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MARRIAGE, SEX, AND PLAIN DEALING: A STUDY IN  
THE MORAL VIEW OF WYCHERLEY'S PLAYS.

University of Washington, Ph.D., 1976  
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1976

Marriage, Sex, and Plain Dealing: A Study in

the Moral View of Wycherley's Plays

by

Richard Anthony Davis

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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1976

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to Offer Degree DRAMA ARTS

Date 19 AUGUST 1976

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Date: July 23, 1976

We have carefully read the dissertation entitled Marriage, Sex and Plain Dealing: A Study in the Moral View of William Wycherley and His Plays submitted by Richard A. Davis in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and recommend its acceptance. In support of this recommendation we present the following joint statement of evaluation to be filed with the dissertation.

We have read with great care Richard A. Davis's dissertation, "Marriage, Sex and Plain Dealing: A Study in the Moral View of William Wycherley and His Plays." After surveying the major shifts in critical attitude towards the Restoration drama in general and William Wycherley in particular, the author focuses first on the social and economic factors which helped shape the ways in which English Restoration society viewed the customs of courtship and marriage. Using the evidence from poems, letters and plays, Davis makes a strong case for Wycherley's moral stand against the unnaturalness and hypocrisy which arose from a society attempting to curb its natural instincts in order to accomodate the codes of love and marriage. Each of Wycherley's plays is then examined with a view to making clear Wycherley's own moral position.

Mr. Davis's research is painstaking, with a wide base of reading in cultural history as well as in the literature of the period. The dissertation is well organized and clearly written, with a careful exegesis of difficult passages in his poems and plays. It is a useful contribution to the scholarship on William Wycherley.

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Doctoral Dissertation

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## CHAPTER I

### SETTING UP THE MIRROR

Since the latter part of the seventeenth century, when they were written, Restoration comedies have been treated from a variety of critical perspectives. Although Jeremy Collier's Short View controversy helped make sentimental comedy more popular on the stage, the best Restoration comedies remained a significant portion of the English theatrical repertoire until well into the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> By the early nineteenth century, however, critics such as Charles Lamb could mourn the passing of such plays: "The artificial Comedy, or Comedy of manners, is quite extinct on our stage. Congreve and Farquhar show their heads once in seven years only; to be exploded and put down instantly. The times cannot bear them."<sup>2</sup> The theatre in 1822, according to Lamb, was under the tyrannical rule of melodrama mixed with attempts at early realism, what he calls, "the exclusive and all-devouring drama of common life."<sup>3</sup> He speaks of seeing or reading the artificial comedies as taking an "airing beyond the diocese of the strict conscience," and claims to feel "fresher and more healthy for it."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1968), p. 266.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Lamb, "The Artificial Comedy of the Last Century," The Complete Works and Letters of Charles Lamb (New York: The Modern Library, 1935), p. 126.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

I wear my shackles more contentedly for having respired the breath of an imaginary freedom. I do not know how it is with others, but I feel the better always for the perusal of one of Congreve's--nay, why should I not add even of Wycherley's--comedies. I am the gayer at least for it; and I could never connect those sports of a witty fancy in any shape with any result to be drawn from them to imitation in real life. They are a world of themselves almost as much as fairyland.<sup>5</sup>

His attitude is perhaps the only possible rationalization for an enjoyment of such plays in the early Victorian era, for it is clear that critical tone had changed from that of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. When Leigh Hunt edited a collection of the works of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar in 1840 in an attempt to re-interest the public, Lord Macaulay expressed what was to be the predominate nineteenth century view towards these comedies. While he claimed that all educated Englishmen should be familiar with this era of dramatic literature and even claimed that "the worst of the English writings of the seventeenth century [were] decent, compared with much that [had] been bequeathed to [England] by Greece and Rome,"<sup>6</sup> he could not accept the innocent view of these plays taken by Lamb and Hunt. Instead, he found them, he said, "a disgrace to our language and our national character." Though he admitted they were "clever . . . and very entertaining," he condemned them not so much for their immorality as for their "singularly inhuman spirit." Their hardness, he claimed, made one feel "surrounded by foreheads of bronze, hearts like the nether millstone, and tongues set on fire of hell." Together, the plays, he believed, were a "systematic attempt to associate vice with those things which men value most and desire most, and virtue with everything ridiculous and degrading."<sup>7</sup> "In the name of art, as

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Babington Macaulay, Critical, Historical, and Miscellaneous Essays and Poems, 3 vols. (Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1886), 3:502-503.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 504.

well as in the name of virtue," he declared, "We protest against the principle that the world of pure comedy is one into which no moral enters,"<sup>8</sup> and he feared what might happen if men and women were exposed to vice so attractively packaged.<sup>9</sup>

It was not until John Palmer's book, The Comedy of Manners, was published in 1913, that the Restoration plays began to be seen from still another point of view. The Yellow Nineties and the Edwardian era were periods of questioning established authority. The objectivity of realism and naturalism was beginning to shock literature out of its Victorian propriety and sentimentality and movements such as art for art's sake questioned the concept of a moral purpose to literature, emphasizing structure and technique within the work rather than didactic purpose. The path was being set for the experimental "isms" of the twentieth century. Palmer re-asserted the love for the plays that Leigh Hunt and Charles Lamb had felt and emphasized that to criticize the plays effectively one had to see them against the real world in which they were written. Palmer, claiming that before Collier no one used morality as a basis for dramatic criticism,<sup>10</sup> attempts to move away from moral criticism entirely, asserting that the Restoration comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar were "an independent growth springing spontaneously from the impulse of English Restoration Society to view itself in reflexion upon the stage."<sup>11</sup> His work set the tone and suggested the broad guidelines for twentieth century criticism of the Restoration comedies--

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 508.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 503.

<sup>10</sup>John Palmer, The Comedy of Manners (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1913; reprint ed., New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 5.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

examination of the social background of the plays, consideration of the plays as works of dramatic art, and treatment of the plays as reflections of life and manners rather than as attempts to teach morality. In expressing the truth of life, Palmer says, the artist attains a higher morality than Collier's more limited view.<sup>12</sup>

Following the direction of Palmer's study, Restoration criticism blossomed in the twentieth century. In 1924 Bonamy Dobree examined the nature of Restoration comedy and determined that Restoration men and women were "experimenting in social things" and trying to "rationalize human relationships,"<sup>13</sup> especially those related to sexuality. In 1926, Kathleen Lynch's The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy proved a landmark in its investigation of the relationship of Caroline and Restoration comedy to the French precieux code of love. Throughout the 20's and 30's, Montague Summers completed editions of most of the major Restoration playwrights and two books on the Restoration theatre itself, and in 1928, Leslie Hotson, having combed the legal records of the seventeenth century, wrote The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage, perhaps the most thorough theatrical history of the era.

Continuing Palmer's suggestion that the Restoration plays be seen against the background of the seventeenth century, Louis I. Bredvold, in 1934, published a study, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, which opened up the philosophical background of the Restoration to critical inspection. Bredvold claimed that the age could not be understood without a knowledge of

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 289-291.

<sup>13</sup>Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy 1660-1720 (London: Oxford University Press, 1913; reprint ed., London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 20.

skeptical philosophy, and that all intellectuals of the seventeenth century were familiar with such skeptical writers as Montaigne and the great compiler of classical skepticism, Sextus Empiricus.<sup>14</sup> Later, Thomas H. Fujimura (1952) and Dale Underwood (1957) dealt with skepticism of the age as it relates to the wit of the Restoration playwrights, and Norman Holland probed both philosophy and science in the seventeenth century to claim that because the Restoration playwrights dealt so frequently with the problem of recognizing and separating appearance from nature that they created The First Modern Comedies (1959).<sup>15</sup> Holland examines the Restoration world as an era of doubt and uncertainty in which one universal order was breaking apart and another--the scientific age, was struggling to bring order out of chaos. The telescope focused attention on the errors of the old universal order, and Holland feels the Restoration playwrights frequently placed the wrong way of life on the stage so that the audience could discover the right way in life in keeping with neo-classic insistence on comedy's useful purpose.<sup>16</sup>

Our own era, the 60's and 70's, quite similar to that of the Restoration in the sense of shifting moral values and questioning of authority, has brought another slant to Restoration criticism. Very much in the spirit of the "individual freedom" versus "the establishment," Virginia Birdsall's Wild Civility (1970) proposes that "both the rake-heroes and their emancipated ladies are seeking . . . genuine self-expression on their own terms," and "looking not only toward the release from old restrictions but also

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<sup>14</sup>Louis I. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1934; reprint ed., Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1956), p. 15.

<sup>15</sup>Norman Holland, The First Modern Comedies: The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, Midland Book, 1967), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 71-72.

toward the creation of a new culture in order to 'make a coherent life.'<sup>17</sup> With this thesis, she fits the plays into a developing tradition of English comedy, challenging the hypocrisy of restrictive society with the power of the natural life force and the individuality of the English comic spirit.

On the whole, in the last 300 years since the plays were written, very few studies of the individual playwrights of the Restoration and their works have been made. Critics have seemed content to study the era, arrive at a thesis and treat the major comic playwrights and their plays (usually Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, and Farquhar, sometimes Dryden and Vanbrugh) as they fit into or fail to fit into that thesis. Thus, for example, Lamb, as has been noted, finds that he can even return from seeing a Wycherley play with a refreshed spirit, and Macaulay claims Wycherley is "last in literary merit, but first . . . beyond all doubt, in immorality,"<sup>18</sup> for "everything that he touched, however pure and noble" he made profligate.<sup>19</sup> The manners critics, such as Palmer, seem disturbed by Wycherley's harshness which breaks the amoral tone of pure comedy, and Palmer claims, "Fundamentally [Wycherley] was a Puritan;"<sup>20</sup> While a wit critic such as Fujimura finds "The most striking feature of Wycherley's plays is the Truewit's philosophy, as expressed through character and action, and the consistency with which he maintained his naturalistic and witty point of view from first to last."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Virginia Birdsall, Wild Civility: The English Comic Spirit on the Restoration Stage (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1970), pp. 36-37.

<sup>18</sup>Macaulay, p. 514.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 525.

<sup>20</sup>Palmer, p. 93.

<sup>21</sup>Thomas H. Fujimura, The Restoration Comedy of Wit (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952; reprint ed., New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), p. 154.

Two biographies of William Wycherley exist, both written by 1931 and both concerned with setting forth the few basic facts about Wycherley's family, his youthful travels, his association with the wits and courtiers of Restoration society, and the nature of his plays. Two more critical studies of Wycherley's life and works also exist--one, William Wycherley by P. F. Vernon, published in 1965, is the best analysis of the plays in terms of Wycherley's attitude toward marriage and the influence of female individuality on Restoration society. Another, also entitled William Wycherley, and written by Katharine Rogers (1972) is an attempt to combine the general facts of the author's life with critical evaluation of his plays. Rogers provides an excellent summary of the last days of the poet, bringing together facts about his relationship with Alexander Pope, his second and final marriage, and provides a more thorough appraisal of his poetry than most other critics. Several dissertations exist on the social and courtship backgrounds and their influence on Wycherley's four plays, and several essays regarding particular points of interest in the individual plays have appeared in a variety of journals. Perhaps the most famous single study of the works is Rose Zimbardo's attempt to place Wycherley's four plays as a link in the development of English satire.

In 1971, a strikingly new book on Restoration comedy appeared. Called The Ethos of Restoration Comedy and written by Ben Ross Schneider, Jr., it raised afresh the issue of morality in the Restoration plays. In his book, Schneider asserts that the Restoration playwrights taught not a Puritan morality, but a Royalist morality,<sup>22</sup> a morality which emphasized generosity and possessed a strong Christian influence. Schneider believes that "the crucial

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<sup>22</sup>(Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1971); see his Chapter 1.

error" of Restoration criticism "was perhaps Lamb's--to deny Restoration comedy any morality whatsoever;" and he asserts that the major types of twentieth century Restoration criticism--"Manners' criticism, 'social mode' criticism, even in some ways 'wit' criticism are mere extensions of his [Lamb's] view that Restoration comedy deals with an amoral world." Schneider's criticism operates on the thesis that the Restoration "stage was clearly aware that it functioned as an alternative to the pulpit as a medium of instructing the populace" and that Restoration dramatists "mirror society in such a way as to criticize it, that is, to present on the stage examples of recognizable human behavior, some to be shunned and some to be copied;" they "reward characters having values they approve of and punish characters having those they disapprove of" carrying out a "poetical justice."<sup>23</sup>

According to Schneider

In Restoration comedy generosity is the word used to convey the attributes of character that make up the finished gentleman who occupies the position of chief protagonist. Its opposite, meanness, comprehends the cluster of ugly deeds and attitudes consistently attributed to his adversaries in the plot.<sup>24</sup>

Generosity of course derives from the word "generous" which means "appropriate or natural to one of noble birth or spirit; hence gallant, courageous; magnanimous, free from meanness or prejudice." Such a person shows, according to the OED, a "Willingness to lay aside resentment or forgive injuries" and a "Readiness or liberality in giving."

Schneider's theory is the result of his computerized tabulation of the characteristics of 1,127 characters in 83 representative Restoration plays and a study of those books held highest in the late Renaissance for the building of personal character, Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Ethics, Cicero's

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 4-16.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

De Officiis, The New Testament, and Castiglione's Courtier. From a careful analysis of the moral virtues emphasized in these books, he arrives at four basic character traits necessary to the concept of generosity: liberality, as opposed to avarice; courage, rather than cowardice; plain-dealing or honesty instead of double-dealing; and unselfish love rather than self-love.<sup>25</sup>

In laying the groundwork for his view of the comedies, Schneider relates generosity to Christianity by comparing the moral of Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice (a play revived in the Restoration) and Restoration comedy, noting that both seem based on a less frequently emphasized but certainly valid view of Christianity--one which accepts Christ's instructions to "Take no thought for the morrow for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself" (Matt. 6:34). The un-Christian Shylocks and Puritans attempt to find legal or mercenary security over themselves, others, and their futures by the accumulation of material wealth, money, property; but "Christians are as careless about agreements, engagements, and contracts as Shylock is careful about them."<sup>26</sup> In Shakespeare's play men have a chance to choose from among three caskets and make their fortune in life and love. The man who thinks he will get "What many men desire" by choosing the gold casket, gains a death'shead. The man who thinks to gain "as much as he deserves" by choosing the silver casket gets the picture of an Idiot; but Bassanio, who is willing to "give and hazard all he hath" by choosing the leaden casket and risking his security wins the love of Portia and a great treasure as well. In dealing later with the ending of Congreve's Love for Love, Schneider says the playwright appears to have elevated "comic heroes from a pagan contempt for danger and

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

trust in Fortune to a nearly Christian faith in Providence,"<sup>27</sup> with Angelica standing for that Providence.<sup>28</sup>

In the light of Schneider's re-assessment of the moral spirit of the Restoration comic stage, it seems appropriate to undertake a re-evaluation of William Wycherley and his works to determine the extent to which they exemplify such a spirit of generosity and moral value.

As early as Sir Philip Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry" (1595), English critical doctrine regarded comedy as "an imitation of the common errors of our life which the poet representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be, so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one."<sup>29</sup> John Dryden, in "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy" (1668), emphasizes the Horatian pleasure and usefulness of both comedy and tragedy when he defines a play as "a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and the instruction of mankind."<sup>30</sup> In 1698, defending the stage against the attacks of Collier, Congreve also claimed that "the Business of Comedy is to delight as well as to instruct." He explained that Aristotle had indicated that "the worse sort of People . . . in respect to their Manners" and "the Vices most frequent, and which are the common Practice of the looser sort of Livers, are the subject Matter of Comedy." Congreve declared

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>29</sup>Sir Philip Sidney, "An Apology for Poetry," in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 2 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1962), 1:431.

<sup>30</sup>John Dryden, An Essay of Dramatic Poesy. A Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy. Preface to the Fables, ed. John L. Mahoney (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, The Library of Liberal Arts, 1965), p. 10.

that these people and vices "must be exposed after a ridiculous manner: For Men are to be laugh'd out of their Vices in Comedy . . . . And as vicious People are made asham'd of their Follies or Faults, by seeing them expos'd in a ridiculous manner, so are good People at once both warn'd and diverted at their Expencc." <sup>31</sup> Congreve shows just how important the moral purpose of comedy was to an author, when in the preface to his The Double Dealer, he explains his poetic technique for writing that play as follows: "I designed the moral first, and to that moral I invented the fable." <sup>32</sup>

Contemporary opinion about Wycherley seems always to have regarded his works as having moral value and usefulness to society. He is universally praised as a master of comedy by even such a venomous critic as the Earl of Rochester:

Of all our Modern Wits, none seems to me,  
Once to have toucht upon true Comedy,  
But hasty Shadwel, and slow Wicherley. <sup>33</sup>

Gerard Longbaine, in his 1691 An Account of the English Dramatick Poets, calls Wycherley "A Gentleman, whom I may boldly reckon amongst the Poets of the First Rank: no Man that I know, except the Excellent Johnson, having outdone him in Comedy." <sup>34</sup> And John Evelyn claims:

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<sup>31</sup>William Congreve, "Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations," in Theatre and Drama in the Making, eds. John Gassner and Ralph G. Allen, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1964), 1:436.

<sup>32</sup>William Congreve. Complete Plays, ed. Alexander C. Ewald (New York: Hill & Wang, Mermaid Dramabook, 1956), p. 116.

<sup>33</sup>John Wilmot, "An Allusion to Horace, the Tenth Satyr of the First Book," in Poems by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, The Muses Library, 1964), lines 41-43.

<sup>34</sup>Gerard Langbaine, An Account of the English Dramatick Poets (Oxford, 1691), in The Restoration Stage, ed. John I. McCollum, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., The Riverside Press, 1961), p. 123.

As long as Men are false, and Women vain,  
While Gold continues to be Virtues bane,  
In pointed Satyr Wycherley shall Reign.<sup>35</sup>

That Wycherley is regarded as a master of both comedy and satire is neither surprising nor confusing. Schneider explains that "the word comedy might easily be substituted for the word satire without violating Restoration usage of either term," since both genres had, as their purpose, the correction of vice by discrediting it.<sup>36</sup> Dryden, in fact, in his "Defense of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy," speaks of "satire" as the "delight" or purpose of comedy;<sup>37</sup> and in his preface to The State of Innocence, his version of Milton's Paradise Lost, he seems to divide comedy into two types and to praise Wycherley for his skill in both:

Comedy is both excellently instructive and extremely pleasant: satire lashes vice into reformation, and humour represents folly so as to render it ridiculous. Many of our present writers are eminent in both these kinds, and particularly the author of "The Plain Dealer," whom I am proud to call my friend. He has obliged all honest and virtuous men and enriched our stage by one of the most bold, most general, and most useful satires which has ever been presented on the English theatre.<sup>38</sup>

Clearly Dryden says Wycherley's work is to be regarded as of value to "honest and virtuous men" and Wycherley as a man was frequently praised for his own personal virtues as this letter from a French gentleman living in London testifies:

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Schneider, p. 13.

<sup>37</sup>Dryden, p. 81.

<sup>38</sup>Quoted in Willard Connely, Brawny Wycherley (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1930; reprint ed. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1969), pp. 127-128.

Mr. Wycherley is one of the politest Gentlemen in England, and one of the most civil and affable to Strangers . . . he is a little shy and reserv'd in Conversation, but when a Man can be so happy as once to engage him in Discourse, he cannot but admire his profound Sense, Masculine Wit, vast knowledge of Mankind, and noble but easie Expression.<sup>39</sup>

Katharine Rogers notes in her biography of Wycherley that his

good nature . . . was conspicuous throughout his life . . . . Wycherley, alone among the court wits, seems never to have been engaged in discreditable episodes. He was never attacked in a libel. The few personal attacks that survive among his poems are mild and gentle compared to those of his contemporaries and he seldom mentions names. It was an intensely contentious age--Dryden was constantly engaged in vituperative quarrels--but there is no record of Wycherley's being involved in any.<sup>40</sup>

In "A Session of the Poets," the Earl of Rochester poetically commenting on who should succeed to the poet laureateship has Apollo disqualify "Brawny W [i]cherley" because he is "too good for the place" since the honor should go to only a "Trader in Wit" rather than to a "Gentleman Writer," such as Wycherley.<sup>41</sup> In addition to moving Wycherley out of the category of those playwrights who wrote for money, this comment implies that Wycherley was "noble, generous, courteous," the possessor of those "gentle" characteristics appropriate "to one of good birth" (OED). Giles Jacob in the 1719 edition of The Poetical Register: or The Lives and Characters of the English Dramatic Poets, says

His Plays are an excellent Satire upon the Vices and Follies of the Age he lived in. His Stile is Masculine, and his Wit is pointed; and yet with all that Sharpness and Severity with which he appears on the Stage, those who were of his Acquaintance applauded him for the Generosity and Gentleness of his Temper.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Boyer's Letters of Wit, Politicks, and Morality, Letter III, p. 217, quoted in The Complete Works of William Wycherley, ed. Montague Summers, 4 vols. (Soho: The Nonesuch Press, 1924), 1:63.

<sup>40</sup>Katharine M. Rogers, William Wycherley, Twayne's English Authors Series, no. 127 (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), p. 49.

<sup>41</sup>Wilmot, lines 21-25.

<sup>42</sup>Reprint ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1970), p. 278.

So wise and virtuous was Wycherley, in fact, that when King Charles decided that the Duke of Richmond, his illegitimate son by the Duchess of Portsmouth, "should be educated like the Son of a King . . . he could make Choice of no Man so proper to be his Governor as Mr. Wycherley."<sup>43</sup> Certainly Wycherley's morality did not consist in his being, as Palmer has said, "Fundamentally . . . a Puritan." If he had been, he would never have been listened to by his peers, let alone hailed as an example to them of virtue and honesty. The personal characteristics of generosity and gentlemanliness were clearly known to be a part of Wycherley's nature and they are an integral part of the moral stance he takes in his poetry and drama. It is vanity, Wycherley says, that makes the most trouble for mankind; and though in slightly different terms than Schneider, he labels the desire for "lucre" and "praise" as man's worst vanities.

There is a Sort of Vanity which runs thro' the Humane Species, and inclines us strongly to an Ambition of being remarkable, tho' to our Scandal. We aim at Immortality so scurvily in our Works, as if we labour'd to be inroll'd in the black List of Fame, like the Fellow that set fire to the Temple of Ephesus, to get a Name from his Rascality.

The Two Vanities, of much Profit, and much Reputation, have been Mothers to most of the Great or Silly things that have been performed in the World. Honesty, perhaps, or a mistaken Hope of reforming the Age, may have set some Hands to Work: but Lucre and Praise have been generally the first Principles. I have always found the most Zealous Patriots busie in accumulating a Fortune to enrich their Posterity; and Authors, that have pretended to be most useful in their Productions, laying up a Stock of Fame to secure themselves from being forgotten after they are buried. Whatever Humility we superficially profess in our Conduct, it is but an artificial Cloak to our Pride; and we are ever fond of being distinguish'd, and pointed out, even when we most affect Obscurity.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>John Dennis, Critical Works, 2:411, quoted in Rogers, p. 100.

<sup>44</sup>William Wycherley, "Introduction," to The Posthumous Works of William Wycherley Esq; in Prose and Verse, in Complete Works, 4:106.

There is nothing more scornful to Wycherley than men who busy their lives trying to be more than their nature will allow them. Avarice he calls "that Wolf, of Greedy Minds" that makes misers, for their very love of money, less content,<sup>45</sup> and in the "Preface" to his Miscellany Poems, he ridicules men driven on both by desire for money and reputation:

. . . as all the most Thoughtless, Stupid, Brutal Animals, seem by Nature, design'd more for Preying on their Fellow-Creatures, than the Sagacious or Tractable; so are the Heavy, Laborious, thick-Scull'd design'd most for Durdgery, or Business in the World;(Which is amongst Men, as amongst Beasts) Preying on one another; and the Folly of the most Stupid Brutes, as that of the most Brutal Men, is distinguish'd, by their making more a Stir, or more Noise, than others of a more Noble, and Useful Kind; as the Monkey is more Active, than the Man (his nearest Likeness) as he is more Mischievous and Ridiculous; who, like the Ambitious, Active, Rising, Proud Man, is always Climbing, tho' the Higher he goes, the more he shows his Breech, to his Shame, and the Hazard of Falling; so, the Human Ape's Pride, and Busie, Impertinent Industry, expose him to more Danger, or Shame, as they are more, and the Higher he rises by them; then the most Ridiculous of Brute-Men, as the most Ridiculous of Beasts, or Birds, are more Loud and Noisie, than the rest of a more Noble Kind . . . .<sup>46</sup>

In an essay "Against Pride and Ambition," he comments:

Among all the Follies, which our Pride and Self-conceit makes us guilty of, there is no one makes us appear so worthless as an Ostentation of our Worth; or any thing that so ill recommends us to the good opinion of others, as the Forestalling our Merit by our own Opinion of Ourselves . . . .<sup>47</sup>

"Good Sense, or Judgment, (they who have them, know)," he tells the readers of the "Preface" to his Miscellany Poems

are as seldom found by, or with an abundance of Scribbling, superfluous Babbling, or plenty of Words, as true Generosity with Plenty of Wealth,

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<sup>45</sup>William Wycherley, "Upon Avarice. To a Miserable Wretch, who pretended to hate Vanity, more than he lov'd Money," in Complete Works, 4:50-52.

<sup>46</sup>Complete Works, 3:10-11.

<sup>47</sup>Miscellaneous Essays in Prose and Verse, in Complete Works, 4:143.

or much Courage, and Honour with much Boasting, or Pride; and Men's Tongues, or Pens, (as Swords) drawn too often in Publick, in Defense of their Understandings, or Fame, most expose 'em to Censure and Disgrace, nay, cause them to be Worsted by that which they design'd their Reputation's, or their Understanding's Defence.<sup>48</sup>

According to one of Wycherley's Maxims (CXCI), "The Utmost Degree of Perfection the Human Mind is capable of is, to know its own Weakness, Vanity, and Misery," and again in Maxim CLXII, he states, "The greatest Wisdom of Men Consists in the Knowledge of their own Follies." Yet he does not wish mankind to be constantly unhappy with itself, for he cautions in Maxim CLXI against the "weakness" of being "too much discontented with ourselves" as well as the "folly" of being "oversatisfied with ourselves."<sup>49</sup> Wycherley wishes each man to come to an honest, plain dealing understanding and respect for himself by accepting his own individual nature, whatever it may be, and having the courage to face his flaws and correct or adapt to them.

He's only Great, who can be Great and Good,  
 (Too hard Atchievement for the Rich and Proud!)  
 Whose Honour is his own, and not his Friend's,  
 Whose Fame, whose Glory on himself depends;  
 Who from his Fathers borrows no Renown,  
 But gives their Virtues Lustre by his own.<sup>50</sup>

Wycherley suggests that for mankind to find the truth about himself, he must risk making a free, brave, honest and generous gift of himself to life, granting Providence its right to deny what it chooses and learning to accept the outcome with grace and dignity. "Ill Fortune," in fact, he says "shou'd

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<sup>48</sup>Complete Works, 3:9.

<sup>49</sup>"A Collection of Maxims and Moral Reflections," Complete Works, 4:109-112. All future references to Wycherley's Maxims will be to the same source.

<sup>50</sup>"Against Pride and Ambition," in Complete Works, 4:114.

be thought" "the best Muse sure" for "both Wit and Judgment best is taught" by it.<sup>51</sup> This kind of courage is not unlike that which Schneider and Shakespeare call Christianity in Bassanio when he risks all to determine his fortune and Wycherley confirms the association of man's nature and Providence when he says that the man who pushes too hard to become something he cannot be is in fact setting himself up "to judge his Maker, and oppose his Fate"<sup>52</sup> and that "Each bold, wise, good Man makes his Will his Fates"<sup>53</sup> and accepts himself and his nature as the workings of Providence. Interestingly enough the New Testament records that Christ claimed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me," (John 14:6) and in John 8:32 mankind is instructed to "know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Wycherley advises in a poem called, "To an Ingenious Young Man, so Sollicitous for the Future that he neglected the Present," that

Knowing our selves we best our Fates might know.  
 Our settled Minds once brought to crave no more  
 Than what Heaven grants, we baffle Fortune's Pow'r:  
 Whilst the rich Powerful most in dread of Fate,  
 Are, from good Fortune, most unfortunate;  
 And, as 'tis best, fear most their Change of State.  
 Good Chance still makes us fear its Fickleness,  
 The Bad, to fear its Constancy no less:  
 We only can be happy, or be wise,  
 As most our Appetites we compromise;  
 As our Actions and our Wills resign  
 To what's thought fitting by the Powers Divine;  
 Who, since all humane Things uncertain are,  
 Desiring nothing, nothing have to fear;

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<sup>51</sup>"The Invocation to Fortune, the best Aid, and Encourager of Wit, tho' call'd the Patroness of Fools," lines 77-78, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works, 3:94-99.

<sup>52</sup>"Upon the Impertinence of Knowledge, the Unreasonableness of Reason, and the Brutality of Humanity; proving the Animal Life the most Reasonable Life, since the most Natural, and most Innocent," line 33, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works, 3:149-154.

<sup>53</sup>"To an Ingenious Young Man, so Sollicitous for the Future that he neglected the Present," line 5, Posthumous Works, in Complete Works, 4:173-5.

Our present, and our future Ills prevent,  
 Whilst we to all, we cannot shun, consent,  
 And spite of Fortune blest, preserve a fix'd content.<sup>54</sup>

In his moral desire for each man to find contentment in the truth of his own human nature, Wycherley is like Montaigne whose works Wycherley is said to have often read himself to sleep with.<sup>55</sup> Montaigne believed "Nature always gives us happier laws than those we give ourselves" and that

It is an absolute perfection and virtually divine to know how to enjoy our being rightfully. We seek other conditions because we do not understand the use of our own, and go outside of ourselves because we do not know what it is like inside. Yet there is no use our mounting on stilts for on stilts we must still walk on our own legs. And on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting only on our own rump.<sup>56</sup>

Wycherley is aware that some men are so caught up in their own dogmatic and enthusiastic "Self-Love" that they cannot recognize their own natures (Maxim CCXXII), but in Maxim CXCI, he says, "Reason and Experience ought to be inseparable in the Discovery of Natural Things." Dryden tells us that comedy works its moral medicine "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."<sup>57</sup> It is in this spirit that Wycherley's plays are intended, to provide experiences by which an audience can see its own nature mirrored and through which it may learn to correct itself.

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., lines 86-102.

<sup>55</sup>Spence's Anecdotes, quoted in J. Auffret, "Wycherley et ses maitres les Moralistes," Etudes Anglaises 15 (1962):376.

<sup>56</sup>The Complete Works of Montaigne: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1957), pp. 816, 857.

<sup>57</sup>John Dryden, "Preface to An Evening's Love," in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy, ed. Scott McMillan, Norton Critical Edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 357.

Ernest Bernbaum, in his book on comedy of the eighteenth century, explains "the ethical basis of comedy was the belief that the majority of men and women in ordinary life were very imperfect creatures. The comic dramatists made it their main business to show the worldliness of society, to strip it of its disguises, and to exhibit the ridiculous contrast between its pretended respectability and its actual folly."<sup>58</sup> When Sparkish in The Country Wife (act 3), complains that Restoration playwrights, unlike portrait painters who flatter the subject, show all the flaws as well ("A Pox, Painters don't draw the Small pox, or Pimples in ones Face"), he is told by Dorilant not to blame the playwrights, for "they must follow their Copy, the Age." The sentimental dramatists felt that the moral lesson of comedy could be taught by putting examples of ideally moral people on the stage, for admiration and imitation, believing "beings who were good at heart were found in the ordinary walks of life," but Restoration playwrights, like Wycherley, felt that one could achieve comedy's purpose by ridicule of men who were less than perfect.<sup>59</sup>

Wycherley's plays are designed as mirrors of human vanity to attack pretensions. As one example of their success in one area of attack, we read, in his dedication to The Plain Dealer, that "some there are who say, 'Tis the Plain-dealing of the Play, not the obscenity; 'tis taking off the ladies Masks, not off'ring at their Pettycoats, which offends 'em: and generally they are not the handsomest, or most innocent, who are the most angry at

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<sup>58</sup>Ernest Bernbaum, The Drama of Sensibility. A Sketch of the History of English Sentimental Comedy and Domestic Tragedy 1696-1780 (Boston: Ginn, 1915), pp. 6-7.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp. 10, 63.

being discover'd." Wycherley is noting that it is the comic method of revealing the truth of these ladies' hypocrisy that is upsetting to them--not the obscenity, but the fact that they see their own imperfect nature upsets them. And he goes on to say that as Mr. Bays, the silly playwright in The Rehearsal claims his plays are "the only Touchstone of Mens Wit and understanding," Wycherley's own plays are "the only Touchstone of Womens Virtue and Modesty."

