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TWO LAUREATES AND A WHORE DEBATE DECORUM AND DELIGHT: DRYDEN, SHADWELL, AND BEHN IN A DECADE OF COMEDY *A-LA-MODE*

by

PATRICIA ANN CHAPMAN

Under the Direction of Malinda Snow

ABSTRACT

The comedies of John Dryden, Thomas Shadwell, and Aphra Behn were equally well-received by Restoration audiences, yet each dramatist professes divergent dramatic theories and poetic goals. In prefatory material to their plays, Shadwell insists a dramatist's duty is to depict virtue rewarded and vice punished, Behn rejects the idea that comic drama might influence morals or manners, and Dryden maintains that his only goal is to please the audience, despite his dull conversation and lack of wit.

A comparison between the playwrights' dramatic theory and their most popular comedies of the 1668-77 decade indicates that none of them represent with any accuracy their own (or others') work. Shadwell abandons his didactic goals in pursuit of approbation and income, while Behn unswervingly attacks social issues prevalent in a patriarchal society. Only Dryden's comedies—witty and fast-paced despite his protestations—conform to his theoretical goals for the comic dramatist.

INDEX WORDS: Dryden, Shadwell, Behn, Restoration comedy, Comic theory, Dramatic theory, Mix't way of comedy, Humours characters, Forced marriage, Commodification of marriage, 1670s comedy, Patriarchy, Shadwell's targets, Witty repartee

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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PATRICIA ANN CHAPMAN

Major Professor: Malinda Snow
Committee: Tanya Caldwell
Paul Schmidt

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Martha F. Bowden, who introduced me to eighteenth-century British literature, to Dr. Tanya M. Caldwell, who shares with me her passion for Restoration drama, and to Dr. Malinda G. Snow, who always asks for more than I believe possible. Thank you.

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Two Laureates and a Whore Debate Decorum and Delight:

Dryden, Shadwell, and Behn in a Decade of Comedy *A-la-Mode*

As the first three fully professional dramatists to establish themselves after the Restoration, John Dryden, Thomas Shadwell, and Aphra Behn have traditionally stood outside the set of comic playwrights often considered the greatest and most representative of the period. It is more often the comedies of Wycherley, Etherege, Congreve, Farquhar, and Vanbrugh that make up the major anthologies of Restoration drama. Even today, Dryden is better known as a successful poet and tragic playwright, Behn is recognized for her work as an early feminist, and Shadwell as the butt of Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* more than for their authorship of many extremely successful comedies. Yet when all three were actively producing dramatic works, writing and staging a comparable number of popular, well-received plays, Restoration theatre-goers appreciated and admired the playwrights equally for their comic work; Shadwell's plays were as popular as Dryden's, and Behn's plays were as well-attended as those staged by either of her masculine counterparts.[1] Unlike courtier dramatists—Wycherley, Congreve, and Etherege, among others—who wrote plays for their friends' entertainment and personal recognition, Dryden, Shadwell, and Behn were professional writers whose incomes depended upon successful productions.[2] And despite pressures to write and stage a minimum of two or three plays a

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[1] Shadwell is the author of at least eighteen plays and was the leading comic dramatist for the Duke's Company; Behn wrote thirteen plays for the Duke's, and is the author of at least five more; Dryden was the leading dramatist for the King's Company, author of more than 20 tragedies, comedies, and tragi-comedies.

[2] Shadwell's Whig politics excluded him from court circles and support, and despite Dryden's position as Poet Laureate, he never secured full support from the court and depended upon his plays, along with prologues and epilogues written for other dramatists' work, poems, translations, and editing jobs to survive. Although Dryden and Shadwell both had assistance from patrons, they still needed to produce successful plays. Behn's income between 1668 and 1677 depended solely upon her third-night earnings; dedications to

year, these three professional dramatists produced comedies as successful as those written by courtier poets who could afford to write and revise at leisure. Dryden, Shadwell, and Behn also shared common previous experience: all three were youths during the Interregnum, Londoners after the Restoration, and they possessed aristocratic attitudes if not status. And as competitors for the same audience, this professional group of three was forced by economic necessity to stage the sorts of play the audience wanted to see, with enough frequency to earn a living.

Dryden, Shadwell and Behn are joined in this critical discussion, however, because of their differences rather than their similarities, and although individual creativity was tempered by public taste, dramatic convention, and theatrical conditions, each dramatist professed divergent dramatic theories and poetic goals. Shadwell claimed that the chief purpose of comedy was didactic; the moral playwright should employ generic humours characters with whom the audience could identify, providing a mirror to their own vices and follies. Behn's goal was simply to provide for her audience entertainment and divertissement, thereby earning both recognition and her living, "for Plays were certainly intended for the exercising of mens passions, not their understandings" (Epistle to *The Dutch-Lover* 79-80). Dryden, who deplored writing comedy (feeling it was beneath his talent as a dramatist), acquiesced to public demand but felt that to focus on humours characters "is to carry them [the audience] from the conversation of Gentlemen, and treat them with the follies and extravagances of Bedlam"

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her work indicate that Behn did not receive the financial benefit of patronage until the publication of her fourteenth play, *The City Heiress* (1682), dedicated to the Earl of Arundel (later the Duke of Norfolk). Behn dedicated her ninth play, *The Feign'd Curtizans* (1679) to Nell Gwyn, and *The Roundheads* (1782) to the Duke of Grafton (Monmouth's half brother), but there is no evidence that either rewarded her with the usual £7-10.

(Preface, *An Evening's Love* 202-04). He felt that witty repartee between characters would entertain his audience who, while reflecting on the dialogue afterward, might identify a moral significance in the lines. Dryden's insistence that "the first end of Comedie is delight, and instruction only the second" locates his efforts somewhere between Shadwell's didactic intent and Behn's goal to entertain (Preface, *An Evening's Love* 278-79). All three, however, produced successful plays quite similar in scope and equally popular with Restoration audiences.[3] Is it really possible, though, to write comedies that involve a limited array of topics and conform to Restoration audience demands, yet integrate dissimilar theoretical concepts and professional objectives? The intention of this thesis is to determine how successfully the playwrights incorporate their professed theories concerning the purpose of comedy and the goal of the playwright into some of the most well-received, profitable comedies of the Restoration era.

[3] According to J.L. Styan in *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, it is "a commonplace that the plots and characters of Restoration comedy largely repeated themselves from play to play for some forty years" (1).

Preface

Because the period between 1668 and 1677 was relatively free of religious and political conflict,[4] my study of comedies produced in London during that decade will focus on some of the most prevalent social and economic issues: marriage, courtship, and women's place in a changing society. An examination of *The London Stage* indicates that post-Commonwealth comedy reached a peak in popularity around 1668, and retained this position for the next ten years. It then receded until its reemergence in the 1690s with a new variation to the comedy of manners. Despite—or perhaps because of—the absence of intense religious and political debate, it was a rather disordered era, filled with the contradictions of a society whose entire value system was under examination. Dramas of the period concern the idealistic expectations and cynicism following the Restoration and the confusion that resulted from an abrupt change in lifestyle: from Cromwell's Puritanism to the debauched court of Charles II. Double standards based on class and gender, questions of identity, the critique of a patriarchal society and female autonomy, and the relationships between men and women are present in most, if not all, comedies of the period.

Original plays written and produced in the first few years of the Restoration (shortly before the decade I have chosen to examine in this thesis) embody a reaction against Puritanism and focus on ideas of usurpation, restoration, and divine right. The effects of the Civil War, Interregnum, and Restoration of 1660 are present in comedy and tragedy alike: in the anonymous *Cromwell's Conspiracy* and in John Tatham's *The*

[4] There is a short, two-year gap in the middle of this decade while England participated in the very unpopular Third Dutch War when few comedies were written or produced.

Rump, both produced in 1660; in Robert Howard's *The Committee* (1662) and *The Usurper* (1664); even in romantic intrigues like Sir Samuel Tuke's great success, *The Adventures of Five Hours* (1663), which are rooted in royalism and aggrandized loyalty to an absent king. Most dramas feature full-blown class antagonism and re-fight the Civil Wars through bitter satires soundly lashing the Puritans and depicting Royalists surviving by their wits. But by the late 1660s, comedy had passed through what Frances Kavenik calls its formative stage to become "precisely what its authors and audiences wanted it to be" (48), depicting society's concerted drive towards what had been denied under Cromwell: pleasure and profit. These comedies also reflect changing interests: manners and behavior, life in London, the demarcation of masculine and feminine domains, sexual desire and marriage. They embody values of the court where men and women of fashion led a life of pleasure and intrigue, disregarding the despised rules of the previous regime. This is not to say that other cultural concerns are ignored or dismissed—the resentment of younger sons in a patriarchal society, the desperation of impoverished gentry whose property went in support of the monarchy—rather they are played out through the somewhat narrow focus of gender, sexuality, and marriage (Gill, "Gender" 191).

A decade later, audience interests changed again, this time in reaction to the political and religious upheaval over the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis of 1678-82. As political fervor gripped the nation, there was a virtual cessation of comedies, and only one, Behn's *The Feign'd Curtizans; or, A Night's Intrigue* (1679), did not fail. As attention was diverted to the political/religious crisis, attendance at the playhouses fell so drastically that the King's and Duke's companies were forced to unite. Behn complains in

her prologue to *The Feign'd Curtizans*: "The Devil take this cursed plotting Age, / 'T has ruin'd all our Plots upon the Stage" (1-2), and Shadwell's epilogue to *A True Widow* attempts to foster interest in the theatre as a distraction from the nation's problems:

> In troubled Times, like these — the Ancients chose
> T' exhibit Feasts and Plays and publick Shows.
> By such Diversions t'allay men's Fears,
> Compose their Minds, and molifie the Cares. (363)

Dryden also acknowledges how great an effect the Popish Plot had on the theatre in his dedication to *The Kind Keeper; or, Mr. Limberham*, published in 1680:

> *My Lord*,
> I CANNOT easily excuse the printing of a Play at so unseasonable a time, when the Great Plot of the Nation, like one of *Pharaoh's* lean Kine, has devour'd its younger Brethren of the Stage. (3)

By the late 1670s, political failures and libertine excesses of the king and the court had put such stress on the myth of the noble cavalier that the theatre registered this change by mounting plays which were "not simply lighthearted amusement, but a 'small Mirror of the late wretched Times'" (Todd, *Secret Life* 281). Playwrights commented on the immoral behavior prevalent among the nobility, upper, and upwardly mobile middle classes with themes of betrayal and moral anarchy and representations of decaying order and authority as depicted in Dryden's *Mr. Limberham: or, the Kind Keeper* (1678), Shadwell's *A True Widow* (1678), and Behn's *The Roundheads* (1681).

Until the Popish Plot in 1678, however, performance records indicate that comedy was by far the preferred theatrical genre, with audiences attending the theatre to see comedies almost three times more often than to see tragedies. And tragicomedy, the favored genre of early Restoration drama had been, as Derek Hughes puts it, "killed off

by declining faith in the heroic and the hero-king" (162). I have chosen to focus on the comedies of the 1668-77 decade because they concern events and issues of the day, void of significant political commentary or religious sentiment. They were written about and produced for an audience that included both aristocrats and the rising middle class, and prove most useful for comparing the work of playwrights such as Shadwell who claims an intent to reform vice, with those of Behn and Dryden who write primarily for the audience's pleasure and their own profit. The similarity in scope of successful, well-received productions makes it clear that audiences expected comedies to address the concerns of the society that supported the theatre and in which they could see images of themselves. Kavenik explains that while "some audience members would have seen these plays in simple terms, others in the same audience could see their desires acted out on stage so long as a pattern one might call 'compromise formation' allowed them to 'sin' with safety of conscience" (50). As long as the plays offered a moral alternative – a conventional couple who marry to balance the joining of the witty heroine to the libertine hero, the conformation of the rake, or a moral conclusion (often an ambiguous ending that could be interpreted ironically), comedies could be more licentious than in either previous or later periods.

Social behavior (formed by the consciousness of being observed), is inherently theatrical, especially in a period when women donned masks in order to disguise their identity, and dramatic French fashion and affectations were all the rage. Imitating the behavior of the fops, rakes, and courtiers of the Pit, the bourgeois capitalistic merchants and provincial fools in the lower and middle galleries, and the cuckolding Town wives of

the upper gallery, combined with representations of social encounters as “dramatic interludes” and caused a familiarity between the actors and the intimate group of Londoners who frequented the playhouses. Since there were only two small theatres, the plays were like living gossip sheets and the references on stage lost to no one. J.L. Styan makes it clear in *The English Stage: A History of Drama and Performance* that the audience “enjoyed sharing the mocking perception of its own social and sexual behavior with author and actor,” while recognizing that “it did not reflect the real world with any accuracy.” Speech and behavior on the comic stage were “guided by a strongly satirical impulse that cast a necessarily distorting eye over what it saw” (255), and subjects were somewhat limited to those affecting a homogeneous minority of the Court and upper classes. While Restoration comedies do not depict reality, Dryden, Shadwell, and Behn all used the genre in their own unique, yet at the same time comparable, approaches to dealing with social issues in modes that both challenged and reinforced the institutions of marriage and ownership in a patriarchal society.

From critical prefaces and dedications to their plays, we know that Behn wrote her comedies to please her audience and thereby earn an income, that Shadwell’s purpose was didactic, writing what he considered corrective social satire, and that Dryden—who felt comedy instructs best through laughter and not by precept or example—fits somewhere between the two with his goal to first please and then, (perhaps) to illuminate the foibles of the age. While there is no reason to doubt each dramatist’s professed intent or clearly defined dramatic theory, we should question how successful the poet is in adhering to his or her prescribed methodology. How well does Shadwell correct vice?

Can we detect undercurrents of reform in Behn's work, despite her claims to write only for entertainment and profit? And is it possible to identify scenes where Dryden endeavors to promote virtue through laughter at witty repartee?

