104. 1.20-22.

2 Ibid. A.5 S.13 p.104. 1.40.

3 Ibid. A.5 S.13 p.104. 1.41.

4 Congreve, William Love for Love. A.5 S.The last. p.329. 1.82-91.

5 Ibid. A.5 S.The last. p.329. 1.94.

6 Ibid. A.5 S.The last. p.329. 1.95-96.

The quality of his words immediately reduces the tension, and even Sir Sampson blusters lamely: "You're an illiterate old Fool, and I'm another".¹ We are back in the realm of comedy.

The climax of The Way of the World is considerably more complex. Mirabell's careful intrigue appears to have gone awry. Fainall is adamant and no hope of preventing disaster is in view. Like Heartwell, though without scurrility, Lady Wishfort blames her daughter for the calamity and pities herself. The eight lines of dialogue beginning: "'Twas against my Consent that she marry'd this Barbarian"² are indeed skilfully written. Subtle fluctuations of sound and rhythm reveal a struggle between anger and despair as Lady Wishfort's emotions tumble over one another. The hard short vowels of her first angry words tail away into sadness which flows into sentimentality. Suddenly the syllables become short and hard with indignation. As suddenly she utters a cry of despair: "I shall be mad".³ Finally she appeals to her supposed friend, Mrs. Marwood, for comfort, showing a combination of self-pity and annoyance in the last sentence.

The pathetic old woman moves us, but at no time is a feeling of the tragic aroused, as occurred momentarily in The Old Bachelor. It is avoided by placing her pathetic words before her defiant cry which, therefore, remains comic.

Any tension which may have been felt is dispelled by the foolish quality of Sir Wilful Witwoud's apology for his drunkenness and the cool, unaffected determination in Millamant's words, commencing: "I am content to be a Sacrifice to your Repose, Madam . . ."⁴ To hear Millamant speak in a way so different from that

1 Congreve, William Love for Love. A.5 S.The last. p.330. 1.97-98.

2 Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.5 S.7. p.430-431. 1.6-14.

3 Ibid. A.5 S.7 p.431. 1.11.

4 Ibid. A.5 S.8 p.431. 1.18-27.

unique quality we associate with her, immediately rouses a feeling of surprise and expectancy. What is to follow? we tend to ask. It is a brilliant introduction to the dénouement, chiefly owing to a change in the quality of Millamant's speech.

Though, apart from The Double-Dealer, the quality of the spoken phrase or sentence was the means by which Congreve manipulated the climax in all his comedies, his diction in The Way of the World alone produced that balance between pathos and laughter which we associate with true comedy.

F. THE CONCLUSION - THE UNION OF THE SEXES

Finally let us examine the words of acceptance used by the true lovers in the last scene of each comedy. The passages of dialogue will be quoted in sequence to observe the maturing power of Congreve's dramatic prose.

(1) The Old Bachelor

Bellmour: "Well, 'Midst of these dreadful Denunciations, and notwithstanding the Warning and Example before me, I commit myself to lasting Durance

Belinda: Prisoner, make much of your Fetters".¹

(2) The Double-Dealer

The Double-Dealer is an exception. Mellefont speaks for both.

Lord Touchwood: "... Nephew, I hope I have your Pardon, and Cynthia's.

Mellefont: We are your Lordship's Creatures".²

1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor. A.5 S.The last. p.108. 1.76-80.

2 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer. A.5 S.The last. p.211. 1.18-19.

(3) Love for Love

Angelica: "I have done dissembling now, Valentine ;
and if that Coldness which I have always
worn before you, should turn to an
extream Fondness, you must not suspect it.

Valentine: I'll prevent that Suspicion - For I
intend to doat to that immoderate
degree, that your Fondness shall never
distinguish it self enough to be taken
notice of. If ever you seem to love too
much, it must be only when I can't love
enough.

Angelica: Have a Care of Promises, you know you are
apt to run more in Debt than you are able
to pay.

Valentine: Therefore I yield my Body your Prisoner, 1
and make your best on't".

(4) The Way of the World

Millamant: "Why does not the Man take me? Wou'd
you have me give my self to you over again?

Mirabell: Ay, and over and over again; (kisses her
I wou'd have you as often as hand)
possibly I can. Well, Heav'n grant I
love you not too well, that's all my Fear" 2

Placed side by side in this way it is not
difficult to see the development. The Old Bachelor is
youthful and conventional. The prose rythms and sound
have no especial merit. Marriage is the end of fun and
liberty. The Double-Dealer is didactic. Virtuous children
are dutiful and should obey their parents or 'guardians'.
The rhythm suits the sense.

In Love for Love there is for the first time
a feeling of true love. Lines like 'I have done dis-
sembling now, Valentine' or 'If ever you seem to love
too much, it must be only when I can't love enough'
reveal it, both in sound and rhythm. Even Angelica's

1 Congreve, William Love for Love. A.5 S.The last.
p.330. 1.118-132.

2 Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.5 S.The
last. p.440. 1.30-35.

playfully reminding Valentine of his youthful errors turns the conventional idea of 'your prisoner' into something real. Angelica has saved Valentine from his own folly and he realises how much he needs her guidance. There is something more human in the language.

The Way of the World, however, stands supreme. The comedy would seem incomplete if the irrepressible wit of Millamant did not illumine the happy ending.

"Why Does not the Man take me?"

The words contain no sentimentality, no obvious passion, but they are the inimitable Millamant that Mirabell knows so well. His quick, apt, yet simple reply is the best acceptance Congreve wrote to achieve a truly happy union of the sexes.

It is hoped that these extracts have shown how promise matured into a brilliant dramatic style.

The three parts of comedy, structure, stage technique and diction, have all developed up to a point which, I consider, was worthy of a regular and true comedy. I now intend to consider the parts of comedy which have a direct bearing upon Congreve's intention. The first is the theme of his dramas.

CHAPTER VII

VARIATIONS ON A SINGLE THEME

If Congreve in fact was striving to write one comedy, regular and true in all its parts, it is reasonable to expect a single theme. Ancient tradition prescribed that the subject of comedy be the union of the sexes - gamos- and John Dryden criticised Ben Jonson for disregarding this precept. It is interesting to find, therefore, that the theme of mutual love appears to run like a persistent thread throughout all the dramas of William Congreve, including his tragedy, The Mourning Bride.

A second classical precept was that a comedy should have a happy ending. Now the theme of mutual love has a positive and a negative side. Assuming that happiness depends upon mutual love it follows that loveless marriages are often unstable. To conform to the precept it is necessary, therefore, that only mutual lovers should be united at the end of a comedy.

Bearing these principles in mind, I shall now attempt to discover how Congreve varied his single theme.

A. POSSIBLE THEME OF THE OLD BACHELOR

The first suggestion of true love is the care taken by Congreve to inform his audience that Bellmour is in love with Belinda. In Act I, Scene I, Bellmour says:

". . . I find I am damnably in Love, I'm so uneasy for not having seen Belinda yesterday". ¹

In the next scene he mentions in soliloquy "the slavery of honourable Love" ² This statement is very important,

1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor. A.1 S.1 p.29. l.150-151.

2 Ibid. A.1 S.2 p.29. l. 2-3.

because soliloquy represents a character's inmost thoughts. We may therefore discard as social raillery his pretence to Sharper that he is infatuated with her "twelve thousand Pound".¹

Belinda affects to dislike Bellmour. Perhaps because her affectation may create a false impression, Araminta is made to say to her in Act II, Scene III:

"I wonder, Cousin, you should imagine, 2
I don't perceive you love him".

For the more discerning part of the audience a scene is introduced (Act IV Scene VIII) in which the reaction to love of different temperaments is contrasted. Belinda speaks volubly about trivialities; Araminta answers politely, but says little.

Vainlove also professes to love Araminta when he says:

"But I saw my Araminta, yet am as impatient".³

But Vainlove has a strange humour. He suspects any woman who speaks to him of love. There is not the slightest doubt, that Araminta is deeply in love with Vainlove. Her words to Belinda are a sincere confession:

"If love be the Fever which you mean,
Kind Heav'n avert the Cure: Let me have
Oil to feed that Flame and never let it 4
be extinct, 'till I my self am Ashes".

In addition there is the scene in the Park and the fact that after she has quarrelled with Vainlove she sends a footman to Belinda to say that "She's not very well"⁵ and is returning home by coach.

1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor. A.1 S.3 p.30. 1.28.

2 Ibid. A.2 S.3 p.45. 1.23-24.

3 Ibid. A.1 S.1 p.29. 1.152-153.

4 Ibid. A.2 S.3 p.44-45. 1.10-13.

5 Ibid. A.4 S.14. p.82. 1.3.

Araminta's sincere affection, however, is lost upon Vainlove. When he receives Lucy's forged letter, which purports to come from Araminta, he immediately turns against the woman he claims to love, muttering: "'Tis an untimely Fruit, and she has mis-carried of her Love" ¹.

Is the audience supposed to believe that Vainlove truly loves Araminta? Probably they are not. His name suggests that he is incapable of any deep affection. His function in the comedy is to act as a foil to the true affection of Bellmour and, if this is so, the end of the comedy will not be truly happy if Vainlove and Araminta are united.

The final scene supports this interpretation. A happy ending is assured by the union of the mutual lovers, Bellmour and Belinda, but Vainlove and Araminta, because they lack that mutual love which is essential for a happy marriage are not united:

Bellmour: "Frank, Will you keep us in Countenance?

Vainlove: May I presume to hope so great a Blessing?

Araminta: We had better take the Advantage of a little of our Friends Experience first". ²

When Sylvia traps Heartwell in a promise of marriage Bellmour tells Lucy: "Your Mistress must not marry Heartwell, Lucy". ³ The only explanation he provides is that Heartwell is his friend. Sylvia is a courtesan, and she will marry any male, merely to avoid being abandoned when she grows old. Heartwell is foolish but he is not a wicked man. If he and Sylvia are united it will be an unhappy marriage. Bellmour is made to personate a cleric which provides the situation for ridiculing Heartwell, but the happy ending is achieved by releasing Heartwell from a union which would have led to misery. If we look for a meaning in this part of the

1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor A.4 S.5 p.72. 1.18-19.

2 Ibid. A.5 S.The last p.108. 1.81-85.

3 Ibid. A.5 S.3 p.92. 1.33.

action it seems to be that Heartwell is "blind"¹ and does not realise that mutual love is essential for happiness and fidelity in marriage.

The Old Bachelor, however, has so many scenes of traditional comedy that we cannot be sure of its theme. There is no suggestion of a moral satire in the final couplet spoken by Bellmour after his affair with Laetitia:

"No Husband, by his Wife, can be Deceiv'd;
She still is vertuous, if she's so believ'd".²

The words of Sir Joseph Wittol do not suggest punishment:

"Pray Madam, who are you? For I find
You and I are like to be better acquainted".³

It is in fact a light-hearted comedy which lacks the imprint of a mature artistic imagination.

B. THE THEME OF THE DOUBLE-DEALER

In the Epistle Dedicatory of The Double-Dealer Congreve wrote:

"I design'd the Moral first, and to that
Moral I invented the Fable . . .".⁴

The theme, or moral as Congreve expressed it, which is central to the plot of The Double-Dealer, is the mutual love of Mellefont and Cynthia. It is contrasted with Lady Touchwood's licentious love of Mellefont, the affected love for each other of Lord and Lady Froth and,

1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor. A.5 S.3 p.92. 1.39.

2 Ibid. A.4 S.22 p.90. 1.163-164.

3 Ibid. A.4 S.The last. p.107. 1.37-38.

4 Congreve, William The Epistle Dedicatory of the Double-Dealer. To the Right Honourable Charles Montague . . . p.114.

perhaps, the uxorious attachment of Sir Paul Plyant to the silly young coquette he has married - his second wife.

The licentiousness of Lady Touchwood must lead to unhappiness. It has no stability and no honour:

Lady Touchwood: " Oh
Mellefont! I burn; married to Marrow!
Despair strikes me. Yet my Soul knows I
hate him too: Let him but once be mine, 1
and next immediate Rhin seize him".

Affected love, because it is based upon insincerity and pretence, is false:

Cynthia: "Indeed, Madam! Is it possible your Ladyship could have been so much in love ?

Lady Froth: I could not sleep; I did not sleep one 2
Wink for three Weeks together".

It is also unstable:

Lady Froth: "No the Deuce take me if I don't laugh
at my self; for hang me if I have
not a violent Passion for Mr. Brisk . . ." 3

The union of an old, uxorious man and a young woman is ridiculous:

Sir Paul: "Gads-bud I am transported. Give me
leave to kiss your Ladyship's Hand.

Cynthia: That my poor Father should be so very 4
silly". (Aside)

It leads to infidelity:

Careless: "O Heav'n! I can't out-live this
Night without your Favour . . .

1 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer A.1 S.6 p.135.
1.112-116.

2 Ibid. A.2 S.1 p.136 1.1-4.

3 Ibid. A.4 S.6 p.180 1.52-54.

4 Ibid. A.4 S.3 p.175 1.74-77.

Lady Plyant: O you have conquer'd sweet, melting
moving Sir, you have conquer'd . . ." 1

It leads to unhappiness:

Sir Paul: ". . Very pretty; it seems then I
am conducing to my own Cuckoldom; . . ." 2

It leads to deceit:

Sir Paul: "I can't tell you, I'm so overjoy'd;
Come along with me to my Lady, I can't
contain my self; come my dear Friend.

Careless: So, so, so, this Difficulty's over" (Aside) 3

True love, however, is sincere:

Lord Froth: "D'ye think he'll Love you as well
as I do my Wife? I'm afraid not.

Cynthia : I believe he'll love me better.

Lord Froth: Heav'ns! that can never be; but
why do you think so ?

Cynthia : Because he has not so much reason
to be fond of himself". 4

It permits the free discussion of problems:

Cynthia : ". . . What think you of drawing
Stakes, and giving over in time ?

Mellefont: No, hang't, that's not endeavouring
to win because it's possible we may
lose; since we have shuffled and
cut, let's e'en turn up Trumps now". 5

It provides mutual support in times of trouble:

Cynthia : ". . I'll lay my Life it will never
be a Match.

Mellefont: What ?

1 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer A.4 S.2 p.172
1.50-51; 56-57.

