

ADAPTATIONS OF THE PLAYS OF MOLIÈRE

FOR THE ENGLISH STAGE

1660 - 1700

Thesis For The M.A. Degree In English

May - 1956

"Ah! Les étranges animaux à conduire que des comédiens!"
(L'Impromptu De Versailles, I).

Dipti Mitra,
Bedford College,
London.

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ABSTRACT

Intelligent English^{men} of the theatre, resident in France during the years which saw Molière's triumph, discerned in his plays new material for diversion and instruction. The taste of the audience, the spirit of the age, and Molière's comic theory, all influenced the nature of the English adaptations of Molière's plays for home-consumption. To gratify a frenchified audience, suggestions from Molière were welcome to the playwrights. The tendency towards rationalism, and the dissolution of old standards, account for the prevailing cynicism, so different from Molière. Finally, Molière's theory that comedy, reflecting contemporary life, brings about social purgation through ridicule and laughter, determined the nature of English comedy. The latter, however, retained much of its native English quality.

A Restoration Comedy is often considered as nothing but an orgy of sensuality, to be distinguished from the refined comic spirit of Molière. But a close study shows that it is not really devoid of a

sound social and moral context. It is, indeed, implicit in the comic cathartic theory. The moral attitude of a comedian does not manifest itself in direct sententiousness or open ethical judgment. It finds expression in acute observation and psychological analysis, used as a social corrective. The absence of open moral censure is indicative, not so much of any moral irresponsibility as of an awareness of the decomposition of morality itself. Much of the vulgarity is but a bold cynical exposure of contemporary life in the comic mirror.

Molière's comic theory has thus defined the social role of the comedian. His influence is pronounced in the comedian's intellectual perception of the follies of life, finding an artistic expression through comedy. The Restoration Age was much too brief, and crowded with internal problems, to affect complete assimilation. The process continued till Sheridan produced the English counterpart of Molière's comic temper.

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CHAPTER I
MOLIERE IN ENGLAND.

"An author justly grown to the authority of a classic than whom none understood or copy'd nature better; as pure in his moral as he is terse in his wit."
 (Dedication to Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, translated in 1732).

"It is true, our modern poets steal from Moliere, and have the front in the Prefaces and Prologues, to prefer themselves to him; and, 'tis an old Observation, that the more Moliere is abused by an Author, the more he hath generally stolen from him".
 (Muralt, Letters Describing The Characters And Customs Of The English And French Nations With A Curious Essay On Travelling. 1726.) *And a criticism of Boileau's Description of Paris. To which are now added, Critical Remarks on the whole Work, by Gentlemen of the English and French nations, with a complete index. 1726.*

"Aristotle was certainly the most generally knowing of all Antiquity; yet he is suspected to have copied some of the books ascribed to him, and to have burnt the originals from whence he had them".
 (Rymer, T., A Vindication Of An Essay Concerning Critical And Curious Learning. 1698)

CHAPTER I.
MOLIÈRE IN ENGLAND

Frequent contacts, friendly or hostile, between England and France, are a foregone conclusion because of their position as neighbours across the Channel. Posterity is often more interested in the intricate process of assimilation of the native and foreign elements than in assessing the phases of the influence, however short-lived, when the alien dominated over the indigenous, on account of the close proximity of the contact. Leaving aside a direct domination like the Norman Conquest, the inevitable result of which would be a wide-spread infusion of French culture, we come to others, which are more debatable because of their subtle and elusive nature. In such instances, a reliable or trustworthy piece of evidence of the extent of the influence would be the testimony of the age itself.

The history of England, immediately after the return of the Stuart Prince from the Continent, presents a variegated spectacle of political, social and literary

activity, having the broader French context as a background. Even before the pressure of events at home drove the royalists abroad, the presence of a French Princess as the Queen of England provided a ground fertile enough for French influence to thrive in. The French troupe visiting England in 1634 - 35, fared better than the previous one in 1629, as Queen Henrietta herself took it under her patronage.¹

It is indeed surprising to find the quick transit of French plays across the Channel. Le Cid was published in Paris in 1637. J.Rutter translated the play into English in the same year and it was staged by *Their Majesties' Servants* at Court and the ^{at} Cock-Pit Theatre in Drury Lane._h

- (1) Lord Chamberlain, Theatrical References, P.R.O., Vol.I., P.4, 18 April, 1635.

Royal permission was granted to the French Comedians to "erect a Stage Scaffold and Seates and all other accommodations which shall be convenient and act and present Interludes and Stage Playes at his House and Manage in Drury Lane"

Op.cit. P.4., 8 January, 1635. Warrant was issued for the Payment of £10 to the French Players for a tragedy they had acted before their royal patrons the previous December.

For a detailed account of the visit of the French troupes under Charles I, see, Lawrence W.J. The Elizabethan Playhouse and Other Studies, Pp. 128 - 138.

Sir William Davenant was one of that group who eagerly accepted suggestions from abroad.

Davenant's enthusiasm over French innovations is seen in the scenic arrangements in an entertainment produced probably on 2, May, 1656:

".....a Concert of instrumental music, after the French composition, being heard a while, the curtains are suddenly opened, and in the rostras appear, sitting, a Parisian and a Londoner, in the livery robes of both cities, who declaim concerning the pre-eminence of Paris and London."¹. It is of interest to note that no English equivalent of the French word 'actrice' seemed to have existed even long after feminine charm had graced the boards. On the third of January, 1661, Pepys had been to the theatre to see the 'Beggar's Bush', and he adds, ".....here the first time that ever I saw women come upon the Stage". Yet, the entry in Lord Chamberlain's records under 30 June, 1666, runs as follows: "Scarlet cloth and Velvet for Liveries for Women Comeedians!"².

(1) See Lowe, R.W., Thomas Betterton, P.5.

(2) Lord Chamberlain, Theatrical References, P.R.O., Vol.I., P.9.

The Kinsmen of the Queen extended a ready welcome to the defeated royalists during the years of banishment. They were mostly men of culture and learning, who under normal conditions, would undoubtedly exert a considerable influence over men and matters at home.

To name but a few of these men who accompanied the Prince of Wales into a voluntary or compulsory exile would indeed be a pointer to their character, talent or social status. Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon, one of the advisers of Charles I, returned to England from France with Charles II, only to go back to that country after he fell from power in 1667 and ^{to} die there in 1674. Clarendon's name has gone down in history not only as a politician but as a writer as well, of no mean repute.

Two other figures of fame and renown were the Duke and Duchess of Newcastle, who were married in Paris in 1645. A patron of art and literature at home, the Marquis exerted influence abroad as well. J. Aubrey notes down in his Letters: "I have heard Mr. Edm. Waller say, that W. Lord Marquise of Newcastle was a great patron to Gassendi, and M. Des Cartes, as well as Mr. Hobbes, and that he hath dined with them all three at the Marquiss's table, at Paris." ^{1.}

(1) Aubrey, J., Letters written by Eminent Persons in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries:
Vol.2.2. P.626, Note 1.

Another personage who saturated himself with French life and letters to such an extent as to write his principal work in that language, was Anthony Hamilton. He spent the greater part of his youth as an exile in France and returned home to the Court of Charles II. His Memoires de Count Grammont belongs more to French than to English Literature.

Moreover, the very nature of the intellectual thought in England, ran along parallel lines with that of France. There was the same sharp inclination towards rationalism in the intellectual sphere leading to a distrust of emotions with the inevitable falling off of lyricism and imagination in art and literature. English intellectuals of various calibres could not but be deeply affected with the French spirit, akin to their own, only much more mature in nature. Philosophers like Hobbes, sceptics like Buckingham, men of letters like Denham, Shirley, Waller, Lovelace and Cowley, were in France some time or other. In his entry under 1 September 1650, Evelyn has noted crowds of exiled royalists in Paris, in fact, all over France.¹

(1) Evelyn, J., Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn, 1 September, 1650: "My Lady Herbert invited me to dinner; Paris, and indeed all France, being full of loyal fugitives."

The State Papers during the early years of the Restoration provide numerous instances where persons who had lately returned to England from France were putting forward their claims to the restitution of their rights.¹

The return of these exiles would naturally resulted in a rapid speeding up of the influx of French customs and manners. It was prominent enough during Queen Henrietta's time. "La grande mode est d'apprendre le français, la langue de la conversation. amoureuse, la langue de l'aristocratie."² With the return of the Cavaliers the last barriers broke down. The postal service between France and England was put on a more efficient basis soon after the return of the old order.³

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- (1) See, Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O., Vol.1660-1661: P.18, May? 1660, Petition of J.Windebank; P.86, June? 1660, J.Sudbury, B.D., Chaplain to the Earl of Leicester in France: P.259, 6 September, 1660, Petition of Col.D.Treswell.
- (2) Mandach, A., Molière et la Comédie de Moeurs en Angleterre, Pp.11-12.
- (3) See Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, Vol.1600-1661, P.82, June? 1660: "Attested copy of the Third Article between the Baron de Nouveau, Grand Master of the French King's Couriers, and Col.Bishop, English Postmaster General, relative to the speedy transmission of letters to England, twice a week."

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English merchants were allowed to establish a French company at Rouen towards the end of the first year of the Restoration.^{1.}

The contact with France was kept up in various ways, as is seen by the visit of 600 Frenchmen, of whom sixty were persons of high rank, who were entertained, in the appropriate style, by the Duke of Buckingham and others.^{2.}

This constant contact with France had different effects on different quarters. "C'est ce contact prolongé avec le culture française, c'est ce long séjour sur sol française, cette connaissance approfondie de la langue et du génie de la France, qui auront un retentissement considérable sur le développement future de la science, des arts et de la pensée en Angleterre. Cela d'autant plus que ces exilés, à leur retour, formeront la société qui donnera le ton à leur pays. Ils emporteront avec eux les doctrines en cours et contribueront à rapprocher les deux pays."^{3.}

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- (1) Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, Vol.1600-1661, P.421, 22 December,1660.
- (2) See, Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O., Vol.1671, P.225, 9 May,1671; pp 236-237, 13 May,1671.
- (3) Mandach, A.Molière et la Comédie de Moeurs en Angleterre, P.15.

"A cette époque, c'était la France qui fournissait l'Angleterre de jeux et de passe-temps et qui régnait sur les modes masculines autant plus que sur les modes féminines. Ceux qui donnaient le ton à la haute société anglaise avaient, presque tous, séjourné en France."¹ To meet the demands of these fashionable pleasure-seekers, there were coffee-houses run by Frenchmen along the Strand together with fashionable shops and hair-dressers after the latest Parisian style; ".....il leur fallait maintenant des maîtres de danse, des coiffeurs, des laquais à la mode, c'est-à-dire des Français. Des jardiniers, des cuisiniers, des chanteurs, des acteurs et des actrices passaient La Manche pour trouver un gagne-pain abondant auprès des nouveaux maîtres de Westminster et de Londres."³

- (1) Gillet, J.E., Molière en Angleterre, P.19.
- (2) Mandach, A., Molière et la Comédie de Moeurs en Angleterre, P.17; Flecknoe, R., Enigmaticall Characters All Taken to the Life, from severall Persons, Humours, and Dispositions, pp.59-66, 'Of a French dancing-master in England'; Pp 125-126, 'Of a petty French Lutenist in England'.

The Strand appears to have been the favourite haunt of the French inhabitants of London.¹ The population living in and round about the parishes of Saint Giles and Saint Martin was about eighteen thousand.²

Obviously, it was for this large section that the French journal, Les Nouvelles Ordinaires was being published, while the London Gazette ran its French edition subsequent^{ly}, twice a week.³

Samuel Pepys seems to have had a special weakness for the French. He often took his wife, of French Huguenot descent, to dine at French restaurants.⁴

- (1) Dryden, J., Dramatic Essays, Everyman's Library, 'An Essay of Dramatic Poesy', P.59. Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O., Vol. 1660-1661, P.277, 28 September, 1660, French Chapel at Somerset House and Savoy Hospital.
- (2) Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O., Vol. Nov. 1667 - Sept. 1668, P.405, 22 May, 1668.
- (3) Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O., Vol. Oct. 1668 - Dec. 1669, P.143, 1668
Diary And Correspondence,
- (4) Pepys, S., 19 January, 1660; 12 May, 1667 - Pepys and his wife dined (at) their perriwig-makers in an ugly street in Covent Garden, ".....but to see the pleasant and ready attendance that we had, and all things so desirous to please, and ingenious in the people, did take me mightily."

"Pepys aimait le français, il trouvait une volupté a prononcer les beaux mots français, une volupté qu'il retrouvera en lisant des pièces de Molière."¹ The royal permission to print books in French in London was renewed in 1666.² This was an impetus to the spread of ^{the} language and literature in the English capital. Undoubtedly, books could be imported from abroad as perhaps they were by the young aristocrats and intellectuals like Rochester and Sedley.³

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- (1) Mandach, A., Molière et la Comédie de Moeurs en Angleterre, P.21. Pepys, S., Diary And Correspondence 10 February, 1661.
- (2) Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O., Vol. Aug.1666 - March 1667, P.412, 1666: "Licence to the Stationers' Company, for 31 years after the expiration of their present licence granted by the late King, for the sole printing of French Comedies, Aesop's Fables, and other classical and educational books"
- (3) Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O., Vol.1660-1661, P.535, 17 March, 1661; Vol.1676-1677, P.49, 3 January, 1677: Letter from Robert Scott to Williamson. The Writer's brother-in-law, a book-seller, got into trouble with Mr. L'Estrange for importing certain books including *Escole des filles*, *Aloyisioe Zigoee Amours*, which he considered to be harmless. Mandach, A., Molière et la Comédie de moeurs en Angleterre, P.24

The local publications certainly brought the foreign literature within easy reach of the average educated Londoner. The weekly London journals of the time gave them full publicity. In The Newes of February 16, 1664-5, there appeared a list of French novels in translation: "Scarrons novels, (viz) The Fruitless Precaution; The Hypocrites;... Englished with some Additions, by Mr. John Davies..." Then again, The Intelligencer of 5 June, 1665, under May 24, 1665, gives the following notice: "A New and Choice Collection (never before publish'd) of the Philosophical Discourses of the French Virtuosi, upon questions of all sorts, for the improving of Natural Knowledge; made in the Assembly of the Beaux Esp^{ri}ts at Paris, by the most ingenious persons of that nation. Englished by G. Havers."¹.

(1) Two interesting letters of the time illustrate the Englishman's interest in French art and literature. Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O. Vol. Oct. 1668-~~Dec, 1669~~, P. 324, 1669. May 12-22 Saumur.: "Rob. Murray to Williamson. Thanks for your introduction to so learned a man as M. Lefevre; though he does not know philosophy nor mathematics, which I wish to know, he is so learned in other things that a man gains much by his conversation. Description of Saumur. It has the best dancing-master in France, M. Jovert. I am learning mathematics from M. Mortaigne. I must apologise for my boldness in writing in French." Op. cit. P. 631, 1669 December 31. Pall Mall. In a letter, the writer speaks of the magnificent laboratory for dissection of animals, a great library of Arabic, Hebrew etc. Mss., and philosophers and historians who make the French Court famous. The writer wishes that the same should be done in England.

In the world of letters, Aphra Behn was a translator of repute in both ~~the~~ countries. Mrs. Behn had translated Agnes de Castro in 1688, while her novel, Oroonoko, was rendered into French in 1745. The translator regretted that there were no other translations of the English authoress's works.¹

In fact, the translation of French novels into English continued to be a pleasurable and profitable occupation right till the middle of the 18th Century, as is seen by Mrs. Cibber's translation by the name of The Oracle, (1741). In the Advertisement to the edition printed in 1752, the translator says that as the piece had met with success in Paris, where it was elegantly written and excellently performed, she "was so struck with the novelty of the subject, and the simplicity and delicacy of the sentiments", that she decided to translate it. That indefatigable diarist makes the interesting entry of having heard the Book of Common Prayer being read in French in the Savoy Church,²

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- (1) Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O. Vol. Oct. 1668 - Dec. 1669, P.55, Nov. 7-17, 1668: The writer of a letter was looking for the French edition of Bacon's work, which had been translated into French under the direction of Cardinal Richlieu in 1635.
- (2) Pepys, S., Diary and Correspondence, 29 September, 1662. Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O. Vol. 1660 - 1661, P.529, 10 March, 1661; Vol. 1661-1662, P.508, 6 October, 1662.

the internal affairs of which very often were referred to the Monarch.¹.

In the second edition of Wycherley's play, The Plain Dealer, printed in 1678, the printers James Magnus and Richard Bentley, give a list of books printed for them. The list includes various French novels and "A French Play acted at White-hall, entituled, Rare-en-tout".²

In the face of all these accumulated facts one can realize something of the depth of the cultural contact between England and France during these years.³ So extensive was the infiltration of the foreign element that apprehensions were felt ^{about} of the result of such an enslaved mentality. ~~The~~ Nationalist sentiment is seen to assert itself through strong criticism of such servility. The daily journals had gradually become popular and some of them voiced their indignant protests. In 1678, the writer in Christianissimus Christianandus Or Reason for the Reduction of France to a more Christian State in Europe, criticises this

(1) Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O., Vol.1660-1661, P.277, 28 September, 1660?; Vol. 1682, P.268, 26 June, 1682.

(2) See Lawrence, W.J., The Elizabethan Playhouse and other studies, P.147.

(3) Lacy, J., The Dumb Lady, Act I: "Softhead: '... Why then the wise men of the East are not so wise as the wise men of France, for if they get into another country, the Devil cannot drive them home again!'"

mental bondage: "Moreover, we must have all French about us; their Behaviour, their Fashions, their Garb in wearing them, their mean way of House-Keeping... their needy men for servants, their meer Dietary Leeches or Scholastick Methodists ... for Physicians; their cast Tooth-drawers and Barbers that had not worth enough to earn Bread at home, to become our admired Chirurgions; French Musick, French Dancing-Masters, French Air in our very Countenances, French Legs, French Hats, French Compliments, French Grimaces;.... Anything that speaks French is our delighthaving made the French Language and Humors Universal, I cannot but look on it as a sad Omen of Universal Slavery; a Nation's taking of Language from another Nation, and preferring it before their own, hath usually been a fore-runner of, and prepared the way for its Conquest."¹ ~~The~~ Foreigners were ousting the natives from trade and commerce and numerous ~~popular~~ indignant ^{popular} protests have been recorded.²

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- ol (1) P.37. See also, Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O., Vol. Aug.1666 - March,1667, P.191, 11 October, 1666. - "A Bill is brought in prohibiting the import of all French manufactures, and requesting a proclamation to that effect. The nation having for several years aped the French too much in their fashions, especially at this season, the King, to avoid the like vanity, has specified that he will wear a vest not after that mode, but will not put it on till Monday, the Duke of York's birthday."
- (2) See also, Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O., Vol.1660 - 1661, P.428, 31 December,1660; Vol.1673 - 1675, P.10, 7 November,1673.

Even in the theatrical world, where the French influence was most prominent, that great nationalist, John Dryden, often came out with open criticism of such incursions of foreign elements. He ~~has~~ pleaded for the purity of the English language by keeping it free of the admixture of French words.¹ He ~~has~~ condemned "those comedies which have been lately written, have been allied too much to Farce: and this must of necessity fall out, till we forbear the translation of French plays:"² Lastly, but not the least, he takes pride in upholding the English tradition in theatrical laws, which should be the standard of judgment as opposed to those from France.³

(1) Dryden, J., Dramatic Essays, Everyman's Library, P.102.

(2) Op.cit. P.79. also P.93.

(3) Op.cit. P.93, Pp 120 - 121.

But King Charles himself was greatly responsible for such extensive importations of French matter and manner of life, by his marked partiality towards them. The royal household was modelled, as it were, on the French.^{1.}

In such a frenchified atmosphere, that the English stage should be considerably influenced by the French, which at this period appears to have excelled all others, was a predestined fate. We have already noticed the influence of Queen Henrietta.^{2.}

(1) See, Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O; the number of Frenchmen on the staff of the royal household indicates the preference for everything French: French musicians - Vol. Jan. 1663 - Aug.1664, P.24, 23 July, 1663; List of King's French musicians - Vol.1660 - 1661, P.7. ✓
 May? 1660; the English Court awaits eagerly the arrival of French violinists who promised to bring the latest music from Versailles - Vol. Oct.1668 - Dec.1669, P.25, 19 October, 1668.

Pepys, S., Diary and Correspondence, 20 November, 1660, notes down the King's preference for French music at General Monk's reception at the Cockpit. Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O.,
 -Physician - Vol.1660 - 1661, P.24, May? 1660;
 French gardeners- Vol.1661 - 1662, P.175, 10 December, 1661; French dancing-master - Vol.1673-1675, P.94, 2 January, 1674; French teacher - Vol. Jan.1663 - Aug.1664, P.526, March 1664; Petition for ~~the~~ payment ~~for~~ flowers brought over from France - Vol. Jan.1663 - Aug.1664, P.57, 27 February, 1662 - 3; Goods from France for the King - Vol.1661 - 1662, P.82, 3 September, 1661. ✓

(2) See above, P.7.

With the coming home of the aristocrats from abroad, one could only expect an acceleration of the whole movement.

Two of the leading figures in the theatrical world, who on the eve of the Restoration tried to set up the English stage in its renewed glory, spent a number of years in France, to gather, as it were, ideas for the betterment of both plays and performances in England. "And in order that every Thing might appear to the best Advantage, and want none of the Decorations used abroad, Mr. Betterton, by Command of King Charles II, went to Paris to take a View of the French stage, that he might the better judge of what would contribute to the Improvement of our own. And upon his Return, such Measures were taken to improve the Stage, that for several Years both Companies acted with great Applause, and gained the highest Reputation."¹. The result of such a visit was obvious on the improvements brought about in stage décor.². Moreover, the presence of French troupes in London, within a short time after

(1) An Account of the Life of that celebrated Tragedian Mr. Thomas Betterton, *Printed for J. Robinson, 1749, Pp. 6-7.*

(2) Flecknoe, R., A Short Discourse of the English Stage; Downes, J., Roscius Anglicanus, Ed. by Montague Summers, P. 20, P. 24, P. 34.

the Restoration, with all their stage equipment, must have provided the English with a model for more decorative theatrical productions.¹ Royal permission was granted to free the goods of the French troupes from Customs duty.² Consequently, the more elaborate mechanical scenic devices of the foreign troupes necessitated the readjustment of the stage arrangements of London theatres.³ The credit of magnificent scenic innovations probably goes to William Davenant.

"Inaugurant le système des coulisses en Angleterre, Davenant fixa un certain nombre de ces cartons peints avec imagination....."⁴.

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- (1) For a detailed study of the visits of the French troupes to England, see, Lawrence, W.J., The Elizabethan Playhouse And Other Studies, Pp.139-156; Boswell, E., The Restoration Court Stage, pp.114-128.
- (2) Calendar of State Papers, Treasury Books, Vol.II., 1672-1675, P.14, 17 December, 1672; P.127, 1 May, 1673; P.533, 1 June, 1674; Calendar of Treasury Books, Vol.V Part I 1676-1679, P.803, 30 November, 1677; Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, P.R.O., Vol. Jan.1663 - Aug:1664, P.253, 25 August, 1663.
- (3) Lord Chamberlain, Theatrical References, P.R.O., Vol.I., P.11, 4 December, 1677; 29 September, 1684. See also Boswell, E., The Restoration Court Stage, Pp.51-54; Pp 64-66.
- (4) Mandach, A., Molière et la Comédie de Moeurs en Angleterre, P.38; Pepys, S. Diary and Correspondence, 15 August, 1661; Nicoll, A., A History of Restoration Drama, Pp. 33-49.

But more important than these scenic changes, was the attempt to change the tone and spirit of the plays themselves. Davenant's right-hand man, Betterton, was in France when Molière was steadily gaining popularity. The question arises whether Betterton, the actor of renown, was influenced by the acting of the French players. Gildon, in his biography of the English actor,¹ points out the stress the actor had laid on the serious nature of the histrionic art, while Colley Cibber recalls the famous roles of the master-comedian.² In fact, Cibber draws a favourable comparison between Betterton and Baron, the well-known comedian in Molière's troupe.³ John Caryl pays tribute to Molière both as a dramatist and an actor:

".....that if our Cheer

Does hit your Pallats, you must thank Moliere:

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Both when he writes, and when he treads the Stage."⁴

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- (1) Gildon, C. The Life of Mr Thomas Betterton.
- (2) Cibber, C. An Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber, Ep. 59 - 71.
- (3) Op.cit. P.102.
- (4) Caryl, J., Sir Solomon, Epilogue.

This seems to imply that the English were not unacquainted with the talent of the French comedian. It was the age of Molière, who had improvised one whole play on the slender topic of a theatrical rehearsal. Betterton, the born-actor, would certainly have picked up cues for acting from the French master. There is a curious similarity too in the manner^{in which} both met their death. No greater love or devotion could they have shown to their profession thanⁱⁿ their last appearance on the stage.

The first definite reference to French troupes on English soil after the Restoration is perhaps the one following Betterton's return from Paris.¹ The English version of the French play ^{may} might have been Davenant's The Play-House To Be Let, which shows considerable borrowings from Molière's play, Sganarelle. The play, it seems, did not meet with much applause.² Perhaps the taste for everything French had not yet fully developed. But such was the absorption of the French element into English Society, particularly, with

(1) Pepys, S., Diary and Correspondence, 30 August, 1661; Evelyn, J., Diary and Correspondence, 16 December, 1661.

(2) Mandach, A., Molière et la Comédie de Moeurs en Angleterre, P.44.

the coming into power of the dominant group led by brilliant but dissolute men like Sedley and Dorset, who themselves were strong adherents of the Continental culture, that soon the taste of the audience and the art and technique of the playwright took a definite turn in favour of the French model, as offered mainly in the plays of Molière. French comedies were not only acted but printed as well with royal permission.^{1.} Mandach sums up this influence in one sentence: "Cette littérature comprenait aussi comédies, dont le message nouveau comportait trois points: le sens de la régularité, la conscience de l'unité et le culte de la beauté idéale."^{2.} It was inevitable that the French ideal would undergo changes in the English social and dramatic context. But it is of interest to note that the literary coterie was always conscious of its indebtedness.

Literary plagiarism is quite an ancient and established practice. Certain ideas are common in the world of arts and literature. Yet a much-used theme assumes an original stamp only when moulded under

(1) See above, P.15.

(2) Mandach, A., Molière et la Comédie de Moeurs en Angleterre, P.26.

the pressure of the personality of the artist. It suggests the borrowed plume when mediocrity handles the creation of the master-mind. Such second-rate work seems always to be in need of an explanation. It almost points to an awareness of ~~diffidence~~^{inadequacy} and an attempt to cover up deficiency.

One of the foremost critics of the Restoration Age, who championed the cause of the play-wrights against the onslaught of the moralists, has tried to explain away the charges of plagiarism. "The Plagiarism objected to our Poets is common to the Ancients too, for Virgil took from Homer, Theocritus, and ev'n Enn^{is}~~is~~; and we are assur'd Homer himself built upon some Predecessors: And tho' their thoughts may be something a-kin, yet they alter their Dress, and in all other things we are satisfied with the variety of the outward visible Form, tho' the intrinsic value be the same, as Mr. Congreve's Song has it, nothing new besides their Faces, e'ry Woman is the same. In all things as well as Women the meer Variety of Appearance, whets our Desire and Curiosity."¹.

Here is the point of view of the practical and successful actor-dramatist of the age. Among other plays, The Double Gallant was acted at Hay Market by the actors of the two theatres: "This last, was a Play

(1) See Gildon, C., Miscellaneous Letters and Essays on Several Subjects. P. 224.

made up of what little was tolerable, in two, or three others, that had no Success, and were laid aside, as so much Poetical Lumber; but by collecting and adapting the best Parts of 'em all, into one Play, the Double Gallant has had a Place, every Winter, amongst the Publick Entertainments, these Thirty Years. As I was only the Compiler of this Piece, I did not publish it in my own Name, but as my having but a Hand in it, could not be long a Secret, I have been often treated as a Plagiary on that Account: Not that I think I have any Right to complain of, whatever would detract from the Merit of that sort of Labour; yet, a Cobler may be allow'd to be useful, though he is not famous: And I hope a Man is not blameable for doing a little Good, tho' he cannot do as much as another?"¹. Unfortunately, this sort of tinkering up of various plays together seems to have guided the pen of many a Restoration comedian. As late as 1707, three plays were chosen to be specially acted. These included Julius Caesar, The King and No King," "and the Comic Scenes of Dryden's Marriage a la Mode, and of his Maiden Queen put together, for it was judg'd, that as these comic Episodes were utterly independent of the serious Scenes, they were originally

(1) See Cibber, C., An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, 1700, P.194.

written to, they might on this Occasion be as well Episodes either to the other, and so make up five livelier Acts between them: At least the Project so well succeeded, that those comic Parts have never since been replac'd, but were continu'd to be jointly acted, as one Play, several Years after."¹.

Very different from these two writers, and writing as late as 1749, the biographer of Betterton advances the third plea, quite a business-like proposition no doubt, for the plagiarist. In the preface, the writer admits of having borrowed freely from Biographia Britannica and says, ".....this perhaps the Proprietors of the above Work may think a little unfair, but I would remind them, that their whole Book is taken from others, and why may not one Person take the same Liberty as another, and gratify the Public with Six-penny-worth of Entertainment, without being obliged to purchase three or four Volumes in Folio?"².

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- (1) See, Cibber, C., An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, P.193.
- (2) See, An Account of the Life of that Celebrated Tragedian Mr. Thomas Betterton, Printed for J. Robinson, 1749, P.iv.

Another piece of plagiarism, which by 1671 had become an established practice, comes from the popular dramatist, John Caryl. In the Epilogue to his much applauded play, Sir Solomon or The Cautious Coxcomb, (1671), Caryl is candid enough about the debt into which the general body of the dramatists had run:

"Since Stealing's grown a pretty thriving Trade,
Which many Rich, but few has Guilty made;
To needy Poets, Why should you deny
The priveledge to steal, as well as lie?" ¹.

This brazen-faced attitude is characteristic of almost every borrower of Molière.

There is yet another interesting side-light to be thrown on these admissions of the playwrights. The dramatists seemed to move ~~about~~ in a rather narrow circle; the mainstay of their audience being recruited from the ranks of the young aristocrats. The playwrights, though much in demand to supply pleasurable diversion for the gay rich, yet led a precarious financial existence. There was a keen competition in the supply of plays to the different theatres. In quick succession. Each playwright was out to exhibit his ability and above all his originality, while taking

(1) Caryl, J., Sir Solomon, Epilogue.

care to point out the ^{stolen by} stolen property ^{of} the fellow-writer. The result was a malicious bickering which did not always keep within bounds of common decency. Great or small, man or woman, few could keep out of this petty squabble. Derisive sarcasm marks these lines of Caryll:

"Faith, be good natur'd to this hungry Crew,
 Who, what they filch abroad, bring home to you.
 But still exclude those Men from all Relief,
 Who steal themselves, yet boldly cry, Stop Thief;
 Like taking Judges, these without remorse
 Condemn all petty Thefts, and practise worse;
 As if they robb'd by Patent, and alone
 Had right to call each Foreign Play their own."¹.

An abundant self-conceit marks the preface of the future Poet-Laureate to The Sullen Lovers; or The Curious Impertinents, (1668)².

"But I freely confess my theft, and am ashamed on't, though I have the example of some that never yet wrote Play without stealing most of it; and (like men that lie so long, till they believe themselves) at length by continual thieving, reckon their stolen goods their own too; which is so ignoble a thing, that I cannot but believe that he that makes a common practice of

(1) Caryll, J., Sir Solomon Epilogue.

(2) Thomas Shadwell, T., Edited by George Saintsbury, Mermaid Series.

stealing other men's wit, would, if he could with the same safety, steal anything else."¹.

Aphra Behn strikes up a pose of self-defence in her address to the reader of her play, Sir Patient Fancy, (1678)². She acknowledges her indebtedness to Molière, yet that is not the whole story: "Others to show their breedingcryd it was made out of at least four French plays, when I had but a very bare hint from one, the Malad Imagenere, which was given me translated by a Gentleman infinitely to advantage; but how much of the French is in this, I leave to those who do indeed understand it and have seen it at the Court."³.

These direct or indirect references to Molière testify to the extent of French influence. Even under the Common-Wealth, there must have been an under-current of admiration for the new type of drama under

(1) Shadwell, The Sullen Lovers, Preface.

(2) Works of Aphra Behn, Edited by Montague Summers, 1915, Vol IV.

(3) Behn, A., Sir Patient Fancy, To The Reader.

the influence of the 'précieuses' cult. In 1650 appeared "The Second edition Corrected and Amended" of Le Cid out of French which had been "acted before Their Majesties". The translator naturally seeks the patronage of the nobility. It is dedicated to the Earl of Dorset who is "not only a perfect understander, but an exact speaker of both languages." Though there is a deep admiration for things French, yet the English writer asserts his right to effect slight changes in accordance with what he considers his national taste and tradition. In his address to the reader, the translator adds his explanation: "Some places in the Originall I have changed, but not many: two Scenes I have left out, as being soliloquies and little pertinent to the business: Some things I have added, but scarce discernible: Where he would give me leave, I have followed close both the sense and words of the Author, but many things are received within one tongue which are not in another."

This tendency to adapt the French plays to the taste and tradition of the English, continued throughout the age. Very often the English adaptor was tardy of admission while strangely enough, writers at times, particularly when Molière's reputation was going up, would attribute their works to the Frenchman, perhaps in the hope of a better reception. Such a curious

instance was the play by Motteux entitled: The Loves of Mars and Venus, published as late as 1697. In the preface, Motteux offers an apology for a part of the play "...borrowed almost verbatim from Molière's as he borrowed his from an old Italian opera....." In fact, Motteux's book owes but little to Molière. Similarly, Corey's Metamorphosis, (1704), has nothing of Molière in it, though the writer is eager to establish the fact that it was "Written Originally by the Famous Molière."

In spite of failure and disappointment, Robert Flecknoe, has been as outspoken in his indebtedness in The Damoiselles A La Mode, (1667), as his more successful contemporaries, John Lacy and Thomas Betterton, ~~had kept~~ ^{have been} silent over theirs. However, in the play produced a year before the publication of The Dumb Lady, (1669), another popular dramatist, Caryl, has paid his due share of gratitude and tribute to the French writer:

"What we have brought before you, was not meant

For a new Play, but a new President;

For we with Modesty our Theft Avow,

.
And openly declare, that if our Cheer

Does hit your Pallats, you must thank Molliere:

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Both when he Writes and when he treads the Stage."¹.

(1) Caryl, J., Sir Solomon, Epilogue.

of above
p 24

Another defaulter who borrowed indefatigably from Molière was Edward Ravenscroft. Most of his plays owe something or other to the foreigner yet there came no gracious acknowledgment from him.

Two writers, who had shown much originality in adapting the French material for the English Stage, are rather silent over their debt. Shadwell always attempts to qualify his admission of borrowings. Moreover, he has been too hasty in his pronouncements. The prefaces to the two plays, The Sullen Lovers, (1668), and The Miser, (1672), display the presumptuous attitude of the English playwright towards the French: "The Foundation of this Play I took from one of Molière's call'd L'Avare; but that having too few Persons, and too little Action for an English Theatre, I added to both so much, that I may call more than half of this Play my own; And I think I may say without vanity, that Molière's part of it has not suffer'd in my hands, nor did I ever know a French Comedy made use of by the worst of our Poets, that was not better'd by 'em."¹ The bumptious impertinence of the passage aroused the just wrath of Muralt, the Swiss critic and traveller.² Even Shadwell's

(1) Shadwell, T., The Miser, Reader.

(2) F.N.Muralt, Letters Describing the Character and Customs of the English and French Nations with a Curious Essay on Travelling. Pp.27.

own countrymen, who took upon themselves the task of refuting the various allegations made by Muralt against the English, were indignant at the insolence of the relevant passage. "By your Leave, Mr. Shadwell, you are not so idle, as Vain and Impertinent; you are indeed a Poet, but a very bad one."¹ These writers were perhaps making a more accurate statement than the Swiss, when they discouraged any comparison between ^{two men,} whom they considered to be the most contemptible of all the English poets and the best of the French. "It is doing a Dishonour both to the English, and Molière to undertake so ridiculous a Parallel."²

The attitude towards Molière had been rather casual and partly supercilious. He was a well-stocked storehouse to rummage for amusing episodes and comical characters. These came ⁱⁿ handy to the hard-pressed playwrights when the audience could only be tempted by novelties. The studied indifference of some is only to be outmatched by the audacity of others who

(1) Remarks on the Letters Concerning the English and the French, Describing the Character and Customs of the English and French Nations, 1726, P.18.

(2) Op.cit. P.18.

claim to have improved on Molière. The one explanation and the one which would partially clear this horde of ^{mediocre} English playwrights of the guilt of deliberate insult, is their inability to understand the depth of wisdom, humanity and subtle irony of the man of genius.

Towards the end of the century however, better sense seemed to have dawned upon the English. The playwrights still pilfered Molière's works, but the appreciative note was present in their acknowledgment. In the two editions of the English adaptation of Les Femmes Savantes, namely, The Female Virtuoso's by Thomas Wright, (1693), and its revised version of 1721 by Colley Cibber, under the title, No Fools Like Wits, one may easily detect the gradual change towards appreciation.

Besides these adaptors of Molière's plays, there were certain translators, who kept to their task of translation quite rigidly, however defective the English rendering at times might have been. Yet, the feeling that Molière ought to be a little touched up for the English Stage persisted. The title-page of Medbourne's Le Tartuffe, (1670) is self-explanatory: "Tartuffe: or the French Puritan. A Comedy; written in French by Molière; and rendered into English with much Addition and Advantage."

With the general change in opinion, the translators too veered round gradually. More interest was shown in Molière's original work without any of the so-called improvements by the English. Two different translations of L'Avare both by Ozell, appeared, one in 1714 and the other in 1732. The first one however, was published anonymously. Ozell's translation of 1732 clearly points to a better understanding of Molière. The translator had taken a good deal of pains to make a correct rendering of the French into English. Molière is no longer a storehouse for plots and characters. His works, though translations, are to be studied as masterpieces of comedy. As Ozell says in his preface: ".....and, instead of dedicating it to any particular Person, I will present the Publick with What I am sure will be infinitely more useful, and that is, Remarks on such Phrases, etc., of the French Tongue, as I think those Gentlemen have mistaken the Sense of; and this I do, in order to prevent the Learners of either the French or English Tongues from being mis-led thereby."

Finally, with the publication of the eight volumes of The Select Works of Molière in 1732, the Frenchman was accorded his rightful place in the world of letters. The classical spirit, which had been gaining ground in England ever since the publication of Le Cid, ultimately

hailed Molière as the master in the sphere of comedy. A sincere appreciation of the Frenchman's plays gradually developed. The preface to each of the select plays is a piece of well-balanced criticism, and does credit to English critical acumen, considering its recent development. The dedication to L'École des Maris¹ is an instance, ~~of well-balanced judgment.~~ It speaks of Molière, ".....whose way of Expression is easy and elegant, his Sentiments just and delicate, and his Morals untainted: who constantly combats Vice and Folly with Strong Reason and well turn'd Ridicule; in short, whose Plays are instructive, and tend to some useful Purpose:"

The dedication to Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme² sums up the general attitude: "An Author justly grown to the Authority of a Classic; than whom none understood or copy'd Nature better; as pure in his Moral as he is terse in his Wit."

The extent of the indebtedness to Molière was gradually established not only through the scanty admissions of the borrowers themselves. Within a short time literary critics, who were a new body in the world of letters, were busy tracing the contacts

(1) Vol.IV.

(2) Vol.II.

of their own age with the foreigners and consequently contemporary drama came under their scrutiny. Gerard Langbaine was a pioneer in the field.¹ He ~~has taken~~ ^{took} infinite pains in ascertaining the English borrowings. Langbaine's findings are usually correct, though his comments *may* have been slightly tinged with personal malice. Colley Cibber, in his book, quite humbly admits of his borrowings and points ~~out~~ as well to Vanbrugh's dependance on the French dramatist for the material of his plays.² Various other references to English borrowings from French are scattered in letters in various defences of the Stage, and in other literary essays that abound in the first half of the 18th century.

The triumph of English classicism ⁱⁿ ~~from~~ the early 18th Century established once and for all Molière's reputation in the English literary world. Writers, like William Wycherley and *William Congreve*, were conscious of the genius of the Frenchman. They could not but accept him as their model both in matter and in manner. Yet, there were strange metamorphoses of

(1) See Langbaine, Gerard, An Account of the English Dramatick Poets.

(2) See Cibber, C., An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, 1740. Pp. 302.

Molière's comedy during this short period of less than half a century and the reason for it lies in the disturbed mental poise of the age when the sense of values had been rudely shaken. Confused and ignorant interpretations gradually gave place to rational and sober judgment which ultimately paid the homage due to the master. This change was brought about by the tendency towards classicism which tipped the scale towards sanity and balanced critical poise. The translation of Molière's works in 1732 was the product of such a spirit which, in its turn, is the result of the traditional English sobriety influenced by the classical doctrines.

CHAPTER II.

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF COMEDY

"Although the roots of Restoration Comedy are to be found in native drama, foreign influences, both social and artistic, are in some degree responsible for it; from Etheredge to Farquhar, the authors..... tried to refine upon the common-sense of Molière and ended by creating a brightly colored bubble of thin substance and temporary duration." ¹.

In these few words the writer has compressed the whole range of the comic drama that flourished in England during the short period between 1660-1700. The roots of Restoration Comedy which belonged to the past are to be sought not so much in the romantic dramatic tradition of the Elizabethan Age as in the realistic and rationalistic movement in drama consciously initiated by Ben Jonson. These two schools of thought, if they can be so called at such an early stage in the history of English dramatic criticism, had in common certain theoretical formulas which had been handed down

Perry, H.T.E., The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama, P.142.

44.

from the classical tradition. As for example, the defence of the dramatists against the persistent Puritan attacks lay in their insistence on the didactic purpose of their art. The aim of comedy was generally held to be double in character, namely, to provide delight and profit. There were undoubtedly a few dissenting voices.¹

Towards the beginning of the 17th century, the initiative passed from the Italians to the French in the world of letters where they soon became the arbiters of taste. J.E.Spingarn, in A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, says, that after 1650 in England, "... the influence of France was substituted for that of Italy".² It is of interest to note that the professional critics in England, who had emerged in the last quarter of the century, as a distinct literary body, were concerned mainly with the criticism of what was considered to be the higher and more serious branches of literature, namely, tragedy and Epic.

Writing dissertations on the tragic stage or translating into English classical literary works as interpreted by the French, appears to have monopolised

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- (1) See Klein, D., Literary Criticism from the Elizabethan Dramatists, P.215.
 - (2) Spingarn, J.E., A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, PP 259-60.

the attention of the critics.¹.