The following list of very successful plays is particularly useful in examining the playwrights' goals and their treatment of social phenomena from three different yet legitimate perspectives, answering questions about how Shadwell employs comedy to correct social ills, whether Behn really ignores the problems of a changing society to concentrate on offering a pleasant reprieve from the challenges of everyday life, and if there are any situations in Dryden's work which indicate that audiences would have left his plays laughing, only to discover a moral message upon reflection. After a brief account of the dramatists' theories as professed in the prefaces of plays written during the first part of the decade under study, I will provide examples from the following six comedies to illustrate the differences in perspective affected by a diversity in dramatic theories: Shadwell's *Epsom-Wells* (1672) and *The Virtuoso* (1676), Dryden's *An Evening's Love, or the Mock Astrologer* (1668) and *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1672), and Behn's *The Town-Fop: or Sir Timothy Tawdrey* (1677) and *The Rover. Or, The Banish't Cavaliers* (1677). While the treatment of authentic social concerns typically featured in Restoration comedy appears—on the surface—quite similar in scope, "drama as living theatre responds less to reality than to perceptions of reality in its audiences. It also responds to internal theories, voiced or unvoiced, about what drama is or should be" (Kavenik 27). It is to those theories, and those of contemporary critics (that both clarify

and confound my argument and the dramatists' professed objectives), that I would now like to turn.

Prologue

> Your several Poets work with several tools,
> One gets you wits, another gets you fools:
> This pleases you with some by-stroke of wit,
> This finds some cranny, that was never hit.[5]

The "several tools" utilized by Dryden, Shadwell, and Behn to mold their wits and fools into characters who either instruct, entertain, or please and illuminate, demonstrate each poet's dramatic theory through a variety of dramatic effects. The following chapters will examine each poet's critical theory and determine how that philosophy is put into practice. Chapter One focuses on excerpts from the prefatory material that accompanies Dryden's *An Evening's Love* (1668), Shadwell's *The Humorists* (1671), and Behn's *The Dutch-Lover* (1673),[6] three critical prefaces that most succinctly express the playwrights' ideas of what comedy is, what it should do, and the dramatist's responsibility to his or her audience. Chapters Two through Four will examine one or more aspects of each poet's philosophy as revealed in his or her work: Shadwell's humours characters, Behn's assertion that she writes only to entertain her audience and earn her "daily bread," and Dryden's "mix't way" of comedy, a combination of both wit and humours, in an attempt to determine whether they have succeeded in or followed their precepts.

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[5] Prologue to Dryden's *An Evening's Love; or, The Mock Astrologer* (15-18).
[6] I have selected the prefatory material from Shadwell's *The Humorists* and Behn's *The Dutch-Lover* only to illustrate each poet's theories on what comedy is and should do. The actual plays will not figure in the remainder of this thesis because neither was well-received by Restoration audiences.

Chapter One

The Literary Debate, or: To Please, To Instruct, and To Please and Instruct. A Tragi-Comedy.

In his critical preface to *The Sullen Lovers*, Shadwell denounces Dryden for his shabby treatment of Ben Jonson, the poet who merited Shadwell's highest esteem, and whom, in Shadwell's words, "all Dramatick Poets ought to imitate, though none are like to come near" (11). Shadwell was infuriated when Dryden, in his prologue to *The Tempest* (1667), indicates that John Fletcher is the superior dramatist:

> *Shakespear*, who (taught by none) did first impart
> To *Fletcher* Wit, the labouring *Johnson* Art.
> He Monarch-like gave those his subjects law,
> And is that Nature which they paint and draw.
> *Fletcher* reach'd that which on his heights did grow,
> Whilst *Johnson* crept and gather'd all below. (5-10)

Also annoyed by Dryden's comments about Jonson's lack of wit in the *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1668), and perhaps envious of Dryden's position as Poet Laureate, Shadwell used his preface to *The Sullen Lovers* to initiate a debate over comic theory that would continue via prefatory matter for several years. He rebukes Dryden by stating, "I have known some of late so Insolent to say, that *Ben Johnson* wrote his best *Playes* without Wit," and castigates his fellow playwrights for "*Playes*, which have been wrote of late, [where] there is no such thing as a perfect Character, but the two chief persons are most commonly a Swearing, Drinking, Whoring, Ruffian for a Lover, and an impudent ill-bred *tomrig* for a Mistress" (11). Shadwell describes his moral agenda in the his letter to the reader of *The Royal Shepherdesse* (1669), a play in which the "Rules of Morality and good Manners are strictly observed in it: (Virtue being exalted, and Vice depressed)"

(100). Michael Gelber posits that the purpose of Shadwell's theory for comedic drama is "strictly devoted to the punishment of vice and the exaltation of virtue. Consequently, light banter offends him by its apparent lack of seriousness and by its tendency to link arms with the bawdy and the profane" (104-5). Dryden eventually responds to Shadwell's accusations in the preface of *An Evening's Love, or the Mock Astrologer*, where he counters Shadwell's indictment for not following the ancient rules of comedy:

> 'Tis charged upon me that I make debauch'd persons (such as they say my Astrologer and Gamester are) my Protagonists, or the chief persons of the *Drama*; and that I make them happy in the conclusion of my Play; against the Law of Comedy, which is to reward virtue and punish vice. I answer first, that I know no such law to have been constantly observ'd in Comedy, either by the Ancient or Modern Poets. (213-220)

Behn, who greatly admired Dryden's work, concurs with his dismissal of the "rules" in her epistle to *The Dutch-Lover*. She admonishes critics who take drama too seriously, and although she does not want to "lessen the dignity of Playes, for surely they deserve a place among the middle, if not the better sort of Books" (20-21), she insists that

> Comedie was never meant, either for a converting or confirming Ordinance: In short, I think a Play the best divertissement that wise men have; but I do also think them nothing so, who do discourse as formallie about the rules of it, as if 'twere the grand affair of humane life. (89-92)

But Shadwell is adamant about the didactic purpose of comedy and the goals of the dramatist and reiterates his stance in his preface to *The Humorists*:

> Here I must take leave to dissent from those, who seem to insinuate that the ultimate end of a Poet is to delight, without correction or instruction: Methinks a Poet should never acknowledge this, for it makes him of as little use to Mankind as a Fidler, or Dancing-Master, who delights the fancy onely, without improving the Judgement. (183-84)

Dryden suggests that his accusers' misconception of his work and purpose in writing comedy is an understandable mistake. They have not, he claims

> distinguish'd, as they ought, bewixt the rules of Tragedy and Comedy. In Tragedy, where the Actions and Persons are great, and the crimes horrid, the laws of justice are more strictly to be observ'd: and examples of punishment to be made to deterre mankind from the pursuit of vice. . . . Tragedie fulfils one great part of its institution; which is by example to instruct. But in Comedy it is not so; for the chief end of it is divertissement and delight. (253-58, 263-265)

Behn's dramatic theory does not differentiate between comedy and tragedy (perhaps because she wrote only one tragedy, *Abdelazer, or the Moor's Revenge*, published in 1677), and she insists that while drama is not worthless drivel, neither is it an effective method of inspiring morality[7] even though such a defense was previously used by playwrights in response to Puritanical accusations that the theatre was a pernicious influence on the morals of the audience. Behn states:

> [I]n my judgement the increasing number of our latter Plays have not done much more towards the amending of mens Morals, or their Wit, than hath the frequent Preaching, which this last age hath been pester'd with, (indeed without all Controversie they have done less harm) nor can I once imagine what temptation any one can have to expect it from them: for, sure I am, no Play was ever writ with that design. (67-72)

Neither Behn nor Dryden makes a pretense of being reformers, and in his essay "Dryden's London," Harold Love posits that "at this period and in this place, [Dryden] is no enemy of hedonism, accepting a 'soft' Hobbesian vision of the human being as a pleasure-seeking animal" in pursuit of gratification through entertainment (119). And Behn, as a woman who ventured out of the traditional women's sphere, was known as a

[7] In later years, as religious and political dispute escalated, Behn (who was by then quite well-known for her literary capacity and Tory politics) changed her opinion about the triviality of plays and came to see them as powerful instruments of political instruction. See Janet Todd's Introduction to *New Casebooks: Aphra Behn*.

libertine who wrote and staged scandalous plays and (like the actresses with whom she worked) as a whore. Yet Shadwell persists, claiming that "For the sake of good men, ill should be punished; and 'tis ill nature to the first, not to punish the last." He disagrees with both Dryden and Behn, insisting that playwrights have an obligation to

> reprehend some of the Vices and Follies of the Age, which I take to be the most proper, and most useful way of writing Comedy. . . . [A poet should] adorn his Images of *Vertue* so delightfully to affect people with a secret veneration of it in others, and an emulation to practice it in themselves: And to render their Figures of *Vice* and *Folly* so ugly and detestable, to make People hate and despise them, not only in others, but (if it be possible) in their dear selves. (184)

Eventually Dryden strikes a compromise with Shadwell and straddles the fence by uniting the poets' disparate purposes of comedy and goals of the playwright. He suggests:

> [T]he 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 publick view, that cure is not perform'd by an immediate operation. For it works first on the ill nature of the Audience; they are mov'd 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, establish'd, that the first end of Comedie is delight, and instruction only the second; it may reasonably be inferr'd that Comedy is not so much oblig'd to the punishment of the faults which it represents, as Tragedy. For the persons in Comedy are of a lower quality, the action is little, and the faults and vices are but the sallies of youth, and the frailties of humane nature, and not premeditated crimes. (269-285)

Before getting to "the business of the Poet," however, it is interesting to consider the perspectives of contemporary scholars who continue to debate the purpose of comedy, satire, and Restoration playwrights' goals.

Pat Gill points out that just as the design of comedy was a subject of lively debate during Behn's lifetime, "succeeding centuries continue to dispute their success, skill, and

significance: different critics find the same Restoration plays to be celebrations of aristocratic libertinism, witty social satires, or equivocal products of a flawed moral vision" (*Interpreting Ladies* 3). Although Robert Hume insists that the term "satire" in Carolean England had little to do with noble purposes or high moral standards,[8] he concedes that several "substantial and radically contradictory books could easily be written on satire in 1670s comedy, a subject that has yielded no consensus among critics" (348). Hume defends his position with examples from Dryden's *Marriage A-la-Mode*, Shadwell's *Epsom-Wells*, and Behn's *The Rover*, wondering how well these plays work as satires for the Restoration audience given the decided lack of punishment conferred upon the upper-class rakes and libertines. "Ridicule of sitting ducks is one of the standard features" of Restoration comedy, claims Hume, "but whether trashing obvious generalized butts from a position of comfortable superiority constitutes satire is open to question" (353).

Love suggests that since the rules of socially acceptable behavior were in flux during the first decades following the Restoration, both "literature and drama became a principal, if not the principal, source of practical advice." Love takes Shadwell's side and argues that plays depict "a gallery of violations of accepted Town decorum presented in order to discourage imitation" (118, 41). Yet Robert Markley maintains that Restoration playwrights employed prefaces and dedications to claim that their plays served a moral

[8] Hume cites definitions from Joshua Poole's *The English Parnassus* (1657), Elisha Coles's *An English Dictionary* (1676), Edward Cocker's *English Dictionary* (ed. John Hawkins 1704) among others.

function that ridiculed vice and promoted virtue simply to protect themselves and their reputations from critics who insisted that literature inculcate morality ("The Canon" 227).

Since there is little consensus on what Restoration comedy was, is, or should be in either the seventeenth or twenty-first centuries, perhaps a consideration of several well-received plays will help determine whether the playwrights' treatments of characters and issues exemplify their professed intents and purposes. Does Shadwell reward virtue and punish vice? Are his heroes admired, his fools despised, and his wicked characters punished? Do Behn's plays—contrary to her stated intent—do more than entertain? Does she directly, or indirectly, comment or pass judgment on controversial issues? And are Shadwell's accusations true? Does Dryden really provide happy endings for his immoral heroes and entertain the audience like the rope-dancer Shadwell accuses him of being, void of moral instruction? Especially interesting is how the poets' dramatic theories are evident (or perhaps not so evident) in their work. The remainder of this thesis will examine how the playwrights attempt to accomplish their goals, fulfill the tenets of their different philosophies, and ultimately to determine whether those intents and purposes are evident in the selected dramas.

Chapter Two

Shadwell's Righteous Stance, or: Lofty Goals are Seldom Met.

A Tragedy.

Shadwell utilizes many of his prologues, epilogues, and dedications to explain his theory of comic drama, and to insist that a poet's goal is didactic. This chapter will explore Shadwell's professed theories and objectives evident in *The Virtuoso* and *Epsom-Wells*, his two most popular plays of the 1668-77 decade. Shadwell was very pleased with his comedy *Epsom-Wells* and presents it to the Duke of Newcastle as a play "which, I confess, I am more fond of than of anything I have ever wrote" (Dedication, *Epsom-Wells* 102). Charles II was also delighted with it, attending productions at Dorset Garden on December 2nd and 4th (1672), and then requesting it staged for the queen on December 27th during the Christmas revels at Whitehall. *Epsom-Wells* paints life at a fashionable spa, its plot the fleeting love intrigues that often occur among revelers on holiday. It is an original play, full of the humours characters Shadwell likes to use in his attempt to instruct the audience in virtuous behavior. In *The Virtuoso*, too, Shadwell has "endeavour'd to represent variety of Humours (most of the persons of the Play differing in their Characters from one another) which was the practice of *Ben Johnson*, whom I think all Dramatick *Poets* out [sic] to imitate, though none are like to come near" (Preface, *The Sullen Lovers* 10-11); it is considered by most critics to be a satire on the scientists of the newly formed Royal Society. First produced by the Duke's Company at Dorset Garden on 25 May 1676 and attended by the king, it was a part of the repertoire

for the next twenty-five years.[9] Both plays are enormously entertaining sex comedies, full of witty repartee and jabs at the follies of humankind.

