English Literature of the 17th Century: Restoration Comedy

Mogilev
MGU имени А. А. Кулешова
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THE RESTORATION PERIOD IN ENGLAND

The Restoration of the English monarchy began in 1660. The term Restoration is used to describe both the actual event of the ascent of Charles II to the throne and the period of several years later in which a new political order was established. It is often used to cover the whole reign of Charles II (1660-1685) and the brief reign of his younger brother James II (1685-1688).

The period of Restoration, in English history took place after the collapse of the Commonwealth dominated by Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate.

Charles the Second ascended to the throne in 1660, bringing to an end England’s republican experiment under Oliver Cromwell. The restoration of the monarchy was generally welcomed by lords of the manor and ordinary peasants who were tired of the conflict and the years of Puritan discipline afterwards.

In English literature the Restoration period (often called the age of Dryden) is commonly viewed as lasting from 1660 to the death of John Dryden in 1700.

Restoration literature is English literature written after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Many typical literary forms of the modern world – including the novel, biography, history, travel writing, and journalism – appeared during the Restoration period, when new scientific discoveries and philosophical concepts as well as new social and economic conditions came into being.

Much of the best poetry, notably that of John Dryden (the great literary figure of his time, in both poetry and prose), the earl of Rochester, Samuel Butler, and John Oldham was satirical. John Bunyan’s great allegory in prose “Pilgrim’s Progress”, also belongs to this period.

The Restoration period was a great age of drama. Heroic plays, influenced by principles of French Classicism, enjoyed popularity, but the age is chiefly remembered for its glittering, critical comedies of manners by such playwrights as George Etherege, William Wycherley, Sir John Vanbrugh, and William Congreve.

“That miserable, rouged, tawdry, sparkling, hollow-hearted comedy of Restoration,” as Thackeray called it, has almost always been the darling of audiences. Restoration comedy, or English comedy from the restoration of Charles II in 1660 to about 1710, disappeared from the stage only during mid-Victorian times. In the eighteenth century and early nineteenth, and increasingly in the twentieth, revivals of Restoration comedy have succeeded beyond any expectation. “Neither is it a fact that the comedies of the last age are no longer played or enjoyed,” wrote Leigh Hunt in 1840. “Whenever an actor comes who is equal to them … they are always played and enjoyed; nor do the present audiences of Covent Garden object to them in the least, in the spirit of a pedantic morality.
A critic here and there may do so; but it is neither the feeling of the press in general, nor of the play-going public.” There was scarcely an important actor or actress of our day who has not starred in some Restoration comedy.

The golden age of English drama lasted scarcely more than twenty years. Shakespeare’s writing career (from the early 1590’s to 1612) spanned it. By 1700 the English theatre had passed through its silver age (the Restoration). It had ceased to appeal to the population as a whole and catered largely to the upper middle class.

During the Elizabethan period, the popular theatre appealed to all classes, there was something in it for the lowest apprentice, the most bookish scholar, or the highest nobleman. However, as Professor Harbage has pointed out, the Elizabethan theatre had evolved **two traditions**. The “theatre of a nation” was one, the popular drama of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Dekker, or Heywood, which emphasized bourgeois values, wedded love, patriotism, hard work, national unity, and moral responsibility. The other tradition, the “theatre of a coterie,” that of Chapman, Jonson, and Marston, appealed only to aristocrats and intellectuals. It was much more consciously “literary” and academic; it questioned established values and often dealt with satire, wealth, the need for ease, the animal nature of man, and the difficulty of ethical behavior. It often attacked middle-class groups, particularly Puritans and merchants. Both traditions were great achievement; but in the days after Shakespeare left the stage, it was the coterie drama that survived. Greater profit and greater prestige drew players and writers away from the popular theatres; more important, Puritan opposition drove audiences away. When, in 1642, a Puritan parliament forbade stage plays, the only important theaters were Blackfriars, the Phoenix, and Salisbury Court, all private theatres. The drama has ceased to be a popular medium. When Charles II returned and in 1660 the theatres formally reopened, they reopened as coterie theatres. Elizabethan audiences had kept as many as nine large popular theatres going; Restoration audiences supported two small private theatres. The theatre had become an upper-class attraction, and monopolies granted by Royal Patents kept it that way.

Thus, Restoration comedy is part of the coterie tradition. Furthermore, Restoration comedy embodied **new theatrical techniques**. The theatre itself had changed. The great Elizabethan popular theatres like the Globe and even the private ones had used a platform stage extending out into the audience with spectators on three sides of it. Very little, if any, scenery was used. The Restoration theatre used a “picture” stage with a proscenium arch and a curtain and lots of scenery. “Elizabethan theatregoers were involved in an action: “Tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,” says one of Shakespeare’s prologues.
The Restoration theatregoer, however, watched a “scene”, and prologues and epilogues awaited his verdict of approval or disapproval. He was regarded as the dispassionate judge of a spectacle – not as someone to be drawn into the play. They make plays now, a Restoration critic wrote, “more for sight then hearing”.

English theatrical tradition was supposed to have died, and when theaters reopened in 1600 after almost twenty years of supposed silence, the returning Cavaliers demanded French genres, and brought into being heroic drama and the comedy of manners. More modern historical research, however, shows that the play-going habit was too strong for even a Puritan edict to ban it. Plays were performed secretly. There were private performances for the wealthy, and, particularly in the provinces, some hidden public theatricals. The two most common kinds of entertainment were masques for the rich and for the poor, drolls – farcical scenes, such as the Falstaff episodes from Henry IV, performed as one-act plays. People even wrote plays, mostly closet dramas, and some stage comedies too.

The term “comedy of manners” was invented by Charles Lamb; George Meredith used it, but it achieved no particular currency until John Palmer’s The Comedy of Manners appeared in 1913. In the seventeenth century, “manners” meant not only “custom” but “character”, the total nature of an individual. The Restoration itself called its comedy “genteel comedy”, meaning simply “comedy of the upper classes,” as opposed to “low comedy”.

The Restoration Comedy.

Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke, Purcell, Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Dyck, Wren, Vermeer, Bernini, the better parts of Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Lope de Vega, and Jonson, Donne, Milton, Herbert, Marvell, Dryden, Racine, Corneille, Moliere, Calderon, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Cromwell, Richelieu, and the gentlemen of the Plymouth plantation, all these the seventeenth century produced. Alfred North Whitehead called it the “century of genius”. In these hundred years, England had her greatest periods of prose, comedy, and lyric verse. The Restoration itself gave us Paradise Lost by John Milton and Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan, Sir Isaac Newton and the law of gravitation, and the greatest of all comedies of “manners.”

It would be surprising if these comedies did not share in the almost magical energy of the age. The comedies are filled with disguises and pretenses, masks and affectations. These comedies by their use of disguise are probing some of the most basic assumptions of their age and ours. In the seventeenth century, disguise became a matter of cosmic significance, a fundamental element in ethical and metaphysical thought, largely as a result of the new physics. The writers
of comedies were connected in various ways to the newly formed Royal Society and were thus exposed to this new scientific thought. The dramatists created a kind of pastoral by describing an idealized, simplified world, the “Utopia of gallantry”, of which Charles Lamb spoke. From this point of view they examined the more complex world of reality. The single most important element of this “pastoral” setting is disguise, and to see its implications involves us in an excursion into the seventeenth-century attitude toward dissimulation, affectation and pretense.

Attitudes toward disguise, dissimulation, and affectation had changed across the century. First, there was an increasing belief that the personality is hard to know under the appearances it puts on; second, affectation (semi-conscious pretense) was uniformly condemned; third, dissimulation (conscious pretense) tended increasingly to be accepted as a necessity. We can see this total attitude toward human conduct that these three views represent in the early plays of Etherege and Wycherley: dissimulation is the rake-hero’s way to success; affectation is a folly because one becomes unable to stop acting. Of course, there is nothing new in recognizing a difference between appearance and nature in human conduct. Man has always thought and joked about the difference between what is and what shows. The crucial change is that formerly men had felt that what shows either was or should be a true reflection of what is; now, at the end of the seventeenth century, men came increasingly to feel that what shows not only was not but often ought not to be a true reflection of what is.

Human conduct, politics, and comedies, moreover, were not the only areas in which such a difference was accepted. The same notion of an outside and an inside applied also, for example, to language. Language itself was regarded as an outside – eg., clothing, ornaments – within which the real substance, thought, lay hidden.

As the seventeenth century continued, however, this idea came to be more and more frequently expressed and to have more and more effect on literary style. Montaigne became a model for later essayists (Congrive, for example, owned four copies of the Essais). As Savile wrote, “He scorned affected Periods to please the mistaken Reader with the empty Chime of Words. He hath no Affectation to set himself out, and dependeth wholly upon the Natural Force of what is his own.” “Tho’ Invention be the Mother of Poetry”, wrote Sir William Temple, Swift’s employer, “yet this Child is like all others born naked, and must be… Cloathed with Exactness and Elegance.” The metaphorical style, Temple said, had “Conceit as well as Rhyme in every Two Lines.” “This was just as if a Building should be nothing but Ornament, or Cloaths nothing but Trimming; as if a Face should be covered over with black Patches, or a Gown with Spangles.”
What was special about the later seventeenth century’s reaction to metaphor was (1) treating the discrepancy between thought and language as a discrepancy between plain prose and ornament, and therefore (2) relegating figures of speech to the passions and poetry and dismissing them in reason and prose as “affectation.”

“Solid” became a “plus” word because it suggested realness, the mass and volume the new physics could measure, as opposed to other illusory and immeasurable qualities such as colour, taste, or smell. In effect, the new physics established a scientific basis for the operation of figures of speech. “The Ornaments of speaking,” wrote Bishop Sprat in telling of the Royal Society’s programme for improving the English language, “were at first, no doubt, an admirable Instrument in the hands of Wise Men … to represent Truth, cloth’d with Bodies; and to bring Knowledge back again to our very senses, from whence it was at first deriv’d to our understandings.” In other words, an image or metaphor appeals to the senses, as nature does; it makes things “real” to us. But sensory appeal is not an end in itself. The real end is “Knowledge,” that is, understanding sensory experience in the mind, truth no longer “cloth’d with Bodies.” “Ornaments,” Sprat complained, had become ends in themselves, and therefore the Royal Society took it upon themselves to try to correct prose style: “to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men deliver’d so many things almost in an equal number of words”; “a close, naked, natural way of speaking, positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near to the Mathematical plainness as they can”, it was the aim of the Royal Society.

Oddly enough, it was probably through this scientific source that the dramatists were influenced. There were, of course, other bases for linguistic reform, the Puritan interest in a “plain style” for sermons, for example; but the Puritans had little influence on the playwrights. There can be little doubt that the playwrights acquired their distrust of metaphor through literary connections with the scientific Royal Society. Dryden, for example, who wrote heroics, the belles-lettres John Evelyn, and the poets Waller and Cowley were all associated with the Society’s committee “for improving the English language”.

Through the Royal Society, literary men and even Charles’s court had been brought face to face with the ultimate disguise, the disguise of reality itself that the new science had revealed.

Scientific discoveries had shown that truths which not so long before had seemed obvious were in fact purely and simply not so. Men’s senses were not to be trusted, and it was science that had shown their falsity. So for the seventeenth-century man, only those things, as Descartes said, “which, speaking generally, are comprehended in the object of pure mathematics, are truly to be recognized as external objects”.

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The drama was not unaffected by the new philosophy. Most obviously, of course, its language was changed. No longer did the playwright use the thick ragout of metaphor that had gratified pre-Restoration audiences. On the contrary, language became thin and spare; similes replaced metaphors. Professor Dale Underwood in his book on Etherege shows that his early plays developed a very special kind of comic language which later dramatists followed. First, the language is built primarily out of nouns. Second, these nouns tend to play down sensory experience in favor of “generalized classes and categories.” Third, the language is primarily engaged in setting up logical and schematic relations among these categories.

Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve were all gentlemen and they were both well educated and well read. Congreve’s library of some 620 titles, known to us through Professor Hodges’ discovery of his book list, contained some twenty books of a strictly philosophical nature, among them Plato’s works with Dacier’s commentary, Locke’s _Essay Concerning Human Understanding_, Hobbes’ _Leviathan_, and a commentary on Descartes’ system. His library contained (besides some twenty-two works on medicine and pharmacology) eleven books on mathematics and the physical sciences, among them Newton’s _Opticks_ and a commentary on Newton’s system as a whole and Fontenelle’s _A Plurality of Worlds_. All three of the writers of the comedies were influenced by the Restoration climate of opinion.

Seventeenth-century metaphysics separated appearance from nature; seventeenth-century political theorists separated the “natural” man from the social man; and the Restoration writers of comedy were influenced by these ideas. They realized their enormous dramatic possibilities.

The seventeenth century saw the most profound changes of modern intellectual history take place. Restoration comedy in a very real sense is the first “modern” drama, and it should be read in its own non-Elizabethan frame of reference, the separation of appearance from nature and fact from value.

For the Restoration writer sensuous data are “secondary qualities”, illusions obscuring the solid facts. Facts do not imply values. Values lack authority and must be understood as merely personal emotions. The social conventions which are the sensuous data of the comedies are in a scientific sense “secondary qualities.” They mask the essential facts and values, and the characteristic tropes of Restoration comedy serve to look through the mask.

In a very real sense, understanding of the comedies by Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve begins and ends with their language.

The figures of speech meet in the “mirror” theory of comedy, according to which the stage should serve as a mirror to the audience. In the _mirror theory_,
both actors and audience are split into actor and spectator. That is, the actor in
the stage-mirror acts and is at the same time the spectator of the audience; so
the spectator watches the actor, while he is aware of his own actions in the real
world. Restoration staging carried out this theory by setting up audiences as
watchers of scene and spectacle, much more than they were for earlier English
drama. The Elizabethan theatre treated the spectator as someone to be drawn
into the action; even the elaborate and spectacular Stuart masques made the au-
dience serve as the actors of the piece. In a Restoration play, however, the author
is apt to call attention specifically to the stage as stage, to deliberately destroy
the illusion and thus to call attention to the mirror of the stage, by cracking it.

At the heart of the comic sense of these plays is what have been called
the “right-way-wrong-way simile.” The wrong way is the play’s humour: the
discrepancy between appearance and nature. In the early plays the right way is
represented simply by the marriage of the hero – a happy ending that represents
a realiziable ideal. In the later plays the contrast between the right way and
the wrong way becomes the contrast between two ways of success: the happy
ending for the lover-hero as opposed to the more limited happy ending for the
rake-hero. This opposition was often presented by the Restoration playwrights
in much the spirit of modern musical comedy.

Questions:
1. Speak about the historic background of Restoration.
2. What is Restoration literature?
3. Name some popular playwrights of the period.
4. What is the golden age of English drama? Its silver age?
5. Describe the difference between the Elizabethan theatre and Restoration
theatre.
6. What theatrical genres prevailed during the Restoration?
7. Name the characteristic features of the comedy of manners.
8. Describe the Reform of the language initiated by the Royal Society.
9. Why do we call Restoration comedy “the first modern drama”? 
By March 1664 the theatres had been open for well over four years following the so-called dramatic interregnum. Yet scarcely a half-dozen new comedies had emerged to interrupt the revivals of Fletcher, Shakespeare, and Jonson that filled the stages, and none of these had caught the fancy of Restoration audiences enough to set a new style. There survived only Dryden’s device of witty lovers from *The Wild Gallant* (February 1663), probably suggested by Nell Gwyn and her then lover, Charles Hart, of the Theatre Royal. The first new comedy to provoke real imitation was Sir George Etherege’s *The Comical Revenge*.

Of Etherege the man, little is known. A gay, handsome individual, who spoiled his looks with drinking, he was a wit of the court circle who turned his hand to playwriting as a gentlemanly thing to do and wrote no more than the gentlemanly number of three plays.

After the Glorious Revolution, he was, of course, replaced. He cast his lot with the Stuarts, went to France, and apparently never returned to England. He died in the early nineties; neither the date nor the place is known. Although to modern eyes his first play looks anything but promising, “The clean and well performance of this Comedy,” wrote the prompter, John Downes, “got the Company more reputation and profit than any preceding Comedy; the Company taking in a month’s time at it 1000&.”

*The Comical Revenge* has three plots, high, low, and middle. The high plot, in neat couplets and even neater patterns of love, honor, and confidants, follows the love of Lord Beaufort and Colonel Bruce for Graciana, and the unrequited love of Graciana’s sister, Aurelia, for Bruce. In the middle plot, Sir Frederick Frollick, Beaufort’s cousin, lackadaisically pursues the Widow Rich, Graciana and Aurelia’s aunt. The low plot shows Wheadle, a rogue acquaintance of Sir Frederick’s, and Palmer, a card-sharper, swindling a Cromwellian knight named Sir Nicholas Cully. In the incident – one cannot call it a plot – that gives the play its title, Betty, the widow’s maid, lures and locks Sir Frederick’s valet, the Frenchman Dufoy, into a tub. (A sweating-tub was the usual seventeenth-century remedy for Dufoy’s “French disease.”)

Most commentators on this play dismiss the heroics of the high plot as irrelevant – “obviously out of the picture,” or “out of keeping with the rest of the play.” “We turn from one to the other,” says one critic of a similarly bifurcated play, “as a music-hall audience will welcome the alternation of bawdry and sentiment.” More important, however, is the fact that the high heroic drama and the low farce interact, each making the other more meaningful. “The clash,” Mr. Empson notes of Dryden’s similarly hybrid *Marriage a la Mode*, “makes both
conventions less unreal; … it has a more searching effect, almost like parody, by making us see they are unreal.” Certainly the high plot is not the main plot, as many writers seem to think. On the contrary, more than twice as many scenes and two and a half times as many lines are given to the low plots as to the romantic, heroic plot. The play opens and closes with Sir Frederick.

The high plot of *The Comical Revenge* idealizes and exaggerates in pure heroic style. The story concerns Cavalier bravery and romance. Both Lord Beaufort and Colonel Bruce love Graciana, while Graciana’s sister Aurelia loves Colonel Bruce. The colonel returns from imprisonment by the Roundheads to find Graciana in love with Beaufort. He therefore challenges Beaufort; on the field, these gallant enemies unite to drive off some treacherous Cromwellian assassins pursuing Bruce and then return to their fight. Beaufort wins the duel but spares the colonel’s life. The colonel, then despairing of Graciana, falls on his sword and the doctor pronounces him certain to die. Graciana decides she ought to be in love with Colonel Bruce and therefore spurns Beaufort, who despairs. Meanwhile Aurelia reveals her love for Bruce and he reciprocates, at which point “the wound … is not mortal found,” and confessions match the proper pairs.

It is somewhat puzzling that a man of “easie” George Etherege’s urbanity could write this sort of thing. Etherege was a comic writer, and nothing could be farther from the multiple perspectives of comedy than the single-minded admiration of the heroic manner. Possibly, Etherege and his friends found the heroic manner funny in and of itself. But whether they did or not, Etherege plays the high plot of *The Comical Revenge* off against the lower plots to develop Sir Frederick Frollick’s role as a realistic, but golden mean.

Frollick, being somewhat of a roisterer, beats up the widow’s quarters with a drunken serenade by way of showing his affection; she puts him off, however. He acts as second for Beaufort in the high-plot duel, and has himself been carried in as though dead to make the widow reveal her love, but she sees through his ruse in time. He then pretends to be arrested for a debt and the widow pays it, thus committing herself. After much verbal play and pretended indifference, Sir Frederick and the widow are finally matched. As a ludicrous parallel to their courtship, Betty, the widow’s maid, locks the neck of Sir Frederick’s valet into a great tub, which Dufoy must then carry about with him like a snail’s shell.

Strange as it may seem, Sir Frederick is the one breath of common sense in the high plot, as, for example, when, after Colonel Bruce has fallen on his sword, he prevents Bruce’s second from doing the same so as to complete the stylized heroic pattern. Sir Frederick says simply, “The Frollick’s not to go round, as I take it”. “I mistrust your Mistresses Divinity,” he answers to one of Beaufort’s exalted love-speeches. “You’ll find her Attributes but Mortal:
Women, like Jugglers Tricks, appear Miracles to the ignorant; but in themselves th’are meer cheats”. “What news from the God of Love?” he cries to Beaufort’s servant, “he’s always at your Master’s elbow, h’as jostl’d the Devil out of service; no more! Mrs. Grace! Poor Girl, Mrs. Graciana has flung a squib into his bosome, where wild-fire will huzzee for a time, and then crack; it fly’s out at’s Breeches”. The hint that Beaufort knew the wench Grace somewhat better than his high-flown heroics warrant and these various contrasts – physical as opposed to spiritual love, the devil as opposed to the god of love, firecrackers as opposed to the flames of love, Grace the wench as opposed to Graciana the heroine – run throughout the play and make up the antiheroic humor.

Sir Frederick is also the one who straightens out the complexities of the low plot. Wheadle, an acquaintance of Frollick’s, and Palmer, another crony, disguised as a sheep-farmer, cheat Sir Nicholas Cully at cards. Cully refuses to pay his losses, and Palmer challenges him. In the field, Cully’s cowardice forces him to sign a judgment for the amount. Wheadle, at this point, promises to mend his fortunes by introducing him to the Widow Rich (actually Wheadle’s mistress Grace in disguise). Cully, however, blunders in on the real Widow Rich, roaring like Sir Frederick. The real Sir Frederick rescues both her and Sir Nicholas by blackmailing the sharpers out of the debt and into marrying; Wheadle to Grace, and Palmer – and Sir Nicholas – to their own ex-mistresses.

Just as Sir Frederick is contrasted by his common sense and earthiness to Beaufort, his counterpart in the high plot, he is, as an urbane, brave, amorous Cavalier, the opposite of the countrified. Cromwellian knight Cully, the fake Frollick of the low plot. Just as Sir Frederick wittily reveals the unreality of the high plot with his skepticism, he brings to the intrigues of the low characters a semblance of honor and mercy. “Tis fit this Rascal shou’d be cheated; but these Rogues will deal too unmercifully with him: I’ll take compassion upon him, and use him more favourably myself”, he says, as he decides to marry Cully off to his ex-mistress. The fact that it is Sir Frederick who puts Cully in his place, Professor Underwood points out, establishes a sense of “degree” between “hero and dupe, wit and fool, gentleman and fop.” The applicability of the word “degree” here shows how this typical trick of Restoration comedy relates to traditional medieval and Renaissance values.

Even so, lest Sir Frederick be taken too seriously, there is always his own ludicrous counterpart, Dufoy, who puts a comic perspective on even the golden mean. Not all the antiheroic contrasts are channeled through Sir Frederick, moreover. Palmer ironically pretends to be a virtuous loyalist like Colonel Bruce, and Wheadle compares the dueling-field to a sheep-field. Palmer can speak the heroic cant of the high plot as he complains of his lack of business:

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I \text{ protest I had rather still be vicious} \\
Then \text{ Owe my Virtue to Necessity.}
\]
The widow is a comic compromise between the virginal heroines of the high plot and the wenches of the low – a woman sexually experienced, but not immorally so. High and low scenes are contrasted individually: the cowardly duel, the honorable duel; the incident of a letter supplies a bridge between low and heroic.

As all talk of wounds suggests, the whole play is a set of variations on the theme of hostility. Sir Frederick’s debauches set the keynote; as described in the opening scene they consist of brawls with watchmen and constables, “beating up” a lady’s quarters, breaking windows, and the like. Counterattacks take place in the morning: “De devil také mé,” announces Dufoy in his French dialect, “if dare be not de whole Regiment Army de Hackené Cochtman, de Linke-boy, de Fydler, and de Shamber-maydé, dat havé bessegé de howsé”. Love, in particular, is compared over and over to fighting. In the high plot, the metaphor takes the form of a stale Petrarchanism – the victory of the mistress’ eyes over the lover. “Beauty’s but an offensive dart; /It is no Armour for the heart”. In the low and middle plots, however, the metaphor becomes an anti-ideal, a reference to the sexual duel: “I have not fenc’d of late,” says Sir Frederick, “unless it were with my Widows Maids; and they are e’en too hard for me at my own weapon”. Grace, when she is trapping Sir Nicholas, must “lye at a little opener ward”. Sir Frederick mocks the convention when he raids the widow’s home in the middle of the night: “Alas, what paints I take thus to unclose/ Those pretty eye-lids which lock’d up my Foes!”. In the high plot, love is the heart-wound inflicted by the mistress’ conquering eyes, but Dufoy’s wound is far more realistic. He explains it in a dialogue with Beaufort’s servant:

*Dufoy.* . . . *it be de voundé dat my Metresse did give me long agoe.*
*Clark.* What? some pretty little English Lady’s crept into your heart?
*Dufoy.* No, but damn’d little English Whore is creepé into my bone beggar.