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- (1) See, The Comparison of Plato and Aristotle. With the Opinions of the Fathers on their Doctrine and Some Christian Reflections. Translated from the French by John Dancer, 1673; The Tragedies of the Last Age Consider'd and Examin'd By the Practice of the Ancients, and by the Commonsense of all Ages in A Letter to Fleetwood Shepheard, Esq., By Thomas Rymer, 1678; Monsieur Rapin's Comparison of Thucydides and Livy. Translated into English by T. Taylor, 1694; De Re Poetica; Or Remarks Upon Poetry, with Characters and Censures of the Most Considered Poets whether Ancient or Modern, Extracted out of the best and Choicest Criticks. By Sir Thomas Pope Blount, 1694; A Defence of Dramatick Poetry: Being a Review of Mr. Collier's View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the Stage; A Vindication of an Essay concerning Critical and Curious Learning, Thomas Rymer, 1698; The Works of Plato Abridg'd, Translated from the French by Dacier, 1701; Aristotle's Art of Poetry Translated from the Original Greek According to Mr Theodore Goulston's Edition. Together with Mr. Dacier's Notes translated from the French, 1705; The Whole Critical Works of Monsieur Rapin, Translated into English by Several Hands, 1706; Monsieur Rapin's Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie, Made English by Mr. Rymer, 1706; The Art of Poetry Written in French by The Sieur de Boileau. Made English by William Soames. Since revis'd by John Dryden, Esq., 1710; The Whole Critical Works of Monsieur Rapin. Newly translated into English by Basil Kennet, 1716.

The influence of D'Aubignac, Boileau and of other French critics was being gradually felt in ~~the~~ English critical circles, particularly towards the end of the century.^{1.} Whatever criticism there existed on comedy was by nature apologetic.^{2.} The case of the comic art appears to have been left to the practitioners themselves.

For the practising comedians of this age the rationalistic spirit behind Jonson's theory and practice had a special attraction. At the same time, circumstances had brought them in contact with the plays of Molière. The French custom of pre-fixing an explanatory preface to the printed edition of a work, must have seen convenient to the English playwrights too. Fortunately for them, Ben Jonson's artistic principles, in broad and general outlines, were similar to those of Molière and this for the simple reason that the two dramatists had their roots in the Classics. Thus the English dramatists were in the advantageous position of supporting their own production by native and foreign

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- (1) See Clark, A.F.B., Boileau and the French Classical Critics in England, 1660-1830.
- (2) Dennis, J., The Impartial Critic, 1693; The Defence of Sir Foppling Flutter, 1726; Congreve, W., Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations, &c. 1698.

examples. Of these two influences, the immediate presence of the Frenchman on the scene, appears to have given him the upper hand in shaping the theory and practice of the Restoration comedians. Molière had reduced the hair-splitting arguments over the different technical terms into a direct and lucid theory, the logic and practicability of which could hardly fail to recommend itself to practising comedians. He paid little attention to the ambiguities of the Rules and laid stress on the social implications of comic laughter.

Such a theory came ⁱⁿ handy to the Restoration playwrights. A consistent body of comic theory, with a distinct echo of the principles of Molière, can be set up from the prefaces of the practising playwrights, whether it be of popular Wycherley or unsuccessful Flecknoe. For the substance of their plays too, they have repeatedly turned to Molière's comedies. It would have been difficult for these playwrights who had first-hand knowledge of Molière to resist altogether his tremendous influence. Moreover, other factors were favourable to such an influence. The stage in England during these years was far from being a national one. It catered for the taste of a small coterie, very often frenchified in taste and manners or for the court, steeped in social and cultural influence

of France. Appreciation of plays written in the French fashion could be easily expected from them. Charles II himself greatly enjoyed the French plays. His taste, to some extent, would dictate the material and the manner of dramatic productions.¹ The Earl of Orrery, in a letter to a friend, writes: "I have now finished a Play in the French Manner; because I heard the King declare himself more in favour of their Way of Writing than of ours: My poor Attempt cannot please his Majesty, but my Example may incite others who can:..."² Even the poet Waller could not resist the temptation of translating a few scenes from French plays.³ Therefore, the English dramatists found it,

- (1) See Chap.I. for the popularity of French music and comedy in court, P.21, Foot Note 1.
- (2) The Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, Vol.I., Preface. In fact, the comedians were only too eager to carry out the wishes of their royal patron. At the monarch's request John Crowne wrote Sir Courtly Nice after a play by Moreto and Sir Samuel Tuke, The Adventures of Five Hours, also of a Spanish origin.
- (3) Pompey the Great - A Tragedy Translated out of French by certain Persons of Honour. 1664

not only lucrative but also an easy way to popularity in Court, to adapt the plays of Molière in various ways to suit the taste of the time. There were either direct borrowings where episodes and characters were transplanted bodily into the English play, or dramas built on subtle suggestions from the French. Sir Solomon Single of John Caryl and The Sullen Lovers of Thomas Shadwell, plays with considerable borrowings from Molière, were selected to be presented at Dover in May, 1670, to entertain the King and his sister, the Duchess of Orleans. "This Comedy [The Sullen Lovers] and Sir Solomon Single, pleas'd Madam the Dutchess, and the whole Court extremely."¹ Old John Downes proceeds to say that "the Play being singularly well Acted, it took 12 Days together."²

In a similar manner, in times of need, when pressed for a defence, Molière's theory must have come quite handy to the English comedians. In the background, Master Ben was no doubt present. But Molière, at that moment, was nearer to them and was still a living voice. The Duke of Dorset, to whom

(1) Downes,^{J.} Roscius Anglicanus, Ed. by Montague Summers, P.29.

(2) op.cit P.30.

Thomas Shadwell dedicated his play, The Bury Fair, (1689), or Congreve's patron, the Earl of Montague, in The Way of the World, (1700), would have readily accepted the authority of Molière giving sanction to their comic art. The arguments of these writers tended to run on parallel lines with Jonson's. Yet, the treatment they received in different hands imparted to them a distinctive flavour. Jonson's tradition was the link with the past, while Molière's simple and direct theory, devoid of all argumentative technicalities, helped to give scope and form to the theoretical aspect of Restoration Comedy. "Ben Jonson and the other Elizabethans had not had the benefit of Molière's influence and example, but their successors in the Restoration period came after the great Frenchman and profited by that fact."¹.

To bring out the extent of the influence of Molière's theory of the nature and function of comedy over the English comedians, and how far they appear as the defaulters in the application of theory to practice, it is necessary to examine Molière's theory of comic art as expounded in his comic work.

Molière lived in an age which was extremely aware of its scholarship and a man of letters had to equip himself with a knowledge of the Classics before

(1) Berry, H.T.E., The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama, P.8.

he could venture on a literary career. Scholarship led to literary discussion, the main staple of which was the classical literary criticism as interpreted by the Italian scholars. The problem round which the scholarly disputes were centred in the theatrical world was the application of the Rules to drama. *And this was a* the Académie Française, ~~was~~ founded in 1637 under the patronage of the great Cardinal, with the purpose of encouraging the production of plays faultless in taste and technique. Critics, like Ogier, Chapelaine, and d'Aubignac, laid the corner-stone of French classicism. The issue was brought to the forefront by the production of the "irregular Cid" of Corneille in 1636. To meet the challenge, Corneille had to come out with an explanation, embodied in his Discours and Examens which have become landmarks in the evolution of dramatic theory.

In theory Corneille was a classicist but he claimed the poetic licence of the dramatist and used it to the fullest extent. He subscribed to the basic principle of ~~the age~~, ^{that} namely, the business of literature is to please, but to please according to the Rules.

The business of Le Cid had aroused the keenest interest round the controversial points of the Rules, and every French dramatist, sometime or other in his dramatic career, was called upon to clarify his point

result of the work of
^ ^ ^ ^ ^

of view towards his own profession. Corneille towers high both as a critic and a dramatist. With Molière, however, practice came first and theory followed incidentally. Corneille, without his plays, would still command attention. But, Molière, first and foremost, was a great artistic creator; the theory of his craftsmanship he deduced gradually only to help the audience in the better understanding of his art. He offered no explanation, but it is an exposition of the nature and function of comedy with a few side-lights on its formal structure. These few critical words of Molière have however, built up a whole world of dramatic theory, partly based on the current classical rules but mainly on the exigencies of the situations portrayed in the particular plays. Regularity, order and reason are the key-note of French classicism. To these Molière adhered not only from the point of view of technique, but in the main substance of the plays, these are the lessons he tried to convey through the medium of his plays.

It would be wrong to surmise that Molière had his theory ready to hand right from the beginning of his career. A glance at the prefaces attached to a few of his plays, in a chronological manner, will immediately point to a gradual process of evolution in Molière's conception of his own art. Like Corneille, he accepted

pleasure as the main function of comedy, yet it is pleasure with an ulterior motive. Molière answered the challenge not in the usual form of prefaces always, but in the form in which he was most at home, namely, the dramatic. Such was the genius of the man that he compelled the audience to accept and to appreciate a play having ~~the~~ literary discussion as its central theme. The characters in La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, (1663), and L'Impromptu De Versailles, (1663), voice the opinion of both the parties, the Classicists and the Molièrists. Molière has exposed the folly of slavish adherence to the mechanical Rules. The sanity and success of his own plays are vouched for by his opponents who complain of the crowds at the theatre.¹ As his art matured, Molière re-oriented his position till, in Le Tartuffe, that powerful exposé, Molière accepts the reformatory responsibility of comedy. In the earlier plays, he has explained the nature of comedy, that is, its subject-matter. Gradually, he defines the function of comedy, namely,

(1) "C'est la plus méchante chose du monde. Comment, diable! à peine ai-je pu trouver place; j'ai pensé être étouffé à la porte, et jamais on ne m'a tant marché sur les pieds. Voyez, comme mes canons et mes rubans en sont ajustés, de grâce. Le Marquis, La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, Sc.4.

the ethical purpose implicit in it. Opposition to the performance of the play made him indignant at the refusal of society to face facts of life. In the first printed edition of the play, (1669), he attached a preface which has remained a manifesto of the art of the comic muse. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that in reply to the query as to why Le Tartuffe was banned, while a farce like Scaramouche ermite was popular, Molière gave one of his pithy ironical utterances: "La raison de cela, c'est que la comédie de Scaramouche joue le ciel et la religion, dont ces messieurs -là ne se soucient point, mais celle de Molière les joue eux-mêmes; c'est ce qu'ils ne peuvent souffrir."¹.

To go into the details of Molière's theory the prefaces to two of his early plays, Les Précieuses Ridicules, (1659), and Les Fâcheux, (1661), give a tentative exposition of the aims of comedy as in the plays themselves. Molière was venturing on a mimicry of social frivolities. L'Étourdi, (1655), or Dépit Amoureux, (1656), had been slight comedies indeed, By this time, Molière's power of observation had developed immensely and his technique too had matured to give it effective expression.

(1) Le Tartuffe, Préface.

Molière chose comedy as his weapon of ridicule and he was in the right path, because comedy had its roots deep in satire from its very inception. The comic muse adopts ridicule as its weapon and it is double-edged. It excites laughter which is thought-provoking. It probes deep into social abuses, into individual folly, into the distortions of human emotions. These are brought up to the surface and the result is an opening of the eye of the beholder to the ludicrous situation into which men have led themselves through their own follies. Molière had a firm grasp over life and society; his age upheld the ideal of reason and good sense; Molière preached these two to be practised in life. He accepted as his ideal in life the golden mean, realising that inclination towards any extreme, be it even good, incapacitates man to lead a normal and healthy life. Molière realised the trend of his own genius. Life is a comedy, as the saying goes, to him who observes it keenly and relentlessly. So, in the preface to Les Précieuses Ridicules, (1659), Molière makes a definite statement of his intentions as a comic writer. Molière desires "la liberté de dire deux mots pour justifier mes intentions sur le sujet de cette comédie. J'aurais voulu faire voir qu'elle se tient partout dans les bornes de la satire honnête et permise; que les

plus excellentes choses sont sujettes à être copiées par de mauvais singes, qui meritent d'être bernés; que ces vicieuses imitations de ce qu'il y a de plus parfait ont été de tout temps la matière de la comédie;"¹. Here is in a nut-shell Molière's theory of comedy, that its subject-matter and its function is satiric by nature. A glance at the comedy concerned will show how skilfully Molière had made fun of those who had entertained false ideas of romance and chivalry.

That it is contemporary society, and no figment of imagination, which supplies the material for comedy, is once again stressed in the Advertissement to Les Fâcheux (1661). The facts recorded on Molière's canvas are stranger than fiction. In fact, so numerous were the figures of fun in society that Molière was quite bewildered in making his selection. The short time at his disposal for the composition of the play prevented Molière from enumerating every type of bore one comes across in life. "Je sais que le nombre en est grand et à la cour et dans la ville, et que, sans épisodes, j'eusse bien pu en composer une comédie en cinq actes bien fournis et avoir encore de la matière de reste. Mais, dans le peu de temps qui me fut donné,

(1) Les Précieuses Ridicules, Preface

57.

il m'étoit impossible de faire un grand dessein, et de rêver beaucoup sur le choix de mes personnages et sur la disposition de mon sujet. Je me reduisis donc à ne toucher qu'un petit nombre d'importunes:...."¹.

As a comic poet, Molière exposes the follies of life in a comic guise and purges it with relentless exposure. Men may flinch at it; it may appear grotesque or outrageous on the stage. Yet, as long as a comedy opens men's eyes, it is deemed to have fulfilled its function.

Passing from these comedies of a lighter vein, we come to the more serious ones, where Molière deals, not with temporary phases of human follies, but with the deep-rooted irrational acts which blast the happy and smooth working of human relationship. The mature mind of Molière was seeking a deeper significance in his art. Comedy, as a mirror of society, reflected not only the outer working of society but presented as well, the problems which men and women face in life. L'École Des Maris, L'École Des Femmes and Le Tartuffe present various acts of irrationality into which men lead themselves. The last two plays created a good deal of excitement. In reply, Molière^{at first} presented two plays, La Critique De L'École Des Maris and L'Impromptu de Versailles, which define ^{his} Molière's position as a comic dramatist.

(1) Les Fâcheux, Advertissement.

Comedy is an imitation of a social folly in a manner" plutôt capable de guérir les gens, que de les rendre malades."¹ Molière met the opposition to his L'École Des Femmes by no other means but by continued representations, which were well crowded and enjoyed, as testified by the Marquis, his opponent.²

Climène and Lysidas enumerate the faults of the play; it offends against decorum and religion; the characters are inconsistent and the most serious sin of all is the one against the Rules, which is most resented by the Poet. Climène protests vigorously on behalf of offended decorum: "...Peut-on, ayant de la vertue, trouver de l'agrément dans une pièce qui tient sans cesse la pudeur en alarme, et salit à tous moments l'imagination."³ The critical words of Dorante and Uranie in reply, serve to set up Molière's own theory of comedy in detail. At the offset, Molière clarifies what he expects to be the attitude of the theatre-goer, particularly, the comic theatre.⁴

(1) La Critique de L'École Des Femmes, Sc.3.

(2) Le Marquis in La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, Sc.3. See above, P.53; See also L'Impromptu de Versailles, Sc.V., Mlie.Molière.

(3) La Critique De L'École Des Femmes. Sc.3.

(4) La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, Sc.6.

Uranie is one of the balanced critics of Dorante, "qui sont capables de juger d'une pièce selon les règles, et que les autres en jugent par la bonne façon d'en juger, qui est de se laisser prendre aux choses, et de n'avoir ni prévention aveugle, ni complaisance affectée, ni délicatesse ridicule."¹ Uranie strikes at the pretenders to modesty, saying: "L'honnêteté d'une femme n'est pas dans les grimaces. Il sied mal de vouloir être plus sage que celles qui sont sages. L'affectation en cette matière est pire qu'en toute autre; et je ne vois rien de si ridicule que cette délicatesse d'honneur qui prend tout en mauvaise part, donne un sens criminel aux plus innocentes paroles, et s'offense de l'ombre des choses. Croyez-moi, celles qui font tout de façons n'en sont pas estimées plus femmes de bien. Au contraire, leur sévérité mystérieuse et leurs grimaces affectées irritent la censure de tout le monde contre les actions de leur vie....."².

Dorante, a little later, enumerates the different types of critics. The ideal critic-cum-audience is portrayed in the figures of Uranie and Dorante. To Climène's objection to the play as a disobliging satire against women, Uranie defines the general nature of comedy and the futility in trying to find in it any

(1) *La Critique* ^{De L'École Des Femmes,} Sc.5.

(2) *Op.cit.* Sc.3.

personal malice. "Pour moi, je me garderai bien de m'en offenser et de prendre rien sur mon compte de tout ce qui s'y dit. Ces sortes de satires tombent directement sur les moeurs, et ne frappent les personnes que par réflexion. N'allons point nous appliquer nous-même les traits d'une censure générale; et profitons de la leçon, si nous pouvons, sans faire semblant qu'on parle à nous.

Toutes les peintures ridicules qu'on expose sur les théâtres doivent être regardées sans chagrin de tout le monde. Ce sont miroirs publics, ou il ne faut jamais témoigner qu'on se voie; et c'est se taxer hautement d'un défaut, que se scandaliser qu'on le reprenne".¹

Again, Uranie asserts that effective comic satire is produced through general characterisation and by the use of this technique Molière vindicates his position as a comic writer. He has as serious a function to carry out as the tragedian. His procedure is different, yet it has the same ultimate effect. Uranie says: "...La tragédie, sans doute, est quelque chose de beau quand elle est bien touchée; mais la comédie a ses charmes, et je tiens que l'une n'est pas moins difficile à faire que l'autre."² Dorantes gives its full implication:

(1) La Critique De L'École Des Femmes. Sc.6.

(2) op.cit. Sc.6.

"....Pour la difficulté, vous mettriez un plus du côté de la comédie,....Car enfin, je trouve qu'il est bien plus aisé de se guinder sur de grand sentiments que d'entrer comme il faut dans le ridicule des hommes, et de rendre agréablement sur le théâtre les défauts de tout le monde. Lorsque vous peignez des héros, vous faites ce que vous voulez....lorsque vous peignez les hommes, il faut peindre d'après nature. On veut que ces portraits ressemblent; et vous n'avez rien fait, si vous n'y faites reconnaître les gens de votre siècle... il y faut plaisanter; et c'est une étrange entreprise que celle de faire rire les honnêtes gens."¹.

Plain, natural good sense and contact with the 'beau monde' will develop the judgment of delicate things better than all common-place learning of the pedants.

On Lysidas' insistence upon the pedantic Rules, Dorante, once again, gives the counterblast: "Vous êtes de plaisantes gens avec vos règles, dont vous embarrassez les ignorantes et nous etourdissez tous les jours. Il semble, à vous ouïr parler, que ces règles de l'art soient les plus grands mystères du monde; et cependant ce ne sont que quelques observations aisées, que le bon sens a faites sur ce qu'il peut ôter le plaisir et le même bon sens qui a fait autrefois ces observations les fait aisément tous les jours...Je

(1) La Critique De L'École Des Femmes. Sc.6.

voudrais bien savoir si la grande règle de toutes les règles n'est pas de plaire, et si une pièce de théâtre qui a attrapé son but n'a pas suivi un bon chemin..."¹.

Molière thus explodes the theory of the inviolability of the Rules and subjects them to the test of plain common-sense to be used as required by the comedian.

Molière would not have any personal malice attached to his art. Whatever he ridicules, it is prompted by an impersonal motive; ~~there~~ great art never suffers from any vindictiveness or spite. The aim of comedy is to expose the eccentricity of character through ridicule but ~~it is never to be~~ ^{through} malignity. Molière takes up this position in L'Impromptu De Versailles".....IL [Molière] disait que rien ne lui donnait du déplaisir comme d'être accusé de regarder quelqu'un dans les portraits qu'il fait; que son dessein est de peindre les moeurs sans vouloir toucher aux personnes, et que tous les personnages qu'il représente sont des personnages en l'air et des fantômes proprement, qu'il habille a sa fantaisie, pour réjouir les spectateurs; qu'il serait bien fâché d'y avoir jamais marqué qui que ce soit; et que si quelque chose était capable de la dégouter de faire des comédies, c'était les ressemblances qu'on y voulait toujours trouver, et dont ses enemies tâchaient

(1) La Critique De L'École Des Femmes,
Op.cit. Sc.6.

malicieusement d'appuyer la pensée, pour lui rendre de mauvais offices auprès de certaines personnes à qui il ne jamais penseComme l'affaire de la comédie est de représenter en général tous les défauts des hommes, et principalement des hommes de notre siècle, il est impossible a Molière de faire aucun caractère qui ne rencontre quelqu'un dans le monde; et s'il faut qu'on l'accuse d'avoir songé toutes les personnes ou l'on peut trouver les défauts qu'il peint, il faut sans doute qu'il ne fasse plus de comédie."¹.

These two plays, La Critique De L'École Des Femmes and L'Impromptu De Versailles are a fine testimony to Molière's comic genius, By a careful selection and juxtaposition of intelligent and ridiculous characters, Molière has achieved the desired effect of comedy and has as well vindicated his own position.

The adverse criticism and the subsequent banning of his masterpiece, Le Tartuffe, roused the righteous indignation of a writer who finds his book, which is his life-blood, condemned by the sheer iniquity and selfish stubbornness of the interested few. "Les Marquis, les précieuses, les cocus et les médecins ont souffert doucement qu'on les ait représentés, et ils ont fait

(1) L'Impromptu De Versailles, Sc.4.

semblant de se divertir, avec tout le monde: des peintures que l'on a faites d'eux; mais les hypocrites n'ont point entendu raillerie; ils se sont effarouchés d'abord et ont trouvé étrange que j'eusse la hardiesse de jouer leurs grimaces, et de vouloir décrier un metier dont tant d'honnêtes gens se mêlent. C'est un crime qu'ils ne sauraient me pardonner;.."1. In the first edition of Le Tartuffe, (1669), Molière attaches his preface in which he dwells once again, on the exalted nature of comedy as a corrective medium of social vices. The hedonistic character of comedy, which he had maintained so long, is now qualified by imbuing it with a deeper significance. Laughter evoked by the picture of affectation in its turn is a most effective form of castigation. The preface is a brilliant exposition of the position of a comedian and of his art in society. "Si L'emploi de la comédie est de corriger les vices des hommes, je ne vois pas par quelle raison il y en aura de privilégiés. Celui-ci est, dans l'État, d'une conséquence bien plus dangereuse que tous les autres; et nous avons vu que le théâtre a une grande vertue pour la correction. Les plus beaux traits d'une sérieuse morale sont moins puissants, le plus souvent, que ceux de la satire; et rien ne reprend mieux la plupart des hommes que la peinture de leurs défauts. C'est une

(1) Le Tartuffe, Préface.

grande atteinte aux vices que de les exposer a la risée de tout le monde. On souffre aisément des répréhensions; mais on ne souffre point la raillerie. On veut bien être méchant; mais on ne veut point être ridicule." ¹.
 The force of reasoning and common-sense coupled with a simple and lucid style makes any explanation redundant.

Thus, Molière is "le railleur" and the "contrefaiseur de gens", who realising "que les hommes aient besoin de divertissement, je soutiens qu'on leur en peut trouver un qui soit plus innocent que la comédie."². As the Laughing Philosopher, he understood that, "On connaîtra, sans doute, que, n'étant autre chose qu'un poème ingénieux, qui, par des leçons agréables, reprend les défauts des hommes, on ne saurait la censurer sans injustice; et, si nous voulons ouïr là-dessus la témoignage de l'antiquité, elle nous dira que ses plus célèbres philosophes ont donne des louanges à la comédie, eux qui faisaient profession d'une sagesse si austère, et qui criaient sans cesse après les vices de leur siècle."³. Molière had been blamed for

(1) Le Tartuffe, Préface.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

writing "de méchantes pièces que tout Paris va voir, et où il peint si bien les gens, que chacun s'y connaît."¹. Yet, Molière had, in spite of opposition, pleased the audience a little more than they could have wished.

In summing up Molière's theory of comedy built up of these different pieces, one cannot but notice that it is essentially an Aristotelian conception.² The various rules of the comic art, commonly attributed to Aristotle, were no doubt current in French literary circles, Molière had imbibed them as naturally as he breathed the air around him. But, guided by his comic genius, he had accepted only those which would stand the test of commonsense and help him to fulfill his rôle as the comic artist in society. The substance of comedy consists of "...an imitation of men in action" and "a resemblance is present between comedy and human life". The effect of comedy may be described as "psycho-physiological". "An outward aspect of it is laughter". The pleasure of comedy arises from our perception of a defect in human nature which disturbs our sense of proportion and causes pain to us. The function of comedy

(1) L'Impromptu De Versailles, Sc.5.

(2) Cooper, Lane, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy.

is as much utilitarian as that of tragedy, the cathartic process being also involved in it. Emotional excesses are disturbing factors and their catharsis "would amount to a form of pleasure". "The comic catharsis may be more direct" and of immediate application. Emotions, like avarice, jealousy, love, exaggerated on the stage become ludicrous. The law of proportion thereby becomes clear to us. "At the end, we are free from the accumulated burden of painful emotion, are relieved of the sense of disproportion - and by a homeopathic means. Through the generalised representation, the spectator loses what was before merely individual in his own experience; the painful element is gone; and a harmless pleasure ensued."¹. But the goal of life is not pleasure. It is "a means to an end". Comedy is one such which by providing means for arousing laughter gives "occasional vent to certain passing emotional states.", and then leaves us free for serious occupation. Thus, comedy is an accessory to the ultimate goal of life which is philosophic contemplation."². Molière, by his portraiture

(1) Cooper, Lane, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, Pp.60-98.

(2) Cooper, Lane, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, P.69.

of varied emotional abnormalities in his comedies, has earned the title of 'Le Contemplateur'. In due course these principles, Aristotelian by nature, infiltrated to the rank of the English dramatists and critics, who found them useful in the practice of their art. The comedians must have eagerly accepted a theory which imparted to their work the impress of an authority well-known in the circle of critics and patrons of literature.

J.E.Gillet tries to ascertain the respective contributions of Jonson and Molière towards the development of the theoretical side of Restoration Comedy. He admits the common features between the two writers. But he adds: "Sa part [Molière's] est probablement plus considérable qu'on ne croit, car la nation anglaise tout entière retrouvait son bon sens indépendant dans l'esprit bourgeois de Molière."¹. Gillet mentions the influence of La Critique De L'École Des Femmes on Sir Robert Howard in his preface to The Great Favourite or The Duke of Lerma and on the Duke of Buckingham in The Rehearsal. One is reminded in this connection of the exchange of letters between the dramatist

(1) Gillet, J.E., Molière en Angleterre, P.125.

Davenant and the philosopher Hobbes in Paris in 1655. Gillet goes on to point out the influence of La Critique De L'École Des Femmes over Dryden too. Perhaps, Shadwell as well falls within this category. A detailed analysis of the theoretical aspect of these dramatists, as expounded in many of the prefaces to their plays, brings out their striking similarity with Molière. Gillet notices the decline of Jonson's influence after 1670 and he sums up by saying: "L'École du bon sens, fondé par Thomas Rymer, qui domina toute le fin du siècle, procédait exclusivement de Hobbes et de Molière."¹.

The man who was acquainted with Parisian life² and who by temperament inclined towards the gay life of a fine gentleman in fashionable society, captured the attention of the theatrical world by giving in his plays a lively picture of the easy social life in Covent Garden and the Mall. With his lightness of touch and his "pleasure in turning a witty sentence", Etherege introduced the new style in character-sketches after the dexterous touches of Molière who gradually supplanted

(1) Gillet, J.E., Molière en Angleterre, P.126.

(2) Biographia Britannica Vol.3: "Tis thought he had some education at the University of Cambridge, but it seems he travelled into France....."

Jonson. In the Prologue to The Man of Mode, (1676), Etheredge speaks of the influence of France in matters of fashion and literature.

"But I'm afraid that while to France we go,
To bring you home Fine Dresses, Dance, and Show;
The Stage like you will but more Foppish grow."
So for his comedies, he turned to his own society;
"For Heav'n be thank't 'tis not so wise an Age,
But your own Follies may supply the Stage".¹.

Moreover, that Etheredge was aware of the satiric strain in such pictures of foppishness is shown in these lines:

"Then for your own sakes be not too severe,
Nor what you all admire at home, Damn here.
Since each is fond of his own ugly Face,
Why shou'd you, when we hold it, break the Glass?"².

These principles behind Etheredge's comic art and characterisation may appear to be a reflection of those of Molière. But it is hardly credible that "Easy

(1) The Man of Mode, The Prologue.

(2) Ibid.

Etheredge" was serious in his vocation as a comedian, or that he was guided by set rules in the composition of his plays. He had accepted whatever came handy to him and Molière was a fruitful source.

For a more definite and conscious echo of Molière's theory and practice one has to turn to the other dramatists of the age whose art was to them a life-long career. Some of these prominent figures in the dramatic world in England after 1660, have had a taste of the polished society in which the witty comedy of manners thrives during their banishment in Paris under the Puritan regime. The quick-witted among them had gathered plenty of material which they could turn to a profitable use at home.

One such comedian was William Wycherley, whose keen intellectual curiosity was considerably sharpened by a prolonged stay in France during the most impressionable years of his youth.¹ These were years of intense literary activity in France and, undoubtedly, young Wycherley found much food for thought and enquiry. Together with his natural inclination, his acquaintance with some of the members of the brilliant house of Rambouillet² had eminently equipped Wycherley for a

(1) Dennis, J., Some Remarkable Passages Of The Life Of Mr. Wycherley, P.114; "About the age of fifteen he was sent for Education to the Western Parts of France, either to Saintonge or the Angoumois".

(2) Ibid. Madame de Montausier or Mlle. Rambouillet, "one of the most accomplish'd Ladies of the Court of France" P.114.

in Le Tartuffe, the comic purpose is fully established: ".....C'est une grande atteinte aux vices que de les exposer a la risée de tout le monde. On souffre aisément des répréhensions; mais on ne souffre point la raillerie. On veut bien être méchant; mais on ne veut point être ridicule."¹. This last principle gives the clue to Wycherley's art. The pressure of culture and social background account for the obvious differences in their dramatic art. But the critical approach of both towards life and art runs along parallel lines. It was not a question of imitating Molière but of writing after Molière in the English context. Therefore, Molière's theory had also played an important part.

The fact that the name of a notorious woman is attached to the Dedication to The Plain Dealer, should not blind us to the point that it forms the manifesto of Wycherley's sincerity of purpose in fulfilling the duties of a comedian according to the age-old tradition of literary art. "The vices of the age are our best business", and with the same out-spoken style, Wycherley doggedly sets his pen to uproot "that heinous, and worst of women's crimes, hypocrisy". One is reminded of Molière's determination in the Preface to Le Tartuffe to expose the vice of hypocrisy, and the manner he chose is "raillerie".². A further implication of Wycherley's

(1) Préface, Le Tartuffe, See above, Pp. 64-65.

(2) See above, P165

statement is that he is trying to draw after nature, particularly, in exposing the weak spots in contemporary society. Molière had also spoken of the function of comedy, which usually decries "sans cesse après les vices de leur siècle".¹ But the finesse of the comic art lies not so much in the depiction of vice in the individual as in the general picture of human frailties most prevalent at the time. Molière, in 1663, had made Uranie in La Critique De L'École Des Femmes and Brécourt in L'Impromptu De Versailles, take up their stand on this general nature of comedy.² Wycherley appears to be echoing the same idea when he says: " But those who act as they look, ought not to be scandalised at the reprehension of others' faults, lest they tax themselves with 'em, and by too delicate and quick an apprehension not only make that obscene which I meant innocent, but that satire on all, which was intended only on those who deserved it."³ In support of his

(1) Le Tartuffe, Préface and L'Impromptu De Versailles, See above, P.65 and P.63.

(2) See above, Pp.60; 62-63.

(3) Wycherley, The Plain Dealer, Dedicatory Letter. Note the striking similarity between this passage and Uranie's speech, in La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, Sc.3. See above, P.59; See also Dorante's opinion of Marchéness Araminta in Sc.5.

statement, Wycherley cites the authority of Aristotle,⁷⁵ Horace and the 'French authors' whom he does not name.

The extravagance of the method in handling the matter is justified by the ultimate function of comedy. "Ridicule commonly decides great matters more forcibly and better than severity", is the motto attached to The Plain Dealer. The comedian considers his subject-matter to be of great importance, crying for immediate attention. The principle guiding the play is certainly that of Le Tartuffe, though the actual characters and scenes have been adapted from Le Misanthrope. Wycherley aims at ridicule and at correction of what is reprehensible through laughter. Therefore, it can be maintained that Wycherley accepts comedy as a social corrective.¹ He may differ at times widely from Molière, but the aim of both the master and the pupil converge upon the same point. "'Tis not sufficient to make the hearer laugh aloud; although there is nevertheless a certain merit even in this."² Wycherley here rejects pleasure as the sole purpose of comedy; the ultimate end of laughter lies in rousing men's consciousness to the truth underneath.³

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- (1) Compare Molière's attitude in the Préface, Le Tartuffe. See above, Pp. 64-65.
 - (2) Wycherley, The Gentleman Dancing-Master.
 - (3) Compare Molière's attitude towards laughter, see above Pp. 61-62 and Pp. 64-68.

Wycherley's manner of treatment has earned for him the epithets *Manly* and *Brawney*, and they are an indication of his stylistic characteristics. As one belonging to the rank of Restoration courtiers, he had witnessed the debauchery that was eating into the heart of society. He realised that such a desperate situation required desperate treatment. Hence, the violence of his denunciation and the extravagance of his remedies. "Indeed, excess is needful for continency's sake. Fire is with fire extinguished".¹ In this one sentence, Wycherley has tersely explained the cathartic process of his comic art.² In the two early plays, he was hesitant; but in the last two products of his mature mind, he wielded the flail to lash society out of its vices. In like manner, Molière too had expressed his intention of exposing all types of hypocrisy.³ His *Préface to Le Tartuffe* is an exposition of his artistic principle which guided his pen in delineating a situation

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- (1) Wycherley, *The Plain Dealer*, Dedicatory Letter.
 - (2) Compare with Molière, See above, Pp.64-65.
 - (3) *La Tartuffe*, *Préface*, see above, Pp.63-64.

which had more tragic possibilities. Wycherley, dealing with similar material, would naturally turn to him for guidance.

The deliberate and pointed comic purpose present even in the apparently cynical words of Wycherley, appears to have been the main standpoint of Shadwell, who, in his prefaces, has clearly stated his reformatory attitude according to tradition.

Shadwell has declared himself a disciple of Ben Jonson, professing to imitate "the practice of Ben Jonson" in representing "Variety of humours". Much of the substance, however, of a number of his plays, consists of direct borrowings from the plays of Molière. Here is an instance, therefore, of an English dramatist, who consciously trying to follow the native tradition, is being considerably influenced by foreign elements near at hand. In one of his later plays, The Miser, (1671), which is a free translation of L'Avare with certain additions, Shadwell tries to make out a case for the English plagiarists on the ground that "'Tis not barrenness of wit or invention, that makes us borrow from the French, but laziness;...."¹. Whatever the case be, a mediocre dramatist of the age could not but utilise some of the substance from abroad that was becoming quite popular on the English stage. Les Fâcheux appears to have been a model before Shadwell for the

(1) Shadwell, T., The Miser, Reader.

portraits of the affected fops so common in his days. At the same time, Shadwell looking for a purpose in his drama found the Préface to Le Tartuffe useful in formulating his theory. Molière's simple critical words had clarified considerably the fruitless arguments over the rules of art and had brought the essentials of the comic theory within the easy reach of the dramatists of medium stature. The influence of Molière's theory over Shadwell's is discernible in the clear and concise definitions of Shadwell which contrast strangely with the diffuseness of his practice.

Shadwell's definition of the nature and function of comedy, as embodied in the prefaces to The Sullen Lovers, (1668), and The Humourists, (1670), has the familiar ring of Molière. Comedy is a mirror of society, by nature satiric. In the Dedicatory Letter to the Duchess of Newcastle, Shadwell says that "The play was intended a Satyr against Vice and Folly."¹ He continued in a molièresque manner, that his design was "to reprehend some of the Vices and Follies of the Age, which I take to be the most proper, and most useful way of writing Comedy."² Shadwell accepts the dual role of comedy and it appears as if the Préface to Le Tartuffe had formed the basis

(1) Shadwell, T., The Humorists.

(2) Shadwell, T., The Humorists, Preface. Compare Préface, Le Tartuffe, See above, PP.64-65.

of Shadwell's conception of the element of instruction present in comedy. "Here I must take leave to dissent from those, who seem to insinuate that the ultimate end of a Poet is to delight, without correction or instruction". Otherwise, a poet is likea Fidler or a Dancing-Master, who delights the fancy only, without improving the judgementI confess, a poet ought to do all that he can, decently to please, that so he may instruct. To adorn his Images of Vertue so delightfully to affect people with a secret veneration of it in others, and an emulation to practice it in themselves. And to render their Figures of Vice and Folly so ugly and detestable, to make People hate and despise them, not only in others, butin their dear selves; because the Vices and Follies in Courts (as they are too tender to be touch'd) so they concern but a few; whereas the Cheats, Villanies, and troublesome Follies, in the common conversation of the World, are of concernment to all the Body of Mankind".^{1.}

Again after the manner set out in the prefaces to Les Fâcheux and Le Tartuffe, Shadwell qualifies the type of vices to be exposed; not those of fools and idiots, but "the affected vanities, and the artificial fopperies of men", which they so studiously try to acquire.^{2.}

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- (1) Shadwell, T., The Humorists, Preface. Compare Préface, Le Tartuffe and La Critique De L'Ecole Des Femmes, Sc.6; See above, Pp.60; 64-65.
- (2) Shadwell, T., The Humorists, Preface. Compare Les Fâcheux Avertissements, See above, Pp.56-57.

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

These words of Shadwell are as assertive as those in the Préface to Le Tartuffe.² Shadwell is even conscious of the general nature of ridicule and of the method by which the dramatist obtains his knowledge of such characters, that is by observation. The poet writes of nothing"... but what must spring from the Observation he has made of Men or Books." One is reminded of the words of Dorante and Uranie in La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, when Shadwell assigns to comedy its difficult role: "That which...makes Comedy more difficult, is that the faults are naked and bare to most people, but the wit of it understood, or valued, but by few."³ Rymer, Gildon, Dennis and a host of English critics, appear a few years later to codify such theories, which were

(1) Shadwell, T., The Humorists, Preface.

(2) See above, Pp. 64-65.

(3) Shadwell, T., The Humorists, Preface. Compare La Critique De L'École Des Femmes. See above, Pp. 60-61.

current at the time. But it is difficult to deny the hand Molière had in the formulation of these neat and precise statements of Shadwell.

It would be difficult to trace any of Dryden's ideas on comedy directly to Molière. Dryden was a staunch nationalist in matters of art and literature. Moreover, comedy not being his forte, he would not perhaps be drawn to the plays of Molière, which were so very different to his taste. Yet he could not have escaped the ubiquitous presence of the Frenchman in the comic world. It is interesting to note his attitude towards comedy in the prefaces to the two plays, namely, An Evening's Love, (1668), and The Spanish Friar, (1681), plays which owe certain scenes and characters to Molière. There are echoes of Les Précieuses Ridicules in The Evening's Love, and Dryden like Molière, has defined his conception of the nature and function of comedy in the preface. Like Molière, Dryden holds that, "Comedy presents us with the imperfections of human nature:.....causes laughter in those who can judge of men and manners, by the lively representation of their folly or corruption:"¹. In the preface to Les Précieuses Ridicules Molière holds a similar position.².

(1) Dryden, J., Dramatic Essays, Everyman's Library, 'On Comedy, Farce, and Tragedy', P.78.

(2) See above Pp.55-56.

Dryden could not but accept the ultimate ethical nature of comedy, though the main emphasis is placed on its pleasure-giving quality: "for delight is the chief, if not the only, end of poesy: instruction can be admitted but in the second place; for poesy only instructs as it delights."¹ He agreed with Molière on the refining influence of the Court and according to him the English monarch held an advantageous position for having been "conversant in the most polished courts of Europe".²

But, it would indeed be difficult to ascribe Dryden's thoughts on comedy to Molière. Dryden has no doubt been influenced by French writers in his other critical writings. He, however, possessed, the talent to turn the borrowed material into his own and to impart to it the impress of his own personality. Therefore, even if there be any indebtedness to Molière, it was an indirect one. Dryden was well-versed in classical and modern literature. His ideas had been gathered

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- (1) Dryden, J., Dramatic Essays, Everyman's Library, 'A Defence Of An Essay Of Dramatic Poesy', P.62.
- (2) Dryden, J., Dramatic Essays, Everyman's Library, 'The Dramatic Poetry Of The Last Age', P.106.

from many fields and had been well thought out by his own judgment. As such, when dealing with comedy, he must have readily agreed with the opinions of Molière as they were universally accepted. Unfortunately, the idea of giving pleasure, through the depiction of social follies, has often overridden the *fundamental* purpose of comedy with much detriment to Dryden's comical art.

The very strength of Wycherley turned out ultimately to be his weak spot. Engrossed in his task as the castigator of vices, he has in the end repelled his audience by the monstrosity of the crimes he had detected in society. Congreve, stepping into his shoes after a lapse of nearly twenty years, was fortunate enough to have left behind the worst of Restoration society. The political and religious horizon had cleared considerably and society had regained its partial stability. With the coming of age of a new generation, the change in the moral tone is clearly discernible. Wycherley's plays, The Plain Dealer and The Country Wife, were among the popular plays of the 70's. But in the last decade of the century, Congreve in his Epistle Dedicatory, was obliged to offer an explanation, because the fair section of the audience had taken umbrage at certain characterisations in his play, The Double-Dealer. It seems to be a parallel case to that of Molière, who after the performance of L'École Des Femmes, came forward

with his defence in La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, where the womenfolk appear in the chief role of censors. The impersonal treatment of the subject-matter in La Critique De L'École Des Femmes and L'Impromptu De Versailles has appealed to the taste and temperament of Congreve. The English playwright was also aiming at a detached view of life. These twin plays rather than the severe Le Tartuffe, which had set the example before Manly Wycherley, had considerable influence in giving shape to the theoretical aspect of Congreve's work.

Like Dorante of La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, Congreve defines his own attitude towards his art as a reply to the criticism. "...They [the ladies] are concerned that I have represented some women vicious and affected: It is the business of a comic poet — to paint the vices and follies of humankind; and there are but two sexes, male and female, men and women, which have a title to humanity: ... I should be very glad of an opportunity to make my compliments to those ladies who are offended; but they can no more expect it in a comedy, than to be tickled by a surgeon when he is letting them blood. They who are virtuous or discreet should not be offended; for such characters as these distinguish them, and make their beauties more shining and observed: and they who are of the other kind, may

nevertheless pass for such, by seeming not to be displeased, or touched with the satire of this comedy. Thus have they also wrongfully accused me of doing them a prejudice, when I have in reality done them a service."¹. Incidentally, it is of interest to note that the charges against Congreve seem to have a similar ring to those of *Climène* against Molière for having written, what she termed, a disobliging satire against women. Congreve's answer is partially based on both Dorante's and Uranie's statements, where they mention how the fastidiousness of the ladies blinds them to the real object of a comedy and "...L'habileté de son scruple découvre des saletés ou jamais personne n'en avait vu."². Thus, Congreve's defence lies in the general position of the comedian while he holds a mirror to public vices, and in admitting the serious purpose of comedy, Congreve falls in line with Molière.

