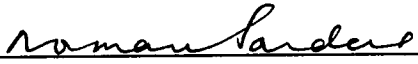
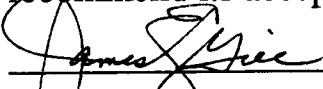
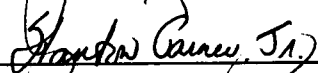
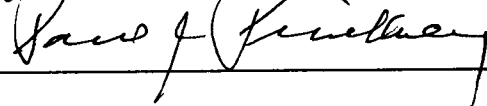


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Christopher A. Coulter entitled "'A More Pleasant Way of Writing': The Aristocratic Ideology of Four Split-Plot Restoration Tragicomedies, 1664-1671." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

  
Norman Sanders, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and  
recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

  
Associate Vice Chancellor and  
Dean of The Graduate School

**“A More Pleasant Way of Writing”: The Aristocratic Ideology of Four  
Split-Plot Restoration Tragicomedies, 1664-1671**

**A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Christopher A. Coulter  
December 1992**

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Mr and Mrs Don A. Coulter, for their unstinting generosity and much more.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my major professor, Dr Norman Sanders, for taking over the job after the departure of Dr Jack Armistead, and especially for his advice and letters of introduction for my study at libraries in England. I also owe a debt to the department for the Alwin Thaler fellowship that enabled me to make the trip over. There are many members of the Royal Shakespeare Company I do not have space to thank but I remember your several kindnesses. I would also like to thank my other two departmental committee members, Dr James Gill and Dr Stanton Garner, Jr., for their patience and direction during some trying early drafts of this project. I would like to extend a special thanks to my outside committee member, Dr Paul Pinckney, for his encouragement and expert suggestions on reading in the period of my study. I am particularly grateful to Rebecca Flynn of the Shakespeare Library in Stratford-upon-Avon, England for introductions and help. Finally, to my good friends Richard Branyon, Ruth Duncan--and some others who come through even when they are not asked--I must say at least once that I appreciate your idle chatter and kicks in the backside when I needed it. Most of all, I owe my parents more than I can properly express here.

## ABSTRACT

This study attempts to assess the ideological significance of four “split-plot” Restoration tragicomedies produced in the period of 1664--the season just before the year-long closing of the theaters again for plague--to 1671, when Dryden’s production of Marriage à-la-Mode proved to be the last tragicomedy in the Fletcherian aristocratic tradition. The four plays are The Comical Revenge (1664) by Sir George Etherege; All Mistaken (1665) by Dryden’s brother-in-law, James Howard; Secret Love (1667) by Dryden; and Marriage à-la-Mode. “Split-plot” plays alternated in scenes of a comic plot--involving witty and desirable aristocrats who evince a fashionable disdain for marriage even after agreeing to it--and a romantic plot depicting royalty or aristocratic families coping with destabilizing intrusions into their midst while trying to maintain a social order from the time of Charles I. The disjunctiveness of the plots in these tragicomedies has always been a critical problem. I argue that these plays employ various dialectical strategies where the comic plot reinforces the romantic plot by pretending to resist ironically the latter’s affirmation of aristocratic-royalist ideology--only to give in at the resolution. My treatment of Howard’s All Mistaken is the only detailed study of the play to date.

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## Introduction

My purpose in this study will be to discuss the ideological significance of four split-plot Restoration tragicomedies in the period from 1664--the season just before the year long closing of the theaters again for plague--to 1671, when Dryden's production of Marriage à-la-Mode proved to be the last tragicomedy in the Fletcherian aristocratic tradition. Some tragicomedies were produced before 1664, but they were generally revivals of Civil War drama.<sup>1</sup> I use the March 1664 première of Etherege's Comical Revenge as a beginning for my study, even though it is generically looser than the other tragicomedies, where a reader finds split-plot tragicomedy apparently engaging the popular imagination and, especially, royalist attention that started a trend of successful productions by new dramatists. The specific focus in this introductory chapter will be to delineate the ideological significance Restoration dramatists and their contemporary audiences attached to these plays. "Split-plot" plays alternated in scenes of a comic plot--involving witty and desirable aristocrats who evince a fashionable disdain for marriage even after submitting to it--and a romantic plot depicting royalty or aristocratic families coping with destabilizing intrusions into their midst while trying to maintain a social order unchanged from the halcyon days before the beheading of Charles I.<sup>2</sup> The comic plot is often brought into some

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of aristocratic drama before the Restoration, see Alfred Harbage, Cavalier Drama (1936; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1964); see also, Kathleen Lynch, The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy (1926; rpt. New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> I choose to use the term "romance plot" or "heroic-romance"--instead of upper or serious--to avoid reproducing the common contemporary judgment

relationship to the romantic plot when its characters eventually prove their allegiance to absolutist-patriarchal ideology by taking risks against costly odds to fight for the royalist cause.

The disjunctiveness of these plots has been a critical problem since the time they were written and performed. Their problematic relationship was regarded by contemporaries as a primary failure of the form, and they categorically dismissed tragicomedy as a dramatic genre unworthy of notice, rendering it extinct for centuries, until some respectful attention was returned to it early in the twentieth century in the criticism of Frank Ristine and Allardyce Nicoll.<sup>3</sup> Recently, Restoration drama critics have approached these problems in tragicomedy with different evaluative criteria. As I will show below, most of them fall into two irreconcilable camps: some critics demonstrate a kind of bemused contempt for the genre as a form lacking themes of ideological complexity, while others allow these plays some thematic sophistication, though this group is at cross purposes over what constitute the prominent themes and disagrees on just how to assess the "political" content of the plays. Despite the genre's reputation as light diversion for sophisticated audiences, complex questions

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on the comic plot as a diverting foil for the aristocratic concerns in the "high" plot without sharing the latter's stake in advancing a specific ideology. As I will take up below, tragicomedy has limitations inherent in its structure so that writers promoted their ideological concerns by exploiting the expectations of their audience's familiarity with the genre. The term "split-plot" originates, I believe, from Robert D. Hume in The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 209-210.

<sup>3</sup> See the following surveys for contemporary and modern judgments on the genre, Robert D. Hume, Development, pp. 209-216; Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Restoration Drama, 1660-1700 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), pp. 182-189; and Frank H. Ristine, English Tragicomedy: Its Origin and History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1910), pp. 172-187.

remain about the plot relationships that demand further empirical study. Early Restoration tragicomedies attempt to comprehend a broad experience of fractious times in the political landscape by embattled royalist sympathisers. The limitation of the split-plot form is that its approximation of a "total" world depends on recognizing its implicit political assumptions. What Lois Potter observes of Civil War-era tragicomedies is true of the form after the Restoration as well, "[that] many of them in fact do require to be completed by the reader's awareness of their context."<sup>4</sup>

Indeed in many split-plot plays the resolutions of the separate plots seem to have conflicting implications for an aristocratic ideology closely identified with royalist concerns. For example, does the resolution of the comic plot by marriage suggest that discussions about sexual freedom are to be valued only for their entertainment and that the romantic plot had the job of convincing audiences about the necessity for preserving a traditional order? To what extent does the celebration of "libertine" wit in the comic plot undermine the traditional authority of the providential ending in the romance plot, since that authority is the whole justification of a ruling order that would otherwise appear arbitrary? Does the romantic plot succeed in shoring up the absolute values of Caroline divine-right mythology despite the Restoration's historical compromises, which are presented attractively in the comic plots?

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<sup>4</sup> Lois Potter, "'True Tragicomedies' of the Civil War," in Renaissance Tragicomedy: Explorations in Genre and Politics, ed. Nancy K. Maguire (New York: AMS Press, 1987), 200.

These plots evidently follow a Fletcherian pattern through which serious questions in the romance plot about royal succession and social allegiance are addressed explicitly and correspond or are analogous to the implicit social values of the comic-plot aristocratic couples who cleverly test each other's suitability for marriage. In the romance plot sexual constancy is proof of allegiance to a hierarchal social order where rank is determined by legitimate birth. In contrast, libertine behavior of couples in the comic plots of tragicomedies appears to undermine the prerogatives of their class by challenging the patriarchal absolutism that depends on the women's "virtue" for ensuring smooth succession of property. I will demonstrate in my study that the dramatists relied on "high" plots as last ditch efforts to legitimate a traditional aristocratic political authority that was--given the documented constraints on absolutist rule<sup>5</sup>--becoming discredited in the Restoration; and I will then proceed by close examination to show further that the comic plots affirm the hierarchal social order authorized in royalist-patriarchal ideology by appearing to first challenge marriage, only to submit to it after making contracts to preserve individual freedoms. Thus, comic plot characters keep their ironic dispositions within a context of role-playing that enables them to appear attractively individualist without deeply challenging a hierarchal order. Though a

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<sup>5</sup> For a concise history of the complicated political events in the period, with social and literary contexts intact, see especially Susan Staves, Player's Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), particularly Chapter 2, pp. 43-51; and see also Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714 (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961), especially Part 3, "1660-88," pp. 193-242. These works offer readable and substantive accounts of the royalist gentry's gradual loss of power to the increasingly prosperous parliamentary sympathisers. Michael McKeon's contribution will be noted below after a full discussion of his argument and terminology which I will use in part.

genuine philosophical libertinism in the comic plot would seriously destabilize the social order in the romance plot if left unchecked, the one or more witty couples' agreement to a provisional marriage in the last act allows them to advertise their wit in order to keep a degree of autonomy and vitality without simultaneously transgressing the boundaries of aristocratic "honor."

My argument depends on realizing that the dramatists in the period were experimenting with every effort, and that, while they were certainly sympathizers with an aristocratic order, their sophistication makes the plays more complicated and ambivalent than political propaganda normally admits. Every attempt will be made to contextualize a play's operating ideological assumptions--though I rely mainly for the political context on the analyses of Susan Staves, Christopher Hill, and Michael McKeon. While I make no claim for causality between a specific unfolding of contemporary political developments and the action in the plays, an awareness of the governing motives of social groups depicted in the drama depends on familiarity with some radical changes in their social institutions effected by the Acts of the Cavalier Parliament and loss of power in the ecclesiastical courts.

In the course of my reading, I found William Empson's first remarks in the second chapter of Some Versions of Pastoral to still ring true:

The mode of action of a double plot is the sort of thing critics are liable to neglect; it does not depend on being noticed for its operation, so is neither an easy nor an obviously useful thing to notice . . . . Just because of this carelessness much can be put into it; to those [of the audience] who miss the connections the thing

still seems sensible, and queer connections can be insinuated powerfully and unobtrusively; especially if they fit in with ideas the audience already has at the back of its mind.<sup>6</sup>

Empson had the right word certainly in "insinuation." Simply stated, I think that textures of meaning are implicit in this drama rather than explicit, and thus modern readers looking for a final intellectual synthesis in the content of a typical tragicomedy will be frustrated. Because the seventeenth-century audience connected tragicomic form with ideas "at the back of its mind," the dramatist chooses not to argue connections between seemingly disjunctive plots and the ideological values they convey. This does not mean that the aristocracy or the dramatists who wrote for them hid or "suppressed" their power. Quite the contrary, the royalist self-promotion of the restored Stuart monarchy and its supporters shows up in the revivals of an aristocratic dramatist like Fletcher. After all, Charles II still wielded considerable influence and was congenial to dramatic innovations.<sup>7</sup> As Douglas Canfield aptly states,

So it should come as no surprise that the heyday of Restoration tragicomedy should be the first years of renewed Stuart hegemony. For far from being meaningless or existing purely for aesthetic satisfaction, tragicomic form in the Restoration, as Northrop Frye says of romance in general, gets absorbed "into the ideology of an ascendant class."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral (London, 1935; New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> See Hume, Development, pp. 27-8, 292, who plays down the "coterie" angle of Charles' participation since few of the plays, he says, present a beau monde without satiric comment. He notes the suppression of Howard's The Country Gentleman as a rare case where Charles restrained dramatic license, and for an obvious reason since it rocked the government.

<sup>8</sup> J. Douglas Canfield, "The Ideology of Restoration Tragicomedy," Journal of English Literary History, 51 (Fall, 1984), 448. Canfield lays out nicely the subgenres of tragicomedy in this brief essay, but his insistence on the divine

That is to say the plot closure peculiar to tragicomedy reflects the providential benevolence that authorizes the attractive social privileges that were enjoyed by the aristocratic class.

Fletcherian tragicomedy was put in the service of the aristocracy by having the two plots' parallel themes variously affirm aristocratic-royalist ideology. The critics who grant the form a significance for its reflection of the Restoration political scene still differ on the relationship of the plots. Nancy Maguire posits an interesting psychoanalytic theory about the popularity of this older type of tragicomedy in the first decade of the Restoration. The immediate reason for using Fletcher's plays was a practical consideration of putting on plays: the two acting company managers granted patents by the king--Thomas Killigrew at the King's Theatre and William Davenant at the Duke's Theatre--had rights to Fletcher's and other older plays. But the overriding reason for Fletcher's suitability in the period, she argues, was the psychological advantage afforded by his "openness" in incorporating two social attitudes--one of them conservative and the other defiant of convention--for an audience old enough to have seen many abrupt changes. She states, "the very word 'tragicomedy' suggests the dilemma of a society which yoked together political and psychological absolutes as contradictory as regicide and restoration."<sup>9</sup> Thus, Fletcher was the obvious psychological outlet for an audience experiencing new political freedom but afraid to confront the

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"Word" for contemporary justification of a hierarchal social order, while valid for the providential "accidents" of the romance plot, glosses over the exigencies of the comic-plot ending in plays (Dryden's, for example) with complicated dialectical strategies.

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Klein Macquire, ed., "The 'Whole Truth' of Restoration Tragicomedy" in Renaissance Tragicomedy, pp. 221, 219, 220, 224.

regicide directly. She concludes that Fletcher's significance for the transition period after the Restoration is that he provided "a relatively safe vantage point" from which to assess the past, and at the same time his plot reversals "created a climate where anything could happen," mirroring the new experience of the 1660s audience. Maguire's argument makes sense in that it identifies a duality operating in Restoration political life which finds representation in tragicomedy. It is certainly helpful in demarcating Civil War drama like that of Shirley from Restoration drama. While I admire Maguire's argument for avoiding a spurious unity--and I agree that the romantic plot represents an older, Caroline order that is "demythologized"--I am not altogether persuaded that assuming schematic psychological correspondences for the plots simply leaves them to "co-exist." Their dialectical relationship in the complicated plays of Dryden, for example, leaves some tensions and ambiguities that make the plots appear to resist or complete each other. I would argue that the aristocratic royalists found Fletcher an authoritative model for launching new ideological campaigns rather than a "safe vantage point" from which to look back.

Robert Markley offers a more satisfactory and, typically, more controversial rationale for Fletcher's reputation among new dramatists in the 1660s. In a long chapter of his book on Restoration drama, Two-Edg'd Weapons: Style and Ideology in the Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve (1988), Markley historicizes the aristocratic assessment of Fletcher's reputation in the late seventeenth century. He argues that the commendatory poems in the 1647 Folio of Beaumont's and Fletcher's Comedies and Tragedies provide evidence that the cavaliers were nostalgic

for an age of "vanished tradition of stylistic grace and aristocratic assurance."<sup>10</sup> He demonstrates convincingly that the critics loyal to Charles I conducted a "polemical misreading" of Fletcher's work to justify their nostalgia for lost preeminence, and that Fletcher's reputation as a "light" dramatist since that time has never recovered from the "comic theory abstracted from his work." Conservatives like Dryden, of course, did champion Fletcher as an exemplar of refined language for a new age; as he declared through the guise of Neander in An Essay of Dramatick Poesie, Fletcher "understood the conversation of gentlemen."<sup>11</sup> In fact, an identification of Fletcher as the harbinger of a witty and urbane discourse has been accepted by nearly every critic in the period. So Markley's reevaluation of Fletcher's heretofore overlooked complexity in shaping Restoration "dialogic" discourse influences judgment on all tragicomedies written after him:

Fletcher is almost as significant a playwright as his followers claim he is, but his fascination for audiences before 1642 and after 1660 stems not from his comforting predictability but from his success in dramatizing the contradictions within cultural ideals of wit and carriage--from the resistance of his comic style to the kind of authoritative discourse that the contributors to the 1647 Folio attempt to promote.<sup>12</sup>

The key to Markley's argument lies in his establishment of a position that goes against a considerable tradition of Fletcher's reputation as just such an exemplar of an "authoritative discourse." For example, he

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Markley, Two-Edg'd Weapons (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 57, *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel H. Monk, ed., The Complete Works of John Dryden, XVII (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 56. This edition when subsequently cited in the text will be referred to as Works.

<sup>12</sup> Markley, p. 61.

attributes to Fletcher's late plays, like The Wild Goose Chase, a comic practice "frequently devoted to violating conventional pieties . . . [and inviting] daring . . . demystifications of upper-class existence."<sup>13</sup> How could Fletcher's contemporaries have overlooked such exposure of the "tensions" inherent in their identities? Markley's first answer poses no problem at all since it is founded on documented history: the Cavaliers saw in Fletcher what they wanted to see and suppressed the rest because of their "isolated" position after the Restoration and the "wounded pride" they still suffered. But Markley goes on to say that Fletcher "offers a radical questioning of conventional moral and social values, although without encouraging political opposition to Stuart absolutism" (p. 56). The central problem in his argument here, of course, is how Fletcher can "demystify" and "question" aristocratic life without actually opposing royalist absolutism. Although Markley's marxism would never allow him to countenance a class that inherited wealth, his assessment unintentionally signals a sort of backhanded compliment to the English aristocracy: Fletcher's example indicates they had a culture with the comprehensiveness for generating self-proclaimed social virtues while parodying their own efforts.

The explanation Markley provides for the apparent contradiction in Fletcher's discourse does not seem like much to go on at first, but it is to his credit that he rigorously follows up on it. Markley argues essentially that the "anti-authoritarian wit" of the libertine hero is an "attitude," as opposed to a systematic philosophy, that "destabilizes" the apparent ease

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<sup>13</sup> Markley, pp. 61, 57, *passim*.

and familiarity of aristocratic assumptions. Markley has to give up some ground to Fletcher's aristocratic contemporaries when he admits, "To a certain extent, [Fletcher's] Cavalier followers accurately perceive that Fletcher characteristically yokes the social use of language to its ideal reflection in the minds of his characters and audience" (p. 65). Markley's most important countering claim is that Fletcher consciously perceived that the aristocratic identity was made up in "a realm of disguise and role-playing": "Fletcher's emphasis on the dependence of 'identity' and 'nobility' on social performance paradoxically destabilizes the absolute values which his followers celebrate" (p. 65).

Markley does well here in showing Fletcher's importance to Restoration tragicomedy by reminding us that the aristocratic class portrayed in it incorporated many attitudes, not all of them self-assured demonstrations of absolutism. But the question that remains for each one of the plays I include is how exactly the writer handles these tensions and ideological ambiguities, and whether there is any real opposition to Caroline divine-right mythology. Markley does not apply this view of Fletcher's language to the problem of the split-plot play. As I will show in the relevant chapters, he also makes Dryden the prime mover in conservative (i.e., "repressive") cooptation of "subversiveness," a claim that seems overstated given the attractiveness of Dryden's anti-authoritarian libertines in his tragicomedies.

There is an essential compatibility in Maguire's and Markley's arguments on the content of Fletcherian tragicomedy as it was variously conceived in the Restoration: they see tension at work between a

hierarchal, patriarchal order and a new attitude with its impetus in anti-authoritarian expressions against "pities" or "conventions." The point of tragicomic form, judging by its divided appeal, is somehow to offer freedom and security at the same time. However, some important critics attribute no ideological significance at all to tragicomedies, except as escapist entertainment for the upper classes. The best known of these arguments comes from Laura Brown who argues that Restoration tragicomedies are trivial in content and inconsequential for the later development of mainstream Restoration comedy, which she terms "major social satire." Brown claims that all plays with Fletcherian plot devices such as mistaken identities and accidents of fortune are mere "intrigues" that "exist in a formal no-man's land between comedy and tragedy."<sup>14</sup> Brown further finds that a movement from "local satiric caricature" to "major social satire" indicates the poverty of the early tragicomedy, since it depends, she insists, on "increas[ing] the expectation of a solution to the intrigue; interest is consistently directed toward the untangling of the trivial mistakes of the plot, at the expense of characterization or theme." Brown then finds that tragicomedy's formal properties exclude a moral content. She ends with a categorical rejection of tragicomedy, since the "major social satire" requires the inevitable "generic rejection" of any play not written to produce "conflict and unresolvable contradiction."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Laura Brown, English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 30, *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> I give a further summation of her argument in the opening to Chapter One on Comical Revenge.

Although Brown is probably right to claim that there are more highly individuated characterization and specifically focused satire in most late Restoration comedy than in early tragicomedy, it does not follow that the latter is a weak or entirely derivative genre with no substance. In fact, all the plays I cover, with the possible exception of Etherege's Comical Revenge, which makes a curious and singular attempt at unity, tend to "unresolvable contradictions" in one or more plots, even after reversals at the end. Furthermore, the love and honor debates in the romance plots of tragicomedies were not vestigial relics from an outmoded drama. Marriage settlements and social allegiance, which figure largely in the outcome of tragicomedy, were contested arenas where people vied for status and satisfaction. The conflict between demands from a hierarchal social order and pressures to change aspects of this order from within intensified rather than abated after the Civil War. The aristocracy became obsessively preoccupied over the problems of status and social order, and this collective self-absorption is reflected within the dilemmas informing tragicomic plots.<sup>16</sup> The comic plot relieves self-consciousness over assumptions about status in the romantic plot, yet, paradoxically, the attractiveness of the comic plot's naturalistic action destabilizes the claims on the individual in the traditional order. Susan Staves corroborates the survival of the traditional social hierarchy in the period: "[Despite changes in social practices] Restoration law itself still supported traditional

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the similarities in the period shared between heroic romance, heroic tragedy, and Fletcherian tragicomedy, see Sarup Singh, The Theory of Drama in the Restoration Period, Chap. 6 (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1963), pp. 139-159.

analogies between kings and subjects, parents and children, husbands and wives."<sup>17</sup>

Thus, I agree that there is no reason to compare tragicomedy and later, "full" satires because they had different generic strategies. Simply stated, the tragicomedies show a tendency to wish fulfillment for a world that has passed, whereas satires of the 1670s deal with the possibility of a moral norm in a real society. Tragicomedy reflects the ideas of a class looking in on itself; later Restoration comedy focuses on poseurs making fools of themselves while trying to gain acceptance in a closed social class. The reform of rakes or display of corruption like that in Wycherley's A Country Wife has moral satire for its engine. For its part, tragicomedy concerns itself with the viability of honor as an intrinsic virtue of an entire social class. The content of 1660s tragicomedy expresses aristocratic values of social adeptness, the badge of intrinsic merit, and the implicit theme of preserving the privileges in this class makes it as thematically substantive as the plays with the Dorimants and Millimants that have been subjected to what Staves accurately calls "increasingly ingenious over-interpretation."<sup>18</sup> Brown finally reduces all the tragicomic plays to flat "entertainment," implying that modern critics cannot take them seriously because the aristocratic audience often enjoyed them uncritically. It would appear after surveying Brown's categories that what really bothers her is the royalist ideology promoted implicitly in tragicomedy. Despite the protestation in her introduction that her book "includes ideology," she too often evades an impartial look into the form because she convinces herself

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<sup>17</sup> Staves, p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> Staves, p. xv.

at the outset that she should promote the drama of the period with "the most radical possible challenge to the status quo."<sup>19</sup> My objection to Brown's approach is not that she embraces a "radical" theory, but that she has disposed of a significant genre only because it advocates royalist ideology. The genre's ideological function appears to me, on the contrary, a good reason for studying it in its context to see exactly how it promotes one ideology over another.

This impatience with aristocratic romance conventions spurs most of the negative criticism on tragicomedy. Edward Burns, another respected Restoration drama critic, at least finds that some "intrigue" plays are more ambitious than others. Burns believes that "intrigue plotting" has "no moral weight" because the audience could entertain a comic or serious plot only for its intrigue tricks, and that the predictable plot closure overrides any thematic interest that may be apparent.<sup>20</sup> He echoes Brown on this score, but admits that the better plays of the subgenre--those of Etherege and Dryden--are similar in effect to the "baroque intrigue comedy" that he argues begins with Etherege's She Would If She Could (1668) and then develops into the main Restoration comedy, or "moral satire." He then identifies a weakness in the formal integrity of tragicomedy:

The structural problems of the mixed form are obvious--the 'witty' subplot is inevitably destructive of any serious attention one might pay to a main plot pursuing opposed notions of love and honour. The problem is that the division between 'high' and 'low' manners is no longer clearcut. Both kinds of behaviour are equally available to the participants, so

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<sup>19</sup> Brown, pp. xv, xiv.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Burns, Restoration Comedy: Crises of Desire and Identity (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 4.

the audience is free to read the implications of one plot into the other and the play's fragile structure inevitably, if sometimes amusingly, undermines itself.<sup>21</sup>

Burns' objection to the form (or rather its unsuccessful examples) makes sense, for the form certainly has limitations. However, the better plays of the genre do not "inevitably" fall apart because they explore the contradictions underlying what Burns calls the "fashionable self-presentation" of the form (p. 14). A case could indeed be made for complete disjunction between the plots if the comic plot systematically and explicitly promoted libertine philosophy over against the theme of loyalty and constancy to traditional ideals in the romance plot. But I think it is a major mistake to interpret the "presentation" of witty and antic couples as an alternative to the social hierarchy in the romance plot. The genre is elastic enough to absorb individualistic challenges without discrediting the affirmation of absolutism that sustains the order. I would argue that the ideological implications often issuing confusedly out of both plots, rather than undermining the form, were simply ignored to avoid embarrassment. As Susan Staves points out for the heroic romance in general,

At first [immediately after the civil war], the political crises people had lived through were both unassimilated and unassimilable. That the audience's reaction to the heroic protagonists mingled admiration and amusement reflected both their lingering respect for the ideal and their awareness that it was unrealistic.<sup>22</sup>

In a departure from Brown's analysis, Burns concedes that the plots contain themes unto themselves. For example, he states, "The Comical

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<sup>21</sup> Burns, p.15.

<sup>22</sup> Staves, p. 52.