This colloquy is immediately preceded by a soliloquy in the high plot in which Aurelia mourns the wounds Bruce has inflicted on her heart, wounds she later refers to as her “disease”.

Hostility exists not just between lovers: love itself and all passions are essentially hostile influences, flaming arrows or flames that burn and torture the heart. Passions assault; they raise a tempest in the mind that tosses and tumbles the individual until difficulties are resolved and love reaches its expression in marriage:

“Thus mariners rejoice when winds decrease,
And falling waves seem wearied into Peace.”
Nor is dueling the only metaphor in the lower plots for the hostilities associated with love. Sir Frederick describes his courtship of the widow as fishing and the sharers in the low plot use exactly the same metaphor for their swindle, and refer to it also as trapping. The ideas of tricking and courtship are linked again when Sir Frederick disguises fiddlers as bailiffs and tricks the widow into bailing him out, thereby swindling her: “Nay, I know th’ art spiteful,” he laughs, “and wou’dst fain marry me in revenge; but so long as I have these Guardian Angels about me, I defie thee and all thy Charms: Do skilful Faulkners thus reward their Hawks before they fly the Quarry?” (The pun on “angels” as coins is the only one of many parodies of the religious imagery in the high plot.) Instead of revenge taking the form of a duel, as in the high plots, in the middle plot the widow retains her estate when Sir Frederick marries her for it; that is one “comical revenge” and Betty’s locking Dufoy into a tub is another.

With marrying for money in mind, Etherege supplies his characters with gambling, as well as swindling, as a metaphor for courtship and marriage. “Do you imagine me so foolish as your self,” the widow asks of Sir Frederick, referring to the money of which he has cheated her, “who often ventures all at play, to recover one inconsiderable parcel?” Sir Frederick’s debt is a parody of the obligations (“debts”) of love and honor in the high plot. Just as Beaufort can speak of his “claim” or “title” to Graciana, so Wheadle can call his illicit of his “claim” or “title” to Graciana, so Wheadle can call his illicit relationship with Grace, making “bold, like a young Heir, with his Estate, before it come into his hands”. This “conversion downward” of abstractions to matter, of people to things – Sir Frederick’s former mistresses to furniture or old gowns, the soul to body, reputation to a possession, and the like – becomes a major component of the antiheroic jokes of Restoration comedy, a metaphorical form of hostility.

Love, in the high plot, is divine, a kind of religious devotion to the loved one, directed by the god of love, for passion is too much for mere mortals to control. The low plot takes place in the “Devil” inn, using the “Devil’s bones”, i.e., dice. The “hell” of the low plot is dramatized as complete pretense. One disguise follows another and the basest motives are tricked out as love, friendship, or honor. The high plot lacks any pretense. Every emotion is on the surface, to be talked about, analyzed, displayed. It is as though Etherege were trying “to express the motions” of the spirits, and the affections or passions whose center is the heart,” trying “in a word, to make the soul visible.” (These phrases come from a treatise on painting that Dryden translated for its insights into poetry.) In the high plot, there is no body: “Those flames my tortur’d breast did long conceal”. As opposed to the low plot, the heroics are only a different kind of incompleteness.

Between these bodies, heaven and soulless hell stands Sir Frederick Frolick because he partakes of both sides. He cuts through the pretenses of both high and
low, but is in turn capable of both kinds of conduct, honorable dueling or drunken battles with constables and bailiffs, which are called his “Heroick actions”.

Thus, an elaborate set of contrasts and parallels establishes the somewhat doubtful merits of Sir Frederick Frollick as a golden mean and casts a comic perspective on the doings of all the characters, both high and low. There are the parallel duels, one the paragon of honor, the other of dishonor. There are the parallel near-deaths, Bruce’s real and Sir Frederick’s pretended one, both of which result in declarations of love later recalled. There are the parallel “revenges”: Betty the maid taunts Dufoy the valet for his disease as the widow taunts Sir Frederick for his promiscuity; the maid drugs the valet and locks him in a tub, while the mistress makes her admirer fall in love, and locks him into marriage. All four plot lines are united by the faintest hint of a comic version of death and resurrection. Each one of the men must be laid low before the final matches can take place: Sir Frederick has himself been brought in as though dead; Sir Nicholas falls into a drunken stupor and wakes to find himself about to receive Sir Frederick’s Lucy in marriage; Dufoy is drugged so Betty can lock him into the tub; and Colonel Bruce is nearly killed before Aurelia declares her love. These absurd deaths-and-rebirths fir into what Professor Underwood sees as the basic comic action of Restoration comedy, which, he says, Etherege developed in this play: the protagonist (Sir Frederick—or Sir Nicholas or Colonel Bruce or Dufoy) aspires to a love or libertinism beyond his “degree”, falls (dies) through this pride, and is regenerated by compromise. We might say the hero dies and is reborn at a more reasonable level.

Thus, in the scene where Sir Frederick pretends to be dead to trick the widow into declaring her love, the action runs the whole gamut from utter heroic down to utter antiheroic and comes up again to the middle note. The intrigue is admittedly not very sophisticated, but the scene is central to the structure of the play. In the scene immediately preceding it, Betty locked the drugged Dufoy into the tub. A messenger from the field of honor goes before Sir Frederick’s corpse to announce in solemn poesy the “bloody consequence” of the duel. The widow drops social restraint and reveals her love. “The World’s too poor to recompense this loss,” she cries, but just as Sir Frederick is about to be elevated to the role of Everyman, Dufoy enters, grotesquely locked in his tub, and frightens everyone away with his cries of distress at his master’s death. Sir Frederick starts up, and the fact of death against which the widow’s pretense of indifference had collapsed shrinks again to comic size: “Farewell, Sir;” laughs the widow, “expect at night to see the old man, with his paper Lanthorn and crack’d Spectacles, singing your woful Tragedy to Kitchin-maids and Coblers Prentices,” and the love-duel resumes. The scene ranges in fifty-six lines from high plot to low.
As this sample, the play seems neither overpoweringly funny, nor startlingly new. It uses a number of Restoration devices developed before 1664: the witty lovers, the concentration upon the upper class, and the cynical, competent rake-hero. In many ways, moreover, it stands closer to Tudor-Stuart dramatic techniques than to those of the Restoration, particularly in the religious imagery of the high plot and the extended use of parallelism and analogy. Nevertheless, the play did, for those who first saw it, define a new comedy. Although the dominant humor of this new comedy was to be antiheroic, its techniques grow from the same sense of schism that shows in the rigid patterns of love and honor in heroic drama and heroic verse. Its cynicism is that of a disappointed idealist. Things are either perfect or awful: the hero, if he cannot be a heroic Cavalier, becomes a rake.

The antiheroic comedy found three characteristic devices of language and action. First, love is shown with a strong component of hostility or reluctance (a comic and truer version of the artificial love-honor conflicts of heroic drama). The lovers engage in a verbal duel, pretending indifference and comparing themselves to adversaries. Second, abstractions and ideals are converted downward into physical realities: love into sex, reputation into a possession, and so on. Finally, the outer appearance of a thing or person and its inner nature are shown as separate, indeed, inconsistent, and this division is seen as usually true, not an aberration that the action of the play corrects. The cuckold is not given justice as he would be in an Elizabethan play; rather Cully must set out to pass Frollick’s ex-mistress off as an honest lady to his country neighbors.

Although The Way of the World, written nearly forty years later, is a far more subtle and complex piece, these three elements of Etherege’s first play still pervade it. “The Coldeness of a losing Gamester lessens the Pleasure of the Winner,” says the villain in what is almost the opening speech, “I’d no more play with a Man that slighted his ill Fortune than I’d make Love to a Woman who undervalu’d the Loss of her Reputation.” First, there is the sarcastic sense of hostility: love is a winning against the woman-opponent. Second, the speaker converts reputation downward into something monetary that can be priced and wagered. Third, he assumes the reputation (an appearance) as normally inconsistent with the woman’s “natural” desires. Unpromising as it is, The Comical Revenge sounded the authentic triad.

Questions:
1. Comedy “The Comical Revenge” differed from other plays of the time. In what way?
2. What do we know of Etherege, the man?
3. Describe the three plots of Etherege’s play “The Comical Revenge”.
4. What makes up the antiheroic humour in the play?
5. Name the main characters of the Restoration comedy.
2. W. WYCHERLEY. THE COUNTRY WIFE

The play was extremely popular. The King’s company produced it at Drury Lane in January 1675. Many critics think it is one of the great comedies of all time. With it, Restoration comedy came of age. The significance of the play lies in the contrast and interaction of three closely connected lines of intrigue. Two of three intrigues define a “wrong way”, a limited, half-successful way of life. The third intrigue defines a “right way” that contrasts with the limitations of the other two.

The intrigue of the title makes up one of the wrong ways. Pinchwife, an aging, conceited rake, has married a naive, simple country girl in a hope that her ignorance will keep her faithful to him. But it didn’t happen.

Every step that Pinchwife takes to prevent his wife from joining the society fails. Pinchwife boasts constantly, “I understand the town, Sir”, but he actually knows only enough to hate and fear the liberty the Town offers a woman. His speech is full of quasi-heroic images of hostility. For example:

“Good Wives, and private Soldiers shou’d be Ignorant.”.
“If we do not cheat women, they’ll cheat us; and fraud be justly used with secret enemies, of which a Wife is the most dangerous; and he that has a handsome one to keep, and a Frontier Town, must provide against treachery, rather than open force.

Pinchwife is a speaking name. He fears and distrusts women. He satisfies his aggressive instincts by frustrating and disappointing women, his wife Margery, in particular.

On the contrary, Horner, the rake Pinchwife is most worried about, has achieved a success by a fabulous device. Horner has announced to the town that he is a eunuch after a recent visit to France where he was infected with the pox. His strategy is to find the ladies “that love the sport” and then, by letting them in on the secret, to guarantee the safety of their reputation. Sir Jaspar Fidget is delighted to have found a safe “playfellow” for his wife.

Some critics see Horner as a villain. Mr. Bonamy Dobree compares him to Tartuffe and calls them both “grim, nightmare figures, dominating the helpless, hopeless apes who call themselves civilized men”.

These two lines of intrigue, the Horner plot and the Pinchwife plot, define the play’s “wrong way” – deception. It is Horner’s deceiving others or Pinchwife’s deceiving himself, but the idea is that of forcing an appearance on a contrary nature. These two plots set off town against country. Pinchwife believes that a country wife will be different. “I have marry’d no London wife”,

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he says proudly. “We are a little surer of the breed there [in the country], know what her keeping has been, whether foyl’d or unsound.”.

The difference between town and country is the contrast between Lady Fidget on the one hand, and Margery on the other. “The Country is as terrible to our young English Ladies, as a Monastery to those abroad,” says a ladies’ maid. The country is a place of bad manners and restrictions to them. “The Town” is a place of pleasures, “Plays, Visits, fine Coaches, fine Clothes, Fiddles, Balls, Treats.”. No wonder that Margery, who at first prefers the country, soon learns to like the town. It can be a place of “innocent liberty”, or “free education”. To Margery a “London woman” is the standard of cleverness.

But these are superficial differences. Underneath, human nature is the same in town or country. “I’m sure if you and I were in the country at Cards together”, writes Margery to Horner. “I cou’d not help treading on your Toe under the Table”. Pinchwife’s words “I understand the Town, Sir “sound ironic. He understands the town not enough to know that the human nature underneath the social appearance is what matters, that a woman’s state of mind is the index to the physical fact of her chastity, not vice versa.

1. The only difference between town and country is the amount of pretense each involves. It is worth noting that while Horner’s ruse is necessary for his seduction of Lady Fidget, it plays no part in his seduction of Margery Pinchwife. She asks Horner: “Don’t I see every day at London here, Women leave their first Husbands, and go and live with other Men as their Wives.” And she adds: “You shall be my Husband now”.

Contrasted both to the elaborated earthiness of the town wife and the direct earthiness of the Country Wife, there is the “right way” of the lovers, Harcourt and Alithea. This is the third line of intrigue. Alithea, an intelligent and sophisticated girl, is about to marry the fop Sparkish, whom she has accepted only because he shows no jealousy, even when Harcourt, the lover-hero, and Horner’s friend, declares his love and urges her to drop Sparkish and marry him. Sparkish can afford to be indifferent because he only wants to marry her estate. After Margery’s disguise as Alithea, Sparkish accuses the latter of having given herself to Horner. So Alithea drops the fop and marries Harcourt who still believes in her. The action of this third line of intrigue is the education of Alithea. She has to learn not to substitute appearance (Sparkish’s lack of jealousy) for inner nature (Harcourt’s merits).

She must learn a wisdom of ends, a faith in love, a willingness to prefer love as an end to, “fortune, liberty, or title.”

Harcourt’s speech is full of upward, celestial, religious images. For him Alithea is the “Divine, Heavenly Creature” ; “the most glorious Creature in the
World” ; he loves her “with the best, and truest love in the world”, “above the World or the most Glorious part of it”; his love “can no more be equal’d in the world, than that Heavenly form of yours”. It is symbolic that Harcourt disguises himself as a priest to court her.

On the contrary, practical reality dominates the metaphors of all but Harcourt and Alithea. To Pinchwife, a woman is a possession, like money. “Our Sisters and Daughters”, says Pinchwife, “like Usurers money, are safest, when put out: but our Wives, like their Writings, never safe, but in our Closets under Lock and key”. Pinchwife’s and Sir Jaspar’s concern with a supposedly practical reality contrasts with Harcourt and Alithea’s achievement of an impractical reality, romantic love.

In the pretenses of the “low” plots, love and honour are converted downward to physical facts. Thus, honor to Alithea’s maid is “a disease in the head, like the Megrim, or Falling-sickness”. Love is something one can be cheated of, just as money is “the common Mistriss”. Love is most often compared to food: the town offers “such variety of dainties” rather than the “course, constant, swinging stomachs in the Country”. “A woman mask’d”, says Pinchwife, “like a cover’d Dish, gives a Man curiosity, and appetite, when, it may be, uncover’d, ‘twou’d turn his stomach”. “A Rival”, says Sparkish, is as good sawce for a married Man to a Wife, as an Orange to Veale”. Even, Mrs. Margery, walking about London, cries with outrageous innocence,” I haven’t half my belly full of sights yet”. Disease, too, is a word for love: “The London disease”. “Wife and Sister,” complains Pinchwife, “are names which make us expect Love and Duty, Pleasure and Comfort, but we find ‘em plagues and torments”.

The action of the play develops the right-way-wrong-way comparison. The wrong way is symbolized by Horner, the maimed man. In his way of life, limited to the world, the flesh, and the devil, things are never what they seem to be. Two kinds of deception, deceiving others and deceiving oneself, shape the absurdities of human life. One deceives others by pretending to a character one does not have. Horner pretends to be a “shadow”, and a “sign of a Man” to hide his intrigues. He pretends to virtue by assuring the town he has been forced into it. Lady Fidget pretends to honour “as criticks to wit, only by censuring others”. “Your Virtue is your greatest Affectation, Madam,” Horner calmly assures her. Lady Fidget adopts the outward appearance of a woman of honour to hide her inner, lecherous nature. Sparkish also pretends – he is a remarkably complex instance of the type-character of the fop. He pretends to conversational wit: that is his foppishness. But his foppishness is itself a pretense to cover up his small, scheming nature. Under both these pretenses, Sparkish seems to possess a self-serving wit. Just as Horner uses his well-known lechery to create an appearance
of virtue, so Sparkish rather cleverly uses his own disinterest in Alithea. It enables him to be unjealous, and that lack of jealousy persuades Alithea he has a real faith in her and nearly enables him to marry her estate.

But pretending to a nature does not bring results. First, by long usage, it corrupts both one’s pretended outer appearance and one’s inner nature. Continued pretense gives the deceiver a certain cynical wisdom about human nature: an awareness that since one’s own appearance does not reveal one’s own nature, the same thing is probably true of the rest of mankind. “Most men”, says Harcourt, “are the contraries to that they wou’d seem”.

Harcourt is opposed to the wise in the play and seems bumbling and ineffective. His schemes consistently misfire. He is ridiculed by the fools of the play, Sparkish and Pinchwife. Sincerity is the essence of the apparent folly here. Everyone laughs at his sincere declarations of love, and they get him nowhere until Alithea finally learns the difference between the superficial appearance of faith and real faith. The real key with which Harcourt unlocks the situation is his offer to marry Alithea, even when she has apparently given herself to Horner. He succeeds only when he shows he is willing to make a fool of himself for her. In the end, though, he achieves everything. They form a real union with the woman he loves.

Wycherley contrasts the women, too. Margery, the naive country wife is set off against Alithea, the sophisticated London girl. Here, sophistication wins. Alithea’s strength comes from her knowledge of town ways. Wycherley is comparing two kinds of wisdom, a wisdom of means and a wisdom of results. To achieve the results, one must have the wisdom of means, the “free education” of the town. “Margery” cannot support her effort and fails. She knows she wants love, but she cannot get it. She lacks the social experience to succeed. She cannot translate her love for Horner into an enduring social form.

This is the measure of success in the play – the extent to which the characters can free themselves from pretense by openly translating their “natural” desires into visible, enduring social forms. Margery’s love for Horner is open and honest, but she cannot translate it into the outward fact of marriage, even though she calls Horner her “husband”. The only open unpretended impulse that can be translated into permanent social form is Harcourt’s love for Alithea. Only these two are completely successful, first, because they know how to achieve their aims in the social framework of pretense and, second, because they each realize the importance of an aim that goes beyond the social and answers one’s inner nature.

Harcourt and Alithea are the most successful and the most right ethically; they seem foolish, but turn out to be wiser than all the rest. This is the basic division between Harcourt and Alithea on the one hand and all the rest of the
characters on the other. Margery stands at the centre, and perhaps this is why she is the title character. Her country naivety links her to the sincerity of Harcourt and Alithea, but she cannot make her sincere aims survive.

This comedy has a broader meaning than the term “comedy of manners” suggests. The presence of an ideal in a realistic situation signals the beginning of the eighteenth-century sentimentalism. *The Country Wife*, by showing an ideal in a realistic context, shows both the beginning of the great period of Restoration comedy and its decay.

Questions:
2. Name the characters of the play.
3. State the main lines of intrigue in the play *The Country Wife*.
4. Comment on the contrast between town and country as shown in the play.
5. What characters represent the “low” plot and the “high” plot in the comedy?
6. Can we name the play *The Country Wife* by W. Wycherley the “comedy of manners”?
3. W. WYCHERLEY. THE PLAIN-DEALER

No self-respecting commentator on Restoration comedy passes by Wycherley’s last play without leaving behind a purple passage of tribute. This is the one play that everyone calls moral and Wycherley is the one Restoration dramatist who all the commentators think shows an earnest and proper disgust with his age. This play is more discussed than any other Restoration comedy, except The Way of the World, yet no play is more commonly misunderstood. The Plain-Dealer, first produced in December 1676, is supposed to be an unequivocal damnation of Restoration society.

The confusing factor is the title character, the nominal hero Manly. Wycherley describes him as “of an honest, surly, nice humour . . . and chusing a Sea-life, only to avoid the World”. Most critics, despite this ambiguous description, assume that Manly speaks for Wycherley. As a result, the play has had its critical ups and downs. The critic John Dennis recorded its reception when it was first produced; “The Town, as the Author has often told me, appeared Doubtfull what Judgment to Form of it,” and it took all the efforts of the court wits to get it accepted. Dryden called it “one of the most bold, most general, and most useful satires which has ever been presented on the English theatre.” Hazlitt praised the play for his Romantic readers with only a little more precision: “It penetrates to the core; it shows the immorality and hateful effects of duplicity, by shewing it fixing its harpy fangs in the heart of an honest and worthy man.” Leigh Hunt, however, described Manly as having a “gusto of desecrated animal passion, fit only for some ferocious sensualist who believed himself as great a rascal as he thought everybody else.” Macaulay damned it, and Meredith called it a “coarse prose adaptation of the Misanthrope, stuffed with lumps of realism.” Finally, however, The Cambridge History of English Literature, Volume VIII, appeared. “Here at last,” notes Heldt, “it is openly and distinctly said that Wycherley was a moralist.” “The savage blasphemer in the halls of beauty and of art,” declared The Cambridge History, “is, after all, at heart a moralist, indignantly flagellating vice as well as gloating over her deformities.”

The decision that Wycherley is a moralist “makes the character of the Plain-Dealer, despite everything,” a standard literary history says, “a strong and personal creation; the symbol of a furious, incoherent, powerless anger of the traditional English temperament, against the treachery of a refined corruption which captures it through the senses, dominates its intellect, and leaves nothing save the fitful straining of its will.” Wycherley’s attitude toward the Restoration comes to be understood, by Joseph Wood Krutch, for example, as a “genuine and savage disgust at its baseness.” The decision that Wycherley is a moralist leads also to a comparison, invariably invidious, to Moliere, for, as one author says,
“The boldness of Wycherley’s satire need not be disputed, but the hypocrisy which he lashed was not that of vicious passion.” “Compare Molière’s Alceste in the *Misanthrope*,” said William Archer, “with the foul-mouthed brute into whom Wycherley converted him in *The Plain Dealer*, and you have the measure of the difference between the French and English comedy of the period. It is in very truth Hyperion to a satyr.”

The comparison to Moliere led only to further confusion, for Rousseau had decided that Alceste was “un homme droit, sincere, estimable, un veritable homme de bien,” and that Moliere had treated him very shabbily indeed. Alceste’s comic nature, however, became re-established, but Manly’s comic nature has not been – even for the very writers who see that Alceste is comic. Oddly enough, it is assumed that Wycherley’s attitude is the same as Rousseau’s, that “the social folly ridiculed in Moliere becomes the virtue praised in Wycherley.” *The Plain-Dealer* is interpreted as a ridicule directed “not at society, at foibles, or vanity, but at mankind itself,” and even the leading authority on Restoration comedy assumes that Manly equals Wycherley: “Wycherley threw himself into the character, and with his rage for the absolute came to an extreme of furious passion, imagining himself in the worst conceivable situations, so that every event would prove him right in his indignation.” The problem becomes further confused by the introduction of biographical evidence, for Wycherley was nicknamed “Manly” and the “Plain Dealer.” Wycherley’s dedication of the play to Mother Bennett, a notorious procuress, in words that parallel some of Manly’s speeches in the play, tends to support this interpretation.

There are, however, some two or three commentators who question this identification and its relevance. Professor Fujimura reexamines the biographical evidence and concludes, quite correctly, that what we know about the actual Wycherley suggests that he was not like Manly at all. Thus, Granville wrote: “Congreve is your familiar Acquaintance, you may judge of Wycherley by him: They have the same manly way of Thinking and Writing, the same Candour, Modesty, Humanity, and Integrity of Manners.” We should remember, too, that Dryden said of Wycherley, he “sometimes . . . says more than he needs . . . but never more than pleases.” Professor Fujimura goes on to point out that the motto of the play prefers ridicule to severity, that the prologue is ironic and urbane rather than savage, and that Captain Manly throughout the play acts ridiculously when compared to his sophisticated lieutenant, Freeman. Miss Kathleen Lynch points out that Manly acts throughout like a madman. Professor Chorney, from a consideration of seventeenth-century “characters,” literary vignettes of personality types, concludes: “The real character of Manly is, of course, neither serious, philosophic, nor misanthropic: Wycherley’s contemporaries would have
recognized him as a ‘humours’ character and an object of satire.” Congreve, at least, felt this way when he re-drew the character as Heartwell in *The Old Batchelor*.