Shadwell typically employs three character types: those who are either wicked or foolish, both of which he utilizes as humours characters; and virtuous characters, those men (and women) of wit and honor who cannot be touched by satire (Preface, *The Humorists* 185-86). *The Virtuso* opens with Bruce and Longvil, described in the *Dramatis Personae* as "gentlemen of wit and sense," discussing the sad lack of values for gentlemen and their sons in the current age, when it is not only unfashionable to understand Latin, but "accounted pedantry for a gentleman to spell" (I.i.19-22). When Bruce complains that "the race of gentlemen is more degenerated than that of horses" (23-4), Longvil explains that "gentlemen care not upon what strain they get their sons, nor how they breed 'em when they have got 'em" (I.i.25-27). These opening lines begin Shadwell's satire that condemns women for extramarital affairs and men for "false learning." The traditional view—that this play is a satire against the new science of the Royal Society—is undoubtedly incorrect because the experiments described are farcical exaggerations of actual scientific research used to damn the foolishness of bombastic virtuosi, not the work of the Royal Society. Joseph Gilde, in "Shadwell and the Royal Society: Satire in *The Virtuoso*," insists that "far from being the object of the play's satire," the work of the Royal Society

> provides a standard for judging the follies of the two principal fools. . . . The Society's position that no scientific inquiry is valid unless it serves a utilitarian end is opposed to Sir Nicholas's conviction that the practical

[9] See Nicolson's "Introduction" to *The Virtuoso*, page xiii.

> application to be derived from scientific experiments is irrelevant and that knowledge is an end in itself. (469)

Gilde's argument is illustrated in the final act, when Sir Nicholas's servant interrupts the pseudo-scientist as he is explaining some of his inventions to Bruce and Longvil, frantically shouting that the "house is beset by a great rabble":

> SERVANT. Sir, they are ribbon weavers who have been informed that you are he that invented the engine loom, which has provok'd 'em to rise up in arms, and they are reslov'd to be reveng'd for't. Listen, sir, you may hear 'em.
>
> SIR NICHOLAS. O what will become of me! Gentlemen, gentlemen, for Heav'n's sake do something for me. I protest and vow they wrong me. I never invented anything of use in my life, as Gad shall mend me, not I. (V.ii.105-116)

Obviously, it is not the new science that Shadwell targets, but those who are "pretenders to learning"[10] and those whose humours are affected: foolish characters like the virtuoso and his admirers and wicked women who scheme and cheat.

Epsom-Wells begins with the fools and immoral characters of the play drinking at the well, discussing the benefits of the waters and illustrating the debauchery that takes place at the vacation resort. Two bullies, Kick and Cuff, drinking to ease the uncomfortable effects of the previous evening's brawl and too much claret, explain some of the other uses for the waters:

> KICK. Many a *London* Strumpet comes to Jump and wash down her unlawful Issue, to prevent shame; but more especially charges.
>
> CUFF. Others come hither to procure conception.
>
> KICK. Ay Pox, that's not from the Waters, but something else that shall be nameless.

[10] Also ridiculed by Aristophanes in *The Clouds*.

> CUFF. I have a great mind to run roaring in amongst ‘em all.
>
> KICK. Thou hadst as good fling thy self among the Lyons in the Tower when they are fasting. They’ll tear thee in pieces, but wee’ll have a course as they are going from the Wells.
>
> CUFF. Agreed: we seldom use to miss of some kind good body to supply our necessities that way. (107)

As in *The Virtuoso*, Shadwell indicates his targets at the very beginning: primarily cheating wives and imperceptive cuckolds, but also London strumpets and vacationing gulls from both town and country whose pockets are picked to provide a livelihood for petty thieves and whose foolishness supplies material for Shadwell’s attempt to “render Vices and Fopperies very ridiculous” (Preface, *The Humorists* 184). The epilogue to *Epsom-Wells* makes the playwright’s message perfectly clear:

> Gallants, leave your lewd whoring and take Wives,
> Repent for shame your *Covent-Garden* lives:
> Fear not the fate of us, whom in the Play
> Our bawdy Poet Cuckolded to day;
> For ours are *Epsom* Water-drinking Wives,
> And few in that lewd Town lead stricter lives:
> But for the rest he’d have it understood
> By representing few ill Wives he wou’d
> Advance the value of the many good. (182)

Is simply “representing” a few “ill Wives” Shadwell’s attempt to ridicule vice and reward virtue? Mrs. Woodly, the most wicked of the wives portrayed in *Epsom-Wells*, is described in the *Dramatis Personae* as “Woodly’s wife, Jilting, unquiet, troublesom, and very Whorish” (101). She cuckolds her husband by having sexual intercourse with his friend Ned Bevil, one of Shadwell’s “Men of wit and pleasure” and supposedly one of the virtuous persons that the audience should want to emulate. Rains, Bevil’s friend and

another gentleman of wit and pleasure, questions Shadwell's "virtuous" protagonist's conduct when he asks:

> RAINS. Are not thou a Villain to Cuckold this honest fellow, and thy friend *Ned*?"
>
> BEVIL. Gad, it's impossible to be a man of honour in these Cafes. But my intrigue with her began before my Friendship with him, and so I made a friend of my Cuckold, and not a Cuckold of my friend.
>
> RAINS. An admirable School distinction. (109)

Despite Rains's sarcastic reply, his behavior is just as unprincipled as Bevil's, and when Mrs. Jilt, a "silly, affected Whore, [and] Pretender to Vertue" (101) sends a note requesting the pleasure of his company, he justifies his acceptance, saying: "Mrs. *Jilt* appointed to meet me here, she's handsome, and I hope sound.[11] I love *Lucia* even to the renouncing of Wine and good Company; but flesh and blood is not able to hold out her time without some refreshment by the bye" (152). Later, Rains accepts another "intrigue" invitation, this time from Mrs. Woodly, who is jealous of Bevil's attraction to Carolina. Anxious to rid herself of a ridiculous and inept husband (also described by Shadwell as a man of wit and pleasure), and settle her score with the lost lover, she incriminates Bevil and encourages her husband to initiate a duel:

> MRS. WOODLY [to Mr. Woodly]. That false Villain, *Bevil* has again had the impudence to sollicite my virtue, and after he had ask'd me a thousand pardons, he was as audacious to press me to a meeting, saying, he would defend me against all your rage, and that there was no way for me left, but to fling my self upon him for protection.
>
> WOODLY. S'death and Hell, and I'le reward him for't.

[11] I.e. not infected with venereal disease.

> MRS. WOODLY. Lord, how I tremble, do not quarrel,[12] good Dear; though you are a naughty man, I cannot but love you yet, and wou'd not have told you this, but to clear my honour; take two or three of your Servants, and beat him soundly; do not quarrel, good Dear.
>
> WOODLY. I'le warrant you, let me alone.[13] [*Exit* Woodly.
>
> MRS. WOODLY. I know he has too much honour not to meet him singly; if he kills *Bevil*, I am reveng'd, if *Bevil* kills him, he rids me of the worst Husband for my humour in Christendom; but I'le to Mr. *Rains*, he's a gentleman indeed. (173)

Woodly isn't the only man duped by a conniving woman in this comedy. The lower plot centers on country justice Clodpate, "a publick spirited, politick, discontented Fop, an immoderate Hater of *London*, and a Lover of the Country above measure, a hearty true *English Coxcomb*" who has come to Epsom to find a wife (101). Clodpate first proposes to Lucia, but when she tells him that she has vowed to marry a knight and spend all her life in London, he focuses his unwanted attention on her friend, Carolina. The girls eventually rid themselves of this country pest when Lucia tells him that Carolina wants him to meet her in the cemetery and marry immediately because her brother is coming to drag her back to London against her will. Clodpate rushes off to the church-yard in search of Carolina, but runs into the bullies Cuff and Kick who not only rob him of his money, tie him up, and send his beloved horse racing for London, but go one step further to ensure their escape:

> KICK. If we had only bound him, some body might have pass'd by by accident and unloos'd him; but to tie his hands behind him, and take a sheet off the next Hedge, and tie him up in it like a Ghost, and gag him, was a master-piece of Roguery.

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[12] I.e. duel.
[13] I.e. "I'll do it my own way."

> CUFF. This way will not only secure us from present pursuit, for no body durst come near him to unbind his hands. But it will make excellent sport, he'll fright all the Town out of their wits. (164)

Clodpate eventually dislodges the gag from his mouth and manages to convince his servant, Toby, that he is not a ghost. Toby then informs his master that his beloved mare has run away and that the county justice has been duped by Carolina and her friends:

> CLODPATE. Oh, what shall I do? Oh miserable man! Oh poor Dapple—I love her so, I could go into mourning for her. I had as good almost have lost Carolina.
>
> TOBY. Nay, you had better, Sir; she was in the Plot against you to night, and abus'd you all this while with a story of the Church-yard.
>
> CLODPATE. Gudsooks, abuse me?
>
> TOBY. She has no Brother hates the country, is an absolute vain *London* Lady, and has made sport with you all this night. (168)

Shadwell's virtuous characters, those "Men of Wit and Pleasure" and "young Ladies, of Wit, beauty and Fortune" treat Clodpate in an unkind and callous manner, yet they are rewarded in the final act of the play. While Shadwell does not succeed in his decree that characters be entirely virtuous or completely loathsome, he does create a marvelous humours character in Clodpate. The country justice eventually marries Mrs. Jilt who, knowing Clodpate's aversion to London, has been pretending to be a gentlewoman who hates city life and loves to milk cows. Mrs. Jilt's sister, Peg (Mrs. Woodly's maid), arranges to have another servant impersonate a parson and perform a marriage ceremony for her sister and Clodpate. Immediately after the ceremony however, the new bride tells her husband that she really prefers life in London:

> JILT. Did you think I would be mop'd up in a house in *Sussex*? Sister,

> take a place in the Coach, and to morrow to *London*, get my Brother to bespeak me a fine Coach and Horses, and to hire me a House in *Lincolns-Inn-Fields*, I shall find Credit for Furniture; but now I think on't, my Dear [to Clodpate], you shall go with me. You are so strangely Rustical, I swear, you must be better bred, if you think to please me; upon my word you must. (177)

As soon as Clopate, desperate to be released from such a union, promises (in front of witnesses) to pay Peg to arrange an annulment and makes a financial settlement with his "wife," Peg admits, "Well now, Sir, know the Parson would not marry you, because the hour was not Canonical, but I was fain to steal a Cassock, and counterfeit a Beard for Mr. *Woodly's* man. Look you, this is the first Parson I ever ordain'd" and pulls the beard off the imposter's face (179-80). In Clodpate, Shadwell has created the ultimate foolish coxcomb whose delusions of his own importance lead to his downfall. But would Shadwell's audience see images of themselves in Clodpate's vanity, or would the reflection in the mirror always be that of a ridiculous friend or neighbor?

Even more contrary to Shadwell's professed goals for didactic comedy is that evil is punished and virtue rewarded. Except for Lucia and Carolina, the "Two young ladies of Wit, beauty and Fortune" (101), every female character in *Epsom-Wells* is portrayed as a cheat, strumpet, or whore. Yet at the conclusion of the comedy, every women gets what she wants: Lucia and Carolina promise to take Rains and Bevil for their servants "upon trial" (181), Mrs. Jilt will receive financial maintenance from the foolish Clodpate, and Mrs. Woodly—the most wicked character in the play—is not only released from her marriage vows, but gets enough money in a separation agreement to satisfy her desires and pursuit of pleasure, and freedom to "enjoy all Priviledges of other separate Ladies, without any lett, hindrance, or molestation whatsoever" (180). It is Mr. Woodly who

suggests to his wife: “I restore you all your Portion, and add 2000 *l*. to it for the use I have had on you” (180), endowing upon the woman who has cuckolded him, lied to him, and instigated a duel in the hope that he would perish in the process, the means to enjoy the life she desires. How can Shadwell damn Dryden for providing happy endings for his immoral characters? It seems here as though the corrupt female characters have, in actuality, “won.” Gill suggests that Shadwell’s satire “functions as an obscene joke, opening up the private lives of fallen women to public scrutiny. The threat of exposure . . . prevents a worldly female adversary from carrying out her plans of independence or revenge. It puts her firmly back in her place by forcing her to rely on a man’s good nature and discretion” (*Interpreting Ladies* 14). Yet the final action of both separating couples in *Epsom-Wells* merely adheres to laws of the time:

> Parliamentary divorce was rare and could only be granted in cases of adultery, resulting in much scandal as well as condemnation from the society. . . . In addition to destroying the privacy of those involved, litigation through the ecclesiastical courts was expensive, particularly for the husband. If he were ruled guilty, the judge assessed alimony, usually a third of the husband’s land and immovable goods. Even if the husband should win his case and prove his wife’s infidelity, he was required to provide his wife with a separate maintenance while, at the same time, suffering the social stigma of being a cuckolded husband. (Young 12)

If providing his wife with a financial settlement for separate maintenance is an act—as Gill suggests—of the husband putting his “female adversary” firmly back in her place, it certainly does not apply to the separating couples in Shadwell’s comedies; what his “fallen women” *want* is financial maintenance and physical separation from incompatible husbands. I simply cannot find the poetic justice Shadwell insists upon in so much of his prefatory material, which keeps the playwright from being “as little use to Mankind as a

Fidler, or Dancing-Master, who delights the fancy onely, without improving the Judgement" (Preface, *The Humorists* 184). I would argue that Shadwell has failed miserably in his attempt to punish vice and reward virtue. There are no completely virtuous characters to reward, and those who are vice-ridden are not punished but rewarded for their debauched, self-indulgent behavior.