2 Ibid. A.4 S.9 p.181. 1.7-8.

3 Ibid. A.4 S.11 p.184. 1.21-24.

4 Ibid. A.2 S.2 p.139. 1.47-53.

5 Ibid. A.2 S.3 p.140. 1.11-15.

Cynthia : Between you and me.

Mellefont: Why so ?

Cynthia : My mind gives me it won't . .

Mellefont: . . Fox O'Fortune, Portion, Settlements
and Jointures.

Cynthia : Ay, ay, what have we to do with 'em ;
you know we marry for Love.

Mellefont: Love, Love, down-right very villainous
Love.

Cynthia : And he that can't live upon Love, deserves ¹
to die in a Ditch . . . "

It gives strength to resist opposition :

Cynthia: "I would obey you to my power, Sir ;
but if I have not him, I have sworn ²
never to marry".

Mutual love is, therefore, the surest foundation
for happiness and fidelity in marriage, as Lord Touchwood's
final speech seems to imply :

" . . . mutual Love, lasting Health and circling
Joys, tread round each happy year of your long lives". ³

I have included the traditional comedy of an
old man married to a young wife in the evidence for
Congreve's theme because this time it appears to have
been employed to heighten the contrast. The affected
love of Lord and Lady Froth serves a like purpose, but
though it is relevant to the theme, there is a flaw in
Congreve's technique. By designing the moral, or theme,
first, he failed to assimilate it with the plot. The
evidence is sufficient to state, however, that the theme
pervades the entire action.

1 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer. A.4 S.1 p.169-
170. 1.8-12.

2 Ibid. A.4 S.3 p.173. 1.4-5.

3 Ibid. A.5 S.The last p.211. 1.22-24.

C. VARIATION ON THE THEME IN LOVE FOR LOVE

William Congreve added an ingredient of surprise to vary the treatment of his theme in the comedy Love for Love. From the first scene, Valentine's deep affection for Angelica is patent. His wild life with the town wits has led him into serious debt, but he has not lost hope of winning her as his bride. He says to his servant, Jeremy :

" . . . I'll
pursue Angelica with more love than ever . . ." ¹

Angelica herself is the enigma. Does she truly love Valentine? Jeremy calls her "a Lady, that did not care a Farthing for you in your Prosperity". ² When they first meet in the play she is non-committal :

Angelica : "You can't accuse me of Inconstancy ;
I never told you that I lov'd you.

Valentine: But I can accuse you of Uncertainty,
for not telling me whether you did or not.

Angelica : You mistake Indifference for Uncertainty ;
I never had Concern enough to ask my self
the question". ³

Her strange, though ironic, words to Sir Sampson Legend add to the enigma :

"If I marry, Sir Sampson, I'm for a good
Estate with any Man, and for any Man with
a good Estate. Therefore if I were oblig'd
to make a Choice, I declare I'd rather have
you than your Son". ⁴

There is also an 'Aside' spoken by Angelica after she is convinced that Valentine's madness is a trick, which sounds more like malice than love :

" . . . If I don't play Trick for Trick
may I never taste the Pleasure of Revenge . . ." ⁵

1 Congreve, William Love for Love A.1 S.1 p.220. 1.55-56.

2 Ibid. A.1 S.1 p.220. 1.49-50.

3 Ibid. A.3 S.3 p.262. 1.1-7.

4 Ibid. A.3 S.5 p.268. 1.21-25.

5 Ibid. A.4 S.3 p.288. 1.16-17.

When Scandal asks her to acknowledge her love, she even denies that she loves Valentine :

" . . . to love is neither in
my Power nor Inclination ; . . . " ¹

With surprise in the end, however, we learn that all these signs of indifference are tests to assay the quality of Valentine's love. The theme is stressed by this image of the depth and constancy in mutual love. Valentine is willing to sacrifice all his worldly possessions before Angelica says :

"Had I the World to give you, it cou'd not
make me worthy of so generous and faithful
a Passion: Here's my Hand, my Heart was
always yours, and struggle'd very hard to
make this utmost Trial of your Virtue". ²

There are, in Love for Love, episodes of traditional comedy similar to those in The Old Bachelor. Unlike the Old Bachelor, where the masked marriage was no more than a traditional entertainment, Love for Love treats it as a punishment. Mrs. Frail cries :

" . . . I always despised Mr. Tattle of all
things ; nothing but his being my Husband
could have made me like him less". ³

Valentine's words to Mr. Tattle are :

" . . . you would have interposed
between me and Heav'n ; but Providence
laid Purgatory in your way - You have but
Justice". ⁴

It might, therefore, be pardonable to assume that young Mrs. Foresight's infidelity to her foolish old husband, though traditional, was selected as an example, or warning, to those who would marry without love. If the assumption is correct, the theme of mutual love pervades all parts of the action.

1 Congreve, William Love for Love A.4 S.3 p.288. 1.24-25.

2 Ibid. A.5 S.The last p.329. 1.71-75.

3 Ibid. A.5 S.11 p.326. 1.36-38.

4 Ibid. A.5 S.The last p.330. 1.106-109.

D. ANOTHER VARIATION IN THE MOURNING BRIDE

The Mourning Bride, though a tragedy, shows the fidelity and eventual happiness of mutual love. A happy ending is unusual in a tragedy but John Dryden countenanced it,¹ and in Chapter III we observed how closely William Congreve followed Dryden's opinions on tragedy.

In The Mourning Bride the lovers are already married :

Almeria: ". . . when my Lord beheld the Ship pursuing
And saw her Rate so far exceeding ours ;
He came to me, and beg'd me by my Love,
I would consent the Priest might make us one ;
. . . . I granted,
And in one Day, was wedded, and a Widow".²

For the sake of clarity I shall briefly explain the salient points of the situation. Almeria's husband, Alphonso, was not drowned. He was rescued by a Moorish Queen named Zara. He urged the Moors to attack Granada where Almeria's father, King Manuel, reigned. In the attack, the Moors were defeated and Zara's husband was killed. Zara, Alphonso (who had assumed the name Osmyn) and Heli his friend were all taken prisoner and brought to King Manuel's court in Granada. There Almeria, Alphonso and Heli met once more.

The situation becomes complicated because Zara has fallen in love with Osmyn not knowing him to be Alphonso, King Manuel has fallen in love with Zara, and Gonsalez, a court favourite, has obtained the King's consent to a marriage between Garcia, his son, and Almeria. Zara's love is hopeless because Alphonso is already married and he does not love her ; King Manuel should not marry Zara because their love is not mutual ; Gonsalez wants his son to marry Almeria to satisfy his

1 Dryden, John An Essay of Dramatic Poesy. (In: Dryden Essays. London, Dent ; New York, Dutton, (1954)). p.54.

2 Congreve, William The Mourning Bride. London, Jacob Tonson, 1697. A.R. S.1 p.5.

CHAPTER VIII

TOWARDS A REGULAR COMEDY

In the last chapter there was sufficient evidence of a constant theme to justify the proposition that Congreve was striving to perfect the presentation of a basic idea and pattern. The pattern may be called Restoration Comedy and it consists of three distinct parts :

- (1) Traditional comedy ;
- (2) Comedy of Wit ;
- (3) Comedy of the Situation.

To amalgamate these parts into an harmonious unit required a work of genius, but to create a regular comedy, harmony was essential. As early as 1694, Congreve had written in The Epistle Dedicatory of The Double-Dealer : "I confess I design'd . . . to have written a true and regular Comedy" ¹ and though he admitted his failure, the comedies provide adequate information to assume that he did not lose sight of this purpose. In the present chapter I shall attempt to trace the technique by which the three parts of Restoration comedy were assimilated in the regular action of The Way of the World. At the same time I hope to adduce some evidence of a basic idea underlying the action, which Congreve wished to communicate artistically.

A. TRADITIONAL COMEDY

(1) Extempore Acting

When I mentioned the Italian popular comedy, or Commedia dell'arte in Chapter II, I expressed the view

¹ Congreve, William The Epistle Dedicatory of The Double-Dealer. To The Right Honourable Charles Montague . . . p.113.

that several characters in The Old Bachelor had Italian forbears. The resemblance of character types, however, is less important than the spontaneous dialogue of the actors themselves. The groups of Italian actors and actresses comprised men and women who were born to the mimic tradition and their art consisted in their ability to provide extempore quips and retorts in response to any situation which might arise. The variety and, I might add, the vulgarity of the dialogue is not difficult to imagine.

The success of The Old Bachelor on the Restoration stage may be explained if we take into account English extempore acting. Dialogue certainly would have diverged from the text in scenes such as the trapping of Bellmour and Laetitia by Fondlewife, or the many episodes when Captain Bluffe and Sir Joseph Wittol are on the stage. An indication in the text that Congreve intended the actor to proceed extempore is the inclusion of 'etc' after the last word in Sir Joseph's opening lines (Act II Scene I). The foolish proposal of Heartwell to Sylvia also allowed the actor great latitude.

The actors seem to have upheld the tradition, for these words are written in The Dedication of the play :

"Yet I must declare my self sensible of the good Nature of the Town, in receiving this Play so kindly, with all its Faults, which I must own were, for the most part, very industriously covered by the care of the Players ; for, I think, scarce a Character but receiv'd all the Advantage it would admit of, from the justness of the Action" ¹

The spontaneous element was probably omitted from The Double-Dealer. One is able to imagine an actor exceeding his part in the text when Careless makes love to Lady Plyant, or when Sir Paul Plyant comes upon the stage reading his wife's letter from her lover, but

1 Congreve, William The Dedication of The Old Bachelor. To the Right Honourable Charles Lord Clifford, of Lanesborough. p.16.

the dialogue is so carefully written that one doubts if it was done. Perhaps the limiting of the spontaneous actor was responsible for its failure.

The action of Love for Love is very like that of The Old Bachelor, with one major difference. The dialogue is brilliant and carefully written and one wonders if it was intended merely to guide the actor in the traditional scenes. A good actor might scarcely have improved the love scene, in which Mr. Tattle instructs Miss Prue, by introducing lines of his own. The cheating of Mr. Foresight, too, leaves little room for improvement. It is impossible to be certain, but the indications are that the action was too long to allow for additions to the dialogue. On the other hand, Congreve disclosed in The Dedication, that "some Lines" and "one whole scene in the Third Act"¹ were omitted on the stage. Love for Love was a very popular play, so it is possible that some degree of spontaneous acting was responsible for its success.

The Prologue to The Way of the World specifically excludes farce when it defines the action of the play, so we must accept the dialogue as complete in itself.

In order to study Congreve's dramatic technique however, it is necessary to assess the relative value of each part in the final product. At present we are concerned with conventional episodes which may be comprehended in the phrase traditional comedy. They did not all originate in the Commedia dell'arte, but they were sufficiently familiar upon the Restoration stage to be recognised as conventional by the audience.

(2) Conventional Episodes

Prior to The Way of the World, Congreve employed traditional comedy, or farce, as light entertainment connected with, though usually not an integral part of,

1 Congreve, William The Dedication of Love for Love To the Right Honourable Charles Earl of Dorset and Middlesex. p.215.

the main action and plot. In Chapter IV we noted how slender were the links between the kaleidoscopic actions of The Old Bachelor, a comedy in which convention predominated, how some traditional episodes were external to the plot of The Double-Dealer, and how similar episodes though stemming from the central action and theme, gave the structure of Love for Love an appearance of looseness. Episodes of this nature are, firstly, an old man married to a young wife. There is Bellmour's amour with Laetitia in The Old Bachelor, while her puritanical old husband, Isaac Fondlewife, is out of town; the intrigue of Lady Plyant and Careless in The Double-Dealer; and, in Love for Love, the trick played on the gullible old astrologer Mr. Foresight, by his wife and Mr. Scandal. The level of this type of comedy may be judged by the exclamation of Bellmour when Isaac Fondlewife unexpectedly returns home :

"Pox choak him, would his Horns were in his Throat" ¹

or the innuendo of Mr. Scandal when Mr. Foresight is persuaded to go to bed :

"Good Night, good Mr. Foresight; and I
hope Mars and Venus will be in Conjunction; - ²
while your Wife and I are together".

There is an episode in The Double-Dealer, which, though part of the main action, is the same tradition. Lady Touchwood persuades the vain Lady Plyant that Mellefont is really in love with her. He has only pretended to love her daughter because he has designs upon the mother. It is a conventional item with potentialities of low comedy and suggestive dialogue based on misunderstanding :

Mellefont : "Madam, pray give me leave to ask
you one Question -

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- 1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor. A.4 S.15 p.82.
1.13-14.
- 2 Congreve, William Love for Love. A.3 S.14 p.281.
1.1-3.

Lady Plyant: "O Lord, ask me the Question, I'll swear
I'll refuse it; I swear I'll deny it -
therefore don't ask me, nay you shan't
ask me, I swear I'll deny it . . . " 1

A second tradition of the Restoration stage is the masked marriage. It is always associated with farce and is the conventional punishment for knaves and fools who are tricked into marrying a prostitute or at least a loose woman, instead of the heiress whose wealth they covet. Congreve made use of this tradition in The Old Bachelor and Love for Love.

A scene of ridiculous love-making is a third comic tradition. Either a guache male makes love to a sophisticated female or a worldly male initiates an innocent female in the art of love. Heartwell, an old bachelor, is the awkward lover while Sylvia's innocence is a sophisticated intrigue. Tattle, on the other hand, is a worldly fop, though Miss Prue is a very young and innocent country girl.

Stock ideas invariably are expressed in the conversation. In this scene it is the insincerity of a lover's words. Thus, in The Old Bachelor, Heartwell says :

". . . Now by my
Soul I cannot lye, though it were to
serve a Friend or gain a Mistress.

Sylvia: Must you lye then, if you say you love me?" 2

In Love for Love, Miss Prue exclaims:

"O Lord, I swear this is pure, - I like it
better than our old fashion'd Country way
of speaking one's Mind; - and must not
you lie too?

Tattle: Hum - Yes - But you must believe I speak Truth" 3

Being traditional low comedy, the scene usually contains suggestive dialogue :

1 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer A.2 S.5 p.146 l.50-55.

2 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor A.3 S.10 p.64 l.44-48.

3 Congreve, William Love for Love A.2 S.11 p.260 l.49-53.

Miss Prue: "Oh, but I'll hold the Door with both Hands, and be angry; - and you shall push me down before you come in.