In fact, we would have to assume that Manly is actually not heroic at all, but blundering, blustering, and self-deceived. A sea-captain, Manly returns from fighting the Dutch to find the one woman he believed in, his fiancee Olivia, surrounded by foppish admirers, married, and refusing to give him back the money with which he entrusted her. When he sees that Olivia has conceived a sudden desire for his cabin-boy, Manly has this person keep an assignation with her, intending to substitute himself and sleep with her out of revenge. In the dark, Olivia meets her new lover (and the concealed Manly), but her husband arrives. In the resulting confusion, the money is returned, and Olivia’s unlucky husband turns out to be Vernish, Manly’s one supposedly true friend. The cabin-boy, however, turns out to be Fidelia, a girl who disguised herself to follow Manly’s merit. Manly rewards her with the somewhat doubtful benefit of his love.

Manly is a dupe, not a hero. His railing only blinds himself. Neither is he a moralist. What he objects to in society is not wrongdoing, but the unwillingness to admit it — pretense and affectation. He carries his demands for sincerity to absurd lengths, holding that “a true heart admits but of one friendship, as of one love”. His ideal of sincerity makes him unfit for civilized living: “I rather choose to go where honest, downright Barbarity is profest, where men devour one another like generous hungry Lyons and Tygers, not like Crocodiles; where they think the Devil white, of our complexion, and I am already so far an Indian”. Ironically, Olivia deceives him by the very kind of play-acting he despises: “I knew he loved his own singular moroseness so well, as to dote upon any Copy of it; wherefore I feign’d an hatred to the World too, that he might love me in earnest”. Manly’s virtue is his failing: he cannot — or is unwilling to — tell the copy from the real.

He boasts of his knowledge of human falsity, then rejects his one true friend, his easy-going lieutenant, Freeman, and embraces Vernish, saying, “Nay, here is a Friend indeed”. Even his sailors realize the absurdity of his foibles: “Dost thou remember after we had tug’d hard the old leaky Long-boat, to save his life, when I welcom’d him ashore, he gave me a box on the ear, and call’d me fawning Water-dog”. Manly is hardly virtuous himself; he prefers his affairs with prostitutes whom he respects (as Wycherley in the prologue does Mother Bennett) to normal social intercourse because, he says, there is no hypocrisy in the paid relationships. The fact that he has virtually cut himself off from other people makes him all the easier to deceive, as ‘Olivia is shrewd enough to discover: “He that distrusts most the World, trusts most to himself, and is but the more easily deceiv’d, because he thinks he can’t be deceiv’d: his cunning is like the Coward’s Sword, by which he is
oftner worsted, than defended”. He says of Olivia and Vernish, “I have such proofs of their faith, as cannot deceive me”, but never says what those proofs are or, indeed, could be. The attitude of the other people in the play proves conclusively that Manly is not to be taken seriously. If he were, the other people would respect him but hate him; actually, they like him and laugh at him.

The one thing that makes us think of Manly as heroic is his raging, furious honesty. Because his own exterior is a true reflection of his inner self, he expects the same of others and is enraged when he does not find it. That rage is the only large, heroic thing about him, and even though it expends itself on absurdities, it is in some sense praiseworthy. A psychologist, I think, would say that Manly felt too guilty about his own failings. His guilt makes him aggressive and hostile and makes him punish himself” by attacking insincerity or “adjustment” in others. By these attacks he not only punishes himself by tempting others to dislike him, but at the same time he persuades himself that he is better than they are because he judges them. His concept of plain dealing is simply raw hostility. One thinks of a tolerant, relaxed attitude as plain-dealing, but Manly thinks it should be to “tell my promising Friend, the Courtier, he has a bad memory”; “tell the great Lawyer . . . that he takes oftner Fees to hold his tongue, than to speak”; “tell the new Officer, who bought his Employment lately, that he is a Coward”; “tell the Scribler of Honour, that Heraldry were a prettier and fitter Study, for so fine a Gentleman, than Poetry”; and “tell the holy Lady too, she lies \\ with her Chaplain”. Manly’s faith that these insults will reform people is a touching measure of his naivete.

In any case, all the brouhaha about Manly’s rages at pretense has obscured three rather more striking features of the play. After all, there is nothing very novel in the plot of the perfidious woman or in the contrast between Manly’s passion for sincerity and his lieutenant Freeman’s complaisance at pretense. Far more evocative are three strange unrealities: the odd ending, the character of Fidelia, and the presence of Eliza, Olivia’s cousin.

Eliza is highly significant, even though she scarcely appears except to defend The Country Wife against Olivia. Their argument, in which Olivia hypocritically attacks the morals of the play and Eliza tolerantly defends them, is a rather striking feature in the play. This English version of the Critique de l’Ecole des femmes seems at first glance an outrageously irrelevant digression. Actually, it is an organic part of the action — and not a new trick with Wycherley. In The Gentleman Dancing-Master, two characters in the play discuss the merits of two of the actors in the play. There, as in The Plain-Dealer, the effect is to emphasize the “playness” of the play, to break the dramatic illusion and remind the audience that the actors are really just play-acting. As such, this episode keynotes the theme in The Plain-Dealer — pretense.

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Eliza is by no means “principally a mouthpiece for the author, without any real part in the dramatic action.” She serves as a reflector for Fidelia just as Freeman does for Manly. Though she does not play any causal part in the plot, her presence develops a tension. There is a natural relation between her and Freeman. They are much alike and ideally suited to each other, and the fact that this relationship is conspicuously and completely undeveloped constitutes an important part of the meaning of the play as a whole. Like Freeman, she knows “the Town.” She contrasts with Olivia, and their dialogue about The Country Wife reveals the exact nature of Olivia’s villainy to anyone, like Freeman and Eliza, wiser than Manly. She knows “A Woman betrays her want of modesty, by shewing it publickly in a Play-house, as much as a Man does his want of courage by a quarrel there; for the trully modest and stout say least” and because “we ought to leave off dissembling since ‘tis grown of no use to us; for all wise observers understand us now a-dayes, as they do Dreams, Almanacks, and Dutch Gazetes, by the contrary”. “Grimaces of honour, and artificial modesty, disparage a Woman’s real Virtue, as much as the use of white and red does the natural complexion: and you must use very, very little, if you wou’d have it thought your own”. In other words, Eliza knows that in society a person’s appearance and nature are normally not the same and that all intelligent people realize this.

Fidelia, like Eliza, is another odd and highly significant factor in the play. The most important thing about her is that she is unreal, scarcely more than a literary convention — the girl who, disguised as a boy, follows and serves the indifferent object of her affections. It is almost as though Wycherley had borrowed her from heroic drama. Bonamy Dobree calls her a “curious evocation from Fletcherian romance . . . flitting through the play as an angel might flit through purgatory if conjured up in the imagination of a tortured soul.” She is Illyrian, the highly unlikely embodiment of all of Manly’s unreal demands, completely out of place in the realistic London the rest of the characters inhabit. Her unreality makes her in some sense an ideal of sincerity and devotion: “There is nothing certain in the World, Sir,” she tells Manly, “but my Truth, and your Courage”. Her presence, putting an unreal, ideal goodness in a realistic situation is, by the way, an important step toward eighteenth-century sentimental comedy, but typical of sentimental comedy, she cannot really be considered an ideal, not, at least, by any sensible standard. “The north” that bred this superhuman fidelity is, to the London of the play, an Erewhon like “the West Indies” where Manly hopes to find barbarity outrightly professed or the sea where he could vent his rage with honor. Significantly, Fidelia was willing to follow him to both these places. Her love for Manly, like Manly’s love of sincerity, overrides any realistic sense of limit or decorum she might have and ultimately degrades her. Not even
a twentieth-century father would care to have his daughter disguise herself and join the Navy to pursue a man like Manly. Neither is she the kind of contained heroine (like Harriet) that the Restoration liked; on the contrary, she is guilty of a deplorable degree of “wildness.” Eliza is the admired heroine, just as Freeman is socially more desirable than Manly. Fidelia is ideal only in supernatural, no realistic terms; from a realistic point of view, she is degraded and sordid. Her name, Grey, embodies the ambiguity of her nature.

But surely the most striking feature of The Plain-Dealer is neither Manly’s rage for sincerity nor even the unreal Fidelia nor the unnecessary Eliza: it is the utterly artificial part of the ending in which we learn on the last page that Fidelia is an heiress who left behind two thousand pounds a year and multitudes of admirers to disguise herself as Manly’s cabin-boy and so adore his merits. It makes the final statement about the basic theme of the play pretense.

In this, as in the other Restoration comedies we have considered, one of the basic themes is the contrast between appearance and nature. It is developed in part by talk. Manly, of course, rails constantly at pretense, as does Olivia; Freeman and Eliza (Olivia’s tolerant cousin) both discuss the problem. Less explicitly, but more effectively, the imagery of the play develops the contrast or conflict between appearance and nature. On the side of appearance are the references to clothes and customs; on the “natural” side are Manly’s (and others’) furious images of animals and money. Indeed, the whole action takes place within the convention that love and money are the two things that motivate human conduct, the two universal mainsprings. “Those two grateful businesses,” Olivia calls them, “which all prudent Women do together, [secure] money and pleasure”. This equalizing of love and money is a kind of simile, the conversion downward we have seen before in Restoration comic diction; it suggests, too, the prostitution Manly sees everywhere. Yet even Manly feels he must give with his love, those “certain Appurtenances to a Lover’s heart, call’d Jewels, which alwayes go along with it”; he gives his money first to Olivia and then to Fidelia.

The minor characters must be understood, in this as in other Restoration comedies, in terms of their attitude toward the difference between appearance and nature. Novel and Plausible, Olivia’s admirers, are typical Restoration fools in that they concentrate all their attentions on externals. Plausible insists on forms and ceremonies, Novel on clothes, gossip and false wit, insisting, “A man by his dress, as much as by any thing, shews his wit and judgment, nay, and his courage too”. The things they find in themselves that a lady might like are revealing: the title Viscount — the name Novel; “the softness, and respectfulness of my behaviour” — “the briskness of my Raillery”; “the sleepiness of my Eyes” — “the fierceness of mine”; “the gentleness of my smile” — “the subtily of my leer”; “the whiteness
of my teeth” — “my janty way of picking them”. They are, in short, all outside, no inside: as Manly calls them, “these two Pulvillio Boxes, these Essence Bottles”, “Parrots of the Town, Apes and Ecchoes of Men only”. What Manly fails to see is that their affectations and hypocrisies oil the social wheels and allow hostilities to become smoothed over under pretenses. Novel and Plausible get along reasonably well together, even though they detest each other.

The subplot, too, is based on pretense. It traces the efforts of Freeman, Manly’s complaisant, and therefore much criticized, lieutenant, to marry the rich, litigious Widow Blackacre. He succeeds finally in discovering that her son is really over twenty-one and is being defrauded by his mother, and he uses this information to force her to settle an annuity on himself.

Major Oldfox, Freeman’s rival for the hand of the Widow Blackacre, concentrates his attentions on appearances, his “parts,” literary and intellectual pretensions pasted on a corrupt and senescent Roundhead. The widow herself by her litigiousness concentrates on externals, for law is, as manners are, “the Arts and Rules, the prudent of the World walk by”. Lawyers, we are told, substitute form for substance; as one of them says: “I will, as I see cause, extenuate, or examplifie Matter of Fact; baffle Truth with Impudence; answer Exceptions with Questions, tho’ never so impertinent; for Reasons give ‘em words; for Law and Equity, Tropes and Figures: and so relax and enervate the sinews of their Argument, with the oyl of my Eloquence”. The widow has tried to make her son over into a lawyer by forcing him to wear “the modest seemly Garb of Gown and Cap,” and giving him an “inns of Chancery breeding”, though in his real nature he is simply a dull country squire. The widow herself has become “this Volume of shrivel’d blur’d Parchments and Law, this Attornies Desk”.

The major characters must also be understood in terms of their relationship to the conflict between appearances and nature. Thus, though Freeman is the one true friend Manly has, Manly constantly vituperates him because he is willing to admit and accept a difference between social, outward appearance and inner nature. Freeman, like Molière’s Philinte, contrasts in this respect with the misanthrope — and that contrast is central to the significance of the play as a whole. Thus, in the hunt for love and money in which all the characters — even Manly and Fidelia — are engaged, Freeman succeeds by pretending and by knowing about pretense. He can, for example, see through someone like Olivia who is opaque to everyone else in the play (but Eliza): “She stands in the Drawing-room, like the Glass, ready for all Comers, to set their gallantry by her: and like the Glass too, lets no man go from her, unsatisfi’d with himself”. Freeman can reach inside the widow’s pretenses, catch the natural fact she is concealing (that her “minor” has come into his majority), and manipulate that
reality to achieve his ends. More important than his success, he has a tolerance that compares most favorably with Manly’s fanaticism:

Manly. Why, thou art a Latitudinarian in Friendship, that is no Friend; thou dost side with all Mankind, but wilt suffer for none. Thou art indeed... the Pink of Courtesie, therefore hast no Friendship; for Ceremony and great Professing, renders Friendship as much suspected, as it does Religion.

Freeman. And no Professing, no Ceremony at all in Friendship, were as unnatural and as undecent as in Religion.

Freeman is far more sophisticated than Manly, simply because he knows appearance does not normally reflect nature.

Olivia, on the other hand, wants society to believe that appearance reveals or even is nature. She, like the Widow Blackacre, uses her concentration on externals to ruin others by forged evidence. They are natural mates: when Olivia is trapped at the end, the widow cries, “I’ll follow the Law for you,” and Olivia snarls, “And I my Revenge”. For Olivia’s own pretenses and affectations to deceive others, people in general must believe that appearance is all of reality. Though she knows appearances do not necessarily represent a true state of affairs, she insists that they be treated as though they did. That is the essential difference between Eliza’s and Olivia’s reactions to The Country Wife:

Olivia. I say, the lewdest, filthiest thing, is his China; nay, I will never forget the beastly Author his China: he has quite taken away the reputation of poor China it self, and sully’d the most innocent and pretty Furniture of a Ladies Chamber, insomuch that I was fain to break all my defil’d Vessels. You see I have none left; nor you, I hope.

Eliza. You’ll pardon me, I cannot think the worse of my China, for that of the Play-house.

Eliza realizes that the play-action is only a kind of pretense; Olivia insists that it — like her own pretenses — be treated as an objective reality.

Manly’s virtue is like Olivia’s villainy: he, too, demands that appearance be thought of as reflecting real, inner nature, though for a different reason. Because his own outward appearance reveals his real nature, he expects the appearances of others to do the same. His rhetoric of honesty and hers of hypocrisy are almost indistinguishable:

I cou’d not laugh at a Quibble, tho’ it were a fat Privy Counsellor’s; nor praise a Lord’s ill Verses, tho’ I were my self the Subject; nor an old Lady’s young looks, tho’ I were her Woman; nor sit to a vain young Simile-maker, tho’ he flatter’d me; in short, I cou’d not glote upon a man when he comes into a Room, and laugh at him when he goes out; I cannot rail at the absent, to flatter the standers by, I...
One must look underneath the linguistic surface to tell if the speaker speaks truth, but Manly is unwilling to admit that he must.

As in Wycherley’s other plays, the intrigue is tailored to bring out the difference between two heroes. In *The Country Wife* they were a rake-hero and a lover-hero. In this play, they are two kinds of plain dealers, a misanthrope and a “Complier with the Age.” At the outset, Manly knows only that most people use appearance to hide their real feelings. This is only superficial wisdom, only the beginning of knowledge. Armed with only this one insight, Manly has no idea of underlying realities. He is easily deceived by Olivia’s hypocritical railing as Freeman would not be or as Eliza in fact is not. For Freeman knows what Manly does plus the fact that despite inconsistency between appearance and nature, the inner nature may be good (as Fidelia’s turns out to be) or bad (like Olivia’s).

Wycherley uses darkness to reveal the truth. “Kind darkness,” Olivia calls it, “that frees us Lovers from scandal and bashfulness, from the censure of our Gallants, and the World”, “for young Lovers, like game Cocks, are made bolder, by being kept without light”. Darkness, in other words, by rendering appearances invisible, brings inner nature out. “Wuh!” says Manly at Olivia’s behavior in the dark, “she makes Love like a Devil in a Play; and in this darkness, which conceals her Angel’s face; if I were apt to be afraid, I shou’d think her a Devil”. The first scene of darkness, Olivia’s first meeting with her lover, creates confusion, but, as in Wycherley’s first play, the second resolves it when Manly and Vernish make themselves known.

The action of *The Plain-Dealer* is to educate the two idealists, Manly and Fidelia, by dragging them through the very mire they despise. Fidelia tries to escape the deceptive world, but she cannot and is forced into the worldly requirement of pretense. She has to disguise herself to follow Manly — “Love has chang’d your outside,” Vernish tells her. She is wise enough not to tell Manly of her pretense or her love until she can do:

Under this habit, such convincing Acts
Of loving Friendship for him, that through it
He first might find out both my Sex and Love.

But the first such act is to pimp for him, and she is naive enough to think that Olivia’s contempt will cool Manly’s love. She is forced to learn, as Manly is, that Olivia’s pretenses of love and virtue will convince sooner than her own proofs — that reality itself is part pretense and deception is a condition of existence.

Manly too has to learn. The widow drags him off to the law courts, where he is forced to witness in quantity the very hypocrisy he hates. At first, he tries to fend off the hypocritical lawyers with force and ends up with three quarrels
and two law suits. Then he learns that a better way is to pretend that he needs a lawyer to do charity work in forma pauperis, and Freeman comments, “So, you have now found a way to be rid of people without quarrelling”. In the larger action, Manly is forced to use deception to free himself of Olivia, just as in this miniature action, he deceives to rid himself of the lawyer. He confesses:

*Manly.* I dissembled last night.
*Fidelia.* Heavens!

He begins to win his revenge only when he gets behind Olivia’s pretenses and uses Fidelia to manipulate her lust (just as Freeman uses Squire Jerry to manipulate the widow’s law lust). Manly even lies to his friend Vernish (when he supposes him still true) in saying that he has slept with Olivia. This lie, and his use of Fidelia to mask his access to Olivia, are the rather sordid and dishonest means of his final revenge. Compared to Manly, Freeman is far more honest. His proposals to the widow are frank offers to gratify her sexual desires if she will satisfy his monetary ones.’ Though he blackmauls her at the end, the widow is a villainess, and Freeman asserts her son’s rights as well as his own. Moreover, in the process, two of the widow’s professional perjurers are arrested.

Though Manly dissembles even more than Freeman, and admits it, he never acquires Freeman’s skill:

How hard it is to be an Hypocrite!
At least to me, who am but newly so.
I thought it once a kind of Knavery,
Nay, Cowardice, to hide ones faults; but now
The common frailty, Love, becomes my shame.

The fact that this speech is in verse is significant. Fidelia and Manly speak the only verse in the play (except the tag ends of scenes), and they each speak it only when they admit their own pretenses. Their love-speeches at the end when they have stopped pretending are in prose. It is as though verse were the only medium adequate to the stress felt by an idealist forced to accede to the way of the world. Fidelia sums up their problem:

O Heavens! is there not punishment enough
In loving well, it you will have’t a Crime;
But you must add fresh Torments daily to’t,
And punish us like peevish rivals still,
Because we fain would find a Heaven here?
Manly and Fidelia must be taught their own mortality; they must realize, despite their attacks on pretense, that it is a condition of existence to deceive and be deceived by the contradictions between appearance and nature. There is no Heaven here. Manly’s reformation in the finale consists of acquiring exactly the knowledge that Freeman had at the beginning:

I will believe there are now in the World
Good natur’d Friends, who are not Prostitutes,
And handsome Women worthy to be Friends.

Manly must learn, in other words, that though dissimulation may be an evil, there are more basic goods and evils concealed beneath its surface.

But surely no feature of this play, not even the character of Manly, shouts for attention more than the complete artificiality of the ending. Just as there are two plots and two heroes, Freeman and Manly, there are really two endings, one plausible and realistic, and one out of some romantic Never-Never-land. In the realistic ending, the villains, Olivia and Vernish, are punished by the appearances they have misused. Vernish is left believing that Olivia has deceived him with Manly, Olivia’s reputation is ruined by appearances, and Freeman forces the Widow Blackacre to give him an annuity. But Wycherley carefully omits what would have been a real “happy ending” for Freeman. The obvious, natural ending would have Eliza and Freeman meet and fall in love and Manly go off to his self-inflicted exile. This is substantially what Moliere does. Wycherley, however, gives Freeman only the annuity be sought and rewards Manly beyond his wildest dreams and by the most outrageous kind of improbability.

Freeman’s final realistic simile, “I think most of our quarrels to the World, are just such as we have to a handsome Women : only because we cannot enjoy her, as we wou’d do,” matches Eliza’s earlier statement, “The World is but a constant Keeping Gallant, whom we fail not to quarrel with, when any thing crosses us, yet cannot part with’t for our hearts”. The tension of the uncompleted, even unbegun, match between these two natural mates suggests how they are confined to the social world of their own making.

A director would make the point by the grouping in the finale — the only scene where Freeman and Eliza appear together on the stage. The minor characters would be placed upstage, Manly brought downstage off-center by. She stands on one side of him and Freeman somewhat further off on the other side. Eliza would stand downstage next to Freeman, closer to him than he is to Manly, but not so close as Fidelia to Manly. Eliza has no lines and her position in the foreground would raise the very question the play asks: how can
the blundering, blustering Manly marry an heiress, when the sleek, competent Freeman fails even to meet the girl he is obviously so well suited to?

For Manly is given a blatantly unlikely “happy ending”: he is rewarded with the utter and abject devotion of a lovely, virtuous heiress, herself the highly unlikely embodiment of all of Manly’s idealistic demands. Fidelia is a pastoral heroine, who simply does not belong in the realistic London to the rest of the play. She is, like the ending as a whole, a trick. The artificiality of her character and of the ending, like the defense of The Country Wife, remind us of the “playness” of the play. The play becomes not a realistic representation of life, but a comment on it. We are, in The Plain-Dealer, to remember what the prologue said:

And where else, but on Stages do we see
Truth pleasing, or rewarded Honesty?

On the stage, the realists, Freeman and Eliza, are confined to the real world: no Fidelias or other miracles come their way. Manly, on the other hand, is rewarded artificially and unrealistically. Freeman achieves only his limited social objective; Manly, however, is rewarded as though he were touched by God.

Indeed, what Kierkegaard said of Abraham applies to Manly: “There was one who was great by reason of his power, and one who was great by reason of his wisdom, and one who was great by reason of his hope, and one who was great by reason of his love; but Abraham was greater than all, great by reason of his power whose strength is impotence, great by reason of his wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by reason of his hope whose form is madness, great by reason of the love which is hatred of oneself.” Freeman also offers a parallel to Kierkegaard’s thought: he is the ordinary hero, whose achievement is confined to a worldly plane and who must be judged by ordinary ethical criteria. Manly, however, is the “knight of faith” who has enlarged his desires (his love of honesty) to his whole being, resigned them (when disappointed in Olivia), and then turned around and achieved them through his union with Fidelia. He and his achievement cannot be understood except in terms of a half-rational absolute: through him we get a glimpse of a supernatural quality beyond good and evil. The artificiality of virtue’s triumph hints at another world where such miraculous absurdities can be.

The Plain-Dealer, then, does not simply make a statement about the baseness of the Restoration. In a uniquely comic way it asks a question: Can an idealist find his ideal in this imperfect world in which appearances can never really be consistent with nature? Wycherley offers only a hint at a supernatural
answer, and that laughingly. It is in this sense that the play is as Dryden said, “one of the most bold, most general, and most useful satires”; it is, indeed, a satire on all the world. The wise man like Freeman accepts the contradiction between appearance and nature and deals with the inner, important attributes; the fools like Novel and Plausible are unaware of it and pursue vain outward appearances; the villains (Olivia and Vernish) make use of the contradiction to defraud others. But finally, there is a special kind of folly, the idealist’s, touched with godliness, that tries to escape the paradox, to run away to sea or the West Indies: this is Manly’s folly and Fidelia’s. In this sense, The Plain-Dealer is, like all great comic art, encomium moriae, the praise of Manly’s folly in fighting the contradictions of society and Freeman’s in accepting them. The play becomes an almost cosmic right-way-wrong-way simile: by showing us two wrong ways of this world, the ending implies a right way — improbable, unreal, in short, supernatural.