Revenge reflects the experience of civil war in a high-plot formed in language and psychology by fear and division." Since all the tragicomedies share this characteristic it would appear inconsistent that he finds only plays with London settings convincing because they reveal "contingencies" about the assimilation of civil war trauma. He also says Marriage à-la-Mode is "interesting" because "it lets contemporary concerns invade it."<sup>23</sup> So I believe Burns would agree that the form's best plays are significant. I submit that Burns' general dislike of tragicomedy stems from his modern antipathy to aristocratic "self-presentation": "Aristocracy can no longer [in the Restoration] claim to tell the truth through a neoclassical decorum that demands a moral hierarchy and a 'correct' view of class relationships practically identical to it" (p. 4). The dramatists I analyze did indeed have trouble with the presentation of honor as a virtue of the aristocratic class, but still insisted on a traditional hierarchy. Burns says of Restoration tragicomedy that its romantic intrigue plot "is expressive of the tenuous stability of the society from which the play comes" (pp. 40-41). I intend to show in my study of the individual plays that what makes the romantic plot's expression valuable is that its tenuousness helps to form a viable and comprehensive literary experience.

Michael McKeon provides an indispensable frame of reference for understanding the difficult ideological issues confronting the Restoration audience at the time these plays were produced. He traces the shifting social and status categories which he calls "Questions of Virtue." He corroborates Staves and others who claim the Stuart-era aristocracy was on

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<sup>23</sup> Burns, p. 16.

the ideological defensive, and he makes further distinctions about the nature of honor that figure largely in Restoration tragicomedy. His argument is that, as aristocratic honor met with serious challenges in this period, its identification with "rank" or "degree" "was accompanied by the accelerated mobilization of social, intellectual, legal, and institutional fictions whose increasingly ostentatious use signaled their incapacity to serve the ideological ends for which they were designed."<sup>24</sup> He puts it clearly in a restatement of this idea: "As with the providential argument . . . we are often obliged to understand the very force with which traditional authority is asserted as one telling sign of its weakness" (p. 151). The ultimate appeal in what McKeon calls "aristocratic ideology" is based "on an idea of status derived from the personal possession, or nonpossession, of honor. . . . equivalent to an internal element of "virtue" (p. 131). Furthermore,

the notion of honor as a unity of outward circumstance and inward essence is the most fundamental justification for the hierarchical stratification of society by status, and it is so fundamental as to be largely tacit. What it asserts is that the social order is not circumstantial and arbitrary, but corresponds to and expresses an analogous, intrinsic moral order.  
(p. 131)

Since honor is an inherited characteristic of the family's male heirs, it is used to justify the existing "status hierarchy" that extends to the entire family.

Anyone familiar with the divine right controversy would not find much new about the identification of honor with virtue, but McKeon goes

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<sup>24</sup> Michael McKeon, The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740 (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 133.

on to consider categories of social status that show the crucial stage at which aristocratic ideology becomes gradually supplanted by a critique he calls "progressive ideology" (p. 153). He points up two crises that put the aristocracy in the late seventeenth century on the defensive: One was an "inflation of honors" under the early Stuarts, where they raised royal funds by selling titles previously transmitted by primogeniture, "underscor[ing] the central tension between monetary and honorific criteria" (p. 151). This sale of honors took place under James I and Charles I, leaving problems that persisted to the days of Charles II. The second crisis he identifies was a demographic one for "England's landed elite" as so many aristocratic families failed to produce male heirs. This meant that the aristocracy had to scramble to ensure keeping property in the family, a system of "patriline repair" that guaranteed provisions for daughters. So the progressive attack on the aristocracy gained impetus from the gradual detachment of honor from virtue to ensure rank. As McKeon puts it, "'Honor' now fails to unite internals with externals" (p. 155).

The implications of McKeon's analysis of aristocratic status are important for tragicomedy. Romance conventions associated with aristocratic affirmations of a traditional heirarchy, are dialectically engaged with character types who attempt to break with that tradition. Yet it is the comprehensiveness of experience attempted in the subgenre of split-plot tragicomedy--which compared the providentially approved, romance-plot male hero's status (which is contingent on his success in defeating the opposition) to personal freedoms enjoyed by a post-war generation in the comic plot--that made it a significant, short-lived

expression of a "tired" and "disillusioned" aristocracy.<sup>25</sup> Aristocratic ideology cannot hope to contain hierarchal disintegration for long when its weak authority at the top is exposed. After all, the libertine couple features in all the comic plots in these tragicomedies. Libertinism obviously threatens the authority of a royalist-patrilineal social order because it permits the separation of personal loyalty from obligation to this political order. If a hierarchal order cannot be aligned to "natural law," then its existence must be seen as an arbitrary, unfair arrangement. The provisos negotiated before marriage in these plots warn that passion cannot be enjoined like social status. Libertines who threaten "inconstancy" (demonstrating the need for a contract for marriage since there is no other tie) tacitly defeat the argument that honor is an intrinsic virtue. Yet in most of these plays, genuinely threatening libertinism is softened or contained by couples portrayed too sympathetically to take personal satisfaction at the expense of aristocratic honor (the humiliation or exploitation of lower status groups is expected). However, a justification of the hereditary transmission of property rights must at least maintain a pro forma position that honor is intrinsic, benefitting from an analogy to absolutist doctrine that a king's succession is an indefeasible hereditary right.

The ascending class of gentry, who became rich on settlements provided in the Civil War practice of selling off land held by royalist sympathisers, certainly gained prestige that rivaled traditional social categories. But McKeon argues convincingly that the aristocracy survived

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<sup>25</sup> Singh, p. 2.

by adopting new "quantitative" as opposed to "qualitative" criteria for status. The social structure "whose external shell still seems roughly assimilable to the status model" persisted by being transformed from within, by "individualistic and class criteria." There was a volatile social situation, then, after the Civil War, reflecting the flagging vigor of the "aristocratic ideology" that had justified itself earlier on intrinsic virtue. The impermanence of a social category will be signaled by its member's insistence on status. McKeon describes this last stage, which can be applied to the content of tragicomedy because of its insistence on aristocratic virtue in the romance plot:

. . . [s]tatus values--like deference and paternalistic care--that we commonly associate with aristocratic social relations [do not] lose their force in the early modern period. On the contrary, they undergo the more elaborate sort of "theatricalization" that is likely to occur whenever social convention is raised to the level of self-conscious practice.<sup>26</sup>

In the heroic drama, the epic hero makes explicit appeals to honor as a signal of virtue. But the full-length heroic drama is outside the scope of my study. I am intrigued instead with the implications McKeon's categories carry--usually tacit ones--for the relationship of the plots in the split-plot tragicomedy. I argue that these plays employ a dialectical strategy where the comic plot reinforces the romantic plot by pretending to resist ironically the latter's affirmation of royalist ideology--only to give in at the resolution. The Restoration form of tragicomedy comes out of the Fletcherian drama without destroying its aristocratic attractiveness. If it is true that it shows aristocracy as "a shell of status," that is all the more

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<sup>26</sup> McKeon, p. 169.

reason for its presentation of the attractive sides of aristocratic identity. That identity contains a libertine reinvigoration of the patriarchy by the comic plot couples who reaffirm aristocratic ideology by flirting with "quantitative criteria" like marriage provisos, only to settle on marriage in the end since their compatibility depends on the intrinsic virtue of honor they recognize in each other. So aristocratic ideology is affirmed because the couple needs to believe their status is justified by intrinsic merit. Yet, ironically, the insistence on honor in the split-plot tragicomedy and its demise after 1671, indicate that this ideological effort had indeed lost much of its force.

I will proceed with an examination of four plays to discover how each playwright attempted to capture a comprehensive (and flattering) experience of aristocratic society within the limitations and advantages of tragicomic form. Etherege's Comical Revenge (1664), in Chapter One, presents a challenge for this study. It could be argued that it is not a true split-plot play, but a multi-plot precursor of later, explicit moral satire in Restoration comedy. The number of plots presents no real problem, however, as the farcical bits are subsumed in the larger comic plot involving the love contest between the libertine rake and the widow, the updated couple from Fletcherian Sicily placed in a realistic London. I include it here because the ethics of Etherege's new aristocratic hero show that honor had been transvalued by quantifying class criteria and that, consequently, the traditional appeal to intrinsic virtue no longer had force. Sir Frederick Frolick's libertinism is, ironically, put in the service of the aristocracy to defend its social order against the "emerging gentry"--

represented buffoonishly in the knight, Cully. Sir Frederick Frollick reinvigorates the aristocratic family when he vanquishes its enemies and shows up the self-defeating excesses in honor by the male heirs. He is rewarded with adoption into the family by the patriarch.

Howard's All Mistaken (1665), treated in Chapter Two, has never before received a detailed, critical examination. Yet it is one of the most interesting plays of the period because of its realistic comic-plot couple. I argue that, although the romantic plot's royalist concern with absolutist doctrine does not admit any historical contingencies, it affirms an absolutist, hierarchal order by presenting the women as repositories of aristocratic honor, or "virtue," when the men weaken in resolve. The comic plot, despite its coarse realism, parallels the romantic plot and affirms its social order by testing the moral qualities of the aristocratic heroine who insists on prudent conduct against the male's libertine ethic. The Hobbist state of nature is presented frankly in the comic plot, showing an aristocratic cynicism about ordinary people who overreach their place in the hierarchy authorized by the heroic-romantic plot.

Dryden's best efforts in the subgenre--Secret Love (1667), covered in Chapter Three, and Marriage à-la-Mode (1671), treated separately in Chapter Four--are the most polished of all the plays, which is not too surprising as he is the lone professional dramatist of the group. Influenced by the witty couple in Howard's All Mistaken, Secret Love differs from Howard's by showing the conflicts within royalist politics. Dryden explores the complexities in different versions of natural law, where individual desire usually conflicts with a preordained social order. The

dialectical comparison of the Queen in the romance plot to Florimell in the comic plot upholds the traditional order by demonstrating that individual wills need external constraints to diffuse threats to ties between subject and ruler, husband and wife. Dryden allows women a significant degree of autonomy to assent to the conditions of their status. A reliance on role-playing allows the comic plot couple to keep each other's interest after anticipating an inevitable decline of passion. The firmly negotiated marriage contract in the comic plot subordinates the male's libertine ethic--even if it is only a fashionable pose--to a traditional social order.

Marriage à-la-Mode, by all accounts one of the critically acclaimed successes of Restoration comedy, presents the most attractive couples of all the plays. I have to part ways with Robert Markley here who argues that Dryden "coopt[s] the subversiveness" of Fletcherian wit in his comic plot to adapt to his "conservative ideology."<sup>27</sup> I do not find Dryden any more conservative than his precursor, Fletcher, whose comic practice he followed closely. Dryden elaborates the dialectical plot structure in Marriage that he delineated in Secret Love. There is an analogical correspondence between the political order and the social order, but Dryden's conservative solutions to the plots are mediated by the various degrees of satisfaction in his characters with their destiny. Although both plots evince an ambiguous thematic strategy, Dryden's ideological purpose of promoting a conservative order clearly emerges by the end. In this play, Dryden attempts to reconcile the imperatives of a viable social order with a recognition that subjects have a dynamic of personal desires.

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<sup>27</sup> Markley, p. 86.

Therefore, he is more explicit in this play than in Secret Love about his royalist rationalization of power: that constraints on a free will absolve an individual of making the wrong choice and threatening the proper social order. There is a parallel in the comic plot, where the characters submit to a Hobbist contract, even if it is provisional, to restrain their appetites and thus prevent upsetting a harmonious order among the young aristocracy.

The futile attempts to revive tragicomedy in the 1680s and 90s are covered fully in the studies I discussed in this chapter. As I noted above, I owe a considerable debt to the methods of Robert Markley and Michael McKeon. I hope to demonstrate convincingly that the primary appeal of split-plot tragicomedy between 1664 and 1671 was the investment in an aristocratic-royalist ideology to justify a hierarchy of status, which proved difficult given the documented erosion of belief in an aristocratic version of honor.

## Chapter 1

The Comical Revenge; or, Love in a Tub (1664)

George Etherege's first play, The Comical Revenge; or, Love in a Tub, was originally produced in March 1664. It was a very popular early Restoration success and had regular revivals through the rest of the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> John Downes featured its première in Roscius Anglicanus with one of his rare elaborations in his usual lists of plays and cast members:

The clean and well performance of this comedy got the [Duke's] company more Reputation and Profit than any preceding Comedy; the Company taking in a months time at it 1000£.<sup>2</sup>

It was Etherege's only play to include the romantic and comic plots which constitute split-plot tragicomedy. The romantic plot is entirely disjunct in language and characters from the other, comic, plots. Etherege's two later prose comedies dropped verse and heroic action altogether to focus exclusively on sexual battles among upper-class young people. For example, his second play, She Would If She Could (1668), has two complementary comic plots that amount to a single action because they share characters whose ends are bound together. Also, the plots are unified in this play because they both depend on a select group of young gentry or

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<sup>1</sup> For the première performance history see The London Stage, Pt. 1, 1660-1700, ed. William Van Lennep (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), 76.

<sup>2</sup> John Downes, Roscius Anglicanus, ed. Robert D. Hume and Judith Milhous (1708; reprint, London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1987), p. 57.

aristocracy who display their wit and sophistication in appropriate language.

In contrast to the domestic or moral focus of his later plays, The Comical Revenge dramatizes in its romance plot Cavalier preoccupations about regaining political ascendancy during the period of social chaos just before the Restoration.<sup>3</sup> The women in this plot are unhappy because they must become vessels for their men's abstract notions of honor, and this standard expected from the women keeps them from happy marriage alliances. Traditional aristocratic royalists in this plot are depicted as ineffectual against their opposition, represented by Sir Nicholas Cully, who possesses the predatory acquisitiveness that honor-bound Cavaliers disdain. The old aristocracy's sons expend their energies quibbling over moral abstractions, leaving them unfit to fight off the real challenge presented by the new class of Cullys. Sir Frederick Frolick enters the picture with qualities he has adapted, ironically, from lower status groups to assert with renewed vigor the royalist ethos. His wit is the weapon the Cavaliers must use instead of their traditional reliance on violence to intimidate the radicals and traitorous class of Cullys. Although there is a life-threatening injury in the play sustained by a Cavalier, Colonel Bruce, there are no deaths--only comic humiliations of satirized "low" characters. Etherege preserved the Fletcherian form that averts tragic endings in the romance

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<sup>3</sup> For standard accounts of the Royalists during the war years see Keith Feiling, History of the Tory Party, 1640-1714 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), especially Chaps. 2 and 3, celebrating Cavalier loyalties; Godfrey Davies, The Restoration of Charles II, 1658-1660 (San Marino, Cal., 1955); Paul H. Hardacre, The Royalists during the Puritan Revolution (The Hague, 1956), good on the economic background; and David Underdown, Royalist Conspiracy in England, 1649-1660, 19 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), especially Chaps. 1, 13, and 14 on the events showing divisiveness and loyalties among those royalists personally responsible for the political fortunes of Charles I and II.

plot, even if the heroic plot appears almost disjunct from the lowest of the comic plots.

The play makes a confusing initial impression on a modern reader because of its ambitious inclusion of characters from nearly every stratum of contemporary English society, all represented in four complicated plots. Many commentators have observed that Etherege created nothing new in any one plot, but that the attempt to include them together was, as R. D. Hume says, "a tribute to his acumen, if not to his originality."<sup>4</sup> The Comical Revenge affirms the legitimacy of aristocratic claims to rule with a presentation, in their absence, of the awful spectacle of political misrule and social chaos by various groups that worsens the further down they are on the ladder of the traditional social hierarchy. The plots present (in descending order from the heroic verse plot) increasingly realistic representations of contemporary life. These plots are consistent in their tone and language for each group: There is a love-honor affair in heroic verse with double couples agonizing over professed internal virtues identified with aristocratic ideological concerns; a "gay couple" plot featuring a famous example of the early Restoration rake, Sir Frederick Frollick, who attracts the attention of a wealthy young widow and makes explicit what the revised Restoration aristocratic ideology entails: that an aristocratic male hero familiar with the emerging emphasis on individualistic ambition can reinvigorate the gentry;<sup>5</sup> a gulling plot that

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<sup>4</sup> Hume, pp. 245-246.

<sup>5</sup> John Harrington Smith, The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp. 51-53. He notes that James Howard's The English Monsieur (1663) has a "gay couple" action from which Etherege modeled his. However, Etherege should get credit for the more complex rake in Frollick, who, I argue below, influences the heroic part a good deal.

implicates the pretended cavalier virtue of Sir Nicholas Cully, whose clumsily expressed desires result in his humiliation at the hands of a couple of loyalist--albeit roguish--tavern sharpsters; and a farcical action where Frollick's disease-ridden French valet is outwitted by chambermaids. However, because the two "lower" comic plots can be taken as part of the larger Frollick plot, the play retains the split-plot structure common to Fletcherian tragicomedy.

It is important for assessing Comical Revenge's connection to a vital royalist ideology that Etherege constructed a heroic-romantic plot that conspicuously lacks a hero. Lord Bevill can be taken, without any parodic skewing, as the exemplary royalist patriarch waiting impatiently for his family to regain a hold on patrilineal rights. However, he initiates no action since his intervention in the decision-making process about suitable male additions to the family would abrogate his daughters' liberty in their choices. The nominal candidate for heroics belonging exclusively to the romantic plot action is Beaufort, presented here as a denatured, de-eroticized man because he has imbibed uncritically an effete préciosité, which operates in the romantic plot as a substitute for real passion.<sup>6</sup> The expected event in an aristocratic plot is for the son to defend his family's honor against interlopers and become the head of the family after doing so. But Bevill's son Lovis--a young Hotspur--provokes everyone when defending his family's honor-encumbered alliances because he, too, has been infected by abstracted Platonic idealism. Lovis nearly ruins his

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<sup>6</sup> For a lucid explanation of the role this philosophic system played at court and in the plays of the seventeenth century, see Kathleen Lynch, The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy (1926; rpt. New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1965), Chap. 5, pp. 107-136.

sisters' chances to marry happily and wisely, and, most significantly, his father passes him over and chooses instead the politically realistic Frollick.

So, though Sir Frederick Frollick belongs in the comic world of dalliances with mistresses, he enters the aristocratic world, standing in symbolically as its savior/hero to reinvent the aristocratic male; and by doing so he ensures the social preeminence of the family situated in an all-too-real world where intrinsic honor must be transvalued in an explicit relation to the hierarchal order. Moreover, Frollick borrows socially marginal practices of "low" groups to revivify an aristocratic ideology that became stagnant in its literary representation because it had displaced entirely, in court masques and the plays of Davenant, the popular language that included witty, sexually-charged combat between men and women. The Frollick "gay couple" action and the serious, aristocratic part are the two main plot lines, then, which are nearly equal with respect to the attention given the characters and the stage time which Etherege devotes to them. Both plots are of the Fletcherian intrigue variety, and the characters possess the ironic dispositions of Fletcher's comic heroes. The classic pattern for Restoration tragicomedy strictly divided into the heroic--or serious--drama and the rest of the action, which was accorded "low" status based on the lower social level of the characters. But the plots in Comical Revenge, which appear to be entirely disjunct in terms of the type of characters presented, share devices which eventually mingle some characters who eventually appear in both plots by a multiple marriage and dance. Etherege keeps to a disjunct pattern as far as the overall working out of the intrigue in each action is concerned, but Frollick is the

exceptional character who materially symbolizes the intersection of "high" social status with "low" realistic, untidy appetites in his masterly orchestration of the neatly culminating alliances.

Much comparatively recent criticism has called into question the success of the romantic plot in Comical Revenge. The heroic character intrigue has met with little approval from those who generally value the play only because it is seen to anticipate the comedy of manners, or from those who believe the gay couple characters the only worthwhile development in this early part of the Restoration drama before sophisticated social satire of the 1670s emerged as the dominant or vital genre. As Arthur Huseboe states after having surveyed all the Etherege criticism to 1987, "Most critics have argued that the upper plot of the heroic Bevill family and the lively lower plot of the gay couple are an unnatural mixture that cannot reasonably be linked together, but that seems not to have been a concern of the audience who first saw [the play]."<sup>7</sup>

I propose, therefore, to demonstrate that the serious plot was not a vestigial remnant of a different type of drama that Etherege worked in by pastiche, and that he incorporated it to parody pre-Civil War bloodless Platonic idealism, an idea preventing the development of an explicit Restoration royalist position. Obviously, Etherege has a political motivation, which is not to assail the power or privileges of the aristocracy but to promote its claim as a stabilizing social force. He hoped to accomplish this in Comical Revenge, where, rather than divorce the royalist position from popular culture, he was to revitalize the royalist

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur Huseboe, Sir George Etherege, Twayne's English Author Series, Bertram H. Davis, ed., 446 (Boston: Twayne, 1987), p. 65.

position by ridding it of the ossified rhetoric of religiosity in verse, and then appropriating popular symbols like the dance, which leads to a fruitful multiple marriage that strengthens the aristocratic family's hold on status. Precisely because the civil war had upset confidence in "aristocratic presumptions," and their representation in heroic verse, Etherege parodies the excesses of romantic sentiments among the aristocracy by which they sought to elevate themselves in symbolic representation as they were elevated in the social hierarchy.<sup>8</sup>

But Etherege would never parody aristocratic family relationships, nor the social ideals of the royalist gentry. The plots intersect and social chaos is quelled when Frolick reinvents the role of the male aristocracy, hopelessly separated from their women by a effete Platonic doctrine that denies the natural completion of sexual desire. Certainly, it is no coincidence that the servant girl whores and other mistresses in the "low" world are much happier than the heroic plot women. The mistresses in the comic plot do not have to contend with impossible absolutes that thwart self-expression and sexual fruition. Robert Markley has noted aptly that the complicated political and stylistic boundaries in the play "seem to exist solely to be transgressed, particularly by the play's comic hero."<sup>9</sup>

Because of the contentious critical history of Comical Revenge, it will be necessary, first, to survey the important critical analyses of these plots from select modern critics. Since the treatment by Allardyce Nicoll

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<sup>8</sup> See Markley, p. 102, who identifies in Etherege's plot relationships the most elusive critical problem confronting the play's contextual analysis: "The Comical Revenge is cavalier about defining the social status, though not the political allegiances, of its characters." See his Chap. 4, pp. 100-111, on Comical Revenge.

<sup>9</sup> Markley, p. 101.

in History of Restoration Drama (1923) and Norman Holland in The First Modern Comedies (1959), who pronounced the heroic verse plot a handicap to the comedy, recent critics have taken a fresh interest in the play, especially as it represents the genre of tragicomedy. I will then offer in the last part a close analysis of the heroic plot to show that aristocratic ideology is affirmed at the end of the play once some of its former weaknesses are exposed and meliorated; and that the serious plot has a thematic interest which depends not merely on tricks and devices of intrigue, but also differentiates characters by their relation to an outmoded aristocratic ideology (from which Etherege distances his witty characters), or a reinvigorated "patriline repair" which keeps satisfaction of desire for men and women a necessary part of marriage.<sup>10</sup> This reinvestiture of marriage with eroticism was necessary to overcome the false and damaging Platonic doctrine that subordinated making alliances and children to keeping purity or "virtue." The emphasis on personal fulfillment was surely a reaction against Puritanism as well.

Dryden might have had Etherege in mind, as well as his own The Wild Gallant (1663) and Secret Love (1667), when he formulated his definition of successful tragicomedy in Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668) in the character of Neander, who defends the English comedy against the French by an appeal to the pleasures of "variety."<sup>11</sup> His enthusiasm for tragicomedy is instructive, since the Essay was written during the genre's short and very successful run in the theaters. His defense of the divided plots identifies the tragicomic form as a peculiar English political art:

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<sup>10</sup> McKeon, Origins, p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> Works, 17, 46.

I must therefore have stronger arguments ere I am convinced, that compassion and mirth in the same subject destroy each other; and in the mean time cannot but conclude, to the honour of our nation, that we have invented, increased, and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the stage than ever was known to the ancients or moderns of any nation, which is tragicomedy.

(Works, 17, 46)

The appearance of The Comical Revenge has been defined by modern critics as an atavistic melange of elements from Jacobean and Caroline drama rather than the harbinger of a new comic drama, rather than a crystallizing of a tragicomedy genre. It has been rescued recently by a good deal of attention brought to the "middle" plot of Frolick and the Widow Rich as the first really successful anti-romantic comedy.

Allardyce Nicoll was the first modern critic to examine the effect of the play's structure even though the heroic plot gets barely a mention: "The Comical Revenge, or, Love in a Tub. . . was really only a tentative effort. Marred by the introduction of rimed verse, which, however, makes it of interest historically, and by several other crudities, it does not really grip one as do so many other plays of the manners school."<sup>12</sup> Choosing not to elaborate on the many "crudities," Nicoll no doubt viewed the honor plot as pointlessly disjunct from the comic action. Moreover, he did not like any 1660s comedy, with the exception of Etherege's own She Would If She Could (1668). Clearly, he would have agreed wholeheartedly with Norman Holland's later assessment that "the play seems neither overpoweringly funny, nor startlingly new . . . Nevertheless, the play did,

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<sup>12</sup> Nicoll, p. 223.

for those who first saw it, define a new comedy."<sup>13</sup> Holland echoes an old argument by Eugene Waith that the Frollick plot creates a "middle mood" that raises feeling above significance in the outcome of the plot. He maintains that the prevailing Cavalier attitude is much more important than any specific theme implicitly delineated.

Kathleen Lynch has probably the last word for the group of critics who, in looking backward from what they see as a maturity in the sex comedies or social satire of the late 1670s, dismiss Comical Revenge as a reworking of bits from pre-Restoration drama: "The great success of the play was due perhaps to his audience's familiarity with these précieuse conventions and, in any case, could not have been the result of novelty of comic form."<sup>14</sup> Lynch may be right about the audience's familiarity with the conventions, but I would argue that this recognition included their approval of the hero's rewriting of the old Cavalier code. As I will attempt to show below, notwithstanding a recognition that Etherege borrowed on a long English tradition for both plots, Comical Revenge capitalizes on the inversion of hierarchy in the traditional roles of the heroic and comic plot heroes.

Turning again to Lynch's case, which is that the Restoration comedy "was the natural outgrowth of a magnificent English tradition," her insistence and correct emphasis on the familiarity of the action in the heroic plot is one which has much value when it is seen as a part of the whole play. Above all, the most important character in the play, Sir

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<sup>13</sup> Norman N. Holland, The First Modern Comedies: The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Lynch, p. 144.

Frederick Frollick, is defined as much by his intrigue in the romantic plot as in the comic ones. It is a sphere of action that would have interested the contemporary audience precisely for a reason Lynch had identified: the audience was familiar with the Platonic conventions in Davenant's and Suckling's plays, and would have been expecting an ironic twist when a familiar figure of a contemporary social milieu entered this otherwise remote and ethereal world of perfect honor and love.

