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"A DANCE OF CUCKOLDS": COMIC FORM AND FUNCTION IN THREE RESTORATION COMEDIES.

Until quite recently critical interest in Restoration comedies was centered on the question of whether or not the comedies were immoral and obscene. In a famous essay, "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century", Charles Lamb attempted to rehabilitate Restoration comedy by simply denying that morality was a relevant criterion. The characters in the comedies, he asserted,

> ...do not offend my moral sense; in fact they do not appeal to it at all.
> ...They have got out of Christendom into the land - what shall I call it ? - of cuckoldry - the Utopia of gallantry, where pleasure is duty, and the manners perfect freedom. It is altogether a speculative scene of things, which has no reference whatever to the world that is.
> /1/

From the pages of the "Edinburgh Review", Lord Macaulay thundered his Victorian outrage at this point of view:

> In the name of art, as well as in the name of virtue, we protest against the principle that the world of pure comedy is one into which no moral enters... Morality constantly enters into that world, a sound morality and an unsound morality; the sound morality to be insulted, derided, associated with every thing mean and hateful; the unsound morality to be set off to every advantage, and inculcated by all methods, direct and indirect.
> /2/

During the nineteenth century Macaulay's view triumphed and little interest was shown in what were felt to be the decadent productions of decadent society. Interest in Restoration comedy revived in the early years of the twentieth century and, taking a line through Lamb, critics praised the plays as examples of art for arts sake. Morality, it was agreed, was irrelevant to these plays. They were described as the comedy of manners and attention was drawn to their urbanity and displays of sparkling wit. John Palmer, the pioneer of the revival wrote that,

> Life here is made up of exquisite demeanour. Its comedy grows from the incongruity of human passion with its cool, dispassionate and studied expression.
> ...We are no longer men; we are wits and a peruke. We are no longer women; we are ladies of the tea-table. /3/

Elegant trifling, according to the critics of this school, is the main characteristic of Restoration comedy. To bring charges of immorality against it was to burst a bubble with a tank. Bonamy Dobrée, one of the best and most influential of these critics wrote that,

> ...we feel that no values count, that there are no rules of conduct, hardly any laws of nature.Certainly no appeal, however indirect, is made to our critical faculties.
> ...We are permitted to play with life, which becomes a charming harlequinade without being farce. Is is all spontaneous and free, rapid and exhilarating; the least emotion, an appeal to common sense, and the joyous illusion is gone. /4/

Festive release and holiday charivari certainly have their place in Restoration comedies, as in most evocations of the comic spirit in any age./5/But this insistence on the carefree, detached elegance of Restoration comedy led to a distorted view of Restoration comedy in general. Only the few works which could be made to fit in with this reading of the mode were studied and, misleadingly, treated as typical. Etherege's play The Man of Mode /1676//6/was regarded as the play which dominated the genre and Congreve's The Way of the World, /1700/ was seen as its final and most perfect manifestation. These are, indeed, two very fine plays but not especially typical. The idea that Restoration comedy as a whole was a comedy of manners led to a general assumption that all comedies could be judged in terms of reaching the ultimate goal of becoming The Way of the World.

The satire and realism of Wycherley's far from exquisite comedies, The Country Wife, /1675/ and The Plain-Dealer, /1676/ was neglected, as were most comedies which included such disturbing elements. Mrs. Aphra Behn's comedies, which are both farcical and satirical, were mostly ignored or deplored, as were the comedies of writers like Thomas Otway, Nathaniel Lee, Thomas D'Urfrey; /though his play, The Fond Husband, was a smash hit and Charles ll's favourite play/, and Thomas Southerne. A brutal farce like Dryden's Mr. Limberham: or, The Kind Keeper, /1678/fairly typically, fails to transport us to an elegant world of tea-tables and sprightly exchanges, locating us instead in a near bawdyhouse boarding house where downright insult rather than well turned double-entendre is the order of the day. Most Restoration dramatists, in fact, were not Etherege or Congreve.

A reaction to the trivializing and over exclusive manners school of criticism was bound to occur. The second phase of Restoration criticism was ushered in, not by a new defence, but by what one might call an old attack. L.C.Knights responded to the manners for manners sake criticism by stating trenchantly that "the criticism that defenders of Restoration comedy need to answer is not that the comedies are 'immoral' but that they are trivial, gross and dull"./7/ Knights' attack nicely turned the contemporary critical response on its head. Whilst appearing to dismiss Macaulayesque moral outrage as irrelevant, he challenged the defenders to explain why a comedy of tea-tables and perukes was worth serious critical attention. In many ways his attack is a disguised, or modernised, version of Macaulay's criticism, as he once again places moral seriousness and relevance to the age at the centre of artistic appreciation./8/

Elegance and charm could no longer be considered as the all important qualities of a drama and the last twenty years have seen an impressive number of works attesting to the moral seriousness and intellectual substance of Restoration comedies. In The Restoration Comedy of Wit,/9/ Thomas Fujimura pointed out that the earlier critics had ignored the realistic, coarse and savage aspects of the plays they looked at. However, Fujimura complicated the issue by creating a new category, the comedies of wit, which is as exclusive as any previous category; though he does show, with respect to this small elite of plays, that there is ample evidence of intellectual thought and moral seriousness in the plays. Dale Underwood has gone much further in tracing the philosophic background to Restoration comic pratice. He concentrates on Etherge and in a brilliant opening chapter, meticulously untangles the complex skein of seventeenth century ʹlibertineʹ and ʹscepticalʹ thought. He points out the ironic possibilities inherent in the coincidence of these intellectual traditions with elements of chivalric literature and with patristic and puritan fideism and doctrines of the fall of man. Underwood argues that the ʹhonestʹ libertine attempts in the comedies to "attain his naturalistic state of grace in a society of unnatural and restrictive customs"./10/ Etherge, he states, "made the comedy of manners the expression of man's mind and wit ambiguously groping among the abstractions by which he had thought to order his world"./11/

Valuable though Underwood's approach is, there is a danger that he has taken the challenge to find intellectual content too far. In the new complex and philosophical drama which he presents, the more mundane elements of farce and humour, which in the first place made Restoration comedies good box-office drama, tend to get over-looked.