Tattle : No, I'll come in first, and push you 1 down afterwards"

OR

Sylvia : "Nay, but if you love me, you must marry me; what don't I know my Father lov'd my Mother, and was married to her?

Heartwell: Ay, ay, in old Days People married where they lov'd; but the Fashion is 2 chang'd Child".

A conversation between female characters is a convention of the Comedy of Manners, though it is usually an intermediate stage between traditional low comedy and the high comedy of wit. Men may be discussed in terms of stock attitudes which are affected and insincere, the dialogue may be malicious, or the scene may include both the stock attitudes and malice. Belinda's words in The Old Bachelor are a good example of the stock, affected attitude towards the male:

"Oh you have raved, talked idly, and all in Commendation of that filthy, awkward, two-leg'd Creature, Man - you don't know what you've said, your Fever has transported you". 3

Later in the scene the malice motif is stated:

Belinda: "My Denial is premeditated like your Malice . . ." 4

Love for Love has a scene in the same tradition where female malice predominates:

Mrs. Foresight: "You deny it positively to my Face.

Mrs. Frail : Your Face, what's your Face?

Mrs. Foresight: No matter for that, it's as good a Face as yours.

Mrs. Frail : Not by a Dozen years wearing - But I do deny it positively to your Face then" 5

1 Congreve, William Love for Love A.2 S.11 p.260 1.76-80.

2 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor A.3 S.10 p.65 1.92-97.

3 Ibid. A.2 S.3 p.44 1.6-9.

5. Congreve, William. Love for Love A.2 S.9 p.255 1.52-57.

4 Ibid. A.2 S.3 p.46 1.58-59.

Other conventions of the stage are the incensed father or uncle threatening to disinherit his son or heir; the scorn of fashionable town people for country gentlemen; and the faked, or clandestine, letter which motivates action. These, like the conversation between female characters, must be distinguished from traditional low comedy, or farce. They are perhaps best described as devices for producing a particular action or situation. They may be part of the main action, unlike traditional farce, which is invariably external and, like Shakespeare's scenes for the groundlings, designed to satisfy a certain taste.

Thus we find Lord Touchwood furiously denouncing his nephew and heir, Mellefont, in The Double-Dealer:

"... Death, I'll have him stripp'd
and turn'd naked out of my Doors this
Moment, and let him rot and perish . . ." 1

He intends to disinherit him. Similarly, Sir Sampson Legend in Love for Love speaks threateningly to his son Valentine, whom he plans to disinherit:

"... 'S' heart, live by your Wits, - You were
always fond of the Wits, - Now let's see if
you have wit enough to keep yourself. . . ." 2

There is Belinda's contemptuous description of the country squire in The Old Bachelor:

"Oh a most comical Sight: A Country Squire,
with the Equipage of a Wife and two Daughters
came to Mrs. Snipwel's shop while I was there
- But, oh Gad! Two such unlick'd Cubs!" 3

On two occasions The Old Bachelor, Congreve employs the conventional letter to set an action in motion. In The Double-Dealer, a clandestine letter from a lover is inadvertently handed by a wife to her husband.

1 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer A.3 S.1 p.153 l.109-111

2 Congreve, William Love for Love A.2 S.7 p.253 l.148-150.

3 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor A.4 S.8 p.76 l.26-30.

affectation. Nor is Mrs. Marwood affecting malice when she replies to Mrs. Fainall. She bears a deep malice, not only towards Mirabell who has slighted her, but towards the wife of the man she loves.

The second conversation between Mrs. Marwood and Millamant contrasts with the earlier scene. Mrs. Marwood is speaking sincerely, but Millamant is hiding her true feelings behind affected disinterest:

Mrs. Marwood: "That I detest him (Mirabell), hate him Madam.

Millamant : O Madam, why so do I - And yet the Creature loves me, ha, ha, ha, How can one forbear laughing to think of it . . . " 1

It is a new technique being applied to conventional comic episodes.

Congreve gave a clever twist to the scene of an irate father or uncle threatening to disinherit his heir. In The Way of the World the fictitious uncle is Waitwell, who is personating Sir Rowland, and the melodramatic threat has no substance, whatever (Act IV, Scene XII). Conventional scorn of the fashionable town for a gentleman from the country is found in the scene where Sir Wilfull Witwoud arrives at Lady Wishfort's home (Act III, Scene XIII). The purpose, however, is to reveal the mental quality of certain characters, not merely to introduce a conventional comic episode.

Even the drunken scene is not a farcical incident. It has a bearing on the main action and is pre-arranged by Fainall.

Finally, the conventional letter is devised by Mrs. Marwood to avenge Mirabell's slight. She determines to disclose his intrigue to Lady Wishfort (Act III, Scene XVIII). The new technique is that the letter rebounds and serves to advance the intrigue it was intended to expose.

These examples should suffice to demonstrate that traditional comedy became something different in The Way of the World. Its characters were still types, but types that each materially contributed a share to the action as a whole.

In the earlier comedies the conventional episodes might be removed without disturbing the plot, but it could not be done in The Way of the World. Each character plays his part in the dénouement avoiding the impression that extraneous incidents have been tagged onto the plot to entertain. This rounded unity, which includes so much that is familiar, may be clearer after we have examined the comedy of the situation.

B. COMEDY OF WIT

In order to appreciate the comedy of the situation it is essential first to examine the high comedy of Wit. Wit was placed in apposition to the low comedy of tradition and the two were linked by intermediate scenes, ranging from suggestive dialogue to malicious or affected discussions, which I have called conventional. In this way at least three grades of comedy were provided, without considering a satiric intention which the dramatist might have, or the meaning of the total situation.

As Congreve's dramatic technique matured, his portrayal of wit showed a definite development and the simplest way of presenting these ripening powers will be to look at some examples from each comedy. We then should be able to appreciate his concept of wit and its importance in a regular comedy.

(1) Wit in The Old Bachelor

Wit in The Old Bachelor is the kind one might expect from young, vivacious people who vie with one another, delighting in amusing critical comments, a clever retort, or an ingenious description. If the

character is disliked, the retort may be blunt or sarcastic, even malicious, but always there is the youthful striving to outdo the opponent. There are, of course, degrees of wit. Bellmour and Belinda are more vivacious than Vainlove and Araminta. Araminta, on the other hand, is more subtle at times. The general tone, however, remains constant.

Bellmour and Vainlove, for instance, vie with each other in a critical vein :

Vainlove: "Oh the Wise will tell you -

Bellmour: More than they believe - or understand" ¹

Then Vainlove turns the tables :

Bellmour: ". . Business is not my Element - I
rowl in a higher Orb, and dwell -

Vainlove: In Castles ith' Air of thy own building: ²
That's thy Element, Ned . . . "

Likewise Belinda and Araminta vie with one another :

Belinda : "Oh I love your hideous Fancy ! Ha, ha,
ha, love a Man !

Araminta: Love a Man ! Yes, you would not love
a Beast.

Belinda : Of all Beasts not an Ass - Which is so ³
like your Vainlove . . . "

With subtle irony Araminta turns the tables. She knows Belinda is staying because of her love for Bellmour :

Belinda : "I am tender of your Reputation.

Araminta: I am oblig'd to you - But who's
malicious now, Belinda?

Belinda : Not I ; witness my Heart, I stay
out of pure Affection.

Araminta: In my Conscience I believe you". ⁴

1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor A.1 S.1 p.25 l.15-17.

2 Ibid. A.1 S.1 p.26. l.29-32.

3 Ibid. A.2 S.3 p.45. l.25-30.

4 Ibid. A.2 S.6 p.47-48. l.8-14.

When the lovers meet, the pattern of wit remains substantially the same. Bellmour and Belinda vie for ascendancy:

Bellmour: ". . . But my Tyrant there and I, are two Buckets that can never come together.

Belinda : Nor are ever like - Yet we often meet 1
and clash".

Bellmour, however, is not to be suppressed:

Bellmour: "But tell me how you would be ador'd -
I am tractable.

Belinda : Then know, I would be Ador'd in Silence.

Bellmour: Humph, I thought so, that you might 2
have all the talk to yourself . . ."

in contrast,
Vainlove, lacks the gay banter of Bellmour, though the monotonous pattern continues:

Araminta: "Favours that are got by Impudence and Importunity, are like Discoveries from the Rack, When the afflicted Person, for his ease, sometimes confesses Secrets his Heart knows nothing of.

Vainlove: I should rather think Favours, so gain'd to be due Rewards to indefatigable Devotion - For as Love is a Deity, he must be serv'd 3
by Prayer".

It is Araminta who, this time, delivers the coup de grâce:

Vainlove: "You are the Temple of Love, and 'tis through you, our Devotion must be convey'd.

Araminta: Rather poor silly Idols of your own making, which, upon the least Dis- pleasure you forsake, and set up new . . ." 4

Occasionally a retort is sarcastic. Sharper is defending Araminta against Vainlove's foolish suspicion:

1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor A.2 S.7 p.48. 1.5-8.

2 Ibid. A.2 S.8 p.50. 1.16-20.

3 Ibid. A.2 S.1 p.48-49. 1.25-32.

4 Ibid. A.2 S.7 p.49. 1.35-39.

Vainlove: ". . . Yes I will go too - and she
shall see her Error in -
Sharper : In her choice I gad. . . " 1

Occasionally there is a touch of malice :

Araminta: ". . . why would you affront
any Body so? They might be Gentle-
women of a very good family -
Belinda : Of a very ancient one, I dare swear, 2
by their Dress . . . "

In general, the wit of The Old Bachelor is
wit for wit's sake, a youthful exhibition of verbal
sparring with nothing in view beyond entertainment.

(2) Wit in The Double-Dealer

A different technique marks the wit in The
Double-Dealer. Congreve apparently intended to distin-
guish between true wit and false wit, and certain
characters are made to comment on the false wit of
other characters. Careless and Cynthia perform this
function.

Lord Froth is an example. He says to Sir
Paul Plyant: "I assure you, Sir Paul, I laugh at no
Bodies Jest but my own, or a Lady's" 3 Brisk does not
wish to appear obtuse. He must try to explain Lord
Froth's attitude :

Brisk : ". . . Nay, duce take me there's Wit
in't too - And Wit must be foil'd by
Wit; cut a Diamond with a Diamond;
no other way, I 'gad.
Lord Froth: Oh, I thought you would not be long, 4
before you found out the Wit".

Careless comments irritably :

"Wit! In what? Where the Devil's the Wit,
in not laughing when a Man has a Mind to't". 5

1 Congreve, William The Old Bachelor A.4 S.5 p.72 l.36-38
2 Ibid. A.4 S.8 p.76-77. l.41-45.
3 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer A.1 S.4 p.129 l.22-23.
4 Ibid. A.1 S.5 p.130 l.23-27.
5 Ibid. A.1 S.5 p.130 l.28-30.

Then there's Lady Froth's silly and affected story of how love disturbs the true lover. It draws a dry and, perhaps, sarcastic comment from Cynthia:

Lady Froth: "I could not sleep; I did not sleep one Wink for three weeks together"
 Cynthia : Prodigious! I wonder, want of Sleep, and so much Love, and so much Wit as your Lady ship has, did not turn your 1 Brain".

Cynthia is again present to comment when, after a fatuous discussion of Lady Froth's poem, Brisk, Lord and Lady Froth indulge in what they consider to be witty social gossip:

Lord Froth: "Foh!"
 Lady Froth: Then she's always ready to laugh when Sneer offers to speak - And sits in Expectation of his no Jest, with her Gums bare, and her Mouth open -
 Brisk : Like an Oyster at low Ebb, I 'gad - Ha, ha, ha.
 Cynthia : (Aside) Well, I find there are no Fools, so inconsiderable in themselves, but they can render other people contemptible by exposing their Infirmities" 2

To drive home the point of her comment, Cynthia delivers a critical and ironic soliloquy when they leave, beginning:

"'Tis not so hard to counterfeit Joy in the depths of Affliction, as to dissemble Mirth in Company of Fools . . ." 3

After these comments, the extravagant mutual flattery of Brisk and Lady Froth is allowed to pass unnoticed, but no doubt the audience is conceded sufficient intelligence to recognise by now that it is false wit. It is interesting to note their affected pleasantries for another reason:

1 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer A.2 S.1 p.136 l.3-7.
 2 Ibid. A.3 S.10 p.167. l.81-91.
 3 Ibid. A.3 S.12 p.168. l.1-3.

- Lady Froth: "Well, I swear, Mr. Brisk, you understood Astronomy like an old Egyptian.
- Brisk : Not comparably to your Ladyship; you are the very Cynthia of the Skies, and Queen of Stars.
- Lady Froth: That's because I have no light, but what's by Reflection from you, who are the Sun.
- Brisk : Madam, you have Eclips'd me quite, let me perish, - I can't answer that". ¹

The conversation shows considerable mental agility, so that 'fool' seems not to imply an obtuse person. By folly Congreve appears to mean a lack of what he called 'judgement', that is, an imaginative mental awareness of truth, and this deficiency renders nugatory an otherwise keen and alert human intellect.

Unfortunately, there is too little direct contrast in The Double-Dealer to make this point clear. Mellefont and Cynthia speak alone in two scenes only. In each Cynthia is testing Mellefont's constancy and no more than a hint that imaginative intelligence, not verbal dexterity, is the essence of true wit may be abstracted from their words. In the first instance, Cynthia invites discussion by asking ". . . What think you of drawing Stakes and giving over in time"? ² Mellefont's reply which compares marriage to a game of bowls, reminds one of Bellmour in The Old Bachelor, but the phrase "the Game depends entirely upon Judgement" ³ is significant. Significant too, is the balanced intelligence shown by Cynthia when Mellefont suggests their running off to marry. She is not swept away by emotional desire. Her words are calm and reasoned:

"If you had not been so assured of your own Conduct I would not - But 'tis but reasonable that since I consent to like a Man without the vile Consideration of Money, he should give me a very evident Demonstration of his Wit:..". ⁴

1 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer A.3 S.10 p.167 1.81-91.

2 Ibid. A.2 S.3 p.140. 1.11-12.

3 Ibid. A.2 S.3 p.140. 1.21-22.

4 Ibid. A.4 S.1 p.170. 1.48-52.

(3) Wit and Imaginative Intelligence in Love for Love

When we studied traditional comedy and conventional episodes in the comedies of Congreve, I suggested that Love for Love was a complex of material which belonged to one or other group. There are characters like Ben, who is described as a 'sea wit' and Jeremy, a servant, who has a naturally witty turn of phrase, but they do not belong to the high comedy of wit that we are tracing at the moment. The clue to this comedy is found in Angelica alone.