The 90's of the century witnessed the opposition to the stage gathering momentum and culminating in Collier's violent denunciation. Of the few practising dramatists, who championed the cause of the stage, Congreve was in

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- (1) Congreve, W., The Double-Dealer, Epistle Dedicatory. Compare Uranie's speech in La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, Sc.3. See above, Pp.59.
- (2) La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, Sc.5. Dorante.

the forefront. He could not keep aloof from the bitter controversy over the value of the stage, because it involved his reputation not only as a dramatist but also as a man of the world. Congreve had accepted morality as the yardstick for the valuation of drama. He had no other alternative but to accept the critical theories of the age which tended towards the central topic of morality. Like Wycherley, Congreve was conversant with the French mode of thought and tradition; his frequent quotations and references ally him with the group of writers, like Rymer, Gildon and Dennis, who were trained in the school of Aristotle and Horace through their French interpreters, like Rapin and Dacier and Boileau. On top of this came their acquaintance with the French dramatists, who, including Molière, had to make a public avowal, as it were, of their artistic principles. Congreve, like Molière, was too intent on his artistic creation to be aware of any utilitarian purpose, but, like Molière, he was drawn into the fray. His arguments attest his lofty conception of comedy as an art, the purpose of which he had tried to carry out with due sincerity. But on both the French and English comedians, the garb of the moralist hung rather loosely, because both were, first and foremost, conscious of their vocation as an artist.

In his defence in Amendments of Mr Collier's False and Imperfect Citations, &c., Congreve begins with the usual definition of the nature and function of comedy. "Comedy (says Aristotle) is an Imitation of worse sort of People".¹ He proceeds to qualify the character of vice to be depicted in a comedy: "....the Vices most frequent, and which are the common Practice of the looser sort of Livers, are the subject-Matter of Comedy....."² Then comes the crucial point in connection with a comedy, a point tenaciously held by the French master: "....they must be exposed after a ridiculous manner; for Men are to be laugh'd out of their Vices in Comedy; the Business of Comedy is to delight as well as to instruct; And as vicious People are made asham'd of their Follies of Faults, by seeing them expos'd in a ridiculous manner, so are good People at once both warn'd and diverted at their Expence".³ Congreve's statement is an echo of Molière's point of view as put forward in the Preface to Le Tartuffe and in La Critique De L'École Des Femmes.⁴

(1) Amendments of Mr Collier's False and Imperfect Citations &c. Pp. 7 - 8.

(2) op.cit. P.8.

(3) op.cit. P.8.

(4) See above, Pp 64-65, P.60.

The stress is once again laid on the dual role of comedy. "After the Action of the Play is over, and the Delight of the Representation at an end; there is generally Care taken, that the Moral of the whole shall be summ'd up, and deliver'd to the Audience, in the very last and concluding Lines of the Poem. The Intention of this is, that the Delight of the Representation may not so strongly possess the Minds of the Audience, as to make them forget or oversee the Instruction."¹ Never did Congreve falter in his insistence on the general nature of and the moral purpose implicit in comedy. In the same defence, he reiterates that if the comic "...business is to expose and reprehend Folly and Vice in general, no particular person ought to take offence. And such business is properly the business of Comedy."² That this has always been Moliere's angle of vision needs no reiteration. A glance at Le Tartuffe, La Critique De L'École Des Femmes and L'Impromptu De Versailles will convince one of the

(1) Congreve, The Amendment of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations, Pp

(2) op.cit. P.64.

fact. To quote only the words of Brécourt from L'Impromptu De Versailles: "...Il disait que rien ne lui donnait du déplaisir comme d'être accusé de regarder quelqu'un dans les portraits qu'il fait; que son dessein est de peindre les moeurs sans vouloir toucher aux personnes, ^{et que tous les personnages} qu'il représente sont des personnages en l'air, et des fantômes proprement, qu'il habille a sa fantaisie, pour réjouir les spectateurs;"¹. Congreve's imaginative soul, aiming at a general effect, has partially succeeded in leaving the particular behind and in creating fascinating comic characters in the fashion of the French master whose delicate raillery and finesse find an echo in the polish and elegance of the English dramatist.

Congreve mentions in the Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations &c., Rapin's praise of Molière for having raised the comic character.². Molière's delicate sense of the dignity of comic characters is shared by Congreve. In the preface to The Way Of The World, he writes: " Those characters which are meant to be ridiculed in most of our comedies, are

(1) L'Impromptu De Versailles. Sc.4.

(2) Congreve, W., Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations, P.18.

of fools so gross, that, in my humble opinion, they should rather disturb than divert the well-natured and reflecting part of an audience." He gives expression to the same idea in a more assertive manner in his letter, "Concerning Humour in Comedy", to Dennis, written on July, 10. 1695: "Things, that either are not in Nature, or if they are, are Monsters, and Births of Mischance; should be stifled, and huddled out of the way, that Mankind may not be shock'd with an appearing Possibility of the Degeneration of a God-like Species. For my part, I am as willing to Laugh, as anybody, and as easily diverted with an Object truly ridiculous, but at the same time, I can never care for seeing things, that force me to entertain low thoughts of my Nature" Sure the Poet must both be very ill-natur'd him-self, and think his Audience so, when he proposes by shewing a Man deform'd, or Deaf, or Blind, to give them an agreeable Entertainment; and hopes to raise their Mirth, by what is truly an object of Compassion."¹.

Together with this high conception of comic character goes Congreve's motto for his first serious play, The Double-Dealer, "Nevertheless, sometimes even

(1) Congreve, Letters Upon Several Occassions Written By And Between Mr. Dennis. Pp.83-84.

comedy exalts her voice". The purpose he set out to fulfill is to be found in the Epistle Dedicatory: "I designed the moral first, and to that moral I invented the fable,..." This exalted notion of comedy Congreve seems to have imbibed from Molière, together with his graceful and delicate touch, which is the cream of comic raillerie. In La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, both Uranie and Dorante, as Molière's mouth-piece, speak of the high tone of comedy,¹ while in the Préface to Le Tartuffe, the exalted function of comedy appears as the main argument.

These striking similarities can hardly be looked upon as mere coincidences. The fact that Congreve should be influenced by Molière is not to be wondered at. Wycherley learnt from Molière the art of ridicule while Congreve turned to the Frenchman as a kindred spirit in the world of art.

~~There is a~~ host of minor dramatists who have ransacked Molière mercilessly and have, at times, forgotten to acknowledge their debt to the French dramatist. There were even some who, with surprising self-complacence, claimed to have improved upon the original. This single fact denotes the failure ~~on the part~~ of these dramatists

(1) See above Pp. 60-61.

to understand the spirit of Molière'. ~~Perhaps,~~
 Sometimes, ^{however} we come across someone who has vaguely
 grasped the moral implications of Molière's plays.

Aphra Ben voices effectively the opinion of these minor writers. In the prologue to one of her own plays, based on Molière, she writes;

"We write not now, as th'antient Poets writ,
 For your Applause of Nature, Sense and Wit;
 But, like good Tradesmen, what's in fashion vest,
 And cozen you, to give ye all content." ¹.

These dramatists kept the audience, who clamoured for excitement and intrigue, entertained by a continuous flow of plays in quick succession. Pressed by incessant demands for novelty, they were kept busy searching for material, and for this purpose Molière's plays came rather handy. It is hardly to be expected that any serious consideration could have inspired any of such a band of writers. Their purpose was served as long as the audience was kept amused. The indefatigable borrower, Ravenscroft, the popular dramatists, Caryl, Lacy, Centlivre, and Otway, who 'lived to please', showed their unanimity of purpose by making facetious merriment the target of their writing.

However, a few out of this group seem to have possessed a certain degree of awareness of the nature

(1) Behn, ^{A,} Sir Patient Fancy, Prologue.

and function of comedy. Though of as depraved a ⁹³
taste as any other, Aphra Behn, has shown some discerning
faculty in judging the contemporary stage. She accepts
comedy as the reflection of society:"...this small
Mirror, of the late wretched Times:..."¹. The False
Count has its main plot taken out of Les Précieuses
Ridicules and Behn is conscious that the aim of the
comedian is to ridicule the affected fops. The play
to her, was "...a slight Farce, five days brought forth
with ease,

So very foolish that it needs must please;"².

Of the other writers who had depended entirely
on Molière for their material, James Wright, a dramatist-
critic, who has left behind an invaluable account in his
Historia Histrionica, (1699), of the life of the dramatists
during the interregnum, analyses the position of the
opposing camps in his Country Conversations, (1694).
In the essay, Of the Modern Comedies, Wright makes the
two characters represent the two trends of thought
"...for our Wits and Criticks have more than one inform'd
us, that Instruction is not the business of Comedy, but
Diversion and Laughter. Moral Precepts, say they, are
only proper to Tragedy and Grave Subjects: while the
Right Object of Comedy is the True and Lively Representation

(1) Behn, The Roundheads, Or The Good Old Cause.
Dedicatory Epistle.

(2) Behn, A., The False Count, Epilogue.

of the Manners and Behaviour of Mankind in the times we Live in, so as to make a pleasant Entertainment, and that's all."¹. But Lisander, who represents Wright himself, says, " ... the True End of Comedy as well as Tragedy, ought to be the Reformation of Manners, though they differ in the Operation Comedy relates to the Inferior sort of Mankind, but shou'd be directed to the same End, it should render the Ill Habits of the Vulgar Odious as well as Ridiculous, it should make Folly Blush, and Men ashamed of their Vices, and Encourage Virtue."².

To this camp belongs the unsuccessful dramatist, Robert Flecknoe, whose name will be remembered as the butt of Dryden's satire. Flecknoe was an admirer of French art and literature of which he had a fairly wide knowledge. His dull plays are more or less translations of pieces out of Molière's different plays put together without the least dramatic skill. But the specific purpose in his writings, which comprises both profit and pleasure, may have been derived from Molière. He places the effectiveness of a comedy next to that of the pulpit.³.

(1) Wright, J. Country Conversations, Pp.8-9.

(2) op.cit. P.10.

(3) Flecknoe, R., Love's Dominion, Preface.

Wright and Flecknoe were, perhaps, aware of the taste for indecency creeping into the English stage. Both had borrowed the staple of their comedies from Molière. Perhaps, they were influenced by the moral purpose behind Molière's work and tried to infuse it, Flecknoe at an early period and Wright a little later, into the spirit of their fellow-dramatists.

John Crowne's name may be included in this group of dramatists. He almost gives the impression of a ~~writer~~ who works consciously with a set purpose in view and is making a deliberate choice of material to that end. Crowne's aim was to ridicule and expose in the proper comic guise, the degeneracy that had crept into society.¹

Thus, in his outlook ^{Crowne} he may be put in line with Molière. This fact becomes more convincing in his play, The English Friar, (1690), where he was consciously following Le Tartuffe, in exposing religious hypocrisy and religiosity, which was bound to rouse strong opposition from a certain section of society. Curiously enough, both the French and the English plays seem to have had a checkered career. Following Molière's lead, Crowne had given an explanation of his attitude towards the subject treated in his play and he begs of his readers to judge it according to its merit. In the first instance,

(1) Crowne, J., The English Friar, Dedicatory Letter.

against the charge of personal satire, his defence lay on the general position of his social criticism. Like Moliere, his intention is exposure of hypocrisy, particularly, the underhand practices in court from which, he proceeds cautiously to those of an evil priest.^{1.} Against the criticism of structural defects, Crowne points out the greater importance of subject-matter. It is to end the reign of the 'frequent impudent practise' of the priests and the reign of foppery in court, that the satire was mainly directed. Crowne, therefore, is as sincere as Molière was in his attempt to mend society through comic laughter.

Towards the beginning of the new century, a perceptible change was coming over the English comic stage. It had considerably assimilated the foreign material and was slowly emerging in its new form. This is obvious in the realm of criticism as much as in the practical dramatic field. The younger generation of comedians, though still linked with the past, were striking out a new line for themselves. Both Farquhar and Vanbrugh have gained much more freedom in their art, both in theory as well as in practice. Farquhar shared with Molière a sense of freedom from classical bondage and he makes light of the Rules in the same bantering

(1) Crowne; ^{The English Friar,} J. 78 The Preface To The Reader.

manner as Dorante did in La Critique De L'Ecole Des Femmes.¹ He accepts comedy "...as an agreeable Vehicle for Counsel or Reproof".² But, Farquhar lays down once for all the English quality of an English comedy. Whatever affinities he might have had with Moliere, it was a matter of coincidence, for the general principles of the comic art had been universally accepted. Quite different from Farquhar is the treatment of Vanbrugh in his defence, A Short Vindication of the Relapse and the Provok'd Wife, from Immorality and Prophaneness. Vanbrugh has the direct and blunt thrust of the Dutch instinct. Though he accepts the fundamental principle of a comedy being "...in general a Discouragement to Vice and Folly" together with its dual role of giving pleasure and instruction, yet Vanbrugh has no pretensions to scholarship or high principles. While Farquhar's treatment is general, Vanbrugh's reply is specific, being confined to a direct refutation of the charges brought against his plays by Collier. Whatever be the treatment, the approach of this younger generation is the same, namely, their

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- (1) Farquhar, G., The Works, 1772, Vol. I, 'A Discourse Upon Comedy, In Reference to the English Stage,' pp. 72-73.
- (2) op.cit. P. 82,

sense of freedom from abstract dramatic laws and their assertion to put forward their personal point of view. The pervasive influence of Molière had certainly contributed to the development of the English attitude.

From external and internal evidence it cannot be denied that Molière's influence was considerable on the development of the critical theory of the comic art during the Restoration period. The fact that it was mainly the comic writers who were interested in expounding their own theory makes it the more convincing. They had partially broken away from the native dramatic tradition. To build the new structure they looked round for a living and successful model. In the existing circumstances, they would naturally look across the Channel, where the comic muse thrived well. England was on the threshold of an important phase in the history of the development of literary criticism, namely, the classical period. The Restoration Age saw the beginning of the crystallisation of ideas which had been in the air. "Each country, however, gave this system a national cast of its own, but the form which it received in France ultimately triumphed,.....Ben Jonson represents a transitional phase, and Dryden and Pope the final form of French classicism." ¹.

(1) Spingarn, J.E., A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, 1899, P.510.

CHAPTER III

THE ADAPTATIONS.

"For to set up the Grecian Method amongst us with success, it is absolutely necessary to restore not only their Religion and their Polity, but to transport us to the same Climate in which Sophocles and Euripides writ: or else by reason of those different Circumstances, several things which were graceful and decent with them, must seem ridiculous and absurd to us, as several things which would have appear'd highly extravagant to them, must look proper and becoming with us."

(Dennis, J., The Impartial Critick. 1693)

"As little can I grant that the French dramatic writers excel the English. Our authors as far surpass them in genius as our soldiers excel theirs in courage. 'Tis true, in conduct they surpass us either way; yet that proceeds not so much from their greater knowledge, as from the difference of tastes in the two nations.....I dare establish it for a rule of practice on the stage, that we are bound to please those whom we pretend to entertain; and that at any price, religion and good manners only excepted.....There is a sort of merit in delighting the spectators."

(Dryden, J., Examen Poeticum. 1693)

"This Comedy is taken out of several excellent pieces of Moliere.....all of which like so many pretieuse stones, I have brought out of France; and as a Lapidary set in ^{one} ~~own~~ Jewel to adorn our English Stage: and I hope my setting them and English soyle, has nothing diminisht of their native luster."

(Flecknoe, R., The Damoiselles A La Mode, 1667)

"Since Stealing's grown a pretty thriving Trade,
Which many Rich, but has Guilty made;
To needy Poets, why should you deny
The privilege to steal, as well as lie?"

(Caryll, J., Sir Solomon. 1671)

CHAPTER III

SECTION I

THE ADAPTATIONS.

Towards the middle of the seventeenth century, the pressure of events at home drove a body of English royalists to seek refuge in France. It was not only a period of political glory in France but, in matters of art and literature, she was then passing through a brilliant phase of her life. That these Englishmen, including statesmen, courtiers, philosophers and writers, who stayed abroad during the years of Puritan rule at home, should come back steeped in French culture and introduce it into the newly established court-circle was a foregone conclusion.¹ Charles Stuart himself inclined towards France not only in his political and religious tendencies, but he looked upon the court of Louis XIV as a model in matters of fashion and taste.²

With the renewed outburst of loyalty to the king after 1660, his lead was eagerly followed both by royalists and the world of fashion. It is therefore,

(1) See above Chap.I.

(2) See above, Chap.I.

through direct contact or through the influence of the monarch that not only the court but other sections of society came to regard the French model as the last word in style, whether in dress or etiquette, art or literature.

After the revival of the stage in 1660 it is not to be wondered at that there were distinct and frequent echoes of the French theatre in the English plays, particularly in the comedies.¹ In taking over the borrowed material for the English stage, the English playwrights were constrained to adapt it to suit the taste of their own audience at home under the social and cultural conditions that prevailed during the years after the Restoration. The austere years of Puritan rule had led to a reaction which, with an admixture of French and Continental elements, brought into existence a new culture, almost hybrid in character. It must however be remembered that this new culture was a short-lived one as it flourished under the patronage of the gay monarch.

During this period, the divorce between the theatre and the bulk of the nation continued to be strongly marked. It soon became the monopoly of the

(1) See Chap.II.

court and its hangers-on seeking div^{er}sion. The principle patron of the stage was the monarch himself.¹.

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- (1) See above, ChapII. P. The Dramatic Works of Roger Boyle, The Preface, p.vi ; "The Black Prince was acted accordingly, and it met with Approbation of the King, and consequently of the Court. His Majesty was not only Sovereign of the Kingdom, but of the Graces, the Muses, and the Loves. Poets paid an implicit Obediance to His Laws, and he reign'd despotically over the sons of Apollo, without so much as the Ceremony of a Privy-Council. Whatever the King applauded was sure to meet with the praise of the People: So that when the Royal Taste was vitiated, the Poison diffused itself through his whole Dominions, and reached even Dryden himselffalse Taste became predominant, and appeared in a thousand shapes, but nowhere more successfully than upon the Stage: Such is the unhappy Influence of a Court!"
- An Account of The Life of That Celebrated Tragedian Mr.Thomas Betterton, Printed for J.Robinson, 1749, P.8:
- "To say the truth, the stage was then so much the care of the stage, or at least of the Court that whenever any disputes arose, they were generally decided either by the King, or his Brother the Duke of York; which not only kept the players in order, and in that obedience which was requisite to the Patentees, but gave them likewise figure and character in the world as gentlemen, and the immediate servants of their Prince."
- P.8. Footnote: "There were some of the King's Company actually sworn of his Majesty's Chamber, and had scarlet cloth and lace assigned them, as menial servants."

He introduced the practice of royalty visiting public theatres and the court and stage were on unusually friendly terms. Colley Cibber mentions the desire of the members of the royal family to receive lessons on the art of declamation from professional actors.¹ Consequently, the playwrights had to suit their style to the select audience, who happened to form only a minority of the population. This factor explains the constant pressure on the dramatists to produce new plays, as the small audience was always clamouring for novelties.

"Enrag'd to find you never do come near
The Theatre, but when New Plays are here,"²

Thomas Shadwell speaks of the haste in which he has written some of his plays.³ and Aphra Behn writes

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- (1) Cibber, C., An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, P. 96. An Account of the Life of that Celebrated Tragedian Mr. Thomas Betterton. Printed for Robinson. 1749. P. 11.
- (2) Wright, J. The Female Virtuoso's, 1693, Prologue.
- (3) See, Shadwell, T. The Sullen Lovers, 1668, Preface; A True Widow, 1679, To Sir Charles Sedley; The Squire of Alsatia, 1688, To The Earl of Dorset and Middlesex.

in the Epilogue to The False Count (1682)

"This Play the Author has writ down to you;
'Tis a slight Farce, five days brought
forth with ease,"¹.

The result was a hurried search for some raw material to produce plays in quick succession. Many of these English dramatists had witnessed the success and the immense popularity in the French court of Molière's Comedy and it would be natural if they turned to his plays for help and guidance. There was, however, much that was dissimilar in French and English tastes and in theatrical conditions. The borrowed material, therefore, underwent numerous and varied changes, and various factors determined the nature of the English adaptations.

(1) See also Behn, A., Sir Patient Fancy, 1678, To The Reader.

"Your Fathers other Methods did pursue,
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They left not Stage nor Pulpit in the lurch;
Week-Days they went to Plays, Sundays to Church:
And judg'd the Muses gracious did appear,
Presenting them one new Play every Year.
But without daily new ones you are cloy'd,
And slight Plays seem as mistresses enjoy'd.
For we must say - we'll give the Devil his due,
In Wit, as Love, you daily gape for new!"
Boyle, R., Herod The Great, Prologue.

In the first place, the English comedians were providing recreation for an audience which was essentially different from the French. These were glorious years of prosperity and true glory for France. Molière was fortunate in having the most polished and refined men and women of the time as his audience. The brilliant court of Louis XIV gathered round it a galaxy of talents, who adorned and brought glory to France. For the success of subtle wit and pointed satire, Molière could depend upon the taste and imagination of such an audience. In England the playwrights had to deal with an audience of a very different mettle. The court, which formed the bulk of the audience, had won notoriety for its depraved morality. The monarch himself was not above reproach. Gallants, like Rochester and Buckingham, would not be slow to follow royalty along the primrose path of dalliance.¹ In adapting the French material for such

(1) See, Cibber, C., An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, P.200, Cibber's comment on the suppression of The Maid's Tragedy.

See Fujimura, T.H., The Restoration Comedy of Wit, Chaps. III and IV for an analysis of the temper of the age.

an audience, witty but coarse, its taste was the predominating factor. Shadwell in 1679, in the Epilogue to The Woman-Captain, succinctly sums up the calibre of such an audience. Shadwell had been for a number of years a popular dramatist and had borrowed profusely from the French. Therefore, his assessment of the situation could be accepted as fairly correct.¹

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- (1) "He found by's last, you would not like what's good,
 Though it was praised by all that understood.
 Remembering how you used that last he writ,
 He made this Law, so to your Level fit;
 Plenty of Noise, and scarcity of Wit -
 The Devil's in you all, if this don't hit:"

Shadwell, T., The Woman-Captain, Epilogue.

"But in this Iron-Age your Souls to move,
 In vain we try by Honour or by Love;
 The certain way to please your vicious Taste,
 Are Streams of Blood and Valleys of Bombast.
 Dancers and Tumblers now the Stage prophane,
 Musick and Farce alone our Plays sustain,
 And Art and Nature leave the trifling Scene."

Boyle, R., Altemira, Prologue.

Moreover, in the 17th century, the position of the men of letters in England was far from being a stable one. As a large reading public had not yet come into existence, the theatre appeared to be one of the lucrative branches in the literary profession. In spite of royal patronage, however, poverty and insecurity seem to have haunted these dramatists. The chief means of income was the sale proceeds at the theatre. From contemporary evidence it appears that, in the absence of a regular system, entrance collections were well nigh an impossible task. Not only the indigent wit, but the rich gallant as well, failed to be scrupulous in the payment of entry fees. Devious methods were adopted to evade payment.¹ Skirmishes were frequent between the recalcitrant visitor and the gate-keeper. Matters came to such a pass that laws were passed frequently to ensure the legitimate income of the actors.²

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- (1) Shadwell, T., A True Widow, Act IV.Sc.I.
Farquhar, G. A Discourse upon Comedy, 1772, P.86.
- (2) Lord Chamberlain - Theatrical References, P.R.O.
Vol.I., P.9. 7 December, 1663. "Royal Proclamation that none shall force themselves into the two Theatres, without paying the Established prices and ordering all officers and to take such Offenders with Custody and bring them before the Lord Chamberlain".

The audience was small,¹ and the payment irregular. The result was that the writers were left with no choice but to produce the type of plays which would be to the taste of the crowd of nobility who patronised the theatre. A. Beljame² speaks of the callous indifference of the same nobility towards the playwright. The age, though outwardly devoted to literature, was too flippant, too superficial to take any serious attitude. "A society with so base and so narrow a conception of literature thought of them [^{the}writers] only as entertainers and mountebanks, people in whom you took but little interest except so far as they amused you. Such interest as Charles II's Court showed for them, was wholly selfish, superficial and devoid of sympathy. They were praised, it is true, but the patron praised out of vanity to prove his good taste and gain kudos thereby."³ Such

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- (1) See Pepys' Diary and Correspondence, 17 April, I and 26 August, 1667; Shadwell T., The Bury Fair Epilogue.
- (2) Beljame, A., Men of Letters and the English Public in the 18th century. 1610 - 1744.
- (3) Beljame, A., Men of Letters and the English Public in the 18th century. 1610 - 1744, P.127.

supercilious affront could only drive talent to desperation. Lee became insane; Otway's aristocratic companions left him in time of need, while Wycherley lay in prison for seven years. Anyone taking up the profession was looked upon as cursed by fate.¹ The position of writers presented a different picture in France. The monarch and as well as his ministers took personal interest in the improvement of literary production and generous grants were made to the writers by the government. Moreover, there was a national theatre and Molière claimed the Pit as his foremost supporter.² But the constant complaint of the English writers was against the merciless gibe of the occupants of the Pit. Under these circumstances, the indigent playwright was driven to eke out a living by plays which would keep up the interest and excitement of the fluctuating audience.

One has to differentiate carefully between two distinct types of adaptations of Molière's plays to suit the English audience. There were writers for whom the French comedies were ^afruitful storehouse of

(1) See, Wright, ^{J,} The Female Virtuoso, (1693), Prologue; Wycherley, W. Epistles to the King and Duke, (1683)

(2) La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, Sc.5.

plots, episodes and characters. They cared for or understood little of Molière's spirit or his comic art. An analysis of any of their plays would show how they applied, as D.H.Miles says, a pair of scissors to cut off portions from different plays and put together in one single plot elements that were either farcical or exciting or promising scope for scheming and scabrous situations.¹ This love for a complicated plot may be traced, ^{it is true,} to the English dramatic tradition. But, an average Restoration Comedy was a regular whirlpool of intrigues and movements, The audience of the late 17th century was satisfied as long as there was ribald excitement in an involved plot. The Anatomist by Edward Ravenscroft or The Amorous Widow by Thomas Betterton would keep the audience amused for a couple of hours. The motive behind such adaptations was, therefore, only to provide facetious diversion of an elegantly coarse nature for the hedonistic crowd. The episodes and characters used by Molière underwent changes in the English fashion; they became anglicised in the manner of 1660.

(1) Miles, D.H., The Influence of Molière on Restoration Comedy, P.88.

There was the other set of writers who took to their art with a serious purpose and with an ^{aesthetic} end in view. Such writers, like Shadwell, Wycherley and Congreve, had partly inherited Ben Jonson's tradition in theory and practice and were partially influenced by that of Molière. They had accepted the main principles of the Frenchman's comic theory, which they tried to apply to their adaptations of the French plays for the English stage.¹ The primary aim of the comic art was pleasure and it was all important with the English playwrights and their audience as well. But the quality of laughter in Lincoln's Inn Fields or Dorset Garden was essentially different from that of the Palais Royal or the Salle du Petit Bourbon. The sardonic laughter of the man of pleasure or the sniggering titter of the woman of easy virtue filled the theatre hall in London. The comedian, driven by indigence, was seeking to provide diversion for such a crowd. It was inevitable that the smutty buffoonery of the town spark, or the slick manoeuvring of the man about town, would border on the licentious and the vulgar. The temper of the audience was, therefore responsible, to a great extent, for the difference in the treatment of similar material, worked under the

(1) See above, Chap. II.

same artistic principles but in two different social and theatrical conditions.

Secondly, the satiric element inherent in Molière's theory suited the mood of the age. During the 17th century, England had gradually accepted the rationalistic leading to the realistic attitude towards life and art. Hobbes's philosophy seems to ^{have} given it a definite shape and authority for circulation in society.^{1.} "By challenging orthodox thinking, he no doubt unsettled the convictions of many intelligent men; at the same time, as a firm believer in naturalism, he was undoubtedly a persuasive advocate for his own beliefs."^{2.}

"Pleasure, both intellectual and sensual, is especially important in Hobbes's psychology and ethics. Happiness is a feeling of well-being due to the satisfaction of one's appetites, and it is possible only through constant activity and constant satisfaction. Hence even the carnal pleasure of sex is good, though less permanent than intellectual pleasure; for it, too, contributes to man's happiness."^{3.} During the first

(1) Fujimura, T.H., The Restoration Comedy of Wit, Chapter III.

(2) op.cit.P.43

(3) op.cit.P.48.

two decades of the Restoration the equilibrium of the English people was rudely disturbed not only by the reaction that set in in the wake of the return of monarchy, but also by this new philosophy of pleasure. The tendency towards rationalism had hardened into cynicism and naturalism which openly flouted social and moral conventions. The "...distrust of dogmatism.... the skepticism of established beliefs, and, at times, the disillusionment that follows on skepticism, explain, in large part, the skeptical and cynical wit in Restoration comedy..."^{1.} In such an age, the satirical element in Molière's plays was eagerly seized upon by those *authors* who had seriously taken up the task of the comedian to ridicule society out of its evils.^{2.} Intelligent and keen comedians, like Etherege or Wycherley, were mainly drawn from that courtly circle who held "libertine principles" and "naturalistic psychology". They would only be too willing to analyse and give an intelligent and as well as an interesting comment on society. Perhaps, they would derive some mischievous or malicious pleasure *from* ridiculing one of their own set. Comedy was a mirror of society, but,

(1) Fujimura, T. H., *The Restoration Comedy of Wit*, P. 43,

(2) See above, Chap. II.

unfortunately, society supplied, at times, material of the most unpalatable nature to the comedians. Yet, the writer felt the need of exposure and the necessity to be ruthless. Hence, the frequent and apparent distortions of materials borrowed from Molière. The aim of both was similar. Molière was fortunate to have a better material which his comic genius could give a proper shape. He gradually passed from the immediate problems of society, as in Les Précieuses Ridicules, to questions of universal interest, as in Le Misanthrope. He preached order and discipline in society and sanity and equilibrium in the mental world. He thus gradually developed his art from the specific to the general. His age and his society were conducive to such mature development of art. Unfortunately, for the English playwrights, the immediate social conditions were in need of an Augean cleansing before they could proceed to the universal. So colossal was the task, that brilliant minds like Wycherley, Dryden or Congreve, were at times overwhelmed by it. England of 1660 was cynical in outlook, intellectual to the point of ruthlessness and devoid of such moral values as ensure stable human relationship. Consequently, the naivety and credulity of simple souls like Agnès¹, or the burning sincerity of Alceste².

(1) L'École Des Maris

(2) Le Misanthrope

could not easily be accepted. These figures out of the French plays underwent the necessary changes under the English clime of 1660, because the playwright had accepted comedy as the mirror of society, having a cathartic value.¹ To be true to life, Agnès was transformed into Mrs. Margery Pinchwife or Alceste into Manly, and they were well appreciated by the audience, including the pit and the box. It would be futile to heap disapprobations on these writers of a serious bent because of the libertine principles they displayed. They, in their own way, had tried to follow the comic principles. But, circumstances were unfavourable to produce any comedy of universal appeal. In such a relentless intellectual age, the satiric element would be expected to dominate in the comic world, and satire, unfortunately, ^{does} not always come up to the level of great literature. Shadwell, Dryden, Wycherley and Congreve, all through the interval of ^{thirty} years, had declared their intellectual approach to life and art and had borrowed material from Molière, adapting it to suit English conditions. They had of course to offer amusement to the audience, this being the first of the principles. Here again,

(1) See above, Chap. II.

the Restoration playwrights stand open to censure. The hilarious laughter or the sympathetic smile of Molière, was changed into the hard cynical guffaws or the insolent laughter of the Restoration crowd. It cannot be denied that the comedians had catered for the low taste of the audience. But as matters stood, neither the comedian nor the audience could have fared better. So, in adapting Molière's satiric picture of Society, from the very beginning, the English writers were handicapped by the society of their own age and by the spirit of the audience. Hence, the strange transformations of Molière's creations before they could be served to the English audience after 1660. The scourge was necessary and each of these dramatists, over a period of ^{forty} years, applied it according to the necessity of the time and the dramatic ability of the person who handled it. Some had caught the satiric temper more *conspicuously*, and the result was the relentless exposure and intellectual probings in The Country Wife or the delicate raillery, a few years later, in The Way Of The World. The world of romance and chivalry had passed away and penetrating intellectual curiosity together with the right of the individual asserted themselves. Women had claimed their independence and the attitude towards love and marriage was rapidly

changing. Some of the popular borrowings are from Les Précieuses Ridicules, L'École Des Femmes, L'École Des Maris, Les Femmes Savantes and Le Misanthrope. In every one of these, Molière deals, in some form or other, with the question of the relation between man and woman and the need for adjustment. Similar problems crop up in English plays but in a different social context and hence the need to adapt the French material. Molière would always insist on the sanctity of family life, because to him society presented a coherent and ordered picture. Since his early comedies, and even in the lighter pieces, Molière had upheld the sanctity of marriage.¹ Marital infidelity is a rarity in his comic world and, if he gives it any scope, it presents rather a tragic than a comic prospect.² Sincere love is spontaneous among young people and it leads only to happiness and contentment.

(1) "Gorgibus - Je n'ai que faire ni d'air ni de chanson. Je te dis que le mariage est une chose sainte et sacrée, et que c'est faire en honnêtes gens que de débiter par là." Les Précieuses Ridicules, Sc.4.

(2) George Dandin.

But the Restoration writers, on the other hand, saw the dissolution of the old order and the quick changing of values. Therefore, Shadwell had no compunction in breaking up the married life of Mr. Oldwit¹ or Laetitia, in The Old Bachelor, deceiving her husband. In trying to give a reflection of society in the comic mirror, these comedians had been over-zealous, and being engrossed in the immediate the universal was quite lost sight of.

The English comedians were conscious of the conditions under which they worked and of the material which had to be moulded by dramatic laws. The best of them could not but be attracted by the intellectual probity of the Frenchman and they made a deliberate attempt to shape their native comic element after his model. Therefore, the adaptations of the plays of Molière for the English stage have a special interest and value of their own. In the process of adaptation, certain principles seem to have guided the pen of the major dramatists. They had to encounter first and foremost the spirit of the age and the taste of their audience. They were men with an eye to their pocket. They were quick enough to take stock of the popular requirements, which had a certain tendency towards the bizarre and the naturalistic. The

(1) The Bury Fair.

tremendous success of the Italian farces and harlequin shows would be a clear pointer to an easy path to popularity.¹ The irony of the situation was that the dramatists, even those who had been censured severely, were conscious of their own degeneracy.² John Crowne, who was certainly influenced by the reformatory spirit of the French comedian³, had admitted his own lowering of artistic standard. His comedy, The Country Wit, (1675), will

- (1) For a detailed account of farces in London during these years, see, Nicoll, A., A History of Restoration Drama, Pp.238-243.

"But in this Iron-Age your Souls to move
 In vain we try by Honour or by Love.
 The certain way to please your vicious Taste,
 Are streams of Blood and Volleys of Bombast.
 Dancers and Tumblers now the Stage profane,
 Musick and Farce alone our Plays sustain,
 And Art and Nature leave the trifling Scene."

Boyle, R., Altemira, Prologue.

See also, Boyle, R., As You Find It, Epilogue,
 written by the Right Honourable G. Granville, Esq.

- (2) See, Ravenscroft, E., The Citizen Turned Gentleman, 1671, Epilogue.
- (3) See above, Chap. II. Pp. 95-96.

not please all, "...because a great part of it consists of comedy, almost sunk into farce; yet, if they will allow it well in its kind, I shall desire no more favour from 'em; any may perceive I never intended to build high, ..." ¹. The editors of the Biographia Dramatica, however, gave a revealing insight into royal taste, when they said that, "This Play contains a good deal of low humour, and was a great favourite with King Charles II." English comedians and critics were well aware of the high role that comedy was expected to play as they were well acquainted with the French theatre and criticism. Yet, unrelenting fate had made them stoop to public demands. Even then, the situation at times became so desperate that plays had to be strongly laced with singing and dancing, particularly of the foreign brand. "...The Anatomist, Or Sham-Doctor; it was perform'd on Shrove-Tuesday, the Queen's Birth Day..... and perfectly Perform'd; there being an Additional Entertainment in't of the best Singers and Dancers, Foreign and English: As Margarita D^elphine, Maria Gallia Twas very well lik'd by the whole Court." ².

(1) See, Crowne, J., The Country Wit, 1675, Dedication to Earl of Middlesex.

(2) Downes, J., Roscius Anglicanus, Ed. by M. Summers, P. 47.

Moreover, "...In the space of Ten Years past, Mr. Betterton to gratify the desires and Fancies of the Nobility and Gentry; procur'd from Abroad the best Dances and Singers, as, Monsieur L'Abbé^x, Madam Sublini, Monsieur Balon,.....and divers others;"¹. Such being the general trend, the comedians too would make a selection of matter of an extravagant nature.

These English comedians had accepted their task of exposing society with interest and enthusiasm. If they happened to fill the role of the moralist as well, by their use of the scouring^g rod, it was more accidental than intentional. The implications of their comic principle happened to be moralistic and reformative at the core, and this resulted in the purgative theory of driving out fire with fire.² Perhaps, the dose administered, at times had been too strong, as the zest of the comedians could hardly be curbed by any conventional morality. They realised the social implications of the comic art. Any character or episode not suitably adapted for the English social context would have left the audience unmoved as did Flecknoe's play. The Damoiselles a La Mode was

(1) Downes, J., Roscius Anglicanus, Ed. by M. Summers, P.46.

(2) See above, Chap. II.

neither a picture of English society nor a satire on it. Hence, the ridicule that was poured on the writer.

Therefore, the main interest of the contact with the French lies in the diverse ways by which the English dramatists tried to adapt the French plays to suit their own temperament and taste.

SECTION II

L'ÉTOURDI. 1655

L'Étourdi is one of the first ^{plays} to be written by Molière. It is indeed a minor piece, in which Molière was practising his pen in portrait-painting through a number of highly amusing situations. The play presented a complicated plot with a fund of possibilities for farcical situations which would have entertained the theatre-goers of London. Strangely enough, the play failed to draw the attention of the comedians across the Channel. With the exception of Dryden's play, Sir Martin Mar-All, (1667), few other plays have worked out any suggestions from it. Any plausible explanation for this lack of interest, in this otherwise hilarious comedy, would perhaps lie in the very nature of the piece. It presented to the English comedians neither a satirical study of social affectations, nor a possibility of the duel of the sexes, nor an exposure of some vice. It was too simple and straightforward in characterisation and in episodic matter; the people are naive and sincere and the intrigues too direct to offer any scope for

development according to English taste. Any inert imitation would have brought down the contempt of the crowd on the unfortunate playwright.¹

Suggestions from this play have been slight indeed. Dryden was attracted to this play of Molière because it provided characters and episodes which would well divert the audience, pleasure being the chief target of his comedy.² Therefore, a few tricks of the roguish Mascarille have been introduced in his play Sir Martin Mar-All, which has a multiple plot-structure. But it is mainly in the treatment rather than in the material that the influence of Molière is so marked. Characterisation in these borrowed parts runs on parallel lines with the French original and the atmosphere of a rollicking comedy has been partially reproduced in the manner of the French. In spite of the coarser elements and the final ending which are quite in line with the Restoration mood, the play has a certain lightness

(1) See P.133-135 for the failure of The Damoiselles a La Mode by Flecknoe.

(2) See above, Chap.II. Pp.82-83.

of touch which goes to the credit of Dryden, and in which Molière's influence is clearly discernible.^{1.} Another such character is Benito in The Assignation, (1672), in whom has been combined the characteristics of the fop and the blunderer. Molière's Lélie is however no fop; he blunders because he is in love and too many obstacles seem to frustrate him. But by assigning to Benito the qualities of a fop Dryden has successfully adapted this character for the English stage. Such a figure had become the butt of ridicule both in life and on stage. The discomfiting blunders of a cox-comb would indeed be suitable material for the purpose of ridicule and laughter on the stage. It is so much the more effective *because of* its immediate application. Sancho in Dryden's Love Triumphant, (1694), has been regarded as a reminiscence of Lélie.^{2.} But there is little that is common between the unaffected passion of a young man like Lélie and the vicious desire of a fool like Sancho.

(1) For a detailed study of the play, see Gillet, J.E., Molière en Angleterre, Pp.50 - 64.

(2) Miles, D.H., The Influence of Molière on Restoration Comedy, Appendix, P.233.

The episode of the outrageous and blundering Lélie, threatening Mascarille for having marred the reputation of his beloved, is reproduced in a more cunning and reverted manner by Congreve in Love For Love, (1695). Jeremy, the accomplice and the servant to Valentine, plays a trick on his master by asserting the latter's pretended insanity before Angelica to the dire exasperation of Valentine.¹ Such a scene would be worthy of the pen of Molière and in these minor but skilful touches Congreve shows his affinity with Molière's art.

(1) Congreve, W., Love For Love, Act IV. Sc.3.

LE DÉPIT AMOUREUX. 1656.

This early play of Molière presents various comic techniques with a fund of risible elements in them. As an early play of Molière it has a complicated plot-structure with straightforward characterisation. The play however, did not turn out to be a favourite with the English adaptors. Perhaps the grounds of rejection are similar to those of L'Étourdi.

There are however certain minor echoes, by nature farcical or satirical, in some English comedies. The appearance of a valet, French in character and manners, ~~would have~~ highly amused the Restoration audience. Such a character had become quite familiar in the well-to-do Restoration Society.¹

The immense scope that such a figure would provide for comic ridicule was first realised by George Etherege. He introduced Dufoy, the French valet in Love In A Tub, (1664) with his flirtations with the maid, in a manner which bears distant

(1) Pepys, S., Diary and Correspondance. Pepys mentions his brother-in-law's French valet, 11 September, 1661.

resemblances to the more shrewd valets of Molière. But Etheredge's version lacks much of the comic charm of Molière's. Perhaps, Etheredge was more sophisticated in his satirical picture than the simple French love-story. It might also be that the English, in spite of their liking for French valets, would not give him the liberty that the French counterpart took with his master. The English preferred to keep the socially inferior at arm's length.¹

Another item for adaptation would be the farcical element present in the play. Dryden, with his aim to please the crowd², has reproduced the jargon of the pedant³ in that of Lopez in The Evening's Love, (1668),⁴. The meeting between Wildblood and Jacinta in disguise,⁵ the character of the shrewish maid, Camilla,⁶ as well as the lovers' quarrel, bear striking resemblances to

(1) See Gillet, J.E., Molière en Angleterre for a detailed study of the play, pp. 33-39.

(2) See above, Chap.II.P.83.

(3) Le Dépit Amoureux, Act II. Sc.6.

(4) Dryden, J., The Evening's Love, Act III, Sc.1.

(5) op.cit. Act IV.Sc.2.

(6) op.cit. Act IV.Sc.4.

similar scenes and characters in Le Dépit Amoureux.^{1.} It goes without saying, that Dryden has adapted them to suit his audience, which accounts for ~~much~~^{many} of the dissimilarities. The English comedian selected these particular scenes either because they contained certain farcical elements to amuse the crowd or because they offered scope for the duel between the sexes.

It was towards the beginning of the new century that this play of Molière gained some popularity. Perhaps, the change in the taste of the audience accounts for it. John Vanbrugh gives a free translation of the play in The Mistake, (1705), with a distinct touch of the English character. Vanbrugh has a clear conception of English tradition and taste. He has shortened some of the typical French stage fooleries, namely, those of the valets, and has reduced the comic repartee between the master and his man.^{2.} Again Vanbrugh shortens the long French speeches^{3.} and substituted^{for} them

(1) Le Dépit Amoureux, Act I.Sc.2., Act IV. Sc.3. and 4.

(2) Vanbrugh, J., The Mistake Act IV.Sc.2; See above P. for a similar case.

(3) Ibid.