While the prevalent ideology among the upper classes during the Restoration was that marriage works badly, even middle class marriages in *Epsom-Wells* are shaky. Mrs. Bisket sends her "quiet, humble, civil Cuckold" of a husband to bring gallants home to play cards (and other games!) with her while he goes to the bowling green or gambles with his friend Mr. Fribble. Fribble's wife looks forward to her husband's departure in order to spend time in "better Company" (127), and since Fribble has brought his wife to Epsom to drink the waters and conceive a child, the duplicitous Mrs. Fribble says, "I use all the means I can, since he is so desirous of one" (128). Shadwell does and excellent job in creating humours characters of these foolish, horn-bearing husbands who imprudently exhibit their wives to the bullies Kick and Cuff in an attempt to settle a bet about whose wife is prettier:

> MR. FRIBBLE. Here are pretty plump red lips.
>
> MR. BISKET. But see my Ducks teeth, and smell her sweet breath. Breath on 'em Duck. . . . Prethee Dear, do but shew them a little of your Foot and Leg, good Duck, . . . A little higher, but up to your Garter, good Lamb. (145)

While Bisket and Fribble are out that night carousing with friends, Cuff and Kick spend the evening in bed with the credulous Cits' pretty wives to protect them from the "ghost" seen running around town. Bisket and Fribble are surprised and dismayed to come home

and find their wives in bed with the ruffians, but as the constable leads Cuff and Kick to jail, the husbands rationalize:

> BISKET. If we order our business wisely and impanel a good substantial Jury, of all married men, they'll give us vast damages.
>
> FRIBBLE. I have known a man to recover 4 or 500 *l.* in such a Case, and his Wife not one jot the worse. (179)

This episode with the Biskets and Fribbles provides another example to disprove critics who claim that "Shadwell propounds an unambiguous social morality, continuing to champion the traditions of gentility and citizenship," and that he exploits the ambiguities of the term "civil" only to reinforce established standards of social behavior (Hughes, *English Drama* 156). What are the "traditions" of gentility and citizenship – having sexual intrigues with other men's wives? And why do only Kick and Cuff—unquestionably lower middle class hooligans—go to jail when almost all the male characters have had intimate relations with women other than their wives? One has to question whether Shadwell's rule that "for the sake of good men, ill should be punished" is dependent upon the miscreant's social class (Preface, *The Humorists* 184).

Shadwell somewhat ameliorates the libertine acts of sexual freedom and worldly cynicism with the possibility of marriage between his men of wit and pleasure and their ladies of wit, beauty, and fortune. After witnessing the Woodlys and the Clodpates terminate their marriages, Lucia defends her decision to refuse Rains's proposal:

> LUCIA. See what Matrimony comes to—
>
> RAINS. Madam, since we cannot agree upon better tearms, let me claim your Promise, and admit me for your Servant. . . .
>
> CAROLINA [to Bevil]. And I you upon your good behaviour: I think you

> have gone far enough in one day.
>
> LUCIA. If you should improve every day so, what would it come to in time?
>
> BEVIL. ‘Twill come to that, Jack; for one Fortnights conversing with us will lay such a scandal upon ‘em, they’ll be glad to repair to Marriage. (181).

The young couples are a good match, equally young, attractive, witty, and wealthy, and the indefinite ending is really less ambiguous than it seems. Yet the probability of marriage—a “reward” for virtuous behavior—is bestowed upon characters who are not entirely admirable.

Shadwell’s ending in *The Virtuoso* is even less ambiguous that that of *Epsom Wells* and offers only the possibility for marriage between heroes and heroines, and divorce for the foolish virtuoso and his wife. Like *Epsom-Wells*, *The Virtuoso* is another un-Jonsonian witty sex comedy that follows the tradition for Carolean drama where the younger generation challenges orthodoxy and appropriates power from the older generation. The heroines, Clarinda and Miranda (along with their fortunes), are the wards of Sir Nicholas Gimcrack, who spends his days and money on useless scientific experiments, and of the jealous Lady Gimcrack, who keeps her young wards under lock and key. Our introduction to the witty, beautiful, and wealthy girls is a conversation that explains the dismal and frustrating situation in which they find themselves, and introduces the humours characters of the satire:

> MIRANDA. Were ever women so confin’d in England by a foolish uncle worse than an Italian?
>
> CLARINDA. A sot that has spent two thousand pounds in microscopes to

> find out the nature of eels in vinegar, mites in a cheese, and the blue of plums which he has subtly found out to be living creatures.
>
> MIRANDA. One who has broken his brains about the nature of maggots, who has studied these twenty years to find out the several sorts of spiders, and never cares for understanding mankind.
>
> CLARINDA. Shall we never get free from his jealousy and the malice of his impertinent wife? (I.ii.1-2, 7-15)

Shadwell is at his best with the characters portrayed in this comedy, defining humours as "the affected vanities, and the artificial fopperies of men, which, (sometimes even contrary to their natures) they take pains to acquire." His generic characters are so bizarre that they trigger no recognition of anyone in particular, which Shadwell declares is most useful for "the reformation of Fopps and Knaves,"

> because to render Vices and Fopperies very ridiculous, is much 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, than even death can do. (Preface, *The Humorists* 184)

But if the characters are so generic and so bizarre that no one in the audience can identify with them, how is reformation possible? Rather than recognize others in the mirror held in front of the audience, or associate the Gimcrack's foolish and dishonest behavior with their own, the audience would derive only pleasure in the antics of Shadwell's ridiculous characters rather than admit, despise, and amend their own conduct and affectations.

In the dedication to *The Virtuoso*, Shadwell says he has "endeavored in this play at humor, wit, and satire," and four entirely new characters that display "such an affectation as misguides men in knowledge, art, or science" (4): the Virtuoso, Sir Nicholas Gimcrack; Sir Formal Trifle, "the orator, a florid coxcomb"; Snarl, "an old,

pettish fellow, a great admirer of the last age and a declaimer against the vices of this, and privately very vicious himself"; and Sir Samuel Hearty, "a brisk, amorous, adventurous, unfortunate coxcomb, one that by the help of humorous, nonsensical bywords takes himself to be a wit" (8). Sir Nicholas earns nothing but our contempt for his constant boasting and misrepresentation of his scientific endeavors. He claims that he is "so much advanc'd in the art of flying" that he can outdistance a bustard[14] and outrun a greyhound (II.ii.30-32); he has transfused the blood of a sheep with a man, and now the grateful patient sends the virtuoso wool sheared from his own body and about whom Sir Nicholas boasts, "I shall shortly have a flock of 'em" (II.ii.209). He also claims to have trained a spider to come when he was called, and that "knew his name so well he would follow me all over the house" (III.iii.74). Sir Nicholas describes how he can read the Bible by the light of a rotting leg of pork (V.ii.31), and with his telescope, has determined that the moon is really another earth:

> I can see all the mountainous parts, and valleys, and seas, and lakes in it; nay, the larger sort of animals, as elephants and camels; but public buildings and ships very easily. I have seen several battles fought there. They have great guns and have the use of gunpowder. At land they fight with elephants and castles. I have seen 'em. . . . There's now a great monarch who has armies in several countries in the moon, which we find out because the colors which we see are alike. . . . He is a very ambitious prince and aims at universal monarchy, but the rest of the moon will be too hard for him. (V.ii.82-88, 93-95, 96-98)

Not only do Sir Nicholas's endeavors violate Royal Society strictures against false science and elaborate rhetoric, they have neither practical application nor do they serve a utilitarian end (Gilde 469). In the virtuoso, Shadwell has created a humours character

[14] A genus of bird remarkable for its great size and running power.

whose interest in unusable scientific experimentation precludes an interest in his fellow human being. When describing his plans for improving the "speaking trumpet" so that a man's voice can be heard throughout the county, Sir Nicholas's bias is clear:

> SIR NICHOLAS. I have though of this to do the king service. For when I have perfected it, there needs but one parson to preach to a whole county. The king may then take all the church lands into his own hands and serve all England with his chaplains in ordinary.
>
> LONGVIL. This is a most admirable project. But what will become of the rest of the parsons?
>
> SIR NICHOLAS. It is no matter. Let 'em learn to make woollen cloth and advance the manufacture of the nation, or learn to make nets and improve the fishing trade. It is a fine, sedentary life for those idle fellows in black. (V.ii.58-68)

Certainly Sir Nicholas's pretenses and fabrications would garner contempt from the audience, but would anyone really see himself in Shadwell's mirror to folly and vice? Would anyone but those "idle fellows in black" (who most likely would not have been attending the theatre in the first place) notice Sir Nicholas's total disregard for his fellow human beings, and even if they did, would they recognize it in themselves?

Another of Shadwell's "all new" humours characters is Sir Formal Trifle, the virtuoso's sidekick and a self-satisfied "orator" who tells his friends:

> Upon my sincerity, I wholly eschew all oratory and compliments with persons of your worth and generosity. And though I must confess upon due occasions I am extremely delighted with those pretty, spruce expression wherewith wit and eloquence use to trick up human thoughts, and with the gaudy dress that smoother pens so finely clothe them in, yet I never us'd the least tincture of rhetoric with my friend, which I hope you'll do me the honor to let me call you. (I.i.210-218)

Like all good humors characters, Sir Trifle brings about his own exposure and punishment. Just as Miranda and Clarinda get some well-earned time alone with their

suitors Bevil and Longvil, Sir Trifle interrupts the lovers' conversation. The girls compliment him on his eloquent speech, position him directly over a secret trap door, and mockingly deliberate upon the subject about which he should speak. Sir Trifle settles the question, explaining that "we orators speak alike upon all subjects. My speeches are all so subtly design'd that whatever I speak in praise of anything with very little alteration will serve in praise of the contrary" (III.iv.92-95). Clarinda suggests, "Let it be upon seeing a mouse enclosed in a trap" (III.iv.96), and after twenty-six lines of Sir Trifle's elaborate pedantry, she releases the trap upon which he stands, thus imprisoning him in the virtuoso's underground vault. On another occasion, the orator attempts to dispel a mob of ribbon weavers angrily seeking the virtuoso (whom they believe has invented an engine-powered automatic loom), but his gibberish is ignored and the rabble beat him, kick him, and throw oranges at him (V.iii.40-70). Sir Trifle is indeed the florid coxcomb Shadwell designated him – another excellent portrayal of a humours character, but again, not someone with whom the audience would readily identify and then initiate a process of reform.

Sir Samuel Hearty is another character who is entertained by his own discourse, but his words are as nonsensical as Trifle's are florid; Longvil describes him to Bruce, saying:

> [H]e is very much abounding in words and very much defective in sense . . . the most amorous coxcomb; the most designing and adventurous knight alive; a great masquerader, and has forty several disguises to make love in; . . . Words are no more to him than breaking wind: they only give him vent. They serve not with him to express thoughts, for he does not think. (I.i.115-16, 138-41, 348-50)

As the most comical of Shadwell's humours characters in *The Virtuoso*, Sir Samuel tosses off meaningless phrases like "whipstitch, your nose in my breech" and "*Tace* is Latin for a candle"[15] (II.i.146-47, I.i.162), and his penchant for disguise gets him into trouble on several occasions. Sir Samuel (one of the only foolish characters to be "punished") has been banished from the Gimcrack home because he is such a silly coxcomb, which thwarts his efforts to court the virtuoso's niece, Miranda. When Bruce and Longvil receive an invitation to watch Sir Nicholas dissect a lobster, Sir Samuel proposes to dress in livery and act as footman to gain access to the estate (and Miranda). As Bruce and Longvil flirt with the girls, however, Sir Samuel realizes that "I must discover myself quickly about this business, or, whip-slap, I shall be bobb'd of my mistress in the twinkling of a bedstaff" (II.i.118-20), yet his attempts to get the ladies' attention only gets the "impudent, saucy footman . . . beaten into good manners" (II.i.108-08). On another occasion he disguises himself as a woman, "the subtl'st disguise to make love in that e'er was invented" (III.iv.133-34), and pretends to sell cosmetics and perfumes to the virtuoso's wards. When caught attempting to convey a note to Miranda from "Sir Samuel," s/he is accused of acting as procuress for the fop, and is detained in the Gimcrack vault along with Sir Formal who remains imprisoned in the "mousetrap" upon which he was orating. While confined to the vault until a constable arrives, Sir Samuel (still disguised as a woman) has to fight off the amorous advances of Sir Formal or risk exposure as a fraud (or perhaps even worse, a bawd) in a thoroughly enjoyable and humorous scene, resplendent with the witty repartee Shadwell claims to abhor.

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[15] *Tace* is the Latin imperative "be silent."

When Sir Nicholas and his wife return home to find their nieces have captured a bawd, and that Sir Nicholas has been secluded with her in the vault for more than an hour, the hypocritical Lady Gimcrack admonishes the orator, saying "You are a man of integrity—to meet privately with a filthy creature, a bawd, an ugly bawd too!" to which Sir Samuel indignantly replies: "I scorn your words; neither a bawd nor ugly, neither, by your leave. —Ugly and bawd, quoth she!" (IV.iii.119-122). Lady Gimcrack locks the bawd (Sir Samuel) in a room to await the constable, and rather than "disappoint the town" and miss a party scheduled for that evening (173), he strips naked and escapes through a window, leaving his female disguise behind. When the constable arrives with a warrant to arrest the bawd, Sir Nicholas (the scientist!) explains, "It was undoubtedly a spirit. I could have told you that before, but I was afraid I should fright you all" (IV.v.32-3). The scene is farcical, and clearly contrary to what Shadwell deems a poet's goal: the "perfect Representations of Humane Life" (Preface, *The Sullen Lovers* 11). Yet in his preface to *The Humorists*, Shadwell denounces those who frequent the playhouse and "are more pleased with the extravagant and unnatural actions the trifles, and fripperies of a Play, or the trappings and ornaments of Nonsense" (185). And in his letter to the reader for *The Royal Shepherdesse*, he insists that the playwright who "debases himself to think of nothing but pleasing the Rabble, loses the dignity of a Poet, and becomes as little as a Jugler, or a Rope-Dancer" (100). Shadwell seems to be the one walking the tightrope here, criticizing others for what he does himself. Is it his intent to reform fops and fools by suggesting they avoid dressing in women's clothes and escaping naked through windows? Is this a "perfect Representation of Humane Life"?