Having understood this, we can understand Wycherley’s relation to Manly. The playwright who devised intrigues to work out the exact limits of Manly’s and Freeman’s virtues can hardly be said to share in Manly’s blind rage or his inability to find any merit in Freeman’s position. On the contrary, Wycherley’s identification with Manly is not savage, but, if it exists at all, jocular, self-deprecating, as though he were saying, “This is the kind of fool I am.” As he wrote in his Epigrams:

Every Man is a Player on the Stage of the World, and acts a different Part from his own natural Character, more to please the World, as more he cheats it.

The wise Man, who lives in the World, must move and do as a Man in a Crowd, that is rather carried than goes his own Pace; for if he thinks to advance in spight of the Opposition, he will be spurned, elbowed, squee’d, and trodden down, or else heaved from the Ground, and born up upon others Shoulders, whether he will or no. Both things happened to Manly, to Wycherley — and to Alceste.

After all the opprobrium that has been heaped on this play by American and English critics and all their praise for Le Misanthrope, I would hesitate to say that Wycherley had outdone Moliere, but I do not hesitate to say that, among the world’s great plays, The Plain-Dealer ranks beside its French source. The long-held belief that The Plain-Dealer is simply a diatribe on its age obscures its merits. Actually, both playwrights are dealing with the same subtle problem: whether an idealist can live in this real world. Moliere deals with it tragically; Wycherley deals with it comically. When Alceste leaves the stage we are not laughing; he is defeated like a tragic protagonist, pinned down to the contradictions of reality. Wycherley’s Manly, like every comic protagonist from Dionysus to Chaplin, improbably, indeed supernaturally, transcends those
contradictions. The ending in this sense is not unreal at all — if we are willing to look at it from another world.

Mr. Empson suggests, in his brief analysis of this play, that the complex word that describes it is “honest”; I submit that a better word is “world.” It is the word most repeated in the play and acquires an extraordinary complexity, whereas the two concepts of “plain dealing” serve only to set off Freeman and Eliza from Manly and Fidelia. There is, for example, the land-world as opposed to the sea-world set out by Manly’s use of the epithet “Sea,” as in “Sea Pimp”. In the seventeenth century people believed quite literally that the sea was a world of its own with a type in the sea to correspond to each type on land. The sea, however, is only one of a series of such “worlds.” There is the world of the play and the world of the audience, set off from each other by the artificiality of Fidelia and the ending. The pastoral desire to escape defines the difference between the natural, real world and the supernatural, ideal world, the “enchanted island” represented in this play by the West Indies or “the North,” as opposed to “the practice of the whole World” where they seem to rehearse Bay’s grand Dance: here you see a Bishop bowing low to a gaudy Atheist; a Judge to a Doorkeeper; a great Lord, to a Fishmonger, or a Scrivener with a Jack-chain about his neck; a Lawyer, to a Sergeant at Arms; a velvet Physician, to a thred-bare Chymist; and a supple Gentleman Usher, to a surly Beef-eater; and so tread round in a preposterous huddle of Ceremony to each other, they can hardly hold their solemn, false Countenances.

There is the world of talk and the world of action, set apart by all the incidents in the play — repeated almost to the point of tedium — in which people profess one thing and immediately do its opposite. Olivia, for example, rails against vanity in dress and then scolds her maid for not arranging her tower of hair properly. These several worlds are linked linguistically and dramatically in the play. Just as Manly’s sea voyage is an attempt to escape toward an ideal, his invectives and diatribes are verbal voyages through every corruption in real society: “Ay, ay,” says Manly to the disguised Fidelia:

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\text{thou art a hopeful Youth for the shore only; here thou wilt live to be cherish’d by Fortune, and the great ones; for thou may’st easily come to out-flatter a dull Poet, out-lie a Coffee-house, or Gazet-writer, out-swear a Knight of the Post, out-watch a Pimp, out-fawn a Rook, out-promise a Lover, out-rail a Wit, and out-brag a Sea-Captain: All this thou canst do, because thou ’rt a Coward, a thing I hate, therefore thou’lt do better with the World than with me, and these are the good courses you must take in the World.}
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By a variant of the right-way-wrong-way simile, Manly, like Piers Plowman, implies what these people ought to be by describing what they are.
The most important use of “world” is that in the passage just quoted: the contrast between “the World” and “I.” By every kind of device the play creates the impression of an all-engulfing world of universal corruption — by the sailors’ speeches in the first scene, by the realistic and corrupt atmosphere of Westminster Hall, and most important, by the fact that every character assumes that all the rest of the world tries to deceive him. Whether, like Manly, a character seeks to dissociate himself from that world, or, like Olivia, to participate in it, the relation of that individual to the world finds linguistic expression in the device we noted in She wou’d if she cou’d and that Professor Wanning terms “the language of split-man observation.”

Professor Wanning’s dissertation discusses this linguistic effect with reference to Congreve’s dialogue, making clear, however, that all Restoration dramatists use it to some extent, although Congreve is undeniably the master. As Leigh Hunt remarked with charming naiveté, “Everything seemed to be of value, only inasmuch as it could be likened or opposed to something else.” I have chosen to defer my own illustrations of the practice to this play where it keynotes the whole theme of the relation of the individual to the world.

Manly’s speeches with few exceptions set up a felt antagonism between himself and the principles governing the rest of the world:

... this thou canst do, because thou’rt a Coward, a thing I hate, therefore thou’lt do better with the World than with me.

Freeman. You use a Lord with very little Ceremony, it seems.
Manly. A Lord! What, thou art one of those who esteem men only by the marks and value Fortune has set upon 'em, and never consider intrinsick worth; but counterfeit Honour will not be current with me.

Tell not me ... of your Decorums, supercilious Forms, and slavish Ceremonies; your litde Tricks, which you the Spaniels of the World do daily over and over; for, and to one another; not out of love or duty, but your servile fear. . . . I'll have no Leading-strings, I can walk alone; I hate a Harness, and will not tug on in a Faction.

Olivia’s speeches set up the same sense of antagonisms — when she is hypocritically pretending to virtue. But in her unguarded moments of passion, she sounds like this:

So, I, have at once now brought about those two grateful businesses, which all prudent Women do together, secured money and pleasure; and now all
interruptions of the last are remov’d. Go, Husband, and come up, Friend; just [like] the Buckets in the Well; the absence of one brings the other; but I hope, like them too, they will not meet in the way, justle, and clash together.

Come hither, come; yet stay, till I have lock’d a door in the other Room, that may chance to let us in some interruption; which reciting Poets, or losing Gamsters fear not more than I at this time do.

She reveals a felt alliance with the way the world goes, with “all prudent Women,” the physical behavior of buckets in a well, with the vanity of the reciting poet, and the urgency of the losing gamester.

The point is that, whether the character feels antagonism or kinship to the general principles of the world, he feels he must establish some kind of relation to them. He seeks out quasi-scientific laws to apply deductively to his own behavior. By so doing, Professor Wanning points out, the speaker escapes the prison of his own illusory sensations and attaches his action to a larger system of generalization, giving it the authority of science. At the same time, the actor becomes a split man: his reason comments rationally on the irrational actions his passions force on him. William Oldys, the early eighteenth-century antiquary, gives a curious illustration of Professor Wanning’s point. He’ attributes to Jonson and Shakespeare a pair of couplets on the theme, Totus mundus agit histrionem:

Jonson. If, but stage actors, all the world displays,
Where shall we find spectators of their plays?
Shakespeare. Little, or much, of what we see, we do;
We’re all both actors and spectators too.

Oldys’ Shakespeare (surely a very eighteenth-centuryish Shakespeare) states exactly what “the language of split-man observation” implies.

As Professor Wanning’s dissertation suggests as a whole, these are the assumptions of Restoration comedy itself, not just its language. There are two basic characteristics of Restoration comedy: first, the plays are based on the assumption that society is corrupt in that it runs on principles of self-interest; second, the plays are focused on the relation of the individual to those principles. Thus, by the title of this play, Manly the individual is related to the general type or principle — proverbial in this case: “Plain-dealing is a jewel.” In its title, but more important, in its fundamental assumptions, The Plain-Dealer does not differ from She wou’d if she cou’d or The Man of Mode.

Yet Wycherley’s last play marks a basic change in the values behind Restoration comedies. In the earlier plays, the dramatic tension pulled between
two kinds of people, the competent rake-heroes with complete command of both appearance and nature, and the fools who confused the two or devoted their attention entirely to appearances: Sir Frederick Frolick was opposed to Sir Nicholas Cully. Dorimant contrasted with Sir Foplihg. This kind of comedy reaches its peak with *The Man of Mode*, generally considered the first comedy of manners, but actually coming at the peak of the form. Manly is a new kind of hero, compounded of Harcourt’s goodness and incompetence and Pinchwife’s selfdeception (“I know the Town”) and hostility. Freeman, like Horner, is a typical rake-hero. While Horner overshadowed Harcourt, Manly is now the center of interest, not Freeman. There are three kinds of people in *The Plain-Dealer*: fools devoted to outward things, a competent rake-hero who plays the social game of disguise and pretense, and, at the top of the scale, a man who is innately good and who is a deviant from his society. This is the new hero and structure that Congreve took and built upon to bring Restoration comedy to its peak, but at the same time Wycherley’s innovation is the seed of sentimentalism.

The two hallmarks of the sentimental “weeping comedy” that replaced the so-called “comedy of manners” on the reformed eighteenth-century stage are, first, the presence of ideal goodness in a realistic situation, and second, the sense of natural goodness inherent in every man. Fidelia, Professor Bernbaum points out, is a “romantic or sentimental heroine”, and even Manly, if the play did not treat him as less clever than Freeman, would be a sentimental hero. In the first of our eleven plays, folly was allied with evil and cleverness was goodness. In this last play of Wycherley’s, cleverness represented by Eliza and Freeman becomes separated from goodness represented by Manly and Fidelia. The trend becomes even stronger in Congreve’s plays; though his and Wycherley’s are the most brilliant plays of the Restoration, they are the direct forerunners of “weeping comedy”. In short, the sense of good and evil that was Wycherley’s great contribution to Restoration comedy became its tragic flaw, the seed both of greatness and decay.

Questions:
1. Name the main characters of the play.
2. Describe Manly as “a strong and personal creation” of the dramatist.
3. What is the key theme of *The Plain-Dealer*?
4. Describe the subplot of the comedy.
5. Dryden’s opinion on the play was, “one of the most bold, most general, and most useful satires”. Comment on his words.
6. What connects Wycherley’s comedy with sentimentalism?
Wycherley’s second play was produced at the new theater, Dorset Garden, apparently in the fall of 1672. It was indifferently received then — and has been since. No one revives this play; critics rarely give it more than passing mention. However, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* stands out as perhaps the most ingenuous and innocuous comedy of the period. Restoration audiences received it coolly, possibly because it is less smutty than most Restoration comedies, but more probably because it was too simple for their tastes: the intrigue is not very complicated and the humor is more slapstick than verbal. But the qualities that made the Restoration dislike it are precisely the things that should make a modern critic or audience prefer it, for it is intrigue and verbal wit that make most Restoration plays hard to follow. This, therefore, should be an ideal play for revival. On its own merits, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* has a pretty charm that contrasts with and overshadows the small amount of Restoration vulgarity that remains in it.

By Restoration standards, its plot, based on Calderon’s *El Maestro de Danzar*, is almost unbelievably simple. Sir James Formal has adopted Spanish clothes, manners, oaths, even the name Don Diego. He has therefore confined his daughter Hippolita to the care of a duenna, her aunt, Mrs. Caution, until her forthcoming marriage to Monsieur de Paris, an English fop who returned from France just as French as Don Diego is Spanish. Hippolita, who is only fourteen, but wonderfully clever, tricks Paris into bringing her a wit of some repute, Gerrard, whom she decides to marry instead of Paris. When her father finds them together, she passes Gerrard off as a dancing-master, although he cannot dance, and although Mrs. Caution warns Don Diego. While Paris intrigues with two prostitutes and Don Diego tries forcibly to translate his prospective son-in-law’s French ways into Spanish ones, Gerrard and Hippolita plan to elope. After two false starts, they are married. The pseudo-Spaniard covers his humiliation by pretending he knew their plan all along.

The play makes its point simply, directly, and amusingly. In the title lies the theme: the contrast between the dancing-master (one of “those tripping outsides of Gentlemen”) and the true gentleman, who is form alone as opposed to form plus substance. Dancing itself in the play serves as one half of a sustained *double-entendre*: dancing is an outward form that cloaks the real dance of marriage: “Adam and Eves dance, or the beginning of the World,” or at least of its populating. The lovers who concentrate on the substance of their relation are surrounded by absurd people who devote all their attention to appearances: Paris,
of whom, when Hippolita asks, “Is he no man?” her maid replies, “He’s but a Monsieur”; Don Diego Formal — the name is significant — whom Paris calls a “capricious, jealous Fop” and Gerrard calls “old Formality”; Mrs. Caution, who consistently attaches more importance to the fact of chastity than to the state of mind that gives rise to it. In the first scene, Mrs. Caution and Hippolita discuss the contrast that dominates and shapes the play:

Mrs. Caution. I know you hate me, because I have been the Guardian of your reputation. But your Husband may thank me one day.

Hippolita. If he be not a Fool, he would rather be oblig’d to me for my vertue than to you, since, at long run, he must whether he will or no. . . . I have done no ill, but I have paid it with thinking. . . .

Mrs. Caution. O that’s no hurt; to think is no hurt. . . .

Hippolita. I am for going into the Throng of Temptations. . . . And making my self so familiar with them, that I wou’d not be concern’d for ‘em a whit. . . . And would take all the innocent liberty of the Town, to tattle to your men under a Vizard in the Play-houses, and meet ‘em at night in Masquerade.

Mrs. Caution. There I do believe you again; I know you wou’d be masquerading . . . O, the fatal Liberty of this masquerading Age[!] when I was a young woman.

Hippolita. Come, come, do not blaspheme this masquerading Age, like an ill-bred City-Dame . . . by what I’ve heard ‘tis a pleasant-well-bred-complacent-free-frolick-good-natur’d-pretty-Age; and if you do not like it, leave it to us that do.

Don Diego also reverses the proper roles of social forms and state of mind, in a broader sense, of appearance and nature. Thus, he congratulates Mrs. Caution on keeping even priests away from Hippolita:

We are bold enough in trusting them with our Souls, I’le never trust ‘em with the body of my Daughter, look you Guarda, you see what comes of trusting Church-men here in England; and ‘tis because the Women govern with Families, that Chaplains are so much in fashion. Trust a Church-man — trust a Coward with your honour, a Fool, with your secret, a Gamester with your Purse, as soon as a Priest with your Wife or Daughter, look you. Guarda, I am no Fool, look you.

This is Wycherley’s peculiarly caustic sense of humour: the ability to laugh at the whole “masquerading Age”, that has given the soul the value of the body and the body the value of the soul, the ability to laugh on one side at the chaplains and the ladies who engage them and on the other at Don Diego who complains for a wrong reason.

Mrs. Caution’s hypocrisy is only a more subtle version of the attention to forms that constitutes the humors of Diego and Paris. “Ha — is dere -any ting in de Universe so jenti as de Pantaloons?” cries Paris, “any ting so ravisaut as de
Pantaloom.” “I must live and dye for de Pantaloon against de Spanish hose”. Marriage, compared to clothing, is a mere nothing: “Dere is not the least Ribbon of my Garniture, but is as dear to me as your Daughter, Jernie”. Paris believes — almost logically — that since the French have them, the way to achieve good manners is to imitate the French, to speak one’s native English with a French accent, and the like. Anything English, such as Gerrard, is ipso facto objectionable: “I wou’d not be judg’d by an English Looking-glass, Jarnie”. He thus debases “Civility and good Breeding more then a City Dancing-Master”. He is the real dancing-master (the outside of a gentleman), and Gerrard is the real gentleman. Fittingly, then, Monsieur is duped into bringing Hippolita her lover, standing watch for them, bringing a parson, and guarding them while they are married.

Don Diego, too, though his pretense is a little subtler than Paris’, values clothing more than his daughter: “He that marry’s my Daughter shall at least look like a wise Man, for he shall wear the Spanish Habit”. Whereas Paris seeks only good manners, Don Diego seeks wisdom itself. His only mistake is to assume that by putting on Spanish clothes, beard, and oaths, one achieves “Spanish Care, Circumspection, and Prudence”. But Don Diego is at least a shade wiser than his French counterpart. He can see Paris is “so much disguis’d”; he can see Gerrard is “a very honest man, though a Dancing master” — even if Gerrard is deceiving him as he speaks. He can at least say: “The Hood does not make the Monk, the Ass was an Ass still, though he had the Lyons Skin on; this will be a light French Fool, in spight of the grave Spanish Habit, look you”. Most important, Don Diego can make a turnabout pretense at the end, to fill out the happy ending for the story.

In contrast to these absurd people who pretend almost unconsciously, stand the witty lovers who know what they are doing, even if they are impelled by the disturbing influence of love: “Love, indeed”, says Gerrard, “has made a grave Gouty Statesman fight Duels; the Souldier flye from his Colours, a Pedant a fine Gentleman; nay, and the very Lawyer a Poet, and therefore may make me a Dancing-Master”. It is an error to assume that the satire deals only with “nationalities.” On the contrary, the satire, both in language and action, contrasts two kinds of pretense: we might call them clever and foolish, conscious and unconscious, pretense as a means as opposed to pretense as an end in itself, or more accurately, pretending in order to achieve a proper appearance with which to express one’s nature as opposed to pretending in order to substitute appearances for the emptiness of one’s nature.

Wycherley even uses the play as a play to flesh out this contrast: the actor in a part as opposed to the foolish character he plays makes up a perfect instance
of dissimulation as opposed to affectation. To call attention to the play as a play, Wycherley uses a number of asides to be delivered directly to the audience. He also puts in two amusing little figures, Pirandello-like in the way they break down the dramatic illusion. Paris, a fictional fool, debates with Hippolita the relative merits of two stage-fools — Edward Angel and James Nokes. At a later point, Hippolita remarks to the audience:

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

Paris and Hippolita in these two situations call the audience’s attention to the whole joke: appearance assumed to belie inner nature, the difference between the conscious pretense of the actor and the unconscious pretense of the foolish characters. This concentration on the play becomes in The Plain-Dealer an even more important device. Here, it serves to highlight the comedy of pretense.

Women, to Wycherley, are like plays and reality: they deceive. Each of the women in this play, Mrs. Caution, Hippolita, Prue her maid, even Flirt, the prostitute, is wiser than any of the men, including Gerrard. “Let an old Woman make discoveries,” cries Mrs. Caution, “the young Fellows cannot cheat us in any thing. . . . Set your old Woman still to grope out an Intrigue”. Men are no more than pets to women, albeit an adult taste, “for after the Shock-dog and the Babies [i.e., dolls], ‘tis the mans turn to be belov’d”. Gerrard very quickly learns that what he thought was “the Innocency of an Angel” is a rather terrifying amount of cleverness. “The mask of simplicity and innocency”, remarks the fourteen-year-old Hippolita, “is as useful to an intriguing Woman, as the mask of Religion to a States-man”. Women are as deceiving as the Devil: “Fortune we sooner may than Woman trust”. Even the foolish Monsieur can see it: “Women are made on purpose to fool men; when they are Children, they fool their Fathers; and when they have taken their leaves of their Hanging-sleeves, they fool their Gallants or Dancing-masters”.

Hippolita, it is true, uses pretense, but she uses it to fill out a social form, not, as her father or Paris use it, to replace substance with an empty form. Hippolita creates a marriage of love, by a growth from within, whereas the real pretenders try to impose an empty marriage from without. She uses pretense to manipulate Gerrard, to bring him to her and correct his attitudes. Their relation
grows from their random desires at the opening of the play, Hippolita’s for “any man, any man, though he were but a little handsomer than the Devil, so that he were a Gentleman”, and Gerrard’s desire for “a new City-Mistress”. At their first meeting, their relation grows to a frank sexuality; they talk about money matters. They come to admire one another’s wit when Gerrard sees Hippolita devise the dancing-master scheme. Finally, when Hippolita pretends she is penniless, she causes a real meeting of selves, free of social criteria.

On the other hand, Paris’ relations with his prostitute Flirt lead from aggression on Flirt’s part to a quasi-marriage, “keeping” with all the forms of marriage, settlements, maintenance, house, coach, and the rest, but without affection or cohabitation. The scene in the last act between Monsieur and Flirt adds to the general contrast in the play. Paris is blackmailed into “keeping”—explicitly contrasted to marriage—at almost exactly the same moment that Gerrard and Hippolita are being married in fact.

Not only is there this contrast between Hippolita’s more or less genteel pursuit and the pursuing prostitutes: “Bailiffs, Purveyants”, a press-gang to a “hot Service”; there is also a continued discussion and contrast of right and wrong kinds of marriage. In addition to Gerrard and Hippolita’s marriage based on love, and Monsieur’s quasi-marriage, there is the Don’s idea that “as soon as she’s marry’d, she’d be sure to hate him; that’s the reason we wise Spaniards are jealous”. Whereas in the world around the lovers money can change a woman’s very nature (“O money, powerful money! how the ugly, old, crooked, straight, handsom young Women are beholding to thee”), Gerrard cannot part with his love, even when he thinks she is penniless. There are the marriages in which “Cuckolds by their Jealousie are made”, and wives are confined to that absolute evil, the country, marriages in which the husband takes his privileges in the dark—and the wives by day. Opposed to them is Hippolita’s simple announcement and Gerrard’s agreement that she will have none of it: jealousy is “arrant sawciness, cowardise, and ill breeding”. Some marriages are forced by parents and these, even Prue the maid can see, are bad: Gerrard and Hippolita’s marriage is anything but forced. It becomes, in effect, a symbol for the harmonious marriage of appearance and nature, just as the various kinds of false marriage become symbols for false relationships between appearance and nature, the affectations of Monsieur and the Don, for example.

The general movement of the comedy parallels these contrasts: the action works through barriers of pretense toward an underlying situation. At the opening of the play, Don Diego’s house constitutes a prison of folly and affectation in which Hippolita is confined like a sleeping beauty. “Around the castle”, the story goes, “a hedge of thorns began to grow, which became taller every year,
and finally shut off the whole estate”. Before Hippolita is irrevocably fenced in (by her forthcoming marriage to a foolish fop) Gerrard comes, though he has to break through the gallery window to get to her. The action moves further inward when Gerrard secures his entrance by the dancing-master fiction and when the lovers go into a closet to be married; the final inward movement would be the consummation after the curtain. “Together they came down the stairs and the king awoke and the queen and the entire courtly estate, and all looked at each other with big eyes.” But neither Don Diego (the king) nor Mrs. Caution (the queen) is awakened out of pretense to a true perception of reality. The Don resolves instead on a further pretense. He makes believe he was never deceived and acts the part of the pleased father with blessings and gifts:

Rob’d of my Honour, my Daughter, and my Revenge too! Oh my dear Honour! nothing vexes me but that the World should say, I had not Spanish Policy enough to keep my Daughter from being debauch’d from me; but methinks my Spanish Policy might help me yet. . . . I am resolv’d to turn the Cheat upon themselves, and give them my Consent and Estate.

Wycherley has turned the opening situation around. Instead of being able to force the form of marriage on a loveless relationship as he had planned, Don Diego himself is forced to shape his own formal pretense to fit the inner reality given outward form in Hippolita and Gerrard’s marriage. “Nature” grown into appearance scores a complete victory over appearance forced on nature.

The Gentleman Dancing-Master pictures two decent people surrounded by a world of folly. Decency means simply two things; the ability to see through to reality and the ability to make the forms one puts on reflect one’s private life or “nature.” Folly, on the other hand, means the substitution of appearance for one’s nature, Spanish clothes for wisdom, a French accent for good breeding, or the form of marriage for the emotional basis of marriage. This kind of folly blinds its fools so they see into others no better than they see into themselves. To Etherege, folly was the confusion of private life with public front. Wycherley saw that much and more: folly represented a commitment to a life of pretense. The unconscious pretenders, Don Diego, Monsieur, and Mrs. Caution, are foolish, even to some extent evil, but without exception less happy than Hippolita and Gerrard, who pretend for a limited purpose, binding themselves temporarily to pretense to gain a permanent freedom from it. Such a contrast shapes a comic action based almost entirely on intrigue. Comedy becomes a chain of results set off by an initial discrepancy between appearance and nature or form and inner reality; for example, the loveless marriage a foolish parent tries to impose.
Wycherley’s unique contribution to Restoration comedy was a sense that folly, evil, and limitations to happiness were all related, that there is a right way and a wrong way.

