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TWELVE FAMOUS PLAYS OF THE RESTORATION AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Introduction by

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN Charles II came to the throne (1660), the London theatres had been closed for about eighteen years—since the puritans, in 1642, had ordered that actors in all "Stage Plays, Interludes, or other common Plays" were to be "punished as Rogues, according to Law." On August 21, 1660, the new king issued letters patent to Thomas Killigrew and Sir William D'Avenant for the incorporation of two companies of players. By this official act the theatrical interregnum was brought to an end, and the stage, now protected by royal patronage, was safe from the attacks of its puritan enemies.

Londoners who recalled the last performances allowed under Charles I were to find conditions greatly altered in the new theatre. In former times, says a writer of 1664, the theatre was "but plain and simple, with no other Scenes, nor Decorations of the Stage, but only old Tapestry, and the Stage strew'd with Rushes, (with their Habits accordingly) whereas ours now for Cost and ornament are arriv'd to the heighth of Magnificence." If this is extravagant praise, at least the illusion of drama was greatly enhanced by the addition of movable scenery. Actually in many cases the scenic effects were very elaborate. Much greater use was made of music, too, and—most important of all—female parts, which formerly had been played by boys, were now regularly performed by actresses. Another difference soon began to be evident, at least to the more discerning patrons. With the restoration of the stage had come also a new type of drama, plays of a much more sophisticated type than those to which they had been accustomed. Sir Philip Sidney had deplored the formlessness of Elizabethan drama and had urged playwrights to improve their art by an imitation of classical drama. The advice went unheeded in his time, and, with the sole exception of Ben Jonson, no English dramatist of the later period had tried seriously to compose "regular" plays upon the model of the ancients. During the interregnum in England, the classical ideal had been generally adopted in France and loudly proclaimed. Largely through the influence of French example and criticism, the English began after 1660 to set their own house in order, and thus inaugurated the Age of Classicism.

As the cult of correctness gained ground, Elizabethan plays were regarded with increasing disfavor. Not that they were neglected or that the national tradition had been severed. Indeed, as one may see from the lists of offerings at the King's and the Duke's, their repertory consisted largely of plays written by Shakespeare, Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher. But, Jonson alone excepted, none of them were considered as authoritative exemplars of dramatic art, and seldom were any of their tragedies or comedies put upon the boards until they had undergone drastic revision. No doubt existed that some of the Elizabethans and Jacobeans were men of great native genius; but, unhappily, they had not acquired that refinement of manner demanded in an age of politeness. Though sufficient for a rude and barbarous generation, they "could charm an understanding age no more." To be acceptable now, they had to be reshaped into conformity with the three unities and the other prescriptions of the neo-classic code as it was being constantly elaborated by Gallic doctrinaires. Within limits, the attitude was thoroughly defensible; beyond question, many of the old plays are inexcusably loose in structure, some of them marred by downright crudeness. The process of remodeling the elder poets began with the Restoration and continued without abatement for fully a hundred years.

Although the effort to moderate "the generous splendour and faulty exuberance of adventurous youth" sometimes resulted in sheer mutilation, it is not to be denied that a few of the adaptations were better than the originals for the purpose of the stage. Only one of them, however, has found a permanent place in English literature, Dryden's *All for Love* (1677), and his success was only partial. None but a prejudiced critic would question that Dryden's *All for Love* is a better piece of dramaturgy than Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,* and no producer would hesitate in his preference for the later version; but only an insensitive critic would fail to perceive that the gain in dramatic technique has been secured at the expense of human appeal. The loss is felt especially in the character of Cleopatra herself; the well-known criticism is just, that Shakespeare's wily "serpent of old Nile" has dwindled into a conventional courtesan of the Merry Monarch's *ménage.* The redactor himself knew that, while he was reforming the artless original according to the ancients and Mr. Rymer's rules, he had allowed much of the human essence to escape. With the good sense and candor which seldom, though occasionally, failed him, Dryden expresses the modest hope that by imitating the "divine Shakespeare" he has managed to rise above himself.