Angelica appears to be the only character in Love for Love who truly may be said to have wit as Congreve intended the word to be understood and by that is meant both imagination and intelligence. She is wealthy and independent and knows the way of the world.

Valentine, though the male protagonist in the comedy, shows a surprising lack of imagination. It is this contrast, central to the comedy of wit in Love for Love, which convinces one that verbal dexterity without imaginative insight is false wit to William Congreve.

This aspect is further stressed by Mrs. Frail. She is a woman with a keen intellect who entirely lacks an imaginative awareness of truth. An example of her ability to retort quickly and aptly is her conversation with Mr. Tattle :

Mrs. Frail: ". . And what will you give me,
Mr. Tattle?

Tattle : My soul, Madam.

Mrs. Frail: Pooh, No I thank you, I have enough
to do to take care of my own . . ." 1

Perhaps the best example of her mental agility is the way in which she turns the accusation of her sister, Mrs. Foresight, who claims to have found her 'bodkin' in a house of ill fame, against her accuser:

1 Congreve, William Love for Love A.1 S.14 p.237. 1.62-65.

Mrs. Foresight: ". . . But look you here now, -
 where did you lose this Gold Bodkin?
 - Oh Sister, Sister!

Mrs. Frail: My Bodkin!

Mrs. Foresight: Nay, 'tis yours, look at it.

Mrs. Frail: Well, if you go to that, where did you
 find this Bodkin? - Oh Sister, Sister,¹
 Sister every way".

This woman, however, is the victim of the traditional masked marriage, because of her deficient imagination in wishing to marry any man for his estate, without love, which renders her keen intellect nugatory. In other words, she lacks true wit.

That Valentine is intended to lack imagination is shown in several ways. His debts from a wild life amount to nearly £4,000 for which he tries to blame Angelica.

" . . . so shall my
 Poverty be a Mortification to her Pride,
 and perhaps, make her compassionate the
 Love, which has principally reduc'd me to 2
 this Lowness of Fortune . . . "

He resents his father's offer to pay his debts on condition that he resigns his inheritance in favour of his younger brother Ben and says to the stern old man :

"I would have an Excuse for your Barbarity³
 and unnatural Usage".

To evade his obligation under the contract with his father - to which he verbally agreed in order to pay his debts and secure £4,000 - he pretends to be mad, so that his signature becomes invalid. He is criticised by Jeremy, Scandal, his father and Angelica, but remains complacent :

1 Congreve, William Love for Love A.2 S.9 p.255.1.60-67.

2 Ibid. A.1 S.1 p.220. 1.59-63.

3 Ibid. A.2 S.7 p.250. 1.59-60.

Valentine: ". . . But its wonderful strange,
Jeremy.

Jeremy : What is, Sir - ?

Valentine: That gray Hairs shou'd cover a green
Head - and I make a fool of my Father . . ." 1

Despite all this, he expects Angelica to accept him as he is, and is taken aback when she refuses.

Angelica is an enigma to Valentine because he does not understand the meaning of true wit. She is enigmatic for two reasons: firstly, to make Valentine realise the folly of his ways and, secondly, to test the depth of his love.

Angelica's mental alertness tells her that if she pretends to be willing to marry Sir Sampson, Valentine's father, she will be able to save Valentine, for "it would oblige him to throw off his Disguise of Madness, in Apprehension of losing me". 2

Her trick succeeds and Valentine, realising his folly, acknowledges his errors. He reveals his constant love by agreeing to sacrifice his inheritance for Angelica. With this demonstration of true wit the comedy ends:

Angelica: ". . Here's my Hand, my Heart was always
yours and struggl'd hard to make this
utmost Trial of your Vertue . . ." 3

The meaning of true wit to Congreve is perhaps clearer now than it was at the end of The Double-Dealer.

(4) The Way of the World

Though a study of Love for Love enables one to appreciate what Congreve implied by true and false wit, the distinction may not have been apparent to an audience

1 Congreve, William *Love for Love* A.4 S.10 p.295 l.27-31.

2 Ibid. A.5 S.2 p.314 l.113-115.

3 Ibid. A.5 S.The last. p.329. l.73-75.

who would see the comedy once or twice. In The Dedication of The Way of the World, Congreve complains that 'hasty judges' sometimes fail "to distinguish betwixt the character of a Witwoud and a Truewit".¹ For this reason, the comedy of wit is given especial prominence in The Way of the World. Congreve's words suggest a deliberate contrast between true and false wit:

"This reflection mov'd me to design some
Characters, which shou'd appear ridiculous
not so much thro' a natural Folly . . .

as thro'
an affected Wit; a Wit, which at the same
time that it is affected, is also false".²

The key word is 'false'. If my interpretation is correct, false wit implies, in addition to affectation, a deficiency in imaginative intelligence. In this play therefore, there should be, besides the transmuted remnants of traditional comedy and convention, an obvious contrast in the quality of verbal utterances which points to the mental awareness of each character.

This brings us to an interesting consideration. If the quality of verbal wit is to be contrasted, there must be verbal exchanges of a kind similar to those in The Old Bachelor; a character's intellect may only be revealed in the ideas he expresses and his actions, as it was in Love for Love; and finally there may be a tendency to comment on the false wit of some characters similar to the technique in The Double-Dealer. The Way of the World embraces all these techniques. In other words, the comedy of wit in The Way of the World combines some quality from each of the earlier comic plays with a more accomplished presentation.

Comments on wit occur in conversation and are veiled, brief and apt. Witwoud, for instance, is described as "a Fool with a good Memory, and some few Scraps

1 Congreve, William The Dedication of The Way of the World.
p.337.

2 Ibid. p.337.

Witwoud: ". . . a Letter from the Fool my Brother, as heavy as a Panegyrick in a Funeral sermon, or a Copy of Commendatory Verses from one Poet to another. And what's worse, 'tis as sure a Forerunner of the Author, as an Epistle Dedicatory.

Mirabell: A Fool and your Brother, Witwoud!

Witwoud: Ay, ay, my half Brother. My half Brother he is, no nearer upon Honour.

Mirabell: Then 'tis possible he may be but half ¹ a Fool".

Petulant's dull mind is exposed by his inability to appreciate the significance of Mirabell's reply:

Mirabell: ". . . . Come
I'm sure thou wo't tell me.

Petulant: If I do, will you grant me common Sense then, for the future?

Mirabell: Faith I'll do what I can for thee, and I'll pray that Heav'n may grant it thee in the mean time.

Petulant: Well, Harkee". ²

Lastly, the deep malice of Mrs. Marwood's wit is disclosed in an affected, though pertinent, conversation with Mrs. Fainall:

Mrs. Marwood: "And yet I am thinking sometimes to carry my Aversion further.

Mrs. Fainall: How?

Mrs. Marwood: Faith by marrying; if I cou'd but find one that lov'd me very well, and would be thoroughly sensible of ill Usage I think I should do my Self the Violence of undergoing the Ceremony.

Mrs. Fainall: You wou'd not make him a Cuckold?

Mrs. Marwood: No; but I'd make him believe I did, ³ and that's as bad."

These contrasts follow one another in the order cited as the play proceeds.

The next development in the comedy of wit is to contrast Witwoud's affected wit with Millamant's witty affectation:

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.1 S.6 p.351.

1.12-21.

2 Ibid. A.1 S.9 p.357. 1.83-90.

3 Ibid. A,2 S.1 p.361. 1.56-66.

of other Folks Wit".¹ Fainall is "one whose Wit and outward fair Behaviour have gain'd a Reputation with the Town";² and Millamant tells Mrs. Marwood that she finds the folly of Witwoud and Petulant "less provoking than your Malice".³ The comment on Petulant alone is direct and, consequently, longer:

Mirabell: ". . . Let not us be accessary to your putting Ladies out of Countenance, with your senseless Ribaldry; which you roar out aloud as often as they pass you; and when you have made a handsome woman blush, then you think you have been severe".⁴

Two grades of false wit are discernible here : the false affectation of Witwoud and Petulant and the lack of imaginative insight in otherwise intelligent people, found in Mrs. Marwood and Fainall.

The way in which Congreve deliberately contrasts the differing grades of wit in The Way of the World makes this part of the comedy much more satisfying than any of his earlier attempts. Firstly, Mirabell gives the laugh to Fainall :

Mirabell : "For Travel! Why the man that I mean is above Forty.

Fainall : No matter for that; 'tis for the Honour of England, that all Europe should know that we have Blockheads of all Ages.

Mirabell : I wonder there is not an Act of Parliament to save the Credit of the Nation, and prohibit the Exportation of Fools.

Fainall : By no means, 'tis better as 'tis; 'tis better to Trade with a little Loss, than to be quite eaten up, with being over-stock'd."⁵

Then Mirabell's superior intellect is thrown into sharp relief against the trite comparisons of Witwoud :

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.1 S.5 p.350 1.45-46.

2 Ibid. A.2 S.3 p.368. 1.25-27.

3 Ibid. A.3 S.10 p.388. 1.53.

4 Ibid. A.1 S.3 p.359. 1.161-166.

5 Ibid. A.1 S.5 p.349-350. 1.16-26.

Millamant: "Dear Mr. Witwoud, Truce with your
Similitudes: For I am Sick of 'em -

Witwoud : As a physician of a good Air - I cannot
help it Madam, tho' 'tis against my self.

Millamant: Yet again! Mincing, stand between me
and his Wit.

Witwoud : Do, Mrs. Mincing, like a skreen before a
great Fire. I confess I do blaze to Day, 1
I am too bright".

Immediately afterwards Mirabell and Millamant
clash in witty dialogue. It is sex antagonism resembling
the witty exchanges in The Old Bachelor, but of a much
higher standard. Mirabell indeed appears quite dull in
contrast to the adroit brilliance of Millamant's wit:

Mirabell : "... Is there a worse Disease
Than the Conversation of Fools?

Millamant: Yes, the Vapours; Fools are Physick
for it, next to Assa-foetida.

Mirabell : You are not in a Course of Fools.

Millamant: Mirabell, if you persist in this offensive
Freedom - you'll displease me - I think I
must resolve after all, not to have you -
We shan't agree.

Mirabell : Not in our Physick it may be.

Millamant: And yet our Distemper in all likelihood
will be the same; for we shall be sick 2
of one another . . . "

This is the highest expression of verbal wit
in the comedy. It is the realm of true wit.

The level drops, but the contrast continues,
when Millamant and Mrs. Marwood oppose each other with
cutting irony:

Mrs. Marwood: "What a pity 'tis, so much fine Railery,
and deliver'd with so significant Gesture,
shou'd be so unhappily directed to miscarry.

Millamant: Hae? Dear Creature I ask your Pardon - 3
I swear I did not mind you".

Down the level of wit plunges to the fatuous

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.2 S.4 p.370.
1.15-23.

2 Ibid. A.2 S.5 p.373-374. 1.17-29.

3 Ibid. A.3 S.11 p.388. 1.22-26.

affectation of learning in the dialogue between Witwoud and Petulant. It is the very negation of judgement :

Petulant: "If he says Black's Black - If I have a Humour to say 'tis Blue - Let that pass - All's one for that. If I have a Humour to prove it, it must be granted.

Witwoud : Not positively must - But it may - It may.

Petulant: Yes, it positively must, upon Proof positive.

Witwoud : Ay, upon Proof positive, it must ; but upon Proof Presumptive it only may. That's a 1 Logical Distinction, now, Madam".

Wit remains at this level throughout the conventional scenes of Sir Wilfull Witwoud's arrival which lead up to the scene in which Mrs. Marwood's malice and Fainall's falsehood and greed - both attributes which show a lack of judgement - are coupled :

Mrs. Marwood: ". . But first prevent their Plot, - the half of Millamant's Fortune is too considerable to be parted with, to a Foe, to Mirabell.

Fainall : Damn him, that had been mine - had you not made that fond Discovery - That had been forfeited, had they been Married . ." 2

The true wit of sound judgement reaches its highest expression in the dialogue of the marriage bargaining scene between Mirabell and Millamant. It is a superb example of two intelligent and independent people being brought into unison by agreeing to differ :

Millamant: ". . . I hate your odious Proviso's.

Mirabell : Then we're agreed. Shall I kiss your 3 Hand upon the Contract? . . ."

The pattern is too regular to be coincidental. The comedy of wit in The Way of the World is not wit for wit's sake, as it is in The Old Bachelor ; it is not

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.3 S.13 p.390. 1.15-25.

2 Ibid. A.3 S.18 p.398. 1.15-20.

3 Ibid. A.4 S.5 p.409. 1.148-151.

didactic, like the wit of The Double-Dealer; it does not stress imaginative awareness alone, as it does in Love for Love; it is a combination of the three in a subtle contrast and a purposeful unit. It suggests that imaginative intelligence is the essence of true wit. The surprise at the end when Mirabell produces the Deed of Conveyance which defeats Fainall's dishonest scheme shows his alert imagination.

The quality of imaginative intelligence has been repeatedly stressed because it is very important to remember its function in the comedy of wit when we examine the purpose of both the high and low comedy in the comic situation.

C. COMEDY OF THE SITUATION

In a comedy like Bartholomew Fair we are interested in the present resolution of a situation created by the meeting of a number of people with predominant character traits, not in the characters themselves. William Congreve was greatly indebted to Ben Jonson for the method of presenting the action in The Old Bachelor. The situation is loosely strung together into a kaleidoscopic sequence of intrigue, horse-play and wit, predominantly conventional or traditional, and the interest centres on how it will be resolved, not in the characters as people. The purpose of The Old Bachelor seems to be to entertain without instruction. In this respect Congreve was nearer Sir George Etherege and his school, than to Ben Jonson and his followers. The male characters, nevertheless, are based upon the theory of humours. Each has a predominant character trait which creates the situation. Bellmour believes that pleasure alone has meaning; Vainlove mistrusts all Women; Heartwell is overconfident in his own power to resist love; Fondlewife is a jealous and uxorious old man; Sharper is a cheat, as his name implies; and Captain Bluffe and Sir Joseph Wittol are both cowards, the first boastful, the second a gull. It is not difficult to see how an assembly of these men together with four women, might create a very entertaining situation.

