



DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

V O L U M E

23





DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied
Dramatic Works from All the World's Literatures

VOLUME 23

Lawrence J. Trudeau
Project Editor

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Preface

D*rama Criticism (DC)* is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring interest. Furthermore, *DC* seeks to acquaint the reader with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in *DC* offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies. Where appropriate, reviews of important productions of the plays discussed are also included to give students a heightened awareness of drama as a dynamic art form, one that many claim is fully realized only in performance.

DC was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Thomson Gale's *Short Story Criticism (SSC)* and *Poetry Criticism (PC)*, which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Thomson Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *DC* directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Thomson Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*.

Scope of the Series

By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, *DC* assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Approximately five to ten authors are included in each volume, and each entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that playwright's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Thomson Gale's literary criticism series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *DC* volume.

Organization of the Book

A *DC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** consists of the playwright's most commonly used name, followed by birth and death dates. If an author consistently wrote under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction are any name variations under which the dramatist wrote, including transliterated forms of the names of authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.

- The list of **Principal Works** is divided into two sections. The first section contains the author's dramatic pieces and is organized chronologically by date of first performance. If this has not been conclusively determined, the composition or publication date is used. The second section provides information on the author's major works in other genres.
- Essays offering **overviews and general studies of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes, and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism** of individual plays offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. In some cases, the criticism is divided into two sections, each arranged chronologically. When a significant performance of a play can be identified (typically, the premier of a twentieth-century work), the first section of criticism will feature **production reviews** of this staging. Most entries include sections devoted to **critical commentary** that assesses the literary merit of the selected plays. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; often, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

Cumulative Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *DC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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A **Cumulative Title Index** lists in alphabetical order the individual plays discussed in the criticism contained in *DC*. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

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When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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George Etherege

1636-1692?

English playwright and poet.

INTRODUCTION

Etherege has been credited as a principal founder of the comedy of manners tradition in English drama. This dramatic genre represents the satirical exploitation of the manners and fashions of the aristocratic class on the stage for the aristocracy's own amusement. Critics have acknowledged Etherege as an accomplished writer of wit, speculating that his comedic voice was shaped by his experiences as a young traveler in France, where he likely witnessed the pioneering social comedy of Molière as well as the ostentatious display of Parisian court fashion and manners. Based on these experiences, Etherege wrote comedies in which he affectionately yet incisively parodied Carolinian attitudes toward a vast array of ideological concerns, including sexuality, naturalism, fashion, and social class. Despite achieving celebrity as a playwright during his lifetime, popular interest in Etherege and his comedies declined significantly in succeeding centuries, to the point that his plays are rarely performed for modern audiences.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Etherege was likely born in London in 1636, to Captain George Etherege and Mary Powney. Little is known about his formative years, other than the fact that his father, who was a royalist during the Civil War, fled to France in 1644 and died in exile six years later. Placed in the care of his grandfather, Etherege was apprenticed to attorney George Gosnold of Beaconsfield in 1654. Five years later, he was admitted to Clements Inn to study law, during which time he was involved in a lawsuit between his uncle and grandfather over a disputed inheritance. Literary scholars have noted that Etherege exhibited neither the aptitude nor the inclination to study law; instead, he began writing poems and bawdy verse that earned him some notoriety in academic and courtly circles. Scholars have discovered little evidence to indicate the substance of Etherege's activities as a young man, but some have argued that he traveled to Flanders and France at this time and became highly influenced by French comedy and manners. Also during this period, Etherege became acquainted with Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, later the Earl of