Norman Holland in The First Modern

Comedies: The Significance of Etherge, Wycherley and Congreve, also gives the comedies he studies intellectual substance. The basic concern of Restoration comedy, he argues, is a throughly modern conflict between appearance and reality. Cartesian dualism and Hobbist materialism both fed into and grew out of the sceptical temper of the age and reinforced the sense of a separation between appearance and essence. He finds in the plays he studies /and others which he briefly surveys/, a conflict between two competing realities: a false social reality and a true emotional reality. The emancipation of the second true reality leads to " a new social structure based on these underlying emotional realities".[12] Holland's work usefully draws attention to the Rake's Reformation theme in many Restoration comedies, but neglects the many comedies in which no such reformation is envisaged. Like most attempts to categorize Restoration comedies in terms of content, his definitions are highly relevant to some works but misleading with respect to others.

Such critical works have been valuable in refuting both Macaulayesque claims that Restoration comedy is essentially trivial and immoral, and the Lambian defence that they are elegant and amoral. However, these studies still tend to concentrate on an unrepresentative selection of Restoration comedies. An aspect of Restoration comedy which is often ignored is its sheer quantity. Few plays ran for much more than three days and, apart from reviving old plays, there was a constant need for and a fairly constant supply of, new plays. The two theatres in London, The Theatre Royal and the Duke's Theatre, were in cut-throat competition with each other and Restoration comedy is best seen in terms of the economic necessity to draw in an audience. Variety was the spice of Restoration life and, as Dr. Johnson wrote in the next century, "the Drama's laws the Drama's patrons give". At the same time, Restoration companies were repertory companies; a situation which encouraged both type-casting and the creation of stock-characters. Whether plays were intellectual or merely farcical, speculative, or cheerily obscene, the unifying factors were a dependence on a very few basic plots and a collection of stock characters.What is remarkable is the tremendous variety which dramatic ingenuity gave to the manipulation of the comic formula. Both the reliance on stock characters and situations and the diversity of Restoration comedy is stressed by R.D. Hume:

> The same plots are used again and again: the young man wins his girl, and usually reforms in the process; fortune is won; adulterous copulation is achieved, without discovery - or the consequences are evaded. The same perils of discovery are run in comedy after comedy.
>
> ...When we ask what the comedies are like, we find that plays with the same subjects and components have entirely different tone and effect. The principle object of critical characterisation is not to limit arbitrarily, or to categorize, but to explore the great variety of results in comedy. /13/

In this paper I am going to look at three cuckolding comedies written in the 1670's: Dryden's Marriage a ls Mo'de, /1673/ Wycherley's The Country Wife, /1675/ and Thomas Otway's Friendship in Fashion, /1678/. The cuckolding plot was one of the dramatic staples of this period and in each of these plays, we find the stock situations of courtship and adultery and the stock characters of ranging gallant and husband-hunting miss, discontent husband and neglected wife. In all of these plays we also find conflicts between appearance and reality, society and nature, but these broad thematic generalizations obscure the very different attitudes of the playwrights to these themes. These three plays give some indication of both the formality and the diversity of the Restoration comic mode.

Marriage a la Mode, although dealing with earnestly desired adulterous affairs, never allows any of the illicit loves to be consummated in the course of the play a fact which Dryden refers to teasingly in the Epilogue:

> Our modest author thought it was enough
> To cut you off a sample of the stuff:
> He spared my shame, which you, I'm sure would not
> For you were all for driving on the plot. /14/
> /23-26/

R.D.Hume argues that the play formed part of a campaign by Dryden and his brother-in-law, Edward Howard, to ´clean-up´ the stage.[/15/] As a campaign it was not particularly successful; sex-comedies dominated the stage in the 1670's and early 80's, but the play seems to have been successful in it own day - even if it did not set a new fashion. It is a dual-plot play, a mode Dryden always favoured with an heroic and a comic plot. Clifford Leech has said that, between the two plots, "there is no fusion but merely the haphazard linking of two separate plays".[/16/] Anne Barton agrees with this, describing the play as "split down the centre, resolving into two separate and exclusive halves".[/17] However, the dual-plot structure was basic to Dryden's aim of leading his audience "all the way to Reformation" /Epilogue, 2/ by showing examples of correct and incorrect behaviour.

The comic plot concerns the crossed loves of Rhodophil and his wife, Doralice, and Palamede and his fiance, Melantha. The play opens with Doralice singing a song which states the basic argument of the comic plot:

1

> Why should a foolish marriage vow,
> Which long ago was made,
> Oblige us to each other now,
> When passion is decayed ?
> We loved, and we loved, as long as we could,
> ´Till our love was loved out in us both;

But our marriage is dead,when the pleasure is fled:
'Twas pleasure first made it an oath.
11
If I have pleasures for a friend,
And further love in store,
What wrong has he, whose joys did end,
And who can give no more ?
'Tis a madness that he should be jealous of me,
Or that I should bar him of another:
For all we can gain, is to give ourselves pain,
When neither can hinder the other.
/1.3-20/

The opportunity to put the libertine principles enunciated in the poem into practise are immediately presented. Palamede, a young gallant who has just returned from travels abroad, overhears the song and at once starts to flirt with Doralice. Doralice, bored after two years of faithful marriage, is happy to encourage him. Palamede has returned home to marry a bride selected for him by his father, but sees no reason not to have a brief affair in the two days before his marriage. His fiance, Melantha, is a delightful, bird-brained young lady who is pleased to have a new "servant", but does not see that this should stop her from encouraging the advances of Palamede's best friend, Rhodophil - Doralice's husband. The two friends are therefore busy throughout the play trying to get off with each other's girl. Each hopes to cuckold the other. As Palamede remarks.

> 'Tis a pretty odd kind of game, where each of us plays for double stakes: This is just thrust and parry with the same motion; I am to get his wife, and yet guard my own mistress. But I am vilely suspicious, that, while I conquer in the right wing, I shall be routed in the left.
> /111.118-121/

The various assignations the lovers make with each other are constantly foiled by the fact that all four turn up at the same place together. No matter how hard they try, circumstances force them to be chaste. The climax of these attempts is reached in Act lV, when both young men turn up at the same inn with their respective 'mistresses' disguised as boys. Confident that their companion's disguises are impenetrable, the young men glory in the idea of cuckolding each other in public and invent every excuse to embrace the 'boys.' Consummation is, however, averted, as just as they are about to retire to their separate rooms in the inn, a riot breaks out and Rhodophil and Palamede are called away to quell it. The riot is the result of the activities of the high plot characters and it is not insignificant that, at this last ditch, the comic characters' chastity is preserved by the intervention of the high plot.