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The same characterization is applicable, indeed, to most of the original tragedy of the new era; it excels in technique, but is lacking in true passion. The astonishing fact is that for more than a century after the Restoration, only two tragedies of lasting worth were composed—Otway's *The Orphan* (1680) and *Venice Preserv'd* (1682). The explanation sometimes given for the dearth is too simple to be true. It will not suffice to say that the Muse of Tragedy was suffocated by an artificial code. No doubt the neo-classic prescription in its extreme form tended to destroy naturalness of expression and thus to inhibit genuine tragedy. Of this danger Englishmen of the Restoration were not unaware. There was never a time when the invasion of England by the French critics was not resented in some quarters and a plea being made that the English playwright assert his independence of the foreign dictators. Rymer might, if he liked, call *Othello* a "bloody farce" because Shakespeare had neglected the proprieties; but Rymer was the extreme rigorist in England. His bigotry is less typical of critical opinion than are the protests he evoked from saner men, those who believed that the doctrine of correctness was salutary only when applied in moderation and that a dramatist must have regard for the peculiarities of his public. When ample allowance has been made for the sterilizing effects of the new dramatic rules, the sickly state of English tragedy has not been explained. That Addison's *Cato* (1713)—the one correct tragedy produced in England, according to Voltaire—is devoid of passion is no proof that a play may not be both correct and impassioned. If the typical tragedy of the classical period is a perfect body without a soul, the true explanation seems to be that the age itself was deficient in spiritual quality.

While the theatre remained under the immediate control of a dissolute and cynical court, as it was during the twenty-five years of Charles II's rule, the dramatist had slight incentive to provide his audience with anything better than rhetoric and splendor. The beginning of rhymed tragedy, the so-called Heroic Play, was attributed largely to the French taste of the monarch, but it accumulated absurdities for which certainly France cannot be held responsible. The Heroic Play is the most exotic and unreal of all the drama the English people have ever tolerated in the name of tragedy. Dryden's *Conquest of Granada* (1670), a thoroughly representative specimen of the *genre,* was not designed to move the audience with pity or terror. The superhuman deeds of Almanzor ("that great trumpet-blower" Taine calls him) place him at a remote distance from human sympathy or comprehension. The poet laureate's purpose was rather to dazzle the audience

and excite "admiration." Dryden endeavored, says Johnson, "to glut the publick with dramatick wonders; to exhibit in its highest elevation a theatrical meteor of incredible love and impossible valour, and to leave no room for a wilder flight to the extravagance of posterity." There is ample evidence in *The Rehearsal* (1671) that the absurdities of the type were fully understood by contemporary wits; but the existence of the fashion remains a damning commentary on the low state of dramatic taste.

Against this background of artificiality, the tragedies of Thomas Otway appear strangely anachronistic; they are probably more out of place in the reign of the Merry Monarch than they would appear at any other moment in the history of English drama. A testimony to the indestructible genuineness of the poet's character, they testify also to the inspiration which was still to be derived from the "giant race before the flood." Wherever tragedy takes on the semblance of life in the age of passionless rhetoric, it will be found that the dramatist has derived his inspiration, as Otway did, from the fountainhead of Elizabethan drama. Much of Otway's early work is in the conventional manner of his time. He, too, has written plays in which "Declamation roars while Passion sleeps"; but in *The Orphan* and *Venice Preserv'd* are heard once more the accents of genuine feeling. There is a tradition that the pathos woven into the parts of Belvidera and Monimia is the effect partly of Otway's hopeless love for Mrs. Barry, the mistress of Lord Rochester, for whom the parts were written. In the conception of these two characters, at least, Otway has earned a right of comparison to Shakespeare. Dryden had once spoken of his rival as "a barren illiterate man," but afterwards acknowledged his greatness in terms of true understanding. "The motions which are studied," he says, "are never so natural as those which break out in the height of a real passion. Mr. Otway possessed this part as thoroughly as any of the ancients or moderns." Goldsmith thought Otway was "next to Shakespeare the greatest genius England has ever produced in tragedy." A generation later Scott went so far as to say that Otway not only rivals, but in some respects surpasses, the master himself, and that "more tears have been shed probably for the sorrows of Belvidera and Monimia than for those of Juliet and Desdemona."

Undoubtedly Otway has been over-praised, largely because his two tragedies are the one oasis in a dreary desert. Theatrical conditions improved later, and drama became less artificial than it had been during the heroic age of the Restoration, partly in response to Otway's own example. Still, no single specimen of pronounced worth had been produced before Scott wrote. So far

as tragedy is concerned, Dryden's characterization was still applicable:

> Our age was cultivated thus at length;
> But what we gained in skill we lost in strength.
> Our builders were with want of genius curst,
> The second temple was not like the first.