Dorset, who would become a close friend and patron. Back in London by 1664, Etherege became an instant celebrity when his *Comical Revenge; or, Love in a Tub* debuted to widespread popular acclaim at the Duke's playhouse. Apparently taking advantage of his newfound fame, Etherege embraced a lifestyle of drinking, gambling, and seducing women, earning the nicknames "gentle George" and "easy Etherege" for his devotion to free living. He also became acquainted with a group of court wits known as the "merry gang," which included Buckhurst, Sir Charles Sedley and John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Rochester in particular shared Etherege's libertine proclivities and the two became fast friends. In fact, many scholars contend that the rake Dorimant in *The Man of Mode; or, Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676) was modeled on Rochester and his real-life antics. In 1668 Etherege's *She Would If She Could* premiered at the Duke's playhouse. Based on Samuel Pepys's eyewitness account, the audience was disappointed with the play, and Etherege himself placed the blame for the play's failure on the actors' uninspired performances. The failure of the play did not affect Etherege's court preferment; in fact, he was granted gentleman status and assigned as a secretary to the Turkish ambassador, Daniel Harvey. Etherege followed Harvey on a diplomatic mission to Constantinople in late 1668, and after some three years there, he made his way to Paris and then back to London. In London Etherege resumed his life of dissolution, occasionally circulating poems and songs but more often pursuing libertine activities with his "merry gang." By 1676 Etherege had written his third and final play, *The Man of Mode*, which was staged at the Dorset Garden Theatre. That same year, Etherege and other members of the "merry gang" were involved in a fracas with a watchman at Epsom, which left a man dead. In the years that followed, Etherege was knighted and he married a rich widow named Mary Arnold. Some biographers have posited that Etherege married Arnold for her fortune in order to pay off his gambling debts and to purchase the knighthood. Based on Etherege's own letters, the union was not happy, and when he was appointed by James II as ambassador to Ratisbon, Germany, in 1685, Arnold did not join him at his new post. By all accounts, Etherege missed his life of ease at the English court. He despised living in conservative, provincial Germany, and he became embroiled in several gambling and sex scandals. Nevertheless, he remained at his post in Ratisbon until he learned of

James II's ouster in the Glorious Revolution in late 1688. The following year, Etherege joined James and the exiled court in Paris, where it is believed that he died in 1691 or 1692.

MAJOR WORKS

While most commentators have censured Etherege's insubstantial plots and lack of dramatic action in his comedies, they nearly all have acknowledged the brilliance of his brisk and witty dialogue. It is this element, critics have contended, which invigorates his characters and creates humorous scenes which resonated with Carolinian audiences. Because of their lack of technical sophistication, Etherege's plays have often been viewed as prototypes of the later, more refined Restoration comedies of William Wycherley, William Congreve, and John Vanbrugh. In *The Comical Revenge*, critics have mainly focused on the comic sequences featuring Sir Frederick Frolick. They have posited that Frolick is the embryonic representation of a character type known as the Restoration rake, or a libertine aristocrat with a sharp wit who subscribes to free living, drinking, gambling, and pursuing women for romantic trysts. In *She Would If She Could*, critics have maintained, Etherege initiated a more complex exploration of sexual politics between his characters, especially Courtall and Lady Cockwood. They have argued that Courtall represents Etherege's ideal libertine of easy morals and fine wit who defies social convention, whereas Lady Cockwood embodies the playwright's disdain for those who succumb to sensual, naturalistic impulses but who hide behind social pretense to manipulate and seduce others. According to most commentators, Etherege achieved artistic maturity in *The Man of Mode*, a comedy which deftly combines witty dialogue, superbly drawn characters, and Etherege's trademark social satire. Critics have regarded Dorimant, the central character, as the consummate Restoration rake, still given to liberal excess, but also exhibiting a worldly cynicism that suggests a more complex perception of the character than the farcical, one-dimensional Sir Frederick Frolick. The significance of Sir Fopling Flutter as the foil to Dorimant has not been lost on critics: he is the epitome of the vain, superficial man of mode, who is wholly involved in his affectation of courtly manners and fashion. In fact, Sir Fopling initiated the popular stage convention of the foppish imitator of flamboyant French courtly manners who is oblivious to the mocking ridicule of the other characters.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