When The Old Bachelor was produced in 1693 something happened to Congreve. The part of Araminta, a rather colourless though basically good woman, was played by Anne Bracegirdle, and Congreve fell in love with her. From that moment the theme, of mutual love acquired a new significance.

Having designed the theme or moral, Congreve determined to write a regular comedy that would be true in all its parts and in which Anne Bracegirdle would play the part of a good woman. The situation in The Double-Dealer is, therefore, quite different to that of The Old Bachelor. The materials are similar, but the purpose has changed. Instruction takes precedence over entertainment. False wit is exposed and even the traditional scenes contrast with the true love of Mellefont and Cynthia. The situation is still important and complete in itself, the interest is still centred on the resolution of the complications which arise, but the source of our interest and sympathy is the true lovers, Mellefont and Cynthia, who innocently have become involved in a situation over which they have no control.

Love for Love apparently returns to the method of The Old Bachelor, but an examination of the action soon negates this assumption. The entire action, as I suggested in Chapter IV, results from a single problem - Sir Sampson Legend's determination to disinherit his eldest son Valentine. An assembly of the characters does not create the problem. It is present in the beginning. The comedy is the reactions of various character types to the situation. This new technique of the situation enables Congreve to introduce traditional character types who react in a conventional way for the entertainment of the audience and it also enables him, in the higher comedy of wit, to disclose the relationship of an imaginative intelligence to constant love. Again Congreve has added something to Ben Jonson's theory. We are much more interested in Valentine and Angelica and the resolution of their problem than we ever could be in Bellmour and Belinda. It is a situation which poses questions. Should a woman marry the man she

loves if his behaviour suggests that he lacks imagination? Was Angelica right in demanding a demonstration of Valentine's constant love before she agreed to marry him?

The final development in Congreve's technique of the situation is seen in The Way of the World. A problem which gives rise to the situation is again present in the beginning. It may be stated as Lady Wishfort's refusal to consent to the marriage of Mirabell and her niece, Millamant. The action, as we noted in Chapter IV, is unified, and we have already seen that traditional and conventional scenes were transmuted to form part of this unified whole. The interest throughout is centred on the lovers, Mirabell and Millamant and the problem they must solve to be married.

The situation however, is complicated by a deeper problem. Should a woman sacrifice all her liberty when she marries? This problem is confined to the high comedy of wit. Mirabell and Millamant agree in the proviso scene that each spouse should be allowed a lawful degree of personal freedom. This idea is confirmed by Mirabell's words when he hands the Deed of Trust, by which her estate was saved from the avarice of her husband, to Mrs. Fainall :

" . . . it may be a Means, well
manag'd to make you live easily together".¹

In an age when the wife was virtually a slave, this was indeed an imaginative insight.

The situation of The Way of the World is, thus, very different from those of Ben Jonson or The Old Bachelor. The regular comedy has become a problem play, an intellectual unit pointing the way, not to Sheridan, but to Shaw. The total situation is still more important than the individual characters, but it is a situation which postulates thought, not merely one that exposes

¹ Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.5 S. The last. p.491. 1.57-58.

or condemns vice. The stress on human reason and imagination is something new in comedy.

To sum up the findings of this survey, I shall say that Congreve varied the proportions of traditional or conventional comedy until he achieved a balance in The Way of the World, where this element served not only to provide lighter interludes, but to contrast with the high comedy of wit in a unified action to which it belonged as an integral part. The increasing stress on imaginative insight in the comedy of wit led, inevitably, to a situation in which a problem is posed for intellectual consideration.

A closer study of this idea now becomes necessary. In the following chapter I shall attempt to establish the proposition that the characters in The Way of the World were more than types created for specific actors to portray. They were a group of carefully chosen intellectual beings who had evolved gradually until their assembly in a problematic situation enabled Congreve artistically to communicate his idea of balanced reason to the world.

CHAPTER IX

ACTORS AND CHARACTERS

Congreve wrote his dramas at a time when the number of performers on the London stage was limited and audiences were small and homogeneous. It is said that actors became associated with specific character types so that dramatists wrote their plays with particular players in mind. "A new play (the name of it I have forgot)", wrote Colley Cibber, "was brought upon the stage, wherein Sandford happen'd to perform the part of an honest statesman. The pit, after they had sate three or four acts, in quiet expectation that the well-dissembled honesty of Sandford (for such of course they concluded it) would soon be discover'd, or at least, from its security, involve the actors in the play in some surprising distress of confusion, which might raise, and animate the scenes to come; when, at last finding no such matter but that the catastrophe had taken quite another turn and that Sandford was really an honest man to the end of the play, they fairly damned it, as if the author had imposed upon them the most frontless or incredible absurdity".¹

The extent to which Congreve was influenced by this artificial narrowing of dramatic scope may be estimated only by noting the parts played by individual actors in his dramas.

A. ACTORS AND ACTRESSES

Thomas Betterton was the leading actor. He interpreted the rôles of Maskwell in The Double-Dealer and Fainall in The Way of the World, characters, Cibber's words suggest, that were created for him. They are both evil men and admirably suited to a stereotyped actor.

¹ Cibber, Colley An apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, etc. London, Dent; New York, Dutton. 1938. p.73.

We find, however, that he also played the part of Heartwell in The Old Bachelor and Valentine in Love for Love and are no longer sure that Cibber was correct. Heartwell is elderly; Valentine is very young. Both are over-confident, to be sure, but neither is a villain. Fainall and Maskwell are wicked men. Through suffering, Heartwell and Valentine find happiness; for making others suffer Maskwell and Fainall are punished. Finally if we turn to The Mourning Bride we find the antithesis of Maskwell in the virtuous hero, Osmyn, yet Thomas Betterton interpreted the rôle. It is a tragedy and perhaps Colley Cibber was referring to drama of a specific kind, so let us observe the practice of other actors.

Mr. Brown acted in three of the comedies. He took the part of Sir Joseph Wittol in The Old Bachelor, Jeremy in Love for Love, and Witwoud in The Way of the World. Sir Joseph Wittol, as I mentioned in Chapter VIII, is a traditional character and there is a definite indication in Act II Scene I that extempore dialogue is expected from the actor. Jeremy, though a servant, speaks lines which are carefully written and I doubt whether the part was intended to be played extempore. Witwoud is a fop who affects wit. The Way of the World contains no farce, so his lines are complete as they are written.

The characters interpreted all belong to low comedy, but, otherwise, they are very different. Sir Joseph is a country squire, Jeremy a servant, and Witwoud a town fop. One cannot imagine that the thought of an actor to interpret them influenced the creation of any of these characters.

Mr. Verbruggen took part in all the comedies except Love for Love. He played Sharper and Careless, who are indeed similar, but Mirabell, a man of reason and good sense, seems to be out of place in their company. So does King Manuel of Granada in The Mourning Bride, though the fact that it was a tragedy makes it less significant than the characters in comedy.

Mr. Dogget played Fondlewife and Sir Paul Plyant, both traditional old, uxorious men, but his rôle as the young naive, outspoken Ben makes it difficult to believe that Congreve was restricted if he wrote for specific actors. Whereas the characters of Fondlewife and, perhaps also of Sir Paul Plyant may have permitted some impromptu dialogue, the lines written for Ben are surely too good to be improved upon extempore. It must be admitted, nevertheless, that all are characters of habit. In other respects Ben stands alone.

Mr. Williams provides more convincing proof. He interpreted the suspicious, amoral Vainlove and his antithesis, the sanguine, trusting and honest Mellefont.

If one were to read The Old Bachelor and The Double-Dealer it is unlikely that a similarity between Bellmour and Brisk would be noticed. The first is a vivacious young lover, the second a city fop. Both parts, however, were taken by Mr. Powell.

The greatest contrast is seen in the rôles interpreted by Mr. Underhill: Setter, a coarse serving-man; Sir Sampson Legend, a stern domineering, egocentric father; and Sir Wilfull Witwoud, a foolish country gentleman. Had he played Sir Joseph Wittol instead of Setter in The Old Bachelor one might have overlooked the misplacement of Sir Sampson Legend, but there appears to be no reason to suppose that Congreve designed any of these rôles for a specific actor.

Mr. Boman is the only member of the company who appears consistently to have played the part of a fop. Lord Froth, Tattle and Petulant are quite distinct, but they are all of a kind. His interpretation of Heli in The Mourning Bride may be ignored, since it was a tragedy.

The Restoration saw the replacement of the boy actor by the English actress. Female rôles became more truly feminine and the sophisticated lady with her

affected mannerisms and airs was an important part of the social comedy. Perhaps the most attractive of all Congreve's creations are the affected society ladies who animate the comic dramas. Each is so individual that one cannot imagine he was restricted by the limited number of actresses in the company. To round off this survey, however, I shall glance at the rôles interpreted by each.

Mrs. Barry acted the parts of Laetitia Fondlewife in The Old Bachelor, Lady Touchwood in The Double-Dealer, Mrs. Frail in Love for Love, Zara in The Mourning Bride and Mrs. Marwood in The Way of the World. If Congreve intended certain characters for specific actresses one would expect Mrs. Barry to play the part of Lady Plyant rather than Lady Touchwood or Mrs. Fainall instead of Mrs. Marwood. The rôles she interpreted vary from the naughty high spirits of a bored young wife to conscienceless wickedness. The only resemblance in these characters is their lack of virtue.

Mrs. Mountfort played Belinda and Lady Froth, their only resemblance being that they are both affected society ladies.

Sylvia, Mrs. Foresight, Leonora and Mrs. Fainall were the characters acted by Mrs. Bowman. It is a varied selection. Sylvia is a prostitute who is determined, like Mrs. Frail, to marry any man; Mrs. Foresight is the bored young wife of a foolish old man, though considerably more mature than Laetitia Fondlewife, whom she resembles; Leonora is an attendant on Almeria the princess; Mrs. Fainall is described as a 'sweet lady'.

Great versatility is suggested by the rôles interpreted by Mrs. Leigh: Lucy, a vulgar maid; Lady Plyant, the vain and foolish wife of an old man; the nurse of Miss Prue in Love for Love; and that supreme paradox of the stage, Lady Wishfort.

We know that Congreve wrote for Anne Bracegirdle,

every good woman in his comedies, after The Old Bachelor, was created for her. Nevertheless, his artistic genius was in no way clogged by this consideration.

The parts she played were Araminta, in The Old Bachelor, Cynthia, in The Double-Dealer, Angelica, in Love for Love, Almeria, in The Mourning Bride and Millamant in The Way of the World. Each is so individual that even Angelica, who, of the five, most resembles Millamant, is quite distinct. They are however, all ladies of character and intelligence.

Araminta, of course, is irrelevant, as Congreve did not know the actress until The Old Bachelor had been staged. Thereafter his developing dramatic ability is imaged in these ladies, from the young and rather puzzled Cynthia, through the resourceful, balanced and intelligent Angelica, to the inscrutable and delightfully vague Millamant. Almeria, being the heroine of a tragedy, is not truly relevant.

There is a deeper reason than developing technique behind the growing complexity of these ladies. Professor Howarth rightly sees here a reflection of Congreve's unrequited love. The childlike Cynthia, disillusioned with the world, becomes the enigmatic Angelica, in calm command of every situation. Then she is Millamant, inscrutable, laughing at life, teasing yet sincere, the woman who will never be fathomed by her husband. As the complexity grows, so the wooing of the lover is intensified until it seems that Congreve himself has experienced the baffling love of a woman that cannot be won. Yet each lady is individual and distinct. Millamant no more resembles Cynthia than Beatrice resembles Viola.

There need be little doubt that Anne Bracegirdle supplied the inspiration underlying the unique character of Millamant. But, though he was writing for her, Congreve knew that her versatility enabled her to interpret unique and inspired rôles. Anne Bracegirdle was not merely an

actress for whom Congreve wrote : she was a motive impelling his aesthetic soul to create a true and regular comedy worthy of her art.

The minor characters are unimportant. Actors who took part once only in Congreve's plays are Mr. Kynaston, who played Lord Touchwood, Mr. Sandford, of whom Colley Cibber wrote, who acted Gonsalez the villain in The Mourning Bride, Mr. Smith who took the part of Scandal, Mr. Haines, who was Captain Bluffe and Mrs. Ayliff, who played Miss Prue. These however, are merely incidental.

The evidence seems to favour the opinion that, although the restrictions imposed upon dramatists by the theatre and a limited audience were real, Congreve was not unduly hampered by them in the creation of his characters. The words of Colley Cibber, therefore, need not be taken too seriously. A resemblance between certain characters probably owes more to a single artistic mind than to the limitations of the Restoration stage.

B. THE EVOLUTION OF CHARACTERS

Having decided that Congreve was influenced more by his own aesthetic judgement than by the actors for whom he wrote his plays, I suggest that, if he was guided by a single artistic idea which I have called a regular comedy true in all its parts, the characters in The Way of the World probably evolved from the material of The Old Bachelor through the developmental process in The Double-Dealer and Love for Love. (The exalted characters in The Mourning Bride are different, and so are irrelevant in this chapter). I therefore intend to search for evidence which will substantiate my suggestion, and at the same time I hope to discover some further information relative to Congreve's artistic idea.

I shall commence with the minor characters who,

though basically stock types derived from traditional comedy and the works of Congreve's predecessors, nevertheless show a new development in technique.

(1) The Minor Characters in The Way of the World

(a) Sir Wilfull Witwoud

Sir Wilfull Witwoud is a country gentleman. The only other country gentleman in Congreve's comedies is Sir Joseph Wittol in The Old Bachelor. Sir Joseph is a shadowy conception of a stock type though in his drunkenness and his gauche behaviour in the presence of ladies he resembles Sir Wilfull Witwoud.

Sir Wilfull also speaks a 'peculiar dialect' and this agrees with Congreve's definition of a character of habit in his letter Concerning Humour in Comedy. Other characters of habit who speak a distinctive cant are Ben Legend and Mr. Foresight in Love for Love. Congreve's imagination appears only to have reproduced one slight resemblance to Mr. Foresight when he created Sir Wilfull Witwoud and that is the sly dig at Sir Sampson Legend which reduces tension after the climax in Love for Love. Sir Wilfull employs a similar technique at the height of Fainall's rage by aptly repeating words Fainall had previously spoken to him.¹

Development is seen in the small touch of humanity that Congreve gave to Sir Wilfull. In readily consenting to assist Mirabell and Millamant by pretending that he has agreed to marry Millamant and so delaying Fainall's plot until it is overthrown by Mirabell, Sir Wilfull reveals sufficient humanity to raise him above a stock type or a character of humour. He is something more than Sir Joseph Wittol, Mr. Foresight and even that delightful character of habit, Ben Legend.