In his plays Wycherley demonstrates his moral stance in relationship to the subject matter customarily dealt with in comedy and of topical interest to the age. By mirroring the mercenary nature of contemporary marriage and those who desire to wed for money, property, revenge, reputation or selfish desire for personal freedom and satisfaction at the expense of another, he ridicules such immoral reasons for marriage and provides examples of characters who, learning to temper their jealousy and realize their own natures by a generous acceptance of the human value of their loved ones, are able to enter into a truly Christian union based on faith, trust, and love. By mirroring the unnatural hypocrisy of the sexual roles the female and the male were expected to play in seventeenth century society and the disrespect, deceit and sexual revenge resulting from them, Wycherley suggests a more generous and humane respect for the individual differences existing within the sexes. And finally, by mirroring the struggles of male and female to find a satisfactory mate, Wycherley metaphorically illustrates the predicament of mankind attempting to understand his own fortune, the relationship of his own free will to Providence, of his own nature to the love of God. Wycherley's answer to the predicament seems to be a generous acceptance of fate as Providence and a blend of both morality and religion in a moderate Christianity.

While it would be possible to deal with these themes by a separate analysis of each of the four plays, I have chosen to illustrate Wycherley's moral concern for Restoration marriage by a discussion of that topic in relationship to Love in a Wood, and The Gentleman Dancing Master; his moral concern for honor in the sexual relationship by a study of The Country Wife and The Gentleman Dancing Master; and his consideration of man's relationship to fate and God by an analysis and interpretation of The Plain Dealer. I shall also draw heavily from Wycherley's poetry and other writings to support my arguments.

The morality of the Wycherley plays, then, the lesson taught as a result of the laughter and the satire is that man, being imperfect and subject to excesses of vanity, should moderate himself by recognizing the truth of his own nature and achieving a non-dogmatic tolerance of others as natural individuals as well. Just as Manly, in The Plain Dealer, comes back to the world from his attempt to escape from it, so Wycherley's moral intent is that his audience accept themselves and their age--their own individual natures and the nature of man by first recognizing their imperfections and then correcting them; and there is no more manly lesson to teach than to awaken humanity to the acceptance of itself and its own actions.

## CHAPTER II

### MARRIAGE

White Cupid, chang'd from what he was of Old,  
Now, like a Negro-Slave, is bought and sold.  
Wycherley, "Love's Golden Age"

The easiest, calmest, Government is the most lasting  
and stable; so that Kings and Husbands, if they would  
reign or live in Peace, must sometimes let fall their  
Pre-rogative.

Wycherley, Maxim XII

When Wycherley began to write for the theatre, it is not surprising that his first plays dealt with the subject of marriage; not only was marriage the classic subject for comedy, but the institution of marriage was a topic of genuine public concern in England. In 1673, the same year The Gentleman Dancing Master was produced, a "lover of his country and well-wisher to the prosperity both of the King and Kingdoms" offered to Parliament a proposal for naturalizing aliens so that England could be assured of sufficient population in the future:

. . . there being, almost all over England, a spirit of madness running abroad, and possessing men against marrying, rather choosing to have mistresses, by whom very few ever have children. And many married women, by their lewd conversations, prevent the bringing forth many children, which otherwise they might have had. These humours and practices, if continued will prove so mischievous, that unless foreigners come in amongst us, in few years there will not be people to manure our lands, eat our provisions, wear our manufactures, or manufacture the stale commodities that are the growth of the kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Grand Concern of England explained in several Proposals offered to the Consideration of Parliament . . . by a lover of his Country and Well-wisher to the Prosperity both of the King and Kingdoms, London, 1673; Harleian Miscellany 8 (London, 1746):532-4, in 17th Century Economic Documents, ed. Joan Thirsk & J. P. Cooper (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 742.

One proposal to counteract the continuing unpopularity of marriage was made in a book entitled, The True English Interest, published in 1674. It suggested that married persons should be given "many privileges more than either single or debauched persons," and that unmarried persons be kept from "any profitable office or preferment." Since married people are "more honest, economical, and industrious," it concluded that the solution to the lack of marriages was to advocate stricter marriage laws:

Strictness of matrimonial laws, and penalties against lewdness breeds constancy and pleasure in lawful ties, and hinders the very thoughts of loose designs, making people follow their callings quietly and soberly, when the pain of the penalty spoils the sweet of luxury, and every honest man would be glad, that by this means himself is also kept from such vices, otherwise he would be apt to commit.<sup>2</sup>

But rigid marriage laws were already contributing to the unpopularity of marriage and the rigorous process of obtaining a divorce frequently led to public scandal. In 1670, one year before Love in a Wood was performed, English society witnessed a Parliamentary debate to determine whether John Manners, Lord Roos, could be granted a divorce and the right to remarry. Roos had begun legal proceedings against his wife, an obvious adulteress, as early as 1659, but had succeeded in obtaining only a legal separation which prevented him from remarrying and thus provoked him to further petition Parliament. The King and his party were particularly interested in the outcome of the debate, and the Duke of Buckingham, friend to the King and soon to befriend Wycherley as well, argued in Parliament for a fairer divorce law hoping to make use of it in behalf of the King, and perhaps himself as well.

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<sup>2</sup>Carew Reynel, The True English Interest, 1674, pp. 59-67, in 17th Century Economic Documents, ed. Joan Thirsk & J. P. Cooper (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 759-760.

He may even have been sent by Parliament to investigate the subject of divorce in conversation with John Milton, the acknowledged authority on the subject.<sup>3</sup>

With books like The True English Interest calling for stricter laws to enforce marriage with no regard for the individual problems of those involved in the match, and men like Buckingham appearing to show little respect for the institution itself by calling for a loosening in marriage laws, it is not surprising that the subject of marriage was adopted by so many playwrights of the era as suitable material for the theatre. Wycherley, in his four plays, suggests a plain dealing middle ground of moral truth in regard to marriage, one that takes into account the valid criticism made by both extremes and brings into proper perspective both a respect for what the institution should be and a respect for the individuals caught up in the reality of its seventeenth century condition. Indeed, in the final analysis Wycherley's plays and writings, surprisingly enough, seem to advocate a marriage morality similar to that found in the writings of John Milton.

It is clear that Wycherley felt seventeenth century marriage, his society's sanctioned institution for procreation, had become "the World's, and Man's Destruction." It had become a threat to mankind, Wycherley claims, because it was being entered into not for love, but for selfish gain. Mar-

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<sup>3</sup>John Harold Wilson, A Rake and His Times: George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1954), pp. 160-161. See also Burnet's History of His Own Time: From the Restoration of King Charles the Second to the Treaty of Peace at Utrecht, in the Reign of Queen Anne. A New Edition (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), pp. 177-178, and Gellert S. Alleman, Matrimonial Law and the Materials of Restoration Comedy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1942), p. 135.

riage, he says, is "the greatest Sin, or Infamy, /Of Love, made by Church Bargain's Simony; /When that Divine Love, i'th' Church is sold, /Not for the Just Exchange of Hearts, but Gold."<sup>4</sup> At first glance, it would seem that Wycherley is totally opposed to marriage of any kind; but closer study of his writings reveals that he is concerned that unions between individuals be motivated by a generous love and not by selfish gain. True generosity, Wycherley explains, does not mean giving "but for more, that may be gain'd by it;" instead, to be generous

. . . Benefits, we, like the Sun, shou'd do,  
And like it, nothing of 'em seem to know,  
To grow like it, by them more glorious so.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, in regard to marriage

If that the Favours greatest are which we  
Confer most voluntary, frank, and free;  
And if that Benefit we value most,  
Which comes the easiest, or in Toil or Cost,  
That courteous Virgin most our Thanks demands,  
Who on no Wedlock-Terms precisely stands:  
And she who soonest, cheapest, grants her Love,  
Does the most honourable Mistress prove:  
Who nobly does on her Friend's Faith rely,  
Without a Bargain, Bond, or previous Tye.

But Marriage makes the Mode of bart'ring Love  
Less generous, as more distrustful prove;  
Since Love is not dishonourable made,  
When a free Gift, but mercenary Trade.

"What gen'rous Mind," he argues can condescend to become the victim of the "priestcraft" and legal trickery of the "gown-men" (lawyers and clergy) who would fool people into thinking that a "paultry Vow" or "a dull Tenure that the Church has sold" is the same as a generous exchange of love between two

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<sup>4</sup>"An Heroic Epistle. To the Most Honourable Matchmaker, a Bawd, called J. C. \_\_\_\_\_, proving Free Love more Honourable, than Slavish, Mercenary Marriage," lines 41-44, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 4:28-31.

<sup>5</sup>"To the Upbraiding Friend," lines 79, 83-85, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 4:43-45.

individuals. "Give me thy Love, but let thy Love be free, / Nor aim to rob me of my Liberty," he pleads in the same poem. "Passion alone shall make me True and Just, / All Obligations else bespeak distrust." If love is not strong enough and the individual charms of the two people involved forcible enough to maintain the union, then how can contracts and pledges be of any aid? They only serve to force a bond which should be free--

And that forc'd Bond, which Diffidence implies,  
Does Breach of Faith, and Falsehood authorize.  
Let Marriage, and forc'd Contracts only joyn  
Those that exchange not Hearts, but truck for Coin:  
Slaves that make Settlements, and can for Gain  
Submit to drag for Life a golden Chain.

.....  
Not so the Lover, who to change is free,  
Serves unconstrain'd, and counts it Liberty.<sup>6</sup>

Wycherley's earlier stated understanding of generosity is based on sound Christian doctrine concerning the motivation in giving;<sup>7</sup> and the last lines above resemble the free will which Milton attributes to God in Book III of Paradise Lost. In order to be sure He is being truly appreciated and properly loved for his genuine worth, God creates man not as a blind puppet or slave but as a thinking individual capable of judging true merit:

Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.  
.....  
Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere  
Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,  
Where only what they needs must do, appear'd,  
Not what they would? what praise could they receive?

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<sup>6</sup>To a Lady, An Advocate for Marriage," Posthumous Works, in Complete Works 4:215-217.

<sup>7</sup>Christ recommends: "And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to Simmers, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." (Luke 6:34-35)

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,  
 When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)  
 Useless and vain, of freedom both despoil'd,  
 Made passive both, had serv'd necessity,  
 Not mee.<sup>8</sup>

In order to be sure of a union of love between two people, one cannot depend upon vows and contracts and legal appearances, Wycherley says. Unless the heart of the union exists, unless there is a continuous mutual exchange of love between those united, a faith and trust, there is no genuine holy sacrament, only slavery.

Wycherley vividly portrays such marital slavery in a poem entitled, "To a Bridegroom, after having married an ill Wife to screen him from debts." In that poem, the husband, who married for monetary reasons alone, finds that his wife has become a more frightening jailer than the debtors' prison could have provided: "The strictest, and most jealous Keeper, She, / From whose Controul Death only sets thee free." His "Goods and Person" are completely at her disposal, and he is never allowed out of her sight. The marriage contract becomes a "Bond" to deprive him of everything that was his, and he is "Confin'd without the Benefit of Bail, / In [his] own House, by Marriage made [his] Jail."

Nor is Imprisonment alone thy Fate,  
 Correction too attends the Nuptial State.  
 Constrain'd to Drudg'ry, each dull Husband beats  
 The Hemp of Wedlock in the Wedding Sheets;  
 And the gross Work of Love, in Form and Fear, repeats.  
 By Wedlock then thou art remov'd, not freed  
 From that Fleet-Prison thou so much did'st dread,  
 To the damn'd Durance of the Marriage Bed;  
 Seiz'd by that Church-Writ, they a Licence call,  
 Which does all Ranks of Men for Life enthrall.  
 Unhappy Wretch! that thinking to be free,

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<sup>8</sup>Lines 99, 103-111, in John Milton. Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957).

Hast damn'd thy self to lasting Custody.  
 So tim'rous Fools the Fear of Death to shun,  
 Rashly into his cold Embraces run.<sup>9</sup>

Marriage without love and based only on the selfish desire for money enslaves the male to the female and forces him to make sexual relations a duty and obligation rather than a free gift of Love. In another poem, "An Epithalamium on the Marriage of Two very ill Natur'd Blacks, who were to have their Liberty, in consideration of their match," he deals with the same theme.

You Slaves! are not set Free, but on the Score,  
 Of growing much more Slaves, than e're before;  
 Go freely thus, into more Slavery,  
 Call'd Wedlock, for your Infidelity;  
 For want of Faith, in one another, you,  
 Bond-Slaves for Life, thus one to t'other grow;  
 By your Church-Bondage, that of Marriage, since  
 Death only can be your Deliverance;  
 Each, fondly thinking to get Liberty,  
 Each other bind more fast in Slavery;

It is clear that Wycherley believes that marriage cannot be based on a pre-meditated desire to gain something for oneself and even those who seek to gain liberty from a previous situation as in the case of these slaves, because they lack faith in each other as individuals, selfishly "More Slave, for Life, each other . . . make."<sup>10</sup> In "To a Mercenary Mistress; who said, Love was the Greatest Blessing in the World, and therefore shou'd be purchas'd at the Greatest Price," while warning the woman that she too could be reduced to slavery by insisting on marriage for money, he says

You were my Slave, shou'd I your Body buy;  
 But I your Slave am, therefore my True Love,  
 Best, by my giving nothing for you, prove;  
 Best serve your Love, and save your Honour too,

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<sup>9</sup>Posthumous Works, in Complete Works 4:192-193.

<sup>10</sup>Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 4:53-54.

When I, your Slave, buy not my Chains of you,  
 Which wou'd make, both's Love, both's Dishonour grow;  
 By which, our Noble, Free Love, wou'd be made  
 Of a just Commerce, a base Trucking Trade;  
 Since none, but faithless Turks, or Jews, their Gains  
 Wou'd make, of their Slaves Service, or their Chains.<sup>11</sup>

A woman who demands contracts and complicated monetary marriage settlements Wycherley says, "whorishly contrives / To fix her self for Life at Bed and Board, / And make a Keeper of her pinion'd Lord: / Nay, makes him, (more injurious is the Force!) / To keep her too, for better and for worse." Such women make their husbands into "Dissembling Wretches that caress a-bed / The Wife, who heartily they wish were dead."<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Muir, in his Comedy of Manners, points to the scene between Flirt and Monsieur in The Gentleman Dancing Master in which Flirt "lays down her terms" for a keeping contract insisting upon a house in town; separate coach; a bed apart; "a couple of handsom, lusty, cleanly Footmen," (act 5) fine new furniture, £ 1000 present maintenance, £ 300 separate maintenance later on, no cohabitation and no questions asked about her visitors and gifts, and labels it satire on seventeenth century "fashionable marriage as well as on 'keeping'".<sup>13</sup> To Wycherley, a marriage based on money and terms profanes love "Which is most valu'd, as most frank and free"<sup>14</sup> and makes husband and wife not human beings united in trust and faith, but slaves united out of self-satisfaction and legal duty--inhuman pieces of property to be used by their mates. Wycherley re-

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<sup>11</sup>Lines 69-78, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 3:61-63.

<sup>12</sup>"To a Lady, an Advocate for Marriage," lines 49-50, Posthumous Works, in Complete Works 4:215-217.

<sup>13</sup>Kenneth Muir, Comedy of Manners (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1970), p. 71.

<sup>14</sup>"To a Mercenary Mistress . . . ," line 65, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 3:61-63.

calls the mythical free days of innocence in the world in a poem called "Love's Golden Age."

## I

How happy was that Age of Old  
 When Hearts were neither bought, nor sold?  
 When each unmercenary She  
     For Love expected nought but Love;  
     And when the kind protesting He  
 His Passion by his Faith did prove:  
 When Friends each other's Words did take,  
 And Honesty did all their Bargains make!

## II

Then Look for Look, and Kiss for Kiss,  
 Was all was giv'n her Love, or his;  
 Or for Exchange of Hearts was paid,  
     By the gen'rous youthful Swain,  
     To the bright, but artless Maid,  
 His Love to prove, and Hers to gain:  
White Cupid, chang'd from what he was of Old,  
 Now, like a Negro-Slave, is bought and sold.<sup>15</sup>

While Wycherley's desire for a frank and free union of love for love seems too ideal and unrealistic, it was surprisingly enough, a valid, though highly unusual legal and religious position. The Anglican Church did hold that when two parties agreed to give themselves in marriage in words of the present tense ("I do take thee . . ."), that such mutual consent was "sufficient for valid marriage at canon law and recognized as such in the common law courts," without formal religious ceremony or legal contracts of any kind; and further, something Wycherley as a law student would have appreciated, even a promise in the future tense could become valid, though irregular marriage, in the eyes of the Church, if it were followed by sexual intercourse, since mutual present tense consent would be assumed on the part of both indi-

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<sup>15</sup>Posthumous Works, in Complete Works 4:176.

viduals by the act of intercourse itself.<sup>16</sup> Contemporary practice was far removed from this ideal possibility, however, and Wycherley was clearly correct in calling marriage, as it existed in his day, a mercenary Trade. In the seventeenth century, marriage was, in practical terms, a union for life arranged by the fathers of the two individuals to be united, without concern for their feelings in the matter.

According to Morton Hunt, in his The Natural History of Love, Medieval and Renaissance marriage was "fundamentally a genetic device . . . a financial transaction and a life-long business; raptures and adorations would either be harmful to it, or simply perish in its mundane soil."<sup>17</sup> Both Emily James Putnam in her book, The Lady,<sup>18</sup> and H. J. Habakkuk agree with this analysis. "Calculations of material interest have played an important part in marriage between propertied families in almost all periods," Habakkuk tells us, but there is evidence, he continues that during the seventeenth century, as political power became less dependent on royal favor and more dependent on the possession of landed wealth, there was "a change in attitude of landed families to marriage itself, an increasing subordination of marriage to the increase of landed wealth, at the expense of other motives for marriage."<sup>19</sup> Marriage, in the seventeenth century, was, in fact, the

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<sup>16</sup>Gellert Spencer Alleman, Matrimonial Law and the Materials of Restoration Comedy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1942), pp. 7-11.

<sup>17</sup>Morton M. Hunt, The Natural History of Love (n.p.: Funk & Wagnalls, Minerva Press, 1967), p. 188.

<sup>18</sup>Emily James Putnam, The Lady: Studies of Certain Significant Phases in her History, with a Foreward by Jeannette Mirsky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 124-125.

<sup>19</sup>H. J. Habakkuk, "Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century," Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 32 (London, 1950):24.

time when the patriarchal father made provisions for his entire estate, drawing up legal papers which fixed his eldest son, the groom's, maintenance and provided for the bride's jointure, as well as a sum of money for what children might come of the marriage.<sup>20</sup> And of course there were contracts between the two fathers of those persons being married which provided for the bride's dowry as well.

The dowry or portion was supposedly provided as an income for her maintenance as a wife; however, by the seventeenth century, it had become common custom to use the dowry to purchase more land.<sup>21</sup> Families seeking to improve their status knew "a wealthy marriage in one generation put a family in a stronger position to make another in the next generation,"<sup>22</sup> thus accelerating the growth of great estates. An overabundance of women in relationship to men in the kingdom in the seventeenth century was making a "change in the conditions of supply and demand in the marriage market" however, which had the effect of increasing "the price of husbands."<sup>23</sup> Throughout the seventeenth century in England, the woman desirous of marriage had to provide an increasingly larger dowry in relation to the amount of jointure which her future husband agreed to grant her should he die before she did, and with young men being encouraged to marry heiresses or wealthy merchants' daughters, both men and women were becoming increasingly more conscious of the relationship between marriage and money. In the early seventeenth century, the woman had to provide an average dowry of £ 620 for every £ 100 per year

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

jointure. By the end of the century this had risen to an average of £ 1000 dowry for every £ 100 per year jointure. It is clearly "a change in the terms of marriage settlements in favor of the husbands,"<sup>24</sup> and a change that makes the woman not so much important to her husband as a human being, but as a means to increase his estate, and indirectly his political or public importance and power. The daughters of wealthy merchants could inherit entire fortunes, and "the competition presented by the merchants' daughters tended to drive up the level of portions which landed families gave their daughters." The portions which merchants could offer with their daughters were often, in fact, larger than those offered by all except the very greatest landowners.<sup>25</sup>

Edward Waterhouse, in his Gentleman's Monitor (1665), one of the earliest discussions of social mobility, tells his readers, "to have money is to be master of every almost desirable adjustment to God's glory and men's good. Money then being thus prevalent, it cannot be denied to be a probable rise to men and in them to families." While he notes that marriages that are only "a bare conjunction of male and female" are "deplorable" and lead to "total alienation," he still maintains "Apt matches in marriage are helps to raise and advance families" and encourages parents to breed and educate their sons well, since

almost every heir or son, being complete in breeding, enamours a fortune and heir female, whereby he adds to his family lands, landsworth [sic] and alliance, with armoreal accessions; when others precipitating do not in ages add anything by their marriages . . .; and so they resting upon the single fortune of their ancestors, decrease every descent (as profuseness or multitude or children eats upon them); whereas those that

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-23.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

have several fangs to fatten them, and accrements of marriages, to relieve their distresses and inevitable expenses upon, endure longest and bear the expensive accidents of life with less palpable injury and visible diminution . . . .<sup>26</sup>

With general concern for what this sort of mercenary trend in marriage was doing to the sacred institution, Sir William Temple complained at the end of the seventeenth century:

Our marriages are made, just like other common bargains and sales, by the mere consideration of interest or gain, without any of love or esteem, of birth or of beauty itself, which is ought to be the true ingredients of all happy compositions of this kind, and of all generous productions.<sup>27</sup>

Wycherley's plays, as a mirror of their time, accurately portray the greed and self-seeking desire for personal prominence and reputation which frequently motivated seventeenth century marriage. Love in a Wood serves as an excellent example to illustrate how Wycherley, in his very first play, sought to point out such flaws in motivation for marriage and how, by the poetic justice of the ending, he leaves a clear moral to be drawn on the side of liberality, generosity and love as the best justification for marriage.

The characters in Wycherley's first play, Love in a Wood, or love in a state of confusion, as Montague Summers interprets the title,<sup>28</sup> cluster into two groups: those centering on the house of Alderman Gripe and who seek the aid of old Joyner, the Matchmaker, and those who are friends of the more sincere and honest Vincent.

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<sup>26</sup>Edward Waterhouse, Gentleman's Monitor, in Social Change and Revolution in England 1540-1640, ed. Lawrence Stone, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, 1966), pp. 133-137.

<sup>27</sup>Sir William Temple, "An Essay on Popular Discontents," Miscellanea. Third Part, quoted in H. J. Habakkuk, "Marriage Settlements . . .," p. 25.

<sup>28</sup>Complete Works 1:243; explanatory note for p. 65.

Alderman Gripe is a splendid specimen of the avaricious, superficially religious, middle-class Englishman, a "prime target of satire in Restoration comedy."<sup>29</sup> Joyner, his procuress, praises him as "a sturdy pillar of his cause" and ironically sums up his selfish personality, since he boasts he has praised himself in just that way "and without vanity" (act 1). Wycherley, in the cast of characters, calls him "seemingly precise, but a covetous, leach-erous, old usurer of the City," and gives him an appropriate name. According to A Glossary of Tudor and Stuart Words,<sup>30</sup> a Gripe is a vulture (p. 177), or a griffon, "a fabulous monster, a kind of lion with an eagle's head" (p. 179). One of the earliest uses of the word is in Lyly's Galathea--"Grypes make their nests of gold" (p. 177), a sentence which tells us a lot about the nature of the Alderman. Gripe, a rapacious lion of lust with a desire for young girls, hides the truth of his nature with a self-righteous and eagle-like pride and religious appearance. Unable to tolerate criticism of himself, he literally locks up his daughter Martha for fear of Dapperwit, a notorious would-be wit with an eye on young ladies and their fortunes and who has dared to disagree with the Alderman in public on a matter of politics and religion. Under the guise of protecting a poor young girl, Gripe has hired Joyner to help him gain the sexual favors of the lower class Lucy Crossbite, who is presently Dapperwit's willing mistress. "Privacy, privacy, Mrs. Joyner, I love privacy, in opposition to the Wicked, who hate it" (act 3)<sup>31</sup> he boasts as he prowls through Lucy's dumpy dwelling looking for a place to hide in case he should be caught with her during their affair; yet he claims all along to be

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<sup>29</sup>Schneider, p. 49.

<sup>30</sup>Ed. Walter W. Skeat, with additions by A. L. Mayhew (n.p.: Folcroft Library Editions, 1972).

<sup>31</sup>All quotations from Wycherley's plays are from The Complete Plays of William Wycherley, ed. Gerald Weales (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971).

protecting Lucy from contamination by Dapperwit: "I cannot rest till I have redeem'd her from the Jaws of that Lyon" (act 1).

When Joyner suggests that winning Lucy will require generosity, money for gifts, food, clothes, and entertainments, Gripe declares he hates such "Modes and Forms" and abominates "Entertainments . . . there can be no entertainment to me, more Luscious and Savoury, than the Communion with that little Gentlewoman . . . we will be to each other a Feast" (act 3). Joyner admits she has praised Gripe to Lucy and her mother especially because of his virtue of "Liberality; which is so great a Vertue, that it often excuses Youth, Beauty, Courage, Wit, or any thing" in winning a lady, but that she is so ashamed of his miserliness that she fears they will think her a liar. Gripe dismisses her concern and the concept of liberality with a "Pish, pish 'tis the vertue of Fools." (act 3)

"I never knew any man so mortify'd a Miser that he would deny his Letchery anything," Joyner tells the audience in disbelief over Gripe, and, afraid she herself will not be paid for her matchmaking services, she resorts to blackmail after Lucy arrives, forcing Gripe to give her five pieces before she will leave him to his much desired privacy with Lucy.

Equally selfish as Gripe is Lucy, the daughter of Mrs. Crossbite whose name means cheat. As Dapperwit's mistress she is content to receive a "Farrendon Gown, . . . Worsted Stockings, . . . plain Handkerchiefs," and to be taught "to dress, talk, and move well," (in Wycherley "move" usually has a sexual connotation), and she has dreams of rising from her lowly economic status, thanks to the acting lessons Dapperwit has given her, until she possesses "good Cloaths, Plate, Jewels, and things so well about [her]; that [her] Neighbours, the little Gentlemens Wives, of Fifteen hundred, or two thousand pound a year, should . . . [retire] into the Country, sick with envy,

of [her] prosperity and greatness" (act 3). But when Lucy finds Dapperwit is attempting to rent her out for the sexual satisfaction of his friend Ranger and has indeed had sexual relations with her mother as well as with herself, she determines to take her mother's advice and go after Gripe who, as Joyner says, "Zealously, and in pure Charity," is "bent upon her redemption" and has promised to save her from Dapperwit and "relieve" both Lucy's and her mother's "necessities" (act 3).

Ironically, though she is incensed by Dapperwit's "design to Pawn me for the Rent," as she says, in determining that it is "time to remove [her] Goods" and that "there are as little as [she] can bargain for themselves nowadays, as well as properer women," she turns herself into the very piece of property or "Goods" she resents others bargaining for. Coupling her acting talent with her new-found mistrust of men, she feigns an appealing innocence to Alderman Gripe and when he has her alone in her little room with a chair against the locked door for privacy, cries rape. With the help of her mother and the force of the landlord, she manages to extract a £ 500 portion out of the Alderman to keep him from being publicly embarrassed.

Like Lucy, Lady Flippant, the Alderman's sister, sees her own chance for independence and freedom in terms of material property and makes it her only reason for seeking a husband. Her name itself implies her inability to treat marriage with proper respect. "Do you think me so ill bred, as to love a Husband, she tells Lydia in Act 3, "I shou'd rather make an adventure of my honour, with a Gallant, for a Gown, a new Coach, a Necklase, than clap my Husbands cheeks for them, or sit in his lap; I shou'd be as asham'd to be caught in such a posture, with a Husband, as a brisk well bred of the Town, wou'd be, to be caught on his knees at prayers, unless to his Mistress." Her freedom, in fact, almost her whole identity, depends upon the material poss-

ession of a coach, for she says a Widow "is most properly at home in her Coach, she eats, and drinks, and sleeps in her Coach; and for her Visits she receives them in the Play-house" (act 1). Since she has no money, unless she can gain a husband, she will lose her coach and have to be dependent upon her miserly brother Gripe who already ridicules her fashionable face-patches, censures her at dinner and has locked his doors to her male visitants, among them Dapperwit. Her scheme for husband hunting, like Lucy's, is to turn herself into a likely business proposition not by pretending to be virginal like Lucy, but by claiming honor and pretending to a fortune while preaching a "publick detestation of marriage." (act 1) "The Widow's Fortune (whether suppos'd, or real)," she boasts, "is her chiefest Bait, the more chary she seems of it, the more she withdraws it, the more eagerly the busie gaping frye will bite;" and although Joyner reminds her that she is no longer a virgin and cannot count on such a foolish denial of interest in marriage to win a husband, the Widow Flippant is persistent, getting herself entangled with Sir Simon Addleplot and Dapperwit in her matrimonial and sexual intrigues.

Sir Simon Addleplot is a man as his name implies whose plots for a mate are confused and muddled. Ranger testifies to the fact that Sir Simon "has his fruitless designs upon the bed-ridden rich Widow, down to the sucking Heiresses in her [sic] pissing cloute; He was once the sport, but now the publick grievance of all the fortunes in town." (act 1) Sir Simon is in the same penniless condition as Lady Flippant unless he can find a wealthy mate, and like her he has used his last money to hire Joyner to aid him. He has already paid her 20 guineas for helping him disguise as a clerk and get a job in Alderman Gripe's household; and from this inside position he hopes either to win Lady Flippant (for whom he will pay Joyner another 50 guineas) or Martha (for whom he will pay 100 guineas since she is younger and has a E 30,000 in-

heritance). Joyner, of course, gives him friendly advice, wishing he wouldn't try for two women at the same time, and warning him to stay away from Dapperwit, whom Sir Simon thinks a friend, but who is in reality using him to gain Martha himself. Sir Simon is so ridiculously self confident in his strategy of "Sly Intrigue" that he ignores Joyner's advice and carries messages between Martha and Dapperwit without realizing that he is cheating himself and helping the two in their plans to elope.<sup>32</sup>

Dapperwit and Martha stand on the outer edges of their groups--Martha, Gripe's daughter, having some genuine sense of love about her in spite of her gripish background, and Dapperwit, a friend of Ranger and Vincent, who though claiming wit and love, is really concerned with the prestige of outwitting Sir Simon and gaining Martha's £ 30,000 inheritance. Martha is six months pregnant, perhaps because her father's gripish lock-up has driven her to find freedom in secret evening meetings with young men, or perhaps as the incestuous result of her father's attraction to young girls. She is afraid to tell Gripe of her condition and to rely upon him to find her a husband, so has determined to save her reputation herself. Faced with the choice of Sir Simon, whom she knows to be "no better than an Idiot" (act 4), the laughing stock of all the men and women of the town, a victim of venereal disease, and likely to have spent his entire estate (act 4) and Dapperwit, the seemingly clever wit who appears to be genuinely concerned in helping her to escape both her father and Sir Simon, she chooses to marry Dapperwit.

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<sup>32</sup>Wycherley uses this plot situation again with Margery, Horner and Pinchwife in The Country Wife.

For her determination to save her reputation and herself, if for nothing else, Martha deserves some admiration; and her name, interestingly enough, means "lady."<sup>33</sup> When, in Act 5, Dapperwit urges her to marry him and get revenge on her "Zealous Jew" father, she shows a Christian desire to forgive her father, to accept even his evil as a means to greater good. "His hard usage of me, conspir'd with your good Meen, and Wit, and to avoid slavery under him, I stoop to your yoke," she tells Dapperwit. But unfortunately she has misjudged her man. Underneath Dapperwit's "good meen" is what Wycherley calls in the cast of characters, a half-wit. "I will be obliged to your Father, for nothing but a portion, nor to you for your love; 'twas due to my merit," he boasts, proving his own conceit. Wycherley has characterized Dapperwit as a vain egotist who cheats his friends and insults them behind their backs. Early in Act 1, Dapperwit has clearly indicated that he believes Martha to be so in love with him that she would "scratch through four walls" to reach him. Too late, Martha realizes: "I shou'd have thought," but trapped by her need to save her reputation and desirous of a husband who will give her greater freedom than Gripe or Sir Simon, in desperation, she weds Dapperwit, then has her own revenge in Act 5 when she admits it was the necessity of being six months pregnant, not love, in the final analysis, that forced her decision.<sup>34</sup> The blow to Dapperwit's conceited view of himself when he discovers he has married a wench and not a lady is softened when he rationalizes that her "thirty thousand pound will make amends" (act 5); but the nest of

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<sup>33</sup>Wycherley may intend the name to satirize the typical Restoration lady who will do anything to maintain the reputation of being an honorable lady though she has no honest right to it because of her sexual excess.