The Augustan Ages were richly endowed to produce a literature of knowledge, as DeQuincey calls it, but not a literature of power.

Out of these very conditions which all but extinguished tragedy came the impulse for a vigorous comedy—comedy, too, of a new kind. Charles II was fond of "a very merry play." This well-known taste of the sovereign's was an invitation not to be neglected by the wits in his kingdom. The writing of comedy became at once the most lucrative and fashionable kind of literary work. Dryden, Charles's poet laureate, complained pathetically that in order to succeed a writer had to compose comedies whether he liked or not, or whether indeed he had the necessary skill. No English men of letters have ever had a richer field for the exercise of their talent in satire or a more generous license for their practice. The life of the time—brilliant, but corrupt and cynical—provided admirable copy for satiric portraiture, and the artist was allowed to reproduce it without let or hindrance. It is to this peculiar combination of circumstances that we are indebted for what is by common consent the most scintillating of all English comedy. If Lamb meant that the satirist was not drawing his material from actual conditions, he was clearly wrong. Hazlitt insists, rightly, that the truthfulness of the portrait is what accounts for the vigor of Restoration comedy and its fascination for the contemporary public. No one supposes that the loose morals exhibited on the Restoration stage are those of a whole people or indeed any considerable portion of it; but they are, emphatically, the manners of that modish world centering in Whitehall—and in the Restoration theatre no one else counted. Let anyone read such private records of court life as have survived—Pepys's *Diary* and Grammont's *Memoirs* if nothing else—and then ask himself if the dramatist needed great gift of invention to people his stage with a motley group of fops, gallants, libertines, coquettes, and courtesans or to provide them with their amorous intrigues. The characters are as real as the familiar scenes through which they pass—the Rose, Hyde Park, Spring Gardens, the New Exchange; some of the scandalous episodes are transcripts from life. Gathered in the Duke's or the King's, haunts of pleasure where no puritanic censor would think of appearing, was a more homogeneous audience than had ever

before assembled in an English theatre or was likely to assemble again. The men and women who composed it came to see themselves mirrored to the life, to laugh over their follies, and to applaud the wit inspired by their frailties. The picture is, of course, selective, as satirical portraiture always is. It has the exaggeration of any composite. Vice and Folly are, speaking in terms of art, idealized. But the elements are indigenous, and the degree of exaggeration is actually slighter than comic realism usually requires. To think of this drama as "a speculative scene of things, which has no reference whatever to the world that is" is to mistake the only possible explanation of its existence. The reality of the scene accounts for both the strength and the weakness of the *genre*. As soon as the comic writer confines himself to a study of a shallow-minded group of aristocratic rakes, he limits his art to a small part of the comic field and gives an incomplete report of the human comedy. This is merely to say that the Restoration Comedy of Manners is not the Human Comedy of Shakespeare; but in its kind it is supreme.

The main tendencies of the new comedy of manners are reflected in the character of its founder, Sir George Etherege. "Easy Etherege" was a clever and dissolute man of fashion who, like many other royalists, had spent most of his time in Paris during the dark days of puritan rule. After he had returned to help the king enjoy his own and make up for the lean years of exile, he was to be found with his fellow-wits at the Mulberry Garden and the other haunts of the *beau monde*. Among his intimate friends were Rochester, Buckingham, and Sedley. His first play, *Love in a Tub* (1664), provides scarcely more than the rough outlines of the pattern he was to develop afterwards in *She Wou'd if She Cou'd* (1668) and *The Man of Mode* (1676). It was part of the gentleman's creed that the Muse should never be taxed. Sir Fopling Flutter, speaking with slight exaggeration for Etherege himself, declares that writing is "a mechanic part of wit" and that "a gentleman should never go beyond a song or a ballet." Etherege astonished the Town with the brilliant wit of three comedies; then he laid his pen aside and spent the remaining years of his life *à la mode*. Meanwhile, John Dryden, unquestionably the greatest literary figure of the age, was producing comedy after comedy, but never quite succeeded in attaining the "fashionable cut." Even *Marriage à la Mode* (1672), though witty enough and licentious enough, fails to catch the easy nonchalance requisite for perfection. The explanation Etherege himself gave Dryden is probably the true one: the poet

laureate was too serious, he lacked that "noble laziness of the mind" in which the king had set the example.

