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The Intentions of William Wycherley as Dramatic Wit and Satirist and the Contemporary Reception of His Plays: A Collection of the Evidence for Certain Observations About Wycherley's Dramatic Satire

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THE INTENTIONS OF WILLIAM WYCHERLEY AS DRAMATIC WIT AND SATIRIST
AND THE CONTEMPORARY RECEIPTION OF HIS PLAYS: A
COLLECTION OF THE EVIDENCE FOR CERTAIN
OBSERVATIONS ABOUT WYCHERLEY'S
DRAMATIC SATIRE

by
James E. Kasprzak

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LIFE

James Edward Kasprzak was born in Buffalo, New York, October 11, 1942. He was graduated from Bishop Fallon High School in June 1959, and received a State scholarship to attend Canisius College. In 1963 he received the Degree of Bachelor of Sciences from that college, and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army.

From 1963 to the present the author pursued his studies under a National Defense Education fellowship at Loyola University.
"It is, however, not necessary, that a man should forbear to write, till he has discovered some truth unknown before; he may be sufficiently useful, by ... luring the mind ... to a second view of that which it had passed over inattentively before."

Samuel Johnson, The Adventurer, No. 132.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMEDY OF MANNERS: RESTORATION VALUES AND THE RISE OF A NEW DRAMA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE RELATIONS OF THE COURT TO THE MEN OF LETTERS AFTER THE RESTORATION OF CHARLES</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. WILLIAM WYCHERLEY'S EARLY DRAMATIC CAREER: WYCHERLEY AS MODEL COURTIER AND MAJOR ADVOCATE OF THE COURT IDEAL</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE PLAIN DEALER: WYCHERLEY'S REACTION TO THE SYSTEM OF PATRONAGE PRACTICED IN THE RESTORATION COURT</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE INTENTIONS OF WILLIAM WYCHERLEY IN HIS WORKS: WYCHERLEY'S CONCEPTS OF LITERARY AND DRAMATIC ART AND SATIRE</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. THE CRITICAL REPUTATION OF WYCHERLEY AS WIT, DRAMATIST, AND SATIRIC WRITER IN HIS LIFETIME</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. CONCLUSION: THE IMPLICATIONS OF BIOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND TEXTUAL EVIDENCE OF WYCHERLEY'S MOTIVATION AND INTENTIONS FOR CRITICS OF HIS DRAMATIC COMEDY</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The unusual approach of this thesis requires some explanation of its intentions and method of organization.

Since 1700, many of the critical interpretations of Restoration comedy have pursued the more sensational, but less useful, matters of extrinsic values — basing judgments of the plays upon the personal mores of the various authors, for example. The critical approaches which emphasize these extrinsic criteria may be granted certain value as forms of dramatic appreciation, but nonetheless possess at least one serious failing: they tend to be too self-enclosed and too subjective, producing value judgments without the necessary basis in "pure" scholarship.¹ The outraged diatribes of Macaulay, to take one example, have seemingly done nothing but hinder studies of Restoration drama, and few reputable critics today seriously share his opinions. One noted scholar has emphasized the seriousness of the situation: "the bibliography in the field is mountainous, but the mountain has brought forth a mouse. The great failure has been that critics have chosen to deal mostly in mere impressions."²

² Ibid. p. 209.
The critics who have chosen to avoid fashions of criticism and who have produced the scholarly works which necessarily must precede more adequate dramatic interpretations, are relative newcomers to the field. The relevant works produced by Nicoll, Fujimura, Lynch, Holland, Van Lennep, and a few others, form the core of a more rigorous type of scholarship in this field, and all have been produced within the last forty years. Unfortunately, this reinvigorated scholarship has not as yet been applied to many of the individual dramatists of the Restoration period. The studies of William Wycherley, one of the foremost dramatists of the period, will serve to illustrate the point.

The only full-length biography of William Wycherley is an incompetent popularization which has been as much as called a plagiarism of secondary sources by one competent scholar. Even the staid Times Literary Supplement felt obliged to call the work a "vulgarization" of scholarship. Another basic work, the so-called "complete" edition of Wycherley's Works, serves the laudable purpose of making the minor works of Wycherley available to a wider audience, but is similarly flawed.

3 The biography referred to is that of Willard Connely, Brawny Wycherley (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930). The first commentator is Montague Summers, and both references are found in his work The Playhouse of Pepys (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 335.
This edition contains a large number of typographical and editorial errors, is based in part on discredited sources, and despite its title, is neither "complete" nor does it consist solely of works attributable to Wycherley.  

The same failings are found endlessly repeated throughout the scholarship. One researcher, attempting to outline a history of the criticism of Wycherley's dramatic works, finds little more than a dozen critical references among Wycherley's contemporaries, and declares: "The written remains of his contemporary reputation are remarkably slight." As slight as these remains may be, the fact that this thesis contains nearly twice the number of contemporary commentaries found in any prior

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4 This edition is that of Montague Summers, The Complete Works of William Wycherley (Soho: The Nonesuch Press, 1924). I have found such minor pieces as the "Prologue" to Agnes de Castro entirely omitted from that collection, while a partial list of works wrongly attributed to Wycherley by Summers may be found in the article by Vincent Dearing, "Pope, Theobald, and Wycherley's Posthumous Works," PMLA, LXIII (March, 1953), 223-236. For the "discredited sources," see below, Chapter V, for the discussion of Pope, Spence, and related sources. I wish to make it clear that for its avowed purposes, Summer's edition was an admirably competent work. Changing conditions and later discoveries have, however, rendered it somewhat unsuitable for close textual analysis. Because of its availability, I myself have quoted chiefly from Summer's edition, inserting appropriate corrections from other texts where necessary.

compilation is sufficient evidence that research in this area has been far from adequate in the past.

But perhaps the most indicative sign of the failure of basic scholarship in this field is the fact that the date of Wycherley's birth — considered useful in dating his works — has been a matter of debate for over two hundred years. It was not until 1932 that an enterprising scholar discovered the birth date recorded in one of the most obvious places imaginable: in the records of the legal proceedings which followed Wycherley's death. It is quite apparent that despite the controversy, no one had bothered to pursue more than the most superficial investigation of this point.6

These signs of inadequacy in the scholarship indicate that it is time Wycherley's role as a Restoration dramatist and literary figure be re-evaluated. There is no question but that the weakness of the basic scholarship has been a prime cause of the present chaotic state of the criticism of William Wycherley's dramatic works. This thesis, therefore, has been written in a modest attempt to collect and evaluate basic biographical and historical facts related to the dramatic career of William Wycherley; it is designed to provide other scholars with a foundation of factual evidence appropriate for objective.

rigorous analysis of Wycherley's drama. With the same purpose as that of the more objective Restoration scholars, but with far less ambition, this author has attempted to outline the relevant literary and social Restoration history, document and analyze the opinions of Wycherley voiced by his contemporaries, list the biographical and textual evidence of Wycherley's dramatic intentions, and use a number of similarly oblique approaches which will help determine the function of Wycherley's drama in its own time. In the course of this "pure" study, we will explore a field as yet untouched by previous commentators: Wycherley's relations with the professional men of letters in the period 1674-1677, and the impact this relationship had upon Wycherley's last play, The Plain Dealer. The new sources of m{nor biographical information found in previously unknown comments of Lansdowne, Prior, Sheffield, James Wright, and others, in conjunction with information culled from Wycherley's poetry, (a source of information almost completely ignored by scholars) reveal the hitherto unsuspected fact that Wycherley played a key role in the eventual reaction to Restoration court literary standards. The Plain Dealer, as we shall show, was intended by its author as an angry satire of the court, and was prompted by the court's abuse of the system of literary patronage.

I wish to express my gratitude to my advisors, Dr. Clayes, Dr. Hummert, and Dr. Spencer, for their aid in producing this work, and Father Carl Stratman C.S.V. for aiding and
directing my bibliographical researches, and for lending me works from his personal library. I wish to thank the librarians of Newberry Library, Northwestern University, Western Reserve University, and the University of Chicago, for allowing me to use the many rare and valuable works necessary for this study. I am especially grateful to my wife, who typed and edited this work, and to Dr. Abel, chairman of the Classics Department of Loyola University, for his help in developing the ideas in Chapter IV, and for his aid in selecting and correcting the translations of Horace.

James E. Kasprzak
CHAPTER I

On the 29th of May, 1660, the bells of England pealed forth in joy the news that Charles the Second, King of Great Britain, was returned to his throne. On that day, long celebrated in the Book of Common Prayer as "Restoration Day," Charles was ushered into Whitehall amidst the glad cries of his subjects, and the sweep of his elegant new robes brushed aside the old forms of the age of unlimited monarchy.

The rule of Charles, not surprisingly, differed greatly from the rule of any prior Prince of the Realm: the long Interregnum had modified the roles of both the Prince and his people. Charles, chastened by his "travels," had humbly accepted his people's gift of rule without condition. Mindful of the lessons poverty and privation had taught him, and fearful for his hard-won throne, Charles dispensed amnesties to a number of the regicides who had usurped his father's throne and attempted to ease the frictions of government by cautious diplomacy.

In historical perspective, many of the characteristics of Restoration society seem an inevitable result of the new
conditions of government. Despite his popularity, Charles was unlikely to forget that many of the cheers he heard had also echoed around the block where his father's head fell. Having long been deprived of the glories and privileges of the throne, Charles feared --- with sufficient cause --- that an aggressive sovereign might be called upon the slightest of pretexts to join Charles I in the Anglican Martyrology. Thus it would be that Charles would never be known for the great scope of his political accomplishments, but rather for the ingenuity with which he avoided conflict with the commoners and for the energy with which he devoted himself to his own amusements. The age of Charles would be known neither for its wars nor for its peace, but for the elegance --- and frequently, the vulgarity --- with which his court pursued its pleasures.

While Charles sought personal popularity among his subjects, fundamental religious and social disagreements divided his nation. These differences would prove to be so enduring that they would later serve as the political basis for the Whig and Tory factions. The court, developing in impotent and impoverished exile on the Continent, had its own history, and had developed a set of traditions independent from

---

the rest of England. Modeling themselves upon the elegant
nobles of France, Charles and his courtiers had become *railleurs*
and *modistes*: they were expert at witty conversation and tri-
fling literary achievements, knew how to dress expensively and
dance gracefully, but too often showed a basic ignorance of the
responsibilities and graces of a governing class. Deprived of
their anticipated revenge on the Puritans by the conciliatory
policies of Charles, the returned Cavaliers demonstrated their
superiority by practicing the unrestrained pleasures and decadent
graces learned in a court without real tradition, decorum, or
responsibility. Isolated from the rest of the kingdom by
temperament, education, and almost every aspect of history and
breeding, frustrated in their immediate expectations of revenge
and total political power, the court of Charles formed an exclu-
sive and restricted club which shared the common beliefs,
pleasures, and tastes learned in exile. In this respect, the
court cannot be called immoral: they were merely practicing
the learned responses which had been necessary to preserve the
glory --- indeed, the existence --- of an impoverished court in
exile. Scornful of the Puritans as the Royalists were, there
was little possibility that the Puritan-influenced tastes of the
general populace could exert more than a minimal influence upon
the riotous lives or elegant entertainments of the court. As we
shall see later, the aspirations and characteristics of the
Restoration court --- and its staunchly anti-Puritan ideals --- were of paramount importance to the lives and successes of the literary men who surrounded the new court.\(^2\)

Despite the animosity between Puritan and Royalist, neither side wished to provoke open political conflict. It has been said that, "the political problem par excellence in the second half of the seventeenth century was to avoid the recurrence of a second Civil War."\(^3\) If, however, we are to account for the later development of the Restoration court and its contemporary theatre, we must note that in this period the conflicts of the Royalist and Cavalier factions were sublimated to the social level, and that almost from the first day of the Restoration, the Puritan opposition to the court was violently, almost rabidly, opposed to the manners, morals, dress, and entertainments of the court. Not surprisingly, the courtiers delightedly antagonized their enemies by pursuing even more extreme fashions of dress and entertainment. The extant pamphlets of the "Country" chronicle the Puritan distaste for court manners,\(^4\) just as the theatrical works of the day reflect

\(^2\) See below, Chapter II.

\(^3\) Bateson, p. 28.

\(^4\) The minor genre of the "country" literature was a convention of title used to imply criticism of the "town" or court.
the scorn with which the Royalists viewed the Puritans.5

This opposition in social matters, so fundamental to understanding of the Restoration theatre, permeates the early years of Charles' reign. At first, the courtiers, unsure of their new position and uncertain of their power, attempted to fill their place in society with a gracious sense of responsibility. Their refinement, polished conversation, and gallant courtesy was considered a model of good taste and a pleasant relief from the coarser manners of the Puritan era. Within a few months, however, there occurred a great degeneration of court manners, and the key to the new style was the anti-Puritan sentiments of the Royalists. As the progressive reaction to Puritan influence set in, all that the Puritans had forbidden was actively pursued; where the Puritans, for example, had worn their hair short and banned elegant dress, the court chose to wear long wigs and magnificent apparel. Drinking, gambling, and obscenity became the mark of a gentleman.6 It became something of a "political duty" to break the Sumptuary Laws and the 1650

5 Wycherley writes in The Country Wife, "the country is as terrible, I find, to our English ladies, as a monastery to those abroad...." (Act IV, Sc. 1.). See also below, n. 12.

Act against adultery and fornication.\textsuperscript{7} Hundreds flocked to the court, the new source of power, and each new recruit attempted to ape his betters in order to convince the court of his loyalty. As Dryden wrote in \textit{The Wild Gallant}, "He has been a great fanatic formerly, and now has got a habit of swearing that he may be thought a cavalier."\textsuperscript{8} Opposition only served to anger the new nobles, and the court indulged itself in any manner which would irritate its enemies.\textsuperscript{9}

One sure way to antagonize the Puritans and please the court was to reopen the public playhouses, which had been closed almost completely through the Interregnum. Shortly after his return, Charles issued a royal patent to Thomas Killigrew and Sir William D'Avenant which empowered them to start two companies of players for the amusement of the court. These companies, the King's and the Duke of York's players, proved to be the most popular entertainments of Charles' court.

The newly-resurrected professional stage was completely dominated by the court and its hangers-on: the patrons demanded amusements which reflected their own small world --- and that is precisely what the Restoration theatre

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{7} Bateson, p. 28 \\
\textsuperscript{8} John Dryden, \textit{The Wild Gallant} (Act I, Sc. I.). \\
\textsuperscript{9} Beljame, \textit{Ibid}.
\end{flushright}
presented to them. As Samuel Johnson noted later:

The stage but echoes back the public voice;  
The drama's laws, the drama's patrons give,  
For we that live to please, must please to live.

More than any other contemporary institution or form of literary endeavor, the theatre reflected the tastes, ideas, and limitations of upper Restoration society. The audience of the drama was in London, and contained only those in London who belonged to the court or followed its precepts. 11 Some idea of the extent of the theatre's subservience to court tastes can be found in the large number of anti-Puritan plays produced by the London stage in the years of Charles' reign. 12

Subsequent changes in this new professional stage followed the pattern of the evolution in manners during the Royalist-Puritan social conflicts, and we might tentatively assign the same underlying cause for both reactions. When first the theatres reopened, they were caught completely unprepared for the new tastes of their new audience, and were, in fact,


12 A listing of a number of noted anti-Puritan plays of the period may be found in George Sampson's The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1961), pp. 417-418.
judging that audience by the standards of the "popular" audiences of the pre-Restoration era. In the first few years of Charles' reign, the theatres simply reverted to the stock plays of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and some few plays of D'Avenant which had been staged in the Commonwealth period. Nicoll has taken the extreme position of asserting that the comedies of Jonson and of Beaumont and Fletcher form the basis for almost all of the plays produced upon the stage from 1660 to 1700. Be this as it may, from the first it was obvious that the repertoire of the stage was sadly out of touch with the new currents of taste, and desperate experiments were made to find plays which would appeal to the new audience. Variety was given to stock pieces of the theatre by reworking the plots and modifying the characters and endings of favorite dramas. *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, was played as both a tragedy and a comedy on alternating nights.

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13 Beljame, p. 37.


15 The extent of the experimentation by the new theatre may be illustrated by the fact that in 1661 an interlude as hoary as *Tom Taylor and His Wife* was revived and adapted for the Restoration stage. Since there is no later reference to the play, it must be assumed that the revival was unsuccessful. See J.C. Ghosh, *Annals of English Literature* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 74.

16 Beljame, p. 38.
Upon the chaos of Restoration theatrical experimentation, the order of a four-fold classification has been imposed by one scholar: the types are known as the school of humors or satire, the school of manners, the school of romance comedy, and the school of Spanish intrigue. The first three of these classifications may be identified roughly with the influences of Jonson, Shirley, and Shakespeare, and represented the major forms of comic drama inherited from the Elizabethan era. None of these traditions of comic theatre was to satisfy the new court taste.

This early confusion of the theatre was an inherently unstable situation: it was inevitable that the King and his court, the only patrons of the theatre in the early 1660's, would mold their entertainments to their own taste. As a result of the favor of Charles and his court the theatres soon became a center of social and semi-political activity. The theatre was not only a place of recreation and assignation for the nobility, but attendance was a political necessity for the members of Parliament, officials of government, and other aspiring citizens who sought to identify themselves with the court. In actuality, the early Restoration stage was "Owned


and dominated by the court,19 and the point is well illustrated by the paternal influence of Charles:

Charles and his brother took more than a leisurely interest in the theatre: they frequently attended performances in order to insure their success, donated items from their own wardrobes for costumes, and found places for worthy playwrights at court. In some instances Charles even suggested the subjects of the plays, i.e. **The Adventures of Five Hours** by Sir Samuel Tuke.20

The predictable result of the domination of the stage by a small and powerful clique possessed of comparatively trivial literary taste and ability, would be a theatre of inferior quality and drama of questionable value. Such was the case in the early years of Charles' reign.21 In retrospect, it is apparent that nearly all of the valuable "Restoration" comedy (comedy generally ascribed to the period 1660-1700), was written by dramatic professionals. Only the dedicated men of the theatre were able to do what the great professional comic

---


20 Swarr, p. 60.

21 This seemingly over-generalized indictment of the literary ideals and taste of the court is introduced here as necessary for the following discussion of the development of the comedy of manners. The inferiority of court taste and the conflicts with Wycherley and other men of letters will be discussed in detail in Chapters II and V.
playwrights have always done: portray the foibles of their world in an enduring, satisfying, and eloquent form. The professional writers of Restoration comedy considered great in their own time --- Congreve, Wycherley, and a few others --- are largely those considered valuable today. On the other hand, three hundred years has not been enough time to redeem either the pompous or the servile followers of the superficial manners of the beau monde --- the hacks and the nobles of literary pretensions --- from deserved literary obscurity. Time has steadily diminished the reputations of men such as Shadwell, Sedley, and even Etherege, to the point where they are clearly recognized as secondary writers, important for historical, rather than dramatic reasons. The artistic independents --- those as likely to challenge or transmute the Restoration standards as follow their precepts --- were those who produced the enduring comedies of "manners," and these independents were nearly always professionals. This is a point too often missed by those who emphasize solely the influence of the court on the Restoration theatre, and fail to understand the tensions of that unstable world.

Among the professional playwrights who sought to strike the note of the new taste of the theatre-goers was John Dryden, who feverishly experimented with every imaginable dramatic form and situation in his attempts to please his
audience. In his early years Dryden attempted adaptations of farces written by Brome and Shirley; wrote tragi-comedies and heroic plays; based an opera on Milton's *Paradise Lost*; re-worked Shakespeare's *The Tempest* for the Restoration audience, and even modified works of Molière and Corneille for the plots of some of his works. Dryden's eventual success was no accident, for it has been said that Dryden aimed far more deliberately and conscientiously to hit new tastes and copy the new manners than any other man of his age. In 1663, he revived *The Wild Gallant*, which had failed in its first presentation. The hopeful "Prologue" appended to this new version is the best single description of the progressive changes in early Restoration theatre and society, and the best indicator of Dryden's own aims:

As some raw Squire, by tender Mother bred,
Till one and Twenty keeps his Maidenhead,
(Pleas'd with some Sport which he alone does find,
And thinks a secret to all Humane kind;)
Till mightily in Love, yet halfe afraid,
He first attempts the gentle Dairymaid;
Succeeding there, and led by the renown
Of Whetstones Park, he comes at length to Town
Where enter'd, by some School-fellow, or Friend,
He grows to break Glass-Windows in the end;
His valour too, which with the Watch began,
Proceeds to dwell, and he kills his Man,
By such degrees, while knowledge he did want,
Our unfletch'd Author, writ a *Wild Gallant*.

---

He thought him monstrous leud (I'll lay my Life)
Because suspected with his Landlord's Wife:
But since his knowledge of the Town began,
He thinks him now a very civil man;
And, much asham'd of what he was before,
Has fairly play'd him at three Wenches more.
'Tis some amends his frailties to confess;
Pray pardon him his want of wickedness;
He's towdayly, and will come on apace;
His frank confession shows he has some grace.
You balk'd him when he was a young beginner,
And almost spoil'd a very hopeful sinner:
But, if once more you slight his weak endeavor;
For ought I know, he may turn tailed for ever. 23

The open bawdiness of this prologue is amusing but not
important: what is important is that such verse could be
written to be recited upon the stage so soon after the Common-
wealth era. Dryden's avowed attempt here to please the taste of
the theatre-going audience is all the more significant in view
of the reputation of The Wild Gallant as the first successful—
if primitive --- comedy of manners in the Restoration proper. 24

23 John Dryden, The Dramatic Works of John Dryden
ed. by Montague Summers. (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1932),
p. 67.

24 Etherege is traditionally given the honor of being
the first true playwright of the comedy of manners, but this is
perhaps due to the distracting brilliance of his style rather
than to any historical necessity. Nicoll, in his History of
English Drama (Volume I, p. 194), declares that The Wild Gallant
represented, "a ... distinct tendency towards the later manners
school," while Joseph Wood Krutch, in his Comedy and Conscience
After the Restoration (New York: Columbia University Press,
1949), p. 8., declares that "Dryden's Wild Gallant has at least
as good a claim as any other play to be called the first Restora-
tion Comedy...." A detailed examination of the predecessors
and "firsts" of the comedy of manners may be found in the work
of Katherine M. Lynch, The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy
(New York: Macmillan and Co., 1926), a work valuable for its
If this is true, and Joseph Wood Krutch presents some very good arguments for the thesis, we might tentatively suggest that the real value of the Restoration court influence upon the stage was that it provided the setting and the inspiration for the professional dramatists to write works of literary value, rather than believing, as is usually proposed, that the Restoration comedies are important simply for their realistic

historical treatment of the development of the Restoration comedy. Miss Lynch's work demonstrates that the question of historical precedence is far more complex than simply assigning Etherege as the author of the first Restoration comedy. Yet even today, Hazlitt's opinion holds sway in the field: "The dawn," Hazlitt said, "was in Etherege, as its latest close was in Sheridan." (quoted in Ashley Thorndike's *English Comedy* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 294.)

In addition to the above footnote, we might cite again Krutch's work, pp. 6-19., for its statements on the subject of the originator of Restoration Comedy. I quote from his conclusion:

"One hesitates to give special importance to a play as universally neglected as "The Wild Gallant", but it seems clear that if the later form was substantially the same as the latter, then Dryden wrote the first Restoration Comedy. Nor should this conclusion be surprising, for Dryden showed no characteristic more marked than his ability to give the people what they wanted." (p. 17.)

"Etherege's claim to be the originator of Restoration comedy cannot rest on "Sir Fopling Flutter," which came too late, and must fall to the ground if based on his other plays, for they are but experiments." (pp. 18-19.)
portrayals of the life of the upper classes of the time. It took a professional --- Dryden --- to create for the court the first dramatic presentation of the Restoration social ideal, and professionals such as Wycherley and Congreve to take that dramatic form to its greatest height.

A year after Dryden staged The Wild Gallant in its revised form, "gentle" George Etherege presented to London The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub. Literary tradition holds that from the first, this play was recognized as a new and vital tradition of comedy, both original in form and designed to suit the new age:

Whether Sir George knew or not how original he was, his contemporaries realized it beyond question. They had not yet seen a comedy upon the English stage in the least resembling Love in a Tub; and immediately when they saw it they recognized it for an expression of themselves and their period for which they had unconsciously been waiting.

There is little evidence to support such a view. Pepys, seeing Love in a Tub for the first time, criticized the play for its shallowness and farcical humor:

26 The number of critics and commentators who interpret the Restoration Comedy as a mere realistic portrayal of their society or as a chronicle of historical interest, is myriad. See, for example, Thorndike, p. 235.; Krutch, p. 238.; Swarr, p. 2.

January 4, 1665. To "Love in a Tub," which is very merry, but only so by gesture, not wit at all, which methinks is beneath the Duke's House. 28

And yet, despite the disappointing early performances of Love in a Tub, the play eventually gave the Duke's house, "more reputation and profit than any preceding Comedy; the company taking in a month's time from it 1000L." 29 The play was to maintain this popularity throughout the remainder of the century, and into the next.

Etherege's second play premiered on February 6, 1668, and was a decided improvement upon Love in a Tub. The play, She Would If She Could, again displeased Pepys, and the poor performance disappointed both author and spectators; nonetheless, She Would If She Could represented a great advance in the comedy of manners form, and soon became a standard of the theatre. 30 Pepys' account of the premiere is both unique and interesting:

February 6, 1668. To the Duke of York's playhouse; where a new play of Etherege's called "She Would If She Could," and though I was there by two o'clock, there was a thousand people put back that could not have room in the pit;... but, Lord! how full

29 John Downes, Roscius Anglicanus; or A-Historical Review of the Stage From 1660 to 1706, quoted in Norman Holland's The First Modern Comedies (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 20.
was the house, and how silly the play, there being nothing in the world good in it, and few people pleased in it. The King was there ... The play being done, I into the pit ... There I found ... Sidly, and Etherege, the poet; the last of whom I did hear mightily find fault with the actors, that they were out of humor, and had not their parts perfect ... and so was mightily concerned; while all the rest did, through the whole pit, blame the play as a silly, dull thing, though there was something very roughish and witty; but the design of the play, and end, mighty insipid.31

The presence of the King and the general favor of the court were all that kept Etherege's second play from immediate obscurity. Shadwell, in his preface to The Humorists, attributed the popularity of the play, and indeed the very preservation of its existence, to the favors of the court, which protected its own.

She Would If She Could. I think, and have the authority of some of the best judges for it, is the best comedy that has been written since the reformation of the stage. And even that, for the imperfect representation of it at first received such prejudice that, had it not been for the favor of the court, in all probability it had never got up again ....32

It was common practice at this time for the members of the court to support without reserve any play written by a fellow courtier. Groups of the wits would band together to applaud a new play, and thus assure its success. Dennis describes the practice in graphic detail in his essay "The Decay

31 McAtee, p. 158.
32 Quoted in Palmer, p. 75.
and Defects of Dramatick Poetry."

There were several extraordinary men at Court who wanted neither Zeal nor Capacity, nor Authority to set... the audience right... There was Villiers Duke of Buckingham, Wilmot Earl of Rochester, the late Earl of Dorsett, the Earl of Mulgrave,... etc. When these or the majority of them Declard themselves upon any new Dramatick performance, the Town fell Immediately in with them, as the rest of the pack does with the eager cry of the staunch and the Trusty Beagles. When the Town too lightly gave their applause, to Half a Dozen Romantic, Ryning, whining Blustering Tragedies, allured by their novelty and by their glare, then Villiers Duke of Buckingham writt the Rehearsall, which in a little time opend their eyes, and taught them to Despise what before They rashly admird.33

Further indication of the extent to which the court supported the new playwright (perhaps undeservedly), can be found in the Theatrum Poetarum Anglicanorum, published in 1675. While Etherege was changing theatrical tastes, while he was pleasing the court -- and being supported for his pains -- more professional critics and theatrical historians did not accord him the praise which he received from his friends. The Theatrum Poetarum Anglicanorum, a play-list and collection of biographical and critical dramatic sketches, describes Etherege thusly:

George Etheridge, a comical writer of the present age, whose two comedies, Love in a Tub, and She Would

If She Could, for pleasant wit, and no bad economy, are judged not unworthy of the applause they have met with.  

To demonstrate that this conciliatory but certainly unenthusiastic appreciation of Etherege is not simply typical of the style of the *Theatrum Poetarum* we might note that the author waxes eloquent over other dramatists, lauding and even defending their works. John Dryden, for example, is highly praised:

John Dryden, Poet-Laureat, and Historiographer to his present Majesty, with whom such hath been the approbation and acceptance his poetry hath received, especially what he hath written of dramatic, with wonderful success to the Theatre Royal: viz. Comedies.... and two Parts of *The Conquest of Granada*; in which if he have indulged a little too much in the French way of continual rhyme... I am apt to impute it rather to his complying with the modified and gallantish humour of the times, than to his own well examined judgment.

From 1667 to 1675, Etherege produced no plays for the stage; court positions and court pleasures occupied most of his time, and the sobriquet "Easy" Etherege is as indicative of his force of character as any term could be.  

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36 Etherege was known to his contemporaries as one of the most languid of men. Rochester, in "a Session of the Poets"
gap stepped William Wycherley, who from 1671 to 1676 ran his "brief and astounding" career as a comic dramatist. Wycherley had learned from the experiments of Etherege, and his early works, Love in a Wood (1671) and The Gentleman Dancing-Master (1672), while patently works of apprenticeship, are surprisingly good; better than say, Love in a Tub. Love in a Wood, a polished, if trivial comedy of wit and manners, was well received, and formed the basis of Wycherley's career at court; the significance of its reception will be examined in detail in Chapter III. Of more immediate interest here is the disastrous failure of The Gentleman Dancing-Master in 1672, for this play was better than its predecessor; it was more economical, witty, and topical. Its failure was a puzzle to its author, and continues to perplex modern commentators.


"...Apollo, had got gentle George, in his Eye,
And Frankly confess, of all Men that writ,
There's none had more fancy, sense Judgment and Wit.
But th' crying Sin, idleness, he was so harden'd,
That his long Seav'n years silence was not to be parioned."

37 Krutch, p. 21.

Wycherley himself, in the "Prologue" to *The Country Wife*, describes himself as "the late so bafled Scribler:"

Poets, like Cudgel'd Bullies, never do
At first, or second blow, submit to you;
But will provoke you still, and ne'er have done,
Till you are weary first, with laying on;
The late so bafled Scribler of this day,
Though he stands trembling, bids me boldly say,
What we before most Playes arc us'd to do,
For Poets out of fear, first draw on you.\textsuperscript{39}

It is doubtful that the fearfulness expressed here by the author was feigned or conventional: the fate of Wycherley who had no income of his own, hung by the slender thread of the social prestige and patronage granted him by the court. If his reputation as a wit and poet failed, so would his income.

We have noted repeatedly that the court rewarded those who flattered its tastes and manners on the stage; in the case of *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, we have a chance to determine the results of neglect by the court. When the play was first presented upon the stage, England was in the midst of one of the interminable wars with the Dutch which occurred throughout Charles' reign. It was fashionable at that time for the "sparks" and young gallants to prove their loyalty and courage

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. Volume II, p. 9.
by going to sea in defense of their country, and as a result, the pits were empty of nobles, and the "cits" or commoners composed the audiences of the theatres. The "Epilogue" of The Gentleman Dancing-Master coyly observes:

You good men o' th' Exchange, on whom alone
We must depend, when Sparks to Sea are gone;
Into the Pit already you are come,
'Tis but a step more to our Tyring room;
Where none of us but will be wondrous sweet
Upon an able Lover of Lumber-street:

.................................................................

And since all Gentleman must pack to Sea,
Our Gallants and our Judges you must be;
We therefore, and our Poet, do submit
To all the Chamlet Cloaks now i' the Pit.40

The play itself was quite obviously written for the court and the nobility; not a single theme or feature of the play seems designed to appeal to the merchant or citizen class. Having written the play, Wycherley perhaps did not imagine that the citizens would give a comedy of wit a reception far different from that given by the courtiers. In any event, Wycherley made every effort to place his comedy on the stage as soon as possible. The company of the Theatre Royal, which had already rehearsed his new play, was burned out of their theatre; rather than wait a few months for the company to

reform, Wycherley gave the play to the Duke's Company at Dorset Gardens for immediate presentation.\textsuperscript{41} 

The new play was anything but appealing to the audience of commoners. The flattery of the citizens in the Prologue and Epilogue is unctuous but insincere: its contrast with the text must have been painfully obvious to the audience, and a sharp-eared play-goer may well have detected a note of ironic scorn in both addresses:

\begin{quote}
You we had rather see between our Scenes, 
Than spend-thrift Fops with better Cloaths and meens; 
.................................................................
For you are fair and square in all your dealings, 
You never cheat your Doxies with gilt shillings; 
You ne'er will break our Windows, then you are 
Fit to make love, while our Houzaas make War.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

The result was catastrophic for Wycherley. John Downes, the barely-literate prompter who later wrote his memoirs, reminisced over \textit{The Gentleman Dancing-Master}: "Wrote by Mr. Wycherly, it lasted but six days, being like't but indifferently; it was laid by to make room for other new ones."\textsuperscript{43} The comedy of manners clearly could not survive without the court.

\textsuperscript{41} Summers, Volume I, pp. 152-153 \textit{et passim}. 
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid. p. 233. 
After this brief pause in the development of Restoration comedy, the form proceeded to new heights. The first high point of the comedy of manners came in the years 1675-1676, when three of the greatest comedies of the period were produced. Etherege's *The Man of Mode*, Wycherley's *The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer*, saw their premieres, producing so electric an effect upon their audiences that this short period has been called the "annus mirabilis" of the Restoration theatre.44 After these plays were produced the first great period of the Restoration comedy of manners would end.

*The Man of Mode* or *Sir Fopling Flutter* is undoubtedly Etherege's best work, and the finest "pure" comedy of manners. It followed precisely the strictures and precepts of court life and manner, and has been called the "clearest expression of the comic spirit which directed laughter at aberrations of taste."45 The Man of Mode was an enormous success, for the casual wit and negligent manner in the character of Dorimant was not only a portrait of a rake in the grand manner, it was distinctly approved by the Restoration court.46 But while *The Man of Mode* may be the finest model of the Restoration ideal, while *Sir

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44 Van Lennep, cxxv.
45 Bredvold, p. 28.
Popling Flutter may well be "par excellence Etherege's crowning achievement in satire." Etherege had taken to the extreme limit a basically limited theory of conduct; after his last play, no comedy of manners would be written for fifteen years.