<sup>34</sup>Since Martha was also a Biblical name, popular amongst the Puritans, it is not unlikely that Wycherley may intend some satire involving the Martha of the Bible who was too concerned about her reputation as a domestic and homemaker to take time to hear the message of love Christ preached in her own home (Luke 10:32-42).

gold that surrounds these characters is based on selfishness, spitefulness and revenge, and Wycherley implies that no happy marriage will result from such motives.

When Sir Simon is told that Martha will wed Dapperwit, he vows revenge and hurries off to tell Gripe. When Gripe hears his daughter has married a wit and the horrible Dapperwit at that, he immediately sees his opportunity for revenge. Joyner has already urged him to take revenge on Lucy and her mother for tricking him out of his £ 500 and having picked up a cue from comments about the economy of keeping a wife rather than a mistress, Gripe cleverly decides to take his revenge by marrying Lucy:

My Daughter, my Reputation, and my Money gone--but the last is dearest to me; yet at once I may retrieve that, and be reveng'd for the loss of the other; and all this by marrying Lucy here: I shall get my five hundred pound again, and get Heirs to exclude my Daughter, and frustrate Dapperwit; besides, 'tis agreed on all hands, 'tis cheaper keeping a Wife than a Wench. (act 5)

When Gripe makes this intention public, Lady Flippant who has lost her chances at Dapperwit and has been unable to find any man of any kind who will accept her, declares that she, too, will be willing to marry and with pseudo-modesty accepts Sir Simon's attentions, though she has learned in Act 2 that he thinks her ugly and "as errant a Jilt, as ever pull'd pillow from under husbands head" and he, in Act 4 has, in his clerk's disguise, learned that she will let any servant enjoy her sexually without a squeak.

Marriage for Gripe is a means of gaining money and revenge; for Lucy it is a means to gain money and social prestige; neither partner has any regard for the other except as he or she satisfies his own sexual and selfish sense of personal gratification. Lucy has yet to bear the brunt of Gripe's miserliness and Gripe will need more exposure before he sees Lucy's desire to spend his money on herself. Sir Simon and Lady Flippant marry for the money they assume they will each get from the other; when they discover that each is

penniless, their marriage will be a meaningless slavery. Martha marries Dapperwit to save her reputation and instead loses her inheritance and is yoked to a man who obviously cares for no one but himself. Once they have all realized what they have done to themselves, Wycherley seems to tell us, they will join with Dapperwit in saying: "Abus'd by him, I have abus'd! Fortune our foe, we cannot over-wit, / By none but thee, our projects are Cross-bit" (act 5). Yet even should they cry out against Fortune in this way, Wycherley shows by their actions in the play that they have brought their own fates upon themselves by their greed and selfish desire for reputation.

Presiding over all these lecherous, avaricious, and revengeful motives for marriage stands Joyner, Wycherley's matchmaker. Like the priests she preaches generosity and liberality and though she is aware that "'tis as impossible for a man to love, and be a miser, as to love and be wise," still she has no qualms about profiting from their own lack of wisdom and has carefully lined her own gripish nest with their gold. "Like the Lawyers, while my Clients endeavour to cheat one another; I in justice cheat 'em both" (act 5), she declares, becoming a kind of symbol for the league of "Gown-men" (priests and lawyers) Wycherley refers to in his marriage poem (See p. 25 above) responsible for tricking men and women into seventeenth century marriages based on property and reputation rather than love and generosity. Wycherley in a poem about a jockey who tried to be a matchmaker to him sums up Joyner's occupation and the outcome of the marriages such matchmakers make:

Then make no Match for me, my Jockey Friend,  
Who wou'dst be Mounting always, all Mankind:  
A Match-Maker, so, both for Horse and Man,  
Draw'st Friends into their Loss, by Hopes of Gain;  
Jocky-like, making a Crimp-Match for me,  
To make my Ruine Sport for others be;  
Jocky-like, with me, wou'dst, (as others do)

Who cheat their Best Friends, making Matches too;  
 Giving them Jades to ride on, without Proof,  
 Such, as for Life, they cannot get red [sic] of.<sup>35</sup>

If we are led to admire Joyner, it is as we might admire the mindless institution of seventeenth century marriage itself, which while it may be capable of a good purpose is equally capable of punishing, with a kind of eye-for-an-eye Old Testament justice, those who would use it to serve their own greedy and selfish interests.

Valentine, Christina, Ranger and Lydia, the characters associated with Vincent, in the play, are not confused in love because of money and greed; they are entangled instead in webs of jealousy. But, encouraged by Vincent's patience, faith, and advice, they find their way to marriages based not on revenge but on forgiveness, faith, trust, and generosity, highly Christian principles.

Jealousy, while it shows an excessive degree of concern for one's loved one (it can mean zealousness or devotion), paradoxically implies both a doubt about one's loved one's constancy and a strong desire to physically possess or control the loved one to be sure of that constancy. Jealousy, then, contains all the dangers of a Gripish lock up unless the jealous lover understands the danger and moderates it. Both Valentine and Lydia possess this dangerous quality.

The penniless Valentine has pledged a "mutual love" contract with the heiress, Christina, and fought a duel with Clerimont to defend her honor, but even as he fled to France to avoid retaliation from Clerimont's relatives he was guilty of doubting Christina's constancy. He explains that his "ill luck

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<sup>35</sup>To W. O. my Jocky-Friend, and a Matchmaker for Horse and Man; upon his offer of a Wife to me, saying, in commendation of Her, She was Soft-wax, Virtuous, Pious, and Charitable," lines 76-85, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 3:87-89.

has taught [him] to credit [his] misfortunes, and doubt [his] happiness" (act 4), thus pessimistically he judges all women to be inconstant. Returning to England in spite of his enemies, Valentine jealously claims that he desires to "secure" Christina's constancy, but at the first test he proves he believes her unfaithful.

Christina, distraught at Valentine's flight to France, has dressed in mourning during his absence and shut herself away from her friends and family as a sign of her devotion to Valentine. When Lydia, her friend, begs Christina to conceal her from Ranger who has followed Lydia to Christina's house from the park, Christina agrees, but remains aloof to Ranger's flattery throughout her brief conversation with him and steadfast in her love for Valentine. But when Valentine overhears Ranger's boasting of having gained access to Christina's lodgings, he is overcome with jealousy and in spite of Vincent's testimony to Christina's Penelope-like faith, Valentine persists in doubting Christina and vows revenge. When Vincent urges that he confront Christina directly, Valentine is "afraid to surprize her, for her sake" if she is innocent, for it would be an insult to her honor, and "afraid to surprize her, for [his] own" sake if she is false, for it would be a disgrace to his honor to show how much concern he has for one who is false to him (act 4). It is easier for him to fight a supposed rival than to admit to his own lack of faith in his loved one.

Ultimately, Christina, who has risked public disgrace by mourning for him and by coming to see him at Vincent's when she hears of his return, braves the disgrace of appearing in St. James Park in order to beg Ranger to tell Valentine the truth about her. Mistaking Valentine for Ranger in the dark, she proves her love for Valentine by praising him as "A brave man, till you [Ranger, she supposes] made him use a woman ill, worthy the love of a

Princess; till you made him censure mine; good as Angels; till you made him unjust."(act 5) The experience is, as Valentine admits, "rather a tryal of my self than her" for hearing himself spoken to as a Ranger or doubter of women, he awakens to the selfishness of his jealousy. Without realizing it his jealous suspicion of all women's and especially Christina's constancy has been a necessary aspect to the maintenance of his own sense of honor as a man, and now he must face this embarrassing, cowardly and self-defeating truth about himself, and conquer it. To have admitted her devotion to Valentine under these conditions is also an embarrassment to Christina. At first, when she learns whom she has spoken to, she struggles to get away from Valentine, but finally, having heard his repentance and having accepted him for what he is, she is true to her name and forgives him for his doubt.

Vincent, as a wise and moral plain dealer, and a "near neighbour, and . . . inquisitive . . . friend" of Christina (act 2), helps bring Valentine's rigidly self-defeating jealousy under control. "Open but your eyes," he tells Valentine," and the Fantastick Goblin's vanish'd, and all your idle fears, will turn to shame; for Jealousie, is the basest cowardize"(act 5). Vincent is a "rough draft of Manly,"<sup>36</sup> according to critic Fujimura, and a fascinating moral figure in the play. He first demonstrates his good nature and wisdom when in Act 1 he scorns Dapperwit's "chaw'd jests" and "mouldy Lampoons" and refuses to gossip or betray his friends behind their backs. Even in the darkness of the park when Ranger and Dapperwit want to criticize everyone they see, Vincent wishes to "distinguish a Friend from a Fop"(act 2). His desire to evaluate men on the basis of a moral code he himself determines, and which the play seems to justify, places him above making blanket pronouncements like Valentine's view that all women are inconstant (act 4), or Ranger's view that

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<sup>36</sup>Fujimura, p. 129.

all women "are poor credulous creatures" (act 1) or Lydia's view that all men are "ignorant" or "false" (act 3). He is neither overly loose as is Ranger, nor overly rigid as is Valentine; he maintains a moderate stance throughout the play, keeping faith in the goodness of Christina, yet warning that if Ranger's boasts about Christina are true, Ranger should beware of Valentine's desire for revenge.

In Act 5, one of Vincent's speeches is full of Biblical allusion: "I am glad I have found you, for now I am prepar'd to lead you out of the dark and all your trouble; I have good news." "Good news" in fact is one way of referring to the entire New Testament, or the gospel, since that word derives from Anglo Saxon godspell or good tidings, and the New Testament is a message of light out of darkness, and freedom through knowledge of the truth. Christ himself claimed to be "the light of the world" (John 8:12) and "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6); he explains that "every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light . . . . But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John 3:20-21.) Set against the greed and gripishness of Joyner and her friends, Vincent appears to be symbolic of the truth or faith which brings Ranger and Valentine to their appropriate Christinas, and his name means victorious.

Lydia, like Valentine, is caught in the confusion of jealous love. So desirous to be secure of Ranger's devotion is she that she follows him everywhere, thereby showing her own suspicious lack of faith in him, and encouraging him in his belief that all women are "credulous creatures" he can outwit. Just as Valentine is afraid to have an actual confrontation with Christina, so Lydia fears one with Ranger. Driven on by her suspicion of him, she follows him to the park and when she is seen and chased by him, takes refuge in Chris-

tina's lodgings. She herself is thus responsible for bringing Ranger to his first meeting with Christina, and while hiding at Christina's house she overhears herself criticized and Christina's beauty praised by Ranger. Unable to admit her own love for Ranger before, and now unable to tell him of her anger lest he reject her and she not be able to forgive him (act 3), she forges Christina's name to a letter of assignation for Ranger, and goes in disguise to the meeting only to find Ranger again in the company of the real Christina.

Ranger, meanwhile, has been learning a lesson of his own. Twice rejected and embarrassed in his offers of love to the angelic Christina, and rejected as well by the lowly Lucy, confused by what his friends tell him are two Christinas, and "giddy" from romances he cannot control, Ranger determines to free himself from the madness of this game of "Blind-mans Buff" and seeking an end to his ranging declares: "Lydia, triumph, I now am thine again; of Intrigues, honourable or dishonourable, and all sorts of rambling, I take my leave." (act 4.) Lydia is beginning to feel she is herself to blame for Ranger's inconstancy and, hoping for another chance to win him, returns to the park where she is mistaken by him for Christina and nearly raped by Ranger in revenge for her coldness to him. As Valentine's mistaken conversation with Christina brought a true understanding between himself and Christina, Lydia's near rape breaks down the barriers of pride and jealousy between herself and Ranger. She realizes that Ranger regrets his "natural inconstancy" and would indeed offer himself to her "for good and all" and she is willing to forgive him his fault since she was responsible for his meeting Christina in the first place. He is painfully and honestly blunt in telling her that not to forgive him would only be hurting herself and her own desire for him. At the end of the play he forgives her for her jealousy in the same way that Christina forgives Valentine, but Lydia gives signs of still being jealous and doubting all

he has told her. "Cou'd he find it in his heart to quit all other engagements, and voluntarily turn him self over to one woman, and she a Wife too? cou'd he away with the unsupportable bondage of Matrimony?" (act 5) His answer has provoked much critical comment. First he tells her she seems to be treating "Matrimony as irreverently as my Lady Flippant" and then he explains "the end of Marriage, now is Liberty, / and two are bound--to set each other free." "The double entendre here is obvious," says Elizabeth Birdsall:

two alternatives for retaining freedom within marriage are being simultaneously suggested: one the mutual faith of which Valentine and Christina have been talking, the other a mutual faithlessness rather in the Dorimant vein. A defier of conventional morality to the end, Ranger continues to champion the cause of his own freedom and pleasure.<sup>37</sup>

Norman Holland, although he believes Wycherley sees marriage as a means for freedom within form, calls the lines "cynical,"<sup>38</sup> while P. F. Vernon refuses to see any ambiguity at all and claims that after Ranger's Act 4 repentance, such a view is "undoubtedly mistaken."<sup>39</sup> Mr. Schneider finds the lines "paradoxical" and chooses to interpret the passage to mean that "Marriage sets one free from the endless maze, madness, or wood of unlimited sexual adventure" and cites Wycherley's poem, "To Love," in which Wycherley "affirms that love not only has the power to chain us to 'wedlock's yoke' but also allows us to 'triumph in [those] chains.'"<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Birdsall, p. 120.

<sup>38</sup>Holland, p. 44.

<sup>39</sup>P. F. Vernon, "Wycherley's First Comedy and Its Spanish Source," Comparative Literature 18:137.

<sup>40</sup>Schneider, p. 177.

The lines are clearly ambiguous, but I believe purposely so. They are Ranger's dramatic challenge to Lydia. "All right, Lydia," he seems to say, "are you going to begin the doubting all over again after I have forgiven you and promised to give myself to you 'for good and all'? Will you treat marriage irreverently by demanding terms and particulars like a Lady Flippant or will you treat my gift of myself and my pledge of faith with acceptance and a gift and pledge of your own and make marriage the reverent union Providence intended it to be? I will, if you will!" The answer to his challenge is left to the audience to make on behalf of Lydia.<sup>41</sup> Will she or won't she accept the truth of his new found faith and love? Will the Restoration audience accept generosity instead of contracted terms, money and property as a motivation for marriage?

Ranger finds Lydia's reference to matrimonial bondage irreverent and flippant. Of course marriage is a bond, but it need not be "insupportable bondage" if those who enter into it do so with the right motives. This would seem to be Wycherley's view as well and the whole play is designed to prove that moral. The Gripes and Flippants and Dapperwits may end cursing fortune for agreeing to wed, but Ranger wants a wife and a fate that will be free of such mean motives and holds out that option both to Lydia and the Restoration audience as well. Wycherley in writing the play seems bluntly to warn the public that unless generosity and trust become the basis for marriage, English marital unions--because made up of "Slaves"--will produce an English population of legitimate Fools and Cowards and illegitimate wits and brave men, turning the whole procreative purpose of the marriage institution topsy-

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<sup>41</sup>It is interesting to note here that Lydia is the name of the first female Gentile convert to Christianity (Acts 16:14). Perhaps Wycherley makes an intentional allusion here wishing that both Lydia and his audience will arrive at a more Christian and love oriented basis for marriage.

turvy as Lady Flippant's closing song to the first act of Love in a Wood so flippantly suggests:

When Parents are Slaves,  
Their Bratts cannot be any other;  
Great Wits, and great Braves,  
Have always a Punk to their Mother.  
(act 1)

Wycherley's moral concern for generosity and trust between marital partners so that husband and wife would not become slaves, and so that marriage itself would not become an "insupportable bondage" is remarkably similar to the attitude John Milton took towards marriage in his divorce tracts. Milton believed that "Marriage is a covenant the very being whereof consists not in a forced cohabitation and counterfeit performance of duties, but in unfeigned love and peace." Without such mutual love in marriage, he claimed, "there can be left of wedlock nothing but the empty husk of an outside matrimony, as undelightful and displeasing to God as any other kind of hypocrisy," since all "duties" of marriage would have to "be dissembled."<sup>42</sup> People forced into such dissembled slavery

can neither be to one another a remedy against loneliness nor live in any union or contentment all their days; yet they shall so they be but found suitably weaponed to the least possibility of sensual enjoyment, be made, spite of antipathy, to fadge together and combine as they may to their unspeakable wearisomeness and despair of all sociable delight in the ordinance which God established to that very end.<sup>43</sup>

While not advocating loose living, Milton acknowledged the Rangers of the world when he said that those who "have lived most loosely, by reason of their bold accustoming, prove most successful in their matches, because their wild

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<sup>42</sup>John Milton, "Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce," in John Milton. Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957), p. 711.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 703.

affections, unsettling at will, have been as so many divorces to teach them experience."<sup>44</sup> To avoid sacrilege to a religious institution and to aid mankind in finding companionship and "happy conversation"<sup>45</sup> Milton recommended the legalization of divorce since "Honest liberty" would prove "the greatest foe to dishonest license."<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting, also, that Milton wrote the only epic poem in which the human marital relationship--that of Adam and Eve--forms a major and significant portion of the subject matter. In Book IV of Paradise Lost, he describes the couple as Satan found them in their state of Paradise:

From this Assyrian Garden, where the Fiend  
Saw undelighted all delight, all kind  
Of living Creatures new to sight and strange:  
Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,  
Godlike erect, with native Honor clad  
In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all,  
And worthy seem'd, for in thir looks Divine  
True, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure  
Severe, but in true filial freedom plac't;  
Whence true authority in men; though both  
Not equal, as thir sex not equal seem'd;  
For contemplation hee and valor form'd,  
For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,  
Hee for God only, shee for God in him:  
His fair large Front and Eye sublime declar'd  
Absolute rule; and Hyacinthine Locks  
Round from his parted forelock manly hung  
Clust'ring, but not beneath his shoulders broad:  
Shee as a veil down to the slender waist  
Her unadorned golden tresses wore  
Dishevell'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd  
As the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd  
Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,  
And by her yielded, by him best receiv'd,  
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,  
And sweet reluctant amorous delay.  
Nor those mysterious parts were then conceal'd,  
Then was not guilty shame: dishonest shame

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 708.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 707.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 698.

Of Nature's works, honor dishonorable,  
 Sin-bred, how have ye troubl'd all mankind  
 With shows instead, mere shows of seeming pure,  
 And banisht from man's life his happiest life,  
 Simplicity and spotless innocence.  
 So pass'd they naked on, nor shunn'd the sight  
 Of God or Angel, for they thought no ill:  
 So hand in hand they pass'd, the loveliest pair  
 That ever since in love's embraces met,  
 Adam the goodliest man of men since born  
 His Sons, the fairest of her Daughters Eve.<sup>47</sup>

In this description, Milton's Adam and Eve live in a pre-fall marriage of perfection, a relationship similar to Wycherley's ideal description of Love's Golden Age. There is no shame of sexuality here. Milton even allows sexual intercourse in the Garden of Eden before the fall because all of mankind's personality, having come from God, if kept in honest harmony and moderation, must be good. Finally, Milton clearly delineates the proper husband and wife relationship within the ideal marriage structure. The husband, Adam, is absolute under God, but he is so perfect that he deserves to be respected as absolute. Adam rules his wife "with gentle sway" and Eve's reaction to the subjection is a yielding in the best manner of Restoration heroines, "with coy submission, modest pride, / And sweet reluctant amorous delay." The combination of paradoxical adjectives is perfect to suggest her free will to be governed.

That Wycherley's view of what the husband-wife relationship should be was similar to Milton's may be seen from a consideration of the married couples who appear in his other plays, The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer, and from the central image and closing comments of the heroine of The Gentleman Dancing Master. The marriages of Sir Jaspar Fidget and Lady Fidget and Jack

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<sup>47</sup>John Milton, Paradise Lost, book 4, lines 285-324, in John Milton. Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957).

Pinchwife and Margery in The Country Wife are clearly examples of what a good husband and wife relationship must not be. Absolutism in the hands of unworthy husbands more concerned with jealously guarding their own reputations than with honestly loving and trusting their wives leads to disorder, rebellion and adultery. Pinchwife, past his prime as a man (49 claiming to be 41) and unable to find even a whore who will remain faithful to him (act 1), has turned to the totally ignorant and innocent country girl, Margery, seeking to make up for his feelings of inadequacy by dominating her. He has no feelings of love or respect for her. She is his long sought after possession, a "whore" he can "keep . . . to [him] self." (act 1) Any thought of treating her as a friend or an intelligent human being is alien to his intentions, a threat to his manhood and his personal esteem. "What is wit in a Wife good for, but to make a Man a Cuckold" (act 1), he says, failing to see his own obligation to make himself a worthy husband who need not fear being cuckolded. Women were made "plain, open, silly and fit for slaves, as Nature and Heaven intended 'em," he cries, but "damn'd Love" taught them "craft" and the "art of deluding" and therefore must be strangled (act 4); in another passage, he curses love again for making "these dow-bak'd, senseless, in docile animals, Women, too hard for us their Politick Lords and Rulers" (act 4). Since he is blind to the fact that his very restrictions against love are driving Margery (who was all loving to him) into adulterous rebellion, he can only assume that women have "more desires, more solliciting passions, more lust, and more of the Devil" (act 4) than men and that "If we do not cheat women, they'll cheat us." Without realizing it, he admits his own degraded view of marriage and his selfish keeping motives when he rationalizes that "fraud may be justly used with secret enemies, of which a Wife is the most dangerous; and he that has a handsome one to keep, and a Frontier Town, must provide against treach-

ery rather than open Force" (act 4). Like a cruel tyrant, afraid of losing his whorish slave, the absolute Pinchwife locks his wife in her room, threatening to blind her with a pen knife or kill her with his sword and finally literally leads her into the hands of his enemy and adultery.

While Pinchwife's absolutism attempts to make his wife fearful of love by restrictive rules to curb her nature, Sir Jaspar Fidget's absolutism is perhaps even more insidious for he claims to respect his wife for her honor and by referring to women as "that sweet, soft, gentle, tame, noble Creature . . . made for Man's Companion" (act 2) pretends to trust her and make her his equal. His name, Jaspar, in fact, means "treasurer,"<sup>48</sup> but he is a fidgety one, and for all his seeming trust he admits his lack of faith in her by seeking out only impotent companions for her and congratulates his own wisdom: "'tis as much a Husbands prudence to provide innocent diversion for a Wife, as to hinder her unlawful pleasure; and he had better employ her, than let her employ herself." (act 1) Sir Jaspar's abundant praise of his wife is a smokescreen to preserve her as a necessary addition to his reputation while he pursues his real love--business. He can't be late to his council meeting and makes clear that "business must be preferr'd always before Love and Ceremony" (act 1). Naturally she is frustrated by his inattention; and while at first she accepts her situation and boasts of the virtue her husband praises in her and claims she is one of those rare Women of Honour scorned "for loving her Husband," (act 1) she eagerly submits to Horner when he offers to set her free.

These examples indicate that Wycherley was scornful both of the husband who blindly tyrannizes over his wife in the marital relationship and of

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<sup>48</sup>Ernest Weekley, Jack and Jill: A Study in Our Christian Names (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1940), p. 140.

the husband who cunningly masks his attempts to control his wife with a sugar coat of false praise for her. Such husbands at heart are contemptuous of their wives, even fearful of them and are driven to use the subjection of their mates as a necessary factor to maintaining their own sense of masculine well-being. To set up excessive restrictions to a wife's freedom and lock her from temptations or to praise her faith but never provide an opportunity for its testing is to demonstrate total breach of trust. By these examples, Wycherley demonstrates that such husbands are unworthy of respect because they cannot give it in return.

If excessive or cunning male absolutism is an inadequate arrangement for a good marriage, in The Plain Dealer, Wycherley would seem to scorn total freedom and equality between married partners as well. In the union of Vernish and Olivia he provides an example of marriage for money and of a husband and wife who act as individuals quite independent of each other's control. Olivia, believing that "money and pleasure" are the "businesses" of "all prudent Women" posed as one scornful of the world in order to gain the favor of the misanthropic Manly. So sincere did she seem that when Manly desired her to come away with him to the Indies and her family refused to let her go, Manly left her in the custody of his friend Vernish and gave her half his fortune with the hope that eventually both would join him in his Indian paradise. Satisfied of her success in tricking Manly out of his wealth, she married Vernish who had posed as Manly's friend and helped her gain the money. Vernish, however, admits that he married only for "interest" (act 5) and although he and Olivia have been married for only a month, he has already been away from her for five days and is not above raping Fidelity (a girl disguised as a boy whom he finds in Olivia's chambers), except that his desire for money makes him postpone the deed until it is too late to accomplish. Olivia is no more loyal to him.

Since they have not announced their marriage, fearing Manly might learn of it, Olivia can still publicly gather in the jewels and gifts of her many admirers who are ignorant of her situation, and when she is attracted to Fidelia (seemingly because the "fellow" is young enough to dominate and yet to give her pleasure) she does not hesitate to arrange secret meetings and an elopement with him. Clearly there is no faith, trust, or love between Olivia and Vernish. They are linked only in a kind of anarchy of mutual deceit and disrespect. That is why when Vernish becomes upset over what he suspects is his wife's adultery and Olivia throws an hysterical tantrum over what she claims is Vernish's infidelity, they appear all the more ludicrous since neither has contributed anything to their marriage to make it worthy of honorable defense. By ridiculing such a disrespectful business-interest marriage, a loose conjunction of two independent individuals, Wycherley shows his scorn as well for a marriage arrangement that would invert the absolute position of authority of the husband in marriage by giving so much freedom to the wife because of her property and wealth.

Stuart political philosophers of the seventeenth century, such as Sir Robert Filmer, frequently made comparisons between the king and his people and the male as head of his family in order to illustrate the kind of absolutism appropriate to harmonious government in England.<sup>49</sup> A look at two of

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<sup>49</sup>Filmer, for example, in his Patriarcha, states: "If we compare the natural rights of a father with those of a king, we find them all one, without any difference at all but only in the latitude or extent of them: as the father over one family, so the king, as father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct, and defend the whole commonwealth," and again: "The father of a family governs by no other law than by his own will, not by the laws and wills of his sons or servants," in John Locke, Two Treatises of Government with a Supplement: Patriarcha by Robert Filmer, ed. Thomas J. Cook (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1947), pp. 260, 281.

Wycherley's poetic comments on the relationship of king to state may therefore, by reverse logic, prove useful in clarifying his position on absolutism in the husband-wife relationship. In a poem entitled, "To King Charles II. On His Return," Wycherley makes the point that because Charles returns to his subjects as a Christian monarch to a heathen land, they are made less [ the King's] Slaves than Friends" and because "like a God" he shows them mercy, he returns to England such friends "to free, not Foes to bind." Charles's subjects become "joyful Volunteers . . . / Sure of Protection" because he raises them out of "Vassalage" to be his "Peers." In this poem, also, Wycherley associates such generous and merciful absolutism with the sun which chases the winter of fear and mist away.<sup>50</sup>

Again in "To the King my Master . . . ," Wycherley praises an absolutism that makes subjects volunteers of their own free will to be ruled:

If you were not, by Heav'ns peculiar Choice,  
A King, you'd be so by your People's Voice;  
Whose Subjects Volunteers, not Vassals are,  
Their Duty, but th'Effect of Love, not Fear;  
Your Pow'r does them less than your Justice aw,  
Who so just are, your Will's the safest Law;  
Your Mercy does your Empire best maintain,  
O'er yours, a Pow'r more absolute you gain,  
Because you can't be their Dread Sovereign;  
All things are in your Pow'r, but Tyranny;<sup>51</sup>

In his politics Wycherley is clearly an absolutist, but his absolutism is idealized like that of Milton's Adam and Eve. It is based on the genuine moral worth of the absolute ruler or husband and the mutual respect of husband and wife, king and subject. It is, like Adam's rule over Eve, a "gentle sway;" for as Wycherley points out in his Maxim XII: "The easiest, calmist,

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<sup>50</sup>Posthumous Works, in Complete Works 4:214.

<sup>51</sup>"To the King my Master; after His Mercy, to a Fault, shown to some Conspirators against His Power and Life," lines 1-10, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 3:260-263.

Government is the most lasting and stable; so that Kings and Husbands, if they would reign or live in Peace, must sometimes let fall their Pre-rogative."

The Wycherley play which perhaps best illustrates the harmonious kind of absolutism he favored in the marriage relationship is his second comedy, The Gentleman Dancing Master. Hippolita, the charmingly impudent and plain dealing heroine of that play expects the parties in the absolute husband and wife relationship to be friends just as Wycherley refers to the relationship of King and subjects in his poems, and she calls the marriage state a "dance," a metaphor which Wycherley uses throughout the play as a symbol both for courtship and for the harmonious relationship of husband and wife in the marriage itself.

The dance to the Renaissance mind was a well established metaphor for the "order of the world;"<sup>52</sup> like the concept of the chain of being, it was useful in explaining the relationship of God to man, king to subject, husband to wife, male to female--indeed all the major relationships of life. According to Thomas Elyot who wrote a treatise on "the ideal Elizabethan gentleman" the dance "'betokeneth concord'. It reconciles and harmonizes such moral and psychological opposites as fierceness and mildness, boldness and fearfulness, arrogance and modesty."<sup>53</sup> It is therefore the perfect symbol for the union of male and female, of sexual freedom within socially acceptable form.

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<sup>52</sup>E. M. W. Tillyard, "Shakespeare's History Plays," in Twentieth Century Views: Shakespeare. The Histories. A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Eugene M. Waith (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), p. 33.

<sup>53</sup>M. H. Abrams, and others, ed., Introduction to section on "Sir John Davies," quoted in Norton Anthology of English Literature, 2 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962) 1:395.

In polite seventeenth century society from Elizabethan times dancing was considered "an essential in a well ordered society."<sup>54</sup> It afforded the male an opportunity to display his "good temper and grace" before women, and gave both men and women an opportunity to show they were "comely and modest."<sup>55</sup> As a preliminary to marriage, according to Thoinot Arbeau who wrote a treatise on the subject, "dancing is practiced to reveal whether lovers are in good health and sound of limb, after which they are permitted to kiss their mistresses in order that they may touch and savour one another, thus to ascertain if they are shapely or emit an unpleasant odour as of bad meat."<sup>56</sup> The courante in particular, the dance Wycherley uses in The Gentleman Dancing Master was a kind of pantomime of courtship in which the male courts, is rebuffed, but is finally accepted by his lady.<sup>57</sup> Wycherley allows his heroine Hippolita to use the dance in all its senses as a test or trial, according to critic Anne Righter, "by which Hippolita and Gerrard come to understand both their own emotions and each other"<sup>58</sup> and are thus prepared for a harmonious marriage.

Hippolita is a fourteen year old girl who has been locked away for a year under the guardianship of her aunt Caution awaiting the return of her father, Don Diego, who intends her to marry his nephew, an effeminate fop

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<sup>54</sup>Thoinot Arbeau, Orchesography. A Treatise in the form of a Dialogue whereby all may easily learn and practice the honourable exercise of Dancing, first printed in 1588, ed. Mary Stewart Evans (New York: Kamin Dance Publishers, 1948), p. 12.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 123-124.

<sup>58</sup>Anne Righter, "William Wycherley," in Restoration Theatre, ed. John R. Brown and Bernard Harris (New York: Capricorn, 1967), p. 76.

named Monsieur. Hippolita refuses to degrade herself by marrying such a fool who would trust Caution's locks and keys to be true guardians of her virtue when he should trust only Hippolita herself (act 1). She determines to find herself a "gentleman" to marry, one who is well known, brave, handsome, witty, educated and traveled, unaffected by French foppery, knowledgeable about himself and his desires, and "unable to endure Monsieur." She succeeds not only in tricking Monsieur into naming just such a man (Gerrard), but also into tempting him to come to her rooms.