During his lifetime, Etherege's comedies met with general approbation by his peers and audiences, and he was eulogized in numerous contemporary poems and

pamphlets. A generation later, the comedies were disdained as vulgar products of a licentious and immoral age. Writing about *The Man of Mode* in 1711, Sir Richard Steele asserted: "This whole celebrated piece is a perfect contradiction to good manners, good sense, and common honesty." Throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, Etherege and his comedies remained in a state of general neglect. In the late nineteenth century, commentators began to reexamine Etherege as a leading innovator in the English comedy of manners, but they still generally dismissed his works as superficial showpieces intended merely to appease the degenerate tastes of Carolinian theatergoers. Etherege's literary reputation suffered another blow when L. C. Knights wrote an essay in 1937 condemning Restoration comedies as "trivial, gross, and dull," written by dramatists with a "miserably limited set of attitudes." Knights's essay ignited a critical controversy in which literary scholars set out to restore the reputation of Restoration drama. Many mid- to late-twentieth-century literary scholars have applied a sophisticated, new level of critical analysis to Etherege's comedies. They have maintained that the subtexts of the comedies reveal a complex form of social satire which addressed the most controversial cultural and ethical issues of the Restoration period, including naturalism, skepticism, and libertinism. More recently, commentators have taken this analysis a step further, examining Etherege's comedies as highly charged ideological documents which subvert conventional morality and reveal the cultural dislocation of the aristocratic class in Restoration England. Despite these recent interpretations of Etherege's works, modern scholars nevertheless remain divided in their opinion of the level of his literary achievement. To some, the playwright has been redeemed as a brilliant satirist of the ideological turbulence of the Restoration period; to others, he remains an unsophisticated dramatist who merely intended to amuse and delight his peers by lampooning their court manners on the stage.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Plays

The Comical Revenge; or, Love in a Tub 1664

She Would If She Could 1668

The Man of Mode; or, Sir Fopling Flutter 1676

The Works of Sir George Etherege: Containing His Plays and Poems 1704

The Works of Sir George Etherege: Plays and Poems [edited by A. Wilson Verity] 1888

The Dramatic Works of Sir George Etherege. 2 vols. [edited by H. F. B. Brett-Smith] 1927

The Plays of Sir George Etherege [edited by Michael Corder] 1982

Other Major Works

The Letterbook of Sir George Etherege [edited by Sybil Rosenfeld] (letters) 1928

The Poems of Sir George Etherege [edited by James Thorpe] (poetry) 1963

Letters of Sir George Etherege [edited by Frederick Bracher] (letters) 1974

GENERAL STUDIES

Laura Brown (essay date 1981)

SOURCE: Brown, Laura. "Dramatic Social Satire." In *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History*, pp. 28-65. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981.

[In the essay below, Brown explores the evolution of social satire in Etherege's plays, finding little criticism of social standards in his two early comedies and a more outspoken approach in *The Man of Mode*.]

George Etherege's drama . . . falls into two main periods, a single work, *The Man of Mode*, constituting the second. And again, those two periods exemplify the course of generic evolution that we have been tracing in this chapter. Etherege's first plays (*The Comical Revenge*, 1664, and *She Would If She Could*, 1668) contain the same intriguelike or "all in fun" qualities as Dryden's early comedies: a tendency to emphasize a clever resolution of the plot at the expense of serious content, and, as a corollary, a consistent attempt to defuse conflict and eliminate sexual impropriety. But even more than Dryden's, Etherege's career clearly evolves toward full social satire. For this reason, the distinction between Etherege's early comedies and his last, best play provides a good basis for a clear definition of the form and ideology of the major dramatic social satire of the mid-1670s.

Etherege's first play, *The Comical Revenge*, is a multiple-plot tragicomedy with the characteristic early Restoration intrigue structure. The high plot presents the love conflicts of aristocratic characters in lofty heroic verse. It portrays a duel and an attempted suicide, and ends with the convenient and appropriate pairing of the necessary couples. The low plot is a simple stage farce, including an echoing mock duel. The middle plot