Dale Underwood's study of Etherege's entire work and its intellectual foundations in a libertine ethic emphasizes especially the comic hero's acceptance into--and defense of--the heroic world. Underwood states the central significance of Frollick's vitality, which is crucial as an influence on the heroic characters: "By conventional [i.e. heroic] standards Sir Frederick at the beginning of the play is morally weak, not strong, a victim of his passions, not master of them, and his fall is, therefore, his regeneration."<sup>15</sup> The source of this regeneration, in other words, is the libertine, "natural" man rescued from the confining "custom" of the heroic ethos. I would add also that a second "custom" Etherege wanted to peel away was the narrow Platonic ethos vitiating royalist mythology. This action clears the way for the renewed affirmation of patriarchal hierarchy. Thus, Underwood sees thematic implications which go beyond a simple pattern of erotic intrigues and the ensuing marriages. But he is on target for the present investigation into the dramatic importance of the heroic plot: "Each of the three plots in the prose portion of the play supplies its

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<sup>15</sup> Dale Underwood, George Etherege and the Seventeenth Century Comedy of Manners (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 52-53.

own opposition to this heroic-courtly world."<sup>16</sup> The word "opposition" here needs to be taken carefully, since the remaining group of critics who have passed recent judgment on the heroic plot do not see this action having a vitality in the play at all, at least since Underwood's Sir Frederick has been taken for granted as the central focus of attention in the play. Underwood takes the heroic plot as an imitation of previous Cavalier plots to contrast with Sir Frederick's "conversion" from a life of debauch to one of "natural" freedom of the self from convention. I would add to Underwood's thesis the ironic paradox of this process of conversion--that this self is realized successfully only in a marriage. The marriage will be firmly grounded on contract and consequent fulfillment of sexual desire rather than the idealized passion of the heroic ethos.

An important critic of Restoration comedy--Virginia Birdsall--has assailed Etherege's creation of a contemporary heroic world as a return to values that were outdated by this period. She successfully refutes both Underwood's and Holland's arguments that Frollick represents a sort of roving ambassador between the romantic and comic plots of The Comical Revenge. Contrary to the main line of critics (Underwood is an important exception) who denigrate Sir Frederick for his not very piquant wit, Birdsall's main contention is that Frollick is nothing less than

the original Restoration embodiment of the English comic rogue, the English comic spirit incarnate, and second (the really vital point) that Etherege's play is actually thematically concerned with depicting this spirit in the very act of gaining acceptance and dominance in a new sphere. The action of the play, which records his successful wooing of the Widow Rich,

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<sup>16</sup> Underwood, p. 55.

constitutes a dramatization of the process whereby Falstaffian tavern humor, with its boisterousness and its robust vitality, challenges and gains entry into a sophisticated and effete court world.<sup>17</sup>

This is especially well stated, and nearly sums up the previous critical exegesis of the play at a stroke. However, Birdsall omits a discussion about the significance of Frollick's dominance in his dialectical relationship to the characters in the lower plots. Although Birdsall somewhat obstinately misreads Underwood's thesis--putting Frollick more in the lower world than in Underwood's middle--her conclusion about Sir Frederick's future in a marriage is really the same. Underwood had said that Frollick was "regenerated" but stood "equivocally" to the old and new in his make-up, whereas Birdsall argues that he "re-forms marriage rather than being reformed by it."<sup>18</sup> This distinction does not alter the essence of Underwood's argument, however, that Frollick is a conscious libertine. Certainly Birdsall is right about the process of the action: that Frollick's "vitality" is meant to contrast with the conventions of the heroic plot.

Also, I would agree with Birdsall completely that the Platonic world is "effete," but would argue that the social hierarchy, which needs justification from the Platonic world despite the ineffectual language, stays intact, and, furthermore, that Frollick revitalizes and strengthens it by marrying into it and outwitting any opposition.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the romance plot's ideological function would not be entirely outmoded because the family's

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<sup>17</sup> Virginia O. Birdsall, Wild Civility: The English Comic Spirit on the Restoration Stage (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> Birdsall, p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> See the arguments below of Gagen and Pendelton who take the extreme view that the high plot parodies and therefore denies the dead past. I have argued why this cannot be true.

values are dialectically set against those of the low characters so that the hierarchy can be ultimately vindicated. The very important function of the comic plot is to legitimate the low characters and their directly expressed passion as part of a totality lacking in the romance plot. Birdsall ultimately claims too much for the presentation of the Platonic action in Comical Revenge : “[that f]or all its artificiality . . . we are clearly asked to believe in the actual existence of this précieux realm of courtly love . . . much as we are asked in Henry IV to believe in Hotspur’s world as one possible interpretation of reality by which men still choose to live.”<sup>20</sup> Certainly the set of values implicit in the presentation of “this realm” are still espoused by some members of the audience, but they cannot be abstracted from the dialectical reality of all the plots. Yet the “elevated” language in the romance plot proves itself dead because it frustrates an authentic expression of sexual passion and genuine familial interconnectedness that will ensure the longevity of the aristocracy against intruders like Sir Nicholas Cully. Even though the dance that ensues on the marriages that conclude the play is a stylized effect every bit as formal as the heroic rhyming verse in the romance plot, it serves symbolically as part of the “natural” movement where low action intersects the high. There is really no contradistinction to be made between the action of the heroic intrigue and the completion of Frolick's intrigue and subsequent marriage. The final dance joins the romantic and comic plots whereby Frolick is taken by the Platonic characters, quite literally speaking, into their family. Presumably, the aristocratic characters can sustain their social dominance with a

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<sup>20</sup> Birdsall, p. 44.

regenerative cabability now that doctrinal differences and intrusive fools like Sir Nicholas Cully have been overcome. Sir Frederick Frollick, on the other hand, was never entirely a subversive intrusion into the heroic world, but a raucous member of the King's restorative party who just happens to have marriage on his mind. And at the end of the play Frollick is much more a part of the heroic world than ever, though in his "natural" manner. In fact, he saves this world. Frollick is actually the real son of the aristocracy who affirms the authority of that world. Virginia Birdsall has done the heroic plot in Comical Revenge a good service, indirectly, since any criticism which has followed has had to recognize that the heroic plot was not an entirely disjunct sphere of action but a vital part of the whole play.

Robert D. Hume investigates the significance of the divided plot structure in his encyclopedic Development of English Drama in the late Seventeenth Century (1976). He correctly shifts the burden for the play's aristocratic attractiveness off the Frollick-Widow plot, and falls into agreement with earlier critical positions:

We should probably not be surprised that the young George Etherege, seeking a sure-fire formula for his first play, hit on the expedient of combining four of the most popular distinguishable modes of the time. Critics tend to concentrate on only one part of The Comical Revenge (March 1664)--the humorous courtship between Sir Frederick Frollick and Widow Rich, a love duel of the sort on which Etherege focuses in his two later plays. Actually, this is merely the second-to-highest of four plot lines, differentiated according to social standing.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Robert D. Hume, The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 245.

Both in this book and in his introduction to a recent edition of Sir Robert Howard's The English Monsieur (1663), Hume has been at great pains to establish that the Howard "gay couple" is the original one, not the Frolick-Widow plot in Comical Revenge. His point notwithstanding, the Widow in Comical Revenge fails completely to capture any interest because of her inadequate realization.<sup>22</sup>

The last important critic who needs careful attention in her judgment of Comical Revenge's heroic plot is Laura Brown. I outlined her position in the introduction above but a recounting of her main point is in order here. Brown argues that the Comical Revenge belongs to the divided plot "intrigue" type of comedy and that it is interesting only for this reason. Intrigue, in essence, signifies complicated action and reversal of fortune at the end. It is taken as a given in Brown's argument that the serious and comic plots are disjunct in theme, yet produce a unified effect by the similarity of their love actions, in events concluding with a satisfying closure that never varies at the expense of depth in characterization and thematic seriousness. Her objection to this pattern is predicated on the notion that this type of drama merits no serious attention of critics seeking meaningful "dramatic social satire," especially because tragicomic intrigue defuses social tension in order "to furnish [unvarying] aesthetic pleasure."<sup>23</sup> Brown's argument is interesting, but it does not completely fit Comical Revenge. Her twentieth-century preferences--which are not

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<sup>22</sup> Other commentators on Etherege have taken note of this. Birdsall, in fact, states: "[i]f Sir Frederick has no female counterpart possessed of an artistry and aggressiveness to equal and challenge his own, it is presumably because of the kind of boisterous comic hero he is" (p. 52).

<sup>23</sup> Laura S. Brown, "The Divided Plot: Tragicomic Form in the Restoration," English Literary History, 47 (1980), 73.

discussed but implied in terms like the derisive "lofty" she ascribes to the heroic plot, put value on "tension" over "pleasure," and on unresolved conflicts over the plot closure of Restoration tragicomedy. Brown certainly overstates the case for "the absence of actual ethical conflict" in Comical Revenge.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Brown's hostility to the tragicomedies serves them well by providing careful proof of the interdependence of their romantic and comic actions.

As I have shown, the Comical Revenge has led many modern critics into a sort of grudging acceptance of a play they do not really like because of its mixture of styles. Etherege's royalist affirmation, as should be clear at this point, cannot be abstracted from the romantic plot alone. In order to see that affirmation, I turn my attention to the specific challenge Etherege presents the aristocratic characters to reinvigorate themselves and to realign their relationships with others beneath them. Frolick emerges as the revealed son of the true aristocracy who defeats the outmoded court language and values of the last age with a re-eroticized wit and action so that royalist idealism is rendered palpable and successful, and in turn qualifies what Markley rightly calls the romance plot's "obstreperous idealism" with real passion that can stand boldly with explicitly expressed sexual desire and commingling with other classes.<sup>25</sup> The idea of an "intrinsic honor" (to use McKeon's term) was politically suspect after Cromwell's regime, but adherence to a royalist social order was still attractive to the aristocracy. Etherege, as a member of the gentry,

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<sup>24</sup> Brown, p. 76.

<sup>25</sup> Markley, p. 102.

represents the dominant culture at its most attractive, exploring its own symbolic strengths and weaknesses.

The process by which the aristocratic Bevill family members are rescued individually from their paralyzing scruples over "honour" is engineered by Frollick. The reason he is chosen does not become clear until we understand his position in the family's domain vis-à-vis the patriarchal assumptions of contemporary aristocratic ideology. The précieuse declamations, particularly those of Graciana and Aurelia, have separated them from a viable future. No man situated in the actual world can overcome the barriers they throw up to happiness until Frollick, the trusted mediator coming out of the other plot, the life-affirming comic world, pierces the veil of dead language with his erotic wit, demythologizing the gulf between the ladies' idealism in the heroic plot and the inevitable opportunism of the lower-plot women after they have consorted with Frollick on one of his characteristic "debauches." The women benefit as much as the men from this process, of course. They eventually gain husbands who match their status and who, therefore, most importantly, will be under constraint to remain loyal. What makes Frollick doubly significant to the heroic action is not merely that he brings closure to the intrigue with a round of successful marriages. He is the true son of the aristocracy revealed--the patrilineal favorite certainly of Lord Bevill, whose real son has failed him where it was most important. Lovis had forsaken the real duty of the son in breaching an obligation to trust in the father. Most significantly, Lovis is the only member of the high plot who does not get married. He confuses a self-destructive impasse over a

peccadillo of honor that has ceased to be recognized as an intrinsic virtue by the emerging propertied class with what should be his real concern--the privilege of retaining property for his family. Frolick's role here is to set things on their proper course for the good of the aristocracy, symbolised by the Bevills who do not realize the Platonic passions are no longer viable in the new social order. Frolick is given license to criticize the excesses of the Bevills so that he can rejuvenate them and extend their control over the low world. When Frolick revitalizes the family by marrying into it and taking over the role of the favorite son, he validates aristocratic supremacy. The dramatization of the inversion of high and low orders in Frolick thus underscores that the fiction of aristocratic virtue must surrender to a pragmatic--what McKeon calls "instrumental"--conservative practice where aristocrats reassert their claim to privilege by modifying the fictions themselves and ensuring their political preeminence in a new era.

Virginia Birdsall's view that the high plot family is effete can be complemented by an understanding of Etherege's royalist sympathies. As A. H. Scouten suggests, he would not attack the absolutist doctrine that justifies a hierarchal order: "the genial dramatist would have been horrified by the conduct of humanity untrammelled."<sup>26</sup> His parody of the Bevills' honor-bound dilemma punctures their language of spiritual elevation because it is hopelessly ineffective against the new order comprised of Cullys, who do not recognize Platonic conventions as authoritative models of conduct. The incapacity of the Bevills to realize

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<sup>26</sup> A. H. Scouten, The "Revels" History of Drama in English, 1660-1750, 5, T. W. Craik, ed. (London: Methuen, 1976), 182.

the danger posed by this pretender to cavalier rank means that they are vulnerable to displacement by his type. His poor demonstration of "parts" is exposed for what Etherege evidently held most in contempt--an overweening lust for usurping a place in the honorable world by brute force of money. The high world needs the low world to distinguish itself by its superiority, but Cully upsets the binary interconnectness of these worlds with his absurd intrusiveness. As he quantifies relationships by trying to buy into them, he upsets the old order. Cully's folly is the only kind among all the characters which rates an unmistakable vituperative tone by Sir Frederick Frollick (as contrasted to the gentle deflation of Platonic excess in the Bevills)--a not surprising condemnation, since Etherege's new hero stands on the side of Stuart moral hegemony:

Sir Fred. [Wheadle] has lately insinuated himself into Sir Nicholas Cully, one whom Oliver, for the transcendent knavery and disloyalty of his father, has dishonoured with knighthood, a fellow as poor in experience as in parts, and one that has a vainglorious humour to gain a reputation amongst the gentry, by feigning good nature, and an affection to the king and his party.<sup>27</sup>

Even more important than the expected vilification of Cully is Frollick's implicit tone of respect for the family of the heroic plot. Despite a propensity for too much "art" in the précieuse conventions about unrequited love, the family still enjoys a reputation of "good nature," the foundation of honor that was very important to seventeenth century

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Corder, ed. The Plays of Sir George Etherege (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982): I.ii., 15. All subsequent references to this edition appear in parenthetical notes in the text. Page numbers are given instead of line numbers, though Corder's edition supplies both, for easy locating of references.

English families.<sup>28</sup> The rest of the play unites Frollick's "experience" with the correct "parts" of the Bevills to withstand further corruption by the entire class of Cullys created in Cromwell's regime. The précieuse sentiments of the Bevills (principally the women) render them unfit to deal with a Cully since they are blinded to the motives and power of the newly emerging class he represents. The genuine libertine wit of Sir Frederick is saved for the fate of Nicholas Cully, whom Frollick tricks by assigning him his own mistress under the pretense she is Frollick's rich sister. She is pregnant with Frollick's child:

Sir Nich. Did Not I marry your sister, Sir?

Sir Fred. Fie, fie, Sir Nicholas; I thought  
[you had] been a modester man.

Sir Nich. Is my wife no kin to you, sir?

Sir Fred. Not your wife; but your son and heir may, if it  
prove so. (To Lucy) Joy be with thee, old acquaintance.  
Widow, resolving to lead a virtuous life, and keep house  
altogether with thee, I have disposed of my own house-  
hold-stuff, my dear Mrs Lucy, to this gentleman.

(V,v: 101-102)

This is an example of a wit which the seventeenth-century audience especially enjoyed: the profession of virtue in the claim to constancy while at the same time pragmatically arranging a pregnant ex-mistress's marriage to a social pretender trying to break rank. Frollick's dispensation protects the woman by providing her with an income and husband, while preventing Cully's further incursion into the gentry. Frollick's intervention here

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<sup>28</sup> See the Introduction above for McKeon's formulation of aristocratic virtue and its transvaluation during the period.

indicates where the old aristocracy needs to be remade for political survival. Sir Frederick's dispatch of Cully at the end of the play rids the heroic world of its primary threat, upholding the hierarchal social order by arranging a marriage for a woman whom Frollick had compromised himself. A patriarchal beneficence is revived, and the comic plot obviously depends for moral authority on the serious plot.

Laura Brown overlooked this last episode when she charged the comic action with promising more than it delivered: "Characteristically, Etherege absolves his comic protagonists of sexual impropriety, despite their claims to libertinism . . . . In fact, the play portrays no illicit sexual relations, though the characters often seem on the verge of some tantalizingly indecent behavior."<sup>29</sup> The reason Sir Frederick and the Widow do not enjoy premarital sexual relations is that it is necessary for the Widow to retain some leverage for maneuvering, not from any sentimental restraint. She is already at a disadvantage as a young widow, from Frollick's jaded perspective, where "widows must needs have furious flames; the bellows have been at work and blown 'em up" (II,i: 26). Yet she holds her own so that Sir Frederick needs her estate as well as her person. Toward the end of the play, Frollick's mastery of the sexually compromised girls he eventually marries off in the low plot fails him when he tries the same tactics, for comic effect, on the not-so-girlish widow:

Fred. Ho, widow! the noise of these nuptials  
brought you hither; I perceive your  
mouth waters.

Widow. Were I in a longing condition I should

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<sup>29</sup> Brown, 71.

be apt enough to put myself upon you, sir.  
(V,v: 100)

Clearly, the "longing condition" suggests pregnancy, or perhaps sexual arousal, not merely the lack of a ready husband. But the Widow resists, and Follick is forced to woo her.

After we see that Frollick's wildness can be tamed by the widow, he puts his tempered experience to use saving the patriarchal order. The action which involves the father-son breakup constitutes the essence of the threat to the moral order of the romance plot. Here a contemporary audience would have been concerned with a genuine solution and not a "trick" from the heavens to save the family. Lovis, Lord Bevill's son, advocates Colonel Bruce for the hand of Graciana, only because Lovis had given his own premature word to Bruce that it could be so. Lovis demonstrates the proper "loyalty," which is not all that is required for "good nature." Honest love is not enforced tyranny. Lord Bevill had stipulated that his daughters must give their approbation before he decided on their marriage partners. Lovis' humour blinds him to this crucial element of the true aristocratic love arrangement. His challenge to Lord Bevill has already been carried too far and undermines the reputation of the entire family early in Act One:

Lord Bevill. Forbear, I charge you on my blessing; not one word more of Colonel Bruce.

Lovis. You gave encouragement sir to his love; The honour of our house now lies at stake.

Lord Bevill. You find by your sister's inclinations heaven has decreed her otherwise.

Lovis. But sir, --

Lord Bevill. Forbear to speak, or else forbear  
the room.

Lovis. This I can obey, but not the other. Exit Lovis.  
(I,iv: 21)

Lovis' fault is that he does not understand the exigencies of aristocratic honor. He believes it can be forced, itself a violation of the nature of that order as completely as it is wrong for Cully to aspire to a rank where he has no designated place. Even Colonel Bruce, Graciana's erstwhile lover released from a Cromwellian prison, thinks Lovis' excessive devotion to Bruce's exclusion on a ghostly principle of intrinsic virtue provokes the "pow'rs above." After Bruce tells Lovis that Graciana had not promised her love to him as much as he had wished it were so in his exile, Bruce generously releases Graciana from any further obligation to him so as not to transgress her idea about her honor. Lovis then passionately directs Bruce to physically attack Beaufort, a misdirected effort to cause fighting within aristocratic ranks, debilitating their best men needlessly when they should be closing ranks against the common enemy--Cully:

Lovis. Do not this opportunity withstand;  
These lovers now are walking hand in hand  
I' th' garden; fight him there, and sacrifice  
His heart to that false woman's cruel eyes:  
If fate be so unjust to make thee fall,  
His blood or mine shall wait thy funeral.

Bruce. Young man, this rashness must have my excuse  
Since 'tis your friendship does your fault produce;  
If pow'rs above did not this passion sway,  
But that our love our reason did obey,  
Your sister I with justice might accuse,  
Nor would I this occasion then refuse.

(III,vi: 57)

This rejoinder by Bruce is made before his passion rises and overcomes his better judgment. The appeal to fate indicates that their language, situating love in an heroic realm, compounds their frustration. Robert Markley makes a similar argument about the Beaufort-Bruce rivalry:

The conflicts between love and honor that all of the heroic characters, to some degree, experience demonstrate that they are verbally and ideologically incapable of exploring the conditions of their existence; they can neither analyse their behaviour nor question the ideology of aristocratic privilege and obligation that is ultimately the source of their problems.<sup>30</sup>

They cannot see that an insistence on obligation to Platonic honor codes undermines the succession of male heirs in the aristocracy and fulfillment of desire on a material level. The high-plot male characters would prosper better if they saw beyond their fruitless idealism and its excesses of honor and moral absolutism. Luckily, an outside agency intervenes in Sir Frederick--who saves an especially foolish Lovis from a pointless death. Beaufort wins Bruce's sword in two passes and returns it to him. Bruce falls on his own sword, proving the self-destructive desperation among honor-clad idealists, and Lovis prepares to follow suit:

Lovis. He does his blood for a lost mistress spend;  
And shall not I bleed for so brave a friend?

[Lovis offers to fall on his sword,  
but is hindered by Sir Frederick.]

Sir Frederick. Forbear,sir; the frolic's not to  
go round, as I take it.

(IV,v: 70)

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<sup>30</sup> Markley, p. 106.

Lovis cannot understand his own position in the imbroglio of heroic virtue. Bruce has the excuse of passion, but Lovis undermines the essence of the aristocratic social order in abrogating all good advice of moral authority and, incidentally, threatening patrilinear succession. Fortunately, in a completion of the intrigue, Bruce's wound reveals Aurelia's love for him; the lovers then pair off with honor, and all goes well with them. The resolution of Lovis' ethical problem is problematic, though it is somewhat glossed over:

Lovis. [To Beaufort] My lord, our quarrel now is at an end;  
You are not Bruce's rival, but his friend.  
(V,v: 99)

However, quite significantly, Lovis is not included in Lord Bevill's benediction at the end for the lovers: "May love in you still feed your mutual fire" (V,v: 99). Frederick Frollick is blessed by Lord Bevill in Lovis' place, which indicates a delegation of authority usually given over to the son. This is made explicit after the concluding dance, which has been orchestrated by Frollick, as has the general regeneration of the Bevill family:

Lord Bevill. (after the dance)  
Sir Frederick, you shall command my house this day;  
Make all those welcome that are pleased to stay.  
(V,v: 103)

The crucial word "command" indicates that Bevill has invested all authority in Frollick. Lovis, presumably still onstage after the wedding dance, is conspicuous in his silence. He has been relegated to a secondary role behind Sir Frederick Frollick, the newest family member. Also in the

same scene, as noted above, Cully has been cut off completely, no longer a serious threat to the cavalier order.

The aristocratic ideology in the heroic plot is reworked to incorporate comic insistence on materialism and eroticism as potent antidotes for the ossified religiosity investing absolutist doctrine and the static honor threatening vital marriages and families. The women in the plot get worthy husbands, despite their earlier précieuse acrobatics and self-defeating excess. The Bevill women's icon-like passivity is the reason some recent commentators have argued that the entire heroic plot outcome is parodied by the tone in the comic plot. I have shown already why that is not the case. The argument which holds Etherege ridicules the heroic plot action altogether is best represented by a point Jean Gagen makes when she maintains that "Etherege cleverly 'traps' readers and auditors into assuming that they are about to become involved in serious dilemmas over honor."<sup>31</sup> But it is reasonable to counter on this point that if Etherege went to this much trouble over the plot, someone in the audience must have taken the précieuse material seriously, and it would not be necessary to trick readers into watching a play with a conventional Platonic ethos. The regeneration found in the comic plot means that the romance plot must be taken seriously to show where it was lacking. Also, an audience knows that Lord Bevill is never an object of parody because he embraces Sir Frederick as a social healer, and he remonstrates with the dangerous applications of crossed honor codes by his son, Lovis. Lord Bevill himself is the

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<sup>31</sup> Jean Gagen, "The Design of the High Plot in Etherege's The Comical Revenge," Restoration and Eighteenth Century Theatre Research (Winter, 1986): 3; for a similar statement on the parody of the high plot see Mary Jo Pendleton, "Sir George Etherege: A Pleasure More Noble," (Diss. U of Southwestern Louisiana, 1984): 114.

patriarchal model behind which a conventional host of assumptions about property and its relation to marriage are made by an audience. In other words, if the audience accepts the relationship between Lord Bevill and his daughters, then they must accept as well these "role models" in its seventeenth century theatrical sense (not a twentieth century psychological "identification"). The heroic plot is invested with an absolutist fervor that contains an affirmation of the traditional moral order for all to see, but it occurs without a conventional hero. Aristocratic ideology has been successfully re-eroticized by the life-affirming vulgarity of the low characters and validated by the material symbol of Sir Frollick, whose wit restores the attractiveness of the hierarchal social order, which had lost ground after the Restoration to the emerging class of Cully's from an ineffectual insistence on an abstraction of honor.

Etherege's She Would If She Could (1668), which expands his first "gay couple" plot into couples who possess wittier capacities, drops the heroic plot themes altogether to develop a realistic comedy of manners. However, for more than a decade, some tragicomedies continue to be produced that still tried to work out a "purist" royalist ideology that would legitimate an absolutist doctrine. As it happened, the audience had developed a taste at this point for wild comedy that threatened to undermine the effort at legitimacy in the romantic plot by the former's apparent completely disjunctive effect. My treatment of All Mistaken in the next chapter, for example, addresses this formal problem. But where Comical Revenge regenerates its heroic action through Frollick's vigorous engineering of viable marriages, All Mistaken's plots are in a simpler dialectical

relationship, taking swipes at low characters in the comic action, and emphasizing the roles of the women in both plots as repositories of virtue. And they thus replace an older version of aristocratic ideology.

## Chapter 2

All Mistaken; or, The Mad Couple (1665)

In Comical Revenge Etherege revitalized royalist sympathies by inscribing a new ethos in the romantic plot. He had made an inside joke on, and thereby sought to discredit, the excesses of précieuse feeling that prevailed a generation before him. Etherege's new aristocratic hero's ethics showed that honor had been transvalued by quantifying class criteria and that, consequently, the traditional appeal to intrinsic virtue no longer had force.<sup>1</sup> Frolick's libertinism was, ironically, put in the service of the aristocracy to shore up its social order against the "emerging gentry"--represented buffoonishly in the knight, Cully. Frolick was the vehicle for an "instrumentalist" conservatorship of the royalist Bevill family--a practice that included adopting acquisitive values of the lower status groups to prop up the old aristocracy--who apparently had Etherege's sympathy because royalists believed the family organization was analogous to the sovereign/subject relationship.<sup>2</sup> So Frolick's time in the low world, seen from the conservative perspective, was not wasted moral energy; his experience with tavern sharpers and treacherous roundheads gave him the means to fight for his family, solidifying its position by marrying everyone, including himself, to advantage. Moreover, the low-plot farcical characters were included in a regenerative dance at the royalist household

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<sup>1</sup> See McKeon, pp. 162-165, on the value of honor in terms of "status" and "class."