Their first meeting is love at first sight, but Gerrard is so awed by her that he fears to assert himself and to steal her away. Hippolita foolishly tries to "quicken his sense" by tempting him with her £ 1200 inheritance, then realizes she can no longer tell if he is more interested in her as a human being or as a piece of property. Surprised by her father and her aunt, she convinces Gerrard to pose as her dancing master so he will not be discovered; and he agrees to let the pretense be a kind of test "till [she] may better know [him] and [his] heart, and have a better opportunity to reward it" (act 2). The dancing lessons they enact become their courtship and a preparation for their marriage. Gerrard admits at first that he "ever wanted inclination and patience to learn" to dance, a fitting attitude for a young Restoration man about town in regard to courtship and marriage; but he endures the test and proves he can remain constant to Hippolita even when she claims to be penniless, seems to make him "her sport," and asks that he patiently accept that he must sometimes "be more obedient to [her] desires than [his own] passions." (act 4)

Having proven Gerrard a man of courage and faith in risking the dancing pose to win her, a man self-assured and magnanimous enough to put aside his own desires and to tolerate her feminine whims though they are sometimes em-

barrassing to him, and finally a man who honestly loves her as a human being and not just for her fortune, Hippolita boldly offers herself to him in Act 5: "Well, Master, since I find you are quarrelsome and melancholy, and would have taken me away without a Portion, three infallible signs of a true lover, faith here's my hand now in earnest, to lead me a Dance as long as I live." Up to this time in the play it is Hippolita who has really been the "Dancing Master" of their relationship; but now, having proven Gerrard a satisfactory husband, capable of appreciating her as a human being, she is willing as an ideal wife to relinquish her "mastership" to her husband. He is now to be "Master" of their marriage and he will "lead" her in that "Dance" as long as she lives. Hippolita makes no marriage contract and she gives herself and her £1200 inheritance freely, but she does impress upon Gerrard a warning about his position as absolute master of their marital union. As long as Gerrard respects her honesty by trusting the gift she gives him of herself, he can expect to find her faithful, but if he doubts her and thinks that all women deceive their husbands and make them cuckolds, she is likely to "fore-arm" him with horns just as he has said a husband usually wears. Jealousy in a man before marriage she says is "only an undervaluing of himself to over-value her; but in a Husband it is errant sawciness, cowardise, and ill breeding . . . ." "Cunning men would pass [it] upon their wives for a complement," but it "is the worst that can be made 'em" for while it is "a Complement to" a Woman's beauty, it is "an affront to [her] Honour." The harmony of the ideal Wycherley husband and wife relationship, if one draws a conclusion from the ending of this play and the other examples discussed in this chapter, depends upon the husband's own self-assurance and his ability to trust his wife and the wife's own personal sense of honor and self respect. If Gerrard will not trust Hippolita, she bluntly tells him she should not be

expected to trust him! They must both venture their mutual faith to make a marriage that will last, and while there is considerable risk involved, as Hippolita says, "Plain dealing is some kind of honesty . . . and few women wou'd have said so much." She wants them both to "have a good understanding betwixt one another at first, that [they] may be long Friends."

Wycherley is aware of what his audiences will think of such a bold and honest woman and allows Hippolita to worry about it and to defend him as well on stage:

I am thinking if some little filching inquisitive Poet shou'd get my story, and represent it on the Stage; what those Ladies, who are never precise but at a Play, wou'd say of me now; that I were a confident cunning piece I warrant, and they wou'd damn the poor Poet for libelling the Sex; but sure though I give myself and fortune away franckly, without the consent of my Friends, my confidence is less than theirs, who stand off only for separate maintenance. (act 5)

Whereas the ladies of so-called honor are boldly confident of their solid monetary marriage contracts, Hippolita's match, though less secure, is one of mutual giving, honest generosity and friendship.

Montaigne, in an interesting comment about marriage, states that "it is a bargain to which only the entrance is free--its continuance being constrained and forced, depending otherwise than on our will--and a bargain ordinarily made for other ends . . . . whereas in friendship there are no dealings or business except with itself . . . . The ordinary capacity of women," he feels "is inadequate for that communion and fellowship which is the nurse of this sacred bond" of friendship and their souls don't "seem firm enough to endure the strain of so tight and durable a knot," but

if such a relationship, free and voluntary, could be built up, in which not only would the souls have this complete enjoyment, but the bodies would also share in the alliance, so that the entire man would be engaged, it is certain that the resulting friendship would be fuller and more com-

plete. But this sex in no instance has yet succeeded in attaining it, and by the common agreement of the ancient schools is excluded from it."<sup>59</sup>

In Hippolita and Gerrard, Wycherley creates a man and woman capable of making the absolutism of marriage into just this kind of generous friendship, the companionship and "happy conversation" Milton idealized. In a poem about a mistress who was rumoured to be an Hermaphrodite, Wycherley praises the woman who possesses both male and female natures:

Thou! The just Wonder then, of Nature art,  
Male, in thy Sense, yet Female in thy Heart:  
Woman in Body, Man in Sense, or Mind,  
Tho' Female, Faithful, tho' a Man, a Friend.<sup>60</sup>

In the character of Hippolita, Wycherley pays tribute to the clever and honest woman of the Restoration beginning to be aware of herself as an intelligent human being and courageous enough to assert herself with "modest pride" and plain dealing in a male world. Even Hippolita's name befits the honor he pays her. She is named for Hippolita the Queen of the Amazons who was the fitting bride for Theseus the great and manly Greek hero, and she submits herself to the manly English male, whom Wycherley names Gerrard ("Strong with the spear").

There is of course no guarantee that any marriage will remain ideal; that is the plain dealing truth that Hippolita makes clear to Gerrard, but Wycherley suggests in his poetry and plays that when two people can appreciate each other as human beings, acknowledging each other's good qualities but forgiving each other's flaws, and generously extend to each other a mutual faith and trust, they have at least a chance of making the absolutism of the marriage institution into an enduring friendship. When Valentine in Love in

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<sup>59</sup>The Complete Works of Montaigne . . ., pp. 137-138.

<sup>60</sup>Miscellany Poems, lines 52-55, in Complete Works 3:79-81.

a Wood, claims that he will always trust Christina after their wedding ceremony, she hopes that she will not become so jealous and restrictive that she will be unworthy of that trust and generously offers him more freedom to show she does indeed have faith in him. When Ranger gives Lydia the same generous freedom, he desires her to reciprocate and trust him in the same way, not make marriage an "insupportable bondage" of deceit. But those who marry for "lucre," "reputation," or any other selfish reason are doomed to marriage of hopeless tyranny, slavery, and hypocrisy, doomed as Milton said "to fadge together and combine as they may to their unspeakable wearisomeness and despair of all sociable delight in the ordinance which God established to that very end."

#### P O S T S C R I P T

In the light of Wycherley's expressed feelings concerning marriage and the husband and wife relationship, his own experiences with that institution are indeed ironic. His own first marriage in fact was responsible for most of the unhappiness of his later years and was directly tied to problems of money. Shortly after the publication of his final play, The Plain Dealer, and while at Tunbridge Wells for his health, Wycherley, then about thirty-seven, was introduced to Laetitia Isabella, Countess of Drogheda, who chanced to be asking for a copy of The Plain Dealer at a bookstall as Wycherley passed by. Instead of the book, she got the real thing; and Mr. Fairbeard, who was accompanying the playwright, pronounced them "design'd by Heaven for each other." Wycherley visited her often at Tunbridge Wells and in London. But the Countess was still married and in such financial straits that she had to return home to her husband in Ireland for more money. Her husband died while

she was there, leaving his estates to her and her family instead of to his own brother; and Laetitia had a marriage contract drawn up between herself and Wycherley.

Wycherley, himself, had contracted a severe fever and been sent to France, at the King's expense, to recuperate. When he returned to London he was offered the most financially secure position he was ever presented in his life: King Charles desired him to tutor his seven year old illegitimate son, the Duke of Richmond, at a salary of £ 1500 and with a pension at the end of his services until the end of his life. It was a tremendous honor, but marriage to the Countess was equally appealing. Wycherley consulted his miserly father about the situation and old Daniel Wycherley not only encouraged the marriage, but suggested that keeping it a secret was the best plan since the King would probably not approve.

The Countess returned to London and the two were married in 1679. But if this was a match of love with the Countess's estate as a not unpleasant addition, the pleasure was short lived. The King frowned upon the marriage and nothing came of the offer to make Wycherley his son's tutor. Laetitia herself proved to be a shrew, given to wild tantrums, jealously insisting that she accompany Wycherley everywhere and that when he went alone to the Cock Tavern across from their lodgings that he keep the tavern windows open so that she could tell if he was in the company of another woman. Katharine Rogers in her Wycherley biography suggests that Laetitia may even have made impossible sexual demands on Wycherley as well (p. 104). Connely, another Wycherley biographer, says Wycherley "was so good-natured that he had to humour the passions of his volcanic lady." (p. 171)

The disfavor of the King and Laetitia's shrewishness were nothing however to the legal battles and financial problems the marriage brought. The

brother of the Countess's deceased husband filed suit to recover the lands his brother had willed to Laetitia and her family; her family, the Radnors, had greedily taken possession of these lands and went to court to maintain them. Laetitia's former maidservant, Sarah Barnaby brought suit against the Wycherleys for money she had loaned to Laetitia and had never been repaid. When Laetitia died in 1681 after two years of marriage, leaving Wycherley her estate, he was forced to enter the legal battle over the Drogheda estates himself. Within a year's time he was £ 700 in debt. The Earl of Mulgrave aided him with £ 500 but when that was gone and unable to get loans from either his father or his publisher, Wycherley was taken to debtors' prison at Newgate and was later transferred to Fleet prison. It was not until 1686 that, thanks to Colonel Brett, a friend, The Plain Dealer was performed before the new King James II, who, remembering the playwright, paid his debts and gave him a pension for life which unfortunately left Wycherley penniless again in a matter of two years when James, himself, fled to France and William and Mary became England's rulers. From 1688 to 1697 Wycherley managed to live with his father at Clive with occasional visits to London. In 1697, sixteen years after Laetitia's death, the Drogheda estates case was finally settled and Wycherley received only the sum of £ 1500 for his rights to his wife's estate.

In the same year, Daniel Wycherley died leaving Wycherley an entailed estate and the lands and rents pertaining to Clive with the power to settle a jointure on any future wife from these lands. Clive itself, however, went to Wycherley's nephew who refused to let the playwright sell any of the property. Rogers points out that as a result Wycherley could live moderately, but was unable to pay off his debts (p. 112). When Wycherley's attempts to publish his poetry proved unproductive, a marriage for money seemed the only solution

to his financial problems. As Connely explains: "He could then liquidate from what fortune his wife might have of her own, and recompense her with the Widow's jointure on the estate . . . ." (p. 298.)

Captain Thomas Shrimpton, the nearest living relative on Wycherley's mother's side, was now in London and had befriended the playwright. When Wycherley was arrested again, this time for a debt of £ 30, Shrimpton borrowed the sum which freed the old man from prison a second time. Wycherley determined to marry for the open and honest reasons of financial security and Shrimpton brought him Elizabeth Jackson, a stationer's daughter, with "'coarse and unrefined'" manners and a fortune of something less than £ 1000. (Connely, p. 329) As it turns out she was Shrimpton's former mistress and possibly pregnant by him. Since Wycherley was 74, nearing death, and unable to walk to Church, the ceremony was performed at Bow Street and Wycherley agreed to make Elizabeth a £ 500 jointure. For the remaining eleven days of his life (December 20-December 31), Wycherley was married for a second time. On his death bed he called his young wife to him and in his characteristically plain dealing manner requested that she "never marry an old man again." (Connely, p. 333). Recent scholarship has suggested that Wycherley, old and feeble, may have been coerced into his last marriage by Shrimpton, but Rogers in her book suggests he probably entered into the relationship of his own free will since Alexander Pope in a final visit to the playwright saw no signs of such coercion. (p. 132) His widow married Shrimpton afterwards and though sued by Wycherley's nephew to break the jointure, the Shrimptons won their case.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>The information in this postscript is a summary of events in the later life of William Wycherley as they appear in Katharine Rogers, William Wycherley, pp. 131-133, 98-116, and Willard Connely's Brawny Wycherley, pp. 136-335.

While his plays and poems speak of an ideal marriage relationship entered into out of love and generosity, Wycherley's own marriage of love brought him nothing but jealousy and financial disaster; and ultimately it forced him to marry a second time out of the very motive his literary works had scorned the most--the need for money.

## CHAPTER III

### SEX

Too much Love, as too little, but equally show our want of sense; since not to love as we ought, is setting up our Sense against the Wisdom of Nature; and to love more than we ought, is setting up the Extravagance of Nature against our Reason.

Wycherley, *Maxim VIII*

Bonamy Dobree in his analysis of Restoration comedy determined that men and women of the Restoration era were "experimenting in social things" and trying to "rationalize human relationships,"<sup>1</sup> particularly those related to human sexuality; thus, Restoration dramatists reflect the interest of their age in creating a seemingly unending series of plays dealing with relationships between the sexes. Wycherley, as Restoration playwright, in reflecting the current interest of his era, carefully lays bare the hypocrisy of the sexual roles the male and female were expected to play in refined Restoration society and the misunderstanding, disrespect, deceit, and revenge which result from them and lead to the battle of the sexes. In so doing, he suggests the need to correct the error of labelling all men and women the same and encourages a generous and healthy tolerance of individual differences existing both within and between the sexes. In addition, he warns of the serious disservice both men and women do to their personal sense of honor and to the honor of each other's sex by failing to properly appreciate and moderate their sexual nature.

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<sup>1</sup>Dobree, p. 20.

Significant to the appreciation of one's sexual nature according to Wycherley are a knowledge of oneself, a knowledge of society's code of manners set up to regulate the wildness of individual passion, and finally the willingness to risk oneself generously in society, hoping that an individual who is of a like generosity will appreciate one's gift and reciprocate. The need to give generously of oneself to another in love and the acceptance of the risk involved in making the gift is the fundamental point of Wycherley's moral view toward love, but he is keenly aware both of the vanity of human passion and the power of human natural passions which lead men and women into extremes of thought and feeling and encourage them to dishonor themselves in the very act of believing or feeling themselves to be honorable. Christ cautions against giving pearls to swine, and Wycherley urges by the actions of the characters in his plays that men and women not bring themselves to dishonor by giving themselves to lovers who are incapable of appreciating their gift of love. "Too much Love, as too little," he says, "but equally shew our want of sense; since not to love as we ought, is setting up our Sense against the Wisdom of Nature; and to love more than we ought, is setting up the Extravagance of Nature against our reason." (Maxim VIII) To reach this point of moderation is a difficult task, for an individual must be careful to steer a course between personal rigidity, which is unnatural and prudish in its undue concern for propriety, and personal laxity which is likewise unnatural in its total scorn for what is deemed appropriate conduct.

Wycherley suggests in one poem that to be the "Best Gentleman" one must attain a state of "Carelessness," that is, a state of moderation which helps one to realize one's true nature without falling victim either to the rigidity of social form, or to the looseness of one's own unchecked passions:

He's the Best Wit, as the Best Gentleman,  
 Who, for his Wit, or Money, takes least Pain;  
 For Wit, to gain Esteem, like Beauty too,  
 Must seem, an Artful Negligence, to show;  
 Must, for its Fame on Nature, more rely,  
 Than either upon Art, or Industry.  
 Since Wit, like Beauty, with Art, Pains set out,  
 Its Natural Perfection brings in Doubt;  
 The greatest Grace to both, is Carelessness,  
 The more affected, either's Pow'r is less;  
 Not too much ty'd to Forms, nor yet too loose,  
 Either of them, the more Surprizing grows;  
 So, too much Labour on Fine Fancies spent,  
 As on Fine Faces, does their Praise prevent;  
 For like a Good Face, so too, will Good Sense  
 Seem, more Surprizing for its Negligence;  
 But Ostentation loses either's Aim,  
 And even makes their Merit grow their Shame.<sup>2</sup>

This moderate position which brings not only personal satisfaction but the public esteem as a gentleman is quite similar to the advice one reads in The Book of the Courtier, written in the Renaissance, but recognized even into the eighteenth century as an excellent guide to good breeding.<sup>3</sup> In that book, ladies and gentlemen are urged to seek a kind of natural moderation, a "graceful and nonchalant spontaneity (as it is often called) because of which they seem to be paying little, if any, attention to the way they speak or laugh or hold themselves, so that those who are watching them imagine that they couldn't and wouldn't ever know how to make a mistake."<sup>4</sup> This natural moderation is compared, in The Book of the Courtier, to methods of dancing, and exists between two extremes: over stiffness or obvious affectation, and over-nonchalance, or obvious looseness. Extreme affectation is criticized for its obvious rigidity:

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<sup>2</sup>"Against Industry: to a Laborious Poetaster, who preferr'd Industry to Wit," lines 9-26, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 4:17-18.

<sup>3</sup>Schneider, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup>Baldesar Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, trans. and with an Introduction by George Bull (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 68.

To reveal intense affectation and skill robs everything of grace. Who is there among you who doesn't laugh when our Pierpaolo dances in that way of his, with those little jumps and with his legs stretched on tiptoe, keeping his head motionless, as if he were made of wood, and all so laboured that he seems to be counting every step? Who is so blind that he doesn't see this the clumsiness of affectation?<sup>5</sup>

The extreme of looseness is criticized by the example of the dancing of a man named Roberto who "to demonstrate that he isn't thinking of what he is doing . . . lets his clothes fall from his back and his slippers from his feet, and . . . dances away without bothering to pick them up."

He is really taking too much thought, and by passing the bounds of moderation his nonchalance is affected and inappropriate, and it has exactly the opposite effect of what is intended, namely the concealment of art. So although nonchalance is praise worthy as such, when it leads to someone letting the clothes fall off his back it degenerates as easily into affectation as does a meticulous regard for one's personal appearance (also praiseworthy as such) when it means holding one's head rigid for fear of spoiling one's coiffure . . . <sup>6</sup>

Speaking in musical terms, The Book of the Courtier requires that to "perfect consonances," which alone produce "satiety" and an "affected" harmony, "imperfect consonances" be "introduced to establish the contrast which keeps the listener in a state of expectancy, waiting for and enjoying the perfect consonances more eagerly and delighting in the discord of the second and seventh, as in a display of nonchalance."<sup>7</sup>

Just as The Book of the Courtier explains that a lady or gentleman attempts to avoid the affectation of excessive extremes by cultivating a moderate nonchalance, so Wycherley emphasizes that one's true honor as an individual lies in neither overly asserting nor denying one's natural worth. In matters of sexuality, as in anything else, to Wycherley, "Pride is rather the Downfall of Honour, than the Support of it; and Men always maintain

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-68.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

it best by Humility, as Women do theirs by Modesty" (Maxim V). For the Restoration woman, however, to maintain such moderation was becoming increasingly difficult. Society itself was putting an unnatural emphasis on the female to deny her natural sexual instincts and to maintain a frustratingly unrealistic reputation of "honor." Indeed, Ian Watt tells us in his studies of social background to the English novel that the terms "virtue," "propriety," "decency," "modesty," and "purity," tended to narrow to a definition of a woman's sexuality by the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Thus a woman's very identity and reputation, her honor, were defined by her ability or her inability to remain chaste. Much of the reason for the narrowing of the concept of "honor" and reputation as it applies to woman in the seventeenth century is tied to economics. Watt points out that "strictness in sexual relations tends to coincide with the increasing importance of private property--the bride must be chaste so that her husband can be sure that it is his son who will inherit."<sup>9</sup> This reason for chastity was not new to the seventeenth century. It appears in The Book of the Courtier, published in the early 1500's;<sup>10</sup> but as Christopher Hill confirms in another study, the notion of the economic relationship to woman's chastity was of ever growing importance during the seventeenth century:

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<sup>8</sup>Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1965), p. 157.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>10</sup>"It is wisely made the rule that women are allowed to fail in everything else, and not to be blamed, so long as they can devote all their resources to preserving that one virtue of chastity, failing which there would be doubts about one's children and the bond which binds the whole world in account of blood, and of each man's natural love for his own offspring, would be dissolved," Castiglione, p. 241.

. . . In medieval society, aristocratic marriage had been a property transaction pure and simple: courtly love was sought (in literature at all events) outside of marriage. But matrimonial fidelity was less highly valued, in either sex, before or after marriage, than later. It was a common form for the noble dame of the Middle Ages to have a lover; and the father who announced that the lady was his wife when he heard that she had borne him a son was not unique.

The rise of capitalism and protestantism brought a new conception of marriage, of which Milton's is the highest: a companionship based on mutual affection. The social basis for this view of marriage was the small workshop or farm in which the wife was in fact a helpmeet to her husband: there was no such practical co-operation between the rentier landlord and his lady. In the Puritan conception fidelity in the wife, and pre-marital chastity, begin to be insisted on with a new vehemence. Since love was ideally the basis of marriage, then the marriage must be inviolate. In practice in most marriages property was still the main consideration: and in the world of capitalist production expensive goods must not be shop-soiled or tarnished. The first lesson Shamela's mother taught her was that "a Married Woman injures only her Husband, but a Single Woman herself" (Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews, 1741, 35). Insistence on absolute premarital chastity goes hand-in-hand with the bourgeois conception of absolute property, immune alike from the king's right to arbitrary taxation and the church's divine right to tithes. Dr. Johnson noted that the chastity of women was "of the utmost importance, as all property depends upon it"; and, in contra-distinction to the elder Mrs. Andrews, he thought a wife who broke her marriage vows more criminal than a husband who did the same--because of the doubts that would be cast on the succession of property. (Boswell, Life of Johnson, Everyman I, 347-8, 623-4; II, 287-8).<sup>11</sup>

That women were indeed trained to the denial of sexual feelings can be testified to by some interesting comments by George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, written in the latter part of the seventeenth century as advice to his daughter:

The world in this [matters of sexual freedom] is somewhat unequal, and our sex seemeth to play the tyrant, in distinguishing partially for ourselves, by making that in the utmost degree criminal in the woman which in a man passeth under a much gentler censure. The root and the excuse of this injustice is the preservation of families from any mixture which may bring a blemish to them; and whilst the point of honor continues to be placed, it seems unavoidable to give your sex the greater share of the penalty. But if in this it lieth under any disadvantage, you are more than recompensed by having the honor of families in your keeping

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<sup>11</sup>Christopher Hill, "Clarissa Harlowe and Her Times," Essays in Criticism 5 (1955):330-331.

The consideration so great a trust must give you maketh full amends; and this power the world hath lodged in you can hardly fail to restrain the severity of an ill husband, and to improve the kindness and esteem of a good one.

Savile further cautions his daughter that "next to the danger of committing the fault [adultery] yourself, the greatest is that of seeing it in your husband" for, Savile advises, bringing it to his attention will not reform him--a husband must do that for himself, and it can only have adverse effects on a wife, for bringing up one's husband's sexual inattentiveness is "so coarse" a topic that it would make a wife look immodest, indecent and ridiculous.<sup>12</sup> Savile encourages his daughter to adopt "a way of living that may prevent all coarse raileries or unmannerly freedoms; looks that forbid without rudeness, and oblige without invitation, or leaving room for the saucy inferences men's vanity suggesteth to them upon the least encouragements." Such conduct is "so very nice that it must engage you to have a perpetual watch upon your eyes, and to remember that one careless glance giveth more advantage than a hundred words not enough considered . . . ."<sup>13</sup>

Economics affected the image of a woman's honor in another way as well. Many men postponed marriage until they were economically secure, and to such men who had risen to new social status, a wife became a final and ultimate attainment--a final decoration<sup>14</sup> and proof that one was worthy of praise, a success symbol of fragility and refinement and good taste. To those newly rich, the sort who seek outward appearance of culture, the more fragile the

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<sup>12</sup>George Savile, The Lady's New Year's-Gift; or, Advice to a Daughter (Miscellanies, 1700), in Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry, ed. Robert P. Tristram Coffin and Alexander M. Witherspoon (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1946), p. 738.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 747.

<sup>14</sup>Putnam, p. 164.

woman, the greater the status symbol; for nothing so ostentatiously fragile and decorative as herself could survive except in the midst of wealth and an atmosphere of exquisite drawing rooms, myriads of servants and total protection from anything coarse. Such status-seeking husbands, by flattering their own vanity in the selection of their mates, were well on the way to encouraging the development of women such as are exemplified by Pamela and Clarissa, the fragile heroines of Richardson's novels, who fainted at the slightest hint of indiscretion or indelicacy and whose stereotypes became so popular in eighteenth century sentimental literature.

Since a woman's future depended largely upon a suitable marriage and marriage depended upon having a good reputation, a woman was forced to accentuate her chastity, to make it an advertisement of her value, in order to obtain security for herself in the male world.

Most certainly the inflated ideals of chastity and refinement formed part of the basis for the fad of Préciosité so popular among ladies and gentlemen in the 1630's and still influential in the Restoration. Préciosité, a cult of platonic love and precise manners similar to the courtly love tradition of Medieval romances, was introduced into England in the 1630's by Queen Henrietta Maria, French wife to Charles I and mother to Charles II. The basis for the cult and its "highly specialized system of formal etiquette,"<sup>15</sup> was the notion that "human love, when worthy of its divine origin, is an intellectual experience."<sup>16</sup> The woman involved in the précieux tradition became the recipient of love, adoration, and devotion from her

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<sup>15</sup>Kathleen M. Lynch, The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, reprint edition (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1965), p. 43.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

gentlemen lovers who were required to submit to her every whim without complaint and never hint of any fleshly or base sexual desires.<sup>17</sup> The very foundation of the cult was the assertion of female individuality and even dominance over the male; for "No picture seems to have been quite so enjoyable to précieuses as the spectacle of Alexander, conqueror of the world, prostrate and suppliant before Statira; and this tableau, with the lady assuming the 'imperial' posture and the lover 'dying' at her feet . . . was desired by précieuses and acquiesced in by précieux."<sup>18</sup>

A careful cultivation of the précieux "attitudes, postures, and special vocabulary" separated the woman from "the vulgar mob and their coarseness" and supplied a "'tone' befitting ladies of rank and station" rendering "women of the lower orders worthy of higher regard than that to which birth entitled them."<sup>19</sup> Thus while such a refined position of independence and goddess-like superiority might seem ridiculous, it was supported by those middle and lower class women who desired an image of refinement and virtue the better to attract a husband and make up for a lack of wealth. "Such severely practical reasons guaranteed the appeal of préciosité to aspiring women of all classes, and no amount of ridicule of its asinine formalities was sufficient during the Restoration to dash its success."<sup>20</sup>

Kathleen Lynch in her study of the précieux in Stuart drama, notes that its excessive and unrealistic code of behavior "effectively curbs gen-

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>18</sup>David S. Berkeley, "Préciosité and the Restoration Comedy of Manners," Huntington Library Quarterly 8 (February, 1955):115.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 111-112.

vine self-expression" in individuals, but that the Restoration world, though no longer "believing in the platonic cult" still found its "artifaces of conduct . . . attractive" and though "discerning gallants" saw through its "artificiality" they found its "graciousness" charming.<sup>21</sup> David Berkeley sees the précieux tradition as an "aristocratic vogue," a background for Restoration comic writers to react against as unnatural and ridiculous.<sup>22</sup>

Wycherley was certainly familiar with the précieux. In 1655, at the age of 15, he had gone to the area near Angouleme, France to study the classics and had found himself a frequent visitor at the court of Julie de Angennes, the Marquise de Montausier, wife of the Governor of the province and sister to Angelique de Angennes, the president of French précieuses. During his five years in the area, Wycherley must have been able to evaluate the characteristics of the cult. Shortly after he arrived the Abbe de Pure publicly attacked Préciosité for its anti-marriage philosophy, a philosophy similar to that of courtly love in which marriage, because it was entered into without free choice or love and implied a sexual duty, was judged of lesser worth than a relationship of platonic love such as the précieuses promoted. In 1658, Wycherley would have been aware that Angelique de Angennes, "for all her railings against matrimony," was herself married; and in 1659, a year before he returned to England, Wycherley would probably have been aware of the success of Moliere's Les Précieuses Ridicules.<sup>23</sup> In that play, two silly young précieuses reject the blunt and therefore uncouth marriage proposals of two open and honest young men, only to be tricked by the two men's servants

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<sup>21</sup>Lynch, p. 106.

<sup>22</sup>Berkeley, p. 128.

<sup>23</sup>Connely, pp. 3-27.

who, dressed in the latest fashion, flatter the women by discussing poetry and the dance and appear to be refined in the précieux manner. The young rejected lovers get revenge on the foolish précieuses through their servants, and the two women are ridiculed for judging human value on the basis of appearance and manners alone.

Sir Francis Bacon as early as 1612, in an essay "Of Marriage and Single Life" pointed out that "Chaste women are often proud and froward, as presuming upon the merit of their chastity"<sup>24</sup> and there is no denying that pushed to the extreme by society, placed on the ivory tower or the highest angelic pedestals of purity, the woman, by the very unnaturalness of her position becomes more susceptible to hypocrisy. Clearly all women are not meant to claim purity, chastity and refinement as their natural characteristics, and the persistent need for all women to do so meant that honor and indeed the whole sex was inevitably involved in what Wycherley was to refer to as hypocrisy. Women who find themselves believing in their own perfection seem proud and overbearing; they become a threat to some men, a subject for ridicule to others.

Montaigne, one of Wycherley's favorite authors, felt it was unfair for men to drive women to such rigid and unnatural concern for chastity. It is wrong for men to prescribe "continence as their women's particular share, and upon utmost and extreme penalties," he said.

There is no passion more pressing than this, which we want them alone to resist, not simply as a vice of its own size, but as an abomination and execration, more to be resisted than irreligion and parricide; and meanwhile we give in to it without blame or reproach. Even those of us who have tried to get the better of it have sufficiently admitted what difficulty, or rather impossibility, there was in subduing, weakening, and cooling off the body by material remedies. We, on the contrary,

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<sup>24</sup>In The Norton Anthology of English Literature 1:1041.

want them to be healthy, vigorous, plump, well-nourished, and chaste at the same time: that is to say, both hot and cold. For marriage, which we say has the function of keeping them from burning, brings them but little cooling off, according to our ways. If they take a husband in whom the vigor of youth is still boiling, he will pride himself on expending it elsewhere . . . . If they take one of those broken-down ones, there they are in full wedlock worse off than virgins or widows.<sup>25</sup>

Montaigne scorns the falseness and hypocrisy of those women who seriously boast of their purity:

It is folly to try to bridle in women a desire that is so burning and so natural to them. And when I hear them boast of having such a virginal and cold disposition, I laugh at them: they are leaning over too far backward.

He admits that perhaps the "toothless and decrepit old woman or a dry and consumptive young one" might be telling some "semblance of truth" if she claimed lack of sexuality, but he still finds such an admission "not altogether credible." "What these women say has no value," he claims, "for there is neither continence nor virtue unless there is an urge to the contrary. 'It is true,' they should say, 'but I am not ready to give myself up.' The saints themselves talk that way," he maintains. When such boasting of virtue is done "with an affected countenance, in which the eyes belie their words, and with the jargon of their profession which has its effect in reverse, I think that's fine," Montaigne goes on. "I am a great admirer of naturalness and freedom, but there is no help for it: unless it is completely simple and childlike, it is unbecoming to ladies and out of place in these dealings: it promptly slides into shamelessness." This sort of "Lying holds an honorable place in love," he claims; "it is a detour that leads us to truth by the back door." The other sort of lying with a "straight" face deceives "only fools."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>The Complete Works of Montaigne, pp. 650-651.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 659-660.

That Wycherley admired a woman honest enough to admit her sexuality and deemed it honorable can be seen in his high praise of the King's mistress, Barbara Palmer, Lady Castlemaine, who not only shared her favors with the King and other assorted young men of the court and lower rank, but gave herself to Wycherley as well and was responsible for raising him to court popularity by praising his play, Love in a Wood. In his dedication of the play to her, Wycherley seems to give the complete list of characteristics which to him make up the perfect woman when he says of her:

I . . . cannot but publicly give your Grace my humble acknowledgements for the favours I have receiv'd from you . . . . You have that perfection of Beauty (without thinking it so) which others of your Sex, but think they have; that Generosity in your Actions, which others of your quality, have only in their Promises; that Spirit, Wit, Judgment, and all other qualifications, which fit Hero's to command, and wou'd make any but your Grace proud.<sup>27</sup>

Wycherley makes clear several points regarding his attitude toward women and what he calls their "hard fate" in a poem entitled: "A Song to a Lady, who gave the Subject for it, by complaining of the hard Fate of Women; who, for refusing Love, must be hated; yet for granting it despis'd."<sup>28</sup> First,

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<sup>27</sup>In The Complete Plays of William Wycherley, ed. Gerald Weales (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971), pp. 6-7.

<sup>28</sup>Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 3:64-65.

I

How hard is the poor Woman's Fate,  
 Whether she soon, or late is won,  
 No thanks deserves, if 'tis too late,  
 Nor Love, if that she yields too soon.