The resolution of the amorous impasse is reached in the fifth Act, when Rhodophil comes across Palamede and Doralice "billing so sweetly" that he can no longer doubt the identity of Palamede's mistress. The open admission that they are courting each other's wife and fiance brings the young men to the brink of a dual. Doralice, however, steps in and prevents the fight from taking place. For this is the world of comedy and comedy finds solutions and compromises where tragedy pushes on to ultimate conclusions. Doralice, drawing on the logic of her opening song, points out that "you can neither of you be jealous of what you love not", /V.284/. This comment makes the young men stop and think out their feelings:

> Rhodophil : Faith, I am jealous, and this makes me partly suspect that I love you better than I thought.
> ...Palamede has wit,
> and if he loves you there's something more in ye than
> I have found: some rich mine, for ought I know, that
> I have not discovered.
> Palamede : 'Slife, what's this ? Here's an
> argument for me to love Melantha; For he has loved her,
> and he has wit too, and for ought I know, there may be

> a mine: but if there be, I am resolved I'll dig for it. /V.285-6,288-293/

Rhodophil and Palamede now amicably consider the various possibilities open to them, given that they both fancy not only their legal mates but each other's legal mate as well. The problem is how man's 'natural' tendencies towards promiscuity can be reconciled with his equally strong inclinations towards jealousy and possessiveness. Palamede, in language which recalls the utopian sexual speculations of extremist radical sects during the 1640's and 50's,/18/ suggests:

> "What dost think of a blessed community betwixt us four, for the solace of the women, and the relief of the men? Methinks it would be a pleasant kind of life: Wife and husband for the standing dish, and mistress and gallant for the dessert. /V. 311-314/

But such sexual freedom, they begin to realise, raises more problems than it solves,

> Rhodophil. But suppose the wife and mistress should both long for the standing dish, how should they then be satisfied together?
>
> Palamede. In such a case they must draw lots; and yet that would not do neither, for they would both be wishing for the longest cut. /V. 315-18/

The only solution, in fact, is a return to conventional morality; such social experiments can only lead to anarchy. Having considered all the possibilities, Rhodophil concludes that:

> Then I think, Palamede, we had as good make a firm league, not to invade each other's propriety./sic. property/.
>
> Palamede. Content, say I, From henceforth let all acts of hostility cease betwixt us. /V. 319-22/

Marriage and fidelity are, in the end, more satisfactory than adultery. The arguments propounded in Doralice's opening song have been disproved. Human nature is not sufficiently rational to allow for the casual substitution of lover for husband. Marriage may anhibit certain ´natural´impulses, but it satisfies the equally human and ´natural´impulses of honour and jealousy. Indeed, there is a strong suggestion that monogamous alliances are the only natural form of union. Rhodophil, we learn early on, only began to neglect Doralice when he felt that society was laughing at his unfashionable constancy,

> ...I loved her
> passionately, but those golden days are gone, Palamede.
> Yet I loved her a whole half-year, double the natural
> term of any mistress and I think in my conscience
> I could have held out another quarter. But then the
> World began to laugh at me, and a certain shame of
> being out of fashion seized me.
> /1.130-34/.

Melantha finds Palamede attractive but continues her flirtation with Rhodophil because it is fashionable to have several ´servants´and Palamede and Doralice are similarly motivated by fashionable, as well as sexual, considerations. In returning to the conventional married state they are not only returning to society but also to their own basic natures. False patterns of social behaviour distort human nature and create a gap between instinct and manners, between appearance and reality; the conclusion is the profoundly conservative view that ´good´social institutions have evolved to satisfy man's nature.

The high plot offers up a typically Fletcherian tragi-comic tale of lost and rediscovered heirs. Polydamus, the usurping King of Sicily, has rather carelessly lost not just his wife and child /whose sex he does not know/, but the Queen of Sicily and the rightful heir to the throne. When the play opens two beautiful young people, a man and a girl, have been discovered living among peasants, and it is clear from various tokens found with them that one or the other is Polydamus's child. First Leonidas, and then Palmyra, is declared to be the tyrant's child. In each case, the elevation of one results in the degredation of the other and causes them great anguish as each,in turn, is told to marry a noble selected by the King. In turn, Leonidas and Palmyra staunchly resist the King's bullying and remain faithful to their love for each other. Palmyra and Leonidas have stepped straight out of the world of the pastoral - innocent and virtuous, yet cultivated and regal in their bearing; they illustrate the coincidence of natural and social life. We hear that, even in their country revels, Palmyra was crowned Queen of the May and Leonidas won the contests to become her rightful consort.

In the end it is revealed that Palmyra is Polydamus's daughter and that Leonidas is the son of the deposed King and the rightful heir to the throne. Rhodophil and Palamede lead an insurrection on his behalf and restore him to the throne. Polydamus repents and willingly abdicates, and Leonidas and Palmyra prepare for their marriage and coronation.

On one level, there is an obvious discrepancy between the heroics of the high plot and the realism of the comic plot. As F.H. Moore puts it:

> ...the serious lovers are forever indicating their heroic willingness to die for love, while the comic lovers are unheroically busy trying to die of it. /19/

There is no room here to fully trace the various ways in which Dryden dovetails the two plots, but it is, I think, clear that Dryden wanted to indicate certain broad thematic parallels. The marital disorder of the comic plot is paralleled by the public disorder in the high plot. Just as Palamede and Rhodophil's attempts to usurp each other's marital rights nearly leads to a dual, Polydamus's usurpation of the throne brings him to the brink of civil war. In both the public and the private realms, the necessity of maintaining the traditional social fabric is stressed. It is no coincidence that Rhodophil and Palamede express their

decision not to seduce each other's woman in the language of warfare and treaties, /see V, 319-22, quoted on page /. Dryden carefully balances the improbable idealism of the high plot against the impossible libertinism of the comic plot. Palmyra and Leonidas's noble passion is above the reach of most mere mortals, but total sexual freedom is also impossible. Through the experiments in human alliances to which Dryden submits the comic characters, he shows that a more human and less elevated version of the high plot's heroics is, in the end, not merely an ideal but a necessity.
In this play, at least, the stock cuckolding plot is treated in such a way as to reinforce traditional morality. The pastoralism of Leonidas and Palmyra, combined with the realism of the four lovers suggests that, in the good society, reality-social conventions, and nature are not opposed, but united.