represents the libertine-protagonist Frederick's pursuit of the Widow and hers of him, their schemes to entrap each other into marriage or a declaration of love, and their inevitable coupling. The play contains much of the material of social comedy, though little of the serious meaning of a satire like *The Man of Mode*. Its setting (London taverns, Covent Garden), dialogue (the language of London low life), and dramatis personae (widows, rakes, cullies, and tricksters) are vividly mimetic of familiar London scenes according to the conventions of city comedy. Its action, however, depends mainly upon the neatly propitious shuffling of partners in the serious plot and the fortuitous removal of the nonexistent obstacles in the comic middle plot that are the hallmarks of intrigue. The low plot, which is closest to Jonsonian social satire,¹ is the least formally intriguelike of the three, since its farcical action does differentiate one fool from another, and metes out separate fates to each. But it criticizes only the Puritans and the London lower classes rather than the aristocracy. Ironically, in the evolution of social satire in the early Restoration, those plays that imitate Jonsonian comedy, with its much broader class perspective, are formally more conservative and dramatically less significant than the narrowly aristocratic major comedy of manners. The Restoration's version of the form is only fully serious when, in the later and greater social satires, it turns from blind royalism and anti-Puritanism to libertine ideology.

The coexistence of serious and comic plots in *The Comical Revenge* demonstrates the significance of intrigue form in the early stages of this dramatic history. The juxtaposition is only possible because both plots are so close to intrigue that their characterization and their thematic implications are secondary to the pleasing neatness of their tricks and resolutions. Despite their radically different manner and matter, both plots are designed to furnish the same kind of aesthetic pleasure. Dramatic interest is primarily directed, as in an intrigue, by the expectation of a neat pairing off in the final scene, rather than by the clear and potentially contradictory judgments that genuine tragedy and comedy would demand.

In his early intriguelike plays, Etherege, like Dryden, carefully absolves his characters of actual sexual conflict or even impropriety. Frederick chooses a widow as the happy recipient of his sexual interest and is thus, according to the standards of the day, practically immune to moral reproach. But to make Frederick's innocence unmistakable, Etherege studiously denies him even the opportunity of sleeping with his widow. In fact, unlike *The Man of Mode*, the play portrays no illicit sexual relations, though the characters often seem on the verge of some tantalizingly indecent behavior. In the end, the whole brunt of the play's supposed sexual daring is borne, farcically, by Frederick's comical, poxy French

valet, who is locked in a tub to publicize his contraction of a social disease.

The play's proximity to intrigue and avoidance of conflict places it in that part of the spectrum of social forms which exhibits the least degree of disjunction between social material and implicit moral judgment. The conservative social resolution, directed in part by Frederick himself, who personally gives the Puritan cully and the lower-class gamesters their just deserts, is accepted without qualification, as the unquestioning royalism of the context demands. In *The Man of Mode* neither royalism nor Dorimant has such a role, and the lower-class characters, drawn with even stronger city "realism," are shown to be far beyond this simple formal jurisdiction.

She Would If She Could does not contain the same radical variety of plots and characters as *The Comical Revenge*, and, as a corollary, it is less immediately related to intrigue and somewhat closer to the specific form of *The Man of Mode*. Significantly, Etherege does not make his second play a tragicomedy, despite the success of his first. From the changeable and diffuse action of *The Comical Revenge*, with its frequent moments of farce and stage complication, he turns to an essentially single plot dominated by two pairs of comic lovers who occupy lengthy stretches of stage time in stationary dialogue. For this reason, those critics who do not consider *The Comical Revenge* the first comedy of manners invariably select *She Would If She Could*. In fact, John Harrington Smith designates the appearance of the "gay couple" as the most important aspect of this play and also of the succeeding drama.² But in terms of the evolution of social satire in this period, the mere presence of these lovers and their debates is less significant than the formal developments of which they are only a sign. Smith's isolation of a specific kind of character allows him to document the presence of a particular dramatic formula, but it does not enable him to explain the diminished variety of episodes and *dramatis personae*, the decreased use of mechanical tricks, the lessening emphasis on comic reversal or symmetrical concluding marriages, the growth of conflict and contradiction—in short the transcendence of intrigue concurrent with the development of the major comedy of manners. In *She Would If She Could* the centrality of the witty lovers signifies a change in the formal importance of individual characterization and thus, inevitably, a turn away from the unspecified interest in a neat conclusion that dominates *The Comical Revenge* and reconciles its disparate actions. In effect, the increasing prominence of the gay couple in social satire is a sign of the evolution away from intrigue, since the love-game material reflects an interest in clearly defined character relationships rather than in the simple unraveling of the plot.