Wycherley’s awareness of alternatives creates for itself a characteristic kind of ironic simile: Paris, for example, remarks; “Love, dam Love, it make the man more redicule, than Poverty, Poetry, or a new Title of Honeur, Jernie”. “Redicule” is the word that energizes the comparison. One could say that love, like poverty, poetry; or a new title of honor makes a man aspiring, absent-minded, careless, or even “enthusiastick.” The comparison reminds us that love and poverty and poetry and a new title are alike in certain ways. Monsieur, however, adds another element — himself. By saying they all “make the man redicule,” Monsieur emphasizes one possible connection at the expense of the more obvious ones. From Monsieur’s description of himself and others who laugh at love, we infer a condition in which reactions are appropriate, in which people do not laugh at love, poverty, poetry, or a new title. The simile does not simply compare A to B; it also compares ways of comparing A to B. That is, the oddity of the stated connection between A and B (in this case, “redicule”) leads us to infer other connections, and we compare the stated connection of A to B with the inferred connections. Usually, the stated connection tends to be a “wrong” way of relating A to B, and the inferred connections tend to be “right”. Thus, the real comparisons in these similes are between the stated wrong way of comparing A to B and the inferred right way. Monsieur’s simile talks not so much about love, poverty, poetry, and titles as about Monsieur himself and people like him. The simile represents in itself a kind of dramatic irony. At another point, Monsieur remarks, “There’s little difference betwixt keeping a Wench, and Marriage,” and the connection between them seems obvious enough, though we might infer a larger difference than Monsieur. Monsieur, however, goes on to say, “Only Marriage is a little the cheaper; but the other is the more honourable now”. From Monsieur’s statement, we infer its opposite — a way of life in which one spends more on a wife than on a mistress and in which marriage is more honorable. The simile becomes a comparison of the way of life implicit in the word “now” and a more normal way. This right-way-wrong-way simile is not limited to the absurd characters. Hippolita, for example, compares a lover to a pet, but this simile only clothes the real comparison, that between the fondling kind of love one has for a pet and the mature kind of love one ought to have for a lover. The simile itself has an inside and an outside, just as the pretenses and affectations of the characters do.

“Right” and “wrong” in these similes can range widely in meaning. At one end of the scale, “right” can mean merely “socially correct”, “modish”, as in
Monsieur’s remark about “Poverty, Poetry, or a new Title of Honour”. At other times, “right” and “wrong” can refer to better and worse ways of modishness, as in Monsieur’s comparison of marriage and “keeping”. The “right” way can also mean simply the “successful” way. It can even be the morally right way. Nevertheless, within even that loose ethical framework, some things were clearly “wrong”, for a gentleman to kiss and tell, for example, to cuckold a friend, or to steal money, or for a lady to take love outside marriage — before she is married. In other words, a right-way-wrong-way simile can be based on ways which are more and less modish, more and less successful, or more and less moral; most often, all three apply at once. In particular, the ideas of rightness as success and as ethical Tightness tend to overlap — a comic version of the poetic justice of the “serious” plays.

The right-way-wrong-way simile is, moreover, not just a figure of speech, but a basic frame for the entire action. Etherege’s *The Comical Revenge* and *She wou’d if she cou’d* and Wycherley’s *Love in a Wood* all contrast right ways of behaving with wrong ways. As Etherege and Wycherley develop, however, this basic pattern becomes more complex; the right and wrong ways in their second plays tend to be hidden under a shell of appearances. Thus, in *She wou’d if she cou’d*, both the heroes and the fools pretend; both get lured into the confinements of marriage and the country; both drink, wench, and otherwise carouse. One must look beneath the surface to see the difference. Just as the heroes show up the fools, so the fools stand as ironic comments on the heroes. In *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* both the lovers and the fools pretend, but we understand the rightness of the way represented by Gerrard and Hippolita. This sense of right and wrong way creates the cynical and satirical tone of the play. The very immorality of this play implies an ethic, but an ethic of wisdom. The hero does what the villain does, and one must look inside to see the difference.

Questions:
1. Name the characters of the play.
2. Describe the plot of the play.
4. Comment on Wycherley’s sense of humour.
5. Describe the ironic similes used by Wycherley. What are they based on?
Perhaps because he is unquestionably the most brilliant of all the Restoration dramatists, William Congreve’s plays are those most often dismissed as frothy, empty collections of polished dialogue. Yet, the supposedly rawer, cruder Wycherley was the writer to whom Congreve turned for a model. Wycherley’s plays appeared in 1671, 1672, 1675, and 1676; Congreve’s appeared in 1693, 1695, 1697, and 1700. In the nearly twenty years between these two major writers, the stage was filled by a host of rather minor ones, Edward Ravenscroft, for example, Mrs. Aphra Behn (the rather smutty “Incomparable Astraea”), and the not-so-minor Thomas Shadwell. Congreve, who had been just a small boy when the last plays of Etherege and Wycherley were produced, nevertheless turned back to the earlier style of, in particular, Wycherley. Their contemporary, George Granville, Lord Lansdowne – one of Pope’s early patrons – found them alike not only in personality but in art. Congreve was even more precocious than Wycherley. He wrote his first play at twenty, his third as twenty-five, and his dramatic career was over at thirty. “Among all the efforts of early genius which literary history records,” writes Dr. Johnson, “I doubt whether any one can be produced that more surpasses the common limits of nature than the plays of Congreve.”

His first comedy, The Old Batchelor, proved a brilliant success when it was first produced at Drury Lane in March of 1693. There are several plots, each complex and each a comment on the others. The three principal characters are: Bellmour, a conventional Restoration gallant; Vainlove, a gallant, and Heartwell, the title character, a surly old misanthropic bachelor who has fallen in love with Silvia. He supposes her innocent, but she has in fact been through the Vainlove-Bellmour double play. All the plots in The Old Bachelor, in one way of another, are concerned with the problem of marrying an unchaste woman. Congreve dramatizes in this form the constant Restoration theme of inconsistency between nature (the hidden fact of infidelity and the state of mind that accompanied it) and outward appearances (the lady’s pretense of chastity). The play treats different ways of coping with this inconsistency.

Like earlier playwrights, Congreve makes his fools people who consist only of appearances and who are aware only of appearances. There are two fools in The Old Batchelor; Sir Joseph Wittoll and the miles gloriosus Captain Bluffe. They drift inconclusively through the plot, cheated by the confidence man Sharper, and in the finale they marry the mistresses of the gallants. Sir Joseph Wittoll is described as a suit of clothes, a “tawdry Outside” “and a very beggarly Lining”; Captain Bluffe, “the Image of Valour”, “that Sign of a Man”, “that Pot-Gun charged with Wind” who is, like a drum, “full of blustering Noise and Emptiness”.

5. W. CONGREVE. THE OLD BACHELOR
These people are nothing but appearances and they believe anything anyone tells them. Sir Joseph believes Sharper when he says he was the one that saved the knight from marauders and lost 100 pounds. Bluffe, after Sharper has abused, cuffed, and kicked him, simply denies that these blows ever took place. Sir Joseph recognizes the importance of the face: “To that Face I grant you Captain – No, no, I grant you – Not to that Face by the Lord Harry – If you had put on your fighting Face before, you had done his Business”. Both fools believe Setter (a pimp) when he says one of the high plot ladies loves them; they have no idea of the real nature of the lady or of themselves. Similarly, they marry masked women on Setter’s say-so. Appropriately, they are punished in the denouement by having their wives’ real nature carefully pointed out to them. Their answer, in short, to the Restoration problem of perception is that of all the fools in the comedies: “Ignore it; concentrate your attention on appearances alone”.

The comedy concerned with Fondlewife presents a more sophisticated answer to the problem of appearance and nature involved in marrying an unchaste woman. Fondlewife, an elderly hypocritical Puritan, has a young and beautiful wife Laetitia, who is no fonder of him than one would expect. At a party, Vainlove has made an assignation with her, but in his usual way he turns the lady over to Bellmour. Bellmour disguises himself as a parson and makes his entrance; Fondlewife returns, is assured his wife mistook Bellmour for a real parson, and, more or less consciously, allows himself to be deceived. Fondlewife is aware (as the fools are not) of the difference between appearance and nature: “But does not thy Wife love thee, nay doat upon thee? — Yes — Why then! — Ay, but to say truth, she’s fonder of me, than she has reason to be; and in the way of Trade, we still suspect the smoothest Dealers of the deepest Designs”. He adds, furthermore, a new coloration to the problem: what a man wants he sees as the appearance (a loving, doting wife) but what he gets is hidden nature (infidelity). Like Heartwell, Fondlewife goes through a laughable reason-passion soliloquy, trying to resolve the difference. He tries to reason his wife into living up to his expectations. Reason, however, is not enough to overcome either his own passionate desire for his wife, or hers for satisfaction. Reason, though it tells him to avoid the trap of reality with its basic inconsistency, cannot keep him free of its appearances. When he returns and is confronted with a highly suspicious situation and a doubtful explanation, Fondlewife accepts the choice of self-deception. Belief has the power to persuade him of the existence of a nature that lives up to his desires (“As long as I believe it, ‘tis well enough”), even though his belief is inconsistent with even the appearances of the situation, let alone the hidden reality: “I won’t believe my own Eyes,” he finally says. Bellmour commends him ironically: “See the great
Blessing of an easie Faith; Opinion cannot err” (and, of course, Fondlewife as a Puritan fanatic is the ideal choice to develop this aspect of the theme):

No Husband, by his Wife, can be deceiv’d:
She still is virtuous, if she’s so believe’d.

Heartwell, like. Fondlewife, knows the general inconsistency between appearance and nature and hates and fears it. Unlike Fondlewife, however, he cannot accept the solution of self-deception; instead, he rails at the dilemma: “My Talent is chiefly that of speaking Truth, which I don’t expect should ever recommend me to People of Quality”. His highest social ideal is not the hope that people will improve, but that the inconsistency will be resolved: “I am for having every body be what they pretend to be; a Whoremaster be a Whoremaster”. Because he sees the trap, he does not rush into temptation, but tries to remain aloof: “‘Tis true indeed, I don’t force Appetite, but wait the natural Call of my Lust”.

Heartwell, though both misanthrope and misogynist, has fallen in love with Silvia, formerly Bellmour’s mistress, who pretends chastity to induce Heartwell to marry her. In a soliloquy he debates with his reason against his passion, trying to escape Silvia, but cannot resist, and almost takes Fondlewife’s way out: “I’ll ran into the Danger to lose the Apprehension.” Heartwell is tempted and deluded, both by Silvia’s “dissembl[ing] the very want of Dissimulation” and by his own tendency to see what he wants to see, her supposed innocence that at once torments and pleases him. Silvia very cleverly pretends to be the one thing dearest to the old bachelor’s heart, a girl whose outward appearance and nature are the same, both “honest”. Yet even so, Heartwell fears that she must have the same double aspect as the rest of reality: “dear Angel, Devil, Saint, Witch,” “thou beauteous Changeling”. He tries to buy her, but she refuses. Then, he cannot resist and consciously asks for “One Kiss more to confirm me mad,” willingly deluding himself as Fondlewife does, but only so long as he believes she is true to his ideal.

Finally, of course, the gallants teach him again what he has known all along, that Silvia is, as all reality is, an illusion, a wish-fulfillment – that her appearance was his hope; her nature, his disappointment. He learns, in short, that

We hope to find
That Help which Nature meant in Woman-kind,
To Man mat Supplemental Self design’d;
But proves a burning Caustick when apply’d.
Like Manly, Heartwell is saved from the trap of reality by an improbable *deus ex machina*. Once he has decided to marry, he luckily fails to find his brother’s chaplain. Instead, he happens to pick a Puritan fanatic to perform the ceremony. But the fanatic, *mirabile dictu*, is actually Bellmour disguised as a parson. The gallant decides to release the old bachelor from his predicament and persuades Silvia and her maid to go along with the joke. The three factors that make up Heartwell’s improbable rescue are luck, the friendship of a gallant he contemns for his fawning on the ladies, and disguise, the very division between appearance and nature he despises. Heartwell’s rescue is, like Manly’s, improbable, but Manly’s was so idealized and so unlikely that it made us think him a man with one foot in eternity. Heartwell’s is less so and hence we do not feel as with Manly that there is no escape from the deception of reality but the supernatural. Instead, we feel that Heartwell trapped himself but was saved by the charity that a pretending person like Bellmour may actually have. (The gallant’s disguise as a minister, while a common device, is in this case meaningful.)

The chief weakness of the play, of course, is the improbability of this episode, Heartwell’s rescue. It is this incident that makes the play look like “a hodge-podge of characters and incidents,” as though it were trying to suggest the amount of sheer improvisation required simply to get along in the London Heartwell faces. Heartwell himself is unwilling to improvise, and his solution—or lack of one—to the problem of appearance and nature embodied in marrying an unchaste woman is a fruitless railing at it.

Bellmore offers as a solution the same kind of tolerant acceptance of the dilemma that Freeman offered Manly. Bellmour, moreover, is the only one in the play who in the finale enters into a real marriage (with the witty and charming Belinda). He accepts with a vengeance the contradictions of existence: “What else [but pleasure] has meaning”. “Then I must be disguised — With all my Heart — It adds a Gusto to an Amour”. A Socratik in believing that wisdom is the ability to distinguish accidents from substance, Bellmour is hedonistic and skeptical in his doubt that such knowledge is possible or even necessary, if one devotes oneself to pleasure. “Ay, ay, Wisdom’s nothing but a pretending to know and believe more than we really do. You read of but one wise Man, and all that he knew was, that he knew nothing. Come, come, leave Business to Idlers, and Wisdom to Fools: they have need of ‘em: Wit, be my Faculty; and Pleasure, my Occupation; and let Father Time shake his Glass”. Bellmour accepts disguise, infidelity, and self-contradiction, and is even willing — up to a point — to be a victim: “Why faith I think it will do well enough — If the Husband be out of the way, for the Wife to shew her Fondness and Impatience of his Absence,
by chusing a Lover as like him as she can, and what is unlike, she may help out with her own Fancy. … The Abuse is to the Lover, not the Husband: For ‘its and Argument of her great Zeal towards him, that she will enjoy him in Effigie”. The fact that Bellmour is willing to carry on affairs with women who love Vainlove shows he is concerned with externals as the fools in the play are; it stresses again the kinship of rake and dupe in this respect (like Olivia and the Widow Blackacre or Dorimant and Sir Fopling).

Dissembling comes as naturally to Bellmour as to Silvia and the other women of the play: “I confess, I could be well enough pleas’d to drive on a Love-Bargain in [silence] — ‘twould save a Man a world of Lying and Swearing at the Years end”. Belinda describes their marriage as a banquet that “when we come to feed, ‘tis all Froth, and poor, but in show”; he describes it as a play, i.e., a continued pretense or disguise; finally, they both describe it as a prison, a “lasting Durance” to that reality which Heartwell calls a “Snare”.

Vainlove offers the opposite solution, the possibility that qualifies Bellmour’s answer. Like his peers Bellmour and Sharper and his servant Setter, Vainlove is a master of the arts of conversation and social pretense. Confronted with the problem of a note of assignation supposedly from his beloved Araminta, he comments, “Now must I pretend Ignorance equal to hers, of what she knows as well as Г”. Very quickly he and Araminta unravel Silvia’s simple forgery.

Unlike his friend, Bellmour, however, Vainlove voyages on and on, refusing to come to rest and accept a lesser aim, a permanent compromise, such as marriage, wenching, or money. He refuses to marry his sweetheart Araminta at the end, just as, in his random gallantries, he enjoys the courtship but leaves the consummation to Bellmour. He insists on “the Pleasure of a Chase.” By being always in pursuit, he sees only the idealized appearance; as soon as a woman consents, he becomes aware of the inferior inner self, becomes disgusted, and turns away. He pursues Araminta because she continually eludes his success, “is a kind of floating Island; sometimes seems in reach, then vanishes and keeps him busied in the search”. “Could’st thou be content to marry Araminta?” asks Bellmour. “Could you be content to go to Heav’n?” he replies. He flirts with the trap of reality, but refuses to commit himself, holding off for an ideal. In Heartwell’s terms, “Vainlove plays the Fool with Discretion”.

The comedy leaves us with a dilemma represented by Vainlove .Heartwell on one side and Bellmour on the other. As Shaw says: There are two tragedies in life. One is not to get your heart’s desire. The other is to get it.” Belmour gets his heart’s desire; Vainlove refuses to. In the finale, Bellmour calls his impending marriage imprisonment, while Vainlove can still speak of “hope”. The trick of reality is, as the epilogue applies it to the way an audience treats a play:
Just as the Devil does a Sinner …

Your gain your End, and damn ‘em when you’ve done.

Coming to rest means the acceptance of something less than ideal, a thing that Heartwell and Vainlove refuse to do. Reason tells you to avoid the trap. Passion draws you into it. Only a discretion like Bellmour’s can make the best bargain the limitations of the world permit; only in Vainlove’s “Heaven” is what men hope for, what they get, or appearance nature. The play does not resolve the question it raises: Which is better, Bellmour’s reality or Vainlove’s unrealized ideal?

The women of the play are differentiated along much the same lines, although Congreve drew them in less detailed strokes. They, too, are grouped about the basic problem of appearance and nature. Whereas the men are ranked by their ability to deal with the problem, the women rate according to their ability to create it. As Silvia puts it: “I find dissembling to our Sex is as natural as swimming to a Negro”. It is “natural” because sexual desire is part of their nature, but must not openly appear. Error and absurdity lie (as in earlier plays like She wou’d if she cou’d) in wrongful satisfaction of that desire, in letting that satisfaction appear openly, or in letting dissimulation creep in where it does not belong. Silvia is the worst offender. She does not conceal her desires, nor can she maintain for long the reputation of not satisfying them. Her deceptions are not clever. The trick of forging a note from Araminta had become very stale indeed by 1693. Appropriately, Silvia at the end is reduced to the level of her maid, who marries Captain Bluffe; Silvia marries the other fool, Sir Joseph Wittoll. Laetitia, with Bellmour’s help, manages to hide her faux pas, though she erred earlier and lost Vainlove by letting him know he could have her. Her future, moreover, bodes no good for her: her estimable husband will probably be even more reluctant to leave her alone. As tokens of their lesser stature, both she and Silvia are forced to accept the disguised Bellmour in lieu of Vainlove.

Araminta and Belinda are in another class entirely, at the top of the scale. Belinda, however, carries her dissimulation too far in pretending to her friend that she does not love. “Fie, this is gross Affectation,” says Araminta, and the dramatis personae so describes Belinda: an affected Lady.” Araminta is the mistress of this delicate sort of dissimulation, as indeed she has to be to please Vainlove. She keeps an equilibrium between desire and admitting to it that corresponds to his discretion in refusing to commit himself to what might be a disappointment.

Dr. Johnson calls this play, “one of those comedies which may be made by a mind vigorous and acute, and finished with comick characters by the
perusal of other poets, without much actual commerce with mankind. . . . The characters, both of men and women, are either fictitious and artificial . . . or easy and common.” He is right — the characters are artificially created, but for once, I think Steele is correct when he says, “In [this] comedy there is a necessary circumstance observed by the author, which most other poets either overlook or do not understand, that is to say, the distinction of characters. . . . This writer knows men; which makes his plays reasonable entertainments, while the scenes of most others are like the tunes between the acts.” Each character is created from a single factor, his reaction to the central problem of appearance contradicting nature. While this method does not make for very lifelike characters, it does give the play a beautiful unity: every detail of character, action, and language becomes linked to the focal concept of disguise.

“The dialogue,” says Johnson, “is one constant reciprocation of conceits, or clash of wit, in which nothing flows necessarily from the occasion, or is dictated by nature,”[11] and there he was right. The “polish” of Congreve’s prose is proverbial, but there seems to be no very clear idea of what that “polish” consists. Professor Dobree has analyzed Congreve’s prose rhythms in some detail and shows that he closed satiric passages with a spondee or iambic, strong endings, but used a trochee for the close of delicate passages requiring sympathy, a “dying fall” like Fletcher’s feminine double ending. Congreve used contrasts in vocal sounds to set off the antithetical parts of a sentence, and in a succession of repetitions varied the last one to stress it.

Sentence structure, of course, plays an important part in creating this impression of polish. Constructed always with an element of paradox and antithesis, Congreve’s sentences suggest a dialectic between general principles of human behavior and the particular occasion of speech — Vainove’s description of Fondlewife, for instance:

Vainlove. A kind of Mongrel Zealot,
[1] sometimes very precise and peevish:
But I have seen him pleasant enough in his way;
[2] much addicted to Jealousie,
but more to Fondness:
[3] So that as he is often Jealous without a Cause,
he’s as often satisfied without Reason..
[3a] Bellmour. A very even Temper,
[3b] and fit for my purpose.

Fondlewife’s behavior. Bellmour indicates [3a] his awareness of the principle (that Fondlewife believes what he wants to believe) and [3b] relates that general principle to the particular occasion of the speech. Despite the prodigious number of subordinate clauses, Congreve keeps his prose moving by dialectic between particular case and general rule, which is the matter as well as the style of his discourse. So too, leaving an antithesis open or inresolved tends to push the dialogue forward; closing it suggests a half-stop or full stop depending on the degree of epigrammatic or paradoxical quality in the final clause.

Even more important is the sheer number of figures of speech. Judging simply from a count of the slips on which I note such things, I would guess that there are 30 per cent more figures of speech in The Old Batchelor than in The Man of Mode. There are approximately the same number in The Country Wife as in this play, but The Country Wife is between 35 and 40 per cent longer than The Old Batchelor. The metaphorical density of Congreve’s prose is enough greater than any we have encountered so far as to create a distinctly new impression. Like a jewel with more facets, his prose sparkles more. One would expect, however, from this density not the “polish” we do find, but the busyness and energy we associate with Jacobean writing. The key to Congreve’s style is not so much the number of metaphors but the way he handles them. While Wycherley and Etherege most often make use of what we have called the right-way-wrong-way simile, Congreve is the master of “the language of split-man observation,” which sets up the question of the extent of the speaker’s involvement with the action described. Because the speaker comments dispassionately on his own actions, the “split-man observation” divides him into actor and observer and hides in the apparent indifference created by this separation the metaphorical energy of the play. The language does not add to the intensity of the action; rather action and language each cast a comic perspective on the other. The language covers over the action much the way appearance covers nature.

The speech of Bellmour’s which opens the play is a good example:

Vainlove, and abroad so early! good Morrow; I thought a Contemplative Lover could no nore have parted with his Bed in a Morning, that he could have slept in’t.

The action involved in the speech is simply one young man’s greeting another and expressing interest in his current love affair. The exposition carries the information that Vainlove is in love and is a “Contemplative Lover”. Bellmour shows his interest and involvement in Vainlove’s love affair by his opening exclamation. He establishes a perspective on his interest in the second sentence by assuming the role of an observer trying rather dispassionately to relate Vainlove’s appearance on the street to a general principle of human nature:
that lovers sleep poorly. The metaphorical energy of Bellmour’s speech is all concentrated in the general principle — the faint paradox of “Contemplative Lover”; the implicit comparison of the bed to the person contemplated through the use of the verb “parted” with its association of two persons parting; the contrast between thinking in bed and sleeping in bed; the image of the lover confined to his bed, yet unable to sleep in it. The language applies its force to the general principle, not the action. The forces of language and action subtract, rather than add. They pull apart, creating an outward appearance of lassitude that masks a hidden internal tension between involvement and noninvolvement. This, of course, is Congreve’s sense of the comic: the felt conflict between a decorous appearance and a passionate nature. Johnson was right; practically none of Congreve’s figures of speech “flows necessarily from the occasion, or is dictated by nature,” but that is Congreve’s joke, and, in that sense, they do flow from occasion.