The plays of Etherege, although linked strongly to the fine manners of the Restoration court, have about them an unreal, detached quality. Steele saw the parallels between court manners and comic manners in Etherege's major work, yet commented: "I allow it to be Nature, but it is Nature in its utmost Corruption and Degeneracy." Even Dennis, in defending Etherege against Steele's attack, tacitly admitted that Etherege was only an imitator of society, and that The Man of Mode had "no great Mastership in the Design of it." Independent and coherent design is one of the prerequisites for enduring drama; in literature it is one of the factors which distinguish the true

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48 Ibid.


creators from the mere compliers and imitators, and men such as
Etherege simply did not have the objectivity with which to sur-
pass the outer forms of their society and create original works
of literary merit. As Professor Sutherland has put it,

...for Etherege, as for ... other comic dramatists
of the period, the fashionable world was the only world,
and the frivolous, intriguing, leisured life of Restora-
tion society was ultimately the only good life. They
might ridicule aberrations and eccentricities, or
excess and deficiencies in their own class,... but they
had no real quarrel, other than occasional boredom,
with that world of which they were the leading ornaments,
and which they mirrored with such amusement in their
comedies.51

Etherege, never going beyond the surface manners and
wit of his society, relegated himself to the status of a minor
author. Never having transcended the values of Restoration
society, he can only be judged in relation to those frivolous
values, and his works will always look trivial when contrasted
to the real world:

Etherege is no real satirist, but largely a banterer;
his satire stops really with the kind of people-fops
and the like --- who, merely by existing satirize them-
selves. His wit is never very searching or brilliant,
only quick, easy, and well turned.52

51 James Sutherland, English Satire (Cambridge: Cambridge

52 Louis Kronenberger, The Thread of Laughter (New York:
While Etherege was producing his delicate and insubstantial bits of froth for the stage, William Wycherley was expanding his art beyond Restoration horizons. While *The Man of Mode*, written after Wycherley's two major works, still "treats cleverness as the ultimate virtue," Wycherley's later plays have been acclaimed for the incisiveness with which they pierced the facade of manners in the Restoration society. Wycherley's earlier works had had gilding of fashion too, but as he began to slip away from the influence of the court, his comedies became more sensitively ironic and satiric; one of his plays, *The Plain Dealer*, can even be interpreted as pointedly anti-Restoration in tone. This spark of independence, of human sympathy, sets Wycherley far above the other early writers of Restoration comedy, including Etherege. While Etherege is praised for his wit and polish, every important critic of the Restoration professes to find a substantial difference between the later works of Wycherley and the works of Etherege.  

Neither the morality of Restoration society nor the eloquence

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53 Holland, p. 50.

54 The modern reputation of Wycherley and Etherege may be said to be encapsulated in Leigh Hunt's comparison: "Etherege was the "dandy" of the prose drama, and Wycherley the first man..."brawny" in his step." (In The Dramatic Works of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar /London: George Routledge and sons, 1866/, xvi.)
of the various playwrights is the issue here; it is clearly a matter of the artist transcending — as all great artists must — the forms and manners of his own age:

Etherege is clearly a minor writer, Wycherley essentially is not. Wycherley...cannot, like Etherege, keep life under tissue paper in a bandbox; he cannot even keep life inside a drawing room or the confines of a park.55

Having generally outlined the early evolution of the manners comedies, we will now turn to the basic sources and tenets of this form in order to attempt some definition of the comedy of manners.

A change in basic theatrical forms had followed the accession of the Stuarts; the theatres had ceased to instruct and became centers of amusement for the upper class. The Puritans of the time noted the change, and were enraged by the elaborate masques of James and the theatrical extravagances of Charles I.56 One of the chief offenders of this period was strong-minded Henrietta Maria, sister of Louis XIII, ruler of France, and wife of Charles I. Henrietta Maria had brought to England préciosité, a form of literary and social platonism she learned in the salon of the Marquise de Rambouillet.57 Préciosité, in its early form, was a serious

56 Swarr, p. 5.
57 Lynch, p. 43.
and intelligent movement for the refinement of French speech and manners, but later lapsed into a mere elaborate ritual of etiquette. Through subtle patronage and open encouragement, Henrietta Maria influenced William D'Avenant and others to produce literary works which inculcated the new philosophy of manners, and for a time, this foreign code became quite the fashion in the English court.

The literary works which were produced espousing the newly-imported fashion had unusual characteristics: emphasis was placed upon courtly manner, wit, elegance in conversation, and a liberal attitude towards relations between the two sexes. The similarities between the Restoration comedies and the


59 Lynch, pp. 43,46,48. Thomas H. Fujimura, in his work The Restoration Comedy of Wit (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 17, notes that this movement encompassed the Continent, and was bound to influence the exiled court, both through tradition and external influence:

"The Restoration interest in wit represents the last phase of a continental movement which appeared as Marinism in Italy, Gongorism in Spain, and la préciosité in France. In England, this movement had earlier affected the work not only of John Lyly but of the metaphysical poets, and its influence continued to be felt as late as the Restoration."
earlier literary works produced under the influence of préciosité is such, that it must be concluded that an earlier French influence shaped, and indeed, made possible Restoration comedy. Interestingly enough, the scholar who has done most to clarify this field of research, Katherine Lynch, considers Etherege's plays models of préciosité, while the later plays of William Wycherley she considers distinctly outside the pattern.

It is impossible to determine to what extent préciosité was cultivated in the exiled court during the Interregnum because of the meager accounts which are available. But knowing Henrietta Maria's dominant personality and her position at court, we can conclude that Charles was probably well-versed in his mother's concept of manners.

Beresby admired the queen at all times and was impressed by "the influence she had over the king," her son. Surely we are justified in assuming that such a queen could continue to direct and inspire the poets and dramatists who were still her loyal subjects.

60 Ibid. p. 94. The similarity between the two modes of court conduct and literary fashion was so marked that the Duchess of Newcastle would say, "Wit was only banished with the Cavaliers; but now it is returned home." Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. The Sociable Companions II, iv. p. 38, quoted in Lynch, p. 126.


62 Ibid. pp. 119-120.
The importance of the investigations made by Lynch and Wilcox into the pre-Restoration influence of the précieuse movement may be shown by their conclusion: by 1660, not only were the King and his court probably immersed in the précieuse tradition, but the earlier influence of that tradition by then had, "grown... firmly into English comic tradition." This is the only satisfactory explanation for the pride the Restoration playwrights and critics took in their drama, even while they filched their plays from others; to some extent, the playwrights were probably unaware of the degree to which they were indebted to the French.

From 1660 to 1700, despite the large numbers of borrowings taken from other courtiers, the English writers paradoxically prided themselves upon the originality and uniqueness of their dramatic works, and especially, upon their witty techniques and style. While it is certainly natural that a

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63 Ibid. p. 181.

64 The borrowings were chiefly French, and chiefly from Moliere. John Wilcox, in his authoritative work The Relation of Moliere to Restoration Drama, (cited above, n. 55) emphasizes throughout that Moliere's influence has been vastly over-rated. He does suggest, however, that one play in ten, or a total of 199 plays written in post-Restoration England, were influenced by Moliere (pp. 190-191). The lines of influence are difficult to trace, however, since no editions or translations of Moliere's plays were printed in England before 1700, nor is there any record of Moliere's plays being staged publicly before the early Eighteenth century. The "calendar of Plays Acted at Court," in Eleanor Boswell's The Restoration Court Stage (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), pp. 278f., indicates that French entertainers played at Whitehall, but we have
court newly-returned from exile in France, imbued with the spirit of préciosité, and looking to France as the seat of fashionable culture should be influenced by French drama, it is equally understandable that the new court should take a nationalistic pride in the English theatre and pride in its own influence in that sphere. Shadwell, to take one of the most extreme examples, would write in The Miser.

The Foundation of this Play I took from one of Molière's call'd L'Avare; but that having too few Persons, and too little Action for an English Theatre.

no indication of what plays might have been presented. At the same time, many courtiers went to France and spoke the language well; these would have seen Molière's plays on the French stage itself. Since, however, many were mere pretenders to the language, we can only say that Molière's direct influence was large, untraceable and in substance rather than spirit. (See Wilcox, pp. 23, 113.) Wilcox notes that, "....everyone agrees, Molière's work was in a different spirit /from that of Restoration Comedy/" (p. 195). See also Van Lennep, cxxiv-cxxv, Nicoll's Restoration Drama, pp. 186-190., and Bredvold's comment on the French influence:

"English playwrights frequently borrowed characters and incidents from the French, but the fine art and essential spirit of Corneille, Racine, and Molière never crossed the English channel." (p. 26).

Clarifying comments by Dennis and others may be found in Hooker, Volume I, p. 224; Van Lennep, cxxiv-cxxv; Nicoll, Restoration Drama, pp. 186-190, and Brett-Smith's article in Loftis, p. 47.
I added to both so much that I may call more than half of this Play my own, and I think I may say without Vanity, that Molière's Part of it has not suffer'd in my Hands; nor did I ever know a French Comedy made use of by the worst of our Poets, that was not better'd by 'em. "Tis not Barrenness of Wit or Invention, that makes us borrow from the French, but Laziness.65

Shadwell's oft-quoted preface, considered today rather ungrateful and presumptuous, contains an attitude towards French dramatic works generally current in his own time.66 A large body of critical commentary in the period 1660-1700 illustrates

65 The Works of Thomas Shadwell Esq. (London: n.p., 1720), Volume III, p. 7. In the same place Shadwell notes that in French drama:

"....true Wit's as rarely found
As mines of Silver are in English Ground."

66 Wilcox, p. 65. For sheer presumption, we have the much better example of Flecknoe, who wrote in his Preface to The Damoselles A La Mode:

"This Comedy is taken out of several Excellent Pieces of Moliere. The main plot of the Damoselles out of his Pretieuse's Ridiculees; the Counterplot of Scaparelle... all which like so many Pretieuse stones, I have brought out of France; and as a Lapidary set in one Jewel to adorn our English Stage. ...I have not only done like one who makes posie out of divers flowers in which he has nothing of his own... but like the Bee, have extracted the spirit of them into a certain Quintessence of mine own."

(Quoted in Summers' Playhouse of Pepys, pp. 210-211.) Summers tartly comments on Flecknoe's assertion: "The result of this Bee's labour is the sorriest amalgam that ever called itself a comedy. Even Molière is lost when strained through Flecknoe's collander."
the conflict between advocates of French and English drama, and the pride which the critics and court took in the avowedly "original" adaptations and modifications of the French theatre. The motivation for this rationalizing was undoubtedly patriotic, for many other English writers saw the conflict, and resolved it in favor of their native theatre:

George Villiers, Duke of Buckinghamshire:

...I will grant that the English Comedy is superior to that of France; but this concession reaches no farther than Ben Johnson, Shadwell, Wycherley, and some other comic poets of the first magnitude.67

John Dennis:

England has certainly produced great Men in every part of Learning. But that Branch of it, which did most Honour to Greece and to Ancient Rome, has likewise done most to England. ...Our Comick Poets have surpass'd Mankind. We have had eight-Gentlemen* alive at a Time, who have writ good and diverting Comedies.

*Mr. W., Mr. Dryden, Sir George Etherege, The late Duke of Buckingham, Mr. Shadwell, Mr. Crown, Mr. Otway, Sir Robert Howard.68

Perhaps because of this nationalistic fervor, the highest praise which could be given to the greatest practitioner of the "pure" comedy of manners was that its author was original:


68 John Dennis, "Remarks upon Pope's Homer," in Hooker, Vol. I, p. 120. The most obvious example of this defense of native English theatre in the Restoration period is Dryden's Essay of Dramatick Poesie, too well known to require citation here. Further quotations on the subject by Roscommon, Dryden, Echard, Gildon, Oldmixon, and others, are noted on p. 445 of Hooker's text. The rise of Nationalism and patriotic fervor in England in the post-Restoration period drew many writers to this topic.
Etherege's early reputation was built upon this basis. Rochester, while praising Shakespeare and Jonson, felt it necessary to add:

Whom refin'd E... copies not at all, But is himself a sheer Original.69

Shadwell, despite his adherence to the Jonsonian concept of "humors," declared that,

Frolick and Cockwood yet were good and new.70

Even Dryden, who showed no great respect for Etherege or his works, faintly approved of what he thought was Etherege's originality in satirizing fops:

Most modern wits such monstrous fools have shown, They seemed not of heaven's making, but their own. / yet/.......................................................... Something of man must be exposed to view, That, gallants, they may more resemble you.71

For a destitute court in exile trained in the niceties of courtly manners and the precieuse tradition, but without the wealth and power which were its due, sheer quickness of wit and elegance of manner had been a means of maintaining a pretense of intellectual superiority. As a mechanism of defense --- a "face-saving" device, if you will --- the court had chosen to cultivate a certain image, based upon the only resources at its

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70 Quoted by H.F.B. Brett-Smith in his article "Sir George Etherege", in Loftis, pp. 44-45.

71 Quoted in Palmer, p. 83.
command. Presumably the members of the court, in following the gracious tradition established by Sidney, Raleigh, and other noble men of letters, unconsciously felt that the nobility remained superior to all others in the intellectual literary graces. As we shall see in the next chapter, the court, faced with an aggressive host of professional imitators, would be proven wrong in their assumption; pure wit was neither the preserve of the nobility, nor, in the last analysis, a very valuable criterion of literary worth.

Wit, the central standard of the court in exile, had served not only as a means of amusement, but as a status symbol, means of political and social advancement, and general standard of value. Even after the Restoration, so long as the court remained isolated from the rest of the nation, the "wit" of a man would serve to place him in the social scale, the "pecking-order" of the tiny world of the court.72

72 It is interesting to note that Charles was considered by his contemporaries the chief "wit" of the Restoration, while his closest friends and confidants also attained the reputation of major "wits". See Eleanor Boswell's The Restoration Court Stage, previously cited, for detailed examples of the great extent to which the court produced and supported plays written by court members. Plays of almost negligible value were acclaimed at Whitehall, and even achieved popularity, because they came from within the confines of the "witty" court circle. See also J.H.Wilson, The Court Wits of the Restoration (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 155. "The 1670's were the years of the major development of the comedy of manners, were the years of the Wits' greatest influence on the Restoration theatre, and of their greatest productivity...."
point of view, we can see that wit was originally a social index for the aristocracy, and that many of the Restoration comedies were written solely to publicize the "wit" of a noble author. Charles Sedley's *Mulberry Garden*, for example, was considered disappointing by the court because it did not truly illustrate the wit of its author.73 Dryden, keenly aware of the facts of the literary and social world, observed that Etherege wrote with the same purpose in mind:

Let gentle George in Triumph tred the Stage,
Make Dorimant betray, and Loveit rage,
Let Cully, Cockwood, Fopling Charm the Pit,
And in their folly shew their Writers wit.74

The comedy of manners, then, in its early Restoration form, was a dramatization of the social standards and ideals of the Restoration period, and frequently was written by members of the court who attempted to gain prestige by illustrating their adeptness in the court standards of wit and manners. This observation obviates the conclusion that the Restoration stage was merely a realistic imitation of the Restoration world; it was a stylized, idealized, dramatic presentation of the Restoration standards of conduct.75 The keynote to Restoration court

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73 Connely, p. 59.
75 This concept is surely not new; it was first advanced in attenuated form by Harley Granville-Barker, who noted that Wycherley, "deliberately or instinctively" tried to please the court by making the attitudes of his plays accord "quite perfectly with the rakes' conceit of themselves." *(On Dramatic Method* London: Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., 1931, p. 116.)
society was its homogeneity, its conformity to a unique pattern of conduct: when the Restoration dramatist sought to correct aberrations of taste, he set forth the social ideals of the court rather than the code of conduct of the rest of the nation. Thus one of the functions of the Restoration stage was to teach the court ideal, as well as to delight its audiences.76 The theatre taught both the new taste and the new manners; in the playhouses a wit could stand upon a bench and display his finery and elegance while combing his hair, or he could have his play presented upon the stage itself, and display his fine taste and personal acuity.

A more modern and complete exposition of this view is to be found in E.C. Stoll's "The 'Beau Monde' at the Restoration," Modern Languages Notes, XLIX (November, 1934), 425-432. Stoll describes the "literary ideal" of the comic dramatists of the early Restoration period as a support and reinforcement to the "self-image" of the court. John Harold Wilson advances a similar opinion in The Court Wits of the Restoration, p. 164:

"Here is no question of realism; Etherege seized upon and embodied in his plays not the real, day by day life of Whitehall, but the life which Whitehall was pleased to imagine it led. Individual items may be factual, but the total picture is a comic illusion."

76 See Bredvold, p. 28; and Bartholow Crawford, "High Comedy in Terms of Restoration Practice," Philological Quarterly, VIII (October, 1929), 339-347.
The early Comedy of Manners, in the light of these observations, may be described as the dramatic representation of the social ideals of the court of Charles II, which center on wit and conversational skill, and are imbued with the manners and intellectual concepts of that society. This approach may

77 I will not attempt a definition of "wit" here. One of the theses of Fujimura, in his work The Restoration Comedy of Wit, is that a complete definition of wit which would suit all the comedies of manners would be impossible. He notes that "wit is a very comprehensive and ambiguous term [in this period] and...contradictory in its implications." (p. 38.) Fujimura's analysis of the topic is very complete, and I do not feel that I can improve upon it. Swarr notes, (p. 14.) that, "The definitions of 'wit' varied, ranging from mere 'pleasantry' to 'sharpness of conceit' or 'a perfect blend of fancy and judgment,'...defined by Dryden as 'a propriety of thoughts and words ...elegantly adapted to the subject.' If it is necessary to choose one of these, I would suggest "sharpness of conceit" as the best description of the Restoration dramatic concept of "wit".

78 This description is much more restrictive than the ordinary definition given by Restoration scholars. Since I am concerned with only the early comedy of manners, I have felt no obligation to define my subject by its intellectual content or to attempt to include all the later varieties of that form. This approach has a precedent: Fujimura's definition of the comedy of manners was obtained by inductive rather than deductive means, yet also emphasizes technique:

"The comedy of manners, then, is the laughable born of the inability of men to conform to an artificial social standard...or of excessive attempts at conformity so successful that the individual loses his human elasticity (in a Bergsonian sense)." (p. 5.) Fujimura places such emphasis upon the value of the standard "wit" in Restoration comedy that he prefers to call that form the "Comedy of wit", rather than "comedy of manners." Precedents for considering the two periods of Restoration comedy as separate eras may be found in Nicoll's History, Vol. I, p.195, and in Van Lennep, cxxv. I have avoided discussion of the later period of manners drama because, in my opinion, it possesses characteristics which differ from the earlier form.
appear somewhat circuitous from the point of view of dramatic appreciation and analysis, but for the purpose of a social, historical, and biographical examination of Wycherley's drama, we will find that our description will grant certain advantages of perspective, by drawing attention to the historical relativity of the term.79

79 Note that both the literary and social concepts of "manners" in the Restoration sense, have meanings entirely different from the modern use of the term. "A Manner?" queries Cynthia in the Double Dealer, "What's that Madam?" Lady Froth replies, "Some distinguishing Quality, as for example, the Bel-air or Brilliant of Mr. Brisk...or something of his own, that should look a little Jene-scay-quoys." (Quoted in Nicoll, A History of English Drama Volume I, p. 196.) The concept of "manner" in this period seems very close to the concept of "humor" as used by Jonson. This is hardly an accident; G.G. Falle, in his work Three Restoration Comedies (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), p.7., notes that, "the Jonsonian "comedy of Humors of the early seventeenth century did much to disturb the continuity of the comedy of manners tradition, and...to modify it when it reappeared in Etherege." Dryden defined "manners" in an indicative fashion:

"The manners, in a poem, are understood to be those inclinations, whether natural or acquired, which move and carry us to actions, good, bad, or indifferent in a play; or which incline the persons to such or such actions.... From the manners the characters of persons are derived; for, indeed, the characters are no other than the inclinations, as they appear in the several persons of the poem; a character being thus defined, --- that which distinguishes one man from another."

We have now filled in much of the background necessary for a study of Wycherley in his milieu; we have only to take up a few problems peculiar to the Restoration court and its men of letters but largely untreated in the scholarly literature. If this approach to Wycherley seems languid and roundabout, it must be noted that the connection between Restoration comedy and Restoration manners is exceedingly close: more than perhaps any other period in English history, we require a knowledge of contemporary allusions and ideas in order to understand its literature. Voltaire, an exceedingly bold and keen appreciator of Restoration drama in an age which had no taste for it, offered these suggestions to French students of the Restoration theatre: If you have a mind to understand the English Comedy, of the Restoration and early Eighteenth century, the only way to do this will be for you to go to England, to spend three years in London, to make your self Master of the English Tongue, and to frequent the Play-houses every Night. ... True Comedy is the speaking Picture of the Follies and ridiculous Foibles of a Nation; so that he only is able to judge of the Painting, who is perfectly acquainted with the People it represents. 81

80 Voltaire understood the Restoration spirit, and had a special love for Restoration comedy. In 1747 he attempted to adapt a version of The Plain Dealer for the French stage --- an exceedingly bold enterprise in light of the fact that Moliere was Wycherley's source for that play. The play itself is dull, but Voltaire's general criticism of Restoration drama found in Letters Concerning the English Nation (London: C. Davis, 1733), is still of value.

81 Voltaire, pp. 190-191.
For those critics who have apparently attempted to discourage others from the study of Restoration comedy on moral and other non-literary grounds, we can only express amusement at their poverty of judgment: to condemn an entire period on the basis of the escapades of a comparative few, to accuse an entire generation of comic creators because they do not share our sentiments, manners, or even our morals, can only be called poor history, poor scholarship, poor dramatic appreciation, and even, poor morals. In the twenty-five years of the reign of Charles II, there existed a small segment of society which conformed strictly to a rigid and unique code of conduct, and dramatized its code in the theatre. In so doing, that society produced a form of comic drama so unique that it forms a class entirely to

82 The most noted irrational condemnations of Restoration comedy in our century have come from Joseph Wood Krutch and William Archer. Inasmuch as Archer's work, The Old Drama And The New (London: Wm. Heinemann Ltd., 1923), is the more extreme example, I will briefly quote it here:

"The very essence of social comedy is to present a certain criticism of life. Restoration comedy acutely realises this: it is full to overflowing of sententious generalizations of a sort of perverted, would-be morality. And its criticism of life, whether explicit or implied in action, is stupid, nauseous, and abominable beyond anything else that can be found in the world's dramatic literature. If this be thought too sweeping, let me say: beyond anything of which the rumour has reached me." (p. 173.)
itself, and is eminently worthy of study. The age was a revolutionary one, and its drama proportionally bold; it is doubtful whether, even if the men and women of the Restoration knew they were to be condemned by entire centuries of critics, that the people would have lived, or the dramas been presented, any differently. To those who disapprove of Restoration comedy we can only repeat the self-assured words of Hippolyta in Wycherley's play The Gentleman Dancing-Master:

Come, Come, do not blaspheme this masquerading Age like an ill-bred City Dame...; by what I've heard, 'tis a pleasant-well-bred-complacent-free-frolick-good-natur'd-pretty-Age; and if you do not like it, leave it to us that do. 83

83 The Gentleman Dancing-Master, Act I, sc. 1.
CHAPTER II

In the last chapter, we discussed the general influence of the court of Charles upon the Restoration stage, and the resultant rise of the comedy of manners. Here we shall examine the relations of the court to the stage and the effect of a degenerating patronage system upon the dramatists and theatrical professionals of the time.

Wit and verbal polish --- the central standard of the court society --- had been the distinguishing mark of worth in the exiled court.\(^1\) After the Restoration, the court had continued to use this standard of social value, unaware that it was a completely arbitrary criterion, and irrelevant in the social system of the restored court. "Wit, ... with King Charles come home again, was the order of the day."\(^2\)

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1 See above, p. 35f.

2 Granville-Barker, p. 129.
The weakness of "wit" as a medium of social currency was that it was too easily counterfeited. In theory, only the nobility, and presumably, only those who had been in exile, should be sufficiently adept at the bon mot and the keen similite; in practice, the very opposite was true. So long as "wit" was the standard which determined one's position in the new society, brilliant commoners pursued that standard. Friction was inevitable: the court, languid in the pursuit of any goal, could not compete with ambitious young men. Still, the court did its best to restrict membership in the society of "wits" to its own class:

The great lords considered wit and taste as the prerogative of birth; every author who bore an honoured name had a claim to their admiration or at least to their tolerance. ....A commoner who dared to meddle in the writing business was looked on with another eye; there was no need to spare his feelings. You must note in the many verses Rochester devotes to ordering literature..., the very different tone in which he speaks of writers who are well-born and of those who are not. The plebs had to sue for permission to be witty.3

While the court pursued the ideal of "wit", its members were hampered by the restriction that they could not labor in an unseemly manner, and once the theatre assimilated the new

3 Beljame, p. 70. Beljame's work, Men of Letters and The English Public In The Eighteenth Century, is somewhat dated, (first printed in 1888), but remains the major, indeed perhaps the only work of substantial value on the subject of the patronage system in the early Restoration period. I shall quote it frequently in this chapter.
standard of wit, and dedicated professionals entered the field, the august court circle could no longer compete. The courtier of Charles’ circle was obliged to show nonchalance in the pursuit of any task; this requisite form of conduct was both the courtiers’ chief affectation and their principal encumbrance. The commoners, on the other hand, were under no similar restraint; it was necessary for them to toil for their bread, and toil they did. Often they would imitate the languid nonchalance of the court when presenting their plays, but in reality they were in deadly earnest.

It is perhaps more clear now how the function of the theatre evolved in the Restoration world. In the first few years, the playhouse had served as show-place for the nobility, meeting-house, and place of entertainment. As the professional, more capable men of letters grasped the new code of conduct and began to dramatize it, the theatre became a show-case for

4 Wilcox, p. 195.

5 Wilcox, pp. 76-77, cites examples which show that a number of authors openly imitated the insouciance of the courtiers when writing their prefaces:

“Ravenscroft affirms that ‘A fortnights sickness did this Play produce,’ ...while Payne pretends that The Morning Ramble..... cost him but ‘nine days work.’”
the new ideals, and a classroom for the lesser followers of the courts. Still later in time was the final change in the Restoration theatre: the nobility, bested on their own grounds by professionals, would largely abandon the theatre to its own devices, and the commoners would again dominate the stage.

The height of the predominance of wit as a theatrical and social standard occurred roughly between the years 1668 and 1677. In 1672, the standard of wit so dominated the stage that Dryden would compare his age to that of Jonson in this manner:

"Wit's now arrived to a more high degree,
Our native language more refin'd and free
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit,
In conversation, than those poets writ." 6

The influence of the theatre in this period was large, for part of its function now was to dramatize the new ideal and teach it to the hangers-on who followed the court — what Joseph Wood Krutch has called "giving instruction in worldly wisdom." 7 Steele, who later sought to moderate the influence of this form of wit, noted the continuing influence of the theatre in the propagation of "wit" as a standard:

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7 Krutch, p. 238.
The Seat of Wit, when one speaks as a Man of the Town and the World, is the Playhouse. The Application of Wit in the Theatre has as strong an Effect upon the Manners of our Gentlemen, as the Taste of it has upon the writings of our Authors.

At the same time, despite the influence of wit as a standard in the Restoration theatre and court, a number of authors and critics suspected that "wit" was inappropriate as an enduring standard of literary value. Throughout the period 1668-1677 flowed an undercurrent of criticism of the new values of the stage. Unlike earlier criticism of the playhouses, this criticism was coherent and rational, and often was penned by the most capable literary figures. Dryden, for example, while following the new fashion in the theatre, had not made the mistake of believing that it was of great dramatic value. He wrote in one prologue:

....blame your Selves, not him who Writ the Play; Though his Plot's Dull, as can be well desir'd Wit stiff as any you have e'r admired; He's bound to please, not to write well, And knows, There is a mode in Plays as well as Cloaths:

As the period wore on, more and more fashionable extremes of wit, similitude, and verbal polish were practiced by the

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8 "The Spectator, No. 65," (May 15, 1711), in Wright, p. 246.
court and the theatre. In reaction to these extremes, we have the recorded complaints of Pepys, Evelyn, and the anonymous author of *Railerie a la Mode*,¹⁰ all opposed to the new fashion. Later even John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, eventually saw its absurdity:

....For about fifteen years after the restoration, all was gay, all sprightly, and vivacious, and wit everywhere abounded; ....This spirit of wit, that was diffused so generally through the brisker sort, had likewise taken possession of the writers of the greatest fame so far, that they were fonder of saying a witty thing in their comedies, than a just one.¹¹

It became more apparent that Etherege and other playwrights of extreme wit were not necessarily good artists, and a number of criticisms written by contemporaries show that they were aware of this weakness. Rochester took the extreme step of assaulting one of his own caste:

Etherege writes Airy Songs, and soft Lampoons,
The best of any Man; as for your Nouns,
Grammar, and Rules of Art, he knows 'em not,
Yet writ two talking Plays without one Plot.¹²

¹⁰ For Pepys' comments see above, pp. 16,17. The other two sources are found in Fujimura, p. 25.


¹² "LVI Satyr" in de Sola Pinto, p. 102.
Dryden's criticism was similar:

Sir Fopling is a fool so nicely writ,
The ladies would mistake him for a wit;

.................................
True fops help nature's work and go to school,
To file and finish God Almighty's fool.13

And again,

I knew a poet...who being too witty himself, could draw nothing but wits in a comedy of his; even his fools were infected with the disease of their author.14

To some extent then, the standard of wit as a major literary form was discredited even in the period of its greatest vogue. The common imitators of this fashion, with their own dull similes, were partly to blame, as Dennis charged:

"...in The Quiet part of King Charles His Reign wit was a Downright Distemper epidemick and contagious, and there was scarce an Empty Headed wrong Headed Fellow in the Town, but who sett up for a Witt..."15 Even the aristocracy, who pre-

13 Quoted in Krutch, p. 18. Krutch notes that this evaluation of Etheredge's work has been a major cause of Etheredge's modern status as a "minor" playwright.


sumably wished to maintain the standards they had set up, saw the abuses to which the mode was subjected, and eventually turned against "wit" as a social and literary standard. The Duke of Buckingham, in his Essay on Poetry, noted that the misuse of wit was one of the faults of the age, and recommended regulations for its use:

Another fault which often Does befall
Is when the wit of some great poet shall
Soe overflow, that is, be none at all.
That all His Fools speak sense as if possest
And each by Inspiration breaks His Jest. ---
That silly thing men call sheer wit avoid,
With which our age soe nauseously is cloyed.

Humor is all, wit should be only brought
To turn agreeably some proper thought.\textsuperscript{16}

The imitators of the court were not only offenders:

the average member of the court had little literary competence, and produced only trivial smatterings of wit. The "mob of gentlemen that wrote at ease" were only pretenders to literary talent, and turned out obscene verse, epigrams, bad plays, anything to meet the requirements of fashion. The inferiority of the ephemera produced by the court to keep up the pretense of literary superiority cannot be judged even by the poor plays which have been handed down to posterity. Authorship within the court circle was admired and respected, but litera-

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 290-291.
ture did not flourish in such an atmosphere. 17

...it was particularly in their satires that the "gentleman poets" gave a free vein to their pen.... The satires, or as they were then called, the "lampoons" became in fact the refuge of those at Court who could boast neither wit nor poetic talent. To speak evil of your neighbor is within the powers of the meanest intelligence, and the satirists of those days aimed at nothing else. ...They hurl abuse at people, and since poetry is all the fashion they hurl it in verse. ...No one who has not read these lampoons could conceive the flood of mud and filth with which they unashamedly overflow; having read them, you are driven to marvel how people could be found to write such stuff in such quantities, and readers to understand it when written. 18

For those too inept or lazy to compose even the lowest vituperation, there was always the sport of railing at the actors or of criticizing a play. The phenomenon of criticism, so new in this era, drove playwrights to despair; prologues and epilogues of the period plead with the critics to spare the play. Witness Dryden's lament in the epilogue to The Conquest of Granada:

But were they now to write when Critiques weigh
Each line, and ev'ry word, throughout a Play,
None of 'em, no not Jonson, in his height,
Could pass, without allowing grains for weight. 19

18 Beljame, pp. 11-12. See also Nicoll, p. 89.
Courtiers such as Charles Sedley sat in "Fop corner" in the pit, and abused the play at the top of their lungs, delighting in the squirms of the actors. Without seeking for beauty in the play, with little sense of true appreciation for the stage, these captious coxcombs, with their vanity and crude raillery, waged a kind of war upon the playwrights and the players. Wycherley satirized this competition for attention in the character of Sparkish in The Country Wife:

Gad, I go to a play as to a country treat: I carry my own wine to one and my own wit to t'other, or else I am sure I should not be merry at either. And the reason why we are so often louder than the players is because we think we speak more wit, and so become the poet's rivals in his audience: for to tell you the truth, we hate the silly rogues; nay, so much that we find fault even with their bawdy upon the stage, whilst we talk nothing else in the pit as loud.

At the same time that the courtiers and foppish imitators of the court so abused the professionals of the stage, no license was taken with members of the court itself. We have already noted that the court did all it could to support the plays of its members, and that the plays of the nobles were in general above reproach; the weapon of witty criticism was designed to be used against the commoners, but not against the court itself. In a prologue designed for a play acted and

20 Connely, p. 58.
22 See above, pp. 17-19.
written by members of the court, Rochester made clear this distinction:

Wit has of late took up a Trick t'appear,
Unmannerly, or at the best severe.

rail not here, though you see reason for't

Even If Wit can find itself no better sport;
Wit is a very foolish thing at Court.23

We are now in a position to summarize the effects of the standard of wit upon the social order of the Restoration. The value of wit as an index of social and literary worth rose, then declined in the Restoration period, because it was an unstable and arbitrary standard chosen by the nobility in pre-Restoration days. When the fortunes of the court changed, the nobility as a whole was found to be comparatively untalented in the new fashion, while wit itself was too easily coined by brilliant professionals and counterfeited by ambitious hacks. The court could not compete with a myriad of aggressive and diligent writers, and the resulting confusion caused a basic conflict between the noble amateurs and the professional men of letters. In the theatre itself, it was becoming apparent to the most capable critics that the standards of literature proposed by the King and his court were not necessarily valuable.

23 "A Prologue spoken at the Court at White-Hall before King Charles the Second, by the Lady Elizabeth Howard," in de Sola Pinto, p. 53.
bases for drama; while rhymed and heroic tragedies soon vanished from the boards, even the longer-lived ideal of wit was eventually suspected as a sterile substitute for better comic values.\(^{24}\)

Too often the critics of Restoration drama have emphasized solely the influence of the Restoration court upon the theatre of its time. If our detailed description of the relationship between Restoration court and theatre is a more correct analysis of the situation, we would expect to find progressively more serious conflicts between the court and its men of letters after 1670; progressively less support given to the theatre as the conflicts between court and men of letters increased; and a general decline of court interest in literary and theatrical activities after the decay of the standard of wit.\(^{25}\) This was precisely and exactly the situation;

\(^{24}\) Granville-Barker, p. 128., observes that the "pure wit" approach of Restoration drama is in substance a sterile path for the theatre:

"Wit-veritable wit- cannot, of course, be manufactured in this way. It is a rare flower, which springs from deep thought, and from something deeper; great wits have ever been the most serious of men. You cannot fill five full acts of a play with it, and if you could, the result would be intolerable. Three fours' continuous lightning will suffice to blind a man."