But despite its proximity to full social satire, *She Would If She Could* contains the studied evasion of sexual conflict that characterizes intrigue-like and "all in fun" social forms and that makes the play, in its avoidance of contradiction, closer to *The Comical Revenge* than to *The Man of Mode*. The two rake-protagonists, Courtall and Freeman, promise the gay and witty Gatty and Ariana that they will avoid all female company until their next assignation. Of course, within a matter of minutes they secure an introduction to a pair of eligible and wealthy young country girls. Thus Etherege manufactures an essential dramatic tension between the lovers. But he deprives it of content and significance by making the potential rivals none other than Gatty and Ariana themselves, whose names the errant rakes had never learned. The action of *She Would If She Could* is made up of a series of similar episodes, which consist of tension without conflict and which tend to establish the sexual conservatism of the rakes despite the explicit libertinism of the play's surface. Etherege wants his protagonists to appear to be aristocratic rakes, but without arousing any of the serious sexual and social contradictions that libertinism implies.

In keeping with this consistent avoidance of conflict, the affair between Courtall and Lady Cockwood—the "she" of the title—does not involve a lewd, illicit January and May reversal, but rather a formal diatribe against female libertinism, in which Lady Cockwood serves as an example of unacceptable female behavior. To our relief, Courtall narrowly escapes Lady Cockwood's embraces, and is finally made permanently safe from her only by his marriage. His "affair" is actually a testament to and guarantee of his chastity. Thus, though the play's title suggests promiscuity, its action represents the flight from illicit sex, and Courtall, in vivid contrast to Dorimant and to his own name, is the perfect contradiction in terms: a Virgin Rake.

The empty tensions of the plot are resolved with the prospective marriages of the two gay couples, to which there has been no impediment but misunderstanding, and with the reformation of the insatiable Lady Cockwood.³ Thus the conclusion, perfectly consonant with the sexual conservatism implicit in the whole development of the action, affirms an orderly and totally efficacious social solution to all the problems that the world of the plot can envisage. The form of *She Would If She Could*, from the inception of the action to its resolution, commends society as it is, its traditional institutions, the status quo.

In general, Etherege's early comedies, like Dryden's, can best be understood as kinds of social satires in which the invocation of a recognizable social context and the operation of a recognizable set of social standards is largely free from any implicit criticism of the "rightness" of those standards. The intriguelike ele-

ments of these plays tend to direct expectations away from the specific deserts and fates of individual characters, and thus away from any potential discrimination between social justice and moral judgment. The evasion of actual conflict, especially sexual, contingent on this neglect of differentiated characterization, produces a workable dramatic action which can be resolved easily and automatically and which thus assumes that social tension is "all in fun" and, concurrently, that an adequate solution is always available in the status quo. The care that Dryden and Etherege must take to remove any sources of actual conflict, and the tricks and coincidences of which they must avail themselves to make their rakes virginal, all suggest that contradiction and moral discrepancy are inherent implications of the form against which the "all in fun" dramatist must consciously struggle. Very few of these "all in fun" plays are fully devoid of potentially subversive satiric implications, despite the predominant conservatism of their actions. In *She Would If She Could*, for instance, when the unfaithful rakes are confronted by Gatty and Ariana, they defend themselves in turn:

COURTALL:

Why should you be so unreasonable, ladies, to expect that from us, we should scarce have hoped for from you? Fie, fie, the keeping of one's word is a thing below the honor of a gentleman.

FREEMAN:

A poor shift! Fit only to uphold the reputation of a paltry Citizen.

[II.ii.199-204]

This momentary irony is not developed or repeated sufficiently to imply a full alternative standard of value to the traditional aristocratic assumptions by which the rest of the action operates. But its presence, like Frances's brief critique of aristocratic prerogative in *The Wild Gallant*, suggests the pervasiveness of this kind of social criticism in the comedy of the period, however weakly developed its satire.