<sup>2</sup> Staves, p. 116.

that, however idealistic this may have been, realigned the aristocracy with a Weltanschauung closer to a totality of social experience.

All Mistaken (1665), written by James Howard, Dryden's brother-in-law, presents a sharp contrast to Etherege's play. Howard uses a simpler split-plot structure with a completely separate heroic-romance plot and "gay couple" comic plot. In his romantic plot he incorporates the heroic ethos of the Caroline drama. As in that older drama, the heroics in this plot are influenced by both Christianity and courtly love. Only a few heroic speeches are in couplets and the rest is in blank verse. The romance plot of All Mistaken derives its action closely from Beaumont and Fletcher's very popular A King and No King (1611; pub. 1619), though it is not copied exactly.<sup>3</sup> Like its model, All Mistaken takes place in a pseudo-historic Italian dukedom with a typical honor plot involving the predicament of several women--all of them virtuous in "constancy" and sexually chaste--and all of them unhappy with their lovers. The men, in turn, have good motives but are at odds with their women because of mistaken identities and third-party betrayal. Everything comes out happily with Providence rewarding the virtuous, punishing the villains, and smiling benevolently on the promise of future marriages. The romance plot's affirmation of absolutist, hierarchal order--one that excludes any real political problems of the period--indicates the inability of many royalist sympathizers to come to terms with the fallout of the Civil War. The Italian setting of Fletcherian drama provides a fictional distance from the

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<sup>3</sup> Hume, Development of English Drama, p.253, n.2. Hume is only one of many who have noted the resemblance in plot structure.

thorny political realities the royalists continued to face after the Restoration.

Despite the intrigue structure of the plots, the spotlight in this tragicomedy--like most of them in the period--is on the sexual relationships as a measure of social status. The romantic plot idealism depends on the women, who reinforce an older generation's idea of honor by their willingness to persevere against the treachery of dishonorable men. This female brilliance is reflected in the comic plot where social equality is an issue for a couple intending to make a match, and Mirida thus insisting on prudent conduct against Philidor's libertine ethic. The actions of both plots follow a similar pattern wherein the women are tested for moral and social qualities to ensure the traditional social order; then they must reclaim their men, who have become unconventional to a degree that threatens to undermine social stability. McKeon could have had the action of All Mistaken in mind when he formulated this definition:

For as the progressive critique forces the detachment of "honor as virtue" from male aristocratic honor, it simultaneously encourages its relocation within not only commoners but women, who increasingly come to be viewed not just as the conduit but as the repository of an honor that has been alienated from a corrupt male aristocracy.<sup>4</sup>

All Mistaken's claim to distinction within the tragicomic genre lies in Howard's skillfully constructed parallel plots (not its oftentimes lackluster dialogue), for the purpose of dramatizing how the women in both plots are indeed "repositories" of honor in the conventional moral order. Their "pattern of exact virtue" affirms the traditional patriarchal order, since

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<sup>4</sup> McKeon, p. 158.

Howard's couples implicitly assume that continued allegiance to a traditional order will ensure their prerogatives.<sup>5</sup> My analysis traces these ideas in the plots, but, first, some theatrical history of Howard's play will help place its importance among the other tragicomedies of the 1660s and 1670s.

James Howard remains a necessarily obscure figure even for Restoration scholars, since almost no evidence exists about the casts of his plays or their contemporary reception. Only recent attention given to his early comedy The English Monsieur (1663) has raised him from absolute neglect. Nor are critical treatments of All Mistaken available, except for cursory mention in a few literary histories of the period such as Alfred Harbage's Cavalier Drama (1936; rpt. 1964) or the Revels volume. It was long thought to have been an imitation of Dryden's Secret Love (1667) with a cruder "gay couple."<sup>6</sup> But recent scholarship has produced a near consensus that Howard's play is not only the precursor to Dryden's play, but also that the proviso scene in All Mistaken is the model for Dryden's in Secret Love:

The new date of 1665 for Howard's All Mistaken; or, The Mad Couple gives added significance to this double-plot drama, assumed in the past to be derived from Dryden's Secret Love. An incest motif, so frequently used by Dryden, appears in the main plot. The story is quite intricate, but in the end we learn that the hero and heroine are not after all brother and sister.

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<sup>5</sup> Dryden's Works, XI, 16: In the preface to Conquest of Granada, I, called "Of Heroique Playes," (1671) Dryden states his reasons for a nomenclature signifying the degree of admiration for his heroes. This category represents the best of them as an ideal pattern for moral behavior.

<sup>6</sup> See John Harrington Smith, The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 58: "The play is of value only as it exhibits the fineness of Dryden's."

Howard could have been influenced by Fletcher's A King and No King, very popular on the stage in these years.<sup>7</sup>

James Winn uses the same evidence from R. D. Hume and James Sutherland in his superb intellectual biography of Dryden, Dryden and His World (1987), to concur with the Revels author on the question of stage precedence: "[Dryden] had probably seen or read All Mistaken, by his brother-in-law James Howard, in which a serious plot drawn from Beaumont and Fletcher was played off against the farcical antics of a 'gay couple' played by Hart and Gwyn."<sup>8</sup>

The playtext was not printed until 1672, long after it was first performed. The errors in the text indicate it was printed hastily, possibly to capitalize on revivals of Fletcher's original; the printing also might have followed a performance of Dryden's tragicomedy Marriage à-la-Mode (1671), which depends on a similar--radically split--plot.<sup>9</sup> Pepys, at least, saw the play at Theatre Royal in Bridges Street on September 20, 1667: ". . . and I by coach to the King's Playhouse, and there saw The Mad

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<sup>7</sup> The "Revels" History of Drama in English, 1660-1750, V, ed. John Loftis (London: Methuen, 1976), 173.

<sup>8</sup> James Anderson Winn, John Dryden and His World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p.165; See the following articles which established the première date for the play before the closing of the theatres in June 1665 for plague: R. D. Hume, "Dryden, James Howard, and the Date of 'All Mistaken,'" Philological Quarterly, 51 (April 1972): 422-29; J. R. Sutherland, "The Date of James Howard's 'All Mistaken, or, The Mad Couple,'" Notes and Queries, 209 (September, 1964): 339-40.

<sup>9</sup> All Mistaken; or, The Mad Couple. A Comedy (London: Printed by H. Brugis, for James Magnes, 1672). There is no modern edition of the play. I use the 1672 version which has no lines, scenes, prologues or epilogues, and omits indications of asides, etc. I choose to silently emend the spelling to modern English except for archaic or obsolete words which I leave untouched. Also, I refrain from changing any punctuation, except for obvious errors, as it could prove valuable as an indication for how actors spoke lines. For references throughout the play, I indicate the Act and the original page number.

Couple, which I do not remember that I have seen; it is a pretty pleasant play."<sup>10</sup> The original production, on the authority of Pepys, had the Hart-Gywn combination playing the lovers at Theatre Royal. The legendary couple had good material in the proviso scene of Act II. It is no wonder Dryden borrowed the scene for Secret Love.

The last recorded performance of All Mistaken in The London Stage is for July 29, 1668. It could have been acted later, but since Etherege's masterfully urbane She Would if She Could became widely imitated after 1668, a style such as Howard's, with a Caroline-type serious plot and excremental subject matter in the comic part, makes a later performance very unlikely. Howard belongs to the free-for-all period before the closing of the theatres for plague in 1665 when no dominant English comic form had emerged.<sup>11</sup>

The process of heroic characterization in the high plot begins with a scene showing the Duke's commanding authority as he returns from a successful foreign war (The only direction printed in the play is on the list of dramatis personae: "Scene: Italy.").<sup>12</sup> Despite the fact that Howard makes his sovereign a Duke of Sicily, the analogy made to the English monarchical system is clear. Howard's effort to affirm divine-right absolutist doctrine at this juncture indicates that royalist-aristocratic

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<sup>10</sup> London Stage, 1, 118.

<sup>11</sup> London Stage, 1, 139.

<sup>12</sup> Though the intrigue should not be confused with the heroic tragedy, the proper regard for the Duke is admiration. Howard almost sentimentalizes him in a near pathetic situation in Act III, but the emphasis is still on what he does--offering himself for death--instead of his betrayal by a trusted friend and subsequent misunderstanding with Amphelia. As Eric Rothstein observes, "pathos cannot be central in heroic drama" [Restoration Tragedy: Form and the Process of Change (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 79].

ideology in the 1660s tragicomedy was attenuated, as it clings rather hopefully to a pre-Civil War version of absolutism. As I noted in the Introduction, McKeon says about this type of propaganda that "... we are often obliged to understand the very force with which traditional authority is asserted as one telling sign of its weakness" (p. 133). Of course, the "natural" right of Duke Archimedes to absolute power in the high plot is never questioned. This privilege of authority was understood and accepted by the aristocracy who supported it as providentially determined by birth. This is not to say that the romance plot is an empty vehicle for decayed sentiment. Howard shows, from an aristocratic perspective, how a society can disintegrate when political power in a divine right monarchy is disrupted at the top. The contemporary political philosopher, Sir Robert Filmer, asserting the necessity of obligation to the state, advanced the conservative argument that "[since] the monarch is God's representative . . . his power cannot be subdivided without being cancelled."<sup>13</sup> Howard's plot, in fact, implicitly assumes a divine right doctrine as if the Civil War had never happened. The Christian/heroic romance plot depends on belief in a providential design, not only to distinguish the aristocratic class, but also to place them under obligation to a divine right monarchy. Since a "mixed"--or limited--monarchy had been in effect since the early days of Charles I, a restoration of divine right doctrine was obviously a royalist fiction.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the attractiveness of

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<sup>13</sup> Anne T. Barbeau, The Intellectual Design of John Dryden's Heroic Plays (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> For the Hobbist critique of the role played by the lawyers and universities in the increasing legalism in the period, see Robert P. Kraynak, History and

the play for the original audience probably was owing to a stubborn denial of reality. As Sarup Singh says about the heroic play of the same period, the aristocratic romance, "was essentially an artificial growth, sustained by the needs of an artificial class--a class which sought sustenance in things and ideas which had largely vanished because of historical forces outside its control."<sup>15</sup>

The romantic plot in Act I incorporates two complementary ideas: that a ruler's duty conflicts with his love; and that Providence inevitably requires testing the ruler's resolve. Although there is little about the antecedents of the Duke's situation, the audience understands that he has brought a willing female, Artabella, from a defeated enemy country to be his wife. The Duke turns his immediate attention, though, to his estranged mistress, Amphelia, whom he publicly humiliates by comparing her unfavorably to Artabella. The audience of the period would find the Duke's public outburst distasteful because of Amphelia's self-possession and sensitivity. She does not cower from the Duke (and neither do any of the other characters in the plot); instead she urges her followers to obey the Duke because it is "a respect due him" (I: 7). The seventeenth-century concept of decorum--according to which each character acts as befitting an assigned status--finds its typical expression in relationships like this one. What follows in the first act, however, is a nasty and passionate competition to see which of the two can distance themselves from love of the other the quickest. Amphelia feigns attraction to Ortellus, the

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Modernity in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 54-61.

<sup>15</sup> Sarup Singh, The Theory of Drama in the Restoration Period (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1963), p. 3.

conniving agent of the couple's betrayal (he has no comic side at all, unlike his counterpart in A King and No King, Bessus, for whom Beaumont and Fletcher made a separate farcical action involving his cowardice in fighting to salvage his honor). After the Duke exchanges revealing asides with Amphelia, at which time the audience finds they are still in love with each other, his dilemma comes couched in terms showing influences of courtly love and Augustinian piety:

It's well [that] to her I showed as much disdain:  
 I'd rather perish than she guess my pain.  
 But O! the horrid act she makes me do,  
 To fool a woman that is young and true.  
 So damned a sin that Hell could not invent;  
 It is too foul for any punishment;  
 To question those above I am afraid,  
 Else I would ask them why they woman made.  
 (I: 7)

His personal torment originates from his conventional belief that taking a woman's "virtue" is a sin. His final statement compounds his suffering since he recognizes, by the codes of Christian courtly love, the severity of Artabella's situation. Thus, his violation of her public virtue is all the more horrible to him. Both courtly love and the heroic ideal are brought to bear here. The aristocratic notion of préciosité held that compromising a woman's virginity reflected on the honor of the male as well, since the transmission of property required an unblemished "line." He also invokes a religious injunction against "corrupting" a woman that his audience more likely observed politically. In other words, the guilt assumed by the Duke has to be dramatised with language which justifies the "intrinsic" honor code.

Before Lord Hardwicke's Act in 1754, "spousals," or nuptial contracts, were binding if spoken in mutual consent and made in the present tense.<sup>16</sup> So when the Duke brings over Artabella from her country, his honor requires that he marry her in a short time. The fact that he cannot do so threatens his society's moral code. It is a severe breach of honor, since marriage arrangements and the rules about the transferral of property, upon which the survival of aristocratic status depends, are transgressed. If it can be proven that the Duke is unregenerate, then his death at the hands of Arbatus, Artabella's conventionally protective brother, would have been approved, and even required, by the seventeenth-century audience.<sup>17</sup>

However, it is necessary for the hero to be imperfect so that he can change at the end. His vicissitudes allow the audience to admire his greatness in overcoming them. For example, we have Dryden's authority for it in a dedicatory epistle attached to his Conquest of Granada, I, (1672) when he says of Almanzor:

Both [Homer] and [Tasso] had well considered that a tame hero who never transgresses the bounds of moral virtue, would shine but dimly in an epic poem . . . a character of an eccentric virtue is the more exact image of human life, because he is not wholly exempted from its frailties.<sup>18</sup>

This "concernment" with what Dryden had called the "soft passion" in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy sets apart the romance-plot hero from the hero of

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<sup>16</sup> Gellert Spencer Alleman, Matrimonial Law and the Materials of Restoration Comedy (Wallingford, Pennsylvania, n.p., 1942), p.5.

<sup>17</sup> For the influence of the Spanish code of honor on the period, especially as transmitted through Fletcher, see John Loftis, The Spanish Plays of Neoclassical England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 69-71.

<sup>18</sup> Dryden's Works, XI, 6.

heroic tragedy. As Singh observes, "The 'Lethargy of Love' is indeed the only weakness of the great hero. . . . The 'compassion' that the heroic play arouses is not, however, truly tragic. Since it is centred solely on the misfortunes of love, it lacks both the inevitability and the universality of tragic pity."<sup>19</sup>

"Frailties" certainly describes the early moral incapacity of Howard's Duke, whose increasingly vengeful exercise of his authority indicates that his honor is contingent on personal circumstance. The Duke compares unfavorably during the early part of the play with the foreign prince, Zoranzo, whom he had captured in the wars. Although, as seen above, Howard gives the Duke a psychology, his heroic gestures early in the play appear self-serving rather than magnanimous:

Duke. Well sir, though you did attempt to kill me  
in our camp after you were our prisoner, you shall  
not die, since you are of the same country [Artabella]  
is. Therefore thank her and Fortune for your life.

Zoran. I'd sooner curse them both, shall I thank  
any for my life but heaven that gave it me . . . .

(I: 3)

The Duke at least shows a hero's beneficence here, which partly stems from his guilt in deceiving Artabella as much as it is due to his smothered virtue. Zoranzo evinces a traditional heroic defiance befitting his rank.

The Duke's guilty conscience about betraying his patriarchal responsibility is contrasted for comic effect when Philidor evades his patrimonial duty in the parallel plot. Howard clearly intends for the alternating comic plot to contrast the internalized suffering of the Duke.

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<sup>19</sup> Singh, p. 20.

The comic parts act as an antidote to the oppressiveness of the Duke's and Amphelia's heartbroken despair. The play's dramatic strength lies in the comic-plot couple's libertine antics and the extent to which they equivocate about marriage. In the comic plot the old hierarchal order is expressed only negatively: there are no foolish knights or superannuated parents, and the "mad couple" have no professed political concerns, contenting themselves with flouting convention (somewhat) and playing bratty pranks. Philidor does have several illegitimate offspring, but this in itself does not qualify him as a notable rake. A rake must aggressively pursue, and sometimes seduce, women as part of his ethic, but the women by whom he has children are of lower status groups who did not require such effort. The portrayal of English-style libertinism in an attractive couple, though, is charged with energy from their social interaction with lower status groups. From the couple's point of view, representing the new aristocratic order of skeptics, the vulgarity of the lower status groups is a refreshing change from the stultifying confines of the moribund romance plot world and its emphasis on obligation. As Staves points out, "... the younger cavaliers who had grown up with a contempt for the authority of the interregnum laws, and many of whom had had some contact with French libertinism, had their own brand of antinomianism."<sup>20</sup>

In fact, it appears at first that the comic plot, instead of reinforcing the romance plot's insistence on conventional moral obligation, subverts it, evincing a pessimism about the possibility of a viable future order. The couple appropriate to themselves a field of play among the status groups

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<sup>20</sup> Staves, p. 258.

they want to differentiate from themselves. The royalist strategy in the romantic plot does not seek to include anyone from low status groups, while the comic plot presents these groups as a rabble, an undifferentiated herd. There are no sentient "low" individuals in its action like Grace or Jenny in Etherege's play. Even though the libertine couple are successful in using the ambition of the stupid comic-plot characters for their amusement, the couple's vindication by the heroic world is not at all a simple matter of intrigue reversal. Though the couple easily masters fools from the lower status groups, proving they are a match in wit combat, the couple's antic disposition leaves unclear whether they will marry at the end. Obviously, this is a significant departure from tragicomic practice in the Restoration. The decision potentially threatens an aristocratic lineage. Without marriage there is no sanction for enjoining a patriarchal order.

On the other hand, Philidor and Mirida's equivocation about getting married need not imply a wholesale rejection of conventional moral order, particularly their submission to absolute authority. Hobbes, for instance, not only believed in a binding natural law dissociated from theology, but he also thought a sovereign could make some unconventional acts obligatory for state stability.<sup>21</sup> Howard was apparently not interested in delineating moral philosophy in his comic plot. But his audience was certainly interested in the matter of individual liberty. The couple's situation in the conventional moral order depends on the degree to which their naturalistic flirtations violate "custom," or orthodox doctrine, as found in the high plot. Their style of personal liberty could be viewed as approving a

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<sup>21</sup> Staves covers this point in depth, pp. 263-268.

primitivist, "epicurean" natural law that licenses sensual pleasure against moral authority.<sup>22</sup> I will argue this is not the case. First, their version of libertinism has no necessary philosophical or doctrinal ramifications that would subvert a hierarchal social order, especially since there was always a sexual double standard for the female in the most "epicurean" of contexts. Mirida never transgresses that boundary. No group in Restoration society, no matter how rakish, ever seriously proposed complete sexual freedom for females. So the new aristocratic emphasis on pleasure over obligation has its limits. Presumably, they draw the line where patrilineal entitlements are threatened. Underwood underscores the ambivalence young aristocrats in the period held about love: "This brings us to the final paradox and most pervasive irony in the make-up of the libertine: He too subscribes to 'civilization' at the same time he subscribes to naturalism" (p. 37).

The second reason the couple stay in the boundaries of a conventional order is that Howard owes his comic characters to Fletcher, who, as I noted in the introduction, contains "destabilizing" language of the upper class and so supports royalist doctrine. What Markley says about Fletcher holds true for Howard as well:

[Fletcher's] dramatic language creates a stylistic equilibrium that subsumes libertine wit (and in his tragi-comedies tumultuous passion) within a prescribed, socially conscious notion of

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<sup>22</sup> For the relevance of libertinism and natural law to Restoration comedy see the discussion by Underwood in Chap. 2, "The Fertile Ground," and also Staves in Chap. 5, "The Authority of Nature's Laws." In brief: obviously, there are two definitions of "nature" at work here. The natural law theory approved by most seventeenth century thinkers incorporated the Fall of Man doctrine. The Greek primitivist one credited with authority by genuine libertines did not attach this onus to pleasure when following "nature."

decorum . . . . For Fletcher . . . language becomes a means of reconciling the actual and the ideal, his character's social roles and their often absolutist self-perceptions. His dramatic verse is essentially performative, theatrical or sociological rather than moral.<sup>23</sup>

Philidor's conduct is also mediated by his "theatrical" language. For instance, he complains about "three couple of Whelpes, Alias Children" (I: 7) whose care he shamelessly neglects. The plot supports an interpretation of this language as a joke on idealistic views of honor. By seventeenth century standards, Philidor's "honor" is comically bankrupt since he has children but no money or feelings of responsibility for them.<sup>24</sup> Behind this attitude was a collective Cavalier anger at losing property to a conventionally moral and moneyed class in the Civil War era. What is at issue here in the comic plot is status, not morality. In fact, the legitimacy of Philidor's claim to aristocratic status is unclear, though he has some unspecified power at court due to a blood tie with the Duke. If he marries an estate with Mirida, he can maintain aristocratic status. If he does not marry, the maintenance of status would depend on some kind of court favor or inheritance--details not provided here.

The audience finds Philidor attractive, of course, because his skeptical, "madcap" course never lets him doubt his natural, intrinsic

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Markley, "'Shakespeare to Thee was Dull'": The Phenomenon of Fletcher's Influence" in From Renaissance to Restoration: Metamorphoses of the Drama, ed. Robert Markley and Laurie Finke (Cleveland, Ohio: Bellflower Press, 1984), pp. 96-98.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. an observation by Lois Potter, who notes an "aristocratic role-playing" when royalists reduced to rags in Brome's The Jovial Crew (1642) are likewise "cheerful" because their "virtue" (i.e., loyalty to the crown) is rewarded at the end ["'True Tragicomedies' of the Civil War and Commonwealth," in Renaissance Tragicomedy], 211.

superiority, though the evidence for it is constantly called into comical dispute:

Philidor. The Devil[!] they have left the children behind them, this was a very cunning device of mine, now am I in a pretty condition. Troth a very noble Anabaptist progeny, for the devil a one of these were ever christened; For I have run so much upon tick to the parsons for christening of children, that now they all refuse to make any bastards of mine a Christian without ready money; so that I'll have this boy brought up a parson that he may christen himself and the rest of his brothers and sisters.

(I: 11)

Philidor's presumed aristocratic status enables him to scoff at the lack of status of his "progeny," who are, after all, the issue of lower class women who could not expect to be raised to his social position. His outrageous conduct would only be excused if he were to inherit or marry the wealth that would empower him to raise his illegitimate children. Philidor's bankrupt honor is played for comic effect, which directly contrasts with the painful situation of the Duke. His easy self-exculpation naturally intensifies his contrast with the Duke, which, in turn, makes the latter's case easier to forgive since the Duke feels the pain of guilt.

Another aspect of the comic contrast to the serious delineation of préciosité in the high plot, besides Philidor's disavowal of responsibility for his children, makes the wet nurses and mistresses the butts of his broad humor. The women's sexuality, naturalistically presented, appears bestial next to the Platonic devotion of women in the heroic romance. The aristocratic audience in sympathy with libertine humor would feel released from the brooding seriousness of the romance plot when shown the

travestied virtue of the women in the comic plot, who, though lewd, are not mean or pretentious:

1 Nurse. My young master here is as like your Worship, as ever he can look, has your tempting eyes to a hair, I could not choose but smile to my self t'other day, I was making him clean about the secrets, to see what God had sent him in a plentiful manner, it put me half in mind of your Worship, I am sure I have been at double the expense of other nurses in eating choice meat to make my milk good for my young Master, because I would not spoil the growth of any one of his members.

(I: 9-10)

This amusing babble is as explicitly sexual as Howard gets. What amuses the aristocratic audience, though, is the woman's discourse; her "good-natured" sluttishness confirms their view that the advertised promiscuity of women in lower status groups is a comic testimony to Philidor's ability to reinvigorate the gentry. However, aristocratic women are held to the traditional double standard. Amphelia, for instance, would not be pitied or admired if she had entered any sexual relationship with Ortellus. Philidor, for his part, makes a comment that invites a direct comparison with the Duke in the high plot: "Pox on it[;] I could never light of any but fruitful whores" (I: 12). At the end of Act I, the Duke believes that Amphelia is a whore, so it is too painful for him to speak the word. Philidor can afford to joke about his "maiden ladies'" virtue because only aristocratic women are held to strict accountability in sexual conduct. McKeon states that there was an increasing awareness in the period of a "genealogical rationale" about female sexual accountability:

[P]eople begin [in the period] to be aware of an intrasexual "double standard"--the fact that female chastity is required more insistently of gentlewomen than of those lower down

the social scale, where the transmission of property is less at issue and partible inheritance predominates over the impartible principles of primogeniture that are observed by the gentle.<sup>25</sup>

The quantifying, explicitly self-aggrandizing, negotiations between Philidor and his various mistresses contrast with the speeches in the high plot that are based on words and promises--the qualitative criteria of aristocratic honor. An insistence on status as a function of the word of the aristocracy becomes especially apparent in contrast to the "theatrical" speech above where Philidor disavows all his promises to lower status mistresses. The idealization of honor in the high plot undergoes a successful comic treatment (as I have argued) that underscores McKeon's claim that aristocratic ideology was gradually reinvented in the seventeenth century.

The play's ideological occultation is inescapable: conflict in the comic plot displaces interest in the waning heroic ethos of the romantic plot, but without dismantling the conventional patrilineal order. Throughout the comic plot, the notions of honor and virtue are transvalued so that provisos in marriage arrangements become prominent. The relationships depicted in the comic world reveal an interesting aristocratic ambivalence about what happens when aristocrats become socially familiar with the rest of the populace. From the perspective of the outmoded Carolinian royalism in the romance plot, admitting familiarity is a mistake. But the young generation, dissatisfied with idealism, prefers to fight social wars in a public arena for private glory. Thus Philidor's insolvency can be

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<sup>25</sup> McKeon, p. 157.

seen as a joke; all he needs is his wit to fend off challenges from the social pretenders, whereas Lean-man or Pinguister, both "cits" aspiring above their social places in pursuing Mirida, would be beneath ridicule if they had no ready money. The combination of a "low" birth and a lack of property would render them beneath the notice of the aristocracy, even in a play. As a consequence of Civil War politics, the Christian-courtly love and heroic codes are questionable as viable ideological fictions in the romance-plot world; but they are still the authority for a type of aristocratic pragmatism in the comic plot--McKeon calls it "progressive ideology"--that saves the hierarchal order. McKeon defines this moment of categorical transition:

The idea of aristocracy is decisively conceptualized [in the Restoration period] over against the articulation of progressive ideology, and its paradoxical function is to mediate the persistence of a category whose impermanence is signaled by the very fact that only now need it be conceptualized as such.<sup>26</sup>

If the plots seem disjunct, then, their separation allows Howard to show that a "progressive" critique of Philidor's position makes an allowance for his practical materialism as a Hobbist-royalist strategy that will work against status-conscious groups.