Wycherley's The Country Wife is a far less optimistic work. The country wife of the title comes up to town and the play examines the traditional beliefs that the country is more virtuous than the town. A union is forged between town and country, but here it is a union based on the depravity of man, wherever he is. The Country Wife, is a unified play with three plot strands dealing with adultery and unsatisfactory marriages.
The title plot concerns Pinchwife, an againg debauchee who has just married a country wife. His constant boast is that "I understand the town",/20/ meaning by that the wicked, licentious town in which he tried to play a part never very successfully, for he tells us "the Jades wou'd jilt me, I cou'd never keep a whore to myself". /1.288/ It is to have a woman to himself and to avoid the dangers of a sophisticated town wife that he has married the simple Margery. He believes that her ignorance is proof of her innocence and argues that since she is "silly and innocent" she "won't know the difference between a man of one and twenty and one of forty"./1.352-3/ His rakish friend, Horner, responds to these views of country innocence with the laconic remark that "I have known a clap gotten in Wales", /1.323/.

Basically, Horner is correct; the country does not produce superior and purer beings than the town. Margery is ignorant but not especially innocent, and she soon learns to appreciate the joys of town life. All Pinchwife's attempts to keep her hidden from his friends and to conceal from her the delights of town life fail dismally. In fact, his very attempts work, ironically, against him. His descriptions of lecherous gallants, which are meant to alarm Margery, merely stimulate her curiosity. When he grudgingly agrees to show her the town, he insists that she disguises herself as a boy- and then has to stand by unprotestingly while Horner and his friends kiss and cuddle the 'lad.' Finally, in an attempt to buy off her most persistent admirer, Horner, Pinchwife offers him his sister, Althea, as a bride, but in fact delivers to him Margery, disguised as Althea. It has been Pinchwife himself who has taught the 'innocent' Margery the joys of disguise.

Pinchwife no more understands the than he understands human nature. Margery is a simple country girl, but also a mature woman who can easily distinguish between an elderly husband and a young lover. Country ways are much the same as town ways - only perhaps a little cruder. Margery has the same desires as the town women; the difference is that she does not try to conceal them. In a letter to Horner, Margery describes how she would have been drawn to him if she had met him in the country:

> I'm sure if you and I were in the country at cards together...I could not help treading on your toe under the table... or rubbing knees with you. /lV.341-43/

Ignorance must not be confused with innocence; innocence, in the fallen state of man depends on knowledge and intelligence, not simplicity.

The second plot revolves around Horner, a dedicated womanizer, who has spread a rumour around the town that he is impotent since his last disastrous cure for a bout of syphillis. Horner correctly believes that this will counter-act his reputation for lechery and lead husbands to leave him alone with their wives and daughters. His main cully is Sir Jasper Fidget, a man who neglects his wife in his pursuit of money and who is glad to leave her and her friends alone with a 'harmless' gallant.

Lady Fidget, who constantly talks about her honour and virtue, is delighted when Horner tells her his "dear secret", as she can now have an affair without endangering her reputation:

> But, poor gentleman, could you be so generous, so truly a man of honour, as for the sakes of us women of honour, to cause yourself to be reported no man ?
> /11.471-73/

Honour, in this world, is a mere word; for most of the characters in the play, honour belongs to the world of surface appearances and does not motivate their basic natures. When Lady Fidget and her friends gather at Horner's house for a drinking bout, they initiate him into the hypocrisies of fashionable life:

> Lady Fidget. Our reputations! Lord, why should you not think that we women make use of our reputations, as you men of yours, only to deceive the world with less suspicion ? Our virtue is like the statesman's religion, the Quaker's word, the gamester's oath, and the great man's honour - but to cheat those that trust us.
> Mrs. Squeamish. And the demureness, coyness, and modesty that you see in our faces in the boxes at plays is as much a sign of a kind woman as a vizard-mask in the pit.
> Mrs. Dainty. I assure you women are least masked when they have the velvet vizard on.
> /V. 88-98/

Horner, whose character has been the subject of much debate,[21] is, perhaps, best seen not so much as a character in any rounded state, but as a device used to unmask society. Or, rather, to show, as in this case, that the mask is closer to the truth than the real face. Just as the velvet-vizard - the trade-mark of the Restoration whore - reveals the ladies true inclinations, Horner's disguise of impotence allows his lecherous nature to reveal itself. Underwood described the libertine as seeking to attain his "naturalistic state of grace" through his evasion of "unnatural and restrictive customs", /22/ but Horner's evasions do not exactly lead him to a state of grace. Wycherley does not unequivocally endorse his activities; his ruse shows up the hypocrisies of others, but also degrades him. Horner's view of life is very base and the ladies he associates with - Lady Fidget, Mrs. Squeamish, and Mrs. Dainty are an unattractive trio. His relationship with them is purely and simply sexual and in many ways they mutually exploit one another.

The famous "China" scene illustrates some of the ways in which Wycherley satirises the arch-satirist, Horner. As Lady Fidget enters from Horner's closet, she explains her suspicious absence to Mrs. Squeamish, who has just entered, by saying "I have been toiling and moiling, for the prettiest piece of China, my Dear", /lV.155-6/. Mrs. Squeamish responds by demanding that she too be given some "China", and Horner exhaustedly explains that "This Lady had the last there". The double-entendre, as Holland points out, is both funny and complex:

> "China" as a vessel for food, makes one more of the many conversions of love /or sex/ down to mere appetite. China, furthermore, is an object of surface aspects. Originally mere clay, it has become worked and decorated to the point where its appearance now completely hides its earthy origins. So sex for Horner and Lady Fidget and their kind has become almost fantastic and allegorical, it is so separated from any of its original emotional or biological purposes. /23/

When Horner promises Mrs. Squeamish that "I will have a Rol-Wagon /of china/ for you too, another time", /lV.169-70/ he has undergone a further transformation from virile stallion to sexual automaton. Sex, in fact, has become artificial and mechanical rather than 'natural,' and Horner's evasion of social restraint has merely gained him a new series of contraints.

