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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Julia A. Rich entitled "Thomas Southerne, Restoration Playwright." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

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THOMAS SOUTHERNE, RESTORATION PLAYWRIGHT

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Julia A. Rich

December 1979

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Southerne, for nearly two centuries largely ignored by critics and scholars, was in the last decade of the seventeenth century one of the foremost playwrights of the London stage. He was sponsored in the middle '80's by Dryden and subsequently helped both Congreve and Cibber to establish themselves as dramatists. In his own time he was tremendously successful with a variety of dramatic modes—comedy, tragedy, and tragicomedy—and appears to have been the first English playwright able to support himself exclusively by writing plays.

Except for a study by John Wendell Dodds which appeared in 1933, Southerne has received little attention in this century, although the last few years have produced a handful of articles concerned with certain of his works. The purpose of this present research has been to reassess Southerne's corpus, particularly the eight plays written before 1700, in an effort to determine both the nature of his talents and whether his enormous contemporary popularity was justified. The conclusions are that he was indeed an excellent and at times gifted dramatist and that it is his current neglect, which probably results in large part from the lack of a modern edition, which is unjustified.

His great strengths lay in characterization and motivation, the ability to see relationships between seemingly disparate types, to exploit these ties in dramatically effective ways, and to evoke natural responses to situations. He became particularly adept at handling the split-plot tragicomedy, scoring his two greatest successes with The

Fatal Marriage, or The Innocent Adultery (1694) and Oroonoko (1695), both of which linked serious stories drawn from works by Mrs. Behn with sex-comedy subplots.

In his own time Southerne was known as a favorite of the ladies, and his abilities are particularly evident in the long line of remarkable female characters he created. These range from the libertine Lucia, disguised as Sir Antony Love, to the betrayed wives Mrs. Friendall and Celona, to the splendidly corrupt society courtesan Lady Trickitt. These women are for the most part strong and assertive. They are caught, as Southerne makes clear in each instance, in cultural traps not of their own making and are yet able by their own efforts to impose some sort of control over themselves and their destinies. Isabella, the protagonist of The Fatal Marriage, is another type. She has long been considered an early sentimental heroine, pathetic in her destruction by forces beyond her control. Yet careful reading of the whole play, the comic as well as the serious plot, reveals that she is in fact a truly tragic figure who brings on herself most of the disasters which befall her. She is a brilliant creation by an artist whose respect for and understanding of the situation of women allowed him to present female characters not just as victims but as humans responsible for their own failures as well as successes.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For two centuries Thomas Southerne has been relegated to quiet obscurity; the only complete edition of his ten plays appeared in 1774, nearly twenty years after his death at eighty-five in 1746. But in his time he was a major figure in the world of the London stage: the protégé of Dryden and the sponsor of the early dramatic efforts of both Congreve and Cibber, in his old age the valued friend of Pope and Swift. He was most active in the 1690's, when in a period of five years he produced as many plays, three comedies and two tragicomedies. These last, The Fatal Marriage, or The Innocent Adultery (1694) and Oroonoko (1695), were considered by his contemporaries to be his masterpieces; both were being performed, shorn of what the eighteenth century considered to be inappropriate comic subplots, well past 1800.

Of Southerne's life curiously little is known.¹ He was born in Ireland, probably in 1660, the son of a well-to-do Dublin brewer. He attended Trinity College, Dublin, leaving no record of a degree having been taken. In 1680 he came to London to the Inns of Court, but by 1682, with the production of his first play, The Loyal Brother, he had

¹The biographical information in the following two paragraphs is drawn from John Wendell Dodds, Thomas Southerne, Dramatist, Yale Studies in English, Vol. 81 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1933; rpt. Archon Books, 1970), 1-17. Dodds' research in this area is very thorough, involving civil, military, and church records; contemporary dramatic sources; reminiscences of acquaintances, etc.

deserted the law for the theater. In this premier work Southerne had been very flattering to the Duke of York, who upon becoming James II was to repay the young dramatist. In 1685 Southerne went into the military with the King's forces to repulse the invasion by Monmouth. He later came to the notice of James' natural son, who granted him a commission. Subsequently he apparently rose to the rank of captain; but the events of 1688 destroyed his prospects as a royal favorite. By 1690 he had returned to the stage, where for the next decade he enjoyed great success.

Of his personal life not even John Wendell Dodds, his chief biographer, can find much information. He did marry, since a daughter is named in his will, but when or to whom is not known. His last years were spent visiting friends of social and literary prominence throughout the British Isles; he was, as nearly as can be determined, loved and respected by all. He is buried in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster.

Today most Restoration students know only his name, which, with scattered references to his works, frequently appears in surveys of the period accompanied usually by little more than his dates of birth and death. Just one book-length study has been published, Dodds' Thomas Southerne, Dramatist (1933). Two articles dealing with individual plays have appeared, one on The Wives Excuse and one on Oroonoko,² and several others concerned with extra-literary matters in certain of

²Anthony Kaufman, "'This Hard Condition of a Woman's Fate': Thomas Southerne's The Wives Excuse," MLQ, 34 (1973), 36-47; Michael M Cohen, "'Mirth and Grief Together': Plot Unity in Southern's Oroonoko," XUS, 11 (1972), 13-17.

Southerne's plays can be found.³ Although some recent studies of the entire period examine his works in rather more detail than has been customary, none devotes more than a page or two to an individual play; the most thorough of these is Robert Hume's The Development of the English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century, an invaluable aid to the Restoration researcher. Finally, various of Southerne's works have been considered by scholars examining specific aspects of Restoration and eighteenth-century drama—the comedy of manners, attitudes toward marriage, sentimentality, and theories of tragedy.⁴

A reasonable conclusion that might be drawn from the paucity of critical materials on Southerne is that except in terms of literary

³ A sampling of these include Allardyce Nicoll, "Political Plays of the Restoration," MLR, 16 (1921), 224-42; Clifford Leech, "The Political 'Disloyalty' of Thomas Southerne," MLR, 28 (1933), 421-430. Robert Jordan, "Mrs. Behn and Sir Anthony Love," RECTR, 12, no. 1 (1973), 58-89; and Harold Love, "The Printing of The Wives Excuse (1692)," Library, 25 (1970), 344-349.

⁴ Ernest Bernbaum, The Drama of Sensibility, Harvard Studies in English, Vol. III (1915; rpt. 1958); Thomas H. Fujimara, The Restoration Comedy of Wit (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1951); Robert Hume, "The Myth of the Rake in 'Restoration' Comedy," Studies in the Literary Imagination, 10 (1977), 25-55; Margaret Lamb McDonald, The Independent Woman in the Restoration Comedy of Manners (Austria: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universitäre Salzburg, 1976); Kenneth Muir, The Comedy of Manners (London: Hutchinson Univ. Library, 1970); Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Restoration Drama 1660-1700 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1923); John Harrington Smith, The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1948); James Sutherland, English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century, Oxford History of English Literature, Vol. 6 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969); and Arthur Sherbo, English Sentimental Drama (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1957). Robert Hume's survey of the period, The Development of the English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), is of enormous assistance in setting Southerne's individual plays into the periods within the last two decades of the century; omitted from his consideration, presumably because they appeared after 1700, are The Fate of Capua, The Spartan Dame, and Money the Mistress.

history he simply is not worth studying. Hume, however, suggests another explanation—inaccessibility:

Southerne remains the most neglected of the major writers of this period. He alone has never had a modern edition, a desideratum soon to be supplied [by Harold Love and Robert Jordan]. With his plays readily available, he should certainly take his place with Wycherley, Etherege, and Congreve.⁵

Except for The Wives Excuse and Oroonoko, for both of which modern editions exist, Southerne's plays are available only in rare-books collections and on microcard. For the present study, I have found it necessary to employ the 1774 edition of the works as well as the 1713 edition which omits The Spartan Dame and Money the Mistress, two plays produced after that date. Thus in comparison to the works of Southerne's important contemporaries, his plays are indeed inaccessible.

An intensive perusal of Southerne's corpus suggests that it is certainly not lack of quality which has led to his neglect. While not a brilliant stylist he had an excellent grasp of human psychology and of dramatic effect. At least six of his ten plays—The Spartan Dame, Sir Antony Love, The Wives Excuse, The Maid's Last Prayer, The Fatal Marriage, and Oroonoko—have substantial claims to literary and dramatic merit. In fact, John Harrington Smith called The Wives Excuse "one of the five most considerable comedies written between 1660 and 1700," putting it in such company as The Man of Mode, The Country Wife, The Plain-Dealer, and The Way of the World.⁶

Another factor has probably been at work in Southerne's continued obscurity despite his dramatic gifts: Dodds' 1933 study. While Dodds

⁵Hume, Development of the English Drama, p. 385; and letter to Julia A. Rich, January, 1977.

⁶Smith, p. 144.

was an excellent researcher, pursuing tenaciously and thoroughly the scanty facts of Southerne's biography, sources, subsequent critical appraisal, and publishing history, his book is inadequate as an analysis and criticism of the plays. He writes from the perspective of his time, which today seems overly-moralistic and therefore limited in scope; as a result, when considering Southerne's comic tone he primarily deprecates its grossness, and his assessments of Southerne's more serious elements, while much more objective than his opinions of the humorous, consist a little too much of judgments of how far Southerne failed to be Shakespeare. He does, however, seem to be the only twentieth century Restoration scholar until the last few years to have realized Southerne's true gifts as a dramatist. Unfortunately, later critics seem to have largely accepted Dodds' observations without reading the plays, particularly the comedies, outside the context of his moralizing; the result has been that very few have shared Dodds' perception that Southerne is worth studying.

This leads to the major problem of a new study of Southerne. Ideally, a full-scale investigation would involve not only his plays themselves but their cultural and dramatic milieux—influences, dramatic theories, stage history—and would necessitate having at hand a thorough analysis of the plays individually, considered both as separate works and as a record of Southerne's development as an artist. Such a study, considering themes, techniques, and structure, has not heretofore been made. As a result, I am here providing the required close reading, including only enough of what might be called "literary history" to

furnish the background for what is essentially an exercise in explication de texte. Much of my reading of secondary materials, therefore, is not directly reflected in my analysis; nor have I found it necessary to cite extensively the works of Southerne's contemporaries. Shakespeare's Othello, since its echoes are heard so frequently in Southerne's plays, is probably the "outside" work most often referred to; in addition, Southerne seems to have been influenced by Dryden's Aureng-Zebe and Otway's The Orphan, to which allusions are also made fairly often in this study.

My original intention was to group the plays generically into "tragedy" (or wholly serious works), comedy, and tragicomedy; but it quickly became apparent that Southerne's corpus divides itself rather into periods of development. A generic approach would involve far too much skipping about in time, except in the case of the three comedies of the early '90's, to allow a coherent assessment. Chapter II, therefore, which is entitled "Beginnings: Before the Revolution," deals with what appears to have been the three plays written earliest. The first of these, The Loyal Brother, or The Persian Prince (1682), is a serious work in post-heroic style with both pastoral and political overtones. Next is the first of Southerne's experiments with split-plot tragicomedy, The Disappointment, or The Mother in Fashion (1684). Closer to comedy than tragedy, and demonstrating no particular aptness at blending the two tones, it nevertheless marks Southerne's initial attempt at the form which in the late nineties produced his greatest successes.

Both these plays, while creditable early works, have serious weaknesses, the former in its lack of vitality, the latter in its

failure at coherent characterization and development. No such flaws mark the last work treated in Chapter II, The Spartan Dame, which although not produced until 1719 seems to have been largely written in 1687 and for this reason, among others, belongs in Chapter II. It is an excellent work, wholly serious in tone, but avoiding the problems of artificiality and lifelessness which are found in The Loyal Brother. Its heroine, Celona, is the first of Southerne's attractive women characters, and its structure and psychological credibility show great growth in his skills and insight.

These three early works exhibit their young creator's experiments with tone, form, and characterization, efforts which will come to fruition in subsequent plays. The themes around which he will do his best writing are all evident: the active/passive, urban/pastoral axes; the conflicts between personal gratification and cultural or religious duty; and the ways in which character shapes fate. More importantly, in these plays we see emerging Southerne's concern with the condition of women in society, a concern which he treats with great seriousness and integrity throughout his career.

A hiatus in Southerne's activity follows the production of The Disappointment in 1684, apparently attributable to the political and social upheaval in England after the death of Charles and the subsequent exile of James. The Spartan Dame was so long delayed in production because its central action—the usurpation of a throne by the husband of a king's daughter—was deemed too politically dangerous. Not until 1690 does another of his plays appear in London, a "breeches"

comedy entitled The Rambling Lady, or Sir Antony Love which enjoyed enormous success. Two other comedies follow in quick succession, The Wives Excuse, or Cuckolds Make Themselves (1691), and The Maid's Last Prayer, or Any Rather Than Fail (1693). These three works are the subject of Chapter III, "Comedy: The Early '90's."

Sir Antony Love was a smashing hit; not the least of its charms was Mrs. Mountford in the title role, a breeches-part written especially for her. It is as much farce as pure comedy, its "wit" consisting largely of stage repartée and its "humor" frequently slapstick. Yet if not great art it is great fun, and Southerne's treatment of the title character demonstrates his growing sensitivity to the plight of women in his culture and to the idiosyncratic rather than conventional behavior a strong character will demonstrate. The third comedy, The Maid's Last Prayer, was moderately successful and, for its day, the most nearly typical of the three; but while in it Southerne imitates the brittle surfaces of Etherege and, perhaps, the savage disillusion of Wycherley, neither of these styles is really his own; although much of the play reproduces the conventions of "hard" comedy, both high and low, there is in it a tenderness toward and an understanding of women foreign to Southerne's two great predecessors.

It is the middle play, The Wives Excuse, a failure at its début apparently because Southerne's audience expected another rollicking Sir Antony, that is the most powerful. The work demonstrates Southerne's eye for staging: many of the scenes are carefully choreographed encounters of various characters gathered together at a concert, at a

dinner, in a park, at a ball; and the shiftings of groups and individuals into various patterns allow us to see each character in a number of relationships social and personal. Its heroine is a fascinating figure, a virtuous wife who, despite the petty unworthiness of her husband and the very real attractiveness of her suitor, refuses to be unfaithful. Various critics have seen in this play the early stirrings of "sentimental" comedy, but it is a resemblance of situation rather than of treatment; Southerne romanticizes neither the plight of his mistreated wife nor her responses to it.

The comedies as a group demonstrate Southerne's very special quality of insight which first appeared fully developed in The Spartan Dame: his perception of the strong woman character. He was assisted by the presence in the Drury Lane Company of several actresses capable of carrying off strong female parts, most notably Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Bracegirdle, and Mrs. Mountford (subsequently Mrs. Verbruggen). But the roles he wrote for them are superb: in the three comedies the major women characters are determined to exert some control over their own destinies. Although we may not admire all of them, we must respect their independence, their refusals to become puppets in a male-dominated society. The reader need only listen to their talk and observe their actions to realize that Southerne possessed a keen sensitivity to women and to their role in society that is not, as for example in Shadwell's A True Widow, merely an excuse for a play but its primary motive force.

In his next period Southerne moves on to his two greatest contemporary triumphs: The Fatal Marriage, or The Innocent Adultery (1694)

and Oroonoko (1695). These works are treated in Chapter IV, "The Triumph of Tragicomedy: The Middle '90's." In them Southerne returns to the form he first assayed at the start of his career in The Disappointment: the split-plot tragicomedy. Although the eighteenth century abhorred his mingling of pathetic tragedy with sex comedy, a distaste which subsequent generations of critics have largely shared, a close examination of each work reveals a coherence which results from a careful thematic integration of the comic subplot with the serious story.

The Fatal Marriage, whose tragic plot comes from an Aphra Behn novel, concentrates on another of Southerne's great heroines, Isabella. She is, however, a reversion to one of Southerne's earliest female types: the passive good woman. Because she herself constantly calls herself cursed, destined by heaven to suffer, it is easy to read the play as simply pathetic rather than tragic. But in the comic subplot Southerne provides two of his strong women who in their situations as daughter, lover, and wife, parallel Isabella and by contrast provide authorial comment upon her fate. Julia and Victoria, both of whom are much more assertive than the heroine, nevertheless act with far greater prudence than does she. As a result, they avoid the horrors of social isolation, poverty, and guilt that eventually destroy the saintly Isabella who, innately passive, wreaks havoc not only on herself but on those around her when she takes any action whatsoever. This a highly sophisticated work whose integrity and structural coherence have been ignored for nearly three centuries.

For Oroonoko Southerne returned to Mrs. Behn for material on the life of the African prince stolen and sold as a slave in British Surinam. This work's worth has been recognized by several modern scholars, most notably in the superb introduction to their 1976 edition by Novak and Rodes. These editors demonstrate clearly the thematic relationship between the plight of the noble slave, whose value is not recognized by Western European society, and that of the heroines of the comic subplot, two unmarried sisters of little fortune who must trick their way into economic and social security. One of these, Charlott Welldon, is a reprise of Sir Antony Love, but because she is relegated to the secondary plot she lacks the development and therefore much of the charm of her predecessor. Oroonoko is a sort of male Isabella whose every decision results in disaster; in his case, however, no decision can be a good one, a fact that prevents him from having truly tragic stature. Thus Oroonoko approaches the sentimental mode far more than does Isabella, traditionally considered a sentimental heroine. Nevertheless, in Oroonoko Southerne achieves great depth of feeling for the condition of the oppressed and disadvantaged and weak of all kinds; it is ultimately a profoundly moving and profoundly thoughtful play.

Southerne wrote only two other plays, both disappointing postscripts to a distinguished career: The Fate of Capua (1700) and Money The Mistress (1725). Neither of these is of particular interest intrinsically or developmentally, and thus they are but briefly treated in Chapter V, "Decline: 1700 and Beyond."

Southerne's career obviously covers a broad span of time and his canon includes a variety of dramatic forms. So, in light of his dramatic gifts, it is not surprising that long after he had withdrawn from active participation in the life of the London stage he was consulted and then revered by generations of young playwrights. By examining in detail the precise nature of his talents and range, it should be possible in some measure to understand the respect accorded him by his contemporaries and to draw aside the veil of obscurity in which his reputation has been cloaked.

CHAPTER II

BEGINNINGS—BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

The three works of Southerne's first period of dramatic activity are diverse in style and form, as might be expected from a young playwright embarking upon his career and experimenting with various modes of expression. The first, The Loyal Brother, is clearly related to the heroic play, with its conflicts between love and honor, its ambivalent prince, warrior hero, and submissive heroine. This "tragedy" in which all ends well is rather bookish; that is, its characters are patterns rather than fully-developed personalities, and the developments are of plot rather than characterization. It is carefully, too carefully, structured on a pastoral-court axis.

The next play, a split-plot "tragicomedy" in which the "tragic" line also ends well, is an experiment to which Southerne will return with great success late in his career. In this particular work, The Disappointment, or The Mother in Fashion, he juxtaposes a romantic-pathetic main plot involving passionate jealousy with a comedy of manners subplot involving the selling of innocence. The work is more ambitious in concept than successful in execution; Southerne has real problems with an unintentionally inept villain and a boringly hysterical hero. Of special interest is the character of Juliana, the first of Southerne's admirable determined women. A relatively minor character here, the type takes center stage in several subsequent works.

The Spartan Dame, which although not produced until nearly thirty years later was mostly written during this period, has such a woman—Celona, the daughter of a king and the wife of his deposer. She is a strong and unswervingly loyal woman who has the fortitude to condemn the political action of the man she loves, suffer through his rape of her sister, and still beg for his life at play's end. The play's performance was so long delayed because of unfortunate similarities between its story-line and political events in England in the late '80's—the deposition of James and the institution of his daughter Mary and her husband William as rulers. When it was finally produced it received much admiration, deservedly so, for in it Southerne hits his dramatic stride both in intelligent characterization and in thematic development.

The Loyal Brother, or the Persian Prince (1682)

In February 1682, shortly after the debut of Otway's Venice Preserv'd, Southerne's first play—a "tragedy"—was presented by the Theater Royal. Based on an English translation of a French oriental romance,¹ The Loyal Brother seems not to have had an overwhelming reception despite its pro-Tory bias and fiercely partisan prologue and epilogue by Dryden. The political import is carried through the characters of the noble hero, Tachmas (James); a "villainous favourite," Ismael (Shaftesbury); and a character not included in Southerne's sources,² a "disaffected general"

¹Dodds, p. 31.

²Ibid., p. 32.

whom Tachmas has superseded, Arbanes (Monmouth). Interspersed through the play are several "rabble" scenes, de rigueur in works of this nature and always to be found in any Southerne play dealing with politics, in one of which Ismael/Shaftesbury is seen "work[ing] the crowd/ That their best thoughts may crown [his] villainies,/ And frame [him] honest ev'n in the act of mischief."³

Although these roman à clef elements are obvious, the main focus of the play is heroic-pathetic; Rothstein observes of the "faction" dramas in general that

Political interests . . . remain subordinate; despite censors' pens and prologues' demagoguery, political allusions in Restoration tragedy almost never do more than add spice or set norms in an otherwise conventional and apolitical plot. If one reads Southerne's Loyal Brother or Settle's Female Prelate one finds that they are standard stuff.⁴

Dodds notes that the only changes Southerne made in his French original were the creation of Arbanes and Osman, a captain loyal to Tachmas; the even greater idealization of the heroine; the substitution of a happy rather than a catastrophic ending; and the addition of the rabble scenes.⁵ Dodds, in fact, finds it "surprising . . . that Southerne should have found in an English translation of a French romance characterizations that with as little change fitted so aptly into his political design."⁶

³Thomas Southerne, The Loyal Brother, or The Persian Prince in Plays Written by Thomas Southerne, printed by T. Evans (London: 1774), I, 1-70. Subsequent citations are to this edition, hereinafter referred to as Plays.

⁴Eric Rothstein, Restoration Tragedy (Madison, Wis.: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 109.

⁵Dodds, pp. 32 ff.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 39.

That Southerne was indeed committed to the Stuart cause is indicated by his subsequent entry into military service under Stuart sponsorship; but his withdrawal politically after 1688 casts some doubts on his zeal. One may speculate, in fact, that at twenty-one he found a faction including such a looming literary figure as Dryden, with whom he would later become good friends, more appealing intellectually and professionally than philosophically and politically. It is certain that political satire in The Loyal Brother is extremely mild in comparison with the vitriolic attacks on Shaftesbury by other authors; where, for example, Otway's Antonio demonstrates his sexual inadequacy on the stage and dithers with equal senility over affairs of the state and those of the bed, Southerne's Ismael merely mentions that he is "unfit for fiercer joys" (19).

Arbanes, Southerne's Monmouth and his own creation, presents a character that will reappear in later works—the discarded soldier who feels he has served his ruler and his country only to be cast aside. This is not an original type (see Webster's Bosola in The Duchess of Malfi for a far more powerful execution), and Southerne's attack on Monmouth is softened by his making Arbanes a man of advanced age; in Act V, as Arbanes watches a tender scene between the young lovers Tachmas and Semanthe, he leers to the audience,

O! that I cou'd run back into my youth,
To ravish her before him: but 'tis past;
And my revenge must lie another way. (62)

By making his old general impotent Southerne does establish a tie between him and his coconspirator Ismael, but he simultaneously weakens a connection between Arbanes and the youthful Monmouth and thereby lessens the impact of his political allegory.

The play's Tory bias seems ultimately superficial, since one is left with a heroic-pathetic drama (as in the original French romance) glossed over with a little anti-Whiggery. Supporting such a reading is the character of the Sultan, Seliman, who would have to be identified with Charles himself and who, in his weakness, lack of control, and equivocation, would not be a particularly flattering portrait.

Shaftesbury and Monmouth were more or less fair game for the political dramatist; the King was far more dangerous quarry. If Southerne deliberately intended Seliman to be Charles, it is incomprehensible that his treatment of Shaftesbury and Monmouth should be so mild; if he did not, it suggests that even he was not fully aware of the political implications of what he was writing.

He seems to have been far more certain of his dramatic goals. Although The Loyal Brother is static and derivative, owing much to such works as Aureng-Zebe and to the ambiance of Othello that affects so much of the imagery and characterization of Restoration tragedy, it is still a creditable first effort which demonstrates on its author's part a grasp of dramatic techniques of exposition and characterization that will be developed in later plays.

The Loyal Brother deals with the rival loves of Seliman, Sultan of Persia, and his younger brother Tachmas for the chaste and lovely Semanthe. Envious of Tachmas and anxious for his destruction are Ismael and Arbanes. These two plot with Sunamire, Arbanes' sister, who believes herself to have been scorned by Tachmas. The dowager Sultana Begona and Osman, one of Tachmas' captains, complete the cast of major characters.

The play opens with the country at war and its army, led by Tachmas, facing an overwhelming force. In the first scene Seliman reveals an incipient jealousy, fanned by Ismael, of his brother's prowess and expresses his desire for Semanthe, whose "marble" purity resists the heat of his passion. The audience quickly realizes from Semanthe's reaction to Tachmas' name (a reaction noted and pointed out to Seliman by Arbanes) the reason for her indifference to the Sultan. Ismael and Arbanes plot together against Tachmas, drawing in Arbanes' fiery sister Sunamire, who hates Tachmas for not loving her. When Ismael shows her a love letter from Tachmas to Semanthe which has been entrusted to him for delivery, her fury knows no bounds and she vows the destruction of both.

Tachmas triumphs in battle and returns to court to be reunited with his king-brother. At their mother's request, the two swear oaths of undying loyalty and mutual affection. Ismael meantime has suggested to Seliman where Semanthe's preference lies; he now arranges for several lords to meet Tachmas in Semanthe's apartments, tells Seliman that his brother desires not just his beloved but his crown, and sends the king off to discover the "traitors" at their conference. All are banished; Tachmas, with true magnanimity, urges Semanthe to "Forget that wretched Tachmas ever was" and to "give thy love to royal Seliman" (33).

She refuses to do either, frustrating Seliman to the point where he orders Tachmas arrested and executed. At the gallows the prince once more attempts to give Semanthe to his brother:

Since fate ordain'd Semanthe's charms to be
The fatal prize of our contending loves;

Since I must lose her; with my latest breath,
That sacred relique of my soul, that all
The riches, empire, that my heart rejoic'd in,
I here resign to your eternal care.
O take her, sir! and be for ever blest. (41)

Begona and Semanthe burst in and manage in a contrapuntal supplication so to play on Seliman's tenderer emotions that he not only forgives his brother but holds out the possibility that he himself may surrender his claims to Semanthe. Ismael and Arbanes, their revenge deflected, concoct with Sunamire yet another plot. They forge a letter from Tachmas to Sunamire in which is urged her surrender to his love and her assistance in a plan to overthrow the Sultan. Sunamire takes it to the despondent Semanthe, still separated from her heart's desire, and convinces her of Tachmas' perfidy. The distressed heroine swoons, Seliman rushes to her assistance, and the letter comes to his hand. Once more Tachmas is imprisoned and condemned to death, but this time Arbanes and Ismael take no chances. While Ismael is out working up the rabble with a false report of noble Tachmas' death, Arbanes reunites the two lovers for a tender farewell. Sunamire enters to gloat over the two victims, revealing that she is having bowls of poison prepared for them to drink. In the meantime, however, Osman, Tachmas' captain, has managed to disguise himself as an attendant slave and to poison the villains' bowls instead; all drink, Arbanes and Sunamire expire, and Seliman rushes in with Ismael in bonds. A scene of general reconciliation occurs in which Seliman relinquishes Semanthe to his brother and Ismael is led to death commenting on the fate of traitors.

Even so lengthy a summary does not do justice to the multitudinous "visions and revisions" within the play; Moody Prior's observation in The Language of Tragedy on Restoration tragedy in general is particularly applicable to this specimen: "The action is always managed in such a way as to produce the maximum number of dilemmas for the hero."⁷ The protagonist of The Loyal Brother proves to be of the pathetic rather than heroic school, however, for he is never given the opportunity to act in these dilemmas; his only attempt to assert himself comes early in the play, in an abortive plot to elope with Semanthe. Subsequently his heroism expresses itself in self-denial and humility, as when he surrenders Semanthe not once but twice and unhesitatingly and unresistingly accepts the plans of his king-brother to have him executed.

In fact, an interesting aspect of the play and one which marks it clearly a product of the late seventeenth century ethos is its treatment of the question of individual action. Chapter 5 of Maren-Sofie Røstvig's The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal, a superb study dealing with the development of the beatus ille tradition from 1600 to 1760, is entitled "The Innocent Epicurean, or the Detached Spectator" and examines the impact of Epicureanism on Restoration values. Through consideration of translations of classical artists and study of original works by contemporary poets, Røstvig traces a movement toward a sort of elegant pastoral in which the gentleman may withdraw from the intrigue of the court and the filth of the city to rural

⁷ Moody Prior, The Language of Tragedy (Gloucester, Mass.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1947), p. 157.

retirement, where in a Cartesian contemplation he might come to terms with himself and with the universe.⁸ Rothstein points out signs of this ethos in numerous Restoration tragedies;⁹ although The Loyal Brother is overlooked in his discussion, it provides an almost textbook example of the effect of this "innocent" Epicureanism on a play's structure and moral perspective.

In the broadest terms, Southerne contrasts noble passivity to ignoble activity as functions of good and evil. Both Tachmas and Semanthe are passive, the former asserting himself only in acquiescence to the demands of loyalty to his king-brother, the latter only in her weeping and steadfast refusal to accept Seliman in place of Tachmas. The hero's attempts to surrender his love to his brother are obviously intended to be admired; similarly, his almost Christ-like response to his brother's arresting officers is a nonact presented as a noble deed:

. . . hold, my generous friends! I must not thus,
By disobedience to my king's command,
Rashly forego my viture: if he think fit
To take my life, or make it yet more wretched;
My loyalty ties up my forward sword,
And teaches silently to suffer all. (37)

Tachmas seems as enamored of the stasis of death as he is of Semanthe. Over and over he avers his willingness, at times almost eagerness, to die; before his near execution in Act III, he speaks of death as

⁸Maren-Søffie Rostvig, II (1600-1700) (Norway: Norwegian Universities Presses, 1962; 2nd ed.), p. 229-309.

⁹Rothstein, p. 115 ff.

. . . the best gift of nature
 As a safe inn, where weary travellers
 When they have journeyed through a world of cares,
 May put off life and be at rest for ever,
 If 'twere in private, void of pomp and show. (40)

Although this speech obviously recalls that of Hamlet, the difference is that whereas the Danish prince sees death as an escape from the necessity for painful action, the Persian prince substitutes it for action. And if we consider a similar speech by another of Tachmas' dramatic forebears, Dryden's Aureng-Zebe as he awaits execution, we see the softening that has taken place in the mood of the heroic drama:

Distrust, and Darkness, of a future State.
 Make poor Mankind so fearful of their Fate.
 Death, in itself, is nothing; but we fear
 To be we know not what, we know not where.

[Soft Musick

This is the Ceremony of my Fate:
 A parting Treat; and I'm to die in State.
 They lodge me, as I were the Persian King: 10
 And with luxuriant Pomp my Death they bring.

In the older play we discover similar references to death and earthly station, but a completely different tone. Aureng-Zebe is ironic, contemptuous of his doom; Tachmas is wholly sincere and almost romantic about it. The one defies, the other welcomes.

Tachmas so loves death that in his next major speech, addressed to his brother, he explicitly exalts his impending demise above all his earlier valiant acts:

. . . through my life, in all the fields I fought
 And conquer'd in your cause, I never bled

¹⁰ John Dryden, Aureng-Zebe, in Five Heroic Plays, ed. Bonamy Dobrée, (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1928; rpt. 1960), p. 378.

With more content and satisfaction
 (When crimson conquest clasp'd me in her arms,
 And laurel'd triumphs welcom'd my return)
 Than now I empty all the springs of life,
 Open each vein, and (as the last great due)
 Offer the scarlet treasure of my heart,
 In dread obedience to your high command. (41)

Intimately related to Tachmas' passivity and his urge toward "the best gift of nature" is his situation in a post-Cartesian universe. His soliloquy in the fifth act, where he is "discover'd in Prison" after the incident of the forged letter, begins, "I think, therefore am" (60). The rest of the passage demonstrates his awareness of, and Southerne's familiarity with, the implications of Descartes' assertion:

. . . hard state of man!
 That proves his being with an argument
 That speaks him wretched. Birds in cages lose
 The freedom of their natures unconfin'd;
 Yet they will sing, and bill, and murmur there
 As merrily, as they were on the wing.
 But man, that reasoning favourite of heav'n,
 How can he bear it? tho' the body finds
 Respite from torment, yet the mind has none;
 For thousand restless thoughts, of different kinds,
 Beat thick upon the soul, some are comparing
 The present with the past, how happy once
 I was, and now how wretched: some presenting
 My miseries by others' happiness;
 Whilst others, falsely flattering me to life,
 Tell me my fortune ripens in the womb
 Of time, and I shall yet be happy. (60)

From these lines we can make several inferences. First, for Tachmas there is no hesitation about accepting a Cartesian reality; it is, not "may be," "hard state of man!" Next is the insistence on man as reasonable, thinking, and therefore the "favourite of heav'n" but whose God-given capacity for thought can be curse as well as blessing; the mind has no "Respite from torment"—except, we infer from earlier

speeches by Tachmas, death. Finally, he expresses the Cartesian understanding of separate mind and body; and it is from this perception of the nature of reality that we arrive at the source of his passivity. Although for Tachmas the reality of the mind is at this point "torment" and confusion, his acceptance of Cogito, ergo sum as that which "proves [man's] being" (*italics mine*) suggests a rejection of the physical world; and indeed, given his situation, any "respite from torment" short of death, found by the body would be false and would not reflect the actuality of Tachmas' condition.

From here is but a short step to another of Tachmas' characteristics, the pastoral urge. Earlier, in the "best gift of nature" passage, he uses as a simile for death "a safe inn" where one may find "rest for ever,/ If 'twere in private, void of pomp and show" (*italics mine*). Although the use of "inn" is perhaps infelicitous, suggesting as it does transience rather than permanence, the desire for surcease of action and for the private existence is explicitly expressed. In Act III, after his banishment, Tachmas soliloquizes about his longing for withdrawal from the affairs of men and the world of deeds:

Greatness (the earnest of malicious fate
For future woe) was never meant a good.
Baited with gilded ruin, 'tis cast out
To catch poor easy man.
What is't to be a prince?
To have a keener sense of our misfortunes:
That's all our wretched gain.

* * *

O ambition!
How strangely dost thou charm the minds of men!
That they will chuse to starve on mountain tops,
Rather than taste the plenty of the vale.
Had my kind stars design'd my fortune here;

Bred among swains, with my Semanthe by me,
 The conqu'ring beauty of some neighb'ring village;
 What ages of content might I have past,
 Till time had quench'd both life and love together? (36)

These tendencies taken together make of Tachmas, by reputation a fierce warrior, in reality an "Innocent Epicurean, or Detached Spectator." Despite his fiery love-speeches to and about Semanthe, he is neither passionate nor assertive but a passive subject who is acted upon. Hamlet is tormented by a conflict within himself over whether to act; Aureng-Zebe is prevented by external force from doing so. Tachmas, however, submits when confronted with external authority; confronted with violence he longs for death.

Semanthe is a suitable partner for him, for she too expresses herself only in refusing to act or in discouraging someone else from acting. She is described by Seliman as "Light without heat, and youth without desire" (10), and all her protestations of undying love for Tachmas do little to contradict this assessment; like him, she is a creature of the spirit and not of the flesh. Confronted with the Sultan's protestations of passion she can but weep; warned by the false Ismael of impending trouble and urged by him to "prepare,/ If any storm should fall, to 'scape its fury" (22), she can only compare herself to "a tost bark at sea, the pilot gone,/ . . . left expos'd to winds and waves alone,/ And rocks on every hand to split upon" (22). Like her lover she is incapable of positive action and is only "tost" by the actions of others. Her one "act" is to join Begona in pleading with Seliman not to execute Tachmas; even here her speech, although couched in passionate terms, expresses essentially passive intentions:

Thus pale, and dying,
 With my dishevel'd hair, I'll bind you to me:
 Drag me as you may, or dash me to the ground,
 Trample on me; yet I will not leave you,
 Till your wild rage shall spurn me to my grave. (43)

She cannot even assert herself firmly in her belief that Tachmas loves her. When Sunamire first suggests that the prince "has resolv'd/ (Rather than rob your [Semanthe's] merits of a crown)/ To wean his heart for ever from your charms,/ And fix his wishes to some humbler maid" (49), she first refuses to believe: "Had I a faith beyond the ignorant,/ I could not credit this" (49). But when she reflects that Sunamire has been her "bosom friend" (which is a surprise to the audience), she as abruptly accepts: "Ah! no; I find it now; 'tis all a truth;" she wishes only to know "ere I die/ . . . my happy rival's name" (49). Sunamire's artfully confused response that she herself is the recipient of Tachmas' love produces yet another reversal in Semanthe:

Insinuating fiend! I see thee through
 That painted visor of they flatt'ring friendship,
 With all thy dev'lish strategems a going.
 Now I perceive what I so long suspected,
 Thy love to Tachmas . . .
 * * *
 . . . should the earth
 Depose his falshood [sic] in a general voice,
 Nay, call the tongues of angels to avouch it,
 I would not think it of him. (50)

We are, of course, left wondering why, if she has "long suspected" that Sunamire loves Tachmas, Semanthe has just referred to her as her "bosom friend" and accepted her tale. But at this point Semanthe seems finally to have tumbled to the wiles being practiced upon her.

However, she has still another reversal in her. After vowing that she would not credit "the tongues of angels" speaking against her lover,

and noting in an aside that "This may be malice, or a plot to try me" (51), Semanthe immediately accepts the "ocular proof" of the forged letter and falls fainting to the ground. The main function of this scene (if that of plot is excluded, as it easily can be since the action is not particularly furthered by showing Semanthe the letter—it is Seliman who must see it) seems to be to display Semanthe's exquisite sensibilities as a heroine helpless in a world of betrayal and intrigue. Like Tachmas, she has been victimized by malignancy; like him, she seeks solace in oblivion—in swooning and (temporary) madness rather than in death.

She shares also with her lover the pastoral urge. When in Act II they are reunited after his return from battle, she addresses him in terms which foreshadow his own pastoral musings in exile:

Were our loves' scene a blissful, silvan grove,
And we, the happy tenants of its shade,
An humble rural pair, to all unknown,
Plac'd beneath fortune's aim, we might be blest.
But oh! the storms and tempests of a court,
The rocks, the quicksands, and the tossing seas,
That love must venture through to gain its port,
Foil the most resolute pow'rs of my soul. (30)

Nor does she feel ambition for wealth or position, both of which require action to achieve and maintain, but rather for honor and love, which are states of being. Seliman constantly tempts her with visions of the riches and power which can be hers as his wife; she as doggedly rejects them:

Tho' your wide empire with expanded wings,
Flew over the East farther than Cyrus led it;
Tho' the sun tenanted his course from you,
And the rich Indian world confess'd your sway,
I would prefer my Tachmas, my lov'd lord,
To all the pageantries of gaudy pow'r. (34)

Seliman tells her, "You were not form'd to run in nature's herd,/ . . . These matchless beauties should adorn a throne,/ . . . Dart life or death in every awful look" (34). Sunamire's heated description seems far more apt:

A poor, young, actless, indigested thing,
Whose utmost pride can only boast of youth,
And innocence; whose stature spakes her mind,
And what fate meant her, a plebeian wife;
Whilst my erected head was rais'd to give
A fuller majesty to crowns. (19)

This judgment of Sunamire's summarizes neatly not only the basic contrast between herself and Semanthe but the moral poles of the play as a whole. Ranged against the "good" stasis of the hero and heroine is the "bad" activity of the villains. Sunamire aspires to power and grandeur; where her rival's head is constantly bent in helpless suffering, her own is "erect," suitable "to give/ A fuller majesty to crowns." She is obviously in the play to provide a foil for Semanthe, although Arbanes notes that "A plot without a priest, or a woman in't,/ Had been a prodigy" (16). The two women provide the Roxana-Statira paradigm made popular in The Rival Queens, where we can see parallels to Southerne's women in Statira's withdrawal to her bower and Roxana's pursuit of Alexander across the East.