It is a striking fact that only those writers succeeded who had Etherege's attitude of the gentleman amateur. His friend Sir Charles Sedley produced *The Mulberry Garden* in 1668; after a silence of nineteen years it was followed by *Bellamira* (1687), and nothing more is heard of Sedley the dramatist. Wycherley's four comedies—*Love in a Wood, The Gentleman Dancing Master, The Country Wife,* and *The Plain Dealer*—were first acted between 1671 and 1676. "Manly" Wycherley lived long enough to become the friend and adviser of Pope; but, once he had found favor at court (through the influence of one of the royal mistresses, the Duchess of Cleveland) and thus established his claim to gentility, he idled away the remainder of his life. Congreve, that "splendid Phœbus Apollo of the Mall" who was destined to give the comedy of manners its final perfection of epigrammatic splendor and delicate artistry, ran true to form. When his first play, *The Old Bachelor,* was produced, in 1693, he was only twenty-three years old. It was followed in swift succession by *The Double Dealer* (1693), *Love for Love* (1695), and *The Way of the World* (1700). If there had been any suspicion that he was merely a drudging professional, the misconception was now to be removed. His meteoric flight concluded as suddenly as it had begun. The most scintillating wit of the whole tribe buried his talent, content to live upon such sinecures as he could obtain and devote himself to the business of being a gentleman. Sir John Vanbrugh "descended into authorship" as an avocation in the intervals he could spare from architecture and other business. His only original comedies were *The Relapse* (1696) and *The Provok'd Wife* (1697). The last twenty years of his life were spent in retirement with nothing to show for them except the unfinished manuscript of a comedy afterwards completed by Colley Cibber—*The Provok'd Husband* (1728).

Any form of literary art as definitely identified with a peculiar set of social conventions as the Restoration comedy of manners was could count upon its existence only so long as those conventions prevailed. "By what I've heard," says Wycherley's Hippolita, " 'tis a pleasant, well-bred, complaisant, free, frolic, good-natured, pretty age: and if you do not like it, leave it to us that do." This was all well enough when *The Gentleman Dancing Master* was first played. The Merry Monarch was on the throne; his subjects could live and love as he did; if there were others who still had old-fashioned notions about the sinfulness of sin

or the sacredness of matrimony or the heinousness of adultery, let them stay away from the theatre and enjoy the luxury of a good conscience in private. But this flippant answer gradually lost authority after the last of the Stuart kings had withdrawn from Whitehall. The Gardens of Epicurus were no longer sacred from the intrusion of the vulgar. The moral opinion of the conventional middle classes could not be brushed aside with a laugh from the wits. Under the rule of William and Mary there was an emphatic demand for reform, one patronized by the rulers. The Society for the Reformation of Manners was organized. Strict laws were made for the suppression of drunkenness, profanity, and debauchery, and the stage came in for specific consideration. Jeremy Collier's *Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage* (1698) was not the first protest of its kind; it is significant mainly as the embodiment of a public conscience which was no longer to be denied. By an irony of history he was a High Churchman, a non-juror; the strength of his protest lay largely in the fact that by restating, in modified form, the argument of Prynne and other puritan opponents of the stage, he became the mouthpiece of the puritanic section of society. Dryden, now approaching the end of his busy life, acknowledged that the parson's complaint was, on the whole (though not in all details), a just reproof and promised to mend his ways. The truth is, Dryden, never quite of the fraternity, had made a confession thirteen years earlier in a spirit of contrition which ought to have satisfied even Collier:

> O gracious God! how far have we
> Profan'd thy heav'nly gift of poesy!
> Made prostitute and profligate the Muse,
> Debas'd to each obscene and impious use,
> Whose harmony was first ordain'd above
> For tongues of angels, and for hymns of love!
> O wretched we! why were we hurried down
> This lubric and adult'rous age,
> (Nay, added fat pollutions of our own)
> T' increase the steaming ordures of the stage.