\(^{25}\) On February 6, 1668, Etherege's second play, Love in a Tub, was produced. Only after the productions of his first two plays, could imitations of the established comedy of manners style be produced by commoners. Shadwell's The Humorist (1670) and Epsom Wells (1672) are clearly "early examples of the comedy of manners." (See Sampson, p. 424.)
these facts, hitherto little noticed and accounted for, may be explained in the light of our previous analysis.

The first proof of our conjectures is found in the history of the playhouse in the period 1660-1685. When we consider the appeal of the stage for the Restoration court in its early years, and the support provided by the King, we might imagine that the reign of Charles II (1660-1685) was a highly lucrative and successful period for the Restoration theatres. Precisely the opposite is true: the marriage of court and theatre was, for the court, one of convenience.

Support for the stage was haphazard and inadequate:

Instead of cries that admittance was unobtainable, we met with lament after lament that the managers and promoters could barely make ends meet. Numbers of prologues and epilogues refer to small audiences and the difficulties (monetary) of operating the theatres. Pepys' diary shows that if one theatre had a new play by a well known author, the other was deserted, sometimes summoning barely sufficient spectators to make a performance possible.26

The dramatic career of Wycherley, most competent of the non-aristocratic professionals, stretched from 1671 to 1676. Any conflict of the type described above would necessarily have to occur after 1670, and perhaps even slightly later. As for the significance of the degree of patronage by the court, it must be obvious that a noble would be wary of supporting a competitor for court favor. The court would lose its interest in the theatre once the theatre ceased fulfilling its non-dramatic social functions.

The playhouse was, to the courtiers, a meeting-place where they pursued their pleasures apart from the disapproving Puritans. Here the beaux and fops pursued their dubious loves, fought each other, and drowned out the wit of the stage with their attempts to get attention. The courtiers' disregard for the actors, and their actual interference in plays, show that the basic function of the theatre was for that era something else than mere dramatic amusement:27 "the courtiers trod the boards of the stage itself: D'Avenant speaks of the fops who conversed upon the stage, 'oft combing their hair' while the play was presented."23

The professionals of the theatre were naturally irked by these distractions, but they could do nothing about them: their entire profession was in the hands of these buffoons.29 The playwrights did not hesitate, however, to castigate the audience in plain terms:

"Some come with lusty Burgundy half-drunk,  
'Teat China Oranges, make love to Puck;  
And briskly mount a bench when th' act is done."

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27 Ibid. p. 12.  
28 Ibid. p. 9.  
29 The King managed to keep the theatres from disaster time after time. Charles eased the payment of interest to the investors of the theatres by the payment of over 1000£. (Van Lennep, xxxix.) Thus the theatres were constantly under every sort of obligation to the King.
And comb their much-lov'd Periwigs to the tune
And can sit out a Play of three hours long,
Minding no part of 't but the Dance or song.30

The extent to which the courtiers ignored and even impeded the traffic of the stage is indicated by the comment of Lord Fopington in The Relapse, who says, "a Man must endeavor to look wholesome, lest he makes so nauseous a Figure in the Side-box, the Ladies shou'd be compell'd to turn their Eyes upon the Play."31 This comment, while undoubtedly an exaggeration, is by no means especially harsh satire; for true invective we must turn to The Playhouse (1685), by Thomas Brown, which systematically describes the audience, and includes this acrid passage:

"The Middle Gall'ry first demands our View,
The filth of Jokes, and stench of ev'ry Stew! Here reeking Punks like Ev'ning Insects swarm; The Polecats' Perfume much the Happier Charm. Their very scent gives Apoplectic Fits, And yet they're thought all Civit by the Cits; Nor can we blame 'em; for the Truth to tell, The want of Brains may be the Want of Smell. Here ev'ry Night they sit Three Hours for Sale; The Night-rail always cleaner than the Tayl.32

The company, then, which gathered in the theatres of the time, was not only raucous and coarse, but actually interfered

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30 "Prologue" to The Ordinary, quoted in Van Lennep, clxviii.
31 Ibid. clxix.
32 Ibid. clxx.
with the ability of the few serious observers to enjoy the plays. The courtesans, orange-girls, and wits may have had anything in mind when they went to the theatre, but only rarely was this objective solely to see a play.

The result of these irrelevant and scandalous entertainments within the audience was naturally to drive away more sober patrons of the theatre. In the early years, the number of "cits," or citizens, in the audience had been so small that Pepys had singled out those days when a large number of commoners attended the theatre; he only had occasion to do so five times. It is noteworthy that all five of the dates mentioned by Pepys were all in special holiday periods.

Genuine attempts were made by the authors of Restoration plays to entice the citizens into the playhouse, but the commoners remained aloof so long as the raucous court members dominated the theatre:

33 On 18 February 1667, Pepys, attending a play, remarked that he was amused by the antics of Sir Charles Sedley, but was unable to hear the play. He observes that he "lost the pleasure of the play wholly."

34 The five dates were: 27 December 1662, 1 January 1663, 2 November 1667, 1 January 1668, and 26 December 1668. Pepys disapproved of the attendance of the citizens at the plays, and remarked in the entry of January, 1668, "Here a mighty company of citizens, 'prentices, and others; and it makes me observe, that...I do not remember that I saw so many by half of the ... mean people...in the pit....as now." The date of 2 November, 1667, incidentally, was a holiday. (see Van Lerlep, clxv-clxvi.)
Our Popes and Fryars on one Side Offend,
and yet alass the City's not our Friend:
The City neither likes us nor our wit,
They say their Wives learn ogling in the Pit;
They're from the Boxes taught to make advances,
To answer stolen Sighs and naughty Glances.... 35

Men of reputation, hearing of the unseemly goings-on
in the theatres, not only kept their wives from attending, but
they themselves shunned these dens of iniquity. Dryden noted:
"of late the playhouses are so extremely pestered with vizard-
masks... that many of the more civilized part of the town are
uneasy in the company, and shun the theatre as they would a
house of scandal." Thomas Brown, in his work The Playhouse,
remarks: "Men of Figure and Consideration are known by seldom
being there and Men of Wisdom and Business by always being
absent." 36

The Restoration stage was in a precarious state due to
neglect, rather than the flourishing theatre that we might have
expected. King Charles supported the theatre generously but
eratically, in his characteristic style; the court was little
interested in the theatre except as a social and political bene-
fit; the citizens supported the drama comparatively little.

35 "Epilogue" to Shadwell's The Lancashire Witches (1681),
quoted in the work of Alexandre Beljame, Men of Letters and The
English Public in the Eighteenth Century: 1660-1744, ed. by
Bonamy Dobree, tr. by E.O. Lorimer. (London: Kaogan Paul, Trench,

36 Ibid. See Also Nicoll's A History of English Drama
Volume I, pp. 74-76.
Monopoly of the London stage by the King's and Duke's companies and the support of the reigning monarch was not enough. Without a dependable audience, the Restoration stage could not maintain itself.

In the spring of 1680, the average gate of the playhouses was less than £4 a day, less than the minimum required to meet expenses. By 1682, the King's company, weakened by internal strife and external misfortune, was on the verge of collapse. It offered to form a united company with its rival, and a bargain was struck. Receipts soon rose to the happy average of £50 a day, but the less happy result of the merger was that the United Company encouraged no new plays, and the great majority of its productions were the more profitable revivals. Drama stagnated.

Already in 1690 the actor Powell tells us that, 'the Poets lay dormant; and a new play could 'hardly get admittance amongst the more precious pieces of antiquity, that then waited to walk the stage,'"38

Shadwell, poetaster and imitator though he may have been, was quick enough to note the decline of the stage, and he attributed this decline to the fanciful fashions in court taste that we have already mentioned. Shadwell was correct in his

37 Van Lennep, l111. To this pittance, we might contrast the amount of money which would be taken in from a play which would fill the houses —— £30 a day at this time.

38 Nicoll, p. 334.
determination of causes: court taste and influence was as responsible for the premature decline of the Restoration drama as for its glories. The evolution of Restoration drama as seen by Shadwell in 1688 supports our own description of Restoration theatrical history:

How have we, in the space of one poor Age, Beheld the Rise and Downfall of the Stage! When, with our King restor'd, it first arose, They did each Day some good old Play expose; And then it flourish'd: Till, with Manna tir'd, For wholesome Food ye nauseous Trash desir'd. Then rose the whistling Scribblers of those Days, Who since have liv'd to bury all their Plays: And had their Issue full as numerous been As Priamms, they the Fate of all had seen. With what prodigious Scarcity of Wit Did the new Authors starve the hungry Pit? Infected by the French, you must have Rhime.

When Time, which all things try's, had laid Rhime dead, The vile Usurper, Farce, reign'd in its Stead. If all this Stuff has not quite spoil'd your Taste, Pray let a Comedy once more be grac'd: Which does not Monsters represent, but Men, Conforming to the Rules of Master Ben.39

The theatre, captive of a sterile tradition, was simply marking time in the period 1680-1685, as contemporaries noted: "For that time, Union and Catcalls...quite spoyl'd the Stage."40 The decline of the theatre after 1678 was due to the loss of the interest and support of the nobility, and when the stage was


40 Ibid. p. 27.
revived later in the century, a vital change would be apparent in the theatre: its dramatists, audience, and much of its support would be drawn from the class of commoners rather than that of the nobility. 41 The theatre was no longer useful to the nobles as a standard of social and personal accomplishment: the court had tired of competing for a goal more easily attained by professionals, and turned from wit to the now-available standards of wealth and power. 42

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41 An easily documented fact. Many critics so disapproved of commoners and their literary taste that they loudly bemoaned the lower character of theatrical audiences. See Pepys' early comment (above, Chapter I, n. 36), and the later observations of Charles Gildon, in An Essay on the Art, Rise and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome, and England (London: Edmund Curll, 1710), xii. Dennis notes, in speaking of the early Restoration theatre,

"The Theatre was not then as it is now in Hands of Players, illiterate, unthinking, unjust, ungrateful and sordid, who fancy themselves plac'd there for their extraordinary merits, and for noe other end but to accumulate Pelf, and bring Dishonour upon the Reign of the Best of Kings by sacrificing the British genius to their Insatiable avarice: who reject the Best plays and Receive the worst, if the Blockheads who writ them, are but Syco- phants enough to cringe to and fawn upon Half the Town, and by that mean'd engage whole crowds of Fools to applaud a senselesse Performance." ("The Decay and Defects of Dramatick Poetry," Hooker, Volume II, p. 277.)

42 David Ogg, in England in the Reign of Charles II. (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1955), Volume II, p. 707., directly attributes the decline of the stage in this period to the decline of court interest; Van Lennep, xxiii, also considers "poor patronage" a major cause.
But while the court was in the process of losing its interest in the stage, the dramatists and literary men could hardly be pleased with penury; they had loyally supported the court and flattered its tastes, and for this they received a pittance. When D'Avenant had complained of the poverty of the stage, there had been cause enough; the new poverty of the stage could only be interpreted as a basic failure on the part of the unsympathetic and unappreciative patrons of the theatre, and this fact was widely recognized:

One half o' the Play they spend in noise and brawl.
Sleep out the rest, then wake and damn it all.44

The casual negligence and capriciousness of the nobility could be no laughing matter to the dramatists and men of the theatre. Without patronage or support of some kind, a man of letters could starve --- and a sizable number, including Wycherley, came very close to it. There were few alternatives for aspiring authors: we must remember that the market for publishing literary works was minute at this time, and while geniuses such as Dryden might be able to sell plays by attaching

43 The reference is, of course, to William D'Avenant's famous prologue to the Siege of Rhodes, Pt. II:
"Oh! Money! Money! If the WITS would dress
With Ornaments, the present face of Peace;
And to our Poet half that Treasure spare,
Which faction gets from Fools to nourish War;
Then his contracted Scenes should wider be,
And move by greater Engines, till you see
(Whilst you securely sit) fierce Armies meet...."
See Nicoll, pp. 6-7., for text and further details.

44 Ibid. p. 15.
brilliant prefaces to their printed forms, this avenue was not open to everyone. Professionals such as Shadwell existed on such a pittance, that any extra expense incurred by the theatre, by necessitating a cut in their income, meant consequent poverty:

45 For information on this topic, see Edward Arber, The Term Catalogues (London: privately printed, 1906), Volume III, vii. Arber notes that there was little opportunity for the dramatist to sell printed works:

"....as this contemporary Bibliography clearly shows, all those Shilling Plays put together do not form Two per Centum of the total English books of the Time...."

Also,

"It was the religious people first, and the Scientists next that made the fortunes of the London Book Trade. They often subscribed as much for the folios of a single Writer like Tillotson...or Bunyan, as would have bought a complete set of all the Plays of that time."

The book-sellers, in this period and even later, cannot bear the entire responsibility for the poverty of the men of letters. Some, such as Jacob Tonson, were extremely generous, and the business itself was rapidly changing. We can recall that Milton received only £ 5 for Paradise Lost, while Dryden is said to have received £ 1200 for his Virgil. (Frank A. Mumby, Publishing and Bookselling: A History From The Earliest Times to the Present Day (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1931, pp. 151-152.) Ian Watt, in his work The Rise of The Novel (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1957), p. 54, notes that, "the booksellers acutually supported more authors more generously than ever patronage had."
Then came Machines, brought from a Neighbor Nation; Oh how we suffer'd under Decoration!\textsuperscript{46}

As a rule the playwright received the profits from each third performance, and with only five to fifteen new plays being presented each year, running on the average but three to six days, it was impossible for a playwright to remain financially independent. An aspiring dramatist set about finding a patron or pleasing the taste of higher society; this was the only way in which he could earn a living.\textsuperscript{47}

Patronage as a system was, however, at a very low ebb in the Restoration period. For one thing, the nobles newly returned to England had comparatively restricted resources: Charles, in order to assure the peace of his kingdom, had refused to confiscate the estates of the Puritans. For another, general interest in books and literature had increased the number of professional writers beyond the ability of the aristocracy to reasonably support all of them.\textsuperscript{48} Last, and perhaps most important of all, changing social conditions had modified

\textsuperscript{46} Shadwell, "Prologue" to \textit{The Squire of Alsatia}. \textit{Works}, Volume III, n.p. I might point out here that the quotation, in context, is liable to a number of interpretations. I have chosen what I believe to be the most probable of these alternatives.


\textsuperscript{48} Phoebe Sheavyn, \textit{The Literary Profession in The Elizabethan Age} (Manchester: at the University Press, 1909), pp. 20-21.
the system of patronage itself: where a man of wealth had simply underwritten the expenses of a poor scholar in the days of Chaucer, Gower, and Sidney, later patrons expected value for their money, and doled out their gifts carefully. As early as the end of the Elizabethan era, it could be said that,

However widespread was the habit of patronizing men of letters, the bounty provided did not nearly suffice for the existing writers. It reached very few in sufficient amount to satisfy either their expectations or their needs. 49

Literary patronage, by the late Seventeenth century, had become a humiliating and degrading system: the moment that a man chose to become a writer, he was obliged to make himself an ingratiating and model courtier --- or literally die of hunger. 50 Less fastidious aspirants such as D'Urfey, wrote bawdy songs, participated in drinking-bouts, did any degrading thing to assure the favor of their superiors. 51

The problem of the decline of literary patronage was not restricted to the period of the Restoration: it extended throughout several centuries. It was Johnson, after all, who inquired of the Earl of Chesterfield, "Is not a patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life

49 Ibid. p. 19.

50 Beljame, p. 130.

51 Ibid. p. 73.
in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help?" 52 Other men of letters, in other eras, were faced with the same difficulty. The important difference between the patronage problems of the Restoration, and those of other periods, was the obligation of the Restoration patrons to meet the court standards. Because of the emphasis on literary accomplishments by the court, a member of the aristocracy faced a dilemma: he was expected, by tradition, to support the very men who were striving successfully to outshine him in literary endeavors. The author, at the same time, faced a similarly perplexing problem: if he fell short in his writing, he would be considered unworthy of support; if he surpassed his patron, he was very likely to lose his favor. Both patron and author were captives of the social convention of "wit", which dictated that the best literature was written by those of superior birth and negligent manner.

The gulf between the gentlemanly amateur and the professional man of letters was widened by a theory... that literature received its value not from its content but from a liveliness of manner combined with grace, propriety, and a negligent ease of style such as one might expect of an urbane and cultivated gentleman.... Work which savoured of earnestness or toil was looked upon with suspicion, and the elegant or witty or lively

trifle was exalted. The professional writer, therefore, was likely to be an object of contempt....

To keep the favor of his patron, the author was required to apologetically minimize his own gifts, in order that he might not embarrass his lord or the rest of the court. In public, the playwrights took care to efface themselves and give credit to their patrons, frequently through the use of dedications. This technique had the advantage of both placating the patrons and protecting the play against captious criticism with the authority of the court. Shadwell, for example, writes boldly to the Duke of Newcastle: "The Criticks... will not dare to use [my new play] roughly, when they see Your Grace's Name in the beginning." Dryden, Settle, Crowne, Shadwell, and others used this tactic to protect themselves as much as to advance their fortunes, while the nobles maintained their literary status at the expense of the helpless author. Patrons often imposed their own ideas on the playwrights, required "discreet assistance" for their own works, or even expropriated entirely the works of their protégés.

53 Hooker, Volume II, xxiii.
54 Quoted in Beljame, p. 75.
55 Beljame gives a number of examples on pages 75-79.
56 Ibid. pp. 74.
Dryden, perpetually short of money, was several times a victim of lazy or untalented leeches:

After having insinuated himself into the good graces of Sir Robert Howard, Dryden "collaborated" with him in *The Indian Queen*, which was notable successful. But his noble friend, having done him the honour of borrowing his ideas and his style, studiously omitted all mention of him, and the play appeared under Sir Robert's name alone. 57

Far from being ashamed of the base trickery with which they defrauded the playwrights, the courtiers found the impoverishment of their followers an apt subject for witty poetry, and scoffed both at their penury and their ingratiating humility. Dryden's situation was turned into jest by the Duke of Buckingham, when he wrote to his friend Captain Julian:

.....Poetry has been so much your friend:
On that thou'st liv'd and flourished all thy Time;
Nay more, maintain'd a family by Rhyme;
And that's a Mark that Dryden ne'er could hit.
He lives upon his Pension, not his Wit: 58

Roscommon, in his "Essay on Translated Verse," shows a similar attitude towards the professional men of letters: after praising the feats of the "gentlemen poets," he offers this

57 Ibid. p. 34. Dryden had similar experiences with Rochester and the Duke of Newcastle. Since Dryden was far from ingenuous in these matters, it would appear that he was helpless to prevent the theft of his ideas.

58 Ibid. p. 123.
mock sympathy to the commoners:

I pity, from my Soul, Unhappy Men,  
Compell'd by Want to Prostitute their Pen;  
Who must, like Lawyers, either Starve or Flead,  
And follow, right or wrong, where Guinnys lead.  

The playwrights knew full well where to place the blame for their poverty, but once committed to the writing profession, they could not find alternative sources of income. As we have already seen, the opportunities to build a career through publication were minimal; competent but uninspired professionals like Oldham could barely live on their incomes, and existed in the most wretched poverty. The theatres paid authors ill, but could afford to do no better; the great expenses of production limited the income of all who were concerned with the theatre, and even the great D'Avenant himself died bankrupt. Especially competent and popular authors such as Dryden were given special shares in the theatre, but even this arrangement was usually unsatisfactory for the author.

In this situation, not even the King could be depended upon. Dryden almost never received his full pension as Poet-Laureate and Historiographer, and at one period, his salary was "four years in arrears." In addition, every vagary or


60 Delhaye, pp. 109-110.
whim of the court was likely to affect his position; when the Earl of Mulgrave fell into disgrace in 1680, by some strange logic, Dryden, no longer his protege, ceased to receive the benefits of his pension. 61

Poets from Chaucer to Johnson were forced to plead for aid in pressing circumstances; worthy authors such as Spenser and Nash were denied their due; but in no other period can it be said that the patrons so persistently scoffed at the claims of deserving men of literature. Even worse, the Restoration court, because of a perverse and antiquated concept of literary etiquette, found itself suppressing, indeed, persecuting the men of letters who were the most capable and brilliant. We can pass over the tragic lives of the inferior authors of the Restoration, for they would have had difficulty obtaining patronage in any case; what we cannot forget is that in this period the authors of proven brilliance and the most capable playwrights were those most likely to conflict with the system, and thus most likely to be cast out. Lee, Otway, Butler, Oldham, and Wycherley lived through periods of the most abject and disgraceful poverty, while Shadwell, Crowne, and Dryden lived a precarious existence. The rigors of their lives were

61 Ibid. pp. 122-123.
such that established authors denounced their profession in order to discourage others from entering so unrewarding a field. 62

If this is thought to be too severe a denunciation of the court and its relations to the stage, we have before us the classic example of the Earl of Rochester, one of the chief wits and courtiers of the Restoration, whose career as patron of the arts did more to discourage the Restoration men of letters than any other. 63

In 1673, Dryden, seeking the patronage of Rochester, dedicated to him *Marriage a-la-Mode* in a "long-winded, elaborate eulogy" which is one of the most self-abasing, fulsome flatteries ever written. 64 Having obtained his favor, yet in need of further support, Dryden innocently sought to link himself with the Earl of Mulgrave, who was both hated and feared by Rochester. Rochester sought immediate vengeance by repudiating Dryden and recommending Elkanah Settle to the King for the court entertainments. The Earl of Mulgrave, similarly possessed of no sense of loyalty, abandoned Dryden and wrote a preface for the new play. Settle's *Empress of Morocco* premiered


63 The following account is taken from Beljame, pp. 89f.

64 Beljame, p. 89.
at Whitehall, and was acted by a cast of court members. The play itself was crude and fatuous, but because of the favor of the court and the splendid settings supplied by the King, it achieved a popular success. Dryden, who feared with reason that he would be supplanted at court, "committed the supreme folly of getting angry," and wrote a pamphlet with Shadwell and Crowne castigating Settle. He need not have worried; Rochester, jealous of Settle's brilliant success, suggested to the King that John Crowne take Settle's place at court.

In 1675, the Masque of Calisto, written by Crowne, was presented at court. Dryden had attempted to save face by offering an epilogue for the new play, but through Rochester's wiles, it was rejected. The Masque of Calisto was, if anything, poorer than its predecessor; yet, staged at court with magnificent trappings, it too proved to be a success. Rochester, true to form, immediately had Crowne expelled from court, and repeated the entire maneuver with Otway. After rejecting Otway, Rochester published his Session of the Poets, and anonymously circulated Horace's Tenth Satire of the First Book imitated, in both of which he repudiated all the authors he had so maltreated and maligne them in the most scurrilous terms. Rochester had indeed lived up to his statement in the Satire Against Man:

65 Notes and Observations on the Empress of Morocco. See Beljame, p. 96.
For wits are treated just like common Whores; First they're enjoyed and then kicked out of Doors.66

Dryden had had enough. Disgusted with Rochester and the fatuous pretensions of the court, he wrote All for Love, and in the preface he showed his scorn for the literary "superiority" of the court.

Dionysius and Nero had the same longings, but with all their power they could never bring their business well about. "Tis true, they proclaimed themselves poets by sound of trumpet; and poets they were upon pain of death....The audience...sat in a bodily fear, and looked as demurely as they could: for it was a hanging matter to laugh unseasonably....but when the show was over, and an honest man was suffered to depart quietly, he took out his laughter which he had stifled, with a firm resolution never more to see an emperor's play.... In the meantime the true poets were they who...had wit enough to yield the prize with good grace, and not contend with him who had two legions. They were sure to be rewarded, if they confessed themselves bad writers, and that was better than to be martyrs for their reputation.67

Even a humble playwright had pride, and Dryden had been too mistreated to abase himself before fools. He would continue to accept the support of patrons, but no longer wrote solely to please others. This is perhaps "Rochester's best claim on the gratitude of posterity."68

66 Ibid. pp. 100, 129.
67 Ibid. p. 102.
68 Ibid. p. 101. Dryden's abhorrence for the system of patronage was such that he would refuse to beg for patronage for the rest of his life. In later years, perhaps conveniently forgetting his early dedications, he would write to Dennis:

"I have never been an Impudent Beggar at the Doors of Noblemen: My visits have indeed been too rare to be
The disgust of Dryden was shared by other men of letters, for in the same period in which Dryden was being persecuted by Rochester, Butler, author of Hudibras, was being humiliated at the hands of Buckingham. The story of Butler's repudiation by the Duke spread over England, and at Butler's death became a cause célèbre to the English men of letters.

Butler's Hudibras, one of the early anti-Puritan satires, had taken the court and the Royalists "by storm". The anonymous author of "Hudibras at Court", declares that the new satire was so popular with King Charles,

He never Eat, nor Drank, nor Slept
But Hudibras still near him kept;
Never would go to Church or so,
But Hudibras must with him go;
Nor yet to visit Concubine,
Or at a City-Feast to Dine,
But Hudibras must still be there,
Or all the Fat was in the Fire.

The same author describes the subsequent neglect of Butler by the King:

Now after all, was it not hard,
That he should meet with no Reward,
That fitted out his Knight and Squire,

unacceptable; and but just enough to testifie my Gratitude for their Bounty which I have frequently received, but always unasked...." (Charles Ward, ed. The Letters of John Dryden Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 1942), p. 73.

This Monarch did so admire?
That he should never reimburse
The man for th' Equipage, or Horse,
Is sure a strange, ungrateful Thing,
In any body but a King.\(^{70}\)

Butler's tragic flaw, in an age of sycophants, was that
he refused to flatter the nobility. Because of his aversion
to grovelling, he never attained rank or position, and was
never rewarded for his literary pains. In the early 1670's,
wretched and hungry, he met William Wycherley, who was even
then noted for the loyalty with which he supported his friends.
Wycherley interceded for Butler with the Duke of Buckingham,
and Pack's Memoirs describes their meeting:

Mr. Wycherley had always laid hold of any Opportunity which offered, to represent to his Grace how well
Mr. BUTLER had deserved of the Royal Family, by writing
his inimitable HUDIBRAS; and that it was a Reproach to
the Court, that a Person of his Loyalty and Wit should
suffer in the Obscurity, and under the Wants he did.
The Duke seemed always to Hearken to him with Attention
enough; and, after some time, undertook to Recommend
his Pretensions to His Majesty. Mr. WYCHERLEY, in hopes
to keep him Steady to his Word, obtained of his Grace to
Name a Day, when he might introduce that Modest and
Unfortunate Poet to His new Patron. At last an Appointment
was made, and the Place of Meeting was agreed to
be the Roe-buck. Mr. BUTLER and his Friend attended
accordingly: The Duke too joined them. But, as the
Devil would have it, the Door of the Room where they
sat was open; and His Grace, who had seated himself near
it, observing a Pimp of his Acquaintance (the Creature
too was a Knight) trip by with a Brace of Ladies, immedi-
ately quitted his Engagement to follow another kind of
Business, at which he was more ready than in doing

\(^{70}\) Quoted in Veldkamp, p. 25.
Gooč Offices to Men of Desert; though no One was better qualified, than he was, both in regard of his Fortune and Understanding, to Protect them: And from That Hour to the Day of his Death, poor BUTLER never found the least Effect of his Promise.71

This dramatic confrontation between author and patron affected Wycherley and Butler, two members of the major literary circle of London, and through them the coffee-house circle belonging to Dryden. All the major and minor figures of that group certainly heard of the incident, and were outraged. It was the "scandal of the age"; Butler himself wrote the scathing

71 Major Pack, "Some Memoirs of William Wycherley, Esquire," in Giles Jacob's The Poetical Register or the Lives and Characters of the English Dramatic Poets (London: Z Giles Jacob, 1719), pp. 6-7. The dating of the story of Butler's rejection by Buckingham is difficult. Summers in his Complete Works of Wycherley, Volume I, p. 38., and Veldkamp p. 7., are unable to suggest any date other than the general period 1671-1675, when Wycherley's career was on the rise. Connelly, p. 128, dates it somewhere in the period 1675-1677, about the time of The Plain Dealer, while W.C. Ward, in his work William Wycherley (New York: A.A. Wyn, Inc.), 1949), xxxi, declares it to be in late 1672 or 1673.

Wycherley first met Buckingham sometime in the latter part of 1671, and it is unlikely that he would have asked so great a favor so early in this relationship. From late 1671 to 1673, Buckingham was involved in fighting the Dutch War, raising troops, and employed on a number of diplomatic missions; he would not have had time to discuss charitable causes. In 1673 the Duke was impeached by commons, lost favor with the King, and was thus in no position to do Butler any kind office with Charles II. He returned to his Parliamentary seat in April of 1675 after an absence of one year, and quickly resumed his political and theatrical interests. Wycherley, on the other hand, was enormously popular with the King in the period 1676-1679, and would not have needed Buckingham; he could have presented Butler's request directly to Charles. The incident, therefore, would most probably have taken place in either of two periods: from late 1673 through early 1674, or from April, 1675
"Character of a Duke of Bucks," and circulated it anonymously. Another satire of Buckingham, published much later, seems to attest to the attitude of the professionals toward this rebuff of Butler:

Chymists and Whores by Buckingham were fed,
Those by their honest Labours gain'd their Bread;
But he was never so expensive yet,
To keep a Creature merely for his Wit....

When Butler died in 1680, a flood of scornful abuse burst forth upon the heads of the nobles, and indeed, even upon that of the King himself. The anonymous author of "Hudibras at Court" wrote:

....this Good King it seems, was told
By some that were with him too bold,
If e're you hope to gain your Ends,
Caress your Foes and trust your Friends._
Such were the Doctrines that were taught,
Till this unthinking King was brought
To leave his Friends to starve and die,
A poor Reward for Loyalty."

to early 1676. In any case, it should be noted that all of the possibilities advanced, and all of the proofs, indicate that the incident took place before The Plain Dealer was written and perhaps even before The Country Wife. The most probable date, as we shall note later, is in January, 1674.


73 "A Satyr upon the Poets," in Poems of Affairs of State, Volume II, 1703, p. 138., quoted in Beljame, p. 128. It should be noted that Buckingham had urged Nathaniel Lee to come to London, and then abandoned him. The above quotation may refer to both Lee and Butler.

Otway, in his Prologue to Lee's *Constantine the Great*, used Butler to illustrate the sad state of the literary profession under the patronage of the court:

All you, who have Male Issue born  
Under the starving Sign of Capicorn;  
Prevent the Malice of their Stars in time,  
And warn them early from the Sin of Rhyme:  
Tell them, for Spenser Starved, how Cowley mourn'd;  
How Butler's Faith and Service were return'd.75

Oldham, in his "Satire against Poetry," included this famous passage on the death of Butler:

On Butler, who can think without just rage,  
The glory and the scandal of the age;  
Fair stood his hopes, when first he came to Town,  
Met every where with welcomes of renown,  
Courted, and lov'd by all, with wonder read,  
And promises of Princely favour fed:  
But what reward for all had he at last,  
After a life in dull expectance pass'd?  
The wretch at summing up his misspent days,  
Found nothing left, but poverty and praise:  
Of all his gains by Verse he could not save  
Enough to Purchase Flannel, and a grave;  
Reduc'd to want, he in due time fell sick,  
Was fain to die, and be interr'd on Tick:  
And well might bless the Feaver that was Sent,  
To rid him hence, and his worse fate prevent.76

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The scandal was so great, that even on Butler's tombstone would be inscribed:

How few, alas, disdain to cringe and cant,
When 'tis the mode to play the sycophant.
But oh let all be taught by Butler's fate,
Who hope to make their fortunes by the great.77

After the death of Samuel Butler, the system of patronage could never be the same in England. The professional writers had had enough of bowing and scraping for pennies: the entire attitude towards the court patrons changed. When Dryden wrote to Lawrence Hyde, Earl of Rochester, for the arrears on his salary in 1683, he was respectful enough, but he boldly stated: "'Tis enough for one Age to have neglected Mr. Cowley, and serv'd Mr. Butler...."78

Butler had become a kind of hero to the men of letters; in life he was unassuming, witty, modest, a brilliant author, and of utmost service to his King; in death, his reputation for integrity and the memory of his undeserved sufferings helped the men of letters tear down a cruel and antiquated social system. One sign of his heroic stature in the eyes of the professional men of letters was that the memory of his personal trials lasted in public memory well into the Eighteenth century.79

77 Veldkamp, pp. 8-9.
78 Ward, p. 21.
79 In 1721, a monument was erected in Westminster Abbey for Samuel Butler; for the occasion, Samuel Wesley penned these lines:

"While Butler, needy Wretch, was yet alive,
No Gen'rous Patron would a dinner give;
See him when Starv'd to death and turn'd to Dust,
Presented with a Monumental Bust.
The Poet's fate is here in Emblem shown,
He ask'd for Bread, and he receiv'd a Stone."

(Veldkamp, p. 27.)
After the death of Butler in 1680, the braver professionals of literature no longer granted the aristocracy deference in their own field; presumably the "just rage" of Oldham, Dryden, Wycherley, and a host of others, encouraged the court to withdraw from belles lettres and confine itself to the political sphere. We have already noted Dryden's change of attitude: this shift in the climate of thought was generally prevalent after 1680. Oldham depicted Spenser's ghost as saying:

What Scipio, what Maicenas wouldst thou find;  
What Sidney now to thy great project kind?  
Bless me! how great a Genius! how each line  
Is big with Sense! how glorious a design  
Does through the whole, and each proportion shine!  
How lofty all his Thoughts, and how inspir'd!  
Pity, such wondrous Poets are not preferr'd:  
Cry a gay wealthy Sot, who would not bail.  
For bare Five Pounds the Author out of Jail,  
Should he starve there and rot; who, if a Brief  
Came out the needy Poets to relieve,  
To the whold Tribe would scarce a Tester give."80

William Winstanley, in 1687, listed the writers who had suffered for lack of patronage, and cried:

Thus you see though we have had some comparable to Homer for Heroick Poesie, and to Euripides for Tragedy, yet have they died disregarded, and nothing left of them, but that only once there were such Men and Writings in being.81

81 Winstanley, p. 10.
Evel more indicative of the dramatists' change in attitude towards the court is the fact cited by Jeremy Collier for the suppression of the theatres: the increasingly ill treatment of nobility on the stage. In the four pages of documentation which Collier uses to support his thesis, nearly every quotation is taken from plays written after 1674. Collier himself declares that this form of perversity is entirely new to the world:

...these Liberties are altogether new. They are unpracticed by the Latin Comedians, and by the English too till very lately, as the Plain Dealer observes. ...What necessity is there to kick the Coronets about the Stage....?