The contrast between Sunamire's violence and Semanthe's passivity is clearly illustrated by their differing responses to apparent spurning by Tachmas. Sunamire, whose "haughty spirit," Ismael observes, "Resents an injury beyond her sex" (16), is moved to murderous hate by what seems to have been a misunderstanding caused by her own wishful thoughts:

. . . I see the prince
 In the bright circle, like a charmer stand,
 With all the beauties of the East around him:
 I hear his melting language, hear his court,
 His soft addresses, and his sighing love;
 Whilst my false senses, flatt'ring my despair,
 Whisper through every mansion of my soul,
 To Sunamire they're meant, they're meant to me:
 Then, then I can no longer bear the thought;
 My eager joy works outward on my cheeks,
 And every eye observes my wild concern:
 At which the ladies laugh, and I too late
 The cause perceiving, blushing fly the room,
 To mourn my past disgrace—. (17)

This is a most effective passage, capturing a sense of situation with great precision and ringing psychologically true; the inverted repetition of "To Sunamire they're meant, they're meant to me" and the delay of information in "At which the ladies laugh" reflect linguistically the emotions represented. But we are left with the problem of significance. Was Tachmas deliberately baiting her? Given his nobility, this is difficult to believe; in fact, it is difficult to see Tachmas flirting with the ladies at court at all. To whom were the addresses intended? We have no idea, and it is not easy to imagine a situation actually arising in which Sunamire could believe that compliments meant for another lady were meant for herself. Her motivation is very murky; the incident seems hardly important enough to provoke such savage feelings:

O tortures! furies! hell! ay, that's the cause:
 No, Sunamire must curse his [Tachmas'] crowding triumphs,
 * * *
 may these eyes
 Flash fierce as basilisks, and dart him dead.
 * * *
 . . . but to be scorn'd! that, that's
 The hell of hells, the plague of womankind! (16)

This borrowing from Othello's torment is singularly inappropriate here, where Sunamire's betrayal has no basis in fact either in deed or in situation; Tachmas has never pretended to love her. Southerne does achieve an interesting thematic effect by echoing a line some twenty pages later when Seliman praises Semanthe, whose eyes should "Dart life or death in every awful look" (34).

Semanthe, who has had a long-standing if clandestine relationship with Tachmas, responds far more passively to his supposed betrayal of her. Confronted by the forged letter, she first swoons, then goes mad, and continues throughout to love him. Hers are the virtues of humility and honor, Sunamire's the vices of pride and ambition.

As the two women are set in dramatic opposition, so are Arbanes and Ismael counterpoised to Tachmas, each envying the prince privileges he has gained through honor and virtue (and, of course, his position as the Sultan's brother). Arbanes is the less obnoxious of the two, an old man clinging jealously to the honors of his youth, convinced that "the prince/. . . . / By treachery despoil'd me of those plumes/ My valour purchas'd with an age of war." He strikes a note to be heard in several of Southerne's later plays concerning

. . . the fate of soldiers[.]
 We're but ambition's tools, to cut away
 To her unlawful ends; and when we're worn,
 Hack'd, hewn with constant service, thrown aside
 To rust in peace; or rot in hospitals. (14)

His characterization is in keeping with his profession; although he enters into Ismael's plots, he hungers for overt action:

My fiery soul
 Disdains the timour safety in revenge,
 Which Ismael pursues. My forward sword,
 With resolution steel'd, shall guide me safe
 Through the most desperate attempts.
 Danger has been my mistress: death I've met
 On martial plains, in every garb of fate,
 And shall he awe me now? (53)

Even while dying of poison from the switched bowls he draws his sword and with a certain gallantry attempts to engage his nemesis with his final breath.

As Arbanes seeks the military power he once held, Ismael seeks the political influence he has lost to Tachmas. He is the archvillain of the piece, clearly modeled on Iago.¹¹ Where Tachmas is open and straightforward, he is devious and two-faced, sinking even to pretending to dissuade Seliman from executing Tachmas:

ISM.: [I would have you spare him] Only . . . as he is your brother.
 For, by the gods, were he a private man,
 My sword should reach the villain in his heart:
 But as he is the prince, your people's idol,
 And one that shares your blood, you may forgive.

SEL.: Since he is great, and makes my crown his aim,
 A politic justice does persuade his death.

[Exit Seliman]

ISM.: Becuase I seem for Tachmas, therefore I love him;
 Thus he concludes; but the illation's [sic] false.
 I would as loath obtain the suit I move for,
 As lawyers, brib'd against the cause they plead. (38 ff.)

Ironically, it is precisely because Tachmas is "the prince, your people's idol,/ And one that shares [royal] blood" that Ismael so hates and fears him; were Tachmas indeed a "private man," far away from the court, he would be of no concern to Ismael.

For it is the court which is Ismael's chosen sphere of action; this preference, with its antipastoral associations of deceit, machination,

¹¹Dodds, p. 42 ff.

and activity, distinguishes him as the villain in contrast to the passive, pastorally-inclined hero Tachmas:

I've not thus long
 March'd hand in hand with mischief, spent my days
 In courts, forsworn my conscience, study'd all
 The knotty arts and rules of policy,
 Which wise men use to their own interests,
 Not to provide me with a ready plank,
 To bear me from the ruin, safe to shore. (54)

And his gangway to safety is the people, "the monster," the "rabble" (54; 55). Obviously this projected refuge is related to the satire on Shaftesbury, but in the context of the play as a whole it has larger thematic significance. Pastoral is, of course, essentially an aristocratic worldview in which the normal hardships of the rural poor are romanticized by those not subject to them. Both Tachmas and Semanthe idealize the simple life of the peasant, far from the intrigue and pomp of the court. Ismael too goes to the poor—but to the urban poor, corrupt, diseased, and ready to be manipulated; one of his greatest joys, he reminds us over and over, is to "work 'em" (55). Instead of wishing to sink into the background of the everyday world (however romanticized), Ismael wishes to act, to lead; to be, in short, a villain within the moral parameters of this play.

Hanging somewhere between these two extremes is Seliman, the sultan, who in Aristotelian tragedy would probably become the protagonist. He is possessed of a fatal flaw, an unruly passion, of which he himself is aware:¹²

¹² Compare to the Emperor in Aureng-Zebe, who describes himself to his son as "much distemper'd in my Mind:/ Pull'd back, and then push'd forward to be kind" (Five Heroic Plays, p. 341).

Why is my temper shaken with each breath
 Of fleeting air, that's formed into voice?
 Why have I not an equal mastery
 Over my passions, with the rest of men?
 The court is in an uproar with my follies
 Expos'd in public; all of my friends stand mute
 Before me, not a counsellor that dares
 Advise me, even flattery is dumb. (25)

Tachmas' enemies both rely upon and are frustrated by this quality;
 if they can but "Fix . . . his wavering temper" to their own designs,
 "the day's our own" (53). Seliman, however, proves capable of constantly
 unfixing his temper. In response to his mother's request that he and
 Tachmas "seal the bands of friendship," the sultan swears that

By the eternal God-head of the sun,
 I glory more that I can call thee mine,
 My friend, and brother, than in wearing crowns. (21)

Only two scenes later, after Ismael has Iago-like convinced Seliman of
 the love between Tachmas and Semanthe, his earlier vow is nullified:

Then be forgotten ever
 The ties of blood, friendship, humanity,
 Your empty names, and perish all in him;
 No more my brother, but the worst of villains. (28)

He is now, in Ismael's words, "Full-charg'd, and, like a thunderbolt
 destructive" (29). But this same changeability defeats the villains'
 designs when, at the moment of execution, Seliman is softened by the
 combined pleas of his mother and Semanthe. Arbanes, whose more direct
 methods have been discouraged by wily Ismael, says to his henchman in
 a justifiably annoyed aside,

Hell! plagues! and death! here's your policy;
 Had I been heard, the business had been done
 Without this ceremony. (45)

Seliman undergoes several more changes of heart in the course of the play, all culminating in his reconciliation with his brother after the discovery of Ismael's and Arbanes' treachery:

Virtue shines out again in its full blaze,
 And now not to reward thy sufferings,
 Would speak me acessary [sic] to those crimes
 My ignorance committed: therefore here
 I give Semanthe to thy longing love:
 Take her, and wear her ever in thy heart:
 Whilst I collected in my temper stand.
 And may succeeding monarchs learn from me,
 How far to trust a statesman's policy. (68)

Aside from the pro forma Toryism of the concluding couplet, the most interesting line in this passage is Seliman's qualifying "Whilst I collected in my temper stand." Those moments during the past five acts when he has had his passions in control have been so fleeting that we cannot but wonder how thorough his transformation will be, or how permanent.

Another mystery is that Seliman and Sunamire never realize that they would make a suitable couple. Each is obsessed with power and position, while Semanthe and Tachmas long for simpler lives. And where the star-crossed lovers are passive, the other pair are fiery, explosive, tempestuous, linked even by the same metaphors of storm and artillery, the same qualities of instability and consuming egoism.

In the final analysis, The Loyal Brother is not a particularly lively play. Neither plot nor characterization holds the interest; both are conventional and inadequately motivated. And while the work as a whole is psychologically structured around the pastoral-court conflict with its attendant cluster of conflicting values and images, once the

initial exposition of theme has been laid out early on nothing happens subsequently either to demonstrate development of character or to deepen our understanding of essentially two-dimensional figures. The play simply lies inert upon the page and, we suspect, upon the stage; symptomatic of its stasis is the fact that an analysis requires almost no citation of dialogue, only of individual speeches. Even its one strength, its organization, is marred by the ambiguity of Seliman's character; although his wavering temper and Sunamire's magnificent tantrums provide some fireworks, Southerne has obscured his own design by creating a king apparently intended to be a good if weak character who so resembles the villainess. Finally, submissive romantics, no matter what their military reputations, do not make particularly exciting heroes; had Tachmas even once struggled with the urge not to be a "loyal brother," had the potential for rebellion ever existed even for a few seconds, some sort of real tension might have been created in his character and in the play.

These problems emerge clearly when The Loyal Brother is compared with Aureng-Zebe. The Emperor, like Seliman, is of uncertain temper; but the former is far more aware of his irrationality than the latter and tries to struggle against it. Similarly, Aureng-Zebe himself both demonstrates on stage a fiery military temperament, as Tachmas never does, and struggles actively with the conflicting demands of his love for Indamora and his duty toward his father-king; no such conflicts wrack Southerne's hero.

Nevertheless, this dramatic debut offers many signs of the craftsman and even occasionally of the artist. In it are the seeds of Southerne's

own dramatic ethos, which runs through comedy and tragedy alike: an avoidance of the graphic and horrible scenes so popular in other dramas of his age;¹³ the use of central characters as touchstones from which variations both parallel and opposed are developed; and—crudely—his real gift at creating well-developed, psychologically credible woman characters. The Loyal Brother, then, is a typical early work—academic, wooden, and derivative. But from it Southerne learns, and his next work, if generically and thematically confused, at least moves and lives.

The Disappointment, or the Mother in Fashion (1684)

Southerne's second play, produced in 1684, was somewhat more successful than The Loyal Brother; at least it was acted for the King at Christmas of that year.¹⁴ It differs markedly from its predecessor, being domestic rather than heroic; double- rather than single-plotted; and closer to comedy than to tragedy. Dodds describes The Disappointment as "Restoration comedy sentimentalized," in which Southerne "bath[es] the old comic motives in the warm light of sensibility."¹⁵ While the play clearly points to sentimentalism, it cannot be so described per se; rather, it is a mixture, at times grotesque, of comedy and tragedy. An equally apt description might be "Shakespearian tragedy sentimentalized," since the main plot, as Dodds demonstrates, depends heavily on Othello

¹³Except in Oroonoko; but even here the depictions are comparatively mild and serve to emphasize the moral bent of the work rather than having been thrown in gratuitously.

¹⁴Dodds, p. 48.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 50 ff.

and to a minor degree on Hamlet, as well showing faint traces of a debt to Measure for Measure.¹⁶

The character central to the action is the libertine Alberto, who has designs on two chaste women: Erminia, wife to Alphonso; and Angeline (or Angelline; both spellings occur), daughter to Rogero and loved by Alphonso's friend Lorenzo. Others of the dramatis personae in addition to Alphonso, Rogero, and Lorenzo include Juliana, Alberto's cast-off mistress; Clara, Erminia's corrupt maid; Angeline's "mother"; and Lesbino, a fellow-rake of Alberto's who appears briefly in the first scene. The plot dealing with Alberto's attempts to seduce Erminia is quasi-tragic, that dealing with Angeline quasi-comic.

In the course of the play Alberto's machinations against Erminia convince her husband Lorenzo wrongly that she has been unfaithful or at the very least has contemplated infidelity; he vacillates between trust and suspicion at a rate that would startle even Seliman in The Loyal Brother. To further complicate matters, he believes that it is the city's Duke (who never appears onstage) who wishes to cuckold him, and in disguise as a madman he runs away to plan an assassination. Erminia, completely ignorant of Alberto's designs, is at a loss to understand her husband's strange behavior but endures his erratic conduct nobly. In the meantime the maid Clara arranges an assignation with Erminia for Alberto without her mistress' knowledge. Juliana, learning of the plot and still in love with Alberto, bribes Clara to

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 56 ff.

substitute her for the intended victim; we are immediately reminded of Mariana in Measure for Measure. Lorenzo sees enough of the rendezvous to convince him that his friend's wife is indeed unfaithful; he is so disillusioned with women that he doubts the innocence of even the angelic Angeline.

Paralleling Clara's actions, Angeline's mother arranges a similar assignation for Alberto with Angeline; once more Juliana intervenes and once more substitutes herself. As Alberto's plots begin to unravel, the whole cast assembles at Alphonso's house, where the husband has received (he thinks) confirmation of his suspicions from Alberto, who not unnaturally believes that he has consummated a relationship with Erminia. Enraged, Alphonso wounds Alberto and is about to murder Erminia when the rest enter. Lorenzo prevents the dreadful deed; Alberto does a fifth-act rake's repentance and agrees to marry Juliana; and Lorenzo, upon being assured that Angeline's "mother" is but her father's concubine taken after his real wife's death and that Angeline's blood is therefore untainted by bawdry, is united with his true love.

As he did in The Loyal Brother, Southerne builds his plot around "sets" of characters, organized this time as parallels rather than as opposites. There are the victimized women, Erminia and Angeline; the bawds, Clara and the "mother"; and the abused men, the husband of Erminia and the father and the lover of Angeline. At the center stands the "villain," Alberto. But one of the play's major weaknesses is that Alberto lacks the weight as a character to serve such a pivotal role. He is, for example, onstage only about one-third of the time. By contrast, the far less important Lorenzo appears in nearly half the

play's scenes, and Alphonso in even more. If Alberto's character were sufficiently powerful, such mechanical measurements would be meaningless; his presence could conceivably dominate that action in which he does not participate, as does that of Iago. This is not the case. He is neither corrupt enough to horrify the audience nor manipulative enough to fascinate it.

Alberto seems, in fact, to be a refugee from "hard" comedy pressed into service as the villain in a melodrama. At his first appearance, which opens the play, he emerges as a libertine and rake rather in the style of a Dorimant:

For me, I'm settled in my faith; I've made
A study of the sex, and found it frail:
The black, the brown, the fair, the old, the young,
Are earthly-minded all: there's not a she,
The coldest constitution of the sex,
Nay, at the altar, telling o'er her beads,
But some one rises on her heav'nly thoughts,
That drives her down the wind of strong desire,
And makes her taste mortality again. (82)¹⁷

Dale Underwood, in his study of Etherege and of the libertine ethic, sees the Restoration comedy of manners depicting a society which

may be viewed as in large part the product of two broadly opposing traditions on the one hand, Christianity and Christian humanism, the "heroic" tradition, the honest-man tradition, and the tradition of courtly love; on the other philosophic and moral libertinism, Machiavellian and Hobbesian concepts as to the nature of man, and Machiavellian ethics.¹⁸

Although Alberto is not nearly so complex a character as Etherege's rakes, Underwood's opposites if simplified can provide a real insight into Southerne's libertine.

¹⁷The Disappointment, or The Mother in Fashion, Plays, I, 71-152.

¹⁸Dale Underwood, Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957), p. 8.

In the speech just cited, for example, Alberto adopts a metaphorical framework as old as courtly love: the use of the images of religion to convey the images of carnal desire. True, his version is corrupt, as indeed was the courtly love tradition by this time, but this particular perspective permeates his speech. When Clara is admitting him to what he believes to be an assignation with Erminia, she urges him (hypocritically) to consider "My lady's virtue!" Alberto replies,

And my secrecy, there's virtue for her virtue: nay, if you go to that, mine is a cardinal virtue among the ladies, and ought to be respected in any court in Christendom, where the love as well as religion is Catholic. (109)

He refers to Erminia as "That suffering martyr to a wedded life" (100) and cannot understand her chastity:

For her to trifle out the hours of love
In coy denials, is beyond my creed. (82)

Alberto is a libertine, albeit a not particularly philosophical one.

But we see in these passages the demonstration of Underwood's assertion that

The libertine considered human laws and institutions as mere customs varying with the variations of societies. . . . The libertine revolted in actions as well as in thought against the customs of his society. Among these revolts was, on the basis of a naturalistic concept of love between the sexes as only physical appetite, the revolt against the custom of marriage as well as against the traditional conventions and attitudes of courtly love.¹⁹

Additional support for seeing Alberto as a rake from a comedy of manners can be found in several places in The Disappointment. He has the rake's capacity to turn highly-romantic diction on and off at will. When a

¹⁹Underwood, p. 14.

clandestine meeting arranged by Angeline's "mother" between him and her "daughter" is unexpectedly interrupted by Rogero, he complains to the mother, asking "how came he here to disturb us?"

MOT.: He met us at chapel.

ALB.: Nay, if our saints prove not better friends to the intrigues of this world, we shall soon fall off the zeal of our devotion to them.
But tell me, when shall be the happy hour [of consummation with Angeline]?

The fragrant infancy of opening flow'rs
Flow'd to my senses in that melting kiss:
O! I am wild, impatient as desire,
To force the blushing beauty to my bosom,
And there dissolve it to the balm of love.
Speak, tell me, when! oh when?

MOT.: Alas, my lord! you think I have done nothing for you!
Have not I! When nature, conscience,—

ALA.: I know thou hast: nay, nay, here's the best recipe for a troublesome conscience in Christendom.

[Gives a purse]

Probatum est. I warrant it good, mother. (100)

Aside from yet another incidence of religious images used sexually, this passage demonstrates both how facile and how insincere is Alberto in the rhetoric of love. With scarcely a break he shifts abruptly from ironic prose to high-flown blank verse full of references to passion and nature. Moreover, the verse is highly structured and formal, usually end-stopped, syntactically complex—in short, hardly the result of overwhelming desire. Even the last line, although broken into four units, suggests form rather than feeling, with the syllabic and denotative pattern of "Speak, tell me" precisely balanced by "when! oh when?" At the mother's equally hypocritical response he abruptly shifts once more to ironic prose which includes yet another religious reference. For Alberto love is an artifice used to disguise the

realities of sex, its special jargon and style taking the place of any substance.

Sex itself is a game to him, with no particular significance beyond the act itself. An encounter with one who has a different set of values leaves him befuddled and confused. His exchange with Erminia in the final act, in which he thinks she has kept an assignation with him the night before, and she has no idea about what he is talking, illustrates his congenital inability either to take sex seriously or to believe than anyone else can. He enters with a suggestive "Song written by Sir George Etheridge" and his first words are in the style he used earlier with Angeline's mother: formal (here, even in rhyme), stylized, conventionally romantic, and very erotic:

So the kind nymph, dissolving as she lay,
Expecting sigh'd, and chid the shepherd's stay!
When panting to the joy, he flew, to prove
The immortality of life and love. (142)

When she reddens with modesty and confusion (she is aware, as Alberto is not, that her husband Alphonso is listening), Alberto sees romantic passion:

Turn not away: I see the god of love
Is busy in thy heart; he shoots his fires
Through every pore, and kindles every vein,
And now he mounts in blushes on thy cheeks,
That tell me all, and summon on my joy.

The two are simply at cross-purposes, neither one able to penetrate the meanings of the other's words because they are not speaking the same language. When Erminia asks in horror, "Why do you talk thus to me?," Alberto assumes that she is inviting rather than repulsing him:

I confess I am to blame,
 When this kind opportunity informs me,
 There are a thousand better arguments,
 Of more convincing virtue to prevail,
 Than all the unperforming senseless noise,
 That talking love can offer to the fair.

He is, in fact, perfectly willing not to waste breath in pretty (and meaningless) words if she prefers him to act. As Erminia complains that "You wrong my meaning still," his confidence in his control of the situation begins to waver:

I would not wrong it:
 Nor injure you so far, to think you can
 Mean otherwise: away, this modesty
 Is the dull virtue of a marriage bed;
 The idol only of a husband's zeal!

Erminia, pierced to the heart at his reference, cries out "A husband! then my fit returns again./ Why did you name him?" Alberto, unnerved by what appear to him to be unnecessary histrionics, slips out of his persona to snap in decidedly unloverlike fashion, "Nay, the devil knows." He then believes that he has unravelled the mystery of Erminia's responses—her desertion by Alphonso has frightened her and made her cautious. He therefore picks up again the thread of his romantic rhetoric, assuring her that "There is no danger in a lover's arms" and dismissing her fears of the "straits,/ The hazardous attempts, that vent'rous love/ Engages on his way to happiness."

When she yet continues to repulse him and to deny all knowledge of the encounter which he is convinced they had the night before, Alberto give up both his extravagance and his mistress with pragmatism and even a little grace:

Tho' I find
 Your purpose plainly meant to my abuse,
 I think the management of your design
 Exceeds the peevish follies of your sex:
 Alas! we might have parted upon easier terms.
 For faith you wrong me, madam, if you think
 I came to find out constancy, or preach
 It to a woman. I've been your guest indeed,
 Have met a hearty welcome; and last night,
 That bawdy night, and honest Clara knows
 That I have not been ungrateful: so, I leave you
 To the fresh youth of your next customer. (143)

This whole scene, which is very well written, could easily come out of straight comedy; out of the context of The Disappointment it is susceptible to the interpretation which Alberto places on it. From his point of view Erminia is first playing the pseudo-romantic role of the passionate innocent, to which he matches his part as the chivalric courtly lover. He then begins to feel that she is over-playing her lines. Finally, he decides that she is using her "part" to cast him off—that is, even in the act of dismissing him as a lover she is insisting on carrying out the charade of the frightened and remorseful wife. It never occurs to him that Erminia is actually sincere in her protestations, only that if she wants to be rid of him she could simply say so instead of playing the game beyond reason. If their affair is over, there is no need to pretend further that it was a great romance; they should simply accept the reality—a purely sexual encounter. Alberto and Erminia come from different worlds: he from the urban and urbane life of Restoration London, she from an Italianate romance with its roots in the pastoral. It is no wonder that they are totally unable to communicate.

The effect of all this is that Alberto fails as a successful villain because he is not evil; he does not set out to corrupt innocence, for he does not believe in its existence, only in the lack of opportunity. In many ways and within his own code, he is honorable. When Rogero, in the mistaken belief that Alberto has seduced Angeline, attempts to force him into a swordfight, Alberto tries to put him off; but there is no suggestion of cowardice on his part:

Would I were fairly rid of this old fellow. I have no stomach to murder the father, when the daughter [actually Juliana, not Angeline] has made so handsome an entertainment already!—
Rogero, I won't fight with thee, pr'ythee put up thy sword. (129)

When late in the play Alphonso threatens Alberto with a pistol in the similarly mistaken belief that he has also seduced Erminia, Alberto's reaction is not fear of death but desire for a fair chance:

ALB.: You will not murder me?
 ALP.: 'Tis justice now
 That arms against thy crimes, and strikes in me:
 Therefore, prepare—
 ALB.: Yet throw away your odds [the pistol];
 And do not basely thus attempt my life.

[Alphonso speaks again, the pistol misfires, and he draws his sword.]

ALB.: I wish no more advantage. Now come on. (143-44)

The rest of the characters in the main plot, however, are not from the world of The Man of Mode. The Disappointment, in fact, like The Loyal Brother derives much of its ethos and characterization from Othello; it is this literary ancestry which causes the play's tonal incoherence. Obviously, without major revisions in the psychologies and motivation of the other characters Iago cannot be transformed into a Restoration

rake more interested in an illicit fling than in jealousy and revenge. Unfortunately, those alterations which Southerne makes serve only to compound the generic confusion.

Alphonso is adapted from Othello himself; Dodds cites numerous parallel passages from Shakespeare and Southerne which clearly establish the relationship between the two characters.²⁰ But where Shakespeare carefully provides a rationale for Othello's susceptibility in the lovers' disparate ages, stations, and races, and further sets the stage with Brabantio's warnings, Southerne simply makes Alphonso a jealous husband with whom the audience is nevertheless intended to sympathize as the hero; Erminia is a pattern of chaste matronly discretion, most unlike the very young, passionate, and lively Desdemona.

The initial development of The Disappointment illustrates Southerne's problems in the play. At Alphonso's first appearance early in Act I, he is already in a frenzy of suspicion:

She might have number'd out the stars in sin;
Fed her hot, lustful appetite with change
Of every high fed, wanton fool in Florence:
Yet I had been happy: ignorantly blest,
Like a true marriage tool, I might have sate
Contented at the lower end o' th' feast,
To welcome all, without a farther thought. (85)

The passage continues for several more lines, but these will suffice to illustrate that as Dodds points out the speech is a close adaptation of Othello's "I had been happy, if the general camp,/ Pioners [sic] and all, had tasted her sweet body,/ So I had nothing known," etc.

²⁰Dodds, pp. 56 ff.

Othello's outburst, however, takes place in the third scene of the third act; half the play has been spent building suspensefully to this moment, while Alphonso bursts onstage already in full-blown paranoia. Further, despite Othello's agony he refuses to believe absolutely until Iago can furnish him "ocular proof" beyond a glimpse of Desdemona and Cassio talking alone. Alphonso, on the other hand, has already accepted Erminia's guilt on the basis of an intercepted letter which, as we know from Alberto, was intended only as an opening sally and therefore cannot conceivably contain any reference to any real knowledge of Erminia's feelings and inclinations, much less to any actions. In The Loyal Prince Semanthe similarly puts faith in a false letter, but at least that one is forged as if it came from Tachmas, not to him, with the intent of suggesting he is already involved with Sunamire. Further, she is not Tachmas' wife, merely his lover. To accept Alphonso's agonies requires too great a leap of faith by the audience.

Erminia is more like Tachmas: long-suffering and passive. Her first scene establishes her character; it will never develop further:

. . . I am most happy in content:
 I love the hand that lays this load upon me;
 And shall, altho' it sink me to my grave:
 O Clara! this were wretchedness indeed;
 This usage were beyond the reach of patience,
 From any but Alphonso: him I love,
 Him, whom my heart hangs after for its peace. (91)

She never wavers in her devotion to her husband, who repays her with such rapid shifts between trust and doubt that, Dodds acerbically observes, "we are ready to sympathize with Erminia for her possession, and not for her possible loss of such a husband."²¹

²¹Ibid., p. 54.

Alphonso's friend Lorenzo functions in the main plot in a curiously composite role. On the one hand he serves as a sort of Cassio, the hero's boon companion; on the other, in the third act Southerne converts him quite literally into an "honest Iago." Lorenzo has just seen Alberto keeping what appears to him to be an assignation with Erminia; Alphonso, in one of his recurring fits of pique, has just pretended to leave on a journey in a ploy to test his wife's virtue. Heretofore Lorenzo has defended Erminia to Alphonso, believing absolutely in her chasteness. Now, however, his faith is shaken; when Alphonso suddenly returns, again willing to trust Erminia, the two reenact the crucial "seduction" scene from Othello (Act III, scene iii), although Southerne leads up to it with what appears to be a characterization drawn from Castalio in

Otway's The Orphan:

LOR.: Art though not alter'd from what last I saw thee?
 The hero strutting in thy pageant pride;
 Swell'd with thy wrongs, and bursting with resentment?

ALP.: Ha!

LOR.: Go, you would yet be more her [Erminia's] slave.

ALP.: What mean these words?

LOR.: Your tongue can best explain
 The dictates of your heart: but now you said
 You wish'd you knew to be enough her slave:
 I think 'twas so.

ALP.: It was, by heav'n!

LOR.: And faith
 I thought a husband needed not that prayer.

ALP.: Y'are merry, friend!

LOR.: Would thou would'st be so too!
 And learn to think no farther of the sex
 Than for thy ease and pleasure.

ALP.: Still in riddles!

LOR.: To-morrow will unfold 'em. I must leave you;
 But friend, the night's far spent, Erminia too
 Can live 'till morn without you.

ALP.: Say'st thou friend?

LOR.: To-night you must not see her.

ALP.: Not see her?
 LOR.: No.
 ALP.: Lorenzo, there is something in thy thoughts
 Thou dar'st not trust me with—I hopes she's honest.
 LOR.: O doubtless, honest.
 ALP.: How did she bear thy message [of Alphonso's departure]?
 LOR.: Faith, Alphonso,
 If I may count her sorrow by her tears,
 She very hardly bore it
 ALP.: Then I am satisfy'd.
 LOR.: Indeed!
 ALP.: Again!
 Where would'st thou drive my doubts? If thou wouldst have
 Me think thee still the same, my friend, and honest,
 Inform me of thy thoughts. (112-13)

The scene continues along predictable lines and culminates in Alphonso, solus, gnashing and raving over his betrayal.

In Shakespeare's tragedy this is a climactic scene, horrifying an audience that has watched Othello's psychologically credible corruption by the quintessentially evil Iago. In Southerne's play the emphasis shifts to Lorenzo's disillusionment, which is ultimately irrelevant to the action since he is not the wronged husband. The scene's impact is further diluted by the fact that this is Alphonso's fourth reversal of feeling about Erminia; moreover, he is constantly wrought to a fever-pitch, either in the depths of betrayed despair or on the heights of domestic bliss. Southerne seems unable at this point in his career to perceive the careful structure of his primary model, where Othello's distress in this scene is in poignant contrast to his joyful reunion with Desdemona in the preceding act; nor does Southerne seem to understand the modulations of Othello's mood in subsequent scenes as he hangs between despair and hope. Rather, Southerne simply "lifts" the two most overtly emotional scenes, that of the lovers' reunion after the storm

and that with Iago in Act III, and replays them over and over during the whole of The Disappointment.

The result of this failure to adapt sensitively is the same failure found in The Loyal Brother: the characters have nowhere to go. From their first appearances we know everything about them we will learn; any transformations in character resulting from Alberto's feeble machinations took place before the play ever began. Underneath all its bombast and emotional outbursts, the serious plot in The Disappointment while not static like The Loyal Brother is a series of scenes on a treadmill, covering the same ground over and over. Thus Alberto is not merely an anomaly in a tragic world; the world itself lacks substance and motivation. No wonder Erminia so bewilders him.

The comic subplot is somewhat livelier; at least here Alberto's character makes some sense. But also here what dignity he has as a libertine is undercut; he cannot even seduce a totally naïve girl whose "mother" is actively assisting him. His ineptness as a rake at this level makes Alphonso's ravings and Erminia's tears all the more excessive, for he seems no threat to virtue at all. Further, for a sophisticate he is singularly unobservant even within the context of stage convention; not once but twice a woman with whom he has had an affair substitutes herself for someone else, first a wife and then a maid, without his either recognizing her or even realizing that he has been tricked.

Among the comic characters the "mother" is the least important. She is the standard low bawd; her inconsequence beyond moving the story-line along is indicated by her role-parallel in the main story—Clara,

Erminia's maid. Rogero, Angeline's father and Alphonso's parallel, is more interesting. He shares with Alphonso (and Alcasto of The Orphan) a distrust of court and city life, but whereas the husband's antipathy seems merely the result of his suspicions of the duke, the father's have deeper roots. Rogero, like Arbanes in The Loyal Brother, is an old soldier whose "blunt spirit of thy honesty," Lorenzo says, "And forwardness to all attempts of honour,/. . . . made thy virtue known" (101). Rogero's response demonstrates his "blunt honesty" in its style—prose, rather than verse—and in its content:

Yes, I have been a soldier; and have been rewarded too: had promises for pay, and starv'd for the honour of my profession.

When Lorenzo suggests that he need only "come to court/ And but apply [him]self to our great duke" to get redress, Rogero's reply is in character:

My lord! you know me, and I know myself: you bid God bless the duke, I cry Amen, with all my heart; so far we're right: but here I leave you; not one step farther, not an inch, my lord; I am not for the court, not I my lord: there's a ruggedness in my nature will not let me sell the freedom of my mind, to feed my body: no, when I see a fool, I must laugh at him; not sooth [sic] him in his vanity, nor tickle him 'till he wheeze, and give me an advantage of creeping to his pocket. (102)

To Rogero, as this passage suggests, is assigned the play's satiric voice. When in a peculiar and apparently pointless scene a foppish "'squire" attended by a "Poet" and a "Bully" attempts to trifle with Angeline, it is Rogero who drives them away at sword point. In Act IV his relief at discovering that it is Juliana, not Angeline, with whom Alberto has lain expresses itself in decidedly sardonic tones:

I'll never forgive myself, never, madam, for coming in like an old fumbling coxcomb, so unseasonably to spoil sport: if you had but said the least word to me, I would have held the door in a civil way, and been thankful for the office. (131)

Unfortunately for the play as a whole, these qualities in a character intended as a foil to Alphonso work to the latter's disadvantage; Rogero's common-sensical, satirically-tinged approach to protecting his daughter's virtue serves only to make Alphonso's hysteria all the more insubstantial.

Angeline, the fifteen-year-old who serves as Erminia's counterpart, suffers from a confused characterization by her creator. Such is her purity that Lorenzo extolls her as the pattern of virtue: "Tho' tempted by necessity and want,/ . . . gold could not corrupt, nor pow'r betray [her]" (87). Her first bits of dialogue confirm her angelic innocence:

MOTHER: . . . this is the walk my lord Alberto promis'd to meet me in: come hither, Angeline! ah! thy mother's own twinkle! well, fifteen must be provided for, I see that.

ANG.: I do not understand you.

MOT.: No matter for that, I understand enough in this point for us both, child; if you have but the grace to be rul'd.

ANG.: I hope I have ever been obedient.

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MOT.: Ay, 'twill the better for you: say your prayers duly, and take your mother's advice along with you, and you may come to keep your coach one day.

ANG.: Alas! I am contented with my poor condition. And would not, if I might, be what you say; And see my good old father go on foot. (95)

But in other scenes, although still chaste, she is clever and knowing:

JUL.: Tell me, is there not something in your heart
Pleads strongly for [Alberto]?

ANG.: If something from without
Did not plead more, his cause were desperate.

JUL.: Indeed! I hear your mother favors him.
 ANG.: Would I could say 'twere false.
 JUL.: You came to meet him here.
 ANG.: My mother I believe had so design'd:
 For as we came from chapel with my father,
 She watch'd her time, and lost him in the crowd. (101)

Angeline reveals the same ambiguity of naïveté and prudence at other points, particularly at the assignation with Alberto which her mother has arranged. When talking to her mother she displays ignorance; to Juliana shrewd awareness of what is planned and a determination to abort it. Although apparently intended to be an ingènue, she is far more like the "clever virgin" of Restoration comedy. Since Lorenzo is noble, romantic, and idealistic, one wonders about the ultimate success of their marriage; indeed, in Sir Antony Love Southerne will poke fun at Ilford, a serious lover very much like Lorenzo. But whatever Angeline's inconsistencies, she at least acts rather than repines and is therefore much more appealing than Erminia.

Juliana, the last of the major characters, seems to be one of Southerne's experiments in "interesting" women. Adapted from Measure for Measure, she parallels Erminia in her betrayal by Alberto and in her abandonment by her lover.²² A mistress rather than a wife, she nevertheless endures her lover's aberrations and insults and willingly accepts his sudden fifth-act reformation and offer of marriage. Juliana shares to some degree Erminia's sensibility; even at the moment of

²² Alberto also betrays (or thinks he does) Angeline, and her lover Lorenzo is so repulsed by what he believes to be Erminia's infidelity that he momentarily distrusts and thus psychologically "abandons" Angeline.

disguising herself as Angeline to foil Alberto's scheme of seduction, she sighs, "'Tis a pity to deceive him" (127).

But ultimately she is neither tragic nor sentimental; the soliloquy with which she concludes her first appearance in the play, during which she has been insulted and rejected by Alberto, is a clear repudiation of the attitudes and behavior not only of Erminia but of Semanthe and Sunamire as well. Juliana, like her lover, is a creature of the comedy:

To play the woman right, now I should swoon,
Call curses down from heav'n on his head,
Protest my wrongs, and vow to be reveng'd;
But why reveng'd? Or how have I been wrong'd?
I knew him false before; the sad experience
Of other women, warn'd me on my fate;
And yet I cou'd not hold from venturing:
Had he refus'd me, then my wrongs were plain:
But I have met the softest dear returns
That love could make, or longing maids desire.
If he has left me, 'tis his nature's fault,
That cannot be confin'd. (84)²³

In the final analysis, Southerne's second play suffers from many of the same defects as his first, most notably the stasis of his characters and his frequent failure to develop and/or motivate them consistently. Nevertheless, The Disappointment demonstrates real

²³For a contrast from tragedy, as well as a possible source for this speech by Juliana, observe Monimia in Act I of The Orphan, when she learns from the page that Castalio scoffs at love:

Why was I made with all my sex's softness,
Yet want the cunning to conceal its follies?
I'll see Castalio, tax him with his falsehoods;
Be a true woman, rail, protest my wrongs,
Resolve to hate him, and yet love him still.

progress in Southerne's dramatic skills. Although The Loyal Brother is more coherent and clearly structured than its successor, it is also a less ambitious attempt. In The Disappointment Southerne deals not only with two plots but with two dramatic modes. His handling is clumsy and at times insensitive, and in this particular work the tragic and comic elements work against rather than with each other; but by the mid-nineties, after his three-play excursion into straight comedy, he will return to the mixed play for his two greatest successes: The Fatal Marriage and Oroonoko.

The play is of interest in terms of literary history. Dodds finds in it the seeds of sentimentalism that would reach full flower on the English stage after the turn of the century:

In The Disappointment were anticipated the characters that Cibber and Steele were to make famous: the loyal wife whose virtue triumphs in the end; the man and maid whose love was untouched by any cynical contempt of marriage; the faithful friend; the spurned mistress who is at last married to her former lover; and the rake purged just in time for the fifth-act curtain. Pathos is stronger here than wit, human nature is found to be fundamentally good, and aroused sensibilities find issue in an emotion altogether moral. The history of sentimentalism in England cannot afford to ignore this early appearance of a play that adumbrates, perhaps more clearly than any original comedy prior to Love's Last Shift, the approach of the new drama.²⁴

Sherbo, although he cites at length Dodds' discussion of the play, is more cautious in his evaluation of the degree of sentimentality in The Disappointment. He feels that two scenes, Erminia's response to Alphonso's final reconciliation and Alberto's repentance, cry out for

²⁴Dodds, p. 213.

more sentimental treatment but are both perfunctory and undeveloped.

Furthermore,

it is not unusual at the period in which Southerne wrote his play . . . to find a rake accepting his cast-off mistress as his wife, voluntarily and for reasons of conscience. Southerne was looking forward to sentimental drama, but his neglect of sentimental situations . . . is one reason why it would be improper to term his play a sentimental comedy.²⁵

Additionally, Sherbo finds "the presence of the bawdy" uncharacteristic of sentimentalism.²⁶

Clearly The Disappointment stands somewhere in the ancestry of sentimentalism; it may not have had any direct artistic or thematic impact, but it does demonstrate that well before Cibber's efforts dramatic aesthetics and sensibilities were already shifting toward sentimentalism. Southerne, however, tends largely to be more sentimental in situation than in treatment, a tendency that can be observed in his great comedy The Wives Excuse or Cuckolds Make Themselves (1691) to which The Disappointment clearly points.

The connection between these two plays, with which no study of either has dealt, has less to do with characterization and tone than with the mingling of types of drama. In the earlier play part of Southerne's problems is the insertion of a comic villain into what is essentially a tragic world, a device which instead of heightening the impact of that world diffuses and degrades it. To join these two perspectives coherently in a single work is not impossible but requires both great talent and great experience. Shakespeare, for example, in

²⁵Ibid., pp. 43 ff.

²⁶Sherbo, p. 93.

Troileus and Cressida works not only with comedy and tragedy but with classicism and romanticism with such insight and skill that the opposites both inform and cancel out each other. Southerne is not a Shakespeare, but he obviously has some sense, however rudimentarily expressed in The Disappointment, of the conflicts and connections between comedy and tragedy not just as types but as psychologies. In The Wives Excuse he will reverse the orientation of his second effort, and insert into a comic milieu a tragic heroine with great skill and even brilliance. But for his third play he returns to the themes and genre of The Loyal Brother to create The Spartan Dame.