The overtures the would-be lovers make to Mirida indicate the disintegration of the Carolinian social order in the older aristocratic perspective. Though these popular fools are outwitted by the aristocratic couple, the former group's transgression of the codified rules of upper-class sexual conduct signals what Hobbist-royalists believed to be near

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<sup>26</sup> McKeon, p. 169.

anarchy originally attributed to "democratical" Presbyters in the Civil War:

The Behemoth thus reveals that the English Civil War was set in motion by ministers and gentlemen whose opinions and artifices were remarkably similar . . . . Together they formed a "democratic" conspiracy against the papacy, episcopacy, and monarchy. To acquire a following, they used preaching and political rhetoric to arouse the anger and vengeance of the people against the alleged heresies and injustices of the established authorities. The result was an explosion of religious sectarianism and political factionalism which destroyed the traditional order but failed to replace it with a viable alternative.<sup>27</sup>

A similar popular anti-authoritarian assertiveness coalesces in the comic plot at times when the various types are denied satisfaction on some score or other--such as Philidor's refusal to support his nurses' children--and then it is directed only at the mediator of authority. The comic plot demonstrates a cynicism about ordinary people that clearly has been construed by anti-sentimentalists like Hobbes. What makes All Mistaken a truly representative play of the period is its aristocratic disdain for "cit" social impostors, like Pinguister and Lean-Man, who are held up to ridicule for their gross ineffectiveness. Most of the play's attractiveness to contemporaries must have lain in the comic-plot couple putting lower status groups in their place. The Hobbists believed that the masses regarded only powerful authority figures. This fact in itself would explain Hobbist-royalist assent to absolutist rule. When looking backward, they blamed the lawyers of the common law for stripping Charles I of his army so that he could not defend himself with authority. "Thus the lawyers, no less than

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<sup>27</sup> Kraynak, p. 55.

the ministers and democratic leaders, brought their university education into politics and imposed their doctrines on English society."<sup>28</sup> This context informs the assumptions of the romance plot. Accordingly, the romance plot characters speak précieuse sentiments that are the exclusive preserve of the aristocracy, while the sharp "local satire" (Brown's phrase) on the butts of the merchant class in the low plot indicates the unease of the aristocracy about its dominance.

The aristocratic men's status, already weakened by their irrational passion, is threatened further by aggressive intruders in Act II, which has versions of proviso scenes in both plots. The men's women must act judiciously to save their honor. In the romance plot Amphelia flatly denies the coercion of Ortellus, the treacherous counsellor who, in the fifth act, is revealed to be the one who tricked the Duke. His attempt at emotional blackmail is one of Howard's very fine moments in the play. The scene is genuinely compelling to a sympathetic audience, and underscores the danger to virtuous women from men who covet others' property and will use any means in a Hobbist war of nature. Ortellus also represents, in a muted analogy, the aristocratic mistrust of an ascendancy of self-conscious infiltrators who bribe and cajole as soon as they are let in the once closed ranks of the traditional order:

Ortell. She's false I find, I'll try her love to me----[aside.  
 Madam since you have been pleased to show  
 your kindness publicly to me;  
 I take this time to beg my happiness,  
 which is that a Priest may join our hands.

(II: 14)

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<sup>28</sup> Kraynak, p. 57.

The fact that the high plot is set in an anachronistic foreign kingdom with a presumably pagan religion does not excuse Ortellus to a contemporary audience. His suspicion of Amphelia's constancy--who has already been approved by the audience for her entirely chaste relationship with Zoranzo--exposes his "base" design. The rest of their exchange proceeds along these lines to reveal Ortellus as a scheming parasite. Amphelia's response wins the aristocratic approval with an unswerving refusal to be pressured by Ortellus: ". . . the Duke in all things so far excels you that you were a fool to think when once my heart bid him farewell, that it designed no better a change then you . . . ." (II: 15). Even before Amphelia (or the audience) finds out the extent of Ortellus' betrayal, she has ascertained his intrinsic worthlessness correctly, according to the ideal standards of the high plot. Ortellus' crass attempt at sexual coercion violates the Platonic-aristocratic codes of fair play. A seventeenth-century audience would have found his method particularly repugnant. He fails, which is in keeping with seventeenth-century decorum that punished all transgressors of the honor code.

In the low plot, in contrast to the courtly love code of silence separating the Duke and Amphelia, Philidor openly expresses his desire the moment he lays eyes on Mirida: "A most divine wench" (II: 19). His blending of the religious with the profane names the two kinds of love opposing each other in the play. This expression of desire reflects a judgment on the constraints in the high plot where lovers cannot profess desire directly. Once again the comic action mirrors the situation in the serious plot, but only to dissolve away any connection with painful

romantic entanglements. The couple make a parody of the marriage contract, since they are too "mad" to confess attraction without a derisive humor. They agree to Philidor's condition that they "will love how we please, when we please, and as long as we please"; and after a ridiculously long series of "Items," they cut down their claims on affection to ludicrous intervals:

Phil. To conclude we will be both as mad as we please.

Mirid. Agreed and the Devil take the tamest.

(II: 23)

So the torrid honor scene in the high plot contrasts with a presentation of pretended detachment from passion in the comic plot. The sentiments of Philidor and Mirida bring to mind a poem by the Cavalier poet William Cartwright called "No Platonic Love" (1651), which begins with a similar refused kiss by the woman:

As some strict down-looked men pretend to fast  
 Who yet in closets eat,  
 So lovers who profess they spirits taste  
 Feed yet on grosser meat;  
 I know they boast they souls to souls convey,  
 Howe'er they meet, the body is the way.

(ll. 13-18)

The argument in the poem against a spiritualized ideal love, a pervasive one in the period's literature, reflects more a frustration with the strictest adherents of précieuse doctrine, like the romantic-plot couple in All Mistaken, than it does a rigorous defense of epicurean philosophy.

Actually, Philidor is the only true libertine here. Mirida must remain chaste in order to be taken seriously. Though Philidor resists marriage, equivocating back and forth, he is definitely in love with Mirida.

Libertines are anti-rationalists, but they are, above all, practical. Philidor's marriage with Mirida is inevitable if he wants to keep her.

I would argue that, though the couple flirt with an unconventional alliance, they show that they are waiting for a sure conventional relationship. There are more reasons to believe they will marry after the action of the play than not. Like Arbatus and Artabella at the end of the romance plot, they presumably let their passion cool down some before entering marriage. The provisos in the contract will prevent the couple's passion from the unpleasant realities of suffocation. Most important, Mirida's adherence to strictly chaste sexual conduct at this point allows her to maintain the couple's honorable status. They lay the groundwork for a match together when disabusing social pretenders to citizen status. Despite their urbane attitude of dissimulated carelessness, these aristocrats of the Carolean age understand that life is a struggle. The young aristocrats struggle against the upstart class, showing that they can dominate with wit, effectively propping up the absolutist order, though without necessarily subscribing to any explicit heroic or Christian ethos. The Hobbist state of nature will not satisfy them though. Their battles always end quickly, and they soon grow bored with conquests. They need the limits of their society to satisfy their ultimate desire for an equal, which they do have in each other. The young aristocratic society pursued pleasure and "order" at the same time because "[this attitude] was part of the admonition to follow nature. But within the single admonition the dual demands of pleasure and order were constantly at strife."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Underwood, p. 39.

The social order is never much in doubt, even in Act III where the action becomes frantic. More than any other, this plot contrasts the emotional tensions of the high plot with the corresponding comic action. The intrigue of the serious action has come to near-tragic separation between the Duke and Amphelia, whose execution at the hands of the Duke is imminent as a consequence of her abetting the royal prisoner, Zoranzo. Ortellus has orchestrated these events as revenge on Amphelia for rejecting his terms of emotional blackmail early in Act I. The Duke's emotions are complicated by his (innocent) liaison with Artabella. Arbatus wants blood revenge on the Duke for the humiliation of his sister. He fashions a plot with Ortellus for sneaking into the Duke's bedchamber to enact the deed. The Duke chooses not to resist, as I argued above, because he feels a burden of guilt for using Artabella in his plot to make Amphelia jealous. His reckless acquiescence to Arbatus' bedroom assault signals heroic suffering. Most important, however, is that his heroic self-abnegation absolves him of his earlier brutishness when he publicly humiliated Amphelia. There is a Christian dimension, as well, since his suffering follows as a consequence of his earlier pride which prevented him from humbly putting things right with her. Apparently, all this anguish is necessary for the Duke's providential restoration to a fit patriarch. Suspicion has brought him low because he did not follow the dictates of honor when he believed Ortellus' slurs on Amphelia's reputation. He also lies to Arbatus that he intends to marry Artabella. All this must be set right before he can regain his honor. As McKeon would

have it, the attack on the "static unity of status and virtue" gets tacit recognition in the "urgent" appeal to honorific status:

[I would not] suggest, however, that status values--like deference and paternalistic care--that we commonly associate with aristocratic social relations lose their force in the early modern period. On the contrary, they undergo the more elaborate sort of "theatricalization" that is likely to occur whenever social convention is raised to the level of self-conscious practice.<sup>30</sup>

The audience has the chance in the ensuing farcical antics of the mad couple to forget quasi-tragic emotion altogether. But this scene is more than simple stage farce because it serves as commentary on the related theme in the high plot about freedom for men and women to choose each other. Philidor has locked up six women who had been following him at the opening of the scene when Mirida comes in just as breathless on her part for putting her men-slaves through their paces. The number of the women locked away in the "garret" puts the Duke's burden of responsibility to shame. Philidor knows no shame, of course, since his naturalistic ethic will not allow a Christian sense of guilt. His women scream out at him as he carries on with wooing Mirida. The action becomes wild as the "furious purgations" of Pinguister affect the onlookers ("pinguious" defined in the OED as "*a. Obs. fatty, oily*"). Mirida and Philidor choose the most ridiculous moment in the action to pledge their admiration for each other, and look forward sadly to a time when marriage might interrupt their fun:

Philid. Was there ever such sport as we have seen[?]

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<sup>30</sup> McKeon, p. 169.

Mirid. Heaven send thee and I many a fair year, To  
be mad together in.

Philid. I as you say, give us but time  
enough, and when we grow tame,  
let the bell toll for us; but stay  
let us return back to my virgins,  
that I may make my conditions  
with 'um, before they get out of prison.  
(III: 36)

They hint at marriage ("let the bell toll"), after a period of frolics to extend the pleasures of courtship, but this does not constitute a spousal contract. The necessary "present tense" clause of the consent is missing. However, none of these antics indicates they are willing to abrogate the conventional order. For all Mirida's wildness, as I stated above, she is sexually chaste. There is a brief moment when Philidor's women converge and tie up the couple until the latter escape and stage a celebratory dance. This action comments on the high plot where the virtuous Zoranzo and Amphelia are tied up together in prison at the end of their part in Act III. But the irony is directed at the comic plot because the romantic couple love other people; while the gay couple pretend not to love each other. Howard gets credit for strict attention to dramaturgical completeness. The empowering of the couple rests in their assuredness of social superiority. Their "binding" hardly can be taken seriously as an impediment to their progress. Howard might also intend a joke on a translation of "liaison," usually taken as a binding without the promise of lasting. But the trivializing of the physical danger the couple face could also indicate their "madness" is inconsequential. Their pleasure is over too quickly, and this shows the need for a real binding--a marriage contract.

The same situation reflected in the high plot almost achieves a tragic outcome. The audience anticipates a reversal of Amphelia's fate because the Duke resigns himself to abject despair and orders his own death. His heroic stature has been diminished by his empty promise to Artabella and by his irrational indulgence in passion. A typical Platonic dilemma comes about in what the Duke thinks is his rival's success with Amphelia. The rival in a Platonic relationship claimed the beloved if she showed the original petitioner disfavor.<sup>31</sup>

A fortuitous plot reversal in Act IV affects the high plot in which the Duke and Amphelia will be married. When the Duke orders the executioner to "strike off my head, for I am weary of it" (V: 60), we have a symbolic presentation of how wrong reason can interfere with love and moral order. The Duke quickly regains his composure when he finds fortune is on his side. The expressions of Platonic love between the lovers are certainly "theatrical" in Markley's sense that tensions over "honor" can be subsumed in the Fletcherian dialogue.

Acts IV and V increase the pace of wild stage business in the comic plot to continue the commentary on the action in the high plot. The action of the corresponding comic plot represents an attack on class criteria in its gross manifestations, reduced here to absurdity. Lean-man and Pinguister, representing the new wealthy class, reveal their pitiful inability to entertain a genteel female. Howard's careful attention to the ideological signs in language can be seen in a brief exchange from Act IV. The Duke's recovered heroic status gains credibility by his admission of failure to live

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<sup>31</sup> See Lynch, The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy, Chap. 3.

up to the codes of arbitrary Platonic love. Artabella's speech encapsulates the aristocratic concern to find an ethereal beauty that will be untouched by time and changes in social relationships:

Arta. I would thank you for my [death];  
Would you not come unto my grave, Sir?

Duke. O yes, and make thy coffin float  
with a sea of tears.

Arta. Fair Sir, of what?

Duke. Of grief.

Arta. O me, a sea of tears, and yet  
not one of love, waste not such precious  
drops upon my grave, it will not satisfy  
my hovering soul to see your eyes  
drop pity without love, farewell, Sir[.]  
Oh for a grave, that were a resting place,  
Good heart be kind and break apace.--[Exit.

(IV: 42)

Artabella embodies the platonic ideal of a woman: she would rather sacrifice her own life than live on the kindness of strangers. She is also the "pattern of exact virtue" in heroic terms. The Duke can recoup his honor only when he marries her. Providence intervenes for him when he finds out eventually that she is his long-lost sister. This stroke of divinely ordained fate restores the Duke completely, since both women attain satisfactory alliances within the conventional law that leaves his honor unscathed. In fact, the revelation of Artabella's true identity makes all the difference since this passion was the one that brought on his only real problem. Just as Arbaces in A King and No King was glad upon hearing news from others so he could marry a woman he believed previously to be

his sister, the Duke in All Mistaken has similar redemptive joy in learning Artabella is his sister so that he does not have to marry her. Howard provides a neat twist on a familiar Fletcher plot.

Naturally, Howard contrasts this emotional scene from the high plot in the comic action, with a real coffin, a mock funeral for Philidor, and a sea of excrement (not tears) from Pinguister. The funeral vault scene could possibly rate as the most bizarre in Restoration tragicomedy. The emphasis on the gullibility of ordinary people, and the disastrous outcome when they take matters into their own hands, has clear royalist overtones. Mirida and Philidor also fulfill expectations as socially superior types who put the social pretenders in their place. Mirida reads a phony will to acquit Philidor of financial obligations to his far-flung dependents. Philidor likewise locks up the assembled nurses, poseurs, children, and would-be wives in a funeral vault. The satirical attack raises for a modern audience a new emphasis on class criteria. The concern with status and order even reaches into the funeral vault.

Tragedy is averted in the high plot, as it must be in Fletcherian tragicomedy, and a providential reward joins the state to moral health. The reversals of fortune concluding the play affirm the absolutist, hierarchal social order. The women of the romantic plot raise the men to a secure status. But, as I have shown, the royalist concern with absolutist doctrine does not admit any realistic, historical contingencies in this play. Thus, its ideological efficacy is doubtful, other than providing some diversion for the aristocracy. Then there is the couple in the comic plot who present an ambiguous statement on the value of marriage in their

society. The conservative values underpinning the couple's high status are incompatible with continued sexual libertinism. It is curious that Howard chooses not to provide Mirida with a father holding out an estate. But the attractiveness of the lovers' earthy, material love does not really contravene their participation in conventional society. As I argued above, their libertinism is restricted and subsumed within the traditional order. Besides, they win their battles against the lower status groups too easily, removing all their pleasure in them. If they cannot find pleasure in a libertine "nature," perhaps they will do so in marriage with an equal.

That the aristocratic audience would entertain the conventional aristocratic codes in the face of rapidly emerging class concerns shows the "loss of force" in assumptions about status. Dryden would make the royalist ideology reveal its self-questioning in his two tragicomedies, Secret Love and Marriage à-la-Mode. Though its comic plot is problematic for the royalist-affirming romantic plot, Howard's play indicates his grasp of the new social forces at work on the "honor" of his audience.

## Chapter 3

Secret Love; or, The Maiden Queen (1667)

That Dryden should produce the split-plot tragicomedy Secret Love; or, The Maiden Queen after the reopening of the theatres following the plague term, 1665-1666, is not surprising. Tragicomedy was a favorite genre for royalists because it had always had an aristocratic patronage associated exclusively with court drama. Although Dryden had written two earlier tragicomedies that failed miserably, he apparently became adept at playwriting after reading extensively during the plague year layoff. He was successful in other genres as well. Dryden's publication of The Essay of Dramatick Poesie (1667), The Indian Emperor (1665), and Annus Mirabilis (1667) by the time of Secret Love's production in 1667 proves demonstrably that, by then, his apprentice work was behind him.<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite nearly universal critical acclaim for Secret Love, it resists an analysis like that accorded to Dryden's early plays because of his attempt in this genre to reconcile neoclassical decorum, evident in his use of heroic characters and "refined" language in the romance plot, with political theories adapted from Hobbes that affect motivation in the character types of the comic plot. He had practiced these theories with good success in his

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<sup>1</sup> See the "Commentary" in the Dryden Works, IX, 331-351, for the relevant background on the play's sources and Dryden's milieu. Because it is complete, I will forego the discussion on sources and production history I give in earlier chapters. Though the California edition also incorporates the stage history from the London Stage, I provide separately here the relevant pages from that work for quick referencing: [I]: 103-105, 109, 112, 128, 151, 167.

strictly heroic plays, of course, but never before had he attempted them in a plot joined to another one depicting naturalistic, anti-romantic lovers.

Because Dryden wrote the Essay of Dramatick Poesie in the same year as Secret Love, it is reasonable to examine it for his critical opinion on tragicomedy that obviously informs the play.<sup>2</sup> The Essay illuminates Dryden's use of tragicomic plots although he probably took hints as well from other successful productions like the Comical Revenge. To put the Essay's significance in perspective, William Myers makes an interesting point about the first-time success of a Dryden effort in comedy: "[Secret Love] has a lucidity and order which would be inexplicable but for Of Dramatick Poesie (1668), his first major critical essay, and effectively 'the preface' to Secret Love."<sup>3</sup> Dryden apparently had an intensive dramatic education between writing The Rival Ladies (1664) and Secret Love. Although Dryden also wrote rhymed heroic plays in the French manner, his persona, Neander, argues essentially that "Fancy" or a "lively imitation of Nature" turns the English comic spirit into vital drama, though it might be occasionally "irregular" (Works, XVII, 44). In other words, the French have so much of "correctness" that the fancy risks being stultified, while the English admit some "irregularities" but prosper in fresh invention, or "more copious variety." Dryden justified in theory what was actually practiced, even if he never overcame his feeling that, without the romantic plot, (unmixed) comedy was "low." As Sarup Singh notes, "[the] only voice wholeheartedly raised in favour of tragicomedy during the period

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<sup>2</sup> Winn, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> William Myers, Dryden (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1973), p. 47.

was Neander's . . . ."4 Moreover, as James Winn observes in the case of Annus Mirabilis, "[Dryden's] greatest successes as a poet and a playwright are generically impure, combining aspects of forms more stringently 'neoclassical' critics would have kept separate."<sup>5</sup>

The characterization in Secret Love of the comic couple and the Queen fall in the category "inventions of 'Fancy,'" which relaxes a neoclassical rigidity of decorum so that Dryden can intensify the "variety" between the comic and romance plots. And Dryden's insistence that "contraries"--or split plots--complement rather than negate each other has certainly worked in earlier tragicomedies like Comical Revenge and All Mistaken. He defends tragicomedy convincingly in the following passage:

The old rule of logic might have convinced [Lisideus], that contraries when placed near, set off each other. A continued gravity keeps the spirit too much bent; we must refresh it sometimes, as we bait in a journey, that we may go on with greater ease. A scene of mirth mixed with tragedy has the same effect upon us which our musick has betwixt the acts, which we find a relief to us from the best plots and language of the stage, if the discourses have been long. I must therefore have stronger arguments ere I am convinced, that compassion and mirth in the same subject destroy each other; and in the mean time cannot but conclude, to the honour of our nation, that we have invented, increased and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the stage than was ever known to the ancients or moderns of any nation, which is tragicomedy.

(Works, XVII, 46)

This passage outlines perfectly the "Design" of Secret Love. "Passion and concernment" [mentioned earlier in the essay] are limited to the heroic plot, while "mirth," or "humour," naturally describes the comic treatment

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<sup>4</sup> Singh, p. 154.

<sup>5</sup> Winn, p. 178.

of Celadon and Florimell. The other point necessary for understanding Dryden's critical view is one that he followed up in the preface to Secret Love where he states the play may be a more successful representative "in its kind."<sup>6</sup> In other words, Dryden thinks highly enough of tragicomedy that he unreservedly allows it its distinct genre, although he believes with his age that "serious" heroic drama is more important. His definition in the Essay serves as the best introduction to a theory of writing tragicomedies like Secret Love. Contrary to his rhetorical practice in full-length heroic plays, there are no long declamatory speeches in Secret Love by the Queen, or any other "shining" character. And, of course, repartee is the heart and soul of the gay couple's love game. Dryden can afford to follow "fancy" as long as he keeps the heroic and comic actions separate, which he succeeds in doing except for a notable example he defends in the preface to the play:

That which with more reason was objected as an indecorum, is the management of the last scene of the play, where Celadon and Florimell are treating too lightly of their marriage in the presence of the Queen, who likewise seems to stand idle while the great action of the drama is still depending. This I cannot otherwise defend, then by telling you I so designed it on purpose to make my play go off more smartly; that scene, being in the opinion of the best judges, the most divertising of the whole comedy. But though the artifice succeeded, I am willing to acknowledge it as a fault, since it pleased His Majesty, the best Judge, to think it so.

(Works, IX, 117)

Dryden's Queen is present as an onlooker during Celadon and Florimell's last scene. Dryden is apparently pleased that the scene came off well in the theater though Charles II took exception to it. Another example of his

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<sup>6</sup> Works, IX, 116.

departure from decorum is the break in action at IV.ii, violating the otherwise strictly observed liaison des scènes. All of these elements taken together indicate that, at this stage of his career, he was obviously willing to experiment outside the precepts of neoclassical theory. But no matter how fanciful Dryden's characterization becomes, he delineates the various types consistently according to their status.

The key to the critical dilemma over the disjunctive plots lies in Dryden's peculiar handling of questions concerning loyalty to rulers and duty to conscience.<sup>7</sup> Dryden's careful treatment of the Queen's character, taken together with verifiable history concerning his royalist politics and the poet laureateship bestowed on him from Charles II in April 1668, certainly confirm beyond question that he was totally in accord with absolutist rule, though he probably would have extended his approval to include a constitutional monarchy.<sup>8</sup> But as Myers observes about Dryden's "serious" [i.e., full-length] heroic drama, "Dryden's curious, stylised heroic

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<sup>7</sup> See Barbeau, p. 6, who notes that though both internal and external laws form the natural law, obligation to the ruler is an external law often conflicting with the internal law of conscience. As many commentators have observed, Dryden, a conservative traditionalist in religion and politics, followed the authority of Filmer to countenance only passive resistance to the unreasonable ruler.

<sup>8</sup> No one, it seems, has advanced a definitive argument connecting the Dryden before 1688 with a theory of monarchical authority. See Michael McKeon, [Politics and Poetry in Restoration England: The Case of Dryden's "Annus Mirabilis"] (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975)], p. 28, who calls the early version of Dryden's political system "authoritarian monarchism"; see also Alan Roper's discussion [Dryden's Poetic Kingdoms (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965)], pp. 72-73, in which he concludes that, between "a limited and a royal monarch" . . . "limited monarchy is not [Dryden's] preferred form." I will use "absolutist" to emphasize the early focus in Dryden's thought when he identified patriarchal order with the indivisible strength of the monarch. The use of the term does not suggest that Dryden would have accepted a despot.

plays reflect the political life of their period with some accuracy, though in suspiciously easy ways.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, because characters in the heroic-romance plots of tragicomedies are differentiated according to rank, there is a tendency to oversimplify the schematization of these character types on a continuum of power or status. Critics in the past have usually avoided Dryden’s political design to discuss other criteria for the play’s success. The play has received attention from most modern critics only because of the great success of its “gay couple.”<sup>10</sup> Critics like Robert Markley who are not hospitable to Dryden’s conservative political and social ideas still concede that Dryden’s “contribution [to the language of comedy] is crucial to the development of sex or wit comedy as a genre.”<sup>11</sup> As everyone knows, Dryden habitually disparaged his comedies, “though he was consistently loyal to tragicomedy, at least until he gave up the stage altogether.”<sup>12</sup> While Secret Love certainly is an apt example of what a sympathetic critic calls Dryden’s “ultra-royalist” politics,<sup>13</sup> it is much different in “design” from a similarly constructed play like All Mistaken. Howard’s play, for all its equivocation about libertinism and its potential to undermine a hierarchal order, has a relatively simple and consistent royalist ideology in the romance plot. Howard’s crude satire on merchants in the comic plot, subsumed in a structure that unapologetically supports a

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<sup>9</sup> William Myers, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> See Smith’s discussion, pp. 55-58.

<sup>11</sup> Markley, p. 93.

<sup>12</sup> Myers, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> John Loftis, The Politics of Drama in Augustan England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 8.

divine right theory of monarchical rule, had a limited appeal, no doubt, as a royalist diversion from political disappointment and general social tension.