To a conservative like Collier, insensitive to the problems of the men of the theatre, the changes in the social order and the attendant changes in theatrical attitudes were only to be interpreted as symptoms of moral degeneration. The social pressures and indignant sense of justice that would lead such men as Dryden and Wycherley to challenge the standards of the beau monde could not be fathomed by such as he.

We may now offer certain conclusions about the relations of the Restoration court to its theatre which will later give us a unique insight into the dramatic career of William Wycherley. It has been widely recognized that the liberties taken by the court and the dramatic "vits" were responsible

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83 Ibid. p. 175.
for the general attack on the stage which occurred late in the
Seventeenth century by Collier and others. The early development
of that opposition has, however, been largely ignored by the
critics of early Restoration comedy. We have endeavored to
establish that in the period from 1673 to 1676, the professional
men of letters were increasingly antagonized by the attitude of
"gentleman poets," the court standard of "wit," and the cruelties
of the system of patronage. Far from being a placid servant
of the court or a mere "mirror" of its tastes, the theatre in
this period was tense with the mutual antagonisms of the pro-
fessionals and their patrons, and beset with the problems of a
disintegrating social standard. Even as the peak years of
Restoration comic theatre were being reached in the period 1675-
1676, two widely-known incidents in which professionals were
abused by their patrons outraged literary circles. Opposition
to the nobility in the profession of letters was, to be sure,
not as pronounced as it would be later in the century, but it did
exist in 1675, and it precipitated a basic change in social taste
and theatrical function. It should be noticed here that William
Wycherley, upon whom we will focus our major interest, was in a

84 Nicoll, A History of English Drama. Volume I, pp. 282-
283. The major exception to this statement is the work of Beljame
position to be profoundly influenced by the reaction to the old order. Wycherley knew Dryden intimately, and was certainly aware of the petty persecutions of Dryden by Rochester; he had brought Butler to Buckingham, and was doubtless personally embarrassed by Rochester's caprice as well as shocked by his attitude; and at the same time, Wycherley himself was the victim of the same vicious and humiliating system. Last, but not least in importance, was the character of Wycherley: he was idealistic in nature, personally fearless, and fiercely loyal; even when he had nothing to gain himself, he had often risked both reputation and freedom to aid a friend. Such a man could not stand idly by while his friends suffered. Within a year after the persecution of Dryden and the rejection of Butler, Wycherley wrote the Plain Dealer.
CHAPTER III

The dramatic career of William Wycherley is uniquely illustrative of both the glories and the defects of the system of patronage we have just described, for not only was Wycherley the greatest literary product of that system, he was its foremost victim.

William Wycherley was born at Clive, near Shrewsbury, in May, 1641, the son of Daniel and Bethia Wycherley.1 His early life was spent at secluded Clive manor under the domineering hand of his father, a man famous throughout the countryside as a "stern martinet," "dour domestic tyrant," and compulsive litigant.2 Whatever his failings, Daniel Wycherley was far from being a country rustic; he was an erudite and accomplished student of the classics, and well aware that a fine education would enable his son to aid him in his endless

1 Howard P. Vincent, "The Birth of William Wycherley," 155. A genealogy of the Wycherley family may be found in Montague Summers' Complete Works of Wycherley, Volume I, pp. 3-5.

2 Summers, Volume I, p. 11.
legal tangles. Under his tutelage, William became proficient in Latin and Greek to the extent that he became intimately acquainted with even the most obscure authors of antiquity.3

The education which William Wycherley received at the hands of his father was unique for a English squire's son of the 1650's, and many a young man of high birth could not boast even as much learning as Wycherley possessed at the age of fifteen. The fanatical Puritan divines, seeking to "reform" education in England, had purged the English Universities and sought to erase all secular classical studies as instruments of Royalty and the Catholic Church:

These fanatics, whose rancour knew neither bounds nor decency, were determined to stamp out...all the amenities and the decorum of a gentle society. Greek letters were an abomination; Latin was the language of the Beast. Not only was the tongue of Cicero and Vergil the vehicle of a thousand pagan fables and obscenities, worse yet, it was the spoken word of the Scarlet Whore, Babylon of the Seven Hills.4

Because of the appalling destruction of the classical forms of education, Daniel Wycherley sent his fifteen-year old son to France to complete his training.5 It was a common enough

4 Ibid. p. 11.
practice for the aristocracy to send its sons to the Jesuit schools of France, for it was there that the exiled court of Charles II had found a haven; for Daniel Wycherley to do the same, despite his Royalist sentiments, was almost presumptuously ambitious. Thus it was ironically through the ambitions of his father that William Wycherley went off to France to become a gentleman.

Daniel Wycherley could not have anticipated what that sojourn in France would do to his son; the brilliant world of French society was an entirely different place from the world of Clive manor and its grim master. In France, Wycherley received more education in the salons than in the Jesuit colleges; he became one of the favorites of Julie d'Argennes, daughter of the précieuse Catherine de Rambouillet and guiding light of French society. Handsome young Wycherley became captivated by the charms of his beautiful mentor, and was frequently allowed into her presence. Dennis would later recall Wycherley's experiences:

About the Age of Fifteen he was sent for Education to the Western Parts of France, either to Saintonge or the Angoumois. His abode there was either upon the Banks of the Charante, or very little remov'd from it. And he had there the Happiness to be in the Neighborhood of one of the most accomplish'd Ladies of the Court of France, Madame de Montausier....I have heard Mr. W say, that he was often admitted to the Conversation of that Lady, who us'd to call him the Little Huguenot;
and that young as he was, he was equally pleas'd with
the Beauty of her Mind, and with the Graces of her
Person. 6

The influence of Julie d'Argennes and her followers
upon the young Englishman was extraordinarily strong: within
four years he had adopted new manners, dress, style, of speech,
and even—a new religion. It is said that in an indecorous ex-
cess of enthusiasm, he had wished to become a priest, but was
restrained by his patroness. 7 By the time Wycherley was recalled
to England for the Restoration of Charles, he had learned to
perfection the manners, ideals, and style of the précieuse
tradition; indeed, since he had learned his manners at the cen-
ter of that tradition, the court of Julie d'Argennes, young
Wycherley was undoubtedly more skilled at the new mode of manners
and wit than even many a seasoned courtier in the retinue of
Charles. Long before the other native English dramatists could
think of copying the new court fashion, Wycherley had learned
the rules of decorum, hyperbole, and wit which comprised that
fashion: Wycherley's career at court and in the theatre was
founded long before the advent of the comedy of manners.

When the time came to return hime, it must have been
with a heavy heart that Wycherley returned to his father's

6 V. deVoiture, Familiar and Courtly Letters, quoted in
Connely, p. 18.

7 Letter "To the Honourable Major PACK. Containing some
remarkable Passages of Mr. Wycherley's Life. Sept. 1, 1720. in
house. After four years spent in the most brilliant and fashionable circle in Europe, he must again be immured at Clive with a demanding father and his dull books of law. Daniel Wycherley apparently was equally displeased: when his foppish young Papist of a son returned, he was immediately sent to Oxford to repent of his sins. Here he was forced to live with the Provost, Doctor Barlow, a man widely reputed for his hatred of Catholicism. In July, Wycherley entered Queen's College under the nominal title of Philosophiae studiosus, and within four months was forced to recant by his dour and irascible tutor. In November he satisfied his father by entering as a student of law in the Inner Temple.  

It is doubtful that Wycherley entered the study of law for any reason other than that of placating his angry father; he apparently never pursued his legal studies with any great ardor, and immediately launched himself into the society of London wits.  

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9 Anthony a' Wood's summary of his legal career seems to imply that Wycherley used the Inner Temple as a stepping-stone to higher society, and was better known for his wit than his legal knowledge, even this early in life.

"Afterwards he retired to the Inner Temple, where for his admired Plays and Poetry, being numbered among those of the first Rank, became noted among the Wits of the City...." (p. 96.)

This quotation may merely be phrased clumsily; if so, any such implication would be removed. On the other hand, we have the evidence of Winstanley's Lives (1687), which was largely
Daniel Wycherley certainly knew of his son's wayward impulses, and did all he could to force him into the legal profession. The arguments must have been long and bitter, but Daniel always won, for he held his purse-strings tightly. William Wycherley made no secret of his distaste for his father and the legal profession, and a number of his friends and contemporaries have recorded Wycherley's struggle for independence from his father:

Tho' his Father, who had a handsome Estate, made him but a Scanty Allowance, yet he made a shift to keep the politest Company in Town, in the merry Reign of King Charles II, who had himself a great regard for him. 10

Based upon information taken from Phillip's Theatrum Poetarum:

"Mr. William Wycherley, ... a Gentleman of the Inner Temple, who besides his other learned Works, hath contributed largely to the Stage in his Comedies...."

(p. 218.)

We can only conjecture what these "other learned works" may have been, but even as late as 1687, Winstanley could not have been referring to Wycherley's collections of poems, for these were not published until long after 1700.

After the failure of Wycherley's Posthumous Poems, a substantial amount of Wycherley's poetry simply disappeared. Presumably many of these were earlier, immature works which had not been chosen for any previous collection. Thus, while only two of Wycherley's extant poems can be indisputably assigned to the period before 1670, there would appear to be sufficient evidence to support the statement that Wycherley gained some reputation by writing poetry in the period 1660-1670. See Howard P. Vincent's article, "William Wycherley's Miscellany Poems," Philological Quarterly, XVI (1937), 145-148, and Wycherley's two early poems, "To King Charles II. on his Return," and Hero and Leander in Burlesque, Summers, Vol. III, p. 214., and Vol. IV, pp. 63-102.

10 Thomas Whincop, Scanderberg; Or Love and Liberty. ... To which are added a List of all the Dramatic Authors, With some Account of their Lives; ... (London: W. Reeve, 1747), p. 303. See also Dryden's dedication to the Earl of Dorset in a Discourse Concerning the Origin and Progress of Satyr (1693) quoted in Summers, Vol. I, p. 10; Pack, Posthumous Works, p. 5.
Young William sought to gain greater heights than the dusty eminence offered by the bar. While still ostensibly a student of law, he turned his attention to social and literary pursuits, which he recognized as the quickest avenue to success and fame in his society:

He afterwards entered himself in the Middle Temple; but, making his first appearance in town in the loose reign of Charles II, when wit and gaiety were the favourite distinctions, he soon quitted the dry study of the law, and pursued things more the taste of the age. As nothing was likely to take better than dramatic performances, especially comedies, he applied himself to this species of writing.  

Wycherley had never been cut out for the study of the law: by temperament and by virtue of his training in the elegant code of préciosité, he was well qualified to meet the standards of the new court, and aggressively sought to penetrate the court circle. He was young, almost excessively handsome, witty, and well schooled in the new fashion; by 1667, we may well assume that he was, "...on the fringe of the circle of wits, if not quite within it." Secure in knowledge that he was heir to a modestly large estate, flattered to think he was one of the "gentleman wits," in 1668 he audaciously had his portrait painted by Peter Lely, who usually painted men of consequence and standing.


12 Connely, pp. 56-57. Wycherley posed for this portrait in his Templar's gown; since he was still being supported by his father, he apparently had kept up the pretense of studying for the law. There is, however, no indication that he completed his course of studies after nine years as a "student" of law — an indication of his seriousness of mind.
In 1669, Wycherley had undoubtedly reached some small status as a rake and man of "wit." As a necessary prelude to entrance into the court circle, Wycherley published anonymously his *Hero and Leander in Burlesque*, an immature and fatuous, yet clever burlesque of a traditional theme. The work itself is decidedly beneath literary notice, but it strongly illustrates Wycherley's mastery of hyperbole, wit, and simile — stylistic characteristics of *préciosité* — and the entire complex of attitudes so typical of the Restoration court standards. The style of this *jeu d'esprit*, while crude, is clearly designed to parody romantic absurdities, and the very excesses of the poem illustrate Wycherley's own anti-romantic tendencies. Take, for example, this tender scene from the poem:

> Hero, from her Eye-lids poking off the Glew,  
> Into the boiling Water fell a staring,  
> Where she perceiv'd her dear Duke — dead as Herring!  
> The Day but just had shewn her scarlet Snout,  
> So she had time for comfortable Doubt,  
> And took her poor Leander for a WHALE:  
> But prying to find out the Proof of's Tail,  
> She out of Window thrust her self so far,  
> That Tiptoes slit, and e're she was awar  
> (Tho' some dispute it still) she tipt clear over  
> Into the Brine upon her pickled Lover.\(^\text{13}\)

The story of Hero and Leander, beautiful in itself, was treated by Wycherley in the rationalistic and anti-heroic manner characteristic of his time. The century which gave birth to Hobbes and the Royal Society had turned away from its early

\(^{13}\) Summers, Volume IV, p. 102.
romantic learnings, and, in the period immediately following the Restoration, emphasized the realistic and the rational. Wycherley's literary career clearly begins here with the prevailing anti-heroic literary, social, and political satiric forms devised by the court to enforce its standards; there is nothing in this work, or in the other early works of Wycherley even remotely analogous to the "sanative" satire of Jonson or Moliere, or anything similar to the indignant sense of moral and religious reformation which Swift instilled into his works. Wycherley never intended in his early works to play the part of a reformer; it was his purpose to advance into fashionable society on the strength of his only resources, his wit and his superior education in the court mode.

After the minor success of Hero and Leander, Wycherley at last made an attempt to break completely with the legal profession and the ties which bound him to his authoritarian father. Fully conscious that for him the most appropriate route to financial and independent social success lay through the playhouse, Wycherley began to write a comedy.

24 Holland, p. 233; George Baker, xiii ff. Summers, Vol. I. pp. 20-23, notes that the "racy and modish Hero and Leander belonged to an extremely popular genre of Maccaronic burlesques imported from France, and ultimately, from Italy. This is the same general form as that of Hudibras, and Wycherley probably designed his poem to ride the coat-tails of Butler's popular reception.

15 George Baker, 1; Fujimura, p. 118.
Love in a Wood, Wycherley's first dramatic attempt, premiered in March, 1671, and was an enormous success. In one

16 Inasmuch as I am attempting to establish a relationship between the court conflicts and Wycherley's drama, it will be necessary to date Wycherley's plays with the utmost care, just as the conflicts themselves were dated in Chapter II.

There is a great deal of confusion in the dating of Wycherley's comedies due to the unreliable nature of the dramatic commentaries of the Seventeenth and early Eighteenth centuries. Anthony à Wood, for example, (p. 977.), dated Wycherley's four plays by approximate dates of editions: 1672, 1673, 1677, and 1683; Gildon, (p. 150), dates them 1672, 1673, 1683, 1688. Perhaps the greatest confusion was caused by Pope, who confidently stated:

"The chronology of Wycherley's plays I am well acquainted with, for he told it me over and over. Love in a Wood he wrote when he was about nineteen; The Gentleman Dancing-Master at twenty-one; The Plain Dealer at twenty-five; and The Country Wife at two- and thirty." / Joseph Spence, Anecdotes, Observations and Characters of Books and Men. ed. by S.W. Singer. (London: n.p. 1820), p. 161. /

This statement, if correct, would date Wycherley's plays in 1659, 1661, 1665, and 1671. This is ludicrously impossible, but nonetheless was commonly accepted before Macaulay showed its absurdity. (Churchill, xv.)

There is as yet no definitive work on the dating of Wycherley's plays, but the almost fatiguingly detailed and well-documented studies contained in the works of Dr. Johannes Klette, William Wycherley's Leben und Dramatische Werke (Münster, Deutschland: n.p., 1883), pp. 20-30., and that of George Churchill, (xiv-xxvi.), are unlikely to be challenged by the faint of heart. My own determinations in each case will be based upon these two sources, with appropriate facts drawn from the works of Arber, Nicoli, and Van Lennep.

The first play, Love in a Wood, is described by Summers as premiering. "In the autumn of 1671, possibly early in October! (Works, Volume I, p. 24.) This estimate is certainly wrong, for Wycherley's dedication to the play states that the first performances were in the Spring:
great leap, Wycherley had bridged the gap between the position of occasional wit and that of "gentleman-poet." As we have already noted, the conspicuous exhibition of wit was the key to the structure of Restoration court society; a mere professional author might beg for his supper; but a true gentleman-wit was recognized as a fraternal member of court society. For the ambitious young man who could manipulate the arbitrary and artificial standard of wit, for the author who could maintain the pretense of gentlemanly "parts" while straining for literary acceptance, the court promised — and upon rare occasion delivered — social familiarity with his betters, position, and even a limited amount of money. This course was more difficult to run than it seemed, and the rewards in the long run were meager; William Wycherley was the only commoner to achieve an unqualified success in this approach to the court, and his

"...your Grace did me the honour to see my Play twice together; yet perhaps my Envies of your Favour will suggest 'twas in Lent, and therefore for your Mortification...." (p. 69.)

Since we know that the first performances were in the spring, that the play was quite popular and likely to be published quickly, and that it was entered in the Stationers' Hall on October 6, 1671, (Churchill, xxii.), the period of Lent, 1671, is very probably the period in which the play saw its premiere. Nicoll, Volume I, p. 438., advances March, 1671, as the date of the premiere. Van Lennep, p. 181., on some authority apparently unknown to other historians, tentatively places the premiere on March 4, 1671.
eventual fate was an unenviable one. Nonetheless, in the spring of 1671, the defects of Charles' gay circle of wits were little apparent. For an adventurous young author such as Wycherley, it must have seemed that his acceptance into the court circle was a miraculous delivery from the dry books of the Inner Temple and the tedium of Clive Hall.

*Love in a Wood*, as a literary accomplishment, is a trivial, inconsequential thing. But in 1671, Wycherley's first play was a superb comedy of manners, one of the best yet written. Wycherley, as we have observed, was already possessed of an exact and superior knowledge of the French manners which the court attempted to imitate, and doubtless this knowledge was perfected in his eleven years as a young rake and man-about-town. His first play gave public notice to the fashionable world that this young student of law was fully qualified to enter the circle of wits and the society of the court.

*Love in a Wood* had been one of the first deliberate attempts to capture court taste on the basis of a new English tradition. The years 1660-1670 had been years of orientation and self-discovery for the court of Charles. In this period, the court had assimilated the French manners and created a French-English fashion of its own. Simultaneously, the theatre, adopted by the court as its means of self-expression, had built a dramatic tradition piecemeal.¹⁷ Plays such as *The English

¹⁷ Churchill, ix-x.
Monsieur, The Wild Gallant, The Mulberry-Garden, Love in a Tub, and She Would if She Could had each explored some aspect of the new court taste, and found a way to please the theatre-going public. After the court had solidly established the new fashion, and theatrical experimentation had determined the most appropriate form of the court's amusements, the time was ripe for an ambitious author to build upon the minor tradition established by his predecessors.

Many aspects of Love in a Wood Wycherley derived from earlier prototypes because they were known to please court taste: Love in a Wood contained settings similar to Sedley's Mulberry Garden, characters derived from The English Monsieur, and a plot of intrigue taken from some unknown Spanish comedy. The title for Love in a Wood itself was undoubtedly suggested by Etherege's Love in a Tub, and puns on the popular phrase "in a Wood," meaning "confused." Wycherley missed no opportunity to make his first comic drama a success.

The plot of Love in a Wood is intricate but sprightly; in twenty-one scenes, we view the troubled and triumphant love of Ranger and Lydia, and the contrasting downfall of Alderman Gripe, described by Wycherley as "seemingly precise, but a

18 Summers, Volume I, p. 31.

19 Ibid. p. 243. The word "wood" may be related to the Anglo-Saxon wode, meaning "mad." One contemporary use of the above phrase is illustrated in Rochester's poem "In Defence of Satyr," (c. 1680) in de Sola Pinto, p. 139. "The World's a Wood, in which all loose their way, Though by a different Path each goes Astray."
covetous, lecherous, old Usurer of the City.\textsuperscript{20} The story of Ranger and Lydia is a typical love-chase with the characteristic Restoration twist; Ranger truly loves Lydia, but pursues other women for sport, since it is all in the "game."\textsuperscript{21} The chase itself takes place in fashionable London: scenes are set in St. James Park and in Mulberry Garden, where the men of fashion went to refresh themselves after the theatre.\textsuperscript{22} Every scene, every character, almost every word, must have seemed to Wycherley's audience as somehow familiar, and yet, "n'er so well expressed."

The second story-line, that of Alderman Gripe, was designed as satire of the Puritans, and is clearly Jonsonian in style.\textsuperscript{23} Gripe, who seeks to seduce young Lucy, is trapped by her mother and Mrs. Joyner (a bawd), who blackmail him and eventually force him to marry Lucy. The seduction scenes are coarse and ribald, but the satiric portraiture in the character of Alderman Gripe is quite striking and has been admired by a number of critics.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.} p. 72.
\textsuperscript{22} Connelly, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{23} Wilcox, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{24} See, for example, Zimbardo, p. 44.; Summers, Volume I, pp. 31-32.
Despite the good qualities of the play, however, and despite the admiration for it shown by such devotees as Summers,\(^25\) we must accept the consensus of literary opinion and judge *Love in a Wood* as trivial and clearly inconsequential.\(^26\) To Wycherley, on the other hand, the success of this, his first play, was of overwhelming importance; by means of *Love in a Wood*, he was able to attain all his heart-felt wishes for advancement. Wycherley became famous as the man who had risen to fortune on the strength of one play:

On the appearance of his first play, he became acquainted with several of the first-rate wits, and likewise with the duchess of Cleveland, with whom, according to the secret of history of those times, he was admitted to the last degree of intimacy.\(^27\)

Wycherley's success in the playhouse, true to the court code of wit, entitled him to a large degree of familiarity with the fashionable courtiers. So long as the standard of wit remained the criterion of social value, a young gentleman could be catapulted from obscurity into the highest reaches of the social world. Barbara Villiers, Lady Castlemaine, "the lewdest

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\(^25\) *The Playhouse of Pepys*, p. 313.

\(^26\) Archer, p. 185., sees *Love in a Wood* as Wycherley's "'prentice piece." Wilcox, p. 83, calls it "a flimsy plot of rakish gentlemen pursuing disguised ladies in a dark park." Even Summers, (Volume I, p. 32.), despite his admiration for the play, is obliged to confess that "the connexion between...the episodes is quite slender."

\(^27\) Baker, p. 475.
as well as the fairest of all King Charles' concubines,"28 found — on the strength of this one play — that Wycherley was a peer worthy of her favors. It was Barbara herself who sought out Wycherley as he rode in the park; Wycherley was now a man of fashion.

Upon the writing his first Play, which was St. James Park, he became acquainted with several of the most celebrated Wits both of the Court and Town. The writing of that Play was likewise the Occasion of his becoming acquainted with one of King Charles' Mistresses after a very particular manner. As Mr. Wycherley was going thro' Pall-mall towards St. James's in his Chariot, he met the foresaid Lady in hers, who thrusting half her Body out of the Chariot, cry'd out aloud to him, You Wycherley, you are a Son of a Whore, at the same time laughing aloud and heartily.29

Barbara Villiers' ribald greeting was not the trite imprecation that it seemed; it was a metaphorical allusion to a song contained in Wycherley's new play:

When Parents are Slaves
Their Brats cannot be any other,
Great Wits and great Braves
Have always a Punk to their Mother.30

Wycherley was of course dumbfounded by this witty compliment. Before Love in a Wood had been presented, he had been a mere minor wit; after a few performances of his new play,

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30 Love in a Wood, Act I, Sc. II.
he was being called a "Great Wit" by Barbara Villiers, mistress to the King, and one of the most wealthy, beautiful, and influential women in the kingdom. To be sure, she had not delivered her compliment in the politest of fashions, but raillery and banter were the fashion of the age, and Wycherley was both quick to detect her meaning, and quick to pursue his advantage.

As, during Mr. Wycherley's Surprise, the Chariots drove different ways, they were soon at a considerable Distance from each other, when Mr. Wycherley recovering from his Surprise, ordered his Coachman to drive back, and to overtake the Lady. As soon as he got over-against her, he said to her, Madam, you have been pleased to bestow a Title on me which generally belongs to the Fortunate. Will your Ladyship be at the Play to Night? Well, she reply'd what if I am there? Why then I will be there to wait on your Ladyship, tho' I disappoint a very fine woman who had made me as Assignment. ...he who will be constant to your Ladyship, till he can find a finer Woman, is sure to die your Captive. The Lady blush'd and bade her Coachman drive away. As she was then in all her Bloom, and the most celebrated Beauty that was then in England, or perhaps that has been in England since, she was touch'd with the Gallantry of that compliment. In short, she was that Night in the first Row of the King's Box in Drury Lane, and Mr. Wycherley in the Pit under her, where he entertained her during the whole play.31

At this time, Barbara Villiers was in mortal fear that she had lost her hold on King Charles, and was seeking to make Charles jealous by taking an assorted series of lovers. She had had suspicious intimacies with Sir Harry Jermyn, Charles Hart, the rope-dancer Jacob Hall, John Churchill, (later Duke of Marlborough) and a number of others. King Charles, contented

with the liaisons he had contracted with Nell Gwyn and others, permitted Barbara her pleasures so long as she was discreet about them. The Duke of Buckingham, however, having been rejected by his passionate young kinswoman, took pains to expose her to the public, and consequently ruin her. Buckingham contrived that the king should catch Barbara in flagrante delicto with handsome John Churchill. Charles, amused at the sight of the young guardsman leaping unclothed from a bedroom window, merely cried after him, "I forgive you, for you do it for your bread." 32

Yet, for Wycherley to take up with Charles' mistress was quite another matter. Wycherley was ambitious, and the king was not always so amused at the casual loves of his favorite. When Buckingham began to blacken the young playwright's reputation, Wycherley found himself in an awkward position, and sought desperately to extricate himself from his difficulties:

...he [Buckingham] had her so narrowly watch'd by his Spies, that he soon came to the Knowledge of those whom he had reason to believe his Rivals. And after he knew them, he never fail'd to name them aloud, in order to expose the Lady, to all those who frequented him, and among others he us'd to name Mr. Wycherley. As soon as it came to the Knowledge of the latter, who had all his expectations from the Court, he apprehended the Consequence of such a Report, if it should reach the King. He applied himself therefore to Wilmot Lord

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32 "Barbara Villiers," The Dictionary of National Biography Volume XX, pp. 312-318.
Rochester and to Sir Charles Sedley, and entreated them to remonstrate to the Duke of Buckingham the Mischief which he was about to do to one who had not the Honour to be known to him, and who had never offended him. Upon their opening the Matter to the Duke, he cry'd out immediately, that he did not blame Wycherley, he only accus'd his Cousin. Ay, but, they reply'd, by rending him suspected of such an Intrigue, you are about to ruine him, that is, your Grace is about to ruine a Man with whose Conversation you would be pleas'd above all things. Upon this occasion they said so much of the shining Qualities of Mr. Wycherley, and of the Charms of his Conversation, that the Duke, who was as much in love with Wit, as he was with his Kinswoman, was impatient till he brought to sup with him, which was in two or three Nights. After Supper, Mr. Wycherley, who was then in the Height of his vigor both of body and Mind, thought himself oblig'd to exert himself, and the Duke was charm'd to that degree, that he cry'd out in a Transport, By G my cousin is in the right of it; and from that very moment made a Friend of a Man whom he believ'd his happy Rival.33

It can thus be seen that we have by no means overestimated the value of "wit" in Restoration society, or the degree to which William Wycherley possessed that qualification. In the space if a mere two months, Wycherley had risen from obscurity to almost complete acceptance by the principal members of the court, and all on the basis of his charm and "wit." Entirely without financial resources, court position, or the advantages of birth, his quick wit and polished manners had brought Wycherley to the bed and favors of Lady Castlemaigne, given him the support of Rochester and Sedley, and even converted Buckingham, his angry rival, into his life-long friend and patron.

33 Letter "To...Major PACK," p. 410.
Wycherley's immediate rewards were assuredly great, for Lady Castlemaigne was known to be as lavish with her purse as with her person, and men such as John Churchill had made their fortunes by her.34 "Beautiful Barbara" must have been especially generous to Wycherley, for she was extravagantly smitten by his charms: it is reliably reported that she often went to his chambers in the Temple, "dressed like a country maid, in a straw hat, with pattens on, and a box or basket in her hand."35 She undoubtedly was munificent in proportion to her passions for the young playwright.

Similar advantages were to be obtained from Buckingham, once his friendship was gained; his early benevolence to Wycherley was well known to Dennis, who observed:

The Duke of Buckingham gave him solid sensible Proofs of his Esteem and Affection. For as he was at the same time Master of the Horse to King Charles, and Colonel of a Regiment; as Master of the Horse he made him one of his Esquires, and as Colonel of a Regiment he made him Captain Lieutenaut of his own Company, resigning to him at the same time his own Pay as Captain, and all other Advantages that could be justly made of the Company.36

34 Ward, xxix, notes that Barbara Villiers presented Churchill with £4,500, the basis of his later fortune.

35 The authenticity of this statement is discussed by Summers, Volume I, p. 36. The above comment was made by Leigh Hunt, erroneously citing Voltaire's "Letter on Comedy," in his Letters Concerning the English Nation, pp. 182-191. The true source, if any, is not known, but the incident nonetheless seems genuine.

Wycherley had presented his first play in March, 1671; in that same month or the next, he met Lady Castlemaine; by the end of June, he was already commissioned as Captain Lieutenant of Buckingham's regiment. ¹³⁷ By October, Wycherley felt secure enough to make public his familiarity with Barbara Villiers, and his dedication to her in the first edition of Love in a Wood is both intimate and boastful:

I can do your Grace no Honour, nor make you more Admirers than you have already; yet I can do myself the honour to let the World know, I am the greatest you have.... I cannot but publickly give your Grace my humble acknowledgements for the Favours I have receiv'd from you.... for you have that perfection of Beauty... which others of your Sex, but think they have; that Generosity in your Actions, which others of your Sex, but think they have; that Generosity in your Actions, which others of your Quality have only in their Promises; that Spirit, Wit, and Judgment, and all other Qualifications, which fit Hero's to Command.... therefore I must... observe and obey you against my will, and say no more.... ¹³⁸

Even considering the familiarity with which authors of the time addressed the nobility, this dedication was a bold stroke; in parts it reads more like a lover's panegyric than a dedication. Wycherley apparently felt quite secure at this time, for so brash a public acknowledgment of his relationship with Barbara Villiers might have had serious results: Charles

¹³⁷ The English Army Lists and Commission Registers (London: publisher unknown, 1892), Volume I, p. 120., quoted in Churchill, v., notes that Wycherley was commissioned on June 19, 1672.

¹³⁸ The dedication "To Her GRACE the Dutchess of Cleveland," of Love in a Wood, Summers, Volume I, pp. 69-70.
II had already shown that he was quite unpredictable where Barbara was concerned. But the sparkling wit and charming manner of young Wycherley was to win over Charles as easily as it had won Buckingham. Charles certainly must have known eventually of the liaison between Wycherley and his favorite, for Buckingham had circulated rumors, satires had been written upon the subject, the dedication had been published, and the affair became a matter of some public scandal. Nonetheless, Charles, like Buckingham, could deny nothing to a true wit, and later became Wycherley's most dedicated admirer.

39 We have already noted that Charles took Barbara's indiscretion with John Churchill quite lightly; yet other lovers, Sir Harry Jermyn for one, had not escaped his wrath so easily. "Barbara Villiers," D.N.B., Volume XX, p.314.

40 The affair between Wycherley and Barbara Villiers seems to have been moderately well known to his contemporaries. Dennis notes that, "the Correspondence between these two Persons...afterwards made a great Noise in the Town," (Letter "To...Major PACK," p. 410.) Summers, Volume I, p. 36., speaks of scurrilous "contemporary manuscript satires," in which there are allusions to Wycherley and Barbara Villiers. I have been unable to confirm their existence, but there is no reason to doubt Summers' statement.

41 Charles II was known for his indulgence toward the wits, no matter how serious the offenses they might commit. Buckingham, in 1677, seriously embarrassed the king by invoking an ancient statute requiring the dissolution of Parliament. He was sent to the Tower for this indiscretion, but was soon released, while Shaftsbury remained there for some time. (Chapman, p. 236.) Similarly, Sedley and Dorset went through the most uproarious escapades without fear of punishment. Once, after running naked along Bow-street, they attacked passers-by and assaulted the watch. When a constable arrested them, the two rakes were released at the order of the king, while the constable himself was imprisoned. Charles is reported to have said in justification, "God will not damn a man, for a little
Eager to capitalize upon his meteoric rise in society, Wycherley wrote a second play, a hurried work which shows every sign of hasty composition. In March 1672, The Gentleman Dancing-Master was presented at Dorset Garden. Its run was only six days, and even this reception was probably due to the anticipation of the audience, who undoubtedly expected another excellent comedy from the author of Love in a Wood. We have already noted that the Gentleman Dancing-Master achieved no great success, and we have tentatively suggested that the absence of the usual court audience was a major factor in its failure. There were, however, other contributing causes: Wycherley, timorous and fearful over the reception which might be given his new play, had polished and repolished Love in a Wood over a period of two or three years. The prologue to

irregular pleasure." (Pepys, October 23, 1668; Connely, p. 56.) Truly, a wit could be forgiven nearly anything.

42 Summers, Volume I, p. 154., persuasively suggests that March, 1671 was the period in which The Gentleman Dancing Master saw its premiere. The matter is of some debate, for we have no concrete evidence to indicate the exact date. Nicoll, Volume II, p. 438., suggests August, 1671, while Ward, p. 126., advances December, 1671 or January, 1672. On the basis of Summers' superior argumentation, I have accepted his opinion.

43 See above, pp. 20-23.

44 Klette has established that Love in a Wood was written over the period 1669-1671. See Klette, p. 21f., and Churchill, xvi.
Love in a Wood had shown Wycherley's anxiety:

Custom, which bids the Thief from Cart Harangue,
All those that come to make, and see him hang,
Wills the damn'd Poet (though he knows he's gone)
To greet you, e're his Execution.