II

By man, forc'd to Hypocrisie,  
 Yet for it, by him, most condemn'd,  
 Hated, if Love she does deny,  
 And yet, for granting it, contemn'd,

he says that a woman is "By Man, forc'd to Hypocrisie, / Yet for it, by him, most condemn'd." This I take to mean that Man has forced women to adopt a mask of disinterest in love and sexuality, that man has encouraged women to cultivate an unnatural chastity and code of honor which, in reality, has become a hypocritical and unnatural denial of the very human instinct which

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## III

By him, with whom she soon complies,  
Is thought, a coming Easie Whore,  
A false Jilt, if she Love denies,  
And does it, only to get more:

## IV

If Love, or Generosity,  
Make her, to Man, for nothing yield,  
Her Honour grows her Infamy,  
Her Kindness is, her Cheapness held:

## V

So, whether the Poor Woman does,  
Show Man her Love, or show him none,  
She must her Friends, or Credit lose,  
Which, lost, or kept, must be undone:

## VI

A Mercenary Jilt be thought,  
Else, a more coming Common Whore,  
If she stands off, 'tis to be bought,  
Or yields soon, 'tis but to get more:

## VII

So, whether you stand off, or yield,  
To Your Admirer, late, or soon,  
You, for a Wench, will still be held,  
Yet be, no mercenary one:

## VIII

But sooner, out of Modesty,  
To save your Credit, yield to me,  
Since Love, grows no Dame's Infamy,  
Till Mercenary, thought to be:

makes her a natural and honest individual. Wycherley, in this one phrase pierces to the heart of a basic and universal problem in the male-female relationship. It is important to notice that the statement is sweeping in its implication that any serious claim to sexual disinterest is a kind of hypocrisy or failure to acknowledge one's human nature since women are, whether men like it or not--or whether women like it or not--by nature, sexual beings. In this, Wycherley is echoing Montaigne. This does not, however, mean that all women are promiscuous anymore than it means that all men are so, but it does mean that to talk about one's honor or lack of it--to deny one's sexual inclination whether that inclination be great or small--is unnatural, and from Wycherley's standpoint, I believe, immoral since it does not allow an individual to discover her true nature. Gaspare in The Book of the Courtier, accused of being woman's enemy for calling her imperfect, warns women not to think him so; instead, he says, "your real enemy is the Magnifico who, by praising women falsely, suggests they cannot be praised honestly."<sup>29</sup> Wycherley and Montaigne are concerned that women recognize their imperfect nature as sexual human beings and that rather than fall victim to unrealistic and précieux codes of sexual abstinence, they maintain a healthy and moderate control of their natures.

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 IX

Yield up your Honour, more to gain,  
 Lest standing off, and seeming Nice,  
 You, by your less'ning more your Man,  
 Seem to inhance, but more your Price:

## X

To make your Modesty, your Shame,  
 Of which you do but make a Show;  
 To get more Coin, not keep more Fame;  
 Till your Shame, does your Virtue grow.

<sup>29</sup>Castiglione, p. 222.

The second important point is that since a woman is a sexual being she can never achieve a completely perfect reputation in her dealings with men no matter how hard she tries. Because of the hypocritical position she is forced into by the male, no matter what course a woman takes in matters of sexuality, she will be labelled a wench. If she gives in too easily, she will be thought "a coming Easie Whore" and men will say she yielded only to get more love. If she stands off, denies she loves, or holds back too long, her reluctance will seem like a desire for money and she will be thought "a mercenary Jilt" out to "inhance [her] Price" and desirous "to be bought." Not only that, but standing off and "seeming Nice"--that is, placing oneself in an aloof tower of purity above the adoring male in the précieux manner runs the risk of "less'ning" the male and this, as we shall see later, is a most significant contribution to the distrust and suspicion between the sexes. In the plays, characters of both sexes are disturbed by the dominance of the characters of the opposite sex and are driven to seek revenge and retaliation which backfires upon themselves. As Wycherley writes in Maxim IV: "Men, cheating Women first into the Intrigue, teach them after to cheat them out of it; as Gullies, enter'd at Play to their Loss, learn the Art of cozening by being first cozen'd."

The word "less'ning" in the poem is purposely ambiguous. The woman who holds herself back from the man may do so to "less-E-n" him in the sense of making herself superior to him and making him feel inferior, or she may "less-O-n" him in the sense of teaching him her genuine value, which may be either considerable or minimal. In either case Wycherley warns the lady she must be wary of too much "less'ning."

Even if a woman recognizes her sexual nature and gives herself freely out of love and generosity and not out of selfish desire for more love, she

will still be thought cheap and will stand to lose her honor and reputation. She will still be termed a wench. The only solution in the world of society, according to Wycherley is for the woman to accept her hard fate--to accept that no matter how she acts in matters of sex and love, someone will criticize her for her actions. If women must be termed wenches by society, then they would do better not to be mercenary ones, but rather, unselfish ones, and "sooner, out of Modesty"--a genuine realization of their own nature--a plain dealing and moral acceptance of themselves for what they are--give themselves to a man who promises "To save [their] Credit"--to appreciate them as honorable. There is some comfort in this honest acceptance of oneself and in not trying to claim a false sense of modesty as a virtue. By giving oneself freely to a man who appreciates the gift a woman need not lessen herself or her reputation. Both male and female honors are preserved because each finds the other's honest sexuality honorable.

But a dilemma still remains--how does a woman find a man who respects her sexual honesty? How can she trust a man who, like Wycherley in the poem, tells her that her virtue or honor lies in yielding herself to him and having faith that he will respect her honor? If she trusts such a man and he turns out to be honest, he will honor her reputation with his own in marriage. If she trusts a man who does not want to marry her, as Bellinda does Dorimant in The Man of Mode by Etherege, she must rely on the fact that as The Book of the Courtier says, a true gentleman will always defend a woman's honor and will consider it "chivalrous and gentlemanly to conceal the fault which a woman may have committed either through mischance or excessive love."<sup>30</sup> If she trusts a man who is no gentleman, she can expect her reputation to be ruined. In all cases she must accept the fact that she is responsible for her action.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 242.

This is the woman's hard fate. It is the personal risk which she alone can take and the consequences of which she alone must accept as the result of her wisdom or weakness. To publicly rail against a man for wronging her makes her seem foolish, as Halifax seems to warn his daughter and as Mrs. Loveit proves in her ridiculous outbursts at the end of The Man of Mode. Such outbursts label her unable to accept the truth of her own nature.

But if the woman does not risk a show of her honest sexual nature and instead remains locked behind the guise of honor, if she holds back as Wycherley says in the poem and makes her modesty into a show, her motives will always seem gripish and her virtue, the very modesty she asserts, will become her shame because of the extremes with which she asserts it. She will, in a sense be selling her virtue to the highest bidder and thus, without realizing it, seem to be no better than a whore who sells her sexual favors for money. Worse still, if she pursues this course of dishonest reputation and turns herself into a kind of treasure of virtue--a property or decoration to be possessed, she will attract those men who desire only property and will neither satisfy her sexually nor respect her as a human being.

When our present day women's liberation movement began in the early 1970's, Norman Mailer wrote a book called The Prisoner of Sex (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1971), in which, though he assumed he would be called a male chauvinist, he sought to remind women that it was their unique sexual nature which made them different from the male. They were the sex specifically capable of having children and continuing the race with the help of the male. He was concerned that in their over-riding search for greater independence and social dominance in the male world they might ironically cheat themselves of true self-realization as women by denying their capacity to love and procreate and rendering sexual intercourse a sterile and mechanical exercise. This

failure to acknowledge their female nature is to Mailer a kind of unnatural act, obscene in its immoral and personally destructive power, a danger not only to the female herself, but to the male, and, indeed, to the continuation of healthy society. When men and women recognize their sexuality, they become prisoners of that sexuality, but that is not a bad thing Mailer maintains, if they can learn to accept that nature and themselves.

In a similar way, though in a different era and circumstances, Wycherley is concerned with the need for human beings to accept their sexual nature. The Restoration woman's mask of honor denies the plain truth of her human nature, and by encouraging such deceitful vanity, is totally immoral and in need of correction and moderation. Unmasking the hypocrisy of feminine honor not only paves the way for the individual female to reach a healthy and plain dealing understanding of her own individual nature, but it is likewise beneficial to the male who, if such hypocrisy is maintained by the female, is forced to forego plain dealing honesty and adopt the same immoral and hypocritical tactics used by the female to attain self-fulfillment. Perhaps none of Wycherley's plays is more concerned to teach this moral lesson regarding honor than is his The Country Wife, and no character is better drawn for that than Wycherley's many faceted Horner.

Through Horner Wycherley reveals a scathing satirical portrait of the dishonorable women who out of vanity have allowed themselves to fall victim to extreme sexual hypocrisy, hiding their sexual craving, until in or out of marriage their rigid code of false honor has trapped them into sexual frustration and finally into fornication or adultery. Lady Fidget is one of those characters who, as Wycherley says in his poem, has made her virtue her shame. She has married Sir Jaspar, a man who encourages women to hypocrisy by his very hypocritical praise of them. "That sweet, soft, gentle, tame, noble Creature Woman, made for Man's Companion"(act 2, sc. 1) he says, yet in his

heart he knows he daren't trust her to "employ her self" freely and so reveals that beneath his praise for her there is only distrust. He dares leave her with no one but worn out old men and eunuchs such as he thinks Horner has become. Lady Fidget is torn between a natural desire for sexual freedom and an ingrained necessity to maintain an honorable reputation, and her situation is further complicated by the sterility of her marriage and Sir Jaspas's evident impotence. He would rather go to a council meeting than stay with her.

So "nice" has been Lady Fidget's training that she cannot bear to hear her husband use the word "naked" in the phrase "naked truth" (act 2, sc. 1) and she reprimands Dainty Fidget, her sister-in-law, for mentioning the word "pleasure" with sexual implications. Yet, when her inhibitions are removed in the drinking scene of Act 5, she boldly sings against her frustrated marriage predicament and in favor of pleasure:

Why should our damn'd Tyrants oblige us to live.  
On the pittance of Pleasure which they only give.  
We must not rejoyce,  
With Wine and with noise.  
In vaine we must wake in a dull bed alone.  
Whilst to our warm Rival the Bottle, they're gone.

Underneath the mask of honor lies the truth of her frustrated sexuality.

When Sir Jaspas brings her to meet Horner, she views him as someone who hates women of quality and virtue because of their love to their husbands; and learning he is an eunuch, she "can't endure the sight of him," calls him "filthy French beast" and spits out her "foh, foh" of indignation. But as the play moves on, Wycherley allows his audience to see her gradually weaken and give way. First she confides in her friends about the frustrated condition she is in as a wife, and secondly she learns that Horner has money and potency.

In a conversation with Dainty Fidget and Squeamish, Lady Fidget bemoans the fact that "wives are so neglected" and is appalled that women of

honor are beginning to keep "little Creatures" to satisfy their sexual desires in retaliation for the Men of Honour who are neglecting them for lower class women. "Birth, birth shou'd go for something," she feels; such men of quality are no better than dogs and horses for lowering themselves to have common women. But she is most indignant over the fact that men of honor are claiming to have lain with women of honor and thus ruining the women's reputations without ever really committing such sexual acts. "To report a Man has had a Person, when he has not had a Person, is the greatest wrong in the whole World, that can be done to a person," she cries. While reputation is everything to her, in her frustrating position as a wife, she is beginning to teeter, and she engages in a debate over whether an affair is worse with one of higher or of lower rank. At first she says it is "an erranter shame for a Noble Person to neglect her own honour, and demean her own Noble Person, with little inconsiderable Fellows." When her friends tell her that the crime is the same in any case, Lady Fidget can only think there is less fault when one is sexually free with one of the quality of one's husband. Dainty and Squeamish warn her that affairs with men of quality are more notorious, and thus much more damaging to one's reputation, but that "no body takes notice of a private Man, and therefore with him "'tis more secret, and the crime's the less, when 'tis not known." Lady Fidget is impressed by what they say: "y faith I think you are in the right on't: 'tis not an injury to a Husband, till it be an injury to our honors; so that a Woman of honour looses no honour with a private Person."(act 2)

Dainty and Squeamish both marvel at how her attitude has changed from the beginning of the scene to the end. No longer are these men "little creatures;" they have been reclassified as "private Persons" in her mind. The audience is aware that Lady Fidget is beginning to entertain the sexual nature

which has so long been pent up beneath her claims to honor. Brought into Horner's company again in Act 2, though still calling him a "Brute! stinking, mortyify'd rotten French Weather" (a wether is a castrated ram), when she is told by her husband that Horner "loves play, and has money," she decides she is "contented to make him pay for his scurrility" since "money makes up in a measure all other wants in Men." The mercenary Lady Fidget is ready to compromise her principles and take on this "beast" as if he were a man, because he has money. At this point, Horner reveals his genuine potency to her, and the already weakened Lady Fidget whose frustrated sexuality is eager for release capitulates completely. At first she is gratefully overjoyed that Horner could be so "generous," "so truly a Man of honour, as for the sakes of us Women of honour, to cause your self to be reported no Man . . . ! and to suffer your self the greatest shame that cou'd fall upon a Man, that none might fall upon us women by your conversation." He is truly a "dear, dear, noble Sir." But in Acts 3 and 4, Wycherley allows us to see that such women as Lady Fidget and her friends have been so long without sexual satisfaction that when they are given it, they abuse the generosity in excess. The china scene proves this point about these ladies of so-called honour.

Having locked herself away from Sir Jasper in one of Horner's rooms, ostensibly to get a piece of Horner's chinaware collection, Lady Fidget shouts a verbal challenge through the doorway encouraging Horner to enter the room and take her sexually: "Let him come, and welcome, which way he will"(act 4, sc. 1). Locked into her own marriage situation as she is, the scene is symbolic of her urgent need for sexual fulfillment while still imprisoned in marriage; and of course Horner's mask of impotence is the way to enable him to enter in at the back door of the room, and at the back doorway of her marriage as well to set her free. Having met her challenge, Horner and Lady

Fidget emerge from the room, and we learn that the long sexually unsatisfied Lady Fidget has drained Mr. Horner dry; for he admits to Squeamish, who would also have liked some "china," that he has "none left now." (act 4, sc. i.) Protected by the metaphor, Lady Fidget boldly states before Squeamish and her husband, "d'y think if he had had any left, I would not have had it too, for we women of quality never think we have China enough." (act 4, sc. i.)

In the china scene as well, we are allowed to see something of the reason why young ladies become as frustrated as Lady Fidget, for we see Old Lady Squeamish running frantically after young Squeamish who has dropped out of her sight for a moment and come to find Horner. Thinking Squeamish has run away to a man, the old grandmother comes in raging, "Where is this Harlotry, this Impudent Baggage, this rambling Tomrigg?" but learning these are Horner's rooms, she decides "there's no hurt in't" for her "Biddy" for he is only "a Snake without his teeth." Wycherley cleverly shows us that such women as Lady Fidget and Squeamish and Dainty Fidget have never been trusted, even as children, unless there was no danger of temptation, and thus they have had no experience with sex to know truly how to moderate it. Just as Sir Jaspar, for all his praise of her, can't let Lady Fidget stay with any man, so Old Lady Squeamish refuses to trust her granddaughter with any male. From birth through marriage women such as Lady Fidget and Squeamish are given absolutely no trust, so it is not strange that they cannot withstand temptation when it comes. A similar situation is presented in Don Diego and Caution's attempts to lock up Hippolita in The Gentleman Dancing Master and also in the Widow Blackacre's attempt to protect Jerry's innocence in The Plain Dealer, though both of these attempts are thwarted. Because of their training, Squeamish and Lady Fidget are thirsting for sexual freedom and have no sense of moderation. These unsatisfied women know only extremes of all

or nothing in sexuality. They will not let Horner alone once he has generously revealed himself to them. Squeamish teases, tugs and kisses him, calling him "beast," "Sloven," and "filthy Toad," and he promises her a "Rol-waggon" of china another time.

Warped by capitalistic society increasingly requiring superchastity from its females, Lady Fidget's sexuality has paradoxically been emphasized by its very repression until it has swallowed up all sense of modesty and moderation. The self we see her realize through her false honor is a monster of repressed sexuality and she becomes a subject for ridicule, perhaps even a grotesque subject for disgust from the audience. In the drinking scene of Act 5, Wycherley makes his final point about such women and how they got to be what they are as Lady Fidget tells Horner: "We women make use of our Reputation, as you men of yours, only to deceive the world with less suspicion: our virtue is like the States-man's Religion, the Quakers word, the Gamesters Oath, and the Great Man's Honour, but to Cheat those that trust it." When Horner asks them why, if they were so sexually inclined, they made "such a mighty pretense to honour," Lady Fidget replies, for the same reason as men, "To avoid ill company, to enjoy the better, and more privately those [we] love," and also because the male's reputation frightened them.

Women's honor, is a hypocrisy then, taught to her by men. It is an attempt to make up for, equal or excel what she finds to be man's deceit about his own honor, with each sex attempting to outdo the other in the game of deception and absolute assertion of its own sex. There is only cheating in this kind of relationship--no trust. The male reputation, Lady Fidget says, being "so notoriously lewd" frightened them into a pretense just as the female's reputation of austere honor, Horner admits, frightened him. So it is the very code of honor--the ultra-sexual male and ultra-chaste female im-

ages which lead to sexual misunderstanding and conflict. When Lady Fidget learns that Horner has been a "Machiavel in love" and has been enjoying all her friends as well as herself, she urges: "Let us not fall out, but have a care of our Honour; though we get no Presents, no Jewels of him, we are savers of our Honour, the Jewel of most value and use, which shines yet to the world unsuspected, though it be counterfeit."

It seems symbolically clear to me that Horner, himself, is that honor, maimed and counterfeit as it is, a salvation and jewel to those who have no other honor but false reputation. Horner claims such honor is "e'en as good, as if it were true provided the world think so; for Honour, like Beauty now, only depends on the opinion of others." Wycherley through Horner has struck at a society that has made reputation the only honor and external vanity the only truth, and he has forced the ladies of his audience, and the men too, through Horner, to see the truth of their counterfeit honor. Seen from this angle, Horner is like the Woman of honor herself who denies her sexuality publicly the better to enjoy it lasciviously in private, and as such Horner teaches the moral he proclaims to Quack in Act 4:

Your Bigots in Honour, are just like those in Religion; they fear the eye of the world, more than the eye of Heaven, and think there is no virtue, but railing at vice; and no sin, but giving scandal: they rail at a poor, little, kept Player, and keep themselves some young, modest Pulpit Comedian to be privy to their sins in their Closets, not to tell 'em of them in their Chappels.

Besides demonstrating the extreme of sexual restriction which hypocritically calls itself honor in The Country Wife, Wycherley demonstrates to his audience the results of being too generous in giving away one's sexual favors. Wycherley's love poetry always encourages the female to give herself freely to an appreciative male, but in "the hard fate of women," he remarks that even extreme generosity in sexual matters, unrelated to monetary gain, labels a woman a wench in the eyes of unappreciative society. While such sexual gener-

osity is not to be considered as harshly as Lady Fidget's restrictive virtue, it is nevertheless an extreme; one which labels the woman more a fool than vicious in the eyes of society. Giving oneself generously to those who do not appreciate the gift is equivalent to casting pearls to swine. To be truly honorable a woman must have the wit to properly respect herself and neither hold back too rigidly by overvaluing herself, nor undervalue herself by giving way to all.

In Margery Pinchwife, Wycherley creates an example of this kind of sexually generous extreme. Margery, as her name implies,<sup>31</sup> is indeed a pearl of a woman, free in the gift of herself openly and innocently to any man who will say he loves her. Her problem is that coming directly from her country environment, she has been married to Pinchwife, an "Old Whoremaster" who, as Horner surmises, "only married to keep a Whore to him self." Pinchwife is totally untrusting and thus like society itself is unable to appreciate the genuine innocent pearl which is his. Instead, having brought her to town against her will, he warns her against even the most innocent pleasures and literally locks her away in her rooms from what he calls the evils of the world, threatening her with sword and penknife if she fails to obey him. Even the ignorant Margery cannot believe that plays, visits, coaches, clothes, fiddles, balls, treats, other men and the whole town life are completely and totally wicked. It looks like innocent fun to her, but Pinchwife keeps fanatically insisting that the world is evil until, he himself turns her natural generosity into his own enemy. "Nay, I confess I was quiet enough, till my Husband told me, what pure lives, the London Ladies live abroad, with their dancing, meetings, and junketings, and drest everyday in their best gowns," Margery admits and even explains to Pinchwife what his tactics are doing to

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<sup>31</sup>Margery, as a name, means pearl.

her: "when you forbid me, you make me as't were desire it." By Act 3 of the play, melancholy and ill, she sees herself as a "poor lonely sullen Bird in a cage." When she learns that Horner claims to love her, she innocently believes him, and disguised as a boy by Pinchwife, to keep her from the lewd Horner's advances, she enjoys his kisses and his presents of fruit. Compared to her husband's love, Horner's seems kind. "What care I for my Husband," she finally decides, and willingly plots with Lucy, Alithea's maid, to escape the clutches of the loathsome and nauseous Pinchwife. When, threatening and jealous, he demands she write a critical letter to Horner, Margery substitutes her own letter to "Dear, Sweet, Mr. Horner" instead; and it is Pinchwife who unknowingly carries it to Horner, a dramatic enactment of the way Pinchwife's whole social mask telegraphs his insecurity to the world. Ultimately Pinchwife actually delivers Margery, herself, to Horner, thinking she is really Alithea. Obviously Wycherley intends his audience to see that natural love, locked away from the world and told it is evil by self-righteous society, will rebel secretly against that society and thwart such ridiculously restrictive attempts to protect it. Wycherley seems to agree with Milton who in Aereopagitica says: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."<sup>32</sup>

Margery, Wycherley would have us see, is a totally open and honest soul crushed by her husband's own blind restrictions and fears. Finally, she too, must turn to Horner's counterfeit honor for her sexual freedom, having lost her innocence as a result of an untrusting society. Horner, while he

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<sup>32</sup>John Milton, Aereopagitica, in John Milton. Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957), p. 728.

recognizes Margery's letter as "the first love letter that ever was without . . . Lying and Dissembling in it" and while he will gallantly defend her ("The poor woman has call'd for aid, and stretch'd forth her hand . . . , I cannot but help her over the Pale out of the Bryars" act 4.), still cannot help seeing her as "a silly innocent." (act 5) Even after she is brought to him and he offers to "let [her] down the back way," which I take to mean not only literally, but figuratively in the sense of saving her reputation by his own counterfeit honor, she is still so silly as to assume she can make him her husband. Horner does his best to defend her honor with his own counterfeit kind ("So much a man of Honour, that I must save my Mistress, I thank you, come what will on't"; "I must be concern'd for a Ladies Honour too"; "My Lady has not her Honour, but has given it me to keep, and I will preserve it." Act 5), but only when Margery accepts the way of the world and its marital laws and understands that she can't "be rid of [her] musty Husband and doe what [she lists] ," only when she lies about her true nature, can society be satisfied and the play end. Lucy explains in what sounds like an author's rationale for using this sexual pearl of a woman as a character in this play, that Margery's "end of coming out was but to see her Sisters Wedding, and what she has said to your face of her love to Mr. Horner was but the usual innocent revenge on a Husbands jealousy." If that is so, then Wycherley seems to be somewhat wistfully pointing out that the golden age of love is gone and that anyone who desires to portray such sexual generosity and regenerative sexual power in the seventeenth century must lie about it, must claim to emphasize perfect marriage, rather than the beauty of free sex, for such honest sexual generosity can no longer be appreciated by an untrusting, warped, and indeed, fallen society which can only look at such honesty as foolish or a threat which must be forced to hide in self-denial, and counterfeit honor.

Much then, as Wycherley honors the honest and open spirit, he warns against its use to the extreme as silly in this world, unless one is assured of finding the appreciative man who, like the true gentleman will protect one's honor; in which case such genuine love is not foolish, but something to be respected. This rather ambiguous attitude toward generous free sex is perhaps difficult to accept, yet it appears in some of Wycherley's other poetry and writings as well. It is particularly humorous in a poem entitled "The Frail Nymph's Apology," in which, speaking as the frail nymph Wycherley rationalizes a totally open sexual generosity: "That which we can't defend we must submit / To strong Perswasions urg'd by Love, or Wit; / And, not to lose our Honour, part with it; / Since sure our Honour more our Shame wou'd prove, / Made by our Pride, ungrateful to our Love: / If cruelly perverse, and simply coy, / We would prevent our own and Lover's Joy." Since to refuse a man can lead to rape and the loss of genuine sexual pleasure for the woman, such refusals, according to the nymph, show only ingratitude and folly; thus, she says, "You may be sure I no Man can deny" and yields herself to Men of Honour, fools, wits, the proud and the humble, the ruffian and the gentleman, old acquaintances and total strangers, bullies and flatterers, the cowardly and the brave, the fashionable and the ill-dressed, the tall and the short, the slender and the fat, the old, the young, the rich, the poor, the black, the fair, the brown, and even the red.<sup>33</sup> There is an innocent honesty in the voice of the poem yet the list of lovers grows to hyperbole and with each new category there is a kind of ironic ridiculousness in her ability to justify them all. It is finally that witty hyperbole which makes Wycherley's wry point about her ridiculousness in society. True, it is great to be generous, and certainly to receive the fruits of the generosity of such a girl, but

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<sup>33</sup>Posthumous Works, in Complete Works 4:168-171.

such extremes with their rationalizations are ultimately silly. There is something indecent in them no matter how honest they are and one cannot help but feel such innocents, for all their openness, are being used by some of their male friends.

Perhaps there is something of this ambiguous half-appreciation--half-ridicule even in Wycherley's praise of the Lady Castlemaine's favors to him. It is certainly present in his dedication of The Plain Dealer to Mrs. Bennet, the London Madam, where one hears the double entendre in his compliments:

I can no longer defer doing you the justice of a Dedication, and telling you . . . who are, of all publick-spirited people, the most necessary, most communicative, most generous and hospitable; your house has been the house of the People, your sleep still disturb'd for the Publick, and when you arose 'twas that others might lye down, and you waked that others might rest; The good you have done is unspeakable; How many young inexperienc'd Heirs have you kept from rash foolish Marriages? and from being jilted for their lives by the worst sort of Jilts, Wives? How many unbewitched Widowers Children have you preserv'd from the Tyranny of Stepmothers? How many old Dotards from Cuckoldage, and keeping other mens Wenches and Children? How many Adulteries and unnatural sins have you prevented? In fine, you have been a constant scourge to the old Lecher, and often a terrour to the young; you have made concupiscence its own punishment, and extinguish'd Lust with Lust, like blowing up of Houses to stop the fire.

. . . . .  
Nay in justice, Madam, I think a Poet ought to be as free of your Houses, as of the Play-houses.

. . . . .  
And whatsoever your Amorous misfortunes have been, none can charge you with that heinous, and worst of womens Crimes, Hypocrisie.

. . . . .  
But you, in fine, Madam, are no more an Hypocrite than I am when I praise you.<sup>34</sup>

The overly-generous woman is to be admired for her generosity, but she is still unfortunately a fool. I think that Wycherley wishes to place the blame for both the plight of the Lady Fidgets and the Margeries on the males of society, however. For it is the males who praise a woman's good natured

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<sup>34</sup>The Complete Plays of William Wycherley, ed. Gerald Weales, pp. 378-384.

purity and fail to teach her to cope with the truth of her imperfect female nature. Thus the Lady Fidgets must take refuge in a counterfeit honor which emphasizes their pure reputations publicly and forces them into secret lust and adultery. And in the opposite extreme, it is the male society that criticizes the woman's sexual nature, thus frustrating the innocent Margerics from naivete to loss of innocence until they must take refuge in a similar counterfeit honor to live in society. Both too much praise for a woman's purity and too much criticism of a woman's natural weakness create one sided and unnatural females unable to accept their sexual nature and thus in need of the sort of counterfeit salvation that Horner and his kind of honor afford them. We laugh at Margery for her simplistic acceptance of the counterfeit honor Horner provides for her, but hardly anyone reading The Country Wife fails to feel a certain amount of honest sympathy for Margery, forced to lie about her natural sexual desires in order to save herself and Horner as well. This sympathy is not just the result of the eighteenth century sentimentalism and the nineteenth century romanticism which stand between twentieth century readers and the original character. Wycherley sincerely believed as can be seen by his poetry that the generous sexual gift of female love, when appreciated by the male and uncomplicated by legalistic marital contracts, was the ideal of love. That is why Margery sticks with us so strongly and why I think that as an audience we cannot be content to label Horner a monster for all his cunning tricks to unmask the sexually vulnerable woman. He honors Margery's naivete and gallantly saves it along with the more mercenary and stupid Lady Fidgets, and she gallantly reciprocates in saving him, for he seems to be the prototype of the sexually frustrated male. Had society not been what it was in the seventeenth century--had women not been trained to put on such frightening airs before men and been encouraged to do so by the

men themselves, Horner would perhaps have found his Margery without the need for public debasement of his own male potency; and had society been truly able to appreciate generous love, Margery would not have fallen victim to Pinchwife--for there would be no Pinchwives--only satisfied males and females able to trust each other in free gifts of love. Such free love matches would require no strings or vows or forced regulations to keep them going, and would willingly dissolve when one partner desired or would remain perfect unions of eternal love should the couple be of the highest calibre. But society, as Wycherley points out, is not ideal. It is full of fear and cheating between the sexes. Even to exist in the world, generous love must lie about itself though it knows in its heart the truth of its nature. And honor must in some cases be counterfeit as long as the extremes of overpraise for virtue alone and over criticism of vice alone are allowed to dominate. Horner, counterfeit honor, is the release society creates as a means of setting people free from its own restrictions.

But Wycherley in The Country Wife does show a way for Restoration men and women to achieve the goal of generous sexuality and genuine honor within society. He does it through the characters of Alithea and Harcourt. Instead of viewing honor in a woman as purity alone with all its unrealistic implications, or seeing woman as an evil temptation to man with all the blindness to her good qualities which that view implies, Wycherley's Harcourt teaches Alithea to recognize the truth of her nature--that she must accept her sexuality rather than attempt to deny it, and be prepared to risk it publicly with the man whom her heart tells her will properly appreciate it. Like Gaspare in The Book of the Courtier, who believed that women were more imperfect than men, Wycherley seems to believe that women should be taught to be appreciated and to appreciate themselves honestly for what they are--not con-

demned as evil nor put on unrealistic pedestals. Wycherley allows Harcourt to teach women that wits such as he, when they criticize women or point out bluntly that women are sexual beings, are not necessarily condemning them, but reminding them realistically of their natures.<sup>35</sup> The ability to preserve their sexual nature for the right man is the true test of a woman's honor-- nothing else, a fact which Wycherley evidently believed his seventeenth century audience needed to be reminded of. Women should admit they possess a sexual nature, but explain that they are not ready to give it to anyone until they find the right man, just as Montaigne said.

Alithea, used to the town and having observed the jealousy of her brother Pinchwife, is fearful that if she marries such a husband she will lose access to the town and like Margery be "sent into the Country." Indeed Alithea seems to feel that "the last ill usage of a Husband to a Wife" is to send her "into the Country" (act 4). Norman Holland, in dealing with the contrast of town and country in the Wycherley plays, emphasizes the difference between coarse country life and the more mannered and civilized life of the town. "For Wycherley," he says, "the country stands for a place where one's inner nature is very close to the surface."<sup>36</sup> We may carry this further, for I think that Wycherley, almost every time he uses the word, "country," is concerned with female sexuality. Because she has been trained to regard honor as a total denial of her "cuntryness" and marriage requires "cuntryness" she is unconsciously looking for a husband who will not see her sexual nature, for she considers it coarse and uncivilized. With this in mind, she has set-

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<sup>35</sup>A point which as one reads and re-reads Wycherley's plays and poetry one finds true of Wycherley's whole satiric and comic position as writer. The plain dealer points out flaws more out of realistic and friendly love than out of hatred.

<sup>36</sup>Holland, p. 43.

tled on a marriage to Sparkish, who by claiming, "I have that noble value for her that I cannot be jealous of her," flatters her sexless honor pose while revealing to the wiser members of the audience his disrespect for her as a woman (See p. 83 above). Sparkish treats her as an object of beauty, not as a person; as something with which to augment his own sense of vanity. Later, he proves capable of believing Alithea unfaithful and turns jealous, but only in regard to winning or losing Alithea's "portion," for he says, "I never had any passion for you, 'till now." (act 5) Marriage to such a man who cannot appreciate the natural honor of a woman would bring only dishonor to Alithea, for in giving herself to Sparkish, she would be degrading her nature, not realizing it.