The Spartan Dame (written 1687-88; produced 1719)

On December 11, 1719, Southerne's tragedy The Spartan Dame was produced with a Drury Lane cast of the highest quality: Mills, Booth, and Wilks in the male leads, Oldfield and Porter in the female. The play was a hit, running nine nights, and very profitable for its author; according to the Biographica Dramatica ticket sales brought Southerne 500 pounds,²⁷ and he tells us in the preface that he received 120 pounds for the copyright (81).²⁸ Dodds' research indicates that the play went through three printings in three months.²⁹

²⁷Biographica Dramatica, III, 294; cited in Dodds, p. 178.

²⁸The Spartan Dame, Plays, III, 75-171.

²⁹Dodds, p. 177.

Thirty-five years had passed since the appearance of The Disappointment, nearly twenty since Southerne had last been active in the theater. The Spartan Dame was not a product of his old age, however, but of his youth; in his preface Southerne explains that

This tragedy was begun a year before the Revolution, and near four acts written without any view, but upon the subject, which I took from the Life of Agis in Plutarch. Many things interfering with those times, I laid by what I had written for seventeen years: I shew'd it then to the late Duke of Devonshire, who was in every regard a judge; he told me, he saw no reason why it might not have been acted the year of the Revolution: I then finished it, and, as I thought, cut out the exceptionable parts, but could not get it acted, not being able to persuade myself to the cutting off those limbs which I thought essential to the strength and life of it: But since I found it must pine in obscurity without it, I consented to the operation; and after the amputation of every line, very near the number of four hundred, it stands on its own legs still, and by the favour of the town, and indulging assistance of friends, has come successfully forward upon the stage. (79)

If this account is correct—and there is no reason to think it isn't—Southerne seems to have written the bulk of the play about 1687-88, gone back to it about 1704 and deleted certain lines with political implications, and finally after another revision managed some thirty years after its inception to get it produced.

The problems with the play were obviously political. It deals with a good king, Leonidas, who during a public insurrection flees the city and is deposed by his corrupt son-in-law Cleombrotus, who then ascends the throne himself. As Dodds points out, and as Southerne was surely aware, the dramatic situation was far too close to the English political situation at the succession of William and Mary for the government to look favorably on a staging of The Spartan Dame.³⁰ Even the version

³⁰Ibid., p. 180.

acted in 1719 had excised all references to usurpation and the rule of the people, although these are restored, indicated by a quotation mark, in the printed work.

The play therefore presents a problem of chronology: does one deal with it in order of writing or in order of production? Dodds chooses the latter method, although he feels that the play was indeed written when Southerne claims it to have been. He points out that

The edition of Plutarch's Lives called Dryden's had been completed in 1686. What would be more natural than that the young playwright should turn to it at once as a source of tragic material?³¹

Dodds believes, however, that Southerne probably revised the play very extensively during the three decades that passed before its public debut; as evidence he cites a letter by John Duncombe, who

tells of a Mr. John Allen who advised Southerne as early as 1694 that The Spartan Dame would never succeed, but who, on reading it in 1719, "found it very different (he said) from what it was then."³²

On the basis of this report, and because he feels that "the play was clearly shaped by [Southerne's] mature hand,"³³ Dodds places it ninth in the corpus.

Nevertheless, to deal with The Spartan Dame directly after The Disappointment seems more logical, at least in terms of this study. By Southerne's own account most of the play was written before the Revolution. Then too, there is internal evidence for the early dating: certain elements of style and characterization which both look back to

³¹Ibid., p. 183.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., p. 184.

the first plays, The Loyal Brother and The Disappointment, and forward to the fifth, The Wives Excuse; the very perfunctory nature of the fifth act (barely eight pages in a play seventy pages long), which, presumably not added until the mid-nineties, seems not to have been revised during the succeeding years as one might expect had Southerne indeed extensively recast the play; and the vast advance in dramatic skill to be observed between The Disappointment and Sir Antony Love, a fact which suggests that Southerne's apparent seven-year absence from the stage included some writing experience.

In The Spartan Dame Southerne returns to a single plot line mixing politics and love such as he employed in The Loyal Brother. The king of Sparta, Leonidas, has been driven out by a mob uprising; his heir and son-in-law Clembrotus has been offered the crown by Agesilaus, a demagogue whose role in the action of the play is quite minor. Leonidas has three daughters. The eldest is Celona, "The Spartan Dame," who is Cleombrotus' wife; it is this marriage which makes him the heir. The second daughter, Thelamia, has just been married to Eurytion, who supports Leonidas and therefore leaves Sparta and his bride to be with his king and father-in-law. The youngest, Euphemia, is a minor character who lives as "a recluse in Diana's Temple" (98). Cleombrotus has tired of married life and plots to seduce Thelamia, who is staying with his wife in her husband's absence. He tricks her by coming to her on a night when she expects her husband;³⁴ when Thelamia discovers

³⁴ This appears to be a device of which Southerne is particularly fond; compare the similar situation with Erminia in The Disappointment. Also see the tricking of Monimia in The Orphan, although Polydore, unlike

the deception—too late—she goes almost mad with horror and grief. Meanwhile Crites, an Iago-like figure who in his hypocrisy is reminiscent of Ismale in The Loyal Brother and whom Leonidas' party erroneously believe loyal to themselves, has both arranged the tryst with Thelamia and simultaneoulsy plotted to bring Leonidas into the city with a forged letter purportedly from Celona; he and several others plan to assassinate the old king without Cleombrotus' knowledge and so forestall any chance of Leonidas' restoration. The plot goes awry, and Leonidas, learning of Thelamia's violation, rouses the people against Cleombrotus and his faction. At a final battle before the temple of Neptune, Cleombrotus holds Euphemia, the youngest daughter, hostage, threatening to turn her over to his slaves for rape and murder if Leonidas does not withdraw. Just as the distraught father agrees, Eurytion's forces get in from the rear and rescue the girl. Eurytion stabs Cleombrotus; Thelamia, having seen her dishonor avenged, drinks poison; and Celona withdraws to end her days in seclusion.

The similarities to The Loyal Brother are clear. The central character is torn between two sets of loyalties and responsibilities; there is a noble father who equals the noble mother; Begona; and the corruption within the palace extends to and involves the people of the city. But The Spartan Dame is the far more complex work, both dramatically and psychologically, and demonstrates Southerne's increasing skill at producing drama which moves upon the stage, not merely declaims.

Alberto and Cleombrotus, does not know his prey is married. However, the question of incest is central to the situation both in The Orphan and in The Spartan Dame.

The heroine, Celona, is Tachmas' counterpart; throughout the work she is torn between her love for and loyalty to her husband, of whose ambitions she disapproves, and that for and to her father. Both politically and domestically, Celona epitomizes the traditional Spartan virtues of integrity, simplicity, and steadfastness. Devoted to moral order, she is rewarded by her husband with public and private chaos.

As the first act opens, the city is in revolt and Leonidas has fled; Cleombrotus, a conspirator tells us, anticipates that "The tumult may depose his father[-in-law]; then/ He is a king" (100). Celona enters and within a few lines has given the audience her measure. She is a simple woman whose

. . . beauties,
Such as they are, are honest, and my own;
They go to bed with me, with me they rise,
And need not many hours in putting on.

She loves her husband and values her marriage; in a thematically significant passage she tells Cleombrotus

. . . I am your wife,
Most honour'd in that title; and despise
Th' applause and breath of any other praise,
Than of my virtue, and obedience now. (100)

Her feelings appear reciprocated; her husband responds with a paean to the wedded state:

Here this, you libelling marriage-mortifiers!
You unhous'd, lawless, rambling libertines;
Senseless of any charm in love, beyond
The prostitution of a common bed,
Lewdly enjoy'd, and loath'd: hear, hear, and kneel
Before this shrine, repent, and all get wives. (101)

This is the pair's last moment of connubial happiness, for Cleombrotus immediately hints at some great news for his wife, bidding her to

. . . raise your wishes high, mount your desires
 On bold ambition's wing: whose airy flight
 Shoots thro' the clouds, to mingle with the stars—.

Like Seliman before him, Cleombrotus believes that power and station are as important to everyone else as to himself, that all share his ambition; like Semanthe, Celona quickly disabuses him:

Leonidas, a king, and father too!
 O sound those awful words: me thinks there waits
 A reverence upon the very names,
 That should disarm the resolution
 Of every heart and hand that would rebel. (102)

For Celona words are what they symbolize; her personal integrity is expressed in and reflected by her semantic integrity. Unlike her husband, she says what she means.

Once again Southerne has drawn the moral lines of his drama immediately, in the opening scenes. We know already where Celona stands on the question of usurpation; her attitude, it is clear, will not change. Where Southerne makes an advance in his writing lies in the fact that he has finally created a central character whose plight is truly moving and whose response to it we can admire. Her dilemma is not externally imposed by another's jealousy but internal: how to fulfill her private and public duty to her king-father while fulfilling her duty to her husband.

If Celona's situation is to affect us, we must be convinced of the importance of her husband and her marriage to her. This Southerne accomplishes; for the first time he manages to make a psychological quandary realistic in terms of plot and motivation. Celona is like Tachmas and Erminia in her steadfast loyalty; but where Tachmas'

submission to his brother and Erminia's to her husband³⁵ are merely presented and never questioned, Celona's response is more complex. Her concern extends not just to her wronged parent but to the moral and political dangers to which his course will expose Cleombrotus and by extension herself. Hers is a traditional view of marriage; whatever Cleombrotus does will reflect on her, who is "yourself, my lord./ . . ./ Half of yourself, your wife" (102):

My fame must live but in your chronicle:
And as your actions show to after-times,
My memory must be honour'd, or despis'd:
Therefore I speak, and therefore must be heard. (102)

She reacts neither with passive nobility, as does Tachmas, nor with pathetic complaints, as does Erminia, but with appeals to her husband's honor and common sense.

If, she argues, Cleombrotus accepts from the mob the crown that in the natural course of events will be his anyway, he will

Like a young wasteful heir, mortgage the hopes
Of Godlike majesty, on bankrupt terms
To raise a present pow'r, that's sickly held
By the frail tenure of the people's will. (102)

She agrees that he must act in such a time of turmoil, not stand idly by and "Behold the strongest hand" snatch away the crown:

. . . No, no my Lord,
I would not have you tame at such a time;
Boldly assert the cause of majesty,
The right of the good king, his right, and yours:
For yours is the succession. (103)

If he accepts power from the people rather than by hereditary right, he is setting a dangerous precedent; "And precedent is more than an excuse;/ It takes the force of law."

³⁵The former paralleling her loyalty to her king, the latter that to her husband.

. . . How then, my Lord!
 If as they would un-king my father now
 To make your way, their giddy humour changing,
 They drive you out to make another room?
 For what has been, they say, may be again. (103)

Thus rather than meekly suffering a wrong, Celona marshals arguments warning of the damage to Cleombrotus' fame in ages to come, of the pointlessness of wresting away a crown that will be his eventually, and the abasement and insecurity inherent in accepting authority from the fickle mob rather than in the traditional way of natural succession.

When in Act II Cleombrotus despite Celona's pleas has allowed himself to be declared king, she is firmly convincing both of her abhorrence of the act and of her great love for him.

CLE.: Be mine that guilt,
 The guilt of empire; all its thorns and cares
 Be only mine: but the substantial goods,
 Which in opinion, or experience,
 Make life a real blessing, shall be thine.
 CEL.: O sister, witness to my virtue now!
 Which tempted thus, thus courted to a throne,
 And by the man, who has all charms for me,
 Stands yet resolv'd—
 CLE.: Of what? Resolv'd!
 CEL.: O, Sir!
 Were it a task for every common strength
 To undertake, it were no part for me;
 But loving as I do, and so belov'd!
 Prosperity inviting every sense,
 With various arts, to unprovide my mind!
 What but a Spartan spirit can sustain
 The shock of such temptations; thus resolve
 To leave the comforts of your bed and throne,
 And live a mourner for a father's wrongs! (123)

Here is the first of Southerne's great women characters. We recall a similar appeal to ambition presented to Semanthe in The Loyal Brother, that one also rejected. But Semanthe's decision is much simpler—she loves Tachmas, not Seliman. In turning from a king's throne Celona must also turn, as she observes, from her husband's bed and side; her

temptation is not merely exalted station but "the man who has all charms for me." For Semanthe love and honor are in harmony; for Celona they are in conflict. Hers is the position more common to the male hero—for example, Tachmas.

The parallel to Cleombrotus' next betrayal of his wife, the domestic one of violating her sister, can be found in The Disappointment. In that play we have Alphonso alternating between mania and depression over the purely imagined infidelity of his wife. In this play Celona is confronted in Act IV with actual knowledge of her husband's unfaithfulness, from the evidence of her own eyes and of Thelamia's accusation. As he did in both The Loyal Brother (Sunamire) and in The Disappointment (Alphonso), Southerne in dealing with sexual betrayal immediately reverts to Othello:³⁶

CEL.: What, at my years forsaken! Had I been
Ugly, or old, mismatcht to my desires,
My natural desires had taught me then,
In a tame expectation of my fate,
To sat me down contented: But to be
Thrown off, abandon'd! for a sister too!
O! monstrous love indeed! which such a sin
As incest could not tame.

* * *

But I must stand the shot of every tongue:
The censure and the jest of laughing fools:
Be pointed at for the forsaken thing,
Forsaken for a sister. (156)

These passages, showing Celona apparently more concerned with her reputation than with her sister's plight, perhaps strike an off-note in her characterization as the ideal Spartan woman. But she quickly redeems herself. When Leonidas hears of this act, he resolves immediately to kill Cleombrotus in revenge for the dishonoring of his two daughters.

³⁶ Compare Othello's speech beginning, "Had it pleased Heav'n/ To try me with affliction" (IV.11).

Her father's intent brings Celona to her senses, and she is once more the loyal, if betrayed, wife:

Alas! my woman's weakness has undone
 All that my virtue had so long preserv'd;
 Now I too late perceive the consequence:
 How fatal this discovery must be
 To my Cleombrotus! for he is mine,
 My husband still, however base and false.
 Tho' I am wrong'd in the most tender part,
 Most sensible of pain, I am his wife;
 That is the character I must maintain. (157)

Even in the final act, when Cleombrotus has been captured after the failure of his plan to hold Euphemia hostage, Celona can still plead for his life:

CEL.: . . . I wonnot move
 A word in the defence of that bad man,
 A burthen to the earth with all his crimes.
 But O! remember Sir, I am his wife—
 LEO.: Forget him, most unworthy of his race.
 CEL.: Instructed in that duty, taught by you,
 To bear a part in all his weal or woe:
 O! therefore, if you would defend my fame,
 My virtue, which your precepts first inspir'd,
 Let me not leave him in extremity;
 If you would save your sinking daughter's peace,
 Bestow her husband's life, grant it to me;
 * * *
 . . . drive him out
 To reprobated exile round the world,
 A caitive, vagabond, abhor'd, accurs'd,
 Most miserable in a hated life.
 I ask but for a change of punishment,
 More exquisite, and sharp; revenge itself
 Should grant me that. O! only spare these eyes
 The murdering object of a husband's death. (166)

When Eurytion nevertheless stabs and kills Cleombrotus, Celona takes upon herself the fate that she has urged for her husband:

I was born
 To be unhappy, and I have my lot:
 This is the portion was reserv'd for me,
 Unhappy in the dearest names of love,

A wife and daughter! and I'm past the care,
 The miserable care of comfort now.
 Yet I will bear this wretched load of life,
 But far remov'd, and shut out from the world,
 No more be remember'd in my wrongs. (168)

In The Loyal Brother Southerne established moral poles of passive nobility and active villainy. A related pattern structures The Spartan Dame. We cannot call Celona passive, for if her rejection of her husband along with his acts is in one sense negative, a surrendering of happiness, it is in a larger sense positive, an affirmation of morality without which Celona cannot feel true happiness. Better terms for the opposites in this play might be a sense of time as opposed to a sort of carpe diem philosophy. Celona is a traditionalist for whom the future is an extension of the past. Her society's conventions make her very conscious of her position as a Spartan wife and a Spartan daughter, and lead her to attempt to fulfill the obligations laid on her by those roles even when they are in conflict. Furthermore, she is aware that her actions and values not only derive from the past but will shape those of the future. This awareness forms one of her arguments to Cleombrotus in the first act:

Suffer not, my lord,
 Th' industrious malice of our histories,
 To take advantage of a crime like this,
 To stain the glorious story of our lives,
 And curse our names to late posterity. (102)

Her husband stands at the opposite pole; for him the moment, the immediate present, is everything. Politically he refuses to wait for a legitimate succession to the throne, preferring to snatch it while Leonidas, bound to him not just by the ties of monarch to subject but

by those of father to son, still lives. This impatience in affairs of state extends to the domestic. After the couple's first estrangement over the succession we discover upon Celona's withdrawal that Cleombrotus' praise of marriage was a charade; he himself is a "libelling marriage-mortifier" and an "unhous'd, lawless, rambling libertine."

Tender, and chaste, and fair! nay, she was once
The boasted pride and judgment of my choice;
So she was thought, and so I valu'd her;
But she's my wife; and nothing, but a wife,
With all her charms, could have been stale so soon.
A curse of marriage! plenty makes its wants;
And what was meant love's food, starves all its joys:
The feasts come quicker than our appetites;
Yet forcing nature still, at last we cloy,
And surfeit even to loathing. (104)

His fancy has already lit elsewhere—on his sister-in-law:

O that sound!
The very mention of Thelamia's name,
Like strong philter, rages in my veins. (104)

It is typical of Cleombrotus, for whom Celona's invocation of "those awful words" "king and father" (102) had no meaning, to collapse with desire at the word signifying the woman for whom he lusts. She is doubly forbidden him; a relationship with her would be incest, and Crites gives Cleombrotus news that puts her farther from his reach. The preceding day she has been married to her lover Eurytion. Crites suggests that Eurytion is frustrating Cleombrotus at every point, not just marrying Thelamia but by standing firm with his father-in-law, the banished Leonidas; many problems would be solved with his death. Cleombrotus' ecstatic response is a ghastly parody of "love and honor": "Thelamia and a crown" (105), both gained by betrayal and murder.

Thus another plot is set in motion. Crites is still believed loyal to Leonidas, and Eurytion will entrust his wife to Crites' care; this traitor will make it possible for Cleombrotus to achieve his base desire. Thelamia, of course, rejects Cleombrotus' advances, horrified at his suggestion that since both are forsaken, he by Celona and she by Eurytion, who has gone to her father, they should comfort one another. When he protests that he loves her, she retorts with her sister's integrity:

Call it not love;
 Coming from you, it has another name
 Too horrid for the ear.
 * * *
 Tho' I were fear'd against all other sins,
 Incest would make me tremble: Sure it is,
 On this side hell, known only in the name. (128)

His answer, which contrasts sharply with his wife's repeated appeals to words as symbols of unaltering relationships, recalls Seliman:

SEL.: Then be forgotten ever
 The ties of blood, friendship, humanity,
 Your empty names, and perish all in him;
 No more my brother, but the worst of villains. (I, 18)

CLE.: Brother, and sister, are but terms of art,
 Occasionally fashion'd to the ends
 Of government; as marriage is no more
 Than a mere human obligation'
 Of no more force than is ordain'd by pow'r;
 Which, as it ties the knot, unties it too:
 And I ordain it shall no longer bind. (III, 129)

Thus in every context Cleombrotus casts aside the formal patterns of life, the traditional bonds both public and private that cement the social structure. It is significant that he comes to power in the midst of anarchy, because he is a creature of disorder and impulse.

These same qualities eventually destroy him. When Thelamia threatens to stab herself rather than to submit to his attentions, Cleombrotus manages to cool his passions and withdraw; in his frustration he applies again to Crites. This traitor has just received a message that Eurytion plans to return that night for a secret visit; Crites suggests that with careful timing Cleombrotus may in the darkness of night go to Thelamia's bed in place of Eurytion, whom Crites will intercept.

Meanwhile, Crites and other conspirators have decided to lure Leonidas into the city and there assassinate him without Cleombrotus' knowledge. Crites' plan is to forge a letter to Leonidas in which Celona states her intention to murder her husband; Crites knows that while Leonidas will not fight to regain a crown he will risk death to prevent his daughter from so betraying her Spartan ethic. Everything goes wrong from the start. Eurytion arrives too early and is sent off with great difficulty; Leonidas too arrives at the city before Crites expects him. As the traitor rushes out of the house to set the assassination in motion, Cleombrotus, waiting hungrily without, stops him and insists on being admitted to Thelamia; refusing to listen to Crites' explanation that Leonidas is within their grasp, he threatens Crites with a dagger and orders him to

. . . introduce me to her arms,
And on thy life stir not till my return. (143)

This delay prevents the death of Leonidas, and his impatience sets in train events that will destroy Cleombrotus and his cohorts.

Cleombrotus' character is further revealed when after their encounter Thelamia discovers his true identity and falls into hysterics. Just as he earlier offered to bear any guilt for usurping the throne of Celona's father, so he now offers to assume himself the sin, "If there be any sin." After all, he points out,

'Tis yet a secret; While you keep it so,
Your husband is not wrong'd, or if he be,
He who has done it, can maintain the wrong. (150)

Again we see Cleombrotus' limited and amoral vision of reality; what is not known has not happened.³⁷

The other characters in the play are variations on the two themes embodied in Celona and tradition as opposed to a philosophy of greedy hedonism. Crites is the most interesting secondary figure. His ancestry, like that of Ismael in The Loyal Prince, obviously derives from Iago. Unlike Shakespeare's villain, however, he seeks not to corrupt but, already corrupt himself, to ensure his own safety and comfort. Even in the final scene, when it becomes clear that he has chosen the losing side, he has arranged with a kinsman who is a priest at the Temple of Neptune to admit the supporters of Leonidas in return for the preservation of his own life. He meets his end when Cleombrotus, learning of this betrayal, throws him from the ramparts of the temple.

It is fitting that Crites die at the hands of Cleombrotus, for he is in a sense a part of the usurper, a sort of distillation of Cleombrotus' characteristic discarding of traditional forms and conventions. It is amorphous, many-faced, the very symbol of falseness:

³⁷ Molière's *Tartuffe* uses similar arguments in attempting to seduce Elmire.

CRI.: Thus in the days of reformation,
 We must put on those forms, and features, which
 Resemble and come nearest our design.
 All are not born with handsome faces; then
 Mend 'em, the ladies will advise;
 Paint to the fair complexion of the times,
 And hide the natural deformity. (118)

The other characters are primarily members of Celona's family. Leonidas is a man whose nobility exceeds even that of his daughter. In pointed contrast to Cleombrotus he values above his rank and even above his own life those whom he loves and to whom he is obligated. He flies, as Crites knows he will, to halt what he believes to be Celona's intention to murder her husband; he is less concerned that Cleombrotus has taken his throne than that his daughter will "stain the blood you boast" (143) by such a sin. And when in the final scene Cleombrotus holds his youngest daughter hostage, Leonidas again puts his children's welfare above himself and his lost power:

Hold, hold; the Gods dispose of me, and mine.
 The father gives his all to save the child:
 Unstain'd restore her to my trembling hand,
 And I resign my pow'r, renounce my crown,
 Disband my friends, or if you would have more,
 It shall be done. (164)

His other daughter, Thelamia, and her husband are conventional ill-fated lovers. Thelamia does have one rather effective scene in Act III, as she sits at night nervous and distraught after Cleombrotus' initial advances to her and seeks out the story of Lucrece:

THE.: O, Crites, I have met the saddest tale,
 The rape of Lucrece there.—

CRI.: 'Tis famous in
 The Roman story: Tarquin ravish'd her.

THE.: The circumstances are so near my case—

CRI.: So near your case! [This is the night Crites plans to admit Cleombrotus to Thelamia; he fears she suspects something.]

THE.: In all but the sad end.

*

*

*

THE.: When I think
 Upon that midnight ravisher, I reflect,
 Upon our sex's weakness, thus expos'd,
 How easily we are betray'd, or sold,
 By any one in trust.
 CRI.: There cannot be such villany [sic] in men.
 THE.: There should not, sure. Indeed, I was afraid,
 But now I think myself securely safe,
 In thy kind care.
 CRI.: I'm glad you think you are. (137)

Considering what is planned for Thelamia, this exchange is both moving and horrifying.

Eurytion appears relatively little in the play and always demonstrates great sensitivity and nobility. In marked (and probably deliberate on his creator's part) contrast to his brother-in-law, he places duty above self, honor before love:

Sir [Leonidas], speak on.
 Tho' I should starve the youth of my desires,
 And come but old to [Thelamia's] expecting arms,
 When I can serve my royal master's cause,
 The bare reflections of my loyalty
 Shall make amends for all my loss of love. (158)

Why it took thirty years and extensive excision to get The Spartan Dame produced is obvious; whether accidental in the source from Plutarch or not, the parallels of situation between the saintly and quintessentially honorable Leonidas and the deposed James are too close for political comfort, and the comments on William by analogy to Cleombrotus and to Mary by contrast to Celona, even if coincidental, would be downright dangerous to the author and to any company which might produce the play.

But aside from the political questions, The Spartan Dame is of far greater interest as a milestone in Southerne's development as a playwright. Building upon the conventions and situations he employed in

in his two earlier works, here he has gone beyond formula and produced true complexity of character and motivation. Celona is magnificent in her honor and her sorrow, convincing in her love for her unworthy husband and in her respect for her royal father. Hers is not an easy path, an easy decision. She is the first of Southerne's great women parts, and he does not forget her. Two plays later she will be transported to Restoration London, her values and commitments intact, and presented as another of his great heroines, Mrs. Friendall in the comedy The Wives Excuse.

CHAPTER III

COMEDY—THE EARLY '90's

After the production of The Disappointment in 1684 a six-year hiatus in Southerne's career occurs, probably explained by the events leading up to the Revolution of 1688 and Southerne's participation in them, although in a minor capacity, on James' side. He was not completely idle, however, since The Spartan Dame was largely written during this period but could not because of its subject be produced.

When he did return to the stage in 1690 he abandoned for several years the serious mode he had employed wholly in The Loyal Brother and The Spartan Dame and primarily in The Disappointment, and turned to straight comedy. Even so, his experience with serious drama and his growing insight into human character, particularly the female, give to all three of his comedies dark edges that deepen progressively through them.

The first is a rollicking farce entitled The Rambling Lady, or Sir Antony Love (1690), involving a very attractive and engaging female libertine in male disguise. She dominates the work with her gallantry and assertiveness and is the first of several "breeches parts" Southerne will write; there will be Victoria in The Fatal Marriage and Charlott Welldon in Oroonoko. Unlike his earlier libertines, Alberto and Cleombrotus, Sir Antony is admirable in her freedom from convention; this is due primarily to her position as a woman who before the play

opens has been victimized and deceived by the very society of hypocrites and hedonists whom she victimizes in its course.

Next followed the brilliant The Wives Excuse, or Cuckolds Make Themselves (1691). Its central character seems completely opposite to the libertine heroine of Sir Antony Love; Mrs. Friendall is a conventional woman of high moral standards married by her family to a foolish fop and pursued by a very attractive and persuasive rake. She too is a victim of her society's low valuation of women; Southerne's attitude toward her is indicated in his title. Like Celona, she is pulled between the demands of honor and of love; but her choice is as much harder than that of Celona as Celona's was than that of Semanthe. Mr. Friendall, to whom she owes honor, is no noble Leonidas but a stupid and unfaithful husband who neglects her; Lovemore, her suitor, is sophisticated, witty, and clever about women. She maintains her integrity, but with great struggle, and is rewarded at play's end by the sight of her husband publicly betraying her with another woman. She is left alone—as she has in fact been throughout the play—because no one else understands the demands of tradition and morality to which she responds.

The Maid's Last Prayer, or Any Rather Than Fail (1693) is the last and darkest of the comedies. Although it is flawed by a confusion of focus and tone, it presents another of Southerne's great women: Lady Trickitt, the high-born whore whose determination to control her own life in the face of society's hypocrisy rivals that of Sir Antony Love. The play is disturbing in its cynicism, and reading it makes one realize

why for his last two great works Southerne returns to the tragicomic form; only there can he express his dual view of the human condition.

The Rambling Lady, or Sir Antony Love (1690)¹

This comedy opened at the end of 1690 and was an immediate success. Its title character is that perennially popular literary type, the woman (Lucia) disguised as a man. But she is neither a Viola nor a Fidelity, both of whom appear to others as sorry male figures. True, she has in time-honored dramatic tradition followed her love Valentine to France known only to her man-servant Waitwell, who passes as her tutor. But she has financed this expedition by stealing five hundred guineas from her keeper, the foppish Sir Golding Gentle; and when Waitwell remonstrates with her over her "affairs" with young women who believe her a man and over her quarrels and duels, she replies,

Why, 'tis only the fashion of the world that gives your sex a better title than we [women] have, to the wearing a sword; my constant exercise with my fencing master, and conversation among men, have at last not only made me adroit, but despise the danger of a quarrel, too. (62)

She tells Valentine that "courage . . . proceed[s] more from habit and practice, than any virtue of the mine" (164), and we learn that "Sir Antony" is so quick-tempered that "he" has run through the arm another young man whose only offense was hesitation in agreeing that Valentine possesses every good quality; in fact, the victim was not even acquainted with Valentine.

¹This play is referred to by various scholars as either Sir Anthony Love or Sir Antony Love; since the edition used in this study employs the latter spelling consistently, I also have used it. See Sir Antony, or The Rambling Lady, Plays, I, 153-260.

Nor does she wish for marriage as do most Restoration women. In her character as Sir Antony she several times avows her disinclination to wed, which is reasonable since if "he" did marry, "his" bride would be greatly disappointed. But even when she reveals to Valentine her true identity and he offers marriage, she refuses a state "which I neither desire nor deserve" (221; italics mine). In fact, she is shrewd enough to urge him to marry Floriante, the young French girl of whom he is enamored and who, she says frankly, "would be a dangerous rival in a mistress . . . but matrimony, that's her security, is [also] mine; I can't apprehend her in a wife" (222).

"Sir Antony" is, in short, a libertine, a role usually reserved for men both on the stage and in real life. She scoffs at custom and tradition, social and religious, as conducive to empty gestures. When Ilford, Valentine's rather strait-laced friend and travelling companion, suggests that "Courage often runs in a blood[line]," Sir Antony replies,

They say so of the pox, indeed. The sins of the father may run in the blood sometimes, and visit to the third and fourth generation: but their virtue dies with the men. (165)

She compares the imitation of one generation by the next to the acting style of an "ignorant player" who,

undertaking to copy a master actor of his time, began at his infirmity in his feet; and growing famous for the imitation of his gout, he cou'd walk like him, when he cou'd do nothing else like him. (165)

She is equally liberal in religious matters, laughing alike at a passing Pilgrim and at an unctuous, worldly Abbé, and agreeing wholeheartedly with Valentine's pronouncement on religion, a veritable tract on free-thinking and typically libertine in tone:

No opinion ever sprung out of an universal consent; truth can no more be comprehended than beauty; we have our several reasons for the one, and fancies for the other. And as beauty has not the same influence upon all complexions: so reason has not the same force upon all understandings: we embrace what pleases us in both, secure ourselves in a probability, and guess out the rest. (165)

We have seen Southerne dealing with a libertine before, in the character of Alberto in The Disappointment. In that play the type is villainous, and not effectively so. But similarities between Sir Antony and her predecessor are clear: they share a refusal to "play by the rules" of traditional values and a set of naturalistic attitudes toward both religion and sex. But Sir Antony emerges as more admirable and, ironically, the truer libertine, for reasons that are suggested in Dale Underwood's definition of the philosophy:

Finally the libertine considered human laws and institutions as mere customs varying with the variations of societies and characteristically at odds with Nature as, of course, with "right reason." . . . The libertine revolted in action as well as in thought against the customs of his society.²

The libertinage of the heroine differs from that of the villain in the context of the action and the way it is carried out. Where Alberto uses subterfuge and deceit to victimize the innocent, Sir Antony attacks only the unworthy. She is, Hume observes, what Robert Jordan characterizes as an "extravagant rake,"³ full of impulse and craziness.⁴ Alberto, on

²Underwood, p. 14.

³Robert Jordan, "The Extravagant Rake in Restoration Comedy, Restoration Literature, ed. Harold Love (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 69-90; cited in Hume, "The Myth of the Rake in 'Restoration' Comedy," pp. 38 ff.

⁴Hume, "The Myth of the Rake," p. 38.

the other hand, would seem to fit Hume's classification of the "vicious rake" whose "libertinism is real, not all airy talk and light-hearted escapades, and is taken seriously."⁵ One way of expressing the problem of Alberto in The Disappointment is that he is obviously intended to be a vicious rake but comes off as something considerably less. Sir Antony, on the other hand, is considerably more than an "extravagant rake;" she is what Hume calls the "judicious rake" or "philosophical libertine."⁶

To understand her nature it is necessary to understand the play in which she appears. It is around her that Sir Antony Love revolves, a circumstance as unusual in the male-centered Restoration comedy as is her libertinism. True, she is disguised as a man, but from the first few lines in the play the audience knows her real sex. The plot, which is simultaneously over-contrived and episodic, seems designed primarily to allow Sir Antony to display her cleverness and joie de vivre. Valentine is infatuated with Floriante, whose father, Count Canaile, wishes her to marry the over-bred and haughty Count Verole. Ilford, Valentine's friend, loves Volante, the niece of the reprobate but affable Abbé and cousin to Floriante; she in turn desires Sir Antony, who encourages her affections in order to annoy the occasionally priggish Ilford. One thread of the action concerns these amatory tangles, which are resolved by the two Englishmen obtaining their true loves and by Charlotte, Floriante's younger sister, tricking Verole

⁵ Ibid., p. 42.

⁶ Ibid.

into marrying her; as obnoxious as he is, she prefers being his wife to staying in the convent to which her father has consigned her.

Another action revolves around Sir Gentle Golding, the fool whom Sir Antony has robbed and abandoned and who has come to France, we suspect, to let the resultant laughter at his expense subside. Sir Antony manages to rob him of still more money and at the end to marry him by allowing him to believe that she is Floriante; she then demands and gets a separate maintenance. Finally, there is a subplot involving a rascally Pilgrim who in the guise of a holy man has robbed and conned his way across Europe; he, like Sir Gentle, becomes the butt of a series of pranks by Sir Antony and is also robbed by her.

What distinguishes this hodge-podge of actions is the character of Sir Antony. She lives by her wits, which are considerable, and possesses all the qualities of conversation, valor, and recklessness which had become the standard hall-marks of the rake. Although she gives herself and her worldly possessions freely to those for whom she has affection, she has no mercy on those whom she does not respect. As Ilford rightly observes early in the play, she is "an enemy of form" (165), for she has proven in her own successful masquerade how susceptible is her world to appearances. The ultimate irony is that the woman disguised as a gallant is a true gallant—witty, courageous, refusing to follow society's script for a woman in her situation. Sold by an aunt, as Valentine reveals, "when she was too young, to judge between the fortune and the fool" (177), she has wasted neither energy nor time in self-pity or regrets, nor has she taken to the livelihood

expected of women in her position, professional prostitution. A most revealing exchange takes place in the first act as Sir Antony discusses the fate of Lucia (actually herself in her old life) with Valentine and Ilford, who as yet are unaware of her true identity. Valentine remarks that very shortly after the relationship was established Lucia discovered that the "loath'd, and abhorr'd" Sir Gentle.

ILF.: Loathing and abhorring are tokens of mortification indeed; but penance is not enough for such a fault; 'tis generally as short-liv'd as the sin that begot it. What marks of amendment has she since given?

S.A.: What marks of amendment wou'd you have? . . . Wou'd you have her snivel, like a girl; more afraid of her mother than the sin; and cry, Forgive me this one slip, I'll do so no more—. (177)

Rather than sharing Alberto's propensity to victimize, to debase libertinism to unthinking self-gratification while simultaneously pretending that he is acting "naturally," Lucia has herself been a victim of an older, less attractive Alberto. She is honest about herself in all but her disguise as a man; Alberto is dishonest in all but his masculinity.

Closest to being Sir Antony's equal is her love Valentine, who like her is witty, generous, and his own man. He also is a "man's man"; frustrated in a rendezvous with Floriante, he accepts Sir Antony's offer of a visit to "his" mistress, an "English lady" who is actually Sir Antony, or Lucia herself. When Antony asks, "Then you are not one of those fine gentlemen, who because they are in love with one woman, can lie with nobody else?," Valentine's reply is worthy of a Dorimant: "Not I . . . I may be a lover, but I must be a man" (218). Illustrative of the difference between the protagonist of *Etherege* and that of *Southerne*

and perhaps indicative of the three decades that separate them is that when the encounter has taken place and Valentine has discovered the lady's true identity, he immediately—and, one feels, sincerely—offers to marry her. Although he is rejected, his offer is a striking departure from the "typical" action of a Restoration hero in such a situation.

Like Sir Antony, Valentine is "an enemy of forms" less concerned with a man's family and estates than with the man himself. The cautious Ilford believes that far from being a "baronet, of twelve hundred pounds a year, under age, and upon an allowance for his travel from his guardians," Sir Antony is more likely to "have been some court page, spoil'd first by the confidence of his lady, in knowing her secrets," and

then coming early into the iniquity of the town, by the merit of his person, and impudence has since made a fashionable livelihood out of women and fools. (177)

Valentine, however, is unmoved by his friend's suspicions:

I don't know who he is, or what he has: if he be no knight, he's a pretty fellow, and that's better; and if he has not twelve hundred pounds a year, he deserves it, and does not want it; which is more than you can say of most of your knights, that have that estate. (177)

In short, Valentine is not a contrast to Sir Antony but "his" male counterpart; what we know about one we know about the other. It is the other men in the play who by contrast to either of them become comic.

The least silly of the lot is Ilford. Although witty and sophisticated, he is not the free spirit that Valentine and Sir Antony are. Since he is so distrustful of this "baronet," Valentine laughingly

accuses him of disliking Sir Antony because Volante, the Abbé's niece who is as flighty as her name suggests, prefers the younger "man's" flirting charm to Ilford's honorable, serious—and often dull—courtship. This triangle provides some of the most comical scenes in the play.

There is more than a suggesting of Molière's *Alceste* about Ilford, although he is far less sensitive and self-centered and far more conventional than that gloomy hero. Yet the hoyden Volante is as inappropriate an object for the affections of a man who not only seems to be approaching thirty but is "tender of [his] reputation" as is Célimène for those of *Alceste*. Sir Antony, typically libertine, cannot resist tormenting the staid Ilford by pretending a far more intimate interest in Volante than "he" can ever hope to accomplish. When Ilford attempts to make his young rival understand how serious are his own intentions by revealing that he is in love, Antony replies,

[With a lady t]hat was never sad, nor serious in her life
 . . . in love! thou art a very honest fellow, and hast a
 great many good qualities, but thy talent lies quite another
 way. (186)

What, wonders Antony less than tactfully, can Volante possibly see in such a fellow? Ilford's response reflects his conventionality: "I think my estate might recommend my person to a welcome, where-ever I pretend." Antony suggests that "more modesty might become a man of your gravity!"

Part of the humor in this scene and in others dealing with the triangle derives from the audience's knowledge of Antony's true identity; we thus understand what Ilford finds so frustrating, "his" ability to know what pleases young girls. This is an interesting variation on the

dramatic convention of girl-infatuated-with-boy-who-is-really-girl; rather than being embarrassed or made uneasy, Antony leads Volante on, primarily to annoy Ilford. "He" goes so far as to reveal that Volante is enamored of himself, and that he intends to "lie with her under [Ilford's] nose" (186). At this the two draw, only to be interrupted by Volante's arrival. In the ensuing exchange, Antony maliciously puts poor Ilford in the wrong, and Volante forces her unhappy suitor to make up with his young rival. Ilford's subsequent soliloquy shows that even he is aware that he is being made "a woman's fool," although he little suspects that he is being made a fool by two women:

I deserve it all, for putting it into her power to use me so: he's ten years younger than I am, and consequently so much handsomer in her eye: he prates a great deal more, and better than I do for her purpose, and therefore lies better in her ear: he has the advantage of me in every vanity that can betray a girl: Volante's a girl, and what could I expect from my honourable love for her, when, in the weakness of a woman's choice, she will prefer the present laughing hour to all that can come after. If this would cure me now, 'twere a lesson well learn'd. (188)

It is this capacity to see how silly he is being, even if he cannot overcome his infatuation, that makes Ilford so attractive and prevents him from becoming a comic butt. He is indeed, to use Antony's phrase, an "honest man." Even when he has assisted his rival at a fake marriage to Volante, himself posing as the priest, and is sent by Antony to do a groom's duties, he refuses to take advantage of Volante's deception; instead, he points out to her the folly of having trusted a man who would thus betray her. As for himself,

However you deserve of me, I come to serve you: and since this opportunity (that favours, and was given me for baser ends) encourages me to nothing beyond the hope of your esteem, you must give me leave to think, that from my behaviour, I deserve that honour better than my trifling rival does the title of your love. (239)

Thus Ilford wins his lady. But even at this moment he cannot help moralizing and preaching, making sure that Volante realizes the enormity of her indiscretion and of Sir Antony's perfidy. She repents and vows amendment with as many tears and protestations as Ilford could have wished from Lucia. However, if one doubts Dorimant's reformation one must also question Volante's: Mrs. Ilford is likely to lead her husband a merry dance.