The last of Shadwell's "entirely new" humours characters is Snarl, the virtuoso's uncle, an elderly man who thinks little of the "coxcombly, scandalous age," the foolish penchant of the young for French fashions, and especially his virtuoso nephew (I.ii.144). He carps at Sir Nicholas:

> In sadness, nephew, I am asham'd of you. You will never leave lying and quacking with your transfusions and fool's tricks. I believe if the blood of an ass were transfus'd into a virtuoso, you would not know the emittent ass from the recipient philosopher, by the mass. (II.ii.195-99)

Snarl's ill-humor extends to visitors, too, and when introduced to his nephew's guests, the cantankerous old man retorts:

> SNARL. I desire no acquaintance with any young man of this age; . . . they are vicious, illiterate, foolish fellows, good for nothing but to roar and make a noise in a playhouse; to be very brisk with pert whores in vizards, who, though never so ill-bred, are most commonly too hard for them at their own weapon: repartee. And when whores are not there, they play monkey tricks with one another while all sober men laugh at them. . . . Besides, they are all such whoring fellows, in sadness, I am asham'd of 'em. The last age was an age of modesty.
>
> BRUCE. I believe there was the same wenching then; only they dissembled it. They added hypocrisy to fornication, and so made two sins of what we make but one.
>
> LONGVIL [to Bruce]. After all his virtue, this old fellow keeps a whore. (II.ii.243, 246-252, 280-285)

In Snarl, Shadwell has created a humours character whose hypocritical, argumentative, and disagreeable nature might be more easily identified with by audience members, but he is never punished for his offensive behavior. Snarl also berates his nieces for their silly hairstyles and makeup, declaring, "I'd not kiss a lady of this age; by the mass, I'd rather kiss my horse" (I.ii.114-15), which makes it particularly amusing when he and his hairstyled, made-up mistress cuddle and coo, calling each other pet names like *bird's-nie*,

pig's-nie, *numps*, and *Perdy* (III.ii.17-20, 51-2). Snarl's tirade against the "whoring fellows" of the age reveals him as a hypocrite when he and the prostitute are interrupted by the arrival of Sir Nicholas and his whore, and both couples are discovered in the rented bedchamber by Sir Nicholas's wife and her lover. It is important to note that only Sir Nicholas does not get what he wants at the conclusion of the play, and even then, his obsession with pseudo-scientific experimentation renders him impervious to punishment.

Snarl's hypocrisy is almost negligible as compared to Lady Gimcrack's performance when (with her own lover standing by her side), she chastises her husband whom she has caught with his mistress: "Was I not sufficient for thee, vile man, but thou must thus betray me? . . . Have I been always your obedient, virtuous wife and am I thus requited?" (IV.ii.82-3). When Sir Nicholas points out the presence of Lady Gimcrack's lover, she wails, "Was ever woman yet so miserable? To be betray'd by one whom she has lov'd so much better than her life! She would have laid it down to have done him any kindness. And yet to perfect all his cruelty he blots my reputation" (IV.ii.130-133). Considering Shadwell's stance on punishing vice, one would imagine that Lady Gimcrack will suffer at the conclusion of the play, but as we shall see, this is not the case. On several occasions, Lady Gimcrack attempts to seduce both Longvil and Bruce; when her overt hints do not get a response, she corners Bruce in a secluded spot of the garden and encourages him to "make use of an opportunity" (III.i.137-38); when Longvil approaches the hidden couple, Bruce uses the intrusion to escape from Lady Gimcrack. Her charms work on Longvil though, and he suggests, "Let us repose a while in the grotto, madam" (203). Sir Formal interrupts this anticipated coupling, advising Longvil

that Sir Nicholas is waiting for the young men to share the results of his research on insects.

The garden interruptions, love scenes left dangling, and reversals in the action of the play, alternating between Sir Nicholas's experiments, the courtship scenes of the young men and the virtuoso's nieces, and the uncurbed adultery of the older couples, are typical Fletcherian devices for witty sex comedies, a style that Shadwell ridicules in his critical prefaces. He consistently ignores his own insistence that virtue be exalted and vice depressed, and that wicked characters get the punishment they deserve; his dissolute characters—especially Lady Gimcrack and *Epsom-Wells* cheat Mrs. Woodly—get away with a multitude of lies, deception, and immoral behavior. And if, as Shadwell claims in the Preface to the *Sullen Lovers*, "a Man is confin'd not to swerve from the Character, and oblig'd to say nothing but what is proper to it" (11), Sir Nicholas is a problem character because he does not remain true to his humours as virtuoso when he abandons his experiments to meet his mistress. He does, however, return to character at the conclusion. While being informed that his estates have been seized for payment of debt, his wife decides to take her money and depart with her lover, and his nieces reject him as guardian and transfer their dependence and their fortunes to Bruce and Longvil, the virtuoso observes, "Am I deserted by all? Well, now 'tis time to study for use. I will presently find out the philosopher's stone. I had like to have gotten it last year but that I wanted May dew, being a dry season" (V.vi.130-33). For the most part, Shadwell excels at his depictions of humours characters, thereby earning his self-proclaimed title as the grandson of Ben.

Contrary to Shadwell's objectives to reprehend vice and reward virtue, however, his most debauched and unscrupulous characters go unpunished for their behavior, clearly indicating that Shadwell has not adhered his own mandate that for "the sake of good men, ill should be punished" (Preface, *The Humorists* 184). What is most un-Jonsonian about Shadwell is that he, like the jugglers and rope dancers he ridicules, panders to audience demands for sex comedies, and simply populates Fletcherian love intrigues with as many Jonsonian humours characters as he can invent. Vicky Bancroft explains this incongruity with her proposal that claims:

> More than most, Shadwell desired to be popular; and although in the prefaces to his published plays he presents himself as a high-minded writer, above such considerations as public opinion and interested chiefly in satisfying the demands of his creative genius, Shadwell was ever willing to sacrifice principle to popularity and to write for the amusement and entertainment of the mainstream playhouse audiences. (165)

Perhaps, in part, economics also forced Shadwell to disregard his dramatic theories in his endeavor to please the audience. In the dedication to *The Virtuoso*, Shadwell admits that "having no pension but from the theatre, which is either unwilling or unable to reward a man sufficiently for so much pains as correct comedies require" (5), he could not afford the time necessary to write as properly as those playwrights who received financial assistance. I think it more likely that Shadwell, jealous of Dryden's success as a playwright and envious of his position as Poet Laureate, desired fame as much as fortune. Shadwell's wife was an actress with the Duke's company and one can assume that many of their friends were connected with the theatre. Lengthy epistles that explain and validate Shadwell's position as a successful poet also imply that he hoped his prestigious reputation would endure long after his death, a theory that is reinforced by reward of the

Poet Laureate title in 1688, when William and Mary revoked Dryden's position because his politics ran contrary to their own.

While I have indicated that Shadwell has failed in his efforts to reprehend the vices and follies of the age, he does take a few stabs at the shortcomings and idiosyncrasies of his society with the conversation between Bruce and Longvil in the beginning of *The Virtuoso* and in Snarl's interpretation of the "current age." But his only real petition for reform comes in the epilogue to *Epsom-Wells*, where he encourages young gallants, "For Heaven's sake, take the first occasion, / And marry all of you for th' good o' th' Nation" (182). This seems to be an afterthought, or perhaps a desperate attempt to add a reformative aspect to this work, because the final lines of the play are spoken by Mr. Woodly, who says, "How easie and how light I walk without this Yoke! [of marriage] methinks 'tis air I tread—Come let's dance, strike up" (181). Nor do the young gallants of the play marry the heiresses; they are on probation, their marital status dependent upon their "good behaviour" and their ability to "improve every day" (181). Shadwell certainly does not meet the criteria he determines for the business of the poet—even in *Epsom-Wells*—the comedy with which he was more pleased than anything else he ever wrote.

Chapter Three

Behn's Bravado, or: Look Out Laureates, Here I Come.

A Heroic Drama(tist).

Behn was the last to arrive on the theatrical scene, following Shadwell by three years and nine years behind Dryden's first production. Having no theatre experience, recently released from debtor's prison, and—most disadvantageous of all—a woman attempting to intrude into a male-dominated profession, she nevertheless managed to take her place alongside the experienced male writers. In "Aphra Behn and the Restoration Theatre" Derek Hughes says that in her prefatory material to *The Dutch-Lover*, Behn "jostles for position with Dryden and Shadwell, without naming either. . . . At this early stage of her career she does not see herself as a face in a crowd, but as competing for top place in a threesome" (30). Not only was Behn the first woman to earn a living writing in English, she made a public space for women, paving the way for the female playwrights who flourished shortly after her death: Susannah Centlivre, Delarivier Manley, Catherine Trotter, and Mary Pix. "All women together" says Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, "ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn . . . for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds. It is she—shady and amorous as she was—who makes it not quite fantastic for me to say to you tonight: Earn five hundred a year by your wits" (66).

The major points of Behn's dramatic theory are stated in her "Epistle to the Reader" prefixed to *The Dutch-Lover*; she voices additional theoretical positions in the dedications, prefaces, prologues, and epilogues of her later plays, as her theories adapted

to public taste and to reflect significant political and religious events that occurred during the ensuing years. This chapter will explore Behn's professed theories and objectives as found in *The Town-Fopp* and *The Rover*, two very successful plays of the 1668-77 decade. Both plays were produced at the Duke's Theatre, *The Town-Fopp* in 1676 and *The Rover* in 1677, and both plays, despite Behn's insistence that a poet's only goal is to entertain, paint a dark picture of Restoration socio-economic ideology.

In her lengthy epistle to *The Dutch-Lover*, Behn claims that "Playes were certainly intended for the exercising of mens passions, not their understandings" (79-80), yet the comedies she wrote throughout her career provoke an examination of several social issues and traditions of the patriarchal society in which she lived. Both *The Town-Fopp* and *The Rover* illustrate problems that arise from marriages contracted purely for economic benefit, the horrors of forced marriage for both men and women, and the limited options available to women, especially, but also for men in Restoration England.[16] In the depictions of her characters, Behn also seems to endorse a watered-down version of libertinism – not Rochester-style libertinism, but certainly one that grants more freedoms for both men and women. In "Behn and the Unstable Traditions of Social Comedy," Robert Markley suggests that Behn

> explore[s] the psychological consequences of her characters having to negotiate a socio-economic ideology which is treated as *both* the foundation of a 'natural' order based on socio-economic inequality and royalist authority and as an ideological fantasy which justifies historically and culturally specific forms of female oppression. (102)

[16] Options for English women of the upper- and middle-classes were limited to marriage, the socially disreputable position as a "kept" mistress, or the probability of starvation as an impoverished seamstress. Upper-class younger sons could join the military or the church, or they could tend the family property holdings on their eldest brother's behalf.

To a certain extent, this cannot be true. We feel the anguish that Bellmour experiences when forced to marry Diana, and Diana's rise in self-esteem when she finally rejects Bellmour. We can relate to Hellena's excitement as she steals from her father's house in disguise to enjoy Carnival, and we recognize Angellica Bianca's justifiable fury with both herself and Willmore when she falls in love with him. Behn certainly explores specific elements of Restoration socio-economic ideology through the emotions of her characters, but I do not think she concerns herself—in her comedies, at least—with that ideology's psychological consequences. If this were so, Behn's characters would be more fully developed from a psychological perspective and we could determine how the prevalent ideology affects their futures; we would understand the consequences of their actions beyond the end of act five. But Behn's plays conform to Restoration comedy standards and have (ambiguously) happy endings; she is simply in tune with social issues of the day, and focuses on what the audience wanted to see.

Marriage, especially forced marriage based on economic gain or social advancement, was the most popular topic for Restoration comedies and is the prominent theme in more than ten of Behn's plays. Behn also examines other unfair practices of a patriarchal society in her plays, whether her characters are impoverished second sons, kept mistresses, unmarried women without a portion, or young men turned fop after a Grand Tour. But in an era when many playwrights maintained there was a "noble purpose" in writing what others considered licentious or immoral drama, we must assume that Behn's insistence that she is *not* writing to improve the morals of those attending the

theatre is true. She addresses this theoretical issue in her "Epistle to the Reader," prefixed to *The Dutch-Lover*:

> I am my self well able to affirm that none of our English Poets, at least the Dramatique (so I think you call them) can be justly charg'd with too great reformation of mens minds or manners, and for that I may appeal to general experiment, if those who are the most assiduous Disciples of the Stage, do not make the fondest and the lewdest crew about this Town; for if you should unhappily converse [with] them through the year, you will not find one dram of sence amongst a Club of them. (40-46)

Yet Behn says that dramatic poets cannot be charged with attempting "*too great* [a] reformation of mens minds or manners" (italics mine). Perhaps "exploring" female oppression and socio-economic inequality is enough to work some small reformation through imaginary characters who challenge a system of subjugation, succeed in reversing the usual distribution of power, or simply question established orthodoxy.

In the opening scene of *The Town-Fopp*, Behn portrays women as commodities and victims of the patriarchal practice that condoned forced marriage. Sir Timothy, the fop of the title, explains to his cohorts that he plans to marry Celinda, a "Wench I never saw yet, but they say she's handsom — But no matter for that, there's Money, my Boyes! . . . my whole design in it is to be Master of my self, and with part of her Portion to set up my Miss[tress], *Betty Flauntit*, which, by the way, is the main end of my Marrying" (I.i.19-20, 25-27). Celinda's father has agreed to traffic his daughter as a wife for Sir Timothy, making it possible for the fop to procure Betty Flauntit as his mistress, and thereby consigning the young, wealthy, virgin noblewoman to the same commodified status as the whore. Later, Sir Timothy tells Celinda's brother, Friendlove, that "the old People [their parents, whose estates are contiguous] have adjusted the matter, and they

are the most proper for a Negotiation of that kind, which saves us the trouble of a tedious Courtship" (I.i.125-27), and adds, "All things are sacrific'd" to the power of ready money, and "no Mortal conceives the joy of Argent Content. 'Tis this pow'rful God that makes me submit to the Devil Matrimony" (I.i.36-38). Celinda—like many daughters of her class—is simply the sacrificial pawn in her father's consolidation of his estate with that of the Tawdrey property, and one of those "things sacrificed" in order for Sir Timothy to afford the expense of keeping a mistress.