This is precisely what Harcourt tells her: "If you do marry him [Sparkish] your reputation suffers in the world, and you wou'd be thought in necessity for a cloak." He means either that to marry such a fool would indicate she was in need of any available husband to hide an already ruined condition, or that married to a man who has no genuine respect for her as a sexual being, her so-called honor or sexless pose will become a necessary cloak so that she can release her sexual frustration in adultery. At any rate, Alithea is shocked by this "rude" suggestion. Indeed Harcourt's brash, bold, aggressive and manly "wit" frighten her completely. His sexual nature is so bluntly obvious he seems to be the one to fear most in terms of leading her into "cuntryness" for he is decidedly jealous, and his calling her honorable and praising her beauty sounds like ridicule and raillery. She will not marry him, but his comments do make her think, and she refuses to let Sparkish kill him.

Harcourt, with advice from Horner, performs a series of comparison tests before her eyes to prove himself the better man and the possessor of wit

and persistence, but, even aware that she loves Harcourt, Alithea still feels the necessity to be loyal to Sparkish out of a sense of duty. Papers have been signed, etc. Sparkish seems to praise her honor genuinely, and she has given her word--almost naively as Margery--who also cannot see how a man who praises her and says he loves her could hurt her. Society has taught her, after all, that her purity is worthy of praise. Lucy, Alithea's maid, while engaged in dressing Alithea for the marriage, a task she feels is like that of perfuming a corpse, sums up Alithea's predicament when she exclaims: "What a Divil is this honour? 'tis a disease in the head, like the Megrin, or Falling-sickness, that always hurries People away to do themselves mischief; Men loose their lives by it: Women what's dearer to 'em, their love, the life of life." Finally, discovering that Sparkish can be jealous of a rival to her portion and not to her love, and fearing she may be forced into marriage with Horner, (again the reference to future adultery) she determines she would rather have "Mr. Harcourt for [her] Husband," and publicly goes to his house to seek his aid, a boldly sexual move to save her own honest nature. At the end of the play when Horner casts doubt on her reputation, Harcourt is willing to defend her for it. Thus truth, for that is what Alithea's name means, gives herself into the hands of frankness (Harcourt's first name is Frank) having arrived at a healthy understanding of herself and that her honor as a human being lies in her ability to give herself intelligently to a man who shows himself equally intelligent in appreciating her and in reciprocating with an equal gift of himself. She rejects the Sparkish man who would insult her sexuality by falsely praising it and treating her like an object of art, and she rejects the Horners who in defending her sexuality imply her identity is only sexual; she accepts Frank Harcourt whom Wycherley in the play presents as a moderate man, able to respect and accept both men and women for

what they are as honest individuals. And in accepting Harcourt, Alithea becomes the wife of a man who respects her honor as a woman--both her "country-ness" and her wisdom in sharing it with him.

Wycherley's desire that the Restoration woman accept a more honest view of her sexual nature is, of course, directly related to his attitude toward the honor of the male sex. Perhaps more than any other Restoration playwright, Wycherley was concerned with the male and his sense of manliness,<sup>37</sup> especially in regard to the way feminine honor affected that manliness. Wycherley's treatment of Harcourt in his early meetings with Alithea is an excellent mirroring of the fact that the plain and honest Restoration man who said he loved a woman and expected an honest reply to that love was finding it more difficult to gain the Restoration female's attention. As early as the 1630's a book on marriage and courtship for the middle class advised:

He that thinks to win affection by telling a maid in plain terms that he loves her is much deceived, for when she hears you begin so plainly, she will start back from you, and think you to be some ignorant Corydon that know not Cupid's language; when on the contrary, he that can deliver his mind in amorous words doth seem to keep the keys of their maidenheads, of which he can take possession when he list.<sup>38</sup>

Later in the century John Evelyn, in his preface to Mundis Muliebris somewhat scornfully warns if you would court a woman:

You must often treat her at the Play, the park and the music; present her at the raffle; follow her to Tunbridge at the season of the drinking of waters, though you have no need of them yourself. You must improve

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<sup>37</sup>David Vieth for example has written an article in which he finds Wycherley's The Country Wife to be "An Anatomy of Masculinity," Papers in Language and Literature 11:335-350.

<sup>38</sup>Cupid's School: Wherein Young Men and Maids May Learn Divers Sorts of New, Witty, and Amorous Compliments, by W.S. (London, 1632), quoted in Morton M. Hunt, The Natural History of Love (n.p.: Funk & Wagnalls, Minerva Press, 1967), p. 208.

all occasions of celebrating her shape, and how well the mode becomes her, though it be ne'er so fantastical and ridiculous; that she sings like an angel, dances like a goddess, and that you are charmed with her wit and beauty . . . . If the whole morning be spent between the glass and the comb, that your perruque fit well and cravat strings be adjusted, as things of importance, with these and the like accomplishments, you'll emerge a consummate beau, or, in English, a coxcomb . . . . Thus you see, young sparks, how the style and method of wooing is quite changed, as well as the language, since the days of our forefathers.<sup>39</sup>

Evelyn's comments are clear. The sort of flattery and lying necessary to attract the attention of a seventeenth century woman is in danger of making the male alter his image in order to please. A moderate amount of altering may be a useful tempering of man's own vanity, but too much may have dangerous repercussions for the male sex as well as the female. In his poem on "the hard fate of women," Wycherley warned that the female who asserts her purity and holds herself back from her lover risks the danger of "less'ning" her lover, "less'ning" in the sense of making him feel unnaturally ashamed of his own honest sexuality in desiring her, and "less'ning" in the sense of "teaching" him contempt for the female sex as a whole. A foolish male might accept the terms for Restoration courtship and, following the extreme whims of his lady, turn himself into a kind of effeminate fop similar to Monsieur in The Gentleman Dancing Master, thus debasing his masculine honor. Such emasculation relative to fashion and dress was already being noted in England as early as the 1620's when the more rigorous Puritans had cried out against the fact that "women were being 'transformed into men' by vain fashions that made them forget their 'subjection both to God and man;' and that "'divers of our masculine and more noble race are wholly degenerated . . . into women' by

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<sup>39</sup>Quoted in Morton M. Hunt, The Natural History of Love (n.p.: Funk & Wagnalls, Minerva Press, 1967), pp. 262-263.

'the very length and Culture of their Lockes and Haire,' which is a 'badge of . . . Vanitie, Singularitie and Effeminacy.'<sup>40</sup> Pepys in his Diary tells of men dressing in women's clothes and women in men's clothes for fun (August 14, 1666) and of his own first concerns at shaving his head and adopting the new bewigged look (August 3, 1663);<sup>41</sup> and John Harold Wilson quotes the following first hand comments from the Restoration which prove to what extent the sexes in terms of appearance had exchanged positions:

A strange effeminate age when men strive to imitate women in their apparel, viz. long periwigs, patches in their faces, painting, short wide breeches like petticoates, muffs, and their clothes highly scented, bedecked with robbons of all colours . . . On the other side, women would strive to be like men, viz., when they rode on horseback or in coaches weare plush caps like monteros, either full of ribbons or feathers, long periwigs which men use to weare, and riding coats of red colour all bedabbed with lace which they call vests.

For news from Court I shall tell you that one cannot possibly know a woman from a man, unlesse one hath the eyes of a linx who can see through a wall, for by the face and garbe they are like men. They do not weare any hood but only men's perwich [periwigs] hatts and coats.<sup>42</sup>

John Evelyn in a suggestion for moderating clothing worn in England and presented to the King in a pamphlet entitled Tyrannus or The Mode (1661) declaims against the elaborate and ever-changing fashions which "however allowable in the weaker, becomes not the Viriler Sex" and are so effeminate

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<sup>40</sup>William Prynne, The Unloveliness of Lovelocks (1628), quoted in Bill Severn, The Long and Short of It: Five Thousand Years of Fun and Fury over Hair (New York: David McKay Co., 1971), pp. 40-41.

<sup>41</sup>The Diary of Samuel Pepys, ed. O. F. Morshead, Illustrated Edition, Academy Library (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1960).

<sup>42</sup>Anthony Wood (1665) and a courtier writing to a friend in the country as quoted in John Harold Wilson, All the King's Ladies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 74.

that "Me thinks we should make water sitting, and since we invert our Sex, learn to handle the distaff too."<sup>43</sup>

In The Gentleman Dancing Master, not only is Monsieur ridiculously effeminate in his costume, but Don Diego is unable to tell Flirt and Flounce from men, they have become so brazen in their whoredom ("Are they not men in womens cloaths?" act 5). Flirt and Flounce are even bold enough to attack the public house to take away their men and Wycherley shows them carrying off the foolish Monsieur who weakly bewails that they have a care of his honor, a telling comment on the extent to which even the lowest women were able to dominate foolish males and lead them to disgrace their masculine honor.

In The Plain Dealer Wycherley provides his audience with the Widow Blackacre to show the effect the proud woman's influence can have on the future male population. The Widow, masculine in her desire to make a name for herself in the male world of the law, is preventing her own son, Jerry, from coming into his own as a man and thus effectively emasculating him while she benefits from his rightful inheritance. ("My Curmudgeonly Mother wo'nt allow me wherewithall to be a Man of myself." act 3) The Widow won't allow him to be interested in the army, nor is he allowed to read plays for fear he might discover his natural sexual inclinations: "There are young Students of the Law enough spoil'd already, by Playes; they wou'd make you in love with your Landress, or what's worse, some Queen of the Stage, that was a Landress; and so turn Keeper before you are of age." When Freeman encourages the boy to give up the lawyer's gown his mother dresses him in and not to "carry green Bags all thy life," he discovers that Jerry is eager to break free. Just like Martha in Love in a Wood and Margery in The Country Wife, this male

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<sup>43</sup>J. L. Nevinson, ed. (Oxford: Luttrell Society, Basil Blackwell, 1951), pp. 9, 24.

character, locked up to protect him from society, is ready to tell his mother:

If I do go where Money and Wenches are to be had, you may thank your self; for you us'd me so unnaturally, you wou'd never let me have a Penny to go abroad with; nor so much as come near the Garret, where your Maidens lay; nay you wou'd not so much as let me play at Hot cockles with 'em, nor have any Recreation with 'em, tho' one shou'd have kist you behind, you were so unnatural a Mother, so you were. (act 4)

If some foolish men fall victim to the female's influence by debasing their manhood and becoming effeminate fops, other, more intelligent men are taught by such false feminine refinement and artificiality to regard all women as silly cheats whom they can outwit by a similar method of cheating. If such a man has the quality of generosity about him, like Harcourt, he may seek to teach the woman the error of her pose, but if he lacks generosity, and is excessively proud of his masculine honor, he may be driven to debase it by retaliation and revenge against the female who rejects him, attempting to prove his superiority by raping her and ruining her public reputation or by cunningly appearing to praise and respect her, courting and marrying her, then neglecting her as a wife.

Both Sparkish and Sir Jaspas of The Country Wife are examples of this latter type of retaliation, cheating the female by cunning false praise. True, these men have perhaps a minimal sexual interest in the women they catch, but by winning the beautiful woman with false praise, by capturing the huge dowry for their own treasury, they also prove their own superior masculine intelligence amongst other men, or so they think.

Sparkish makes every effort to show off Alithea as his possession and keeps inviting Harcourt to praise him for catching such a wonderful prize as a fiancée. "How dost thou like her, Faith? . . . How dost thou like her?" he urges, then boasts, "I love to be envy'd, and wou'd not marry a Wife, that I alone cou'd love." Yet there is small reason to feel honorable in such a

conquest if he cannot respect her as a person. Sparkish has so little regard for the intelligence of the female that he feels "a little reading, or learning" makes a woman "troublesome" and he is so sure of his own image of himself that he cannot believe a woman he would choose to marry could outwit him. Such a ridiculous self concept of masculine honor is pathetic even to the other men of the play who, as Harcourt says, call Sparkish: "A Bubble, a Coward, a senseless Idiot, a wretch . . . contemptible to all the world." When Sparkish thinks Alithea has been false to him, he denounces her, claims he only wanted her portion, then, discovering she was honest after all, decides he'll never marry since he does not wish to "disparage [his] parts." Thinking himself superior in intellect to all females, he ends ridiculously denying himself any chance of manly fulfillment in society because he refuses to risk being made a fool of by a woman. Perhaps this is a wiser choice than Sir Jaspur, his older counterpart, however. He, too, as we have said, praised women falsely and having cheated Lady Fidget into a frustrating marriage, now finds that he must use all his wits in a losing battle to avoid being cuckolded or cheated by her. Praising his own cleverness he secures the assistance of Horner to entertain Lady Fidget and thus brings his own dishonor as both husband and man.

Perhaps Wycherley's most telling comment on this type of praising lover is in the character of Oldfox in The Plain Dealer. Oldfox is constantly trying to praise himself and the Widow Blackacre by using the old précieux techniques of flattery and compliments. He boasts of his military prowess, his literary accomplishments, and in one final attempt to conquer her, ties the Widow to a chair, gags her with his garter and announces, "She'll be acquainted with my parts." The Widow, like the audience understands him to mean rape; but poor Oldfox is so emasculated by his training as a gentleman

that he can only rape her "by ear." He will read her his acrostics! How right she was to turn him down as a husband. He is, with his false sense of male superiority and intellect, as she says, "a Cripple all over," a "Senseless, impertinent, quibbling, driveling, feeble, paralytic, impotent, fumbling, frigid Nicompoop."

To the manly man, nothing could be more disconcerting than to see the opposite sex lording over him either as false angels or as bold masculine types who would bully him into submission, and nothing could be more revolting than to see other men receiving favors for becoming disgraceful effeminate. Even the lower class women, as we see by Lucy in Love in a Wood, were beginning to put on airs about their honorable reputations in retaliation for being abused in their honest sexuality by the male. They too were requiring more in the way of courtship and the manly man was finding himself shut out of either refined or openly sexual satisfaction. Such men, unwilling to cunningly flatter, take the opposite extreme and, like Pinchwife and Dorilant in The Country Wife, cheat women of any praise by assuming they are only sexual beings with no intelligence, meant for male satisfaction; thus, without realizing it, they also cheat themselves of sexual satisfaction.

Dorilant in The Country Wife is openly sexual and proud of it. Rather than become a "superannuated stallion" and an impotent companion to ladies at cards, he convinces himself "a Mistress shou'd be like a little country retreat near the town, not to dwell in constantly, but only for a night away; to tast the town the better when a Man returns." With this attitude of male superiority, he is surprised when Horner, whom he thinks a eunuch, is willing to be used by women. Dorilant would prefer to "avoid 'em, and hate 'em as they hate you." "I wou'd no more sup with women, unless I cou'd lye with 'em, than sup with a rich Coxcomb, unless I cou'd cheat him," he boasts. He

has adopted the attitude of scorn for women's company unless it is sexual, seemingly because they tend to scorn him. In Act 2, we see how he might have arrived at this attitude. Dainty Fidget calls Horner and him "obscurity all over" and Squeamish says, "I wou'd as soon look upon a Picture of Adam and Eve, without fig leaves, as any of you, if I cou'd help it; therefore keep off, and do not make us sick." Obviously, to a man of Dorilant's virile pride, these remarks are disconcerting. "What a Divil are these" women, he asks Horner, and is told they are "pretenders to honour, as criticks to wit, only by censuring others." When he sees that such women agree to the company of a eunuch, and that he, "the fitter man" is turned away, he cannot understand it: "'tis strange a Man can't come amongst virtuous women now but upon the same terms, as Men are admitted into the great Turks Seraglio." "Heavens keep me," he says, "from being an hombre Player with 'em," and exits as if he's running from the thought of their threat to his masculinity. He has earlier chosen to be with men rather than to beg sexual companionship ("Wine makes us--makes us Princes, Love makes us Beggars, poor Rogues--"), but he still desires women. In Act 3, he approaches Lucy and holds her back from leaving with the sexual announcement, "I have something to present you with." She stays, reluctantly. "Thou sha't not stir thou robust creature, you see I can deal with you, therefore you'd stay the rather, and be kind," he tells her; but Lucy struggles to be rid of him. Poor Dorilant does not succeed with the lower class Lucy either. Like the Lucy of Love in a Wood this Lucy too is concerned about improving her rank, and wishes for a weak-witted Spar-kish husband, though she fears as a chambermaid she can never have such luck (act 3).

Obviously Dorilant is closely related to the Pinchwife type of man. Pinchwife was a "Whoremaster" in his youth and found difficulty keeping a wo-

man, even of the whorish type, to himself. But just as Wycherley lets Spar-kish decide not to ruin his parts by marrying and becoming another Sir Jas-par, so Dorilant seems to be kept from marrying by adopting not Harcourt's, but Horner's pattern of action. Dorilant, unwilling to become either "super-annuated stallion" or "cuckold" is brought round the back way by Wycherley. Having dropped him from the plot mid-play, he brings him back again in the company of Quack, when Quack reappears to save Horner's false honor, seeming to imply that Dorilant, too, is willing to sacrifice his public reputation for masculinity in order to enjoy a private one.

Horner, in fact, may have become what he is as a man by following the same pattern as Dorilant. He says in Act 5 of The Country Wife that women of honor put up a frightening mask of reputation and that they require so much ceremony that they are not worth courting since one never knows whether they will give in or not. He cannot afford to give the women such gifts and jewels as they desire in order to win them without more security for success; thus he is forced to turn to women with less sense of their honor. But we have seen at the beginning of the play that love with them grows tiresome. Such women become, as he says, "insatiable sorts of Duns" and "Love when it becomes so, is paid the most unwillingly" (act 1). To gain new acquaintances and to test who is willing to enjoy his sexual advances and who is not, he adopts his pretense of impotency. He gains only what could be called a dubious satisfaction. Drained dry, called sloven and toad and pulled about by the cravat by his harem of women, forced to be in the dull company of the husbands whom he is cuckolding, he has sacrificed his public reputation for the private satisfaction of his extreme sexual desire. His sexual generosity to the ladies is so great that he, like the frail nymph and Margery, seems, though magnanimous in his gesture, somehow foolish. "Vain Fops, but court, and dress, and keep a puther, / To pass for Womens men, with one another. /

But he who aims by women to be priz'd, / First by the men you see must be despis'd," he advises at the end of the play. It is not in his nature to marry and play the social game; so since he does not require the good reputation and esteem of men or society, he can afford to do as he pleases and to be a society to himself. As the bringer of a certain amount of freedom and salvation to the frustrated women hiding under the surface of society's honor, he is something like a Christ figure saving those who have fallen victim to the sinful world of vanity, but at the same time his *Paradise Regained* is so indecent in comparison to Harcourt and Alithea's that he appears, for all his efforts, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, with a mouthful of ashes. Vieth says his "stikingly successful ruse limits the nature of his masculine activities so drastically that in a sense he becomes the eunuch he pretends to be. His admission at the end of the play that 'I, alas, can't be' a husband may reflect a belated recognition that he was capable of something better."<sup>44</sup> Horner does point the way to Harcourt, however, aiding him to achieve a public honor and a fine woman as well.

Cunning praise, belligerent male superiority, and male generosity which negates public honor are all self-defeating male reactions to the female's pose of chastity and purity in the relations between the sexes, but perhaps the most disturbing and self-defeating reaction from the male is the kind of contempt for the female which, under the frustration of being rejected, leads the male to retaliation through rape. Ranger in *Love in a Wood* is so proud of his masculine superiority, that he boasts of Lydia, his mistress, "Faith, I may allow her any privilege and be too hard for her yet; how do you think I have cheated her tonight? Women are poor credulous Creatures, easily deceived." Vincent warns him, "We are poor credulous creatures, when we

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<sup>44</sup>Vieth, p. 346.

think 'em so," but Ranger, with his blind sense of superiority, refuses to listen. Having lied to Lydia in order to be free for a ramble in the park, Ranger is surprised to discover Lydia in the park soon after he arrives. When she runs away and hides in the house of her friend Christina, Ranger follows and, turning on his masculine charm, seeks to seduce the heiress Christina by flattering her in the précieux manner. Christina sees through his foolishness, however; and Ranger is turned out. Impressed by Christina's angelic beauty, he is nevertheless physically frustrated, and at Dapperwit's suggestion, he seeks sexual gratification from the lower class Lucy. But even here he is refused, for Lucy no longer desires to be used by such men. Kept from attaining both Christina, the angel, and Lucy, the whore, Ranger's frustration continues to grow. Lydia, meanwhile, jealous of Ranger's attentiveness to Christina, has determined that "Because it has been the constant endeavour of men to keep women ignorant, they think us so, but 'tis that increases our inquisitiveness, and makes us know them ignorant, as false." To test whether Ranger is indeed an "impudent dissembler" she forges a letter of assignation from Christina, then goes to the appointed place, Vincent's lodgings, to see if Ranger will come. Ranger, now assured of his masculine prowess, eagerly goes to Vincent's to claim Christina, only to be publicly embarrassed by Christina in front of Vincent, for by accident she has actually come to Vincent's lodgings. Humiliated as a man, tired of blind man's buff games of love, Ranger sees that Lydia was indeed worth having and that women are capable of outwitting men. Later in the park in his anger and frustration, he attempts to rape Christina as if to prove such angelic images are all false, but again it is he who is embarrassed, for it turns out that the woman he was trying to rape was really Lydia in the dark. His contempt for the female intellect has circled back around on him by the end of the play, just as Valentine's attempt to take revenge in the last act against what he supposes to be

the general inconstancy of women backfires to injure him more than it does Christina.

Perhaps it is in The Plain Dealer and the character of Manly where the male's desire for retaliation against the female is pushed to the ultimate extreme. Manly has trusted Olivia as perfectly beautiful and an honest woman, yet when he sees the extent of her falsity, he is appalled: "She makes Love like a Devil in a Play; and in this darkness, which conceals her Angel's face; if I were apt to be afraid, I shou'd think her a Devil" (act 4). The play in its closing lines sounds the theme of masculine unhappiness with women when Freeman says, "I think most of our quarrels to the World, are just such as we have to a handsom Woman: only because we cannot enjoy her, as we wou'd do." In Act 4, Manly, still in love with Olivia to his shame, though he knows she has ridiculed his honest boldness as coarse and has married another, and sounding much like a Dorilant or a Pinchwife, wonders "Why Fools, Rascals, and desertless Wretches, shou'd still have the better of Men of Merit, with all Women; as much as with their own common Mistress, Fortune!" Both Manly and Freeman respond to the statement and their responses are an excellent example of masculine sexual attitudes.

Freeman believes that the reason women favor worthless men and turn down men of merit is "Because most Women, like Fortune, are blind . . . they have no more reason in their love, or kindness, than Fortune her self." Like Dorilant, Freeman seems to see little if any value in women at all, because they are witless. By the end of the play, he learns, like Ranger, that it is not so easy to outwit a woman as he thought, especially one as sharp as the Widow Blackacre. Although he does win out, it is not without the wise advice of Manly who ultimately gets him to refuse to enslave himself by marrying the Widow on her terms. Freeman marries her only to make a permanent separation and to place himself in charge of her estate.

Manly, unlike Freeman, does believe women "have reason," but he thinks they are always "giving away profusely to worthless Flatterers," rather "than in paying just Debts" because they are jealous of the male's superiority, "they hate any thing that disturbs their admiration of themselves." "In short, all Women, like Fortune . . . and Rewards, are lost, by too much meriting" (act 4). The ironic ambiguity of the phrase "too much meriting" is telling. It means of course that women who seek to dominate men by too much female pride lose the chance of winning good men, but the statement also reveals Manly's own egotism as a stumbling block to his sexual success and personal happiness with women. Men who too much merit themselves are incapable of appreciating that some women are not trying to dominate or lessen the male; they do not understand that some women by refusing to give themselves immediately to the male are merely protecting themselves against loss of reputation should they be mistaken in their choice of the man or should he rebuff them for admitting their love. That is what Fidelity, disguised as a boy throughout the play, says to Manly in the same scene.

Manly, so caught up in his own blind self-meriting is about to rape Olivia to get his revenge on her. Fidelity what Wycherley wants to emphasize to the Restoration public, that these general images of the woman as angel and the woman as devil, as all witless or all intelligent and scheming, all constant or all inconstant are death traps for both men and women. Fidelity says, "Sure there are some, who have no other quarrel to a Lovers merit, but that it begets their despair of him." If, indeed, there are senseless women and jealous women trying to put men down, there are also women who are kept from the man they love only by the man's own blindness to them--by the male's self-meriting which causes him to court the wrong woman out of personal egotism instead of the right woman who would have him gladly. Wycherley shows through Fidelity's comments that men and women cannot be dealt with as general-

ities, categories, or stereotypes. They must be seen as individuals. Those women, just as those men, who have a moderate amount of cleverness cannot afford to give themselves to other men and women who do not appreciate them and who are not worth the sacrifice, nor can they deny themselves the chance of ever finding someone who might appreciate them. Harcourt was a skeptic until he saw how strikingly beautiful Alithea was and taught her, with Horner's advice, to become a sensible young woman; and Fidelia at the conclusion of The Plain Dealer teaches Manly that he can be wrong in his estimation of individual women, that it is possible to find a woman who can be faithful and constant to him no matter how difficult the struggle.

That it is possible for an intelligent and generous woman to teach a man to respect her without teaching him to lose respect for himself and give away to foppery, cunning, or violent retaliation on her sex seems to be one of Wycherley's points in The Gentleman Dancing Master in Hippolita's courtship of Gerrard. Hippolita, under great risk and locked in her father's house is sensible enough to lead Gerrard to sexual happiness, and through him to achieve it for herself. Her kind of lessoning of the man is a lessoning of herself as well, for she learns that she does not want a man who will sweep her off her feet and carry her away with no strings attached, nor does she want a man who wants her only for her money, but that she does want one who will respect her for the intelligence she has and have patience with her as a human being. It is an embarrassing learning experience for Gerrard's masculine pride, for in order to preserve her honor, he must endure the nonsense of pretense and dancing with a girl who refuses to run away with him and who he suspects may be playing him for a fool. Hippolita teaches him that to win a truly worthwhile woman, it is he who must risk his reputation in a courtship which, while it temporarily embarrasses him, will bring him marital honor in the end. Late in Act 4 when Gerrard's patience is about to give out, Hippol-

ita begs him, "For my sake be in humor" and asks that he keep up the pretense and dance just one more time before her father, Don Diego. Gerrard is so exasperated that he wants to reveal the truth to Don Diego, and he complains that Hippolita "pretends she can't do what she shou'd do, run away with him and give in to his masculinity and that she is not in humour, the common Excuse of Women for not doing what they shou'd do." But she tells him, "You wou'd not be so ungenerous, as to betray the Woman that hated you, I do not do that yet; for Heaven's sake for this once be more obedient to my desires than your passion." The man must for this once be secure enough in his own sense of manhood to endure the test of faith and to respect her need to dissemble her honor before her father so that Gerrard may have it afterward as her husband. As he dances the dance, Gerrard mutters to himself in anger and humiliation--"Fool'd and abus'd," "By such a piece of Innocency," "I am become her Sport," "Death, Hell, and the Devil," "Can you be so unconcern'd after all," "Hell and Damnation," "I can be fool no longer"--but he does temporarily do her bidding, and when the courtship is over and she thinks he can indeed respect her, she has no qualms about giving herself to him and letting him be her master for the rest of her life. I have earlier pointed out that Hippolita is a kind of model woman because she has sense and patience to teach--to lesson her man--without destroying his masculinity. She breaks him down momentarily, to build him up for ever with the gift of herself, a truly fine woman as a mate in the same way that Harcourt breaks down Alithea's false femininity to build her up with a better perspective on her sexual nature for the future. The false stereotype of male and female honor, the labels and generalities disappear if one can accept individuals as different, come to terms with oneself, and after risking or testing, reach a sense of contentment with one's own fate.

For the wise male, the search for a true mate may be never ending and as Manly learns may involve the ability to forsake violent retaliation against those who reject him as well as excessive praise of those who do not. The masculine predicament, similar to that of the woman's hard fate, is perhaps best summed up in a poem by Wycherley entitled "For Variety in Love. To a Mistress, who accus'd her Lover of Inconstancy; saying, She lov'd most and best, whilst he prov'd he lov'd her most, for loving more."<sup>45</sup> In the poem, while the male is described as loving all women he meets, his various sexual experiences all lead him back to his one love because he finds his other women all so inferior to her. The male, like Ranger in Love in a Wood, touches all levels of womankind, but somehow providentially is drawn back to his perfect mate. In the poem, the imagery of the male risking his masculinity with many women in a search for the perfect one is tied to a faith not only in "the blind God" of Love, Cupid, but in the Christian God and Providence as well. In having "so much Faith" in Providence that he has "no Free Will," by refusing to accept "this, or t'other Goddess" as his "Destiny," or his ultimate Fate, he hopes to find "The grace of some bright Angel" who will ultimately make his "Call, Election, sure." Thus his faith is so "Catholical" he loves all women who help him in attaining his goal. At first the poem sounds like an echo of the Frail Nymph, but we are brought out of the ridiculousness of that poem's ending by the concluding lines in which the poet says, "I find I love you best, / Since I love you most." His previous experiences with other women have lessoned him, as Milton suggests in his divorce tracts<sup>46</sup> to appreciate the true love he feels for this last love, whom he possesses now

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<sup>45</sup>Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 3:55-57.

<sup>46</sup>See Chapter II, above, pp. 50-51.

and constantly returns to, knowing her worth. Without the trial he would not have been able to recognize this last love for her supreme excellence over all the others: "But for our Comparison alone, / Of all things, we shou'd know the Worth of none."

The wise male must test and in the process be tested, according to Wycherley, so that he can attain "election." He must risk his manhood by encouraging the woman to discover herself and protecting her when she does; he must be prepared to change loves without ruining reputations until he attains the woman he regards as best, and who regards him as such. There is something profound in the linking of the discovery of the ultimate female with religious or heavenly election. Such a masculinity is a tough, manly acceptance of both the pleasure and the pain one receives from women and fate, a courageous continuation in a kind of faith in oneself and in the "blind God" who brings about learning and appreciation of the good through a gradual process of testing and experience.

That Wycherley was disappointed in his audiences' inability to learn from the mirror of sexual conflict he held up to them in his plays seems clear from his dedication of The Plain Dealer to Mrs. Bennett, the London Madam. Signing himself "The Plain Dealer," an indication that the opinions are his own, he not only criticizes Restoration women, but perhaps reveals his own sexual plight at the time his final play was published. He speaks as a poet too poor to gain the sexual favors of the lower class actresses who, like the Lucy of Love in a Wood, were desirous of more wealthy lovers to keep them. He speaks of being unwilling to temper his blunt and honest wit (as a Sir Jaspar might do) in order to win the favors of the ladies the likes of Lady Fidget or Squeamish. And, like Manly, he speaks of his disappointment that "most women now adays, apprehend Wit in a Lover" and so avoid an intelligent lover because "they hate a Man that knows 'em, they must have a blind easie

Fool, whom they can lead by the Nose, and as the Scythian Women of old, must baffle a Man, and put out his Eyes, ere they will lye with him, and then too, like Thieves, when they have plunder'd and stript a Man leave him." Finally, he speaks of his unwillingness to lower himself to be kept by some generous married woman just to enjoy another man's luxuries, like a Horner. Certainly in his plain dealing honesty about the Restoration woman and his own inability to find an honest one who would have him for love alone there is a ring of Manly's egotism; yet, while the overall tone of the dedication is biting and satirical, Wycherley does not allow himself to condemn all women. He has correctly appraised the false honor of these particular types of Restoration females, and he rightly regards himself as better than they; however, he will not be content to remain a bachelor and apart from society for the rest of his life. Instead, he will settle for an honest whore from Mrs. Bennett's house, one whose honest worth he knows, and will pay that value rather than debase his masculine honor with women who have no respect for him; but he will continue the search for the right woman, the one who can provide him "good husbandry" as he calls it. In that phrase is the recognition that such a woman may exist for him, and that because he refuses to resort to cunning, flattery, violence, or to turning his love into a mercenary bargain, that he is worthy enough to find her.

Like Gaspare in The Book of the Courtier who believed there was a value in telling women the truth and respecting them for what they are, Wycherley in his plays, attempted to tell Restoration women the truth about themselves-- not simply to hurt or insult them, though he did do just that, but to free them from falling victim to their own vanity and to help them and the Restoration male to a plain-dealing acceptance of genuine sexual honor.

## CHAPTER IV

### PLAIN DEALING

It is fitting to conclude this study of William Wycherley and his moral view with an exploration of the concept of plain dealing, since there is perhaps no moral concept so closely associated with Wycherley and since from the success of his final play, The Plain Dealer, Wycherley adopted that title as a kind of personal signature.