Dryden's dramatic technique differs crucially from dramatists like Howard by complicating the conflicts within royalist politics. Dryden's great strength as a dramatist is shown in this play in its combination of witty and charming characters in the comic plot with rigorous intellectual probity in the romance plot. As Anne Barbeau accurately notes, "the unique quality of Dryden as dramatist . . . seems to be his ratiocinative manner of depicting various political relationships within society."<sup>14</sup> Although Dryden's belief in absolutist rule is implicit in this play, in which (surprisingly) there are no villains, when the heroic plot is carefully examined alongside its affective qualities, then his political reasoning does clearly emerge. That is to say specifically that the conflict is located in the Queen's conscience, where she wavers between her duty to govern effectively and her feeling to throw away responsibility and pursue her beloved like an ordinary woman. The authority for Dryden's political values is summed up aptly by Loftis: "[Dryden's notion of decorum] rested on the assumption that monarchy was a form of government sanctioned in natural law."<sup>15</sup> The moral corollary attached to his belief, which Barbeau provides, is that "[the] chief tie between king and his subject, in Dryden's view, is a natural and moral one, that of gratitude."<sup>16</sup>

The esteem for monarchical authority in Dryden's romantic plot is beyond dispute, but its relationship with a libertine comic plot is

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<sup>14</sup> Barbeau, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Loftis, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Barbeau, p. 43.

complicated. I find a two-part strategy operating in the play essential to understanding how Dryden's plots affirm a traditional, hierarchal order. The first part in Dryden's royalist strategy concerns Dryden's treatment of the Queen in the romantic plot. She has a desire for one of her subjects that temporarily makes her forget that the divine "glory" she enjoys depends on her first protecting the dignity of the crown; so her eventual decision to give up Philocles restores order successfully, all owing to a providential design.<sup>17</sup>

The second idea affirming absolutist order in the play comes about in the comic plot, where the libertine male has the earliest conversion to marriage on record in the early Restoration. As long as a character like Celadon recognizes his overriding duty to the state, and is lucky enough to meet an equal in Florimell, he cannot stray too far from a conventional morality even though his wit impels him to sample new experience. Ultimately, the private consciences of the characters in both plots must be aligned with the providential design, represented in this play by the restoration of the Queen to her "glory." The happy preservation of the kingdom comes at the expense, to a greater or lesser degree, of each character's personal ambition. The characters' sacrifice in the romantic plot to restore the Queen is mirrored in the comic plot by the "gay" couple's threats of retaliation against each other should one of them stray out of bounds in the marriage. Dryden's first principle of design in characterization is that internal wills need external constraints. All of the characters' genuine happiness, whatever their status, must therefore come

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<sup>17</sup> See Myers, p. 18, whom I must acknowledge for this general point about Dryden's heroic characters.

in a preordained social order where desire can find its "rightful" expression.

A productive method for analyzing the character types in Secret Love so that Dryden's overall ideological "design" can emerge is to examine "contraries" in light of Dryden's concerns with contemporary theories affecting the social order. The passion of the Queen and her subsequent discovery of the choice incumbent on her in the romantic plot naturally compare to Florimell's expression of desire and the necessary constraints on her sexual freedom in the comic plot. (Dryden had created these roles for two strong actresses in his original cast--Rebecca Marshall as the Queen and Nell Gwyn as Florimell.) The audience is engaged emotionally by the Queen's "imperfection," and intellectually by Florimell's considerable freedoms.<sup>18</sup> In the comic plot Dryden succeeded in following his acknowledged masters, Fletcher and Jonson. Florimell's emotional extravagance constitutes a Jonsonian "humour" for Dryden though she has a self-awareness complicating her responses. She is also of a genteel class, which places her in the Fletcherian category of delicate lovers.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In his essay "Of Heroique Playes" (1672) Dryden calls his perfect heroic characters "patterns of exact virtue." The Queen would be in this category except that Dryden has given her a psychology where she must regain self control.

<sup>19</sup> See Frank Harper Moore, The Nobler Pleasure: Dryden's Comedy in Theory and Practice (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 84. Moore argues that Dryden employs the Jonsonian "humour" in his genteel characters and the "humour of extravagance in degree": "[Celadon and Florimell] . . . could be regarded as heightened versions of the average Restoration gallant and his lady; and their heightened wildness makes them more delightful than the average."

The action takes place on the island of Sicily in antiquity, though the character's names come from Dryden's sources in French romances and the English pastoral tradition.<sup>20</sup> The setting serves as an easily recognizable metaphor depicting the English court life of Dryden's time. There were obviously personal and political advantages in keeping some fictional distance between the world of the play and the real court. There is little doubt that the contemporary audience understood the convention as an artist's license for making political observations.

The first scenes introduce the lovers of the comic plot and, through exposition, the Queen's authoritative command of her subjects, which earns their respect. When Florimell meets Celadon, she is "masqued," a visual metaphor appropriately conveying her desire for love worthy of herself that she is too proud and "mad" to confess. Her wit is equal in all respects to that of Celadon, proving they are a good match. When she resists Celadon's rakish importunities, she has staked out her territory as a woman free to pursue pleasure:

Celad. Since you will not take the pains to convert me[,]  
I'll make bold to keep my faith; a miserable man I am sure  
you have made me.

Flor. This is pleasant.

(I,ii: 128)<sup>21</sup>

Naturally, these two have the reputations for the brightest beauty and wit at court. They are both used to getting their way and therefore must test each

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<sup>20</sup> See the "Commentary," Works, IX, 337; See also Ned Bliss Allen, The Sources Of John Dryden's Comedies, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1935; rpt. Gordian Press, 1967).

<sup>21</sup> Page numbers will be provided in the parenthetical citations, instead of the California line numbers, to stay consistent with earlier chapters.

other's strengths and weaknesses to find if they can or must submit to fidelity.

The exposition leading to the Queen's entrance establishes the temper of court politics. In I.iii, Philocles and Lysimantes talk over the Queen's succession problem after Celadon compliments Philocles. The audience has just had a good exposure to Celadon, and we know he could never be a synchophantic type. So Philocles obviously deserves respectful address. However, Philocles evinces a singlemindedness about rules of conduct prescribed by status that will be a source of risibility later when he cannot guess that he is the Queen's object of adoration. Prince Lysimantes is cousin to the Queen and understood to be the favorite candidate for her husband. But right away something in Lysimantes' unctuous manner puts off the audience: he protests too much. Courtiers are expected to be florid, but not to those who are social equals like Philocles. Dryden casts Lysimantes in the role of a Hobbist power seeker, although he demonstrates genuine affection for the Queen. These qualities of Lysimantes and Philocles are represented in this brief exchange:

Lysimantes. I am not worthy,  
 Except Love makes desert;  
 For doubtless she's the glory of her time;  
 Of faultless beauty, blooming as the Spring,  
 In our Sicilian groves; matchless in virtue,  
 And largely souled, where ere her bounty gives,  
 As with each breath she could create new Indies.

Phil. But jealous of her glory.

(I,iii: 130)

The Queen's entrance line shows at once her command of her subjects that punctures the self-serving ambition of Lysimantes, and an aggrieved

sensibility that keeps petitioners at a distance from the "Indies"-breathing Queen: "And I must tell you,/ It is a saucy boldness thus to press on my retirements" (I,iii: 132). Dryden surprises those expecting a woman to act less assertive of authority than a man. Dryden represents his Queen within the usual guidelines of decorum, but still allows us to witness the effects of her desire and loss of control. Like Florimell, she must keep her "secret" passion for the man she desires from everyone but a female confidante. She struggles within herself to keep her passion hidden, but her loss of self-possession hampers her judgment to govern:

Queen. Cousin [Lysimantes], I expect  
 From your near blood, not to excuse  
 but check' em [i.e., the deputies of the  
 state asking her to name a successor].  
 They would impose a ruler  
 Upon their lawful Queen:  
 For what's an husband else?

(I,iii: 132)

Of course, the more emotional and distressed the Queen becomes, the more quickly the audience falls in love with her because we know her secret soon after. But her discomfort with Philocles distracts her attention from the important issue of smooth political succession. Her final question/plea raises the relationship of all the women in the play to power. Dryden allows his Queen and Florimell some maneuvering space between their prescribed roles and their potential transgression of the limits set by male authority in a patriarchal order. The opposition of the words "lawful" and "husband" here is disconcerting because the logic of the Queen's emotions suggests that a husband's rule is somehow not lawful. The obvious conservative answer to the question posed by the Queen is "Yes, a husband

is a ruler, and that is how order is maintained over generations. Even a Queen must submit to it." Of course, the audience finds out soon that she might also be fearful she cannot attract the husband she desires. That would be worse for her than unfavorable political fallout if she does not name a successor. While "mirth" may be restricted to the comic plot, a kind of compassionate humor comes out of the Queen's growing resentment and lover's frustration during the course of the action.

The Queen's most difficult moments occur when she becomes flustered by proximity to Philocles:

Queen. Philocles you may stay.

Philocles. I humbly wait your Majesties commands.

Queen. Yet, Now I better think on't, you may go.

Philocles. Madam!

Queen. I have no commands--or, what's all one, you no obedience.

Philocles. How, no obedience, Madam? I plead no other merit; 'tis the Charter by which I hold your favour, and my fortunes.

Queen. My favours are cheap blessings, like Rain and Sunshine, For which we scarcely thank the Gods, because we daily have them.

(I,iii: 133-134)

She ends this exchange by weeping, the only time she publicly lets down her guard. Her femininity comes off attractively in this scene, not because she cries but because she can separate her feeling from her role. The "I" in "I have no commands" indicates that the Queen sees her femaleness as a separate issue from her public role as a lawgiver. Her last line above, suggesting an undisclosed self-denial with the word "cheap," comes as close

as she dares to blur the line between sovereign and subject. Philocles maintains a charming confusion and blankness about what issues from the dialogue above. The Queen is upset that he joined in when she had been encouraged to make Lysimantes her husband. Philocles is an unassuming man, already in love with another woman, and the last thing he suspects is that the Queen loves him. If Philocles were more imaginative, he could hear her emphasis in the word "favour." Her problem is temporarily insoluble, and renders her dangerously close to a pathetic character. But the tension created between her desiring inner self and her otherwise confirmed public role is Dryden's point. She cannot marry Philocles without compromising her "glory," the ideological underpinning for the kingdom's claim to divine favor. For a conservative like Dryden, the sacralty of kingship must be preserved to ensure the authority in the sovereign. It's significant that Dryden makes even the nominal Hobbist, Lysimantes, innocent of casting doubt on the Queen's authority. Dryden's omission of any members of what Philocles later calls "the lees o' the people" (II,i: 146) seems to indicate that the solution of state affairs will largely remain the affair of the few annointed, without disintegrating to the point where the court faces an angry populace. The insurrection of the guard is contained at court, though the danger of its spilling into the countryside is an ominous, however distant, possibility. Traditionalists like Dryden believed above all that the state must be maintained to prevent rebellious outbreaks from the lowest status groups--the "mob."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Barbeau, p. 28: "For Dryden . . . the state of nature is in part a predatory struggle, and for this reason he distrusts the mob, the lower echelon of society, and regards it as a powder keg."

Despite the Queen's guard against limits on her authority, she persists in wanting Philocles. There is a curious phrase the Queen uses to Philocles when he protests his loyalty to her. She says, "You are above [my favors] now; grown popular" (I,iii: 134) [my emphasis]. Philocles is in the dark about her feelings for him, so he can only interpret this as her resentment of his success with the common people. Her jealousy of her regal reputation, or "glory," is understandable since it is the source of a sovereign's effectiveness. But she suffers no evident diminution of her authority. After all, Dryden represents the deputies--the representatives of the people--as properly obedient to her (I,iii). Dryden does provide a rebellion at the end when Lysimantes overthrows the Queen's guard. It is portrayed as a sad event. I will comment further on that scene below.

Dryden's focus here in the early part of the play is on the difficult struggles of conscience in the four main characters. When the Queen reveals her passion for Philocles to her lady-in-waiting, Asteria, Asteria names all the things she thought would occur had the Queen transgressed the divinely ordained monarchial function:

Ast. I thought your Majesty had framed designs  
To subvert all your laws; become a tyrant,  
Or vex your neighbours with injurious wars;  
Is this all, Madam?

(I,iii: 137)

Since Asteria is Celadon's brother, she represents a normative, aristocratic view of proper conduct. The Queen's careful modesty in her personal affairs indicates that her judgment on matters of import to the kingdom is usually sound, so that the Queen's passion for a subject creates her only political problem because her feminine "honor" is unimpeachable.

Philocles is judged worthy by all the characters and even his own comic discomfort is becoming when the Queen tells him "one" she loves has ignored her. Dryden pays a compliment to Charles II in a sly reference to the contemporary English political climate:

Qu. Princes sometimes may pass Acts of Oblivion in  
their own wrong.

(III,i: 150)

The Royalist party was not altogether happy with a similar act passed by Charles that forgave Stuart opponents as part of the Restoration settlement.<sup>23</sup> However, the Queen's statement indicates her sore vulnerability to a love that, at best, would not enhance her royal prerogatives. Even though the comically beleaguered Philocles is at loss to understand her from moment to moment, apart from the romantic comedy the audience respects the Queen's politically wise self-denial. If she were to blurt out her passion, she would have ceded her right to command her subjects. By the same token, the Queen's ambition for romantic fulfillment is hopeless at the outset even though she invites help to get the attention of Philocles. She struggles for respect as a woman able to attract this man's sexual desire in the following scene where she compares herself to Candiope. She "plucks out her Glass," and asks Philocles to comment on both women's charms. Candiope imprudently interrupts the Queen twice with the observation that Philocles loves her blindly, with all her "faults" (III,i: 154). The Queen flies into a rage at once, of course, and comes

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<sup>23</sup> See Winn, pp. 107-108, 352-353. The Act was passed in 1660 and forgave all but the regicides for Civil War allegiances. Though royalists like Dryden were "personally thankful" for Charles II's "Christian mercy" in the Act, they also believed Charles I "had been destroyed by his own willingness to forgive his enemies" (p. 353).

close to threatening the couple: "I, he may love, but when he marries you/ Your bridal shall be kept in some dark dungeon. Farewell, and think of that too easy maid . . . ." (III,i: 154). Although the Queen moves to prevent the couple's elopement, she would be politically stupid to imprison important court figures without a public reason. She is behaving irrationally at this point for someone in her position, but she is not arbitrarily self-destructive.

Florimell also vies for attention from her favorite and fends off competition in Act II, but, in contrast to the Queen's delicate position, things are in her favor. She is the epitome of court fashion--beautiful and rich, besides possessing a charming femininity; and she has the intelligence to wait for an opportune moment for her personal triumph. The libertinism of Celadon would seem to be held in check by his admiration for the talents of Florimell.<sup>24</sup> After all, he promises her quite a bit in the first proviso scene:

Flor. But, without raillery, are you in love?

Cel. So horribly much, that contrary to my own maxims, I think in my conscience I could marry you.

(II,i: 141)

Celadon's invocation of his "conscience" is a frank admission, I would say, that his libertine antics are more of a fashionable pose than a commitment to a skeptical philosophy. There is also the possibility that his desire to "possess" Florimell exclusively leads him to a practical morality. Once he

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. to Markley's observation, pp. 86-87, about Dryden's processes for displaying Fletcherian "wit" in *The Wild Gallant*: "The language of his female characters may enliven the 'chase of wit' but it stops short of challenging masculine prerogatives."

finds a woman who interests him, his “madcap” course begins to run to a more conventional authority. Florimell’s wit, while not challenging patriarchal authority with anything as radical as sexual pleasure for females outside marriage, provides her a latitude within aristocratic society. Her power lies in her ability to charm Celadon with her wit. Accordingly, she gives him a “year of probation” to conform to her expectations, “and of all this I only to be judge” (II,i: 142).

The following scene between the Queen and Philocles also puts the woman in a position over the man as a “judge,” but with the opposite result of alienating the man’s attraction to her.

Qu. You know you have a favourable judge;  
It lies in you not to ask anything I cannot grant.  
(II,i: 144)

Of course, he wants the one thing she cannot grant--Candiope’s hand in marriage--because she herself loves him. Naturally, her denial of Philocles’ request makes him resentful, since he thinks of himself as loyal, and, therefore, deserving. But even so, he would still face the dilemma left for the end of the play--constancy to Candiope or an ambitious move to share the Queen’s glory. The scene concludes ironically so that Philocles, unaware of the Queen’s affection for him, demonstrates a fetching sensibility when he pronounces his separation from his lover “doom” and “torment” in the précieuse language of court society. Here Dryden’s philosophy about the conflict between obligation to rulers and obeying private conscience in matters of love becomes explicit in Secret Love for the first time. Dryden believes in the traditional submission to absolutist-patriarchal authority before all else, except that of love between men and

women where he allows the woman a choice to say yes or no to marriage. If, as Barbeau asserts above, Dryden thinks the proper relationship between sovereign and subject is "gratitude," then the corresponding attitude in the private sphere of conscience is affection, the "natural" result effected through knowledge of a lover's "secret" qualities; without such knowledge passion will either undergo a "violent death" or will vanish over time with a "surfeit" of companionship.<sup>25</sup>

Philocles reasons that the Queen suspects his honor because he is of those who do not question sovereign power.

Phil. Weak bars they needs must be that fortune puts  
 'Twixt sovereign power, and all it can desire.  
 When Princes love, they call themselves unhappy,  
 only because the word sounds handsome in  
 A lover's mouth . . . .

(II,i: 145)

Philocles, the "ultra-royalist," decides that it would be "injurious" to his sovereign to make any other choice than for Lysimantes because he would come from "the lees o' the people." The Queen turns him away in a fit of pique: "Sir, be rude again; and give laws to your Queen" (II,i: 146). Even if the Queen seems arbitrary in her majesty, as in this case, she would not command someone to love her because the implicit, normative understanding of Dryden's characters is that love cannot be forced on an individual will. Her pride would prevent her from such an admission anyway.

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<sup>25</sup> Dryden would make this problem of the diminution of passion in married life his central conflict in his next play, Marriage à-la-Mode, which I treat in Chapter 4.

The “turns” in the two plots allow the female characters to be tested for the degree of external constraint necessary to persuade them to place their roles in the traditional order above private passion. Robert Markley has described Dryden’s political tactics in the play: “Dryden’s comic prose in Secret Love exists within a framework of authoritarian values asserted in the serious half of the action.”<sup>26</sup> I agree completely with Markley’s assessment of Dryden’s royalist ideology, but I would frame his statement with a reminder that an integral part of those values allowed some autonomy for women as equals to men in matters of love or “conscience” extending into the patriarchal family. Florimell must remain chaste before marriage to ensure the patrimonial estate. This obligation can also work to her advantage, allowing her considerable freedom to avoid arbitrary demands. Florimell, for her part, must submit to marriage sometime; still, she does limit Celadon’s male sexual prerogatives, not only by humiliating the competition, but with the more potent threat of cuckoldry. In the case of the Queen, it takes a rebellion and the nearly successful overthrow of her power to make her realize she must forget Philocles as much as possible in order to restore her command.

In Dryden’s scheme of values, the Queen should expect the disorder following her dangerous transgression of her role as a benevolent ruler. The audience knows that her excuse for neglecting the succession issue until almost too late arises from her “secret” passion. She gets an education in Realpolitik the hard way. She orders guards out to stop the marriage of Candiope and Philocles in III.i. after leaving Philocles no honorable

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<sup>26</sup> Markley, p. 89.

alternative to her (as it seems to him) arbitrary prevention of his desire. Since the Queen and Asteria had earlier gone up to the balcony to listen in on the couple, the Queen overheard the couple's plans to escape into the countryside.<sup>27</sup>

Lysimantes apparently loves the Queen, but that does not absolve him of his opportunist scheme to get rid of Philocles in IV.i when he learns the Queen's secret. He duplicates exactly the Queen's jealousy of Candiope and her subsequent efforts to thwart her success with Philocles. Lysimantes' Hobbist decision to seize power results in his forming a crafty plan that shows a great deal about Dryden's assumptions of an usurper's psychology. Lysimantes says that he merely "strain[s] a point of honour" (IV,i: 173) in persuading others about the Queen's "seizure" ("the word might be too rough, I meant secure her") since he feels unjustly passed over by the Queen. It is true that Lysimantes had earlier exhausted all the regular channels for effecting what he believes to be a mutually advantageous marriage, but Dryden's spokesman for proper royalist conduct, Philocles, does not approve. Philocles speaks for the conservative royalists when he angrily rejects Lysimantes' proposal for overthrowing the Queen:

Cand. And will you not do this, my Philocles?

Phil. Interest makes all seem reason that leads to it.  
Interest that does the zeal of sects create,  
To purge a church, and to reform a state.

(IV,i: 174)

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<sup>27</sup> For an enjoyable discussion of the balcony employed on the Restoration stage, see J. L. Styan, Restoration Comedy in Performance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 25-26: Restoration stages were equipped with two "balcony" doors or windows that opened above the area on the main stage.

Dryden's royalist ideology condemns the radicals, or "sectarians," who dismantled the monarchy and episcopacy during the Civil War. Philocles argues that whenever hierarchal rule is contravened then selfish interests are at work that will dissolve a working social order into a popular madness. Dryden puts the words of Hobbes in the mouth of Lysimantes so a right-thinking royalist like Philocles can set matters straight.

Philocles has a more complicated decision than he first thought when he must, as he thinks at the time, follow Lysimantes in armed revolt or lose Candiope forever. Philocles has a perfect record as an exemplar of royalist loyalty and Platonic devotion until his "temptation" scene in IV.ii. Then, when he thinks he can have the Queen, he becomes dangerously ambitious. What is restraining him is his private conscience in the name of constancy to Candiope. A match of Philocles with the Queen would be for his private, Hobbist "glory"; while a marriage to Candiope would leave glory, providentially determined, to the sovereign. On the other hand, Lysimantes, in Cavalier terms, has already traded his honor for a "crime" when he compromises the authority of the sovereign, and Dryden lets the audience think the same of Philocles until the end of the play. This is the Queen's low point. Only an outside agent can recover her power for her. As an unwitting agent of the larger providential design, Celadon intervenes with drunken "Blades" to overpower Lysimantes.

Philocles had ordered the surprise of the guard led by Lysimantes after letting him think he would join him to overthrow the Queen. The

audience is, of course, relieved to find this out.<sup>28</sup> The action has a two-fold purpose: It proves Philocles is not willing to abrogate the proper sovereign-subject relationship; and it lets the Queen reinstate her "glory" as an act of her free will, uncompelled by a usurping force. The restoration of the Queen is bittersweet, however, and makes the happy ending appear less forced.

Phil. O Heavens, she'll own her love!  
Then I must lose Candiope forever,  
And floating in a vast abyss of glory,  
Seek and not find myself!----- [Aside.

Qu. Take your Candiope; and be as happy as  
Love can make you both.-----How pleased I am  
That I can force my tongue,  
To speak words so far distant from my heart!----- [Aside.  
(V,i: 195)

Even the Queen's betrayer, Lysimantes, thinks her fate severe:

Lys. Heaven bear me witness that I take no joy  
In the succession of a crown  
Which must descend to me so sad a way.  
(V,i: 197)

She names Lysimantes her successor to ensure his loyalty, and when he proves his fealty by taking on an odd "single life," the succession devolves upon Philocles and his heir by Candiope. However, the Queen's end, a heroic decision shared by the four main characters but spoken of by none, unfolds a providential plan that will ultimately save the kingdom in time, when her personal loss will appear less important than a restoration of order. So the Queen's restored self-control insures the providential plan

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<sup>28</sup> See Singh, p. 71, who notes that "in [Dryden's] Essay . . . poetic justice is the only critical question which does not arouse any controversy and which in fact is applauded by almost all the speakers."

for orderly succession. Only an unfolding of the grand design in history will confirm the choices made by the characters in the heroic plot.

Florimell's chance to fulfill her desire for freedom and love depends on how she can soften her threat to a conventional patriarchal order. Even though her wildness is understood to be aristocratic role-playing, in which the libertine implications constituting a real threat to an absolutist political order are more or less contained, she does rely on her capacity for sexual revenge to obtain what she wants from a particular man. Without such resources, she would be a pawn in a man's game of power. She makes an explicit statement that marriage--the decision to say yes or no--is a woman's ultimate weapon:

Flor. There's the more hope he may love me among the rest:  
hang it, I would not marry one of these solemn fops; they are  
good for nothing but to make cuckolds: Give me a servant that  
is an high flier at all games, that is bounteous of himself to  
many women; and yet whenever I pleased to throw out the  
lure of matrimony, should come down with a swing, and fly  
the better at his own quarry.

(III,i: 159)

The falconry metaphor is appropriate for a fashionable game player like Celadon. I believe this speech underscores that sex--or its refusal--is not an end in itself for Florimell, but only a means to marriage with the man of her choice.

The motivations of the comic-plot couple are completely established by III.i. Celadon has already declared for Florimell and mentioned marriage. Florimell has proved sufficiently wild to allow her an identity apart from her prescribed role as an aristocratic woman of property destined to form a secure alliance with a rich man. Security bores women

like Florimell when purchased too easily. The only obstacle preventing Dryden from marrying them off is that Celadon's personal courage must be proven in a scene where he is called to action for the Queen's sake, which I discussed above in connection with the romance plot. Also, there is a minor complication between the couple over the attentions Celadon pays Melissa's daughters. To teach Celadon a lesson in Act IV, Florimell outplays the rake at his own game. The breeches scene here serves two purposes at once. On one hand, it confirms the necessity of role-playing among the aristocracy, their identities contingent on well-defined roles that are prescribed for them. On the other hand, Florimell's defeat of her competition registers a woman's personal triumph, when her secret identity helps her to the object of her desire.

In comparison to Florimell's intelligent use of the liberty allowed her, the Queen's resistance to destructive passion also caused her to push away the man she wanted. In order that the monarchal state remain secure from usurpers or lapses in authority at the top, the Queen's public role as sovereign regulates her private freedom to submit to passion or any private irrationality; whereas Florimell, actively choosing her role, can maneuver more easily between private feeling and public role, though she must be careful to keep her virtue to be taken seriously.

Celadon pays a price of conscience for his flirtations with Melissa's daughters when, after being outwitted by Florimell in the second proviso scene, his alignment with a Christian-patriarchal state is implicit in his forced confession: "Well, we must all sin, and we must all repent, and there's an end on it" (III,i: 162). He is fully aware, however, that his

libertine attitudes are attractive to women. His Fletcherian wit helps him to women, but his sexuality is not of a predatory type. The pleasure for the man and the woman is instead in the battle of wits :

Flor. Why do you look that way? You cannot forbear leering after the forbiddin fruit.-----But whenever I take a wencher's word again!-----

Cel. A wencher's word! Why should you speak so contemptibly of the better half of mankind? I'll stand up for the honour of my vocation.