In the next scene, Celinda's nurse berates Sir Timothy, reiterating his previously mentioned intent while pointing out the sad future that awaits her charge and many other young ladies who are forced to marry men they do not love and who do not love them, simply for economic gain:

> to patch up your broken Fortune, you wou'd fain Marry my sweet Mistriss *Celinda* here — but 'faith Sir, you're mistaken, her Fortune shall not go to the maintenance of your Misses, which being once sure of, she, poor Soul, is sent down to the Countrey house, to learn Housewifery, and live without Mankind, unless she can serve her self with the handsom Steward, or so — whil'st you tear it away in Town, and live like Man and Wife with your Jilt, and are every day seen in the Glass Coach, whil'st your own natural Lady is hardly worth the hire of a Hack. (I.ii.153-160)

This is, indeed, Sir Timothy's plan, and he cares not whether Celinda has a love affair with "the handsom Steward" because, as he explains to his sidekicks, marriage no longer implies fidelity:

> SHAM. And is it possible you can be ty'd up to a Wife? Whil'st there in *London* and free, you have the whole World to range in, and like a wanton Heifer, eat of every Pasture.
>
> SIR TIMOTHY. Why dost think I'll be confin'd to my own dull

> Enclosure? No, I had rather feed coarsely upon the boundless Common, perhaps, two or three dayes I may be in Love, and remain constant, but that's the most.
>
> SHARP. And in three Weeks, should you Wed a *Cinthia*, you'd be a Monster.
>
> SIR TIMOTHY. What, thou meanest a Cuckold, I warrant? God help thee! But a Monster is only so from its Rarity, and a Cuckold is no such strange thing in our Age. (I.i.40-50)

Here Behn portrays marriage as a financial negotiation that satisfies only on an economic basis; fidelity is not expected from this sort of arranged marriage, and once the newly-wedded husband's passion for his virgin wife has subsided (in "two or three dayes" at most), both are free to pursue extramarital relationships.

Behn makes it clear, however, that the socially-endorsed, legal rights of a father or guardian to choose his child's spouse is not just a female problem, as Lord Plotwell has selected a wife for his nephew, Bellmour, who is, unfortunately, in love with Celinda. To thwart her father's plans to marry her to Sir Timothy, Celinda and Bellmour have exchanged marriage vows in front of witnesses (although not officiated by a clergyman), but Lord Plotwell demands that his nephew forsake Celinda and marry the girl he has chosen for him:

> LORD PLOTWELL. Sirrah you are my slave — at least your whole Estate is at my mercy — and besides, I'll charge you with an Action of 5000*l.* for your ten Years maintenance: Do you know that this is in my pow'r too?
>
> BELLMOUR. Sir, on my bended knees, thus low I fall to beg your mercy.
>
> LORD PLOTWELL. Yes, Sir, I will have mercy, I'll give you Lodging — but in a Dungeon Sir, where you shall ask your food of Passers by.
>
> BELLMOUR. All this, I know you have the power to do. (II.iii.120-22,

125-30)

Just as Celinda's father can arrange an unsuitable marriage between Celinda and Sir Timothy, so is Bellmour under the control of his guardian uncle, who can not only deny him his inheritance, but condemn him to a life in prison.

In the final act of the play, when it appears that Bellmour's younger brother, Charles, and sister, Phillis, will not receive their share of their brother's inheritance, Charles and the faithful family servant, Trusty, discuss their options:

> TRUSTY. Here's like to be a hopeful end of a Noble Family. My comfort is, I shall dye with grief, and not see the last of ye. *Weeps*
>
> CHARLES. No, *Trusty*, I have not been so meanly educated, but I know how to live, and like a Gentleman: all that afflicts me in this misfortune, is my dear Sister *Phillis*; she's young, and to be left poor in this loose Town, will ruine her for ever.
>
> TRUSTY. Sir, I think we were best to Marry her out of the way. . . . If you dare trust her to my management, I'll undertake to Marry her to a Man of 2000*l*. a year; and if I fail, I'll be sure to keep her Honour safe. (V.i.161-171)

Even Charles and Trusty, responsible brother and loyal servant, feel it their duty to marry the young girl to a gentleman—any gentleman—who has an income that will support her, and Trusty, with the help of Sir Timothy's sidekick Sham, trick the fop into marrying the penniless virgin. Sir Timothy, who is desperate to have sexual intercourse with the unrelenting Phillis, confides in his friend Sham, and the "solution" to the fop's licentious desire becomes the remedy to Phillis's predicament of being unmarried and impecunious:

> SIR TIMOTHY. Oh, Sham, I am all over fire, mad to enjoy! I have done

> what Man can do (without doing what I wou'd do)[17] and still she's Flint; nothing will down with her but Matrimony — what shall I do? for thou knowst I cannot Marry a Wife without a Fortune.
>
> SHAM. Sir, you know the old Cheat, hire a Lay Rascal in a Canonical Habit, and put a false Marriage upon her.
>
> SIR TIMOTHY. Lord, that this shou'd not enter into my Coxcomb before? haste then and get one — I'll have it done immediately, whilst I go after her to keep up my flame. (V.i.254-262)

The man in canonical habit whom Sham brings to perform what Sir Timothy believes is a false marriage ceremony is actually a real parson, and Timothy finds himself legally married to the penniless Phillis. When Trusty informs Bellmour (who has been forgiven by Lord Plotwell and assured of his inheritance) that his sister is married to Sir Timothy, the fop explodes, crying:

> SIR TIMOTHY. How can that be a Marriage, when he who join'd us, was but a hired Fellow, drest like a Parson? . . . Sham, didst not thou hire a Fellow (because I was damnably in Love, and in haste) to Marry us, that was no Parson?
>
> SHAM. Why truly Sir—I did go to hire such an one—
>
> SIR TIMOTHY. Look ye there now.
>
> SHAM. But cou'd meet with none; and because you said you shou'd dye if you enjoy'd her not presently, and that she wou'd not yield on any other terms, but those of Marriage, I e're brought the Parson that Trusty had provided for you. . . .
>
> SIR TIMOTHY. What's my Money gone! and am I Marry'd too! This 'tis not to use to go to Church; for then I might have chanc'd to know the Parson.
>
> BELLMOUR. Death you Dog! you deserve to dye, for your base designs upon a Maid of her quality —how durst you, Sister, without my leave, Marry that Rascal?

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[17] I.e. rape her.

> PHILLIS. Sir, you den'd me in my Portion, and my Uncle design'd to turn me out of doors, and in my despairs, I accepted of him. (V.i.565-87)

This passage delineates the harsh reality of several social problems: men seducing young virgins with counterfeit marriages or insincere promises, and male family members controlling the choice of a spouse; it also illustrates how those who do not possess a suitable inheritance or income must take whatever rash actions are necessary in order to survive in this commodified society.

Behn discusses the same issues in *The Rover*. As the play opens, Florinda and Hellena, the two heroines of the comedy, discuss the dismal futures their father has designed for them: Hellena will become a nun, and Florinda will marry the wealthy, but elderly, Don Vincentio. When Hellena teases her sister about the upcoming nuptials, we learn that neither girl intends to allow such travesties to occur:

> HELLENA. —why do you blush again?
>
> FLORINDA. With Indignation, and how near soever my Father thinks I am to Marrying that hated Object, I shall let him see, I understand better, what's due to my Beauty, Birth and Fortune, and more to my Soul, than to obey those unjust Commands.
>
> HELLENA. Now hang me, if I don't love thee for that dear disobedience . . . but tell me dear *Florinda*, don't you love that fine *Anglese*? —for I vow next to loving him myself, 'twill please me most that you do so, for he is so gay and so handsome.
>
> FLORINDA. *Hellena*, a Maid design'd for a Nun, ought not to be so Curious in a discourse of Love.
>
> HELLENA. And dost thou think that ever I'le be a Nun? or at least till I'm so Old, I'm fit for nothing else—Faith no Sister; and that which makes me long to know whether you love *Belvile*, is because I hope he has some mad Companion or other, that will spoil my devotion, nay I'm resolv'd to provide my self this Carnival, if there

> be ere a handsome proper fellow of my humour above ground, tho I ask first. (I.i.18-23, 25-35)

Neither Florinda nor Hellena intend to follow their father's resolutions, and take action in order to prevent the arranged marriage and consignation to a nunnery. While they eventually succeed in defying their patriarchal father, they must first negotiate with their brother, Pedro, who initially appears to support their absent father's decrees:

> PEDRO. I have a Command from my Father here to tell you, you ought not to despise him, a Man of so vast a Fortune, and such a Passion for you . . .
>
> FLORINDA. I hate *Vincentio*, Sir, and I wou'd not have a Man so dear to me as my Brother, follow the ill Customes of our Countrey, and make a slave of his Sister — and Sir, my Father's will, I'm sure you may divert. . . .
>
> HELLENA. Is't not enough to make a Nun of me, but you must cast my Sister away too? exposing her to a worse confinement than a Religious life.
>
> PEDRO. The Girl's mad—it is a confinement to be carry'd into the Countrey, to an Antient Villa . . . and have no other Prospect than that pleasing one of seeing all her own that meets her Eyes—a fine Ayr, large Fields and Gardens, where she may walk and gather Flowers? (I.i.55-56, 59-62, 87-93)

Again, such "ill customs" have placed economic benefit—that of being mistress of a large estate—ahead of Florinda's desire to determine her own future and marry for love rather than for money. Hellena continues her objection of her sister's fate with a colorful description of Florinda's future life with the elderly Don Vincentio:

> HELLENA. [I]f these be her daily divertissements, what are those of the Night, to lye in a wide Motheaten Bed Chamber . . . [which Don Vincentio] makes his dressing Room, and being a Frugal and Jealus Coxcomb, instead of a Valet to uncase his feeble Carcass, he desires you to do that Office — signs of favour I'll assure you,

> . . . [and that] Honour being past, the Gyant stretches it self; yawns and signs a Belch or two, loud as a Musket, throws himself into Bed, and expects you in his foul sheets, and e're you can get yourself undrest, call's you with a snore or Two — and are not these fine blessings to a young Lady?
>
> PEDRO. Have you done yet?
>
> HELLENA. And this Man you must kiss, nay you must kiss none but him too—and nuzel through his Beard to find his Lips.—And this you must submit to for Threescore years, and all for a Joynture.
>
> PEDRO. For all your Character of *Don Vincentio*, she is as like to Marry him, as she was before. (I.i.96-98, 102-104, 107-117)

Although Behn cloaks the episode in humor, her opinion of forced marriage and undesirable or unwanted unions for economic gain is perfectly clear. Behn's estimation of the patriarchal practice in which male family members—father, brother, uncle, or guardian—choose mates for their familial young ladies or male dependents is the impetus of the attack. When Pedro informs his sister that although he knows she loves the English colonel, Belvile, and that their father has designed her for Don Vincentio, he has decided she must marry his friend, Don Antonio. Although Florinda eventually marries Belvile with her brother's grudging approval, Pedro is furious when he learns that his sister Hellena has evaded the nunnery through an agreement of marriage with Captain Willmore, another Englishman and the rover of the title. Hellena, who is not yet legally wed and technically still under her brother's control, fears she will be forced away from the man she loves and into the convent. She exclaims to Willmore, "my brother! now Captain shew your Love and Courage; stand to your Arms, and defend me bravely, or I am lost for Ever" (V.i.464-56). When Pedro demands that Hellena explain her disobedience and rash behavior, she replies, "Faith, Brother my bus'ness, is the same

with all living Creatures of my Age, to love, and be beloved, and here's the Man" (V.i.470-72). Behn's heroines insist that, contrary to the ideology of patriarchal Restoration society, they have the right to reject the futures chosen for them by the male members of their family, and to marry for love instead of economic gain. Willmore, like other cavaliers banished from England during the Interregnum, is impoverished and of a lower social class than Pedro and his sisters. But the girls are in love with the poor Englishmen, and Behn clearly illustrates that women—and men, as indicated in *The Town-Fopp*—should be allowed to make their own decisions when choosing a spouse. Bellmour's economically advantageous (second) marriage to a young woman chosen by his uncle causes misery for everyone concerned. Hellena and Florinda assert their independence from domineering kinsmen, and Florinda chooses to marry a penniless foreigner instead of the wealthy, elderly don her father has chosen for her.

While Behn conforms to her dramatic theory that the purpose of the playwright is to entertain with lively courtship scenes full of witty repartee, intriguing plots that include mistaken identities, and a party atmosphere that delights an audience, one cannot help but detect the messages embedded within the hilarity. The characters guilty of arranging or participating in economy-based marriage are Sir Timothy, the avaricious fop, and the nasty Don Pedro, filling in for his absent, heavy-handed father; none of the admirable characters support the practice. Moreover, in *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, Hughes maintains that "Behn emphasizes that sexual relationships at every level are governed by a monetary economy; that the socially approved institution of marriage reproduces the nature of its socially proscribed opposite, prostitution" (72). We see this in *The Town-*

Fopp, as Sir Timothy acquiesces to marriage only if he gains control of a wealthy wife who can support his mistress, fusing wife and whore, both of whom are available for purchase in this particular market economy.