From Ilford to the other men in the play is a vast leap downward. If Ilford is sometimes ridiculous in his courtship of Volante, he at least recognizes that fact. And he is truly concerned for her happiness; if she honestly loves Sir Antony, Ilford would prefer to see her married to his rival than unhappy. No such self-perception or generosity marks the other two "lovers" in Sir Antony Love, nor does Southerne soften or mitigate their pretensions.

The first of these, Count Verole, to whom Floriante's father intends to marry her, is a stock French aristocrat—arrogant, effete, and devious, with only his rank to recommend him. The Abbé, a sacrilegious old scoundrel, is nevertheless a good judge of human nature; and he describes Verole as the "worst of fools; a singular, opinionated, crooked-temper'd jealous-pated fool" and observes that "Virtue created first nobility: but in our honourable ignorance nobility makes virtue" (179). The Abbé clearly shares the libertine's (and Sir Antony's) impatience with custom and tradition. Verole indeed sees himself as "above the taste of common things,/ Being born above the rank of common men" (190). Southerne himself cleverly mocks Verole's self-importance by having him speak in blank verse when he is being "lordly."

Sir Antony, herself a self-made creature, sees through and derides such pretensions, averring that one can tell Verole is a count

By that coy, cock'd-up nose, that hinders you
From seeing any man, that does not stand
Upon the shoulders of his ancestors,
For long descents of far-fam'd heraldry.
I take you for a thing, they call a count;
For had you not been a count, you had been nothing;
At least I'm sure you had been nothing here. (191)

This description, with its clever punning on "account" and "no account," exemplifies the libertine attitude toward tradition. Verole is clearly a manifestation of that phenomenon, described by Antony in the first act, whereby the descendants mimic the manners of their fathers whose "virtue [has] die[d] with the men."

Verole's manners are so affected and exalted that they become ludicrous. When Antony carries a challenge to him "from a gentleman" (Valentine), Verole can only ask, "Is he no more?" Told that Valentine is his rival for Floriante, he sneers that "My rival is my equal; I am born/ Above his rank, he cannot rival me . . . [although]/ Envy he may my fortune with that lady" (192). To duel would be "common soldiers work," a wasted effort when "I can hire ruffians to take the trouble off my hands" (193).

Verole is the antithesis of the libertine. With no sense of identity beyond that of being the heir to his ancestors' glories, he is wholly a creature of the past; but he has retained the forms of his heritage while corrupting the substance. "Honor" to him means that which is due himself; he feels no necessity to demonstrate it. He disguises cowardice as "reason"—only men who are angry, mad, or drunk

fight. It is his idea that Floriante's younger sister Charlotte be sent to a convent, "the best retreat from a bad world." Charlotte suggests that "my sister's fortune, in your opinion, wanted mending more than my manners" (190); that is, if she goes into a nunnery her portion of her father's fortune will pass to her sister and thence to Verole if Floriante marries him. Verole thus disguises greed as Christian concern for another's soul. Even Count Canaille, the girls' father, at first determined that his daughter will wed her aristocratic suitor because "that fool's a count; and the count makes amend for the fool" (179), is revolted by Verole's bringing a band of braves to fight Valentine for him.

Verole, and to a lesser degree Canaille, represents the effete, over-cultured tradition against which the libertine seems to have been rebelling. Verole's illusions about his own worth have no relationship with any sort of reality; instead, they feed upon "virtues" and events in the distant past and allow him to avoid any sort of contact with life or confrontation with himself. By his pretensions he is able to obscure his own weaknesses and less noble desires from his own consciousness. Juxtaposed to Sir Antony, who though neither noble nor even a man nevertheless demonstrates courage and grace, Verole stands completely exposed.

Sir Gentle Golding is Verole's English counterpart, although Southerne seems to have discriminated fairly carefully between national stereotypes. Where Verole is an over-bred and dandified aristocrat, Golding is a dull country squire with an ambition to be a dashing

blade. What the two have most in common is an obsession with image. Because Sir Gentle is socially a far less powerful figure than the Count, he is the most "comic" figure in the play, the butt of both author and characters.

As with Sir Fopling Flutter, we have his measure before he ever appears on-stage. Upon hearing of his arrival in France, Valentine admits that he knew "a considerable coxcomb of that name in England" (176); the servant who has brought the message agrees that "Your description is so like him, sir" (176). In the same scene we learn that this is the very man to whom Lucia (Sir Antony) was sold by her aunt; when Valentine and Ilford wonder what has become of Lucia, Sir Antony reveals that "She has robb'd him of five hundred pounds, run away from him; and so expos'd him, that he has been the common rhyming theme . . . for the puny poets to set out upon" (178). With his actual appearance, Sir Gentle more than fulfills the audience's expectations of him.

For if Verole is a caricature of the "typical" French aristocrat, Sir Gentle demonstrates all the insularity and jingoism of an Englishman abroad. He is sure that he will be great friends with his countrymen because "I'm an Englishman, and the English always keep together abroad . . . for fear of being cheated . . . Of their mother-church, their religion." Sir Gentle is determined "to continue as I am" (194); for him France can offer nothing but an opportunity to display his own superiority as an Englishman.

He also affects town-manners, attempting an air of ease and wit which betrays him at every turn. He refers to Valentine as "a very pretty fellow:"

but I have know him a great while; I am for variety and fresh faces; here's honest Ilford, my very good friend, of half an hour's acquaintance, will recommend me. (194)

This abuse of language—Ilford is a "very good friend" on the basis of "half an hour's acquaintance"—and Sir Gentle's expressed desire for "variety" and "fresh faces" are symptomatic of the fool who is not to be trusted and who has no perception of how others see him; his dialogue thus links him with his French confrère, the Count.

When his "friends" rally him about Lucia, he reveals still more of his character; like Verole, Sir Gentle has a positive gift for reworking any unpleasant reality that does not suit his self-image into more palatable form. Lucia, to whom he first refers as "A jilting jade" in his shock at hearing her name, quickly becomes a "poor creature" to whom he "gave . . . a jealousy of another woman." Rather than having been robbed by her of the five hundred pounds, "the truth is, I gave her an opportunity; left my cabinet open on purpose; and was glad to get rid of her for the money" (196). He wishes to believe himself a rake and libertine, irresistible to women and "able to bid up the price of any of 'em." When Valentine observes that "If you show your money, we may borrow," Golding again betrays himself:

You may borrow, but I never lend; you are acquainted, and have your good breeding and behaviour to recommend you to the ladies. (197)

Early in the play Sir Antony has voluntarily relieved some financial distress for Valentine and Ilford by lending them fifty of the stolen

five hundred pounds; and in their discussion of their young friend, Valentine has assured Ilford that should Antony every want for money he will lend his all to help. Thus we see Golding contrasted, to his detriment, with the "heroes" of the play. Finally, this speech again reveals through Golding's own words the discrepancy between the picture he has of himself and the reality. The others have "good breeding and behaviour" in their favor; he has only money.

Later in the play Sir Gentle finds himself in a room with the rascally Pilgrim, who has been arrested for his frauds. The Pilgrim threatens the Englishman with what he says is a pistol in his pocket and forces him to give him his clothes for a disguise. Sir Gentle, left stripped naked, is primarily distraught because he had dressed especially for an assignation with a French lady arranged by Sir Antony. His reflections on his situation reveal how shallow a creature he is:

here I must stay, to be expos'd in his room; but in a foolisher figure, than ever the Pilgrim made: he was only disguis'd [in Sir Gentle's clothes]; but I am stripp'd . . . wou'd I were dead drunk, to cover my shame in any way; wou'd I had any disguise. 'Gad, I'll put on the Pilgrim's—it can't be worse with me.—Besides, the respect that is paid to this clothing will at least carry me safe to my lodging. (210)

Here is expressed the old adage, "clothes make the man." Sir Gentle would rather be unconscious than found naked; if he can keep himself unaware of how others see him, he is comfortable. In a larger context, clothing has become a symbol: if he cannot be the gallant he believes his own dress to have made him, the reverence owed a Pilgrim will suffice for the moment.

When Sir Gentle has at last his opportunity for an assignation with the French lady (actually Sir Antony, or Lucia) his response exposes

again his pretensions and posturings. Brought to the lady's chambers by Waitwell and left alone for a few minutes, Gentle is overtaken by a panic which presages Marlow's dilemma in She Stoops to Conquer:

How ceremony disguises any thing! I can't take this civil gentleman for a pimp, tho' I have occasion for him; nor this house for a bawdy-house, tho' I have a mind to make it one. Would Sir Antony were here, to encourage me with his impudence; when I have company to halloo me, I can fasten like a bull dog. But I have a villainous suspicion, that when I see this lady, I shall take her for a civil gentlewoman; abuse her in a way she does not deserve; think too well of her, and lose my labour. (219)

When the "lady" appears, Waitwell tells Sir Gentle that she speaks no English. Gentle quickly dismisses an initial shock at her resemblance to Lucia and gets down to business with his usual address: "What sign shall I make to put her in mind of her bedchamber? Money speaks all languages, this purse will be my interpreter" (224).

His chagrin when Lucia reveals her identity is enormous; and when she hints that she has a pistol about her (Sir Gentle seems to have a deathly fear of unseen firearms), he immediately acquiesces to her demands for a draft to his banker. As Waitwell leads the hapless gull away to be locked up until the money be paid, Valentine, emerging from the hiding place from which he has watched the exchange, delivers a sort of summary of libertine law:

Thus all things are provided for by fate:
The witty man enjoys the fool's estate.
So rich and poor, let 'em compute their gains;
One has his lot in lands, and one in brains.
And 'tis but justice fortune should do more
For him, who being born so, would be poor. (226)

The final major character in the play is not a lover but a rascal—the Pilgrim. He has almost no part in the main actions, which center

around the various love interests. His function seems to be that of a foil to Sir Antony, not in the way that Verole and Sir Gentle are, but in a less comic and more thematic sense. The Pilgrim and Lucia have much in common. Each lives off fools by his or her wits; each is in disguise; and each sees through the other. Yet the Pilgrim (or Palmer, as he is also called) is the "villain" of the piece, Sir Antony the "hero." The difference lies in their purposes and methods.

Lucia has assumed her disguise as a way to freedom, as a way of controlling her destiny. While she has no mercy on fools, even in her male dress she is direct and open in relationships, such as hers with Valentine, which she values. The only person whom she criminally victimizes is Sir Gentle, who after all debauched her and is a pompous ass into the bargain. She maddens Ilford with her false courtship of Volante, but he is as pompous as Sir Gentle where Volante is concerned, and Volante is a rather silly girl who (as Ilford himself admits) is too young and foolish to be wise in love. Sir Antony takes Valentine into her bed, but this is no purely physical coupling resulting from animal passion or avarice but a gift of herself to someone for whom she feels deep and longstanding affection. Even in her deception she is, in a larger sense, honest: a sort of beau idéal of libertinism.

The Palmer, on the other hand, is a thorough-going hypocrite who uses the garb of religion, both literally and symbolically, to take advantage of those from whom he steals. When Sir Antony, trying to break through the facade which she suspects hides a villain, tells the "holy man" that she was a younger brother who not only murdered her

elder brother to get his estate but also disposed of an old grandmother who had a jointure on it, the Pilgrim finally exposes himself in a speech that emphasizes the (misleading) resemblances between himself and Sir Antony; he is, he says, "as arrant a rogue" as she,

a shifter of shapes and names; have travell'd through every profession, and cheated in all: so having by my industry gather'd a handsome fortune, I converted that into jewels and myself into a Pilgrim, for the safer conveyance of both. (202)

When Sir Antony first drugs and then searches him, she finds a notebook listing all his depredations and confidence games; her subsequent exposure of him to the civil authorities leads to his escape in Sir Gentle's clothing. That particular scene, involving once more the change of appearance by dress, serves to underline the basic difference between Sir Antony and the Pilgrim and Golding. The men depend on apparel to hide their weaknesses and faults from the world; Sir Antony uses her disguise to experience the world more fully. She as much honors the garments of manhood as the other two degrade those of the holy man and the gentleman.

The other characters in the play have very slight functions. The Abbé, amusing as the hedonistic priest, like the Pilgrim suggests the Church's corruption of its own tenets. He has one very funny scene in which he attempts to seduce Sir Antony, only to recoil in horror when the handsome young man reveals her true sex. This episode, however, was cut from the final production. Southerne claims in his Preface that this was due to the inordinate length of the play (nearly 99 pages), but it was more likely due to a fear of offending. The Abbé's brother,

Count Canaille, is the stock "heavy father" determined to fix his children's destiny and inevitably tricked by them. One minor thread in the play is standard Molière, a disagreement between the Count and the Abbé on how best to raise children; however, this theme is never developed.

The three girls, all slight characters, can be distinguished as three types of Restoration ingénues. Floriante, in love with Valentine, is resisting an arranged marriage; Volante has fallen in love with Sir Antony who even if a man would make a poor husband; and Charlotte does not care with whom she is joined just so she has a husband. They are primarily cogs which allow the wheels of intrigue and romance to turn.

Sir Antony Love was tremendously popular in its own time and later, but it is perhaps good entertainment rather than good drama. Dodds, who finds it all too vulgar, is quite right that "The play is half again as long as it should be" and that the "plot shows little ability."⁷ But even he admits that in Sir Antony Southerne "does have a knack of getting his characters into situations provocative of real mirth."⁸ Nicoll observes that the play "is a fair specimen of mannered comedy, its dialogue being good and witty, although marred by Southerne's prevailing weakness—the over-use of theatrical broken sentences [which] become wearisome and monotonous by the end of the play."⁹ We might recall, however, that neither Nicoll nor anyone else alive has seen the play presented, so what seems wearisome on the page may not be in the theater.

⁷Dodds, p. 68.

⁸Ibid., p. 69.

⁹Nicoll, p. 228.

Sutherland calls this Southerne's "poorest [comedy]. . . . The action is sometimes farcical, and the dialogue is often spun out to a tedious length without being particularly witty; but even here there are some signs of an unusually acute observation of human behaviour and motives."¹⁰ Muir echoes these various observations: "The play has some lively scenes, some good comic situations, and some amusing dialogue. But it . . . is not well constructed, many of the minor characters are uninteresting; the humor is sometimes farcical and not very funny."¹¹ Hume, the most recent critic to write on the play, is more generous: "In Sir Antony Love . . . he is finding his bearings. The piece is a jumble of romance, adventure, and intrigue. . . . The plot is dazzlingly energetic; lusty and vivacious action combines with a fine display of wit. Morality is just not an issue. Tremendous energy and headlong pace compensate for frequent patches of over-clever wit strung out too long."¹²

Hume's assessment seems the fairest of the lot; but the statement on morality needs modification. While the major characters in the play talk a great deal about free-thinking and libertine values, no one does very much of a libertine nature. The danger to the critic of this play lies in equating morality with sexual chastity. The equation for Southerne is not quite so simple as this, and it is on this point that Sir Antony Love becomes crucial to an understanding of the moral

¹⁰ Sutherland, p. 144.

¹¹ Muir, p. 85.

¹² Hume, Development of the English Drama, p. 385 ff.

framework which Southerne develops in his corpus. Dodds approaches the crux but does not explore it adequately: "The treatment of sex [in Sir Antony Love] is intellectual rather than emotional. Passion is treated with a dryness altogether passionless."¹³ This is because for Southerne sexual attitude is a symptom of psychological state, not a condition of itself, as an examination of his earlier plays reveals. If we consider the three works written before this first comedy from this perspective, it is clear that Southerne's developing thesis—quite psychologically sound—is that the drive to possess physically is an external manifestation, an "objective correlative" one might almost call it, of an inward spiritual malaise. For Southerne passion becomes a symptom rather than an emotion.

The key word is "possess." In The Loyal Brother the love between Tachmas and Semanthe is, as has been noted, strikingly spiritual and physically passive. The characters who are sexually aggressive, Seliman and Sunamire, are destructive, violent, and selfish, concerned more with the gratification of their desires than with the happiness of the objects of their desires. The sexually impotent Ismael and Arbanes have become powerless in other spheres, respectively politics and the military, and are actively and treacherously seeking regain power. In The Disappointment Alberto is moved less by passion than by the challenge of chastity: the urge to conquer, to possess, to have power. On another level, to Angeline's "mother" the possession of her stepdaughter also means power,

¹³Dodds, p. 73.

translated into money; Alphonso rages that the Duke's power (as he is led to believe by Alberto's forged letter) can force him to make his wife, or possession, available at court. Juliana is admirable because although she has given herself physically to Alberto her feeling for him transcends the sexual. She is rewarded with marriage; the "mother," clearly only a physical convenience, has lived as a concubine for years.

In The Spartan Dame Cleombrotus' illicit passion for Thelamia coincides with his illicit passion for political power, and his pursuit of both goals violates the sanctity of the family; the function of the family unit as the source of security for the weak and helpless against all sorts of exploitation, including the sexual, becomes a major thematic concept in Oroonoko, and the failure of familial relationships contributes to dangers to the weak in a number of the plays. Celona's rejection of Cleombrotus' political ambition requires that she morally must end her relationship as his wife, because her love for him has been far more than lust. In both The Disappointment and The Spartan Dame the villain's sexual ends have been attempted or accomplished by deceit (Erminia and Thelamia) or by force (potential in the case of Angeline, actual in the case of Lucrece, an important reference in The Spartan Dame). Seduction and rape have become recurring themes in Southerne's plays and will continue to be so in his subsequent major works. The moral question involved is not a sexual one per se, however, but the more abstract one of abuse of power.

It is within this context that we must consider Sir Antony Love and its heroine. Lucia is a logical development from the Spartan dame

Celona, although superficially they seem very different; Celona is bound by tradition, reputation, and strict morality, while Sir Antony is the libertine. But the comic heroine has the same strengths as the tragic in a far more difficult world and age. Lucia is a victim, both physically and psychologically, of her time's disillusion: "we embrace what pleases us in both [beauty and reason], secure ourselves in a probability, and guess out the rest" (165). She does not have the cultural absolutes of classical antiquity which support Celona. In her world of multiple realities nothing seems unshakable, unchanging; the juxtaposition of "secure" and "probability" expresses the constantly shifting sands beneath the foundations of her culture. She has been betrayed by her aunt, who ought to have protected her—the family bond broken—and she is now expected to bear the blame and repent of a crime that was not her own, to "snivel like a girl; more afraid of her mother than the sin; and cry, Forgive me this one slip, I'll do so no more" (177). One critic calls Lucia "clever and callous," an "intrepid virago" and "heartless."¹⁴ Such an evaluation ignores the realities of her situation, which Southerne establishes clearly and repeatedly. By the conventions of the very society which debauched her she is now outside the pale of respectability; her future should have been either suicide or prostitution. But she gets her revenge by manipulating the double-visioned world that first sold, then condemned her: not only does she pose convincingly as a man; she becomes a better man than those

¹⁴MacDonald, pp. 111 ff.

around her. Their blindness to her masquerade parallels their moral blindness and confusion, their obsession with form their emptiness of substance. She is quite aware that the stake is power and that she can prevail only by making herself sexually and monetarily independent. She is as successful at dealing with society as Horner (and far more honest); as arrogant in her way as Dorimant. She does as she chooses, unfettered by conventional morality and codes.

But she possesses one other quality which sets her apart not only from the men but from most of the women of Restoration comedy: a gallant charm that probably stems from her position as victim. Although the male libertine is in revolt against an intangible, a collapse of values that has left him rudderless, he uses but is not himself used. Sir Antony has suffered real indignities which might have destroyed another but which seem to have strengthened her. And, perhaps because she is a woman, in her character as Lucia she is conventional to some degree; she does not, she tells Valentine, "desire" to marry him—or "deserve" to, presumably because of her checkered past. For her, because of her sex, there can be no return to the fold of respectability; all she can do is to choose how she will live outside its bounds, as Valentine's mistress in an affair of love rather than as another man's mistress in an affair of business. She represents a view of woman rare on the Restoration comic stage: neither sex-starved bitch, nor money-hungry harpy, nor "nice" if clever virgin who ultimately is allowed to marry the hero, she is a completely developed character who makes her own way through the wilderness.

The Wives Excuse, or Cuckolds Make Themselves (1691)

In his next play, Southerne moves into another world, that of sophisticated, intriguing London society, a setting which is more nearly typical of Restoration comedy than the farcical France of Sir Antony Love. He gives us the mandatory rakes, high-born procuresses, dandies, fops, and fools—but he also gives us an unusual character on the Restoration stage of the period, the loyal wife as heroine. Aesthetically The Wives Excuse is among the best of Southerne's works; it is certainly the most complex in characterization. Completely different from Sir Antony Love in setting, plot, and tone, the play is dark, overtly socially critical rather than gay and farcical. In it Southerne treats with almost unrelieved severity the concern of Restoration comedy with the conflict between manners and morals.

As its title suggests, The Wives Excuse, or Cuckolds Make Themselves is a cynical study of "polite" society's obsession with sex. A clue to the comedy's genesis is found in the fourth act during a discussion between Wellvile, the most honorable male character in the play, and Mr. Friendall, an "impertinent, nonsensical, silly intriguing, cowardly good-for-nothing coxcomb" married to "a fine young woman," (56)¹⁵, about a play Wellvile is supposedly writing called The Wives Excuse. The subject has arisen from Wellvile's disgust at

see[ing] the women upon the stage make cuckolds at that insatiable rate they do in all our modern comedies; without

¹⁵The Wives Excuse, or Cuckolds Make Themselves, Plays, II, 1-90.

any other reason from the poets, but, because a man is married he must be a cuckold: . . . the women are most unconsciounably injur'd by this general scandal upon their sex; therefore to do 'em what service I can in their vindication I design to write a play. (56)

The main characters in Wellville's "play" are, the audience quickly realizes, based on Friendall himself and his wife, although Friendall, energetically offering suggestions to the "author" on whether or not the heroine should cuckold her husband, is too obtuse to see himself. One of the two major plot-lines in Southerne's play involves this foolish husband's obvious deservail of cuckoldom and his wife's attempts to be true to him despite the efforts of Lovemore, whom Friendall has encouraged to be attentive to his wife so that she will not notice his own pursuit of Mrs. Sightly. The other plot deals with Wellville's "Platonic" attachment to and Wilding's lust for Sightly. Yet a third, very minor thread involves Fanny, a young girl newly-arrived in town who is (willingly) seduced by the satyromaniac Wilding.

The action thus revolves around three stock characters of late seventeenth century comedy: the wife, the sophisticated unmarried woman, and the inexperienced girl. But Southerne reverses the conventional sexual attitudes of the first and makes the wife chaste. The society in which these women move, however, seems determined, even eager that she should fall. Values are inverted; manners divorced from morals; appearances preserved only as a mask for corruption. This is a disturbing and depressing rather than "amusing" comedy. It goes against the fashions of its time and provides in place of a racy, bawdy, sophisticated world one that is almost totally corrupt and tawdry and which offers neither glamor nor amusement.

The opening scene, involving several footmen awaiting their employers outside a music-meeting, establishes characters, action, and tone. The servants are ending a session at dice, and in their boredom they discuss the private affairs of the families with whom they are in service. The audience learns that the town is in expectation of Mr. Friendall's cuckoldom because of his neglect of his recent bride for other women; Friendall's footman is in expectation of financial reward when the anticipated fall occurs:

Let her like as many as she pleases, and welcome: as they thrive with her, I shall thrive by them: I grind by her mill, and some of 'em I hope will set it a-going. Besides, she has discover'd some of my master's intrigues of late, that may help to fill the sails; but I say nothing, I will take fees on both sides and betray neither. (13)

This seems the conventional attitude of the Restoration stage servant; but what humor there is degenerates when he debates with his fellows which of their masters most deserves his mistress. Lovemore, he says, "is a generous gentleman, and deserves well of her, and me" (14). Wilding's footman dismisses Mr. Wellvile as a possibility for he "follows Mrs. Sightly," but can recommend his own master

if your lady has a mind to be very well-used; not to settle to't; but only by way of a fashionable revenge . . . to do herself justice upon her husband: I look upon . . . my master [Wilding] to be the cleverest cuckold-maker in Covent Garden. (14)

In response the Friendalls' man gives us Wilding's measure: "Not to settle to't indeed, for your master is not over-constant" (14).

Next Courtall's servant recommends his master "if your lady be dispos'd to the more refin'd part of an amour, without the brutality

or design of enjoyment, only for the pleasure of being talk'd of."

Wilding's footman mockingly observes,

[Courtall] will be as fond of the appearances of an intrigue as she [Mrs. Friendall] can be . . . he will take as much pain to put her undeservedly into a lampoon, upon his account, as he would to avoid a handsome occasion, in private, to qualify her for the scandal. (14)

The Friendalls' man closes the discussion: "Well, there are pretenders enough: so I have the profit, let my lady take the pleasure of the choice: I'm for the fairest bidder" (15).

This portion of the opening scene provides many insights into the values of the world within which the play's characters operate. It is assumed by all that Mrs. Friendall will take a lover:

Every man has hopes of a new marry'd woman: for she marries to like her man; and if upon trial she finds she can't . . . she'll find somebody else that she can like, in a very little time, I warrant her, or change her men 'till she does. (13)

All that is questioned is who the man will be. Neither love nor romance is at issue, only consummation; her servant's sole concern is how much he will gain by her lapse—the concern of a pimp.

As striking in the exchange is the debasement of language. We have earlier encountered among Southerne's characters those whose diction revealed their corruption: Alberto in The Disappointment; Cleombrotus in The Spartan Dame; Verole, Sir Gentle, and the Pilgrim in Sir Antony Love. The device is here much more fully developed, with the meanings of words which usually refer to moral and aesthetic values inverted. Lovemore deserves the lady because he is "generous"—with money spent for his own pleasure. Mrs. Friendall will do "justice" if she betrays her husband. Courtall will provide a "refin'd" intrigue.

The footman awaits the "fairest bidder." Related to this abuse of language are the references to "talk"—ephemeral conversations of conjecture and slander. The conversation of the servants provides an illustration, and Courtall's man suggests that to be an object of such speculation is a privilege to be sought, a "pleasure."

This leads the group to a discussion of Witwoud, the mongerer of scandal, who keeps "a correspondent porter, in every quarter of the town, to dispense her scandalous letters."

She lives . . . least at home; has no business of her own, but a great deal of other people's. All the men in town follow her, but 'tis for other women; for she has frightened every one from a design upon her: then's she a general confidant, and sometimes reports no more than she knows: but that's a favour indeed, from a wit, as they say she is.
(15)

Witwoud's avocation is the dissemination of rumor; her concern is not for truth but for malicious gossip. That her society deserves her is suggested by an exchange between two pages mocking the affectations and pretensions of their mistresses. The two "ladies" are full of false modesty, complaining about the attentions they themselves invite by their conduct. Reiterated here is the relationship between the corruption of language and corruption of values seen earlier in the scene. One page reveals that "she"

wou'd rather do anything to deserve blushing in another place, than by a country modesty betray such an unpardonable want of breeding, to the censure of so much good company.
(16; italics mine)

Wilding's footman interjects that indeed "her ladyship . . . had rather do it than blush for't" (16). When the second "lady" expresses fear that the French fleet will come and "ravish us all," the first cries out,

ravishing us is nothing, but our dear religion, madam, what will they do to that? . . . I would not lose the gaping galleries of our churches for the best religion in christendom.
(17)

This superficially silly exchange involves hypocrisy in the feigned concern for religion; heresy in the suggestion of many "religion[s] in christendom;" and sacrilege, since the "gaping galleries" the "lady" places above religion were popular spots for assassinations. We are reminded of similar falseness about religion in Alberto and in Verole and the Palmer.

The servants' "preface" presents to the audience much information about the major characters, still unIntroduced, and their milieu. The obsessions with sex, "talk," and appearance, which have degenerated into role-playing by the two pages, have filtered down from masters to men; only one footman seems to come from a respectable household, and he is mocked by the others for having been "debach'd" (another inversion of language) by "keeping good hours, and living orderly" (12). In this world manners have become almost totally disassociated from morals; everything is pretense. Before the audience ever meets the principals it knows well what to expect and has, in the person of the mocked servant, both a prefiguring of Mrs. Friendall and a reminder of a decent world against the values of which these masters will be measured and found wanting.

The plot of the play that follows depends more on encounters than on action. Friendall is fruitlessly pursuing Sightly, a sophisticated yet virtuous young woman loved Platonically by Wellvile. Friendall has asked Lovemore to distract Mrs. Friendall from his own amours, not realizing that his "friend's" pursuit of his wife is a serious one. Lovemore uses a tool, Ruffle, who is as foolish and cowardly as Friendall himself, to offer an insult to Mrs. Friendall which her husband should be honor-bound to challenge. She, cleverer still than her tempter Lovemore, with the aid of her brother Springame and a forged note frightens Ruffle into apologizing. Thus fails Lovemore's scheme so to humiliate his prey by exposing her husband that she will come to him; but he does not give up at this setback.

Meanwhile Fanny, a young girl supposed to be in the care of her cousin Witwoud, has slipped away to be debauched by Wilding; to prevent a public scandal, Witwoud promises Wilding that if he will keep quiet about the escapade she will help him seduce Sightly. Wellvile, who has loved Sightly for years without ever straying from the bounds of strict propriety, hears a garbled version of the plot which leads him to believe that Sightly is a part of it; when he as a consequence himself propositions his lady, he unwittingly insults her and finds their relationship almost destroyed. Finally, after Wellvile, Sightly, and Lovemore from a variety of motives have made Mrs. Friendall aware of her husband's pursuit of Sightly, the faithful wife is completely humiliated by the public exposure of her husband and Witwoud in flagrante delicto, he believing her to be Sightly, she believing him to be Wilding.

Mrs. Friendall agrees to a separation and is left at play's end neither married nor free.

Obviously the plot is nearly as complicated and only slightly more substantial than that of Sir Antony Love. But whereas the earlier play depends heavily on farce and slapstick, here the emphasis is on characterization, particularly that of the heroine. She is isolated from her company and no one, except to some degree Wellville and Sightly, sympathizes with her. In comic convention it is usually the character who believes himself better than and/or wronged by society who is the butt and must be chastened and instructed before reentering the social unit; both the audience and those members of the dramatis personae who are honest and reasonable about their culture perceive the comic figure's isolation as humorous and as the result of his own arrogance, whether moral (Malvolio, Alceste) or social (Benedick and Beatrice, Sir Fopling Flutter). In this play, however, the heroine is the outcast—and Southerne expects us to take her absolutely seriously, to see her as innocent victim rather than as deserving scapegoat. There are in her character none of the ambiguities surrounding a character like Manly; she, like the footman scorned by his fellows in the opening scene, is a symbol of goodness in the midst of corruption and betrayal. This is closer to the stuff of tragedy than of comedy, and Mrs. Friendall is, in fact, a development of Erminia and Celona.

The Wives Excuse can be seen as almost a reworking of The Disappointment. We have again the wronged wife pursued by the rake, the mixture of comic and tragic themes. But in the later play Southerne

does not divide the modes into separate plots but centers the tragic or serious content in Mrs. Friendall. She is the only morally-developed character in a superficial and amoral world; the resulting tone of the play is rather like that of Austen's Persuasion, where Anne Eliot struggles for integrity among hypocrisy and pretense. Mrs. Friendall is governed in her uprightness not by the hyperbolic romanticism of Erminia, but rather by the moral absolutes of Celona with whom, as the play develops, we discover she has much in common. Significantly, the role of Mrs. Friendall was taken by Mrs. Barry, the great tragedienne of the Drury Lane company.

Southerne's problem in creating such a character is to avoid extremes. If she is too pathetic we will pity but not respect her, as we do not respect Erminia; if too strong we will admire but not be moved. She is therefore made clever enough to protect her husband from exposure as a coward, yet vulnerable enough to be hurt by his stupidity. Most importantly, she cannot be portrayed as either naïve or self-righteous but as honest. We must see her struggle to maintain her integrity in the face of both her husband's neglect and her suitor's attentions. Her plight is in fact more difficult than Celona's; since the Spartan dame loves her husband and has no other temptation, she can make her decision on purely ethical grounds.

To achieve such a characterization, Southerne creates an extremely conventional woman who has married to please her family and is determined to fulfill her side of a bad bargain. In the first act she tells Sighly that she knows her husband

does many things he shou'd not do . . . but I think he loves me, and that excuses him to me: tho' you may be sure, 'tis with the tenderest concern for my own reputation that I see my husband daily trifle away his so notoriously, in one folly or other of the time. (24)

Like Celona, Mrs. Friendall has a traditional view of marriage; thus when she protects her husband's name and honor she feels she is also protecting her own:

The concern and care of your [Friendall's] reputation is as dear to me as it can be tender to you; since I must appear in the world only in that rank of honour which you are pleased to maintain. (33)

But where Cleombrotus' sins are at least grand, involving kings and revolutions, Friendall's are venal and foolish. Nor is Mrs. Friendall a princess with a weighty cause, but a woman married to a fool, a woman who can maintain herself as a person of dignity and integrity only so long as she can prevent her husband's complete exposure to the world.

Lovemore, understanding this, uses Ruffle to force Friendall into just such a public exhibition as Mrs. Friendall seeks to avoid. As he observes,

let her say what she can . . . I believe no woman can be contented to have her honour much longer than her fortune in the possession of a man, who has no fund of his own, to answer in security for either. (29)

Only to herself can Mrs. Friendall admit her desperation. In a soliloquy in which she examines her condition as a traditional wife, she uses political terms which, given the political events of the seventeenth century, are of particular interest:

How despicable a condition must that matrimony be, when the husband (whom we look upon as a sanctuary for a woman's honour) must be oblig'd to the discretion and management of a wife, for in a marry'd state, as in the public, we tie ourselves up,

indeed; but to be protected in our persons, fortunes, and honours by those very laws that restrain us in other things; for few will obey, but for the benefit they receive from the government. (35)

It is Mrs. Friendall's misfortune that she wishes to be faithful both as a wife and as a woman in a situation and a society which make such fidelity almost impossible. Celona has at least the support of her family and her father's partisans. Mrs. Friendall's very servants expect her to fall; her brother Springame observes that "she has satisfied her relations enough in marrying this coxcomb; now let her satisfy herself, if she pleases, with any body she likes better" (19). When she tells Sightly that "'tis with the tenderest concern for my own reputation that I see my husband daily trifle away his [own]" (24), Witwoud remarks in an aside,

For her own reputation it must be; for the world will believe that she turns such a husband to the right use, whatever she says to the contrary. (24)

Mrs. Teazall, the elderly kinswoman of Sightly and Witwoud, tells Mrs. Friendall after her husband has publicly spurned her,

Why, how have the men, at this rate, the impudence to think the women should not cuckold 'em! . . . use him as you please. Nobody will think you wrong him; and let me tell you, 'tis a great thing to have the town on one's side. (51)

Thus besieged not only by her would-be paramours but by her whole set, Mrs. Friendall's position grows more and more desperate. She must, to maintain it, continue to believe that her husband loves her and is worthy of her own love and respect. When Lovemore, therefore, secretly arranges for Ruffle to challenge Friendall, whom he expects to back down, she forestalls her husband's exposure by begging him not to

risk his life, to leave everything to her. She averts the duel, which Friendall is obviously all too willing to avoid, but not before she must face his weakness:

I don't know that he is a coward; but having . . . reasons to suspect him, I thought to . . . hinder him from discovering himself: for if he had betrayed that baseness to me I shou'd despise him; and can I love the man I must despise? (34)

She is trapped by a tragic paradox: in order to be honest she must pretend to the world and to herself that her husband deserves her. His every appearance in the play, however, reveals how unworthy he is.

Friendall exemplifies that stock Restoration comic figure whom Southerne has treated before as Sir Gentle Golding: the foolish fop. Combining equal parts of affectation and ignorance, he refers to the major playwrights of his day as "Jack" Dryden and "Will" Wycherley (55), yet thinks that "chacons" and "sonatas" are the names of composers (18). When he entertains at a dinner, in one of the funniest scenes in the play, he displays the ostentatiousness of a Trimalchio but none of the shrewdness of the self-made man. For tea he offers a choice of "the plain Canton, the Narquin, the Bohea, the Lantheroon, [or] the Suisse;"

WEL.: Have you any of the Non Amo Te?

FRI.: Faith, no sir, there came but little of it over this year; but I am promis'd a whole canister [sic] by a friend of considerable interest in the committee.
(63)

He again makes a fool of himself in a discussion of wines; asked if he has ever met with "such a wine as the vine de Shorneck," he replies,

Vine de Shorneck? yes, I have drank of it at Thompson's and that was the first that took notice of it; but 'tis a prohibited French wine, and I have too great an acquaintance with the members of parliament, not to drink according to law. (62)

Even his snuff is (strangely) superior, made not from the tobacco leaves but

of the fibres, the spirituous part of the plant; there's not a pinch of it out of my box in England; 'twas made I assure you to the palate of his most Catholic majesty, and sent me by a great don in Spain, that's in his prince's particular pleasure. (62)

He is an even greater fool in affairs of honor. When Ruffle gets up the quarrel with him, striking him and drawing, Mrs. Friendall quickly "pretends to hold her husband" (28); before he can respond (probably cravely), she cries out, "consider where you are. You are more a man of honour, I know, than to draw your sword among women" (28). But when with her brother's help and a forged note she has tricked the equally craven Ruffle into believing that Friendall actually intends to meet him, Friendall is too stupid to leave well-enough alone. Faced with an opponent even more frightened than himself, he suddenly finds his courage and does not want to accept the offered apology.

Not content with all his other follies, Friendall has also set up for a lover, fastening on Sightly as the object of his favors. She, of course, finds him contemptible; but he persists with unwanted attentions and unwelcome notes, convinced that she is only being coy. In a silly attempt to distract his wife from what he firmly believes will be a successful pursuit, he asks Lovemore to "entertain and divert her from making her observations up me" (22). What seems to escape him is that Mrs. Friendall is herself a very desirable woman and that Lovemore's designs are not only quite real but much more likely to succeed than his own on Sightly. Thus, instead of being alarmed that Mrs. Friendall is

inclining . . . to speak very well of you [Lovemore]; and
 . . . she approves of the intimacy and friendship between us,
 and of your coming to the house,

he is pleased that his scheme is working; he worries only that Lovemore
 will not be adroit enough in his attentions:

I wou'd have you very frequent in your visits, and very
 obliging to my wife, now and then, to carry on our other
 pleasures [i.e., the pursuit of Sightly] the better: for
 the amusement or so, you may say a civil thing to her, for
 every woman, you know, loves to have a civil thing said
 to her sometimes. (23)

But when Mrs. Friendall asks him to walk with her in the park he will
 agree only to

go home with you like a good husband, madam: but no man of
 fashion, you know, walks with his wife: besides there's a
 noble lord I must walk with. (50)

In the opening scene of The Wives Excuse we saw the two pages
 "role-playing," acting out the mores and morals of their mistresses.
 That charade is in a sense reenacted in the character of Friendall,
 who attempts to act out the mores and morals of a fashionable gentleman
 without the graces, inherent or learned, that gave rise to them. He
 is almost pathetic in his inadequacy. It is, however, his wife whom
 Southerne intends to receive the sympathy of the audience. It would
 be hard enough for a woman of her quality and her standards to be
 insolubly linked to a real rake; her husband is what is worse, an inept
 and ignorant imitation who fools no one except, perhaps, himself.

By contrast Lovemore seems far more attractive and more worthy
 of her. He is clever, witty, sophisticated, and a charming wooer. If
 Friendall is a man to whom it would be easy to be unfaithful, Lovemore
 is one with whom it would be hard not to be. By making him the very

sort of man Friendall aspires to emulate, Southerne makes the wife's dilemma all the more difficult. Lovemore is therefore crucial to The Wives Excuse. Anthony Kaufman, the only modern scholar to have published an article on the play, sees the "psychological interest in this play stem[ming] from a development in Mrs. Friendall's attitude toward Lovemore."