(IV, i: 169)

Unlike the comic plot hero of Howard's All Mistaken, who does not participate in the romance-plot action, Celadon justifies his witty escapades by helping the Royalist cause when it needs him. Celadon is as effective in the romance plot as he is "rakish" in the comic plot. Until this scene his sexual suggestions could be interpreted as fashionable posturing. His military prowess metaphorically confirms his sexual prowess. He disarms soldiers in IV.i and leads another detachment of soldiers to back up Philocles in Act V. Celadon's success in battle also reflects on Florimell's achievement when she outwits him in the final act. If he had been merely a "madcap" lover, without proving an ability in worldly affairs equal to his aristocratic status, he would be an easy catch not worth Florimell's talents.

By the same token, when Florimell outwits Celadon and Melissa's daughters in Act V, she shows that her ambition and cleverness are a match for Celadon's wit. She dazzles those around Celadon at court with a tour de force performance in a male role. When Celadon discovers her disguise, one of the daughters, Sabina, exclaims for all females still playing the conventional roles: "Well, if ever I believe a man to be a man for the

sake of a perruke and feather again-----" (V,i: 186). The "honor" of a comically corrupt aristocratic male has been transferred to the female (which was precisely the case in All Mistaken). It is left to the female to hold a man to his marriage vow by whatever means necessary. Thus, in the proviso scene Florimell invents constraints to ensure her man living up to his vow. The Hobbist social contract here replaces the ideal of a benevolent husband looking after the interests of his wife for her own good. Each must protect his/her self interest when passion wanes.

Celadon's profession of constancy to Florimell has implications for his loyalty as a subject as well. When faced with losing Florimell, he discovers that she is worth more to him than his pleasure in pursuing many women:

Cel. This is not very heroic in you now to insult over a man in his misfortunes; but take heed, you have robbed me of my two mistresses; I shall grow desperately constant, and all the tempest of my love will fall upon your head: I shall so pay you.

(V,i: 186)

His enforced "constancy" reflects on the seriousness of Philocles' decision, made of his free "conscience," to choose Candiope instead of power in a marriage to the Queen: [Phil.] "Wake, Philocles, wake from thy dream of glory/ 'Tis all but shadow to Candiope" (V,i: 188).

Celadon also feels that a fresh start with his sovereign is the proper way for demonstrating a loyalty free from suspicion of insinuating private "glory." Dryden makes Celadon into a model subject with his explicit statement condemning rebellion to absolutist authority:

Cel. I was in hope your Majesty had forgot me; therefore if you please, Madam, I only beg a pardon for having taken up

arms once today against you; for I have a foolish kind of conscience, which I wish many of your subjects had, that will not let me ask a recompence for my loyalty, when I know I have been a rebel.

(V,i: 197)

The object lesson on obedience to the crown is not lost on a seventeenth-century audience, in view of the recent Civil War.

Dryden's royalist ideology appears complicated by the end, with little hope of reconciling divergent views on honor or marriage, and the resulting implications for the authority of an absolutist state. Dryden marries the comic plot couple, of course, ending the threat to conventional order. The reconciliation of the plots depends on Dryden's belief in having the freedom to follow one's "will," or "conscience." A subject like Philocles has the right to run away with his lover because that is a passive disobedience to an unjust demand by the sovereign. On the other hand, Lysimantes oversteps his prerogatives in "natural law" when he initiates an armed insurrection. The rights of ruler/subject are mirrored in the marriage of a man and woman. Florimell forces a social contract version of marriage vows because the male, the patriarchal head of the family order reflecting the larger hierarchy in the state, cannot guarantee his commitment to protect his wife's interests. So she negotiates the room she needs to have a happy marriage without enduring abject servitude:

Flor. But this marriage is such a bugbear to me; much might be if we could invent but any way to make it easy.

Cel. Some foolish people have made it uneasy, by drawing the knot faster than they need; but we that are wiser will loosen it a little.

Flor. 'Tis true indeed, there's some difference betwixt a girdle

and a halter.

(V,i: 198)

After a frank discussion about the inevitable decline of passion in marriage, they decide to continue role-playing in order to liven up their real situation of husband and wife. Instead of those terms, they will call each other "Mistress and Gallant" (V,i: 199). Thus, the pattern of disguises and games in a marriage likewise diffuses the threat of libertinism to marriage and the traditional social order. Even in an agreeable marriage, the couple find it necessary to invent outlets against excessive constraints: Celadon threatens a "month of fasting-nights" if Florimell infringes his "freedoms"; and Florimell goes him one better with the "penalty of cuckoldom" for her part. Cuckoldom is serious threat to a patrilineal order. So the resignation of the strong-willed couple to marriage under these conditions appears credible. However, this marriage still comes in the category of "fancy," following the prescription in the Essay. Despite the agreed upon constraints, the couple's attractiveness is itself a type of "heightening" of reality connecting it with that of the romantic plot. Dryden's insistence on romance plots like this one in the historical context of a diminishing authority in aristocratic ideology risks interpretation as reactionary propaganda. But the complicated turns in his ideology concerning rights and natural law effectively constitute a more interesting, dialectical dramatic art. He would elaborate on this dialectical process in his next tragicomedy, Marriage à-la-Mode, but the realism of the comic plot renders the heroic-pastoral romance plot in that play less effective than the romance plot of Secret Love.

## Chapter 4

Marriage à-la-Mode (1671)

The dialectical plot structure that Dryden delineated in Secret Love, and that he elaborates in Marriage à-la-Mode, complicates an understanding of his royalist ethos. The pragmatic attitudes about traditional social conventions taken in the comic plot would seem to diminish the authority of those conventions in the idealistic romantic plot. Dryden allows the plots to exist without one cancelling out the other, but this raises the question of whether their juxtaposition somehow produces a unified effect or mirrors an analogous consciousness of experience coming in "sequential alteration."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the ambiguous thematic strategy in each plot, especially the romantic-heroic plot, offers conflicting possibilities for internal resolution. Indeed, the suspended judgment accorded rebellious

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<sup>1</sup> See Douglas J. Canfield, "Ideology of Restoration Tragicomedy," 448. He argues for a unity as the result of a providential ending that affirms the "patrilineal order." I develop a similar argument for Secret Love as far as affirming the hierarchal order, although tragicomic form offers more possibilities, as I have argued, than a simple thematic unity. See also, Nancy Klein Maguire, "The 'Whole Truth' of Restoration Tragicomedy," 229. She refutes Canfield's theory and offers a solution that ignores the issue of unity altogether--a schematic version of Restoration political mythology wherein the "high" plot represents the Caroline order and the comic plot the Carolean restoration pragmatism of Charles II, so that the two plots experienced in "sequential alteration" simply "co-exist." I am persuaded that the relationship of the plots is more complicated, even though I agree with Maguire's assessment that the romantic plot represents an older, Caroline order that is "demythologized." The plots are in a dialectical relationship that contrasts the solutions and limitations of each in order to satirize the Hobbist attitudes of the comic plot characters. See note three below where I discuss McKeon's "dialectical unity." The commentary on Marriage is too extensive to summarize in the text since every important book on Restoration drama has something to say about the play. Therefore, I will cite only those arguments immediately relevant to my own.

characters in the romantic plot would seem to be at odds with Dryden's otherwise clear ideological purpose of promoting a conservative political order. Marriage has two social groups who eventually align in a typical "high" and "low" hierarchy, as does Secret Love; the later play's comic plot characters express themselves in urbane, witty dialogue entirely separate from the heroic-pastoral discourse of the romantic plot. Dryden was apparently quite careful to observe neoclassical precepts of characterization after apologizing for the breach of decorum charged to him by the King in the earlier play where, in the final act, the Queen waited while the comic plot lovers finished their proviso scene.<sup>2</sup>

Dryden's choice of such a distinctly aristocratic, courtly fashion in the heroic plot is not, of course, completely unexpected. He had been having good success with the full heroic plays produced the same year.<sup>3</sup> But the disjunctiveness of the plots of Marriage is nearly complete here, and their proper relationship resists easy formulation even more than did Secret Love's. Some critics have declared for a "final, affective unity" and others for a "dialectical unity."<sup>4</sup> Dissenting from the "unity" solution

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<sup>2</sup> See note ten below, where I discuss Moore's argument of Dryden's "return to the theory."

<sup>3</sup> See the relevant background on Dryden and the production history of this play in the "Commentary" from the California Works, XI, pp. 460-486. I will therefore omit a discussion of the play's cast and publication history in the text, as was my practice for Secret Love. All subsequent citations to the play itself are from this edition and noted parenthetically in the text. Page numbers are provided for consistency with my earlier chapters.

<sup>4</sup> See the "Introduction" by Mark S. Auburn, ed., in Regents Restoration Drama Series (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), p. xxix: "Yet his intention might have concerned final rather than formal unity, the affective rather than the analogical." See also the argument by Michael McKeon, "Marxist Criticism and Marriage A La Mode," in Eighteenth Century Theory and Interpretation 24 (1983): 141-162. He is quite persuasive that the play demonstrates a particularly complex "dialectical unity" where contradictions

altogether is one of Dryden's most unsympathetic critics, Robert Markley, who maintains consistently (as I noted in the Introduction) that the heroic plot ethos in all Dryden's tragicomedies has been insulated from Fletcherian comic wit and its "potentially subversive" implications for absolutist-patriarchal authority "as a strategy of ideological investigation and containment."<sup>5</sup> Although I would certainly affirm Markley's point that the most destabilizing of the libertine implications in the comic plot are "contained," I disagree with his emphasis on the tameness of Dryden's comic plot challenge: I do not find Fletcher any more or less "potentially subversive" than Dryden, who followed his precursor's comic practice closely.<sup>6</sup>

The key to understanding Dryden's plot relationships in Marriage is that he leaves it for the reader/spectator to arrive at a judgment on the conditional nature of his royalist ideology in the romantic plot, making the ambivalent and good-natured comic plot part of a complicated dialectical tactic. Although I think it would be inaccurate to suggest a complete resolution of the tensions between the plots that the play will not definitively support, I assent (given my qualification) to Rodes' notion of unity: that the plots act as a "corrective" or "rebuke" to each other's

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abound within an unstable "aristocratic ideology." Cf. Markley's statement in the note immediately below.

<sup>5</sup> Markley, p. 89, *passim*: ". . . I am less convinced than McKeon that 'dialectical unity' is a valid historical or theoretical description of the play's structure; it comes close to reproducing the totalizing assumptions of Dryden and some of his spectators."

<sup>6</sup> See the "Commentary" on the play [Works, XI, pp. 484-486] where David S. Rodes summarizes the controversy at the time of the play's original run, when critics and pundits split into camps on the matter of the play's frank treatment of sexual mores. Some saw it as contributing to sexual immorality, and others viewed it as a satire on sexual license lending itself to a defense of marriage.

distortion of reality so that the play attempts to find a social mean that will be realistic in the new Restoration order (p. 485). While there is certainly an analogical correspondence between the political order and the social order, Dryden's conservative solutions are made provisional by the various degrees of satisfaction in his characters with their destiny.

As I argued in Chapter 3, Dryden admits into his conservative political ideology toleration of individual desires.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the motivations for the character's decisions achieve an openendedness that, for example, bears out McKeon's observation that Dryden's management of the romantic plot ideology "encourages the suspicion that noble blood is no more than a metaphor for what we covet and value, that the signs of 'nobility,' so far from being clearly correlated with birth, are a complex function of personal emotions and interests."<sup>8</sup> Both plots reinforce an ambivalence about the divinely ordained hierarchal order as the characters reluctantly submit to social and political authority. The divestiture of a subject's belief in the divine right theory can affect his or her belief in the monarch's intrinsic worth, but, as Barbeau observes, even under the divine-right doctrine "the subject can never have 'an infallible certitude, but only a moral knowledge' of who the rightful king is, such moral knowledge being grounded on 'peaceable possession' of the crown."<sup>9</sup> In this play, for example, the usurper Polydamas has not taken over by force; his subjects think that he rules by the default of a legal heir. It is important

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<sup>7</sup> See Barbeau, p. 52: "Dryden's conservatism can be clearly distinguished from that of Hobbes and Filmer in the matter of the rights of conscience"; but, then again, for Dryden "armed resistance is out of the question."

<sup>8</sup> McKeon, "Marxist Criticism," 155.

<sup>9</sup> Barbeau, p. 42.

to a conservative like Dryden that a subject obey the monarch even if he doubts the sovereign's hereditary right to the throne.<sup>10</sup>

While delimiting the authority of the monarch over his subjects in a play that contains contrasting models of ruler and subject relationships obviously requires investigation, I am persuaded that Dryden advances his conservative ideology in Marriage by involving the audience in his preoccupation with usurpation and violation of order--both in the monarchical state and in the private sphere of marriage. These concerns were obviously shared by an aristocratic audience for whom Dryden wrote this complex play. Dryden's attention to both fashionable characters and a "restoration" romantic plot more than ten years after the real event indicates his obvious eagerness to please the aristocracy. He goes out of his way in the Dedication to flatter Rochester's contribution to the effort: "I am sure if there be anything in this play wherein I have raised myself beyond the ordinary lowness of my comedies, I ought wholly to acknowledge it to the favor of being admitted into your lordship's conversation" (Works, XI: 221). He needed friends because his success had earned him the enmity of Buckingham, who had written The Rehearsal (1671) primarily to attack Dryden's heroic dramas like The Conquest of Granada. Perhaps this fact explains Dryden's personal reflectiveness later in the Dedication: "In my little experience of a court (which I confess I desire not to improve) I have found in it much of interest and more of detraction: few men there have that assurance of a friend as not to be made

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<sup>10</sup> See Barbeau, pp. 42-54, who argues Dryden takes ideas about subjects and rulers from Filmer, though he changes his emphasis to allow the subject more autonomy.

ridiculous by him when they are absent" (Works, XI: 221-2). Winn's hypothesis that Buckingham particularly objected to Dryden's overreaching his aristocratic patrons in an aristocratic art form could reflect as well Dryden's choice of an internally divided ideology:

What [Buckingham and company] may have actually resented in Dryden, then, was not his failure to emulate their literary style but his success. If a plainspoken Northhamptonshire squire could write such courtly lyrics as those in Marriage A-la-Mode, the claim that the ability to write such lyrics was a matter of aristocratic birth was clearly damaged.<sup>11</sup>

Tragicomedy may have been the preferred choice for Dryden to work out his royalist versions of the desired social order and its corresponding values, but he was undoubtedly aware of the limitations inherent in the form itself. As Nicholas Jose points out, these limitations affected the particular uses writers made of the available forms in the period:

There was a degree of provisionality and uncertainty at the heart of the Restoration settlement. There was nothing which could be pointed to as "social reality." Political exigencies were confused. There was no received version of the immediate past, and hence no established ways of seeing the present or anticipating the future; and the literary conventions to hand were in various ways anachronistic or inappropriate. In such a situation, in answer to a widespread and many-faceted desire for reparation and restoration, the poets engaged in an act of fabrication.<sup>12</sup>

I am convinced that Dryden realized that heroic romance was anachronistic, but that he wanted to offer alternative versions of defining

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<sup>11</sup> Winn, p. 226.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Jose, Ideas of the Restoration in English Literature, 1660-71 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 166.

the past, and therefore, the future as well. In Marriage à-la-Mode, Dryden attempts to reconcile the imperatives of a viable social order with a recognition that subjects have a dynamic of personal desires, especially when the social order conflicts with these desires. Dryden was an ardent royalist who also wanted to acknowledge worthy individuals. McKeon attributes this characteristic to his "bourgeois" individualism, which may be the case, but aristocratic ideology also allows for personal recognition if intrinsic "honor" can be assumed as a valid social criterion for reward.<sup>13</sup>

Thus one's view of the relationship of the two plots in Marriage depends on one's view of Dryden's ideological starting point: Dryden can be read as holding that a viable order will contain an individual's egotistic ambition, not by force, but by granting him or her attractive rights in the existing social order. In the romance plot, for example, the realignment of the political order with aristocratic hereditary succession is enacted by Leonidas' forgiveness of Polydamas. Dryden's royalist ethos therefore results from a complex series of tests and refutations of alternative power structures. His comic plot also affirms aristocratic/royalist ideology by demonstrating the attractive benefits of external social constraints, coming only after allowing enough role-playing and daring suggestions to justify witty young people restraining their desires by choice. To borrow Schilling's phrase when he described the purpose of Absalom and Achitophel, one can say that the play also "finds that what has to be is

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<sup>13</sup> McKeon, "Marxist Criticism," 156.

really what should be; what is necessary is also what is right, fusing the requirements of both reason and experience.”<sup>14</sup>

Because the romantic-heroic plot manifests particularly its “self-consciousness,” I am persuaded by McKeon’s general argument in the “Marxist” essay that the plot is therefore “provisional”: its outcome appears “reasonable” because the legitimacy of monarchical succession requires that it appear so. This is not the same as saying that Dryden was uncertain about his adherence to conservative royalism. He most definitely was not. His problem was not in constructing an ideological defense for himself, but with making the limitations and advantages in tragicomic form work in his favor. Most critics have argued in the past that Marriage succeeds brilliantly. I agree. Dryden’s remarkable achievement is that he makes the materialist appetites of the comic plot characters engagingly attractive, so that their decision to keep their marriage vows in the end validates the romance plot order after it has met a serious challenge.<sup>15</sup>

Dryden’s concern to exploit the ideology of romance in the heroic plot is confirmed in the observations of Frank Moore on the plot’s neoclassical structure. He argues that Dryden returns to his own version of neoclassical theory after deviating from it in the odd An Evening’s Love (1671). His three main points are essential for understanding how Dryden changed his procedure for Marriage. His first point is that

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<sup>14</sup> Bernard N. Schilling, Dryden and The Conservative Myth: A Reading of “Absalom and Achitophel” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> For a persuasive argument of the Hobbist views of the comic plot characters, see Bruce King, Dryden’s Major Plays, Chap. V (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), pp. 82-94.

Secret Love abides by the unites . . . [whereas] Marriage à-la-Mode violates the unity of time; its action lasts three days. However, this violation is also in accord with Dryden's theory. In the 'Defence of an Essay' he says that comedy should abide by the unity of time, but that the weighty design and great persons of tragedy require more than one day.<sup>16</sup>

Dryden's "weighty design" in this play, the restoration of a King, requires several tests of Leonidas to see if he is worthy of his hereditary right. So Dryden matches the comic plot with the romance plot by extending its action to three days also, which is plausible since the couples need to arrange meetings before the arrival of Palamede's and Melantha's fathers for their marriage.

The second contrast in the structures of Secret Love and Marriage explains the later play's more complete disjunctiveness:

The principle of decorum is more carefully observed in Marriage à-la-Mode than it is in Secret Love . . . In [Marriage] the four principal comic characters, unobserved by the serious characters, settle their marital difficulties before the final episode of the serious plot begins. (p. 104)

As Moore observes, Dryden preserves decorum more strictly in this play. One of the advantages of strictly separating the plots is that it keeps clear the succession question, which has already been complicated enough by several revelations and reversals that constantly surprise the expectations of the audience. Also, since the authority for the resolution of the comic plot depends on the romantic plot, it is fitting that the former's conclusion follows that of the latter.

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<sup>16</sup> Moore, pp. 102-103, passim.

Moore's last point refers to Dryden's original defense of tragicomic form in the Essay of Dramatick Poesie:

Marriage à-la-Mode is richer than Secret Love in what Dryden calls "pleasing variety." Its serious plot is more complex and fuller of vicissitudes than that of Secret Love, and in the comic plot we have not one pair of lovers, but two.  
(pp. 105-106)

Dryden probably wanted to make the best use of his actors by doubling the roles, but the increased complexity also allows for many plot complications and character contrasts that make intrigue plots interesting. Dryden's ideas about social order, as I stated above, require a series of complicated challenges to prove them attractive, which process itself entails proving the chief characters' worth. Therefore, the best procedure for analyzing the play will be to identify the nature and degree of opposition to different kinds of challenges made to the patriarchal order.

Taking the romantic plot first, one of its important features is the loving disposition of the heroic couple. As John Loftis notes, "[Unlike the pressures facing Secret Love's heroic couple], the obstacles confronting Leonidas and Palmyra are political and dynastic, irrelevant to their affections, which remain constant."<sup>17</sup> The ideal couple is brought in to the King because the reports of their "uncommon beauty and graceful carriage," proof of an intrinsic superiority, give away the aristocratic origin of the couple hidden heretofore "in fishers' cabins" (I,i: 237). This network of assumptions about status informs the intensity of interest in the couple by the corrupt characters, Polydamas and Argaleon, both

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<sup>17</sup> John Loftis, "Dryden's Comedies," in Writers and Their Background: John Dryden, ed. Earl Miner (Berkeley: University of California, 1972), 42.

treacherous schemers who understand the importance of the find without having to be told.

In fact, Polydamas corroborates their identity without information from anyone, even before he has heard the story from the couple himself:

Behold two miracles!  
 Of different sexes but of equal form.  
 So matchless both that my divided soul  
 Can scarcely ask the gods a son or daughter  
 For fear of losing one. If from your hands,  
 You powers, I shall this day receive a daughter,  
 Argaleon, she is yours; but if a son,  
 Then Amalthea's love shall make him happy.  
 (I,i: 238)

Since the couple love each other, their betrothal to others creates their dilemma. Polydamas' profession of a "divided soul" above contrasts with the self-assuredness of Leonidas' claim to self-control: "I can fear nothing but the Gods" (I,i: 240). His statement conveys the point that beauty and honor must appear together. What judgment, then, should the audience make of Polydamas' rule, a usurper of the lawful king? The opinion of seventeenth-century royalists like Dryden would, of course, condemn a monarch's overthrow. But in the example of Polydamas the modern reader finds one of the stranger aspects of Dryden's political thought: It is better to endure even a tyrant or usurper, than bring on a disaster to the state by armed rebellion that results in a civil war, the worst outcome for those of Dryden's generation. Barbeau encapsulates Dryden's outlook perfectly:

Dryden . . . demonstrates repeatedly that an armed uprising against a monarch for the sake of basic liberties is inexpedient; such a use of force results in a change of tyrants but not in

reform.<sup>18</sup>

A pragmatic acceptance of the difficult situation at the Syracusan court enables an audience to have compassion for Polydamas in his role of frustrated father despite his prior villainies. The discovery of the couple in the romance plot provokes a chain of unmasked desires, making the provisional court dangerous for innocent lovers. They find themselves the objects of various types of envious characters who collapse distinctions between lawful and unlawful desire where they concern the couple: Polydamas wants to discover his real child; Argaleon and Amalthea want to recruit lovers from the couple; the couple only want each other. Dryden shows the internal conflict brought on by desire in the separate responses of Polydamas and Leonidas.

The unlawful king realizes everyone defers to him because he is the strongest. Yet, at the same time, he is desperate to seek out his lost child, which is revealed in his testy admission to Hermogenes:

Poly. Then prove indulgent to my hopes, and be  
My friend forever. Tell me, good Hermogenes,  
Whose son is that brave youth?

Her. \_\_\_\_\_ Sir, he is yours.

Poly. Fool that I am, thou see'st that so I wish it,  
And so thou flatters me.

(I,i: 240)

The feeling of Polydamas is attractive here regardless of his previous history. The desires of a father for affection palliates his forceful method. A lesser writer than Dryden would have made his grasping tyranny his

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<sup>18</sup> Barbeau, p. 53.

only credible motivation. The reaction of Leonidas to his new-found status is also mixed, recalling McKeon's observation above that Dryden "encourages the suspicion that noble blood is no more than a metaphor for what we covet and value . . . ." He is angered that Argaleon has impugned the integrity of Hermogenes. When Argaleon charges Leonidas that he is "too soon a Prince," Leonidas threatens, "Too soon you'll find me one" (I,i: 241). His anger is justified in the sense that it reveals the royal warrior in the boy raised as a shepherd, protecting a man who had protected him. But there is also a suspicion in his insistence on using his new status that he wants power as much as he has wanted Palmyra. The ambiguity in Leonidas's motivations indicates, on the one hand, a righteous indignation that merit has not been properly recognized. On the other hand, a destabilized aristocratic ideology, while still broadly assuming intrinsic superiority based on birth, also admits that the legitimate desire of Leonidas for his birthright can also appear to serve a self-interest of the commoner sort.

The fragile peace effected by Leonidas' willingness to acknowledge Polydamas as a father is upset when Leonidas refuses his demand to marry Almathea. Leonidas' unwillingness to submit to a man whom he still believes to be a lawfully enthroned king is a serious transgression of the absolutist order. Amalthea has been described already as "all goodness and generosity" (I,i: 235) by Rhodophil, whose judgment the audience values because he has previously demonstrated his wit and good humor. Leonidas loves Palmyra, but his clear duty by seventeenth-century standards (if Polydamas was, as he believes, a true King) is to submit to an arranged

marriage to uphold patriarchal authority and political stability. His refusal on the grounds of personal desire affronts the moral authority of the state and the hierarchy that supports it. He gallantly avoids hurting Amalthea's feelings as much as possible, though she loves him desperately. Polydamas' exasperation after first patiently examining Leonidas for his reasons does not appear tyrannical. If anything, it proves his fatherly feeling and frustrated expectations:

Poly. Leonidas, you owe me more  
Than to oppose your liking to my pleasure.

Leon. I owe you all things, Sir; but something too  
I owe myself.

Poly. You shall dispute no more; I am a King,  
And I will be obeyed.

Leon. You are a King, Sir; but you are no God;  
Or if you were, you could not force my will.

(II,i: 252)

Leonidas' assertion of his will, or conscience, causes problems for a monarchical state. As Polydamas knows all too well, if the King's word and authority are challenged without correction, then the natural, unchecked impulses of the individual will logically lead to the disruption of the hierarchal order. Polydamas, to his credit, gives Leonidas some time to think over his position without restricting his free movement--the normal punishment for disobedience. When Amalthea intercedes on behalf of Leonidas, she confirms the aristocratic assumptions about appearance signifying status: "You may see/ Something so noble in the Prince his nature/ As grieves him more not to obey, than you/ That you are not obeyed" (II,i: 253).