The formal category of social satire, then, enables us to perceive the coherence of the drama over these years, while at the same time distinguishing from that larger group the particular characteristics of the early manners comedy. As we have seen, the evolution from intrigue to intriguelike and "all in fun" social satire entails an increasing formal discrimination of individual characters and fates. It also entails a concurrent progression from entertainment for its own sake to entertainment with an explicitly social context that provides terms for the judgment of the characters and the resolution of the action. The major dramatic satire exploits the implicit contradictions of this social context. It fills the form

with actual and unresolvable conflict, and it develops fully all the potential disjunction between social and moral that social satire implies. In *The Man of Mode* Etherege seeks out the collisions of character and value that he avoids in *She Would If She Could*. The polarizations in the play reproduce the ideological contradictions of the aristocratic society that it depicts. That society is examined and finally affirmed, but simultaneously exposed and judged in the unique manner of Restoration dramatic satire.

Libertinism, or some reference to it, is the distinguishing ingredient of the major social satire of this period. It effectively discriminates the Restoration social satirists as a group from such predecessors as Jonson, Shirley, and Molière. The formal centrality of libertine philosophy for the Restoration dramatists results from its direct implication of the essential social contradictions of their time and class: writers of social satire naturally turn for their material to the issues they perceive as problematic in their particular society. In these plays, the ambivalence toward the social status quo—or the disjunction between represented social reality and the implicit moral judgment upon the "rightness" of that reality—represents an aesthetic expression of the ambiguous aristocratic attitude toward the subversive content of libertine ideology, as revealed to us in its links with the rhetoric of the radical Puritans.

Though libertinism has a long and distinguished intellectual history,⁴ Restoration libertinism is more than an ideological or philosophical fossil in postrevolutionary England. During and immediately after the revolution and Restoration, the aristocracy lost much of its economic and social distinctiveness and even preeminence. Politically, it remained dominant into the eighteenth century and beyond. Economically, however, it derived the preponderance of its income from capitalist enterprises, primarily in agriculture, but also in trade and industry. In the nation as a whole, moneyed interests were more powerful than landed interests by the 1690s at the latest. Thus, as the aristocracy increasingly depended on the same sources of wealth as the bourgeoisie, it became less distinguishable from that class, in its economic position and in some aspects of social relations and ideology.⁵

A segment of the youngest and most embittered members of the aristocracy sought refuge in the advocacy of a loose social and philosophical system diametrically opposed to that of the increasingly prominent, often Puritan, bourgeoisie. Not surprisingly, this system includes a whole spectrum of social values that parallel those expressed by the Ranters, the Diggers or True Levellers, and the Muggletonians during the early revolutionary years. In general, the radicals and the libertines share a common studied opposition to the beliefs and programs of the Presbyterians. Both the

Ranters and the court wits encourage profanity and exercise their considerable talent for cursing and swearing, in obvious opposition to the moderate Puritans' obsessive verbal purity. Both radicals and libertines advocate free love and the abolition of traditional marriage, in opposition to bourgeois sexual constraints. Both declare an aversion to labor, expressed specifically by the Diggers as a principled rejection of labor beyond the amount necessary for subsistence, in opposition to the capitalist, middle-class work ethic. Both practice nudity and thus challenge the notion of original sin. Both voice an explicit theoretical rejection of all authority and hierarchy, which on the part of the Diggers is expressed as the advocacy of a classless society. And both espouse antimonarchism, radical republicanism, and atheism—in Gerrard Winstanley the gradual substitution of a rational principle for the divine being.⁶

As these similarities suggest, though the aristocratic Restoration libertine retains and protects what remains of a privileged class position, he is also provided with the ideological material for a radical assessment not only of the bourgeois, moderate Presbyterians, but also of the monarchy and the aristocracy itself, especially in their accommodation to capitalist society. The libertine advocacy of freedom, with its deliberate subversion of social order and hierarchy, constitutes an implicitly radical attack upon the status quo, launched from an ideological vantage point outside an increasingly capitalist society and reflecting the discontent of a class whose partial exclusion from traditional routes to wealth, power, and prerogative provides it with a critical perspective upon that society. For this reason, libertinism is inevitably viewed as a threat and ultimately repudiated, even by the Restoration libertine himself.