As she is forced in the course of the play to acknowledge her husband's worthlessness, she becomes increasingly attracted to Lovemore, and the main interest of the play is in the series of four encounters between them.¹⁶

Kaufman's discussion of Mrs. Friendall's terrible situation is perceptive and intelligent, but he does not always seem to read carefully. Contrary to his opinion, Mrs. Friendall likes the real rake no more than she does the imitation, and for most of the play withstands Lovemore's advances. The first two encounters, at a concert in Act I and a conversation the morning after Lovemore has engineered the quarrel and (he hopes) the duel between Ruffle and Friendall, serve primarily to establish the struggle between man and woman: he determined to seduce her and she equally determined not to be seduced. It is in the third scene, during a dinner party given by Friendall in Act IV, that he gets past her guard suddenly and abruptly by acting rather than merely speaking chivalrously. Here, too, we get our fullest portrait of Mrs. Friendall's quality—and, finally, that of Lovemore. The last encounter, at a soirée at the Friendalls' in Act V, is a development of that in the preceding act.

¹⁶Kaufman, p. 39.

The first of these exchanges is also our first view of the two. One of Southerne's most effective techniques in the play is to assemble most of the cast in one place—a concert hall, a park, a private home—and to orchestrate a series of encounters, between pairs and among larger groups, which allow the audience to see each character in a number of relationships and poses. The effect is very similar to that produced on the motion picture and television screens as the camera moves from one conversation to another, leaving one group and going to the next, frequently in the middle of whatever discussion is currently taking place.

We meet Mrs. Friendall and Lovemore in just such a fashion; after moving through several independent conversations concerning when and with whom the lady will betray her husband, Southerne's "camera" focuses on the pair in the midst of what, it becomes clear, is an attempt by Lovemore at seduction:

MRS. F.: Is this your friendship to Mr. Friendall? I must not hear it.

LOVE.: You see he give you leave.

MRS. F.: Therefore I can't take it; the confidence is so generous, that ev'n that would secure me to him. (12)

Kaufman believes that Lovemore has been making "whining love" to the lady, and that when she subsequently starts to tell her husband of his friend's advances and then changes her mind, she is "cleverly veer[ing] off."¹⁷ It is difficult, however, to imagine Lovemore "whining"—at no point in the play does he seem to do so. And although Kaufman seems to take Mrs. Friendall's action to suggest that she is already attracted

¹⁷Ibid., p. 37.

to Lovemore even as she despises him, it appears more likely that she avoids the confrontation because she knows that Friendall will shirk his husbandly responsibility to her honor; after all, even this early in the play, the audience already knows from the servants and the company at the concert that Friendall is a silly fop who neglects his bride, and Mrs. Friendall later in the same act clearly realizes that she must move quickly to conceal her husband's cowardice in the face of Ruffle's challenge.

Finally, one of Kaufman's major theses in his study is that Mrs. Friendall is not "witty," that "she lacks the witty brilliance of a Millamant."¹⁸ He believes, and rightly, that "Southerne . . . was imaginatively interested in the situation of his heroine . . . [an] interest . . . unique in 1691; the typical heroine of the earlier Restoration comedy . . . is at times brilliantly comic, but two-dimensional at best."¹⁹ Yet in his description of the first encounter, when he ascribes her change of mind to a "clever veering off" he seems to be attributing to her a species of flirtation intended to pique Lovemore's interest. He can't have it both ways.

The second encounter takes place directly after Mrs. Friendall has foiled Lovemore's plot involving Ruffle. He has ostensibly called to offer himself as Friendall's second in the projected duel; she knows, however, that actually "he comes to tempt me to rebel; but I'm prepar'd for him" (35). After an ironic exchange about the defense of her "honor,"

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 46.

she enlists Lovemore's aid in preventing the duel she claims her husband is eager to carry through. She is indeed clever here, but her intent is not to further but to avoid a relationship with Lovemore. Lovemore, stunned by her revelations, agrees to help her—"if he should behave himself better than I though he would," he tells us solus, "it may secure him in her esteem, and only ruin me with her, who laid the design" (36). He rushes to Ruffle's lodging, arriving after Friendall has reluctantly accepted the apology. When Ruffle gives him Friendall's note of challenge, Lovemore realizes that the handwriting is not that of Friendall and that his prey has carried out a design of her own.

The third and most critical exchange takes place at the Friendalls' home during a dinner party. Lovemore, with her husband's connivance, catches Mrs. Friendall alone and once more renews his suit. This is the most extended conversation between the two and the most revealing. In it we actually see Lovemore wooing and, knowing his designs on the lady, realize that he is "role-playing" as much as Friendall.

But whereas the husband is a boob setting up for a rake, the rake casts himself as a romantic lover who worships at the altar of beauty and goodness. He falls to his knees and in the style of the tragic hero declaims his love in the most conventional of terms:

Everything is the matter of your praise, the subject of fresh wonder: your beauty made to tire the painter's art, your wit to strike the poet's envy dumb. (63)

Sardonically she inquires, "Are you turn'd poet too?" and shows a sound knowledge of the psychology of romance:

MRS. F.: . . . you keep me here against my will, against all rules of decency to me, my sex, and character;

the worst of wrongs; yet you will think it hard to to be condemn'd, or hat'd, for this your light opinion of me, that first encourag'd you to this design.

LOVE.: Hated for loving you!

MRS. F.: Ay, there's the business: who wou'd not stay to to see her worshipper upon his knees, thus prais'd and ador'd? her beauty made to tire the painter's art, her wit to strike the poet's envy dumb: and all deliver'd in such a dying tone, ^{no} lady can out-live it. Mr. Lovemore, you might ^{have} known me better, than to imagine your sly flattery could softly sing me into a consent to any thing my virtue had abhorr'd. But how have I behav'd myself? What have I done to deserve this? What encouragement have I given you? (64)

With her firm conception of her responsibility to the realities of her situation, Mrs. Friendall will not allow herself the luxury of self-deception; she is perfectly aware that lust can be disguised as romance, desire as adoration. Lovemore is, we might note, here talking very like Alberto to Erminia in the last act of The Disappointment; he, however, has every reason to believe that Erminia has already succumbed to his charms and is now playing the romantic game with him. Lovemore intends to be taken seriously by a woman of whom he has only as-yet unfounded hopes. What is particularly striking about this exchange is the earnest indignation of Mrs. Friendall at the insult to her honor; if Lovemore imitates the rhetoric of the despairing lover, here is the real language of the tragic heroine whose virtue is calumniated (see, for example, Thelamia in The Spartan Dame in a similar situation).

It is this which makes Mrs. Friendall unusual as a comic heroine: she takes sex deadly seriously. Relationships between men and women are to her neither "natural," in the libertine sense that we are all

physical creatures, nor a witty game. They are, rather, a part of the cultural institution of marriage; while we may infer from Friendall's many other inadequacies that here, too, he is not a satisfactory husband, his wife's values do not allow her to expect redress outside her nuptial contract. So great is her distress at Lovemore's importunity that she blurts out her distaste for her situation:

MRS F.: I must own to you an ill husband is a great provocation to a wife, when she has a mind to believe as ill of him as she can.

LOVE.: How if the wife believe too well of him?

MRS F.: Why then the folly's hers: for my part, I have known Mr. Friendall too long, not to know what he deserves; I won't justify his faults, but because he does not take that care of me he shou'd, must not I have that regard to myself I ought? What I do is for my own sake . . . [you find my husband] Fit to bear a wrong? Is that the reason of your wronging him? I want but that; O let me but believe you injure him, because you know you may, and attempt me because you think it safe; and I will scorn you low as you do him. (64)

Even in her agitation Mrs. Friendall is not deceived by words; surrounded by people whose language is at odds with their conduct, she sees through Lovemore's rhetoric as she sees through that of her husband. Her passionate honesty in this exchange strips Lovemore of all pretense, as she implies that to urge her to fall because he desires her is bad enough; to do so simply because he thinks her situation makes such an effort safe is unbearable insult. She saved her husband from discovery as a coward "not for commendation of your wit, nor as a debt to him," but "for my own sake" (65). Ironically, in thus asserting her moral independence she, like Celona in The Spartan Dame, in a sense denies her own traditional conception of the wife as dependent on her husband.

But Lovemore has one more weapon at his disposal, which he deploys brilliantly. Seeing, like Iago, that words alone will now sway, he offers "ocular proof" of his honesty—and returns to her the forged note he earlier obtained from Ruffle; only his possession of it, he tells her, has made him "presume all that I have said to you."

I hope you may forgive my knowing [about her trick], since by resigning [the note] into your hands, I give up the only evidence which can rise up against [Friendall]. Such a piece of news, Madam, wou'd have been welcome enough to the ill-nature of the Town; and I might have had my ends in such a report, had I encourag'd the exposing him: but when I saw how near you were concern'd I had no other pleasure but the thought of serving you: if I have serv'd you, I am over-paid; if not, I must serve on. For I but live to serve you. (66)

Stunned, Mrs. Friendall departs "a little abruptly," as Lovemore subsequently observes; and, he continues, "I'm glad she did. For that methinks confesses an obligation which she has not yet in her power to return" (67).

Lovemore has indeed been very clever. In acting as well as speaking romantically and chivalrously, he has gotten past Mrs. Friendall's defenses against language. When he says, "if I have serv'd you, I am over-paid; if not, I must serve on," his protestations have a foundation of action; he has actually, it appears, "served" her. There is no gradual softening toward Lovemore by Mrs. Friendall, as Kaufman would have it; it is obvious that it is the return of the note which weakens her resolve not to respond to him.

Until this point in the play Lovemore has been unscrupulous in his pursuit but clever and even somehow charming in his machinations. His gesture with the note seems to the audience even to ameliorate

his dishonorable intentions. Has he indeed been moved by her goodness? Is his action sincere? But as soon as Mrs. Friendall withdraws, the real Lovemore reveals himself:

I find I am restor'd, but I was reduc'd to the necessity of a lie to come into favour again; but that's a necessity that every man of honour must submit to sometimes, that has any thing to manage with the women; for a lover, that never speaks more than the truth, is never believed to be a lover. And he that won't lie to his mistress, will hardly lie with her. So let his honesty reward him; the lady won't. (66)

In reference to another woman this speech would be witty and clever, if cynical. But given Mrs. Friendall's character it is obscene. Lovemore lies both in words and in actions to a woman for whom the ultimate self-betrayal would be to "lie" with him. Himself a role-player, he cannot admit that she is not one also, and he thus insists on perceiving a Mrs. Friendall who does not exist, who is an abstraction of what he believes women of her class to be:

There must be a cheat upon the sense sometimes, to make a perfect pleasure to the soul; for if the women did but always know what really we are; we shou'd not so often know so much of them as we do. But 'tis their own faults; they know we can't live without 'em, and therefore ask more of us than we have honestly to give for purchase. So, very often, they put us upon dissimulation, flattery, and false love, to come upon their pride. (67)

Women, he is sure, ask for deception by unreasonably asking for love in relationships which to men are simply physical. But if Mrs. Friendall requires a suitor who is "honorable" and chivalrous, Lovemore is willing to cast himself for the part.

This pseudo-chivalry of Lovemore places him clearly in the libertine school. Underwood points out that

The promiscuous sensualist mouthing protestations of eternal devotion had been a stock figure in both the literature and practice of courtly love long before the Restoration. In this respect . . . the problems which the libertine posed for Restoration comedy concerning the nature of love and its operations within the established institution of society were an inherent part of the whole courtly tradition Dressed as "passion" his libertine appetite could plead, when it served his purpose, the far more respectable sanctions of courtly love which, in many respects, was as disruptive to established institutions as was his open libertinism.²⁰

Alberto, we recall, was willing to mouth romantic and chivalric commonplaces to both Angeline and Erminia. Lovemore is a far more dangerous example of the type, however, since he chooses his prey more carefully and is able to create an illusion of action as well as language. He is not even deceived about himself; knowing clearly which role will be most likely to appeal to Mrs. Friendall, he creates it. Here is Don Juan before his transformation by the Romantic mind.

During the dinner party at which this conversation takes place Sightly, at Lovemore's suggestion and Wellvile's urging, has informed Mrs. Friendall of her husband's unwelcome attentions. Sightly produces a note from this would-be rake attempting yet another assignation, this time at Rosamond's Pond. The two women decide to go out masked to see if he actually will show up. When Sightly suggests that Lovemore, who already knows about Friendall's pursuit, should accompany them, Mrs. Friendall in exhaustion acquiesces.

Later that evening the three arrive at the rendezvous where Friendall waits. Recognizing neither his wife nor his intended paramour,

²⁰ Underwood, p. 10.

he proceeds to insult them both, asserting that if Sightly does not meet him he will assure the town that she did and claiming that he married only because a husband has a better entrée into houses with susceptible wives and daughters than does a bachelor. He even suggests that Lovemore does not discuss his own affairs because he has none:

Lovemore's a little too reserved, 'tis, at present, his fault, from a want of knowing the town; but he'll mend of it, I hope, when he comes to have a woman worth talking of. (78)

And adjuring his friend not to breathe "a word of this at home of seeing me here" (78), he withdraws to await his lady.

Humiliated and disgusted, the betrayed wife turns on Lovemore:

MRS. F.: Are you the confident of the gentleman's pleasures?

LOVE.: I have not betray'd 'em, madam.

MRS. F.: Methinks a friend should have warn'd me of 'em.

LOVE.: I would not be thought to do ill office, especially in marriage, madam.

MRS. F.: I don't think you would; would Mr. Friendall were as tender of wronging me. (78)

The combination of Lovemore's apparent generosity and her husband's revelation of his true feelings toward her has so far achieved Lovemore's end that Mrs. Friendall believes his words, although she has ample reason in the past to believe that he will indeed "do ill office, especially in marriage."

The scene is now set for the fourth and final encounter, at the masquerade ball. But Southerne rejects the obvious dénouement of having his heroine surrender. As Lovemore speaks to her tenderly, offering to "ease" her of "her cross"—her husband—her response shows that she has reached a decision which he, and possibly many in the audience, have not expected:

MRS. F.: No more upon this subject, you have carried the argument so far, 'tis allowing what you say, to listen any longer. But Mr. Lovemore, I will give what satisfaction I have in my power, and praise is the reward of virtue you know; I think you have proceeded like a man of experience in this business, and taken the natural road to undermining most women. I must do you this justice, that nothing has been wanting on your side.

LOVE.: I would have nothing wanting on my side, madam.

MRS. F.: And however you came by the knowledge of Mr. Friendall's weaknesses, you have improv'd 'em as much as they could bear upon the conduct of his wife: if they have not carry'd me as far as you design'd; 'tis the fault of my heaviness, perhaps, that can't be transported into the woman you'd have me. (81)

Never has Mrs. Friendall seemed more admirable. While there is perhaps some irony here, there is no sarcasm; she is justly giving the devil his due. Most striking is her perception of his nature, her realization that indeed he would "transport" her into another woman, that he has been pursuing an illusion—in a singularly appropriate pun, not a "light" woman but one with "the fault of . . . heaviness."

Once more she opens her heart to him, as she did in Act IV:

MRS. F.: Some women won't speak so plain, but I will own to you, I can't think the worse of you for thinking well of me: nay, I don't blame you for designing upon me, custom has fashion'd it into the way of living among men; and you may be i' th' right too, to my sex and to myself: thus far you've proved your passion and my virtue try'd; but all beyond that trial is my crime, and not to be forgiven: therefore I intreat you, don't make it impossible to me for the future, to receive you as a friend; for I must own, I would secure you always for my friend; nay more, I will confess my heart to you: if I could make you mine—

LOVE.: For ever yours.

MRS. F.: But I am marry'd, only pity me—

[Goes from him.]

Again her moral vision will not be blinded, no matter what the demands of the heart and, perhaps, the flesh. Even more remarkable is her understanding of Lovemore, her refusal to judge. In contrast might be set the hysteria of both Erminia and Thelamia.

That Mrs. Friendall should speak so openly to the man who has been attempting to seduce her is not so surprising as it might seem when we remember that he is the only character in the play who has shown her the least sympathy for her plight. Her desperation and her loneliness have driven her to find some confidant who, she feels, has some understanding of and pity for her situation. But even here Lovemore has deceived her; as she withdraws, with her final plea to "pity me" still echoing, he once again in soliloquy shows his true colors and those of his society:

Pity her! she does not deserve it, that won't better her condition, when she may; but she's marry'd, she says; why, that was the best of my reasons of following her at first; and I like her so well, as she's another man's wife, I should hardly mend the matter by making her my own. I won't think yet my two months thrown away upon her; one time or another, some way or other, I may be the better for her; at least with some other woman: but I begin to believe that every man loses his labour this way sometimes. (82)

Again the effect of the juxtaposition of her tragic pathos with his callous calculation is appalling. In response to Mrs. Friendall's carefully and honestly reasoned explanation of her decision, Lovemore offers sheer sexual appetite and a total inability to be as generous in understanding her as she has been with him.

By this point in the play the differences between Friendall and Lovemore which seemed so clear at the start have been found to be

those of degree rather than of kind. Neither of them values Mrs. Friendall, or indeed any woman, as he ought; neither, in his relationships with the opposite sex, can see beyond his own gratification, whether physical or social or both. Interestingly, each despises the other: Lovemore, Friendall for his pretensions; Friendall, Lovemore for what to him appears to be a lack of finesse in conducting affairs. Together they symbolize Mrs. Friendall's lack of choice in her society, her lack of recognition as a person rather than as an abstraction, a convenience. Friendall, like Cleombrotus in The Spartan Dame, neglects his wife because she is secured to him; Lovemore, like Alberto in The Disappointment, pursues a woman because she is not available. She cannot act in either case, only react in defense of her integrity. Finally when at the ball which ends the comedy her husband is publicly discovered consummating a relationship with another woman, and the disgusting Witwoud at that, she is forced once more to deny her own fulfillment and control over her own destiny. Friendall proposes since "we are both disappointed in this affair of matrimony; it is not the condition you expected; nor has it the advantages I propos'd" (89), that they separate (the same solution Sir Antony offers her reluctant groom). He will provide for her, his only "article" being "that I may have a freedom of visiting you, in the round of my acquaintance" (89). She can but reply, "I must still be your wife, and still unhappy." Lovemore is, of course, delighted at this turn of affairs, anticipating better luck with the lady in the future.

The other characters in the play seem designed primarily to provide a background for the heroine's situation; we learn little more

about them than their servants reveal in the first act. Wilding emerges as a satyromaniac whose lusts overwhelm all considerations of truth and honor; he is almost a caricature of all that is most despicable in Lovemore. Witwoud is a study in frustrated malice, determined to debase other women who are more attractive to men than she; Mrs. Teazall, the only older person among the characters, provides neither the wisdom nor the sense that one might expect from age; Courtall is a cipher, filling in scenes and contributing nothing material either to play or to theme.

The most interesting secondary parts are those of Wellvile and Sightly, the would-be lovers. He is a man who seems to value Mrs. Friendall—it is he who is "writing" Cuckolds Make Themselves—yet he is not unwilling to aid Lovemore in his machinations if to do so will humiliate Friendall. Sightly is an "honest" woman but she is also willing to reveal to his wife Friendall's attentions. Together they make an ambiguous pair, obviously a cut above their fellows yet susceptible to the same sorts of self-interest. The reader is never sure how to respond to them, which may be the result of an ambivalence toward them on their creator's part. Most interesting and puzzling is their failure to marry; they have been in love for seven years but seem unable for reasons never explained to resolve their situation. Southerne's choice to leave their affairs in abeyance may be an attempt to underscore the barrenness of their milieu, in which not even licit relationships can flourish and grow naturally; it is certain that The Wives Excuse includes no normal male-female relationship among all its many characters.

Wellville is considered by both Smith and Hume to be a sort of alter ego for Southerne himself. The former, seeing the playwright in the scene in which the projected "play" is discussed, feels that "Southerne projected himself, as a wounded yet sardonic observer [, into] at least one point [in the play]. . . . Wellville is a man of sense, but with the disadvantage incurred by this type in such a society. . . . Thus Southerne, in this bitter play, saw the world as infected with a blight which could attack even honest love."²¹ Hume similarly observes that "Southerne actually wrote himself in—as Wellville, a sardonic, unhappy observer who is writing a play with this title. This touch adds a strong sense of the author's unhappy entrapment in a degraded society."²² One hesitates to make such a biographical inference on the basis of a few lines in a single play, but given the social comment in other of Southerne's works—The Disappointment, Sir Antony Love, later The Maid's Last Prayer and Oroonoko—such an interpretation seems possible. If, however, Southerne is indeed presenting himself all through the work in the guise of Wellville he has not treated himself very kindly.

Ultimately the play belongs to Mrs. Friendall; Southerne may be "more interested in accounting for [cuckolding] than in demonstrating it,"²³ or he may be attacking "free gallantry,"²⁴ but to take either of these concerns as the major theme of the work ignores the wife's refusal

²¹Smith, p. 148.

²²Hume, Development of the English Drama, p. 387.

²³Sutherland, p. 145.

²⁴Hume, Development of the English Drama, p. 387.

to fall. The fop and libertine are static; it is Mrs. Friendall who struggles and suffers and is clearly intended to engage the audience's interest.

Unhappily, The Wives Excuse closed after its first night. The comedy's failure to gain contemporary approval is probably attributable to the fact that unlike its boisterous predecessor it is rarely funny—only those scenes involving Friendall's pretensions to culture and sophistication, Springame's forthright country sparkishness, and Mrs. Teazall's vulgarity are humorous, and these passages make up a very small portion of the work as a whole.

Modern critical appraisal has been mixed. Dodds, typically "how anyone could have expected The Wives Excuse to succeed, even in 1691. A drearier round of cuckolding and wenching would be hard to find in any writer approaching Southerne in talent."²⁵ Nicoll feels simply that is "is not a very good play."²⁶ Smith, on the other hand, ranks it as "one of the five most considerable comedies of the period."²⁷ Muir is particularly struck with the play's innovations, especially in the final confrontation between Mrs. Friendall and Lovemore; he points out that it is

rare in Restoration comedy for a wife to reject the advances of a man to whom she is attracted. . . . rare for a dramatist to deal with such a situation in such a cool and sensible way, without righteous indignation on the [woman's part] . . . [or] attempted use of force by the man. . . . And the woman's

²⁵Dodds, p. 80.

²⁶Nicoll, p. 228.

²⁷Smith, p. 194.

confession that she finds the man attractive and his proposal a compliment is psychologically truer than many of the reactions ascribed to virtuous wives of the period; and it is quite different in tone from similar scenes written by writers of sentimental comedy.²⁸

It is indeed a remarkable play, despite its failure at its debut and its relative neglect in the nearly three centuries since. It is all the more remarkable when compared to its immediate predecessor, Sir Antony Love—the two are totally different in mood and scope, with Wellvile, who is clearly related to Ilford in conception, being the only major recurring type; while Friendall shares some qualities with Sir Gentle, the former is much less a silly clown than the latter—he is stupid, but he is far more destructive. The heroines—Luica and Mrs. Friendall—could not be more different: one a libertine, the other a virtuous wife. But at a very basic level they share with each other and the The Spartan Dame's Celona a basic characteristic: each has vision of who she is and what she must do to maintain her sense of self. In his next comedy, The Maid's Last Prayer, or Any Rather Than Fail, Southerne creates another of their group: this time a cold, calculating whore who resembles none of her predecessors except in her insistence on her right to be true to her own interests and self. *

The Maid's Last Prayer, or Any Rather Than Fail (1693)

This last of Southerne's comedies of the early 1690's had neither the roaring success of Sir Antony Love nor the total failure of The Wives Excuse; it has similarly received mixed reviews from modern critics. Dodds, predictably, sees in the play "the same defects and

²⁸Muir, p. 90.

the same thin virtues that had belonged to The Wives Excuse;"²⁹ Nicoll observes that with this work "Southerne sinks below even the level of The Wives Excuse."³⁰ Sutherland is less severe, concluding that "Comedy . . . was not really [Southerne's] métier; his characters are more apt to interest than to amuse us."³¹ And Hume finds the work to "be a very fine one The play is splendidly brisk, an icy account of corruption, and a beautiful example of hard comedy at its best."³²

Although his assessment of Southerne's comedic talents is perhaps debatable, Sutherland's moderate evaluation of The Maid's Last Prayer seems to be closest to the mark. Despite Hume's enthusiasm the play is not particularly brisk, and its impact is blunted by a confusion of direction. The "maid" in the title is the elderly Lady Susan Malapert, enamored, in typical Restoration fashion, of the younger Granger; he in turn has a sort of love/hate relationship with the corrupt, mercenary, yet strangely compelling Lady Trickitt, a woman of social quality whose love of money has led her to prostitute herself and to cheat at cards. Her lover, as distinct from her clients, is Garnish, who is jealous of Granger. Granger's friend Gayman is attracted simultaneously to the unmarried Maria, to whom he becomes affianced at play's end, and to the eighteen-year-old Lady Malapert, Lady Susan's niece by marriage, who under the direction and encouragement of Wishwell, the standard high-born bawd, has begun to emulate Lady Trickitt's conduct.

²⁹Dodds, p. 90.

³⁰Nicoll, p. 241.

³¹Sutherland, p. 146.

³²Hume, Development of the English Drama, p. 145.

In the course of the play Granger tricks Lady Susan and is in turn tricked by Lady Trickitt into keeping unproductive assignations. Gayman, by substituting himself for Lady Malapert's latest client, enjoys a rendezvous with her which for the first time introduces her into the joys of a meaningful sexual relationship; he then drops her for Maria. At the same time, there are intermittent comic scenes involving India, a dealer in import goods, and her rascally, blowhard husband Drydubb, a low-comic figure. Finally, Lady Susan, rather than fail, accepts the proposal of a rather foolish music-master, Sir Symphony. The other characters are Lady Malapert's hapless husband and Sir Ruff Rancounter; the latter has dishonorable designs on both Maria and Lady Malapert.

The problem of direction is that we are never sure which of two main plot lines, that involving Gayman or that involving Granger, is the primary one. Gayman, who is very similar to Valentine in Sir Antony Love, has many of the qualities of a hero; Wishwell, who fears his influence over her protégée, Lady Malapert, describes him as a "master of those thriving arts, and little rogueries, that cheat and please the women: then to his person, wit, and industry, he has a certain respectful impudence in his behaviour, few women can find fault with, or resist" (111)³³. He is a rake, but neither mocked nor censured; he is neither an Alberto nor a Lovemore.

Granger, on the other hand, is named first in the dramatis personae, and his love-hate attraction to Trickitt occupies much of the story.

³³The Maid's Last Prayer, or Any Rather Than Fail, Plays, II,
91-177.

Yet he is made a fool of several times and in his mordant view of life reminds us of both Ilford and Wellville. He is eccentric and inconsistent in his emotions, and Southerne frequently, if gently, makes fun of him.

The problem is compounded by the characterizations of the ladies who so preoccupy the two gentlemen. Lady Malapert is a wife in Mrs. Friendall's position (although her husband, while ridiculous, seems truly to care for her) without her predecessor's moral strength. When the play opens she has already fallen, succumbing under Wishwell's aegis to one Lord Lofty who, we are told, is tiring of her. Wishwell is about to arrange a new liaison with Sir Ruff, whom Lady Malapert stigmatizes as a "beast." Wishwell replies that

A thousand pounds may answer for the man: 'tis but suffering a little of his company; and why not a little of his, as well as more of your husband's? They're beasts alike: only this, in proportion bids more to be receiv'd by you. Then he can do you no injury, either in your quiet, or your fame: for you can no more be in love with him, (which is a great blessing in these affairs) than the town can think you ever allow'd him to be in love with you; and in not a thousand pounds a round sum, for doing so little, and suffering nothing . . . we'll learn . . . of the men—For love is nature's appetite diseases'd:
Where we have no concern, we're always pleas'd. (118)

Passages such as this, delineating a milieu in which libertinism has become good ton, explain the contradictory assessments of the play by Nicoll and Hume. This world, where seduction and cuckoldry have become outright prostitution, is indeed "beneath" that of The Wives Excuse and indeed stinks of "icy corruption."

That Southerne himself does not believe that "love is nature's appetite diseases'd" is clear from his treatment of Wishwell and Lady Malapert. Wishwell is the more conventional stage figure, a sister to

Witwoud—bitter over aging, mocked by her servants and her peers alike. Lady Malapert is pathetic, clinging to romantic notions even as she sells herself. She has become a bone of contention between Wishwell and her own husband's aunt, Lady Susan Malapert, each of whom is eager to serve as her bawd; we see here the abuse of familial relationships leading to destruction that occurred earlier in The Disappointment, The Spartan Dame, Sir Antony Love—who was sold by her aunt, and The Wives Excuse—Mrs. Friendall's brother is among those who expect and encourage her to fall. The presentation of Wishwell, Lady Susan, and Lady Malapert suggest that the problem of all of them is that they have made of love a disease of natural appetite.

The wronged husband, Lord Malapert, is staggeringly stupid; describing a dinner party at Wishwell's to Sir Ruff, intended by Wishwell to be Lady Malapert's next paramour, he reveals that while he and his hostess "rail[ed] . . . at the vices of the age,"

my lord [Lofty] and [Lady Malapert] went into the little room, with the crimson couch, to talk of state affairs: now you must know my wife understands state affairs to a miracle . . . she picks up all the news of the drawing-room, to inform me of at night; for the whole business, you must know, is to make me rise—. (104)

Like Friendall he fancies himself—or wants society to fancy him—a wit; he barely averts a duel when in an attempt to be witty he speaks insultingly of Maria to Sir Ruff, who has hopes of her as well as of Lady Malapert. And like Friendall and Sir Golding, he perverts the truth to hide his own inadequacies, both from society and, we suspect, from himself; when Sir Ruff physically threatens him, he cries for assistance:

Help there! treason! I am the lord Malapert, seize him somebody—but dear Sir Ruff [as Granger and Gayman answer his cries], I meant no harm in the world; but as I love railing mightily, I can't forbear a witty jest sometimes—. (105)

As Ruff rushes off, Malapert's first words to his rescuers are as if nothing has happened:

Mr. Granger, Mr. Gayman, your servant; were you at the park last night? (106)

When his wife fears that, with their affair over, Lofty will gossip about her, Wishwell undertakes to cover their tracks with the unsuspecting husband. She tells him that Lofty had one day surprised Lady Malapert in her dressing room and attempted to ravish her; the lady swooned, and only Wishwell's timely interruption saved her honor. My lord's response is a masterful comic stroke:

what signifies our wives virtue, if they are so liable to fall into a swoon? any woman may be taken napping, you know. (147)

He determines to deal with this affront not by calling Lofty out but by going to the king for redress. Wishwell, after discouraging him from such a course, warns him that in revenge Lofty may brag of favors never received; Malapert's reaction is perfectly in character:

Why, let him brag, he's out of favour at court; and whatever he says now goes for nothing in the drawing-room; and I care not this, what he can say any where else; for I wou'd not be known by my good will out of the verge of Whitehall. (147)

Thus far Malapert seems merely a representation of Friendall; but suddenly, with his wife's entry into the room, the portrait is softened; although he is no less ridiculous, he becomes infinitely more pathetic.

bawd. Nor is Lady Malapert, except in her marriage to a fool, like Mrs. Friendall. And the alterations to the husband's character are obviously intended to lessen the justification for the wife's behavior. Finally, if Mrs. Friendall had fallen to Lovemore, it would have been because she was attracted to him and (mistakenly) believed that he cared for her in return; Lady Malapert has prostituted herself for money.

Her relationship with Gayman elicits our pity but not our respect, for she keeps an assignation with him through a ruse of his part; she believes him to be the "beast" Rancounter.³⁶ His own attitude toward her is a major problem in the play. When in the first scene the misogynist Granger berates her as a whore, Gayman comes to her defense:

Prejudice of education, Granger; her inclinations may be good, and Wishwell's influence over-rule 'em. (101)

In fact, Gayman adds, Granger himself pursues Lady Trickitt, despite his avowed distaste for her avarice and promiscuity. Granger's excuse is that

I consider the principles of a mistress no more than of a good companion, they are both the instruments of pleasure for the time, and to be trusted with nothing beyond that meeting. (102)

Gayman asks then, "Can you love without esteem?" and reveals his own purpose in following Lady Malapert:

Cou'd I reclaim her I shou'd be happy: at least the trial will be pleasant. (103)

Although the effect of this exchange is somewhat spoiled by Gayman's immediate revelation that he is also interested in Maria, whom he has "try'd . . . every way but one; and that one way, that highway of

³⁶ Yet another variation on the substitution of a sexual partner, a device which appears in so many of Southerne's plays.

matrimony, 'twill come to at last" (108), the tenderness of his references to Lady Malapert is quite touching; we must remember, after all, that he here addresses only his best friend, not someone whom he wishes to impress with his chivalry, and we must assume that he is sincere.

Later, at Wishwell's, he manages to get Lady Malapert alone, where he woos her with equal tenderness:

LADY M.: I ne'er can by your enemy.

GAY.: O, no! they're outward all, not near this tender breast, and most unworthy to possess your heart; that heart, which once you said was wholly mine.

LADY M.: And was not that a fault?

GAY.: It was, to break your word.

LADY M.: Why did I say so?

GAY.: Because then it pleas'd you, to speak a truth that charm'd me to be yours; and yours I must be, use me as you will—; but being yours. (115)

As he importunes her to meet him again soon, she cries, "Why will you press me thus to what will ruin me?" (116). Here she apparently plays the modest woman; Gayman tells us in an aside, "With Wishwell, I would have it—" (116).

This exchange demonstrates the ambiguity of Southerne's treatment of this couple. Our earlier impression of Gayman, preserved until this aside, is that he does care for her; our subsequent impression of Lady Malapert is one of great pathos, particularly in a conversation with Wishwell later in this same scene in which she talks of love and tries to withdraw, however hesitantly and unsuccessfully, from her "arrangement" with her hostess. And we must remember that this part was taken by Mrs. Barry who just the year before had played Mrs. Friendall and was

known as a tragedienne. How are we to take him? her? Is he a romantic lover, or a cold libertine? Is she a cold harlot, or a young and lonely woman ill-married and fallen into bad company?

The resolution given by Southerne after the consummation of their relationship does not answer any of these questions. Her assignation has actually been with Rancounter, but Gayman with Granger's assistance has engineered a "duel" between Sir Symphony and Sir Ruff to take place at the same time; the same device was used less successfully and for a different but related purpose in The Wives Excuse. Gayman takes Rancounter's place and afterwards, as Act V opens, "enters dressing" (163) and repeating a snatch from a romantic poem. He interrupts himself to reveal that

now can't I help thinking of Sir Ruff, and destroying the memory of this night's pleasures, by calling to mind they were all design'd for another. Can't I be contented with the enjoyment of a delicious woman, without reflecting, that any body else might have had her as well as I? 'Tis an impertinent curiosity in our natures, that when we have discover'd as much as we can to please us, will always drive us upon something to find fault with: curiosity did I call it? nay, gad there's ingratitude in the bottom on't . . . for 'tis the way of the world, in other favours too, to lessen those obligations as much as we can, which we han't in our honesty to return. (163)

At this point Southerne has gotten his hero and himself into a very sticky situation: now that Gayman has enjoyed Lady Malapert his creator must disentangle him without condemning him. Gayman must be freed to marry Maria, but in such a way that his position as exemplar, as the most admirable man in the play, is not damaged. Southerne's problem lies in his prior development of the pair. Had he followed

Etherege's lead more closely and made the man a total libertine, hard, glossy, compellingly attractive, and at heart unsentimental in public or in private; had he made the mistress avaricious and brittle, a woman whom it is possible to pity only in the abstract even as she is cast off for another—this scene would not be so problematical. But since Gayman has already been established as caring for Lady Malapert, as wishing to redeem her, Southerne is forced here to give him a soliloquy in which he cannot forget that "this night's pleasures . . . were all design'd for another." Gayman simply is not a libertine; if he were, he would "be contented with the enjoyment of a delicious woman" and expect nothing more.

But in his reasoning Gayman becomes pettish and petty rather than, as Southerne obviously intended, sensible:

I can't be ungrateful here, if I wou'd; for there was nothing designed to me of the benefits I receiv'd . . . the lady receiv'd me for Sir Ruff; but when I think of the pleasures that came after, that she shou'd still mistake me for that bargaining booby of her bawd's providing, I don't forgive her; the furious riot, the expense of charms, the prodigality of life, and love (too vast for nature's bounty to support another hour) might have inform'd her better. (164)

This is the complaint of piqued pride, not of disappointed love.

Southerne still might have salvaged the situation by having Lady Malapert reveal herself as totally base and unworthy of Gayman's affections. But he repeats a technique which, brilliant in The Wives Excuse, here is merely confusing: he introduces a tragic note into his comedy, as the lady enters still unaware of her lover's true identity:

I have slept away my life, my better part of it, my life of love: he's gone from me: was this an hour of rest, sleep had been welcome in a husband's bed; but in a lover's arms! he stole away, fearful of waking me and fearful to be seen, he stole away, in every thing shewing his care of me: how cou'd Sir Ruff do this? O love! what can'st thou not do in a woman's heart! that brutal thing, whom, as I thought, I loath'd, thy gentle fires hath soften'd by degrees, and melted in Gayman: night be still my friend, let me not see him, and I will think it was my Gayman still. (164)

The playwright may have meant Lady Malapert's wakening to love to be her punishment for her prostitution, but the effect has been diffused by her earlier exchange with Wishwell. If the possibility of romance had never occurred to her, if Southerne had not created so many pressures on her—Wishwell, her own husband's Aunt Susan, even Gayman himself; if, in short, she were a character from Etherege or Wycherley, a hard scheming woman, her awakening to love would be an ironic justice. But her softness and the lyric terms of her soliloquy do nothing to excuse Gayman's attitude toward and subsequent treatment of her. In an aside he mutters, "O this woman! I love her for herself, but hate her too" (164). It is a neatly turned phrase but does not, in the situation, ring true.

When she realizes her lover's presence, although not yet his true identity, Lady Malapert tries to make amends for her prostitution:

LADY M.: Can you forget? can you forgive me? can you excuse my being to be sold? Let Wishwell bear the mercenary blame—Her baseness wrought me to her sordid ends: but I'll return your bills—

GAY.: Return my love; my fortune is but yours.

LADY M.: You are my better fortune.

GAY.: O this happy night! but to remember it, a locket, your picture—

LADY M.: Take this ring, to make a better marriage. Have you forgiv'n me? (164)

This development too is ambiguous, since it is possible to read Gayman's part of the exchange in either of two ways, neither of which is satisfactory. First, he may be speaking ironically—after all, he still has not disclosed his real identity. But if his intention is, as he stated in the first act, to "reclaim" her, she is obviously ready to be so redeemed, and his speech earlier in the scene has not really prepared us for so drastic a step as abandonment; indeed, they now start to withdraw to consummate their relationship once more. And such irony is simply out of character—Gayman is a Valentine, not a Lovemore, as Southerne has made most clear. He could, of course, be sincere; but this is the less likely possibility, since his character would then be even more inconsistent within this scene.

As the two "lovers" leave they encounter Wishwell bearing a lantern which discloses Gayman's identity. In the subsequent exchange it is Lady Malapert who undergoes a rather abrupt shift in character. One moment romantically proclaiming her love, indeed her "marriage," to the partner she had imagined to be Gayman, she does not as we might expect fall rapturously into his arms, but cries out, "Gayman! then I am ruin'd; base woman [to Wishwell]! have I deserv'd this from you?" (165). While Southerne does achieve in this passage a neat and ironic echo of her earlier question to Gayman ("Why will you press me thus to what will ruin me?"), he has nevertheless once more jerked awry any natural pattern of character development. The similar situation in Sir Antony Love, when Lucia poses as the "English lady" to Valentine, is far more believable. Lucia feels no regret that Valentine has

enjoyed himself, although he believes his partner to have been another, nor is he appalled to discover that the "lady" is none other than the woman for whom he has great affection. Even the fact that one of the partners in The Maid's Last Prayer is already married does not greatly diminish the parallel of situation; after all, Lucia not only refuses Valentine's offer but declares her intention to be his mistress after he weds Floriante.

But the presentation of Gayman and Lady Malapert is simply not satisfying; Southerne appears to have been torn between writing "hard" comedy and his natural tendency toward sentiment. In Sir Antony Love he turns this sympathetic streak to advantage in creating the gallant Lucia; in The Wives Excuse he expresses it only through Mrs. Friendall, with whom he intends his audience to sympathize; here, in this third comedy, it causes a sort of schizophrenic effect.

The subplot goes on with Wishwell'd announcement that Lord Malapert is coming upstairs with several companions, news which throws his wife into a panic: "O, every way undone!" (165). Wishwell rushes out, locking the door to escape so that the pair are trapped. Malapert, whose denseness is pierced by the sight of another man in his wife's bedroom at an unseasonable hour, becomes suspicious; but Gayman manages to convince him that he has been with Malapert's party all evening and entered the room with his host. When, for reasons never explained, the rest of the cast assembles in Lady Malapert's room, Gayman in front of his paramour not only begs Maria to marry him but rather maliciously asks Lady Malapert to intercede for him; her cup of bitterness is complete.