The audience knows that Leonidas will eventually be restored to his inheritance by the demands of the tragicomic form, but it does not know at what price. The first two acts have nearly absolved Polydamas of blame for his original crime. He has proved generous, repentant, and slow to assert absolute authority. The tension this produces is more interesting than establishing control over a simple villainous type like Argaleon. It is impossible to dislike a character who admits, "I know/ I lie as open to the gusts of passion,/ As the bare shore to every beating surge" (II,i: 253). The tension in the romantic plot lessens, alternating in the comic and passionate relationship between Leonidas and Palmyra.

After Palmyra has asked Leonidas to "free me from this bad man" (II,i: 254), indicating the nakedly ambitious Argaleon who has actually been brought low with genuine heartsickness for her, Dryden has some fun with the précieuse mode:

Leonidas. What did he say, Palmyra?

Palmyra. I'll tell you all. First, he began to look,  
And then he sighed, and then he looked again;  
At last, he said my eyes wounded his heart.  
And after that he talked of flames, and fires,  
And such strange words, that I believe he conjured.  
(II,i: 254)

Dryden's aristocratic audience would have had a laugh on themselves here. Palmyra, innocent of court fashion as she was raised in the country, takes the conventions of Platonic dialogue as a monstrous affront. Naturally, the mode is rendered ridiculous to the audience. Dryden further associates it with debased usage since it comes from a corrupt courtier like Argaleon.

Leonidas has an obligatory scene with Argaleon which ends with an ironic turn reflecting the privilege of status in enjoying passion. Leonidas had earlier been granted an unusual concession by Polydamas to reconsider his refusal to marry Amalthea. He loves Palmyra and uses as his defense the autonomy of individual will. Argaleon is in the same position vis-à-vis Leonidas. Leonidas now has authority over him since he is the Prince. For obvious reasons, he intervenes between Argaleon and the object of his passion, Palmyra. Leonidas becomes indignant when Argaleon similarly asserts his right to talk to a woman befitting his social status:

Leon. \_\_\_\_\_ What? a disputing subject?  
Hence; or my sword shall do me justice, on thee.  
(II,i: 255)

Argaleon has been a scheming opportunist all along, yet Leonidas' insistence on his authority in this case exposes his rationalization of his own personal desires as royal prerogatives. The complexity of feeling in his response explains the rather unusual metaphor Leonidas uses when he parts with his beloved. After Palmyra tells him she will die forsaken in the country without his love, he pledges not to desert her though their communication will necessarily be covert:

Our souls sit close and silently within;  
And their own web from their own entrails spin.  
And when eyes meet far off, our sense is such,  
That, spider-like, we feel the tenderest touch.  
(III,i: 258)

The strangeness of the metaphor undercuts the potential sentimentality in the conventional parting scene. It is also employed after the heightened artificiality of the pastoral verse to reassert the association between the senses and a natural world. The spider metaphor then extends to all the

characters in the romantic plot who have desires that will be affected by the couple's fate, because most of them must keep their feelings and desires for connectedness secret.

The succession question is still in doubt when Leonidas is denied Palmyra's company. In Act III, Polydamas has had reports from Argaleon that she has been the cause of Leonidas' refusal of Amalthea. His severe sentence on Palmyra--that she is to be humiliated then left to die at sea--indicates that his tyrannical nature evinces itself only when faced with extremes, such as when he is denied what he thinks is a reasonable request for respectful obedience from a son. After all, Leonidas' disobedience has serious repercussions for the security of the kingdom. If the monarch is disobeyed in one instance, then it sets a precedent for any act of rebellion. The safety of the whole kingdom is in doubt. Leonidas meets the challenge to confirm assumptions about the nobility of his birth in his most stringent test when he can save Palmyra's life if he "forever will abjure her sight" (III,i: 267). Both Leonidas and Palmyra make the heroic decision to die rather than to accept the death of the other. Leonidas finally draws his sword on Polydamas in the ultimate act of rebellion of son against father, subject against ruler. The moment portends such terrible consequences for all concerned that Palmyra even retreats from her claim on Leonidas: "Do not by lawless force oppose your Father,/ Whom you have too much disobeyed for me" (III,i: 268). Dryden has taken the sacrifice for love as far as it can go without starting a full-scale rebellion against the King. Even though Leonidas eventually submits to the ordained order (as far as

he understands it without more knowledge of the past), that decision is tempered by his deepest personal regrets.

Hermogenes enters the action to make another in a string of revelations that changes the relationships of power and desire. Leonidas is again relegated to peasant status and still cannot be admitted into Palmyra's company as an equal. Leonidas has already proven his worth by his heroic defiance of opposition, but his final speech in Act III betrays his frustration over losing his opportunity to achieve a status commensurate with his virtue because of "niggard fortune" (III,ii: 272): "'Tis true, I am alone;/ So was the Godhead ere he made the world,/ And better served Himself, then served by Nature" ( III,ii: 272). In this early stage of the hero's education, his opinion of his own value seems ridiculously exalted, although an audience could anticipate another reversal typical of tragicomedy that would restore him. He resigns his will to his new fate, but his personal dissatisfaction with a providentially enforced resignation is palpable.

The theme of resignation ties the fate of the ex-Prince to that of Amalthea. She has swallowed her pride before in a public humiliation when Leonidas refused to marry her at the behest of Polydamas. When he is commanded from the court, she risks her pride again by coming to him to prove she loves him. Act IV.i is played for its affective stress on the futility of desire when it has no practical object. Leonidas pities himself for his losses and misconstrues Amalthea's attentions as a kind of perverse gloating over someone lower in rank:

Leon. \_\_\_\_\_ Is this your pity?  
You aggravate my griefs, and print 'em deeper

In new and heavier stamps.

Amal. 'Tis as Physicians show the desperate ill  
To endear their art by mitigating pains  
They cannot wholly cure: when you despair  
Of all you wish, some part of it, because  
Unhoped for may be grateful; and some other \_\_\_\_\_  
(IV,i: 278-9)

She cannot bring herself to answer Leonidas that she is the "other" that could make up for his loss. Ironically, Amalthea herself will soon be in need of a physician to cure her own sickness. Leonidas enlists her help to visit Palmyra, and she agrees in an act of self-abnegation. Leonidas, for his part delivers a speech on the dangers of an imagination: "... I have been wandering in a maze of fate/ Led by false fires of a fantastic glory,/ And the vain lustre of imagined Crowns . . . ." (IV,i: 280). The imagery would make a contemporary audience think of tyrants who confused their duty with ambition. Since Leonidas can analyze his own ambitious designs, he can regain self-control over his passion to force his claim to the throne. His lover's passion has not subsided, but Providence will ultimately reward his patience after he has willingly resigned himself to its processes. Thus, his aristocratic/royalist status will be preserved, but, to insert a point from McKeon that I brought up in my introduction, "As with the providential argument . . . we are often obliged to understand the very force with which traditional authority is asserted as one telling sign of its weakness."<sup>19</sup>

Dryden's adherence to an aristocratic ideology where the possession of honor is signified by great beauty is made explicit in the masquerade scene (IV. ii). Although Leonidas has suffered humiliations, an

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<sup>19</sup> McKeon, Origins, p. 133.

observation of him by Polydamas anticipates the reversal of his station: "Argaleon counselled well to banish him,/ He has, I know not what,/ Of greatness in his looks, and of high fate,/ That almost awes me" (IV,ii: 284). Leonidas' looks are recognized by the aristocratic world as external signs of his inner possession of virtue. He comments himself on a corresponding virtue in Palmyra, who is disguised in the scene:

Leon. I know [Palmyra] by a thousand other signs,  
 She cannot hide so much divinity.  
 Disguised, and silent, yet some graceful motion  
 Breaks from her, and shines round her like a Glory.  
 (IV,ii: 284)

Argaleon has schemed to keep Leonidas out of the way, but he is defeated through the providential agency of his sister and by the unswerving devotion of Leonidas and Palmyra to each other. Yet it is difficult to dislike Argaleon because he is suffering from thwarted desire as much as anyone. Polydamas speaks for all the individual wills wanting liberty from the effects of desire: "So blind we are, our wishes are so vain,/That what we most desire, proves most our pain" (IV,ii: 287). The hierarchal social order will be eventually upheld, but the suffering exacted by a mysterious Providence from the honorable and dishonorable alike moderates an audience's anticipatory pleasure in that event.

The ending of the romantic plot manifests its conditional solution of the succession problem by reinstating Leonidas without punishing the long-ruling Polydamas. Palmyra is faced with the decision of saving her father, the usurper, or aligning herself against him to join her lover, the revealed true King. Against Leonidas' angry insistence that she prove her love to him by sacrificing under adverse circumstances as he has done all along,

she asserts her right (even against her King) to retain her autonomy in making personal choices. Her delay in assenting to Leonidas' demands nearly costs the true King his restoration. She tries to enact a compromise to stall choosing between helping Leonidas to his crown and the punishment that will ensue for her father:

Leon. Each act of mine my love to you has shown;  
But you, who tax my want of it, have none.  
You bid me part with you, and let [Polydamas] live;  
But they should nothing ask, who nothing give.

Palm. I give what virtue and what duty can,  
In vowing never to wed another man.

(IV,iv: 295)

She attributes her resistance to Leonidas' pleading to her duty to her father and a cruel fate. Leonidas has to use his authority to keep her detained until his move to restore his rule. He has the legitimate right to do so for the good of the kingdom, although it is painful for him personally. The royalist rationalization for exercising power is that constraints on a free will absolve an individual of making the wrong choice and threatening the proper order.

With the help of the royalist courtiers from the comic plot, Leonidas regains his crown and forgives Polydamas. Palmyra no longer has to choose between love and duty, but the manner in which fate saves her from having to make such a decision shows that the solution to the romance plot does not dissolve all its tensions. Amalthea is sent off to a life of renunciation, a duty she takes on willingly. Her example offers the clearest dialectical contrast to the egotistical women in the comic plot. Argaleon ends pathetically as well befits his traitorous role. However, his loss of

Palmyra in a reversal of fate is not unlike Leonidas' loss of her earlier in the play. His harsh fate is thus justified by the audience's knowledge that the couple's future and the restoration of the kingdom comes at the expense of unhappiness for some ordinary subjects. Leonidas is vindicated after his education as a hero is made complete by his magnanimous act in absolving Polydamas. This rethronement, after his earlier temporary loss of royal status, along with the restoration of Palmyra to him, engages the comic plot dialectically on the theme of value and trust between a man and woman. Yet the moral authority of the patriarchal social order is left ambiguous since the decision of Leonidas to let Polydamas go unpunished allows Palmyra to decide in favor of their marriage. Leonidas' generosity apparently is conditional upon his getting the object of his personal desire, although any conservative authority would argue that he has a right to Palmyra's hand as long as he fulfills the duties of a ruler. The outcome effected by a "nobility of blood" reveals, as McKeon states, that it depends upon "[the plot's] optimistic but delicately provisional comprehension of parts that have a powerful tendency also to pull in opposite directions and to deny their consistency."<sup>20</sup>

The comic-plot part of the play's dialectic ends in an affirmation of the conservative social order after first investigating how far these characters can go before transgressing marriage vows. This experiment produces a tension over potential disruption of the social order analogous to that of the romantic plot. The materialist attitudes of the two couples--they take libertine pride in their surrender to appetites--challenge the

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<sup>20</sup> McKeon, "Marxism," 162.

divinely ordained order in the romance plot. However, the characters in the plot behave genially so that the action (unlike the insinuations conveyed in the racy dialogue) never becomes farcical or dangerously libertine, which could certainly destroy the effect of its elevation by the romantic plot. The chasing games are sexier and more unsettling in Marriage than the ones played by the couple in Secret Love, who loved each other from the beginning despite their fashionable libertine antics. All the characters in the comic plot of the later play are determined to maintain appearances in proportion to their desire to outmaneuver the others. This self-conscious role-playing contrasts with the constantly shifting identities in the romantic plot, gently mocking its heroic entanglements without satirizing it. A Hobbist contract takes effect in the comic plot, where each protects his or her interest, and finally stabilizes their attempts to undermine the traditional marriage. But the naturalistic tendencies revealed in the characters throughout the plot renders the presumed finality of the ending suspect, because if they must be restrained by their Hobbist fear that their rights to security will be invaded by others, then their allegiance to a royalist-patriarchal order also comes from a sense of self-preservation rather than duty.<sup>21</sup>

The famous song that begins the play negates a "foolish Marriage vow" when "passion is decayed" (I,i: 228). It is entirely appropriate that Doralice sings the song, since the audience soon finds out she and Rhodophil suffer from nearly fatal doses of ennui after only two years of

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<sup>21</sup> See King, p. 82: "The [comic] plot is based upon an extended comparison between fashionable Restoration society and Thomas Hobbes's theory that man in his natural state is permanently at war to conquer the property of others."

marriage. What is curious about the performance is Dorlice's comment that it is a song "the Princess Amalthea bade me learn" (I,i: 228). Since that character's motivation was consistent in her own world/plot, then why would the self-effacing heroine be interested in a fashionable song about the unfashionableness of marriage? We can only infer that all the characters in the play need a mask or role from behind which they can protect their honest feelings. (This theme is eventually to be made explicit in the fourth act when there is an event in each plot where the characters appear to each other masked.) The characters introduced in Act I are so accomplished in playing social roles and producing formally elegant responses that their true feelings are quite difficult to discern. Thus, the danger of placing a trust in words can undo any character not adept enough to play along. All the comic plot characters have to maintain a glib pose to protect themselves: as Doralice implies to Palamede, "But are you sure [his witty flirtations] are not words of course? For I would not give my poor heart an occasion of complaint against me, that I engaged it too rashly, and then could not bring it off" (I,i: 230).

The characters are willing to risk being made toys for each other because each secretly hopes (against his and her better judgment) that, as Palamede says, "... while sweet love is in the case, fortune do thy worst and avaunt mortality" (I,i: 231). The characters bear out Hobbes' statement that man is a series of appetites as they search endlessly for an opportunity to exploit each other's valuable properties. Dryden restrains the grosser appetites in his characters because indulgence without constraint results in banality rather than fulfillment. Still, the implications of

choosing pleasure over marital fidelity are serious threats to the stability of the social order. For example, Doralice flirts with an assignation, although never quite entering into it: "Remember [Palamede] I invade no propriety: My servant you are only till you are married" (I,i: 230). But as her passion heats up later in the play, she becomes more inclined to give in to Palamede's amorous overtures. Melantha's designs are more innocent. Her social role-playing is less dangerous because it is comically transparent, thus mocking the self-justification necessary for the others to disguise their predatory pursuits. The threat of her sexuality is comically defused because she is too busy social-climbing at court to complete an assignation:

Pala. Well, then, how far have you proceeded in your love?

Rho. 'Tis yet in the bud, and what fruit it may bear I cannot tell; for this insufferable humour of haunting the court is so predominant that she has hitherto broken all her assignations with me, for fear of missing her visits there.

(I,i: 234)

Rhodophil complains of Melantha's absence as if he had rights to her. But his frustration is comic because of his assuredness that he is an attractive object of desire for a woman. The possession of a mistress in name is more important for the fashionable male characters than actually enjoying her favors. Whether the assignations are completed or not, the reputation of conquest enhances their value as objects of desire for others.

The energy-consuming consequences of following desire anywhere it leads are expressed in the endless permutations of chance meetings between the couples. The comedy comes about because the constant shifting is so rapid it makes the feelings of the characters as superficial as Melantha's

about her life at court, epitomized in her hilarious appropriation of French vocabulary. In II.i, the game is nearly over before it begins, when Palamede names his freshly acquired mistress--Rhodophil's wife, Doralice. Rhodophil's jealousy is instantly provoked, and Doralice must lie outright to save them both. The fortuitous entrance of Melantha lets Palamede off the hook temporarily, but now each of the group knows the ambition of the others to transgress marriage vows at the first opportunity. Palamede's comic reaction is representative of the group at large in his pragmatic acceptance of the way of the world at the libertine court:

Pala. (Aside.) O Jupiter! What a blockhead was I not to find it out! My wife that must be is his mistress. I did a little suspect it before; well, I must marry her, because she's handsome, and because I hate to be disinherited for a younger brother, which I am sure I shall be if I disobey; and yet I must keep in with Rhodophil because I love his wife.

(II,i: 247)

Marriages were arranged in the aristocracy in order to compound estates and transmit property in patrilineal succession. Individual tastes were admitted for personal compatibility, as I noted in the Introduction in connection with McKeon's thesis, but the estate had to be secured. What is significant beyond the apprehensive note in Palamede's speech is that he thinks enough of Rhodophil's talents with women to fear his success with Melantha. Their friendship is kept up only because it helps them to what they want, not from a kind of Platonic meeting of minds. The irony abounds with each conquest because the couples expend much energy planning assignations; but they prevent each other from completing them accidentally, not from any moral feeling.

Rhodophil's echo of Palamede's sentiment makes his pleasure in enjoying another's wife sound trifling: "'Tis a hard case when a man must go by his rival to his mistress; but 'tis at worst but using him like a pair of heavy boots in a dirty journey; after I have fouled him all day, I'll throw him off at night" (II,i: 251). Both of the men have damned each other--each the mirror reflection of the other--in the strongest terms. Their competition would be merely brutal if it were not for Doralice's mastery at containing the aggressiveness of both men. But none of the group ever publicly admits frustration or jealousy because that would be an admission that the others had won.

A survey of the domestic scene between Doralice and Rhodophil at home shows in realistic detail the punishment of living under a "decayed passion." The couple exchange hilarious mock-devotions for the benefit of Doralice's attendant. The serving-woman's comment on the scene proves how easy it is to be taken in by such practiced actors as the married couple: "Why, this is love as it should be, betwixt man and wife: such another couple would bring marriage into fashion again" (III,i: 258). Behind the scenes, what is not said is as important as what is said. Neither of the two alludes to their earlier escapades when they caught each other out with someone else. But their unhappiness does come out civilly in the scene where they complain of mistreatment and boredom:

Rho. Prithee, Doralice, why do we quarrel thus a-days? ha? This is but a kind of heathenish life, and does not answer the ends of marriage. If I have erred, propound what reasonable atonement may be made, before we sleep, and I shall not be refractory: but withall consider, I have been married these years, and be not too tyrannical.

Dor. What should you talk of peace abed, when you can give  
no security for performance of articles?

(III,i: 260)

Rhodophil may have been scared by Palamede's intrusion into their midst. He proposes a Hobbist contract to absolve himself of guilt and perhaps to persuade Doralice to a reconciliation. Her response reveals her frustration at the lack of sexual attention from her husband, a subject upon which she later elaborates, complaining about husbands in general that "because they cannot feed on one dish, therefore [wives] must be starved" (III,i: 260). The natural law affecting desire has been confronted bravely in their exchange. The possession of someone once desired often ends his or her attractiveness. They cannot arrive at a remedy, but at least the scene affirms that neither can one dominate the other. This state of ambivalent tension means that one will not be left pathetically at the expense of the other. The tragicomic form reassures the audience that an attractive character will not be treated with utter derision.

The case of Melantha is singular among the characters. Her impertinent appearances at court and her close attention to the rapid changes in social fashion seem to place her dangerously close to the "mere town ladies" (III,i: 261), whose pretensions she and Doralice completely annihilated earlier. The difference between her and lesser women lies partly in Melantha's status--she is a rich aristocrat seeking her freedom from her father--and the most important distinction in her case is that she seeks approval only from those who will never grant it. Melantha complains so often of being made ridiculous by royalty that no one else would ever accuse her of it. She deliberately exposes her role-playing as

an indulgence in imaginative fancy for its own sake. The finest example occurs in III.i when she elevates the routine billet-doux from Rhodophil into a "French romance": "What do you mean to throw me down thus? Ah me! ah, ah, ah" (III,i: 266). Her sexual titillation is produced by her overactive imagination rather than the contents of the letter. If Rhodophil perhaps read more female romances, or if women could name their pleasure like men, everyone would have relief, and the men would no longer complain of being "jaded," nor the women of being "starved." But the impossibility of such a state of affairs makes the pursuit of constant pleasure wearisome in the end. Besides, the sexual freedom of women threatens to unravel the very foundation of the social order, because if they are not subject to the patrilineal demands, then the moral authority of a hierarchal order dissolves. As Palamede acknowledges, "If [women's] necessities and ours were known,/ They have more need of two, then we of one" (IV,i: 277).

The two intricately contrived meetings between the four--once in a grotto (III.ii) and the other at the masquerade when the women are disguised as boys (IV.iii)--leave the maneuvers at a stand off, the women frustrating the men into near madness. The women, disguised in their boy's "habits," have given up interest in fooling their respective spouses and compete like men by challenging each other to a sword fight:

Mel. I'll sacrifice my life for French poetry.

Dor. I'll die upon the spot for our country wit.  
(IV,iii: 291)

The comic scene reflects (and diffuses) the painful episode in the romantic plot where Amalthea has had to point out Palmyra and in doing so loses

Leonidas. The scene also affords Dryden a few hits at the court's obsession with French fashion. The women's competition brings concreteness to the similar private and public feelings of the men. Rhodophil wants to turn his personal frustration to a fight that will reinstate the true king in the romantic plot, and Palamede turns his frustration into anger at the hypocrisy of the Roundhead side in the late civil wars:

Pala. I'm sure we fight in a good quarrel:  
 Rogues may pretend religion and the laws;  
 But a kind mistress is the Good Old Cause.  
 (IV,iii: 292)

The four end their "thrusting and parrying" because the impending marriage of Palamede and Melantha punctures their temporary illusion of freedom from all external constraints. They must marry if they are to enjoy the money that will buy their status. Palamede wins over Melantha with a barrage of French phrases that are "airy" and have no "sense." He also finds himself attracted to her naturally after having to work for her favor: "'Tis so; I have known many, who never cared for hare or partridge, but those they caught themselves would eat heartily: the pains and the story a man tells of the taking of them make the meat go down more pleasantly" (V,i: 303). This analogy addresses the imagination's effects on desire. As the four have realized after much chasing and frustration, imagining helping oneself to forbidden play with another's spouse stimulates pleasure until the reality of fighting and jealousy cools everything off. Doralice comes to the same conclusion after thinking it over: "'Tis better as 'tis; we have drawn off already as much of our love as would run clear; after possessing, the rest is but jealousies, and disquiets, and quarrelling, and piecing" (V,i: 305).

Ironically, Rhodophil catches Doralice and Palamede in the very moment when they have decided to break off their sexual pursuit of each other. After first picking up swords to satisfy honor, an act made ridiculous by the parallel incident between the women in IV.iii, each man discovers his interest in his female counterpart has revived because of his respect for the other's taste or "wit." Doralice is thrilled that her husband desires her again: "Then I have found my account in raising your jealousy: O! 'tis the most delicate sharp sauce to a cloyed stomach; it will give you a new edge, Rhodophil"(V,i: 308). They make a Hobbist contract in the language of a war treaty to agree not to "invade each other's propriety." If one of the men breaks the treaty both women will get revenge "by the help of the other party."

The ambivalence in the romantic plot solution is reflected in the ending of the comic plot action: the characters agree not to transgress marriage vows, but not because they have gained any moral knowledge. The theme of renunciation in the romantic plot, where characters voluntarily submit to duty (largely because doing so brings attractive rewards), is contrasted by the necessity of a Hobbist contract in the comic plot. Setting limitations on desires in the naturalistic action prevents individuals from upsetting an harmonious social order. The comic plot characters' affrontery has challenged its stability, but the providential order of the romantic plot has needed them as well to complete the restoration of Leonidas.

Each of the men in the comic plot finds his appetite for his spouse or intended active again because they both see that men like themselves want

to seduce them. Both couples' jealousy of each other will subside but their suspicion will remain. The social order is maintained because each person keeps others from trampling an individual's rights to peace and security. So the rewards in adhering to a traditional order offset the costly satisfaction of an individual challenge to it. It is simply more convenient for Palamede and Melantha to please their fathers than to go to the trouble of opposing them. The agreement between Rhodophil, Palamede, and Doralice demonstrates that the social order is likewise maintained by allowing for role-playing and unconventional experimentation with individual appetites as long as there is a submission to authority at the end. External constraints on unrestrained appetites--both private and public--are attractive by comparison with the earlier scenes of rampant jealousy and frustrated pleasure. Although it is evident that the idealism of the romantic plot can be taken for exactly that, and while the final alignment of the comic-plot characters to the traditional order is made credible, the individual freedoms of the latter appear to have cost them far less than the renunciation and enforced submission among those of the romantic plot.

## Epilogue

The four plays in my study--far from proving insubstantial of thematic content and undifferentiated in formal properties--have shown rather a complexity and variety that gives the lie to the old assumption that tragicomedies, at least early Restoration comedies, were simplistic sexual intrigues that served only to divert the jaded aristocracy. The dialectical relationships I have discussed between the romantic-heroic and comic plots (always adapted to fit each play or playwright's audience) indicate that the audience considered the theater, and these plays in particular, arenas where the royalist aristocracy contested challenges to their status and previous debilitated rhetoric of personal virtue. Comical Revenge and Marriage à-la-Mode, as I have argued, achieve a kind of unity where the hierarchal social order is affirmed with reinvigorated characters effecting new strategies. On the other hand, the complete disjunctiveness of the comic plot in All Mistaken with its romantic plot, which is inspired by an old-fashioned divine-right theory, is problematic but succeeds in allowing the female characters to achieve an important autonomy within the traditional order. Also, the apparent failure in the romantic-heroic plot of Secret Love brings an interesting conditional closure to the play. I especially hope that a reader takes from this study a sense of the fresh approaches attempted in romantic plots of these early Restoration tragicomedies, which were carefully adapted by the dramatists to the purposes of an audience who were at least as concerned with how the plays reflected changes in

status and authority as they certainly were with female actresses and pleasantly witty entertainment.

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University Press, 1987.

## VITA

Christopher A. Coulter was born in Ardmore, Oklahoma on September 10, 1959. He attended schools in Arkansas, Texas, New Jersey, and Tennessee and graduated from Franklin High School in Franklin, Tennessee in 1977. He attended the University of Tennessee at Knoxville for two years, then transferred to Peabody College at Vanderbilt University. He studied under the Vanderbilt English department, majoring in English literature and minoring in British history. He graduated with the degree Bachelor of Science in English in May 1981. He entered the graduate program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 1982, teaching as a graduate assistant. He took the degree of Master of Arts in English in Fall 1984 and continued in the PhD program in English as a graduate associate until 1991. He has since taught at Maryville College as Instructor, and also worked as an editor for Martin Marietta Energy Systems-DOE in Oak Ridge and the College of Social Work Research and Publications Office at the University of Tennessee. He received the degree in Fall of 1992.