In *The Rover*, an economic relationship that exemplifies the correlation between choosing a wife based on her fortune and paying a prostitute transpires between Angellica Bianca and Willmore as he attempts to negotiate a lower price for the attentions of the courtesan. Angellica is both infuriated and captivated by Willmore. She says:

> ANGELLICA. — poor angry Man, how I despise this railing.
>
> WILLMORE. Yes, I am poor — but I'm a Gentleman, And one that Scornes this baseness which you practice; Poor as I am, I wou'd not sell my self, No not to gain your Charming high priz'd Person. Tho' I admire you strangely for your Beauty, Yet I contemn your mind. . . .
>
> ANGELLICA. —Pray tell me, Sir, are not you guilty of the same Mercenary Crime, When a Lady is propos'd to you for a Wife, you never ask, how fair—discreet—or virtuous she is; but what's her Fortune—which if but small, you cry—she will not do my business—and basely leave her, thou she languish for you—say, is not this as poor?
>
> WILLMORE. It is a Barbarous Custome, which I will scorn to defend in our Sex, and do despise in yours. (II.i.318-25, 357-63)

Later in the evening, as Willmore prepares to leave after having a sexual encounter with Angellica, the courtesan gives the impoverished cavalier—with whom she has fallen in love—five hundred crowns. With this incident, Behn clearly indicates that it is Willmore, not Angellica, who is the prostitute. The "barbarous custom" of selecting a wife based on her fortune commodifies nobly-born ladies, essentially making them and the

impoverished gentlemen who marry for money, part of the economics of prostitution. In *The Town-Fopp*, the juxtaposition of wife and whore indicates that both young virgins and prostitutes are marketed as sexual commodities. In *The Rover*, Behn reinforces this idea with several incidents in which the honorable girls (usually in Carnival attire) are mistaken for whores. But one night, when Florinda creeps out of her father's home to meet Belvile in the secluded garden, Willmore (who has had too much to drink) spies her and decides in his typical libertine fashion that Lady Fortuna has graced him with a beautiful woman, available for the taking:

> FLORINDA. Heavens! what a filthy Beast is this?
>
> WILLMORE. I am so, and thou ought'st the sooner to lye with me for that reason—for look you Child, there will be no sin in't, because 'twas neither design'd nor premeditated. 'Tis pure accident on both sides . . .
>
> FLORINDA. I'll cry Murder! Rape! or any thing! if you do not instantly let me go.
>
> WILLMORE. A Rape! Come, come, you lye you Baggage, you lye, what, I'll warrant you wou'd fain have the World believe now that you are not so forward as I. No, not you—why at this time of Night was your Cobweb Door set open dear Spider—but to catch Flyes?—Hah—come—or I shall be damnably angry. (III.ii.139-43, 156-62)

As Florinda struggles with the drunken Willmore, Belvile arrives and pulls his friend away from her and out of the garden just as Pedro and servants arrive, awoken by Florinda's screams. And Belvile, furious and disappointed that his plans to elope with Florinda have been ruined, berates Willmore for his brutish behavior. The drunken cavalier defends himself, insisting:

> WILLMORE. By this Light I took her for an Errant Harlot.

> BELVILE. Damn your debaucht opinion! tell me Sot had'st thou so much sense and light about thee to distinguish her Woman, and coudst not see something about her Face and Person, to strike an awful Reverence into thy Soul?
>
> WILLMORE. Faith no, I consider'd her as meer a Woman as I cou'd wish. (III.ii.216-21)

The difficulty that Willmore experiences in determining harlot from noblewoman exemplifies Behn's implication that wife and whore are interchangeable, if not identical, commodities when considered in the light of a patriarchal society's dependence on marriage as an economic boon, placing daughters (and sons) on the market for the highest bidder.

The freedoms for which Hellena, Florinda and Bellmour of *The Town-Fopp* fight—the right to determine their own futures and to extricate themselves from the status of commodity—and the evils of patriarchy are topics found in most, if not all, of Behn's plays. Behn may be accurate in claiming that the "playes [themselves] do nothing to mend mens morals," but she certainly indicates several situations where men's morals would benefit with mending. And while theoretically Behn insists that sensible professional writers sought only to please an audience, in practice, her brave commentary on biased and unjust social practices would seem to do a better job of teaching morality than all of Shadwell's humours characters combined. Not only has Behn muscled her way into the masculine domain, she attacks some of the most unjust patriarchal practices of the period.

Chapter Four

Dryden's Defense, or: "Hey, I'm Only in it for the Money"

A Farce.

In his critical "Defense" to *The Indian Emperour*, staged in 1665, Dryden firmly declares that comedy is not his forte:

> I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy: I want that gaiety of humour which is required to it. My conversation is slow and dull; my humour saturnine and reserved; in short, I am none of those who endeavour to break jests in company or make repartees. So that those, who decry my comedies, do me no injury, except it be in point of profit: reputation in them is the last thing to which I shall pretend. (259)

Several years later, Dryden continues his defense against Shadwell's accusations in the preface to *An Evening's Love* where he adds:

> Neither, indeed, do I value a reputation gain'd from Comedy, so far as to concern my self about it any more than I needs must in my own defence . . . and that when I succeed in it, (I mean so far as to please the Audience) yet I am nothing satisfi'd with what I have done. (17-19, 29-31)

Clearly, over the course of more than thirty years of writing plays, Dryden remains adamant that his only goal is to please the audience and consequently earn an income from the successful staging of his work. This chapter will consider Dryden's objectives in light of two of his most successful comedies of the 1668-77 decade: *An Evening's Love*, in which he incorporates a little bit of everything—love, intrigue, adventure, farce—in his effort to please the audience; and *Marriage A-la-Mode*, a play that editors Beaurline and Bowers call "a balance of whimsy and seriousness, of self-mockery and sentimentalism, of tough reasonableness and slight lyrical grace" (277). While Dryden wrote several other comedies during the decade under study, these two were extremely

popular, often revived, and offer ideal examples that both prove and disprove his dramatic theories and intent.

Like Behn and most other Restoration dramatists, Dryden's focus in his comedies is on courtship and marriage issues. In *An Evening's Love*, two young Spanish noblewomen, Theodosia and Jacinta, outwit their foolish father, Alonzo, and his plans to marry them off to unsuitable, but wealthy Spaniards. After escaping the confines of their father's protective custody and spending the last night of Carnival carousing with two young English gentlemen, the girls (with the help of their servant Beatrix), convince Alonzo that allowing a marriage between his daughters and the Englishmen is the best of a very limited selection of society-approved options:

> THEODOSIA. The propositions are good, and marriage is as honorable as it us'd to be.
>
> BEATRIX. You had best let your Daughters live branded with the name of Strumpets: for what ever befalls the men, that will be sure to be their share.
>
> ALONZO. I can put them into a Nunnery.
>
> ALL THE WOMEN. A Nunnery! . . .
>
> LOPEZ [a young Spaniard, in love with the girls' cousin]. You know the Custome of the Country, in this case Sir: 'tis either death or marriage: the business will certainly be publick; (V.i.462-68, 472-73)

Alonzo is forced to agree with Lopez and Beatrix, that of the limited and disagreeable alternatives: his daughters' (and by association, his entire family's) ruined reputations, confining both girls to a convent (causing speculation that would again put the status of the familial name in jeapordy), or marriage to the unworthy Englishmen, marriage is the

best option to protect the reputations of everyone concerned and will not cost any more than sending the girls and their portions to a nunnery. Like Behn's heroines, Theodosia and Jacinta have overturned the heavy-handed patriarchal tenets of the older generation to establish rights as individuals to determine their own futures. Is this a scene that Dryden hopes his audience will reflect upon—and perhaps entertain a few "enlightening" thoughts—at some point after having left the theatre?

Marriage A-la-Mode involves eight characters who are—at some point or another in the play—either betrothed to, denied to but in love with, married to, or having an "intrigue" with another in a confusing array of wife, fiancée, and rightful-heir-to-the-throne exchanges. The two plots that run side by side in this brilliant play offer high and low mimetic episodes that echo and reflect the situations of royalty and peasants, courtiers and soldiers, men and women, both principled and dishonorable. Only an armed rebellion that corrects the turmoil caused by the aging usurper of the throne in the high plot, and the machinations of intelligent young lovers in the lower plot, can overpower or outwit fathers intent on forcing children into unwanted marriages. Yet again, the wishes of the younger generation prevail.

In the high plot, Polydamas, the king of Sicily, attempts to force his new-found son, Leonidas, to marry the princess Amalthea whom he deems worthy of the prince. Leonidas, who is in love with another, first tries to persuade his father to abandon his plans for a union between Amalthea and himself, saying, "'Tis hard to have my inclination forc'd. / I would not marry, Sir; and, when I do, / I hope you'll give me

freedom in my choice" (II.i.318-20). Polydamas is adamant, however, forcing Leonidas to respectfully refuse to obey his father's command:

> POLYDAMAS. *Leonidas*, you owe me more
> Than to oppose your liking to my pleasure.
>
> LEONIDAS. I owe you all things, Sir; but something too
> I owe my self. . . . This beauteous Princess, charming as she is,
> Could never make me happy (II.i.341-44, 394-95)

The honorable Leonidas, rather than acquiesce to his father's wishes and inherit the throne via marriage to Amalthea, chooses happiness with the peasant girl, Palmyra, over the power and prestige to be attained through a union with a woman he does not love. Leonidas disobeys his father's (and thus his king's) command to marry Amalthea, assigning greater importance to the rights of the individual rather than to the hegemonic controls of a patriarchal society. The forced marriage theme is present in the lower plot as well, introduced in the first act and scene of the play. As Rhodophil, a captain of the court guards, encounters his friend, Palamede, a courtier who has just returned home from his grand tour abroad, he asks:

> RHODOPHIL. I beseech you, what brought you home from travel?
>
> PALAMEDE. The commands of an old rich Father.
>
> RHODOPHIL. And the hopes of burying him?
>
> PALAMEDE. Both together, as you see, have prevail'd on my good nature. In few words, My old man has already marry'd me; for he has agreed with another old man, as rich and as covetous as himself; the Articles are drawn, and I have given my consent, for fear of being disinherited; and yet know not what kind of woman I am to marry.
>
> RHODOPHIL. Sure your Father intends you some very ugly wife; and has a mind to keep you in ignorance, till you have shot the gulf.

PALAMEDE. I know not that; but obey I will, and must. (I.i.112-26)

Dryden, like Behn (particularly in her portrayal of Sir Timothy) and many other dramatists of the period, illustrates how patriarchal society's tradition of arranging marriage for economic gain often results in dismal unions destined for emotional failure, or at least, dissatisfaction for one or both parties. Shadwell, Behn, and Dryden all indicate that extramarital relationships were expected, and—for men at least—socially acceptable behavior; until the final act of *Marriage A-la-Mode*, Rhodophil attempts to make a mistress of Palamede's fiancée, while Palamede swears his undying love to Rhodophil's wife. Yet in the end, after momentarily considering the benefits of a *ménage a quatre*, the husbands decide that the constancy of traditional marriage (however boring it might become) would afford greater satisfaction than the amusement and diversion of variety. In *A Mirror to Nature*, Rose Zimbardo claims that

> [s]tructurally, *Marriage à la Mode* presents a continuous vacillation between the stable realm of ideational truth and the constantly shifting realm of confusion and change in which we are caught, the world of experience. Marriage is a perfect metaphor for the uneasy union in disparity that our human condition is, because it is at once a sacramental sign of the union between two spirits and a galling yoke that confines our animal appetites to the necessities of civilization. (87)

And although Dryden acknowledges that comedy "presents us with the imperfections of humane nature" (Preface, *An Evening's Love* 50-51), I find it difficult to imagine him writing *Marriage A-la-Mode* with the "uneasy disparity" of the human condition held foremost in his mind. Zimbardo posits that marriage as depicted in this Restoration comedy (and many others, one could argue) creates a metaphor for the discrepancy between conforming to society's (or parental) expectations and the desire for spiritually

satisfying marital relationships. But it is a metaphor of our own making. There is no reason to discount the assertions of dramatists who profess their goals as comedic playwrights, whether we discern loftier ambitions in their plays, as we can with Dryden and Behn, or find execution of the goals deficient as in the case of Shadwell. The return to traditional marriage at the end of *Marriage A-la-Mode* and the marriages of choice in *An Evening's Love* indicate an opposition to arranged marriages enforced by necessity or for economic gain, not to the institution of marriage itself. When we consider other elements of Dryden's theory for comedic drama that are equally represented components of his plays—witty repartee and the naturalness of characters and their actions—Zimbardo's theory becomes even more illogical; just as Behn and a host of other comic dramatists utilize courtship and marriage as the focus (or perhaps the vehicle?) of their work, Dryden highlights forced marriage in his plots because it was a popular topic among Restoration audiences, not to utilize marriage as a metaphor, as Zimbardo posits, to illustrate disproportional unions of spirit that create the human condition.

Dryden's concern with witty repartee also derives from his desire to meet the demands of theatre-goers who consciously practiced the art of conversation in court and town circles. In the preface to *The Sullen-Lovers*, Shadwell derides those poets (meaning Dryden), who imagine "that all the Wit in *Playes* consisted in bringing two persons upon the Stage to break Jests, and to bob one another, which they call Repartie" (11). Dryden responds in his preface to *An Evening's Love*, explaining that just as witty repartee

> is the very soul of conversation, so it is the greatest grace of Comedy, where it is proper to the Characters: there may be much of acuteness in a thing well said; but there is more in a quick reply. . . . [And] in the characters of humour, the Poet is confin'd to make the person speak what

> is only proper to it. . . . A witty Coward and a witty Brave must speak differently. (162-65, 180-82, 186-87)

In both *Marriage A-la-Mode* and *An Evening's Love*, Dryden creates a great number of instances where the witty dialogue between characters in both the high and low plots is accomplished within the confines of language appropriate to their stations. Doralice and Rhodophil, the married couple of the humorous subplot of *Marriage A-la-Mode*, regularly engage in witty repartee, often debating which of the two suffers more in their unhappy marriage:

> RHODOPHIL. Well, thou art the most provoking Wife!
>
> DORALICE. Well, thou are the dullest Husband, thou art never to be provok'd.
>
> RHODOPHIL. I was never thought dull, till I marry'd thee; and now thou hast made an old knife of me, thou has whetted me so long, till I have no edge left.
>
> DORALICE. I see you are in the Husbands fashion; you reserve all your good humours for your Mistresses, and keep your ill for your wives.
>
> RHODOPHIL. Prithee leave me to my own cogitations; I am thinking over all my sins, to find for which of them it was I marry'd thee.
>
> DORALICE. Whatever your sin was, mine's the punishment.
>
> RHODOPHIL. My comfort is, thou art not immortal; and when that blessed, that divine day comes, of thy departure, I'm resolv'd I'll make one Holy-day more in the Almanack, for thy sake.
>
> DORALICE. Aye, you had need make a Holy-day for me, for I am sure you have made me a Martyr. (III.i.45-63)

This sophisticated attack and counter-attack could not be further from Shadwell's assessment that "all the Wit in *Playes*" consists of two persons bobbing one another and

making jests. The dialogue between this witty man and woman of the court is certainly appropriate and natural, as is the lack of wit and intellect apparent in Melantha, described in the list of characters as "an Affected Lady" (282). Melantha has, as Rhodophil explains to Palamede who has not yet met her:

> one fault that's almost unpardonable; for, being a Town-Lady, without any relation to the Court, yet she thinks her self undone, if she be not seen there three or four times a day with the Princess Amalthea. . . . With all this, she's the greatest Gossip in Nature; . . . No Lady can be so curious of a new Fashion, as she is of a new French-word; she's the very Mint of the Nation; and as fast as any Bullion comes out of France, coins it immediately into our Language. (I.i.205-209, 215, 223-26)

Melantha is an amusing character who exhibits Dryden's talent for writing in his "mixt way of Comedy," which skillfully combines stage personalities full of Fletcherian wit with those affected with Jonsonian humours. Shadwell's derision of "most other Authors that *I* ever read [who] . . . content themselves with one or two Humours at most" (Preface, *The Sullen-Lovers* 11), and provide inappropriately witty repartee for such common and imperfect characters, while directed at Dryden, certainly does not apply. Melantha never deviates from the behavior assigned to her humour (something Shadwell could not accomplish with any of his humours characters) and she never utters an inappropriately witty line. It is Melantha's clever and ingenious servant woman, Philotis, who understands enough French to make a dupe of her mistress and acts as a foil for Melantha's ridiculous affectations. As Philotis arrives with a list of French words in her hand, it is clear which character is the fool and which has some wit:

> MELANTHA. O, are you there, Minion? And, well, are not you a most precious damsel, to retard all my visits for want of language, when you know you are paid so well for furnishing me with words for my daily conversation? . . .