It is a clever scene, but again its point is blunted by Southerne's failure ever to determine how he wishes us to respond to either of the pair.

He is guilty of no such obscurity, however, in dealing with the other major plotline—that involving Granger's splenetic attraction to Lady Trickitt and Garnish's jealousy of his advances. Granger is the most delightful of Southerne's Alcestean figures; Garnish, in the strength of his passion for his mistress, overcomes our distaste for his relationship with her; and Lady Trickitt, who is the personification of Hume's "icy corruption," revolts the audience even as she ultimately wins its grudging admiration.

Southerne is successful in setting up the two "love" stories as parallels, a process begun in the first scene where Gayman and Granger discuss their ladies. In contrast to the former's romantic and apparently altruistic attitude toward his lady-whore, Granger has no illusions about his; after he had a successful night at cards, she sought next morning to borrow five hundred guineas, for security offering "the best she had about her" (100). He refused her offer, knowing

'twas so incumber'd with fops and blockheads, there was
nothing in remainder for a reasonable man: there's not a
rogue so nauseous, but is welcome to her for his money:
all that will be losers, lenders, or givers, have an equal
claim to her good graces. (101)

When he goes on to attack Lady Susan Malapert, "that youthful virgin of five and forty, with a swelling rump, bow legs, a shining face and colly'd eye-brows" (101), Gayman wonders why, "despising [Lady Susan] as you do . . . are you so often with her?" (102). Granger admits that

since I refus'd Trickitt the five hundred pounds . . . she has made me some advances, that have put me into a curiosity of knowing the meaning of 'em. But, damn her, while I believe her endeavouring to persuade me that she is in love with me, I think I am in love with her; I can't see to the end on't; but she, and my worthy Lady Susan, being . . . inseparable, I need explain no farther. (102)

Granger's perversity and eccentricity extend to his social life; when "the new favourite [at court] summons [Granger] to dine," he falls into a rage at the invitation of which, as Gayman points out, "many an honest fellow [would] be proud . . . and think his fortune made by it" (122). Granger, however, is determined to keep a prior engagement with Lord Lofty, to his friend's surprise; after all, Gayman says, "'tis not a month since [the new favorite] was in your favour, and Lofty could not get a word from you" (122):

GRA.: And 'tis not yet a fortnight since he was mean enough to accept of an employment, and Lofty had the soul to part with three.

GAY.: Sure . . . thou lovest a nodding well, that will bury thee in its ruins, tho' it never gave thee shelter while it stood; as no one was the better for Lofty's greatness, methinks it be difficult to be concern'd for his disgrace; I'm sure I'll condole with no man that wou'd never give me cause to rejoice with him.

GRA.: He mended every day.

GAY.: No faith, he kept up his character to the last; and had his politics and honesty been put into the scale, the balance had been even. (122)

When Granger refuses to be persuaded, demanding that the new favorite be abused simply because he is "a favourite; that will make faults if it find none," Gayman demurs on personal as well as abstract philosophical grounds:

GAY.: You may distinguish the man from the favourite; he's never the worse for having it in his power to do good offices; besides his company's good; his table easy; and, Granger, he has always been a friend to you. (123)

Granger here is acting exactly like Lord Malapert in reverse; whereas the lord drops a man when he falls from favor, Granger drops him when he rises in favor. This exchange, reminiscent of a conversation between Alceste and Philinte in the opening scene of Le Misanthrope, establishes the nature of Granger's role in the play: to be Gayman's foil, as Ilford was for Valentine and as Wellvile, in a sense, was for Lovemore. Gayman's clear-sighted honesty in this scene reinforces his position as exemplar and Granger's as a slightly mad misanthrope. However, Granger is not merely a comic figure. Gayman obviously values him; Garnish, who is jealous of him, yet calls him with apparent sincerity "a man of honour" (109); and Maria describes him as

sometimes splenetic indeed, but 'tis thro' so much good sense
and breeding, 'tis rarely seen, and always diverting. (109)

Granger can tell a hawk from a handsaw, and like Ilford (and unlike Alceste) he can see his own foolishness in pursuing an unsuitable lady; again like Ilford, he is saved from being a butt by his ability to laugh at himself.

Garnish also has no illusions about Lady Trickitt but, like Granger, is attracted to her nevertheless. In his case, however, the attachment is mutual. For her part, she hides nothing from him—her cheating of her friends at cards, her selling of her body, her general corruption—and still he cares. Their relationship makes an interesting counterpoint to that between Gayman and Lady Malapert. Garnish appears to be a man of honor who has become a "slave to all [her] interests" (109). For her, "There's no true friend but money" (109) and himself. "But let us get as much money as we can; 'twill secure your friendship

to me" (109); here, instead of offering her body as security for money, as she did to Granger, she seems to ask money in security for her body:

GAR.: I cannot need such a security—well, madam, you have reconcil'd me to some things—for your service.

TRI.: And for your own, good sir.

GAR.: That I cou'd never have thought on, for myself.

TRI.: And you have persuaded me to another thing.

GAR.: For both our services.

TRI.: That I wou'd ha' done for nobody else. (109)

The pair seem to have reached some sort of peculiar equilibrium where, for her sake, he has made himself party to venality and she, for his, has achieved some sort of fidelity.

But because she does not admit him to the secret of her apparently kind treatment of Granger, she thereby arouses his jealousy. With a bit of auctorial manipulation, Southerne complicates the situation by having Garnish learn just enough to suspect that something is going on behind his back, and just too little to understand its nature.

Meantime, Lady Susan has become convinced that Granger's frequent visits mean that he loves her and that comments aimed at Trickitt are really meant for herself. She sends a poem (anonymously) by her page to Granger, whom Garnish happens to be visiting. Granger, unaware of Garnish's interest, gives the boy a note in return, along with a coin, and asks him to deliver it to Trickitt on his way home. Garnish is also present when the answer is delivered, again anonymously, agreeing to a rendezvous that night at Rosamond's Pond. Both men assume that the assignation is with Trickitt; Granger is triumphant, while Garnish must hide his bitter sense of betrayal.

The scene at Rosamond's Pond parallels that in Lady Malapert's bedroom. Like Gayman, Granger opens with a soliloquy abusing his mistress, although this time it comes before, not after, consummation:

Because I like Trickitt, she thinks I'm in love with her: why, how has she the impudence to think so! but she does think so; for in this note, she has promis'd to meet me here; if she has honesty enough to be as good as her word, she needs no greater curse; there was no occasion of my knowing that she can make her husband a cuckold, to make me have an ill opinion of her: I always thought so ill of her that 'tis now necessary to think a little while well, to think worse of her than I did: that must be my reason of liking her; a malicious pleasure of revenging the quarrel of those fools (not forgetting her dear lord) who have trusted, and been deceiv'd by her. She can't deceive me. (158)

The words are no sooner out of his mouth when enters, masked, not Trickitt but none other than his bête noir Lady Susan.

Stunned, Granger recovers quickly and saves himself by pretending to recognize the lady:

LADY S.: Pray, who did you visit this afternoon?

GRA.: A worthy, grave lady, Lady Susan Malapert.

LADY S.: Suppose it her you talk to.

GRA.: Suppose you her! Suppose my lady Susan with a man, alone at ten at night, and in this place too! no, no, that is not to be suppos'd; and you are no better than you shou'd be to offer it; if you were not in petticoats, you wou'd know how I resent a wrong so great to her I so much honour. (160)

He then pretends to become convinced that he speaks to "some mischief-making fiend, who wou'd assume the title of an angel. Bless me! methinks I see the cloven foot peep under her petticoat!" (160). He rushes off in mock terror, leaving her bemused and confused but still set on marrying him. The situation is a sort of parody of that between Gayman and Lady Malapert, with the unexpected substitution of a partner leading here to farce rather than to hard comedy.

As Lady Susan departs, Trickitt comes forth laughing at the success of her revenge, only to be startled by Garnish's sudden emergence as well. He is, of course, furious, thinking that she has just met Granger, whom he passed on the way in "look[ing] like an ass . . . not the first of your making:"

I'm sure you have made an ass of me: but my jealousy has restor'd my eyes; and now I plainly see you wou'd abuse me.
(161)

She explains that when she received Granger's message she put it into another envelope and sent it on to Lady Susan for a joke; she herself has come in order to "laugh at the mistake" (162). Furious, Garnish refuses to listen:

TRI.: I ne'er was false to you.
GAR.: Away, away, it is not to be excus'd.
TRI.: I don't excuse it.
GAR.: No, no it never can.

Trickitt's reaction to Garnish's treatment of her makes her another of Southerne's memorable heroines:

if you don't think it worth your while to be satisfy'd, I'm sure I was in the wrong to endeavour it. Sir, as I remember, matters between you and me are entirely depending upon our good liking and pleasure: 'tis not in the nature of an amour to make one another uneasy: when once we begin to find faults, 'tis high time to find out fresh friends that have none; the most desperate jealousy of this kind lies within the remedy of parting.

She refuses Garnish's attempt at conciliation:

Sir, I won't be suspected, I won't be enquir'd into: a husband can do no more; and I have enough of one husband and his ill humours at home, I thank you, ever to allow of a husband abroad to torment me. Perhaps you think I can't break with you; I wou'd rather than break one hour's rest for any of you. I'll change as often as I shift my clothes, but I'll light upon a man that has sense enough to value his own

pleasure without invading mine. If I depended upon you indeed, and there were nobody else to be had, you might tie me to your terms; but, make us thankful, there's roving room enough in this dear town: I can provide myself, I warrant you.

A mistress is a name implies command:

Nor shall the scepter fall within my hand:

But if you wou'd take back that pow'r you gave,

Marry the woman you wou'd make a slave. (162; *italics mine*)

Here is an older, far colder Lucia, still insisting on her right of choice and independence and turning the tables on the double standard with a vengeance. And here is a surprising echo of Mrs. Friendall. The two wives are polar opposites in all but the most important respect: each has an adamant core of strength which sustains her. In fact, Lady Trickitt is in a way the stronger of the two: Mrs. Friendall has as her support at least traditional morality; Lady Trickitt, like Lucia before her, has only herself. Underlining her strength is the presence in the play of the weak, pathetic Lady Malapert who is playing at a game whose implications she does not fully understand.

Eventually Lady Trickitt's strength conquers. Trickitt and Garnish are reconciled in the last scene, but on her terms. Overhearing her cleverly mocking Granger for being so deceived, he realizes that she has told him the truth earlier than night:

GAR.: You have convinc'd and oblig'd me; and I thank you for the satisfaction.

TRI.: Pray thank me when you are oblig'd, Mr. Garnish; I have done nothing to convince you: 'twas necessary to clear myself, and I have done it without a regard to your jealous thoughts upon the matter.

GAR.: I promise you, I'll never be jealous more.

TRI.: Then here I promise you, I'll never give you cause to be jealous. (172)

But despite its intriguing Lady Trickitt, despite certain genuinely funny scenes, The Maid's Last Prayer is not so satisfactory a play as either of its two predecessors of the '90's. A third triangle, involving Drydubb, his wife India, and the foolish Lord Malapert, is frequently amusing but needlessly complicates an already complex story. The double plot itself poses a problem since only with difficulty can one determine which plot is to dominate. That with Gayman and Lady Malapert seems intended to be the primary focus, but Lady Malapert is so over-shadowed by the magnificently-drawn Lady Trickitt that the focus is blurred. Finally, Southerne's inconsistency of tone in dealing with the two younger lovers injects still more confusion. But this was his third work in less than four years—his most prolific period—and we know from his preface that the failure of The Wives Excuse two years before had deeply disappointed him. Perhaps by the time this comedy was written he was a little weary; he would not attempt the pure comic form again for decades, turning next to the tragicomedy for his great triumphs of the mid '90's, The Fatal Marriage and Oroonoko.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRIUMPH OF TRAGICOMEDY—THE MIDDLE '90'S

With three comedies behind him, Southerne returned in mid-decade to a form with which he had experimented ten years before in The Disappointment: the split-plot tragicomedy. He had, however, never completely deserted the type, since in both The Wives Excuse and The Maid's Last Prayer he mingled tragic and comic tones into the same plot lines. Now he separated them once more; in the two resulting works he achieved his highest fame.

The Restoration tragicomedy is a much-neglected field; indeed, no critical consensus has yet been reached on its precise definition. But if Southerne's plays The Fatal Marriage, or The Innocent Adultery (1694) and Oroonoko (1695) are representative samples this neglect is unfortunate, for they are highly sophisticated works of thematic and structural integrity. In each, a serious main plot resulting in catastrophe for the protagonists is paired with a sex-comedy subplot. Since the eighteenth century often found such a linking offensive and a violation of decorum, both works were eventually shorn of their comedy and presented as straight tragedy well up into the nineteenth century. Their enormous popularity at their debuts, however, suggests that a late seventeenth-century audience had no difficulty with this mixed form; perhaps enough of the ethos of the pre-Interregnum world remained viable to permit the understanding and appreciation of what might be called "metaphysical" drama. That is, the same capacity which allowed

the blending of perceptions from widely different contexts, such as are found in the poetry of Donne and his school, would have no trouble grasping the simultaneous presentation of alternate kinds of reality on the stage.

The removal of the comic elements from The Fatal Marriage is particularly destructive to the play's effect. The subplot involving a daughter and a wife tyrannized by a jealous old man provides the context which makes the serious action tragic; without it, the story of Isabella's "fatal marriage" to another while her husband, unknown to her, still lives becomes pathetic and sentimental.

The eighteenth century truncation of Oroonoko is less destructive to the play's tone, since its hero simply is not the classical Aristotelian protagonist but a good and noble man trapped in a world of corrupt madness. With the comic plot removed it remains what it was before, a pathetic serious drama; in The Fatal Marriage the nature of the character of Isabella changes from tragic to pathetic without the subplot. But the story in Oroonoko of the search of the Welldon sisters, women of little fortune who have come to the new world in search of security they are unable to find in the old, adds a great deal to the play by offering an effective parallel to the story of the African prince stolen from his home and sold into slavery. Southerne treats in two keys, the serious and the comic, the same problem: the plight of the oppressed in a society which measures worth not in human but in economic terms.

In all of his work, with the exception of The Spartan Dame, Southerne has used the structural technique of parallel sets of actions and

characters. In The Fatal Marriage and Oroonoko, the climax of a distinguished career, he brings together everything he has learned about this device previously, as well as his experience with both high and low drama, to create the masterworks of his corpus.

The Fatal Marriage, Or The Innocent Adultery (1694)

The flurry of activity which produced three plays between 1690 and 1693 continued into the next year; Southerne's most successful effort appeared in February, 1694, and established him for his contemporaries in the front ranks of dramatists. This seventh work to be written and sixth to be presented was a departure from his run of comedies, harking back to the split-plot tragicomic form he had essayed ten years before in The Disappointment. The Fatal Marriage, or The Innocent Adultery was immediately hailed by the town as a profoundly moving masterpiece.¹ Again, Southerne had the benefit of a superb cast, most especially Mrs. Barry in the role of Isabella; the author himself observes in his dedication how much he owes to her gifts: "I made the play for her part, and her part has made the play for me" (182).² Her fellow players included Betterton, Underhill, Powell, and Mrs. Bracegirdle.

The main plot concerns the "innocent adultery" of Isabella, a beautiful and good widow whose husband Biron has supposedly died in

¹Dodds, p. 99 ff. Dodds cites numerous contemporary sources, including Motteaux, Downes, and several letters.

²The Fatal Marriage, or The Innocent Adultery, Plays, II 179-266.

battle seven years earlier, leaving her with a small son. She is now destitute, having parted with everything she owns that is of value except her wedding ring. Her father-in-law Count Baldwin, a wealthy nobleman who did not approve of her marriage to his son, blames her for Biron's loss and refuses to assist her. Another man, Villeroy, has patiently loved her throughout her widowhood, always respecting her vows never to wed again. Now, however, urged on by Biron's brother Carlos, who for reasons of his own wishes his sister-in-law remarried, Villeroy convinces the destitute Isabella to marry him even without love in order to provide sustenance for her son. She finally agrees, although warning him that she can never give him what has died with Biron, and they are wed. The next day he must leave on urgent business; in his absence a ring is brought to her which she recognizes as one she had given her first husband. He, it turns out, is alive, having languished a prisoner all these years; unaware that Isabella has remarried, he returns to her. She is driven almost mad by her mixed emotions of joy that he lives and sorrow at her sin of adultery. Carlos, who has hidden the knowledge that Biron was a prisoner in hopes of succeeding to their father's estates, discovers his brother's return and has him murdered in such a way that Villeroy is accused of the crime. Isabella goes completely mad and destroys herself. Carlos' perfidy is uncovered through his accomplices, and he is condemned. Villeroy, exonerated, is left to mourn the loss of his dead love and the formerly unforgiving father-in-law bitterly to repent of his hardheartedness.

The secondary comic plot, which seems lightyears away from this domestic horror, deals with a different sort of familial conflict.

An old man, Fernando, is so obsessed with jealousy and avarice that he on the one hand keeps his daughter Victoria and pretty young second wife Julia immured in the house away from temptation, and on the other casts off for profligacy, with some reason, his son Fabian. Victoria is in love with an acquaintance of Carlos, Frederick, with whom she is carrying on a clandestine correspondence; Carlos has designs on Julia.

Victoria escapes from her father in the disguise of a man and fools even her lover until she chooses to reveal her identity to him; she refuses to marry Frederick, however, until she has obtained her dowry from her father. The family conspires to trick Fernando by drugging him at the wedding of Villeroy and Isabell and then, when he revives, telling him he has been dead and greatly mourned. The ruse works; Fernando, much frightened by his resurrection, softens his heart toward his wife and children and vows never to be jealous again.

In this play, by altering the nature of the "villain," Southerne avoids the problem which arose in The Disappointment of the tragic line becoming trivialized by the comic. In the earlier work Alberto simply was too inept and too much the creature of comedy to carry the responsibility for Alphonso's quasi-Othellian tortures; as a result, the "hero's" hysterics and the heroine's suffering seemed excessive and inadequately motivated. In The Fatal Marriage the villains are Isabella's father- and brother-in-law, the former moved by hate of her, the latter by jealousy of her husband, whose inheritance he desires. The whole weight of their malignity falls upon the single character of Isabella, a woman suffering not only from grief at the death of her beloved husband

but reduced to penury as a result; the pathos of her situation is heightened by the existence of a small son, whose plight as well as her own she must consider and who in effect lessens her choices in coping with her hardships. Biron, too, has suffered, his long imprisonment having been kept secret by Carlos from both his wife and father; but he appears only in the fifth act. Thus for most of the play the horror is not diffused among several characters but concentrated on a woman who seems not to deserve it. In The Disappointment our sympathies are intended to be divided between Alphonso and Erminia, and the evil represented by Alberto is not sturdy enough to support two victims; in The Fatal Marriage either Baldwin or Carlos alone would be adequately villainous.

Count Baldwin appears the less reprehensible of the two, hard and cold rather than wicked. His hatred of Isabella results from the circumstances of her union with his son, who married her out of a convent upon which she had bestowed her dowry. After disinheriting Biron in favor of the younger son, Carlos, the enraged father sent the former to the siege of Candy, where he reportedly was killed. Baldwin thus considers Isabella the indirect cause of Biron's death and has refused in the seven years she has been alone to help her or her child, his grandson. He blames all on her "perjur'd vows; your plighted, broken faith/ To Heav'n, and all things holy" (201). Interestingly, in this work it is Baldwin to whom Southerne gives a version of the "Had it pleased heaven" passage from Othello which recurs throughout the earlier plays. Here, however, only the rhythms and

structures are retained; the substance is no longer that of sexual infidelity:

Had my wretched son
Marry'd a beggar'd bastard; taken her
Out of her rags and made her of my blood;
The mischief might have ceas'd and ended there.
But bringing you into a family,
Entails a curse upon the name, and house,
That takes you in: the only part of me
That did receive you, perish'd for his crime. (203)

He suffers from a disorder common to Southerne's unsympathetic characters, such as Lovemore and Friendall in The Wives Excuse, of seeing types rather than individuals; he perceives Isabella, quite falsely, as a woman rather like Sir Antony Love's Charlotte, who, sent off to a convent by the revolting Count Verole so that her portion will fall to her sister, whom he hopes to wed, nevertheless allows herself to be married to him by mistake. Asked why, she replies that she is

Not so much in love with the count, as I am out of love with
a nunnery: any man had been as welcome. (I, 250)

Baldwin characterizes Isabella in such a light, and expresses himself in terms similar to those of Charlotte:

A cloyster was
Too narrow for the work you had in hand:
Your business was more general; the whole world
To be the scene: therefore you spread your charms
To catch his soul, to be the instrument,
The wicked instrument of your cursed flight.
Not that you valu'd him; for any one,
Who could have serv'd that turn, had been as welcome. (203)

Baldwin emerges not as an evil but as a narrow, rigid man who deals with his son's death by transferring all blame to the blameless Isabella; after all, it was he who first disinherited Biron, then sent him off to war. He can be softened, for when Isabella urges his

protection for his grandson, begging him to "save, defend him, save him for the wrongs/ That fall upon the poor," Baldwin replies, "It touches me—/ And I will save him—." But his heart will not soften toward her, and he qualifies his concession: "to keep him safe [from her 'curse'];/ Never come near him more" (203). This, however, is more than she can agree to, and he promptly casts her out: "Then have your child, and feed him with your prayer" (204).

Carlos, Isabella's brother-in-law, is truly malignant, hating her not out of love for Biron but for jealousy of him. He busily promotes a marriage between his sister-in-law and Villeroy that he is aware is bigamous; his reasoning is that

I knew my brother lov'd his wife so well,
That if he ever shou'd come home again,
He cou'd not long out-live the loss of her. (262)

So desperate is he that when Biron does return he does not wait for the anticipated suicide (which indeed Biron intends); he sends assassins to murder him and then accuses Villeroy of the crime. Discovered, he ultimately blames his father for his crime of fratricide; as Dodds points out, his motivation is that of Lear's Edmund, although in this case he is a younger rather than a bastard son:³

Biron stood
Between me, and your [Baldwin's] favour; while he liv'd,
I had not that; hardly was thought a son;
And not at all a-kin to your estate.
I could not bear a younger brother's lot,
To live depending, upon courtesy.
Had you provided for me like a father,
I had been still a brother. (262)

³Dodds, p. 93.

Ironically, given the fact that his father believes Isabella cursed for having left her convent, Carlos attributes his own cleverness at deceit to his earlier religious training. Frederick, in response to Carlos' claim to be "endeavour[ing] to provide a good husband for my elder brother's widow," observes that he is "A very kind relation indeed: you'll give your consent to the match, where you are to have the benefit of the bargain":

FRE.: That has a fact of good nature; but it squints with both eyes upon your own interest.

CAR.: That trick I learn'd in the schools, in your company, when I was a younger brother, and designed for the church.

FRE.: The church is a very good school: . . . there are . . . lessons for every learner; doctrines for all disciples, and calculated to all capacities; to thrive or starve by, as they are able to digest 'em. The church will teach us to rise in this world as well as in the next, if we have but grace to follow her example.

CAR.: I think I have taken care to improve the principles I receiv'd from her. What did they turn me into a trade for, but to thrive by the mystery? and cheating is the mystery in all the professions I know of. (193)

Isabella, against whom Baldwin works overtly and Carlos covertly, is the descendant of Southerne's earliest heroines, Semanthe and Erminia. In addition to having their passivity and goodness, she shares the former's helplessness in the face of what she perceives to be her bitter destiny and the latter's loyalty to her husband. Convinced that she is cursed, she warns Villeroy from her:

Fate watches the first motion of the soul,
To disappoint our wishes; if we pray
For blessings, they prove curses in the end,
To ruin all about us. Pray be gone,
Take warning and be happy. (196)

Rebuffed by her father-in-law in her moment of great need, she cries,

"Do I deserve to be this outcast wretch?/ Abandon'd thus, and lost?"

This instant of questioning is succeeded by crushed acquiescence:

But 'tis my lot.
The will of heav'n, and I must not complain:
I will not for myself: let me bear all
The violence of your wrath; but spare my child;
Let not my sins be visited on him:
They are; they must; a general ruin falls
On every thing about me. (208)

Faced with a torrent of creditors secretly set on her by Carlos, she reiterates her resignation:

Let my fate
Determine for me; I shall be prepar'd.
The worst that can befall me, is to die:
When once it comes to that, it matters not
Which way 'tis brought about.
* * *
Hark, they are coming; let the torrent roar,
It can but overwhelm me in its fall;
And life and death are now alike to me. (210)

The critical question central to The Fatal Marriage is posed in these speeches and dozens more like them: is Isabella indeed cursed, doomed by fate or heaven to suffer? The title of the play would seem to indicate that she is, and the few scholars who have considered the work seem to agree. Hume, for example, although finding the play "as fine as pathetic drama gets," describes the heroine as "luckless" and observes that

There is almost no internal conflict, this is tragedy almost entirely of circumstances, and Southerne supercharges the pathos . . . The Fatal Marriage has everything a play needs to be great—except internal *raison d'être* for the tragedy. The pain we feel is that elicited by a gruesomely enacted accident—and so we may be left tearful, but we are never deeply moved.⁴

⁴Hume, Development of the English Drama, p. 402 ff.

Dodds finds in Isabella

purity engulfed by a storm not of its own brewing, whose lot is not to act, but to be acted upon by a destiny from which there is no escape. Something of the inevitability of Greek tragedy hovers over the play Yet the tone of the play is far from Greek, for Southerne's emphasis is on the pathos of the situation, and his tears are those of sensibility. Moreover, the feeling of fate which is an element of great tragedy and is seemingly persistent here is weakened for us by the realization that had the protagonists contemplated their situation sanely, it would not have proved unresolvable. The acquisition of two husbands need not in itself argue any moral guilt on the part of the unfortunate wife, but such a degree of intellectual analysis is wholly beyond the minds of Southerne's characters, to whom it is given to feel rather than to think. With the exception of the energetic Carlos, the main characters accept the situation as given His pathos, then, is not that of Shakespeare's which lies in the spectacle of a noble soul in conflict with itself. There is little internal conflict in The Fatal Marriage As a heroine . . . Isabella lacks the necessary tragic flaw, unless, indeed, it be that of an inability to come to grips with a distressing situation. Southerne would have us believe her in the vise of a circumstance not of human making and beyond her power to modify.⁵

Bernbaum observes "emphasized in conspicuous scenes of the play . . .

Isabella's irresponsibility for the calamities that fall upon her

[However, i]t should . . . not escape notice that the miseries of Isabella are at times though of as justly incurred. At the outset much is made of the circumstance that when she married Biron she broke her vows as a nun."⁶

Obviously the question of Isabella's fate is central to the play.

But while Hume, Dodds, and Bernbaum all agree that she is doomed by circumstance rather than by human agency, whether of others or of herself, the answer is not quite so simple; it is possible to see

⁵Dodds, pp. 112 ff.

⁶Bernbaum, pp. 56 ff.

the disaster as resulting at least as much from character and action as from destiny.

To begin with, Isabella's bigamous state, which triggers her fifth-act histrionics and the bloody dénouement, is not really an "accident" but the result of the actions of her father- and brother-in-law. If Baldwin had not rejected her, she would not have been driven to accept Villeroy. And it is Carlos, working behind the scenes, who engineers the situation, first by concealing his information that Biron is alive, then by bringing Isabella's creditors down upon her, and finally by urging her to marry Villeroy, if not for her own sake for those of the child and her faithful retainers. Isabella, unaware of the truth, may perceive her condition as being destined, but the audience knows better. Dodds' strictures on the lack of "intellectual analysis" by Isabella and Biron are also problematical. Othello (with whom Dodds compares Isabella unfavorably as a tragic figure) cannot think incisively about his own situation, primarily because he is not a thinker but an actor. In addition, Biron arrives late one night and is murdered early the next morning; there is very little time for sane contemplation of the situation.

Beyond these concerns of plot looms the character of Isabella herself; does she, in fact, in any way bring destruction on herself? The first step in such an investigation involves the point made by Bernbaum (and by Baldwin), that Isabella has broken her vows as a nun to marry Biron. But this fact must be considered not as the origin of a curse, but as a clue to character. Isabella is possessed of a negative

strength, reminiscent of that of Semanthe; her miseries are the result of the fact that the two times in her life when she acts rather than retreats, she indeed brings a "general ruin" on those about her.

Her first act, or choice, is to leave the convent for Biron. Her response to Baldwin's throwing up of this decision to her as a sin is significant:

There, there began my woes.
 Let women take warning of my fate,
 Never resolve, or think they can be safe
 Within the reach and tongues of tempting men.
 O! had I never seen my Biron's face;
 Had he not tempted me, I had not fall'n,
 But still continue'd innocent, and free
 Of a bad world, which only he had pow'r
 To reconcile, and make me try again. (202)

The passage is highly abstract. Isabella begins by generalizing about the sexes; even when she moves to her particular "fall" the language is allusive rather than specific, setting her sin in the vast context of the fall from Eden: "Tempted," "fall'n," "innocent," "free," "bad." This reads suspiciously like an evasion of responsibility for individual action, and very like a highly hypocritical speech by Count Verole in Sir Antony Love in which he attempts to justify his desire to send Charlotte to a convent: "A nunnery is virtue's best retreat from a bad world" (I, 190). Isabella is neither a Verole nor a Charlotte; but neither is she a Celona or a Mrs. Friendall, both of whom in the face of terrible odds maintain their integrity. Isabella has in a real sense been unfaithful in the past; although she was not in secular terms a wife betraying her husband, she was a bride of the church who in marrying betrayed her vows.

For a number of reasons it is difficult to believe that Southerne was not aware of this aspect of Isabella's character, for her next

decision, to marry Villeroy, both parallels her earlier one and is foreshadowed in the passage just discussed. She still is not "safe/ Within the reach and tongues of tempting men;" pressed by Carlos and Villeroy, she once again succumbs to temptation. Even "Biron's face" plays its part again, for she is largely moved by concern for their son in whose countenance "my bury'd husband rises" (197). And it cannot be accident that at the beginning of the scene in which she agrees to accept Villeroy she sends the old nurse who tends her out to sell her last possession of value—a ring given her by Biron on the occasion of their marriage which

I have always . . . kept,
With my best care, the treasure next my life:
And now part with it to support life. (209)

When Biron returns, her ring also in a sense returns, for he sends in to her as a sign of his identity the one she had given him as a wedding present. Thus Geoffrey Marshall is not wholly accurate when he uses the second ring as an example of the paucity of concrete symbol in Restoration drama:

When [Isabella] faints at the appearance of a ring which she has given to her husband, we are suprised, for the ring has never been mentioned—and, furthermore, it never again plays a role. It is not the sign that is significant here; it is Isabella's reaction.⁷

The paired rings are indeed significant because they link Isabella's betrayal of Biron in remarrying to her distress on Biron's reappearance.

Therefore to some degree, and to a far greater than has been admitted, Isabella is responsible for what has fallen upon her. The

⁷Geoffrey Marshall, Restoration Serious Drama (Norman, Okla.: Univ. of Oklahoma, 1975), p. 92.

difficulty in perceiving her tragic rather than merely pathetic stature lies in the nature of her flaw. She creates chaos and destruction for herself and others not when she acts unwisely or extremely but when she acts at all. We recall again her predecessors in Southerne's work, Semanthe and Erminia, both of whose very passivity is the indicator of their goodness. The parallels are most strong with Semanthe, who like her lover Tachmas longs for surcease of thought, of action, indeed at times of life. Isabella is similarly tormented. In Act II, when her fortunes are at their lowest ebb, she muses on her child's freedom from reflection:

His little sports have taken up his thoughts:
O may they never feel the pangs of mine,
Thinking will make me mad: why must I think,
When no thought brings me comfort? (209)

This echoes Tachmas' "I think, therefore am" soliloquy in The Loyal Brother, where the hero also laments the torments of thought from which there is no surcease but oblivion.

In Act V, after revealing their situation to Biron, she finds her mind wholly unable to deal with her dilemma:

What will this battle of the brain do with me?
This little ball, this ravag'd province, long
Cannot maintain—The globe of earth wants room
And food for such a war—I find I'm going—
Famine, plagues, and flames,
Wide waste and desolation, do your work
Upon the world, and then devour yourselves. (252)

The disjointedness and repetition of her speech indicate the chaos in the mind which produces it; Southerne reinforces the almost wholly affective import of it by having sound overwhelm sense in a barrage of alliteration and assonance. Then, like Semanthe when she thinks she

has discovered Tachmas faithless to her and can no longer support reality, Isabella first swoons, then arises quite literally out of her senses, in a state of amnesia:

ah now, 'tis better with me
 Conflicting passions have at last unhing'd
 The great machine; the soul itself seem'd chang'd.
 O, 'tis a happy revolution here!
 The reas'ning faculties are all depos'd,
 Judgment, and understanding, common sense,
 Driv'n out, as traitors to the public peace.
 Now I'm reveng'd upon my memory,
 Here set dug up, where all the images
 Of a long mispent life, were rising still,
 To glare a sad reflection of my crimes.

* * *

Better and better still! this is the infant state
 Of innocence, before the birth of care. (252)

While to give this speech to Isabella may not have been a happy choice by Southerne, since thus to dissect the joys of the loss of rationality exhibits rationality and far more knowledge of the immediate past than an unhinged amnesiac could be expected to possess, the nature of her madness confirms another similarity between The Fatal Marriage and The Loyal Brother: a version of the pastoral urge to withdraw from the world. We recall that Isabella came out of a convent, itself a retreat to contemplation, inaction, and (ideally) simplicity of life, to marry Biron; here her derangement, which she recognizes as that of the child (cf. Locke's tabula rasa), is a parallel retreat. But even in this condition Isabella is apparently not in a state of grace, for hearing Biron's voice from her bed, where he lies sleeping, she mutters,

A man's voice! in my bed! how came he there?
 Nothing but villainy in this bad world;
 Coveting neighbours goods, or neighbours wives;
 Cuckolds or cuckold-makers every where;
 Here's physick for your fever. (253)

And drawing a dagger she approaches the bed (the stage directions carefully specify that she "goes backwards," presumably so that she will not recognize Biron). Fortunately he awakes and brings her to herself, thereby producing in her paroxysms of despair:

Who, but the wretch, most reprobate to grace,
Despair ever harden'd for damnation,
Could think of such a deed! Murder my husband! (253)

In the Aphra Behn novel The Nun, or the Fair Vow-Breaker on which Southerne based the serious part of his play, Isabella deliberately kills both husbands to avoid discovery as a bigamist, only to be discovered as a murderess and executed. Dodds, who discusses extensively source and play, observes that Southerne "ignores such a conception of guilt and disaster. . . . [The Isabella of the drama's] part is to suffer, and to die ultimately on the horns of a dilemma beyond her power of escape, rather than to show assertiveness either of crime or of innocence."⁸ In point of fact, given the moral code of the Restoration serious heroine in general, previously particularized by Southerne in *Semanthe*, *Erminia*, *Celona*, and *Mrs. Friendall*, Isabella commits one heinous crime, adultery, and almost commits another, the murder of her husband, in addition to the perhaps lesser sin of breaking her vows as a religious. What is more, interspersed with her cries of doom are recognitions by her of her guilt—as when she apostrophizes herself as a "wretch, most reprobate to grace,/ Despair ever harden'd for damnation" for her attempt to take Biron's life. Indeed, she herself appears early

⁸Dodds, p. 105.

in the play to perceive her "fate" as the effect of her "fall" when initially "tempted" by Biron.

Thus Isabella does seem to be characterized tragically rather than merely pathetically; her "flaw" is that she several times acts, rather than not-acting, and thereby goes against her own nature. Furthermore, she is the victim not just of the fate but of Baldwin's hatred and Carlos' schemes. Yet it cannot be denied that Hume and Dodds are correct in observing that the serious plot in The Fatal Marriage, which for them seems to represent the substance of the play, does not have a tragic effect; the real reason lies not in Isabella but in the rest of the cast directly involved with her. Among the other major characters only Baldwin suggests that she is in any way to blame for what has happened, and his judgment is so perverted by his own biases and guilt as to have no impact on the audience. No one else in the play ever even hints that Isabella is anything but blameless. Oedipus, Creon, Lear, Othello, Antony, Faust—all to varying degrees commit sins which are at least initially understandable; but all are warned by others whose judgments are credible to the audience. It is the pursuit of wrong action despite advice and warnings to the contrary which contributes to tragic impact at least as much as recognition, and no one in The Fatal Marriage ever comments on Isabella as a tragic heroine; even Baldwin, after the final bloody dénouement, takes the blame on himself for having been a bad father.

But in assessing the play as tragedy we cannot ignore its other half, the comic plot, which occupies much of the first four acts. With

the exception of Dodds, the few critical evaluations of The Fatal Marriage either ignore the comic line entirely or dismiss it in a few sentences. Bernbaum never mentions it. The Revels History merely observes that "Southerne does employ a comic subplot to great advantage. . . . [He] inserts his comic scenes functionally, and by relief and contrast is able to heighten his sad story."⁹ Novak and Rodes, in their Regents Restoration Drama Series edition of Oroonoko, point out that

In The Fatal Marriage, the disastrous reappearance of Isabella's first husband, seemingly from the dead, and the trick played on Fernando to make him think that he has died and returned to earth after a day in purgatory, have an obvious and witty parallelism.¹⁰

Both Hume and Dodds notice that each plot involves a brother trying to marry his sister(-in-law) out of the family in order to increase his own inheritance, but while Hume finds "the comic variety . . . both welcome and thematically pointed,"¹¹ the more cautious Dodds feels that Southerne

invests these scenes with a hearty and true humor. Their effectiveness lies not so much in the sallies of wit, which are not particularly brilliant, as in the genuine humor of the the situation, for which Southerne had always an instinctive tact. Strangely enough, some of his best comic writing lies here in the midst of his best tragedy.

Nevertheless,

The comedy is neither organic to the play nor strikingly original in conception. Main plot and subplot are joined only perfunctorily.¹²

⁹John Loftis, et al., The Revels History of Drama in English, V (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1976), p. 279.

¹⁰Maximillian Novak and David Stuart Rodes, "Introduction," Thomas Southerne, Oroonoko, Regents Restoration Drama Series (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1976), p. xxii.

¹¹Hume, Development of the English Drama, p. 403.

¹²Dodds, p. 108.

In point of fact, the relationships between the two "plays" are far more extensive than appears to have been heretofore noticed; an examination of the comedy reveals that it provides a commentary on Isabella that is missing from her own plot line.

What Southerne does is to divide the role of the tragic heroine between two comic heroines; the relationship between Victoria and her father, Fernando, parallels that between Isabella and Baldwin, and Victoria's elopement with Frederick parallels that between Isabella and Biron. Julia provides a parallel to Isabella in her relationships with her husband Fernando and her would-be lover Carlos, who correspond to Biron and Villeroy in the main story. The responses of these two women to their situations provide another perspective from which to view Isabella's responses to her own.

Victoria is a splendid example of Southerne's active woman character, one very similar to Lucia in Sir Antony Love. She is determined to marry Frederick; her father, convinced that everyone is out to cuckold him, refuses his consent for fear that Frederick's real prey is Julia, and plans to give his daughter instead to an old friend. In a very funny scene Frederick's impudent servant manages to send a letter from his master to Victoria by pinning it to Fernando's coattails while Frederick involves him in an argument. This letter details a plan to Victoria to escape her father's house and triggers the subsequent comic action; in contrast, Biron's letters are suppressed by Carlos and trigger the tragic action.

Half the first act is spent establishing the ways and means for Victoria to marry against her father's will and to escape what her

stepmother calls his "tyrannical government" (194). The rest of the act introduces Isabella and presents her confrontation with Baldwin. The relationships between the two parts consist of more than a mere contrast in tone: the scenes involving Isabella point out a possible consequence of Victoria's determination to ignore her duty to her father and to marry the man she loves; Isabella's leaving the house of God to marry Biron has had terrible consequences.

Act II begins with Carlos encouraging Villeroy to marry Isabella, then shifts swiftly to the comedy. Fabian, Fernando's son who (like Biron) has been disinherited, enters "in a friar's habit" (206), speaking very like a repentant:

you will all come to a serious sense of your sins one time or another, as I have done. I have had a good father, and I have been an ungracious boy to him; that's the truth on't. Therefore to make him what satisfaction I can for my past faults, I have taken this habit, with an intention to pray for him—

But he quickly reveals the true nature of his transformation:

I am never the nearer being a saint, for putting on the habit of piety! the profession and the practice of it are two things in the schools . . . in short, I have told our honest abbot the whole history of my father's jealousy, covetousness, and hardheartedness to his wife and children. (206)

The abbot has given permission as a "work of charity" for Fabian to disguise himself thus; the scapegrace son intends thereby that his father, "believing, from my clothing, that I shall have no more occasion for the transitory things of this world," will reinstate him in favor. In addition, he has a plan in mind which will not only "put the means honestly into my [step]mother's hands, to make my father a cuckold," but will enable Fabian "to be reveng'd upon the person of the

old gentleman" (207). The band of friars is involved in the as-yet secret plot, but he needs Frederick's servant Jaqueline to take a part at which even they will "scruple a little" (207).