The younger wits, some of them just entering upon their careers in the drama, adopted a very different tone. They undertook to argue the matter with the clergyman. From the outset they were doomed to defeat. They were hopelessly lost the moment they began contradicting him, as Congreve did, or asserting, as Vanbrugh did, that his plays were worthy of a place in a lady's library next to her Bible. It required more ingenuity than even the brilliant Mr. Congreve possessed to prove that Restoration comedy was not indecent according to the recognized conventions

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of decorum; the most courageous apologists of the *genre* have had to admit that the wits were guilty of obscenity and nastiness. Congreve fared almost as badly when he fell back upon his second line of defense and contended that, even if the Muse had occasionally overstepped the bounds of propriety, the indiscretion was atoned for by the salutary moral inculcated in the conclusion. His antagonist needed only to remind him of (what he had apparently forgotten) the morals enforced in the final lines of *The Old Bachelor* and *Love for Love!* Modern critics who have undertaken the cause have succeeded no better than Congreve did. It is futile to impute to Etherege and his followers the noble design of reforming a frivolous and vicious society. That certain kinds of hypocrisy and depravity are rendered odious is true enough. But the Cavalier wits have one trait, if no other, in common with their sanctimonious opponents; they

> Compound for sins they are inclined to
> By damning those they have no mind to.

They can be severe enough upon the faults of ill-breeding and vulgarity or monstrous vices that a man of fashion would abhor, but they have more than a sneaking kindness for the modish vices. The only sin they recognize is the sin of dullness. Much of the merriment of their comedies arises from the humorous contrast between themselves and their conventional neighbors. They have no greater desire to remake fashionable London than Pope has when he writes *The Rape of the Lock*. Their plays, like his mock-epic, idealize the very follies they expose. It is not as if they were spectators standing apart and viewing the pageant of folly; they themselves are a part of the picture they paint, and, though keenly conscious of the absurdities in their snug little world, they find it, on the whole, a very agreeable one, not in spite of but because of, its absurdities, for these are material for wit. Most of the characters in Etherege's plays were identified with members of his own group. Usually he himself was considered the original for Sir Fopling Flutter, and Dean Lockier says that he "designed Dorimant the genteel rake of wit for his own picture." The Wit's Creed is ideally summarized by Bellmour in the opening scene of Congreve's first play: "Come, come, leave business to idlers, and wisdom to fools: they have need of 'em: wit, be my faculty, and pleasure my occupation; and let father Time shake his glass." Only a quixotic apologist will undertake to enthrone these graceless wags among the great English moralists, and they would be amused to find themselves there. Vanbrugh wrote for gentlemen, hoping "to

divert (if possible) some part of their spleen in spite of their wives and their taxes." Diversion was their object, wit was their faculty, and nothing else mattered.

Various critics have remarked that Congreve might have made an effective reply to Collier if he had not consented to argue the case on the parson's own terms; he might, that is, have stood upon his right as an artist, insisting that Art justifies the means it employs and is not to be tried by the conventions of the moralist. But the observation, however sound, is irrelevant in a discussion of Congreve's quarrel. Such language would not have been understood by Collier or any of his contemporaries. No doubt, wit, like virtue, is its own reward; and great was the reward of Congreve and his fellows in the satisfaction of an artistic taste. It is doubtful, however, if they themselves ever definitely put the credo of art for art's sake into words. By rare good fortune, Etherege and Wycherley were at work during the brief and unique period in the history of England when wit was its own apology for being. So long as they could turn off sparkling epigrams they were asked no questions by a moral censor. It is to be remembered, however, that the license granted to them was based, not upon any modern æsthetic doctrine, but solely upon the moral indifference of their judges. There was no relaxation of the theory that satire must perform a moral function; the comic dramatists themselves were perpetually reiterating the truism. Congreve and Vanbrugh had the misfortune to be born an age too late. When called to account, they had no choice of weapon. The time was still distant when a philosophy of an independent æsthetic would be formulated, to say nothing of the remoteness of the time when the doctrine would affect public taste. Congreve used the only argument available, and, inevitably, the artist lost in the controversy with the parson.

The moral prejudice aroused by the Restoration wits was not the only obstacle to be confronted by comic writers of the eighteenth century, nor the most formidable. A more insidious opposition arose from the comedy of sensibility and tears—what Goldsmith calls a "bastard tragedy." In January of 1696, there was performed at Drury Lane a play by Colley Cibber called *Love's Last Shift, or The Fool in Fashion.* Those who attended the performance, expecting merely to be diverted as usual, had the novel experience of weeping over virtue in distress through four acts and then of rejoicing virtuously in the happy deliverance of the heroine from all her sorrows. Hints of the sentimental view of life are to be found in plays preceding this; but Cibber had founded a new type of drama. Sir John Vanbrugh was quick

to sense the presence of a dangerous foe. Cibber's play was offensive to him because of its tears, still more because of the unsound moral philosophy it inculcated. The assumption that the virtuous Amanda could permanently reform her libertine husband, a typical Restoration figure, by appealing to his feelings and reducing him to tears was ridiculous. In the following December Vanbrugh was ready with a witty sequel, *The Relapse,* in which the converted rake returns to his vices, and the world, stripped of sentimental gloss, is shown in its true colors—the world as it had been depicted in the honest comedies of the Restoration.