~~with~~ short but sharp repartees, fitting well into the style both of the English stage and society.¹ The final act has undergone some drastic changes for the sake of a proper English denouement. The discovery in Molière seems to lack the vivacity peculiar to this play, though it is replaced by the witty dialogue of the two valets, who always play an important role in Molière. Vanbrugh's manner of handling the discovery is ingenious indeed. On the English stage action had always been given more importance than the narration peculiar to the French. The kneeling figure of the disguised woman, the surprise of the sudden discovery, are all quite in line with English tradition. With certain alterations and additions, Vanbrugh has displayed plenty of dramatic insight and skill, in turning the French play into English for production at home.

(1) Vanbrugh, J., The Mistake, Act V., Sc.I.

LES PRÉCIEUSES RIDICULES.1659.

Les Précieuses Ridicules of Molière has been written in a lighter vein and is not considered to be of the highest order. Molière here appears as the critic of the sophisticated follies peculiar to his time as it presents the picture of various affectations in social life and intercourse which had crept into society through a false notion of romance and chivalry. Molière was merciless in exposing anything that lacked logic and sincerity. "Molière was the scourge of ridicule in his country".¹ The distorted views on love and marriage stood in need of rectification. Looking around in society he saw the material ready to hand. He has brought out the folly of the situation with a touch of exaggeration which is one of the effective comic techniques. The play does not end in the conventional manner, but the audience was left in no

(1) Muralt; Letters Describing The Character And Customs Of The English And French Nations With A Curious Essay On Travelling, P.29.

doubt about the aim of the comedian. The learned and the illiterate laughed at their own follies. Menage is reported to have said to Chapelain after seeing the play: "Monsieur, You and I have approved of all the follies which have been ridiculed here with so much delicacy and common sense. But, believe me,.....We must burn what we have worshipped, and worship what we have burned".¹ An old man in the pit, it is said, cried out: "...Take courage, Molière, this is good comedy." Molière's purpose could have had no better application or appreciation.

Les Précieuses Ridicules turned out to be a popular searching ground for material ^{among} ~~by~~ the Restoration comedians. There are several factors to account for it. The central story of the disguise of the valet as a member of the nobility, provided ample scope for a complicated plot as well as for farcical development. The affected fop, aping French manners, had become a common figure in the drawing-room, the chocolate-house and in the fashionable parks of London after 1660. To expose ~~their~~ folly, Molière's subtle pen drew the model for those who were to follow him. The imitators, at

(1) Mantzius, K., A History Of Theatrical Art,
Vol.IV, Pp 71-72.

times, laid on rather heavily with a clumsy pen as did Shadwell in The Bury Fair, (1689), or like Etheredge and Congreve, who imparted to their creation the subtle touch of the French master.

The story of the disguised valet perhaps made its first important appearance on ~~the~~ English soil in Robert Flecknoe's unsuccessful play The Damoiselles A La Mode, (1667). The title itself is self-explanatory. The plot is balanced by two sets of guardians with their wards, one drawn after L'École Des Femmes and the other after Gorgibus with his two romantic daughters from Les Précieuses Ridicules. In following the French play, Flecknoe has, at times, given a verbal rendering of certain parts of the original.¹ But the English dramatist's failure to grasp the principle behind Molière's practical application of his theory is illustrated by the insipid treatment and the unimaginative conclusion of his play. In fact, the subtlety of satire is lost in the zeal for the reformation of manners.² The scornful young ladies are made to realise their folly and in spite of their humiliation, are reduced to become reconciled to their marriage with the once-despised suitors. The

(1) See, Gillet, J.E., Molière En Angleterre, Pp. 151-155.

(2) See above, Chap. II, Pp. 94-95.

young men too, though very much piqued, have to compromise a little as they agree to adorn themselves in a manner befitting their role as lovers. Thus Flecknoe, in a rather sententious manner, has tried to bring about a reform within the play which ends with the peal of wedding-bells. But the English adaptor has managed to blunt the edge of raillery. In the place of hilarious laughter, dullness could be the only outcome of such a vapid moralizing. Moreover, his play fails to give a picture of the affected manners of the day in England. His age entertained no such illusions about love or marriage. Nor was it a pointed satire on the theme he chose to present. His was a slavish imitation of Molière's play and had no immediate context in the English society. Flecknoe has repeatedly warned, in his prefaces, against the use of low scenes or characters. Therefore, it seems that while the other playwrights did not hesitate to adapt the French episodes into English situations, however salacious they might have been, Flecknoe played for safety and thereby produced neither a hilarious comedy nor a satiric picture of contemporary society. The problem of the two romantic ladies remained a French one, as England of Flecknoe's age had stripped love of its romance and had exposed it in all

its bareness. Therefore, what held good for Paris of 1659 failed in London of 1667.

There were other adaptations from Les Précieuses Ridicules. It was chiefly, no doubt, the story of the disguised valet, which remained a favourite with the English comedians over a long period. But fruitful suggestions for the development of the character of a fop were adapted from the play. From Mascarille and Jodelet has been derived a long line of fops and wits similar to those in Les Fâcheux but with subtle differentiations. Thornbanck and Sir John Shuttlecock, in The Curious Impertinents, (1694), of Crowne, are the ridiculous echoes of these popular stage figures. The female counterpart is Aurelia in An Evening's Love, (1668), of Dryden. She is painted in the manner of the romantic ladies of Molière from whom she has picked up the pretentious and romantic diction.¹ Perhaps Malenthea in Marriage A La Mode, (1672), and Teresia in The Volunteers, (1693), are her befitting sisters. These men and women, however, with their eccentricities, always seem to screen some perverted or malicious motive at the back of their mind. The laughter they arouse is not simple and hilarious as that evoked by the foolish maids of Molière.

(1) Dryden, J., An Evening's Love, Act III, Sc.I.

The finest fop ever produced on the Restoration stage is Sir Fopling Flutter. The name together with the descriptive sub-title, The Man of Mode, (1676), require no further explanation. Etheredge without any specific avowal of comic principles has caught the subtle and delicate points in the external characterisation of such a figure from Molière. The latter was ridiculing the affected mannerism of the fashionable fops in French society. Etheredge was well acquainted with the slavish aping of French fashion in English society. He drew a life-like picture of the English dandy who tried to adopt a supercilious attitude towards his native culture and to capture the admiration of ~~the~~ society by cultivating an acquaintance with Parisian items of fashion. Like Molière, Etheredge leaves no doubt as to his purpose. He has taken infinite pains to draw the details of the man of mode and then within the play itself he is mocked by others. This appears to have been a common technique with the comedians with a satiric aim. Two groups of characters are balanced, the ridicule and laughter being evoked in the play at the expense of one party through the contrivance of the other. The audience laughs with the saner or perhaps the cleverer^{group} of people. The devise is followed by Bejterton in The Amorous Widow

(1670), Shadwell in The Bury Fair, (1689), and by Congreve in The Way Of The World, (1700). These plays are the direct descendants of the plot of La Grange and Du Croisy. The English dramatists used the trickery for purposes perhaps a little more cunning or slightly more malicious. There is an important divergence to be noticed. In this comedy, Molière is giving a close picture of society and he has ridiculed youthful folly. In the three English plays, the duped women are elderly persons, the young daughter in The Bury Fair being really instigated by her mother. These English dramatists writing towards the end of the century perhaps were hesitant of making fun of the new generation.

Betterton first used the story of the elderly woman to be deceived by the disguised valet, a trick played on her by the younger people. Though a successful actor, Betterton yet failed to utilise, to the fullest extent, his experience on the stage in writing a play. He perhaps shared with ~~the~~ other fellow-writers that fatal lack of dramatic sense. In his play the audience is let into the secret of what is to happen right from the beginning. The false Count is described as one who, "...is so great a Lover of Musick, he has not a Servant but can Sing or Dance, or Play upon some Instrument"¹. Betterton

(1) Betterton, T., The Amorous Widow, Act I, Sc.I.

has added but little new to the story of the disguise. The single change that he brings into the story, and which goes to the discredit of the plot-construction, was that the old lady was not let into the secret at all. She who had been the motivating factor throughout the story, hangs like a loose end at the ^{close} end. In fact, the interest of the play lies more in the amusing story of the two friends trying to dodge the advances of the amorous widow. The borrowing from Molière has lost its piquancy and its freshness *has been* tarnished through repeated usage.

In The Careless Lovers, (1673), Ravenscroft uses a situation similar to the one in Les Précieuses Ridicules, in which the girls treat their suitors disdainfully. Ravenscroft tries to arrive at a certain dramatic balance by differentiating the two girls. Jacinta is sober, serious and sincere whereas Hillaria is gay, witty and coquettish. In the French play the girls are instigated by a false notion of romance to treat their suitors shabbily, so that ultimately the laughter turns against them. They are the objects to be exposed. But Ravenscroft and his audience had long got rid of such notions of chivalry. Moreover, Ravenscroft attached hardly any serious motive to his play other than entertainment through light farcical scenes into which plenty of the salacious

element has been scattered for the amusement of the audience. Jacinta and Hillaria are women of the town and not like Magdelon and Cathos lately come to Paris from the country. The English girls turn the laughter away from themselves to the foppish suitors. ~~Such~~ ^A similar instance is to be found ^{also} in Sir Courtly Nice, (1685), by Crowne.

Shadwell, as ^{the} Chronicler of his age, has recorded every minute detail of custom and convention, noting down the various shades of fashion. The hilarious practical joke of Molière has been turned ^{in The Bury Fair,} into a serious fraud played upon Lady Fantast and her daughter who suffer from all sorts of pretensions to culture and learning. As in Molière, the plot serves a double purpose. It ridicules all those fops, male or female, who ape foreign manners. It punishes, at the same time, the foolish who are trapped by such display of inanity. La Roche, as the Count, is portrayed well in the style of Mascarille with his powdered wig which he offers to the ladies for inspection.¹ But then Shadwell had a number of 'humours' in view for the working out of the plot, whereas, Molière's aim was to expose one particular human eccentricity. Therefore, Shadwell, with painstaking care has given the various encounters of

(1) Shadwell, T., The Bury Fair, Act III, Sc. I.

the false count with the infatuated ladies, and ultimately, he is hauled away by the constable. The light touch of ridicule is lost and the incident verges on the comico-tragic. Perhaps, Shadwell was aiming at a poetic justice in a proper conclusion, as his age could accept only the concrete and little of the imaginative. Nonetheless, the dramatic atmosphere of the play has been painfully disturbed. Shadwell's fatal repetitive devices and his sad lack of dramatic discernment are the factors which contributed to his failure to leave any permanent impression. Though considered to be one of his best plays and a quite successful and lively one on the stage, The Bury Fair however does not leave the impression of a light satiric play as does Les Précieuses Ridicules.

At the turn of the century, we come across another play which offers an ingenious presentation of the borrowed device with a certain freshness of its own. William Congreve has shown himself a master of the situation. He has distilled the essence of the episode from the French play and utilised it because it provided ample scope for intrigue. Congreve realised that the violence of the enraged Lady Touchwood of his earlier play The Double-Dealer,

disturbed the sensitive equilibrium of the comic world. His mature art reduced the virago into the fantastic Lady Wishfort in The Way Of The World, (1700), whose rage at the outrageously comical trick played on her vanishes, to describe it in her own words, like camphor and frankincense". Congreve borrowed heavily from the French master in the ingenious technique of satire-cum-comedy, Molière, appearing as the delicate and fine critic of his time, had set out with the deliberate purpose of ridicule. But, Congreve's artistic soul could not reproduce the gross stupidity of English society, particularly in his masterpiece. Moreover, a change for the better had already come over the English society¹, which hardly necessitated the direct method of satire. Therefore, Congreve's sensitive nature was eager to catch the delicate raillery of the French play and to turn it to a profitable end in his artistic world. Lady Wishfort provides the material for laughter, because Congreve desires to expose the egregious folly of old people who try to compete with the young. However, in Congreve's particular artistic manipulation, the situation loses the full force of the purpose inherent in the French play. Congreve utilises the device

(1) See above, Chap.II. P.83.

only to serve as a twist in the plot, but it has not much of the immediate or definite social context. The contemporary generation, youthful and buoyant, is let off almost unscathed, while the older generation is made the butt of ridicule. Then again, unlike the other English playwrights, Congreve brings about not a reformation but a reconciliation which suits well the atmosphere of his play. Lady Wishfort with her whimsicalities, readily forgave the erring couple who themselves pretended all humility. Molière's purpose was specific in spite of its comic garb. Congreve appears to be side-tracking the issue being carried away by his comic muse. Moreover, Les Précieuses Ridicules was Molière's early play while The Way Of The World was the product of Congreve's mature mind, where he was aiming to reach the standard of "Terence, the most correct writer in the world,...."¹. Congreve admired "The purity of his [Terence] style, the delicacy of his turns, and the justness of his characters,beauties which the greater part of his audience were incapable of tasting;"². But Molière was a success because the audience was imaginative enough to appreciate the sound contents of the deft strokes of the pen. Congreve's was a failure on the stage. The reason ascribed by old

(1) Congreve, W., The Way Of The World, Dedication.

(2) op.cit.

John Downes was that it was "too Keen a Satyr".¹ Congreve could not live in the company of the degraded beings of Wycherley nor could he follow up the usual method of adapting Molière's material. His witty satire is subtilized into the tantalizing coquetry of Millamant or into the rhapsody of Valentine over Angelica.² Congreve, like Molière, is driving at truth and beauty by trying to eliminate that which distorts human dignity. Beauty and Truth, like Millamant, are to "be solicited to the very end, nay, afterwards." But, the audience, in "inglorious ease," lagged behind in the search. This single incident of the refusal of Congreve's play on the part of the English audience, is a clear pointer to the difference in the mental calibre and the taste of the two audiences.

(1) Downes J., Roscus Anglicanus, Ed. By M. Summers, P.45.

(2) Congreve, W., Love for Love.

SGANARELLE. 1660.

The interest that this short play has aroused in England is more historical than dramatic. There is sufficient evidence of the presence of a French theatrical troupe in London soon after the Restoration.¹ Unfortunately, neither playbills nor any other records have been preserved of the plays presented by this company.² Circumstances are strongly in favour of including Sganarelle of Molière in the repertory of this visiting theatrical company. This particular French play is one of the first to appear on the English stage in an English rendering, though only a few scenes of it, which are mainly translated and slightly adapted to fit into the new plot-structure devised by Davenant. The translated parts follow the

(1) See above, Chap.I. P.25.

(2) For a detailed study see, Mandach, A., Molière Et La Comédie De Moeurs En Angleterre, Pp.35-44.

French quite closely.^{1.}

The interest, however, lies not so much in the play as in certain passages which throw light on existing conditions of the newly-opened theatre. The French stage-manager in the play, who is hiring the theatre for the season, appears to be quite confident of the success of the performance he intends to put on the stage, which would be mainly French farces. The bulk of the audience was obviously the "travell'd Customers." As They were out of town "To take the Air with their Own Wives," the shrewd French manager provided for performances suitable for the ordinary citizen, so as not to have an empty hall:

"Me have a Troop of French Comoedien

Dat speak a little very good Engelis".^{2.}

Obviously, the theatre-going crowd had a cosmopolitan taste for having travelled abroad, perhaps mainly in France, during the exile. Therefore, it must have been a small well-to-do section of society who patronised the theatre. Then again, the translation of the play into a peculiar Anglo-French jargon may be accepted as an evidence of the prevalence of such a

(1) See, Miles, D.H., The Influence Of Molière On Restoration Comedy, Pp.79-80.

(2) Davenant, W., A Play House To Be Let.

conversational dialect already in English society, at least, within a particular section. Davenant's introduction of such a dialogue might have been satiric in purpose. ~~The~~ Shrewd businessman ^{as} ~~that~~ Davenant was, he must have quickly sensed the competition to be faced with these French troupes visiting London, where the taste for everything French was growing at a rather rapid pace. Davenant's play perhaps had served a double purpose. It could have drawn crowds to the theatre with the bait of a French play, and at the same time, satirised the rival party as well as their patrons, in the ridiculous and almost unintelligible Anglo-French jargon. The play has indeed very little dramatic value, though it marks an important stage in the gradual incursion of the foreign element which was to dominate the English stage during the next few decades.

Very different from Davenant's play is Tom Essence, (1677), by Rawlins, which shows the Restoration taste for the low and the farcical. The play is an illustration of a comedy of intrigue based on suggestions from three different plays of Molière. The first scene follows Molière's play closely. Then Rawlins complicates it with secondary plots of a rather questionable nature. The play has little

merit of its own. It is only the story of the young lovers taken from Molière, which maintains the interest and relieves the otherwise intriguing atmosphere of a low farce.

L'ÉCOLE DES MARIS. 1661

L'ÉCOLE DES FEMMES. 1662

In the last play of Wycherley,¹ ^{namely *The Country Wife*,} which has distinct echoes of the twin plays of Molière, one should look not so much for specific borrowings as for the pervading influence of Molière over the English dramatist. Wycherley had already come under the direct influence of the Frenchman as is seen by his adaptation of Le Misanthrope in The Plain Dealer,² which of course had undergone careful revision before the final stage-production in 1674. The enthusiasm of the young comedian, taking up the role of the comic moralist with a vengeance in this early piece, might have overstepped his target. But as his art matured, Wycherley was able to override the limitations of the single plays of Molière and develop the power of assimilating the spirit behind the various plays of

(1) The Country Wife was written in 16⁷1-16⁷2; the first draft of The Double Dealer was made in 1665-1666; see, the introductions to the respective plays by W.C.Ward, in the collection of Wycherley's plays in the Mermaid Series.

(2) See below, p. 194 ff.

Molière dealing with similar topics. Thus Wycherley, as a more experienced man, was able to turn the intellectual element in Molière to a greater advantage in ridiculing men and women in society out of their follies. Therefore, the pleasure and laughter evoked by The Country Wife is decidedly a relief after The Plain Dealer. This does not necessarily imply a healthier atmosphere in the play. On the contrary, we are still living in the midst of Restoration degeneracy. But the artist's maturity of mind has presented the unpalatable with an artistic finish, which is more pointed being more polished. Moreover, Wycherley's dramatic sense has led to a more subtle analysis of character and situation; he has a better and firmer grasp over his material, which shapes into tantalizing forms under the pressure of his fingers. Last but not the least, the purpose of the comedian is not expounded in an easy conventional poetic justice; its appeal is to the intellect, which critically analyses society and gives to each his due. As in his earlier play¹, society still presented before Wycherley a picture of unrestrained hypocrisy which he was still eager to expose. "Ay, arrantest cheat is your trustee or excutor; your jealous man, the greatest cuckold; your churchman the greatest atheist; and your

(1) The Plain Dealer, see below, P 194 ff.

noisy pert rogue of a wit the greatest fop, dullest ass, and worst company, as you shall see."¹.

The Country Wife is an exposure of jealousy and so is linked with L'École Des Maris and L'École Des Femmes, the central theme of the three plays being a study of a jealous husband. Molière's attempt was to rationalize the relationship between man and woman and give woman her legitimate position in society. She is neither man's plaything nor his slave but his partner in life. Molière puts his finger on the sore spot; it is man's possessive instinct which gives rise to jealousy with its consequent disastrous mental effects. Wycherley's play offers a more cunning study of the case than the two French ones for the simple reason that his people are moving in a more sophisticated society. Molière in these two plays was steadily developing a more universal artistic expression, while Wycherley, though writing his master-piece, was yet tied down to the immediate and the specific world of gallants and cuckolds. This single factor accounts for much of the difference in characterisation and subject-matter. For instance, the hero of Wycherley is certainly not drawn after Horace of L'Ecole Des Femmes.² Horner is made to take the place

(1) Wycherley, W., The Country Wife, Act I.Sc.I.Horner.

(2) See Miles, D.H., The Influence of Molière On Restoration Comedy, Appendix, P.227.

of Horace with an entirely different purpose. Molière had faith in the simple love of emotional but upright young men and women. As a character, Horace serves a double purpose. He is a striking foil to Arnolphe so that the narrow jealousy of the older man stands in a sharp contrast to the spontaneous faith of the younger. In the mechanism of the plot he is made to defeat the selfish design of the older man and win the love of Agnès. Horner serves the purpose of befooling Pinchwife but both of them belong to the same category of cynical characterisation. But with the same intellectual grasp over his material as the Frenchman, Wycherley develops his story which follows in broad outline the plot of the two French plays. He does not sacrifice characterisation to a plot bristling with intrigues as do most of his contemporaries. The main story is that of Horner and his amorous intrigues to be contrasted only with the minor theme of Sparkish and Alithea. As in Molière, the story evolves out of the characterisation itself. Horner is engaged in analysing the characters of the intriguing wives with their credulous husbands, while Sparkish, the fop, gives the clue to his own character¹ which is developed into the

(1) Wycherley, W., The Country Wife, Act III.Sc.2.

secondary story against the general background of a study in jealousy.

The Sparkish and Alithea theme recalls that of Leonara and Ariste in L'Ecole Des Maris. Wycherley has transformed the genial elderly man who acquiesces in the taste of his young mistress into the usual Restoration fop who shares with Ariste his geniality without his sanity. As in the French play he stands as a contrast to the jealous brother. But as Wycherley has deepened the lines of his satire, Sparkish's credulity borders on imbecility which costs him his mistress, who fortunately is the only person in the play who gets her deserts.

Mrs. Margery Pinchwife has the naivety of Agnès but not her innocence, because the heroine of Wycherley could not escape the taint in the atmosphere. The erstwhile boon companion of Horner in his ribaldry has been transformed into the over-zealous husband whose picture Wycherley draws as the subject for laughter. Pinchwife has turned his back on the passion of lust only to be possessed by the devil of jealousy. His French original, Arnolphe, is the picture of a man with narrow and selfish ideas, yet he has a sincerity of his own. His English counterpart, Pinchwife, lacked this last element and this simple fact has vitiated the whole atmosphere. Like Arnolphe,

Pinchwife's malady leads to his failure to look at life in the right perspective. Wycherley has followed molièr^esque technique in showing the morbid anxiety of the suspicious husband trying to put blinkers on his wife and thereby betraying himself repeatedly by dropping hints unawares which are eagerly seized upon by the inquisitive country-girl, who is not innocent but ignorant of town-life. Isabella, Agnès and Mrs. Margery, all three of them are victims of man's irrational fear of woman's frailty. In self-defence, they are prompted to have recourse to subterfuges which are, by conventional standards, the foul trickery of the cunning. Yet, the fault does not lie with them. It is Lisette or Lucy or Allen, that nature's wit, who detects the erring and blurts out the home-truth. The problem before the French and the English writers was similar by nature, the difference being that of the social context. In the conception of a Restoration Comedy this element seems to have been always the determining factor in shaping the dramatic art of the playwright who had accepted comedy as the mirror of life with a cathartic purpose. Molière has applied this theory in its widest implication while the English playwrights were strongly influenced by the immediate social context. As a result, characterisation plot and dialogue, bore the stamp of the age .. In

adapting Act II Scene 5 of L'École Des Femmes into Act IV Scene 2 of The Country Wife, Wycherley was coming against difficulties in handling an innocent character like Agnès's. Here again the change is obvious. It would be difficult to condemn Wycherley's scene as it would be absurd to be scandalised at Agnes's hesitations over the ribbon. Wycherley is portraying the foolish ignorant woman, whose natural curiosity is roused by unnatural restraint, while Agnes blunders because of faulty education.

At this point Wycherley switches off to the intrigue in L'École Des Maris. In the first instance, it gave him scope for development and complication of the plot and secondly, Isabella's shrewdness and duplicity tallied more with his conception of Margery's character. The intrigue follows closely the French original. Molière's play ends with the lovers united happily and the jealous man discomfited in spite of his sincerity. Molière's grasp over commonsense and reason has maintained the balance in his comic world. Consequently, he could resolve the problem in a satisfactory manner in his play. But the disintegrating contemporary social picture left Wycherley's plot at a loose end, and the chaos in the moral world remains much the same. It seems that Wycherley was facing a situation as problematic as that

in George Dandin. In the figure of Horner, he desperately tries to find a clue to the various pressing problems of the time. He exposes the set of vile women at whose expense the laughter is evoked. Alithea gets the respect of all including Horner. Yet, Wycherley seems to be baffled in the same manner as Molière in George Dandin when he failed to arrive at a conclusion. Significantly enough, in The Country Wife, there are no loving couples to be united. In their stead is the ever-present figure of the cuckold with his cap drawn over his forehead and that of his wife who has learnt the art of lying according to the ways of the world.

Sir Solomon, (1669), by John Caryl presents an interesting contrast to The Country Wife in the manner of adaptation. The intellectual element in Molière's plays led Wycherley to provide for pleasure-cum-instruction through comico-satirical portraiture of social follies. Caryl was free from any ethics in comedy. He aimed at entertaining, perhaps, his royal guests at Dover and was amply rewarded by the popularity of his play.¹ Due credit must be given to Caryl for having steered away from ~~any~~ ^{the} lubricity of the time. At the same time, far from being an

(1) Downes, J., Roscius Anglicanus, Edited by M. Summers, Pp.29-30.

inane imitation like Flecknoe's play. This was a conscious adaptation of different comic elements from L'École Des Femmes, using them for the purpose of a hilarious comedy without any other motive. Caryll has succeeded in catering for lively entertainment with the very material which, in the hands of Wycherley, has been used for the most provocative as well as controversial play of the age. The fundamental difference between the two writers lies in their attitude towards their art.

Caryll follows the story of L'École Des Femmes in broad outlines. Sir Solomon, like Arnolphe, is bringing up his future bride in seclusion, "to preserve her in her simplicity". Caryll has skilfully interwoven a secondary love-story in order to give scope for a complicated plot. Moreover, the sub-plot introduces such comic figures as Sir Arthur Addell, the usual fop of Restoration stage, to the immense delight of the audience. In general, characterisation in the manner of Molière is followed. But the tone is partially changed by the introduction of new matter. Sir Solomon shares with Arnolphe all his idiosyncracies. Matters become complicated as a recalcitrant son is introduced, who turns out to be his father's rival. The last factor leads to the difference between Sir Solomon and Arnolphe. Caryll is quite in line with

(1) See above, Pp. 133-135.

his contemporaries when he makes the father ungraciously disinherit the son, who to the father becomes "an utter stranger". However unlike Molière and typical of the Restoration society these sentiments might have been, Caryll has passed off the situation with a lightness of touch which fits in well within the comic atmosphere. In fact, Caryll has successfully contrasted the unreasonable jealousy of the older man with the touching charm of the love between Julia and Single. He has put the young lovers' quarrel in verse to build up the contrasting picture. Finally, the third figure of contrast and a favourite of the Restoration stage, which has no prototype in the French original, Sir Arthur Addell, is introduced for further complications. As a writer of light comedy, Caryll has shown ample dexterity in plot-construction and characterisation through contrasts. The maximum of effect he derives from short episodes, almost all taken from Molière. The amusing episode of the misunderstanding between Sir Solomon and Wary, the two prating and shrewish servants, the device of the letter,¹ all such minor details have an accumulative effect in building up the comic story. Caryll has not even changed the temperament of the women. Julia possesses^a certain gracious charm of her own, very much

(1) See, Caryll, J., Sir Solomon, Act I, Act II and Act III.

akin to some women in Molière, though the heroine of Caryll displays more shrewdness than the simple Agnes of Molière.

Thus, by careful selection of similar incidents from the twin plays of Molière, with an admixture of contemporary popular comic elements, Caryll has shown plenty of inventive power in adapting foreign material for the English stage. He cared little for the instruction behind Molière's play and is justified in his attempt to provide light entertainment.

These two plays of Molière have been pillaged eagerly by a host of minor playwrights of the time. In the first place, the subject-matter fitted well into the general attempt to bring out the duel of the sexes, particularly, where women were asserting their right. Secondly, the elements of intrigue provided ample scope for the complication of the plot, which was thought to be one of the marks of the superiority of the English plays. The gulf of difference between Wycherley and writers like Flecknoe, Ravenscroft and even Dryden, together with his victim Shadwell, is indeed rather wide. They fail to convey the impression of any purpose, ethical or aesthetic, when they entertained their audience by low buffoonery. In them the mobile features of Molière had frozen into lines of farcical masks and the lightness of raillery

hardened into cynical and broad repartee. Wycherley was conscious of the pressing problems of his time. He accepted Molière's method of treatment though he might have over-shot the target. But the failure of these writers to understand Molière is obvious from their claim of having improved upon the original.

In spite of his failure to carry out the moral purpose set in the preface to The Sullen Lovers, credit must go to Shadwell for making an attempt to grapple with some of the social problems of his time. Molière has come out as the champion of young women in these two plays and has given them the reward of victory and happiness. Shadwell was quick to take hints from Molière when dealing with the same topic.¹ But the unfortunate lack of imagination and of dramatic insight coupled with his eagerness to please the crowd, have resulted in the distortions of the material. The facts in reality might have been quite plausible but Shadwell confused art and reality.

Ravenscroft's inclination towards low farce is shown in his treatment of the matter in The London Cuckolds, (1682). The play is a mess of intrigues of the most perverted type and the story from Molière has undergone outrageous changes. Molière could meet any

(1) See, Shadwell, T., The Virtuoso, 1676; The Squire of Alsatia, 1688; The Amorous Bigotte, 1690; The Scowrers, 1691.

criticism of Agnès's conduct on the ground that his has been an attempt at a picture of the ignominy into which a girl's ignorance may^{cause her to} sink through faulty education. The absurdity of Agnès's folly is balanced by the spontaneity of her youthful love which gives to her the charm of life. But it was the automaton movement of the puppet in Ravenscroft which tickled London audiences.

In contrast to Ravenscroft, we come to the unsuccessful Flecknoe, who set^{for himself} a high purpose in his play.¹ Flecknoe is one of the first who borrowed freely from Molière and tried to produce a single play like The Damoiselles A La Mode out of several cuttings from Molière.² Yet, Flecknoe left no other impression but of insipidity. The only redeeming feature perhaps is the absence of vulgarity. But even his virtue gained him little but the ridicule of his fellow-writers.

Almost every time the story of the two plays of Molière was treated by an English adaptor, the young and simple girl of Molière had been changed into the cunning wife who evades the vigilance of the jealous husband, haunted by the fear of cuckoldry. Molière

(1) See, Flecknoe, R., Loves Dominion, The Preface.

(2) See Chap. IV for a detailed study of the play.

seldom dealt with marital infidelity which unfortunately was not an uncommon occurrence in ^{English} contemporary life and in comic art which is supposed to mirror it.

The young wife in Dryden in The Double Discovery seeks adventure with a stranger on the ground that she cannot accept "...a covetous and jealous, and an old man..." as her husband. Then follows complications akin to those in L'École Des Femmes where Horace ignorantly confides in Arnolphe. A similar situation develops but, in the light of the double discovery, Dryden has created a situation which not only makes a heavy demand on the credulity of the audience but which is revolting in its conception. Dryden has so often vaunted the superiority of English plays in characterisation and plot-structure and has made fun of the grimaces of the French actors. But as a comedian, he fully shares the charges brought by Collier against the stage.

The numerous variations on the theme, as in The Mulberry Garden (1668) by Sedley, Love In A Wood (1671) by Wycherley, Soldier's Fortune (1681) by Otway, The Old Bachelor (1693) by Congreve, Virtue in Danger (1696) by Vanbrugh, have a strong Restoration flavour. They mirrored the society and no doubt tickled the audience. But they bring hardly any credit to the writers. In conception and treatment they have

travelled far from Molière and Wycherley and have
created their own species on the similar theme.

✧

LES FÂCHEUX. 1661.

Les Fâcheux was written by Molière in great haste to acquiesce in the wishes of the noble Fouquet. The play has hardly any plot; it is a picture-gallery of the bores who put the ordinary man into all sorts of embarrassments by their importunities, hardly realising what a pest they are in a well-ordered society. In the preface, Molière has said that so numerous were the fops in actual life, and such tempting models they ^{were} provided for the comedian's canvas that it was with a careful restraint he cut down the range of his portraits. A slender love-story is present but the main interest lies in the portrait-gallery.

Thomas Shadwell was undoubtedly an enthusiastic student of Jonson whose Theory of Humours had greatly attracted him.¹ It so happened that this particular play of Molière had fitted neatly into Jonson's theory. In fact, it is nothing but a study of a set of 'humours'.

(1) See above, Chap. II. P. 77ff.

Shadwell was acquainted with the French play,^{1.} and in his haste to compose his own play,^{2.} the young aspiring beginner must have been captured by the ready-made material presented to him by the two dramatists, namely, the theory of Jonson to be applied to some of the characters, with their oddities, taken from Molière. The latter's comic figures are life-like. They have hardly any touch of the abstract that tend to mar at times Jonson's characters. Shadwell had been faithful to both these masters as well as to what he considered to be the duty of a comedian, namely, to hold a mirror to nature. Perhaps, Shadwell's application of theory to practice was a little too literal and narrow. In fact, the popularity of the play depended on the identification of Sir Positive At-All with Sir Robert Howard.^{3.}

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- (1) See, Shadwell, T., The Sullen Lovers, Preface.
- (2) op.cit. "Look upon it, as it really was, wrote in haste, by a young writer, and you will easily pardon it;"
- (3) See, Pepys, S., Diary And Correspondence, 5 May, 1668, "And to see the folly how the House do this day cry up the play, [The Impertinents] more than yesterday! And I for that reason like it, I find, the better, too; by Sir Positive At-All, I understand is meant Sir Robert Howard."

Such identifications with living personages were not a rarity in Molière either.¹ Credit must go to Shadwell for the success of the life-like portraiture, though perhaps somewhat dated.

Shadwell's main borrowings from Les Fâcheux are traced in the characters of the different fops or 'humours'. Woodcock, Ninny and Huffle are echoes of Lisandre, Ormin, Alcippe and Dorante in their habits of singing, dancing and borrowing money.² To fit into the plot-structure of the English play, the first two are shown to be in love with Emilia and hence follow the complications, certainly much to the delight of the audience.³ Molière's audience could catch the wit and humour of a situation or a character through a few deft strokes of the pen. Shadwell's audience required a full-length figure of a bore or of a fop for enjoyment. Therefore, Woodcock and Ninny undergo the ridiculous process of expansion for the direct exposure of folly. They are thus made to play an important part in the plot and keep the spectators in fits of laughter.

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- (1) Les Femmes Savantes, Vadus and Trissotin are caricatures of Menage and Abbé Cotin respectively.
- (2) See Borgman, A.S., Thomas Shadwell. His Life And Comedies, Pp.121-136, for a detailed study of the play.
- (3) See Chap.IV.

little purpose in either characterisation or plot-construction. In fact, Brainsick is hardly a convincing figure, introduced perhaps to intensify the darkened atmosphere of the moral world. In spite of his intention of exposing the crying sin of keeping, Dryden has only added one more play to that stock which rightly called down on itself the wrath of Jeremy Collier.

LA CRITIQUE DE L'ÉCOLE DES FEMMES.1663.

In La Critique De L'École des Femmes the aim of Molière is principally to establish his position as a comedian by exposing the futility of hidebound criticism in assessing any work of art. The vital principle which guides the pen of the comedian is the exposure of vices or eccentricities of men living in society, even if these be bordering on the offensive to ears polite. Uranie and Dorante are his mouth-piece¹: Uranie holds that "...cette comédie serait plutôt capable de guérir les gens, que de les^{prendre} malades."². Moreover, such a play should be accepted at its face value, and "l'on ne faut pas y vouloir voir ce qui n'y est pas".³. The plea for the comic portraiture of

(1) See above, Chap.II.Pp.59-62.

(2) La Critique de L'Écoles des Femmes, Sc.III.

(3) Ibid.

ridiculous characters is voiced by Dorante.^{1.}

From the vindication of the comic subject-matter, Molière passes on to a vehement criticism of the fashion of rigid adherence to technical rules on the ground of conformity to rigid classic^{al} definitions. He refutes each point of the poet Lysidas with ample logical arguments.^{2.}

The comic art of Molière lies in his dexterous mixture of academic discussion with comic portraiture of various characters. In fact, Molière appears to be the pioneer in this particular comic genre where action is replaced by a literary debate, the interest being kept up by the constant clash of personalities. It may be said that Molière is refining the comic genre itself by such a technique. La Critique De L'École Des Femmes affords an instance of subtle intellectualism in a comic atmosphere.

(1) See ^{above,} Chap.II. P. 61.

(2) See ^{above,} Chap.II. Pp. 61-62.

Such a dramatisation of academic discussion is indeed rare in English plays. Hamlet is shown discoursing on the histrionic art with the players while Love's Labour's Lost plays wittily on the literary innovations of the 16th century. But an entire play dedicated to some urgent critical question is a rare specimen and a difficult one too.

For the Restoration comedians, however, La Critique De L'École Des Femmes could hardly offer suitable material for adaptation. An English audience of the late 17th century, looked upon the theatre not as the platform for academic discussions but as an instrument of diversion. Though manifesting an eager interest in the critical controversies, the English playwrights found but little food for thought in this supremely subtle comedy of Molière. Perhaps, the most critical of the dramatists, Wycherley, saw an opportunity of utilising a few suggestions in The Plain Dealer. With abundant dramatic insight, Wycherley combined effectively the personality of the gay and sophisticated Célimène from Le Misanthrope with the hypocritical prudery of Climène from La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, to create the heroine of his play, The Plain Dealer.¹

(1) See ^{below,} Pp. 201-202.

Obviously, the tone of the first play undergoes a considerable change on the side of hypocrisy and dishonesty in order to create the proper atmosphere. For the sake of character delineation Wycherley has accepted technical suggestions from Molière. A critical discussion takes place in The Plain Dealer, on his other play, The Country Wife, in the manner of Molière. The two cousins, Olivia and Eliza fill in the roles of Climène and Uranie respectively. Molière's main interest, however, centres on the dramatic controversy, and the comic delineation of character gives an added interest to the otherwise non-dramatic theme. For Wycherley, however, the interest lay in the technique for character-study rather than the subject-matter. In this play the English playwright was earnestly engaged in exposing social vices. He has borrowed this episode in order to bring out the characters of the two women in a sharp contrast, and to show up hypocrisy in a more lurid light.

In 1674, it was not yet so urgent a question to defend the stage as it was at the turn of the century after the publication of Collier's book. Defences of the stage came in plenty, and it was Tom Brown who hit upon the bright idea of defending the theatre from the stage itself. Undoubtedly, Molière's play came handy to him. In fact, his play, The Stage Beaux

Tossed In A Blanket, (published in 1704), is a close adaptation of La Critique De L'École Des Femmes. The theme, obviously, centres round the vexed question of immorality of the stage, and Brown has shown much skill in giving it a dramatic shape.

In the Epistle Dedicatory to Christopher Rich, Brown makes a plea for the stage on the ground of exposing fools and knaves, prodigals and affectations. The first scene opens with the conversation between Uranie and Eliza, followed by the unwelcome visit of Climène and Lord Vaunt -Title. It is a skilful combination of scenes and characters from foreign and native plays on the relevant dramatic problem. The main inspiration, however, comes from Molière's play, as it would supply plausible grounds for a vigorous challenge to Collier's attack. The general trend of the arguments follows the French one. The characterisation is effective as Brown has followed the French model closely. The amusing conclusion is perhaps a sop to the audience, yet it is quite applicable to the situation on the stage. In his attempt to adjust it to the immediate context nearer at home, Brown has at times, become rather diffused through a lack of dramatic insight.

LE MARIAGE FORCÉ.1664.

The picture of an old man of fifty-five, eager to marry a pretty young girl, is by itself comical in conception. He becomes a fixed figure of scorn when drawn by the ingenious pen of a master-comedian, for the purpose of gentle satire and diversion. In this comedy, Molière has drawn, with unfailing humour, the picture of age eager to marry youth in various discomfit^{ing} situations, followed by the unavoidable ludicrous consequences of such an odd combination.

It stands to reason that such a comic figure would become a popular one in Restoration Comedy. The picture of the eager elderly suitor, inclining more towards the uncouth and the crude, is a convenient target for ridicule. The direct imprint of it is in Scaramouch, (1677), by Ravenscroft. The elderly suitor in the English play is as adamant as his French prototype in his views on marriage. In both the plays, the self-complacency of the man is contrasted with the impertinence of the flippant young woman which shatters the smugness of the elderly suitor. Molière intends to paint a coquette, who seeks freedom

from parental tutelage in marriage. For her, marriage signifies not responsibility but only the means to self-indulgence. She is the younger counterpart to the lusty old suitor. Both of them draw up pictures of life which appear to them the most desirable through their distorted vision. In them Molière has sketched the different perversions of age and youth; the dotting old man who lacks judgment and the young girl in whom selfishness acts as an anti-social force to flout social institutions. In Scaramouch, however, much of the point is lost through the Restoration love of intrigues. Ravenscroft, with little originality of his own, has left little to the imagination of the audience. The young girl had already entered into an intrigue with her young lover. She is forward before the old suitor, the choice of her parents, not because she is an inveterate coquette, as her French counterpart is, but because her own wish was being thwarted by the domineering parents. Thus the French version presents a painful picture of life through character-sketches, while the English one is the story of a well-planned intrigue between two young people. Therefore, the focus of interest in each play determines its conclusion. Sganarelle is burdened with the coquettish wife who will forever disturb his peace of mind while the young

lovers in the English play ultimately manage to get their own way. Molière has made his audience both laugh at and ponder over the incongruity of the situation through well-balanced characterisations; the artful intrigues of the lovers and the consequent discomforts of an elderly lover would indeed be the suitable subject-matter of a popular Restoration comedy.

Ravenscroft has struck out quite an original line in his later play, The Canterbury Guests, (1694), which has distinct though distant echoes of Le Mariage Forcé. He seems to have succeeded in reproducing the rollicking fun at the expense of the central figure of the elderly suitor. The contrast is indeed humorously drawn between the bombastic pedant like Sir Burnaby¹ and the modest and timid Jacinta. There is no touch of the coquette in her nor could she act the part. She is really a damsel in distress. There are again slight reminiscences towards the end of the play when Sir Burnaby is challenged.² Such suggestions of humorous episodes had by the end of the century become part of the English comic repertoire. Ravenscroft's careful selection of comic matter for

(1) Ravenscroft, E., The Careless Lovers, Act II, Sc.4 and 5.

(2) op.cit. Act V.Sc.5.

the stage of the 90's of the century might have been an unconscious assimilation of the foreign matter.

Perhaps a more intelligent adaptation of the spirit of the French play has been made by Congreve in his first work, The Old Bachelor, (1693). The foolish and prating Sganarelle has been changed into the much experienced and cynical bachelor of Restoration England. Consequently, Congreve's technique works in a reverse process. The egoism of the overwrought old bachelor adopts a scoffing attitude towards philandering which has become a social accomplishment. In self-defence, he exposes the crudity of the gallantry of young men: "I confess, you that are women's asses bear greater burdens; are forced to undergo dressing, dancing, singing, sighing, whining, rhyming, flattering, lying, grinning, cringing, and the drudgery of loving to boot".¹ Yet the fate of the cynic is to fall in love with the inveterate coquette and be cozened. Molière has presented the blind obstinacy of human nature which refuses to see beyond its immediate self-interest. Congreve has put the same problem in the midst of a heartless and

(1) Congreve,^{w/} The Old Bachelor, The Mermaid Series, Act I. Sc.I. P.17.

highly sophisticated society. Both Sganarelle and Heartwell cannot but be tempted, in spite of their age and experience, into a foolish marriage. Dorina knows no dissimulation; she is a coquette by nature, and makes no effort to hide it. But Lucy is the product of an age where dissimulation is the supreme social grace if not virtue. Therefore, her split personality required the pretensions to innocence and modesty to "dissemble the very want of dissimulation"¹. The two elderly suitors share a similar fate - one through natural foolishness and the other through cynical blindness.