The third plot deals with a sympathetic pair of lovers whose behaviour forms a marked contrast with that of the other characters. In this plot, Althea, Pinchwife's sister, learns to trust to the truths of the heart rather than appearances. She is engaged to marry Sparkish, a foolish would-be wit,who proudly displays her to all his friends. One of them,Harcourt, falls in love with Althea and she with him. Althea, however, will not break off her engagement with Sparkish since she misreads Sparkish's open boasting as proof of his total trust in her fidelity. With the spectacle of her insanely jealous brother ever before her, it is not surprizing that she puts a high value on mutual trust as a basis for matrimony. But she is mistaken; Sparkish's behaviour springs from his own self-satisfaction and not from any affection or trust of Althea. He quite simply enjoys making his friends jealous and cannot imagine that Althea could find anyone more attractive than him.

When it appears that Althea has had an assignation with Horner /it is, of course, Margery, disguised as Althea who has met him/, he brutally repudiates her. Harcourt, on the other hand, shows the wisdom and truth of his love by refusing to believe in the appearances which defame her.

The ending of the play is distinctly equivocal; on the credit side we have Althea and Harcourt, who are happily united and demonstrate the possibility of intelligent, rational human beings working their way towards a meaningful relationship. Against this one success of reason and moderation are ranged, Horner, still is possession of his ´harem´; Pinchwife, as jealous and unhappy as ever; and Margery, who has just learnt that discretion is the better part of adultery. The right way, the way that unites the lovers and society through the ceremony of marriage in the traditional comic fashion, is outweighed here by the static continuation of the various wrong ways of going about living. Indeed, it is questionable whether or not Althea and Harcourt's match represents the union of lovers and society or rather their escape from society. In Wycherley's next play, The Plain-Dealer, the romantic lovers move to the centre of the plot and the ending is an unequivocal escape from social reality into the realms of Fletcherian romance. In The Country Wife, pastoralism is banished from the country and no union is forged between natural and social inclinations. Salvation, if it exists at all, lies with Althea and Harcourt in a discriminating use of wit and intelligence. On the other hand, if the palm goes to wit and intelligence, Horner, undoubtedly, has both qualities in large quantities.

There are some similarities between the conclusions Wycherley and Dryden draw from their materials. But where Dryden shows a group of people wrong-headedly trying to commit adultery, he makes sure no copulations are actually achieved and leads all his characters to reformation and marriage. Marriage in his play stands at the centre of society. Wycherley allows several adulterous copulations to take place during the course of the play, and married harmony, although endorsed, is not shown as central to society. At the end of the play it is Horner who dominates the stage, and the one happily united couple stand to one side to watch the "dance of cuckolds" which, aptly enough, ends the play.

The last play I am going to took at is Otway's comedy Friendship in Fashion. Once again we come across the stock characters of bored wife, insatiable town lady, discontented husband, and carefree gallants; and again cuckolding forms the basis of the action. However, in this play, there is a perceptible darkening of the comic materials, comic follies have turned into vices and the stereotypes have a tendency to develop an alarming and surreal psychological force.

The play deals with the internicine copulations of a group of fashionable friends. Mr. Goodvile hopes to marry his mistress and kinswoman, Victoria, to his friend, Trueman, and he plans to seduce Camilla, who is engaged to marry his friend, Valentine. Goodvile's bored and neglected wife fancies Trueman, tells him about Goodvile's affair with Victoria, and offers him the pleasant revenge of cuckolding Goodvile.

In the course of the play, Goodvile is throughly defeated: he is cuckolded; exposed as a hypocrite; tricked into making love to Lady Squeamish, "a perfect Coquet, very affected and something old" /1. 93-94/,/24/ instead of Camilla; and publicly berated by his wife for his infidelities. Malagene, an obnoxious voyeur, tells Goodvile about his wife's affair with Trueman. To revenge himself and to gain grounds for a separation, Goodvile fakes his departure for the country. He returns in disguise, hoping to find his wife in flagrante delicto.

However, Victoria betrays his plans; Malagene is suborned and, instead, Goodvile is forced to accept his wife's patently false assurances of her innocence.

The play concludes with a little flurry of weddings which burlesques conventional comic conclusions, as they bring with them little sense of celebration or resolution.Goodvile attempts to patch up his 'friendship' with Trueman, asking him;

> ... if thou hast enjoyed her, I beg thee keep it close, and if it be possible let us yet be friends,/V. 735-6/

and turning to the audience, he advises husbands to keep their wives from "Balls and masquerades". Throughout the play the activities of the main characters are observed and hindered by the frivolous, drunken and malicious activities of Caper, Saunter and Malagene - degraded versions of the Sparkish character-type.

The most striking feature of the play is the absence of any really attractive and sympathetic characters. As R.D.Hume points out, Valentine and Camilla "represent, evidently, a tolerable if unadmirable way of the world" but do little to "suggest a genuine positive norm in the world of the play"./25/ They do not display the common sense and genuine affection which we find in Wycherley's normative duo,Althea and Harcourt. Their marriage at the end of the play brings with it no sense of achievement and celebration, and Goodvile's advice to Valentine to:

> ...trust her not with thy dearest Friend,
> She has beauty enough to corrupt him,
> /V. 746-747/

briefly indicates their future prospects. We are given no reasons to suppose that, once the homeymoon period is over, their marriage will be very different from the Goodvile's. The romance which underlies many Restoration comedies is entirely absent. Otway was, most probably, influenced by Wycherley's outspoken satires on modern society and morality, but, unlike Wycherley, he does not offer any escape from his grim world into the realms of Fletcherian romance and the truths of the heart.