Rochester's inconsistent and occasional republicanism, his atheism, his rejection of monogamy as a restraint on human freedom, and his satires upon monarchy and traditional values provide the most obvious example.⁷ But many of the comic dramatists of the seventies express specific social criticisms of a similar nature. Jeremy Collier himself, in his attack upon what he clearly perceived to be a subversive literary form, links manners comedy with Leveller revolutionary rhetoric and suggests that the two share a parallel, radical purpose.⁸ Like many conservative spokesmen, he knew his enemy, and his assessment of the radical implications of libertine ideology is accurate, though his readings of the plays are not.⁹ The best of the courtier playwrights, in their adoption of a satiric form, dealt, each in his or her own particular manner, with the most fundamental social contradictions that they could perceive. The turn to satire in this period of a reinstated but economically and socially transfigured aristocracy is the aesthetic consequence of those contradictions.

Dramatic social satire, then, is the formal expression of a peculiarly vexed and conflicted ideology, fundamen-

tally conservative in its allegiance to traditional values and to the status quo, but daringly radical in its exposure of the hypocrisy, the immorality, and the materialism of the society it must finally accept. The complexity of this ideological contradiction is typically not apparent to critics who see the phenomenon of libertinism ahistorically. Such a perspective has produced, on the one hand, a view of the libertine as an honest, self-conscious, or unsentimental hero, the embodiment of a momentary assertion of sexual or psychological liberation. For critics of this school, the plays are not satires, but either uncritical descriptions of contemporary aristocratic mores or actual celebrations of libertine freedom.¹⁰ This prolibertine position is balanced by an equally incomplete antilibertine argument, which emphasizes the traditional morality of the drama and documents its rejection of libertine behavior.¹¹ The polarities of this critical dispute reproduce the structure of the formal and ideological contradiction that I have taken as the basis of my definition of mature dramatic satire: the contradictory interpretations elicited by the form can be seen as evidence of its contradictory nature.

The Man of Mode (1676) begins with a seemingly irrelevant confrontation between Dorimant and a succession of outspoken lower-class characters: the Orange-Woman, the Shoemaker, and, by proxy, the whore. Each of these characters in turn disparages the aristocratic rakes—their behavior, their morality, and their class. The Orange-Woman, who expresses open disgust at her client's sexual corruption,¹² spits at the sight of Dorimant and Medley's morning embrace and, cursing Medley, likens him to her peer, "the shoemaker without" (I.82). The Shoemaker himself compares the morality of the gentlemen to his own: "There's never a man i' the town lives more like a gentleman with his wife than I do. I never mind her motions; she never inquires into mine. We speak to one another civilly, hate one another heartily, and because 'tis vulgar to lie and soak together, we have each of us our several settle-bed" (I.282-86). He challenges the prerogatives of the aristocracy, asserting a kind of egalitarianism in sexual behavior: "Zbud, I think you men of quality will grow as unreasonable as the women: you would engross the sins o' the nation. Poor folks can no sooner be wicked but th'are railed at by their betters" (I.253-56). The rakes themselves condone and even contribute to this disruption of traditional class distinctions. When, at the end of the act, Dorimant receives a request from his whore for "a guynie to see the operies," he decides to send her the money specifically so that she can "perk up i' the face of quality" (I.471-75).

The presence of these characters, their outspoken observations, and their unique relationship to their "betters" distinguish the social world of *The Man of Mode* from that of *The Comical Revenge* or from Jonsonian social satire. This lower class is not amenable to the

simple formal authority that Frederick exercises over Wheadle and Palmer in *The Comical Revenge*. Significantly, the Orange-Woman and the Shoemaker, not one of the gentlemen, are the first to verbalize Dorimant's libertine philosophy, thereby distinguishing it as much as possible from traditional aristocratic morality.