(b) Witwoud and Petulant

Congreve's warning in his letter to John Dennis (discussed in Chapter III) is of service here. Both

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.5 C.10 p.435
1.30-38 and A.5 C.13 p.439. 1.49-50.

Witwoud and Petuland may be mistaken for Jonsonian characters of humour. The first is sanguine and has a facetious wit; the second is splenetic and has a pseudo-satirical wit. There is evidence in the dialogue, however, to prove that these attitudes are affected. Mirabell says to Witwoud that "he so passionately affects the Reputation of understanding Raillery, that he will construe an Affront into a Jest", ¹ and Petulant constantly refers to his "Humour", ² indicating that it is what he 'would be' and is affected. They are, therefore, what Congreve described as characters of affectation.

Predecessors of Witwoud in Congreve's plays are the 'good natur'd Coxcomb', Brisk, in The Double-Dealer and Mr. Tattle in Love for Love. As I mentioned in Chapter II, the prototype may have been Wycherley's Lord Plausible.

Witwoud resembles Brisk in being quite satisfied with his would-be wit and in not hesitating to say so; ³ as Brisk prides himself on his literary ability, so Witwoud is proud of his affected logic; ⁴ and finally, neither Brisk nor Witwoud is aware of the world around him so that a sudden turn of events takes each by surprise. ⁵

Witwoud appears to derive one character trait from Mr. Tattle. He claims to defend Petulant, but says many detracting things about him when questioned by Fainall and Mirabell. It resembles the affected secrecy of Mr. Tattle who makes indiscreet admissions when questioned by Scandal and Valentine.

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.1 S.5 p.350 1.49-50.

2 Ibid. A.1 S.9 p.359. 1.159 et seq.

3 Congreve, William (a) The Double-Dealer. A.1 S.2 p.124 1.19-23. (b) The Way of the World. A.2 S.4 p.370. 1.19-23.

4 Congreve, William (a) The Double-Dealer. A.2 S.2 p.139. 1.63-64. (b) The Way of the World. A.3 S.13. p.390. 1.23-25.

5 Congreve, William (a) The Double-Dealer. A.5 S.The last. p.210. 1.12. (b) The Way of the World. A.5 S.The last. p.440. 1.25-27.

Petulant is a strange combination. In many ways he appears to resemble the cowardly bully, Captain Bluffe, but his social inadequacy resembles Caperwit in Love in a Maze by James Shirley. He also affects the splenetic humour and positive speech of Sharper, Careless and Scandal in Congreve's earlier comedies.

Sharper, Careless and Scandal are all men with few moral inhibitions who assist the 'hero' to achieve his ends and Petulant's affectation is similar, though his nature is gross. His contribution to Mirabell's intrigue is a blind act of signing as witness to a Deed of Conveyance which he did not read. As Scandal claims to "set up for Defamation", ¹ so Petulant claims to be a "malicious Man". ²

These two characters seem to represent the remnants of Ben Jonson's theory of humours in The Way of the World. Congreve's creative imagination appears to have assimilated different comic character traits into a single conception, but Witwoud and Petulant are really still character-types. Just as he continued to use compound and descriptive character names, so also he employed these character-types to contrast with and illumine the imaginative insight of a higher intellect symbolised in Mirabell and Millamant. They cannot be said to have evolved. They were rather created from selected material to heighten the meaning of the total concept.

(c) The Servants - Waitwell, Foible and Mincing

The servants Setter, Jeremy and Waitwell are all willing devices to manipulate the intrigues of their masters. Setter is a coarse, immoral pimp without character. He is really no more than a stage device. Jeremy is more sophisticated. He has been servant to a gentleman at Cambridge, ³ and his loyalty to his master

1 Congreve, William Love for Love. A.1 S.10. p.230. 1.6

2 Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.1 S.9 p.358 1.137.

3 Congreve, William Love for Love. A.1 S.1 p.119. 1.19.

in time of trouble makes him resemble a romantic servant on the Elizabethan stage. His speech prolix and he has a brand of natural wit. Waitwell is more colourless than Jeremy, but he is also more human. His loyalty is not unquestioned. Mirabell induces him to co-operate by promising him a lease on a farm if the intrigue is successful.¹ Here again is the human touch. Waitwell is not above temptation, and it is this which places him higher than a stock conception for manipulating intrigue.

There is only one serving-maid in The Old Bachelor who might be compared with Foible. She is Lucy, Sylvia's maid. Lucy, however, is coarse and malicious. She is truly a stage device to motivate intrigue. Foible is a main of a different class. She has more humanity than any other character in The Way of the World. It is she alone who seems to appreciate the sacrificed Mrs. Fainall has made for Mirabell.² Her words are sincere, without sentimentality or flattery, and they appear to flow spontaneously from a simple human appreciation of goodness. Foible has other noble qualities. She has known of a secret affair between Fainall and Mrs. Marwood for some time, but hates to cause trouble, and has honourably remained silent. Her words to Mrs. Fainall are :

" . . . I cou'd have told you long enough since, but I love to keep Peace and Quietness by my good Will: I had rather bring Friends together, than set 'em at Distance, But Mrs. Marwood and he are nearer related than ever their Parents thought for".³

Extracted from their context, these words may well appear to be hypocritical, but in fact they are not. Foible reveals the truth to Mrs. Fainall only because Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are threatening to ruin her and it would be wrong of Foible to remain silent any longer.

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.2 S.7 p.376. 1.37-38.

2 Ibid. A.3 S.7 p.383-384. 1.22-26.

3 Ibid. A.5 S.2 p.424. 1.19-34.

Her trustworthiness is further revealed by the fact that she also knows of an affair between Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall which she has faithfully concealed. We learn of her knowledge when she says to Mrs. Fainall :

" . . . I thought the former good
Correspondence between your Ladship and
Mr. Mirabell, might have hinder'd his
communicating this Secret". 1

At the same time she has the agile brain of a stock servant girl in the comedy of manners. She is quick to observe a weakness in the character of another person and easily convinces Lady Wishfort that her meeting with Mirabell in the Park was innocent by inventing a conversation she supposedly had with him in which he made several sneering remarks about the old Lady.² Her words advance Mirabell's intrigue (a function of the conventional servant) by inducing Lady Wishfort impulsively to exclaim: "I'll be marry'd to Morrow, I'll be contracted to Night"³

Mincing appears to have no purpose in the comedy beyond agreeing with everything her mistress, Mrs. Millamant, says and using language incorrectly. Quite suddenly she becomes as human as Foible. She, too, knows the secret of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood and has honourably concealed it. To save Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall from ruin she now joins with Foible in exposing the affair. Stung by Mrs. Marwood's accusation that they are mercenary, her high moral principles are revealed in one defensive stroke :

" . . No, if we wou'd have been Mercenary,
we shou'd have held our Tongues ; you wou'd
have brib'd us sufficiently". 4

In creating these two serving-maids whose sense of honour puts to shame the glittering society of the elite, William Congreve's artistic imagination swept

1 Congreve, William The Way of The World A.3 S.6 p.383.
1.16-19.

2 Ibid. A.3 S.5 p.380. 1.32-34.

3 Ibid. A.3 S.5 p.381. 1.54-55.

4 Ibid. A.5 S.11 p.436. 1.21-23.

beyond convention and tradition. Something new, a deeper insight, was added to the comedy of manners and the complexity of the social situation was increased.

(2) Lady Wishfort and her Daughter, Mrs. Fainall

I think it is significant that there is no old lady and no comparable 'sweet lady' in Congreve's earlier comedies who might be said to resemble Lady Wishfort and her Daughter, Mrs. Fainall. Oddly enough, there are times when Lady Wishfort's behaviour reminds one of Lord Touchwood in The Double-Dealer and Sir Sampson Legend in Love for Love. The resemblance to Lord Touchwood is very slight, but to Sir Sampson it is more striking. Both, Lady Wishfort and Sir Sampson for instance, are very domineering and tell their dependants whom they should marry,¹ They are apt to speak contemptuously to servants,² and they are both extremely vain. Perhaps it was to stress their vanity that Congreve was careful to tell their respective ages. At fifty years and over they should have been old enough to know that they no longer were attractive to young people, but they would not believe the obvious truth.

It seems probable, therefore, that Lady Wishfort was Congreve's final picture of a dying age - a vain, domineering old woman - whom he contrasted in The Way of the World with the new school of balanced reason and imaginative intelligence. It is therefore necessary to examine the evidence before reaching a decision.

A very interesting piece of evidence is to be found in Act III, Scene IV. There Lady Wishfort says to Mrs. Matwood:

"... There are Books over the Chimney
- Quarles and Pryn, and the Short View of
the Stage, with Bunyan's Works to entertain you" ³

1 Congreve, William (a) Love for Love. A.3 S.6 p.271. 1.93.
(b) The Way of the World. A.4 S.1 p.401. 1.39-40.

2 Congreve, William (a) Love for Love. A.2 S.7 p.252. 1.122-123. (b) The Way of the World. A.3 S.1 p.377 1.7-9.

3 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.3 S.4 p.379. 1.25-27.

Both Frynne, in his Histriomastix published in 1632 during the reign of Charles I, and Collier, in his Short View of the Stage, had attacked the English theatre. The coupling of Quarles and Bunyan (both remembered for their religious writings) with Frynne and Collier is significant, because Lady Wishfort's idea of entertainment appears to be quite in keeping with Collier's puritanical opinions.

When Lady Wishfort tells Mrs. Marwood of the severe virtue to which her daughter was reared, it is difficult to believe that her words are not intended to be a satire :

" . . . I promise you, her Education has been unexceptionable - I may say it ; for I chiefly made it my own Care to initiate her very Infancy in the Rudiments of Virtue, and to impress upon her tender Years a young Odium and Aversion to the very sight of Men - ay, Friend, she would have shriek'd if she had but seen a Man, 'till she was in her Teens. As I'm a Person 'tis true - She was never suffer'd to play with a Male-Child, tho' but in Coats ; Nay her very Babies were of the Feminine Gender,"

This is exaggerated prudery at its very worst, but it is not all. Lady Wishfort starts to tell Mrs. Marwood about the evil plays, using words like 'prophane' and 'blasphemy', so prominent in the vocabulary of Jeremy Collier. Her daughter, she says, heard "long lectures against Singing and Dancing, and such Debaucheries ; and going to filthy Plays ; and prophane Musick-meetings, where the lewd Trebles squeek nothing but Bawdy and the Bases roar Blasphemy".²

Lady Wishfort is so completely convinced that she has guided her daughter on the path of virtue that she is unable to understand why she has fallen. Her words are pathetic :

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.5 S.5
p.427. 1.3913.

"O Daughter, Daughter is it possible thou should'st be my Child, Bone of my Bone and Flesh of my Flesh, and as I may say, another Me, and yet transgress the most minute particle¹ of severe Virtue? . . . "

Mrs. Fainall, her daughter, has not only fallen, but she has been very unhappily married ever since as a result of her error. Her ignorance of men is patent. She is a kindly but unhappy woman, a character who has no parallel in Congreve's dramas. It seems that she was created to complete this part of the complex social picture Congreve was painting. One feels that he is saying: 'In this corner is Lady Wishfort, a woman whom Jeremy Collier would praise; there is her daughter, a kindly lady, suffering for her mother's prudery. Do we want to return to a social system of this kind?'

This part of the comedy is new, 'some new thought', so it is reasonable to find that although Lady Wishfort resembles two earlier male characters in her behaviour and ideas they all belong to the old society and that as a character she is unique in the dramas of William Congreve. Her daughter too can have no predecessor. I suggest that they were the direct consequence of Jeremy Collier's attack upon the stage.

(3) Fainall and Mrs. Marwood

Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are interesting for another reason. They have predecessors in The Double-Dealer, and we know that Congreve there admitted the failure of his design to write what he called a regular comedy. If there is a strong resemblance between Maskwell and Lady Touchwood in The Double-Dealer and Fainall and Mrs. Marwood in The Way of the World, it will add some weight to my hypothesis that Congreve fulfilled his design in The Way of the World. At the same time I hope to discover some evidence that Congreve's dramatic technique had developed.

¹ Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.5 S.4 p.425.
1.19-23.

(a) Fainall and his Predecessor

The impression one gains on reading The Double-Dealer is that Maskwell is too wicked to be convincing as a human character. One cannot imagine that he is able to love. Thus, when he speaks a soliloquy and says of Lady Touchwood: "I lov'd her once", ¹ the words jar. It seems that for a moment he has forgotten his calm, calculating hypocrisy and is now deceiving himself. His desire for Cynthia is much more probably since a handsome dowry goes with her.

Maskwell never seems to falter. His cunning is superhuman:

" . . . I will deceive
'em all, and yet secure my self . . . " ²

He even foresees the danger which leads to his downfall, but he gambles with fate for the riches success will bring, and loses.

Fainall, too, is a hypocrite, but he is not a monster. Mirabell sketches him in a few strokes:

" . . . I knew Fainall to be a Man lavish of
his Morals, an interested and professing
Friend, a false and a designing Lover; yet
one whose Wit and outward fair Behaviour,
have gain'd a Reputation with the Town. . " ³

He is, on the contrary, a weak and erring man. He has the same craving for wealth that we see in Maskwell, but he is not trying to deceive. He is merely exploiting the situation and seizing every opportunity to better himself, as his free admission that he married for money shows. ⁴ He obviously did not realise, however, that his wife was forced to marry him because of an indiscretion with another man, that he had been 'Out-witted' and 'Out-jilted'. ⁵ An error of this nature would be too human for Maskwell.

1 Congreve, William The Double-Dealer A.3 S.3 p.155 l.3.

2 Ibid. A.3 S.3 p.155 l.19-20.

3 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.2 S.3 p.368. l.23-27.