The O.E.D. defines plain dealing as "openness and sincerity of conduct; absence of subterfuge; candour, straightforwardness," and delineates a plain dealer as "one who is straightforward and candid in his relations with others." According to the examples of its usage in the O.E.D. it is associated with righteousness, honesty, and lack of dissimulation. Ben Ross Schneider considers it an aspect of generosity and quotes Lady Mary Montague to prove the point. He explains that plain dealing or truth telling is generous because "it is a graceful gift of one's talents for the welfare and well being of one's friends." But it is generous also because the plain dealer courageously runs the risk of receiving retaliation or condemnation from the very individuals he desires to befriend by his generous gift of truth and useful advice.<sup>1</sup>

In Shakespeare's King Lear, for example, Kent, a plain dealer, speaks truth to the king ("To plainness honour's bound when majesty falls to fol-

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<sup>1</sup>Schneider, p. 96.

ly" act 1, sc. i., lines 150-151.),<sup>2</sup> and suffers for his generosity. Though banished, he is so concerned for Lear's welfare that he returns in disguise to aid the king and willingly offers his services to the man until death. The concept of plain dealing as exemplified by Kent is clearly related to a sincere motivation in the plain dealer to help Lear moderate his self-centered view of the world, to open his eyes to the truth as the plain dealing Kent sees it. But Lear is so overcome with his own sense of infallible judgment that he cannot see the flaw in himself which makes him an imperfect human being in a fallen world. In seeking to open men's eyes to the truth of the fallible human condition, the plain dealer helps fallen man adjust to his state in the real world--and thus to better accept his fate and fortune, and his relationship to the powers of the universe.

But how can a plain dealer tell others about their flaws, when he himself is fallible? The concept of plain dealing is one of honest truth telling, but it is made more complex by considerations of the plain dealer's own motivation and his intellectual awareness and modest acceptance of his own capacity for human error. If a plain dealer gives advice to others believing his judgment to be infallible, no matter how sincere he may be, he is liable to be ridiculed by those who see him as the very likeness of what he criticizes--and rightly so, for he is a fool whose blindness concerning his own capacity for error proves he deserves the ridicule he receives. If a plain dealer refuses to accept his own fallibility and sanctimoniously credits himself with having told the truth, he can as the evil Cornwall says of plain dealers, "Harbour more craft, and more corrupter ends, / Than twenty silly ducking observants that stretch their duties nicely" (King Lear, act 2, sc. ii., lines 101-110). A plain dealer who criticizes others under

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<sup>2</sup>William Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. Russell Fraser, The Signet Classic Shakespeare (New York: New American Library, 1963).

the pretense of helping them while actually intentionally leading them astray, becomes a double dealer ( for example, one may note the pretended friendship Maskwell has for Mellefont in Congreve's play The Double Dealer ). But if the plain dealer speaks his mind honestly with the sincere motivation of helping mankind, aware that his own perception of truth may be flawed, if he is willing to learn from the experience of risking his opinion in the world, then he is not only a true plain dealer, but a wise man as well.

The true plain dealer, then, is the man bold enough, manly enough, to share himself and his perceptions with the world and run the risk of being ridiculed for what he believes. He is man enough to accept his fate as the product of his own actions, and wise enough to believe that being imperfect, he is neither always wrong nor always right. Thus, he has tremendous courage and faith in himself, imperfect as he is, and a hope that, though his present state may be one of error, his ultimate fate need not necessarily be so. The plain dealer's courage in accepting his nature and continuing to live in the world sets him apart from the blind misanthrope who, considering himself superior to the world and thus condemning it, seeks to escape from it to some other world where he can be better appreciated. Shakespeare treats such a plain dealer, Apemantus and such a misanthrope, Timon, in his play, Timon of Athens; and Wycherley, borrowing extensively from Moliere's The Misanthrope, uses similar plain dealing and misanthropic concepts in his The Plain Dealer.

The Wycherley play has always presented critics with problems. Boname Dobree called it "a strange thorny monster" and asked, "How is criticism to approach this play?".<sup>3</sup> Norman Holland tells us that The Plain Dealer "is more discussed than any other Restoration comedy except The Way of the World, yet

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<sup>3</sup>Dobree, p. 88.

no play is more commonly misunderstood." Holland himself provides the best summary of the play's critical ups and downs. Since much of the plot-line is borrowed from Moliere's The Misanthrope, the play has been tossed back and forth between those who admire the clean structure of the French play and those who prefer the broader and bolder English model. Since Manly and The Plain Dealer were both acceptable nicknames for Wycherley himself, it is common for critics to claim that the honesty meant for ridicule in The Misanthrope "becomes the virtue praised" in The Plain Dealer. Holland thinks "the action of The Plain Dealer is to educate two idealists, Manly and Fidelia, by dragging them through the very mire they despise," teaching them that "reality itself--is part pretense and deception is a condition of existence," but that "though dissimulation may be an evil, there are more basic goods and evils concealed beneath its surface."<sup>4</sup>

Other critics see the play as a debate between Manly and Freeman. Rose Zimbardo in her thesis on Wycherley's works as a link in the development of English satire prefers to argue that the play is a formal satire, with Manly as "the envious malcontent-satirist, who is guilty, in desire or in fact, of the vices he rails at in others" and Freeman as *adversarius*, "the more comical, clever-parasite-satirist, who both ridicules and exploits the vices he detects," with the satiric debate played out against Restoration society as a background.<sup>5</sup>

To Virginia Birdsall, the play is also a debate, but one between Manly representing satire as a genre and standing for the belief that evil can be

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<sup>4</sup>Holland, pp. 96-97, 105, 107.

<sup>5</sup>Rose Zimbardo, Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 73, 127-128.

abolished, and Freeman representing comedy as a genre, believing that one must accept the best of a bad situation and winning.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing interpretation of the play is that put forward by J. Auffret: that Wycherley patterned his dramatic characters on genuine personalities well known to Restoration society. Thus, though Manly may be to some extent "Alceste englished" and "Wycherley himself," he is largely based on the personality and events in the life of John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave. Olivia is a composite of Barbara Villiers and Moll Kirke (both mistresses to Mulgrave, and the former a mistress to Wycherley as well). Vernish is Sir Thomas Vernon; Freeman is a composite of Henry Savile and Henry Bulkeley, and Novel is Lord Mordaunt.<sup>7</sup>

If modern critics of the play have had trouble interpreting it, however, there is some consolation in knowing that the same was true of the play's first audiences. We are told by John Dennis that "upon the first representation of The Plain Dealer, the Town, as the Authour has often told me, appeard Doubtfull what Judgment to Form of it." It was not until Buckingham, Rochester, Musgrave, Dorsett, Savil, Buckley, Sir John Denham and Mr. Waller, the popular wits of the day, gave it "loud approbation" that it gained "both a sudden and a lasting reputation." Dennis himself called the play "a most instructive, and a most noble Satire upon the Hypocrisy and Villainy of Mankind" and praised Wycherley for "being, indeed, almost the only Man alive who has made Comedy instructive in its Fable; almost all the

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<sup>6</sup>Birdsall, p. 158.

<sup>7</sup>J. Auffret, "Wycherley et ses maitres les Moralistes," Etudes Anglaises 15 (1962):375-388.

rest, being contented to instruct by their Characters.<sup>8</sup> This criticism certainly suggests that the value of the play has to do with the outcome of the plot line and that it was regarded as having a definite moral or instructive value to mankind. The same praise of the moral value of the play is suggested by John Dryden who praised Wycherley for having "oblig'd all Honest and Virtuous Men, by one of the most Bold, most General, and most Useful Satyrs, which has been presented on the English theatre."<sup>9</sup>

I believe the way to approach the play from a critical standpoint is to ask the question: "What is the moral lesson The Plain Dealer provides for the 'Honest and Virtuous Man'?" Modern critics have noted the moral implications of the play, but they generally only touch upon them in pursuing other points of explication. Zimbardo says Manly becomes a "Morality Everyman, the subject of a study in the corrosive effects of hypocrisy upon an individual soul" and Fidelia is a kind of cross between "morality play figure" and a pastoral character, a "Faithful to Manly's Everyman."<sup>10</sup>

Holland notes with a certain discomfort that "Manly . . . is rewarded as though he were touched by God," and says that the "artificiality of virtue's triumph" at the end of the play "hints at another world where such miraculous absurdities can be." Manly and his end-of-the-play reward give us a "glimpse of a supernatural quality beyond good and evil."<sup>11</sup> He says that Wycherley's play "cannot be understood except in terms of a half-rational absolute," yet he does not permit himself to say that this "hint" or "glimpse"

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<sup>8</sup>The Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. Edward Miles Hooker, 2 vols. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939 & 1943; 2nd Printing, MLA, 1964), 2:277, 1:157.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Langbaine, p. 515.

<sup>10</sup>Zimbardo, pp. 141, 144.

<sup>11</sup>Holland, p. 108.

of the "supernatural," this "half-rational absolute" could be Christian faith. That Wycherley should actually be recommending Christianity as a way of life (at least his own plain dealing version of it) in what is regarded as an otherwise tough and realistic play is evidently hard for even modern critics of Restoration era drama to swallow, as must be the thought of Christianity being a realistic solution to life rather than a half-rational ideal. Yet it is precisely this position that Wycherley seems to have taken in The Plain Dealer, turning the play into a kind of lesson for individual man on how to find happiness and contentment in the world by adopting a Christian philosophy. While the play's quotidian plot line is that of Manly's struggle to convince himself Olivia is unworthy of his love, and the subplot deals with Freeman's attempts to reduce the Widow Blackacre to submission, by mirroring these struggles of male and female to find a satisfactory mate, Wycherley metaphorically provides a plain dealing look at man's relationship to God and his foolish attempts to control his own fortune by asserting his free will over that of Providence. To understand this view of the play, we must first understand Wycherley's plain dealing view of the human condition and his attitude toward the attainment of earthly happiness, and then apply this background to the play.

That Wycherley's concept of plain dealing is the same as that discussed above may be seen from a brief look at his writings on the problems an individual faces attempting to live successfully in the world. Wycherley seems always to recommend that man rely on the truth of his nature: "Since nothing in our Nature can be thought, / Our Shame or Blame, if it be not our Fau't; / Who are, or not, as made by Providence, / Whose Act in us, cannot

be our Offence, / Our want of Reason, is our Innocence."<sup>12</sup> Yet to think that one's nature is perfect in its fallen state is a drastic error. Wycherley is particularly aware of the fallibility of man's natural reason. In a poem entitled, "In Praise of Ignorance . . . ," he states that the "more we know, the less we know, we know . . . ."<sup>13</sup> Right reason, in fact, to Wycherley, is the acknowledgement of one's fallibility, for he writes in "Upon the Impertinence of Knowledge . . ." that the wisest man knows that the truth of his reasoning "must on its doubtfulness rely:"

For Reason's none, which against Nature goes;  
 Since Nature gets the better of it still,  
 Man's Reason then is no more Sense, but Will,  
 His vain Sense, with his Senses so to vie,  
 His Liberty, with Fate's Necessity  
 Tho' more in vain still, as he more does try;  
 Who is (as more his Sense,) more Obstinate,  
 In his opposing his Will, to his Fate;  
 By Reas'ning Want of Sense, to justifie,  
 Whose Truth, must on its Doubtfulness rely,  
 Yet stands on it's Infallibility.<sup>14</sup>

It is only when a man ignores modest right reason and is driven by vanity to believe his reason infallible that he becomes a fool and brings about his own unhappiness. The man who either unduly praises his own virtues or blames himself for his faults in public, according to Wycherley shows his ridiculousness:

If we speak well, or ill, of ourselves, we shew but less of our Wit  
 the more we would shew it: For, if we speak well of Ourselves, we  
 but provoke the World, which loves Contradiction, into a Scrutiny

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<sup>12</sup>"Upon the Impertinence of Knowledge, the Unreasonableness of Reason, and the Brutality of Humanity; proving the Animal Life the most Reasonable Life, since the most Natural, and most Innocent," lines 149-153, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 3:149-154.

<sup>13</sup>"In Praise of Ignorance; which is, as least Knowledge, most Wisdom. Dedicated to the Court; nay, to all sorts of Courts," line 152, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 4:55-59.

<sup>14</sup>"Upon the Impertinence of Knowledge, . . . ," lines 43-53.

of our Faults; if we speak ill of Ourselves, 'tis understood that we do it, but that others might think well of us. Now to publish our Imperfections is Impudence, and seems as we would glory in them, and to make known our Virtues is likewise Impudence; so turns our Desire of Reputation to our Miscredit, and defames Ourselves and Sense most by our Affectation of Praise.

Certainly Wycherley paints a bleak and frustrating picture of man's ability to express his sincere motives to the world. No matter what man says or does he will be looked upon as acting from the most selfish of motives. "Whatever Humility we superficially profess in Conduct, it is but an artificial cloak to our Pride; and we are ever fond of being d<sup>i</sup>stinguish'd, and pointed out, even when we most affect obscurity."<sup>15</sup> But although man's actions and words are likely to be judged unfavorably by the standards of the world, Wycherley does not suggest that a wise man hide from the world in inferiority, nor that he withdraw from the world assuming he is superior to it:

Man was no more to live alone design'd,  
A shameful Renegade from Humane Kind;  
Than him his wise just Maker did create  
A public Slave to drag the Yoke of State<sup>16</sup>

The wise man, according to Wycherley, takes a middle road, speaks when necessity requires it and speaks as honestly as he can with the knowledge that his opinions may be in error. "The Words of true Wits are Slow, because they stay to drag Weighty Judgment along with 'em, well knowing, if their Wit loses its Guide, (their Reason) it may lose its Way, and End."<sup>17</sup>

A man's reason to Wycherley is only good in so far as it points man to his own need for caution in arriving at judgments. The modest man, aware of his flawed state, is like the man in the innocence of original nature, the

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<sup>15</sup>"Introduction," to Posthumous Works in Complete Works 4:107,106.

<sup>16</sup>"The Various Mix'd Life, against the Constant Publick or Private Life," lines 22-25, Miscellaneous Poems, Etc. by Mr. Wycherley, Posthumous Works, in Complete Works 4:147-150.

<sup>17</sup>"The Preface," Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 3:10.

golden age before the fall, but the moment he begins to assert his reason and to insist upon his judgments of others, the more he becomes the victim of his own self righteous blindness. If his attitude is self righteous, he has allowed his reason to run away with him and

As more his Sense, so more is his Offence;  
 Who Pow'r thence, to himself does arrogate,  
 To judge his Maker, and oppose his Fate;  
 Who, for his Sense, can less his Mind fulfill,  
 Yet, wou'd, on others Sense, impose his Will;  
 By's Reason, more unreas'nable to grow,  
 To think, all other Mens, by his shou'd go,  
 Who want that Reason, his for Truth, to know;

To be carried away by one's own blind reasoning, forcing one's opinions on the world is unnatural, an extreme of the individual who falls into the trap of trusting his reason as infallible. But it would be equally unnatural to allow "others apprehensions, check his own" to the point where he becomes an unnatural slave "to Custom" by acceding always to the will of society,<sup>18</sup> pleasing others and thus denying one's own views out of fear of being publicly humiliated for expressing oneself. Wycherley's poem, "Ease the Wish and Endeavour of all Men, Lost by Their too eager Pursuit of It," is almost self explanatory. In it, he demonstrates that man's desire for ease or personal happiness leads him into either troublesome industry or troublesome lethargy to attain it--and neither is successful, bringing unrest and dissatisfaction:

Let Wise Men then, who most seek Ease,  
 The disappointing Search give o'er,  
 Since they will but enjoy it less,  
 As anxiously they seek it more;  
 Alone at Ease is that well-judging He,  
 Who thinks, in Life, there no such thing can be.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>"Upon the Impertinence of Knowledge, . . . ," lines 31-38, 58-62.

<sup>19</sup>Stanza 7, lines 1-6, Posthumous Works, in Complete Works 4:181-182.

Wycherley's plain dealing comment on the human predicament is that man must accept his fallible reasoning ability, accept the truth of his own nature and calmly assert it as he seems honestly motivated, learning from the experience. If one does not let his reason run away with him and doesn't try to force one's fate, either by pushing too hard or holding back too much, one will attain a kind of ease in the midst of struggle and an attitude toward life that is neither too pessimistic nor optimistic about the future. In his "To an Ingenious Young Man so Sollicitous for the future that he neglected the present," Wycherley says to "secure" future happiness one must "spend well the present Hour." "Each bold, wise, good Man," he says, "makes his Will his Fates" and, giving himself completely to his own God given nature, will spend "this Life well," and fear "no future States." Such a person is "fortunate in spite of Fortune here," and recognizes that if fortune is not good for him on earth, he will be "most blest elsewhere;" he "Makes his Life blissful here by his Content, / Forms no vain Hopes, and does vain Fears prevent."

We should not idly murmur at our State,  
 Since as we here are all but Guests to Fate,  
 We ought, as Guests, our Treater's Time to wait;  
 Nor, e'er we come our Treatment to receive,  
 What it will prove be too inquisitive;  
 Since all sound Minds, like all sound Stomaches, are  
 Still the least curious how they're like to fare:  
 For as it is the Stomach, not the Meat,  
 Which to it self, makes good or bad the Treat;  
 So the good Mind, with whatsoe'er can come,  
 Is satisfied, since satisfied at Home;  
 Pleas'd less by th' Appetites which it supplies,  
 Than by those things which it to them denies:  
 Whilst the weak Mind, like all weak Appetites,  
 In far-fetch'd Curiosities delight;  
 And most its certain Weakness does imply,  
 As only gratified with Novelty.

By going "In search of future Knowledge, Joys and Rest, / We of the present do ourselves divest," and so we make ourselves uneasy when we needn't be:

Our Care the Menaces of Fate to Shun,  
 Does not retard, but drag 'em sooner down,  
 Makes sure the Mischiefs we but dread from Fate,  
 Speeds their Arrival, and prolongs their Date.  
 Fore-knowledge then the worst Imprudence is,  
 Which makes us Joys in our Possession miss;  
 And, by a most improvident Forecast,  
 Urge on the Future, and the Present waste.  
 Thus we imaginary Evils bring,  
 By our vain Fears, to solid Suffering;  
 unanxious then of what the Powers decree,  
 Let's learn a wise Insensibility;

.....  
 Knowing our selves we best our Fates might know.  
 Our settled Minds once brought to crave no more  
 Than what Heaven grants, we baffle Fortune's power;

.....  
 We only can be happy, or be wise,  
 As most our Appetites we compromise;  
 As we our Actions and our Wills resign  
 To what's thought fitting by the Powers Divine;  
 Who, since all humane things uncertain are,  
 Desiring nothing, nothing have to fear;  
 Our present, and our future Ills prevent,  
 Whilst we to all, we cannot shun, consent,  
 And, spite of Fortune blest, preserve a fix'd content.<sup>20</sup>

The "wise insensibility" he recommends is a kind of acceptance of free will and predestination--both in a mysterious paradox, an easy assent to fortune and one's nature at the same time, with the willingness to assert oneself honestly and the courage to face the outcome and accept it as the intention of "the Powers Divine." This is a learning attitude. In his "Invocation to Fortune," Wycherley praises bad fortune as the best of teachers since when we receive only the gifts of good fortune "our Sense" or reason is taken "from us" and we forget our fallible nature, but "Ill Fortune" is the "best Muse sure" because "both Wit and Judgment best is taught" by it.<sup>21</sup> One is

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<sup>20</sup>To an Ingenious Young Man, so Sollicitous for the Future that he neglected the Present," Posthumous Works, in Complete Works 4:173-175.

<sup>21</sup>"The Invocation to Fortune, the best Aid, and Encourager of Wit, tho' call'd the Patroness of Fools," Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 3:94-96.

reminded of Jupiter's sudden descent in Shakespeare's Cymbeline to set straight those family spirits moaning over the injustice Posthumous is having to suffer on earth: "Hush! . . . / Whom best I love I cross to make my gift, / The more delayed, delighted. Be content."<sup>22</sup>

Wycherley's "wise insensibility" is a kind of ignorance. Since one's imperfection neither guarantees all good fate nor all bad fate, one may act in good conscience and hope for what one deserves. In "Praise of Ignorance," Wycherley states

Ignorance is our Happy'st State of all,  
For such was Adam's, e'er he had his Fall;  
So, 'twas his Knowledge was his First Offence;  
But for which, he had kept his Innocence;  
Man's first Blest State of Ignorance, it was,  
Which now, for that of Innocence does pass,  
Since Knowledge was Man's Guilt, so his Disgrace;  
The State of Ignorance then does suffice,  
Like that of Grace, for our Necessities,  
Which them, for Want of Knowledge, best supplies;<sup>23</sup>

In his poem, "The Good Conscience, the only Certain, Lasting Good; since the only in Our own Power, and out of Fortune's," Wycherley emphasizes that the inner peace of this wise insensibility and faith in oneself and one's nature, comes from one's personal sincerity and honesty. The "good conscience" is an inner peace which enables one to be "Free, though in Gaol; and though in Pain, at Ease." It is not "Good Luck," he explains, but "the Good Mind, that / Makes the Good Life, and the Most Happy State," and it is likewise the Good Mind that "Rewards itself . . . best, in spite of Fate."

So Man's Good Conscience is its own Relief,  
From Passion, Shame, Misery, Fear, or Grief;  
From Nature's Debt to Death, the best Release,  
Whilst Wealth without it, makes Man less at Ease;

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<sup>22</sup>William Shakespeare, Cymbeline, ed. Richard Hosley, *The Signet Classic Shakespeare* (New York: New American Library, 1968), act 5, sc. 4, lines 70-74.

<sup>23</sup>"In Praise of Ignorance . . . ," lines 118-127.

But he must live well in the Poorest State,  
 Who still contented is with his own Fate,  
 In spite of Fortune, be most Fortunate.

The Good Mind makes men "Just and Innocent," bold in their actions, yet capable of being "Judge, Party, . . . Witness" to themselves as well:

Our Crimes may 'scape, the Judges, and the Law,  
 But conscience our own Lives will judge, and aw;  
 Within itself, will to its own self, do  
 Justice, itself condemn, and punish too;  
 Is, to its own Crimes so, but most severe,  
 Since its own Judge, and Executioner;  
 Its Forum too, from whence none can Appeal,  
 Where Man, of his own Justice, cannot fail,  
 And the Sole, which Innocence needs not fear,  
 Yet where most Punish'd, but the Best Men are;  
 So Conscience, even here, is Heav'n, or Hell.<sup>24</sup>

Wycherley's view of life as it appears in his writings, is indeed that of plain dealing, brave and bold; he everywhere recommends that one assert oneself in what, with one's good conscience one thinks right, and then learn to live and accept the consequences with an equally good conscience. Such a plain dealer has faith in his own innocent and honest nature, trust in his own good conscience and knowledge of his fallibility, and thus makes what could be a life of struggle into a life of exciting adventure. A further look at Wycherley's concept of plain dealing shows that it is highly Christian. Indeed in a poem entitled "In Praise of Laziness," Wycherley calls this plain dealing wisely insensible philosophy an example of both "true Stoicism," "Heathen Philosophy," and "True Faith," "Christian Faith."<sup>25</sup>

Just as Wycherley points out that no man's actions or words will be judged well in the eyes of the world, Christianity teaches that if one tries

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<sup>24</sup>"The Good Conscience, the only Certain, Lasting Good; since, the only in Our own Power, and out of Fortune's," Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 3:266-268.

<sup>25</sup>"In Praise of Laziness," Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 4:23-5.

to live up to the laws or rules of society, he will find it an impossibility. St. Paul, who also called himself a plain dealer ("Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech" 2 Cor. 3:12), preached that adherence to the Old Testament laws and ceremonies of society served only to open men's eyes to their own sins. Both Wycherley and Paul taught that no matter how sincere man's inner motives, to the world at large his actions would always appear to be those of an imperfect being trying to make himself more than he is. St. Paul makes this point vividly clear in regard to himself and his ministry when he explains that however much he desires to do good, he can always see that he is doing evil--"The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19). Since his exterior action is viewed as evil though his intention is good, and since he believes that through Christ (the way, the truth, and the light) he has been set free from sin, he is able to rationalize: "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:20). Made aware of the imperfection of his flesh, but encouraged by his faith in the truth--the Christ that sets him free and allows him to have a good conscience of the spirit--Paul can face life with hope.

Caught in the frustration of being a fallen human being and subject to the judgment of others for one's actions, one is constantly being proven sinful in the eyes of the world and its law--in the eyes of the Old Testament concept of morality. To go on living in an attempt to attain perfection under that Old Testament law is to live a life of frustration and disappointment, for no matter what one does, he will fall short of perfection in his fallible state. His guilt will lead him to dissimulation or to impudent self-assertion, and both of these will in turn, cause him greater frustration. St. Paul explains, however, that just as all men fell by Adam's sin and

"judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of ~~our~~ the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. 5:18). And the free gift of course was Christ, God's gift of love. To St. Paul it is the ability to step beyond the law and to remove the veil with which the Old Testament law blinds men's minds and hearts (2 Cor. 3) to the truth, the Christ that is in them. It is in fact a kind of unselfish-self love which brings men liberty of spirit. When one accepts faith in Christ, Paul preached, one is no longer afraid to live his life, for "as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:2). It is this very plain dealing in spite of one's known imperfection, yet with the faith of being one with God in spirit that I believe is identical to the "wise insensibility" state which Wycherley recommends. It is this "wise insensibility," this Christianity, which brings men back to the innocence of the golden age and the Garden of Eden. If one follows this philosophy and asserts himself in the world as a plain dealer, or a Christian, he may be misunderstood, rebuked, or ridiculed for his actions, he may come to see that his actions have at times served the law of the flesh and sin, but he will remain secure--in "fix'd content" that because his motivation or spirit is correct and he understands his fallible or imperfect position in the universe, that he is serving the law of God or acting as Providence intends. The law of the flesh leads to sin and death, but acceptance of the truth leads to a manly knowledge of one's fallible condition and the Christian courage to face one's fate with the hope of a better life to come. St. Paul stoutly defends in his New Testament letters that man can, indeed, be saved by faith alone, if he keeps God's law in his

heart and his conscience bears witness to his moderation in making judgments of others (Rom. 2:15). St. Paul's message of faith and Wycherley's plain dealing trust in the Good Conscience and a wise insensibility are identical and Christian. It is this Christian message which I believe Wycherley attempts to present in The Plain Dealer, his last play.

Manly, the central character in The Plain Dealer, is at the play's beginning totally confident in his own infallible sense of judgment and resentful of a world that seems unable to reward him for his seemingly obvious superior worth; he is like the selfish and blindly egotistical natural man of Hobbes's Leviathan and is definitely a misanthrope. He cannot tolerate Lord Plausible's habit of "speaking well of Mankind" because it "takes away the Reputation of the few good men in the world, by making all alike" (act 1), and of course, it denies Manly's own individual worth, something Manly cannot tolerate. He boasts of his singularity and his ability to "walk alone" rather than submit to the "supercilious Forms, and slavish Ceremonies" of society which would rob him of his identity. Rather than embrace a man he hates and criticize him behind his back, he says he would insult him to his face and thus "do a rude thing, rather than an unjust thing." Unlike others who "esteem men onely by the marks and value Fortune has set upon 'em," Manly claims to value the "Intrinsick worth" of a man, yet when he throws Plausible out of his lodgings he conveniently saves his truly insulting comments as asides to the audience and reserves a "God be w'ye, my Lord," for Plausible's ears. He is blind to the inner worth of the sailors who saved his life and literally kicks them out of his presence, and he is totally unable to see the "Intrinsick" value of Fidelia and Freeman when they claim to be his genuine friends. Fidelia, he thinks, is nothing but a cowardly flatterer in her praise to him and he calls Freeman a "latitudinarian in friendship, that is,

no Friend" because he sides "With all Mankind, but wilt suffer for none." Manly wishes to assert himself and his opinions on society in all plain dealing honesty, but he does not realize his own judgment is flawed.

If Manly is so sure of his own nature that he is blind to his fallen state, Freeman represents the opposite extreme. He is so faithful a Hobbesian man that he everywhere appears to have submitted himself to the exterior rules and regulations, the authority of society, while underneath this appearance he is free in a kind of Machiavellian sense to think, feel and act as he pleases. As the cast of characters suggests, he is "A Complyer with the Age," and this is precisely why Manly objects to him. To make him a friend, Manly fears, would mean accepting all those "Pimps, Flatterers, Detractors and Cowards, stiff nodding Knaves and suppliant kissing Fools," whom Manly hates in the world. But Freeman denies he is "Friend to all those" he "hugg'd, kiss'd, flatter'd, bow'd too." "When their backs were turn'd," he boasts, "did I not tell you they were Rogues, Villains, Rascals, whom I despis'd and hated." "Telling truth," according to Freeman, "is a quality as prejudicial, to a man that wou'd thrive in the World, as square Play to a Cheat, or true Love to a Whore!" To Freeman, Manly is "severer than the Law," for it allows men to deceive others and hide the truth about themselves, while Manly will not. Freeman urges Manly to watch how men act together "on the Exchange, in Westminster Hall, or the Galleries in Whitehall." The business of the world, he explains, is conducted with the same selfish and hypocritical principles Freeman himself proposes and against Manly's "Particular Notions," Freeman maintains, "I have the practice of the whole world." Manly of course is proud that he cannot understand such a world. It is, he explains, like the purposeless "Bay's Grand Dance" in The Rehearsal (a satirical play by Buckingham) in which men of title bow to those of less and so

tread round in a preposterous huddle of Ceremony to each other, whil'st they can hardly hold their solemn false countenances."

Obviously Manly's extreme of letting all of his imperfection unknowingly be unleashed on the world is too ridiculous not to be ridiculed in its blind egotism, but it is likewise blind egotism to assume one can play deceitful games of flattery to people's faces and always tell the truth behind one's back. Freeman is so caught up in his own superior reasoning ability that he blindly assumes that by compliance with the age he can secretly remain honest to himself, while Manly believes that by giving in to his every personal impression, his supposedly genuine nature, that he is being honest with himself. Both of these positions--excessive reason and excessive nature--are too extreme. Both men are in danger of losing their personal goal of individual happiness if they pursue their desires, their blind concept of truth, to the extreme. Manly's extreme either forces him upon the world, whether it appreciates him or not, or else it causes him to reject the world outright; and Freeman's extreme leads him to the false assumption that by always flattering and pleasing the world, one can realize one's desires and happiness in hiding one's true self. Both extremes of asserting oneself as superior to society and of losing one's identity in conforming to society are unnatural, and as Manly and Freeman pursue these goals, each loses sight of his genuine nature. As we have seen, a moderate view of self understanding and adherence to social custom is the moral view Wycherley maintains, and as a playwright he is concerned to bring each of these men to a better understanding of himself through association with the other. The great theme of the play is how an individual can learn to live wisely and contentedly in the world.

Manly, believing himself superior to the world, boasts that he has a true heart and thus can have only one friend and one mistress. These are, of

course, the one man and one woman who appear to agree with all his views. Vernish is his one friend--"fit to advise, to keep a secret: to fight and dye for his friend" and worth "a thousand friends in one," according to Manly; but Vernish's good qualities are rather unusual. He possesses, Manly explains, "the courage of men in despair, yet the diffidency and caution of cowards; the secresie of the Revengeful, and the constancy of Martyrs." Courage, diffidence, secresy and constancy may be fine qualities, but in conjunction with despair, cowardliness, and martyrdom they are a better description of Manly's own qualities which he is too blind to see for himself. The O.E.D. explains that Vernish is an obscure and rare form of the word varnish, something used to "paint over" reality, to give "specious gloss or outward show; a pretense." Manly has, in adopting Vernish as his friend, covered over reality with his own glossy, egotistical sense of superiority over the world. In the blindness to his own pride, he has set about embellishing, adorning, and beautifying this personal evaluation of the world, coating it so thickly with self deceit that he can no longer see genuine truth. Blinded by his own vanity, which he believes to be his friend, he has become a martyr to his own blindness.<sup>26</sup>

Manly's mistress is Olivia (his ideal view of life, so to speak). She is so "perfect a Beauty, that art cou'd not better it, nor Affectation deform it . . . . Her tongue as well as her face, ne'r knew Artifice; nor ever did her words or looks contradict her heart: She is all truth, and hates the lying, masking, daubing World, as I do; for which I love her." In act 4, Plausible and Novel who are equally taken in by Olivia, compare her both to fortune and to a looking glass: "she stands in the drawing-room, like the

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<sup>26</sup>Vernish as a character has also hidden his true nature from Manly by appearing to be his best friend while secretly helping Olivia to gain Manly's fortune and then marrying her.

Glass, ready for all Comers to set their Gallantry by her: and, like the Glass, too, lets no man go from her, unsatisfied with himself." Manly has taken Olivia's image to be ultimate truth, but she is only a reflection of himself; he has made himself the victim of his own ego mirrored in her surface appearance only. Olivia confirms this fact later in the play when she says: "I knew he lov'd his own singular moroseness so well, as to dote upon any Copy of it; wherefore I feign'd an hatred to the World too, that he might love me in earnest," and again, "he that distrusts most the World, trusts most to himself, and is but the more easily deceiv'd, because he thinks he can't be deceiv'd: his cunning is like the Coward's Sword, by which he is oftner worsted, than defended" (act 4).