The opening scene thus introduces libertinism almost as the corollary of the rejection of class hierarchy advocated by the most radical revolutionary sects. The conjunction is also made explicit, in this scene and throughout the play, in the character of Lady Woodvill, who nostalgically recollects "the forms and civility of the last age" and fears and detests Dorimant and "the freedoms of the present" (I.117-20). In addition, Medley's debate with the Shoemaker and the Shoemaker's apologia for his own morality, which he claims is "like a gentleman[s]," initiate the critique of libertinism that constitutes the play's satire. Echoing Courtall's ironic comment in *She Would If She Could* (see above), Medley remarks to the Shoemaker: "You have brought the envy of the world upon you by living above yourself. Whoring and swearing are vices too genteel for a shoemaker" (I.249-52). In short, this first scene serves at once to define the social and historical context of libertinism, to applaud its witty representation in the gay and liberal rakes, and to suggest an implicit criticism of its moral and social assumptions. It establishes the formal prerequisites of the drama.

From this introduction until his final triumph in Act V, Dorimant dominates the action of the play. His libertinism, moreover, has greater substance than Courtall's in *She Would If She Could*. We see him involved in two affairs, one of which comes so close to represented consummation that we witness Handy's tying up of the linen (IV.ii.opening *s.d.*). And as a libertine, Dorimant is the epitome of social accomplishment and "genius" (I.232). He is the subject of every conversation, the preoccupation of every woman, and the model for every man. Even the old-fashioned Lady Woodvill is enamored of his wit and charm when he entertains her in disguise. His sexual pursuits generate the action of the play and his social success sets the standards of his dramatic world.

But the implicit moral judgment upon the libertine hero diverges from this assessment of his preeminence in the social world of the action. Though literally triumphant in the context of the plot, Dorimant is the object of a consistent moral criticism, supplied through the details of characterization, incident, and dialogue. The disjunction between this moral criticism and the social approval asserted in the action is the essential formal feature of Etherege's dramatic satire. For instance, we know from Bellair's commendations in the first scene of the play (I.337-38) that Dorimant takes particular care of his appearance. Fopling, who is introduced as

the epitome of social affectation, immediately recognizes Dorimant as a compatriot in the French style of dress and manner (III.ii.140ff.). The parallel between these two "men of mode" is pursued consistently throughout the play,¹³ and Fopling's obvious and exaggerated affectation is made to infect his more graceful and self-conscious counterpart. Thus the local ridicule directed against the person of Fopling, though also an end in itself, becomes an important device for the implicit assessment of the libertine hero; a device, however, that does not interfere with our admiration for the hero's preeminence or with our sense of the appropriateness of his success in the social context of the action.

The central tension between Dorimant and Harriet further contributes to this implicit judgment of the libertine. Harriet's consciousness of social role-playing serves to reveal Dorimant's hypocrisy: "He's agreeable and pleasant, I must own, but he does so much affect being so, he displeases me" (III.iii.23-24). This contrast in their characters is reiterated in each of their disputes and keeps them at odds until the resolution of the action, despite the fact that they are obviously designed for each other.

The implicit criticism of Dorimant extends beyond this juxtaposition of his social accomplishment with Harriet's naturalness; his relationships with Loveit and Bellinda give rise to the same satiric judgment. For instance, when his scheme to rid himself of Loveit backfires and she flouts him with Sir Fopling, we do not feel her temporary victory over her tormentor to be undeserved. Significantly, Etherege chooses to portray at length Dorimant's coldly calculated plot against Loveit (I.222-31) and his quickly forgotten protestations of eternal love for Bellinda (IV.ii.36-43). By this means Dorimant's whole represented relationship to his cast mistresses is weighted toward a sympathy for them, at his expense. The accumulating judgment upon libertine morality acquires further substance from Loveit's singularly convincing attacks on Dorimant, which contain all the criticisms expressed only implicitly in the juxtapositions and confrontations of the characters. When she accuses him of artificiality (V.i.112), we know from his own comments in previous acts that she is justified. When she confronts him with his lies (V.i.155-60), we know that he has no answer. When he claims she never loved him (V.i.167-68), we are able to reverse the charge. And when he reproaches her with her attentions to Fopling, we feel the perfect justice of her response:

You, who have more pleasure in the ruin of a woman's reputation than in the endearments of her love, reproach me not with yourself and I defy you to name the man can lay a blemish on my fame.

[V.i.183-86]

In short, the force of her eloquence, joined with the force of moral judgment communicated more indirectly