In this play, Otway systematically exposes the degradation of all the traditional bonds which hold society together. The detailed view we are offered of the Goodvile's marriage anticipates the marital discord comedies of Southerne and Vanbrugh in its unsparing analysis of discontent. Trueman describes how Goodvile deserted his wife less than a fortnight after their marriage:

> ...h'ad hardly been married Ten
> Days, but he left his Wife to go home from the Play alone
> in her Coach, whilst he debaucht me with two Vizors in
> a Hackney to Supper.
> /l. 28-31/

At the begining of the play Goodvile complacently regards his wife as a pis aller:

> ...Mine is such a fond wanton
> Ape, I never come home, but she entertains me
> with fresh kindness: and Jack when I have been hunting
> for Game with you, and miss'd of an Opportunity, stops
> a Gap well enough.
> /l. 74-78/

By the end of the play his complacency has vanished and he violently asserts that he would "sooner return to my Vomit" /lV.655/ than his wife. Otway is, however, a strict realist when it comes to Restoration matrimonial law and does not genially extend the divorce laws as Farquhar was to do in

The Beaux' Stratagem, /1707/. At the end of the play the Goodviles are unhappily, but firmly, linked together by a social convention neither of them believes in. Mrs. Goodvile, understandably, has a jaundiced view of marriage, describing Goodvile as :

> As much a Husband as one would wish: I have not seen him this fortnight; he never comes home till four in the Morning, and then he sneaks off to his separate Bed, where he lies till Afternoon, then rises and out again upon his Parole :
> flesh and bloud can't endure it.
> /11. 15-20/

The matches which conclude the play do nothing much to improve our view of high society marriages. Camilla and Valentine's match, as I have pointed out, is greeted cynically. The effect, I think, is to suggest the begining of a new cycle of deceptions and frustrations./26/ The other marriage which is announced at the end of the play is the union of Victoria with Sir Noble Clumsey; a boorish and drunken relative of Lady Squeamish. Earlier on in the last Act, Victoria describes Sir Noble with justice as a "ridiculous Oaff", and her marriage is simply an act of desperation. As a publicly defamed woman, she must take whatever husband she can find. Sir Noble sums up the depth of feeling involved on his part when he announces his marriage:

> Ay, Sir, I am marry'd, and will be drunk again
> too before Night as simply as I stand here. /V. 760-1/

If the sanctity of marriage has been exploded, so too are the bonds of kinship. The characters in Friendship in Fashion are all densely inter-related. Malagene is related to Mrs.Goodvile, Sir Noble is Lady Squeamish's nephew, Victoria is Goodvile's cousin, and by the end of the play, the Goodvile and Squeamish households are related by the marriage of Victoria and Sir Noble. Lady Squeamish announces this union in a speech which underlines the farcical nature of these relationships :

> ...Dear Mr. Goodvile,
> be pleas'd to give my Kinsman Sir Noble, Joy:
> He has done himself the Honour to marry your Cousion
> Victoria, whom I must now be proud to call my Relation,
> since she has accepted the Title of my Lady Clumsey.
> /V.755-759/

She is talking to the man she has just made love to about a woman who was his mistress, who has just married a man they all know she despises. In the circumstances, it just about ties up and disposes of the concepts of honour and fidelity, as well as the institutions of marriage and kinship.
The most obvious violation of the bonds of both kinship and honour is Goodvile's seduction of Victoria. As Mrs.Goodvile's maid protests:

> Why, she is his near Kinswoman and lives here
> in his house with you, besides he would never dishonour
> his own family surely.

Mrs. Goodvile cheerfully explains that such thinking is old fashioned and irrelevant :

> You are a Fool, Lettice, the nearness of bloud
> is the least thing to be considered. Besides, as I have
> heard 'tis almost the onely way Relations care to be
> kind to one another now a days.
> /ll. 47 - 53/

Other characters display a similarly degraded view of family life. Malagene, who is described as :

> ...a general Dispenser of nauseous
> Scandall tho' it be of his own Mother or Sister,
> /1.47 - 48/

confirms this opinion as he gossips about Mrs. Goodvile's liaison with Trueman and says that he has :

> ... a particular
> esteem for my Family, /the nearest Relation of which
> I would go fifty miles to see hang'd/.
> /lV. 561 - 3/

Sir Noble's family feelings are demonstrated as he drunkenly makes passes at his Aunt, /ll. 563-6/ and recommends his sister as a bride for Malagene:

> ...she is a pretty hopeful Lady - Truly she is not full thirteen - but she has had two Children already.
>
> /V. 215-17/

A climax in the destruction of the family is reached in the fifth Act, when Goodvile returns to his house to find yet another party in full swing. Using the term 'family' in its fullest sense to mean the whole household, Goodvile asks his wife:

> Well Madam, and for your Sett of Fools here:
> to what end and purpose have you decreed them in this new Modell of your Family ?
>
> /V. 589-591/

The term "new Modell" recalls Cromwell's formidable New Model Army: that collection of psalm-singing social revolutionaries who humiliatingly and consistently defeated the Royalist armies. For a Tory dramatist like Otway, they must have represented the ultimate in social anarchy. The family was a common metaphor in the seventeenth century for the state, with the King as the benevolent, yet stern, father of his people./27/ The disintegration of the family, both in terms of the ties of kinship and the order of the household, suggests by analogy the disintegration of the state. Otway is here making similar links between private and public order to those made by Dryden in Mariage a la Mode.

The title of the play, Friendship in Fashion, has two meanings: friendship is fashionable nowadays and, this is what friendship is in fashionable society. The disregard for the bonds of friendship is yet another element in this depiction of a society on the brink of dissolution. As Laurens J. Mills has shown, ideas of friendship in the seventeenth century were drawn from Cicero's De Amicita, where virtue is the basis of all friendships./28/

But in this society, virtue is conspicuous only by its absence and the terms 'friend' and 'friendship', though endlessely reiterated throughout the play, are shown to be hollow and meaningless. Goodvile uses the cover of friendship to try to palm off one mistress on a 'friend' and gain a new one from another 'friend.' Friendship, like 'honour' in *The Country Wife*, is reduced in meaning in the course of the play as the characters make declarations of friendship only as a prelude to betrayal. As Mrs. Goodvile explains to her maid:

> ... if I would ever consent to wrong my Husband /which Heav'n forbid, Lettice!/ it should be, to choose, with his Friend. For such a one has a double Obligation to secresy, as well for his own Honour as mine.
>
> /11. 59-61/

Friendship, in fact, is merely an appearance, a facade which is maintained because it makes deception easier.