Well then, who nothing hopes, needs nothing fear;
And he, before your cruel Votes shall do it,
By his despair, declares himself no Poet.45

After his success with Love in a Wood and after his
eager reception by court society, Wycherley no longer feared
the worst; the prologue to the Gentleman Dancing-Master shows
some arrogance on the part of its author, and his condescen-
sion to the audience of "cits" in a misplaced attempt to gain
their approval:

In short, we shall be heard, be understood,
If not, shall be admir'd and that's as good;
For you to senseless Plays have still been kind,
Nay, where no sense was, you a Jest would find:

...on the Change, Wits have no reputation,
And rather than be branded for a Wit,
He with you, able men, wou'd credit get.46

Whatever the immediate cause of the failure of The
Gentleman Dancing-Master, it is clear that Wycherley's hasty
writing, condescension to the audience, and overconfidence
can be construed as contributory negligence.47 It was a mistake

46 Prologue to The Gentleman Dancing-Master. Summers, Vol. I, p. 155. The inappropriate nature of Wycherley's "misplaced attempt" to obtain the approval of the "cits" has been noted above, p. 23.
in judgment that Wycherley would not make in his later dramatic attempts: both The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer would be as polished and as carefully written as Love in a Wood.

The Gentleman Dancing-Master does, however, have some aspects in common with Love in a Wood. Wycherley's second play, like his first, plainly, even thoughtlessly, espoused the new ideals, fashions, and manners of the court society. The love between Gerard and Hippolyta, the center of the play, is a typical Restoration romance of a rakish young man and his pert mistress. From the beginning of her amour, Hippolyta recognizes that she is a woman of a new age, and vows to choose freely her future husband. The theme itself is ancient, but the treatment is in the Restoration form, and the character of Hippolyta shows peculiarly Restoration traits:

Hipp. I thought you would like this man strangely, I was going to say lov'd him. Courage then Hippolyta, make use of the only opportunity thou canst have to enfranchise thyself: Women formerly (they say) never knew how to make use of their time till it was past, but let it not be said so of a young Woman of this Age. . . . well then, courage, I say; Hippolyta, thou art full fourteen years old, shift for thy self.48

Despite the fact that Hippolyta is a mere child, and all of her young years have been spent in seclusion, she quickly learns the manners of the new age and devises the means with which to outwit her father. When Gerard steals her away, it

is Don Diego Formal, Hippolyta's father, who receives the blame for losing his daughter — a typically Restoration concept.

Ger. Well, old Formalty, if you had not kept up your Daughter, I am sure I had never cheated you of her.

The Wary Fool is by his care betray'd, As Cuckolds by their Jealousie are made. 49

At the end of the play, we find that this relationship of parent and child has been the theme:

When Children marry, Parents shou'd obey, Since Love claims more Obedience far than they. 50

While the Gentleman Dancing-Master does not have the glitter and gaiety of Wycherley's first play, the ideas presented are clear expressions of the Restoration ideal. The importance of love, the independence of youth, the instinctive amorous proclivities of young ladies, irreverence towards age, are all concepts contained in that ideal. A happily seduceable young lady, a rake expert in seduction, and an oppressive guardian are all here — the omnipresent triangle of Restoration comedy. 51 The play itself, despite the praises of a few devoted critics, 52 is not very good; the importance of The

49 G.D.M., Act III, Sc. I.

50 G.D.M., Act IV, Sc. I.


Gentleman Dancing-Master for us, is that it exhibits the ideals of the beau monde as clearly as Wycherley's previous play, and it can be considered as representative of the comedy of manners form. Even a casual comparison of its minor themes with much better Restoration plays will show its topical nature and its adherence to the Restoration ideal.\(^\text{53}\)

The minor plot of The Gentleman Dancing-Master, for example, revolves about satires of James Formal (Don Diego) and Nathaniel Paris (Monsieur de Paris), two Englishmen who affect the fashions of Spain and France to an intolerable degree. Each recognizes the foppishness of the other, but is quick to rationalize his own affectation, and soon the two coxcombs clash:

Don: You are a rash young Man, and while you weare Pantaloons, you are beneath my passion, voto — Auh — they make thee look and waddle (with all those gew-gaw Ribbons) like a great old Pat, slovenly Water-dog.

Mons. And your Spanish Hose, and your Nose in the Air, make you look like a great grisled-long-Irish-Grey-Hound, reaching a Crust off from a high Shelf, ha, ha, ha.\(^\text{54}\)

The French and Spanish are not the only nations satirized in The Gentleman Dancing-Master; the Dutch also are

\(^{53}\) See, for example, Elizabeth Mignon, Crabbed Age and Youth: The Old Men and Women in the Restoration Comedy of Manners (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1947), p. 53f.

\(^{54}\) G.D.M., Act III, Sc. I.
incidentally treated — probably because the Third Dutch War (1672-1674) was then raging. Monsieur de Paris, stung by criticism of the French, retaliates, and the following dialogue ensues:

Mons. Nonde Grace — you are alway turning the Nation Francez into ridicule, dat Nation so accomplie, dat Nation which you imitate, so, dat in the conclusion you butte turn your self into ridicule ma foy; if you are for de raillery, abuse the Dutch, why not abuse the Dutch? les grosse Villaines, Pandars, Insolents; but here in your England ma foy, you have more honueur, respecte, and estimation for the Dushe Swabber, who come to cheat your Nation, den for de Franch-Foot-Man, who come to oblige your Nation.

Mar. Our Nation! then you disowne it for yours, it seems.

Mons. Well! wat of dat; are you the disoblige by date?

Ger. No, Monsieur, far from it; you cou'd not oblige us, nor your Country any other way then by dis­ owning it.55

The criticism of the Dutch here is incidental; the anti-Dutch criticism is intrusive enough into the main idea of the plot to show that it was probably a late topical insertion into the play.56 The importance of the preceding quotation is that it shows the satire of foreign imitators was largely based upon the patriotic feeling so widespread in the Restoration era. To be sure, nationalistic feeling was at a peak because

55 G.D.M., Act I, Sc. II.

56 Klette, p. 23f., concludes that The Gentleman Dancing-Master was written in 1671 and the minor references to the Dutch would not have been inserted until the breakdown in negotiations early in 1672.
of the war, but the relatively minor references to the Dutch in Wycherley's second comedy show that *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* was more than a mere reaction to war hysteria—it was part of an accepted form of xenophobic social satire.

From 1660 on, the court had attempted to inculcate in its members a new spirit of national feeling. It was to the interest of Charles to join his subjects in a common bond of patriotism, and to discourage those who would continue to heedlessly ape French society once the English court was restored. We have already noted that Restoration men of letters absorbed much from the literatures of other courtiers, and with patriotic fervor, prided themselves on their adapted "English" creations.\(^{57}\) By the same token, those who later persisted in openly emulating the French, and thus belittled their native land, were subjected to caustic satire. As the court assimilated its French and English traditions, as it became more of an independent entity with an independent tradition, it used satire—in the drama and elsewhere—to discipline recalcitrant members who were tardy in accepting the Anglicized court manners.

Thus far, we have noted three major types satirized by the drama in the period 1660-1685. The first was that of the Puritan or conservative who refused to accept the new manners.

\(^{57}\) *See above, pp. 31-35.*
precieuse style, and standards of wit imported by the newly-
restored court of Charles. This type was strongly satirized
in the earliest years of the court, but later generated into
simple satire of the "rustics," or ill-mannered men of the
country. We discussed in Chapter I the function of this type
of satiric figure in Restoration society.

The second type of satiric figure we have mentioned was
that of the imitator, the coxcomb who copied fashions in order
to advance himself into the Restoration courts inner social
circle. All of the "would-be-wits" so frequently found in
Restoration comedy are obviously of this type.

Finally, the last type consisted of those who continued
to look to France (or another country) for their standards of
fashion and social manners even long after the Restoration.
This type was considered unpatriotic by the restored court,
because he rejected the standards of his own country for those
of foreigners. The court itself may have taken most of its
tastes in fashion from France, but once it was re-established,
it naturally expected to set the standards of etiquette for
Englishmen. In practice, Restoration dramatists often combined
the latter two satiric types into one superbly comic figure—
the "fop! The most ingenious fool ever to tread the Restoration
stage, "Sir Fopling Flutter," combines the imitation of French
fashions with the affected manner of the "would-be-wits." The
enormous number of satiric portraits of his type in the Res-
toration period indicates that the figure of the fop had a special meaning for the audience of the time, and these foolish caricatures of human beings may have been taken far more seriously as social abnormalities than we might be inclined to believe today.

All of these types were extremes of fashion, and were easily controlled by ridicule so long as the court was the center of social and economic power. Satiric portraits of Puritans and conservative men of the country abound on the Restoration stage, and one appears as Alderman Gripe, "the most finished satirical figure" in Love in a Wood. 58 As early as 1663, Sir James Howard satirized the English Gallomaniac in his play The English Mounsieur, and another caricature of the same type is found in Dryden's Marriage-a-la-Mode (1672). Both plays may have served as models for the Gentleman Dancing-Master, although we have little proof for this conjecture. 59

The fops then, and the men of fashion who were oriented towards other nations, were favorite satiric figures in the theatre of Wycherley's time. The extravagant figures which they presented upon the stage were sure to amuse the audience:

58 Perry, p. 38.
59 Summers, Volume I, p. 44.
even Pepys, who despised farce, was delighted by The English Mounsieur. Nonetheless, we must remember that there was a serious purpose behind this xenophobic ridicule: the new independence of the court and the establishment of a new English social tradition required Englishmen to follow the lead of the court — out of patriotism. By 1672, under the pressures of the Dutch war, this nationalistic sense of conformity had reached new heights, and was appropriately expressed in Wycherley's Gentleman Dancing-Master.

By the beginning of the seventies it was plain how far the admiration of the English court for what was French had gone in the way of actual assimilation, and how far it remained truly English. ...Certain ideals of social intercourse, the admiration of witty converse, of fidelity to social convention, of savoir faire, the love of ease and gaiety and glitter, testify to the lasting influence of France. But English society had already proved to itself, and more, it had come to protest openly with a certain satisfaction, that it was not French. It had...largely cast off the imitation of externals — so that a Monsieur de Paris had become a ridiculous figure, the butt of society and comedy.... The development of an adequate selfexpression in the drama, the establishment of a new comedy, was a process coincident in time with that by which English society had 'found' itself.

We can see now that Wycherley, in his first two plays, wrote with absolute, almost unimaginative, fidelity to the norms and standards of the contemporary court society. Despite

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60 "A mighty pretty play, very witty and pleasant." (December, 1666).

61 Churchill, xi.
the temptation to read into Wycherley's earlier plays the more substantial literary qualities of his Country Wife or Plain Dealer, they have little in the way of enduring value, for these lesser works do not transcend the artistic and philosophical limits of the artificial Restoration society. For this reason, Love in a Wood and The Gentleman Dancing-Master are historically interesting as expressions of their particular social period; as dramatic art, the plays rest in deserved literary obscurity.62

The importance of Wycherley's earlier plays to this study, is that they show to us the extent to which he had assimilated the values of his society. Wycherley in these early years, was ambitious, well-educated, and sensitive to the last degree to the nuances of the court standards; in his early plays he portrayed the manners and concepts of his society with brisk and gay precision, but with little artistic or critical perception. The objects of his satire, the themes of his plays, even their form and style, were dictated by the whims and fancies of court, and when society could no longer appreciate the values put forth by that court, Wycherley's first two plays disappeared from the stage. Love in a Wood and

62 Perry, p. 35., notes: "The last two [plays] are so immensely superior as practically to contain in themselves Wycherley's entire contribution to English dramatic literature. The first two are frankly prentice work...their plan is trivial and superficial by comparison." See also Wilcox, pp. 82-83; above, p. 100, and notes.
the Gentleman Dancing-Master had artfully transfered the Restoration social values to the stage, but this was not enough: there is a great deal of difference between "art" and "artfulness." As a result of his uncritical adherence to an artificial and limited code of conduct, Wycherley's first two plays can be classed today as mere "light social drama, interspersed with scenes of...farcical intrigue."63

After the unfortunate reception given to The Gentleman Dancing-Master, Wycherley took far greater care in writing his comedies. In 1672, he began The Country Wife;64 not until 1675 would it appear upon the public stage.65 The pains taken by

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63 Wilcox, p. 82. This comment was originally applied by its author solely to Love in a Wood. It is applicable to both early plays, however, and I have used it in this sense.

64 This is the conclusion of Klette, p. 25f., et passim. Churchill, (xix), on the other hand, noting references to L'Ecole des Filles and the Covent Garden Drollery in the play, concludes that these references could not have been written before very late 1672 or 1673. Even dating the writing of The Country Wife as late as 1673, would not affect our contention that The Country Wife was written more slowly and with greater deliberation than The Gentleman Dancing-Master.

65 The precise date of the premiere of The Country Wife is unknown; it is certain, however, that it was played before royalty on January 12, 1675, and many historians have taken this to be the date of the first performance. See Van Lennep, p. 227.; Nicoll, Volume VI, p. 345. I have tentatively accepted this date, because Thomas H. Fujimura, the latest editor of The Country Wife (Lindoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), x., has also done so. There are a number of indications however, that an earlier private production had taken place, undoubtedly at Whitehall. (Churchill, xxv.; Fujimura, The Country Wife, x.)
Wycherley to polish his new comedy were rewarded. The Country Wife appears to have been an extraordinary success. We have no accounts of its early presentation as we do of Love in a Wood, but we know The Country Wife had many successful performances and at least five printed editions in the Seventeenth century; it remained popular far into the next century, and a revival was commanded by royalty as late as 1726.

The years 1771-1775 had been instructive for Wycherley. For five years he had consorted with the rogues, rakes, and aristocrats who dominated the social and political spheres; more important, in the early seventies he had made lasting friendships with such literary giants as Samuel Butler and John Dryden. With the advantage of his new position within the heart of the court circle, he attained a more mature insight into the Restoration theory of conduct; because of the undoubted inspiration of his professional peers, he reached a new level of artistic ability. His new play, The Country Wife.

66 Summers, Volume I, p. 46., and Volume II, pp. 141-142. The early performances seem to have been marred by the disapproval of the ladies in the boxes, who resented the implications to their own "honor." See Wycherley's refutation of their criticism in Act II, Sc. I., of The Plain Dealer.


68 Connely, p. 101.
was the most artistic expression of the manners of his age, and certainly the greatest comedy of manners to appear in Charles' reign. With the first performance of *The Country Wife*, "every distinguishing feature of the Restoration comedy had appeared in definitely recognizable form." Wycherley thus showed himself to be "the greatest [dramatic] genius who appeared during the century following the civil war."69

*The Country Wife*, is not only "the purest expression of Wycherley's comic genius," it is very probably the most subtle and incisive comedy of manners ever produced: it bridges the gap between enduring dramatic art and the trivial farcical amusements so common among the lesser Restoration comedies.70 In *The Country Wife*, the farcical lampoons of the fops, the themes of hypocrisy and affectation so beloved by the Restoration audiences, are all subsumed into one greater dominating theme: the deception of appearances, the contrast of social reality with social masquerade. The theme of imposture was common enough in the Restoration theatre, but it had never before been used with such consummate skill, nor shaped to give such universal and deeply-felt meaning, as in *The Country

69 Krutch, p. 21.

It is in this play that we perceive Wycherley "to have passed beyond the careless art of Etherege," and the other gentleman poets.\footnote{A.W. Ward, and A.R. Waller, \textit{The Cambridge History of English Literature}, Volume VIII. \textit{The Age of Dryden} (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), p. 164.}

\textbf{The Country Wife} possesses many of the characteristics of a typical Restoration comedy, and at first glance, might be ranked as a mere farce with many of its contemporaries. Its plot is simple, and typically Restoration: a great rake, by means of an imaginative device, gains entrance to the houses of willing women; in the process, he cuckolds a number of domineering husbands, and enjoys the favors of their all too willing wives. This is a plot-line used fatiguingly often in Restoration comedy, although usually without the technical skill and ingenuity found in \textit{The Country Wife}.

The significance and the literary value of this play lies in Wycherley's expansion of his theme to all mankind: we are all dissimulators and hypocrites.

\begin{quote}
Hor. Most Men are the contraries to that they wou'd seem; your Bully you see, is a Coward with a long Sword; the little humbly fawning Physician with his Ebony cane, is he that destroys men.

\begin{quote}
Ay, your errantest Cheat, is your Trustee, or Executor; your jealous Man, the greatest cuckold; your Church-Man, the greatest Atheist; and your noisy pert Rogue of a Wit, the greatest Fop....\footnote{\textit{The Country Wife}, Act I, Sc. I.} \end{quote}
\end{quote}
From another aspect, *The Country Wife* is the Restoration ideal made fantastical, stylized even more than that artificial society was in reality. *The Country Wife* is a "dream-play, an illusion of the best of all possible worlds, given the standards of the society in which it was written. Generations of theatre-goers who have not shared —nor even understood— the Restoration ideal of conduct, have applauded the sexual fantasies in *The Country Wife*. These spectators have seen within themselves the elements of wish-fulfillment portrayed so graphically by Wycherley.

For the modern audience, the value of *The Country Wife* is that it presents archetypal, psychologically satisfying characters, and an enduring philosophical truth; for the Restoration higher society, which chose the rake as its model of conduct, the impact of *The Country Wife* must have been felt far more immediately and keenly. Throughout the play, Horner, is portrayed as a hero of epic proportions; he is the man completely devoted to seduction, the supreme cuckold of foolish and domineering husbands. Wycherley saw him as the unattainable ideal of his society, and in the epilogue, clearly states that his archetypal satyr can be matched by no human being. Horner is an ideal incarnate, "a purely sexual creature."73

73 Perry, p. 49.
and the rakes of the audience, "both old and Young," can
match Horner in reputation, but certainly not in performance:

In fine, you Essens't Boyes, both Old and Young,
Who wou'd be thought so eager, brisk and strong,

A Horner's part may vainly think to play;

men may still believe you Vigorous,
But then we Women, ______there's no cous'ning us.

Another indication of the stylized and fanciful nature

of The Country Wife is the symbolism inherent in the names


The symbolic character of the name of Horner was quite deli-

berate, and underlined by Wycherley in The Plain Dealer:

Oliv. (Note)...the clandestine obscenity in the
very name of Horner.
Eliz. Truly, 'tis so hidden, I cannot find it
out....

Oliv. O Horrid! does it not give you the rank
conception, or image of a Goat, or Town-Bull, or a
Satyr? nay what is yet a filthier image than all the
rest, that of a Eunuch?
Eliz. What then?....

Oliv. I, but, Cousin, one cannot stop there.
Eliz. I can Cousin.

Oliv. O no; for when you have those filthy crea-
tures in your head once, the next thing you think, is
what they do; as their defiling of honest Mens Beds
and Couches, Rapes upon sleeping and waking Country
Virgins, under Hedges and on Haycocks....

In this dream world, populated by the most capable
seducers and the most eminently seductible, an infallible
method is found for distinguishing friend from foe; the pre-

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74 Epilogue to The Country Wife.

tense of impotence. Given this opportunity, it is inevitable that Horner will achieve his desired "ends." It is a rake's dream, the perfect world of seduction: young women naturally have the instincts which lead them, unbidden, to others' beds; husbands, by their very actions, make certain their cuckoldry; Horner, the ideal rake, is besieged by voracious females. This erotic phantasm bears no relation to any reality, even that of Restoration society, and can only be called the most elaborate, most highly stylized expression of the Restoration ideal to be presented in the theatre. The inevitability of seduction is the key to interpretation of the play, as John Harrington Smith has noted:

Horner reaps Mrs. Pinchwife with no effort at all. And the same is nearly true in the action involving the Fidgets. All Horner need do is set the Quack to spreading the report about him; and so infallible is this for distinguishing women who are truly virtuous from those who are not, and so certain is it to draw in the husbands of just the women Horner wishes to meet, that the women and husbands do the rest.76

There is no sense of traditional Christian morality in this play, nor should we expect it; while The Country Wife is a far more brilliant, more capable, and more valuable work than either of Wycherley's prior comedies, Wycherley was still completely under the influence of the court when he wrote The

76 J.H. Smith, p. 86.
Country Wife, and the same ideals and manners are all common to his first three efforts.

To illustrate this latter point, we may suggest that the plot lines of The Gentleman Dancing-Master and The Country Wife show a rough similarity. In The Gentleman Dancing-Master, Don Diego restrains his daughter, and thereby forces her to use her innate cunning to attract Mr. Gerard, the most accomplished rake of the town. Both Gerard and Hippolyta can manipulate Don Diego because of his domineering temper, and soon Hippolyta's father is outwitted. Gerard triumphs and Don Diego eventually accepts their union with the best graces he can muster.

In a far more finished and elegant form, this is generally what happens in the Horner-Margery-Pinchwife episode of The Country Wife. In the latter case it is not marriage, but pure seduction which is the end, for Pinchwife is Margery's husband rather than her father. Nonetheless it is obvious that the same ideals, manners, and social forms are basically found in both plays; their difference may be attributed to the greater skills and insights gained by the author as he matured.

Thus, all of the first three comedies of Wycherley can be said to espouse the court ideal, and to carefully adhere to the other contemporary standards of "wit." In each, the enemies of the court, rather than the court itself, are pilloried: Alderman Gripe in Love in a Wood; Don Diego and Monsieur de
Paris in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*; Sparkish in *The Country Wife*. Each of these characters was a conventional satiric figure of the Restoration court society: the domineering husband or father; the Puritan; the would-be-wit; the extremist of fashion. In every case, the subjects of satire in these plays were approved by the court and indeed, dictated by the very nature of its prescribed manner of living. There are those who read a "savage exposure" of Restoration society in *The Country Wife*, but we can attribute the possibility of this interpretation to the ambiguity contained in every masterpiece of dramatic art. There is every indication that in his first three plays, Wycherley satirized within his social framework, and in defense of the contemporary social order. Hypocrisy and conservative opposition, affectation and lack of patriotism were all central problems of the Restoration society, and the "gentleman-poets" portrayed them strictly in accordance with the opinions of the court. Wycherley, in this matter, did not differ from Etherege, Sedley, or Howard: social pretense and hypocrisy are painted as the major flaws of human nature in his plays:

> Just as Wycherley's ideal remains constant throughout his plays, varying only in the degree to which it seems attainable, so too does his central obsession with

77 R.C. Churchill, p. 421.

78 Wilcox, pp. 86-87. Wilcox, I believe, would include *The Plain Dealer* in this judgment. I intend to demonstrate that *The Plain Dealer* differs from Wycherley's other plays in its object of satire.
hypocrisy. The evils of false virtue, false modesty, false courage, are the very corrosives of human nature?

We can go further than subject-matter to demonstrate our case: the first three plays of Wycherley share a common style, that of the elaborate language patterns of préciosité promoted by the court. If anything, Wycherley's use of the prescribed figures and forms of this stylized linguistic trait increases throughout the progresslon of his first three plays. The Country Wife is often singled out from among all the Restoration comedies for the brilliance and copious quantity of its puns, double-entendres, similes, and plays on words: Wycherley's use of the terms "china," "honor," and "wit" in that play is noted throughout the critical literature. Who would think to suggest that the puns and similes of Sparkish are inferior—or less in the style of préciosité—than the quibbles of Dapperwit in Love in a Wood? On the basis of style alone, then, we must conclude that in The Country Wife, Wycherley was still attempting to flatter and please the court taste, rather than seeking to oppose it. All three of the early comedies are characterized by the stichomythia and epigrammatic raillery, witty aphorisms, and the self-conscious linguistic gilding considered characteristic of préciosité and the Restoration court standard of language. These traits of language were so

79 Zimbardo, p. 49.
observable characteristic of Wycherley's plays, that Pope could declare:

In spite of his good sense, I could never read his plays with true pleasure, from the general stiffness of the style. Ay, that was occasioned by his always studying for antitheses. 82

These stylistic traits are given all the more weight when we observe that Wycherley was highly conscious of his artistry, and spent long periods polishing and repolishing his plays. By court convention he was forced to pose as a "gentleman-author" —a station which required that he write his plays with appropriate negligence and apparent indifference. In actuality, there is sufficient evidence to show that Wycherley was simply masquerading for the benefit of the nobility. Lord Lansdowne was taken in by this pretense, and wrote of his friend, "If it had been a trouble to him to write, I am much mistaken if he would not have spared himself that trouble." 83

In fact, the very opposite was true: we have already seen that Wycherley usually spent years in refining and polishing his plays. Rochester, who was quick at detecting social shams, saw through Wycherley's pretense and dubbed him "slow" Wycherley because of his careful professional approach;

Of all our Modern Wits, none seem to me
Once to have touch'd upon true COMEDY,
But hasty Shadwell, and slow Wycherley. 84

82 Spence, p. 121.
In corroboration of Rochester's comment, we have Wycherley's own opinion of the negligent style of the gentleman writers. Steele, writing in the Tatler, recorded one of the few literary opinions of Wycherley which have been preserved for posterity:

The town has for half an age been tormented with insects called "easy writers," whose abilities Mr. Wycherley described excellently well in one word: "That," said he, "among these fellows is called easy writing which anyone may easily write." 85

Wycherley defended his painstaking literary approach in the preface to his Miscellany Poems, published in 1704. He had never accepted the casual attitude towards art so popular among the Restoration aristocrats, and his comments upon the subject of "wit," show he had never attempted to practice the "negligent" approach in his own works:

The Words of True Wits are Slow, because they stay to drag Weighty Judgment along with 'em....The Tardy, or Slow, to bring forth, are not Barren, but stay for perfect Productions, whilst the Hasty, or Precipitated, are often Abortive, Imperfect, or Monstrous; the Brains slow to bring Forth, are not Barren, no more than Heavy Soil's unfruitful...the Light Brains, like the Light Sandy Soils, for receiving Impressions soonest, soonest lose 'em. 86

There is ample evidence, then, that the similarities between the three early comedies of Wycherley are not simply


86 Summers, Volume III, p. 10.
fortuitous. Wycherley was a very deliberate and conscious artist, and his early comedies clearly reflect both his personal aspirations and ideals, and the standards of the society to which he belonged. Those critics who continue to maintain that *The Country Wife* differs in content, style, or intention from his earlier plays, will not be challenged here. They are as entitled to their opinions as any other commentator, for *The Country Wife* contains that universalizing ambiguity that is characteristic of all great art, and a large variety of critical interpretations of that play may be assessed as equally valid. We only emphasize that all such evaluations are mere interpretive judgments, and are not based upon historical, but aesthetic proofs. Our own attention has been centered upon the historical and social relations of Wycherley's early plays, and it is in this context that we can declare the first three plays of Wycherley to be cut from the same cloth. Throughout the period in which our author wrote his first three plays (1669-1674), there is every indication that he not only approved the Restoration ideal, but pursued it with such adeptness and energy, that he amazed his contemporaries:

Nothing in Wycherley's biography suggests that he was out of touch with the society in which he moved. Quite the contrary, from the time that *Love in a Wood*, his first play, appeared and he was dubbed

87 For example, see R.C. Churchill, p. 421.; Holland p. 233.
son of a whore (i.e. a wit) by the Duchess of Cleveland, Wycherley was in the very swim of courtly society. A favority of his king and the ladies of the court, a wit, a beau, a keeper of mistresses, Wycherley the man was every inch a Restoration gentleman.88

Wycherley not only admired the court and imitated his betters in order to advance himself, he shared the court ideal, and was to some extent a pace-setter in the court. The standards and manners which the court sought to uphold, were largely the very rules of conduct Wycherley had learned in childhood, and were part of his very being. While it is true that he deliberately sought to advance his fortunes by beguiling the nobility, there is every indication that he personally believed and trusted in their common ideal. Major critics of Wycherley, while divided upon the implications of this fact, have acknowledged it to be true, and a basic factor which assured Wycherley's triumph at court over lesser playwrights:

["Restoration comedy...was in this respect a flattering of the little court clique and their snobbish disciples, upon whose patronage the theatre now depended. ...Wycherley, deliberately or instinctively, was certainly the most skilful of the flatterers; since his amoral attitude...accorded quite perfectly with the rake's conceit of themselves.89
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\text{italics supplied by me}
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Other avenues of approach lead us to the same inevitable conclusions: every fact which we can uncover pertaining

88 Zimbardo, p. 78.
89 Granville-Barker, pp. 115-116.
to Wycherley's personal life in the period 1669-1774 and beyond, leads us to conclude that Wycherley, gifted and capable as he was, participated wholeheartedly in all of the dissolute and licentious practices which have been condemned by later critics and moralists. He drank copiously, wrote bawdy poetry, and seemed to be extraordinarily attracted to the ladies:

Mr. Dennis, in a few words, has summed up this gentleman's character; he was admired by the men for his parts in wit and learning; and he was admired by the women for those parts of which they were more competent judges.90

Throughout the period of the early 1670's, Wycherley undoubtedly accompanied the other famous rakes in their rau­cous pleasures.91 Richardson Pack, in his "Memoirs of William Wycherley," indicates that Wycherley may have participated in

90 Theophilus Cibber, Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland (London: R. Griffiths, 1753). Volume III, p. 255. I have been unable to trace the reference to "Mr. Dennis," but a very similar statement is made by Pack, in the Posthumous Works, p. 8., and this might be the true source:

"His company was not only courted by the Men, but his Person was as well received by the Ladies; and as K. CHARLES was extremely Fond of him upon account of his Wit, some of the Royal Mistresses, I have been credibly informed, set no less Value upon Those Parts in him, of which they were more proper Judges. Thus the Circle of his Life was filled with all the delightful Variety, that Freedom, Fav'our, and Easy Fortune could administer to an Elegant MIND and Vigorous Constitution."

91 Connely, p. 56.
the libertine entertainments of his friends to a startling
degree:

I cannot forbear to mention (just for the Oddness of the Thing) one Piece of Gallantry, among many others, that Mr. WYCHERLEY was once telling me they had in Those Days. It was this! There was an House at the Bridge-Foot, where Persons of Better Condition used to Resort...for pleasure and Privacy. The Liquor the Lad­ies and their lovers used to Drink at those Meetings was Canary; and among Other Compliments the Gentlemen paid their Mistresses, this it seems was always One, to take hold of the Bottom of their Smocks, and pouring the Wine through that Filtre, feast their Imaginations with the Thought of what gave the Zesto, and so Drink a Health to the Toast.

He...had been Indulged in the Sweats of Plenty, even to Excess;...had wantonly Roved through all the enchanting Mazes of PLEASURE;...was admired for his Wit; and Valued for his Worth....92

Another indication of Wycherley's rakish leanings may
be found in his poetic writings. An enormous percentage of his poems are drinking songs, poems of seduction, and bawdy verses. Many of these poems of wit are merely coarsely humorous, but a number are so explicitly and shamelessly erotic, that their avowed aphrodisiac purposes cannot be doubted.93

92 Pack, in The Posthumous Works, pp. 8-9, 11-12.

93 A number of these poems were obviously meant for the casual entertainment of Wycherley's fellow-rakes. They have undoubted humorous qualities, and even their titles are amusing:

"To a fine young Woman, who being ask'd by her Lover, Why she kept so filthy a thing as a Snake in her Bosom; answer'd, 'Twas to keep a filthier thing out of it, his Hand; and, that her Snake was to play with, and cool her in hot Weather; which was his Aversion."

(Summers, Volume III, p. 76.)

"Upon a Lady's Fall over a Stile, gotten by runn­ing from Her Lover; by which She show'd Her Fair Back-side,
Thus, on the basis of all available textual, biographical and historical evidence, we can conclude that Wycherley was still under the influence of the court as late as 1675, the year in which The Country Wife saw its premiere. In these early years, Wycherley lived the life of a rake, affected the mannerisms and style of a wit, dramatized sympathetically the court ideal, and showed every indication that he supported the standards of the prevailing social order. His adherence to contemporary standards was rewarded, for he succeeded in gaining entrance to the highest circles of the court, even to the person of the king himself:

King Charles the Second, a nice Discerner of Men, and himself a man of Wit, often chose him for a Companion at his leisure Hours, as Augustus did Horace, and had very advantageous Views for him....

Wycherley had reached the highest pinnacle of success after The Country Wife: he was an accepted "wit", a member of court society, and a boon companion of King Charles. The ambitious young amn who had aspired to the social heights had bested the nobles at their own game, and thereby made his own fortune. He had made himself into the model courtier of his age, and attained his highest aspirations.

which was her best Side, and made Him more Her Pursuer than He was before." 
(Summers, Volume III, p. 98.)

But as we shall see, the roles of rake and serious playwright were incompatible in Wycherley's time: soon he would be brought into conflict with the system of patronage which so oppressed the professional men of letters.
CHAPTER IV

In the last chapter, we demonstrated that Wycherley cultivated to a high degree the vices and virtues most admired by his own contemporaries: he was a man produced by the aspirations and ideals of his age. But merely being a man of one's "age" is hardly a guarantee of distinction; Wycherley possessed in his own right certain ennobling characteristics which raised him above his own time. No one, not proud and gentle Butler, not suffering and brilliant Dryden, not even the independent and courageous Buckinghman, received such praise from his contemporaries for nobility of mind, personal courage, and complete loyalty to his friends. Despite the anxious jealousy of his fellow-courtiers, hardly an ill word seems to have been said of Wycherley throughout his lifetime.

All through [his life] he was regarded as the chief theatrical figure of his time, and there are only one or two satirical notices of him by contemporaries — a rare thing in that lampooning age.¹

¹ Nicoll, Volume I, p. 63.
Perhaps the most endearing characteristic attributed to Wycherley was his kindness to others. Wycherley possessed none of the acrimonious or malign spirit which the writers of his age so often infused into their works and personal relationships: he was widely reputed to be the most gentle of men, and rarely sought to lampoon or satirize any particular individual. Out of all the hundreds of poems said to have been written by Wycherley, less than a dozen are directed against any specific person, and most of these appear to be wrongly attributed to Wycherley. The remaining few are comparatively mild in tone, and may be described more as bantering verse than as true invective. Wycherley preferred to attack general abuses rather than individuals, in the manner prescribed by his master Horace; as a result, he achieved a uniformly good reputation among his countrymen, and the great esteem of his friends. Lord Lansdowne, for example, praised him highly:

To judge by the Sharpness and Spirit of his Satyr, you might be led into.../ a Mistake, and imagine him an ill-natur'd Man: But what my Lord Rochester said of Lord Dorset, is as applicable to him — The Best

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3 See for example, "To my Lord Chancellour Boyle, at once Chancellour and Primate of Ireland: Written when the Author had a Suit depending before him." Summers, Volume III, p. 195.
good Man with the worst-natur'd Muse. As pointed and severe as he is in his Writings, in his Temper he has all the Softness of the tenderest Disposition; gentle and inoffensive to every Man in his particular Character; he only attacks Vice as a publick Enemy, compassionating the Wound he is under a Necessity to probe, or grieving like a good-natur'd Conqueror at the Occasions that provoke him to make such Havock.

My partiality to him [Wycherley] as a Friend might render what I say of him suspected, if his Merit was not so well and so publickly established as to set him above Flattery. To do him Justice, is an Undertaking beyond my Skill....