Within the larger scheme of split-man observation, Congreve uses the tropes his predecessors prepared for him; for example, the conversion downward of abstractions or emotions to things, as when Belinda says of love: “Tis in the Head, the Heart, the Blood, the – All over”. For the most part, however, this figure is confined to the low characters and to Heartwell, who says, “chinking” his purse after an entertainment at Silvia’s:

Why ‘twas I sung and danc’d; I gave Musick to the Voice, and Life to their Measures – Look you here Silvia, here are Songs and Dances, Poetry and Musick – hark! how sweetly one Guinea rhymes to another – and how they dance to the Musick of their own Chink. This buys all the t’other.

Of his affections he says: “No reflux of vigorous Blood: But milky Love, supplies the empty Channels; and prompts me to the Softness of a Child – A meer Infant and would suck”. It is not surprising, then, that for the most certain sign of his love for Silvia, he gives her his money. Fondlewife, in a similar comparison, speaks of his wife’s body as “her separate Maintenance,” i.e., her trust fund, that “she’ll carry . . . about her”. Captain Bluffe, in one of Congreve’s rare puns, converts “mettle” down to “metal”; he substitutes his sword for wit or logic: “This Sword I’ll maintain to be the best Divine, Anatomist, Lawyer or Casuist in Europe; it shall decide a Controversie or split a Cause – ”. “I’ll pink his Soul,” he threatens Sharper. The gentle Sir Joseph can say to Sharper, “I’m very sorry ... with all my Heart, Blood, and Guts, Sir”. Lucy, Silvia’s maid, exemplifies the figure, by thinking of her mistress’s reputation as a physical thing that Vainlove and Bellmour have made have made a “gap” in, “And can
you blame her if she make it up with a Husband?”. Setter gives the clew to the antiheroic basis of this kind of metaphor when he, the servant, uses heroic language: “Why, how now! prithee who art? . . . Thou art some forsaken Abigail, we have dallied with heretofore”.

This conversion downward of love is paralleled in physical terms by images of weight, such as Fondlewife’s amusing description of adultery as “a very weighty Sin; and although it may lie heavy upon thee, yet thy Husband must also bear his Part”, i.e., his horns. Bellmour, with mock sorrow, describes his promiscuity as “too heavy” a load: “I must take up, or I shall never hold out; Flesh and Blood cannot bear it always”. Thus, Heartwell describes the gallants as “Womens Asses bear[ing] greater Burdens; Are forc’d to undergo Dressing, Dancing, Singing, Sighing, Whining, Rhyming, Flattering, Lying, Grinning, Cringing, and the drudgery of Loving to boot”. He feels the “Load of Life” and finds women no help in carrying it; rather man becomes a beast “and with what anxious Strife,/ What Pain we tug that galling Load, a Wife”.

Balancing these conversions downward are comparisons that tend to point the action up toward a supernatural level; for example, Vainlove’s statement that to marry Araminta would be like going to Heaven. Bellmour puts himself at a more earthy level when he replies that he would rather not go immediately; “I’d do a little more good in my generation first, in order to deserve it” Vainlove, as the highest character in the scale, is the one most given to this kind of neoplatonic imagery: the favors of a much-petitioned lady are “due Rewards to indefatigable Devotion – For as Love is a Deity, he must be serv’d by Prayer”. Belinda, too, can talk this way: “A Lover in the State of Separation from his Mistress, is like a Body without a Soul”; more often she laughs at a lover with “Darts, and Flames, and Altars, and all that in his Breast”. Rather, she says, “I would be ador’d in Silence”.

Most often these images appear ironically, as when Bellmour assures his helper he will “confess” Laetitia, when he tells her eternity was in the moment of her kiss, or when he speaks of adultery as “Zeal”. Sharper kindly explains to Heartwell, who thinks he is married to Vainlove’s ex-mistress, “Few Women, but have their Year of Probation, before they are cloister’d in the narrow Joys of Wedlock”. Setter, Vainlove’s servant, describes Bellmour’s plan to seduce Laetitia as going well, “As all lewd projects do, Sir, where the Devil prevents on our Endeavours with Success”. Even Bluffe and Wittoll come in for a bit of religion: Bluffe “is ador’d by that Biggot Sir Joseph Wittoll, as the Image of Valour”.

Araminta sums up the tension expressed by these faintly supernatural conversions upward and bestial conversions downward when she replies to
Belinda’s raillery: “Love a Man; yes, you would not love a Beast”. Naturally, most human relations take place neither at the exalted level of neoplatonic love imagery nor at some subhuman depth, but on a realistic plane. At this level, love is an adversary proceeding, a lawsuit to Vainlove’s servant or, to Sir Joseph, a military attack. For his major characters, however, Congreve sets up a more subtle kind of adversary relationship.

To the men, love is something that affects the inner man. From the neoplatonic convention comes the notion that love is a wound: “By those Eyes, those killing Eyes; by those healing Lips”. To Heart-well, love is a disease, a folly, a madness for which “if whoring be purging (as you call it) then ... Marriage, is entering into a Course of Physick”. In another sense love is something one puts inside oneself, for Laetitia is a “delicious Morsel” and even Araminta, after Vainlove has received her supposed note, is “a delicious Mellon pure and consenting ripe, and only waits thy cutting up”. Bellmour, when he and Belinda have resolved to marry, say to the equilibrists, “May be it may get you an Appetite to see us fall to before ye”. Thus a man (as in Etherege’s plays) is a hunter. Vainlove is “continually starting of Hares for [Bellmour] to course”. It is not true that Vainlove cannot digest love; he can.

But I hate to be cramm’d — By Heav’n there’s not a Woman, will give a Man the Pleasure of a Chase: My Sport is always balkt or cut short — I stumble over the Game I would pursue — Tis dull and unnatural to have a Hare run full in the Hounds Mouth; and would distaste the keenest Hunter — I would have overtaken, not have met my Game.

Man’s appetite for love means that he can be baited and trapped. Thus, Silvia’s maid encourages her to “Strike Heartwell home, before the Bait’s worn off the Hook. Age will come. He nibbled fairly yesterday, and no doubt will be eager enough to Day, to swallow the Temptation”, for a man’s passion is “that very Hook your selves have baited”.

While man engulfs woman, woman engulfs man, consuming him almost as Thurber’s famous cartoon suggests. Over and over again, woman is a house, to Fondlewife a “Tabernacle”, and to Vainlove “the Temples of Love”. Heartwell thinks of his supposed wife as “that Corner-house – that hot Brothel” (100). For a man to have a handsome wife, says Fondlewife’s servant, “[if] the Man is an insufficient Husband. Tis then indeed, like the Vanity of taking a fine House, and yet be forced to let Lodgings, to help pay the Rent”. Setter calls Silvia’s maid “the Wicket to thy Mistresses Gate, to be opened for all Corners”, and even Belinda finds a country girl she meets “like the Front of her Father’s Hall; her Eyes were the two Jut- Windows, and her Mouth the great Door, most
hospitably kept open for the Entertainment of travelling Flies”. A house can easily become a prison. Vainlove thus can consider himself an “Offender” who “must plead to his Araignment, though he has his Pardon in his Pocket”, and Bellmour says, when he and Belinda decide to get married, he has become a “Prisoner,” committed “to a lasting Durance” and “Fetters”. Quite literally thinking of woman as surrounding man, Heartwell calls falling in love “to put on the envenom’d Shirt, to run into the Embraces of a Fever, and in some raving Fit, be led to plunge my self into that more consuming Fire, a Womans Arms”. He hesitates, but “her Kiss is sweeter than Liberty” (66), and he suffers the “Execution” of marriage. His wife becomes absorbed into him so that he would have to be maimed to be divorced.

The paradox of man ingesting love and woman surrounding man matches on a human, realistic plane the tension between upward conversions toward Heaven, and downward conversions toward physical animality. It matches, too, the central paradox of the play — the contradiction between appearance and nature. Just as men and women consume each other, so they deceive each other. As Heartwell with great solemnity counsels the supposedly innocent Silvia: “Lying, Child, is indeed the Art of Love; and Men are generally Masters in it: But I’m so newly entred, you cannot distrust me of any Skill in the treacherous Mystery”. The women are the real experts, however, for as Lucy says, “Man, was by Nature Womans Cully made”. Setter, Vainlove’s servant, when he sees Lucy in a mask tells her: “Lay by that worldly Face and produce your natural Vizor,” while she accuses him of being “made up of the Shreds and Pairings of [thy Master’s] superfluous Fopperies”.

Just as one is composed of appearances! and a nature underneath them, so one is moved by these tensions but at the same time is a spectator of one’s own motion. Thus, the crotchety sty Heartwell debates with himself before Silvia’s house:

Why whither in the Devil’s Name am I a going now? Hum — let me think — Is not this Silvia’s House? …. Ha! well recollected, I will recover my Reason, and be gone... Well, why do you not move? Feet do your Office — not one Inch; no, foregad I’m caught — There stands my North, and thither my Needle points — Now could I curse my self, yet cannot repent. … Death, I can’t think on’t. – I’ll run into the danger to lose the Apprehension.

So, too, Belinda warns Araminta: “But you play the Game, and consequently can’t see the Miscarriages obvious to every stander by”. Bellmour tries to persuade his beloved that “Courtship to Marriage, is but as the Musick
in the Play-House, ‘till the Curtain’s drawn; but that once up, then opens the Scene of Pleasure,” though she insists, “Rather, Courtship to Marriage, as a very witty Prologue to a very dull Play”. To Congreve, each of us plays both actor and spectator and our two roles interact. In a sense, watching can change actuality, as Bellmour says, “[A Wife] still is vertuous, if she’s so believ’d”. Understandably, this further paradox leads one quite naturally to Bellmour’s hedonistic skepticism, where only pleasure has meaning and wisdom is only a pretending to know. The conflict between actor and spectator represents still another tension.

A third dimension is added to the picture of man created by Congreve’s metaphors. There is the sense of time as an irreversible process. We roll our lives like bowling a ball, says Bellmour in the opening image of the play. He closes the play with a related image: “Now set we forward on a Journey for life.” Heartwell sums it up:

With gaudy Plumes and gingling Bells made proud,
The youthful Beast sets forth, and neighs aloud.  
A Morning-Sun his Tinsell’d Harness gilds,  
And the first Stage a Down-Hill Green-sword yields.  
But, Oh —  
What rugged Ways attend the Noon of Life!  
(Our Sun declines,) and with what anxious Strife,  
What Pain we tug that galling Load, a Wife;  
All Coursers the first Heat with Vigour run;  
But ‘tis with Whip and Spur the Race is won.

Passion is what drives human conduct: as Heartwell says, “Yet I must on – ‘Tis a bearded Arrow, and will more easily be thrust forward than drawn back”. Reason, he knows, is what holds us back: “I will recover my reason and be gone”.

In short, Congreve’s metaphorical structure creates an impression of that most characteristic of the seventeenth-century inventions – the coordinate system. We have seen how the individuals in the play present themselves as in tension — between conversion up and conversion down, between consuming and being consumed in love, and between reason and passion in the forward progress through time. The “journey of life” idea presents itself as forward or backward; the relation to ideals as up or down; the love relationship as from side to side. At the same time that the individual stands in the center of these tensions, he stands outside them as a spectator of himself.

It corresponds to what many critics have said about Congreve’s characters: “They are without a background, without roots,” writes Professor Bateson.
“We do not know how old [Mirabell] is, whether he has been at the University, whether he is in Parliament, or whether he has a post. We do not know anything about him. It is to be presumed that we were not meant to.” We are to sense them as isolated individuals surrounded by choices. The Way of the World is organized about a similar kind of co-ordinate system as well as some of his poetry.

No, all is hush’d, and still as Death – «Tis dreadful
How reverend is the Face of this tall Pile,
Whose ancient Pillars rear their Marble Heads,
To bear aloft its arch’d and pond’rous Roof,
By its own Weight made stedfast and immoveable,
Looking Tranquility. It striks an Awe
And Terror on my aking Sight; the Tombs
And Monumental Caves or Death look Cold,
And shoot a Chilness to my trembling Heart,
Give me thy Hand, and let me hear thy Voice;
Nay, quickly speak to me, and let me hear
Thy Voice — my own affrights me with its Echo’s. ...
No, I will on; shew me Anselmo’s Tomb,
Lead me o’er Bones and Skulls and mould’ring Earth
Of Human Bodies. ...
That Thought
Exerts my Spirits; and my present Fears
Are lost in dread of greater III. Then shew me
Lead me, for I am bolder grown: Lead on
Where I may kneel and pay my Vows again
To him, to Heav’n, and my Alphonso’s Soul.

(from The Morning Bride)

One of the reasons the passage is so effective is a similar use of directions. Three physical dimensions image the psychological tensions surrounding the speaker. The rise of the pillars and the arch of the roof balancing its own “pond’rous” weight parallel in the up-and-down direction the conflict between the speaker’s heavenly and earthly obligations set out in the last three lines. The picture of ruins and death shows the passage of time; “I will on” suggests a parallel forward movement with fears pulling back and greater fears pushing forward. “Give me thy Hand” parallels the reciprocation of the speaker’s voice, “its Echo’s,” and her tensions with the other people in the play. This somewhat abstruse connection between a more or less heroic drama and the comic action of The Old Batchelor is the same kind of link Professor Sypher finds as the transition between mannerist and baroque art and literature: the
baroque resolution of mannerist tensions. We could say that Congreve’s three-dimensional conception is mannerist in having unresolved tensions and a shifting point of view (spectator’s and actor’s), but baroque in that these tensions are seen along orthogonal, clearly defined directions.

Congreve uses two rather curious image clusters to reinforce this picture, each related to movement in three dimensions. As in Etherege’s comedies, man is regarded “Creature” and compared to birds. The gallants are hawks, or “young, termagant flashy Sinners”. Bellmour calls himself “a Cormorant in Love”, while Sharper compares Sir Joseph and Captain Bluffe to “Owls”. They, in turn, think of Sharper as a “Cock”. Belinda, when she encounters two country girls, thinks of them as “fat as Barn-door Fowl: But so bedeck’d, you wou’d have taken ‘em for Friebland Hens, with their Feathers growing the wrong way”.

A much more unusual image depicts travel over water: the possibility of sinking supplies the third direction. Thus, Vainlove is described as “ever embarking in Adventures, yet never comes to Harbour”, “because he always sets out in foul Weather, loves top buffet with the Winds, meet the Tide, and fail in the Teeth of Opposition.” He has “not dropt Anchor at Araminta” though “she fits his Temper best, is a kind of floating Island; sometimes seems in reach, then vanishes and keeps him busied in the search”. Sharper says to Bellmour: “You steer another Course, are bound,/ For Love’s Island: I, for the golden Coast”. When Bellmour returns from Laetitia, Vainlove’s servant asks him:

*Setter*: Joy of your Return, Sir. Have you made a good Voyage? or have you brought your own Lading back?

*Bellmour*: No, I have brought nothing but Ballast back – made a delicious Voyage, *Setter*; and might have rode at Anchor in the Port ‘till this time, but the Enemy surpriz’d us.

This same servant describes Araminta, whom he is supposedly to bring to Vainlove, as “a noble Prize,” “A goodly Pinnace, richly laden, and to launch forth under my auspicious Convoy. Twelve thousand Pounds, and all her Rigging; besides what lies conceal’d under Hatches”. Heartwell, in his relation with Silvia, looks on himself as a kind of Odysseus going to “Silvia’s House, the Cave of that Enchantress,” yet he cannot navigate away for “There stands my North, and thither my Needle points”. She finds “dissembling to our Sex is as natural as swimming to a Negro; we may depend upon our skill to save us at a plunge, tho’ till then we never make the experiment”. Sir Joseph apologizes for having forgotten that Sharper rescued him from some seventeenth-century delinquents (“Canibals”): “My intire Dependance, Sir, [is] upon the superfluity of your Goodness, which, like an Inundation will, I hope, totally immerse the
recollection of my Error, and leave me floating in your Sight, upon the full blown Bladders of Repentance – by the help of which, I shall once more hope to swim into your Favour”.

Both these images — man as a bird or man as a swimmer or sailor – show the individual isolated in space. He is surrounded by choices. He can choose high aspirations or low sensuality, progression or regression, love or hostility, and the over-all system of metaphors puts choices in terms of directions. This three-dimensional system is simply the character grouping we noted at the beginning of the discussion, turned inside out. The characters are grouped around the central problem of appearance and nature, differing only in their involvement or non-involvement with it. The language inverts the situation: it puts the individual composed of an appearance and a nature at the center of tensions representing his choices. The action and language pull against each other, giving different, even inconsistent, points of view on the things a particular individual does. The “language of split-man observation” covers over the turbulent action by metaphors that constantly evaluate it. These continual evaluations create the effect of a smooth, polished appearance laid over a harshly physical nature. This contrast between language and action is Congreve’s special sense of humor, his version of the continuing theme of appearance versus nature, and his unique, indeed triumphant, contribution to Restoration comedy.

Questions:

1. Name the main characters of the comedy *The Old Batchelor*.
2. Describe the main plotlines of the play.
4. Describe the three-dimensional system of images used in the play.
5. Comment on Congreve’s sense of the comic.
6. W. CONGREVE. THE DOUBLE-DEALER

In this play Congreve carried on themes Wycherley had developed. It treated folly and vice as kindred failings in which people pay too much attention to externals. *The Old Batchelor*, moreover, introduced a new technique, the tension between language and action, and a new theme: the play identified appearances with the ideals people seek and “nature” with the disappointments they find. Congreve had pushed *The Plain-Dealer* to the next logical step in *The Old Batchelor*, but after that first brilliant success, *The Double-Dealer*, when produced at Drury Lane in October 1693, was a comparative failure. Dryden wrote to his friend Walsh:

“His Double Dealer is much censured by the greater part of the Town; and is defended onely by the best judges, who, you know, are commonly the fewest. Yet it gets ground daily, and has already been acted Eight Times. The women thinke he has exposed their Bitchery too much; and the Gentlemen are offended with him; for the discovery of their follyes: and the way of their Intrigues, under the notion of Friendship to their Ladies Husbands.”

While Dryden’s solicitude is touching, it is more likely that the combination of realistic tragedy and realistic comedy in the same play annoyed Congreve’s audiences, as it was to do again in *The Way of the World*. Indeed,” writes Macaulay, “there is something strangely revolting in the way in which a group that seems to belong to the house of Laius or I of Pelops is introduced into the midst of the Brisks, Froths, Carelesses, I and Plyants.”

*The Double-Dealer* does combine a “serious” plot with an unusually airy comic action, but the play uses each to look at the other. The comic plot satirizes folly in the usual Restoration way; the serious plot, however, attacks villainy in a manner quite unusual for a Restoration comedy. Nevertheless, both plots develop in terms of appearance and nature, and the combination of the two suggests relationships between folly and villainy. For example, both the folly and the villainy take the same two characteristic forms: suppressing the real self or over-expressing it.

The comic plot works out the several follies of Lord and Lady Froth and Sir Paul and Lady Plyant. The husbands are deceived, of course; Froth by Brisk, a pseudo-wit, and Sir Paul by Careless, a friend of the hero, Mellefont. The Froths overexpress themselves, fawning on each other in public, showing off their pretentious affections. The Plyants show the folly of suppressing nature. Sir Paul Plyant, the father of Cynthia, the heroine, is henpecked by his second wife, who is so “nice” that she keeps him tied up in bed to prevent any normal marital relations. Lady Plyant has suppressed Sir Paul’s “natural” desires, in-
deed, she has to some extent suppressed her own, and when Careless woos her, he has to suppress his own natural response of laughter to be able to say the absurd things he must to win her. This kind of foolishness is given its best exposition by Lord Froth: “There is nothing more unbecoming a Man of Quality, than to Laugh; ‘tis such a Vulgar Expression of the Passion! every Body can Laugh. . . To’be pleased with what pleases the Croud! Now when I laugh, I always laugh alone”. He never laughs at comedies, “to distinguish my self from the Commonalty, and mortifie the Poets. . . I swear, — he, he, he, I have often constrain’d my Inclinations to laugh, — he, he, he, to avoid giving them Encouragement”. He and Brisk conclude the scene:

Lord Froth. Oh, for the Universe, not a Drop more I beseech you. Oh Intemperate! I have a Flushing in my Face already.

[Takes out a Pocket-Glass, and looks in it.]

Brisk. Let me see, let me see, my Lord, I broke my Glass that was in the Lid of my Snuff-Box. Hm! Duce take me, I have encourag’d a pimple here too.

[Takes the Glass and looks.]

Ld. Froth. Then you must mortifie him with a Patch; my Wife shall supply you.

Not a very pretty image, but it is magnificently appropriate to the idea of stifling one’s inner nature.

Opposed to suppression is the other form of indecorum: overexpression — akin to “wildness” in the earlier comedies. It is shown here by the cuckolding intrigues, by the wives who dominate their husbands, and by the frequent and effusive expressions of love all the spouses make. Overexpression here, like Mrs. Loveit’s in The Man of Mode, is the failure to control and direct one’s inner nature into socially acceptable channels; it is represented in the intrigue by the false, strained wit of Brisk and Lady Froth, particularly their forcedly laughing courtship:

Brisk. Yet, ha, ha, ha. The Deuce take me, I can’t help laughing my self; ha, ha, ha; yet by Heav’ns, I have a violent Passion for your Ladyship, seriously.

Lady Froth. Seriously? Ha, ha, ha.

Brisk. Seriously, ha, ha, ha. Gad I have, for all I laugh.

L. Froth. Ha, ha, ha! What d’ye think I laugh at? Ha, ha, ha.

Brisk. Me, I’gad, ha, ha.

L. Froth. No the Deuce take me if I don’t laugh at my self; for hang me if I have not a violent Passion for Mr. Brisk, ha, ha, ha.

Brisk. Seriously?

L. Froth. Seriously, ha, ha, ha.
Brisk. That’s well enough; let me perish, ha, ha, ha. O miraculous, what a happy Discovery. Ah my dear charming Lady Froth!

L. Froth. Oh my adored Mr. Brisk! [Embrace]

Sir Paul’s advice to his daughter on marrying is another form of effusiveness: she is to think of her father on her wedding-night,

For I would fain have some Resemblance of my self in my Posterity, he Thy? Can’t you contrive that affair Girl? Do Gadsbud, think on thy old Father; heh? Make the young Rogue as like as you can. . . . I’ll give thee 500 £, for every Inch of him that resembles me; ah this Eye, this Left Eye! A thousand Pound for this left Eye. . . . — Let it be transmitted to the young Rogue by the help of Imagination. . . . — Ah! when I was of your Age Hussey, I would have held fifty to one, I could have drawn my own Picture. . . . Don’t learn after your Mother-in-Law my Lady here. . . . If you should take a Vagarie and make a rash Resolution on your Wedding Night, to die a Maid, as she did; all were luin’d, all my Hopes lost! . . . I hope you are a better Christian than to think of living a Nun; he?

Instead of satisfying his desire to express himself through progeny in the normal marital way, he tries to extend his wishes through the family triangle to his grandchildren. Pie tries by overexpression through Cynthia to compensate for his suppression by Lady Plyant. As both these quotations show, Congreve embodies this effusiveness in its own special logorrhea.

Indeed, Lady Froth gives overexpression its own special literary form in her “Songs, Elegies, Satires, Encomiums, Panegyricks, Lampoons, Plays, or Heroick Poems” with which she gives vent to her “Whimsies and Vapours”. Her major effort is an “Essay toward an Heroick Poem,” the subject being “my Lord’s Love to me”. This epic is called The Sillabub (i.e., a wine and cream frappe, the seventeenth-century version of an ice cream soda) “because my Lord’s Title’s Froth, I’gad, ha, ha, ha”. The most trivial transactions of Lady Froth’s trivial life must be blown up to heroic size: “That Episode between Susan, the Dairy-Maid, and our Coach-Man is not amiss”. The maid is called “Thetis,” and the coachman is to be compared to the sun and called “Heav’ns Charioteer.” The fragment of this epic that Congreve gives us is one of the most delightful things in the play:

For as the Sun shines ev’ry Day,
So, of our Coach-man I may say,
He shows his drunken fiery Face,
Just as the Sun does, more or less.
And when at Night his Labour’s done,
Then too, like Heav’ns Charioteer the Sun:
Into the Dairy he descends,
And there his Whipping and his Driving ends;
There he’s secure from Danger of a Bilk,
His Fare is paid him, and he sets in Milk.