Fabian's "act" as a religious figure for his own benefit and general mischief recalls that of the Palmer in Sir Antony Love, and similarly comments both on the corruption of the church and the susceptibility of the world to appearances. But within the context of The Fatal Marriage his role-playing also has a more specifically thematic purpose. First, we remember, it is for leaving the convent that Baldwin so condemns Isabella, an almost pathologically "good" woman. Thus Fabian's "I am never the nearer for being a saint, for putting on the habit of piety" is ironic, for the converse is true: Isabella is no farther "being a saint" for putting it off. In addition, Fabian's quips not only echo closely those of Carlos concerning the lessons of religious training, but also serve to link the two plots. Finally, and perhaps paradoxically, the connecting of both these "villains" with Isabella by means of religion seems to reinforce Baldwin's strictures; for which has been least faithful: Carlos, sent to the church as a younger son; Fabian, using the church to achieve his ends against a selfish, jealous old man; or Isabella, breaking formal vows apparently freely taken?

The next section of Act II is devoted to Isabella's distress and to her final acceptance of Villeroy's offer of marriage. The scene then shifts to night outside Fernando's house, where Frederick and Jaqueline await an opportunity to help Victoria escape. When they toss her up a rope ladder, she still hesitates:

Well! the ladder that is to convey me is ready; but before I part with this world 'twould be but reasonable to have a little consolation to encourage my journey to the next. What am I to trust to when I come there?

Frederick's answer, "Rely upon your beauty," provokes this exchange:

VIC.: Nay, now is my time indeed, and 'twill be my own fault if I don't [make my own terms]. I shall shift, as my neighbours daughters have done before me, if I am left to the wide world. But Frederick, as to your particular.

FRE.: Why, my particular is at your service, and pray come down and be satisfied; lord, here's such ado to persuade a woman to her liberty.

VIC.: I'm answer'd, I'm answer'd, and coming down as fast as I can: any thing to get rid of this father. (216)

Besides the sexual innuendo, the passage develops several themes present in the play as a whole. There is the question of death and rebirth raised in Victoria's first speech, as well as the visual symbolism of her coming down to Frederick from her father's house. The obvious parallel is Isabella's desertion of the convent for Biron, an act which she describes to Baldwin in terms of the Fall from Eden. But Victoria seems quite another type, cautious in the act of incaution and well aware of the possible consequences of her conduct; one suspects that she will indeed be able to "shift" if "left to the wide world."

At the crucial moment Fernando appears, removes Victoria from the window, and, armed with a blunderbuss, takes her place on the ladder. A brief farcical scene ensues, in which Jaqueline sees what he takes to be "The devil, the devil, the devil" (217), an echo of Granger's pretense in The Maid's Last Prayer of believing the disguised Lady Susan to be a fiend. Frederick disarms the old man, but Jaqueline quavers, "I am not perfectly satisfied whether he has kill'd me or not; but if I am

dead, I shall be glad to hear the old rogue was hang'd for me" (218). Even in this moment of slapstick Southerne alludes to his theme of death and rebirth; Biron will return from the dead to be murdered, and Jaqueline's shout of "the devil" will be echoed by Fernando later, when he awakens from his drug-induced sleep thinking he has been dead and tormented by hellish fiends.

In the midst of the confusion Victoria slips out of the house disguised as a man; Fernando, distracted by the belief that a robber or seducer has been in his home, gives chase. Frederick and Jaqueline, not recognizing Victoria, run away taking her with them. The next scene is almost directly out of Sir Antony Love; indeed Mrs. Mountfort, now Mrs. Verbruggen, played Victoria in the original production. Victoria tells Frederick that she is her own lover and has "had an intrigue with her these three months: I am almost tir'd of her" (220). Carrying the joke still further, she tells Frederick that Victoria wants to marry him only to escape her father and that "he" is to "continue upon all occasions of pleasure" (220). Frederick meets his lover's test, however:

Look you, sir, if I believ'd any thing that you have said of Victoria; I wou'd not think you worth a beating upon her account: I wou'd leave you to your vanity, and her to the folly of throwing herself away upon such a rascal; but I know you lye; yet I'll use you better than you deserve—draw—. (221)

This is the same response produced from Ilford by Lucia with a similar trick involving Volante in Sir Antony Love. At this point Victoria reveals herself, to general amazement, and the three go off, Frederick

even more determined to marry her and she warning that there is to be "nothing in the dark" till then.

Act III begins with the comic thread, this time concentrating on the father-son relationship. Fabian appears at Fernando's house in his monkly garb, once more in his father's favor. The exchange is very amusing, with Fabian pretending to piety to get the old man's money and Fernando pretending to piety to keep it from him until his own death, when he will "leave a swinging legacy to the monastery upon thy account." Fabian finally promises that he and his fellows will pray his father's soul "out of purgatory."

FER.: Ah! my purgatory is in this world; and a young wife my tormentor. Good son, call her to me. [Ex. Fab.] Let me see, I have lost my daughter, but then I have sav'd my money If Frederick has got her, and will play the honourable fool to marry her for love, that is, without a penny of portion; he is in the way of repenting his bargain, and not I, I take it. (223)

This section of comedy also has reverberations in the serious plot. There are the ubiquitous references to life and death; the giving of money to a religious house and the avoidance of a dowry—both allusive to Isabella's dowry lost to her convent; and the false spiritual commitment springing on both sides from love of money. Further, Fernando's equating his married state with hell presages his own "death" and the cries in the final act of both Isabella and Biron that they are in torment and despair.

It becomes obvious that Southerne's second plot is integrally related to his first in cast, event, and theme. The critical question which must be considered is that of function: why did Southerne include

it? After the turn of the century the comic subplot was considered an excrescence on a beautiful work and excised; the resulting revisions of The Fatal Marriage played in England for nearly two centuries after its original performance. In his "Dedication" to Anthony Hammond, which prefaces the printed edition, Southerne avers that he has

given you a little taste of comedy with it, not from my own opinion, but the present humour of the town; I never contend that, because I think every reasonable man will, and ought to govern in the pleasures he pays for. (182)

Dodds accepts this auctorial excuse, only lamenting the weakness of artistic fiber that made Southerne so susceptible to public opinion.¹³

Southerne's ingenuous disavowal is difficult to accept, however, not merely because artists are notoriously unreliable about their own motivations (cf. Frost on "Whose Woods;" Byron on poetry as a gentleman's hobby; and a host of others who for reasons of modesty, mystery, or modishness are less than frank with their audiences). Southerne has too often in the past experimented with mixed modes, often without notable public success, for this particular effort to be a sop to the play-goer. His second play, The Disappointment, was just such a split-plot tragicomedy, and both The Wives Excuse and The Maid's Last Prayer mixed comic and tragic tones. Finally, in this particular work the correspondences between the two plots are too close for one to have been merely tacked onto the other.

Dealing with a similar structure in Oroonoko, Novak and Rodes suggest that Southerne is commenting on the nature of life: that while

¹³ Ibid., p. 107.

a tragedy of betrayal and lost love is being enacted, the everyday affairs of men and women, sex intrigues and all, go on.¹⁴ Without here getting into a discussion of Oroonoko, let it be noted that the comic action is never gross in The Fatal Marriage, as it frequently is in the later work. What happens here is that Victoria and Julia are placed in situations potentially as disastrous as Isabella's—but that their outcomes are happy while hers is not. These different destinies result in large part from different choices; and it is possible to see provided by the comic action a commentary on Isabella's choices and fate missing from the serious plot.

The crucial points are Victoria's refusal to marry without her dowry and Julia's refusal to cuckold Fernando, both of which have parallels in Isabella's past and present. One source of Baldwin's animus against his daughter-in-law is that she brought no dowry with her. When she marries Villeroy, she again brings only herself to her husband, although he protests (as no doubt did Biron) that she herself is a sufficient portion. Victoria will not take such a step; in answer to her lover's importunings she shrewdly observes,

When that [passion] begins to tire, as every thing is the worse for the wearing, they say, how many husbandly reflections will you have upon the matter! you will find out a thousand pretty things you could have done with my portion; but not one civil thing with my person, without it: the woman that plays the fool my way, in running from her friends, must have more than she can carry about her, to be welcome long in a place; and marriage is only for life, they say.
(225)

¹⁴Novak and Rodes, p. xli.

Frederick can only respond, in an aside, "I' gad, she's in the right on't." Had Isabella, by nature a nonactor, only refused to act in either of her marriages without her dowry, her lot and that of Biron would ultimately have been much different. Victoria's stubbornness is rewarded after her father's "resurrection" by his giving her her due and urging the young couple to make him a grandfather. Until this moment he has made repeated references to the likelihood of Victoria's return from her escapade "looks down, and her belly up, full of the experiment, with a pitiful petition, for pardon, and portion" (223). We need only think of the first-act scene between Isabella, child beside her, and Baldwin to see the fulfillment of this prophecy. Victoria's child will be welcome as Isabella's is not, because ironically the hoyden comic heroine is more cautious than her chaste and saintly tragic sister.

Isabella's great disaster, her bigamous marriage, is also figured in the comedy. Fernando's wife Julia has ample reason to hate her husband; his jealousy and paranoia have made his household, in Julia's words, one in which there is "nothing of love . . . to be talk'd of" (194). Fernando's conviction of her unprincipled lust, like Baldwin's opinion of Isabella's urges, has no experiential reality; it seems based rather on the abstract principle that young wives invariably betray old husbands, a belief shared by many in the play, especially Carlos. Here Southerne presents in brief what he developed as the central situation in The Wives Excuse: the pressures brought against women by societal and even familial expectations that they will cuckold their husbands. During one berating by Fernando, Julia replies that his

treatment is enough not only to make her leave him, but to "run to another man too;" alone this would appear to lend credence to Fernando's suspicions. She adds, however, the crucial conditional, "any thing, if my virtue would permit me" (224).

When at Isabella's wedding Fernando is drugged by Fabian and subsequently convinced that he has been dead and risen again, Julia proves true to her principles. She protests the treatment of the unconscious Fernando at the hands of the rascally Jaqueline, who has beaten the old man to the point that Fernando later believes himself to have been tormented by devils, and refuses to take advantage of the opportunity provided so thoughtfully by her stepson to betray his father with Carlos:

CAR.: O virtue! virtue! what an enemy art thou to a woman's good inclinations!

JUL.: A troublesome companion indeed, if one knew how to be honestly rid on't: can you advise me? (*italics mine*)

CAR.: Nay, take your own way; you are past advising, it seems; for a woman to play the hypocrite, and counterfeit virtue, when she has it not, is a very common thing—

JUL.: But to play the hypocrite, the wrong way!

CAR.: To pretend to be a woman of pleasure and not have the benefit of the character—

JUL.: Is what, it seems, you are not acquainted with. But for the future, sir, you may believe there are women won't be provok'd to injure their husbands. (236)

Here again is Mrs. Friendall, informed by her acquaintances that she will be believed false whether or not she is.

Like Victoria, Julia demonstrates a fortitude not shared by Isabella. Both wives have "dead" husbands, and both are offered substitute relationships. Isabella, who cannot love another and begs

Villeroy not to ask her to cast off her widow's weeds if she marries him, succumbs and of her own volition puts off her blacks for her wedding. Julia, whose husband has abused and confined her, is yet not willing to betray her vows or her own viture; her reward is her husband's repentance and reformation.

The Fatal Marriage, or The Innocent Adultery thus emerges as a play far more coherent in conception and execution than has been recognized since its own age. Southerne clearly knew what he was about in this tragicomedy, as he had not a decade earlier in The Disappointment. The play's reputation appears to have suffered from an insistence by its critics for two and a half centuries on isolating and concentrating upon the tragic plot; doing so distorts the work's unity and destroys its tragic impact. Isabella's fate is misconstrued if one ignores her thematic ties to Carlos and Fabian on the one hand and to Victoria and Julia on the other. She is a tragic figure whose weakness is, paradoxically in one so intrinsically passive, to act when she should not.

Oroonoko (1695)

A year after the triumphant appearance of The Fatal Marriage Southerne had another great hit: Oroonoko, A Tragedy. Until now each of his productions had differed markedly from its immediate predecessor; even the three comedies range from the farce of Sir Antony Love to the pathos of The Wives Excuse to the "hardness" of The Maid's Last Prayer. Now, nearing the end of his active career, Southerne was perhaps disinclined to tamper with success. Oroonoko repeats much of the

pattern of The Fatal Marriage; it combines a pathetic story drawn from a novel of Mrs. Behn with a racy comic subplot involving a breeches part. Despite the similarities of structure, however, Oroonoko produces a very different effect from that of its predecessor; here, rather than using the comic plot to provide a commentary on the serious story, each line informs the other in such a way that the sorrow of Oroonoko's history is deepened by the comedy, while the brightness of the comedy glitters all the more gaily because the dark events in which it is set suggest the transience of happiness. Although the cast was not of the high quality Southerne had previously had at his disposal, since many of the stars of the company had left with Betterton in the year following the production of The Fatal Marriage, the loss seems not to have affected the play's success.¹⁵ Verbruggen took the title role and his wife, who had played Sir Antony Love, recapitulated her triumph as a male impersonator.

The serious plot centers around Oroonoko, an African prince who has been treacherously captured by slavers and brought to Surinam in the West Indies to be sold. He is less distraught by his present situation than by the loss of his pregnant wife, the beautiful European Imoinda, whom his father had coveted and snatched away. Oroonoko now knows neither where she is nor if she still lives. He is befriended by several Englishmen who promise to alter his condition out of respect for his nobility, both hereditary and inherent. He subsequently

¹⁵Dodds, p. 108.

discovers Imoinda in Surinam, also sold as a slave and now pursued lasciviously by the Lieutenant-Governor of the island. The couple are reunited after Oroonoko helps to beat off an Indian attack in which Imoinda has been taken prisoner. The other slaves plan a rebellion to protest their miserable state in which Oroonoko, in his joy at being rejoined with his wife, at first takes no interest; but when it is pointed out to him that his child will be born a slave, and that Imoinda's virtue is in danger, he changes his mind. The uprising fails; the royal couple are promised their liberty if they surrender, only to be betrayed by the evil Lieutenant-Governor. Oroonoko is dragged away and chained, Imoinda dragged to the Lieutenant-Governor's house. She repulses his advances and is rescued by one of the friendly Englishmen; escaping, she seeks out her husband, who has just seen his best friend die in his arms after being tortured by the white owners. To prevent their own dishonor, Oroonoko with his wife's encouragement and insistence stabs Imoinda, kills the Lieutenant-Governor, and finally takes his own life.

The comic plot is a universe away in substance and in tone. Two sisters, having failed to find husbands in London, have used the last of their money to sail to the New World. The elder, Charlott Welldon, pretends to be a man, apparently to lend countenance to their venture. In a very bawdy sequence of action, Charlott is courted in her disguise as a man by the wealthy and vulgar Widow Lackitt; marries her sister Lucy to the widow's half-wit son Daniel; herself "marries" the widow, then sends her friend Jack Stanmore secretly to consummate the nuptials; and finally secures for a husband Stanmore's kinsman, whom she loves.

Like The Fatal Marriage, Oroonoko was in the eighteenth century shorn of its subplot in the interest of decorum, revised, and played as straight "tragedy" well up into the last century. But as has not been the case with The Fatal Marriage, the complexities of its tragicomic structure have been recognized by several modern scholars. The attention it has received is probably due to its accessibility: in 1928 Bonamy Dobrée selected it as one of Five Restoration Tragedies in an anthology first published in 1928, and it has subsequently been included in various drama texts for the period. Thus it has had far more exposure than has any of Southerne's other plays.¹⁶

Michael M. Cohen, in "'Mirth and Grief Together:' Plot Unity in Southerne's Oroonoko," establishes the broad outlines of the relationships between the work's serious and comic plots:

Slavery in various forms, the buying and selling of human beings, honor and dishonor expressed in promises and their betrayal, disguises (a prince disguised as a slave, a woman disguised as a man), comic and serious treatments of the value of love and marriage—all of these contribute to increase Oroonoko's tragic stature and adumbrate the basic contrast and reversal of the tragic plot; Oroonoko, the black, savage pagan, is noble and honorable; his white, civilized, Christian oppressors are treacherous.¹⁷

In the introduction to their Regents Restoration Drama Series edition of Oroonoko, Maximillian Novak and David Stuart Rodes develop in great detail the points only suggested by Cohen and go far beyond them in a superb study of the play. They examine the abolitionist

¹⁶Only The Wives Excuse is presently also available in a modern edition. See Introduction.

¹⁷Cohen, pp. 13 ff.

sentiment just appearing at the end of the seventeenth century which was to gather such momentum in the course of the eighteenth; and they explicate the close thematic relationships between the serious and comic worlds presented in the play.

Oroonoko, "the royal slave," provides the focus of the serious action. He was captured through European treachery when the captain of a sailing ship invited him aboard to discuss European customs, overpowered him and his escort, and sailed away. The captain warns Oroonoko's new master, the Lieutenant-Governor acting as the Governor's agent, that he is dangerous; Oroonoko's response shows him a prototype of the Noble Savage:

Live still in fear; it is the villain's curse,
And will revenge my chains: fear ev'n me,
Who have no pow'r to hurt thee. Nature abhors
And drives thee out from the society
And commerce of mankind, for breach of faith.
Men live and prosper but in mutual trust,
A confidence of one another's truth:
That thou has violated. I have done.
I know my fortune and submit to it. (289)¹⁸

Oroonoko's curse is fulfilled, for the captain is indeed despised even by those who profit by his trade. His motivating force is money, of which he has amassed a great deal; yet this fortune cannot make him acceptable as a husband even to the morally uncritical Lucy, who is appalled by his betrayal of Oroonoko.

Oroonoko is a descendant of the "love and honor" school of heroes. His conflict is between the domestic bliss even in slavery offered in

¹⁸Oroonoko, Plays, II, 267-356.

his reunion with Imoinda, pregnant with his child, and the public duty owed his birth to free himself, his fell-slaves, and most especially his unborn child from the disgrace of bondage. The former possibility he expresses at the moment of the restoration of Imoinda; it is the pastoral urge to withdraw to lower station expressed both by Dryden's Antony and Southerne's own Tachmas:

All our prosperity is placed in love,
We have enough of that to make us happy.
This little spot of earth you stand upon,
Is more to me, than the extended plains,
Of my great father's kingdom, Here I reign
In full delights, in joys to pow'r unknown;
Your love my empire, and your heart my throne. (308)

Oroonoko's present humbleness, however, is that neither of birth nor of choice, but enforced upon him by others from an alien culture. Nevertheless, he fights the necessity to act as a leader, preferring the inertia of fulfilled romantic love. When his trusted aide Aboan, captured and sold with him, urges him to head a revolt, Oroonoko, having been befriended by certain at least of the English, calls the plan "murder." Aboan replies with the arguments of common and natural law:

It deserves a better name:
But be it what it will, 'tis justify'd
By self-defence, and natural liberty. (312)

Yet, says Oroonoko, meeting moral judgment on its own ground, their masters did not enslave them,

But bought us in an honest way of trade:
As we have done before 'em, bought and sold
Many a wretch, and never thought it wrong. (312)

To do as Aboan suggests is to buy his liberty

at the Christian price
Of black ingratitude: they shall not say,
That we deserv'd our fortune by our crimes.
Murder the innocent! (312)

His appeals to natural law and reason failing, Aboan next attempts an appeal to pity, pointing out to his master "the heavy grievances,/ The toils, the labours, weary drudgeries" suffered by their fellow slaves, "the bloody cruelties" inflicted on them by their masters not just as punishment for offence but "sometimes in their proud, insulting sport" (313). Oroonoko admits he pities, and wishes he could "with honesty do more" (313; italics mine); but he will not stoop to conspiracy.

Now Aboan seeks to move his prince with a reminder of his responsibility to his birth:

A prince, born for the good of other men;
Whose god-like office is to draw the sword
Against oppression, and set free mankind. (313)

But in his love Oroonoko can set aside even this moral demand; he is, after all,

Favour'd in my own person, in my friends;
Indulg'd in all that can concern my care,
In my Imoinda's soft society. (313)

Again we are reminded of All For Love.

Aboan has one last goad: "Princes, the heirs of empire, and the last/ Of your illustrious lineage, to be born/ . . . slaves?" (314). Imoinda seconds Aboan's argument; this is a thought she has "long/ Suffer'd . . . with a mother's labouring pains" (312). Aboan drives the knife in further by reminding his master that although some Europeans have befriended him, others believe him dangerous. Imoinda adds her fears that "I shall be torn from you, forced away,/ Helpless, and miserable." And, says Aboan, even the expected arrival of the governor may not protect them:

he is young,
 Luxurious, passionate, and amorous:
 Such a complexion, and made bold by power,
 To countenance all he is prone to do;
 Will know no bounds, no law against his lusts;
 If, in a fit of his intemperance,
 With a strong hand, he should resolve to seize,
 And force my royal mistress from your arms,
 How can you help yourself? (312)

This possibility unites in Oroonoko's mind the divided claims of love
 and honor:

Ha! thou has rous'd
 The lion in his den; he stalks abroad,
 And the wide forest trembles at his roar.
 I find the danger now: my spirits start
 At the alarm, and from all quarters come
 To man my heart, the citadel of love.
 * * *
 Now I am fashion'd to thy purpose; speak,
 What combination, what conspiracy
 Would'st thou engage me in? I'll undertake
 All thou woul'st have me now for liberty,
 For the great cause of love and liberty. (315)

This, as Novak and Rodes point out, is very close to the rant of the
 old heroic drama.¹⁹ It is not, however, merely stylistic anachronism
 but a highly effective expression of situation and character. Southerne
 has accomplished with Oroonoko earlier in this play what he failed to
 do with a similar figure, Tachmas of The Loyal Brother: he has not only
 told us how great a warrior his hero is but in the Indian attack, which
 takes place on-stage, has shown us. Thus the violence of the images
 in Oroonoko's speech has a context of actuality which gives it substance.
 In addition, the reference to "the citadel of love" recalls and contrasts
 to his earlier, pastoral speech at his reunion with Imoinda, when he

¹⁹ Novak and Rodes, p. xxxviii.

welcomes "This little spot of earth you [Imoinda] stand upon" as his kingdom, satisfied to have "Your love my empire, and your heart my throne." The combination in the later speech of military terms— e.g., "alarm," "man," "quarters"—with the reference to love reinforces the contrast to the earlier, domesticated Oroonoko. And this combination together with the last line—"the great cause of love and liberty"—illustrates that the divided claims of love and honor no longer tear at Oroonoko but are reconciled and united; he now will act.

The plan decided upon is Aboan's; they will seize the "very ship that brought and made us slaves" (319) and sail it home again. Only one slave, Hottman, who before Oroonoko's reversal apparently fancied himself the leader, objects; his reservations make Oroonoko and Aboan suspicious of his courage. To test his spirit the prince and his aide lay out graphically their fate should they fail; Oroonoko expresses his perception of their options in their desperate straits in terms strikingly like those of Patrick Henry a century later in the same New World: "There is no mean, but death or liberty" (319). Aboan expands upon this theme of death:

Death is all:
In most conditions of humanity
To be desir'd, but to be shunn'd in none:
The remedy of many; wish of some;
And certain end of all. (320)

The Stoic tone of this stark passage again links Oroonoko with The Loyal Brother and Tachmas' longing for cease of life:

Death we should prize, as the best gift of nature;
As a safe inn, where weary travellers,
When they have journied through a world of cares,
May put off life, and be at rest for ever,
If 'twere in private, void of pomp and show. (I, 40)

But a comparison of the two selections, the one written seven plays and nearly fifteen years before the other, reveals how much Southerne has matured both as stylist and as man. Just glancing at the lines discloses a major difference: those from Oroonoko are much the shorter and simpler in structure. Further, its content is far more abstract; here is no romanticization of death as a "prize," a "safe inn," a "best gift of nature," but a bare statement that to be human is to suffer; suffering and death are not reserved to noble young men whose loves seem hopeless. Nor does Aboan express any sense of a better life after death, even of "rest;" true, he is not a Christian, but the terrible simplicity of "certain end of all" suggests not just his paganism but, we may speculate, a sense of mortality on the part of his creator not given to the very young. In 1682 Southerne was twenty-two; now he is thirty-seven.

This talk of death achieves its purpose; Hottman is obviously stricken with fear. Oroonoko and Aboan are convinced he will betray them; yet the prince, still determined that "The means that lead us to our liberty/ Must not be bloody" (316), restrains his follower from stabbing him. Instead, they agree to watch him closely to prevent any treachery.

Their safeguards are not adequate, however; next morning they are surrounded by the Governor and a "rabble" on the one side, the slaver captain and his crew on the other. Oroonoko kills his first betrayer, the captain, and prepares to lead his followers against the more numerous forces of the Englishmen. But the slaves, urged on by the fears

of and their own fears for their wives and children, surrender to the Lieutenant-Governor's promise of pardon and mercy; and Oroonoko curses those who have so deserted not only him but their chance for liberty:

I wou'd not live on the same earth with creatures,
That have only the faces of their kind;
Why should they look like men, who are not so?
When they put off their noble natures, for
The groveling quality of down-cast beasts,
I wish they had their tails. ([3]31)²⁰

Blandford, the Englishman who owns Imoinda and a man with great sympathy for Oroonoko's plight, enters just as the Lieutenant-Governor promises the prince that if he surrenders peaceably he may "Live, and be happy on your own terms." Blandford, overjoyed at the Governor's generosity, lends his voice to overcoming Oroonoko's not-unnatural fears of betrayal.

The Lieutenant-Governor interjects,

Offer him what you can, I will confirm
And make all good; be you my pledge of trust. (333)

The promise of life and liberty for not only himself but also for his Imoinda and their child puts Oroonoko once again on the horns of a dilemma—how to reconcile to conflicting demands of mistrust and love:

There I feel
A father's fondness, and a husband's love,
They seize upon my heart, strain all its strings,
To pull me to 'em, from my stern resolve.
Husband, and father! all the melting art
Of eloquence lives in those soft'ning names.

* * *

No, my Imoinda! I will venture all
To save thee, and that little innocent:
The world may be a better friend to him,
Than I have found it. Now I yield myself. ([3]34).

²⁰The 1774 edition used in this study has several misnumbered pages in Oroonoko, all between 330-339; several times a "2" is printed in the hundreds column where a "3" belongs. Such errors in pagination are indicated with the correct figure in brackets.

But once more Oroonoko's trust is betrayed; immediately the Lieutenant-Governor orders him seized and chained, and Imoina is dragged away.

The dénouement of the tragic action begins with Blandford, horrified at the Governor's treachery, freeing Oroonoko from his chains and, with Stanmore and several others, condemning the corruption of their fellow Europeans. The captive promises to "thank, and bless" them if they will but

Bring my Imoinda to me; give me her,
To charm my sorrows, and, if possible,
I'll sit down with my wrongs; never to rise
Against my fate, or think of vengeance more. (343)

Yet as soon as Oroonoko is left alone, he reveals that

I never can forgive this governor;
This villain; the disgrace of trust, and place,
And just contempt of delegated power. (343)

This passage is of particular interest in light of the conservative political and social views which Southerne has earlier expressed in his plays. In both The Loyal Prince and The Spartan Dame his protagonists have either deferred to or insisted upon the sanctity of legally constituted rule; Mrs. Friendall of The Wives Excuse brings the concept of order down into the wholly private realm of marriage; in a moment of despair she allows herself to speculate about marriage as a social contract rather than as an institution, but almost frightens herself with the implications of what she is thinking:

How despicable a condition must that matrimony be, when the husband (whom we look upon as a sanctuary for a woman's honour) must be oblig'd to the discretion and management of a wife, for the security of his own! have a care of thinking that way;

for in a marry'd state, as in the public, we tie ourselves up, indeed; but to be protected in our persons, fortunes, and honours, by those very laws that restrain us in other things; for few will obey, but for the benefit they receive from the government—. (II, 35)

But however little benefit she receives from her "governor," her husband, she remains loyal to the institution rather than betray him.

Heretofore, in fact, Southerne has usually condemned those of his characters who disrupt traditional order. An exception is Lucia— Sir Antony Love—who lies, steals, and fornicates with neither remorse on her part nor condemnation on that of her creator. But Sir Antony preys only on those who deserve victimization, and Southerne never lets us forget that she herself has been victimized most of all. Further, the inclusion of the Palmer provides a contrast with true venality which mitigates Sir Antony's actions. We recall among the other of Southerne's characters who foment rebellion Ismael, Cleombrotus, Lorenzo, and Lovemore. Even Isabella violates tradition in leaving the Church; her comic counterpart Victoria runs away from her father's house, it is true, but she refuses to marry her lover without her father's consent and her dowry.

Here, however, we have the hero Oroonoko determine to wreak revenge upon a legally-appointed ruler. True, the governor has acted despicably; yet, we recall, Seliman's obvious failings as a leader did not excuse treachery to his office, and Mrs. Friendall despite her husband's failure as her "governor" will not betray him. One might argue that Oroonoko is not actually a subject but an involuntary slave and might therefore be exempt from the demands of political loyalty; but he himself

has argued over and over throughout the play that his own culture deals in slaves and that if left alone with Imoinda he is willing to accept his condition. Here, however, he has already rebelled once—in the slave uprising—and plans to do so again in revenge. He cannot get to his victim by declaring himself openly; and

If I should turn his christian arts on him,
 Promise him, speak him fair, flatter, and creep
 With fawning steps to get within his faith,
 I could betray him then, as he has me.
 But am I sure by that to right myself?
 Lying's a certain mark of cowardice:
 And when the tongue forgets its honesty,
 The heart and hand may drop their functions too,
 And nothing worthy be resolv'd, or done.
 The man must go together, bad, or good:
 In one part frail, he soon grows weak in all.
 Honour shou'd be concerned in honour's cause.

* * *

Let me but find out
 An honest remedy, I have the hand,
 A minist'ring hand, that will apply it home. ([3]44)

Oroonoko is no Jaffeur; in fact, this whole passage could serve as a comment on Otway's revolutionary. Nevertheless, as long as he can find honorable means he is determined to destroy the Lieutenant-Governor.

The intended victim is meanwhile giving Oroonoko still more fuel for anger by not only refusing to free Imoinda but by forcing his attentions on her. She is rescued by Blandford and escapes to seek her husband; a party, some of whom wish to protect her, the others to recapture her, pursues. The scene returns to Oroonoko, once more musing upon his conflict between love and honor:

To honor bound! and yet a slave to love!
 I am distracted by their rival powers,
 And both will be obey'd.

Once more he manages to reconcile them:

Our honours, interests resolving down,
Run in the gentle current of our joys
But not to sink, and drown our memory:
We mount again to action, like the sun,
That rises from the bosom of the sea,
To run his glorious race of light anew,
And carry on the world. Love, love will be
My first ambition, and my fame the next. (346)

And once more his decision is overturned by Aboan; the faithful follower enters bloody and torn from torture to warn his prince that the same fate awaits him; he tells Oroonoko that "You must not live." In horror Oroonoko asks, "What shall I do for thee?" Aboan desires only the instrument of liberty—"A sword, a dagger yet would rescue me." Oroonoko hands him a dagger:

ABO.: I cannot stay to thank you. If there is
A being after this, I shall be yours
In the next world, your faithful slave again.
This is to try. [Stabs himself.] I had a living sense
Of all your royal favours, but this last
Strikes thro' my heart. I will not say farewell,
For you must follow me. [Dies.]

ORO.: In life, and death,
The guardian of my honour! Follow thee!
I shou'd have gone before thee: then perhaps
Thy fate had been prevented.

* * *

Why, why ye gods! why am I so accurst,
That it must be a reason of your wrath,
A guilt, a crime sufficient to the fate
Of any one, but to belong to me?
My friend has found it, and my wife will soon:
My wife! the very fear's too much for life:
I can't support it. Where! Imoinda! Oh! (347)

He and Imoinda "were born to suffer;" but it is left to the woman to explicitly state the inevitable:

Suffer both,
Both die, and so prevent them. (350)

Unfortunately for modern tastes, Southerne does not maintain this deeply moving simplicity; four pages elapse before Oroonoko, with Imoinda's hand guiding the knife, can bring himself to kill her. As he weeps over her body, the Lieutenant-Governor party enters. Oroonoko stabs his wife's tormentor, then himself with "the hands of justice" (355). The play ends.

In dealing with this "tragicomedy" we are faced with the same problem that arose in considering The Fatal Marriage: is the major figure truly an Aristotelian tragic character? Superficially Oroonoko fulfills most of the traditional criteria: he is of great birth, is brought low, suffers, and dies. But what is his flaw? That of Isabella was not remaining passive; to act was to produce disaster. Oroonoko says at Aboan's death that "I shou'd have gone before thee: then perhaps/ Thy fate had been prevented." Yet not killing oneself sooner cannot be precisely deemed a fatal mistake; Oroonoko, Imoinda, and Aboan all die at the end, but had they died at the beginning it would have made no real difference except that the evil slaver captain and the dissolute Lieutenant-Governor might have lived. The tragic flaw should alter events, not merely postpone them.

Is Oroonoko then too guilty of love? Again, his love for his wife—and unborn child—merely postpones, does not alter; with or without the rebellion Imoinda would have been in danger from her persecutor. Oroonoko and those dear to him are what Isabella claims to be: victims of destiny, not of themselves. The pattern of the serious thread over and over again is honor met by betrayal—Oroonoko's

father, the slaver captain, Hottman, the Lieutenant-Governor. All classes and all races are corrupt; the bonds of family, friendship, condition, and civil rule broken on every hand.

Novak and Rodes suggest that "it might be worth seeing Oroonoko in terms of Southerne's own high Tory politics. . . . Southerne would seem to imply that men like Oroonoko are natural rulers and the planters typical subjects, incapable of either ruling or selecting a ruler."²¹ Such an interpretation would make sense of Oroonoko's rather surprising rejection of authority discussed earlier. It also lends support to a nontragic reading of Oroonoko, since a totally exemplary hero cannot be a traditional tragic hero. Additional light can be thrown on the question by a comparison by Moody Prior of Othello, to which Oroonoko has obvious links, and Heywood's A Woman Killed With Kindness:

Such of [Othello's] virtues as are not utterly destroyed are distorted to perversions of their natural functioning, like his desire for ocular proof and his strong sense of justice. Thus, in the course of the action whatever is basic to a definition of Othello is involved in such a way as to be undermined or defeated. In this difference between Othello and Heywood's play is to be found one of the principal distinctions between tragedy and the kind serious play . . . in which the main characters face a trying situation and confront a difficult problem any solution to which seems to involve them in possibly unhappy consequences. In tragedy, the course of the action involves the character essentially, so that those qualities without which the character could not be realized at all are directly challenged and brought to a critical test. . . . Othello is tragic; A Woman Killed With Kindness is sad and pathetic.²²

²¹Novak and Rodes, p. xxxii.

²²Prior, p. 96.

Southerne too has here created a situation for his protagonist in which all choices are impossible; Oroonoko is a victim from first to last, and therefore his story is "sad and pathetic," not "tragic."

Nor does the comedy in Oroonoko provide, as it does in The Fatal Marriage, a contrast that establishes a tragic context for the serious story. A major thematic relationship between the two plots does exist:

there is a . . . a clear parallel between the institution of slavery and the institution of marriage. That the question of liberty in marriage belongs to the arena of comedy and the same question in the matter of slavery to that of tragedy should not disguise their obvious connection.²³

The play begins with the comic plot, in a variation on the standard Restoration comic opening: an exchange not between two rakes but between two women,²⁴ Charlott Welldon "in man's cloathes" and her sister Lucy. The pair have come to Surinam from London where, almost dowerless, they were unable to find husbands; after residing in the metropolis for several years, they remained on the shelf, becoming shopworn:

WEL.: . . . women in London are like the rich silks; they are out of fashion a great while before they wear out You may tumble 'em over and over at their first coming up, and never disparage their price; but they fall upon wearing immediately, lower and lower in their value, till they come to the broker at last.

LUC.: Ay, ay, that's the merchant they deal with. The men would have us at their own scandalous rates; their plenty makes 'em wanton, and in a little time, I suppose, they won't know what they would have of the women themselves.

WEL.: O, yes, they know what they would have. They would have a woman give the town a pattern of her person

²³Novak and Rodes, p. xxii.

²⁴Ibid., p. xxiii.

and beauty, and not stay in it so long as to have the whole piece worn out. They would have the good face only discover'd, and not the folly that commonly goes along with it. They say there is a vast stock of beauty in the nation, but a great part of it lies in unprofitable hands; therefore for the good of the public, they would have a draught made once a quarter, send the decaying beauties for breeders into the country, to make room for new faces to appear, to countenance the pleasures of the town. (276)

The slave sale at which we meet Oroonoko occurs in the second scene of Act I; the juxtaposition of that sequence with this sets up the common theme. The language of this exchange between the two sisters is purely mercantile—women are commodities who "fall upon wearing immediately, lower and lower in their value." The tone is harsh, almost gross, as Charlott Welldon suggests that society would prefer to "send the decaying beauties for breeders into the country, to make room for new faces to appear" and, in a probable pun, "for the good of the public."

The scene subsequently introduces the Widow Lackitt, who is worth ten thousand pounds . . . [with] a clear estate; no charge upon't, but a bobbly son; he indeed was to have half; but his father begot him, and she breeds him up, not to know or have more than she has a mind to: and she has a mind to something else, it seems. (280)²⁵

That "something else" is "Mr." Welldon, for whom the Widow (of six weeks) has obviously conceived a passion. No longer young or attractive, she understands the mercantile basis upon which marriage is arranged in her culture; her conversation with her prey is full of references to her estate and financial worth. Her courtship is interrupted by the

²⁵ Tony Lumpkin in She Stoops to Conquer is similarly victimized by his mother.

appearance of Stanmore, who brings news of an arriving ship. He had hoped it was from England and might therefore bring Welldon's "cousin Charlott," whose portrait has "charmed" Stanmore; it is, however, "A rover, a buccaneer, a trader in slaves; that's the commodity we deal in, you know" (282). The party exits to observe the impending sale; and already the first link between the two plots has been forged—the selling of humans, whether in slavery or in marriage.

The second scene takes place at the slave market, and reinforces the thematic tie just established. It opens with the planters quarreling about their allotments of slaves; lots have been draw—apparently a form of rationing in a tight market—and some, including the Widow, are not satisfied. She, for example, has gotten "all women and children; what can I do with 'em captain? I am a woman myself, and can't get my own slaves, as some of my neighbours do."

1st PLA.: I have all men in mine; pray, captain, let the men
and women be mingled together, for procreation-
sake, and the good of the plantation. (283)

These comments resonate with the exchange between the Welldon sisters which began the play. Most obvious is the attitude, common to both scenes, that humans are in certain situations mere livestock, goods in which investments are expected to bear fruit; the difference is that the planters and the Welldons speak from different sides of the transaction. Also shared by the woman market and the slave market is an animalistic view of sex. The First Planter's request parodies horribly the Biblical and Christian injunction to "be fruitful and multiply." There is a final connection between the two scenes and by

extension the two plots which is approached but apparently not realized by Novak and Rodes or Cohen: of concern here is not just the male-female relationship but the whole family structure. If the Widow Lackitt's allotment is "all women and children," families have obviously been broken up and separated, the defenseless taken from the protection of the stronger.

This destruction of the family unit is central to the play. The Welldons have been driven to desperate straits not only by their meager fortunes but by their situation as orphans with no kinsmen to shelter them. Oroonoko's "tragedy" began with his father's betrayal of the bond of blood in separating his son from Imoinda out of jealousy;²⁶ Oroonoko's and Imoinda's dilemma is made more poignant by her pregnancy, and her condition further blackens the Lieutenant-Governor's designs upon her. And it is the thought of his child being born in bondage that drives Oroonoko to action. When the revolt actually takes place, it is the fear of the slaves for their families' safety that moves them to capitulate to their masters without resistance. Southerne has dealt frequently in the past with the destruction of family ties—every play has included some such element. Here he makes it a central theme. His concern is not merely with women and slaves, but with the family as well; those most harshly pilloried are those who abuse familial relationships, whether marital or parental.