Congreve seems to have caught the very spirit of Molière in dealing with a problem of this nature. He has, moreover, made a skilful variation on Molière's theme to make it fit into the English atmosphere. Molière aimed at giving a picture of human character in all ages and countries. Congreve gave a more specific study of the same reality befitting his own society and times. The aim of both however, was similar, namely, to hold a mirror to society.²

(1) Congreve, ^{W.,} *The Old Bachelor, Mermaid Series,* Act III. Sc.I. P.36.

(2) See above, Chap.II. P.84-85

LE TARTUFFE 1664.

The powerful exposé in Le Tartuffe could hardly find a parallel in the whole range of English adaptations of the comedies of Molière, except, if it be, in its treatment of matter which happened to be similar, namely hypocrisy, in The Plain Dealer or The Country Wife of Wycherley. The fearlessness and the burning sincerity of Molière in exposing religious hypocrisy, was a subject beyond the reach of the best of the Restoration comedians, however sincere their aim might have been. The need to unmask the abominable crime and to disillusion the infatuated Orgon, were a challenge to the existing order of things, as is seen by the vehement opposition to the play. Yet Molière's honesty of purpose and his moral integrity did not give up the fight, till the battle was won. The preface to his play is a testimony to the zeal of the comic reformer. He has raised comedy to the higher rank of art and has assigned to it a deeper ethical purpose.¹

(1) See above, Chap.II. P.65.

Unfortunately, the English adaptors of the play have missed the important role Le Tartuffe was destined to play in the history of the comic art. Even Dryden has totally failed to reproduce the moral lesson behind the French play in any of his adaptations like Limberham, or The Kind Keeper, (1678), or, The Assignation, or Love In A Nunnery, (1672). In fact, the depravity of taste Dryden has manifested in Limberham makes one wonder how he could mention the French masterpiece alongside with his play. John Crowne and George Farquhar have ^{taken}~~grafted~~ certain hints but they always skimmed the surface. They reproduced mostly some comic or risqué situation to the immense delight of the audience. But, as a whole, the spirit of Tartuffe remained impenetrable to the English mind.

Dryden's comedies are almost always vitiated by sexual perversions. At times, only, the darkness relieves itself by a few strokes of witty repartee, so common in English plays. However, certain passages from Molière may find their interesting counterpart.¹ The scene where Prince Frederick is cornered into an admission of his love for Lucretia is reminiscent of the one in Le Tartuffe depicting the lovers' quarrel.

(1) Dryden, J., The Assignation. Compare Act IV.Sc.4. with Le Tartuffe, Act II. Sc.4.

In spite of the cunning shrewdness of Lucretia trying to capture Prince Frederick, there is much of a witty dialogue to be enjoyed in this scene. Mariane and Valère in the French play, are almost childlike in their deliberate misunderstanding. Theirs is an interesting case where love, in the face of insurmountable difficulty, blindly tries to avenge itself. Molière has presented a subtle psychological factor. Placed in a more sophisticated society, the English counterpart becomes the common ruse resorted to by the artful woman to rouse the man's jealousy. These two scenes are complementary in the sense that they are appropriate comments on their respective times and on the calibres of the writers.

Medbourne seemed to have been aware of the difficult task of translating "...the Master-Piece of Molière's Productions, or rather that of all French Comedy."¹ He was eager that, "...what was Gold beyond Sea, Should not be Methinks in England turn'd to Alchemy".²

(1) Medbourne,^{M.} The Tartuffe, or The French Puritan, Dedication.

(2) op.cit. Prologue.

The translator, though trying to be faithful to the original, made a deliberate attempt to adapt the piece along some acknowledged lines.¹ The Englishman's inadequate knowledge of idiomatic French is perhaps responsible for some change in the general tone of the play.² At the same time, Medbourne was eager to follow his native tradition wherever there seemed to be some scope for it in the French drama. The first item expected to be changed under the English writer's pen would be the simple plot-structure. The final denouement in the French play does not appear to be artificial or extraneous, as the appeal to monarchy was quite in tone with the prevailing custom in France. It could however be expected to have little interest for the Englishman. Hence, the change in the conclusion necessitated certain alterations in the plot, which ~~was~~^{were} only too welcome to the English audience.

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- (1) See Medbourne^{M.}, The Tartuffe, or The French Puritan, Dedication.
- (2) For a detailed study of the English play, see, Miles, D.H. The Influence of Molière on Restoration Comedy, Pp 85 - 87.

A sub-plot among the minor characters met with the English requirement for a complicated plot. It also provided the necessary instrument for a more effective conclusion according to the English tradition.

Unfortunately for Medbourne, it proved too difficult a task to alter Molière without tampering with the spirit or the dramatic integrity of his play. The English version failed to keep up the dramatic tension till the end as the counter-intrigue against Tartuffe by the two domestic servants is made known beforehand. Perhaps, realising this flaw in plot-structure, Medbourne tried to keep up the flagging interest by a number of marriages at the end which bring in the happy note expected of a comedy. In his enthusiasm, however, he almost succeeded in producing an anti-climax by the introduction of a dance which jars on the peaceful atmosphere of the family re-union.

The plays of John Crowne had been quite popular in court. One of his early plays, The Country Wit, (1675), centres round the conflict between the father and daughter over the question of marriage. This is indeed a popular theme for a comic situation. But Crowne's play opens with a scene which has been drawn on parallel lines to the scene in Le Tartuffe¹ where

(1) Le Tartuffe, Act II. Sc.2.

the father argues with the daughter in favour of his match while the amusement and fun is derived from the impudent but logical sorties of the pert maid. Of course, the similarity with the French play ends here for the obvious reason that Molière was dealing with a problem of society while Crowne dealt with the "monstrous witty age".¹

In his later play, The English Friar or The Town Sparks, (1690), Crowne was taking up a more serious attitude. He had conceived the plan of exposing the hypocrisy of a certain religious sect from the national point of view.² He readily accepted the device used by Molière to entrap the over-confident hypocrite. In the English play, Father Finical is a counterpart of Tartuffe. But much of the grandeur or ferocious wickedness of the man is lost in the usual whirlpool of incidents in a Restoration Comedy. The intrigues of the crafty priest play a ^{secondary part} ~~second fiddle~~ and fail to leave a convincing impression. Similarly, the division of the role of Elmira, to be shared by Sir Thomas Credulous and Pansy, leads to much loss of the

(1) Crowne, J. The Country Wit, Prologue.

(2) See above, Chap. II. 1.

force of the original story. Consequently, the simple grandeur of the French outline is blurred in the conglomeration of incidents and characters.

L'AMOUR MÉDECIN 1665

LE MÉDECIN MALGRE LUI 1666

LE MALADE IMAGINAIRE 1673

Molière has used the comic device as a social corrective. Few figures or professions in society, which tended to overstep the boundary of good judgment or to exploit human credulity in the name of art or science, ~~has~~^{have} escaped the comedians good-humoured laughter. The medical practitioners, though of indispensable service to human life, were also a target of his ridicule. In the earlier play, L'Amour Médecin, the butt of his satire is not so much the medical profession as the obstinacy and credulity of the selfish parent. At the same time, the profession is laid bare of its hypocritical solemnity by which it exploits the simple faith of the layman. It is wellknown that in Molière's time, the medical profession was overriden with strict formalities and traditional rules. In the play, therefore, the secret conspiracy of the medical practitioners could not have

been better exposed than in the solemn jargon of their conference. The position of the doctors, in fact, of all men of science in England, was a different one. Though Shadwell had ridiculed the craze for scientific experiments in The Virtuoso, (1676), yet, the very fact that the Royal Society was founded under royal patronage is indicative of the respectable position the scientists were gradually gaining. Thus, it was not so much with a satirical intention that such plays of Molière were adapted as for their scope for farcical intrigues inherent in the situations depicted. It also gave ample opportunity to develop an involved plot. Along with the disguised valet¹, or the Turkish Aristocrat², the lover in the guise of the doctor became quite a popular figure on the comic stage. These three disguise devices are almost direct descendants of Molière's art, much changed ^{owing} ~~due~~ to different ^{social} atmospheric pressure. The trick of the disguised doctor is used by the young couple who try to evade parental authority, or, by the sly young wife

(1) Les Précieuses Ridicules

(2) Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme

on the lookout to deceive the jealous and aged husband. Another form of direct borrowing would be the farcical jargon of the medical men. Such scenes in Molière were no doubt comic in the lower sense, yet they served the purpose of exposing the cabal of the medical profession. Failing to have any such intention, the English plays descended to low farces. If we consider English borrowings from these plays in this light, we shall come across them mostly in the highly intriguing and complicated plots of playwrights who seldom evinced any serious purpose in their comic productions.

The earliest borrowings from Le Médecin Malgre Lui and L'Amour Médecin, are to be found in The Dumb Lady or The Farrier Made Physician, (1669), by John Lacy. The title with the sub-title is self-explanatory. Lacy does not seem to have any artistic principles in spite of his interest in poetry.¹ Moreover, he appears to have adapted the two plays of Molière for the most degenerate taste of the Restoration audience. The main story is taken from Le Médecin Malgre Lui ending up with the subterfuge from L'Amour Medecin.²

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- (1) Lacy, J., The Dumb Lady, The Epistle to the Reader.
- (2) For a detailed study of the play see Miles, D.H., The Influence of Molière on Restoration Comedy, Pp.88-95.

that where I found the Stile too poor, I endeavour'd to give it a Turn; ..."1. Like her compatriot, Thomas Shadwell, Centlivre does not hesitate to demean the quality of the French drama. However, Centlivre has produced a cleverly contrived plot taken out of these three similar plays of Molière.

The principal character would, of course, be the faggot-binder, forced into the role of a learned doctor, at the contrivance of his wife as her means of revenge. Centlivre, however, has shown much dramatic insight by considerably shortening the role of the disguised doctor. Perhaps she was gauging the volatility of the French audience as contrasted with the more phlegmatic humour of the audience at home. Again, by such shortening of the part, Centlivre has managed to arrive at ^athe denouement more in tone with the English tradition. Thus, with careful selection of characters and incidents, Centlivre has developed a plot which has all the bustle of activity and the interest of intrigue, which were so much to the taste of her audience.

(1) Centlivre, S., Love's Contrivance, The Preface.

Another woman who justified her assertion of the capability of women-writers, was Aphra Behn, who had adopted pleasure as the aim of her literary creation¹. To this end, she had used the method in vogue, as she was well acquainted with the taste of the audience. Many of her scenes and characters are now not considered polite enough for cultured society. Yet, such was her time, that she earned her living as a playwright, which ^{means} goes to say that her plays were in demand.².

For the numerous and varied intrigues, Behn had turned to Molière's comedies. The play Sir Patient Fancy, (1678), has distinct echoes of Le Malade Imaginaire. Here again, one notices the method of adaptation. As the title signifies, Sir Patient is the replica of the hypochondriac Orgon, who passes his time in self-inflicted morbid pleasure of counting bills of medicine. The young wife, like her French

(1) See above, Chap.II. Pp.92-93.

(2) Behn, A., Sir Patient Fancy. To The Reader:

"Forced to write for Bread and not ashamed to
owne it,"

prototype, plays her part with well-pretended anxious care for him. Behn, however, in Lady Fancy has given the English version. Belinda is a hypocrite no doubt. Yet, when one remembers the incessant spitting and coughing of the old man, one cannot but sympathise with her. As selfish Orgon is ready to sacrifice his daughter, so perhaps, Belinda also had been the victim of his selfishness which has turned her into the hypocrite. But she has no amours; she only wants her freedom from the perverted sick man. Lady Fancy is a similar case. But in the similar situation she has reacted not only violently but differently too. Behn could not portray a young woman satisfied only with the wealth she had cozened from her husband. It would be an act without any meaning. So, Lady Fancy has her amorous intrigues with the usual type of the foppish adventurer. Belinda had retained some dregs of conscience. But the pursuit of pleasure had hardened Lady Fancy, and her creator has laid the colour ^{thick} ~~deep~~ on the canvas. The scene of the feigned death has lost its original dignity and has been turned into a ^{one} ~~crowd~~ of bustling activity. On the exposure of hypocrisy, Behn winds up in the usual Restoration style. Lady Fancy takes away the money to live with her gallant, while Sir Fancy, not desiring to be left behind in the fashion

of the time, makes up his mind to lead a gallant's life and "go to court". Even the child does not escape the coquetry and gallantry of the sophisticated age.

Aphra Behn took delight in portraying the follies of her time. It can be said to her credit as a struggling woman-writer, that her pictures are no less real than life itself.

LE MISANTHROPE.1666

Le Misanthrope is reckoned in genteel society to be the high-water mark of the comic muse. It is the comic exposure of a man who, through an uncompromising sincerity, could neither accept nor adjust himself to the graceful ubiquitous hypocrisy which oils the social machinery. Alceste's unsparing censure of the polite dissimulations of urbane society is not motivated by any selfish ends. His deep-seated sincerity refuses to accept society as it is. Molière displayed the skill of the comedian in giving his hero a full human stature. In spite of his misanthropy, Alceste is in love and that with a coquette. The fact completes the portrait of Alceste because it helps to portray his character from different angles. It was however not Alceste's sincerity that Molière tried to ridicule; rather, it was the toughness of that virtue which lacked a certain degree of pliability that made Alceste look like an automaton in a society dominated by good sense and taste. Alceste failed to take into account the weaknesses inherent in human

nature and it is this rigid uncompromising attitude Molière intends to bring to light. The end in the comedy is inconclusive. Molière had seen life at close quarters and he had fathomed the tragedy of such a character which refuses to look at life humanely. The result is suffering for all. Molière's later plays tended to end inconclusively or in a not too artistic coup de theatre. This was only because Molière could not easily bring such uncompromising situations in life to a happy end only to conform to some dramatic rule. Therefore, to the end, *Alceste* remains the unsympathetic critic of mankind.

In broad outlines The Plain-Dealer, (1674), of Wycherley follows the plan laid down in Le Misanthrope. The difference in the English adaptation has been clearly summed up by another master-satirist, who was admirably suited to the task: "All Wycherley's strokes are stronger and bolder than those of our *Misanthrope*, but then they are less delicate ..."¹. The aim of the two dramatists in their art was identical, namely, to expose, through ridicule, social vices. But their respective attitude towards life and art determined by their social conditions in which they lived, accounted for all the difference in their treatment of

(1) Voltaire, De, Letters Concerning the English Nation, 'On Comedy' P.43.

similar material. Molière's criticism of mankind was tempered with sympathy and understanding whereas that of the English dramatist was an embittered cry against the outrageous social vices into which his intellectual curiosity had probed. Wycherley accepted Molière's method of ridicule which decides great matters more forcibly and better than severity.¹ Wycherley's mock dedication is a master-stroke of irony and is the index to the biting satire in the play.

The first scene of The Plain Dealer is modelled upon the opening scene of Le Misanthrope. The hero Manly is discovered in the first scene railing against the easy complaisance of society. He is like Alceste, who would like "...qu'on soit sincère, et qu'^en homme d'honneur on ne lâche aucun mot qui ne parte du coeur."² Molière carefully constructs the first scene which leads up to the main theme. There is something wrong with Alceste, and the whole play is devoted to discovering what it is. He remains an enigma to the tolerant and reasonable Philinte. Alceste is the prototype of Manly as Freeman is a shadow of Philinte. Wycherley's Manly however is

(1) See above, Chap. 2. P.75.

(2) Le Misanthrope, Act I. Sc.I.

far from being incomprehensible. The age in which Manly lived would not produce any complex problematic character. Following Molière's technique, Wycherley takes pains to make the hero sketch his own character, that of a plain dealer, whose aim is to tear aside the veil of hypocrisy in society: "Tell not me, my good Lord Plausible, of your decorums, supercilious forms, and slavish ceremonies! Your little tricks, which you, do daily over and over, for and to one another; not out of love or duty, but your servile fear."¹ Like Alceste, therefore, Manly would not accept any friend on easy terms. The subtle art of the French master is laid aside for the direct and energetic exposure of Brawny Wycherley. Manly is described as "of an honest, surly, nice humour". His rough behaviour is partly accounted for by his profession. The unsocial ways of a rover are accentuated because on the stage the deepened outlines carry more impression. According to Manly, a man can have only one sincere friend on whom he could place infinite trust. Like Philinte, Freeman, however, advocates the outward civilities which custom demands.²

(1) Wycherley, W., The Plain Dealer, Act I. Sc.I. Manly.

(2) Le Misanthrope, Act I. Sc.I.; The Plain Dealer Act I. Sc.I.

This particular conversation in The Plain Dealer runs on a coarser plane for obvious reasons. The subtle polish and elegance of Molière's style would have lost its verve and piquancy before the Restoration audience. The noble comic humour of Molière could not have left the Restoration pleasure-seekers less apathetic. Wycherley, with his finger on the pulse of the crowd, whom he was out to please as well as to ridicule, chose as crude an adaptation as society itself was. His play was a mirror of society.¹ His aim was to expose hypocrisy, and unerringly he places his finger on that particular type, namely, the hypocrisy of a woman. In fact, this theme returns again and again in Wycherley's plays. Such a society in which women like Olivia were sought after, stood in need of the ruthless words of a plain-dealer like Manly. Secondly, in accordance with the theory of decorum, Wycherley had tried to explain the crudeness of Manly's behaviour by making him "an unmannerly sea-fellow."² As a sailor he was ready to use bad language and be rude in his behaviour. Yet, Manly shows the affinity of temperament with Alceste when he says: "... if I ever speak well of people, (which is very seldom indeed) it should be sure to be behind their backs; and

(1) See above, Chap II. Pp. 73-74.

(2) Wycherley, W., The Plain Dealer, Act I.Sc.I.Manly.

if I would say or do ill to any, it should be to their faces."¹ Both hate men as a rule, either because they are wicked or they act in an easy complaisant manner towards the wicked. Manly hates compromises because his creator has witnessed many a compromise for selfish and ignominious gains. Manly thus shares the views of Alceste ~~in~~ ^{to a great extent.} ~~much~~ the similar ~~lines~~; only the hero has been transposed from ~~the~~ elegant and polished society into the rowdy company of Lincoln's Inn Fields or Covent Garden in the year 1674.

There is a confusion of values in both the characters. Alceste misjudges the trifling lies in society. There is irony in the situation where a misanthrope loves a coquette in spite of himself. But Alceste harbours no illusions as regards Célimène: "Mais la raison ~~en~~ n'est pas ce qui règle l'amour".² By placing Alceste in different situations Molière brings out the different facets of his character. That Wycherley was not eager to give the picture of a vicious character for its own sake, is borne out by the fact that he makes Manly trust his friend Vernish implicitly and love Olivia with the depth of sincerity

(1) Wycherley, W., The Plain Dealer, Act I, sc. 1. Manly.

(2) Le Misanthrope Act I, Sc. I.

peculiar to his passionate nature. Wycherley seems to be trying to portray a character whose sincere inclination is perverted in the midst of a general chaotic moral condition in society. Like Alceste, there is a lack of discrimination in Manly too, as he fails to see through the double-facedness of Olivia and Vernish, who is described as his "bosom and only friend". Perhaps, like the French prototype, he possesses too much of self-confidence and that renders him blind to certain aspects of life. Leigh Hunt has called Manly "as great a rascal as he thought everybody else". True, after Olivia's treachery, his own perfidy becomes no less than any in the play. Yet, there is hardly any indication of an act of debauchery on the part of Manly, except his extravagance and savage manners. One feels he has deliberately adopted a roughness of behaviour as a sort of defence against the brutality of society. As he lacked balance of judgment, he overacted his part. The second shock comes with the exposure of Vernish, but it does not lead to further degradation of Manly's character. On the contrary, disillusioned and cynical though he is, the loyalty and the love of Fidelia cannot but touch him. The man, who had known no home, now gives up his roving life; the man, who had denounced society in the most ruthless terms, at last

finds an anchor in life. The betrayal of his mistress whom he valued above all; the dastardly act of his only friend, are counterbalanced by one act of fidelity and the man's inherent sincerity responds to it. Such loyalty as Fidelia's cannot go unrewarded; it claims in its fold a strong but misguided character. Manly is reclaimed because the writer was not willing to leave society in a dirty mess. The reformation takes place within the play and herein is to be noticed an important divergence from the technique of Molière. Wycherley's aim was reformation through exposure by direct and concrete means. In this play he leaves no impression of hesitancy. The spark of manliness in Manly redeems him.

In the balancing of characters and in the distribution of different roles, Wycherley has followed Molière's method in Le Misanthrope. In the French play, the heroine is gay and frivolous yet polished and refined. It is the portrait of a woman in society, much sought after, yet, she has a healthy and firm outlook on life. In The Plain Dealer, woman has descended to the lowest depth of moral degradation which has left ulcerous scars on the surface of society, and Wycherley had set out to give a diagnosis. Each of these women reflected the

society to which she belonged.

Eliza serves as a foil to Olivia as Eliante does to Célimène. Both of them play a secondary role, yet both bring out the character of the heroine in a sharper light. To be able to stand up to Olivia, Wycherley changed the gentle Eliante into Eliza, with a strong commonsense coupled with a sharp tongue. Eliante in Le Misanthrope is self-effacive. But Wycherley could hardly believe in such a passive virtue. Therefore, Eliza's shrewd and cutting remarks fit into the atmosphere of The Plain Dealer with due propriety. She appears in the scene where the play The Country Wife is discussed in the manner of La Critique De L'École Des Femmes.^{1.}

The bracketing of Olivia and Célimène does not appear to be justifiable.^{2.} Olivia completely fails to enlist the sympathy of the audience which the coquettish Célimène does. She is rather a compound of Arsonoé and Climène,^{3.} malice and hypocrisy added to prudery. Wycherley was bent on exposing such vices in women. Another

(1) See above, Pp. 170-171.

(2) Miles, D.H. The Influence Of Molière On Restoration Comedy, Appendix, P.235.

(3) La Critique De L'École Des Femmes.

direct borrowing from Molière is the scene in which Olivia with Novel and Lord Plausible is engaged in marring the reputation of their acquaintances.¹

Wycherley shows the same skill in deepening the lines. The light raillery of the sophisticated society, where malice is a pleasant pastime, has been distorted in to ^{the} a sneer of the cynical world of Wycherley. It was no longer the thrust of the rapier but the thwacking of a cudgel that was necessary to rid society of such tricks.

Freeman balances Manly as Philinte does Alceste. Unfortunately, the English counterpart could not escape the vices of the age though sharing the broad humanity of Philinte. A slight discrepancy seems to appear in the portraiture of this character. In the first scene, Freeman seems to possess an abundance of good sense and honesty of purpose like Philinte. But, as the play proceeds, Wycherley makes him take part in some of the prevalent vices of the age, as if none could escape its tentacles. Molière's characters retain their distinctive characteristics, Wycherley's tend to lose their identity in the general moral morass.

Wycherley's intellectual curiosity led him to seek reasons for such decay in society. He makes the characters analyse the situation and offer some

(1) Wycherley, W. The Plain Dealer, Act II, sc. 1.

explanation. Perhaps, Freeman gives the clue to the disease prevalent in society: "... for I think most of our quarrels to the world are just such as we have to a handsome woman; only because we cannot enjoy her as we would do."¹ This selfishness has appeared under different guises in the English and the French plays. In Le Misanthrope Alceste is a victim of egoism. He is the idealist who would not brook any compromise. He is ready to undergo any deprivation for his 'pur amour'. In The Plain Dealer, the same quality takes a vicious turn, because it is up against evil itself. But, in both the cases, it was the problem of the individual unable to adjust himself to the demands of his society.

The end in Le Misanthrope is inconclusive. Ridicule has had no effect on Alceste. He remains comic to the end. Alceste and Manly are both prompted by sincerity. They would like to have "absolute certainty of affections". Alceste suffers because the idealist does so always. Molière, the Contemplator, was face to face with life, and he could offer no solution. But, there was plenty of scope for reclaiming Manly. Wycherley's aim was to drive out fire with fire and hence the extravagance of the treatment.² In The Plain Dealer, at the end of an

(1) Wycherley, W., The Plain Dealer, Act.5. Sc.4.

(2) See above, Chap.II. Pp.75-77.

orgy of violence and debauchery, the conventional happy ending, with the evil-doer exposed, ensues. Manly's word of advice, ending with the rhyming couplet, brings down the curtain with a sense of relief, giving the hint of a return to normal life.

In both the plays, the comedians artfully keep the balance between two contradictory emotions, till in the end, the equilibrium is broken with Alceste's retreat into the private world and Manly's return to society with a saner outlook. In the midst of the malicious chatter of petty men and frivolous women Alceste eagerly seeks to abolish conventional politeness because it only encourages insincerity and prevents one from seeing into the human heart. Manly follows suit in the game of unmasking hypocrisy but with a savagery at heart. The reason is not far to seek. Both aim at absolute honesty in love; Alceste's love is blind; Manly himself is blind. The nature of both is of one mould; Manly's absolute faith rested on Vernish and Olivia and both betrayed him. There is no similar betrayal in the French play and this difference is accounted for by the social background of the two plays. Molière's France presented to him a picture of coherent society, with order, discipline and stability, whereas, the society to

which Wycherley belonged was overwhelmed with moral disorder. The point has been subtly brought out. The law suit in Le Misanthrope is utilised to throw a further light on the rigidity of Alceste's character and accentuates the unsocial bent of his sincerity. But, the litigious woman in The Plain Dealer serves only to worsen the chaotic condition in the moral world.

The exposure of the villainy of Olivia and Vernish has a double context. Wycherley left no stone unturned to pour ridicule on such characters. He makes Manly bring along his friends to witness the downfall of Olivia so that within the play they become objects of ridicule, while the spectators in the auditorium share in the general scorn. Wycherley has carefully constructed the scene. It is an evidence of the writers desire to carry out the purpose he has set out to do in the Dedicatory Letter, namely to expose vice.¹

Novel and Plausible are echoes of Acaste and Clitandre in claiming a place in the affection of the lady. They fill up the gap and provide the material for the infinite scorn of Manly as did the original

(1) See above, Chap.II. Pp. 73-77.

ones for *Alceste*. The ultimate befooling of these bores follows the same device as^{is} used by the French author. The few direct borrowings from Molière are distinct. But it is not only such material borrowings but the conception of characterisation and the playing off of one character against the other for the greatest dramatic benefit which is due to Molière's influence. The changes are due to the adapting of the process to the material available and suited to the taste of the Restoration audience. If one only remembers the criticism of Voltaire, that the strokes have been deepened thereby losing some of the delicacy, one would be able to follow the line of adaptation of Molière's play into Restoration atmosphere.

Wycherley, taking up the cudgel, became too much of a satirist, and thus tended to lose the subtle balance between satire and comedy which corrects men's folly through laughter, a maxim he himself accepted.

Considering the question how far Wycherley had succeeded in carrying out his theory in practice, it is necessary to take into account the opinions of his contemporaries. Wycherley was unable to accept the beautiful and the graceful in Molière's artistic world. But he seized upon the various hints of mental aberrations that are strewn in his plays and developed them to a full stature as they fitted well the

characters in society. In such a task of assessment, the temper of the age is of first consideration. Every evidence points^{it} out as being an age rather brutal in its words and deeds. Social graces afforded a thin coating of varnish over the extremely uncouth and vulgar mental attitude. In such an age of crudity, Wycherley with his dramatic art occupied his position with due propriety. It would be of interest to note the attitude of his contemporaries towards the man and his art. In his character-sketch of Wycherley, George Granville, Baron Lansdowne, testifies to the accomplishments of our playwright as a gentleman, as well as to the affability and sociability of his character. As regards his plays, his lordship writes: "In his Writings he is Severe, Bold, Undertaking; ... He makes use of his Satyr, as a Man truly brave of his ^oCurage, only upon Publick Occasions, and for Publick Good. He compassionates the Wounds he is under a Necessity to probe. In Mr. Wycherley every|thing is Masculine".¹.

Dryden's verdict on this most lacerating play, is another evidence of the ultimate serious purpose of the comedies of our dramatist: "... for Comedy is both excellently instructive, and extremely pleasant; satire lashes vice into reformation, and humour represents folly so as to render it ridiculous. Many

(1) Granville, G., Memoirs of the Life of William Wycherley, P;25.

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, has obliged all honest and virtuous men, by one of the most bold, most general, and most useful satires which has ever been presented on the English theatre."¹.

Not only were his own countrymen aware of the value of Wycherley's comic satires, but the tribute of Voltaire is indeed of a high order. He regards Wycherley as "an excellent comic writer", and about his art he writes, "This gentleman, who pass'd his life among persons of the highest distinction, was perfectly well acquainted with their lives and their follies, and painted them with the strongest pencil, and in the truest colours".².

The complimentary assessment of the French satirist is a clue to the nature and purpose of Wycherley. The playwright is holding a mirror up to nature and that with the comic aim of exposure.³. These evidences indicate clearly that Wycherley's fellow-writers were ready to overlook the vulgarity that has found such prominence in his plays, and to

(1) Dryden, J., Dramatic Essays, Everymans Library, 'Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence', P.110-111.

(2) Voltaire, Letters Concerning The English Nation. 1760. 'On Comedy', P.144.

(3) See above, Chap.II. Pp.73-77.

shift the note of emphasis onto the ultimate comic purpose of reform through ridicule. The crying need of the moment was for some form of remedy and the comedian supplied it through his comic art.

Accepting that Les Fâcheux gave Shadwell the broad outlines of the characters of the various bores,¹⁻ it can be maintained that Le Misanthrope also suggested to him the conception of the protagonists. But the strange and curious change the sincere Alceste has undergone in the process of transformation, accounts for the rejection of the French prototype for Shadwell's hero.^{2.} Here is another English version of Alceste, not as the surly but honest Manly, but as a gentleman of standing. Wycherley's Manly shares with Alceste a deep-seated sincerity, which breaks through now and then the hardened crust of cynicism. According to D.H.Miles Stanford can be bracketed with Alceste,^{3.} but it would be Alceste devoid of his core of sincerity. As a result, Stanford has become a selfish "grumbler",^{4.} who even fails to accept the woman he has come to love

(1) See above, Pp.165-166.

(2) Borgman, A.S., Thomas Shadwell, His Life And Comedies, Pp.126-127.

(3) Miles, D.H., The Influence Of Molière On Restoration Comedy, Appendix, Pp.238-239.

(4) Ibid.

with any warmth of feeling. Molière has given to Alceste all human qualities in spite of his intractable nature. Shadwell has caught the automaton in Alceste's character and failed to add to it any human qualities. This aspect may be accounted for by the confusion arising out of the two different comic models Shadwell had before him. Accepting Jonson's theory of humour, which implied certain mechanical qualities of ~~the~~ human nature, Shadwell had the French characterisation at the back of his mind. The result was the failure, through lack of dramatic skill, to create a full character and not of a bore only, out of the two threads of comic humour.

The dialogue between Stanford and Lovel in the opening scene follows much the same trend of thought as that between Alceste and Philinte, but the depth of human nature has disappeared. Alceste's anger at the insincerity of society is that of a passionately sincere man, while Stanford's irritation proceeds from selfish motives which fail to draw sympathy. Alceste remains the same till the end. But neither the Restoration audience nor the writer would have felt happy over an inconclusive end. So the English comedy winds up with the conventional happy ending. Stanford makes a compromise with society, not with good grace as Manly does, but grudgingly. Stanford

has no moral integrity nor any permanent human quality. He is a character which has been built upon negative qualities. Shadwell is perhaps embodying in him the negative aspects of the age, without any fixed root in life. Molière's characters fit into the social set-up he has envisaged. Shadwell saw the rapid changes taking place around him, and hence his Stanford lacks stability of character. Lovel is the English version of Philinte, the easy-going man of the world. But the same difference is to be noted in characterisation. Philinte offers a philosophy of life with positive values, while Shadwell's Lovel, having some social graces, lacks the firm grasp over life. He is like any of the Restoration young men, perhaps chastened a little by his creator.

D.H.Miles's assumption that Emilia has been created after Célimène¹. does not hold good. There is in fact no point of contact between the two whatsoever. The credit of her creation goes entirely to Shadwell who built up the character on parallel lines to Stanford's. Shadwell in his desire for uniformity failed to note the dramatic interest

(1) Miles, D.H., The Influence of Molière On Restoration Comedy, Appendix, P.239.

arising out of the clash of opposing personalities in Le Misanthrope. He has paired off the young couples rather neatly, so that the opening scene of his play gives a clue to the subsequent conclusion, while in Molière the interest is sustained even after the inconclusive finale. Shadwell offered to his frivolous audience pleasure within the narrow compass of the theatre-hall by giving them a picture to their own liking. Molière sent away his courtly and elegant spectators to ruminate upon what they had witnessed upon the stage. This point can be clearly borne out by the gulf of difference between Arsonoe' and Lady Vaine. By a few subtle strokes of the pen the conceited prudery of the malicious Arsonoe' has been presented. Unfortunately, Shadwell has dwelt at length on the unpleasant traits of the character by twisting them to suit the degenerate taste of the audience. Lady Vaine is one of the long list of debauched persons in Restoration Comedy, and Shadwell is not behind his time in introducing all sorts of risqué situations to the delight of the audience. While Molière was ready to accept a challenge from his audience and to deal with it tactfully,^{1.} the

(1) See above, Chap. II, Préface, Le Tartuffe.

English comedians, as a rule, stooped to pander to the ribaldry of the audience. As a result, in crossing the Channel westward, the French lost their subtle fragrance which would have remained undetected and consequently unappreciated by the audience in Lincoln's Inn Field or Dorset Garden.

GEORGE DANDIN 1668.

Molière in some of his important plays has treated the subject of marriage and conjugal fidelity from different aspects¹. In some plays he has been able to bring off ~~the~~ ^{about} ~~the~~ ~~issue~~ ~~to~~ a successful and satisfactory solution. Yet, when seen at close quarters, the question assumed such a stupendous dimension, that it left even the contemplator dumb-founded. George Dandin presents such a problem. The play is comical, no doubt, in its situation, but it has become tragic by implication, and this fact baffles any solution. George Dandin and his wife remain confronting one another, because there was no way of escape.

The topic dealing with the amorous adventures of the deceitful wife was quite common in Restoration Comedy. But to give a different turn to the much-used

(1) See L'École Des Maris and L'École Des Femmes, pp. 148 ff.

material, the English comedians turned to this semi-farcical play with a deep tragic note for suggestions. However, the play did not prove to be a favourite. Perhaps, it was because there was too deep a contradictory situation, comical at the same time tragic.

For any successful adaptation of the French play for the English stage, a befitting conclusion had of necessity to be found. The actor-dramatist, Thomas Betterton, combined the amorous adventures of an elderly widow with those of the young in The Amorous Widow, or The Wanton Wife, (1670), drawing heavily from Les Précieuses Ridicules and George Dandin respectively.

Betterton has closely followed the plot of George Dandin. The young but deceitful wife, with the help of her crafty maid, is out to befool her citizen-husband. The misadventures of Brittle are of the same colour and the ignominy he has to submit to is of similar strain. In fact, the English dramatist has shown little originality in portraying the picture of the disgruntled husband complaining of the misalliance. This last factor is not the usual plea of the naughty wife who indulges in such forbidden pleasures. But Molière was not in search of pleasure for its own sake. He was looking for the causes which

undermine such relationship. In his conception of the wellordered society, marriage between two equals would indeed work out well. He shows the evil results of the contrary. But Betterton failed to realise this subtle analysis of a difficult situation. Or perhaps, the English actor-dramatist, ever watchful over his profession, was aiming at a more tangible reformatory effect. He sacrificed subtlety of the concluding scene of the French play to provide a moral, as it were, in the English counterpart. He aimed at diversion, no doubt, with the dancing and singing, in the midst of which Brittle is made to bustle in and carry away his wife who ultimately becomes wiser through experience. The pet theory of Restoration comedians of pleasure and instruction was, no doubt, shaping Betterton's method. But the altered conclusion had changed the tragic implication of Molière's play. Betterton had provided the picture of a jealous and not so much of a much-wronged husband. The introduction of this popular comic figure had necessitated the relevant conclusion from the reformist's point of view.

Congreve, in one of his earlier plays, The Old Bachelor, (1693), has made use of certain characters and situations from this French play in a rather vague manner. The couple consisting of the maid and the

servant is reproduced in Setter and Lucy. The difference, however, is obvious. In Molière, they are introduced as a contrast because of their farcical nature. In this early play, when Congreve was still on unsure grounds, his picture of the couple fits into the unsavoury intriguing situation of the main plot.

Another piece of free adaptation in the same play of Congreve is of the story of the first intrigue of Angelique.¹ Congreve's adaptation,² though smacking of the wantonness of his own age, yet has reproduced much of the comic situation similar to Molière. The two women are one in their impudent duplicity and in their role of the innocent and injured wife in the bargain. They share the artful skill by which they coax their husbands into submission. No solution of the situation is offered in either play. Such incongruity of temperament

(1) George Dandin, Act II. Sc.8.

(2) The Old Bachelor, Act.IV. Sc.6.

remains a riddle in society fraught with many a danger and slip. Congreve was still a hesitant apprentice in the art of the comic muse. He is gradually trying to engraft the spirit of the Frenchman in his own. His immature art still lies under the baneful influence of his immediate predecessors.

L'AVARE. 1668.

The figure of the miser had been a stock subject for the ridicule of the comic poet. Molière had derived some of the laughter-provoking mechanism, as for instance, the fury of the old miser at the loss of his treasure, the marrying off of the daughter without a dowry and the repetitive technique of the comic dialogue, from Plautus. At times, the English comedians preferred to borrow directly from Molière as the latter has succeeded in gaining the maximum of effect through subtle suggestions and details. L'Avare of Molière appears to have been a fruitful source of a number of Shadwell's plays. Not only did he translate the piece into English with his accustomed 'improvements', but he also accepted various hints, particularly of a farcical nature, to provoke laughter.

In the Preface to The Miser, Shadwell has acknowledged his debt to Molière; "The Foundation of this Play I took from one of Molière's called L'Avare; but that having too few Persons, and too

little Action for an English theater, I added to both so much, that I may call more than half of this Play my own; And I think I may say without vanity, that Molière's part of it has not suffer'd in my hands, nor did I ever know a French Comedy made use of by the worst of our Poets, that was not better'd by 'em...."¹. In adapting the play for the English stage according to tradition, the adaptor's own inclination and the demand of the audience, led Shadwell into introducing characters all bearing the stamp of the age,². Shadwell's much-vaunted 'improvements' consist of the addition of a few rakes and 'wenches only' and the severe economy of Molière's plot has been made more full by the questionable intrigues of dubious characters. Shadwell was always eager to hold a mirror to society. But lacking Molière's vision or subtlety, he confused between art and reality and gave a photographic picture of contemporary life. His opening scene is typical of Restoration society as reflected in contemporary comedy. Here the 'dialogue runs off very smartly'.³ and the

(1) Shadwell T., The Miser, Reader.

(2) See Borgman, A.S., Thomas Shadwell. His Life And And Comedies, Pp.141-147.

(3) Shadwell, T., The Miser, Act I, Sc.I.Theodore

young wits have not recovered from "last night's debauch." The difference between the French and the English writers is accounted for by the difference in their outlook on life. Shadwell failed to see the subtle link between parents and children in a well-ordered society. He witnessed the changing phases of the transitional times. He has snapped the natural link between parents and children. Shadwell depicting contemporary life, had but to follow what was prevalent in society. His young people, like Theodore and Theodosia¹, or Eugenia and Clara², are as impertinent and even abusive as their parents who have taken little heed of their own duty or responsibility. Molière, aiming at truth and order, dared not break the bond that binds social and family life. He has shown the evil results of miserliness, which might distort parental feelings. Yet, society has not altogether gone astray, because filial feelings still find an outlet. There are perversions, almost monstrous, among human beings. But the current of natural feeling continues to flow to find fulfilment in happiness.

(1) Shadwell, T., The Miser

(2) Shadwell, T., The Scowrers.

Of the additional characters beside the usual type of the low ones common in Shadwell's plays, Timothy Squeeze is introduced for a double purpose, namely for the sake of plot-complication and characterisation. He is brought in as the rival suitor, but he is the common, foolish coxcomb of the age. The setting off of two types of suitors, the foolish and the intelligent, and the fun and amusement that is derived from such *juxtaposition* of characters is both native and foreign by nature.¹ Timothy Squeeze falls in line with the long list of such suitors who perhaps had their origin in ~~the~~ French soil and then had been developed according to English taste. Unfortunately, together with his foolishness go the prevailing vices of drinking and debauchery. In Molière, such scenes of low character find no place, nor does Molière show women in such an unfavourable light, Shadwell was probably carried away by the suggestion for further intrigues in the female counterpart of the valet in disguise which has no prototype in the French comedy. Such a disguise for

(1) See, Monsieur Pourceaugnac, Le Médecin Malgré Lui, Le Malade Imaginaire and their English adaptations.

deceit and that by a woman would not have been true to life or to the comic spirit of Molière. Shadwell, in spite of his high conception of comedy as envisaged in the prefaces to his two early plays, The Sullen Lovers, (1668), and The Humourists, (1670), seems to have failed repeatedly in his duty as a comedian. There was a gulf of difference between the comic reformer's genius and the attempt of a second-rate dramatist to hold the comic mirror to life.

Minor echoes of the comic in L'Avare have been found in some other plays of the period. The automaton like behaviour of Harpagon obsessed with money and ready to sacrifice his daughter, because the proposal entailed no dowry,¹ was used by Shadwell, in a reverse manner, in The Squire Of Alsatia, (1688)². But there is much difference in the technique of the two plays. Molière's character symbolises miserliness, and by accumulation of small details, the personality of Harpagon has been brought out. But Shadwell's Sir William Belfond is no miser. It seems that the technique has been used only to provoke laughter. Therefore, Molière's method is accumulative while Shadwell's tends towards the diffusive.

(1) L'Avare, Act.I.,Sc.5.

(2) Shadwell, T., The Squire Of Alsatia, Act IV. Sc.2?.

Another type of borrowing from L'Avare is from the story of the rivalry between the father and the son. This gave scope for complication in the plot and the occasion to bring in material of a questionable nature, which would have tickled the audience. To take one single instance of such an echo would be Sir Sampson in Love For Love of Congreve, (1695). But Harpagon is a study of a human obsession while the English version is a sample of depraved humanity. Another distinct adaptation is to be found in The Anatomist by Edward Ravenscroft. Here also, the old father turns out to be the rival of his son and is befooled in a rather amusing manner. The whole play provides for side-splitting entertainment, but it has travelled far from Molière's purpose and characterisation. One need only compare the two episodes in which the young girls receive presents from their suitors. Angelique in The Anatomist, though only fifteen as her mother says, is a very shrewd girl indeed. She retains the jewellery given to her by the old suitor on the pretext that "they were his own free gifts; he scorns to take what he has given me".¹ One recalls a similar incident in L'Avare where the young son presses

(1) Ravenscroft, E., The Anatomist, Act III, Sc.I.

the jewels on the modest and unwilling girl.¹

One feels that the age of simplicity and naivety has passed away. Women are fighting for their rights and in their self-assertion they at times overstepped the boundary of modesty and discretion.