Even more important, Wycherley was a man who firmly believed in the virtue of unfeigned friendship: he was fiercely devoted in his personal relationships and loyal to almost any extreme. The castigation of deceit, infidelity, and hypocrisy is a central theme found in all of Wycherley's plays and an enormous amount of his poetry is devoted explicitly to the same subject. Friendship and the importance of personal loyalty appear to have been the central tenets of Wycherley's personal code of values, as Pack observed:

His style is Masculine, and his Wit is Pointed: And yet with all that Severity and Sharpness with which he appears on the Stage, they who were of his Familiar Acquaintance applauded him for the Generosity and Gentleness of his Manners. He was certainly a Good-natur'd Man; and I reckon it as One Great Mark of such a Disposition, that he was as Impatient to hear his FRIEND Calumniated, as some other People would be to find themselves Defamed. I have more than once been a Witness of that Honourable Tenderness in his Temper.

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5 See above, p. 127, and Summers, Volume III and IV.
This character trait is rare among men in any age, but in the crowd of lampooning, captious, fault-finding rakes who surrounded Charles II, Wycherley's personal loyalty was something extraordinary. Any number of times he risked his fame and position to support a friend, often when there was no possibility of gaining any personal advantage. In defense of Buckingham, who had long befriended and supported him, he was especially fearless, and he boldly risked the wrath of two kings to come to his aid. Similarly, when Charles' brother James was threatened by The Exclusion Bills of 1679 and 1680, Wycherley fearlessly took the occasion to defend him.

7 The Duke of Buckingham was brilliant but erratic, and frequently found himself in trouble with both Charles I and James II. He was once placed in the Tower for publicly defying Charles, and no one dared to raise a hand to help him. Wycherley at this time bravely published a poem, "To the Duke of B_____, Imprison'd in the Tower, by a Court-Faction," in an attempt to gain his freedom. This protest may or may not have been instrumental in freeing the Duke, for Rochester and Nell Gwyn eventually pleaded his cause; at any rate, Buckingham was released in July of 1677. (See Connelly, p. 138.; Summers, Volume IV, pp. 26-28, 259.; Chapman, pp. 231-239.)

Again, in the reign of James II, Buckingham incurred the anger of his monarch when he flouted his disdain for James' religion. Cast off by the king, Buckingham was soon in severe financial difficulties. Risking the anger of James, Wycherley wrote another poem, "To the Duke of Buckingham, a Man of great Mind, reduc'd to a little Fortune." The poem apparently did little to soften the anger of James, but was nonetheless a courageous act of friendship.

8 "To the DUKE: Written in his Absence, occasion'd from the sight of some Defamatory Libels on Him." Summers, Volume II, pp. 263-274.
We have hitherto seen no sign that Wycherley was in any way repulsed by that immorality of the Restoration court which is so repugnant to many of the critics and historians of that era. On the contrary, Wycherley appears to have lived his life to the fullest extent, and taken his amusements in whatever form his society thought most pleasureable. What we have seen is that despite his adherence to the general mores of his society, Wycherley was a generous, open-hearted man, and by nature possessed certain traits of character unusual for a courtier. The elegance, wit and polish of Restoration fashion were his by instinct and by training, but he could not accustom himself to a life where deceit, guile, and defamation were the avenues to success. It was not the gaiety nor the license of the Restoration court that he opposed; it was the deeper lack of human values to be found in any court, in any age. He scorned the hypocrites, the affectors of friendship, the unscrupulous, all the rabble who surround any seat of power, and who were found in such plenty in Wycherley's own society. 9

9 True to his enlightened concept of satire, Wycherley satirized court life, the minions who surrounded the king, and the court system of patronage, but never any particular monarch. In fact, precisely the opposite is true: while he became progressively more embittered with the court system, out of gratitude for past favors he continued to prize Charles and his brother in public — even long after he was expelled from court. In 1683, Wycherley published his "Epistles to the King and Duke" which are filled with his expressions of loyalty. See also Wycherley's poem, "To the King, my Master; after his Mercy, to a Fault shown to some Conspirators against his Power and Life." (Summers, Vol. II, pp. 248-262.; Vol. III, pp. 260-263).
There were other ways in which William Wycherley differed from the other members of court society. In some respects, Wycherley was a deeply serious literary man, even a scholar; he was expert in at least five languages, read philosophy for casual entertainment, and knew intimately even the most obscure authors of antiquity. While aristocrats such as Etherege and Rochester approached literature with the negligence prescribed by social custom and treated literary professionals with contempt, Wycherley approached his art with deliberate care, and went out of his way to cultivate the friendship of the professional men of letters.

To Wycherley, literature was not only a means to advancement, it served as his study, his pleasure, and one of the chief delights of his life. Wycherley's scholarship had given

On the other hand, Wycherley had seen many royal courts in his travels, and exempted none of them from his satires. He felt that courts encouraged the evils of infidelity, affectation and hypocrisy, and looked upon the courtier's life as a kind of slavery:

Man,
Vain Empire does o'er other Creatures boast,
But Man condemned to Luxury's a Beast,
Must, at another's Pleasure, drudge or rest;
His Pleasure at another's leave, or take
Till he his Pain does of his Pleasure make."
"Upon the Impertinence of Knowledge..."

10 English, French, Greek, Latin, and Spanish.
11 Pope noted that, "Wycherley used to read himself asleep o' nights either in Montaigne, Rochefooucault, Seneca or Gracian; for these were his favorite authors." (Spence, ed. by Singer, p. 198.)
12 Summers, Volume I, p. 11.
him solace in the spiritual slavery of the courtier's life, and
reconciled him to his fate in later years, while he had lain in
debtor's prison. His attitude towards literature is evinced in
his poem, "Advice to a Young FRIEND on the Choice of his LIBRARY:

Thy books shou’d, like thy Friends, not many be,
Yet such wherein Men may thy Judgment see.

Books that may prove, in ev'ry Change of State,
Guides and Assistants to your shifting Fate:

[they] May travel with you and close up your side:
Relieve you from the Pageantry of Courts,
Their gaudy Fopp'ries, and their irksom Sports:
Or if some dire Necessity require,
With you to Dungeons for your Aid retire.
And still, like Friends, your Sadness to prevent
In Prison, Want, Distress, or Banishment.13

Wycherley, serious man of letters that he was, had every
reason to feel superior to those who surrounded him, for hardly
a courtier in Restoration society could be called his peer. He
was infinitely more learned, witty, and accomplished than even
many of the greatest nobles, and but for his lack of money and
title, would have become the greatest figure of the court. With-
out personal power Wycherley was continually forced to compete
with the masses of incompetent flatterers for the favor of men
who were his intellectual and literary inferiors. We can be cer-
tain that Wycherley resented those nobles who presumed them-
selves to be his superiors in learning or literary judgment,

13 Summers, Volume IV, pp. 194-195. The importance of
this poem is, of course, its obvious relation to the facts of
Wycherley's own life. He seems to be speaking here of his own
internal struggles while he was being persecuted by the court,
and while he lay in prison.
simply because of their social distinction. Even while Wycherley was at the peak of his success at court, he could see the injustice of a intellectual caste system which kept a man crushed down among his inferiors, and he wrote aggressively satiric

A number of Wycherley's earlier poems indicate clearly that he despised the fatuous condescension of less educated and talented members of the court. His distaste for those nobles who affected intellectual superiority is found in the poems "To an Empty Coxcomb, who call'd himself a Lover of Learning; because he had a Fine Study of Books, better Bound than Read," (Summers, Volume IV, pp. 192-193.) and a later poem, "The Court-Life," which clearly expresses his disgust:

Why shou'd we that Ambition call?
To gain at Court a servile Place;
Where, to please one, we flatter all,
And aim at Honour, by Disgrace.

Where all Things we must say and do,
Most alien to the Mind and Heart;
Those who most shun us, most pursue;
And to gain Trust, from Virtue part.

Where we must say as great Fools say,
Do, what great Knaves will have us do;
That we for Wits with Coxcombs may,
With Fools for Politicians go.

Where we must flatter him we hate,
Or (what is worse) him we despise;
To broken Slumbers lye down late,
And early to proud Levees rise.

Where we must change Day into Night,
Night into Day, at others Will;
Must take disgusts, to give Delight,
And slight good Men, to honour ill;

Make many Foes, may be our own;
To gain a Friend, where there is none.

Summers, Volume IV, p. 72.
poems upon the subject — although we can be sure that he made no attempt to publish them until much later. 15

But Wycherley's cause for irritation with the Restoration social structure and its attendant form of literary patronage was more than merely philosophic or ethical in nature: he himself suffered from the deficiencies of these systems. As we have noted several times, one of the primary failures of the Restoration form of patronage was that it failed to supply the most deserving authors with the financial support they required. 16

15 See, for example, "An Heroic Epistle. To the Honour of Pimps, and Pimping; dedicated to the Court; and written at a Time when such were most considerable there." This poem, as its title, style, and theme suggest, must have been written in the period 1674-1678. Part of the theme is an attack upon the nature of the court system of advancement, where a pandarer ironically receives favor for the value of his "talents" and "virtues," while the truly talented courtier presumably goes begging:

"...Pimps, for Privy-Counsellours, are best:

Deserve best what they have, their Prince's Ears;
Guards of their Secrets, Partners of their Care,
Shame, for their Faults, like Favourites to bear;

...Pimps, by whom, Monarchs both live, and move,
Best Ministers, 'twixt King and People prove,

So Pimps are Kings best Ministers of State,
Unite the People, make their Princes Great."

16 See above, pp. 66f.
Wycherley, certainly one of the most deserving men of letters in the Restoration period, was no exception to this rule. If anything, his financial problems were more acute than those of Dryden and the other professional men of letters, for he was considered a gentleman-poet, and therefore could not use many of the tactics used by professionals to obtain money. He received payments from the playhouses and booksellers, no doubt, and an occasional pound for poems such as Hero and Leander; but he practiced none of the schemes which the other dramatists used to make ends meet.17

Alternative sources of revenue were also apparently closed to Wycherley. He did not practice law, for he hated that profession desperately, and despite his many years of study, he had not obtained a degree.18 This sin of omission was one

17 Wycherley, after the dedication of Love in a Wood to Barbara Villiers, never again attempted to gain a patron's support by this device. He wrote no literary prefaces in the manner of Dryden, apparently made no contracts with the theatres or booksellers, and strove to maintain his reputation as a gentleman long after he left the court.

18 We have no record which indicates that Wycherley ever received a degree. Certain of Wycherley's poems, however, indicate that he was unlikely to practice law even if he were forced into the most desperate circumstances, and somehow managed to obtain his degree. See Wycherley's poems in Summers, Volume III; "Upon an Old Worn-out Picture of Justice hung over the Judges Heads in a Court of Judicature," (p. 156.) "To my Lord Chancellour Boyle...," (p. 195.) and "Upon the Injustice of the Law. A Satyr," (p. 131.) In the last mentioned poem, Wycherley cries:

"War of the Pen then, is the squabbling Law,
The Sword of Justice, 'gainst the peace to draw;
Wycherley would live to regret; after years spent in penniless glory, he would advise others differently in his poem, "To a Witty Young Man; who neglected the Study of the Law, for that of Poetry." 19

For his livelihood, Wycherley was thus forced to depend upon support freely given by the court friends, and pounds squeezed from his penny-pinching father. Daniel Wycherley, angered by his son's libertine ways, used the "power of the purse" in an attempt to control him, and "made him but scanty allowance." 20 Buckingham and Barbara Villiers undoubtedly gave Wycherley substantial amounts of aid, but this would only have been for a brief time. King Charles also gave Wycherley financial help, but as Dryden well knew, dependence upon the "merry monarch" was a hazardous affair. 21 Charles was at times extraordinarily generous to Wycherley, 22 but knowing the perilous state of Charles' finance, it is safe to say that Pope's

War of the Pen, which, in the Name of Right, Justice unjustly overpowers with Might:

The Law's a Licence so, to cheat, rob, kill, To make the rich Rogues, live unpunish'd still, And hold, the Pow'rful, Great, can do no Ill."

pp. 132, 135.


20 Whincop, p. 303.

21 See above, p. 71-72.

22 Spence, p. 13.
description of Wycherley's benefits is probably correct:

...King Charles gave him, now and then, 
a hundred pounds, not often. 23

Wycherley thus almost entirely depended upon an irres­
pensible court, and its erratic monarch, to maintain his sol­
vency. He was attempting to live the luxurious life of a rake 
with almost no dependable income. Wine, women and song — and 
two portraits by Peter Lely — were expensive items in the 

23 At the height of Wycherley's career at court, 
Charles showed him the singular favor of visiting him at his 
lodgings while he was ill, commanding him to go to France for 
his health and giving him five hundred pounds to defray his 
expenses. The incident is related in Dennis' Letter "To... 

"He was...in such high Favour with the King, that 
that Monarch gave him a Proof of his Esteem and Affec­
tion, which never any Soverign Prince before had given 
to an Author who was only a private Gentleman. Mr. 
Wycherley happen'd to fall sick of a Fever at his 
Lodgings in Bow-street, Covent Garden, during which 
Sickness the King did him the honour to visit him, 
when finding his Fever indeed abated, but his Body 
extremely weaken'd, and his Spirits miserably shatter'd 
he commanded him, as soon as he was able to take a 
Journey, to go to the South of France, believing that 
nothing would contribute more to the restoring his 
former Vigour, than the gentle salutiferous Air of 
Montpelier during the Winter Season. At the same time 
the King was pleas'd to assure him, that as soon as 
he was capable of taking that Journey, he would order 
five hundred Pounds to be paid him to defray the 
Expence of it.

Mr. Wycherley accordingly went into France in the 
beginning of the Winter of 1678, if I am not mistaken, 
and returned into England in the latter end of the 
Spring of 1679, entirely restor'd to his former Vigor 
both of Body and Mind."
merry reign of Charles, and Wycherley often must have been at a loss to pay for them. One of the most striking characteristics of Wycherley's early poetry was a preoccupation with lack of money, in the circumstances where a young Restoration rake would find it most necessary. There are, for example, a large number of verses devoted to the problems of mercenary mistresses, losses at the gaming table, and Wycherley's amorous defeats by wealthy or titled men of the court.24

24 This is a point seemingly unnoticed by the biographers, and easily demonstrated. In the collected volumes of Wycherley's poetry, (Summers, Volume III and IV) more than one hundred poems are concerned with the disadvantages of poverty, or the injustice of disproportionate wealth. Many of these are undatable, and could have been written at any time in Wycherley's life, but a number of poems can certainly be placed in the period of his early court life. The subjects, style, and intentions of these poems would only be appropriate for a young man at court who does not have the funds with which to compete with his "betters." See, for example, these poems: "To a Mercenary Mistress; who said, Love was the Greatest Blessing in the World, and therefore should be purchas'd at the Greatest Price," "The Invocation to Fortune, the best aid, and Encourager of Wit, tho' call'd the Patroness of Fools," "To a Vain Woman, who being ask'd why she did not marry? answered, Because she could love nothing under the Degree of a Lord," "To a Mistress, The Worst Way insatiable; who yet said, She car'd not for Money, or Presents, but as they were greater Proofs of Her Gallant's Love," "The Poor Poet's Answer to his Mercenary Mistress, who told him, She desir'd a Proof at once, of his Love and Wit, rather by his Money, than his Verses," "To a Fine Young Woman, who lent him Money after a Loss at Play...."

This list illustrates the quantity of verse Wycherley devoted to financial problems. It is safe to say, I believe, that Wycherley was personally disappointed by the financial support he received from the court, even early in his career. Like Dryden, Butler, and so many others Restoration authors seduced by the promises of the court, he received a great deal of praise, but inadequate cash.
An even more indicative sign of Wycherley's comparatively impoverished state in his early years at court, is found in an obscure poem written by Wycherley in his later years. The poem is entitled, "To a Witty Young Man; who neglected the Study of the Law, for that of Poetry." It is not clear to whom the poem is addressed; Wycherley may be addressing himself in persona, or simply advising a young law student on remaining at his studies; in any event, Wycherley obviously is speaking of his own experiences, and the poem appears to have great biographical significance:

Young Counsell! tho' you Counsel may despise,
Show less Wit, (If you can) to prove more Wise;
Good Sense, good Fame, less than good Fortune prize:

Credit, without Wealth, so not seek, in vain;
For since few can to both at once, attain;
Coin, before Fame, then wisely try to gain:

Since, but for Gain, (my knowing Friend) you know,
Honour wou'd Shame, and Wit wou'd Folly grow;
Since none, for Just or Wise, the Poor allow:

Whence none now, by a Man's Parts, but his Gains,
Judge of his Store of Merit, or his Brains;
And Wits have but their Labour for their Pains:

Since Poor Men's Sense, the Rich and Poor despise;
They, who good Fame, less than good Fortune prize,
Just without Faith are, without Reason wise:
Gain Credit, Honour, without Honesty;
Trust without Truth, Fame without Bravery;
So without Honour, live most hon'rably:

Then your Fate for young ill luck, ne'r upbraid,
Since your Fate, your Foe, by your Wit is made,
Which proves your Life's Encumbrance, of its Aid:

Since like a false, tho' pleasant Friend, thy Wit,
Which makes thee lazy, for Cares, Pains unfit,
Undoes thee, by the Trust you put in it:

For Wit is but happy in Thought to be,
While thoughtless Folly fortunate we see;
Thy Happy Wit is then ill Luck to thee:

Your good Sense wou'd you have the Wise commend?
Ne'r let your Fortune on your Wit depend;
Nor to prove by it your good Sense, pretend:

Since there's no Proof, or Measure of True Wit,
But by the Money which is gain'd by it;
Then Empty Fame, for a Full Pocket quit:

For good Sense its own Contradictions is;
By which we gain a good Name, good Luck miss;
Since Poor Men's Wisdom, Wits, nay Fools despise:

Unhappy thee, thy happy Thoughts will make;
Thy good Sense will thy good Luck from thee take,
And thy sound Judgment will thy Credit crack:

The cunning World will your good Sense deny,
Whose Truth shows least its Ingenuity;
Since you, but as a Poet, know to Lie:

Whose Lies, since they least profitable are
By your Wit, make your want of Sense appear,
Which, but of Loving after Life, takes Care:
You, to your self your Livelihood deny,
But out of Love of Immortality;
Which, you know you cannot have, till you die:

Nor can obtain of this World, to think fit,
To gratifie with Praise your Sense, or Wit,
Till you become insensible of it:

Then he's no Wit, who to be reckon'd one,
Proves himself, by despising Money, none;
Lives scorn'd, to get Esteem, when dead and gone:

But if by Lying you wou'd show your Wit,
Lie so, that you may Money get by it;
'Tis Wit, Wisdom, Fame for Coin to quit;

To lie, as Quacks, Divines, or Courtiers try;
Or Lawyers, lie always, but wittily;
You'll lie for Gain, that's Ingenuity.25

This poem makes clear what Wycherley's personal attitude was toward the court system of patronage: he had received much praise, but not enough cash; he could only "live" through the reputation of his works, not by the immediate rewards he received. Wycherley's disillusioned frame of mind is quite apparent here; he was expressing the same disappointment in the system of patronage that Dryden and the other professional men of letters felt, and the anger which was eventually to sweep away court influence in the Restoration theatre.

We have hitherto pointed out only the advantages — social and otherwise — of Wycherley's adherence to the court system; it should be clear by now that there were also many disadvantages inherent in Wycherley's position. The court had never lived up to its promises to the men of letters, and as Wycherley had been given greater hopes, his disappointment was proportionally bitter. He had been denied the prerogatives of his new social position by a caste-conscious aristocracy; he had been forced to compete with inferiors and live the fawning life of a courtier; he had even been denied sufficient financial recompense to maintain his station as a "wit" and gentleman-poet. As time progressed, Wycherley became increasingly dismayed by the court's neglect of his welfare, but he kept up the pretense of gentlemanly station, for he had no alternative. He had almost no support except what he received from his aristocratic friends, and he was entirely incapable of earning his bread in any other manner. In addition, he had been raised in the most glittering courts of Europe, and he could not have eagerly anticipated the anticlimax of a life among dull commoners. He had, in fact, an intense dread of life away from witty, intellectual friends, and he loathed
the secluded existence of the country. Later in life Wycherley was often forced to visit his estate in Clive to obtain money, but he hurriedly fled back to London.26

Thus, because of habit, inclination, and the lack of suitable alternatives, Wycherley felt constrained to continue in his role as gentleman-poet, however adverse his circumstances. In Wycherley's later life after the collapse of his career, he would be imprisoned for debt for years, but there is no sign that he ever attempted to gain his freedom by his pen; it was simply the ungentlemanly thing to do. J.H. Wilson, in his work The Court Wits, notes:

"...perhaps it is significant that Wycherley who spent nearly four years in debtor's prison, made no known effort to write his way out. A gentleman could

26 See Wycherley's letters to Pope in George Sherburn's work The Correspondence of Alexander Pope (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1956), Volume I, pp. 12-13, 38-39, et passim. In one place Wycherley states, "I shall not go into Shropshire, till this day come Seavennight, ... when I must be forced to goe, and make a stay in the Country, for about a Month, or six weeks, (At farthest,) when I shall return again, (God willing,) to London...." (pp. 58-59.)

Pope, in a letter to Cromwell, (November 1, 1708) states, "But nothing cou'd allure Mr. Wycherley to our Forests, he continu'd (as you told me long since he wou'd) an obstinate Lover of the Town, in spite of Friendship and Fair Weather." (p. 52.)
accept money from a woman or from the King... but he could not earn money as a "Trader in Wit." 27

Late in his life, after his pride had been crushed and all hope of returning to gay society had vanished, Wycherley finally collected a number of his poems for sale to the booksellers. He was so ashamed of this mercenary effort that he wrote a special apology in the preface of this work, and in it, implies that he had never before considered such a degrading activity:

As to, or for the following Book, I have nothing else, or more to say, than that it was Written at a certain Time, when 'twas not so much my Head's Need to Write, as my Pocket's, when I had rather my Works shou'd have made me Live, than I to have made them Live; so that it was my then Necessity (which is always an Excuse for all Thefts) made me since, a Poor Wit, a Scribler, or Thief in Poetry

Paupertas impulit audax,
Ut Versus facerem. —

Therefore, I wrote not to give pains to my Mind, but to Ease it from Pain, to Play the Fool with Ridiculous Thoughts, rather than to be Mad with Anxious Ones?

Wycherley had nothing but contempt for literary professionalism as he knew it, and his interesting equation of "thief" and "professional writer" indicates as much. But his comments above should not be taken too literally; the concept of "professional" author had unappealing connotations in the Restoration.

tion period, and Wycherley himself was naturally anxious to be recognized as a gentleman writer. In actuality, Wycherley was much closer to professional status than he might have wished, and we have categorized him as such. From almost the very beginning of his dramatic career, Wycherley had sought out and cultivated professional literary men such as Dryden, Butler, and Shadwell, and publicly espoused their cause against the abuses of court patronage. He himself had long possessed their more rigorous artistic and literary attitudes towards literature, and had suffered from the same defects in the patronage system. When the time would come to choose between the professional men of letters and the literary poseurs of the court, Wycherley would take part of the professionals.

29 We have called Wycherley a "professional" in the sense that he earned his living by his writings, and shared to a great degree the attitudes characteristic of the professional men of letters of his time. In the final analysis, it is certain that Wycherley's motives in writing his works were every bit as pragmatic as those of Shadwell or Dryden, and were therefore a breach of the aristocratic literary standards. Ultimately, the question of whether Wycherley is to be termed a "professional" or a "gentleman-poet", is one of historical semantics and has no real place here; we have chosen to call him a professional simply because it best indicates his true literary station and his artistic and social attitudes.

30 See above, pp. 77-78, and Connelly, p. 101.
In the period 1673-1676, the simmering conflict between the professional men of letters and the court patrons finally broke into open warfare. It was from 1673 to 1675 that Rochester had so humiliated and persecuted Dryden, while Buckingham's scandalous repudiation of Butler seems to have taken place somewhere in 1674. Wycherley was deeply involved in these first few skirmishes between the court and its literary men, and openly took the part of the professionals. There are clear reasons why this should have been so. For one thing, Dryden was Wycherley's very good friend at this time, and Wycherley, famous for his fidelity to comrades, could not help being angry at Rochester's petty and unscrupulous attacks upon him. For another, Wycherley had pleaded with Buckingham to help the impoverished Samuel Butler, and when the story of Buckingham's indifferent rejection of Butler was broadcast throughout the scandalized city of London, Wycherley must have been exceedingly embarrassed and chagrined. One peculiar event which occurred at this time seems to indicate that Wycherley was actually outraged by this affront.

On February 27, 1674, Wycherley was commissioned "capt. of that cy. [company] whf. [whereof] Geo. Duke of Buckingham was Capt. before the Reg[iment] under his comd. [command]"

31 See above, pp. 73-79.
was disbanded, "[in 1673] but he resigned his commission a week after." 32 Wycherley had obtained his position through his good patron Buckingham, and certainly knew that his resignation would embarrass the Duke. Why then did he do it? Furthermore, while we know nothing of Wycherley's particular finances at this time, it certainly seems strange that a young, rakish spendthrift, perpetually short of money, should so easily reject a sinecure worth several hundred pounds a year. We have no real evidence that the two events — the rejection of Butler and Wycherley's resignation of his commission — were integrally connected: we can only say that they took place in approximately the same period of time and that there is some possibility that one caused the other. Wycherley, as we have noted, was exceedingly devoted to Buckingham, and did all he could to help his patron when he was in distress, even at his own peril; with the exception of the incident involving Butler, there was no known major disagreement between the two friends throughout their lifetimes. 33 It must have taken a truly cataclysmic reason for Wycherley to embarrass his best patron and aristocratic friend in so public a manner — Wycherley, of all people! — and refuse to accept the hundreds of pounds which came


33 See above, p. 140.
with his new position. Their disagreement over Butler could well have supplied that reason.

The implications of Wycherley's tendency to align himself with the professional literary men can now be linked with the major literary currents of his time. After 1673, great changes in the literary and theatrical structures took place in Restoration society, changes which were to transform the court-oriented playhouses into popular theatres. From 1673 to 1675, minor but well publicized conflicts had taken place between members of the court and the professional men of letters. The court, taken aback by increasing opposition to its domineering control of literary and theatrical activities, gradually gave up its pretensions to literary superiority, and lost interest in supporting the literary professionals. The playhouses, as a result, nearly collapsed in the period after 1677, and when a new and vital theatre emerged later in the century, slavish imitation of court manners and fashion would be replaced by anti-aristocratic satire.\(^\text{34}\)

From the very beginning of his dramatic career, Wycherley had been well disposed towards the literary professionals, for he had much in common with them: a serious attitude towards literary endeavor, a real talent for writing, and a belief in

\(^{34}\) See above, the conclusion of Chapter II.
pains-taking artistic polish. He had suffered the same indigni-
ties and financial worries which his professional friends had
been forced to endure, was equally disenchanted with the humili-
ating life of a court beggar, and had been embarrassed and
angered by the petty persecutions visited upon his friends
Dryden and Butler. Wycherley sympathized completely with the
sufferings of his professional brethren, and became a leader
in the reaction against the court standards and the cruel system
of literary patronage. In 1676, one year before Dryden wrote
his scathing denunciation of court literary pretensions in the
preface to All for Love, Wycherley presented his new play, The
Plain Dealer.

From its first presentation, it was apparent that
Wycherley's Plain Dealer was vastly different from his earlier
comedies of manners. When The Plain Dealer premiered in 1676,35
the audience was so startled by its uniquely caustic satire and
its complete departure from the comedy of manners form, that
the success of the play hung in the balance. The applause
generated by the aristocratic critics in the pit — Wycherley's
personal friends — was all that kept the Plain Dealer alive:

35 The Plain Dealer, like Wycherley's other plays cannot
be dated too closely. It is more or less accepted that parts of
the play were written in 1676, and that the play was introduced
upon the stage in that year. (Churchill, xviii-xix, xxv-xxvii.)
The earliest known production of the play was on December 11,
1676, and a number of well-known critics have accepted this as
the date of the premiere. See Nicoll, Volume I, p. 345; Van
Lennep, p. 253.
When upon the first representations of the Plain Dealer, the Town, as The Author has often told me, appeared Doubtful what Judgment to Form of it; the fore-mention'd gentlemen Buckingham, Rochester, Dorset, Mulgrave, and others by their loud approbation of it gave it both a sudden and lasting reputation. 36

Those theatre-goers who had witnessed Wycherley's surprising change in attitude towards his society had every reason to be unnerved at his sudden transformation. In 1676, the Restoration court was in all its glory, and the audience of the theatres was completely subservient to the dictates of court society. Those who attended the playhouse who were not actually members of the court, were its most faithful servants and admirers, and naturally this audience expected the playwrights to flatter the court tastes in the same way in which dramatists had done for years.

At the same time, the comedy of manners form, the dramatic expression of court tastes, was at its highest flowering. A year before The Plain Dealer, The Country Wife, the best English comedy of manners to that time, had been presented upon the stage; within a year after The Plain Dealer, Etheredge would present his enormously popular farce The Man of Mode. To all outer appearances, the comedy of manners was a vital, fertile tradition, and there was no sense in departing so radically from the

norm. Most surprising of all was the fact that it should be Wycherley who heaped such bitter contumely upon the very court which had so long sustained and honored him. Only a year before, he had produced the comedy which had expressed the Restoration ideal in its most ingenious, most perfect form. Now, for no obvious reason, he had turned against the standards of withand decorum, and all of the beliefs which his elegant contemporaries held sacred. There can be no question but that many courtiers recognized The Plain Dealer as an assault upon contemporary standards, for the style, theme, and ideas expressed in that play were almost precisely contrary to all the court had preached for years. What, for example, could a society which stressed gentility, decorum, and witty insouciance make of Manly's raging violence? Even in an age accustomed to literary realism we are chilled by Manly's words: 

Damned, damned woman, that could be so false and infamous. ...Her love! —a whore's, a witch's love! —but what, did she not kiss well, sir? I'm sure I thought her lips — but I must not think of 'em more — and then tear off with my teeth, grind 'em into marmocks, and spit 'em into her cuckold's face.37

This very harshness of tone made it all the more obvious that Wycherley had changed the objects and intentions of his satire. His contemporaries recognized that Wycherley had aimed

37 The Plain Dealer, Act IV, Sc. 1.
his satire at the aristocracy, and Jeremy Collier for one, used The Plain Dealer as a prime example of the ill treatment of the nobility upon the stage:

Manley goes on and declares He would call a Rascal by no other Title, tho' his Father had left him a Dukes. / sic/ That is, he would call a Duke a Rascal. This I confess is very much Plain Dealing. Such Freedoms would appear but odly in Life, especially without Provocation.38

The chief courtiers applauded this attack upon their own standards, but this is not strange; the rakes were able to enjoy any witty riposte or satiric criticism, so long as it came from one of their fellow members of the court society. It was ironic, however that they should have been instrumental in popularizing the work which marked the beginning of the decline of Restoration court influence in the theatre. Rather than injuring his career by attacking his patrons, Wycherley achieved a new height of popularity in the court circle.39

But while Wycherley's courtier-friends applauded his play, it is plain to see that Wycherley had expressed an

38 Collier, p. 174.

39 It was two years after the production of The Plain Dealer that King Charles showed his grave concern for the health of Wycherley, and gave him 500 pounds for his trip to France. In Wycherley's time this was considered "the most distinguishing marks of favour, perhaps beyond what any sovereign prince had shewn before to an author, who was only a private gentleman...." Theophilus Cibber, Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland (London: R.Griffiths, 1753), Volume III, p. 251.
antipathy to the court wisely found among professionals of the theatre: The Plain Dealer was praised by serious contemporary writers and critics far more than any of Wycherley's previous plays, including The Country Wife. It is indicative that in the period of greatest theatrical reaction to the court, The Plain Dealer was certainly the most popular of his plays; after the memory of the Restoration court's pretensions had faded, the greater intrinsic merits of The Country Wife would bring that play to the foreground.

40 Vernon, p. 33.

41 Nicoll, Volume VI, p. 439., notes these editions of The Country Wife in the late Seventeenth century: 1675, 1683, 1688, 1695. In the same period, The Plain Dealer was published far more frequently: 1677 (3 editions), 1678, 1681, 1686, 1691, 1694, 1700. The listing of known performances of these plays contained in the first volume of The London Stage (Van Lennep) gives roughly the same facts, but since our record is woefully incomplete, it is difficult to say that this evidence is conclusive. Avery, in his articles, "The Country Wife in the Eighteenth Century," Research Studies of the State College of Washington (June, 1942), 141-172., and "The Plain Dealer in the Eighteenth Century," RSCW, XI (1943), 234-256., comes to the conclusion that the Plain Dealer was much more popular in the early years of that century, while The Country Wife (in modified form) surpassed The Plain Dealer in popularity in later years. It is hardly necessary to point out that in the very early years of the Eighteenth century, anti-aristocratic satire was still presented upon the stage, while it seems to have gradually disappeared as the professionals of the drama established a "sentimental" theatrical tradition for the benefit of their middle-class audiences.
Dryden, who was by now deeply involved in the conflict of professionals and patrons, publically expressed his admiration for Wycherley's courageous stand in the preface to his opera *The State of Innocence*:

The author of *The Plain Dealer*, who I am proud to call my friend, has obliged all honest and virtuous men by one of the most bold, most general, and most useful satires, which has ever been presented on the English theatre.\(^{42}\)

Dryden's praise of Wycherley in this preface is uniquely important: for one thing, it was the first public recognition by the professionals that Wycherley was a serious man of letters. Prior to early 1677, there is no evidence that Wycherley was considered anything but a "gentleman-poet" by his professional contemporaries; after *The Plain Dealer*, Wycherley was accepted by the professionals as a man of their own class.\(^{43}\) This demonstrates that the professional writers in general approved of *The Plain Dealer*, and realized that it assaulted the court system which had so oppressed them. The very immediacy of Dryden's support is some indication of the extent to which he and the other professional men of letters applauded Wycherley's courag-

\(^{42}\) *The State of Innocence* was written in 1673, but apparently was not published until 1677, for *TheTerm Catalogues* record that it was licensed for printing February 12, 1673/77. (Arber, Volume I, p. 266.) The preface to *The State of Innocence* was apparently written for this edition.