4 Ibid. A.2 S.2 p.366. l.119-120.

5 Ibid. A.3 S.18 p.397. l.5-8.

His craving for material wealth closely resembles Maskwell's but Fainall has human emotions. He desires to share his gains with Mrs. Marwood, whom he loves very well.¹ Even when he thinks he has Lady Wishfort in his power, and tells her harshly, as Maskwell might have done, that he will 'hear no Objections', a spark of consideration, quite foreign to Maskwell, may be seen in his words. He tells the old Lady that he will allow her to enjoy her "own proper Estate during Life".²

The resemblance between Maskwell and Fainall is striking. The distinction is that Maskwell is a personification of evil; Fainall is an evil person. The first is an immature conception; the second a mature creation. Maskwell, the egoistic monster, has the keener intellect; but Fainall is human, weak and erring and his lack of judgement makes him a proper subject for Congreve's 'regular comedy'.

(b) Mrs. Marwood and her Predecessor

Maskwell's evil partner in The Double-Dealer is Lady Touchwood. Although she is married, she is a dissolute, passionate, vengeful and intriguing woman. Her response to Mallefont's rejection of her amorous advances is revealing:

"... Mellefont! I burn; married to Morrow!
Despair strikes me. Yet my soul knows I hate
him too; Let him but once be mine, and next
immediate Ruin seize him" 3

Here is a core of appalling evil. Conventional revenge has become grotesque and wicked. It is something new, a different technique. The subtle suggestion with which Lady Touchwood poisons Lord Touchwood's mind against Mellefont (Act III Scene I) discloses not a woman but a monster, like Maskwell. She is evil personified.

1 Congreve, William *The Way of the World* A.3 S.18. p.399-400. 1.92-95.

2 Ibid. A.5 S.6 p.429. 1.5-6.

3 Congreve, William *The Double-Dealer* A.1 S.6 p.135. 1.113-116.

Mrs. Marwood never sinks to these depths. She is a frustrated spinster and well suited to be Fainall's partner in an evil design, but a superior technique reveals her as an erring woman who allows her frustration to overwhelm her judgement and reason. When she is hurt she acts impulsively. Previously Mirabell slighted her advances so she disclosed his intrigue to lady Wishfort; now she overhears Foible say: "I know Mr. Mirabell can't abide her"¹ and she impulsively suggests to Lady Wishfort that Sir Wilfull Witwoud will make a good husband for Millamant, a suggestion that she regrets later, but which, at the time, seems to be a sure way of hurting Mirabell.

Subtle insinuation is horrifying in Lady Touchwood because its basis is lust. In Mrs. Marwood it is a human weakness - the same desire to hurt Mirabell. She knows that Millamant will forfeit her half fortune if she marries Mirabell, but she insinuated that their love is no longer a secret and urges her to declare it openly.² I do not believe, however, that Millamant's fortune was her motive. All Mrs. Marwood's deeds point to a single desire, a desire to hurt Mirabell. It dovetails perfectly with Fainall's greed and she even urges him to act by mentioning the fortune, but, if one considers the situation, her words are little more than a subtle goad. Her real motive is the 'Foe' named 'Mirabell'.³

A very interesting resemblance is to be seen in the passionate nature of both Lady Touchwood and Mrs. Marwood. Maskwell, in The Double-Dealer, expresses a fear that if Lady Touchwood were to hear of his plot to marry Cynthia "Her Fury wou'd spare nothing, tho' she involv'd her self in Ruin".⁴ It is precisely what Mrs. Marwood threatens to do when Fainall displeases her:

"It shall be discover'd. You too shall be discover'd; be sure you shall. I can but be expos'd . . ." ⁵

1 Congreve; William The Way of the World A.3 S.6 p.384. 1.41-42.

2 Ibid. A.3 S.10 p.387. 1.37-40; 3 Ibid. A.3 S.18 p.398 1.15-17; 4 The Double-Dealer A.5 S.4 p.195 1.11-12.

5 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.2 S.3 p.365 1.96-98.

I think there need no longer be any doubt that these two ladies are very closely related. Congreve's imagination appears once again to have been producing images for that 'regular comedy' which he 'designed' to write in 1694 and so, inevitably, the pattern is similar. What lifts Mrs. Marwood above personification is the human touch of a superior technique. Fainall says to Lady Wishfort: "I have suffer'd my self to be overcome by the Importunity of this Lady your Friend".¹ Why should Mrs. Marwood have 'importuned' for Lady Wishfort if she were a monster of evil, like Lady Touchwood? Little touches of this kind make a great difference.

It appears to be true to say, therefore, that both Fainall and Mrs. Marwood have been humanised. They are not complete human beings, like some characters in Shakespeare's plays, but they have sufficient humanity to convince upon a stage. No more is required in a play that deals with a contemporary social problems. The function of the characters is to call attention to an intellectual idea. We are not primarily interested in their emotional lives. It was with reference to this attribute of the characters that I employed the term 'intellectual beings' in Chapter VIII. At the same time Mrs. Marwood and Fainall provide a core of evil which is an eternal problem in society and cannot be omitted from the picture.

(4) Mirabell and Millamant

Mirabell and Millamant are the most important characters in The Way of the World. If Congreve's social picture is complete, their function should be to provide some alternative to the society represented by Lady Wishfort and her daughter, Mrs. Fainall, and some remedy for the evil in Fainall and Mrs. Marwood, which may result from that society.

¹ Congreve, William The Way of the World. A.5 S.6.
p.429: 1.3-5.

(a) Possible Growth of an Idea

Mirabell is a complex imaginative structure. Like Bellmour, Mellefont and Valentine he belongs to the high comedy of wit, but he has passed beyond the simple concept of a character of wit, seen in Bellmour. He nevertheless still retains a few qualities which resemble those of his predecessors. He also possesses two qualities seen in Vainlove, the second lover in The Old Bachelor, so that Congreve's imagination (probably unconsciously) appears to have associated him with his earlier creations.

Mirabell, like Vainlove, is extremely attractive to women, and he also appears to have Vainlove's callous disregard for the feelings of women he has wronged. This latter quality, however, is only apparent, as I shall explain later. Valentine, in Love for Love, is similarly callous. Bellmour has the attribute of being able to overlook his lady's faults and so has Mirabell. Both Bellmour and Mirabell indulge in the recitation of verse when they meet a lady, but this is probably conventional. There is a similarity between Bellmour's description of an intrigue and the words of Mirabell describing his design to win Millamant. Valentine also delights in an intrigue. Finally, both Valentine and Mirabell employ insincere flattery to gain an end, and Mellefont agrees with any opinion so as not to arouse opposition.

The natures of these men also show a line of development. Bellmour is boyish and high-spirited. He likes to play tricks on others. He is always ready to lie his way out of a difficulty with plausible insinuations. Mellefont is adolescent and uncertain. He has very little self-reliance and depends upon others, especially Maskwell, to rescue him when in trouble. Valentine has the self-assurance of a very young man. Though he has squandered £4,000, he describes himself as "a plain easie simple Creature; and to be kept at small Expense".¹ The next step in a logical sequence is the young but mature man, and this is Mirabell.

¹ Congreve, William *Love for Love* A.2 S.7 p.251. 1.86-87.

Captain Bluffe remind one of Millamant's words to Lady Wishfort about the drunken Sir Wilfull Witwoud.¹ There need be little doubt that Belinda was the prototype of the social idiom of affectation that we associate with Millamant.

The adolescent Cynthia is quite unlike Millamant, but it is interesting to note that whereas Millamant's attitude to society is one of mature resignation to an unpleasant fact, Cynthia's is always one of adolescent condemnation.

A very different lady appeared upon the stage when Love for Love was produced. Perhaps even Millamant was not so enigmatical to Mirabell as was Angelica to Valentine. When she says to Valentine, after he has confessed to her that his madness is a trick to prevent his father from disinheriting him:

"How! I thought your Love of me had caus'd
this Transport in your Soul; which, it seems
you only counterfeited; for mercenary Ends,
and sordid Interest,"²

and then leaves, we expect him to cry with Mirabell after an equally fruitless conversation with Millamant:

"I have something more - Gone -
Think of you! To think of a Whirlwind,
tho' 'twere in a Whirlwind, were a case
or more steady Contemplation . . ."³

The reason is similar. Both Angelica and Millamant believe that a woman should be enigmatic and unpredictable to her lover. The difference seems to be that Millamant believes that the situation should persist for life. It is something permanent and her affectation is not merely a conventional attitude of lovers. Angelica's affectation is the conventional kind. It is a mask which she drops when she declares her love for Valentine.

1 Congreve, William (a) *The Old Bachelor* A.4 S.9 p.78 1.31-34. (b) *The Way of the World* A.4 S.10 p.414 1.53-55.

2 Congreve, William *Love for Love* A.4 S.18 p.309 1.30-33.

3 Congreve, William *The Way of the World* A.2 S.6 p.375 1.1-4.

Millamant is, therefore, something more than a conventional lover. She has a philosophy of life.

(b) The Possible Meaning of Mirabell and Millamant

Although, like his predecessors, Mirabell appears to be very attractive to the female sex, when the action of The Way of the World commences he has already come into conflict with Lady Wishfort and Mrs. Marwood. It is perhaps significant that Lady Wishfort, who now is said to hate him 'like a Quaker hates a parrot', represents the old social system, whereas Mrs. Marwood, whom he 'can't abide', is Fainall's partner in an evil plot. It is inevitable, therefore, if Mirabell is to symbolise an enlightened approach to social living, that he should be in conflict with these ladies.

Mirabell's apparently callous treatment of Mrs. Fainall, however, presents a difficulty. We are apt to wonder whether an enlightened young man would really behave in this way.¹ It is this fact, perhaps more than any other, which brings to one's notice a possible meaning in the behaviour of the characters in The Way of the World. 'It is not merely that mutual love does not exist between Mirabell and Lady Wishfort's daughter. Mrs. Fainall is the product of ideas current in the old social system, ideas expressed by Lady Wishfort, and she is intended to be seen as a 'sweet lady' suffering for her mother's prudery and folly. It is the action, not the characters, which is of primary importance. A marriage between Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall initially would have been folly, so he did what he could to protect her and with imaginative foresight persuaded her to sign a Deed of Trust. His words, when he returns the Deed to her, suggest a way of overcoming the social evil symbolised in Fainall: "it may be a Means, well Manag'd, to make you live easily together"² To regard Mirabell as a callous young rake would be to overlook the imaginative purpose of this dramatic episode. Not

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.2 S.3 p.368. 1.17-22 & 1.29-32.

2 Ibid. A.5 S.The last p.441. 1.57-58.

divorce, as suggested in Shadwell's Epsom Wells, but an antenuptial contract appears to be Mirabell's remedy for preventing unhappy loveless marriages.

Other aspects of Mirabell's complex character are seen in a clearer light if one examines a short passage from the philosophy of John Locke. The relevant passage reads as follows :

"The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it which obliges every one ; and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions".¹

Bearing these ideas in mind, one is able to discern a possible significance in Mirabell's behaviour. He felt no compunction in making a fool of Lady Wishfort because she was interfering with the liberty and possessions of her niece, Millamant, by refusing to consent to her marriage with Mirabell. If Millamant married without her Aunt's consent she would forfeit half her fortune. Mirabell had no intention of harming the old Lady. If she were caught in a contract he would "discover the Imposture betimes ; and release her by producing a Certificate of her Gallant's former Marriage".²

A second reason for the intrigue against Lady Wishfort is the mutual love of Mirabell and Millamant. In a sense Lady Wishfort is harming Millamant's life. "I like her with all her Faults", says Mirabell, "nay, I like her for her Faults".³ "I find I love him violently",⁴ says Millamant. To withhold her consent to what will be a truly happy marriage , Lady Wishfort is being unreasonable and so is acting contrary to the law of nature.

1 Locke, John Of Civil Government. Book III, Chapter II. Of the state of Nature. (In: The Works of John Locke. London, Tegg (etc), 1823). Vol.V. p.341.

2 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.2 S.3 p.369 1.55-57.

3 Ibid. A.1 S.3 p.348. 1.30-31.

4 Ibid. A.4 S.7 p.410. 1.8-9.

Mirabell, however, does not always live up to this philosophy. His belief in human reason seems to be so profound that he resents Millamant's conversing with less intelligent people. "You had the leisure to entertain a Herd of Fools", he accuses, "... How can you find Delight in such Society?"¹ It is Mirabell now who is interfering with Millamant's liberty, and she retorts aptly: "sometimes to converse with Fools is for my Health".² The word 'Health' is significant.

Millamant is an ideal mate for Mirabell. She appears to have imbibed the philosophy of John Locke as avidly as Mirabell and, consequently is as independent as he, with an acute intellect. Mirabell is apt to view life rather seriously in a dominating, masculine way and he is a ready target for Millamant's teasing wit. His plea for a moment of serious discussion is met by the quick retort: "What, with that Face? No, if you keep your Countenance, 'tis impossible I shou'd hold mine".³ Millamant has our sympathy, since Mirabell is too coldly efficient and authoritarian and he needs to have the bubble of his ego pricked. Millamant, we feel, will do just that. Where Mirabell, despite his philosophy, is biased towards masculine authority, she restores the balance by applying the doctrine of equal liberty.

Millamant is too enigmatic and too intelligent to be appreciated by a character of Witwoud's mentality. He calls her "a sort of uncertain Woman".⁴ Even Fainall, who has an acute, though warped, intellect, says that "my fair Cousin has some Humours that wou'd tempt the Patience of a Stoick".⁵ But her 'humours', her teasing, her enigmatic and independent nature are the very things which make her so fitting as a compliment to, and partner of Mirabell.

1 Congreve, William *The Way of the World* A.2 S.5 p.373. 1.6-10.

2 Ibid. A.2 S.5 p.373. 1.15-16.

3 Ibid. A.2 S.5 p.374. 1.49-51.

4 Ibid. A.1 S.9 p.357. 1.100-101.

5 Ibid. A.1 S.1 p.343-344. 1.20-22.

To accomplish a union of two such independent and intellectual beings is no simple matter, but, if this idea of freedom and equality is to be an alternative to the old system symbolised in Lady Wishfort, a solution must be found to the problem. "I'll never marry unless I am first made sure of my Will and Pleasure",¹ is Millamant's stated opinion. Marriage, however, will necessarily impose restrictions on liberty. Complete honesty and sincerity, an open and truthful discussion before marriage can smooth away many difficulties, because then the marriage will be based upon mutual understanding in addition to mutual love, and this is the solution offered. Mirabell's faith in the antenuptial contract is echoed in the legal tone of his provisos and Millamant's belief in the rights of married women is shown by the fact that her conditions all refer to personal freedom. It is an agreement based upon imaginative intelligence and balanced reason. Under the new social system a woman will no longer be the property of her husband and she will always remain enigmatic, unpredictable and fresh as though she were still her Lover's betrothed. In this way the bond of mutual love which drew them together would be preserved.