(1) L'Avare, Act III Sc.7.

LE BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME 1670

The play is mainly enjoyed because of its risible qualities. The result is often misleading, as one is apt to miss its social implications. Molière in different plays has dealt with the false notion of romance, of learning and of human relationship. In this play he tries to point out the ludicrous situation in which a man finds himself when he aims higher than what he is in the social hierarchy. There is always present in man a kind of snobbishness to appear above what he actually is. M. Jourdain has pretensions to aristocracy and hence arises the ludicrous situation. Molière had intended it to be farcical; hence the elaboration of the Turkish ceremony.

This farcical element had undoubtedly tempted the English adaptors. Under various guises, enlarged or compressed, the Turk and his Mamamouchi appeared on the English stage. Consequently, in the course of its adaption, the main purpose of Molière's play was, unfortunately, lost sight of. The episode

forming the central topic consists of a trick played on a foolish citizen by a couple of intriguing lovers in order to gain their object. Similar to the story of the disguised valet, it exploited the foolish ambition of the social aspirant.

The most extensive borrowings from Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme are to be found in the two plays of Ravenscroft, namely, The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman, (1671), and The Careless Lovers, (1673). The method of adaptation is very similar to that of the others, namely to present innumerable intrigues by the introduction of numerous characters. Yet, in the Epilogue, Ravenscroft tries to justify the handling of the material, pointing to some purpose in the play.

" To reclaim some men from their extravagances,
 We must appear indulgent to their humours,
 And push them forward to undertakings
 Yet more indiscreet, that rais'd high in hopes
 They may from the unexpected events
 Be convinc'd of their follies.
 For fools are obstinate to good advice;
 Experience, and not precept makes them wise"¹.

These words obviously point to a deliberate purpose in Ravenscroft's work. An indefatigable plagiarist,

(1) Ravenscroft, E., The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman.
 Act V., Sc.I.

a comedian stooping to the taste of his audience, as he was one yet wonders if he was not a little influenced by the theoretical aspect of the Frenchman's work. He was a popular playwright no doubt as is evinced by the entry in ink on the title-page of the Citizen Turn'd Gentleman that the play had a run of 30 days at a stretch.¹ This is indeed, an incredible performance in those days when a small coterie of audience was constantly clamouring for novelty and the playwrights consequently were always in a hurry to turn out a new piece. Like Aphra Behn, Ravenscroft too, seemed to be conscious of the passing away of the old standard. He has at the back of his mind the idea of the right type of entertainment. There is a note of wistfulness as it were, when he says:

"But alas! the world to that pass is grown,
 The modish women are asham'd to own
 A sober man: to like his Play will be,
 As great a scandal as his companie.
 For he observes, and it is very true,
 That modesty's not much approv'd in you.
 And is of late so out of fashion grown,
 She that is honest scarcely dares it own.
 But does, howe'er her mind affected is,"²
 Put on the brisk gay carriage of a MISS."

Yes, Ravenscroft has totally missed Moliere's angle of vision. Molière was undoubtedly extremely

(1) Ravenscroft, E. The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman. 1672.

(2) Ravenscroft, E. The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman, The Epilogue.

farcical in this play, but at the same time the ridicule is distinctly a sharp one. Perhaps, the problem of the social aspirant was more immediate in France than in England where the majority of the nation, though strictly loyal in their affiliation to royalty, was yet averse to the mode of life of the aristocrats, whom the playwrights and players were out to please. Therefore, any adaptation of this play without the basic principle of Molière, would necessarily descend to low comedy.

Such was indeed the case with The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman, (1671), by Ravenscroft, in which the farcical element inherent in the original play has monopolised the whole action. The opening scene illustrates the mode of adaptation. In the French original characterisation plays an important part. The true artist and the mercenary are differentiated, while each of the numerous teachers of M. Jourdain is introduced as a separate personality. In Ravenscroft all subtle distinctions are blurred into the magnified lines of the farce. A maze of intrigues follows, in the style of the French original in broad outlines, to be concluded in the popular trick of the comic device. In spite of it being a huge burlesque, the play was a popular success.

Perhaps, the later play, The Careless Lovers

(1673), had received more attention from the author, though Molière still suffered much ignominy ^{at} in his hands. Perhaps the interest of the piece arises out of the figure of the coxcomb De Bastado, to be identified with numerous others in actual life. The fop adds point to the situation by mentioning the latest fashions introduced by his French tailor. De Bastado in his new suit of clothes is as ludicrous as M. Jourdain in his.¹

It is indeed ironical that the popular playwright of his own time draws the attention of posterity by his ignoble treatment of Molière's plays.

(1) Ravenscroft, E., The Careless Lovers, Act II.

The popular actor-dramatist, Lacy, was the first to discover this source. Lacy was a comedian with a touch of the genius. The flashes of his histrionic talent on the stage so transported his aristocratic audience, that his royal patron had his picture drawn in three different comic garbs.¹ Unfortunately, the comic verve as displayed on the boards could hardly be sustained in his dramatic composition. He failed to profit by the profuse suggestions offered in the plays of Molière. Undoubtedly, Lacy was playing for cheap popularity which he did achieve for some time. However, short scenes in The Dumb Lady do display rare flashes of comic humour which would provoke hilarious laughter. Intent on making a busy plot with episodes borrowed from Le Médecin Malgré Lui as well². Lacy introduced the favourite butt of ridicule of the Restoration stage, namely the cowardly and braggart squire, who appears as the nominated suitor of the exacting parent for his young daughter. The fate of the fop is foredoomed when it was pitted against the clever

(1) Langbaine, G., Lives And Characters Of English Dramatic Poets, 1691, Vol. 2, P. 317.

(2) See above, P. 187.

contrivings of his rival. The hilarious fun in the French play arises out of the comic situation in which the arch-intriguer is belaboured by his less clever master; the position is reversed in the English play for the simple fact that commonsense was on the side of the other party. The bully, is no sooner intimidated than he exposed⁵ his cowardice. Lacy utilised the hints from parallel French incidents for scenes not only farcical but wittily comical as well.

Another such skilful use of minor scenes is to be found in the English translation of Les Femmes Savantes by James Wright in The Female Virtuoso, (1693).¹ Though not a professional dramatist yet Wright must have been interested in the literary topics of the day, as is obvious from the dedication attached to his play. He is clearly on the side of the English taste for multiple plot-structure. By a judicious selection of materials out of native and foreign repertoires, Wright has produced a play quite effective on the Restoration stage. Such a combination of comical sketches goes to the credit of the English adaptor.

The secondary plot from Les Fourberies de Scapin in

(1) See Pp. 239-240.

is justified because it is not ~~so~~ much of an extraneous matter ^{and} ~~as~~ it fits into the mood of the play. Wright has been able to keep clear of the prevailing indecency and has given a plot full of humorous intrigues and satirical pictures. The minor scene¹ where Trap and Huffle try to browbeat the coward Witless, is partially derived from the French play² where Scapin and Silvestre, dressed like ruffians, frighten Argante in order to extort money from him. Witless is the additional character in the English play. His introduction is justified because the satirical picture of the witless beau of the age enhances the fund of humour of the English play.

Congreve in his early stage was repeatedly attracted by Molière's technique in the characterisation of the unscrupulous intriguer with his feigned hesitancy and hypocritical pretences, accentuated by the repetitive device. Congreve had the dramatic insight to turn it to the best advantage.³ In The Old Bachelor (1693), the meeting between Sharper and Joseph Wittol⁴ has been brought out in an effective manner

(1) Wright, J., The Female Virtuoso, Act IV.Sc.2.

(2) Les Fourberies De Scapin, Act II.Sc.6.

(3) See above, P.126; Pp.176-177.

(4) Congreve, W., The Old Bachelor, Act II.Sc.I.

from the parallel situation in Les Fourberies de Scapin where the valet is out to cozen the old father. The cowardly and the fawning knight of Congreve can fit into a place beside the miserly and distrustful French father. All credit goes to young Congreve in reproducing the atmosphere in the English play, perhaps made more effective with the additional Jonsonian touch.

Otway in 1677 produced an English rendering of Les Fourberies de Scapin which follows the original closely. The guiding principles of Otway seemed to have been shortening episodes which had a peculiar French flavour of their own. As for instance, the preliminary speeches of the first act have been considerably condensed, together with the repetitive nature of the knaveries of the roguish French valet, which would have appeared rather too naive to the blasé English audience. They smacked too much of the French comical technicalities. To suit the English taste, the position of the girls is changed as well. In Act III, the Restoration element finds full vent in the conversation of the two young girls, who have assumed the role of two smart and determined women. The denouement in the French play follows the traditional coup de théâtre in which sudden and unexpected discoveries resolve the dramatic problem.

The conclusion in the English play rests on the method of characterisation. The chance meeting of the two runaway girls in pursuit of their lovers, with their fathers, brings about the conclusion in the proper English manner. Otway's play, on the whole, is an effective piece, retaining much of the French original, and only Englished in certain parts with due traditional regard.

Another interesting transformation of this French play is to be seen in Scaramouch, (1677), by Ravenscroft. It affords a strange contrast to the previous one due to the simple fact that Ravenscroft's theatrical skill came nowhere near to Otway's dramatic talent.

The title of the play is self-explanatory, and the dramatist's recognition of French and Italian sources seem to lay both the fame and blame on them. Undoubtedly, Ravenscroft tried to please the crowd with farcical humour. The major part of the story rests on Les Fourberies de Scapin with the two shrewd fathers and their care-free and romantic sons, together with the unscrupulous intriguer in the shape of the famous Scapin. The English writer seems to have been drawn more towards the harlequin tricks and laughter-provoking technique of the popular Italian *commedia dell'arte*.

To provide a wider scope for the farcical element, the character of the arch mischief-maker has been split into two well-known stage figures, namely, the personality of Scapin is embodied in Plutino while the fool is the harlequin in the Italian manner. The story closely follows the French one with interpolations from Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme. There are numerous intrigues and plenty of impersonations, while the general tone of the play is set at a rather low level. Les Fourberies de Scapin is decidedly one of Molière's minor pieces. But, Molière has never lost the equilibrium between commonsense and farce, whether in characterisation or situation. Under the English treatment, whatever dramatic subtlety there was, disappeared, only to leave a play which could bring nothing but disgrace to the writer.

LES FEMMES SAVANTES. 1672.

Molière has sincerely upheld the rights of women, but, at the same time, he has carefully assigned the role women are to fulfil in society. L'École Des Maris and L'École Des Femmes have been clear expositions of the subject. Towards the end of his career he returned to another aspect of the same topic, which still stood in great need of adjustment. Pretensions to learning and hollow pedantry have been duly ridiculed in some of his plays. These objectionable characteristics, when displayed in women lead to ruinous results in family life, simply because, women have overstepped the boundary of their domain. In a household where constant citations from the scholars drive out commonsense itself, and the maid is turned out because of her ignorance of grammatical rules, the result would be as Chrisalus says:

"Raisonner est l'emploi de toute ma maison,
Et le raisonnement en bannit la raison;

L'un me brûle mon Rotenlisant quelque histoire,
L'autre rêve à des vers quand je demande a boire;"¹.

Ultimately, it is the modest and unpretentious Henrietta who gains happiness in life. The whole play is an ironic eye-opener, particularly, when one considers the sincerity of purpose of the mistress of the house.

A direct adaptation of Les Femmes Savantes is The Female Virtuoso, (1693), by James Wright. The play has gone through a process of condensation and, as one would expect, the English dramatists' inclination tends towards the superficial comic elements of the French story. Molière's main protagonists are women, with various intellectual aspirations, with one normal being thrown in their midst. The Restoration audience would have missed the intriguing or the amorous adventures. Therefore, the women characters have undergone the necessary change while the number and character of the men to support them have been altered as well. Mariana is no doubt drawn after Henrietta, but Henrietta touched with a slight

(1) Les Femmes Savantes, Act II, Sc.7.

malice of victory. Her words, "Now, sister, here's scope for your philosophy with vengeance: sum up all your morals to your assistance; let's see if you can look upon a happy rival with a stoical and undaunted mind,"¹ have none of the modest and sympathetic attitude of the French girl. Young Clarimont too has lost the main arguments of Clitandre's speeches. Perhaps, the fault lies neither with the young people nor with their creator, but with the spirit of the age in which they were born in England. One looks in vain for the delicacy and subtle feminine charm of Henrietta holding conversation with her father. Wright, writing in 1693, was still following some of the questionable dramatic traditions of the Restoration. He had no compunction in breaking up the married life of an elderly couple. The play winds up with the jingle of the rhyming couplets as Sir Maggot Jingle and the Beaux Esprits take their place in the household from which the master has been turned out. Order and sanity return to Molière's world. But a discordant note continues to reign in the English adaptation. Together with Wright, Shadwell too writes in the same strain in The Bury Fair, (1689), where the mother and the daughter suffer from similar pretensions. Both the dramatists have concluded their stories in the same manner, because both have failed to grasp the

(1) Wright, J., The Female Virtuoso, Act I, sc. 1.

ultimate purpose of Molière's dramatic art and have presented their plays as their art and understanding could shape them.

Perhaps, the most effective version of the theme of this particular play of Molière is to be found in The Double-Dealer, (1694), by Congreve. It is the story of the exposure of hypocrisy in the different ways of life. The treatment is no more like Wycherley's but it is touched off with the lightness of raillery peculiar to Congreve and for which the Englishman is indebted to the French. Lady Froth, with her dreadful distortions of learning, is a sister to Aramanda, perhaps a little vulgarised. The strain of frustration has deepened and the mind is taking shelter behind a flow of words. The verses of Brisk evoke the same enthusiasm and admiration as did the sonnets and madrigals of Trissotin. But Brisk is a typical Restoration wit. Congreve has given him all the traits of his predecessors, perhaps polishing them a little. Molière was painfully disturbed by the affectations of superficial knowledge among women whereas Congreve's attitude towards such follies was more cynical.

To round off the ludicrous figure of Lady Froth, he matches her with the solemn coxcomb of a husband,

whose pomposity blinds him to the coquetry of his wife. Lady Pliant is another picture, rather a crude one, of a different form of hypocrisy. She is a concoction of Bélise of Les Femmes Savantes and Arsoné of Le Misanthrope. She suffers from delusions similar to those of the former while sharing the prudery and malice of the latter. Her husband is an echo of Chrisalus. The one is burdened with an insolent wife, out to cheat him, while the other has to suffer ignominy because he cannot share his wife's literary aspirations. Both find consolation in their daughters. Chrisalus looks forward to a happy marriage for his daughter because his has been a frustrated one. Lord Plyant would like to see his line continue in a grandson. This accounts for the world of difference between them.

Bélise and Chrisalus however play a passive role. Theirs are slight though deft pencil-sketches, whereas Lord and Lady Plyant are drawn with dark and indelible lines which ^{cut} project deep into the plan of the story. Molière's intention was to accentuate the central theme by a slight supporting cast, whereas the intricacy of plot in the English play offered a wider scope for such figures. The simplicity of Molière's plot stands out in sharp contrast to Congreve's. The wider canvas

provided space for enlarged figures. Consequently, the uxorious Lord Plyant and the amorous Lady Plyant, enlarged hundredfold, offer a more prominent target for ridicule and laughter. Yet one wonders if Moliere has not achieved the desired effect by so slight a sketch, skilfully wrought. In such enlarged pictures of folly, Congreve still appears to be following the lines of his predecessors. But such monstrosities of folly are balanced by rational and living images so that the sanity of the audience is not as disturbed as it was in the earlier period. One can immediately *distinguish* between the old and the new.

Innumerable reminiscences of Molière's comedies have been traced in the plays of the various playwrights of the Restoration.¹ Molière had fixed certain types of characters and episodes, comical and farcical, which gradually became the stock-in-trade of the Restoration theatre. Therefore, it would indeed be difficult to ascertain the exact source of the numerous fops or intriguing comic situations which happen to have a distant echo of those of Molière. Repeated usage made them remoter from Molière's purpose and technique. To maintain that Snarl² is a reminiscence of Alceste³ is to do gross injustice to the noble and passionate misanthrope of Molière. Shadwell had fixed his type of the man-hater in Stanford in The Sullen Lovers⁴ and Snarl being a distant reminiscence of the earlier figure, has completely lost every trait of affinity

(1) See, Miles, D.H., The Influence Of Molière On Restoration Comedy, Appendix, Pp.224-241.

(2) Shadwell, T., The Virtuoso.

(3) Miles, D.H., The Influence Of Molière On Restoration Comedy, Appendix, P.240.

(4) See above P.209-211.

with the French model. One would think, experience had taught Shadwell the type of play with "Plenty of Noise and scarcity of Wit", that was in demand, and he was prepared to supply it to the audience. Similar is the case with Cuff, Kick and Clodpate¹, who had become common figures in Restoration society and consequently in the contemporary comedy. The characters have gone down in the moral scale, and the unsavoury taint in them does not in any way speak of any adaptation from Molière.

Monsieur De Pourceaugnac, (1669), supplied plenty of farcical element which was used liberally for the complication of an already involved plot.² It goes without saying that the Restoration atmosphere was not always conducive to the hilarious laughter evoked by the French play.

Some scattered features in the plays of John Crowne, like the lover in the painter's disguise in The Country Wit, (1675), in imitation of the one in Le Sicilien, (1667), or Lord Stately in The English Friar, (1690), as the male counterpart of the punctilious

(1) See Shadwell, T., Epsom Wells

(2) See, Ravenscroft, E., The Careless Lovers; Act. IV; Wright, J., The Female Virtuoso. Act. V.
Ravenscroft, E., The Canterbury Guests, Act. III, sc. 2., Act. IV, sc. 12.

Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, give the impression of direct borrowing from Molière. Crowne had held a high conception of comedy. Yet in these scenes he seemed to ^{have} prefer^{ed} the low comedy as he himself had differentiated it from the high.¹

Shadwell's debt to Molière's Dom Juan, (1665), in The Libertine is slight indeed. Yet such is the inconstancy^{is e} of this playwright that while he mentions the French dramatist's name in connections where the debt is least he overlooks it in others where the obligation is much greater.²

As late as 1690, Dryden made a direct translation of Molière's Amphitryon, (1668).³ In the earlier stage of his career, Dryden's adaptations of material from Molière had displayed a rather low sense of comic art. Here, however, he makes an attempt to present a really amusing play by keeping close to Molière, though adding much that was of the nature of Restoration wit. He even succeeded in introducing a secondary love-story in the Mercury and Phaedra

(1) See above Chap. III. Sec. I, Pp. 119-120.

(2) See above, Chap. II, L'Avare.

(3) See Miles, D.H. The Influence Of Molière On Restoration Comedy, Pp. 173-174.

intrigue, without complicating the involved plot too much. However, it has to be accepted that Dryden failed to rise to his full stature where the comic muse was concerned.

Adaptations of the Restoration plays, themselves built on Molière's comedies, gradually replace direct contact with Molière. Vanbrugh and Farquhar, both have shown plenty of originality in introducing their own type of comedy as much as they have done in their theory.¹ But direct adaptation had given place to a pervading influence, particularly to be marked in the comedies of William Congreve and his disciples who were to come some time later.

(1) See above, Chap. II. Pp. 96-98.

An intelligent study in an accommodating spirit of the major English adaptations of the comedies of Molière will disclose, if not a positive moral attitude, an alert consciousness of the need for a radical criticism of contemporary social abuses. This fact does not imply that the comedian had usurped the role of the moralist nor does it detract from the art of the comedian. The latter carries out a dual role by providing pleasure and instruction.¹ A comedian, who exercises his comic right conscientiously, is ultimately compelled to accept, at least partially, the task of the moralist. His attempt is to rid society of its vices by an exposure through ridicule. Therefore, the cathartic theory present in the comic art ultimately implies certain moralistic principles. The aim of the comedian and of the moralist seem to converge upon the same point. But ⁱⁿ their practical technique *they are* poles apart. The fanaticism of the 17th. century moralist ran ~~at~~ counter to the naturalism and the intellectualism of the contemporary comedian. Hence followed the wide divergence between the stage and the pulpit in this age.

Yet, the attempt of the comedian to rid society of its vices through exposure and ridicule is borne

(1) See above, Chap. II.

out by the evidence of some of the contemporaries as well as of men of taste and learning, who came a generation later, and who admitted the need of the comic satire which the Restoration comedians had developed under the influence of Molière. The French dramatist's moral basis was firmly established on social virtues and on a steady and sane outlook on life and human affairs. His attitude was expansive and all-comprehensive. The English adaptors failed to offer any coherent social picture as there was none in England of 1660. They are to be judged by the conditions in which they lived and worked and the way they reacted to them. In spite of the glamour of the court which according to the critic, John Dennis, was "A Court the most polite that ever England saw"¹, and the sophistication of the elegant and the witty circle, it must be admitted that it was an age marked by coarseness in thought and action. Men of position and intellect, like Rochester and Buckingham took immense pleasure in indulging in deliberate acts of vulgarity, and in spite of the polished wit of their conversation much licentiousness had crept into it. Yet, these men were the patrons of the men of letters

(1) Dennis, J., A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter, p. 6.

and dictated the fashion in life and art. For the exposure as well as the diversion of such a society, Wycherley and Shadwell had to evolve a technique of their own. The precarious position of these comedians between reality and art, between perilous indecency and crude licentiousness, was fully appreciated by the critics who followed them. The testimony of the latter, who took a proper perspective of the situation from the distance of time, will be a helpful guide to any answer to the vexed question of any reformatory inclination on the part of the playwrights. The pressure of circumstances had compelled these comedians to choose their subject-matter from a narrow section of society. If the theory of purgation were to be accepted, as it was by the leading comedians,¹ their choice was undoubtedly a correct one. It must be remembered that the majority of the nation did not bear the stigma of shame attached to this narrow courtly circle which became the object of dramatic ridicule. It was then only this particular section which stood in need of some drastic measure to be cleansed of its sins.

Again, to follow the critical current of satire in these comedies, one must take into account the spirit of the age. In this connection, one may mention

(1) See above, Chap.II.

Addison's remarks on the subject. In A Discourse On Ancient And Modern Learning, (1734), he mentions the difficulty of posterity in enjoying a satire which has too immediate an application. A knowledge of the person or situation satirised would always add to its enjoyment and correct assessment. The fact that Addison cites the example of Absalom and Achitophel of Dryden is a pointer to his effort to a better understanding of the literature of the preceeding age.¹ Such an attempt, touched with an appreciative note by men like Addison and Steele, goes a long way in proving the sincerity of purpose of many a Restoration comedian. Men were trying to bring about reformation in taste in different ways. While the fanatic Jeremy Collier was vehemently denouncing the stage as a source of pollution, the same stage itself was aiming at purification by a technique all its own. The opposition to the stage reached its peak in 1698 with the publication of Jeremy Collier's book. So far, the comedians had fought single-handed.² Collier's book was the signal for the scholarly circle to take up the cause of one of its brotherhood. Even long after the rancour of the controversy had died down,

(1) Addison, J., A Discourse On Ancient And Modern Learning, P.9.

(2) See above, Chap.II.

and much that was desirable was effected on the stage, men, like Steele and Addison, who dictated the chastened spirit of the reformed stage, continued to pay tribute to these Restoration playwrights, in spite of their having overstepped the boundaries of decency. This recognition and appreciation by men of taste and scholarship may be accepted as evidence of a partial moral basis, or^a reformatory attitude or the intellectual approach to the social problems, of some of the Restoration playwrights. Taking into account the nature of the loose manners and corrupt morals, these dramatists found the theory of ridicule, as exemplified in the comedy of Molière, quite helpful in applying it at home. Like Molière they were no respectors of persons and few escaped their barbed shaft. A comprehensive study of various factors, historical, social, artistic and ethical, is imperative in order to gauge the spirit behind these plays.

To deal with a few of these charges against the comedians, a picture of society will account for much of the scurrilous matter in them, the premise being accepted that comedy is a mirror of society and ridicule the cure for social folly.¹ One of Jeremy Collier's principle accusations is the contemptuous attitude of

(1) See above, Chap. II.

these playwrights towards the clergy which, according to Collier, had undermined their influence. There is no gainsaying the degenerate condition of the clergy during this period of church history. In fact, the Church itself was fully aware of this problem as is shown by a number of well-thought out discourses on this topic. A glance at some of these treatise^s written during the reign of Charles II, would perhaps explain the attitude of the comedian who tried to expose the undesirable actuality. They believed that the painful fact faced squarely would demand immediate rectification. The comedians had fulfilled their duty through an exposure of vice. The Church too was conscious of her internal condition from which abuses had sprung rank.

As early as 1669, in Anglicae Notitia, or The Present State of England,¹ Edward Chamberlayne, speaks of the poverty of the clergy which led to their degeneration. "As it is now in England, where they are accounted by many, the Dross and Refuse of the nation. Men think it a stain to their blood to place their sons in that function; the women are ashamed to marry with any of them."² Then again, John Echard, D.D., in a letter called The Grounds And Occasions Of The Contempt Of The Clergy And Religion

(1) 1st. Ed. 1669.

(2) Arber, E., An English Garner. In Gatherings History And Literature, Vol.7.P.244.

Enquired Into. In A Letter Written To R.L., in the following year (1670), analyses the position clearly. The writer, once again, holds poverty and ignorance responsible for the low morals among the clergy, who are neither respected, beloved, obeyed nor rewarded. He speaks of the faulty training of the boys who are to join the order. Then the writer proceeds to give vivid descriptions, rather harassing, of the afflictions of the clergy. "For where the Minister is pinched as to the tolerable conveniences of this life, the chief of his care and time must be spent, not in an impertinent ... considering what Text of Scripture will be most useful for his parish; what instructions most seasonable;.....but the chief of his thoughts and his main business must be, How to live that week? Whose sow has lately pigged? These are very seasonable considerations, and worthy of a man's thoughts. For a family cannot be maintained by texts and contexts ..."¹ The picture of the man burdened with a family, trying to make the two ends meet on £20 - £30 per annum is pathetic indeed.

The same problem has been dealt with by Steele under the pen-name of Issac Bickerstaffe, in The Miseries Of The Domestic Chaplain in 1710 and once again in

(1) Arber, E., An English Garner. In Gatherings History And Literature, Vol.7. P.293.

1713, . . ., under a different pseudonym.

In The Tattler (No.255) Thursday, November 3, 1710, the indignities heaped on the clergy have again been mentioned, as "the chaplain flying away from the Dessert". This being the layman's point of view, how much more would be the scorn of the comic-satirist ready to dart his sharpest arrow against any folly or vice. It is not to be wondered at that the neglected and the poverty-stricken clergy, who meditated more on bread than on the Text, and who could be easily tempted by an addition to their paltry income, became disgraceful accomplices in the questionable intrigues of the raffish young men with plenty of ready cash to spend. It may be true, the uncomplimentary pictures of the clergy in the plays did not mend matters, yet the comic satirist could not but exercise his comic privilege, as it were, in exposing vice in one of the important social institutions. "Nevertheless, their [^{the} comedians]: wit was directed towards the exposure of the clergy rather than of religion itself..... and much [profane] wit .. is covert criticism of certain clerical failings, such as avarice, ambition, hypocrisy, lechery and lack of charity and true faith." ¹.

(1) Fujimura, T.H., The Restoration Comedy Of Wit, Pp. 46-47.

In the critical writings of John Dennis, Richard Steele and of others, one comes across passages in which they have tried at a proper understanding of the Restoration comedians. While not trying to gloss over much that was undesirable in these plays, they aimed at justifying the comic method of the comedians of Charles II's time. The opinions of these men are much to be valued for a proper assessment of these plays.

John Dennis had a well-established reputation in the literary world in England. He is called "the renowned critick" on the title-page of his biography, published in 1734. The biographer, who remains anonymous, points out that he was well-equipped for the task. After graduation from Caius College, Cambridge, he made a tour in France and Italy as he had inherited a handsome fortune. At home, he was a boon companion of the leading men of letters like Dryden, Wycherley, Congreve, as well as of the aristocracy like The Earl of Buckinghamshire and the Earl of Halifax.¹

Dennis's acquaintance with Molière's plays is evinced by various remarks scattered all over his

(1) Dennis, J., The Life Of Mr. John Dennis, The Renowned Critick. Not written by Mr. Curl. 1734. Pp. 6 - 7.

critical writings. He realised the delicate but penetrating intellectual quality of the French comedies when he said in the Epistle Dedicatory to The Comical Gallants, (1702), that love does not play much part in Molière's comedy. Yet, it entertained the finest ladies of the court of France, as is shown by Madam de Montausier's approval of Les Précieuses Ridicules. Obviously, the English critic was mentally adjudging the comedy near at home. He was in the ambiguous position of a critic who admired foreign works of art and at the same time was apparently much in love with those at home. Perhaps, this factor prevented Dennis from coming to a balanced conclusion when judging his native comedies. As a result, his over-enthusiasm has partially perverted his critical opinions. Yet, a careful examination of the grounds of his argument shows the logic behind his defence. His attitude has also been considerably supported by others, who may have disliked the plays themselves, yet have justified their existence on utilitarian principles.

The general principle Dennis adopts as a critic very often shows a well-poised judgment. In the same Epistle Dedicatory, he sums up the qualities of a good comedian, namely, great parts, generous education and a due application. Learning and

knowledge of mankind form the education:" ... a knowledge of the World and of Mankind, are necessary for succeeding in Comedy. For since Comedy is drawing after the Life, and a Comick Poet is obliged to Copy the Age to which he writes, how should he possibly draw them like, without knowing the persons."¹. By accepting the theory of comedy as a mirror of life, Dennis affiliates himself with the Comedians, from Flecknoe to Farquhar, for whom this principle from the Ancients to Molière came ready to hand.

Dennis championed the cause of the stage over a period of thirty years. In his reply to Jeremy Collier, he shows considerable critical faculty in analysing the role of the comedian in exposing social vices.² He tacitly agrees with the opposers in the matter of grossness in Restoration Comedy. But, Dennis carefully builds up his arguments on well-prepared grounds which have become, it seems, the mainstay of ~~the~~ Restoration Comedy. All the leading comedians had avowed the ethical purpose in their art,³ and as comedy formed the mirror of life, it was

- (1) Dennis, J., The Comical Gallants, Epistle Dedicatory.
- (2) See Dennis, J., The Usefulness of the Stage To The Happiness of Mankind.
- (3) See above, Chap. II.

inevitable that life, however ungracious, had to be dished up. The sincerity of the comedians had often been questioned when the grossness of taste is taken into account. Yet, Wycherley, the most mordant yet the most liked of the comedians, he who developed bitterness as an artistic device and whose psychological need was to outrage public opinion, has claimed a purpose, serious by nature, for his art, by the use of a cathartic process.¹ That his contemporaries accepted his sincerity without the least hesitation and agreed with his artistic principle, is to be seen in various statements of admiration left behind by his numerous friends and admirers. "Mr Wycherley, in his Writings, has been the sharpest Satyrist of his Time; but, in his Nature, he has all the Softness of the tenderest Dispositions: In his Writings he is Severe, Bold, Undertaking; in his Nature, Gentle, Modest, Inoffensive: He makes use of his Satyr, as a Man truly brave of his Courage, only upon Publick Occasions, and for Publick Good: He compassionates the Wounds he is under a Necessity to probe, or, like a good natur'd Conqueror, grieves at the Occasions that provoke him to make such Havock ... But a Diamond

(1) Wycherley, W., The Plain Dealer, Preface.

is not less a Diamond for not being polish'd."¹.

Writing two decades earlier, the critic Dennis, had upheld the reputation of Wycherley not only as a comedian, but as a comedian who had fulfilled his duties as such: "But only for a jest in that admirable Epistle, which is prefix'd to ^{the} The Plain Dealer. However, even that jest, let it be never so much o're-strain'd, can never be brought to convince us of any thing but the abuses of the Theatre, which I do not pretend to defend; and I thought Mr. Wycherley had more than made amends for it, by exposing Adultery, and making it the immediate cause of Olivia's misfortune, in that excellent Play, which is a most instructive and a most noble Satyr, upon the hypocrisie and villany of Mankind.

Mr. Wycherley being indeed almost the only man alive, who has made Comedy instructive in its Fable; almost all the rest being contented to instruct by their characters. But what Mr. Collier has said of Mr. Wycherley is sufficient to shew us what Candour, nay, and what Justice we are to expect from this censurer of the Stage. For in giving Mr. Wycherley's Character, he has shewn himself invidious and detracting even in his own commendation. For the best thing he can afford to say of the greatest of our

(1) Granville, G., Lord Lansdowne, Memoirs Of The Life Of William Wycherley Esq., Pp. 24-25.
The last line refers to versification.

Comick Wits, is, that he is man of good sense
 How unworthy was it to commend Mr. Wycherley for a
 thing, which, tho certainly he has in a very great
 degree, yet is common to him with a thousand more;
 and to take no notice of those extraordinary qualities
 which are peculiar to him alone, his Wit, his
 Penetration, his Satyr, his Art, his Characters, and
 above all, that incomparable Vivacity, by which he
 has happily equall'd the Ancients, and surpass'd
 the Moderns?"¹.

Dennis has answered Collier's charges point by
 point in a historical and social context. He
 affirms that the stage is an instrument of instruction.
 Refuting Collier's accusation, Dennis points out that
 it was the age that had debauched the stage and not
 vice versa: "...the corruption of manners upon the
 restoration, appear'd with all the fury of Libertinism,
 even before the Play House was re-establish'd and long
 before it could have any influence on manners, so
 that another cause of that corruption is to be
 enquir'd after, than the re-establishment of the Drama,
 and that can be nothing but that beastly reformation,
 which in the time of the late Civil Wars, was begun

(1) Dennis, J., The Usefulness Of The Stage, To The
 Happiness Of Mankind. Pp.30-32.

at the Tail instead of the Head and the Heart; and which opprest and persecuted mens inclinations, instead of correcting and converting them, which afterwards broke out with the same violence, that a raging fire does upon its first getting vent. And that which gave it so licentious a vent was, not only the permission, but the example of the Court, which for the most part had just arriv'd from abroad with the King, where it has endeavour'd by foreign corruption to sweeten, or at least to soften adversity, and having sojourn'd for a considerable time, both at Paris and in the Low Countries, united the spirit of the French whoring, to the fury of the Dutch Drinking. So that the Poets who write immediately after the restoration, were oblig'd to humour the deprav'd tastes of their Audience. For as an impⁿer^tinent Sinner that should be immediately trans^{ported}ferred to Heaven, would be incapable of partaking of the happiness of the place, because his inclinations and affections would not be prepar'd for it, so if the Poets of these times had writ in a manner purely instructive, without any mixture of lewdness, the Appetites of the Audience were so far debauch'd, that they would have judg'd the entertainment insipid, so that the spirit of Libertinism which came in with the Court and for which the people were so well

prepar'd by the sham-reformation of manners, caus'd the lewdness of their Plays, and not the lewdness of Plays the spirit of Libertinism. For 'tis ridiculous to assign a cause of so long a standing to so new, so sudden, and so extraordinary an effect, when we may assign a cause so new, so probable, and unheard of before, as the inclinations of the people, returning with violence to their natural bent, upon the encouragement and example of a Court, that was come home with all the corruptions of a foreign Luxury; so that the sham-reformation being in a great measure the cause of ~~the~~ spirit of Libertinism, which with so much fury came in with King Charles the Second, and the putting down the Play House being part of that reformation, 'tis evident that the ^ccorruption of the Nation is so far from proceeding from the Play-^hHouse, that it partly proceeds from having no Plays at all."¹.

Dealing with the question of the clergy, Dennis refuted the corrupting influence of the stage over the clergy as they did not frequent the theatre at all. "A ridiculous or vicious Priest in a comedy, signifies any man who has such follies or vices, and the Cassock is produc'd on purpose to signify to the Clergy, that they are partly concern'd in the instruction, and

(1) ^{Dennis, J.,} The Usefulness Of The Stage, To The Happiness Of Of Mankind, Pp 20 - 23.

have sometimes their vices and follies as well as the LaityNothing can make the Priesthood contemptible but Priests.....the exposing th~~o~~^ese follies and vices, would be a way to reclaim them, and so to preserve the esteem they have in the world...— Shall a Clergyman who is an ill liver go on without admonition. Is that for his advantage, or the benefit of his flock, or the good of the publick."¹. Molière did not hesitate to expose religiosity and its abuses though he called down on himself the wrath of the righteous in society.

On very similar grounds Dennis supports the ridicule on the aristocracy, which Collier thought was disgraceful. In the same defence Dennis writes: "They [the lords] know very well that their titles illustrate their merit, and adorn their virtue: but that those whom they expose, are such whose Follies and whose Vices render their Titles ridiculous...the Satyr of Comedy falls not upon the order of men, out of which the Ridiculous Characters are taken, but upon the persons of all orders who are affected with the like follies.....For the Characters of Comedy are always at bottom universal and allegorical: And the making Lords of their Comick Fools, can signifie no more than to admonish our men of Quality that they are

(1) Dennis, J., *The Usefulness of the Stage, to the Happiness of Mankind*, Pp126 - 128.

concern'd in the instruction as well as others."¹.

One only need recall some of the wild escapades and unscrupulous intrigues of the young aristocrats of the time. The story of Elizabeth Davenport being cheated by the Earl of Oxford, and the royal redress coming in the shape of an annuity of 1000 crowns, is too well-known to be repeated. The echo is to be found in The Squire Of Alsatia where Sir Edward Belfont makes reparation for the Attorney's daughter by setting a fortune on her so that, "she should live above contempt, as the world goes now."².

The scandal between the Duchess of Cleveland, who has been described as "one of the most beautiful and best bred ladies in the world", had been relished with gusto, when narrated by Dennis in his short biography of Wycherley.³ The amusing or the notorious figures in comedies, like Sir Positive At-All or Sir Fopling Flutter or Lady Vaine, were highly enjoyable and interesting on the stage only

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- (1) Dennis, J., The Usefulness of the Stage, to the Happiness of Mankind, pp. 110-111.
- (2) Shadwell, T., The Squire Of Alsatia, Act IV.Sc.2?
- (3) Dennis, J., Some Remarkable Passages Of The Life Of Mr. Wycherley, Pp. 115-120.

because there was the popular identification with living personages. They were not monstrosities living in the playwright's imagination.

Even private letters of the time give illuminating comments on contemporary life. Dennis once again provides an instance. He writes of the previous age, "...when adultery's become so frequent, especially among persons of condition, upon whose sentiments all public spirit chiefly depends, that a great many husbands begin to believe, or perhaps but to suspect, that they who are called their children are not their own."¹ In a collection of letters published in 1700, under the title Familiar And Courtly Letters Written By Monsieur Voiture, there is an account of a journey to Exon written "To Mr. B. - in Covent-Garden, on April, 8, 1700," where the writer speaks of the negligence, ignorance or corruption among men of different ranks in the country. The justice "was as drunk as a Dutch captain the Lawyer slept Dogs-sleep....The Clark was as impertinent as a Midwife at a ^Ggossiping,^{"2"}....The Valet personated his Master to a ^tTitle, and was as arrogant and noisie as e'er a ³Country Squire in England."³

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- (1) Dennis, J., Three letters From Dennis To Steele, printed with the Theatre by Sir Richard Steele with The Anti-Theatre, P.516.
- (2) Dennis, J., Familiar And Courtly Letters, Written By Monsieur Voiture to Persons Of The Greatest Wit And Quality Of Both Sexes In The Court Of France, p.252-253. (3) Ibid. P. 253.

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The life of the youngest daughter of Colley Cibber, Charlotte Charke, is an ample illustration of the venturesome and the raffish exploits of a woman in man's disguise.¹

Pepys, the man of the world who went about in society with his eyes open with insatiable curiosity, had passed a damning verdict on his own age: "If there be hell, it is here; no faith, no truth, no love, nor any agreement between man and wife, nor friends." The comic version of these words put down by another social chronicler is: "Love in this age is as well counterfeited as complexion; what with the men's lying and swearing, and the women's waters and washes, we know not what to make of one another."²

In such a coarse age if the cathartic process were to be applied, it was necessary and permissible as well "to dip the pen in garbage; and the fouler the missiles cast, the better;"³. One may only mention the nature of the wordy battle waged on paper in that age. Even John Milton's polemical writings are open to such a stigma. In a letter to

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- (1) See Shadwell, T., The Woman-Captain; 1679; Granville, G., The She-Gallants, 1684?
 - (2) Shadwell, T., The True Widow, Act III, Sc.I. Theodosia to Carlos.
 - (3) Senior, D., The Life And Times of Colley Cibber, Prologue, P.XIII.

the Earl of Strafford, written on July, 23, 1712, Bolingbroke writes: "It is a melancholy consideration that the laws of our country are too weak to punish effectually those factious scribblers, who presume to blacken the brightest characters, and to give even scurrilous language to those who are in the first degrees of honour."¹ Therefore, Wycherley's plays were in demand because, in the words of George Granville, "In Mr. Wycherley every thing is Masculine: His Muse is not led forth as to a Review, but as to a Battle; not adorn'd to Parade, but ~~to~~ Execution: He would be try'd by the Sharpness of his Blade, and not by the Finery:"².

To come back to Dennis again, in his defence of Sir Fopling Flutter, the critic once again upholds his pet theory that the comic poet exposes corrupt and degenerate nature to the "View of his Fellow Subjects, for no other Reason, than to render them ridiculous and contemptible."³ Pleasure and instruction are

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- (1) St. John, Lord Bolingbroke, Letters And Correspondence, Public And Private. Vol. I. P. 600.
- (2) Granville, G., Memoirs Of The Life Of William Wycherley, Pp. 25 - 26.
- (3) Dennis, J., A Defence Of Sir Fopling Flutter Pp. 4 - 5.

the two ends of comedy. The play concerned has "Art and Elegance; and with Force and Vivacity, the utmost Grace and Delicacy."¹ This "was the Opinion of the most eminent Writers and of the best Judges contemporary with the Author; and of the whole Court of King Charles the Second, a Court the most polite that ever England saw."² With this idea of correction through laughter, Dennis finds Sir Fopling Flutter of immense value. Jonson and Molière are cited as fulfilling such a purpose. Etheredge, according to Dennis, has succeeded in becoming a comedian of this order by exposing the aping of manners and customs of France and Italy by the young men of England.

In his last defence of the stage, in reply to a pamphlet of Mr. Low published in 1726, Dennis once more vindicates the stage from the same angle as in the first defence of 1698. "Now since our Comedies are but Copies of the foolishness and the vicious Originals of the Age in which we live, and Copies which do by no means come up to the Originals, I appeal to all the World, if it does not ^{un}answerably follow from what I

(1) Dennis, J., A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter, P.6.

(2) op.cit. P.6.

have said, that the Originals of the Age debauch the Stage, by which latter, the Age never possibly can be debauched.....the Court returning from abroad, corrupted by foreign Luxury, quickly debauch'd the Town; and the Court and the Town jointly endeavour'd to debauch the Stage, because our Comick Poets were obliged to copy their lewd Originals, in order to expose and reform them".¹.