PHILOTIS. Indeed, Madam, I have been very diligent in my vocation; but you have so drain'd all the *French* Plays and Romances, that they are not able to supply you with words for your daily expences.

MELANTHA. Drain'd? what a word's there! *Epuisée*, you sot you. Come, produce your morning's work. . . . [Philotis reads]

PHILOTIS. *Sottises*.

MELANTHA. *Sottises: bon*. That's an excellent word to begin withal: as for example; He, or she said a thousand *Sottises*[18] to me. Proceed. (III.i.210-14, 218-24, 230-33)

And Philotis proceeds to provide her mistress with a list of French words that Melantha will use inappropriately throughout her day of gossip and artifice with the ladies of the court. The conversation continues:

MELANTHA. Now give me your Paper in my hand, and hold you my Glass, while I practice my postures for the day.
Melantha *laughs in the Glass*.
How does that laugh become my face?

PHILOTIS. Sovereignly well, Madam.

MELANTHA. *Sovereignly*! Let me die, that's not amiss. That word shall not be yours; I'll invent it, and bring it up my self: my new Point Gorget shall be yours upon't: not a word of the word, I charge you.

PHILOTIS. I am dumb, Madam.

MELANTHA. That glance, how sutes it with my face?
Looking in the Glass again.

PHILOTIS. 'Tis so *languissant*.

MELANTHA. *Languissant*! That word shall be mine too, and my last *Indian-Gown* thine for't.
That sigh? *Looks again*.

PHILOTIS. 'Twill make many a man sigh, Madam. 'Tis a meer

[18] *Sottises*: the singular form means folly or nonsense, the plural, insults or abusive language (Beaurline 317).

Incindiary.

MELANTHA. Take my Guimp Petticoat for that truth. (III.i.246-62)

Philotis cleverly earns her living (and her wardrobe) by assisting her silly mistress in absurd pretensions, and Melantha remains "confin'd not to swerve from the Character, and oblig'd to say nothing but what is proper to it" (Shadwell, Preface, *The Sullen-Lovers* 11). Nor does Dryden provide any of the characters in the more serious high plot with the witty repartee of the courtiers; their conversation is somber and regulated, suitable for the heroic actions of honorable characters and momentous events that transpire. While Dryden confines himself to the one or two humours characters for which Shadwell derides him, he succeeds where Shadwell fails in the "carrying on of the humours to the last" (Preface, *The Sullen Lovers* 10).

An Evening's Love is an especially suitable example of Dryden's ability to create characters whose behavior and conversation—although witty—is entirely appropriate. Maskall, a clever servant who works for two gentlemen who are a part of the English ambassador's retinue, is engaged by his youthfully exuberant masters, Wildblood and Bellamy, to determine the identity of the beautiful Spanish women who peeked flirtatiously at them from behind their veils while following their father to church. Maskall pursues them and endeavors to learn their identity through the girls' attending servant, Beatrix, who frustrates his efforts to comply with his masters' request:

MASKALL. Their Names are — out with it boldly—

BEATRIX. A secret not to be disclos'd.

MASKALL. A secret say you? Nay, then I conjure you as you are a Woman tell it me.

> BEATRIX. Not a syllable.
>
> MASKALL. Why then as you are a Waiting-woman: as you are the Sieve of all your Ladies Secrets tell it me.
>
> BEATRIX. You lose your labour: nothing will strain through me. (I.i.176 84)

Beatrix unwaveringly refuses to reveal the identity of her charges, but when the ingenious Maskall changes his tactic, she falls for the ploy:

> MASKALL. [W]ell, get thee gone, now I think on't thou shalt not tell me.
>
> BEATRIX. Shall I not? Who shall hinder me? They are *Don Alonzo de Ribera's* Daughters.
>
> MASKALL. Out, out: I'le stop my Eares.
>
> BEATRIX. — They live hard by, in the *Calle major*.
>
> MASKALL. O infernal Tongue —
>
> BEATRIX. And are going to the next Chappel with their Father.
>
> MASKALL. Wilt thou never have done tormenting me? in my Conscience anon thou wilt blab out their Names too.
>
> BEATRIX. Their Names are *Theodosia* and *Jacinta*.
>
> MASKALL. And where's your great Secret now? (I.i.196-208)

Maskall consistently displays his intelligence and wit, extricating Wildblood and Bellamy from a multitude of blunders and mishaps while orchestrating the romances that eventually lead to marriage for both young men to the witty, beautiful, and wealthy Spanish noblewomen.

When Maskall has successfully extorted the girl's names from Beatrix, he reports his findings to his masters and they follow the girls to church. Wildblood positions

himself next to the praying Jacinta and attempts to engage her in conversation, affording Dryden another opportunity to display his talent for witty repartee:

> WILDBLOOD. Madam, I hope a stranger may take the libertie without offence to offer his devotions by you.
>
> JACINTA. That, Sir, would interrupt mine, without being any advantage to your own.
>
> WILDBLOOD. My advantage, Madam, is very evident; for the kind Saint to whom you pray, may by the neighbourhood mistake my devotions for yours.
>
> JACINTA. O Sir! Our Saints can better distinguish between the prayers of a Catholick and a Lutheran. (I.ii.51-59)

The two witty adversaries do, of course, fall in love, and with verbal dexterity, joust with each other in a number of love duels. When Jacinta catches Wildblood using the gold coins that belong to her to impress another woman, she denounces him for being false, causing another of their several attempts to sever their relationship:

> WILDBLOOD. Because I will absolutely break off with you, I will keep nothing that belongs to you: therefore take back your Picture, and your Handkerchief.
>
> JACINTA. I have nothing of yours to keep; therefore take back your liberal promises. Take ‘em in imagination.
>
> WILDBLOOD. Not to be behind hand with you in your frumps, I give you back your Purse of Gold: take you that — in imagination. (IV.1.784-91)

Never is there an instance in this play, or in *Marriage A-la-Mode*, of a character inappropriately engaging in witty repartee, “bobbing” one another, or simply breaking jests. Shadwell admonishes the Poet Laureate in error; Dryden succeeds in this comedy, as he does in *Marriage A-la-Mode*, in his intent to write in

> the mixt way of Comedy; that which is neither all wit, nor all humour, but the result of both. Neither so little of humour as *Fletcher* shews, nor so little of love and wit, as *Johnson*. Neither all cheat, with which the best Playes of the one are fill'd, nor all adventure, which is the common practice of the other. I would have the characters well chosen, and kept distant from interfaring with each other. (Preface, *An Evening's Love* 151-58)

In both plays, Dryden achieves his goal of keeping his characters from "interfaring with each other" and the distinct personalities of the Englishmen in *An Evening's Love*—two characters whose personas might easily merge—provide an example of the dexterity with which Dryden manages to present them as individuals. Every character in *Marriage A-la-Mode* is well chosen; none is dispensable and each is memorable as a distinctly individual character. Dryden says that comedy consists of "natural actions, and characters; I mean such humours, adventures, and designes, as are to be found and met with in the world" (Preface, *An Evening's Love* 47-49), and in both plays he certainly succeeds in his objective to create realistic, individualized characters who engage in plausible activities and behave in ways appropriate to their roles.

While Dryden insists that he lacks "gaiety of humour" and that his "conversation is slow and dull," Restoration audiences found him, as do twenty-first-century readers, anything but dull and humorless. Dryden thoroughly underestimates—or perhaps modestly avoids proclaiming—his own ability as a comedic dramatist. To put it in his own words, Dryden most certainly *does* "succeed in it, (I mean so far as to please the Audience)."

Epilogue

Shadwell's Corrective Satire, Behn's Divertissement, and Dryden's Dull Conversation, or: The Best Laid Plans. A Comedy.

While there is no reason to doubt each dramatist's clearly defined dramatic theory or description of what drama should be, it is obvious that none of the playwrights examined in this thesis represent with complete accuracy their own (or others') work. Shadwell failed in both *Epsom-Wells* and *The Virtuoso* in his attempt to

> adorn his Images of *Vertue* so delightfully to affect people with a secret veneration of it in others, and an emulation to practice it in themselves: And to render their Figures of *Vice* and *Folly* so ugly and detestable, to make People hate and despise them, not only in others, but (if it be possible) in their dear selves.[19]

Instead, Shadwell chose to comply with audience demands and thereby gain the reputation and recognition he so desired. Despite his condemnation of playwrights "who seem to insinuate that the ultimate end of a Poet is to delight, without correction or instruction,"[20] Shadwell's need for approbation and income forced him to abandon his lofty goals and produce popular comedies with little didactic content. I disagree with Hughes who insists that "Shadwell propounds an unambiguous social morality, continuing to champion the traditions of gentility and citizenship that other major dramatists were finding outmoded and contradictory."[21] Neither comedy convincingly encourages moral behavior, nor has either the capacity to correct social ills. None of his characters are so virtuous that audience members would be inspired to emulate their

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[19] Preface to *The Humorists* 184.
[20] Ibid. 183-84.
[21] *English Drama* 156.

behavior, and his debauched characters are rewarded rather than punished for their actions. And while Shadwell does an exceptional job of creating humours characters, here, too, he does not comply in the least with his own requisite that such characters maintain their individual humours throughout the play and that they depict perfect representations of humane life. Nor are any of his characters easily identified as targets within the audience, an essential identification if one's goal is to reform vice. Furthermore, Shadwell derides playwrights who write Fletcherian-style witty sex comedies, yet many of the stylistic choices he makes for his own plays employ the techniques about which he so vehemently complains.

Behn's insistence that the only job of the comic dramatist is to entertain her audience also presents problems when we consider the extent to which she illuminates the social ills that Shadwell ignores. She consistently condemns the patriarchal practice of forced or arranged marriages despite her assertions that plays are "intended for the exercising of mens passions, not their understandings."[22] Although her own lack of formal education may be one reason she consigns plays to "a place among the middle, if not the better sort of Books,"[23] Behn's initial discussion on the purpose of comedy rejects any possibility that comic drama could have a positive influence in the "reformation of mens minds or manners."[24] Behn triumphantly succeeds in her goal to produce some of the period's "best Divertissement that wise men have,"[25] yet—despite her claims to the contrary—she also addresses social problems that caused unhappiness and

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[22] Epistle to *The Dutch-Lover* 79-80.
[23] Ibid. 21.
[24] Ibid. 42-43.
[25] Ibid. 91.

disappointment for both men and women in the patriarchal society of Restoration England. While many of Behn's characters challenge the commodification of women and the socially-endorsed practice of subjugation, I do not believe that she utilizes her comedies to explore the psychological consequences of her socio-economic environment, although she undoubtedly explores such oppression in both her poetry and prose.

Dryden, like Behn, claims that "the business of the Poet is to make you laugh,"[26] but he also concedes that the playwright might work a "cure on folly, and the small imperfections in mankind, by exposing them to publick view."[27] Dryden's comedies, like Behn's, register weaknesses in the patriarchal system with portraits of fathers and elders who fail as blocking devices, and depict members of the older generation as both unreasonable and incompetent. The consistency with which the younger generations portrayed in these plays work out their own personal agreements over distribution of power in romantic relationships, and the shifting demarcations of masculine and feminine domains indicate a tacit consensus that female subordination was increasingly seen as a social rather than a natural or inevitable inequality. Dryden is masterful in his use of language appropriate to the various stations of his characters, and is unquestionably successful in his goal to combine Fletcherian wit and Jonsonian humours in his "mixt way of Comedy," accomplishing exactly what he says he will do.

Despite a limited range of topics and the confines of audience expectations, personal goals, and dramatic theories, Shadwell, Dryden, and Behn each produced a significant number of successful comedies that not only afforded them a living, but have

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[26] Preface to *An Evening's Love* 269.
[27] Ibid. 272-73.

provided scholars with a never-ending supply of topics for speculation and argument. While all three dramatists examine unsuitable marriages and the relationships between men and women, only Dryden and Behn offer commentaries that might result in reform. Despite Shadwell's claim that his work is designed to attack the vices and fopperies of the age, it is in the comedies of Dryden and Behn that we find implicit warrants to support their arguments against and social commentary on the "ills" Shadwell claimed, so vociferously, that he sought to reform.

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