If one considers the unmistakeable reference of Sir Charles Sedley to the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes in his play Bellamira, which I mentioned in Chapter II, the association of Mirabell and Millamant with the ideas of John Locke does not seem extravagant. John Locke's treatise Of Civil Government was published in 1690. Whether or not the association was deliberate, the ideas were current when Congreve wrote The Way of the World and they do appear to explain the behaviour of Mirabell and Millamant.

The characters in The Way of the World, therefore, suggest that this comedy has a deeper significance than simple social satire. It deals with the question of a better society and the behaviour of the characters

1 Congreve, William The Way of the World A.4 S.5 p.406.
1.31-32.

is surely intended to draw one's attention to this purpose. Shallow laughter is appropriate to farce, but a true comedy touches deeper chords. When we laugh at the vanity and folly of Lady Wishfort, we feel at the same time the pathos of her blind faith in an inadequate social system based on prudery. We may chuckle at Mincing's quaint linguistic blunders and at Foible's ready invention, but we admire their upright principles and are moved to think of their comfortless lives while the Witwoud's and the Petulant's of society squander their substance on pleasure. Even our dislike of the greed and malice in Fainall and Mrs. Marwood is touched with pity when we observe that they, too, have finer emotions which folly has suppressed. Then we look to the fresh gaiety of the mutual lovers, Mirabell and Millamant, and their witty repartee fills us with delight and admiration as they cleverly resolve the difficult problem of reconciling liberty with marriage. In them we see the new society based on mutual understanding, freedom and equality, and our pleasurable laughter somehow becomes associated with the freshness of this vision. In my opinion, this is Congreve's technique as revealed by the characters in The Way of the World.

PART III

WILLIAM CONGREVE AND THE NEW TECHNIQUE

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER X

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF WILLIAM CONGREVE

In retrospect, considering all the evidence, I can find little reason to doubt that Congreve wrote his comedies in accordance with a definite purpose. He left no written explanation of what he implied by the terms 'regular comedy' and 'a comedy true in all its parts', so that one is obliged to infer from the comedies themselves the nature of his intention and his final achievement. Congreve himself expressed the view that to write a comedy true in all its parts was the work of 'a long life'. In other words, comedy was a serious work of art requiring great skill in the accomplishment. Although I have suggested that Congreve elected to write a tragedy so as not to take a retrograde step on the comic state when he undertook to supply Betterton with one drama each year, I find it significant that he selected a form which John Dryden in The Epistle Dedicatory of The Spanish Friar had pronounced very difficult to write successfully. It required 'art and judgement', Dryden opined, to achieve both a probable and a happy ending to a seventeenth century tragedy.

The Mourning Bride is the one drama to which Congreve appended a clear statement of his purpose in The Epistle Dedicatory. It is said to be: "to recommend and to Encourage Vertue".¹ The technique is rather unusual. Emotions of hope, fear and pity are constantly evoked and they alternate fairly regularly, but always attach to the virtuous lovers, Osmyn and Almeria. Appropriate settings, for which the stage was indebted to Sir William Davenant, are used to enhance the effect. In this way the audience virtually has the lovers in mind throughout the tragedy. The extreme fear engendered in the last Act, when Almeria lifts the bowl of poison to her lips, and the sudden relief when she drops it as Osmyn, Heli and the guards enter the prison, might con-

1 Congreve, William The Epistle Dedicatory. To Her Royal Highness The Princess. The Mourning Bride. London, Jacob Tonson, 1697. (Page unnumbered).

ceivably create an emotional atmosphere in which the audience would readily imbibe the moral instruction contained in the closing lines :

"Let us, that thro' our Innocence survive,
Still in the Paths of Honour persevere ;
And not from past or present Ills Despair :
For Blessings ever wait on vertuous Deeds ; 1
And tho' a late, a sure Reward succeeds".

This appears to be very much like art for morality's sake, and, perhaps, it did not satisfy Congreve's fastidious artistic nature. The Mourning Bride was very successful and it enhanced his reputation with his contemporaries, but the fact that he had succeeded at the first attempt in writing the most difficult form of seventeenth century tragedy may have suggested to him that it was not a kind of art which would live. Whatever the reason may be, Congreve followed Jeremy Collier's attack upon the stage with another comedy. His forte was wit, and the comic stage was more amenable to his genius.

What, then was Congreve's intention as revealed by his comedies? In his Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations, etc. he argued that he wrote The Old Bachelor to 'amuse' himself during a slow recovery from an illness.² The sneer at the inadequacy of his critic is obvious in these words, but the statement may have been true, since the evidence of the comedy itself shows no intention beyond light entertainment. Professor Dobrée, however, when considering Congreve's style with reference to The Way of the World, wrote :

"... one cannot but suspect that Congreve 3
was writing for himself alone".

Both instances suggest art for art's sake. We must not,

1 Congreve, William The Mourning Bride A.5 S.The Last.
p.74. (sic. i.e. 66).

2 Congreve, William Amendments of Mr. Collier's false and Imperfect Citations, etc. from The Old Bachelor, Double-Dealer, Love for Love, Mourning Bride. (In: The Complete Works of William Congreve. Ed. by M. Summers. Soho, Nonesuch press, 1923) Vol. III. p.182.

3 Dobrée, Bonamy Introduction II. The Style of Congreve. (In: Comedies by William Congreve. Ed. by B. Dobrée. London (etc) Oxford Univ. Press. (1949)). p.xviii.

however, overlook the fact that the closing lines of The Double-Dealer seem to be morally didactic, and that in Love for Love Congreve appears to be satirising extremes of social behaviour - both the license of the wits and the domineering control of parents. From the satire it follows naturally that balanced reason and imaginative intelligence are implicitly shown by contrast to be the better norms for contented social living.

I shall now venture the opinion that up to the time of writing Love for Love Congreve had not surmounted the conventional in comedy. His defence of the stage against the attack of Jeremy Collier contained little more than a restatement of accepted ideas on drama taken from the past. One might express his achievement prior to his writing The Way of the World in another way: he had followed the advice of Ben Jonson but had not succeeded in turning all to honey. His style resembled the light, easy dialogue of Sir George Etherege, his language contained echoes of John Dryden, he had followed Dryden's advice in making love the theme of all his dramas, like Wycherley he employed the technique of including at least one good woman amongst the characters in all his comedies, and he was greatly indebted to traditional comedy for the popular element in his plays. He openly professed to be following Wycherley when he attempted to write satire in Love for Love. The idea of satirising extremes may have been suggested by Shadwell, but Act I Scene XIV is recognisably Wycherley as also are the words of Scandal to Angelica in the last scene. The important fact is that one cannot point to any of his earlier comedies and say: this is pure Congreve. To assimilate his borrowings and make them part of himself, to show more self-assurance in his own technique, to achieve that singleness of plot of which Molière was the master in France, these developments were necessary before Congreve might hope to create a truly individual work of art.

The burning question still remains: was Congreve

when he wrote The Way of the World, writing for himself alone? May we truly describe this comedy today as art for art's sake? With all due respect to Professor Dobrée one must exercise care in accepting this view. He was writing for himself in the sense of not pandering to current taste (he expected his comedy to fail upon the stage of 1700) but he was not writing for himself alone. He was writing to communicate his vision of truth to mankind in a work of art that would live. The truth of great art does not preclude morality. It is neither art for art's sake nor art for morality's sake, but a unique vision of the truth as only a true artist can view it. Seen in retrospect the evidence in the foregoing discussion is linear towards the conclusion that Congreve was working nearer and nearer to the communication of such an artistic truth.

It is fascinating to study Congreve's maturing powers which lost nothing in the process. The technique which embraces Congreve's achievement is embodied in The Way of the World. He soared above all his contemporaries and immediate predecessors, passing beyond Ben Jonson's theory of humours into a new realm of social comedy based upon a matter for discussion, enquiry and thought. One has to bear in mind Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw and possibly to a lesser extent Christopher Fry to appreciate his contribution to the comic theatre of the future.

On the technical side The Way of the World was certainly Congreve's masterpiece. In it he achieved a unified action, a natural movement of the characters and a smooth flow of the action, with only one dramatic pause and one interchange of characters upon the stage within an act. The dramatic dialogue is brilliant and so subtle at times that its artistically ordered rhythms may only be appreciated fully on hearing the lines spoken by an accomplished actor. The arrangement of scenes, entry of characters and subtle foreshadowing of the action, foreshadowing that sometimes requires careful study, all contribute to the satisfying unity of the comedy as an

artistic whole. In addition, the unities of time, place and action are all scrupulously observed.

It is for many reasons, however, that The Way of the World is Congreve's masterpiece. The human situation with its anomalies, its love and hatred, good and evil, appears always to have fascinated him, but his vision of the world had been limited by immaturity and he had not been able to grasp the essential meaning of universality. Thus Mellefont's problem in The Double Dealer is unique. The situation arises from the assembly of a unique group of characters in a specific environment and its solution depends upon events which may never occur again. Similarly the problem in which the action of Love for Love is centred has a limited contemporary application. In a flash of inspired insight Congreve appears to have grasped the universal principles underlying human behaviour and aptly entitled his vision The Way of the World. The situation here is eternal and universal. Man will always love and pursue woman; societies will always change leaving pathetic remnants of their former glory struggling vainly to uphold those principles which gradually slip from beneath their feet; good, evil, folly, and imagination will always be part of society where society exists, and on such basic concepts William Congreve raised his immortal drama. It is his artistic vision of the truth revealed as he alone might reveal it.

Congreve's new technique is most apparent in the characters of The Way of the World. I think it is true to say that there is no real Jonsonian character of humour throughout the comedy. Even Witwoud and Petulant, who most resemble the earlier genre, are compounded from differing character traits and only affect 'humours'. At the same time I feel obliged to suggest that each character in The Way of the World was created true to a distinct humour in a wider and more pliable meaning of the word. Indeed it is as wide as human nature itself. Congreve's technique of humanising his characters enabled him to introduce an element of pathos which often is

associated with the wider interpretation of the word. It is this consideration which to some extent resolves the difficulty which arose when I discussed Congreve's letter Concerning Humour in Comedy.

That each character is distinct cannot be denied. We are no more able to imagine Mirabell behaving like Fainall than we can picture Millamant resembling Lady Wishfort at the age of fifty-five. What is more, the characters, and even the minor characters, develop as the action proceeds, but one never feels that they have done anything incongruous or unexpected. When Foible and Mincing rise to their full stature in the last Act it appears to be inevitable that they should behave in this way and it seems to be appropriate to Sir Wilfull Witwoud's boisterous nature that he should assist Mirabell and Millamant to defeat Fainall's plot. Rising above the rest in the full brilliance of its conception is the contrast of the old and the new in the characters of the new man and new woman, Mirabell and Millamant, and the pathetic old Lady Wishfort. The fresh vitality and sound common-sense of these intelligent young people is so absorbing that one scarcely realises to what extent the emotional lives of all the characters is hidden from us. Indeed it is all but hidden. In a play where a difficult social question is offered for discussion or thought this technique is necessary. Nevertheless each character remains distinct in The Way of the World and as true to life as real people one might observe at a social gathering.

In achieving a semblance of truth and reality upon the stage Congreve had passed beyond the exposure of social anomalies and the idea of a light entertainment. Probably owing to his defeat in the controversy with Jeremy Collier, he was urged to express in art the ideas he had found himself unable to explain in another way and the result was The Way of the World. His vision of the society which Collier advocated was embodied in the image of Lady Wishfort and her daughter, Mrs. Fainall. The revolutionary ideas of John Locke -

freedom, equality and social justice - were contained in the fresh and stimulating philosophy of life offered as an alternative by Mirabell and Millamant. The vision also revealed the basic worth of a despised serving-class, throwing it into sharp relief against an image of degeneracy in English society. The new man Congreve saw as a person of balanced reason and an imaginative intellectual power sufficient to foresee and forestall the evil ingredient of all societies. It was Mirabell's foresight alone that defeated Fainall's plot. This appears to be Congreve's vision of truth as it is revealed in The Way of the World. If one remembers the limitations of the Restoration stage and realises how completely the stimulating wit of the chief characters enables one to overlook the outmoded plot, it is indeed a magnificent achievement. A vision so advanced nearly ninety years before the French Revolution must not be overlooked.

Consciously or unconsciously, perhaps, Congreve surmounted all difficulties. It is tempting to think that this, surely his ideal of a regular comedy, was a spontaneous act of creation. His borrowings were assimilated into and became part of himself; he wrote with assurance and for the first time in his dramatic career he achieved a true unity of plot. The marriage-bargaining scene had been used by many dramatists before him, but none can compare with the scene in The Way of the World. What Congreve appears to have needed was a stimulus to bring him face to face with reality, and this Jeremy Collier provided. Reality supplied the social question and so his comedy containing universal values was born.

I believe his new technique rejuvenated the comic idea in England in much the same way as the dramas of Molière raised comedy to a respectable art in France. His vision was too advanced to be appreciated on the contemporary stage, but Congreve had revealed the truth as he conceived it in a work of art which satisfied his fastidious artistic nature and there was no more to

achieve. I believe this to be the reason why he assisted Walsh and Vanbrugh in translating Molière's Monsieur de Fourceaugnac into English under the title Squire Trelooby, why he wrote the masque The Judgement Of Paris and the spectacular opera Semele, but did not again attempt to write a full-length drama for the stage. There were, of course, other possible reasons, including his failing health, but this appears to be the most probably explanation of them all.

When D. Crane Taylor wrote: "His genius working within its narrow limits, places him as much above his contemporaries as Shakespeare's towers above his", ¹ he was not being extravagant. Congreve's achievement was not merely a brilliant style and the figure of Millamant, as George Meredith implied. Like many a genius he was scorned by many and praised by a few, but his ideal of communicating an artistic truth to the world in a form that would live was surely fulfilled. He chose the subtle beauties of Terence rather than the coarser strokes of Plautus which would have gained applause and the result on the contemporary stage was a failure - but it was a triumphant failure.

1 Taylor, D.C. William Congreve. London, Oxford Univ. Press. 1931. p.10.

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