The failure of comedy without any immediate social context is the necessary corollary to this utilitarian theory. Dennis rightly enough criticises The Tender Husband by Colley Cibber: "The Romantic Lady, in "The Tender Husband"; is taken from the Précieuses Ridicules of Molière. But there is this difference between Molière's Comedy and yours: Molière's comedy was very seasonable; and for that very reason, among others, was very entertaining and instructive. It appeared at a time when the Family of the Précieuses was as numerous at Paris, as that of the Coquettes is at present in this wicked Town. But the large and fantastic family disappeared at once upon the acting of that Comedy, like nocturnal vapours upon the rising of the sun. But the Romantic Lady in "The Tender Husband" is so singular a monster, that she can neither

(1) Dennis, J., The Stage Defended, From Scripture, Reason, Experience, and the Common Sense of Mankind, for Two Thousand Years, P.18.

be instructive nor delightful; for, if a Comick Poet does not paint the times in which he lives, he does nothing at all. But the reading of Romances, and books of Knight-errantry, had long been out of fashion before."¹ On similar grounds, almost a generation ago, the comedies of Richard Flecknoe were condemned to ignominy, in spite of the playwright's repeated avowal of a moral purpose.²

Foreigners have been divided in their assessment of these comedies. Voltaire could place Wycherley on the same level as Molière. In fact, he prefers the plot-structure of The Plain Dealer to that of Le Misanthrope, because ^{"The English writer has corrected the only defect that is in"} Molière's Comedy, the thinness of the plot, which also is so dispos'd that the characters in it do not enough raise our concern."³ The Swiss, Mr. Muralt, differs considerably, as he has some scathing remarks to make on English social life of this period. He says that the "ordinary Amusements of the English are, Wine, Women, and Dice, or, in a word, Debauchery."⁴

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- (1) Dennis, J., Letter To Sir John Edgar, January, 19 1719-20, Printed in the collection, The Theatre, pp.337-338.
- (2) See above, Chap. III, Sec. II, Pp.133-135.
- (3) Voltaire, De, Letters Concerning The English Nation, 1760, P.144.
- (4) Muralt, Letters Describing The Character And Customs Of The English And French Nations. With A Curious Essay On Travelling, P.33.

He
^make^s the theatre responsible for it, and condemns it
as one of the sources of corruption in London.

Perhaps as a foreigner, Muralt was not in a position to make a just estimate of the English comedies, particularly, when he always had the comedies of Molière at the back of his mind. Naturally, he was prejudiced by men like Shadwell.¹ Here again, Voltaire gives the proper clue to the situation: "We do not laugh in reading a translation. If you have a mind to understand the English Comedy the only way to do this will be for you to go to England, to spend three years in London, to make yourself a master of the English tongue, and to frequent the Play-house every night."²

Nearer at home, men have not stinted in their admiration for the bold task undertaken by these playwrights. They were acquainted with the difficulties confronting them. Taking into consideration their merits and demerits, they could still appreciate the effort.

(1) See above, Chap. I, Pp. 35-36.

(2) Voltaire, De., Letters Concerning The English Nation. 1760, P. 150.

Steele in The Tatler of April, 16, 1709, published a balanced criticism of The Country Wife: "...The Poet, on many occasions, where the propriety of the character will admit of it, insinuates that there is no defence against vice but the contempt of it: and has, in the natural ideas of an untainted innocent, shown the gradual steps to ruin and destruction which persons of condition run into, without the help of a good education to form their conduct. The torment of a jealous coxcomb, which arises from his own false maxims, and the aggravation of his pain by the very words in which he sees her innocence, makes a very pleasant and instructive satire. The character of Horner, and the design of it, is a good representation of the age in which the comedy was written: at which time love and wenching were the business of life, and the gallant manner of pursuing women, the best recommendation at court." One may quote the lines of praise by the same critic in the Commendatory Verses attached to The Way Of The World:

"By your selected scenes and handsome choice,
 Ennobled Comedy exalts her voice;
 You check unjust esteem and fond desire,
 And teach to scorn what else we should admire:
 The just impression taught by you we bear,
 The player acts the world, the world the player
 Whom still that world unjustly disesteems,
 Though he alone professes what he seems."

CHAPTER IV

THE STRUCTURE OF COMEDY.

"They [^{the}French] content themselves with a thin design, without episodes, and managed by few persons. Our audience will not be pleased but with variety of accidents, an underplot, and many actors. They follow the ancients too servilely in the mechanic rules, and we assume too much licence to ourselves, in keeping them only in view at too great a distance".

(Dryden, J., Examēn Poeticum. 1693)

"Courtall:.....that which troubles me most, is, we lost the hopes of variety, and a single intrigue in Love is as dull as a single Plot in a Play, and will tire a Lover worse, than t'other does an Audience.

Freeman: We cannot be long without some under-plots in this Town; let this be our main design, and if we are anything fortunate in our contrivance, we shall make it a pleasant comedy".

(Etheredge, G., She Wou'd If She Cou'd. 1668.
III)

"But pray, Mr. Bayes, among all your other rules, have you no one rule for invention?"

Why, Sir, when I have anything to invent, I never trouble my head about it, as other men do; but presently turn over this book, and that, and have, at one view, all that Perseus, Montaigne, Seneca's tragedies, Horace, Juvenal, Pliny, Plutarch's Lives, and the rest, have ever thought upon this subject: and so, in a trice, by leaving out a few words, or putting in others of my own, the business is done".

(Buckingham, The Rehearsal)

CHAPTER IV

THE STRUCTURE OF COMEDY.

Molière's words on the formal structure of Comedy are not as constructive as those on the nature and function of comedy. The reason is not far to seek. Molière was a practitioner first and then a theoretician. As a man of genius he would brook no interference or dictation. As long as the end justified the means, he was satisfied with his art. His aim was to make known to the world the follies of man in society, and he claimed the freedom that is the privilege of the man with a message. But Molière happened to be born in a country which had always upheld some formalistic style in the arts. The literary circle in Paris was dominated by dogmas and doctrines handed down from the venerated classical writers. How deeply saturated the French literary world was in classicism and how prejudiced and biased was the opinion in favour of it, can be judged by the long-drawn controversy over the irregular Le Cid and the number of scholars and men of position, including

the great Cardinal, who were involved in it. In spite of his victory, Corneille could not but succumb to this classical domination as illustrated by his later dramatic productions. Nor could Molière override the influence of the native dramatic tradition. The French comedian, by nature and nurture, followed the hide-bound theory, though he attached but scant regard to it.

When cornered for a reply, Molière nonchalantly put in the mouth of Dorante, in La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, the defence of his own position. Lysidas, the poet, had cited Aristotle and Horace in pointing out Molière's offence against the Rules in his comedy. It appears that Molière deliberately makes light of this heated debate by making such coxcombs, as Climene and the Marquis, the vehement supporters of the Rules. In reply, Dorante, as Molière's mouth-piece, says: "Vous êtes de plaisantes gens avec vos règles, dont vous embarrassez les ignorants et nous étourdissez tous les jours. Il semble, à vous ouïr parler, que ces règles de l'art soient les plus grands mystères du monde; et cependant ce ne sont que quelques observations aisées, que le bon sens a faites sur ce qui peut ôter le plaisir que l'on prend à ces sortes de poèmes; et le même bon sens qui a fait autrefois ces observations les fait aisément tous les jours, sans le secours

d'Horace et d'Aristote. Je voudrais bien savoir si la grande règle de toutes les règles n'est pas de plaire, et si une pièce de théâtre qui a attrapé son but n'a pas suivi un bon chemin. Veut-on que tout en public s'abuse sur ces sortes de choses, et que chacun n'y soit pas juge du plaisir qu'il y prend?"¹.

Again, "Et c'est ce qui marque, Madame, comme on doit s'arrêter peu a leurs disputes embarrassées. Car enfin, si les pièces qui sont selon les règles ne plaisent pas et que celles qui plaisent ne soient pas selon les règles, il faudrait de nécessité que les règles eussent été mal faites. Moquons-nous donc de cette chicane où ils veulent assujettir le goût du public, et ne consultons dans une comédie que l'effet qu'elle fait sur nous. Laissons-nous aller de bonne foi aux choses qui nous prennent par les entrailles, et ne cherchons point de raisonnements pour nous empêcher d'avoir de plaisir."².

In spite of this disregard of the Rules, Molière had more or less conformed to them in practice. Both Corneille and Molière were much too French to be able

(1) La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, Sc.6.

(2) La Critique De L'École Des Femmes, Sc.6.

to break away totally from the artistic principles prevalent in their age. Moreover, so intent was Moliere to put forward his ideas, that he readily accepted the national dramatic technique which came handy to him. Thus, curiously enough, Molière unawares utilised the very means handed down to him through the classical tradition and culture of his own country though he had summarily dismissed them as artificial hindrances to artistic creation.

In this sphere, the English adaptors of the plays of Molière could hardly be said to have been influenced by him. On the contrary, they presented a rather different picture. English literary criticism was entering on a new phase in its life.¹ A knowledge of the Ancients was imperative^{in order} to be eligible for the literary circle. Consequently, the dramatists, either through genuine interest in such literary problems or through the vanity of displaying some acquaintance with the scholarly literature, have mentioned some of these provocative questions, particularly in the prefaces to the printed editions of their plays.² It was also an attempt to forstall

(1) See above, Chap.II. .

(2) See, Shadwell - The Sullen Lovers, 1668; The Miser, 1671; Lacy - Sir Solomon, 1669; Betterton - The Amorous Widow, 1670; Centlivre - Love's contrivance, 1703.

any adverse criticism by a display of the knowledge of the dramatic rules. Molière had come quite handy to them where subject-matter was concerned.¹ But, for the formal structure of comedy, they derived but little help from him. Many a Restoration comedian had mentioned his concern over the artificial Unities, but his opinions could hardly have been derived from Molière. Then again, the situation was entirely different. The English playwrights following their own dramatic tradition were prone to throw overboard the Rules as enunciated by the Ancients and follow the native genius for freedom. The result was rather curious. The English dramatists tried, ^{in theory,} to attach much importance to the Unities and to all such rules as they put in their prefaces, while in practice, they tended to break away from every rule because by nature and nurture again, they had come to appreciate and accept their own literary legacy. Consequently, the picture presented by the English comedians is entirely opposite to that of Molière. Therefore, any attempt at comparison amounts to a study in contrasts.

In the matter of plot-structure, Molière followed the simple lines of a classical play consisting of a single theme, worked out to its fullest possibility.

(1) See Chap.III.

Moliere had stood for simplicity of plot because, his aim was to demonstrate one particular aspect of life or character from various angles. His plays are marked by economy of structure and theme, the effort being made to gain the maximum of effect through the minimum of action. The severity in plot-structure has accounted for the singular beauty of Le Misanthrope or the cumulative vehemence of Le Tartuffe. The aim is at concentration and not diffusion of emotions.

Molière's way of handling the conclusions of his plays came under the criticism of the English, both of critics and of dramatists. His usual method was the introduction of a deus ex machina and quite a number of plays had followed similar endings. But this factor again illustrates Molière's engrossment in the portraying of his ideas. The plot appears to have been only a peg to hang the idea on and was forgotten as soon as it fulfilled its function.

The English dramatists, high or low, popular or unpopular, had shown much interest in the formalities of plot-structure. Whether it was a genuine curiosity or vanity, it would be difficult to determine. In spite of this widespread interest in and knowledge of the Rules, the general tendency was to discard them and follow the native tradition. Those who borrowed from Molière freely, have often taken pains to differ,

as it were, deliberately from him in the plot-construction. The lead in this direction was given by John Dryden.

Dryden appears as the champion of English tradition and his words on drama have laid the foundation of English dramatic criticism. Dryden realised the futility of dogmatism in imaginative creation.¹ His knowledge, covering a wide field of ideas led him to accept artistic principles based on practical commonsense.² Perhaps, this last factor allies him with Molière and Corneille. Yet, Dryden's thoughts on the structure of comedy are original and national as well.

Dryden has dwelt at length on the various controversial points of the dramatic formalities in his numerous essays on the topic. He bases the clue to successful play-writing on one important factor, namely, national taste and tradition. "The difference of tastes in the two nations" accounts for all the difference in the drama of France and England. "They [^{the} French] content themselves with a thin design,

(1) Dryden, J., Dramatic Essays, Everyman's Library, 'A Defence Of An Essay Of Dramatic Poesy', P.72.

(2) op.cit.

without episodes, and managed by few persons. Our audience will not be pleased but with variety of accidents, an underplot, and many actors."¹ As such, Dryden upheld the multiplicity of plot-structure with its necessary appendages. He seldom hesitated "to tack two plays together; and to break a rule for the pleasure of variety."² Therefore, Dryden did not find fault with those who borrowed material from different sources as long as the borrowers utilised such material to build up the play "..... and to make it proper for the English stage",³ since he believed that "...no ~~one~~ story can afford characters enough for the variety of the English stage ..."⁴.

Dryden's fellow-contemporaries would naturally follow his lead in this matter. It would be not only conforming to theatrical tradition of their own country but also fulfilling the expectations of their small clientele demanding the excitement of an involved story.

(1) Dryden J., Dramatic Essays, Everyman's Library, ('Examen Poeticum'), P. 201.

(2) op.cit. 'Nature And Dramatic Art', P.159.

(3) op.cit. 'On Comedy, Farce, And Tragedy', P.84

(4) op.cit. P.85.

Dryden in fact was preceded in this matter by Robert Flecknoe, who tried to arrive at a happy mean^s between the two extremes.¹ Flecknoe has borrowed freely from Molière. An analysis of one of his plays will illustrate his method of plot-construction.

The Damoiselles a La Mode has been built upon materials gathered from two different sources, namely, Les Précieuses Ridicules and L'École Des Maris. In the first play the interest is centred on the characters and the dramatic tension is kept up till the end. This simple theme of the play proved unsatisfactory to Flecknoe. The English dramatist tried to divide the play into five acts, each having numerous short scenes. The story opens in the manner of L'École Des Maris with the conversation of the two guardians.

(1) See, Flecknoe, R., Love's Dominion, 1654, Preface. "For the Plot, I have taken a middle way betwixt the French and English, the one making it too plain, and the other too confused and intrigued. I imagine^{ng} one of these pieces not like a simple Alley, where one walks alway^{es} in the same track; nor as a Wilderness, where one is lost through so many diversions: but as a pleasant Garden composed of divers walks, with variety and uniformity so mixt, as one part handsomely introduces you into another, and every^{one} has correspondence amongst themselves, and to the whole."

Flecknoe's aim is to balance the indulgent father from Les Précieuses Ridicules with the jealous guardian from L'École Des Maris. The dialogue follows the same trend and the two men part with the usual words of warning. The rest of the first act follows the story of Isabella and Valerio with Sganarelle being sent off with the message to the lover. To bring out the jealous character of the guardian and to add to the farcical element, the two fools from L'École Des Femmes are introduced. Flecknoe, up till now, maintains some unity of structure because he follows the French plays closely. Both the themes, however, seem to carry equal weight and emphasis.

Act II opens with the conversation between the indignant suitors, clearly echoing the French one. But Flecknoe has missed the essential dramatic turn of the original. There, the enraged suitor only mentioned the ingenuity of his valet but the surprise is kept in store. Flecknoe divulges the secret of the scheme and thereby brings about the flatness of his plot. The story of Les Précieuses Ridicules is followed up till Sc.6. when it shifts to Sganarelle's house with no connecting link whatsoever, and continues the intrigue between Isabella and Valerio. That Flecknoe repeatedly failed to catch the dramatic situation is shown in the handling of the father's

character. The French father knows nothing of the romances so that his surprise is as great as that of the audience. The stupefaction was so complete that he could only stutter and say: "Je pense qu'elles sont folles toutes deux, et je ne puis rien comprendre à ce baragouin"¹. Flecknoe blunders by making Bonhomme acquainted with all the romantic and idle habits of his sentimental daughters. The dramatic tension, as a result, is entirely lost. Again, Flecknoe with his open didacticism, makes the father argue and thus he succeeds only in disturbing the atmosphere of the play.

Flecknoe is in a flutter moving from one theme to another, vainly trying to find a link between the two stories. In Act III, the scene shifts to Les Précieuses Ridicules, where the disguised valet receives a sound beating from the sedan-chair carriers. At this point, he finds a flimsy ground of contact with Isabella who is invited to the ball given in honour of the Marquises, and Lysetta, the maid, is made to play a more important role as Flecknoe hardly can resist enlarging on hints of farce. Flecknoe's version of Sganarelle too has undergone a change for the worse, as the unsavoury element of his nature has

(1) Les Précieuses Ridicules, Sc.4.

been given more prominence.¹ In the midst of singing and dancing, the two rejected suitors come and drive away the valets. Molière winds up his play at this point, because his purpose has been served and any addition would be melodramatic. But Flecknoe continues the story to bring it to, what he considers, a proper conclusion with a befitting moral. Bonhomme acts as the peace-maker,² advising both the parties who readily agree. The other story reappears in Act IV, Sc.9. Molière is followed closely until Isabella makes her escape. The scene of discovery is much condensed because Flecknoe was at a loss to fit his material into one story. Moreover, a scene of malice and spite spoils it. Towards the end, Lysetta brings in the news of the reformed girls and another scene follows where the suitors are accepted, after a short interval of dissimulation on the part of the girls. At last, he winds up the different threads and the two groups join in dancing and rejoicing.

(1) Flecknoe, R., The Damoselles A La Mode, Act III. Sc.5 & 7.

(2) op.cit. Act IV. Sc.8.

Such is the maze of incidents in the play of the dramatist who wanted richness of plot and a didactic note in his play. Flecknoe lacked the dramatic sense to weld the two plots together. Incident follows on incident but with little dramatic purpose. Failure was inevitable. Molière succeeded as a dramatist and a reformer whereas Flecknoe only became the butt of ridicule.

To come to a more successful play, which held the stage for some time, The Sullen Lovers of Thomas Shadwell, will be a good example. Shadwell, as a conscientious disciple of Ben Jonson and a borrower of material from Molière, was influenced by both in certain ways. He tried to follow the classical model: "I have in this Play, as near as I could, observed the three unities of time, place, and action; the time of the drama does not exceed six hours, the place is in a very narrow compass, and the main action of the Play, upon which all the rest depend, is the sullen love between Stanford and Emilia, which kind of love is only proper to their characters. I have here, so often as I could naturally, kept the scenes unbroken, which (though it be not so much practised, or so well understood, by the English) yet among the French poets is accounted a great beauty."¹

(1) Shadwell, T., The Sullen Lovers, Preface.

The play is an instance where an English playwright was trying to follow his own precepts quite deliberately. Undoubtedly, Shadwell had the French pattern before his eyes.¹ Yet, he differs essentially from Molière. The two plays of Molière from which he had borrowed, have a structure all their own. Les Fâcheux can hardly be said to have a plot as it consists mainly of detached portraits, strung together by a flimsy thread. Molière's aim is to give a pen-picture of the different humours only; a story or a coherent plot was easily dispensed with. Le Misanthrope can claim a story for itself, but then again, the problem dealt with was too intricate a one to be solved with a stroke of the pen. The result was an ambiguous end. In this play too, there was little development of either character or plot; it is a study in character, shown from various angles.² Shadwell had evinced some amount of dramatic skill in putting the borrowed material together and in evolving one complete plot. His aim was also to portray different humours, but true to the English genius, he has developed a plot with a love-story, having a sub-plot with numerous character sketches. All however have been successfully dove-tailed to produce one single effect.

(1) Shadwell, T., The Sullen Lovers, Preface.

(2) See above, Chap. III, Sec. III, P. 193.

It is the story of the morose man being continually pestered by city wits, only to get caught in a trap, deliberately laid for him. To fill in the gaps of the story by these fools, Shadwell had selected the best ones from the portrait-gallery of Les Fâcheux. Fortunately for the English writer, this particular French play failed to present an interesting or intriguing plot to be tempted by. Shadwell, therefore, was able to keep his main plot free from encumbrances. The opening scene has the familiar ring of that of Les Fâcheux as well as of Le Misanthrope. One by one the wits are introduced to end up with Sir Positive-At-All, the epitome of all the wits. In the second act, the plot to bring Stanford and Emilia together, is laid by the younger couple, Lovel and Carolina. After a proper introduction Emilia is brought on the stage to be followed by Lady Vaine, a typical Restoration character. Her appearance in the sub-plot winds up the list of personages. By the middle of Act III, the preliminaries being over, the scene is set for the development of the main story. Various amusing adventures result from the foolishness of the wits, intercepted by the intrigues of Lady Vaine. The main story of Stanford and Emilia however, dominates the whole plot. Shadwell utilises the fops for the

development of the story by making them fall in love with Emilia, who took advantage of the situation. She lays a plot to befool them and ultimately consents to marry Stanford for whom she had^s developed an affection. Underneath this main story are the amorous intrigues of Lady Vaine. In this sub-plot, Shadwell was following the taste of his audience. He has profited by the two French plays and he had^s shown ample dramatic skill in putting them together and bringing them to a successful end. From this play of Shadwell's, it can be seen that material borrowed from the French could be used for a Restoration play keeping to the Unities, yet having quite an English atmosphere and characterisation. But in the altered structure of the play, the aim of the French dramatist has been totally eclipsed. Molière's was a character study and, therefore, Les Fâcheux, lacks a story while Le Misanthrope is a problem play which leads to no satisfactory conclusion. In both the plays therefore, it may be seen, that Molière has flouted some principle of the comic structure. Shadwell has imparted all the essentials of a regular comedy to his play. He has a well-developed story-element which progresses through the play, and ultimately comes to a happy ending. Yet, Shadwell has only succeeded in producing a play that definitely

smacks of his age while Molière's plays find a place in world literature.

As regards the application of the Rules to dramatic art, Dryden once again appeals to the imagination of the audience and yet at the same time he upholds the formalities of construction to a great extent.¹ "They [^{the} French] follow the ancients too servilely in the mechanic rules, and we assume too much licence to ourselves, in keeping them only in view at too great a distance."² The happy solution for him out of this impasse would again be determined by the national taste and inclination. For the difficult varieties of English designs he would not hesitate to make concessions in the application of these rules. As for instance, he is ready to extend the period of time in comedy beyond the narrow limit of twenty-four hours. Yet, comedy should not have a longer period than tragedy, "for the plot, accidents, and persons of comedy are small, and may be naturally turned in a little compass:"³

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- (1) Dryden, J., Dramatic Essays, 'A Defence Of An Essay Of Dramatic Poesy', Pp.71-76.
- (2) op.cit. 'Examen Poeticum', P.201.
- (3) op.cit. 'A Defence Of An Essay Of Dramatic Poesy', P.74.

Some of the Restoration comedians seem to be following the instructions of Dryden quite closely. Unfortunately, however, a confusion or contradiction seems to exist in the mind of many of these comic-writers. In theory, they adhere to classical rules, in practice they seem to follow Dryden. This confusion of ideas has been fatal to many a Restoration comedian.

Perhaps, Wycherley in The Country Wife is the best exponent of the English stand-point. Either following the French original or the words of his critic friend, Wycherley had more or less compressed the time of the action to the number of hours prescribed by Dryden. Pinchwife all the time talks of marrying off his sister on the morrow and carrying away his wife to the country the following day.¹ Secondly, Wycherley has taken care to avoid too rapid and varied changes of place and scene. The main action takes place either in Pinchwife's or Horner's lodging, while the shifting of scene to the New Exchange² or to the Piazza of Covent Garden³ only creates the atmosphere essential for the success of the play and the unity of action.⁴

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- (1) Wycherley, W., The Country Wife, Act III Sc.I. Compare Arnolphe's intention of marrying Agnès the same evening: L'Ecole Des Femmes, Act II, Sc.5.
- (2) Wycherley, W., The Country Wife, Act III, Sc.2.
- (3) op.cit., Act V, Sc.3.
- (4) The erstwhile friends might have been neighbours as the two brothers were in the French plays.

Moreover, the sub-plot fulfills its required purpose. It is subordinate to the main plot, affording a contrast to the theme of jealousy. It fills up the gaps in the main story and gives scope to character-sketches, which was one of the aims of the dramatist. Alithea stands as a contrast not only to Margery but to the whole set of the "honourable women". Act four opens with the heroine of the sub-plot, *the tone being* quiet and subdued after the feverishness of the previous one and prepares for the rapid climatic development in the following scenes. Alithea, as the only figure of integrity, requires a scene all to herself in order to bring out her character. She is not altogether inaccessible to amorous solicitations but she has her weakness and there is the touch of the struggle in her which sharply contrasts with the prevalent mood of the fashionable set. Finally, the sub-plot supplies the main plot with the instruments for the intrigue as well as for the final denouement. Wycherley has shown careful constructive power in making each character and episode functional by nature, either for the purpose of exposing vices or for the building up of the relevant atmosphere. Certain characters might appear as extras or speeches outrageous. Yet, the desired effect is brought about by the accumulation

naturally unravell'd..." It appears from this statement as if the worth of a comedy depended solely on the Unities and the moral lesson inculcated. In spite of such assertion, the English dramatist has failed to bring about a well-developed plot out of the two stories. Molière's George Dandin stood in no need of a secondary plot to sustain its interest.¹ But for the English writer, it appeared to be too flimsy to suit the taste of the audience. At the same time he tried to keep the Unities.² It was a rather difficult task Betterton set about to accomplish, and sadly enough one looks in vain for a well-spun plot. The amorous intrigues of the widow are entertaining enough. The first act is entirely devoted to the development of the story of the widow and closes with the introduction of the man who is to play the part of the disguised valet. While the story of the love between the young couple is developed, the second act introduces the secondary plot borrowed from George Dandin which it follows closely.³ Taken separately, the two stories have certain merits of their own, yet the reader is suspicious if the value of the subsidiary plot does not go

(1) See above, Chap. III. Sec. III, P. 214.

(2) See above, P. 291; Dryden's attitude towards the Unities.

(3) See above, Chap. III. Sec. III, P. 215.

entirely to Molière. The third act consists of scenes from the two plots, the intrigues of Lovemore are intercepted by scenes of the widow's scheming as well as of the story of the disguised valet. Unfortunately, very few points of contact can be traced. The fourth act sees a further development of the two plots, quite independent of one another. At this point Betterton adds a few more farcical touches ending with dancing and music. In the fifth act the young couple gets married but the widow's fate remains undecided as the trick played on her remains undiscovered to her while the wife of Brittle, undergoes a reformation with promises of future fidelity.

Betterton is supposed to have followed the Three Unities.¹ But, while the first act was enacted in 'a Room', the third act begins in 'a Street before a Glass-Shop'. One wonders why the English comedians had sought to prove the worth of their material by supporting it with the dramatic formulas from the Classics. In spite of repeated protestations, they could not keep to the Unities for the simple fact that they had accepted tacitly Dryden's choice of a complicated plot-structure. Moreover, in order to please the audience, intrigues and complications in plays were the fashion of the time. The playwrights

(1) See above, P.294.

introduced materials from various sources and developed them along parallel lines, but with few interlinking points. The result was that the essential of all the Unities, namely the Unity of Action, was hopelessly disturbed. The English writers spoke of the improvements they had effected on Molière and criticised his repeated use of some sort of *deus ex machina*. Medbourne had made certain changes in the plot of Le Tartuffe¹ by making the maid fall in love with the servant and thereby bringing about what he considered to be a more plausible conclusion. But Molière's Le Tartuffe remains unaltered even with the change made by the younger poet. Molière had unconsciously produced plays in the style of the Ancients and had won applause. The English, trying to follow something foreign to their tradition, very often brought down ignominy on themselves.

Another sad instance of such a failure between theory and practice was the case of Edward Ravenscroft. In his play, The London Cuckold, (1682), he has expressed his intention of following the Unities. He has partly achieved it by reducing the time to two nights only and placing his incidents in one neighbourhood. But in the essential unity, that of

(1) See above, *Chap. III, Sec. III*, Pp. 181-182 .

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action, ^{neither} Ravenscroft, ^{and} (~~or~~ for that matter, ^{most} ~~few~~ of the
English playwrights, could ^{not} achieve in the slightest
degree what Molière had done in each of his plays.
The London Cuckold consists of a most complicated
maze of intrigues and counter-intrigues, and the
reader is left in utter bewilderment at the end.
Such is the effect of most of these plays.

Perhaps, the clue to this conflicting situation
is given by Aphra Behn. ~~The~~ ^S shrewd woman that she
was, she was quick to grasp the temper both of the
dramatist and of the audience. She realised the
futility of making a display of classicism where
only ^a low type of comedy was in demand. In the
Epilogue to Sir Patient Fancy, she dismisses the
whole matter with a few mocking lines, which will
reflect the nature of the task undertaken by the
playwright:

"Method, and Rule - you only understand;
Pursue that way of Fooling, and be damn'd.
Your learned Cant of Action, Time, and Place, .
Must all give way to the unlabour'd Farce."

Molière had conceived a comprehensive view of
theatrical production. He had tried to combine the
different artistic graces, like ballet, music and
dancing, on the stage to give pleasure to the audience
which included royalty. The frequent occurrences
of these musical accessories in the comedies of
Molière can be accounted for by the courtly nature

of their origin. These were artistic embellishments²⁹⁹ of the play which was a social affair as royalty participated in such dancing and ballet.

"Quittons, quittons notre vaine querelle,
Ne nous disputons point nos talents tour à tour,
Et d'une gloire plus belle
Piquons-nous en ce jour:

Unissons-nous tous trois d'une ardeur sans seconde,
Pour donner du plaisir au plus grand roi du monde."¹

L'Amour Médecin was specially commissioned by the King and was meant to be acted at court. In the address to the reader and in the Prologue, Moliere had set down his strong liking for music and ballet. He regards these as necessary *accompagniments* ^{to} ~~accomplishments~~ for a light comedy meant for court performance. "Ce que je vous diray, c'est qu'il feroit à souhaiter que ces sortes d'Ouvrages pussent toujours se montrer a vous avec les ornemens qui les accompagnent chez le Roy: Vous les verriez dans un état beaucoup plus supportable; & les Airs, et les Symphonies de l'incomparable Monsieur Lully, meslez a la beauté des Voix, & l'adresse des Danceurs, lear donnent sans doute des graces, dont ils sont toutes les peines du monde à se passer."²

(1) L'Amour Médecin, Prologue, La Comédie. See also, Les Fâcheux, Lettre de La Fontaine à Maucroix. Relation d'une Fête, Donné À Vaux.

(2) L'Amour Médecin, Au Lecteur.

Perhaps Molière had faintly grasped the ultimate cathartic value of music for quieting the troubled mind: "...j'ai eu celle encore de faire venir des voix et des instruments pour célébrer la fête et pou nous réjouir. Qu'on les fasse venir. Ce sont des gens que je mène avec moi, et dont je me sers tous les jours pour pacifier avec leur harmonie les troubles de l'esprit."¹. Then again,

Sans nous tous les hommes
Deviendront mal sains,
Et c'est nous qui sommes
Leurs grands médecins."².

However, it must be remembered that Molière never let the atmosphere of his serious plays be disturbed by the lightness or the joviality of music or dancing. In such plays as Le Misanthrope and Le Tartuffe, he concentrated on the theme he was presenting and no extraneous matter was allowed to encroach on it.

The English comedians would however eagerly introduce this type of innovation in comedy as the interest in music and dancing had already developed among their audience.³ But music and dancing could

- (1) L'Amour Médecine, Act III, sc. 6, Clitandre. See, Cooper, Lane, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, Pp. 81-82.
- (2) op.cit. Sc. 2. La Comédie, Le Ballet Et La Musique. Tous Trois, ensemble.
- (3) See above, Chap. III, ^{Sec. I,} P. 120. See also Downes, J., Roscarius Anglicanus, Ed by M. Summers, Pp 23, 33, 38.

not form an integral part of the English comedy which was not courtly by nature in the French sense, though patronised by the courtly circle. Quite often these were misused as a bait for ^{the} audience.¹ The craze for more excitement had become so demanding that Julius Caesar of Shakespeare also underwent a change by the introduction of music and dancing, which were ultimately forbidden at the expressed wish of a lady of fashion.² Music in such plays appeared as entirely foreign and repeated attacks are a clear indication of ^{its} ~~their~~ unsuitability. Music and dancing could never be incorporated in the body of the play as ~~it~~ was done in Paris. In Louis XIV's court the comedy, ballet, masque and the music were part of court entertainment and these fitted into the atmosphere. Perhaps the difficulty in England lies in the lack of ~~the~~ gracious charm and dignity ⁱⁿ ~~of~~ the English courtly circle and consequently ^{on} ~~of~~ the stage ^{together} with comedians who failed to grasp the final aesthetic appeal of comedy.

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- (1) See, Boyle, R., Epilogue written by The Right Honourable G. Granville, Esq: to As You Find It; Pepys, S., Diary And Correspondence, 2 May, 1668.
- (2) Dennis, J., Essay On The Opera As After The Italian Manner Which Are About To Be Establish'd On The English Stage.

CHAPTER V

THE EXTENT OF THE DEBT TO MOLIÈRE.

"Most mischievous foul sin, in chiding sin"
(As You Like It. II,7)

"Ne bougez, de grâce, et n'interrompez point votre discours. Vous êtes la sur une matière qui, depuis quatre jours, fait presque l'entretien de toutes les maisons de Paris, et jamais on n'a rien vu de si plaisant que la diversité des jugements qui se font là-dessus. Car enfin j'ai oui condamner cette comédie à certaines gens, par les mêmes choses que j'ai vu d'autres estimer le plus".
(La Critique De L'École Des Femmes V.)

CHAPTER V

THE EXTENT OF THE DEBT TO MOLIERE.

To undertake the task of apportioning the extent of diverse influences on a specific branch of the creative art often appears to be a hazardous one particularly in a cosmopolitan age such as that of the Restoration after 1660. The most reliable scale would be the evidence of those who worked within this sphere of various influences. The copious adaptations of the plays of Molière would certainly indicate an overwhelming French influence on English comedy of the period. Molière has received his due share of acknowledgment too.¹ At the same time, English comedy of this period is certainly not to be looked upon as a minor offshoot of French comedy. Restoration comedy of manners can shake off such a stigma and stand on its own merits, because in some salient features it had roots deep down in the

(1) See Chap. I.

indigenous theatre. The Puritan rule had closed down the playhouses but it is difficult to suppose that an art, with a rich national heritage, could easily become moribund within a period of barely two decades. Performances were banned no doubt, yet printers could at times get through the barriers of censorship and publish some of the popular plays of the previous age for the drama enthusiasts. An edition of the plays of Brome, in two volumes, was published in London: "Printed for Humphrey Moseley, Richard Marriot and Thomas Dring, and are to be sold at their Shops. 1653" The edition is important not only because of the date of publication. Aston Cokaine, who wrote introductory verses to the edition, was also paying tribute to the works of,

"Judicious Beaumont, and th'Ingenious Soule
Of Fletcher too may move without controule.
Shakespeare (most rich in Humours) entertaine
The crowded Theaters with his happy veine.
Davenant and Massinger, and Sherley, then
Shall be cry'd up againe for Famous men."

The allusion to these dramatists implies a general acquaintance with them, at least within the dramatic circle. In 1664, the pioneer in the field of the comic stage, Sir George Etheredge, while making his debut, recalls the glory of the past:

"Wit has, like Painting, had her happy flights,
 And in peculiar Ages reach'd her heights,
 Though now declin'd; yet cou'd some able Pen
 Match Fletcher's Nature, or the Art of Ben".¹

John Dryden, writing commendatory verses to The Double-Dealer of Congreve in 1694, once again holds up these two dramatists as the models in their respective arts:

"In easy dialog^{ue} is Fletcher's praise;

.....

Great Jonson did by strength^{of} judgment please;"

Nathaniel Rowe admits the author's indebtedness in the Epilogue to Farquhar's The Inconstant.

These frequent acknowledgments throughout the period, together with the popular revivals of older plays, will establish the influence of the national theatre over the new one. The industrious book-keeper, John Downes, provides a neat list of some of these early revivals with their original casts. Ben Jonson's plays were much in demand. Volpone, The Silent Woman, The Alchemist, Every Man In His Humour and Every Man Out Of His Humour are a fair representation of the plays of Rare Ben.² Beaumont and Fletcher seem to hold the

(1) Etheredge, G., The Comical Revenge, 1664. Prologue.

(2) See also, Nicoll, A., A History Of Restoration Drama. Pp.168-170 and Appendix B, Pp.305-316.)

second place,¹ while the tragedies of Shakespeare appear to have been popular as well. Some of Shakespeare's plays underwent exotic changes. Julius Caesar was garnished with music and dancing, while Macbeth became popular for its flying witches and other spectacular stage machinery.² Hamlet was a success: "No succeeding Tragedy for Several Years got more Reputation, or Money to the Company than this."³ The explanation of this appreciation perhaps lies in its vague resemblance to the prevalent heroic spirit on the tragic stage. The quality of the theatre-going public was adroitly measured by Sir John Davenant in his adaptation of Measure For Measure, the grim and grey atmosphere of which was dispelled by the spicy word-battles of Benedick and Beatrice.⁴

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- (1) See Sprague, A.C., Beaumont And Fletcher On The Restoration Stage.
- (2) See Macbeth, Quarto Edition 1674. Stage Directions.
- (3) Downes, J., Roscius Anglicanus, Ed. By M. Summers, P.21.
- (4) One can have a fairly good idea of the taste of the audience when one considers that The London Cuckold of Ravenscroft was not only popular, but continued to be played every Mayor's Day till Garrick put an end to it in 1751, though it was played for the last time in Covent Garden in 1752.

Another interesting experiment was the conversion of Romeo And Juliet into a tragi-comedy by James Howard: "...when the Tragedy was Reviv'd again, 'twas Play'd Alternately, Tragical one Day, and Tragicomical another; for several Days together."¹.

In such a critical age, it was inevitable that the romantic comedies of Shakespeare would be little appreciated. To Pepys, faithfully recording the sentiments of the age, A Midsummer Night's Dream was "the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life. I saw, I confess, some good dancing and some handsome women which was all my pleasure."². He resolved never to see it again.³.

- (1) Downes, J., Roscius Anglicanus, Ed. by M. Summers, P.22.
- (2) Pepys, S., Diary And Correspondence, 29, September, 1662.
- (3) See also, Dryden, J. Dramatic Essays, Everyman's Library, The Dramatic Poetry Of The Last Age, P.98; "Poetry was then [last age]....not arrived to its vigour and maturity: witness the lameness of their plots;made up of some ridiculous incoherent story, which in one play many times took up the business of an age. I suppose I need not name Pericles, Prince of Tyre, nor the historical plays of Shakespeare: besides many of the rest, as the Winter's Tale, Love's Labour's Lost, Measure for Measure, which were either grounded on impossibilities, or at least so meanly written, that the comedy neither caused your mirth, nor the serious part your concernment."

George Granville was a successful and a much esteemed dramatist. His adaptation of The Merchant Of Venice appeared as The Jew Of Venice. In an "Advertissement To The Reader", the adaptor offers an apology for undertaking such a work: "The Foundation of the following Comedy being liable to some Objections, it may be wonder'd that any one should make Choice of it to bestow so much labour upon. But the judicious Reader will observe so many Manly and Moral Graces in the Characters and Sentiments, that he may excuse the Story, for the Sake of the Ornamental Parts. Undertakings of this kind are justify'd by the Examples of those Great Men who have employ'd their Endeavours the same way:...."¹. George Granville was regarded as a judicious critic by John Dennis: "For to whom can an Essay upon the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare be so properly address'd, as to him who best understands Shakespeare, and who has most improv'd him".².

Most of the other comedies have been appraised in similar disparaging terms. In ^{The} Merry Wives of Windsor, Pepys ^{only} liked "the humours of the country

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- (1) Granville G., The Jew Of Venice, 'Advertissement To The Reader').
- (2) Dennis, J., An Essay On The Genius And Writings of Shakespeare, Epistle Dedicatory.

gentleman and the French doctor," and not even Falstaff could please him.¹ To his fastidious taste Twelfth Night seemed "but a silly play, and not related² at all to the name or day."² In fact, he had been to an earlier performance of the play only because royalty had graced the occasion.³ It still remained "one of the weakest plays that ever I saw on the stage", when it was revived on January 20, 1669.⁴ For instances of other adaptations of Shakespeare in this epidemic of alterations, one need only refer to the violence done to The Taming Of The Shrew by that indefatigable comic-actor, John Lacy.⁵

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- (1) Pepys, S., Diary And Correspondence, 5, December, 1660.
- (2) op.cit. 6, January, 1663.
- (3) op.cit. II, September 1661: "...the play seem a burthen to me, and I took no pleasure at all in it;"
- (4) See Pepys, S., Diary And Correspondence, 20, January, 1669.
- (5) For adaptations of Shakespeare's plays for the Restoration stage, See, Spencer, H., Shakespeare Improved.

Even in the literary circle which inclined more and more towards classicism, doubts were expressed on Shakespeare's technique though there was no questioning of his genius. "The poet Aeschylus was held in the same veneration by the Athenians of after ages as Shakespeare is by us;"¹. Dryden tries to arrive at a balanced judgment in his criticism of Shakespeare. But his disciplined mind failed to see the beauty and charm of the romantic comedies of Shakespeare. "Let us therefore admire the beauties and the heights of Shakespeare, without falling after him into a carelessness, and, as I may call it, a lethargy of thought, for whole scenes together."². Critics like Gildon, trained in the same school as Dryden, were also inclined to ^{prefer} ~~favour~~ Jonson to Shakespeare for having written the first "one entire Comedy". With the exception of ^{The} Merry Wives Of Windsor, in the other plays of Shakespeare there are "excellent Humours scatter'd about", but not the "just Notion" of comedy.³.

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- (1) Dryden, J., Dramatic Essays, Everyman's Library, 'The Grounds Of Criticism Of Tragedy', P.126.
- (2) op.cit. 'The Dramatic Poetry Of The Last Age', p.106. See also 'The Grounds Of Criticism in Tragedy', Pp.141-142.
- (3) Gildon, C., The Life Of Thomas Betterton, P.173.

Thus the Restoration comedians, during the early days of the reconstruction of the stage, were deprived of this fertile and voluminous source of suggestions. However, they were conscious of a common bond between the past and the present and they looked back for an ally in their new venture in the dramatic world.

Though a gap of half a century lies between Jonson and Restoration comedians, yet one must remember that in the life of a nation such a short period generally does not see drastic changes. Moreover, the difference is more in the nature of development than actual changes. In spite of the rebellion against the established social and political institutions, the current of life seemed to have continued undisturbed, perhaps with a few superficial ripples, towards its predestined goal. Certain aspects of life were accentuated by the changing cross-currents through different contacts. Jonson's Fastidious Brisk, "the fresh frenchified courtier", was gradually metamorphosed into Sir Frederick Frollick, Sparkish and Lord Foppington, variations on the same theme. The preference of the Jonsonian gallants goes to a French tailored suit.¹ With the addition of

(1) Jonson B., The Silent woman; "If she love good clothes or dressing, have your learned council about you every morning, your French tailor, barber, linener,...."Act IV,Sc.I.

elegant foppery and easy wit, out of this rough and unpolished ore has been evolved the glamour of the Restoration men of fashion. The latter had in their turn been in the Parisian school of fashion while their creators were well-versed in the variety of French gallants and their gallantry. Another type is Stephen, the country-gull, who learns the art of town-life and has been set in contrast to his counterpart, the town-gull, who has different artistic pretensions like singing and dancing.¹ The braggart with his vaunting and cowardice is a stock comic figure. But this particular type does not seem to have lent itself to much adaptation in Restoration society. Almost a century later, the braggart soldier was put in a Restoration setting in The Old Bachelor by Congreve.

Jonson's plays also provide an interesting study of minor characters. He has made fun of the different professions of law and medicine. Lady Politick is one of the precursors of the blue-stockings,² while her husband is the prototype of Sir Positive At-All.³

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- (1) See the numerous country squires in Restoration Comedy.
 - (2) See the Ladies Collegiates in The Silent Woman.
 - (3) Shadwell, T., The Sullen Lovers.