It even has footnotes, as Brisk very wisely advises, to forestall the criticism that “Bilk and Fare” are “too like a Hackney Coach-man”:
Lady Froth’s literary pretensions also serve as a mask:

Brisk. I hope you’ll make me happy in communicating the Poem.
Lady Froth. Oh, you must be my Confident, I must ask your Advice, Brisk. I’m your humble Servant, let me perish, — I presume your Ladyship has read Bossu?
L. Froth. Oh yes, and Rapine, and Dacier upon Aristotle and Horace. — My Lord, you must not be jealous, I’m communicating all to Mr. Brisk.
Lord Froth. No, no, I’ll allow Mr. Brisk; have you nothing about you to shew him, my Dear?
L. Froth. Yes, I believe I have. — Mr. Brisk, come will you go into the next Room? and there I’ll shew you what I have.

Brisk’s substitution of neo-classic rules for literary intelligence is only one instance of his general principle: “Why should I disparage my Parts by thinking what to say? None but dull Rogues think; witty Men, like rich Fellows, are always ready for all Expences; while your Blockheads, like poor needy Scoundrels, are forced to examine their Stock, and forecast the Charges of the Day”. Wit is not a faculty, but a possession, money or a “Diamond”.

As in The Old Batchelor, language and action tend to pull apart. In the comic plot, figures of speech enlarge the most trivial actions to epic proportions. We have already seen Lord Froth’s way of refusing a drink: “Oh, for the Universe, not a Drop more I beseech you.” Sir Paul finds he must draw on religious and political imagery adequately to describe his prodigious marriage: “Have I approach’d the Marriage Bed with Reverence as to a sacred Shrine, and deny’d myself the Enjoyment of lawful Domestick Pleasures to preserve its Purity, and must I now find it polluted by foreign Iniquity?”. The fact that Careless is using him to gain access to Lady Plyant is “the very traiterous Position of taking up Arms by my Authority, against my Person!” and Careless ought to “be damn’d for a Judas Maccabeus, and Iscariot both”. Mellefont describes Plyant as “like a gull’d Bassa that has marry’d a relation of the Grand Signior” and indeed when Sir Paul ventures to object to his cuckolding, Lady Plyant shrieks at him: “Heathen,” “Turk, Sarazen,” “Jew”. Lord Froth, on the other hand, finds his marriage ‘Happy Slavery’. 
In the Brisk-Froth plot, the very cosmos must be pressed into service to describe the important events. For example, when Mellefont asks Brisk to return to the after-dinner company, the would-be wit replies: «Gad you shall command me from the **Zenith** to the **Nadir**». Lady Froth says of her idiotic husband: “I think I may say he wants nothing, but a blue Ribbon and a Star to make him shine, the very Phosphorus of our Hemisphere”. Later, Lady Froth’s astronomy, like her literary efforts, serves as a mask to cover her doings with Brisk:

**Lady Froth.** My Dear, Mr. **Brisk** and I have been Star-gazing, I don’t know how long.

**Sir Paul.** Does it not tire your Ladyship? are you not weary with looking up?

**L. Froth.** Oh, no, I love it violently. . . . Well, I swear, Mr. **Brisk**, you understood Astronomy like an old **Egyptian**.

**Brisk.** Not comparably to your Ladyship; you are the very **Cynthia** of the Skies, and Queen of Stars.

**L. Froth.** That’s because I have no Light, but what’s by Reflection from you, who are the Sun.

**Brisk.** Madam, you have Eclips’d me quite, let me perish.

In one of the few brilliant touches in this play, after the real villainy and tragedy have been revealed, Lady Froth comments simply: “You know I told you **Saturn** look’d a little more angry than usual”. I wish Congreve had put in a stage direction: **Giggle**. “Nothing had really happened,” writes Professor Dobree. “It is like an icy douche, everything is brought to a standstill, and we are once more in the realm of that comedy where none of the emotions are important.” But something has happened: we realize with a sudden and violent revulsion how appallingly trivial Lady Froth and her kind are, how she levels everything, and how the magnitude of an action depends on the perceiver as well as its intrinsic importance.

To the fools, everything is the same size. Mellefont’s leaving the room becomes, to Brisk, “thy Amputation from the Body of our Society. — He, I think that’s pretty and Metaphorical enough”. Nothing is more important than anything else. The event and its metaphor are made equal and reality becomes a smooth surface polished by Brisk’s false wit. For the fools, the forms of life equal the substance.

By way of contrast, the serious plot has few figures of speech and no literary effusions. Instead there is real play-acting, and what few metaphors there are create the impression, not of a polished surface that reflects all things equally, but of layers of complexity through which there is inward and outward movement. The main plot concerns the marriage of Mellefont and Cynthia, and particularly
the villainous obstructions set up by Lady Touchwood, Mellefont’s lusty aunt, who has conceived a desire for him. She selects for her ally and lover Maskwell, Mellefont’s supposed friend who he thinks is helping him to bring off his marriage. Just as Maskwell is about to trick everyone and achieve his ambition to marry the wealthy Cynthia himself, Mellefont’s uncle, Lord Touchwood, discovers the plot and sends his unfaithful wife and Maskwell off to punishment.

Both in language and action everything goes in and out. The images of penetration or nonpenetration parallel on a linguistic level the actions of the wives who refuse their husbands intercourse so they can sleep with other men. Thus, when the crimes of Lady Touchwood are finally revealed, Lord Touchwood cries out in a metaphor of inward movement: “Where will this end?”, “Heavens, what a long Track of dark Deceit has this discover’d! I am confounded when I look back, and want a Clue to guide me through the various Mazes of unheard of Treachery”. Earlier, Maskwell describes Lady Touchwood as having a “dam’d penetrating Head” and she herself speaks of his knowing “the very inmost Windings and” Recesses of my Soul”. Sir Paul’s description of his wife is exactly the opposite: he calls her “impenetrable” and she speaks of her honor as “white” and “unsully’d” like a fair Sheet of Paper”. One is reminded also of Brisk’s presumably unpimpled face.

In short, the fools’ similes show that, to them, perception is no problem: everything is alike — a smooth surface. The language of the “serious” plot, however, reflects a self-conscious awareness of the difficulty of perception itself. Thus, Cynthia says of Mellefont’s concentration on getting his uncle’s consent rather than on the marriage itself: “You have look’d through the wrong End of the Perspective [i.e., telescope] all this while”. The wise people see into things rather than perceive superficial similarities:

Careless. I find women are not the same bare-faced and in Masks, — and a Vizor disguises their Inclinations as much as their Faces.

Mellefont. ‘Tis a Mistake, for Women may most properly be said to be unmask’d when they wear Vizors; for that secures them from Blushing and being out of Countenance, and next to being in the Dark, or alone, they are most truly themselves in a Vizor Mask.

Mellefont can tell Careless not to “wear” sense and Maskwell says, “Cynthia, let thy Beauty gild my Crimes; and whatsoever I commit of Treachery or Deceit, shall be imputed to me as a Merit”. Each of the two characteristic types of folly, suppression and overexpression, has its corresponding kind of villainy: Lady Touchwood is effusive and Maskwell hides his real nature. Both their names are indicative, of course. His expresses his hypocrisy. Hers, Touchwood, refers to
old, decayed wood used for tinder; her name thus reveals both her age and the
easy inflammability of her passions. Mellefont continually compares her to a
witch or devil who has stirred up a destructive storm or fire. She, in turn, whose
every passion bubbles Loveit-like to the surface, contrasts her fiery effusiveness
with Mask-well’s cold hypocrisy:

Calm Villain! How unconcern’d he stands, confessing Treachery, and Ingratitude!
Is there a Vice more black! — 01 have Excuses, thousands for my Faults; Fire in my
Temper, Passions in my Soul, apt to ev’ry Provocation, oppressed at once with Love, and
with Despair. But a sedate, a thinking Villain, whose black Blood runs temperately bad,
what Excuse can clear?

Maskwell’s complete suppression of self in various pretenses presented
Congreve with a problem of dramatizing such a character and drove him to
that use of soliloquies that he said in his dedication his contemporaries so
much deplored. Maskwell pretends even to his own desires: “Pox I have lost
all Appetite to her . . . Therefore I must dissemble Ardour and Ecstasie; that’s
resolv’d: How easily and pleasantly is that dissembled before Fruition!” He has
substituted deception for plain-dealing in the old proverb: “Well, this Double-
Dealing is a Jewel”. He has substituted deceit for his own real self even to the
point of confusing his own appearance and nature: “Why, let me see, I have the
same Face, the same Words and Accents, when I speak what I do think; and
when I speak what I do not think — the very same — and dear Dissimulation is
the only Art, not to be known from Nature”.

The villainy in the play involves dissimulation and discovery which form
important parts of the in-out imagery. That is, discovery, as we have seen, is a
penetration, an inward movement, while dissimulation has the special sense of
inwardly inventing a mask and projecting it outward. Lord Touchwood describes
it as a birth when he summarizes the revelations in the finale:

Like Vipers in the Womb, base Treachery lies,
Still gnawing that, whence first it did arise;
No sooner born, but the Vile Parent dies.

Lady Touchwood threatens Maskwell: “You want but Leisure to invent
fresh Falshood, and sooth me to a fond Belief of all your Fictions; but I will
stab the Lie that’s forming in your Heart”, or “Ten thousand Meanings lurk
in each Corner of that various Face. O! That they were written in thy Heart,
That I, with this, might lay thee open to my Sight!”. Indeed, dissimulation in
this special sense is to be associated with sight and vision rather than darkness.
Thus, Mellefont describes Lady Touchwood: “She has endeavour’d to do me all ill Offices with my Uncle; yet has managed em with that Subtilty, that to him they have born the Face of Kindness; while her Malice, like a dark Lanthorn [a seventeenth-century flashlight] only shone upon me, where it was directed”. Just as knaves bring their villainy to the surface, so fools bring their folly. Cynthia describes some: “They have all Jests in their Persons, though they have none in their Conversation”. As Mask-well says:

No Mask like open Truth to cover Lies,
As to go naked is the best disguise.

References to mirrors have a particular appropriateness in this context. In the stage version of the play, between the discovery of Brisk’s pimple and Lord Froth’s self-love in looking-glasses, Lady Touchwood denounces Maskwell as “one, who is no more moved with the reflection of his Crimes, than of his Face; but walks unstartled from the Mirrour, and straight forgets the hideous form.” Lady Touchwood, when she pretends repentance, cries, “I was surprised to see a Monster in the Glass, and now I find ‘tis my self”. The fact that she is pretending creates a double perspective on her remark. The question of what we see in the mirror — the self or its skin — is the question of the play.

As opposed to the mirror images, the high plot abounds in animal images that bring out hidden aspects of human nature. “Oh, ‘tis such a Pleasure,” says Maskwell, “to angle for fair fac’d Fools! Then that hungry Gudgeon Credulity, will bite at any thing”. Mellefont tells Lady Touchwood, “I have you on the Hook; you will but flounder yourself a weary”. He calls her an animal with “no more Holes to your Burrough”. She calls herself a “Vulture”, and Lord Touchwood calls the villains “Vipers”.

There are some parallels in the low plot. Lady Plyant says, “I am as red as a Turky-Cock”, and Sir Paul says of Mellefont, “Snakes are in his Peruke, and the Crocodile of Nilus is in his Belly, he will eat thee up alive”. But these images refer always to superficies: the false appearance of Mellefont’s supposed attempt to seduce Lady Plyant, or that estimable gentlewoman’s skin. Thus, Brisk describes one old lady as “chewing the Cud like an old Ewe,” another without teeth as looking, when she laughs, “Like an Oyster at low Ebb, I’gad”. He says to Sir Paul, “You’re always brooding over [your daughter] like an old Hen, as if she were not well hatch’d”. But his similes deal with appearances; those in the high plot reach toward a hidden self.

While other people are described as animals, Mellefont is associated with vegetables. Lord Touchwood describes him as “the alone remaining Branch of
all our ancient Family”. Careless describes him as having cultivated Maskwell’s interest like a plant, and Mellefont describes himself as a kind of farmer whose misfortune it is “to have a sudden Whirlwind come, tear up Tree and all, and bear away the very Root and Foundation of his Hopes”. Mellefont is given neither to affectation nor to pretense, and except for Cynthia (who remains a witty nonentity) he is the most “natural” of the troop.

He stands alone, expressing his isolation in the same image we saw used in *The Old Batchelor*, when he says to Maskwell, “Thy Presence is a view of Land, appearing to my shipwrack’d Hopes: The Witch has rais’d the Storm and her Ministers have done their Work . . . There’s Comfort in a Hand stretch’d out, to one that’s sinking; tho’ ne’er so far off”. While he is — to some extent — an actor in the situation, his most important role is that of spectator. Through the language of split-man observation he evaluates the relation of Maskwell and Lady Touchwood to him as “Like any two Guardians to an Orphan Heiress”. He can stand outside himself and see he is essentially alone, an orphan, in a corrupt world. He is even a spectator in his relationship with Cynthia. Both of them keep a perspective on their situation by pretending that their courtship and the machinations it entails are a race or a hunt or a contract in which Mellefont must give “a very evident Demonstration of his Wit” as “Consideration”. They treat their situation as a game and debate whether it is more like cards or bowling). Cynthia agrees to allow for “irresistible Odds” if Mellefont fails against Lady Touchwood. He, when he is actually scheming, describes his operations in terms of military strategy, as does Careless.

Ultimately, of course, the play fails because Mellefont is so woefully inadequate as a hero. He is like the passive heroes of contemporary tragedies, such as Osmyn in Congreve’s own *The Mourning Bride*. (Heroic plays in this, their later phase, strove for an emotional effect of pathos, not of admiration) Mellefont represents in some sense an ideal of spectatorship, but in so doing, he is guilty of the same kind of self-suppression as the fools: he replaces himself as actor by Mask-well, his “better Genius”. All the derring-do that is admirable or endearing in a Dorimant or a Freeman is completely lacking. Mellefont lamentably fails to live up to Cynthia’s challenge that he prove his wit by forcing Lady Touchwood to give her consent. In the denouement, it is Cynthia and Lord Touchwood — and chance — who uncover the villainy. The public reaction to Mellefont’s incompetence was precisely what we would expect. Congreve attempted to justify himself in the dedication:

“Another very wrong Objection has been made by some who have not taken Leisure to distinguish the Characters. The Hero of the Play, as they are pleas’d to call him, (meaning Mellefont) is a Gull, and made a Fool, and cheated.
Is every man a Gull and a Fool that is deceiv’d? At that rate I’m afraid the two Classes of Men will be reduc’d to one, and the Knaves themselves be at a loss to justifie their Title: But if an Open-hearted honest Man, who has an entire Confidence in one whom he takes to be his Friend, and whom he has oblig’d to be so; and who (to confirm him in his Opinion) in all Appearance and upon several Trials has been so: If this Man be deceiv’d by the Treachery of the other; must he of necessity commence Fool immediately, only because the other has prov’d a Villain? Ay, but there was Caution given to Mellefont in the first Act by his Friend Careless. Of what Nature was that Caution? Only to give the Audience some light into the Character of Maskwell before his appearance; and not to convince Mellefont of his Treachery; for that was more than Careless was then able to do: He never knew Maskwell guilty of any Villany; he was only a sort of Man which he did not like. As for his suspecting his Familiarity with my Lady Touchwood: Let ‘em examine the Answer that Mellefont makes him, and compare it with the Conduct of Maskwell’s Character through the Play.

I would beg ‘em again to look into the Character of Maskwell before they accuse Mellefont of weakness for being deceiv’d by him. For upon summing up the Enquiry into this Objection, it may be found they have mistaken Cunning in one Character, for Folly in another.” Congreve’s justification cannot save his hero from a Catoesque passivity, nor the play itself from being a hodge-podge of tragedy and comedy. The motto says that “sometimes even comedy lifts her voice”; unfortunately, in this play, it quavered off into a falsetto.

Mellefont’s passivity, however, does serve one useful purpose: it allows full scope for the development of Maskwell, who is the active principle in the drama, and in that sense the real “hero.” It is Maskwell for whom the intrigue was designed, and Maskwell who understands and makes use of the inconsistency between appearance and nature on which intrigue is based. It is Maskwell who is worldly wise, who realizes more than any other character the difficulty of seeing things clearly or acting them out directly: “Is there not such a Thing as Honesty? Yes, and whosoever has it about him, bears an Enemy in his Breast: For your / honest Man, as I take it, is that nice scrupulous, conscientious Person, who will cheat no Body but himself; such another Coxcomb, as your wise Man, who is too hard for all the World, and will be made a Fool of by no Body but himself.” . . .

Why will Mankind be Fools, and be deceiv’d?
And why are Friends and Lovers “Oaths believ’d”?
When, each, who searches strictly his own Mind,
May so much Fraud and Power of Baseness find?
We should remember that Brisk and Careless in the comic plot are double-dealers, too. Mellefont, like Manly, has to learn that Maskwell’s cynical wisdom has at least one or two grains of truth in it. He must learn, as even the preposterous Lady Plyant can tell him: “Alas! Humanity is feeble, Heav’n knows”. He learns it by his own feebleness in love, for, as Maskwell says, “Love [is] like Death an universal Leveller of Mankind”. Here again, as in The Old Batchelor, the influence of The Plain-Dealer is strong — though somewhat less obvious. The relation between Mellefont, Maskwell, and Careless is much like that between Manly, Vernish, and Freeman. But while Freeman carried enough weight to establish a norm of common sense, Careless does not; he sees mostly surface as Mellefont does: “I am a little superstitious in Physiognomy,” he says. Mellefont, of course, hasn’t the idiosyncracies of Manly; still, he is like Manly in that he would prefer to remain aloof both from the follies of the low plot and villainies of the high. He cannot; he is drawn into them by his own involvement with Cynthia and his aunt’s desire for him, just as Manly was drawn back into reality by his love, first for Olivia, then for Fidelia. As in The Plain-Dealer, the problem is to educate the hero to his own fallibility.

Were Mellefont not in the play, we would have a fairly ordinary Restoration comedy; there have been melodramatic villains in comedies’ before. With Mellefont in the play, however, the comedy is no longer a conflict between those who see only the surface and those who see beneath it, the contrast between the wits and the fools of The Old Batchelor. With Mellefont in the play, the tension is between one who intrigues and is evil and one who, though he may know both appearance and nature, is good and does not intrigue. Congreve’s denials in the dedication cannot change the parallel stressed in the play between Mellefont’s goodness and his credulity.

The axis of Congreve’s comedy has shifted. Wisdom is no longer prized: “There are Times,” says Mellefont, “when Sense may be unseasonable, as well as Truth”. Cynthia’s soliloquy sums it up:

If Happiness in Self-content is plac’d
The Wise are Wretched, and Fools only Bless’d.

Her ironic tone hints that happiness is not merely self-content, that the world is not merely money (which even Wycherley seemed to accept); something beyond folly or wisdom is real happiness. No longer is the dramatic tension between wise men and fools, but between fools and villains on the one hand, and Mellefont, who is “all goodness”, on the other. The comic axis is no longer wisdom and folly, but good and evil. Congreve has added to the tendency to
present an ideal in a realistic context still another symptom of the eighteenth-century sentimentality: a faith in the “natural goodness” of people which social forms only interfere with.

Questions:
1. Describe the serious and the comic plots of the play.
2. Name the main characters of the comedy.
3. Explain some of the main images of the play: mirror images, animal images.
4. Comment on the speaking names of the play.
7. W. CONGREVE. LOVE FOR LOVE

Congreve’s third comedy, Love for Love, surely was a success when it was first produced on April, 30, 1695, at the new theater Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and it has been a favorite of critics and audiences ever since. Almost as though Congreve were testing his own innovations, he wrote his third play about three different ways of life.

The high plot deals with Valentine Legend’s courtship of the lovely Angelica. Already at the opening of the play, he has run heavily into debt in his efforts to win her, while she has kept up appearance of complete indifference. Even when Valentine gets into more and more trouble, she ignores his declarations of love. Sir Sampson Legend, Valentine’s father, tries to disinherit him in favor of his younger brother, the sailor Ben, and even tries to marry Angelica himself. Tattle, an indiscreet beau, also tries to marry Angelica; and Mrs. Frail, a none too virtuous lady, tries to marry Valentine, who is at this point reduced to feigning madness. Mad or not, he and his servant Jeremy dupe Mrs. Frail and Tattle into marrying each other; but still none of his schemes to win Angelica, even his feigned madness, succeeds until he finally agrees to renounce his estate and consent to his father’s marrying her. Then, she says his love is true and accepts him.

Valentine in this high plot progresses from lover to poet, to madman, to martyr, almost as though Congreve were remembering:

The Lunaticke, the Louer, and the Poet
Are of imagination all compact. …
And all their minds transfigur’d so together,
More witnesseth than fancies images,
And growes to something of great constancie,
But howsoever, strange, and admirable.

His progress is through three confinements. In Act I, he is forced to remain in his house to elude his creditors, having run heavily into arrears in his pursuit of Angelica. At this stage, he contemplates becoming a poet to support himself. In the second confinement (Act IV), he agrees to relinquish his estate to get his father to pay his creditors, and, to avoid signing the final papers and to get Angelica’s sympathy, he feigns madness, confining himself to his house again. In his third confinement (Act V) – this one metaphorical – he actually relinquishes his estate and Angelica, but she rescues him and accepts him. “I yield my Body as your Prisoner,” he says. His progress involves the familiar neoclassic coupling of religion, love, and the furor poeticus, as aspects of the irrational. “The divine
Part of me, my Mind,” he says to Angelica, “has worn this Masque of Madness, and this motly Livery, only as the Slave of Love and menial Creature of your Beauty”. Thus Valentine’s friend, Scandal, can comment drily on his wish to write satire: “Who would die a Martyr to Sense in a Country where the Religion is Folly?” In the context, it is completely appropriate that Valentine’s final effort to win Angelica is to feign lunacy, for “He that was so near turning Poet yesterday Morning, can’t be much to seek in playing the Madman to Day”.

Valentine’s progress through confinements relates to knowledge as well as to madness. When Scandal suggests to Angelica that her indifference to Valentine is an affectation of ill nature, Valentine ruefully makes a remark which is a key not only to this play but all of Restoration comedy: “I know no effectual Difference between continued Affectation and Reality”. His failure to realize that outside society there is a difference and his related failure to seek Angelica through something other than a show or “affectation” are what keep him from winning her. Love for love is based on the idea of an education or therapy, and this is the point at which Valentine needs education: that there is a reality which is higher and larger than “continued Affectation”.

In all his schemes to win Angelica, Valentine neglects the one method that finally succeeds – directness. He pretends to poetry, to madness, and to devotion; not until the finale does he resort to a simple direct proposal with obvious evidence of his sincerity. When he plans to turn poet, he tells his servant Jeremy:

Now I am poor, I have an Opportunity to be reveng’d on ‘em all; I’ll pursue Angelica with more Love than ever, and appear more notoriously her Admirer in this Restraint, than when I openly rival’d the rich Fops, that made Court to her; so shall my Poverty be a Mortification to her Pride, and perhaps make her compassionate the Love, which has principally reduc’d me to this Lowness of Fortune.

Despite his protestations, though, he is keeping a barrier between himself and Angelica, trying to create a “Mortification to her Pride”, rather than a direct bond between them. His feigning madness is another ruse. Angelica quickly realizes it is and resolves to “play Trick for Trick”. She refuses to recognize that he is feigning, even when he says:

You see what Disguises Love makes us put on; Gods have been in counterfeited Shapes for the same Reason; … Nay Faith, now let us understand one another, Hypocrisie apart, – The Comedy draws toward an end, and let us think of leaving acting, and be our selves; and since you have lov’d me, you must own, I have at length deserv’d you shou’d confess it.
In effect, Valentine still keeps a distance between them, revealed by his speaking of “acting”. He has soiled his relationship with Angelica as she promptly makes him confess:

*Valentine.* My seeming Madness has deceiv’d my Father, and procur’d me time to think of Means to reconcile me to him; and preserve the right of my Inheritance to his Estate; which otherwise by Articles, I must this Morning have resign’d: And this I had inform’d you of to Day, but you were gone, before I knew you had been here.

*Angelica.* How! I thought your Love of me had caus’d this Transport in your Soul; which it seems you only counterfeited; for mercenary Ends, and sordid Interest.