In the comic plot Widow Lackitt is the major such character, since she is guilty of both sins. In her response to her lot of slaves she

²⁶ Compare the Emperor's conduct in Aureng-Zebe.

expresses without realizing it the relationship in her society between money and sex; ironically, she is incapable of seeing that in buying a husband as she buys slaves she makes a slave of herself, since her husband will assume control of her property. The slaver captain, who is rude to her despite her wealth, describes the situation of women perfectly; when it is pointed out to him that he should be more polite because the Widow is "very rich, " he replies,

I'm rich myself. She has nothing that I want: I have no leaks to stop. Old women are fortune-menders. I have made a good voyage, and would reap the fruits of my labour. We plow the deep . . . but our harvest is on shore. I'm for a young woman. (285)

Woman must be usable in some way, depending on the needs of the buyer; she must have money if that is what he lacks or wants, sexual beauty if that is what is required. In fact, the Captain promptly casts eye on Lucy, finds her desirable, and asks Welldon for her hand. Welldon's response is a masterpiece of irony and serves as another link between the plight of women and that of slaves, as well as touching on the power of the male over the female: "This is your market for slaves; my sister is a free woman, and must not be dispos'd of in public" (286; italics mine). The implication is that a private disposal by Lucy's "brother" is quite unexceptionable.

The Widow is fortunate that she at least possesses wealth, which in this commercial world goes further than physical charm. But her position of power in a man's world has made her as insensitive and vulnerable as a man; Restoration comedy is full of foolish betrayed men who think their pocketbooks more than compensate for their personal

shortcomings—Southerne's own Sir Gentle Golding from Sir Antony Love comes immediately to mind. And just as Lucia uses that gentleman's lusts and pretensions for her purposes, so does Lucia's reincarnation Charlott Welldon use the Widow Lackitt's lusts and pretensions.

The key to Charlott's scheme is the Widow's idiot son Daniel—an ironic naming, since he lacks not merely wisdom but the least shred of sense. Charlott, in her guise as a man, tells the Widow early in Act II that "his" father upon his deathbed made Welldon promise to see Lucy married before "himself" embarking upon matrimony. The Widow, anxious to remove any impediment to her own matrimonial hopes, promptly suggests, as Charlott expected her to do, a match between Lucy and her son. Charlott agrees; foolish though he is, the young man is wealthy, and, as she tells Lucy,

I consider'd your constitution, sister; and finding you would have occasion for a fool, I have provided accordingly. . . . Since he is to be a fool . . . , I thought it better for you to have one of his mother's making than your own; 'twill save you the trouble. (293)

Despite Daniel's trepidation and obvious sexual ignorance, the Widow in a sort of dreadful parodic reversal of the actions of Oroonoko's father insists that he marry Lucy so the way to her own gratification will be cleared. The union is not successful, and he soon comes home to his mother with Lucy following behind; he would, he tells his wife, "rather be a cuckold, than what you wou'd make of me in a week, I'm sure: I have no more manhood left in me already, than there is, saving the mark, in one of my mother's old petticoats here" (327). Before the play is over his mother has beaten him into submission, and he kneels

before his wife to beg her forgiveness; this act has, as Novak and Rodes observe, "sexual, financial, and political ramifications."²⁷ We are reminded of the naïve complacency of the equally foolish Lord Malapert in The Maid's Last Prayer, but Daniel's domination is both public and symbolic: he is not merely blind to what is happening, but literally kneels before his wife's power, driven to it by that of his mother—surely a "monstrous regiment of women!"

But the Widow destroys her son's manhood—what little he possesses—for nothing. True, she finally gets Welldon to agree to marry her, despite the impediment of a wife Charlott claims to have left in London; but she is gulled as thoroughly as her male predecessors in Restoration comedy. She makes her groom a present of a thousand pounds—the equivalent of her dowry—and awaits him in the nuptial bed. As in Sir Antony Love when a similar situation occurs, a substitution is made. But whereas Ilford was too honorable to take advantage of Volante, Charlott's "stand-in," Stanford's younger kinsman Jack, has no such scruples; he has been pursuing the Widow—or her riches—himself. The Widow's chagrin when she discovers that her groom is a woman is highly comic:

WID.: A woman! pray let me speak with you. [Drawing her
(Charlott) aside.] You are not in earnest, I hope?
CHA.: Really a woman.
WID.: Gads my life! I could not be cheated in every thing:
I know a man from a woman at these years, or the
devil's in't. Pray, did you not marry me? (338)

When it is revealed that Jack Stanmore has done her a husband's service she agrees to marry him. But even in the midst of farce there is a

²⁷ Novak and Rodes, p. xxv.

reference to the broader, familial implications of sexual relationships; ludicrous though it might be, the Widow fears that "I may be with child too, for ought I know, and may go look for the father" (339).

Charlott has meanwhile accomplished her own matrimonial ends by revealing to the elder Stanmore, in whom she has been interested all along, that the "cousin" whose portrait has so enamoured him is in fact herself. They agree to marry, and it is at this point, with three weddings either accomplished or planned, that a comedy would end.

But Oroonoko is a tragicomedy, and the activities of the Welldons have been interludes in his disastrous story. Southerne has alternated between the two plots with great dexterity. As we have already seen, the Welldons' situation is linked to that of the slaves in the first two scenes. Subsequently we find the farcical betrothal and marriage of Daniel and Lucy preceding the revelation of Oroonoko's lost love and his reunion with her. Daniel's attempt to escape his wife is followed by the slaves' attempt to escape their masters; his obeisance to his wife under threat of violence is juxtaposed to the Lieutenant-Governor's attempt physically to subdue Imoinda to his will. Finally, and most poignantly, the conclusion of the comic line with a celebration of all sort of marriages is immediately followed by suicides of the ideally-married Oroonoko and Imoinda.

Novak and Rodes find a superb analogy for this alternation between the comic and serous worlds in Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts," in which "suffering . . . takes place/While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along." They see the focus of the play in Imoinda:

As a woman and as a slave who is captive both of the English and the Indians and as the European wife of an Angolan prince, she embodies the two principal thematic dualities of slaves/women and European/"barbarian" which give the play its intellectual force. . . . [The Lieutenant-Governor's] lust for Imoinda motivates his treachery toward Oroonoko. It is the pressure of her pregnancy which stirs Oroonoko to revolt; her nobility helps to confirm his greatness. And, in turn, her elegance of spirit is shown in greater relief by Charlotte's busy pragmatism, her proper dutifulness and initiative by Charlotte's desire to assume a man's role. Imoinda initiates her own death and Oroonoko follows her model; but presumably the cool world will wag on with Charlotte and Jack Stanmore and Lucy and her booby, child-husband Daniel. ²⁸

The equation may not be quite so simple. Both Charloot and the Widow assume men's roles, but the former is successful in her aims while the latter is not; further, Southerne's treatment of Charlott suggests real sympathy for her. At times she is clearly the spokeswoman for her author:

there's no relying upon what men say upon these occasions; they have the benefit of their bragging, by recommending their abilities to other women: theirs is a trading estate, that lives upon credit and increases by removing it out of one bank into another. Now poor women have not these opportunities; we must keep our stocks dead by us, at home, to be ready for a purchase, when it comes, a husband, let him be never so dear, and glad of him; or venture our fortunes abroad on such rotten security, that the principal and interest, nay very often our persons are in danger. (323; italics mine)

The difference between the two women is that the Widow wants to be both man and woman—to have masculine power and feminine dependence; moreover, her power—her wealth—came to her by inheritance from a man, not through any effort of her own. Charlott dons man's clothing, setting aside her femininity until she is safe in resuming it; she has provided herself with a thousand pounds for her security by her own

²⁸Ibid., p. xli.

efforts, and if her tactics are open to moral question she has at least not cheated her child of his inheritance as the Widow has attempted to do. Imoinda too is at times almost masculine in her actions: during the escape attempt the stage directions describe her "with a bow and quiver;" when the Lieutenant-Governor tries to force her she threatens him with his own sword; and it is she who, as Novak and Rodes point out, insists on the necessity for death. Both she and Charlott are strong women such as Southerne has created before; in them strength simply finds different forms of expression.

And if the happiness and security which Charlott seems to have found in Act V throws into darker relief the unhappy end of Oroonoko and Imoinda, the serious story darkens the comic: they, too, were once happy and secure—until human malignancy and fate destroyed them. What might lie ahead for Charlott and Stanmore? We recall again Valentine's speech in Sir Antony Love:

we embrace what pleases us in both [beauty and reason], secure ourselves in a probability, and guess out the rest. (I, 167)

In this world there is no absolute security, no absolute of any kind except, as Aboan has reminded us, that of death.

Oroonoko is the last of Southerne's great plays; two more will follow, but neither is of any particular merit or enjoys any success. In Oroonoko however, he seems to sum up and broaden the themes and insights toward which he has been working for nearly twenty years. Central to his vision is his perception of the position of women in society; he sees their treatment as a manifestation of cultural insensitivity and corruption. Although Oroonoko follows The Fatal

Marriage and superficially resembles it in source and structure, the later play is actually closer in spirit to his greatest comedy, The Wives Excuse. Mrs. Friendall is very like both Charlott and Imoinda; she is as clever as the former, as conventional as the latter, and like both of them assumes over her own destiny as far as she is able. In fact, the colonial society is but a coarser—and perhaps therefore more revealing—reflection of the London society on which it is modeled. Attitudes that in the old country are clothed in sophistication and spurious romanticism are baldly stated in the new; secret and clandestine betrayals are here open, unvarnished. Perhaps it is this perspective of America, the hope of the oppressed, being instead but a new breeding ground for the infection of Europe that as much as anything gives Oroonoko its impact. It is certain that in this play Southerne's awareness of the plight of the victim broadens beyond the concern for tormented nobility and abused women demonstrated in his prior works to embrace all sorts and conditions of the poor and the captive and the weak. Oroonoko is not a tragedy of character but of situation. By its scope, however, it transcends all the preconceptions which assign to "classic" tragedy a higher moral and aesthetic place. It is ultimately and profoundly moving both to the emotions and to the intellect, and as such is a fit climax to its creator's career.

CHAPTER V

DECLINE—1700 AND BEYOND

Oroonoko was Southerne's last success; although the highly-acclaimed The Spartan Dame would not be presented until 1719, it had been for the most part written nearly thirty years before and is therefore the product of Southerne's earlier career. After Oroonoko he wrote only two more works: The Fate of Capua, a tragedy which appeared in 1700 and drew largely on Livy's history; and Money the Mistress, a comedy written in the playwright's mid-sixties and produced in 1725. Neither play was well-received by audiences or by critics, nor in these cases does public opinion appear to have been in error. The Fate of Capua is undeveloped and lacking in focus; Money the Mistress is turgid and slight. These works are postludes rather than preludes to a career and are therefore of little developmental interest.

The Fate Of Capua (1700)

This "classical" tragedy, based on the fall of Capua to Hannibal in 216 B.C., includes two story lines: one is political, the other is romantic, neither is humorous. As the play opens, Hannibal is approaching the city and demanding its surrender; the senators of Capua have split into two factions, those led by Pacuvius who favor Hannibal and those led by Magius who hold to the city's ties to Rome. As the sides debate the issue, word comes that the rabble, led by Pacuvius' son-in-law Virginus, has arisen and intends to murder the senators and institute

its own government. Pacuvius persuades them that a known evil is better than an unknown; in gratitude for his having saved them, the senators, with the exception of Magius, agree to treat with Hannibal. As a result, the conqueror promises to provide them with some of his Roman prisoners; these the senate may use to exchange for Capuans presently with the Roman forces and against whom the Romans may retaliate when they learn of Capua's defection.

Hannibal enters the city in triumph, and Magius, accompanied by his few supporters, who include Pacuvius' son Perolla, upbraids the senate for its treachery. Hannibal's officer arrives and the old man is arrested and led away. Perolla determines to assassinate Hannibal and reveals his intention to his father. Pacuvius argues with him to no avail, until he swears that he himself will defend Hannibal from the attack: "first you must reach my heart,/ Before your dagger can arrive at him" (43).¹ Perolla gives up his plan in filial piety but in patriotic despair.

Word now comes that Hannibal's soldiers are debauching the city. Hannibal finally calls the troops out of Capua; it is believed, however, that he does so not so much for the city's sake but because of "some news from Rome" (45). A small garrison is left behind, but they are inadequate to meet a new threat: the Romans, previously reported to be in disarray and almost defeated, have an army in the field advancing on Capua for revenge. A siege is instituted, and the city realizes that

¹The Fate of Capua, Plays, III, 3-74.

it is doomed. Magius is freed and sent as an emissary to Rome with 300 Roman prisoners; the senators wait at Pacuvius' house to learn the outcome of this mission. They determine to drink poison to avoid what they realize is their fate. When Magius returns, he joins them in their suicide after revealing that although the Romans offered to spare himself they are intent on destroying Capua. The curtain falls on the dying senators.

Serving as subplot to the political tragedy is a love tragedy. Virginius is married to Pacuvius' daughter Favonia, whom he loves to distraction; she is in turn dutiful but not passionate. He informs her that his bosom friend Junius, who has been in Rome for several years, has fallen at Cannae; when he withdraws, Favonia reveals in soliloquy the reason for her conjugal coolness: she loves Junius, although she has hidden her affection even from him out of respect for her marriage. When the Roman are brought into Capua, however, Virginius discovers his old friend still alive among them and, over Junius' protests, convinces the guard to let him be quartered in Virginius' home for safe-keeping. Favonia is distraught at the news, since she fears that her feelings will become obvious; she prefers, she tells us, death. When Virginius brings Junius to her, the latter faints, and Virginius leaves him to Favonia's restorative care. Junius revives and declares his hopeless love, and she in return admits hers for him. Although he decides to flee rather than remain in the same house with her, he cannot leave without a last glimpse. Going to the bedroom where she lies sleeping, he plants a kiss on her hand; as he does so her father and husband enter, appalled to see a man in her chamber. Junius flees

unrecognized, Favonia awakes in confusion, and Virginius and Pacuvius condemn her for infidelity. She, realizing that the intruder must have been Junius, keeps silent, even though the penalty for her "sin" is death.

Learning of her danger, Junius determines to rescue her. Meanwhile, Virginius returns home and again attacks his wife, snatching their child from her arms and vowing never to look upon his daughter again because she will remind him of her faithless mother. He leaves her with gifts from her father—a dagger and a bowl of poison, from which she may choose the way to end her life. Just as she drinks the poison, Virginius and Junius enter. As she dies, Junius confesses the truth; the two men fight, wound each other, and, after lengthy speeches of regret, die.

The play suffers from a number of defects we have encountered in earlier of Southerne's works, but here there are few qualities which compensate. As in The Maid's Last Prayer, there is a lack of focus; no single character stands out at the center. Both political and romantic plots are underdeveloped. Magius is clearly the exemplar in the former, but he is rarely on stage. Pacuvius might be intended to function as the tragic hero, but his motivation is inconsistent; although it is in expectation of personal gain that he supports Hannibal and abandons Rome, he is quasi-noble in telling his son Perolla that he will defend Hannibal's life with his own. In his initial treachery he is like The Spartan Dame's Cleombrotus, in his dissuasion of his son from murder like that same work's noble Leonidas.

The play's unity is further damaged by the love story. The romantic development is almost exclusively expository: we are told that

Favonia is cool to Virginus; we are told that she and Junius have longed secretly for each other—too much takes place in the past, too little on the stage. The two lovers have only one brief scene together, excluding that in which Junius kisses the hand of the sleeping Favonia; Favonia spends the rest of the play being pathetically innocent while her husband and father rail at her.

She is clearly a variation on the passive heroine which Southerne first presented as Semanthe in The Loyal Brother and which culminates in Isabella of The Fatal Marriage. But whereas Isabella's suffering—which occupies much of the play—is demonstrated, Favonia's is only suggested; whereas Isabella's trials are to some degree related to her passivity, Favonia's result through no fault or action of her own. Junius' love for her is such that we can assume that with or without her admission that she returns his affections, he would have crept to her chamber before leaving. Favonia reminds us most of Erminia, from The Disappointment. Both women are victims who in no way contribute to their own distress, both are inadequately characterized, and both are plagued with jealous husbands. Like Alphonso, Virginus at the first breath of suspicion alters abruptly from adoration to judgment, although he has long since realized that his love for Favonia is greater than hers for him.

Aside from the coincidence that the senators and Favonia all commit suicide by drinking poison provided by Pacuvius, there is very little to link the two plots except the characters. This disjunction could have been avoided had Southerne explored and developed the ironies

in the conduct of both Junius and Pacuvius. The former is honorable politically, abhorring Capua's accession to Hannibal, but through questionable if not immoral conduct causes Favonia's death; Pacuvius, who has betrayed his city, becomes highly honorable in his private life when he believes his daughter Favonia to have been unfaithful to her husband. The unfortunate heroine thus becomes a double victim of inconsistent standards.

However, Southerne failed to grasp this opportunity, and the result is a lack of thematic coherence between the two story lines. When one recalls that the two plays preceding this were both split-plot tragicomedies and that both are brilliantly integrated and structured, it is surprising that The Fate of Capua should be so perfunctory in development and superficial in theme. But this was Southerne's sixth play in nine years; perhaps its deficiencies are, as Dodds suggests, the results of fatigue and waning interest in the drama.² Certainly, except for some work on The Spartan Dame, this was Southerne's last dramatic effort until the production of the equally unfortunate Money the Mistress a quarter century later.

Money The Mistress (1725)

Southerne's last play was presented in February, 1725, against, as Dodds establishes, the advice of his friends.³ Based on a "romantic and sentimental travel-book of the Comtesse d'Aulnoy,"⁴ Money the Mistress

²Dodds, p. 194.

³Ibid., p. 195 ff.

⁴Ibid. p. 199.

is set in Tangiers and has an international cast of characters—British, French, Spanish, Moorish, and Jewish. A Spanish merchant, Davila, wishes his daughter Mariana to marry the wealthy Englishman Colonel Warcourt, who loves her; she, however, is involved with a French officer, Mourville, and refuses to hear Warcourt's suit. Mourville is captured by the Moors after exceeding his orders on a patrol, and Davila is sent to ransom him. The wily father, although unaware of how far matters have gone between his daughter and the Frenchman, sees an opportunity to get at least one rival for Mariana's hand out of the way, and plans to refuse payment for Mourville. Mariana learns of his plot; she and her cousin Harriet disguise themselves and accompany her father on his mission unrecognized by him. At the Moorish camp they find Mourville, whom Mariana persuades to return to Tangiers while she remains behind in his stead; she is confident that her father will pay any sum to get her back. Mourville's captor is amenable, since Davila is a wealthy man and will give more for his daughter than he would for Mourville.

Harriet returns with Mourville and preys upon his desire for money with the news that because two of Davila's ships have been wrecked his fortune has been badly depleted. Pointing out that her own father is a wealthy merchant also, she convinces the Frenchman to marry her. Not the least of her charms is her possession of a valuable set of jewelry sent by Warcourt to Mariana early in the play, refused by her, and pocketed secretly by Harriet. These are pawned for a hundred pistoles, with which Mourville plans to make his fortune at the gaming table.

Meanwhile Davila, in light of his business reverses, fears difficulty in raising the ransom for Mariana, and her Moorish captor is threatening

to send her to concubinage with a prominent Moor. Warcourt arrives in the nick of time, provides the money while assuring Mariana that he attaches no conditions to his assistance, and escorts father and daughter back to the city. He and Mourville meet later at a party during which Warcourt wins at gambling all of the Frenchman's ill-gotten gains. The two meet in a half-hearted duel in which Mourville, remorseful and despondent, allows himself to be disarmed.

In the meantime, the Jew with whom the jewels have been pawned, recognizing them as the ones made for Warcourt, reports that fact to the Governor, who calls together all the party to hear Mourville's confession that they have been pawned by his wife. Mariana bravely steps into the breach by asserting that she is his wife and that she has sold the jewels—they have not been stolen. Harriet is brought in, however, and also claims both husband and deed. Justice is done in the end; it turns out to have been not Davila's ships but those of his brother, Harriet's father, which were lost, and that Harriet and Mourville are locked in a loveless and poverty-stricken match. Warcourt asks Mariana to reconsider her suit; she, overcome by the treachery of her cousin and lover and covered with shame at having defied her parent, promises to do so.

A minuscule subplot involves Don Manuel, an aging Spanish rake who attempts to seduce Diana, the wife of an officer named Marsan. She complains to her husband of Don Manuel's attentions; Marsan then pays blatant court to Manuel's wife, and thereby forces the Spaniard to call him out. Manuel backs down at the last moment, to the merriment

of all concerned. This particular sequence takes place late in the play and seems irrelevant to its main plot.

Dodds suggests, rightly, that Money the Mistress is sentimental romantic comedy.⁵ Warcourt is a paragon of good, although Dodds is incorrect in calling him "a character new in Southerne's anthology—the faultless hero of honest intent and ready moralization."⁶ He is exactly like Ilford of Sir Antony Love in his gravity, nobility, and sense of honor. But whereas in the comedy of the 1690's Southerne satirized, albeit gently, this character type, here the same type is taken by its creator with deadly seriousness.

Mariana is a good girl who defies convention and her father for the man she loves and suffers for it; it is interesting to note that whereas a play like The Fatal Marriage, which has as a character Victoria, who defies convention and father successfully, ends with the "moral" that parents should not be too harsh, Money the Mistress ends with the observation by the Governor that

These patterns lay before our female youth,
The sure effects of gallantry and truth.
If from their parents' care they wildly run,
They see the ready road to be undone.
But if they wou'd secure content for life,⁷
A prudent choice must make the happy wife.

Harriet seems related to Lucia, or Sir Antony Love; she shares with her predecessor a determination to have her own way and the man she wants, and she does not scruple to pursue her goals vigorously. Again,

⁵ Ibid., p. 200.

⁶ Ibid., p. 201.

⁷ Money the Mistress, Plays, III, 173-243.

however, as with Ilford and Warcourt, Southerne's attitude toward the character type is reversed; here she is condemned rather than praised, punished rather than rewarded. Mourville is a character whose weakness is of potential interest; that he is genuinely attached to Mariana we do not doubt, yet the promise of wealth represented by Harriet overcomes all considerations of honor and feeling. Although it is undoubtedly coincidence, or possibly a transference through the developing novel of sentimental comic convention, there are some striking resemblances in Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility to Money the Mistress. In the novel we have a good heroine, interestingly enough named Marianne, who too is thoughtless of convention in her love. In his affection, avarice, and regret Mourville is highly suggestive of Willoughby, and the rather dull but deserving Warcourt is the same type as the worthy Colonel Burton who eventually wins a chastened Marianne's hand.

It is interesting that Southerne, traditionally considered an early worker in the sentimental mode, should fail with a purely sentimental play. Fail, however, he does; thy play manages to be simultaneously over-contrived and underdeveloped. Mourville's conversion is too fast, Harriet's revelation of her true colors too sudden; Mariana does act imprudently, but her father's conduct is such as to make the Governor's "moral" almost burlesque—Davila is not a wise father but a greedy one. Nevertheless, there are possibilities in the work. Perhaps had Southerne removed the action from so exotic a locale (which provides complications that add nothing to the meaning of the story), simplified the plot,

and made Davila a better father—in short, concentrated on the "sense and sensibility" theme which lies at the heart of the comedy—it would have been more successful.

One cannot but wonder, however, if Money the Mistress is not an indication that conventional critical wisdom to the contrary, Southerne is simply not a sentimental writer. The problems with the play may arise merely from the facts that Southerne was sixty-six at its writing and that he had been away from the theater for decades. But the characters he creates are all kinds he has worked with before—only the authorial attitude toward them is different. A more valid critical statement about Southerne's "sentimentality" is that in his earlier works he works with situations and characters who will occur in the sentimental drama, but he does not treat them sentimentally. Money the Mistress suggests that the sentimental perspective is not one with which he deals well. He is far more the creature of his age than has been heretofore recognized, and in his best works transcends the limitations of period and moves toward the timeless in his observations on the complexities of the human spirit and the human experience.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Today, nearly three centuries after his appearance in the London dramatic world, Thomas Southerne is largely forgotten, relegated to a paragraph or footnote in textbooks, a page or two in literary histories of the period, occasionally an actual analysis or at least plot summary of a play in scholarly studies. Such obscurity for a once popular and admired playwright is not merited. Its cause, perhaps most of all, is one unrelated to the quality of his work—inaccessibility. Oroonoko is the one play by Southerne with which Restoration students are likely to be familiar; one cannot avoid the suspicion that this is not because it is his only good work—it is not—but because in 1928 Bonamy Dobrée selected it as one of his Five Restoration Tragedies; Oroonoko has therefore been available for a half-century outside of rare-book rooms as, until the recent publication of Thornton's edition of The Wives Excuse, the other plays have not.

If Southerne is not the equal of a Dryden, or Wycherley, or Etherege, or Congreve—which may be open to question—he nevertheless was respected by the first and last of these. He was tremendously successful in his time with a variety of dramatic types—comedy, tragedy, and tragicomedy—so successful that he apparently was able to retire from the stage at forty and live in comfort another four decades. Pope and Swift were friends of his old age, and a collected edition of his works was released thirty years after his death and nearly a hundred after the

appearance of The Loyal Brother. Surely something must account for all these marks of great and enduring popularity.

Dodds would account for Southerne's success by what he perceives as the author's rather lamentable tendency to write whatever was popular at the moment, to trim his sails to suit the public's wind. Dodds writes, however, from a late Romantic critical perspective which demands that the author be unique, to his own self true; that numerous literary giants from Shakespeare to Dickens considered public taste and yet achieved critical as well as popular acclaim does not lend credence to Dodds' post hoc, ergo propter hoc argument. It is entirely possible that Southerne was successful because he wrote good plays—not always great literature, but good theater.

His great strengths lay in characterization and motivation, the ability to see relationships between seemingly disparate types, to exploit these ties in dramatically effective ways, and to evoke natural responses to situations. In his first effort, The Loyal Brother, his work is stiff and lifeless, but he establishes psychological types to which he will return: the passive figure confronted with a situation in which he or she either cannot or will not act, and the aggressive, assertive figure, usually a woman, who demands and takes control of her destiny. Tachmas and Semanthe are so inert as to be almost lifeless, Seliman and Sunamire so emotional as to be incapable of repose; but for a first play The Loyal Brother is carefully structured and balanced, and suggests in embryo the direction Southerne's work will take.

In The Disappointment he explores a new and more difficult form, the split-plot tragicomedy. Here inexperience shows; the "tragedy" lacks a villain villainous enough to make it convincing. Eaminia, like Semanthe, is incapable of action and therefore of development; Alphonso rants in Othello's style without Othello's cause or complexity; Alberto is incapable of provoking real tragedy—he cannot even carry off a seduction without being duped not once but twice by the same woman. But in Juliana Southerne introduces another persistent character type—the sympathetically-presented strong woman. Juliana is a cast-off mistress who refuses to pine or to repent; instead, she does her best to secure her lover for herself and to protect other women from him.

The Spartan Dame takes this character type, sets her in a tragedy, and makes her the central figure in the play. Celona is a woman of enormous strength and integrity, both personal and public. As the daughter of a king and the wife of that king's supplanter, she is faced with conflicting loyalties that would break a lesser woman. Even when Cleombrotus betrays their marriage by seducing her sister through a trick, she can condemn his act but still plead for his life. By presenting his heroine within the context of traditional values upon which she can draw for psychological and emotional support, Southerne makes her steadfast fidelity credible; she may refuse to condone her husband's usurpation, she may be appalled at his blatant disregard for the ties of kingship in both the public and private spheres, but her consciousness of her culturally defined role as wife as well as daughter and sister allow her to attempt to preserve his life.

Southerne's interest in a strong woman's relationship to her society becomes the motivating force of the next stage of his dramatic career—the comedies of the early '90's. The first of these, Sir Antony Love, or The Rambling Lady, is a rollicking farce in which can be found some very serious and profound insights into the condition of women in Restoration society. Like Juliana, Lucia has been corrupted; like Angeline in the same work she is betrayed by a guardian who should have been more careful of her welfare. But Lucia transforms herself into Sir Antony; the woman sold to a would-be rake becomes in her disguise the rake and libertine par excellence, confounding and confusing the very social mores which would put her beyond the pale. She takes active control of her own life and by manipulating the very conventions that would damn her gains for herself both financial and personal independence.

Southerne's next play, one of his greatest, goes to the opposite end of the spectrum to concentrate on a highly conventional woman married to a fool and tempted by an attractive rake. The Wives Excuse, or Cuckolds Make Themselves sets in conflict old and new values in very moving terms and comes down squarely on the side of traditional morality. Mrs. Friendall for all her virtue is, like Lucia, determined to have some control over her own destiny. Having married to "please her family," she defies the expectations of family, friends, and servants in being true to vows which have locked her in an impossible match. She is very nearly a tragic heroine, closest to Celona in characterization but without the Spartan dame's access to support from her culture and

her society. Even when provoked beyond human patience by her husband's neglect and stupid attempts at intrigue with another woman, even when courted by a very attractive man who by pretending to act with honor pierces her guard, she maintains her dignity and with touching candour her commitment to her marriage. Nor does Southerne yield to the seduction of romance or sentimentality; at play's end his heroine is rewarded by her virtue by seeing her husband publicly unfaithful to her and herself being left neither married nor free, "as unhappy as before."

The final comedy of this period is still darker. The Maid's Last Prayer, or Any Rather Than Fail is an imperfect work, suffering from an inadequately defined focus and inconsistent characterization. But it does provide two superb women characters, both high-born whores who sell themselves for money. Lady Malapert is weak and ultimately pathetic, a Mrs. Friendall without her predecessor's moral center to sustain her; finally exposed to romantic rather than purely physical love she blossoms into sentiment—only to be painfully rebuffed by her lover. Lady Trickitt is another type altogether. Older and more experienced than Lady Malapert, she manages her own affairs to her advantage, insisting to her lover that she will be no man's possession—her body, her life are her own. In her manipulation of her society to achieve her own ends she reminds us of Lucia, but in place of "Sir Antony's" gallant charm is put a steely resolve that repels sympathy but commands respect. She is the most extreme of Southerne's statements on the formidable woman.

After the comedies Southerne turned to a form he had first tried in The Disappointment: the split-plot tragicomedy. The two products

of this period, The Fatal Marriage, or The Innocent Adultery and Oroonoko, were his greatest contemporary successes and, together with The Wives' Excuse, comprise his best work. The heroine of the former recalls earlier heroines, Semanthe of The Loyal Brother and Erminia of The Disappointment. Isabella's tragedy is an ironic one: totally passive in her goodness and innocence, it is only when she acts, no matter how admirable her motive, that she undoes herself, first in leaving the convent to marry her beloved Biron, then in marrying the faithful Villeroy to save herself, her child, and her dependents from disaster. There are at work malignant human forces, most notably her brother-in-law Carlos, but for all her pathos Isabella by her very sensibility brings much of her fate upon herself. Southerne employs the tragicomic form to great advantage by using the comic subplot to give the context which renders Isabella a tragic rather than pathetic character. Its heroine is another variation on Lucia—Victoria, who by acting forcefully but prudently in a situation thematically parallel to that of Isabella gets both the marital happiness and the economic security that is denied Isabella. Further dramatic contrast is supplied by Julia, Victoria's unhappily married stepmother, who when her selfish and jealous husband is "dead" yet refuses to betray him. This careful blending of different character types in similar situations results in a moving, morally and psychologically valid tragedy which considers Southerne's favorite theme, woman's condition in society.

In Oroonoko he turns to a different sort of bondage: slavery in the West Indies. Oroonoko is a sort of anachronism, a throwback

to the "love and honor" heroes of early Restoration tragedy; he is torn between his desire to live in peace, even as a slave, with his beloved Imoinda and the larger demands upon his conscience to fulfill the responsibilities of his noble birth both to ensure that his unborn child enters the world a free man and to help his often-unworthy but less fortunate fellow bondsmen. The tragic plot moves totally on a plane of nobility and passion, as Oroonoko is betrayed at every point and ultimately can free himself only through suicide. An ironic counterpoint to his predicament is provided by the comic subplot, involving Southerne's third breeches part in "Welldon," who like Lucia and Victoria before her has dressed herself in men's clothes to gain security for herself in a man's world.

Beyond the obvious thematic ties between the two plots, the insecurity and victimization of both slaves and women, Southerne has deeper concerns: the condition of the weak and helpless in a society which places value not on the moral worth of the individual but on the dividends, whether in money or in pleasure, that an investment in a human being can produce for the buyer. Oroonoko's plight is not tragic in the Aristotelian sense; all options are closed to him for reasons beyond his control and blame. But the simultaneous presentations of abuse of the helpless in comic and serious contexts gives Southerne's play a stature that goes beyond conventional platitudes about the relative merits of types of drama. He clearly perceives that the moral vacuum produced by the formalization of medieval European values, perhaps best exemplified in his work by the character of Count Verole in Sir Antony Love, has been

supplanted by a similar malaise in the mercantile system that replaced the old ways. Imoinda is the last of his great women characters and combines all that is attractive in her predecessors. As a wife she is supportive and loving, but as a woman she does not hesitate to act radically, almost masculinely, when her honor or that of her husband is concerned. She and Oroonoko perhaps represent all that is noble and beautiful in the world of heroic drama, by 1695 part of literary and cultural history rather than a living concept; their story, counterpoised with that of the Welldon sisters, who defeat the new system with its own weapons, provides almost an elegy for the memory of an heroic age.

After Oroonoko Southerne appears to have largely retired from active participation in the dramatic world; his last two plays are rather unfortunate products. Five years after Oroonoko he had a total failure in The Fate of Capua, an overly-expository and disjointedly shallow "classical" tragedy. Although The Spartan Dame was subsequently presented, it had been written thirty years before and is the product of youthful vigor. Finally, in 1725, the confusing and dull comedy Money the Mistress appeared and showed that time had indeed withered Southerne's talent and staled his variety. While he here reproduced many character types with which he had been successful in the past, he turned into hero and heroine the types he had earlier satirized, and made "villainous" the sort of resourceful woman he had made admirable heretofore. Thus he sentimentalized his own tradition.

While Money the Mistress as a play is worthy of almost no consideration, it does raise an interesting issue about this last point.

So far, when Southerne is recalled by the modern critics it is as a precursor of sentimental drama; The Disappointment, The Wives Excuse, The Fatal Marriage, and Oroonoko have all been perceived as having sentimental tendencies. Thus when Southerne has heretofore been studied it has tended to be within this limited context: to what degree is he sentimental? The situation has been compounded by the fact that Colley Cibber, whose Love's Last Shift (1695) is widely held to be the first purely sentimental drama, was for many years associated with Southerne professionally and indeed had his help in getting the play produced. The result has been that with few exceptions considerations of Southerne's works have not treated the plays individually as plays, discrete dramatic entities which might or might not work well upon the stage and make significant comments about the nature and quality of life.

However, a close examination of Southerne's corpus such as has been undertaken in this study suggests that he is not in fact sentimental; the criteria for such a classification as developed by the mode's primary investigators, Bernbaum and Sherbo, especially those of elaborate lingering over highly emotional moments and the excision of "bawdy," simply are not fulfilled in Southerne's work. The only possible exception to the first of these conditions occurs in Oroonoko, which was produced within months of Cibber's Love's Last Shift and therefore is not unlikely to have some elements of the growing sentimental movement in it, when Southerne devotes four pages of dialogue to the dramatic moment when Oroonoko and Imoinda determine to kill themselves.

A more fruitful area in which to examine Southerne would be in terms of the Restoration tragicomedy, a form badly in need of study;

Ristine's work stops some seventy years before the period of Southerne's activity. This is a highly complex dramatic type which he comes to handle with great dexterity and insight; even a work like The Wives Excuse, while not formally tragicomic, derives its effect from the skillful mingling of light and dark tones. Related to the tragicomedy is the pastoral; while this is an area which has been explored, particularly by Røstvig and Rothstein, Southerne's use of this perspective in both his serious and tragicomic works needs more examination than has been provided in this study.

The question of influence also remains to be investigated. His many allusions to Shakespeare demand attention, although Southerne's borrowings seem to be rather more superficial—verbal and plot echoes—than substantial, as Dodds believes to be the case. A comparison with Dryden, the major literary figure of his age and Southerne's friend and mentor, would require a detailed study. And Otway, Southerne's contemporary, seems to provide him not only with situations and attitudes but with as many verbal echoes as does Shakespeare; The Orphan appears to have been a particularly favorite source. Probably Etherege, Wycherley, and Lee would also bear consideration, as well as Congreve and Cibber, both of whom were assisted in their early careers by the established Southerne.

But the major gap in Southerne scholarship is the one I have attempted to close in this study. Dodds' book deals admirably with Southerne's biography, sources, and bibliography, but he did not provide what it is hoped is herein provided: an assessment of the plays,

individually and as part of their author's development, as literary works. The scantiness of modern scholarship on Southerne, indicated by the paucity of items in his bibliography, suggests how badly this critical reading needed to be done.

Now that it is completed, one should see more clearly how deserving Southerne is of greater attention than he has received in the past. He was a fine craftsman and a sensitive portrayer of character and situation. My own belief, based on a close reading of his canon, is that Southerne's chief contribution to theatrical art was his perception of women; alone among his contemporaries he frequently made women the protagonists of his plays. He was fortunate in his actresses, especially Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Bracegirdle, but he gave them numerous roles of complexity and psychological depth in which to demonstrate their talents.

He began in The Loyal Brother with the stock Roxana-Statira pairing, treating both types very conventionally. But their subsequent development was more and more his own. The Disappointment produced the rather unsatisfactory Erminia, an exaggerated Semanthe; but it also included among the minor characters the determined yet charming "fallen" woman Juliana. The Spartan Dame takes a part traditionally given to a man, that of the protagonist of the heroic drama such as Southerne had already created in The Loyal Brother, and gives it to a woman whose plight and response are infinitely more moving and worthy of respect.

The women of the comedies are likewise affecting characters, clearly developing out of the character of Juliana from The Disappointment. In Sir Antony Love Southerne again reversed normal casting and made the

libertine hero of Restoration comedy into a woman who although posing as a man manages to be simultaneously more admirably male than the other masculine characters and touchingly feminine. Mrs. Freindall of The Wives Excuse is one of his greatest creations, a woman of almost tragic proportions trapped in a comic world that neither values nor even recognizes her moral worth. The Maid's Last Prayer produced a character less central but in her own way equally striking. Although Southerne was fond in his comedies of using the frustrated and usually aging would-be procuress as a satiric and comic butt, the most corrupt of his women, the avaricious and lascivious Lady Trickitt, dominates this work—to the point of casting it off balance—with her cold, corrupt, and enormously powerful sense of self. The Maid's Last Prayer also includes another of Southerne's passive women in the mold of Erminia and Semanthe and Lady Malapert; but in her characterization he demonstrated the psychological awareness that the passive character who depends on another for her fulfillment and identity is in certain circumstances as likely to be weakly sinful as pathetically good.

This insight transferred to the first of his two great tragicomedies, The Fatal Marriage. Here Southerne took the passivity which in his earliest plays he associated with virtue and which in The Maid's Last Prayer he made productive of moral failure and turned it into a tragic flaw. Finally there is Imoinda of Oroonoko, the wife who has the strength to urge her beloved and heroic husband to take her life, that of their unborn child, and his own rather than that they face dishonor at the hands of a corrupt society which, like that of The Wives Excuse,

is largely unable either to value or even to recognize their moral worth.

That Southerne felt great sympathy for women's circumscribed position in his culture is clear from his portrayals; one could wish that more details of his life were known, since perhaps they might reveal something in his own experience which led to this sensitivity. But Southerne has more: an empathy for woman as well. He does not fall into the trap of romanticizing and idealising the feminine sensibility as the repository of all the passive virtues, a mindset which had as its result the "protection" of half the population from "responsibility" for their property, their government, and themselves and thereby their exclusion from privilege and self-realization. Nowhere is this understanding more vividly expressed than in Oroonoko, where woman's situation is compared to that of the slave bought in a market and valued only for what can produce profit for the buyer.

Nor does Southerne trivialize his female characters by seeing their failures solely as the result of bad environment and thus removing from them any sort of moral identity; we are clearly intended to feel pity for Lady Malapert, but not to the point of excusing her inability to exert some control over her own life. If Lady Trickitt demands our grudging respect it is because while her conduct is in traditional moral terms no better than that of Lady Malapert, she at least has chosen a path which she believes allows her the greatest freedom and fulfillment in an intolerable situation not of her own making; she has not simply fallen into it as the path of least resistance.

In the final analysis, Southerne's gifts deserve far more than the footnote in a survey which they until recently been allotted. In his time he was admired as much as any of his contemporaries who to the present day are placed in the first rank of literary artists. He has suffered both from inaccessibility and from a distorted place in literary history. With the anticipated publication of a modern edition his star should rise again; perhaps to the heights of Dryden, Etherege, Wycherley, and Otway, and surely far above the abyss in which it has been so long obscured. He will take his place as one who in his best plays not only expressed his age but transcended it.

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