Marriage was scoffed at,¹ and Horner's unscrupulous trick was not unknown to Morose.²

Jonson however gave little scope to female roles. His characters are masculine and virile, allowing very little to feminine charm. The atmosphere in Restoration plays however offer^{ed} a picture in reverse. Feminine elegance had begun to grace the English boards and the writer had to justify its presence. The evolution of the Restoration female characters offers an interesting study of the mixture of foreign and native elements. Molière's range of women characters is varied indeed. It includes women who cite learned verses in household matters with disastrous consequences as well as the ladies who lose their heart over gallantry and make themselves the butt of ridicule. But, Molière's women in general follow the dictates of the unerring womanly instincts while the traditional English woman in comedy tends to depend more on reasoning to safeguard her own interest. In their quiet and submissive way, each of Molière's heroines has a strength of personality. Mariana³ can

(1) Jonson, B., The Silent Woman, Otter.

(2) op.cit.

(3) L'Avare

hardly bring herself to disobey her father; the sensible Angelique¹. forgets her own concern of love and gives herself to grief imagining her father to be dead. Isabella, Agnès and Leonara close up the train of the charming women Molière has created.

A little apart from them stands the figure of Célimène; she is the symbol of the woman of the world, witty and coquettish, sophisticated and yet sincere.. No other woman character of Molière has attracted the Restoration playwrights as that of Célimène. The reason is not far to seek. The ingenue like Agnès or the self-sacrificing Angelique could not be to the liking of the sophisticated Restoration writer or audience. The days of the self-effacing romantic love of Rosalind or Miranda were over. Women asserted their rightful position in society and were willing to meet men on their own rather exacting terms, even in matters of sentiment.².

(1) Le Malade Imaginaire.

(2) For various scenes of bargaining between the two sexes, Massinger, The City Madam, Act II, Sc.2; Marston, The Fawn, Act V; Brome, The Northern Lass, Act I, Sc.6.; Dryden, The Wild Gallants, Act, III, Sc.I.; Otway, The Soldier's Fortune, Act II, Sc.I.; Congreve, The Way Of The World, Act IV, Sc.I.

It was the hard metallic ring of the polished wit which captured the imagination of the age. Célimène is not ready to give in to the wishes of the man she loves, nor is she eager to condemn herself at twenty to the unsocial life he proposes to lead. She has the faults of her own sex yet she has the logic to penetrate into the stupidity of Alceste. She herself has cultivated the delicate and gracious hypocrisies which oil the social machinery. Angelica in Love for Love and Millamant in The Way Of The World are not unworthy sisters of Célimène. Congreve gave his women their legitimate freedom that Molière preached and put them on the same intellectual level as men. Such was the age that Agnès or Isabella would have been anachronisms. The brilliance of Célimène dazzled Congreve and he accepted the cue in the creation of some of his interesting women. Molière has tried to strike at the possessive instinct of the man of property; women like Agnès, Isabella and Mrs. Margery struggled against it instinctively for their own happiness. Molière's aim was to rationalize the relation between man and woman; Wycherley presented the problem from its negative aspect while Congreve's aim was to intellectualise the issue by placing both of them on the same plane and giving to each the power of introspection and judgment,

The debate over this topic has been opened by Moliere in his twin plays and the subject was being discussed^{til} threadbare from every possible angle. In the two plays, L'École Des Maris and L'École Des Femmes, Moliere had solved the problem in a satisfactory manner in his dramatic world. But in 1663, he was again posing the question in a slightly bewildered manner:

"Molière: Taisez-vous, ma femme, vous êtes une bête.

Mlle.Molière: Grand merci, monsieur mon mari. Voilà ce que c'est: le mariage change bien les gens, et vous ne m'auriez pas dit cela il y a dix-huit mois.

Moliere: Taisez-vous, je vous prie.

Mlle Moliere: C'est une chose étrange, qu'une petite cérémonie soit capable de nous ôter toutes nos belles qualités et qu'un mari et un galant regardent la même personne avec des yeux si différents."¹. In his later play, George Dandin, the problem remained unsolved.

The same problem, namely that of adjustment, finds expression in Congreve's plays. Looking at Lord and Lady Froth, the she-coxcomb and her joker, the lively and intelligent Cynthia is, for a time, sceptical in her approach to marriage:

"Mel. You're thoughtful, Cynthia?

Cyn. I'm thinking, though marriage makes man and woman

(1) L'Impromptu De Versailles, Sc.I.

one flesh, it leaves them still two fools; and they become more conspicuous by setting off one another.

Mel. That's only when two fools meet, and their follies are opposed.

Cyn. Nay, I have known two wits meet, and by the opposition of their wit render themselves as ridiculous as fools. 'Tis an odd game we're going to play at; what think you of drawing stakes, and giving over in time?

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

Cyn. Then I find it's like cards: if either of us have a good hand, it is an accident of fortune.

Mel. No, marriage is rather like a game at bowls: Fortune indeed makes the match, and the two nearest, and sometimes the two farthest, are together; but the game depends entirely upon judgment.

Cyn. Still it is a game, and consequently one of us must be a loser.

Mel. Not at all; only a friendly trial of skill, and the winning to be laid out in an entertainment. -¹

This is indeed a brilliant piece of comic dialogue touched off with a light-hearted raillery on a most debatable subject. In spite of the innumerable

(1) Congreve, W., The Double-Dealer, Act II.Sc.I.

instances of the failure of marriage, one is tempted to point to Congreve's dramas where the young people repeatedly strive at a compromise, each trying to retain his individuality yet willing to sacrifice something to be enriched by the other's personality. Each respects the other's feelings and that leads to sincerity and trust. Marriage is no more a play of instinct but a willing partnership in which man and woman enter for mutual benefit. The crude fear of cuckoldry has long been left behind. If the young people are apprehensive of the future, it is not because they doubt each other's loyalty, but because they realise that success in marriage depends much on a rational approach to it. Like Alceste, Mirabel is jealous and angry with Millament because she has demeaned herself by entertaining the fops and fools of society. He fears for her intellectual integrity; not once does the thought of infidelity cross his mind.

"Mirabel: Unkind! you had the leisure to entertain a herd of fools; things who visit you from their excessive idleness; bestowing on your easiness that time which is the incumbrance of their lives. How can you find delight in such society? It is impossible they should admire you, they are not capable: or if they are, it should be to you as a *mortification*;

...; for sure to please a fool is some degree of folly."¹ Millamant's whimsicalities or her flirtatious ways only tend to rouse his curiosity about the woman he loves. Love that was once stripped of every vestige of romance, returns once again with its emotional appeal but tempered with reason. Like Alceste once again, Mirabel is bewildered: "Mirabel; - Gone! - Think of you? to think of a whirlwind, though't were in a whirlwind, were a case of more steady contemplation;....A fellow that lives in a windmill, has not a more whimsical dwelling than the heart of a man that is lodged in a woman. There is no point of the compass to which they cannot turn, and by which they are not turned;....for motion, not method, is their occupation. To know this and yet continue to be in love, is to be made wise from the dictates of reason, and yet persevere to play the fool by the force of instinct....."² The young people in Congreve's play reason and bargain with one another with no illusion of romance whatsoever; because the veil of romance, once stripped off, cannot be restored. Yet the sanity of outlook, which Molière preached, Congreve seems to have vaguely caught. His soul

(1) Congreve, W., The Way Of The World, Act II. Sc.2; Compare Le Misanthrope, Act II. Sc.1.

(2) Congreve, W., The Way Of The World, Act II. Sc.2. Compare Alceste's words in Le Misanthrope Act I, Sc.1.

hungered for beauty; it is as compelling an aspect as Wycherley's search for the 'Absolute', or the 'pur amour' of Alceste. Congreve's sensitive spirit has clothes his creation in a different vesture *when he* realises the naked truth, yet draws a veil over it. Of Angelica, Valentine says: "You're a woman, - one to whom Heaven gave beauty, when it grafted roses on a briar. You are the reflection of Heaven in a pond, and he that leaps at you is sunk. You are all white, a sheet of lovely, spotless paper, when you first are born; but you are to be scrawled and blotted by every goose's quill".¹ In this exquisite weighing of reason and instinct, of reality and romance, which is the essence of the balance between man and woman, Congreve has had his lesson in the school of Molière, where also he learnt a sympathetic but critical attitude towards women. Aristo prescribes the best way to secure the love and fidelity of women, when he says:

.....mais je tiens sans cesse
 Qu'il nous faut en riant instruire la jeunesse,
 Reprendre ses défauts avec grande douceur,
 Et du nom de vertu ne lui point faire peur.

 Des moindres libertés je n'ai point fait des crimes
 A ses jeunes desirs j'ai toujours consenti,

 j'ai souffert qu'elle ait vu les belles compagnies,
 Les divertissements, les bals, les comédies;

(1) Congreve, W., Love For Love, Act IV. Sc.3.

Ce sont choses, pour moi, que je tiens de tout temps
 Fort propres a former l'esprit des jeunes gens;
 Et l'école du monde, en L'air dont il faut vivre
 Instruit mieux, à mon gré, que ne fait aucun livre¹.

In the letter to Mr. Dennis, Congreve gives his well-considered opinion on the subject: "But I must confess I have never made any observation of what I Apprehend to be true Humour in Women, Perhaps Passions are too powerful in that Sex, to let Humour have its Course; or may be by Reason of their Natural Coldness, Humour cannot Exert it/self to that extravagant Degree, which it often does in the Male Sex. For if ever any thing does appear Comical or Ridiculous in a Woman, I think it is little more than an acquir'd Folly, or an Affectation. We may call them the weaker Sex, but I think the true Reason is, because our Follies are Stronger, and our Faults are more prevailing."².

(1) L'École Des Maris, Act I. Sc.2.

(2) Dennis, J., Letters Upon Several Occasions:
 'Mr. Congreve to Mr. Dennis Concerning Humour
 in Comedy' Pp 92 - 93.

Congreve has arrived at this conclusion through the gradual process of evolution in the characters of Cynthia, Angelica and summing up in Millamant. The charm that belongs to Cynthia is shared by Leonara of Molière. She has the naivety and the girlishness of Agnès too. Angelica is much more a woman of the world. She is alive and alert and keeps a sharp eye over her own emotions. The eccentricities of the uncle and the frivolities of the aunt have put her on her guard. Like Célimène, she will not compromise her position through her love for Valentine. But ~~the~~ shrewed woman that she is, she puts Valentine's love to ^{the} test. She is acquainted with his reckless ways of living and is not ready to tie her beauty and duty to a spendthrift. She has adopted as a means of self-defence, an outer crust of affectation. In reality it ~~is~~ hides a warmth of feeling which proclaims itself unashamedly when occasion demands it. As Molière has passed from Leonara and Agnès to the sophisticated Célimène, so also Congreve's final picture of his conception of womanhood is the highly polished figure of Millamant. Thus both have at first tried their hands at a simpler portrait and then the painting of a complex character of a woman of the world. The brilliance of wit and the social accomplishments of Célimène had attracted the

English playwright and Millamant is her praiseworthy reflection in the English play. But Célimène is more mature and has a firmer grasp over society. The serious side of life has not as yet touched the younger woman. She flits, like a butterfly, between the two worlds created by Leonara and Célimène.

The Restoration Comedians were thus quick in utilising material from various sources to their own advantage. They were steeped not only in Jonson but in the host of other Jacobean playwrights as well.¹ They borrowed from their predecessors unconsciously, as it were, from their legitimate inheritance while enriching the borrowed goods with a foreign style. Such incidents, as the dramatic disguise device or the unscrupulous stratagems of the crafty serving-man, are generally regarded as Molière's monopoly as he has imparted to them a special flavour of his own. To explore a few such similar episodes in Jacobean drama, and particularly in those older ones which formed the ordinary fare of the theatre in the early days of the Restoration, would be of engrossing interest.

Massinger was one of the less known dramatists in this age. Some of his comedies, however, have utilised comic matter which provides amazing similarities with later plays. The City Madam,

(1) See also, Dobrée, B., Restoration Comedy
Pp. 39-47.

written as early as 1632, illustrates the foolishness of the pedantic mother who brings up her daughters in the romantic tradition. Massinger introduces a scene where the daughters are intent on driving a hard bargain with their prospective suitors. Anne, the elder daughter, sums up her demands in these terms:

"These toys subscrib'd to,

And you continuing an obedient husband;

Upon all fit occasions you shall find me

A most indulgent wife."¹ Nearly a century

later, Millamant consented to set her hand to the compact to "dwindle into a wife." Yet, encrusted within her sophistication, her heart is in the right place and she shares none of the mercenary tone of her English predecessors. A richer vein of womanly wit added to a graceful social maturity has made Millamant the acclaimed heroine of the Restoration society.

To go back to The City Madam, one does not fail to trace another strain which developed into the 'precieuse' cult in the next generation, and was immortalised in Les Précieuses Ridicules. The two

(1) Massinger, P., The City Madam, Act II, Sc.2.

plays afford striking similarities. The rejected suitors depart in a huff and are met by the good-natured father who is rather bewildered with the behaviour of his 'disobedient' wife and daughters. Here the story takes its English course where the erring women are reclaimed through the contrivances of the men.

Richard Flecknoe, borrowing from Moliere for his play, The Damoiselles A La Mode, was undoubtedly influenced by the tradition of Massinger. Flecknoe following the French play closely, deviated from the foreign version at the last stage of denouement.¹ The English writer, who prided himself as a dramatic critic, well-versed in European drama,² ~~however~~ ^{failed} failed, to foresee the ^{unhappy result} ~~failure~~ that would proceed from the uneasy reconciliation between the light-hearted mockery of the French play and the openly moralistic finale of the English. A considerable period of

(1) See Chap.IV.

(2) See, Flecknoe, R., Loves Kingdom A Short Discourse Of The English Stage. To His Excellency The Lord Marquess Of Newcastle.

assimilation was to pass before there could be any successful blending of the subtleties of the two theatrical traditions.

Dulcimet, the sprightly heroine in The Fawn, (1606), by Marston, is another version of Molière's Agnès, in her stratagem to fool her over-zealous father into acting as the 'go-between'. The other part of the story, namely, the dramatic disguise, is reproduced in Eastward-Ho, (1605). The jealous husband is made the unwitting instrument of his wife's escape. It is the story of the dishonour that a man brings upon himself by being ever-suspicious of his spouse and yet sneakingly helping in the elopement of his friend's wife.

In this earlier English treatment one notices the perceptible difference in the angle of dramatisation of a common comic episode. The deceitful wife in Eastward-Ho, (1605), is only one in the long line of such intriguing women who have cuckolded their jealous husbands. The deviations from this much-trodden track offered by Molière and his English follower mark them out as belonging to a different school of thought. The beauty and strength of the situation in the French play arises out of the spontaneous faith in a human heart and love of a human being, while the tragic

implication of Wycherley's comedy is crushing in its cynical assertion that the good and the innocent cannot but succumb to temptations.

The responsibility of the guardians to marry off their young wards in the proper manner, has been used as a comic matter earlier than Molière. The guardians in the two plays of Shirley, namely, Love In A Maze, (1631), and The Witty Fair One, (1628), are prototypes of Molière's Ariste and Sgandrelle. The maximum dramatic effect is gained in the second play by setting off the two old men. One is the old-fashioned father, harping on obedience, while the other believes in giving freedom and that she would choose within "limits of reason". Their expectations are fulfilled according to their deserts.

In these two plays as well as in a third one, namely, The Constant Maid, (1636-39), the country squire as opposed to the town-bred gentleman, is often ridiculed. The former is invariably the approved choice of the parents and his merit is measured not so much by personal qualifications as by inherited wealth. He shows his merit by making a display of his talent in dancing and in high-flown language. Some of the characteristics of these rustic suitors are to be traced in their successors

a generation later. He is either a country-bumpkin or a squire turned a fop during his short stay in the town. The latter is the more frequent type. Sir Gervase Simple in Love In A Maze, (1631), stands on his social status and is punctilious in etiquette while the mawkish squire in The Witty Fair One, (1628), is a rhyming fool. The first one is duped into marriage with a disguised boy, a reminiscence of Jonson, while the second one is the victim of a double trick and finds himself joined in matrimony with the maid.¹

The women in general harbour a marked distrust of country life. The lady of pleasure comes down to town, gets attached to urban gallantry and begins to be disdainful towards the peace-loving rustic husband to whom the town is "compos'd of noise and charge". Paris had already become the goal of the fashionable set. Lady Bornwell² would send her nephew for a "generous education" in dancing and complimenting and cringing which were the accomplishments a la mode. The theme of the play is similar to that of Les Précieuses Ridicules, in which women lose their heart over romantic gallantry. French has already become the language of fashion and from the satirical point of

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- (2) Shirley, J., The Lady of Pleasure, (1635)
 (1) See, Ravenscroft, E., The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman;
 Wright, J., The Female Virtuoso; Gowne, J., The Country Wit.

view the French tailor was considered competent enough to fit out the young would-be gallant. Such an artificial social system would be the breeding ground of amorous and scandalous intrigues.

The Constant Maid, (1636-39), by Shirley moves in a veritable maze of intrigues, much in the style of Ravenscroft though in a far more refined atmosphere. In such a complicated plot, disguise would be a common device. The two plots run on parallel lines. The selfish mother is trying to thwart the love of her young daughter while a usurious father is dead to the sentiments of his daughter. The secondary plot presents an interesting stage in the use of the comic device of a disguised doctor. The clever daughter pretends melancholia and the anxious father sends for a doctor, who turns out to be none other than her lover in disguise. Under his treatment the girl becomes rather garrulous, exposing the usury of her father, who consequently, hurries to beg the doctor to make her dumb again. Such a theme has another version in L'Amour Médecin.

The fraud of illness has been used by Fowler in The Witty Fair One, (1628). The treatment is similar to that of Congreve in Love For Love. Fowler's illness is only a decoy to entrap Penelope. But the young girl

is as discreet and tactful as her later version in Angelica. The girls do not abuse the freedom granted to them and both ultimately succeed in reclaiming their lovers from their extravagant ways of life. The two women in this play provide an interesting study in the development of female characterisation in English comedy. They are seen partly having shed their romantic garb and emerging ~~as~~ endowed with feminine shrewdness and adroitness as a protecting shield for their grace and emotions. Penelope is the new type of womanhood, witty, vivacious and flirtatious as well. Her cousin affording a contrast to her in her obedience to paternal rule, does not however lack feminine craft in matters where her emotions are involved. In all these plays women are seen to give a freer play to their emotions without the danger of giving rise to social scandal and soon they were well-equipped in the game of witty repartee and risky amours. The game itself was worth playing, irrespective of the prize to be won, as love itself was an intellectual stimulant. Fowler, a "wild young gentleman", epitomises the spirit of this type of amorous duel; until it acquires finesse in the incomparable touches of Congreve.

Again, Brains, the man-servant in The Witty Fair One, (1628), is a worthy predecessor of Scapin and his followers.¹ Brains however serves his master

(1) See also, Brome, R., A Mad Couple Well Match'd.

loyally and the situation to some extent is reversed. To counteract his strategy, the intriguing maid has been introduced, who can exchange rapiers with him.

Another feature which contributes much to the right tone of the comedy of manners ~~was~~^{is} the brisk and gay social milieu in which the smart set moved. In building up ~~of~~ such an atmosphere the French should be given their legitimate share. The French social and literary genius had been leaving its *marks* since the days of Queen Henrietta until these ~~marks~~^{marks} became indelible after 1660.

Shirley has a dexterous pen in drawing a facile and engaging sketch of flirtation and affectation, dissimulation and sincerity, as for instance between Carol and Fairfield in The Hyde Park, (1632). The heroine in the play appears to have the same spirit as Millamant, who is socially more mature and is consequently less emotional and more sophisticated. On the whole however, a more sincere and refined tone underlies the social life in the earlier plays.

The relation therefore, between Restoration Comedy on one hand and the native and foreign theatre on the other presents an almost insoluble problem. The consciousness of a new mode pervading the comic world was present. To quote once again the words of

George Etheredge:

"Our Author therefore begs you woul'd forget,
Most Reverend Judges, the Records of Wit,
And only think upon the modern way

Of writing, whilst y'are Censuring his Play."¹.

French fashion was in vogue in deciding the length of a peruke as much as in the discussion of comic matters. But the figure of Jonson looms large, though perhaps a little in the background, in the Restoration world much in the same manner as in the world of philosophic thought, Descartes had partially overshadowed the distant figure of Bacon. Jonson's art is universal, that is, it has illustrated general ideas concerning human beings living in society. His creations have become types of various humours as expounded by his Theory of Humour. His art is concerned with the permanent types of human nature rather than with the incidental or episodic. The creatures of circumstance rarely find room in Jonson's comic world. Volpone stands as the figure of cupidity while Morose is the unfortunate victim of his own idiosyncrasy. They commit excesses and thus become the target of comic laughter. Volpone, the arch-type of lust, exhibits no human deviation in his character. A striking contrast

(1) Etheredge, G., The Comical Revenge, The Prologue.

is offered by Molière's sketch of the miser.

Through Harpagon's inordinate love of gold there appear streaks of essential human nature. Harpagon succeeds in inspiring a certain amount of awe in and in retaining the love and fidelity of his servant, Maître Jacques.¹ His wish to marry is a natural human desire which does not spring from lust.

Moreover, Molière's technique is somewhat different. He has tried to bring out the ignominy of such abnormalities by strong contrasts. The characters in the plays are average, normal human beings striving against the passion of one man. The latter stands towering over them, subject to his own passion. But in the English plays² the miser has his coterie of flatterers, repulsive creatures appearing more debased because they live on a lower level. Moreover, the English dramatists tried to bring about poetic justice in the conventional manner. Their plays required it because of the crimes depicted. But the crime of Molière's miser is mental and demands more special treatment.

(1) L'Avare, Act II, Sc.4.

(2) Volpone, A New Way To Pay Old Debts.

Molière's method of character delineation tends towards rounded figures. The misanthrope is in love with a coquette and a gossip-monger into the bargain. An ignorant and timid girl can follow the dictates of her heart with all her unsophisticated courage. Such unlooked-for surprises add charm to and arouse interest in life. It is the mystery of human nature, with its multi-facet appearance which defies all enquiry into the springs of action.

The Restoration comedians identified their aim with Jonson, but traces of the subtle strokes of the ingenious Frenchman could be deciphered in the comic portraits of the Restoration stage. Their favourite way of approach was through the portraiture of particular individuals in contemporary society so much so that one of the features of the comic stage was the mischievous pleasure of identifying living personalities with the comic characters.¹ Perhaps the impish tendency is allied to the wide-spread practice of penning satires and the stage offered a convenient spring-board from which to pounce upon the victim. It is therefore not a generalisation

(1) See, Shadwell, T. The Sullen Lovers,
Sir Positive At-All.

one comes across in these plays but rather individualisation. Consequently, the personages in Restoration Comedy of Manners appear to be rounded personalities rather than automatons. The Plain-Dealer in Wycherley is not a man of fashion but a blunt sailor and this accounts for much of his rough and ready treatment of his acquaintances. Yet he has moved youthful Fidelia into unfailing love, who follows him like a faithful creature in the face of overwhelming odds. Even the failure of the misanthropic Manly to see through the unscrupulous Olivia and Varnish remains unexplained. Horner is the disreputable rake, who would not hesitate to smirch the reputation of the 'honourable' ladies. Yet he is the only person in the play who receives the designation of "a man of honour" from the only honourable character in the play. Angelica's character is one of constant surprises, while the spendthrift vagabond that Valentine was, could spurn his rich inheritance once his mistress appears to jilt him. Millamant had the appearance of a polished but hard diamond. Yet she could say: "Well, if Mirabel should not make a good husband, I am a lost thing, - for I find I love him violently."¹ Mirabel has treated Mrs. Fainfall shabbily. Yet the man has his worth. His philandering

(1) Congreve, W., The Way Of The World, Act IV Sc.I.

has encrusted a sense of loyalty which comes to the rescue of his erstwhile mistress in her time of distress. In fact, Mrs. Fainfall is an interesting character. She conveys to us the impression of a person more sinned against than sinning. Between her preposterous mother and the scoundrel of a husband, she cuts a pathetic figure. She appears to be a new type of character in the comedy of manners. The woman, mellowed down by the disappointments in life, has not become embittered; but she has had experience of the ways of the world and has come to value the sincerity of a "cautious friend". Such subtle contradictions in characterisation and the clash of personalities thereby ensuing, form the basis of an effective comedy. English romantic comedy had presented a glorious spectacle of such live figures. Portia, so imperious in the garb of the lawyer from Padua could come down with womanly grace in her love for Bassanio while the stoical and the Puritanical votary of St. Clare pleaded passionately for her transgressing brother. Romantic art could go no further. But in an age which showed keen enthusiasm for the critic and the intellect in comic production, romantic plays were out-moded. In such an age, any comic artist, worthy of the name, could hardly escape the overwhelming personality of the exponent of the delicate and penetrating comic treatment of satiric matter, which saturated not only the French comic theatre but that

of all the refined courts of Europe.

It would not be out of place to mention the intermediary position that Thomas Shadwell holds between the native and foreign influence. Shadwell was the avowed disciple of Jonson.¹ But alive to the contemporary conditions and desirous of applying a satirical purgative technique he only succeeded in arriving at a dead-lock, as if caught between the two overpowering influences of Jonson and Molière. He strove at a compromise between the methods of the two masters and the result was his naturalistic plays. He failed to catch the deeper reality which has immortalised the plays of Jonson and Molière. Comedy undoubtedly deals with the factual yet the comic matter may not be recorded by the mere contrivance of human photography. The artist bases his art on meticulous selection and not on indiscriminate accumulation of the concrete in human society. The realism of Jonson lies beyond the naturalism of his avowed but unfortunate disciple. While Master Ben played with human follies, the painstaking apprentice was laboriously recording the blatant frivolities of his own times.

The Jacobean comedians in their prologues and epilogues seldom mention any specific moral or satirical purpose, although this might have been

(1) See above, Chap. II.

implied in their plays. But the Restoration comedies³³⁸^{ans} stood in need of a definition of their work for a proper understanding.^{1.} Jonson had defined the comic art. The Restoration comedians applied it consciously to practice and received, as it were, Molière's moral support.^{2.} They could not but admire Molière's skill in satire. It was more penetrating and thus astoundingly revealing. It seemed that the Restoration comedians, with the recklessness that marked their personal life, were also embarking on a risky theatrical career, by making adventurous experiments. They tapped various resources and were trying to produce the English brand of the comedy of manners. They supported their invention by age-old comic theories which they professed to have deliberately practised. This has resulted in a paradoxical situation. They used comedy as a reflection^{tion} of society for a mental catharsis and only succeeded in rousing the wrath of the moralist in society. It was a bold venture on their part. So far, satire had been more or less implied through the humour characterisation. Or it was clothed in a poetic garb

(1) See Chap.II.

(2) See Chap.II.

as in, Love's Labour's Lost, which might claim to be the first of the English Comedy of Manners. But the impress of French intellect inevitably gave to the native comic genius a new turn, rather a sharp one, towards satirical criticism. What was implicit in the generalisation of Jonson now became explicit in the vivid reflection in the comic mirror. Shakespeare did not bring his only comedy of manners to the traditional happy conclusion. There is however the prospect of wedding-bells in a year and so the audience went away satisfied. Perhaps, part of the satisfaction arose out of the amusing contemporary caricatures which have been lost in the passage of time. But an indecisive conclusion in Restoration Comedy leaves the impression of indecision in human problems. George Dandin will be seeking his wife for ever with the light of the candle which is not sufficient ~~enough~~ to illuminate the darkness around him. Pinchwife, with his cap drawn over his eyes goes through life deliberately blind to the falsehood of the whole situation. To draw such a paradox in life, only a man with a piercing intellect could handle the pen. Very often, the dedication attached to the play, disclosed the serious purpose aimed at while the play itself worked it out artistically. Much of the ribaldry arose partly from the circumstances of the

play and partly from the imitation of the witty talks of the smart set. As the writer's cannot be wholly absolved of the excesses indulged in in such bawdy conversation neither can they be wholly denied an honest attempt to hold up to ridicule the disreputable and unbridled course of revelry.^{1.} Molière had given them intellectual boldness to face the facts of life, its dreadful distortions and frightful manifestations of energetic materialism.^{2.} His influence lies not in lending a few scenes and characters but in shaping the particular approach to the comic art. Difference in circumstances led to variations. Wycherley recognised the need of poison to drive out another poison. Such drastic processes led to distortions. Yet the stimulus of their creation cannot wholly lose its soundness when artistic creations are put on the scales for valuation.

(1) See Chap. III, Sec III

(2) It would be interesting to note the atmosphere of certain 'problem plays' of Shakespeare where the intellectual element seems to predominate. Measure For Measure and Troilus and Cressida have aroused bitter controversy, the obvious vulgarity and the cynicism being the central topic. But did not Shakespeare in these plays make an attempt to show life as it is without any romance or idealism through intellectual probings?

"An examination of their [Restoration comedians] plays reveals the fact that Restoration comedy is not a shallow reflection of a shallow society intent upon manners. On the contrary, it reflects the troubled intellectual life of the times, and as a successful aesthetic expression of a perennially popular attitude toward life, it is far more significant than is commonly supposed."¹.

George Etherege could afford to be amoral in the first flush of home-coming. He has steered clear of the path of heavy satire. Some of Molière's sketches of exquisite foppery have received a more earthly existence through Etherege's irresponsible pen. Wycherley's comic talents were undeniable but were neutralised by an insatiable urge towards biting satire, whereas Etherege remained the epitome of elegant libertinism in comic theatre. Thus, Wycherley ran into a deeper debt to Molière because of his moral or satirical preoccupation due to the awareness of the social responsibility of the comic artist. Dorilant remains the beau ideal of Etherege's society where he lives ever after in spite of his perfidy. It would

(1) Fujimura, T.H., The Restoration Comedy Of Wit, Pp. 56-57.

appear that in such a society the sense of morality has been equated with momentary pleasure, verging on perilous indecency. Wycherley however, particularly in his last two plays, disturbs the common conception of the comic theatre by excluding pleasurable situations altogether. The problem of Le Misanthrope pervades the atmosphere. The obvious poetic justice of the earlier play disappears in The Country Wife. This intellectual treatment of matter usually recalcitrant to comic rendering is the art Wycherley had acquired from Moliere. "...We have no reason to reject their [Restoration comedians] constant criticism of pretension, artificiality, hypocrisy, vanity, avarice, exaggeration, boorishness, and folly, nor the implicit praise of naturalness, reason, moderation, sincerity, and truth."¹

Molière in Dom Juan portrays the destruction brought about by the intellectual pride of a member of ^{the} aristocracy. It is a study in psychology and Molière throws overboard the dramatic unities in order to exhibit the principal character in all his complexity. The same procedure is followed in Le Misanthrope where intellectual honesty is pitted against graceful social

(1) Fujimura, T.H., The Restoration Comedy Of Wit, Pp.71-72.

hypocrisy. Wycherley seems to be following a similar technique in analysing the same section in society which in his time stood badly in need of exposure.

Wycherley's society however, signifies only a small one in which the young rake moved with impunity and it was so different from the all-embracing vision of Molière. Horner and the set of 'honourable women' belong to the same rank of aristocracy which gives them "immense power for evil-doing." It is the case of the young aristocrat, who by making a break with tradition, has become rootless, and as a result, his personal life and work appear disharmonious. He has lost much that had joined him with the past; the future was still uncertain; on top of this sense of insecurity came the intellectual material philosophy of Hobbes. The aristocrats were thus inclined to love life for its immediate gain and pleasure. Their intellectual curiosity often prompted them to seek the unknown in precarious and often risqué adventures. Their attitude towards life is summed up in the words of one of them, to whom however is accorded the sincerity of her set: "Our reputation! Lord, why should you not think that 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 statesman's religion, the quaker's word, the gamester's

oath, and the great man's honour; but to cheat those who trust us."¹. But Horner's intellect has ruthlessly pierced this relentless philosophy of destruction. He still retains the mental equilibrium to stand aside and comment on the scene being enacted in his room. The satiric implications of this scene becomes more pointed because it is the fair and the weaker sex that has assumed the shape of evil. The word 'honour' uttered by them is a sacrilege. To the query of the bewildered Quack, who is a faint recollection of the 'honnête homme', "But do civil persons and women of honour drink, and sing bawdy songs?" in his reply, the cynical Horner gives the psychology of these men and women in society: "O, amongst friends, amongst friends. For 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."². Yet a little later, Horner himself seeks an explanation from the women

(1) Wycherley, W., The Country Wife, Act.V. Sc.4.

(2) op.cit. Act IV.Sc.3.

themselves. His intellectual curiosity tries to take up their position and look at life from their angle of vision: "I beg your pardon, ladies, I was deceived in you devilishly. But why that mighty pretence to honour?"¹. One can immediately detect in this question the compelling nature of this query. Life and love are stripped of every vestige of glamour and romance. The 'myth' of love is subjected to intellectual probings; "Love is stripped of its glamour, ceases to be something sacrosanct as it had been in the past and becomes a purely biological function."². Then follow the crushing words of Horner: "I beg your pardon, madam, I must confess, I have heard that great ladies, like great merchants, set but the higher prices upon what they have, because they are not in necessity of taking the first offer."³.

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- (1) ^{W., The Country Wife,} Wycherley, Act V. Sc.4. It is interesting to note that Horner calls himself 'a Machiavel in love' in Act IV.Sc.3. This passionless intellectual curiosity is a prominent feature of Horner's character. It may be mentioned here that Congreve in The Double Dealer had followed the character of Iago in his conception of his Double-dealer. He had followed Shakespeare's technique when he introduced soliloquies and offered an explanation in the dedicatory letter.
- (2) Turnell, M., The Classic Moment, Pp 86-87.
- (3) Wycherley, W., The Country Wife, Act V.Sc.4.

Horner's character presents interesting facets. He dimly visualises certain implications of honour. Being accused by Pinchwife for having seduced his sister, Horner, like a desperate gambler, tries to save not so much himself as the country-wife, whose foolishness has led to this unnecessary complication. "Now must I wrong one woman for another's sake, but that's no new thing with me, for in these cases I am still on the criminals side against the innocent"¹. Every one of his asides in this scene throws a light on Wycherley's conception of the character of the hero of his masterpiece. Horner, in spite of his debauchery, tries to behave like a man of honour. To the three sets of women in the play, to each Horner assigns her due. Alithea, the only woman of integrity in the play, gives evidence ^{of} to Horner's intellectual honesty: "What mean you, Sir? I always took you for a man of honour".².

This man of honour is conscious of playing his cards with the cunning necessary for such a society. "I must be impudent, and try my luck; impudence uses to be too hard for truth".³.

(1) Wycherley, W., The Country Wife, Act V, sc. 4.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Wycherley, W., The Country Wife, Act V.Sc.4.

In the confusion that follows, Horner has but few words to add to it. He leaves it to the ladies to extricate themselves from the scandal, which they were quite capable of doing by imposing on the credulity of the uxorious husbands. But towards the country-wife, he takes up a more compassionate attitude: "My lady has not her honour, but has given it to me to keep, and I will preserve it".¹ His intellect prompts him to be truthful to the honest woman, because Mrs. Margery does believe herself to be in love with him, and given the opportunity, would willingly and happily marry him without any of the fashionable railings against matrimony.

The whole play is thus a damning satire not so much on men as on women. It presents a new aspect of the activities of the men and women in his society. Wycherley gives the hypocrite's point of view, showing the impunity with which the credulity of foolish men is exploited. Moliere says in Dom Juan that hypocrisy is the most treacherous of the vices because of the difficulty of detecting it. Wycherley is not ridiculing simple souls like Mrs. Margery. But it is the erstwhile debauchery turned into a jealous husband who provides him with the object of derision.

(1) Wycherley, W., The Country Wife, Act V, sc. 4.

There is a paradox in the situation. Pinchwife's jealousy puts the brake on the natural impatience of his wife to see city-life and thus perverts it unawares. Alithea's words in the last scene have quite a molièr^esque strain in them.¹ Wycherley is entirely serious in driving home the moral satire. Alithea in the beginning, is an insignificant character. But in the last scene, she is brought to the forefront. Alithea on the threshold of marriage, utters these words of advice and we have a feeling that Harcourt will be spared the self-destructive passion of jealousy.

A play with a specific satiric purpose cannot exist in a vacuum. It is conditioned by the social environment which it depicts, and as such, must be studied and appreciated against the relative historical and social background.² Like Molière in Le Tartuffe,

(1) "Alithea, Come brother, your wife is yet innocent, you see; but have a care of too strong an imagination, lest, like an over-concerned timorous gamster, by fancying an unlucky cast, it should come. Women and fortune are truest still to those that trust 'em.

Lucy. And any wild thing grows but the more fierce and hungry for being kept up, and more dangerous to the keeper." Act V. Sc.4.

(2) See Chap.III. Sec.III.

Wycherley had realised the sharper weapon of ridicule in contrast to reprehension. Wycherley, together with his French master, had grasped the immense psychological value of ridicule. The dainty Lady Fidget and Lady Squeamish saw themselves in the lurid light and scabrous dialogue of the plays. They must have squirmed in their seats as the uproarious laughter went up not with them but at them and filled the theatre with vibrations.

The works of the two writers are an instance of the peculiar form which a thought assumes when produced by the same reflection or generated by the same object in different minds. Where artistic execution equals the moral or satirical conception, Molière held an inalienable position before Wycherley and Congreve. Etheredge in spite of his graceful laughter-provoking art, was heavily censured by the next generation of critics while Wycherley was upheld for having taken up the pontifical robe of the comic mentor. The moral pre-occupation of these critics led them to accuse Dryden of irresponsibility because of his failure to chastise in the proper manner the illicit love in his play, All For Love.¹

(1) See Langbaine, G., The Lives And Characters Of The English Dramatic Poets, 1712, "...All For Love of Mr. Dryden, were it not for the false Moral, woul'd be a Masterpiece that few of the Antients or Moderns ever equal'd;"

The indebtedness to Molière cannot therefore be dismissed as superficial, as the English were taking over of a few comic episodes or characters. The English as well as the French were borrowers from the common European comic stock. It is a psychological truth that borrowed motifs invariably become modified in the process of application by the borrower. The extension of such modifications is endless and motifs frequently return to their earlier forms extraordinarily transformed. In fact, the Restoration comedian could trace his national descent, yet he preferred to utilise the material ready at hand. Molière had opened a new epoch in the history of comic art. Comedy was given the same status as tragedy so that tragic material could appear in the comic garb. Laughter shed its irresponsible gaiety and assumed the additional role of a mentor. Jonson had made his audience laugh no doubt, But it was more or less impersonal laughter. The miser in the audience would not dream of aligning himself with the Fox. It belonged more or less to the world of abstract reality.¹.

The Jacobean brought comedy nearer to contemporary society. Yet the heritage of romantic

(1) For a criticism of Jonson, see, Dryden, J., On Comedy Farce And Tragedy and Dennis, J., Letters Upon Several Occasions: To Congreve, P 73 ff.

or 'humour' comedy still worked in the form of poetic justice with the idea of the wrong-doer being punished and the righteous living in happiness ever after. Molière dispelled such illusions. Life held out little romance and it turned^{out} to be relentless at times. Here the innocent and the ignorant could be crafty; religion turns the faithful to superstitious religiosity and knowledge only leads to mental perversions. At their face-value, these topics are too grim for laughter. Yet, by the adroit use of the comic pen, they have been turned into comic matter, provoking laughter. Laughter is no more impersonal but is double-edged. Molière drives the shafts of laughter at the audience themselves. They become the target of their own laughter because they have been made aware of their own follies. This particular quality of laughter has been mainly derived by the English from the French master. They have put into their comedy this immediate urgency and applicability of the situation. The characters are no more abstractions but actualities that could be identified in contemporary society. They provided sufficient material for the comic stage to provoke reformatory laughter, and few could fail to see the significance. In their enthusiasm for this new trend in comedy, the English comedians might have overstepped the boundary

between art and nature which accounts for the plays being dated. Yet, this moral quality of their laughter gives them their weight. The episodes are not pleasant yet the treatment is comical. This is the paradox of Molière's art. The English would eagerly seize it, as their own society, in need of purgation, had plenty of such matter to offer and that for comic treatment. Molière was their irreplaceable model. Shirley, who comes nearest to these dramatists, is yet a romantic in his attitude to life. There is too much of sentiment in either *Carol*¹ or *Penelope*² to entertain any scoffing attitude to life. Fowler, who has been described as "a wild young man", turns out to be^a a sentimentalist at heart. Whatever affinities Shirley displays in his spicy wit was perhaps because he lived during the days which saw the introduction of French culture into English Society under Queen Henrietta. But the graceless atmosphere of the Restoration needed the art of Molière to expose it and it produced Wycherley and Congreve, his English

(1) Shirley, J., The Hyde Park, 1632.

(2) Shirley, J., The Witty Fair One 1628.

disciples. They learnt to exploit fully a situation, perhaps of doubtful propriety, through a closely-knitted and ineffusive intellect and wit, provoking uproarious laughter, perhaps tinged with cynicism. The victim among the audience would lie helpless, pinioned by the well-directed shafts of ridicule. Looking back after a decade, John Downes was able to analyse the particular quality of The Way Of The World; it proved to be "too keen a satyr".¹.

The French contact has thus enriched the English comedy^{ians} by giving them the taste for the proper subject-matter and the sharpened tool with which to chisel it. Satire became more varied being presented on the comic stage and the scope of its activity and influence was enlarged and deepened. But the difference between Molière and the English is wide indeed. One simple factor, that Molière was a man of genius dwarfs the figures of the best of the Restoration comedians. It would be an insult to the master and an injustice to the pupil if they were to be put on one plane for comparison. They were not only too small^{for} but too near as well to the towering figure. Moreover, in trying to apply the master's doctrine, they were confronted with the stupendous task "...to expose

(1) Downes, J., Roscius Anglicanus, Ed. by M. Summers, P.45.

the false arts of life; to pull off the disguises of the cunning, vanity, and affectation."¹ There were moments when their art succumbed to the naturalistic portraiture of prevalent vices. They are like scars on the body of their dramatic creation and these can hardly be overlooked. Apologists have tried to explain away the apparent moral turpitude in the comic art by attributing an amoral value to it. Denunciation has been equally vehement to cancel its artistic value altogether. However, with an unprejudiced mind, these plays should be accepted as the accredited comic products of the age of an "incorrigibly agreeable and nefarious prince".

A crusade for a general simplicity resulted in the Sentimental Comedy with the new century coming in. But the verve of the comic muse relied on the comic treatment of satirical matter which is Molière's contribution to the comic art. The Restoration comedians failed to bring about a happy blend of the satiric and the comic elements. They tried to follow Molière but their national and individual genius led them to sacrifice the aesthetic finesse and virtuosity of French art to ponderous and jeering satire. William Congreve was the nearest

(1) The Tatler, 12, April, 1709.

approximation but further development was arrested by the opposition to the stage. But the tradition that started with Molière in England could not die before its consummation. It had to run the full cycle of its development during the course of which it considerably influenced dramatic art in England. It had to wait more than half a century to produce the best style in the English Comedy of Manners, where the comic and satiric art both lent hands to produce the comedies of Sheridan, in whom the English adaptation of Molière's art was brought to perfection.

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