In taking Olivia as his image of perfection, he has turned his own blind imperfection into an ideal. Unless he attains her, all is failure. Prevented from carrying Olivia to the Indies by her relatives, he leaves her in the hands of his friend Vernish, and takes command of a ship "to avoid the World." Like the misanthrope who cannot get the world to acclaim him for his views nor succeed in getting it to grant him his ideal, he desires to leave it forever. If he cannot attain his heaven on earth, he will quit the struggle. But his attempt to leave England or the world, has all the earmarks of a child who holds his breath in order to gain attention from those who will not give him his way. Out in the Channel, his ship is met and sunk by the Dutch, and Manly is forced back to London.

In act 1, the two sailors have an interesting discussion about Manly's motives. Tom says that Manly sank his own ship so neither the enemy Dutch nor the landlubberly courtiers could have it. Jack, the other sailor, who pulled Manly from the sea, suggests that Manly's motives were less honorable. Manly's weariness with the world looked more like a desire for death to him. He cannot believe that Manly, who has such a "rough and angry" spirit could

ever have been content if his utopian world or heaven on earth had really come true, so the implication is that Manly sank the ship so that he neither would have to live with his ideal nor face the imperfection of the earth, but could simply escape both. Indeed Manly gave Jack a box on the ear and called him a fawning waterdog for saving him from death. Manly's retreat from the world seems to be the suicidal action of a man who, seeing life only as good or bad unconsciously fears the attainment of either as a permanent fate or ultimate destiny and so seeks a permanent escape from the possibility of either. Wycherley, acting as a kind of Providence in structuring the incidents of the play, makes it clear from the outset that such nonsense is impossible. It is as if Manly would like to escape the ultimate fate of Heaven or Hell and desires, like an animal, to become simply nonexistent. Wycherley, by bringing him back, forces him to come to terms with a moral view of his fate in the universe as well as to accept the human condition. The shipwreck over, Manly is forced back into the world, back to London, where he must come to grips with his own faulty human nature and gain a better mirror image of its reality than his Olivia, who is, interestingly enough, on his return, now secretly married to Vernish (a wedding of vanity and the false ideal).

As we have seen earlier, Wycherley's writings in regard to a retreat from the world are clear. His Maxim CCLXXIV states, "There is no Difference betwixt an absolute Retreat from the World and a Grave . . . ." Right reason, Wycherley tells us "persuades us to Society, without which Men wou'd live most brutally" since their "sneaking Solitude . . . is more brutal Selfishness, / And proves Man's Vanity, to think that he could to himself so all sufficient be;" in such circumstances, man's "Sense, does to his Reason yield,

but lives, against his Sense and Nature; Wild."<sup>27</sup> Wycherley refuses to allow Manly to be a beast, wild in his freedom, uncontrollable in his blind ignorance of his own fallible nature. By the ending of act 1, having brought Manly into conversation with Freeman, he has begun Manly's civilizing process. If Olivia is a kind of mirror of Manly's faulty ideal, it is reason represented by Freeman which brings Manly to an awareness of her falsity, and Fidelia or truth which ultimately saves Manly from destroying himself as a result of what his reason helps him to discover. Indeed Freeman, Manly's lieutenant, and Fidelia, Manly's volunteer, seem to share Manly's lodgings with him as if, in an allegorical sense, they were other aspects of his identity. It is, in fact, Freeman's questioning of Olivia's virtues, which is a part of his promise to help Fidelia win Manly's friendship, that sets the play in motion. In order to prove Freeman wrong in his questioning of Olivia's perfection, Manly takes Freeman and Fidelia to see Olivia in her own home.

In act 2, we discover that Olivia is indeed the very reflection of Manly's blind egotism, a total hypocrite, refusing to admit any of her own flaws. Though she hates "dressing," she complains when her hair is improperly arranged, though she detests a "variety of rich cloaths," she admits she's had seven gowns made this month. Although she spits at the very thought of a "hideous handsom Fellow" and when Novel arrives for what seems to be a regular visit to her chambers she claims never to have heard his name, she shows herself totally familiar with him. She praises Plausible to his face, but criticizes him behind his back, and though she has an aversion to the court, she becomes uncomfortable when Eliza tells her only those

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<sup>27</sup>"For the Publick Active Life, against Solitude," Posthumous Works, in Complete Works 4:186-187.

people who can't get accepted at court criticize it.<sup>28</sup> She is as blind to her own obvious hypocrisy and the impression of herself she creates to men and women of wisdom in the world as Manly is of his own imperfections. To further emphasize Olivia's mirror image or surface reality in act 2, Wycherley brings Manly, Freeman, and Fidelia in upon Olivia and her would-be witty guests from behind, so that Manly is, in a sense, literally able to see the other side of himself and how this image subjects him to the ridicule of fools and fawning courtiers like Novel and Plausible. He is so appalled by Olivia's falseness that he vows he will "despise, contemn, hate, loath, and detest her most faithfully." But of course he cannot. She is the mirror of his own selfish ideal, and without his knowing it is married to his own best friend, Vernish (his vanity).

At the beginning of act 3 Wycherley divides the plot line following first the antics of Freeman as he courts the Widow Blackacre and secondly of Manly as he struggles with Fidelia to gain the love of Olivia. I believe this divided plot line is an attempt to render Manly's inner struggle of the heart as he comes to grips with the problem of accepting his own hypocrisy, and of the mind, as he learns to live with it in the world. Thanks to Freeman's aiding him to better see the truth of his nature, Manly now knows Olivia to be a hypocrite, and since she is the mirror of himself, he admits his own hypocrisy as well: "How hard it is to be an Hypocrite! At least to me, who am but newly so." (act 3) The difficulty of his hypocrisy is made worse, and perhaps more allegorically significant by the fact that Wycherley sets act 3 against the background of Westminster Hall, the seat of English law and the heart of human dissimulation and guilt. Twice served a summons by the

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<sup>28</sup>Eliza, like Freeman to Manly in act 1, is the rational norm with which to compare Olivia in act 2.

Widow Blackacre, Manly has reluctantly come as a hypocrite himself to testify in her law case. Admitting his hypocrisy to the audience as a character in the play, Manly is made by Wycherley into a testimonial to the human condition and to the awful frustration of having to dance the "Bays's Grand Dance" in the world--a sinner dissembling his own hypocrisy and guilt from the eyes of others. It is, of course, hard for him. While Freeman is courting the Widow, Manly gets involved in "three quarrels, and two lawsuits," but finally at the end of act 3, he adopts Freeman's worldly wisdom for a short time and attempts to deal cleverly with the other hypocrites he meets around him.

Since he himself is a hypocrite and attempting to control his bluntness of speech, he learns that by controlling his temper and letting others talk he can find out their weaknesses; and then by using these weaknesses he can rid himself of those he does not want to be around. When Novel pesters him, he tries to obligate him to help Freeman fight a duel; rather than risk his life, Novel exits. When Oldfox praises all his insults and encourages his bluntness, Manly lets him talk until he reveals that he dislikes martial drilling whereupon by praising such exercise Manly sends Oldfox away in a huff. With a lawyer trying to get Manly's business, Manly uses first the tactic of drawing out the man's interest and then attempting to obligate him to aid "a poor orphan of a sea officer . . . that has no Money." The lawyer immediately refuses the case since it will not benefit him. Freeman praises Manly's "way to get rid of people without quarreling," but when an alderman tries to get Manly to put him on to some business, Manly is so angered that he, himself, is being used by another that he tweeks the alderman's nose, and urges the man to give money to a hospital and hook a way to heaven with it. The alderman refuses to be put off and offers to take Manly to dinner.

He will give a lot to someone if he thinks he can get something in return. Finally Manly suggests the alderman lay out security for a friend, and the alderman exits.

Freeman thinks there is some value in this kind of dissimulation; it allows ones to laugh at fools and knaves; but Manly can see no pleasure in it. "Why the Devil shou'd a Man be troubled with the flattery of Knaves, if he be not a Fool, or Cully; or with the fondness of Fools, if he be not a Knave or Cheat?"(act 3). Dancing the Bays's Dance has only made Manly more aware that all men are flawed and he can see no value in courting their favor, no happiness in avoiding them by clever psychology or double dealing. Learning of his own imperfection hasn't made him any happier. He has no money by it and will not ask favors of such worthless people in order to prosper in such a world. Manly boasts he won't stay at Westminster Hall and be the Widow's witness, the testimonial to man's fallen state. He believes himself superior still to the hopeless frustration of the guilty and imperfect world he sees around him. Freeman suggests that they go "home," and act 3 ends as both men bemoan the fact that once Westminster Hall was used for feasts but now one must be a lawyer and quarrel to get his bread.

Gerald Weales notes that Westminster Hall was indeed the place where the feast of Pentecost or the arrival of the Holy Spirit was solemnized in Medieval times.<sup>29</sup> As the play moves from the world of the law in act 3 and turns home again to Manly's lodgings and to his relationship with Fidelia, it is symbolically fitting that the characters discuss the former nature of Westminster Hall. It is as if the hall, or indeed the world that it stands for, has fallen from a happier, more generous and golden past into the dis-

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<sup>29</sup>The Complete Plays of William Wycherley, ed. Gerald Weales, pp. 464, 532.

simulation, judgment, guilt and disharmony that Manly and Freeman see about them, and is awaiting the return of the Holy Spirit to free it from death and sin, the hopeless frustration which the Old Testament law brings to mankind. Manly has been unable to find happiness in the fallen world because he can see no point or purpose in conceding that he is no better than the ungenerous connivers he has seen in the world of Westminster Hall. In act 4, Wycherley allows Manly to turn inward again, to seek out, within himself, a home that is closer to man's original state, because it is closer to truth, for only then can he live contentedly in the world. The final acts of the play concentrate on Manly's love-hate struggle with his own false ideal and his own vanity, a struggle which allows him to realize the truth of his nature, and his personal link with God, Fidelity, his faith.

Fidelity declares to Manly in act 4 that "there is nothing certain in the World . . . but my Truth, and your Courage." Since her name means faithfulness, and she is Manly's volunteer, she is perhaps best understood as Manly's God-given or true nature, perhaps even his soul. She has donned the disguise of a boy, ashamed of her ardent love for him, yet afraid that should she reveal herself, he, in his fallen and blinded situation and his constancy to Olivia, would refuse to acknowledge her. Her father is "a Gentleman of the North, of no mean Extraction" we are told at the end of the play, and her prayers to Heaven seem to associate her with God and other-worldliness. Manly has scorned the boyish Fidelity as a coward until act 2 and 3 when, surprisingly enough he finds that Olivia is attracted to this cowardly image and encourages Fidelity's impotent advances with open arms. It angers Manly that his cowardly self (Fidelity in her disguise) should be accepted by his ideal when what he regarded as his bold and natural self was rejected. Angrily he turns to a kind of jealous revenge on the very image of false perfection which he adores. He wants to hurt it (Olivia) for what it has done to him

and yet to have it for his own. He will, in short, make himself more dishonorable by claiming a rape of Olivia would be honorable revenge. Fidelity, of course, though sorry to give him pain in doing so, is pleased to be able to help him for she thinks she can give "him a cure" and bring herself "new life." Manly insists that she go to Olivia to talk love for him while he goes to "act love," and though Fidelity warns him that such action is dishonorable, he tells her to call it "Revenge" and it becomes an honorable action. Fidelity, like a true soul or conscience, warns Manly that he is his "own Enemy," and she cannot believe that he would think that raping Olivia--taking his false ideal by force--could be honorable. "What Revenge can you have, Sir? Disdain is best reveng'd by scorn; and faithless love, by loving another, and making her happy with the others losings," she tells him. But Manly will not hear of giving up his ideal. He goes with Fidelity to Olivia's house and this time sees an even more disgraceful image of Olivia than before. Fidelity, his true nature, though disguised, leads him to a better understanding of his hypocritical ideal. Olivia is like the "Devil in a Play; and in this Darkness, which conceals her Angels face; if I were apt to be afraid, I shou'd think her a Devil," he exclaims. Overhearing Olivia say she never loved him, and pretended her love only to gain material benefit, he cries, "Good heav'ns! how was I deceiv'd," but he is still so angered that he threatens violence and orders Fidelity to guard the front door while he goes into the back room after Olivia to make her an accessory to his pleasure. Fidelity asks again, "But are you sure 'tis Revenge, that makes you do this? how can it be?" It is a serious moment in the play, and Fidelity, Manly's soul, as it were, is left on stage to cry out to the heavens against the punishment she feels Heaven has brought her for being true to Manly. "Others, at worst, you force to kill themselves; / But I must be Self-murd'ress of my

love, / Yet will not grant me pow'r to end my life, / My cruel life; for when a Lovers hopes / Are dead, and gone, life is unmerciful."

The soul's struggle pays off, for Manly returns, determined not to rape Olivia until he has public witnesses to her disgrace and to take the counsel of Fidelity ("I have not said a word to her [Olivia], but have kept your counsel, as I expect you shou'd do mine: do this faithfully and I promise you here, you shall run my Fortune still and we will never part as long as we live; but, if you do not do it, expect not to live." Manly is now beginning to respond to the urgings of his true nature, though he does not yet realize its merit. Perhaps the whole episode of Vernish's return, his suspicion, and near rape of Fidelity, is an acting out of the Manly spiritual battle to keep truth from being raped by his own human vanity. Manly desires to reveal Olivia's falseness publicly now: "the more witnesses I have of her infamy, the greater will be my revenge." But it is only Manly's own flawed ideal, his very hypocrisy that everyone is to witness; his public disgrace along with the ensuing lesson which he learns provide the finale to the play.

Returning again to Olivia's lodgings with Fidelity, he admits that Olivia's impudence is such that it could "make Revenge itself impotent, hinder [him] from making [Olivia] yet more infamous, if it can be"(act 5). Significantly the scene is set in the dark. Just as Manly is about to show up Olivia at her worst, Vernish, her husband interrupts by pushing at the door. Manly is pleased, for he has wanted to know who is married to Olivia. As Olivia hurries to escape with Fidelity over the balcony, she mistakenly gives Manly back his jewels and money; Vernish breaks down the door and fights with Manly; Fidelity rushes at Vernish from behind; and at the end of the scuffle, Manly throws down Vernish and disarms him, and Fidelity is thrown to the floor losing her wig in the fall. It is Freeman who brings the scuffle to a close, along with Plausible, Novel, Blackacre, Jorjy and the two sailors with their

torch lights to reveal the truth. With the coming of light into the darkness, Manly sees that it is Vernish, the man he thought his best friend, who worked with Olivia to rob him of half his fortune; and he sees Fidelia, hurt and fainting with a slight arm wound, revealed as a woman, his true soul. Like Everyman, when he realizes his good deeds are weak and cannot travel with him until he makes them healthy again Manly recognizes what a fool he has been in not appreciating the true beauty of his imperfect nature. He need not be concerned for the false Olivia any longer, for imperfection can bring both sorrow and happiness. By his very blind ignorance and natural error, he has brought himself to an appreciation of his own true nature, and out of ignorance has gained wisdom, which his regained jewels and wealth symbolize.<sup>30</sup>

"The sense of my rough, hard, and ill usage of you," he tells Fidelia, "gives me more pain now 'tis over, than you had, when you suffer'd it;" and he begs her to forgive him and accept his heart. This she does and presents him as well with an earthly estate of £ 2000, identifying herself as Fidelia Gray, a fitting name since truth is neither black nor white, but a mixture of both. Before her gift to him of her estate, Manly claims, he was about to suggest that they remain "in this ill World of ours still, though odious to me," rather than risking her life at Sea again. Now, however, if he were to say this to Freeman and to tell him that Fidelia's virtue was responsible for his decision to stay in the world he is sure Freeman would say Fidelia's estate was his real motive; and Freeman confesses he would say that indeed for most of men's quarrels with the world result from not getting their own selfish way with either women or fortune. While Manly now claims that his

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<sup>30</sup>What occurs here is not unlike what occurs in Milton's Paradise Lost in the sense that man experiences, by his sin, a fortunate fall, and gains the hope of something better than Eden.

new found soul or Christian faith makes it possible for him to endure his imperfect human state and to stay in the world, Freeman merely views this conversion as a desire for selfish material gain. To better understand Freeman at the end of the play, we must follow the Freeman plot to see how he has arrived at his knowledge of human selfishness and his more blunt and plain dealing stance.

By the time he enters Olivia's quarters bringing the sailors with their light, he, too, has come to grips with the error of extreme assumptions regarding the way to get along in the world. Before he ever urged Manly to test out Olivia, he made it clear that while he knew the Widow Blackacre to be a "Litigious She-Pettifogger" yet he still wished to "make her agree with [him] in the Church," primarily to obtain her E 1500 jointure. Blackacre is for Freeman the world he must conquer, and his goal is to marry himself to it; but he does not see the danger in such a union with worldly dissimulation. When Manly curses Olivia and swears to avoid the whole sex forever, Freeman takes his own material desire for Blackacre and adds to it his friend's cause: "I'll stay, to revenge on her your quarrel to the Sex." He will marry the Widow, "for her jointure," and put a stop to her actions. We have seen how Manly's revenge upon Olivia became an embarrassing self revelation to him, and the same becomes true for Freeman. "Revenge proceeds always from the Weakness of a Soul that is not able to support an injury," says Wycherley in Maxim CCI, and in Maxim CCXCVII: "Revenge is the Loss of Honour, rather than the Justification of it; since there is nothing so honourable as to pardon an offender."

The Widow Blackacre is a marvelous figure. If, indeed, as Gerald Weales<sup>31</sup> and the O.E.D. state, Blackacre is a label used to designate a particular parcel of land and Wycherley could have designated her green, or white, as well as black acre, it is significant that he called her Black, for she takes on the connotation of the grave, that piece of property everyone wishes to conquer--death itself. Manly calls her a "sinking ship" and we have seen how his own experience with sinking ships was associated with his own kind of death wish. She is that death in life--or that suicide which Manly wishes to avoid because it is such a threat to his identity. She comes to town we are told at Easter term, not to celebrate the holiday, significantly the resurrection and new life, but to vex others with law suits, to frustrate others with Old Testament guilt. She is "contented to be poor, to make other people so." Like her father, she is a "vexatious" and an "implacable adversary" (act 2). She dominates act 3 in particular when she enters "In the middle of half a dozen Lawyers" whispering to a fellow in black. Indeed she is in the midst of black and brings an aura of death to the stage in spite of her green bags which hold the legal papers and a promise of life. Chancery cases which she is so eager to pursue are actually estate cases of deceased persons, so the Widow is associated with the rewards of death as well as the material and earthly aspects of life--the law and its penalties. Reduced to court pleas and law books, she is an image of the fallen world, a world where the law points out man's sinfulness and leads him to shameful double dealing and dissimulation to avoid being found out. As a human being she is afraid to acknowledge her own nature, and thinks that by hiding it well she is maintaining her independence, the exact mirror of Freeman's phil-

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<sup>31</sup>The Complete Plays of William Wycherley, p. 388.

osophy of playing the world's game to his own advantage. Evidently married to a man of wealth, the Widow found marriage so horrible an insult to her freedom<sup>32</sup> that she refuses to be dominated by another man and has become a woman of business. Manly calls her that "Fiend," and says she is destroying her son Jerry's estate by keeping him a minor and thus preventing him from attaining his rightful lands. That Freeman thinks he can win this woman for himself and use her for his own benefit without any personal risk to his own integrity is a striking statement on his personal blindness.

At first Freeman, unlike Oldfox his rival who flatters the Widow's purity, boasts of his sexual prowess honestly pledging to satisfy her with his potency and to do her night business for her. But the Widow rejects them both. While she sees through to the impotence of the "fumbling, frigid, Nicompoop" Oldfox, she fears Freeman's open frankness. She judges Freeman a fortune hunter trying to use her: "Poor Widows are only us'd like Bauds by you; you go to Church with us, but to get other Women to lie with. In fine, you are a cheating, chousing Spendthrift."

Thwarted in his desires, Freeman now determines to get her by the law, by dissimulation and cheating. Jerry, the Widow's son has been forced to dress in lawyer's gowns and to carry the green bags of the law papers about with him and has thus been kept from becoming a man. The Widow won't let him read patriotic, military or play books for fear he becomes a keeper of women and given to lust, and poor Jerry is so afraid of losing his estate that he is content going about doing his mother's business. Freeman tells him to let the estate go "rather than wear this Gown, carry green Bags all they life, and be pointed at for a Tony." Just as Fidelia is disguised as a boy, Jerry

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<sup>32</sup>Perhaps in Oldfox, old and impotent, we are given an idea of what her husband was like and of why her marriage was so horrible in its stifling of her individuality that it caused her to turn against the male society in a revenge of self assertion.

in his gown is the emasculated male, indeed the image of the green bags has all the connotation of his boyish sexuality--a permanent adolescence imposed upon him by the Widow. If the Widow has her way, mankind will never come into its inheritance, for she will like the law, make him conform to society's regulations and never allow him to test his manhood. Wycherley seems to say that an acceptance of Blackacre and the legalism she stands for--an acceptance of Freeman's compliance with the age and its custom--is an acceptance of death.

There is an interesting passage in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians in which the apostle compares man's state under the law and the Old Testament to that of a child under the control of his guardian:

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son: and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Gal. 4:1-7.)

While I do not suggest that Freeman is a Christ figure saving mankind, I do suggest that Freeman represents man's reason attempting to conquer the fear of death, and nearly losing his integrity in the process. As Freeman recommends to young Jerry that he break away from Blackacre, he is falling victim to intrigue and dishonesty and endangering his own true nature. Appealing to Jerry's dissatisfaction with his present condition and offering him the sense of independence he desires, Freeman is able to get the bags which contain the Widow's legal documents and thus is able, he believes, to emasculate the Widow, to take away her power by declaring her false; but when he thinks he has beaten death by playing her game--or beaten society's law by outwitting her and keeping his own integrity intact, he has only shown

that he cannot remain honest and live successfully in the world, that even in desiring to do good for himself and for Jerry (man's nature) and to free them from death, he must acknowledge his own sinfulness. When Freeman says: "I'll marry and live honestly: that is, give my Creditors, not her [the Widow], due Benevolence, pay my Debts," Manly warns him he is making a mistake: "Wilt thou commit thyself to a noisom Dungeon for thy Life? Which is the only Satisfaction thou canst Give thy Creditors, by this match." Even though Freeman says he'll "drudge faithfully" for the Widow and "deserve wages," by the marriage, Manly says it will mean committing himself to slavery for the rest of his life and "would cost [him] too dear" (act 3). Manly recommends that Freeman become the Widow's trustee rather than her marriage Partner.

Freeman succeeds in getting Jerry under his power, but when he confronts the Widow, thinking he can now force her to marry him, the Widow declares Jerry illegitimate and herself a whore in order to escape a marriage with Freeman: "A wise woman will no more value her Reputation in disinheriting a Rebellious Son, of a good Estate; than she wou'd in getting him, to inherit an Estate." The ugliness of society's corruption, of the Widow's ability to seem to be one thing, but to turn out to be another is so disgusting to Freeman that he is stunned. Blackacre busies herself forging documents to make her story stand up in court, but Freeman, with the help of Jerry and three bailiffs, overhears her forgeries and arrests her in the king's name. Now she must choose between jail or marriage to Freeman. "No man was ever too hard for me, till now" she moans and is willing to make him a deal. He can have the privileges of a husband without dominion and serve her good pleasure. In return she'll give him an annuity and pay his debts. But Freeman wants more. He insists that she give Jerry a modest financial independence and free access to her maids. For himself, she must give E 400 a year

during his life, pay his debts not above £ 1000 and in return he'll give her personal freedom to dispose of as she pleases. He will marry her to complete the bargain, but only in return for separation and the alimony settlement he has outlined. The Widow is disappointed that there is no consideration of the flesh in the agreement, but she accepts it. Freeman has seen the sinister threat that death and the law can be and instead of marrying himself to this world and death, he has arranged a bargain whereby he can benefit from the world without having to succumb to its control. In that sense, Freeman overcomes the world and the bad fortune man finds in it. Freeman, as Manly's reason, makes this bargain just before Manly goes with Fidelia to make his final visit to Olivia, and thus when he gives Manly the benefit of his moral lesson in act 5 ("I think most of our quarrels in the World, are just such as we have to a handsom Woman: only because we cannot enjoy her, as we wou'd do," he has learned that the fortune or destiny man may blindly desire for himself, his selfish goal of honor, revenge, and worldly success, may ironically be the very things which lead him to destruction.

Reason has learned that it is not infallible, but that it can benefit from the world, and from its own mistakes in the world, without having to succumb to slavery and death. When Freeman suggests that Manly's decision to stay in the world may be based on Manly's own selfish and materialistic desire for Fidelia's estate, he is then, out of plain dealing honesty and love, making Manly aware of the possible selfish motivation of Manly's decision. As his reason, he gives Manly the light with which to see his soul in true perspective and while his soul (Fidelia) gives him hope and encouragement, his reason (Freeman) gives him sound, plain dealing and realistic self appraisal to put things in balance. Manly emerges at the end of the play then as the perfectly balanced individual, aware of his imperfection,

but undefeated by pessimism and death and encouraged by the hope held out by Providence in spite of his fallibility. Manly (courage), Freeman (reason), and Fidelia (soul)--heart, mind, and spirit, form a kind of trinity at the end of the play--a whole and harmonious man, and it becomes clear that the play presents its audience not only with an entertaining story of two men and their love affairs, but with a lesson in how to find a personal harmony, a Christian faith, to enable one to find contentment in the world.

It is important to note as well that Manly does not consider this ending final. He has accepted his reason and his soul, but he knows that they, too, must be tried and that indeed his life must be that of one continuous trial and error with these new found friends as his guides. At the end of Chapter III I dealt with a poem by Wycherley in which it was indicated that a man must go on testing women until he found the ideal one--go on experiencing the bad so that he could recognize the good when he found it and return to it again if he fell into future error. It is that same situation in which the plain dealer is left at the end of this play.

When Manly asks in act 4 why women and fortune always favor the men who to him seem fools and rascals, Freeman tells him it is because women, like fortune are witless and self indulgent and favor those who please their whims. Manly doesn't agree. Women and fortune, he says, have wit--but they use it spitefully to reward the worthless and to punish truly noble men like himself out of fear and jealousy. Fidelia tries to tell him that all women and all fortune are not either one of these extremes, but that some women, meaning herself (truth and therefore true fortune) are prevented from giving honorable men of the world a just reward because such men, like Manly and Freeman, are so blindly caught up in their own self-meriting and egotistical blindness that they cannot see the benefit fortune and the right women could

give them. They are always chasing after the wrong woman, the wrong fortune for them. Man, to live contentedly in the world, must learn that not getting his own way with women or his own way in fortune may be a blessing of a kind Providence which has a greater reward in store if he will but open his eyes to see it. It is man's own vanity which keeps him from a fix'd content in the world, and that is what Manly comes to know by the end of the play.

Living one's life happily, according to the play and Wycherley's writings, then, means a recognition of one's human fallibility and a Christian hope or faith as a result of seeing both the good and bad of human potential. One can then learn to risk himself courageously in life with a clear conscience, insensible to his defeats except as they make him wiser for the next choices he faces ahead. Testimony about Wycherley as a person seems to bear out the philosophy his writings convey--a paradox of honestly spoken opinion and easy acceptance of what life brought him; a lion of truthfulness when necessity forced him to speak truth, but a pattern of modesty and humility in personal nature--a man intelligent enough to know that he could make mistakes, but natural enough to express himself freely and take the consequences of his action. In his plays we find his principal characters learning to accept their mistakes as human beings--seeing the truth of their fallibility and having to adjust to it if they are wise.

In Love in a Wood, Ranger is revealed in all his foolish natural inconstancy before Lydia, and she in all her intense sexual desire to have him for herself. Valentine is shown the unflattering picture of his own cruel jealousy in Christina's honest trust in him, and Christina is forced to admit her sexual desire for him openly. Even the best of characters is asked to accept himself or be accepted by others he cares about in his flawed state, but on a continuum, the flaws of these characters are tame in comparison to the foolishness of the Gripes, Flippants, Dapperwits, etc.

In The Gentleman Dancing Master, Wycherley devotes his energies to showing his audience a young girl who, in her heart believes herself better than the fate she is destined to experience. Carefully playing society's game on the outside, she persists in her own plain dealing--true hearted desire until, married to the man she has chosen for herself, she willingly reveals her actions and discovers that society itself, unwilling to reveal its stupidity in not encouraging her to that choice in the first place, welcomes it and her daring. She has less confidence, she says, however, in marrying for love than those women who marry for money--she knows as a result of her own choice she is running a risk--but for her own plain dealing peace of mind, she can do nothing else and is willing to accept her fate, and deal with the consequences of her actions. The same goes for Alithea in her struggle to marry Sparkish in The Country Wife, Wycherley's third play. She believes she is doing the right thing for herself until the struggle and the knowledge of her own nature tell her that her reason is driving her to make unnatural choices and that her nature and good conscience tell her she would be insulting herself not to marry Harcourt. Even in *Horner*, we see something of the example of the plain dealing philosophy. *Horner* risks the test to find the right kind of women for himself--as he sees his nature; in so doing he learns that there are women in the world who are not false, that he could have found better and openly--but, trapped by fate and his inability to get himself out of his self-made situation--he accepts his fate as not bad, and with good conscience makes the best of it. Such a double dealer can live peacefully in society as long as he can convince himself he is in the right, but woe be unto him when he is exposed.

Finally, in The Plain Dealer, Wycherley shows us the best example of the problems of speaking truth about oneself and society and living in this world happily. To this play he brings considerations of plain dealing, doub-

le-dealing, misanthropy, good conscience and all aspects related to the individual and society. And by mirroring the struggles of male and female to find a mate, he illustrates man's attempts to understand his fortune and his relationship to God.

As we have seen in the preceding chapters of this study, in his own plain dealing manner, Wycherley boldly defends the free gift of love as the only moral basis for a happy marital union, scorning all meaner more gripish motivation. He recommends also that for marital happiness a husband and wife relationship ought to be based on mutual respect and the willing submission of the wife to the easy authority of the husband. In matters of sex, he urges both men and women to attain the proper moral respect for their individual sexual natures and to avoid extremes of rigidity and looseness which only lead to personal dishonor. And finally, in attempting to find happiness just as in matters of marriage and sexual honor, Wycherley recommends that men risk their imperfect natures in the world with good conscience and learn to accept disappointment with a Christian faith and hope for a better future.

As a playwright, Wycherley obviously came under attack for his harsh comments about the plain dealing selfishness and vanity of Restoration society, and particularly of the Restoration woman. To this extent he was a moralist pointing to the human flaw of vanity and desiring men to look at themselves long and hard in the mirror of his plays. The world has seen this mirror as immoral because of what it seems to say about mankind's nature-- that it is imperfect, that it is full of selfishness, brutality, and conniving, that society itself is nothing but a guise of hypocrisy beneath which cunning men can find personal advantage. In The Plain Dealer, perhaps Wycherley--since he willingly accepted the nicknames of "Manly" and "Plain Dealer"--even shows his audience some of his own flaws as both moralist and

plain dealing human being; and perhaps that is why, having bared his own personal soul, he chose to write no more plays.

Surely he bore with the foibles of his own life--the marriage which looked like material gain and turned into a nightmare that ended in debtors' prison, the release and pension from King James II which within a year had disappeared with James's deposition. Through it all, he lived and lived and continued to live to the age of seventy-four, adapting and adjusting to his misfortunes as a wise and sensible man must, befriending Dennis and Pope, when the giants of the Restoration died away. In his plain dealing defense of the natural instincts to love as opposed to the degradation of avarice, greed, contracts and law; in his defense of risking oneself in society in order to bring about learning and self improvement; and in his ardent defense of the need to know the truth about mankind's selfishness and vanity and to live with that truth once it is found, his morality is indeed Christian.

In terms of his religion, he wavered all his life between the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and the authority of the Church of England--between faith and individual conscience. It would be false to say that he wished to push his own moral views down the throats of his audience, but there is no reason to think that he was not sincere in hoping that they might benefit from the moral lessons his plays presented. He was well aware as he expresses in his poem, "To an University Wit," and in spite of the fact that both trades fall quite short of their purpose, that "the Business of both Trades [The Church and the Theatre] , has been, / To make Divine Things of the worst of Men."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>"To an University-Wit, or Poet; who had written some ill-Verse, with an ill Play or two; which not succeeding, he resolv'd to turn Parson," lines 103-104, Miscellany Poems, in Complete Works 3:67-70.

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