There is reason for suspecting that if Cibber did not become an innovator by mere chance at least he did not grasp the full significance of what he had done or foresee the results. He was not by nature a propagandist. Evidently he felt no resentment towards Vanbrugh, for he played one of the principal parts in *The Relapse.* The work of exploiting the discovery was left to Richard Steele. By nature a sentimentalist and also an incorrigible reformer, Steele realized that here was a golden opportunity for him in his dual rôle. His initial play, *The Funeral, or Grief à la Mode,* acted in 1701, gives a bare hint of what was to follow a little later. In *The Lying Lover* (1703) he converts the pure comedy of Corneille's *Le Menteur* into a solemn and lachrymose disquisition upon the evils of dueling and other fashionable vices. The transformation itself is an important historical phenomenon, for it prefigures the mangling of many genuine comedies by the purveyors of sentimental morality. The prologue notifies the Drury Lane audience that *The Lying Lover* they are to witness will offer no gross vices to their sight, for it has been fashioned

> With just regard to a reforming age.

But the complete doctrine is reserved for the epilogue:

> Our too advent'rous author soared to-night
> Above the little praise, mirth to excite,
> And chose with pity to chastise delight.
> For laughter's a distorted passion, born
> Of sudden self-esteem and sudden scorn;
> Which, when 'tis o'er, the men in pleasure wise,
> Both them that moved it and themselves despise;
> While generous pity of a painted woe
> Makes us ourselves both more approve and know.

It is astonishing that a theatrical audience could have been preached to in this solemn fashion within three years of Congreve's *Way of the World.* Strangest of ironies, the sentimentalist is now

levying upon the philosophy of Hobbes, rationalist and cynic, for a theory of laughter to be used against the cynics of the Restoration! There is pleasure in reflecting that Steele did not quite carry the day; he himself reported, with some exaggeration, that this play was "damned for its piety." But he had not failed, and he was not to be discouraged. After he had produced another comedy, *The Tender Husband* (1705), he continued the campaign in his essays, by teaching his readers "what to think" of the gallant writers of the former age. *The Man of Mode,* they are told, is "a perfect contradiction of good manners, good sense, and common honesty"; but this is not Etherege's gravest offense—"I know but one who has professedly writ a play upon the basis of the desire of multiplying our species, and that is the polite Sir George Etherege; if I understand what the lady would be at in the play called *She Would if She Could.*" Finally, returning to the stage, Steele brought out *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). This, according to Parson Adams, is the only play fit for a Christian to see; indeed, he adds, it has some things in it "almost solemn enough for a sermon." What Steele did was of vast and ominous significance: he brought about a firm alliance of morality and sensibility to the prejudice of true comedy. He is significant most of all perhaps as the forerunner of Richardson and the other apostles of sentiment in the mid-century.

The conflicting counsels of the time and the resulting confusion are nowhere more clearly reflected than in the work of George Farquhar. Though placed by Leigh Hunt in the group of Restoration wits, with whom he has obvious relations, he is distinctly a transitional figure. An author by profession and wholly dependent upon his work for an income, he was under the necessity of consulting public taste as well as his own literary ideals. His work falls into three distinct periods. In his earliest plays—*Love and a Bottle* (1699), *The Constant Couple* (1699), and *Sir Harry Wildair* (1701)—his aim was to write comedy of manners and to recommend his productions by outdoing, occasionally at least, his models in profligacy. If Collier and his friends had any doubt concerning his attitude towards them, they could have found further evidence of his defiance in the *Discourse upon Comedy* (1702). There he proves that the comedy so offensive to the reformer is "a well-form'd tale handsomely told as an agreeable vehicle for counsel or reproof"; its monsters are used for edification as the lion, the fox, the hare, and the ass are employed by Æsop. Then suddenly came a complete reversal. Farquhar apparently thought it wise to placate a dangerous enemy. *The Inconstant* and *The Twin-Rivals,* both of 1702, are dramatic