\(^{43}\) See below, Chapter VI, the discussion of Wycherley's reputation in his later lifetime.
eous manifesto. Dryden did not take the time to write a new piece for the occasion; he hurriedly dusted off an old, but as yet unpublished play, inserted the new preface praising Wycherley, and rushed his work to the booksellers. The State of Innocence was on sale in the book stalls within three months after the premiere of The Plain Dealer. 44

A breath of fresh air had entered the tiny world of the Restoration court when Wycherley revealed that literary men need not accept meekly the dictates of their "betters." Dryden, who had suffered all the abuse and indignities meted out by the court as submissively as any menial servant ever had, was suddenly inspired by Wycherley's stand. Immediately after he published the State of Innocence, he set to work on a new play, and appended to it a scathing indictment of the court pretensions to literary superiority. After years of writing for courtly pretenders to wit, Dryden wrote All for Love, a play which was entirely his own, penned solely for his own artistic satisfaction. 45 The preface of this work, Dryden's favored child of the spirit, expressed his deepest feelings about the court's literary and social affectations:

44 Churchill, xxvii.

45 In his preface to The Art of Painting, Dryden vowed, "But it (The Spanish Fryar) was given to the people; and I never write any thing for my self but Anthony and Cleopatra. (Anthony and Cleopatra are the central characters of All for Love.) Quoted in Beljame, p. 101.
Men of pleasant conversation (at least esteemed so), and endued with a trifling kind of fancy, perhaps helped out with some smattering of Latin, are ambitious to distinguish themselves from the herd of gentlemen, by their poetry —

\textit{Rarus enim ferme sensus communis in illa Fortuna.}

And is not this a wretched affectation, not to be contented with what fortune has done for them, and sit down quietly with their estates, but they must call their wits in question, and needlessly expose their nakedness to public view? Not considering that they are not to expect the same approbation from sober men, which they have found from their flatters after the third bottle. If a little glittering in discourse has passed them on us for witty men, where was the necessity of undeceiving the world? Would a man who has an ill title to an estate, but yet is in possession of it, would he bring it of his own accord to be tried at Westminster? Who who write, if we want the talent, yet have the excuse that we do it for a poor subsistence; but what can be urged in their defence, who, not having the vocation of poverty to scribble, out of mere want-onness take pains to make themselves ridiculous? Horace was certainly in the right, where he said, "That no man is satisfied with his own condition." A poet is not pleased, because he is not rich; and the rich are discontented, because the poets will not admit them of their number. Thus the case is hard with writers; If they succeed not, they must starve; and if they do, some malicious satire is prepared to level them, for daring to please without their leave. But while they are so eager to destroy the fame of others, their ambition is manifest in their concernment; some poem of their own is to be produced, and the slaves are to be laid flat with their faces on the ground, that the monarch may appear in the greater triumph.\footnote{Ibid.}

After the Poet Laureate himself had scorned the literary capabilities of the gentlemen authors of Restoration society, the court soon lost interest in the theatre, and the
playhouses met their sudden fall from favor. Within a few years, the two major companies of London were playing to pitifully empty houses.47

The Plain Dealer, then, appears to be both a turning-point in Wycherley's career, and an important step in the reaction to the fashionable standards of the Restoration court and its attendant literary code. The Puritan opposition to the court in Charles' reign had been merely a scattered reactionary impulse and was almost completely ineffectual in opposing the new court standards. The opposition of the professional men of letters, however, was strong enough to cripple the Restoration court system of literary conventions even at the peak of its power. The comedy of manners form would be carried on at a later date, but in modified fashion, and without the domineering influence of the court. Wycherley had initiated a chain-reaction which would eventually destroy the fashionable literary society which had so long pampered and abused him.

Wycherley's continued favor with the court must be attributed not only to the support of his aristocratic friends, but to the ambiguity found in The Plain Dealer itself. As we shall demonstrate, the style, form, and theme of Wycherley's last play quite obviously satirized the court. The professional men of letters — those who were necessarily most competent

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47 See above, pp. 55, 56, 61f.
at judging such a thing -- seemed to have quickly recognized this. Nonetheless, Wycherley veiled his satire with ambiguity and indirectness, and commentators have found cause to debate Wycherley's intentions, even in modern times. In Wycherley's day, many of his contemporaries were undecided whether The Plain Dealer was a bitter satire, or a simple jeu d'esprit. Collier, for example, condemned the ill treatment of the nobility in The Plain Dealer, but was unwilling to define Wycherley's intentions in that comedy:

I must own the Poet to be an Author of Good Sense; But under favour, these jests, if we may call them so, are somewhat high Season'd....

Ever since the premiere of The Plain Dealer, audiences and critics alike have shared a general uncertainty as to its fundamental meaning, and there is ample reason why this should be so. The radical form of satire practiced by Wycherley in The Plain Dealer pits an indignant extremist against the hypocritical vices of an elegant but degenerate social order; in essence it is the age-old dichotomy of idealism versus pragmatic realism, an insoluble philosophical dilemma. In practice, we cannot choose either the side of Manley or that of his flawed society; the pure idealist-realist partition of life is based upon logical categories rather experiential reality. Satire which attempts

48 Collier, p. 174.
to utilize philosophical distinctions as its subject-matter always runs the risk of being misunderstood.

Our best illustration of the problems facing a satirist who uses this approach is in Molière's play *The Misanthrope*, the source for Wycherley's *Plain Dealer*. Molière was a far more capable dramatist than Wycherley, and undoubtedly a man who better understood the general psychological realities of the mass of humanity. His was a "sanative" satire: one which sought to make whole men out of unbalanced extremists, and purge the social body of disruptive humors. Molière consistently upheld the criterion of "reasonable" conduct so dear to heart of his middle-class French contemporaries, and apparently never deviated from the concept of man as a "social being." On the basis of this generalization, Molière's intentions in portraying Alceste, the chief character of the *Misanthrope*, seem plain enough:

The total effect of *The Misanthrope* is to make this ill-adjusted member of society of the court of Louis XIV /Alceste/ delicately and politely ridiculous, because he demands the whole truth, unflinching sincerity, and absolute justice in a milieu that has learned the art of compromise in all things social. 49

Even more indicative of Molière's intentions was the fact that it was widely recognized in French society that

Aloeste was precisely modeled upon the Marquis de Montausier, who was both a misanthropic recluse and an incredibly extreme idealist. Montausier had lost all contact with reality in his passion for arcane knowledge, and was considered a bore, a pedant, and a social barbarian by his contemporaries. Molière, with his belief in reasonable social conduct, satirically portrayed Montausier as Aloeste, but that monomaniac did not recognize his own folly in The Misanthrope:

The dour Marquis, after the days of his governorship in Angoumois, lived mainly in Paris as companion and tutor to the Dauphin. He never knew that Molière stood by and threaded him into a play, for he had greased his mind with books until knowledge of men, including himself, slipped from it. Montausier went to a performance of 'Le Misanthrope,' so the story goes, sat through it and never winced, then left the theatre saying, 'I should desire nothing better than to resemble so noble a figure as Aloeste.'

Yet, as we have observed, the very nature of this type of satire obscures authorial intent, and makes ambiguous any satiric purpose. Even in the hands of so great a literary artist as Molière, the theme of idealism and realism was bound to puzzle many outside the French court, for every human being likes to feel that he too is an idealist. From the very beginning Molière's point was misinterpreted, even though he expressed himself more precisely and exactly than Wycherley would later. The balance of such a subject is so delicate that

50 Connely, pp. 115-116.
even the slightest exterior circumstance could change the meaning of Molière's play:

The misunderstanding of Molière's intention was almost instantaneous, even in France. The unsigned letter inserted in the first edition in 1677 erroneously attributed by many to Molière himself gives an early basis for the idea that Molière used Alceste as a plain-dealing voice against the hypocrisies of the age. John Pâmer believes that the 'legend of Alceste as an embodiment of philosophic virtue arose from Baron's interpretation of the role.' As Baron took the part from 1673 onward, this interpretation might well have reached Wycherley as Molière's conception. A shift in the sympathy of an actor could create a new spirit in Molière's play that would be close to the spirit of Wycherley's.

Whether or not Wycherley received his concept of The Plain Dealer from this particular unauthentic interpretation of Molière's Misanthrope is a moot point; it is sufficient for our purposes to note that even so great a genius as Molière could perplex his audience when he undertook to write upon such an elastic and easily misinterpreted topic. Wycherley's companion piece would be as easily subject to variant interpretations both in his own time, and later.

From late 1674 through 1675, Wycherley had become progressively more irritated at the humiliating treatment he was receiving from the court, and outraged at the persecutions suffered by his friends Dryden and Butler. He cast about in

51 Ibid. p. 101.
his anger for some means with which to strike back at the court, and his attention was arrested by Molière's old play, *Le Misanthrope*. Molière's drama was suited perfectly for Wycherley's purposes: *The Misanthrope* pitted an idealist against his society, a natural framework for his own satire of Charles' court. By choosing to modify an established play rather than openly and independently attacking his patrons, Wycherley gave his own career a measure of protection, while he seized the opportunity to expose the shams and abuses of his aristocratic "superiors."

There may have been other reasons why Wycherley chose *The Misanthrope* as the basis for his new play. Wycherley had known the Marquis in his formative years in France, and probably understood the scholarly old reprobate far better than even Molière had. The Marquis then had been the husband of Julie d'Angennes, Wycherley's early patroness, and Wycherley had haunted their château for several happy years. Despite their differences in attitude towards the pleasures of social life, Wycherley shared with Montausier a number of aptitudes and character traits rare among men. Both of these court followers had some claim to be called scholars, and pursued special studies of the most obscure writings of the ancients.

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52 The première of *Le Misanthrope* had taken place at the Palais-Royal, June 4, 1666.
Both detested hypocrisy and pretense, believed in open social dealings, and praised the virtues of unfeigned friendship. Both were idealists in highly pragmatic and mercenary societies.

We cannot know whether Wycherley personally admired the anti-social Marquis de Montausier, for that knowledge has been obscured by time. We do know, however, that the traits of Montausier’s character satirized by Molière were shared to some extent by Wycherley, and he would have felt the obligation to defend his own point of view.

For whatever reason Wycherley chose to take The Misanthrope as the framework for his new play, he adapted it to his own ends: the themes of the two plays are poles apart in meaning. Wycherley changed the character of Alceste into Manly, the satiric gad-fly of society, and Le Misanthrope he modified into a general indictment of the Restoration social structure.

There are those critics who imply that Wycherley should have — and did not — copy Molière’s play with

53 Throughout Chapter IV we have described the idealistic and scholarly side of Wycherley’s nature; the comparable traits in the character of Montausier are discussed by Connelly, pp. 6-8.

54 Vernon, p. 33.
enough exactitude. The point is absurd. Molière, like Shakespeare, studied the general psychology of human beings, and believed in proper balance between the rational functioning of the individual and the necessities of social union. Wycherley was simply an idealist who had become disillusioned with the ruling class, and who sought in anger to strike back at those who had disappointed him. Wycherley was incapable of following the spirit of The Misanthrope, for not only were his satiric intentions different, but he knew less about the great mass of humanity than about the surface of the moon. He had spent all the days of his early and middle life at country estates and grand courts, reading great books, entertaining the wittiest nobles, and pursuing his rakish pleasures; what little he could surmise about those beings below his station or outside of the literary profession, he consistently held up to scorn. It is interesting to note that almost none of the

55 See George Meredith, An Essay on Comedy and the Use of the Comic Spirit (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905) pp. 30f. Wilcox describes a similar view:

"A delicate satire on the social folly of being too uncompromisingly truthful and sincere has been turned in places into a berserker denunciation of society for its want of humor, truth, and sincerity." [p.100]

56 Wycherley constantly amused himself at the expense of those who worked for a living. His poetry reflects his distaste for the occupations of bankers, lawyers, doctors, merchants, and soldiers. Wycherley did not associate with people below this professional class, and consequently we have no poetic satires on commoners of a lower station.
characters in Wycherley's plays have any rank less than gentleman or gentlewoman, sea-captain, or alderman. Wycherley may have turned against the court, but he still could only write about what he knew, and he knew little about the lives of the greater part of humanity.

When we turn to the text of The Plain Dealer itself, we can see the remarkable change in Wycherley's entire attitude as he shifted his satire from the court enemies to the court and its followers. The preface to The Plain Dealer is totally unlike the timid supplications appended to all of Wycherley's earlier comedies; it is an open challenge to the court, and Wycherley apparently expected strong objections from his audience, for he anticipates their reaction:

I the PLAIN-DEALER am to Act to Day:  
And my rough Part begins before the Play.

Now, you shrewd Judges, who the Boxes sway, 
Leading the Ladies hearts, and sense astray, 
And for their sakes, see all, and hear no Play:  

Plain-dealing is, you'll say, quite out of fashion; 
You'll hate it here, as in a dedication.

57 Except for the Jonsonian characters of Mrs. Joyner, Mrs. Crossbite, and Miss Lucy in Love in a Wood, we see only a few servants in Wycherley's plays as representatives of the classes below the station of gentleman, and these often have only the most minor roles.
He then openly attacks the literary affectations of
the court audience, using the same approach that Dryden would
use a year later:

Next, you, the fine, loud Gentleman, o' th' Pit,
Who damn all Plays; yet, if y'ave any Wit,
'Tis but what here you sponge, and daily get;
Poets, like Friends to whom you are in debt,
You hate; and so Hocks laugh, to see undone
Those Pushing Gamesters, whom they live upon.
Well, you are Sparks; and still will be i' th' fashion;
Hail then, at Plays, to hide your Obligation.

Plain-dealing was this indeed! Wycherley's bald state-
ment here cannot be easily interpreted as raillery or jest: he
had bluntly avowed that the court wits were the parasites of the
men of letters, that their literary pretensions were absurd, and
implied they had cheated the literary men by withholding vital
support. This invective was certain to upset Wycherley's audi-
ence, and for all he knew, even destroy his career. But Wycher-
ley cared not a whit for his audience's discomfort: he had
written this play to please himself, not others, just as Dryden
would later write *All for Love*. Wycherley states in the Prologue:

Our Scribbler therefore bluntly bid me say,
He wou'd not have the Wits pleas'd here to day.

But the course Dauber of the coming Scenes,
To follow Life, and Nature only means:
Displays you, as you are: makes his fine Woman
A mercenary Jilt, and true to no Man;
His men of Wit, and pleasure of the Age,
Are as dull Rogues as ever cumber'd Stage:
He draws a Friend, only to Custom just;
And makes him naturally break his trust.58

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True to Wycherley's angry statement of aims in the preface, The Plain Dealer censure the Restoration social structure, with its masquerade of hypocrisy, feigned friendship, and defamation. The chief character, Manly, is a man "Of an honest, surly, nice humour, shying a Sea-life, only to avoid the world." 59 Manly has no fear of the social consequences of truth; his courageous truth-telling — as his name suggests — raises him above a world of mere fops and deceivers; it makes him the only true man. He is characterized throughout the play as a man who is fearlessly honest, and his very first words show his independent, near-heroic stature:

Man. Tell not me (my good Lord Plausible) of your Decorums, supercilious Forms, and slavish ceremonies; your little Tricks, which you the Spaniels of the World do daily over and over, for, and to one another; not out of love or duty, but your servile fear. 60

The pleasurable subtleties of civilized social malice escape Manly, for he believes in the virtue of true friendship, and the sheer effrontery of the hypocrites in modern society outrages him:

...generally, no man can be a great Enemy, but under the name of Friend;... if you are cheated in your Fortune, 'tis your Friend that does it; for your Enemy is not made your Trustee: If your Honour, or

59 Ibid. p. 104.
60 Ibid. p. 105.
Good name be injur'd, 'tis your Friend that does it still, because your Enemy is not believ'd against you. Therefore I rather choose to go where honest, downright Barbarity is profest, where men devour one another like generous hungry Lyons and Tygers, not like Crocodiles; where they think the Devil white, of our complexion, and I am already so far an Indian....\textsuperscript{61}

Manly's raging honesty may be portrayed in an extreme form for dramatic and satiric purposes, but nonetheless, he is the true hero of the play. His distaste for infidelity and his love of true friendship, as we have noted, were primary character-traits of Wycherley himself, and his hatred for the servile forms of court follows Wycherley's beliefs precisely. In the play itself, Manly's two sailors, who are certainly not objects of satire, echo Manly's distaste for Lord Plausible.\textsuperscript{62} Freeman, who is described by Wycherley in the list of characters as "a Gentleman well educated,...a complier with the age,"\textsuperscript{63} also disapproves of Lord Plausible, Mrs. Blackacre, and the other hypocrites who are censured by Manly.\textsuperscript{64} Thus Manly's harsh judgments are upheld by more rational observers, and we must believe that Wycherley intended for us to sympathize with his plain-dealing character, if not with his violent manner.

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.} p. 118.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid.} pp. 107-108.
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid.} p. 104.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid.} pp. 108-109, 113, \textit{et passim}. 
Manly's flaw, if any, lies not in his harsh condemnation of human vices, but in the crude form with which he informs others of their failings. He entirely lacks "ceremony," the art of the senseless platitude, and will not use euphemisms for vice; merely to speak as if he had touched pitch, he feels, would be to defile himself. Here is the essential point wherein the actions of Manly differ from those of Olivia, Freeman, and others who can recognize vice: Manly will not suffer to observe dishonesty in silence.

But is this a flaw? Perhaps, but only in the context of daily living; in the context of the play, Wycherley seems to have weighted the scales heavily in the favor of Manly. When Molière had examined the question of idealism versus social co-operation, he had used the argument which is most clearly correct: a certain amount of compromise is necessary for the health of the social organism, and beneficial to all its members. In *The Plain Dealer*, Wycherley twists this approach into a completely unacceptable form: when Freeman debates the question with Manly, his best argument is based upon selfish pragmatism and self-preservation. This debasement of a real philosophical truth makes clear where Wycherley's sympathy lies:

Free. Why, don't you know, good Captain, that telling truth is a quality as prejudicial to a man that you'd thrive in the World, as square Play to a Cheat, or true Love to a whore! You'd you have a man
speak truth to his ruine? You are severer than the Law, which requires no man to swear against himself; you would have me speak truth against my self, I warrant.

Nowhere in the play do we find the valuable, valid, and convincing arguments for social co-operation found in The Misanthrope, for Wycherley has deliberately left them out of the play. Freeman, the advocate of "compliance" throughout the play, is a more acutely perceptive character than Manly, for he is able to predict the infidelity of Vernish and Olivia. Despite his perception and brilliance, however, he is unable to organize a single good argument against Manly. Freeman is able to detect dishonesty himself, but is too weak to oppose it; he is a deceiver himself, solely because it is "the practice of the whole world." Manly is reconciled to a life in society not because of Freeman's prompting — for Freeman has produced only pragmatic and selfish arguments — but because of the practical examples of loyalty he has seen in his two friends, and out of love for Fidelia. Freeman not only does not convince Manly that he should remain in society; he eventually leans toward a mild form of plain-dealing himself.

At the end of the play, we have four plain-dealers, and social honesty in moderation is vindicated as a philosophy of life. Freeman reveals himself as a gentler type of plain-

65 Ibid. p. 110.

66 Ibid. p. 111.
dealer, and a man who is loyal to his true friends; Manly accordingly accepts him as one of his own kind. At the same time, Manly is purged of his suspicious pessimism by the faithfulness of Fidelia and Freeman, and out of love, decides to remain with Fidelia in society. His harsh repudiation of all mankind is now tempered by the revelation that honesty can indeed be found in the world:

Man, Madam, to Fidelia...for your sake only, I would quit the unknown pleasure of a retirement, and rather stay in this ill World of ours still, tho' odious to me, than give you more frights again at sea.... But if I shou'd tell you...your virtue...had now reconcile'd me to 't, my Friend here would say, 'tis your Estate that has made me Friends with the World.

Free. I must confess, I shou'd; for I think most of our quarrels to the World, are just such as we have to a handsome Woman: only because we cannot enjoy her, as we wou'd do.

Man, Nay, if you art a Plain-dealer too, give me thy hand; for now I'll say, I am thy Friend indeed: And for your two sakes, tho' I have been so lately deceiv'd in Friends of both sexes;

I will believe there are now in the World
Good natur'd Friends, who are not Prostitutes,
And handsome Women worthy to be Friends.57

The other two plain-dealers, Fidelia and Eliza, demonstrate even more convincingly that Wycherley approved of the plain-dealing concept of social honesty. Fidelia, while not commonly conceived of by the critics as a plain-dealer, practices all the qualities that Manly espouses in his theories. She is

67 Ibid. p. 196.
faithful to almost the most absurd extremes; she follows Manly to sea, risks danger, even offers him the opportunity to seduce Ophélie. To be certain, she is not outspoken in the way that Manly is, but then again, neither is faithful Freeman; both practice their own kinds of plain-dealing. Even more important proof of Wycherley's intentions is found in the character of Eliza. Olivia's cousin. Eliza is an openly and angrily outspoken in her criticism of social shams and scandalous defamation as Manly, and twice refers to her exposures of Hypocrisy as forms of "plain-dealing." 68 Eliza is not as crude of speech as Manly, but she shows surprising energy in exposing the pretensions of Olivia:

Eliz. ...you mind other peoples actions so much, that you take no care of your own, but to hide 'em; that, like a Thief, because you know your self most guilty, you impeach your Fellow — Criminals first, to clear your self. ...you condemn the obscenity of modern Plays, only that you may not be censured for never missing the most obscene of the old ones. ... you deface the nudities of Pictures, and little Statues, only because they are not real. 69

Eliza's righteous denunciation of Olivia is important to us here, for critics have discounted the various plain-dealings of Manly, Freeman, and even Fidelia, because of the questionable propriety of some of their actions. Certain critics

68 Ibid. pp. 121, 180.
69 Ibid. p. 177.
of the Nineteenth century, for example, saw only the most vicious and scandalous motives in the actions of these characters? But a careful search of the critical literature reveals that not a single critic has ever attempted to impugn the motives, character, or attitudes of Eliza. Wycherley drew the figure of Eliza carefully, and quite obviously gave her the same plain-dealing traits found in Manly, although without his coarseness of manner. We can add this to the overwhelming quantity of evidence which indicates that Wycherley espoused the virtue of plain-dealing in his final play, sympathized with Manly and the other characters who possessed this trait, and used the structural device of idealistic criticism to satirize the vice he most despised, the hypocrisy of his society.

In the face of the enormous amount of biographical, historical, and textual evidence which would indicate Wycherley's intentions in *The Plain Dealer*, however, there will always be those who despise the vulgarity of Manly, and who refuse to accept the fact that Wycherley could have fully sympathized with him or the plain-dealing trait. This attitude might have been

understandable enough had it been prevalent in the Nineteenth century, when Restoration drama was at the very nadir of its popularity, and research into the facts of Wycherley's life was almost negligible. Surprisingly enough, this belief has been most widely held in our own century, and often by the most reputable Restoration scholars: Holland, Lynch, Fujimura, Chorney, and others.  

In fact, we would have to assume Wycherley was a fool to identify him with Manly, for Manly is actually not heroic at all, but blundering, blustering, and self deceived.

Manly is a dupe, not a hero. His railing only blinds himself. Olivia deceives him by the very kind of play-acting he despises: "I knew he loved his own singular moroseness so well, as to dote upon any Copy of it; wherefore I feign'd an hatred to the World too, that he might love me in earnest." (171). Manly's virtue is his failing; he cannot — or is unwilling to — tell the copy from the real.

The one thing that makes us think of Manly as heroic is his raging, furious honesty. Because his own exterior is a true reflection of his inner self, he expects the same of others and is enraged when he does not find it. That rage is the only large, heroic thing about him, and even though it expends itself on absurdities, it is in some sense praiseworthy. ...His concept of plain-dealing is simply raw hostility.

That this error in interpretation could be made by so distinguished a scholar must be attributed to the tempting ambiguity of the entire idealist-realistic philosophical

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71 See the collection of evidence marshaled by Holland, pp. 96-99, where he cites the various supporters of this theory.

question. It was this same difficulty, as we have noted, that even perplexed the contemporaries of the great Molière: the distinction between a philosophical dichotomy and the reality of life.73

Manly is neither a philosophical abstraction nor a simple spokesman for Wycherley, for The Plain Dealer is not solely a polemical satire. The Plain Dealer is, among other things, an excellent drama, and Manly is a character who learns some vital truth about the world and its relation to himself. His is a growing, developing, character and not a stereotyped, singular ideal. We have pointed out ourselves that Manly is not the single perfect ideal of Wycherley. For one thing, he is forced to grow and develop as a social being, and to moderate his opinions. At the end of the play, Manly is willing to accept society for the benefits he may derive from it, and he has lost much of his suspicious and pessimistic nature, for he has found that true friendship can exist in the world. From the very beginning of The Plain Dealer, Manly is characterized as a sea-captain, gruff and without polish, a man of action rather than a man of intellect. He cannot understand the wily deceits of court life, he is impatient with nonsensical ceremony of all sorts, and he longs for a simpler life away from the crafty pretenders of a

73 See above, Chapter IV, pp. 170-172.
civilized society. His impetuosity, his clumsy errors, his tendency to use force rather than cunning, are all in perfect accord with his character.

At the same time, Manly is only one of four plain-dealers. What of Eliza? Her more temperate plain-dealing certainly must have been approved by Wycherley, as we ourselves approve it. What of Freeman? His revelation as a secret "convert" to plain-dealing appears to be taken seriously by Manly, despite the fact that Manly still believes at the end of the play that it is "an ill world...odious to me." Finally, what of Fidelia? Can we seriously believe that the character who is significantly named "Faith," who practices what Manly preaches, is being satirized by Wycherley — or worse — that her honesty and loyalty is somehow irrelevant to the story? I think not. Manly's form of gruff social honesty is only one of many forms of plain-dealing, and whether or not Wycherley identified himself completely with the principal character of his last play, there seems no question but that he thoroughly approved of the plain-dealing philosophy, and openly advocated it in *The Plain Dealer*. Many of his contemporaries certainly thought so, and forgetting his prior works, linked his name inseparably with his last play:

As a supreme compliment, Restoration England dubbed Wycherley "Plain Dealer" for the rest of his life, and Dryden...called him Manly Wycherley.
...His acceptance of his honorary title of 'Plain Dealer' suggests his own leaning.\(^{74}\)

By 1678, Wycherley was so well known by his sobriquet of "Plain Dealer," that he would be introduced socially under that title.\(^{75}\) For the rest of his life, Wycherley's name was so closely linked with the title of his last play, that his title was as well known as Dryden's familiar nickname, "Bays."\(^{76}\)

On his own part, Wycherley was not reluctant to be known as a forthright man and the author of The Plain Dealer. In the prologue to his play, he had placed words in Manly's mouth which show his own identification with the major character:

I, only, Act a Part like none of you;
And yet, you'll say, it is a Fools Part too:
An honest Man; who, like you, speaks what he thinks:
The onely Fool who ne'r found Patron yet;
For truth is now a fault, as well as Wit.
And where else, but on Stages so we see
Truth pleasing, or rewarded Honesty?
Which our bold Poet does this day in me.
If not to th' Honest, be to th' Prosperous kind,
Some Friends at Court let the PLAIN DEALER find.\(^{77}\)

\(^{74}\) Wilcox, pp. 101-102.

\(^{75}\) Dennis, "Letter to...Major PACK," in Hooker, Volume II, p. 410.

\(^{76}\) See below, Chapter VI, on Wycherley's reputation.

\(^{77}\) Summers, Volume II, p. 102.
The statements made in this section of the prologue are from Wycherley's own mouth: they do not apply to Manly as a character, to the actor who portrayed him, or to the play itself. For example, Manly was never intended to represent a "wit", and could not be penalized for being witty (1.5), he had never sought patronage, and been rebuffed (1.4), and he certainly would not plead for future patronage from the court (ll. 9-10). The "I" in the prologue, then, cannot apply solely to Manly, but it does apply to Wycherley's own situation as we have described it: he was without a permanent patron, sought further money from the court, and felt he was penalized for his wit. The request at the end of the prologue is not merely the usual attempt to gain an approval of the audience, for Wycherley was at the height of his popularity, and he had far more praise for his works than financial help. In addition, such a request would not match the aggressive, even abusive, tone of the rest of the prologue. The last two lines are a desperate plea for aid from the court, made by Wycherley, and spoken by the chief character of his play. In the line, "Some Friends at Court let the PLAIN DEALER find," the term "Plain Dealer" refers to Wycherley, and not to his play — a point Wycherley made.

78 See above, Chapter IV, p. 176.
abundantly clear when he signed the dedication to his play under the name, "THE PLAIN DEALER," rather than his own.79

Throughout the remainder of his life, there are persistent indications that Wycherley was to continue to identify himself, in public and private, with the "Plain Dealer" of his play. In the preface to the Miscellany Poems, Wycherley signs his name, using that title;80 similarly, in a number of his letters to his friends he used "The Plain Dealer" for his signature.81 This bit of proof, added to the rest of the biographical, historical, textual, and other forms of evidence we have been able to compile, seems to show beyond any question that Wycherley thought of himself as a "plain dealer," and to some extent, identified himself with Manly. We can conclude that Wycherley's last play expressed his own attitudes towards the court, and as such, was part of the growing reaction to the domination of the stage by the irresponsible court society. In his anger and vexation, Wycherley had openly challenged the social and literary standards of his society, and even satirized the members of the court itself. The stylistic code of préciosité used by Wycherley to such good effect in his earlier

79 Summers, Volume II, p. 100.
80 Ibid. p. 13.
81 Sherburn, The Correspondence of Pope, Volume I, pp. 55, 66, 69, 80.
plays, is entirely absent in *The Plain Dealer*, except perhaps in a few speeches of Lord Plausible and Novel: the style of *The Plain Dealer* is unabashedly open, plain, even coarse. We see comparatively little of the gay lives of rakes and mistresses in *The Plain Dealer*, and these glimpses show Restoration society in its least appealing, most sordid aspect. Wycherley does not even accord the aristocracy minimal respect in this play: the only noble portrayed is the foppish Lord Plausible, and almost every comment made in *The Plain Dealer* upon the subject of the court is openly insulting:

Man. I weigh the man, not his title; 'tis not the Kings stamp can make the Metal better, or heavier: your Lord is a Leaden shilling, which you may bend every way....

The court standard of "wit", the means of which the nobility dominated their society, is also satirized cleverly in characters such as Novel:

Nov. So much for talking; which I think I have prov'd a mark of Wit; and so is Railing, Roaring, and making a noise: for Railing is Satyr, you know; and Roaring, and making noise, Humor.\(^\text{82}\)

Wycherley had entirely changed the basis of his comedy and his attitudes towards the court in this final play, rejecting wit, elegant style, and all the conventions which had flattered court taste. Just as he had been one of the earliest, and

\(^\text{82}\) Summers, Volume II, p. 185.
best, practitioners of the Restoration comedy of manners, he
was the first to reject it as a form when he had a more serious
purpose in mind. Throughout the rest of the century, "his own
Plain Dealer...remained the most significant attempt to move
away from the pattern set by The Country Wife." Wycherley,
under stress, had turned away from the fantastic dramatic ex-
pressions of the Restoration ideal and created his only play
based upon his own personal ethics:

The Plain Dealer is apt to disgust and appal
precisely because Wycherley has in that play taken upon
himself to display all of life as he knew it, not to
rear delicate fancies in a spirit's name.

Thus it was that Wycherley began the reaction which was
to end the domination of the theatre by the aristocratic court
circle. His daring made him into a hero of the professional
men of letters, and his peers would grant him their respect
and praise throughout the remainder of his lifetime. He was
indeed the "Plain Dealer" of Restoration society.

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83 Vernon, p. 33.

84 Nicoll, p. 200.
CHAPTER V

The Plain Dealer, as Wycherley's vexed and despairing plea for court support, seems to have met with some measured degree of success at first. In the two years following the premiere of Wycherley's last play, King Charles himself seems to have taken some of the responsibility for Wycherley's support, and given him several small amounts of money. When Wycherley became ill in the Fall of 1678, Charles did him the unparalleled favor of visiting him at his lodgings, and then packed him off for an expenses-paid trip to France for his health.¹ When he returned to England in the Spring, the king gave him the hope of a steady income, at last raising him above the station of a literary beggar who waited upon the whims of others:

¹ See above, pp. 147-149.
The King receiv'd him with the utmost Marks of Favour, and shortly after his Arrival told him that he had a Son, who he was resolv'd should be educated like the Son of a King, and that he could make Choice of no Man so proper to be his Governor as Mr. Wycherley; that for that Service he should have fifteen hundred Pounds a Year paid him, for the Payment of which he should have a Assignment upon three several Offices... to which the King added that when the Time came that his Office was to cease, he would take care to make such a Provision for him as Should set him above the Malice of the World and Fortune.²

This was the golden opportunity Wycherley had been waiting for; with fifteen hundred pounds a year, his independence would be assured. But as yet, Charles' offer was simply a promise: in the meantime, he had no income and hardly a Guinea in his pantaloons' pockets. Where Charles II and promises of money were concerned, a literary man had ample reason to be cautious.

While waiting for his opportunity to materialize, Wycherley was supported by his mistress, Laetitia Isabella, Countess of Drogheda. At a time when Wycherley had no apparent source of income, the noblewoman who had been a maid of honor at the court of King Charles, gave her lover an engraved cup of silver, a portrait, and other expensive gifts.³ But months

² Dennis, "Letter to...Major PACK," Hooker, Volume II, p. 411.

³ Connelly, pp. 146-158.
passed, and Charles made no attempt to give Wycherley the new position he had so kindly offered. On June 18, 1679, the husband of Countess Drogheda died, and Wycherley's mistress eagerly importuned her lover to marry her. Wycherley demurred, but kept Laetitia in a state of anticipation while he waited for the king to act.

As time slipped by, Wycherley realized that Charles' promise, like so many before it, had been forgotten as soon as it had been uttered. The King's good will was certain enough, but he was perpetually short of money, and a moment's frivolity could drive all thought of his responsibilities from his head. In any event, it was 1679, when court interest in letters was on the decline, and Wycherley's prospects for an independent income began to look bleak. He began to think seriously of the advantages of a match with the wealthy Countess.

Marriage to the beautiful Laetitia certainly appeared to have advantages: wealth, permanent membership in the court society, station, all the things that Wycherley had so long sought for, could be his by marriage. As a husband of a countess, he would no longer be a vassal of the court, but a privileged independent, free to do and think what he liked. His

years as a court wit and dandy were numbered anyway, for his illness had dulled his memory, and he was fast approaching his forties, — the retirement years for a rake in Charles's reign. Wycherley decided to take a chance, and with his father's eager command echoing in his ears, he secretly married the Countess on September 29, 1679.