If society is corrupt, basic human nature when it emerges from the veneer of civilized behaviour is equally flawed. Most of the action in *Friendship in Fashion* takes place in the Goodvile's house during a party they give for their 'friends.' As the evening wears on, the characters get drunker and less capable of concealing their true natures. Malagene, for instance, reveals the depths of his vicious nature when he drunkenly recounts his latest 'jest', which was to trip up a cripple who asked him for charity, /111. 78-86/. Lady Squeamish loses verbal coherence towards the end of Act 111 as her sexual excitement, at the thought of her impending assignation, robs her speech of syntactical coherence, /111.646-655/. Goodvile becomes drunk and violent and spends much of his time trying to throw out various of his guests and, by Act lV, Victoria is hysterical. Typically, attempts to organise a dance constantly fail as the musicians are interrupted and insulted. Music and dance, symbols of harmony and order, have no place in this chaotic world, this can be compared with the ball that takes place in Act lV of Marriage a la Mode and the dance which concludes The Country Wife./

In Act lV the action moves out into the 'Night-Garden' a sort of anti-pastoral where the nymphs and shepherds copulate indiscriminately, scuffles break out and chaos reigns. Human nature as it is gradually revealed is less than human. Language and customs - the essential ingredients of civilized society - break down and man is reduced to the level of the animals. The descent into bestiality is marked by the increasing number of animal epithets which the characters hurl at one another: toads, dogs and vermin are the creatures most commonly compared to the characters. Otway's one-time patron, The Earl of Rochester, concluded his 'Satyr Against Reason and Mankind' with the line "Man differs more from Man, than man from beast",/29/ a view which the play amply illustrates.

There is no question of Otway in any way endorsing his characters' anarchic behaviour and repudiation of social restraints. The spectacle we are shown, of characters caught in a downward spiral towards chaos, is hardly fun and invites a horrified response. Horner will, most probably, always remain an ambiguous figure, since no matter how much we deplore his behaviour, it has to be admitted that he has most of the best lines in the play. He is a figure of anarchy, but also witty and charming. In her essay, "William Wycherley", Anne Barton describes the fascination of the rake:

> The handsome but rather frightening rake, dowered in more than one play with an active case of the pox, is adored despite /or perhaps because of/ his disadvantages by a series of women,
>
> /30/

In this play Otway achieves the distinction of making his rake throughly repellent. Goodvile is, it were, an older and sadder version of Horner, married and bad-tempered; his sexual appetites are so mechanical and jaded that he cannot distinguish between the "old Kite", Lady Squeamish, and the "young Partridge", Camilla, when he makes love to the former instead of the latter. The myth of the attractive rake is laid to rest in this play. At one point Trueman remarks "What a Damn'd Creature Man in"; the theological implications are relevant: the world we are shown here is distinctly fallen. In the other plays we have looked at, Marriage a la Mode and The Country Wife, compromises are reached /though with increasing difficulty/ between man's natural inclinations and his social obligations. In Marriage a la Mode, Dryden shows that, although traditional social conventions may inhibit some aspects of human nature, they fullfill others. Just because most human beings are not perfect /like Leonidas and Palmyra/ but are flawed, social restraint is both necessary and, in the end, satisfactory. In The Country Wife, the situation has become less harmonious. For the truly cunning, like Horner, social conventions need not inhibit but provide endless opportunities. The gap between nature and society is the no-man's land of which Horner is King. Never-the-less, a via media between Horner's anarchic manipulations and Pinchwife's rigid conventionalism is, even if faintly, indicated in the relationship of Althea and Harcourt. The world which Otway depicts has, however, moved beyond the point where meaningful compromises can be reached. In moving beyond compromise, Otway, who was primarily a tragic dramatist, moved to the very limits of comic form. For Otway, the problem with social restraints is not that they repress natural liberties, or set up false relationships /like Pinchwife's and Margery's/, but that they are not strong enough to control man's natural depravity.

The plays we have looked at span the 1670's and the growing sense of disillusionment which is found in the plays, does, I think, reflect the overall dramatic reaction to the deteriorating political and social scene. Marriage a la Mode, written whilst England was at war with Holland, reflects something of the heroic and optimistic temper of the times. Friendship in Fashion, written

a year before the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis, /which formed a prelude to the revolution of 1688/reflects the sense of a gradual break-up of a society.
It is dangerous to seek neat parallels between social and dramatic development; a different choice of plays, perhaps Dryden's Secret Love and Wycherley's The Plain-Dealer, could be cited as proof of the popularity of romantic drama or even the emergence of sentimental drama. Undoubtedly, however, there is a distinct darkening of comic materials in the late 1670's and early 80's, and flights into romance are themselves indicative of a desire to escape from an unsatisfactory reality. In plays like Dryden's Mr. Limberham, Lee's strange and inconoclastic The Princess of Cleve, /1680?/ Otway's later comedies, The Souldiers Fortune, /1680/ and The Atheist, /1683/ or John Crowne's City Politiques, /1681/ the dance of cuckolds conveys a strong sense of disgust and disillusionment with both man and society.
The aim of this paper is not just to trace dramatic development but to demonstrate the flexibility of the Restoration comic mode. Using similar comic materials: stock characters and situations Restoration dramatists were able to adapt their mode to suit their personal beliefs and to reflect the changing mood of the times. It is difficult to produce adequate definitions of what Restoration comedy is about because it can be about so many different things. Even when we can find common themes for instance, the relationship between society and nature the treatment is quite different, as are the conclusions which are reached. The overall mood and tone of the three plays we have looked at is also quite different. Marriage a la Mode presents a happy and optimistic mixture of comedy and romance; The Country Wife is satirical and consciously outrageous; Friendship in Fashion is also satirical but the prevailong mood of the play is pessimistic. The triumph of Restoration comedy is the creation of

a dramatic mode capable of infinite variation.

NOTES

1 The Essays of Elia, /Oxford, 1954/p. 208.

2 'The Edinburgh Review', LXXll, /1841/, pp. 490-528.

3 The Comedy of Manners. /London,1913/ pp. 292-3.

4 Restoration Comedy, /Oxford, 1924/ pp. 13-14.

5 See Northrope Frye's discussion in "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy" in The Anatomy of Criticism, /Princton,1957/ and Ian Donaldson's The World Turned Upside-Down: Comedy from Jonson to Fielding, /Oxford, 1970/.