She meets his social show with an answer in social terms and demands instead that he shows real madness: “I’ll tell you two things before I leave you; I am not the Fool you take me for; and you are mad, and don’t know it”. Thus, too, Angelica replies to Tattle’s proposal: “O fie for shame, hold your Tongue, A passionate Lover, and five Senses in perfection! when you are as mad as Valentine, I’ll believe you love me, and the maddest shall take me”.

In this “mad” scene with its echoes of *Hamlet* and *The Plain-Dealer*, Valentine takes on some of the character of the playwright. Valentine’s statement about his “Comedy” certainly supports this view, as do the frequent references to art and artifice. But, as in *The Way of the World*, drama is tested and found wanting. Valentine has in no sense achieved completeness by becoming inspired and literary. On the contrary, Valentine has yet to learn what Angelica’s trial of his constancy has to teach him – “real” madness.

He must prove to her that the underlying reality, “the naked Hook” that one gets when the bait (appearances and disguises) is thrown off, is worth the loss of liberty and the chase. He must, in other words, prove that Vainlove in *The Old Batchelor* is wrong, that indeed Angelica herself is wrong when she says: “Uncertainty and Expectation are the Joys of Life. Security is an insipid thing, and the overtaking and possessing of a Wish, discovers the Folly of the Chase. Never let us know one another better; for the Pleasure of a Masquerade is done, when we come to shew our Faces”. To prove her statement wrong, when the other characters show it is clearly right for the ordinary social world, Valentine must show a “real” madness, that lifts him above ordinary social realities. That “real” madness comes when Valentine consents to ruin himself simply, as he believes, to please her. He has come, in effect, to the knowledge that the final reality is not affectation, but expectation: “He that loses Hope may part with any thing”.

When he resigns both his love and his money, Angelica accepts him. He sees her then as a kind of religious fulfillment. The idea is implicit in her
name. Valentine had commented on it in the mad scene: “You’re a Woman, – One to whom Heav’n gave Beauty, when it grafted Roses on a Briar. You are the Reflection of Heav’n in a Pond, and he that leaps at you is sunk”. The religious or neoplatonic imagery gets particularly strong in the finale. “Tattle,” says Valentine to the foppish rival whom he has tricked into marrying Mrs. Frail, “You would have interposed between me and Heav’n; but Providence laid Purgatory [i.e., Mrs. Frail] in your way – You have but justice”. Even the cynical Scandal is converted; he says to Angelica:

_Scandal._ There is a third good Work, which I, in particular, must thank you for; I was an Infidel to your Sex, and you have converted me. …

_Angelica._ … Men are generally Hypocrites and Infidels, they pretend to Worship, but have neither Zeal nor Faith: How few, like Valentine, would preserve even to Martyrdom, and sacrifice their Interest to their Constancy! In admiring me; you misplace the Novelty.

The Miracle to Day is, that we find
A Lover true: Not that a Woman’s kind.

In other words, the end of Valentine’s education is to bring him to a higher kind of reality, a Providence or God’s justice, that transcends the chance and show of ordinary social reality. Valentine here shows, like Manly, overtones of the Kierkegaardian hero: he makes the final act of resignation in giving up all he hopes for, his love and his estate, and then achieves what he had given up.

In spite of the neoplatonic religious imagery, much of the material of _Love for Love_ is concerned with Locke’s conception of man, published five years before the play. Thus, Valentine demands of his father: “If you don’t mean to provide for me, I desire you would leave me as you found me.”

_Sir Sampson._ With all my Heart: Come, uncase, strip, and go naked out of the World, as you came into’t.

_Valentine._ My Cloaths are soon put off: - But you must also deprive me of Reason, Thought, Passions, Inclinations, Affections, Appetites, Senses, and the huge Train of Attendants that you begot along with me. … I am of myself a plain easie simple Creature; and to be kept at small Expence; but the Retinue that you gave me are craving and invincible.

Part of Valentine’s education in the play is to realize that his social desires are not part of his intrinsic nature. When he came naked into the world, he was a _tabula rasa_. Indeed, he says to Angelica, “You are all white, a Sheet of lovely spotless Paper, when you first are born; but you are to be scrawl’d and
blotted by every Goose’s Quill” (306) – a quite accurate statement of Locke’s idea that we come into the world as clean states, and our minds are made up of the accumulated scribblings on the slates by all our experiences. The play is so Lockeian that there are two actual tabulae rasa, the presocial “naturals”, Ben and Prue.

Ben is Valentine’s younger brother, a boorish but likable sailor. He has come to see his father, Sir Sampson Legend, who is trying to force Valentine to sign over his estate to his younger brother. Prue is the boorish, countnified daughter of the silly astrologer Foresight. Foresight and Sir Sampson plan a match between the “Sea-Beast” and the “Land-Monster”, but their plans fail when the couple fall out and when Valentine manages to avoid signing the document dispossessing him.

Whereas Valentine and Angelica in the course of the play come through the obstacles of society to their neopltonic, suprasocial status at the end of the play, Ben and Prue are presocial, barely beyond the tabula rasa stage. Shortly after Love for Love appeared, Congreve wrote to Dennis, describing among other things this type of character:

Under this Head may be ranged all Country-Clowns, Sailors, Tradesmen, Jockeys, Gamesters and such like, who make use of Cents, or peculiar Dialects in their several Arts and Vocations. One may almost give a Receipt for the Composition of such a Character: For the Poet has nothing to do, but to collect a few proper Phrases and terms of Art, and to make the Person apply them by ridiculous Metaphors in his Conversation, with Characters of different Natures. Some late Characters of this kind have been very successful; but in my mind they may be Painted without much Art or Labour; since they require little more, than a good Memory and Superficial Observation.

Dr. Jonson said of Ben, with admirable simplicity, “The Sailor is not accounted very natural, but he is very pleasant,” and Coleridge remarked of Congreve’s characters generally, “There is no growth from within.” In the case of Ben, at least, this character structure is exactly what is called for. Ben is unnatural because Congreve was drawing a “natural man”, and intellectual construct. By making Ben less lifelike, Congreve makes us more aware of the character as symbol.

Ben’s sea-jargon sets him off from the other people in the play, and his seaworthiness suggests his association with nature and sincerity: “Flesh, you don’t think I’m false-hearted, like a Land-Man. A Sailor will be honest, tho’f may-hap he has never a Penny of Mony in his Pocket – May-hap I may not have so fair a Face, as a Citizen or a Courtier; but for all that, I’ve as good Blood in my Veins, and a Heart as sound as a Bisket”. When Sir Sampson tries to coerce
Ben into marriage, he is fighting nature itself: “If so be, that I ben’t minded to be steer’d by him; ‘tis as tho’f he should strive against Wind and Tide”.

Ben and Prue, being presocial, have “natural” sexual desires that they do not conceal, as when Prue, in a manner reminiscent of Hippolita, says: “Now my Mind is set upon a Man, I will have a Man some way or other. Oh! methinks I’m sick when I think of a Man; and if I can’t have one, I wou’d go to sleep all my Life: For when I’m awake, it makes me wish and long, and I don’t know for what – And I’d rather be always asleep, than sick with thinking”.

While Ben is of the sea, Prue is of the land and hence more naturally inclined toward the social pretenses to which the foppish beau Tattle introduces her: “All well-bred Persons Lie – Besides, you are a Woman, you must never speak what you think: You Words must contradict your Thoughts; but your Actions may contradict your Words.” “O Lord,” cries Prue delightedly, “I swear this is pure, – I like it better then our old fashion’d Country way of speaking one’s Mind”. Ben, however, finds social pretense unnatural; he tells her, “It’s but a Folly to lie: For to speak one thing, and to think just the contrary Way; is as it were, to look one way, and to row another”. Neither Ben nor Prue has the proper social habit of concealing what one thinks, and as a result they can quickly see their natural mismatch and quarrel over it.

There is a curious kinship between Ben and Prue, the presocial people, and Valentine and Angelica, the suprasocial people. Throughout the play, both Ben and Angelica are free of the pretenses of society; Valentine becomes free at the end, and Prue is free at the beginning (though she learns pretense from Tattle). It is as though Congreve were saying the highest social wisdom is the naturalness of those who never saw society. Thus, Angelica establishes a naturalness like Ben’s when she says, “Passions are unreasonable and involuntary; if he loves, he can’t help it; and if I don’t love, I can’t help it; no more than he can help his being a Man, or I my being a Woman”. Prue uses a neoplatonic image such as we would expect from Valentine or Angelica, when she asks about making love, “Is it like the Catechism?” The connection between presocial and suprasocial is made even stronger by the fact that one of the first things Prue learns is that love in society is not like the catechism: one must say the opposite of what one believes. Valentine calls himself and his brother “Twin-Stars, and cannot shine in one Sphere; when he rises I must Set”, like opposed “suns”.

The presocial and suprasocial characters share as one from of naturalness the fondness for perpetually seeking that was Vainlove’s humour in *The Old Batchelor*: Angelica shows it in her speech, “Uncertainty and Expectation are the joys of Life”. Ben shows it when he says, “I love to roam about from Port to Port, and from Land to Land: I could never abide to be Port-bound, as we call it: 80
Now a Man that is marry’d, has as it were, d’ye see, his Feet in the Bilboes, and may-hap mayn’t get ‘em out again when he wou’d”. Valentine, however, differs from Ben precisely at this point when in the closing scene he yields himself to Angelica as her “Prisoner”. Prue also differs from Ben in the matter of perpetual seeking: Ben seeks freedom; Prue just wants to get into the social swim.

Thus, society lies between the “naturalness” of the presocial people on the one hand and on the other the “naturalness” of the suprasocial people. The social group is composed of a younger generation (Tattle, Scandal, Mrs. Frail, and Mrs. Foresight) and an older generation (Sir Sampson and Foresight). Tattle, after a flirtation with Prue, tries to dupe Angelica into marrying him. Mrs. Frail, after a flirtation with Ben, tries to dupe the supposedly mad Valentine into marrying her. Tattle disguises himself as a friar for the purpose, Mrs. Frail as a nun, and suddenly by the deft doings of Valentine’s servant Jeremy, they find themselves married to each other. Tattle mangles reputations by pretending to mend them; his friend Scandal mangles reputations by direct attack. Even Scandal is impressed, though, by Mrs. Foresight’s *sangfroid* – he seduces her, and she pretends not even to know him the next day. Congreve may have had a real person in mind when he drew Mrs. Foresight, for one of his poems, “To Doris,” says:

But who o’er-night obtain’d her Grace,
She can next Day disown,
And stare upon the Strange-Man’s Face,
As one she ne’er had known.
So well she can the Truth disguise,
Such artful Wonder frame,
The Lover or distrusts his Eyes,
Or thinks ‘twas all a Dream.

Finally, there is some comedy of humors associated with the old astrologer Foresight and Sir Sampson, Valentine’s tyrannical father who is trying to marry Angelica himself. Together, these two represent the older generation in society.

The essence of society in this as in other Restoration plays is the separation of appearances from nature. Most of the material in the first act serves to set the tone of the social world; for example, the amusing episode – otherwise irrelevant – of Trapland. He comes to collect $1500 from Valentine, who in turn tries to divert him from his purpose by plying him with several glasses of sherry and talk of a widow Trapland admires. Unfortunately, however, the moneylender returns to business and Scandal says, “I’ll rip up his Stomach, and go the shortest way to his Conscience”. “He begs Pardon like a Hangman at an
Execution”. The impression we get is of a dog-eat-dog world. Everyone in it, debtor or creditor, is equal in appetite, whether for drink or money. Everyone masks his motives of self-interest as Valentine does in fawning on Trapland or as the moneylender himself does: “Sincerely, I am loth to be thus pressing, but my Necessity – “. We get the impression, too, of the whirligig of improvisation and intrigue that goes into living in such a world when one of Trapland’s tipstaffs says, “We have half a dozen Gentlemen to arrest in Pall-mall and Covent-Garden; and if we don’t make haste the Chairmen will be abroad, and block up the Chocolate-Houses, and then our Labour’s lost”. This is a world in which critics are dogs and poets hunters, and “if you can’t be fairly run down by the Hounds, you will be treacherously shot by the Huntsmen”. This is the world of which Valentine says, “I know no effectual Difference between continued Affectation and Reality”.

Living in this social world calls for the ability to see through appearances, which means knowledge – and several different kinds and levels of knowledge occur among the social people. Foresight, the old astrologer, holds what had become in Congreve’s day an outmoded Renaissance and medieval belief in direct supernatural influence on the physical world. He believes that certain appearances – stars, moles on the face, and the like – show the hidden aspects of the present and future. His belief is based on the facile assumption that all these events are controlled equally by supernatural influence. I “Can judge of Motions Direct and Retrograde,” he says, “of Sextiles, Quadrates, Trines and Oppositions, Fiery Trigons and Aquatical Trigons. Know whether Life shall be long or short, Happy or Unhappy, whether Diseases are Curable or Incurable. If Journeys shall be prosperous, Undertakings successful; or Goods stoll’n recover’d”. Foresight judges people by physiognomies and events by his crackbrained astrological predictions. His knowledge of both persons and events is utterly false, and as if to prove the point he is cuckolded.

Sir Sampson uses another kind of outmoded knowledge. He believes in a kind of Elizabethan “nature” in which a father’s authority is like a king’s – absolute, divinely ordained: “I warrant my Son thought nothing belong’d to a Father, but Forgiveness and Affection; no Authority, no Correction, no Arbitrary Power; nothing to be done, but for him to offend, and me to pardon”. For him, therefore, personal experience – particularly travel and family relations – is the core of reality: “I … know the World, and Men and Manners,” he says:

There’s no time but the time present, there’s no more to be said of what’s past, and all that is to come will happen. If the Sun shine by Day, and the Stars by Night, why, we shall know one another’s Faces without the help of a Candle,
and that’s all the Stars are good for. ... I know the length of the Emperor of China’s Foot; have kissed the Great Mogul’s Slipper, and rid a Hunting upon an Elephant with the Cham of Tartary; – Body o’me, I have made a Cuckold of a King, and the present Majesty of Bantam is the Issue of these Loyns.

His fatherhood, he believes, gives him absolute rights over Valentine and anything other than complete submission on his son’s part is “unnatural”. Yet, as if to give him the lie, his son Ben, the “Hopes of my Family” shows a lamentable lack of such “nature”:

Ben. Well Father, and how do all at home? How does Brother Dick, and Brother Val? Sir Sampson. Dick, body o’me, Dick has been dead these two Years; I writ you word, when you were at Legorne.

Ben. Mess, that’s true; Marry I had forgot, Dick’s dead as you say – Well.

Later, Ben says, “It seems Brother Val is gone mad, … but … what’s that to me?” Furthermore, despite his protestations in favour of the “natural”, Sir Sampson’s words and actions are most remarkably unnatural. His only actions in the play are to try and reverse the natural positions of older and younger brother and to attempt to marry a woman thirty-old years younger than himself. Over and over, he makes exclamations like, “Body o’me, why was not I a Bear? that my Cubs might have liv’d upon sucking their Paws.” “What, wouldst thou have me turn Pelican, and feed thee out my own Vitals?” Valentine turns the tables on this walking Pseudodoxia Epidemica by counterfeiting a disorder in nature, madness: “Indeed, I thought, Sir, when the Father endeavoured to undo the Son, it was a reasonable return of Nature”. It is fitting that the lesson Sir Sampson learns in the play is, “Learn to be a good Father, or you’ll never get a second Wife”, as Angelica says.

Valentine’s servant Jeremy and Scandal use another kind of knowledge, a skeptical naturalism representative of the younger people in the social group. They reject philosophy, poetry, love, and other intangibles in favour of belly-knowledge, and they are the most successful characters within the ostensibly rational social framework. This fact, typical in restoration comedy, hints that for the social people this is the best answer. Thus, Jeremy says of his master’s reading philosophy; “Does your Epictetus, or your Seneca here, or any of these poor, rich Rogues, teach you how to pay your Debts without Mony? Will they shut up the Mouths of your Creditors? Will Plato be Bail for you? Or Diogenes, because he understands Confinement, and liv’d in a Tub, go to Prison for you?” Wits, to him, are only a poor substitute for money.
To Mrs. Foresight, family relations are not real at all. “By my Soul,” she cries, when Prue speaks to her, “I shall fancy my self old indeed, to have this great Girl call me Mother”. If parenthood can be concealed, it ceases to exist. For her, as for Mrs. Frail and Tattle, reputation is reality. “How can any Body be happy, while they’re in perpetual Fear of being seen and censur’d”. For Mrs. Frail and Tattle, only the realization that their marriage will be published makes it real to them.

Among the social people, Tattle and Scandal are contrasted throughout the play. Though both base most of their actions on reputation, Tattle pretends secrecy and openly undercuts his pretense. Scandal cries down the vices of the age and secretly undercuts his railing. “The Liberty I take in talking is purely affected for the Service of your Sex,” he tells Mrs. Foresight, “He that first cries out stop Thief, is often he that has stol’n the Treasure”. Low in social acumen, Tattle is finally duped, because he thinks the “real” thing is not what people say, but what they do, as he explains to Prue. Scandal is more acute. He realizes as Valentine does that in society there is “no effectual difference between continued Affectation and Reality”. He realizes what a playwright like Etherege was laughing at; namely, the confusion of the pretended self with “real” self that results from continued pretense. Scandal cannot go beyond this knowledge and remain in the social framework. For a reality that is not “continued Affectation,” he must be converted to the religion of love in the final scene. He is, at the end of the play, almost ready to cross the boundary between the social and suprasocial people. Thus, plot, character, humors, language, in short, all the elements of the play are tailored to bring out in terms of different kinds of knowledge the distinctions among the presocial, social, and suprasocial people.

The knowledge necessary for living in the social whirl separates Ben and Prue, who do not have it yet, from the social people who do and from Valentine and Angelica who are rising above it. Ben, Valentine, and Angelica are all seeking something outside the ordinary social frame-work. Ben, separated from the others by being a “Sea-Beast,” is beyond social distinctions. He refuses to come to rest, but Valentine and Angelica, by the end of the play, have gone beyond society as they wanted to. One critic notes that Ben “seems out of place”; that is Congreve’s point – Ben is a “natural” man in this highly unnatural society. Prue, of the other hand, seeks only social status. Scandal, who has it, is converted at the end to seeking what Valentine and Angelica have found, while the rest of the purely social people are confined to a box of their own making. As if to make the point, Congreve contrasts the tricked marriage of Tattle and Mrs. Frail with the real betrothal of Valentine and Angelica: the hero and heroine speak of their marriage as heavenly, a kind of true religion; Tattle and Mrs. Frail were disguised as a friar and a nun to wed.
It looks as though Congreve had taken one of Etherege’s plots and framed around it the actions of Ben, Valentine, and Angelica, thus giving his play a theme that rises above the purely social world. Within that world, people confine themselves to purely social aims, trying to see through the shell of appearances, pretenses, affectations, and dissimulations to real nature. In a sense that is just what the author has done: the action of the play is to make Valentine bring his real nature out from under the shell of pretenses he has drawn round himself. In so doing, Valentine grows out of the limited social world into something larger. He has, like any Restoration hero, plenty of social acumen; he marries off Tattle and Mrs. Frail as if with a dexterous flick of the hand. Yet all his intrigues to win Angelica – spending his money, pretending madness, even his simple attempt to visit her – all fail. Valentine’s problem in winning Angelica is that he is still too close to social pretense; he is trying to win her by putting on a mask of poverty or madness. He must learn to transcend his social habits through an action completely asocial, resigning both his fortune and his love; he must learn that intrigue is not effective on the suprasocial level. It is to the education of Valentine that the title Love for Love refers: Valentine learns to substitute real love for showy love. In return Angelica gives him real love for real love, a response not possible for love merely social.

Love for Love, linguistically, is much like Congreve’s earlier plays. The imagery still has the three-dimensional quality we found in The Old Batchelor. Ben’s voyaging is keyed into the passage of time, and both suggest a forward movement. There is the conversion upward in the somewhat hackneyed neoplatonism of Valentine and Angelica and the conversions downward in the speeches of the social people. The confusion of appearance and nature among the social people generally suggest the same transverse motion as the consuming-consumed metaphors of The Old Batchelor. Increasingly, however, Congreve gives the usual tropes of Restoration comedy only to the people confined in the social whirligig. Thus, Scandal dismisses dreaming in favor of “willing, waking Love”, a conversion downward. He attacks honour and conscience: “Honour is a publick Enemy, and Conscience a Domestick Chief; and he that wou’d secure his Pleasure, must pay a Tribute to one, and go halves with t’other”. In the same way Tattle converts Valentine and Angelica’s love to weight: “You will pardon me, if from a just weight of his Merit, with your Ladiship’s good Judgment, I form’d the Balance of a reciprocal Affection”. The right-way-wrong-way simile is a resource of description only for the social people. Tattle decides that the universities are all right for servants. “But the Education is a little too pedantick for a Gentleman”, a remark that tells us more about Tattle’s idea of a gentleman than about the nature of a seventeenth-century university education. Mrs. Foresight
says, as she is offering Prue up to Tattle, “They’re all so, Sister, these Men – they love to have the spoiling of a young thing, they are as fond of it, as of being first in the Fashion, or of seeing a new Play the first Day”. Mrs. Frail, when she is trying to trick Ben into marrying her, says: “You know, marrying without an Estate, is like Sailing in a Ship without Ballast. … And tho’ I have a good Portion; you know one wou’d not venture all in one Bottom”. The contrast is between right and wrong ways of comparing marriage to a vessel: marriage being like a vessel because it requires steadiness represented by ballast and marriage being like a vessel because it is a commercial venture. By contrast, the suprasocial people, Valentine and Angelica, speak a language fraught with cosmological implications – almost in the Elizabethan manner.

The imagery, as well as the figures of speech, is no longer as loose as in *The Old Batchelor*. There is less reliance on isolated image clusters than in Congreve’s earlier plays. Imagery is largely controlled by character: astrological images for Foresight, for example, or nautical images for Ben. Each character has a specific area of experience to which he belongs. His choices, represented by his similes, are more limited. Ben is confined to the continual forward movement of perpetual seeking. The social people are limited to their transverse relations. Valentine, though the most free, moves only upward. Language does not pull apart from action; rather, it constantly tests knowledge, establishing the character’s position and the choices open to him. This parallel motion of language and action is what makes us think this the most “stageable” of Congreve’s plays. The inside-out quality we saw in the relation of language and action in *The Old Batchelor* is retained in the form of a central paradox: Valentine and Angelica escape the social world by finding a liberating confinement within it.

In another sense, *Love for Love* marks a distinctly new stage in Congreve’s development as a comic dramatist. In this epistemological comedy, he contrasts two worlds and two kinds of knowledge: the realistic social world, apparently rational, and the intuitional and unrealistic suprasocial world of aims and seeking. The heart of the irony is that the realities of society are deceptive and social aims limited. The relation among Valentine, Scandal, and Tattle is still faintly like that among Manly, Freeman, and Vernish; the thematic contrast is still between the two worlds of Manly-Valentine and Freeman-Scandal. “Real” reality and success, the fusion of “real” natures, are lodged in the intuitional. Intrigue, with its specious logic of plots and pretenses, is left a role subordinate to naturalness, “generous,” irrational, and ingenuous action.

By comparing the two brothers, one foolish but essentially good, and the other both clever and good, Congreve continues the shift in the comic axis of *The Double Dealer*. Goodness and cleverness are no longer to be equated; the
Etherege is gone. Knowledge to Congreve serves a different function. It becomes a means to larger freedom. While Ben’s freedom means a physical escape from society, Valentine’s freedom is a greater thing, a spiritual freedom. The action of *Love for Love* perfectly exemplifies the last phase of Restoration comedy. The hero retreats from the social world of deception and illusion to a personal heaven of psychological truth and emotional sincerity. He discovers the heart behind the mask.

Questions:
1. Name the main characters of the play.
2. Describe several plotlines of the comedy.
3. Find the examples of pretense in the play.
4. What is the essence of the society according to W. Congreve.
5. Describe the father – son relations (of Sir Sampson, Ben and Valentine).
6. What is the message of the play?
7. Comment on the title *Love for Love*.
8. Speak of the novelty of the comedy.
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