sermons written avowedly for a moral purpose and pointedly intended to comply with Collier's design of purifying the stage. In his final period, when he has ceased to be an opportunist, *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) and *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707) reveal dramatic genius of a high order. The first thing that must strike a reader familiar with seventeenth-century comedy is that the Muse has now deserted the drawing-room for the country, and that many charmingly fresh types of character have been brought in to replace the endless parade of fops and coquettes. There is a prophecy here of the English country scenes in *Tom Jones* and of the whimsical characters in the comedies of Goldsmith. Comedy has outgrown the narrow bounds of social satire, and humor has again found a place. Farquhar was not able to realize fully the possibilities within his grasp, and it is not certain that he greatly influenced the immediate course of literature; but he had provided the most effective answer so far given to the rebellious moralists and the sentimentalists.

The struggle between the two ideals in comedy was waged, throughout the eighteenth century, with no decisive result. Although the two types constantly intermingle, the issue was clear-cut. It is defined as sharply in the novels of Richardson and Fielding as it is on the stage. Nor was it merely another "battle of the books." At the root of the literary quarrel was a fundamental difference in ethical philosophy, which had a definite bearing on social and political theory. Since the Comic Muse had to give a good moral account of herself, most of the comedy produced is satire directed at actual abuses of the time, the dramatic counterpart of Pope's *Satires* and *Epistles* and Young's *Universal Passion.* The comedy of humor could not flourish in this drily didactic atmosphere; the fashion still was one of wit. The connection between the stage and the popular dissipations and follies is so close that the social life is imbedded in the comic literature as it is in the satirical prints of Hogarth. The supply of wit is constantly replenished by recourse to the Restoration writers. In spite of all the objections urged against the immorality of the old comedies, they had not been abandoned. In many instances they underwent considerable expurgation or complete revision. *The Country Wife* reappears in Garrick's adaptation as *The Country Girl.* To the same story Sheridan was indebted for the germ of his plot in *The School for Scandal.* These are but typical instances of a widespread practice. Still, the new plays themselves are by no means free from the licentiousness of their predecessors. One has only to read the comedies of Fielding, for example, to realize that public taste has undergone no thorough revolution.

It is a significant commentary on the merits of the controversy between the two schools of dramatists that not one of the eighteenth-century comedies of sensibility has survived as a part of permanent literature. The only dramatic pieces of the time that have really lasted are examples of pure comedy.

The year 1728 is important in the history of comedy for two reasons. First, the Comic Muse appeared in the novel dress of *The Beggar's Opera*. John Gay, the most dependent but the luckiest of poets, had been advised by his friend Swift to try his hand at a "Newgate Pastoral." The hint bore fruit, though not precisely what Swift had in mind. With some suggestions from Buckingham's *Rehearsal*, a model he had consulted when writing *The What-d'ye-call-it* (1715), Gay turned out the most sensational dramatic hit of the eighteenth century. His ballad opera, produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields by Rich, took London by storm. It "made Gay rich and Rich gay." Addison and others had labored in vain to laugh or argue the fashionable set out of their affected taste for Italian opera. Neither ridicule nor appeal to patriotism had had any effect. Gay's rollicking burlesque accomplished more in three hours of fun than all the critics had done to expose the absurdities of opera and also the false sentiment of weeping comedy. In his exposure of the corrupt political methods of Sir Robert Walpole he opened up virtually a new field for dramatic satire. His experience soon proved, however, that it was safer to ridicule opera and the vicious manners of the polite world than to capitalize the character of Bob Booty. Walpole was so offended that when Gay was about to bring out a sequel, *Polly*, he was refused permission to put it on the stage, and had to content himself with the handsome profits from the sale of his book. The year of *The Beggar's Opera* witnessed also the beginning of Henry Fielding's career as a playwright. It is true that none of the twenty-five comedies he composed within the following decade rise above mediocrity, and that they were completely overshadowed by his later work in the novel. Nevertheless, Fielding's connection with the theatre was more important in the cause of sanity than Gay's one brilliant achievement. His slashing comedies and burlesques did more than anything else in the next ten years to stem the current of maudlin sentiment. Once engaged, Fielding never gave up the fight. His defense of comedy as an ally of virtue proceeded from a sincere conviction that the doctrine of innate goodness, upon which all sentimental literature is founded, was the most insidious enemy morality had to encounter, and that the antidote was to be found in a merciless satire of the delusion. The Fielding of these comedies is the in-

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