6 See Kathleen Lynch in The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, /New York,1926, repr. 1965/ where she states that "by 1676 the dramatic mode of the Restoration comedy of manners had become so authoritative that all dramatists felt the pressure of its unwritten laws", pp. 6-7. Two articles which have done much to dismantle the dominating comedy of manners view of Restoration comedy are A.H.Scouten's 'Notes Towards a History of Restoration Comedy', Philological Quarterly, XlV,1,Jan./1966/ pp. 62-70 and Harold Love's review of the Regents Restoration Drama Series' in the Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association, XXVll, /1967/, pp. 106-8.

7 'Restoration Comedy: The Reality and the Myth' Scrutiny, Vl,/1937/, p. 143.

8 For a discussion of Knights' critique and its relationship to Macaulay's see Andrew Bear, 'Restoration Comedy and the Provok'd Critic' in Restoration Literature: Critical Approaches, ed. Harold Love, /London, 1972/.

9 The Restoration Comedy of Wit, /Princeton, 1952/.

10 Etherege and the Seventeenth Century Comedy of Manners, /London, 1957/, p. 36.

11 Op.cit. p. 161.

12 The First Modern Comedies. The Significance of Etherge, Wycherley and Congreve, /Massachusetts, 1959/ p. 237.

13 The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century, /Oxford, 1976/ pp. 71 -72.

14 All quotations from the play are from the edition in Restoration Comedies, ed. Dennis Davison, /London, 1979/.

15 R.D.Hume, op.cit. p. 276.

16 'Restoration Tragedy: A Reconsideration', in Restoration Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. John Loftis. /New York,1966/p.149.

17 'Heroic Tragedy,' in Restoration Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies,6,/London,1965/, p. 138.

18 For a survey of radical ideas during the revolution see Christopher Hill's The World Turned Upside Down. Radical Ideas During the English Revolution, /London,1972/. Chapter 5, 'Base Impudent Kisses'is of particular interest in this context. A relevant radical work is Henry Nevile's The Isle of Pines, /London, 1668/, which depicts a polygamous utopia.

19 The Nobler Pleasure: Dryden's Comedy in Theory and Practice. /North Caroline,1963/, p. 104.

The sexual connotations in the word ´die´are clearly brought out in the famous erotic song "When Alexis lay prest" in Act lV. Melantha's favourite speech affectation is the phrase "Let me die", a turn of speech which Leonidas ises quite seriously in Act lll, when pleading for Palmyra's life.

20 All quotations from the edition in Restoration Comedies, op.cit.

21 For two radically different interpretations of Horner's character and role see Rose A.Zimbardo,Wycherley's Drama, /New Haven, Conn., 1965/ and Virginia Ogden Birdsall, Wild Civility: The English Comic Spirit on the Restoration Stage, /Bloomington, 1970/.

22 Dale Underwood, op.cit., see page of this paper.

23 Holland, op.cit. p. 77.

24 All quotations from The Works of Thomas Otway, Vol. 1.,ed.J.C.Ghosh,/Oxford,1932, repr.1968/.

25 ´Otway and the Comic Muse´, Studies in Philology, LXXll,1, Jan.1976, p. 95.

26 Otway certainly makes this point in his next two comedies. The young couple whose hasty marriage is annouced at the end of The Souldiers Fortune, are shown as unhappily married and unfaithful to each other in the sequel play The Atheist.

27 See Dryden's ´Absalom and Achitophel´where ´David´s role as both father and King is stressed. In his poem ´Windsor Castle in Monument to K.Charles ll,´ Otway repeatedly depicts Charles as the father of his people,

Great were the toils attending the command,
Of an ungratefull and a stiff-neck'd Land,
Which, grown too wanton ´cause´twas over-blest
Wou'd never give its Nursing Father rest.
/13-17/.

Filmer's Patriarcha, which was finally

published in 1680 is based on this analogy, which was a commonplace.

28 One Soul in Bodies Twain: Friendship in Tudor Literature and Stuart Drama, /Bloomington, 1937/.

29 In The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, ed. David M. Vieth, /New Haven and London, 1968/. Vieth dates the poem to before March 1675/6.

30 In Restoration Theatre, op.cit. p. 89.

" A DANCE OF CUCKOLDS" : KOMICZNA FORMA I FUNKCJA W TRZECH KOMEDIACH OKRESU RESTAURACJI

Streszczenie

Artykuł rozpoczyna się krótkim przeglądem krytycznych reakcji XIX i XX w. na komedie okresu Restauracji. Dominujące pojęcie o obyczajowym charakterze komedii Restauracji poddano wątpliwości na tej podstawie, że definicja ta opiera się na małym i niezbyt reprezentatywnym wyborze sztuk. Jednoczący czynnik w komedii Restauracji jest niekoniecznie tematyczny czy stylistyczny, ale pochodzi ze stosowania stereotypowych sytuacji i konwencjonalnych postaci. Jednakże wśród tych ograniczeń jest miejsce na dużą różnorodność. Rozpatrywane są trzy komedie: Dryden, Marriage a la Mode, /1673/, Wycherley, The Country Wife, /1675/ i Otway Friendship in Fashion /1678/. I chociaż wszystkie te komedie są komediami "rogaczy" i stosują podobne postacie i sytuacje, to jednakże bardzo odmienny jest ton i efekt każdej z nich. Te różnice mogą prawdopodobnie być powiązane ze społeczną i polityczną sytuacją, która pogarszała się w latach 70 XVII wieku. Celem pracy krytyka nie powinno być grupowanie, ale rozróżnianie i różnicowanie. Ponieważ nie ma ani jednej zadawalającej definicji komedii Restauracji, każda próba jej zrozumienia musi opierać się na rozpoznaniu zarówno jej formalnej struktury, jak i indywidualnej odmienności. Takie podejście zachęca do należytego uznania giętkości formy komedi Restauracji i rozmaitości jej funkcji. Zachęca to także do studiowania tych sztuk w ich specyficznym kontekście historycznym, ponieważ formy komicznej, której istnieniu zaprzecza się w narzuceniu statycznych i ahistorycznych kategorii takich jak "komedia obyczajowa" czy "comedy of wit".