Wycherley's marriage, which he hoped would at last free him from the bondage of the court and its neglect of his welfare, turned out to be a horrifying disaster. He found he had married a jealous shrew who was much less wealthy than he thought, and soon he was besieged by both his wife and her creditors. In addition, Charles took the marriage as an insult to his royal magnanimity:

As soon as the News of it came to Court it was look'd upon as an Affront to the King, and a Contempt of his Majesty's Offers. And Mr. Wycherley's Conduct after his Marriage made this be resented more heinously. For seldom or never coming near the Court, he was thought downright ungrateful. ...This,... was the Cause that brought Mr. Wycherley all at once into the utmost Disgrace with the Court, whose Favour and Affection but just before he possessed in the highest Degree.5

Wycherley made attempts to patch up his broken relations with the king, for he had never wished to disgrace that noble benefactor in any way; he had simply desired independence.

from the whims of court patronage and from the company of the 
hypocrites surrounding the Restoration court. In 1683, he pub-
lished his "Epistles to the KING and DUKE," where he defended 
Charles against some satires he had seen:

I too, scarce hold taking great Name in vain, 
Must with new insolence, of theirs complain; 
Who thinks your Name by Slaves can lessen'd be, 
Do's to your Honor, but more Injury.\footnote{6}

But Wycherley's praise of Charles fell upon deaf ears. 

In the Plain Dealer, he had done worse than attack the court 
social code; he had attacked the courtiers themselves, and the 
noble ladies who attended the playhouses. These enemies now 
poisoned the mind of the king. Wycherley still believed that 
his protestations against the court system of patronage were 
valid, and he railed against the courtiers who now blocked his 
return:

Tho Poets still, by Courts were kept Threadbare, 
In Verse, for Monarchy, true Wits declare, 
A Wit's your true, Indigent Officer 
Still out of Royal Sight, kept below Stairs, 
Appearing through his Coat, seldom appears; \footnote{sic} 
Court litter ere has been a Spaniel Crew; 
To Fawning, Sloth, yet scarce to Master true, 
Suff'ring no Poor, to come in Master's view; 
If Royal Bounty, ought to Stranger throws, 
The Household greedy Pawnsers interpose; 
So Wretch for whom 'twas meant, the Boon must lose.\footnote{7}

\footnote{6} Summers, Volume IV, p. 248. 
\footnote{7} Ibid. 
Wycherley then inserts a personal note into the poem, pleading his own case:

I am the only Spaniel of the Crown,
Kick'd out, and yet must still be hanging on,
The kinder too, for being but ill us'd
To baffled me, why is Court-grace refus'd? Where 'tis Preferment, but to be abus'd
But Poet 'mongst State-Lyars can't put in.  

But all was to no avail. Once Wycherley had chosen to leave the court, his old friends ignored him, and Wycherley was left entirely to his own devices.

Wycherley's life was now more miserable than ever: his finances were still precarious, and his marriage to a jealous vixen was intolerable. When his wife mercifully died in 1681, he became embroiled in lawsuits over the estate, and was repeatedly sued for payment by his creditors. In the period 1680 to 1685, he was arraigned for debt on no less than ten occasions. Wycherley borrowed as much money as he could in order to meet his obligations, but at last he was unable to pay. For an unpaid bill of a mere seven hundred pounds, Wycherley was imprisoned, and he languished in the Fleet or seven long years.

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8 Ibid. p. 249.
9 Eleanor Boswell, quoted in Connely, p. 182.
In these seven years of isolation from the world, Wycherley saw that he had been entirely right in attacking the lack of friendship and loyalty in the court society. He would never see the court again in the thirty years of life remaining to him, for nearly all of his noble friends had vanished after his imprisonment. Wit and gaiety was the commodity of the rakes, not acts of charity to impoverished debtors. He could not turn to his father for money, for that hard man had been calloused enough to imprison another of his sons who owed him money, and that poor soul died in prison. Even those who had made money by his plays had turned their backs upon him, as Charles Gildon remarked:

I have been assured, that the Bookseller who printed his Plain-Dealer, by which he gained as much Money almost as the Author did Reputation, was so Ungrateful to his Benefactor, as to refuse to lend him Twenty Pounds in his extreme Necessities. While audiences still delighted to his plays somewhere unseen beyond the dark walls of his prison, Wycherley knew only that he was being punished for the sin of telling the truth, and for the social sin of rejecting his society. When he had turned his back upon the court, the court had turned its back to him.

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12 Connely, p. 223.
In his years of confinement, Wycherley became a more serious, sober man, and was reconciled to his punishment. Despite the chains that bound him, however, he kept his pride, and never ceased in his attacks upon the courts and courtiers. With no hope now of ever returning to the court, he still refused to compromise his position as a gentleman poet by writing for money, but he aimed a barrage of satire at the court. One of the melancholy but caustic poems he wrote at this time, the poem "In Praise of a Prison, call'd by its Prisoners their College; and written there," shows his state of mind:

Since the Vain Libertine, abroad, is here
For his Past Life, a Willing Sufferer;
More Humble, Patient, in Word, Thought, less loose,
By which, he more Sense, and Religion shows;
The more in Body, and in Purse, decay'd,
The more in Mind, as in his Body stay'd,
And more undone, the Better Man, is made;
Thus, we have Sense, Peace, Quiet, Safety here,
He who has nothing, nothing has to fear;
Within thy Walls, so Hospitable Fleet!
A Man is Safe, from all Arrests 1' th' Street,
Of News-mongers, Whores, Borrowers, Men meet;
Courtiers, False Friends, to get out of whose Way,
A Man, safe from 'em, wou'd in Prison stay;
Who (the more they to Friends, were near, and dear, Abroad) in Prison, to them, less come near;
Prisons are best Retirements from Mankind,
Where we, from our Constraint of Body, find
More Liberty, both of the Tongue, and Mind;
Where Man is safe from Fears, and Dangers too,
Attending all, who still Abroad may go:

....................................................
Nor need a Pris'ner fear a Dun, or Whore,
Of whom, there's nothing to be gotten more;
Needs fear no Clap, o'th' Belly, or the Back,
Or, that Proud Courtiers e'er will Visits make
To Pris'ners, who, so Poor are still, that they
Can't, ev'n to Friends, their Visits e'er repay;
Then, my Restraint is Liberty to me,
Which from False Friends, False Whore's Arms keeps me
Free.14

We cannot take literally here any indications of
Wyckerley's complete moral reformation; as we shall later point
out, after his release from prison, he went back to his liberteine ways. Nonetheless, the seven years Wyckerley spent shackled
within the Fleet had a great influence upon his attitudes —
as we might suppose. The poetry Wyckerley produced during and
after his imprisonment differed greatly from the libertine,
lawdy verses produced in his youth. Every poem which can be
dated after his fall from the social heights reflects his more
serious attitude, both in style and subject-matter. A frequent
topic for his poetic musing, we might note, is the corruption
of courts and the hypocrisy of court-friends. The number of
poems which rail against court pretensions, infidelity, and the
court's maltreatment of its literary men, is quite large, and
we will only extract a few sample quotations here to illustrate
their tenor and form:

"To a Young Gentleman, who ask'd the Author's Advice whether he should turn Courtier,"

The Court's a Place of Contradiction's still,
Where all are Libertines, yet none can have their Will.
Where all are proud as Kings, yet all are slaves,
All Men of Honour, yet all lying Knaves.
Where most are Fools, tho' seeming Men of Sense,
Cowards in Fact, but Heroes in Pretense.
Where all to All seem Friends, but are not so;
Where true Faith least, for swearing it, they shew:

Honour and Int'rest you at Court will miss,
Where Virtue's scorn'd, and Vice triumphant is;
Where Modesty to Grace has no Pretense,
But is disgrac'd by pow'ful Impudence.
Where Foes by Truth, and Friends by Fraud are made,
And Flatt'ry is the only thriving Trade.
Where proud, great Men, as most in Actions base,
Themselves in Wealth and Honours highest raise.

With Virtue, Justice, Truth, then ne'er pretend
To gain Friends, where those Virtues have no Friend.
But there pimp, cheat, forswear thyself, and lie,
Shun clownish Truth, and simple honesty,
To gain Court-Grace, and with the Courtier vie. 15

"Upon the Discretion of Folly, by which Men are Fortu-
nate and Innocent, which is better than to be Wise"

So Kings, as here they Heaven's Viceroy's are,
Of Pooles (call'd Innocents,) will take most care,
And raise them still most high in their Esteem.
For having least Sense, so most Faith in Them. 16

"To A Witty Man of Wealth and Quality; whom, after his
Dismassal from Court, said. He might justly complain of it."

Since Titles, Honours, grow his Infamy,
Who then must buy, with Guilt or Slavery.

The Court has then, more gracious to you been,
Putting you out, then when it took you in;

15 Summers, Volume IV, pp. 245-246.
Since sure, the greatest Obligation still
Is that that's done a Man against his will;
Which spares the Lazy, Proud, yet Bashful Wit,
The Trouble, Pains or Shame of asking it.\footnote{17}

These sentiments, it should be observed, were not merely "sour grapes." They were the same satiric exposures of court life found in The Plain Dealer, the work which had been written while Wycherley was at the height of his popularity. In his later life, Wycherley had even less fear of irritating the courtiers, for he was already suffering the worst punishments that society could inflict upon him; as the extracts above show, he became far more open in satirizing court society. In his later life, Wycherley was "plain-dealing" to the point where he boldly stated that failings to the courtiers themselves, as his "Letter to James Graham, Esq.," the Privy Purse to James II, illustrates:

You courtiers, Sir, seldom cease to be friends but you begin to be enemies and it is a double unkindness as it is a double unhappiness for the miserable deserted man...And I protest before God, if we were not of late very much given to change, I should a little admire at yours.\footnote{28}

Wycherley's bold criticism of court pretensions certainly must have had its effect, together with Dryden's repudiation of court standards in All For Love. When the most respected gentleman-poet of the age, and the official Poet-Laureate of the

\footnote{17 {\textit{Ibid.}}, pp. 167-168.}
\footnote{18 Connely, p. 216.}
court teamed up to assault the aristocratic standards of their time, it would be rather much to suggest that the subsequent decline of those standards was simply coincidental.

In 1686, through the intercession of his few remaining aristocratic friends, a revival of Wycherley's Plain Dealer was presented at court. King James II, who prided himself upon being something of a "plain-dealer" himself, applauded the play, and afterwards paid Wycherley's debts, thus freeing him from debtor's prison.19

When Wycherley was at last released from confinement, he found himself lionized by the professional men of letters. It was too early for them to know that he had, with Dryden, helped to change the shape of the English literary system, but they realized that he had suffered grievously for championing their common cause. Before his Plain Dealer, and before the circulation of his later poetic satires, he had been known to only a comparative few of the professional men of letters; after his release from prison, he was idolized by the new generation of young professionals, and treated respectfully by his peers. Dryden deferred to Wycherley in all matters of literary judgment, and in 1694, wrote to Dennis:

19 James was so struck by the play that he sent the Earl of Mulgrave to pay Wycherley's debts — a matter of five hundred pounds — and granted him a pension. For the full account, see Pack's "Memoirs" in Giles Jacob's Poetical Register, p. 279.
"But as well as I love Mr. Wycherley, I confess
I love my self so well, that I will not shew how much
I am inferior to him in Wit and Judgment; by undertak­
ing any thing after him. There is Moses and the
Prophets in his Counsel." 20

Again, in his essay, "A Parallel of Poetry and Paint­
ing," Dryden would comment: "Mr. Wycherley, when we read it
\textit{Racine’s Esther} together, was of my opinion in this, or rath­
er I of his; for it becomes me to speak thus of so excellent a
poet and so great a judge." 21 Dryden thought so highly of his
friend that he served with Southerne, Congreve, and others, as
a backer for Wycherley’s \textit{Miscellany Poems} — as worthless as
that work was. Even further, he openly solicited funds for the
project from other prominent literary men. 22

Wycherley joined Dryden as leader of the coffee-house
circle at Will’s, and he commonly presided over the literary
discussion of the wits. 23 As Swift remarked in a letter to
Congreve, "Wycherley and you and Mr. Bays \textit{Dryden} are the
three first poets of the day, and arbiters of taste at Wills." 24

\begin{footnotes}
20 \textit{John Dennis}, \textit{Letters Upon Several Occasions:}
\textit{Written by and Between Mr. Dryden, Mr. Wycherley, Mr.}
\textit{Congreve, and Mr. Dennis.} (London: S. Briscoe, 1696), pp. 57–58.

21 \textit{The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John}
\textit{Dryden}, ed. by Edmund Malone. (London: H. Baldwin and Son, 1800),
Volume III, p. 335.

22 \textit{The Letters of John Dryden} ed. by Charles Ward. (Dur­

23 "Letter of Moyle to Congreve," October 7, 1695,
quoted in \textit{Connely}, p. 238.

24 Sir Edmund Gosse, \textit{Life of William Congreve} (New
\end{footnotes}
Strangers came from afar to see the old poet, and wrote home that they had seen a celebrity.25

The younger generation of writers, Pope, Congreve, Dennis, and others, literally worshiped him for his courageous stand against the aristocracy. Pope, who learned from Wycherley's example to seek financial independence, (and who later succeeded in his attempt), tells us in his own words how devoted he was to his mentor:

...my Dog...follows me about as constantly here in the Country, as I was us'd to do Mr. W. in the Towne.26

Throughout the late 1680's and early 1690's, young authors flocked to Wycherley, to see the witty and gentle man who had challenged an entire court. John Dennis, newly graduated from Trinity College, went on a pilgrimage to see the great man, and stayed on as a life-long admirer. We still possess one of his early letters to Wycherley, and we can see his admiration for the old dramatist shine through his words:

While I venture to write these [familiar] lines to you, I take it to be my Interest not to consider you as I hitherto always have done, and as for the future I always shall viz. as Mr. Wycherley, as the greatest Comick Wit that ever England bred, as a Man sent purposely into the World, to Charm the Ears of the

Wittiest Men, and Ravish the Hearts of the most Beautiful Women... 28

These aspiring young poets did not come to Wycherley for the reasons one might expect: he had neither the wealth or influence to help them in their careers, nor the ability to teach them the fine points of their profession. Wycherley was still the gracious, witty, and learned man he had always been, but illness had dulled his artistic faculties, and young poets such as Pope now corrected Wycherley's works, rather than obtaining his advice on their poetry. 29 These young poetic firebrands gathered about Wycherley because he was a controversial figure who was attacking the established order of the literary world. Wycherley circulated his newly-written poems among his intimate friends, poems such as "To Nath. Lee, in Bethlem...," 30 and these inconoclastic young men of letters undoubtedly roared their approval of his lines:


29 The Pope-Wycherley correspondence, in Sherburn, Vol. I, shows that Pope often made radical changes in Wycherley's poetry to make his works fit for publication. The end results were still exceedingly bad.

30 It was common practice for Wycherley to circulate his poems before publication. The preface to his Miscellany Poems, for example, contains a harsh denunciation of the critics who had disapproved of his poems in their manuscript form. The poem cited above, "To Nath. Lee, in Bethlem, (who was at once Poet and Actor) complaining, in His Intervals, of the Sense of His Condition; and that He ought no more to be in Bethlem for Want of Sense, than other Mad Libertines and Poets abroad, or any Sober Fools whatever," is one of the few poems we can positively date. It was written in the period 1684-1689, in the early years when the young poets began the cluster about him. See Summers, Volume III, p. 288.
Wits abroad suffer, but for sounder brains; For whose Food, and whose Lodging, none take Care, Shut out of Doors, kept Hungry, Poor, and Bare, Since Great Men their Poetic Fury fear; For telling Naked Truths, like Mad-Men, stripp'd, For their Poetic Lashing Fury, Whipp'd; And having, only, too much Wit, or Sense, More to the World's and vain Great Men's offence; Since to Discov'ry of their Want of Wit, Therefore, can never pardon'd be for it

...Poets Courts have striv'd to cure, in vain, By starving Wits, and keeping them in Pain, To make their Bodies Smart, correct their Brain.31

Wycherley's youthful admirers saw the truth of his case and applauded his satiric attacks upon the court pretensions with glee. Young Congreve, who thought enough of Wycherley to copy him in his first play, called for more of his brand of satire.32 In 1695, that volatile young man wrote in his preface to Love for Love:

Since The Plain Dealer's scenes of manly rage, Not one has dared to lash this crying age.33

These budding authors of a new generation believed in Wycherley's ideals, and sympathized entirely with his plight: they saw him as the persecuted sage, the Martyr to the cause

31 Ibid. pp. 233, 237.
32 Perry, p. 57.
of the professional literary men. Charles Hopkins, for example, thought that Wycherley had been treated shamefully, and wished him better fortune in the future:

May generous Wycherley, all sufferings past,
Enjoy a well deserved estate at last.
Fortune, with Merit, and with Wit be Friends,
And sure, tho' slowly, make a large amends.  

Southerne, in his preface to The Old Batchelor, expressed his belief that Wycherley had deliberately discarded his hopes of success out of courageously idealistic motives. Inasmuch as Southerne was one of Wycherley's intimate friends, we might carefully consider his lines:

His Dryden's eldest, Wicherly in wise Retreat
Thought it not worth his quiet to be great.

But these expressions of faith might yet be taken simply as the credulous expressions of youthful admirers for their literary idol. All of these men were newcomers to the field of professional letters; can we believe that their judgment was correct? If correct, can we believe that the same opinion was held outside Wycherley's small circle of intimate professional friends?

Our point is proven by a citation from the works of George Granville, Lord Lansdowne, a man of respected literary judgment and personal ability. Lansdowne was a noble himself.


35 Quoted in Connelly, p. 57.
but he too was something of an idealist, and he disapproved of the way in which the court had abused Wycherley:

Let others fight, and eat their Bread in Blood, Regardless of the Cause be bad or good; Or cringe in Courts, depending on the Nods Of strutting Pygmies who would pass for Gods. For me, unpractis'd in the Courtier's School, Who loath a Knave, and tremble at a Fool; Who honour generous Wycherley opprest, Possess of little, worthy of the best, Rich in himself, in Virtue that outshines All but the Fame of his immortal Lines, More than the wealthiest Lord, who helps to drain The famish'd Land, and rouls in impious Gain; What can I hope in Courts? Or how Succeed? Tygers and Wolves shall in the Ocean breed, The Whale and Dolphin fatten on the Mead; And every Element exchange its Kind, Ere thriving Honesty in Courts we find.³⁶

Granville's statement here is unequivocal; he himself was no champion of lost causes, but he approved of Wycherley's fearless satire of the court, and echoed his sentiments. He saw Wycherley as "oppress" by the court; a victim of unscrupulous courtiers and the "strutting" nobles. That a member of the aristocracy could write such polemics against his class is some indication of the strength of the reaction against the Restoration court in the last two decades of the Seventeenth century.

³⁶ George Granville, The Genuine Works in Verse and Prose of the Right Honourable George Granville Lord Lansdowne (London: J. Tonson, 1736), Volume I, p. 22. This is, we might note here, the first time anyone has taken note of this passage in Lansdowne's poetry. The critics of Wycherley seem entirely unaware of its existence.
Wycherley, as one of the initiators of this movement, and as a martyr to the cause of literary independence, was the champion of all those who opposed the old order. The "old lion in satire," as Pope termed him, had become the hero of two separate classes, in two different generations.

On the basis of the wealth of biographical, textual, and historical evidence we have cited thus far, it seems certain that Wycherley practiced two distinct types of satire at different times in his life. The first type, the bantering ridicule of social non-conformists, is found in Wycherley's first three plays and in the poetry he wrote for court consumption. The second type, an angry personal and idealistic reaction to the court society and its system of patronage, is found in The Plain Dealer and in the poetry he wrote after 1678, the year he was expelled from court. It is clear from this division that all those critics who have attempted to prove that Wycherley had only one satiric intention throughout his four plays, are in error. We must approach Wycherley's


38 The over-simplification of Wycherley's intentions is a common failing of his critics, both those who believe he entirely supported the Restoration code of values and those who believe he consistently loathed his society. See Fujimura, p.118, and T.W.Craik, "Some Aspects of Satire in Wycherley's Plays," English Studies, XLI (1960), 168-179. The critics of the Nineteenth century in particular, (Macaulay, Taine, and Meredith, for example) seem to have been extraordinarily adept at reducing Wycherley's complex intentions to elegant but untrue generalizations.
plays with the knowledge that he had been an extreme proponent of two entirely different social doctrines in his lifetime, and that both of these doctrines had found satiric application in his works.

The first type of satire used by Wycherley was the form of trivial, stylized banter which characteristic of the style of the early Restoration period. This satire had a social purpose: it ridiculed non-conformists and lampooned those who deviated from the norms set up by the restored court. While the satire thus produced had a serious purpose, however, we must not think that it was biting or severe: the court prided itself upon its equanimity, and even a satiric rage directed as its enemies was out of fashion:

Rage you must hide, and Prejudice lay down,
A Satire's Smile is sharper than his Frown;39

The Restoration court of Charles affected grace and gentility to the extent that it wished to take all of life in easily palatable doses. Its satire had little real bite, for the dramatic portraits of "would-be-wits," fops, and the other

39 John Sheffield, "An Essay on Poetry," in The Works Of The Most Noble John Sheffield Late Duke of Buckingham, Published by His Grace In His Life Time, (London: E.Curll, 1721), p. 26. It should be noted here that Buckingham's "Essay on Poetry" was highly regarded by his contemporaries and received praise from Dryden and Pope. See the section on "John Sheffield." DNB, Volume XVIII, p. 15.
curious denizens of the Restoration world became stereotyped to the point where they could be considered stock characters, conventional figures of the theatre. While satire was still applauded for its "reforming" purpose, it was thought more important in practice to amuse the audience than to censure folly severely. John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, wrote:

Of all the ways that wisest Men could find
To mend the Age, and mortify Mankind,
SATIRE, well writ, has most successful prov'd,
And cures, because the Remedy is lov'd. 40

Rochester in turn wrote:

A jest in scorn points out and hits the thing
More home than the morosest satires sting. 41

It was conventional to praise writers for the reforming nature of their burlesques, but outside of the vulgar lampoons, (which are decidedly beneath literary notice) "the satire of the early Restoration period was designed more to please than to instruct. Dryden, for example, was not one whom we would ordinarily categorize as a "satiric" playwright. Some of his poetry is very caustic indeed, but the majority of his plays are certainly not reforming satires as we might ordinarily conceive of them.

40 Ibid. p. 25.

Nonetheless, Dryden's friend Wycherley praised him for his corrective influence:

But when the vulgar Vice employs your Pen
How we despise our selves in other Men!
At once we grow more merry, yet more wise,
Pleas'd and instructed with your Comedies.

Your Sense, your Humour, and Satyrick Rage,
At once can teach, delight, and lash the age.
The greatest Art is, sure, your Art alone
Of pleasing All Men in your sparing None:
Charmed with your Wit, tho' it their Scandal grows,
Their Follies please them while you them expose. 42

It is apparent here that Wycherley has placed at least as much emphasis upon the amusement found in Dryden's plays, as in the satire. In practice, the Restoration playwrights tried harder to please their audience than to satirize scandalous vice: they poked fun at foibles, eccentricities, and forms of fashion far more than at any of the true defects of their age. In general, the dramatists firmly supported their society and applied none of the conventional norms of human conduct in their satires. As one unsympathetic critic has remarked of Sedley's Mulberry Garden, "It satirizes a weakness and defends a mean- ness." 43 The function of the Restoration comedy of manners was

42 "An Epistle to Mr. DRYDEN, occasion'd by his desiring the Author to joyn with him in Writing a Comedy," in, Summers, Volume III, p. 156.

43 Krutch, pp. 44, 200.
not to produce perspective by incongruity, but to produce social conformity through laughter. 44

The theory behind this form of satire was not native to England, nor was it imported from France at the Restoration; it was taken deliberately and methodically from Horace, the most widely read of the classical writers in Restoration England. Horace himself was an urbane, sophisticated courtier and a man of letters, and he had been concerned with the same problems which Charles' courtiers faced; it was not surprising that they should take him for their model.

It is illustrative of the general character of the eighteenth century that, at a period of classical cultivation which was often superficial, as any cultivation applied wholesale is apt to be, Horace was the most frequently quoted and deferred to even more generally than Virgil, with his higher political ideals and poetic genius. In the reign of Augustus, Horace had gathered from many sources such practical and workable tenets as should strengthen the new-formed empire, and teach men to live soberly and sanely; and his maxims naturally fitted the needs of a similar situation and a similar spirit in England. 45

Some indication of Horace's popularity in the Restoration period can be found in the number of translations and imitations of Horace's works. In all of England's previous

44 On this point, see Margaret McDowell, "Moral Purpose in Restoration Comedy," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of English, State University of Iowa), pp. 11-13 et passim. This work contains comments of a large number of major critics upon the subject.

history, only one translation of the *Ars Poetica* had been made, by Ben Jonson; between 1675 and 1700, half a dozen translations of all types, and countless imitations poured from the English presses. More important, those who most concerned themselves with Horace's works were the most influential wits, critics, and men of letters: Rochester, Roscommon, Mulgrave, Dryden, Oldham, and Wycherley.\(^{46}\) The gentlemen-poets varied widely in their individual knowledge of the classics, but they all seem to have studied Horace with special intensity.\(^{47}\)

Horace's literary personality was multi-faceted, and the nature of his works is far too complex to be examined in a few paragraphs; but we might note that the most striking aspects of his literary form are those characteristics which were generally admired by the Restoration gentlemen-poets. Brevity, for example, succinct wit, and casual good sense, are widely recognized qualities of his works.\(^ {48}\)

Of especial interest to us here is Horace's concept of satire. Horace, unlike Juvenal, did not believe in savagely


\(^{47}\) Belsey, p. 13.

assaulting his victim; he hoped to entice the extremist to better conduct by gentle ridicule and reasonable criticism. Horace made no attempt to castigate vice or laud virtue, and could not be called a self-righteous man in any sense of the word; it was enough for him if a man became a fairly respectable citizen and a man of moderation:

Horace by his satiric raillery had tried to lead his contemporaries into the path of civic virtue; and employed...the same methods to cajole society, if possible, out of its extravagant absurdities....Neither he nor they [the Restoration and Eighteenth Century manners satirists] made exalted demands for civic righteousness; both would be satisfied if they could coax their readers into becoming fairly sensible, decent citizens.49

This urbane, sophisticated, and mildly condescending form of satire was the perfect social and artistic tool for the Restoration court and its men of letters, and was widely used in the Restoration comedies.50 Horace's elegance and style were certainly worth emulation, but for the fifty years following the Restoration, it was the graceful ease of his satire that was most admired by cosmopolitan literary men:

Horace still charms with graceful negligence,
And without method talks us into sense;

49 Goad, p. 8.

Will, like a friend, familiarly convey
The truest notions in the easiest way.\textsuperscript{51}

Horace's casual, smiling approach to the correction of
folly, then, was the major theoretical model of the literary
men of the Restoration, and his concepts probably served as the
basis for the dramatic satire of the period. Dryden, one of
Horace's greatest admirers,\textsuperscript{52} openly defended Horatian satire
against the coarser, angrier, Juvenalian concept of "moral in-
dignation" advocated by Barten Holyday and others;\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{quote}
Let the chastisement of Juvenal be never so
necessary...let him declaim as sharply and wittily as
he pleases, yet still the nicest and most delicate
touches of satire consist in fine raillery.

How easy is it to call rogue and villain and that
wittily. But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a
blockhead, or a knave without using any of these
opprobrious terms!....\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} Pope, "Essay on Criticism," ll. 653-656.

\textsuperscript{52} Goad, p. 2. See Dryden's Horatian odes, and his pre-
face to \textit{An Evenings Love}, in Montague Summers' \textit{The Dramatic}
Works of John Dryden} (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1932), Volume
II, p. 245. It is interesting to note that in the "Essay on
Dramatic Poesy," Dryden's critical masterpiece, all four of the
debaters, Crites, Eugenius, Lisideius, and Neander, consider
Horace the arbiter of literary taste \textit{par excellence}. Horace is
quoted no less than fifteen times by the four critical represen-
tatives in this essay.

\textsuperscript{53} Barten Holyday was the Archdeacon of Oxford, and the
editor of \textit{Juvenal} (1672).

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{The Essays of John Dryden}, ed. by Walter P. Ker.
in Atkins, p. 126.
Wycherley, unfortunately, was not inclined to critical dissertation in the same way that Dryden and others of his acquaintance were, and almost no explicit declarations of his artistic intent are recorded for posterity. Accordingly, we have hitherto had some difficulty in establishing Wycherley's dramatic intentions, and we have been forced to determine his theoretical literary ideals by a laborious inductive process. If we now examine Wycherley's literary relationship to Horace, the critic who shaped the dramatic satire of the Restoration period, we will find that the evidence of his agreement with Horace's theory of satire will provide a measure of independent verification of our previous conclusions regarding Wycherley's dramatic intentions.

Wycherley was an ardent admirer of the classics, and apparently was known for his special love of Horace. Pope, Dryden, and Lansdowne, all intimate friends of Wycherley, knew of his attachment to the author of the Ars Poetica, and drew analogies between the two satirists. In his works, Wycherley quoted frequently from Horace, almost to the exclusion of other

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55 Connely, pp. 16, 76.

authors; he cites Horace's opinions on friendship, style, poverty, old age, — all the possible subjects of art and life.

Before each of the printed editions of his comedies, Wycherley placed a quotation from Horace, which gave his own intentions, described the purpose of the play, or made some remark on the play's reception. Each of these comments, in context, is appropriate to the occasion. On the title page of Love in a Wood, for example, we find the motto:

Excludit Sanos heliconis poetas Democritus

"Democritus excludes sane poets from Helicon."

Out of context, this statement bears no conceivable relation to Wycherley's personal condition or to his play: the reason for its insertion is a mystery. When it is placed within the context of Horace's work, however, we can see how it applies to the situation of a talented young author who is attempting to break into a literary society dominated by the "native talent" of affected aristocrats:


Because Democritus believes that native talent is a greater boon than wretched art, and shuts out from Helicon poets in their sober senses, a goodly number take no pains to pare their nails or to shave their beards; ... for surely one will win the esteem and name of poet if he never entrusts to the barber Lincoinus a head that three Anticyras cannot cure. ... Not another man would compose better poems than I. Yet it's not worth while. So I'll play a whetstone's part, which makes steel sharp, but of itself cannot cut. Though I write nought myself, I will teach the poets' office and duty; whence he draws his stores; what nurtures and fashions him; what benefits him and what not; whether the right course leads and whither the wrong. 59

As we have already seen, Wycherley was one of the first competent professionals to enter the literary field while it was dominated by the Restoration aristocracy. Those who felt they possessed "native" talent — Sedley, Howard, and the other aristocrats — produced poor comedies based upon their theories of "negligent" style, just as Horace refers to those who think they are poets because of their negligent conduct and attire. Wycherley was a capable young author, skilled in the literary arts and the social fashions of his time, and he attempted to produce a play which demonstrated real artistic polish, unlike the authors who copied the negligent airs of the nobility. The analogy is not perfect, but it is quite striking, and no other possibility of interpretation has been offered by any other commentator.

On the title-page of The Gentleman Dancing-Master, there is another quotation from Horace, one appropriate for a play which stressed terseness and simplicity of form, and emphasized satire of court eccentrics and fops. 60

Non Satis est risu diducere riatum
Auditoris est quaedam tamen hic quoque virtus 61

In the context, these lines read:

...it is not enough to make your hearer grin with laughter — though even in that there is some merit. You need terseness, that the thought may run on, and not become entangled in verbiage.... 62

For The Country Wife, Wycherley inserted a motto which showed his indignation at the ill treatment his play had received at the hands of captious courtiers:

Indignor quiocquam reprehendi, non quia orasse
Compositum illepidiave putetur sed quia nuper:
Nec veniam Antiquis, sed honorem et praemia praemia
poscit. 63

I resent a work's being censured, not because it is thought to be coarse or inelegant in style, but because it is modern, when the ancients deserve not praise and rewards, but excuses. 64

60 Summers, Volume I, pp. 44-45.
61 Ibid. p. 151.; Horace, Satires I.x. 7-8.
64 Loeb Library, Horace, pp. 402-403.
It is in the lines appended to *The Plain Dealer*, however, that this investigation proves most fruitful. Here Wycherley declares that he was no longer writing simply to amuse, and no longer using the conventional forms of satire: he was now ridiculing the court in order to influence the turn of a matter of importance to him. This "matter" would have been, of course, Wycherley's personal difficulties with the court, and the inadequate patronage he received.

Wycherley's insertion of the Horatian quotation into the published edition of *The Plain Dealer* gives us additional evidence that his play succeeded in its intended purpose. The prologue had openly mocked the court and its followers in the most unmistakable terms, and then appealed for adequate patronage:

I the PLAIN-DEALER am to Act to Day:  
And my rough Part begins before the Play.  
(The satire follows)  

If not to th' Honest, be tp th' Prosperous kind.  
Some Friends at Court let the PLAIN-DEALER find.  

This was the stick-and-carrot approach; Wycherley was showing the court that he was capable of a second kind of satire, a devastating ridicule which could be turned against his patrons if they continued to abuse him. The patrons at court

apparently got the point, for when The Plain Dealer was published a few months later, Wycherley was able to insert the quotation from Horace: "Ridicule often decides great matters more effectively than severity." 66

We have now examined all the major points of Wycherley's satire except the last, most topical aspect: the limits of his satire. As we have indicated, his reaction to the court seems to have been based upon personal problems and social ideals, rather than upon a moral or religious distaste for the licentious court life. There are a large number of critics, however, who are apparently unaware of these facts of Wycherley's life, largely because of the poor state of basic scholarship in this field, and these critics have considered Wycherley's attack upon the court structure as a symptom of moral upheaval or Puritanical feeling on his part. We will cite a few examples:

He [Wycherley] burst up the foetid air of the time with a force equal to that of Collier. He lashed the age with his plain-dealing pen, lading out his disgust upon a...world of roues and their mistresses. He has not the style of the greater masters of the manners school...yet, in scenes where his moral horror is not aroused, he can be almost as delicate as they. 67

*Horace, Satires, I.x. 14-15; Loeb Library, Horace, pp. 116-117. See also Connely, p. 135.*

67 *Nicoll, p. 237.*
A moral misfit in his own age, wallowing in sinfulness and stammering out repentance, he displays some of that self-consuming, self-poisoning rage that we associate with Swift.

No one seems to have reached out toward London life with a great sense of enjoyment than Wycherley, or afterwards to have recoiled from it with a greater sense of disgust. He is the great pagan of Restoration comedy; but he is also the great Puritan.

It was not frustration that made a moralist of him, but satiety; not lofty thinking but loose living; not an appeal to ethics but a recoil from experience. He was a full-blooded man first, and only a bilious one afterwards.  

\[The Plain Dealer\] is the deliberate attempt of a ferocious moralist to expose the vices of nature for our disgust.  

This savage blasphemer in the halls of beauty and of art, is, after all, at heart a moralist, indignantly flagellating vice as well as gloating over her deformities.

This situation presents something of a problem, for once one has determined solely by critical analysis that Wycherley is a satirist, it is difficult to limit the scope of that satire. Where interpretive analysis is the critics' only tool because they lack strict biographical fact, any subtlety may be interpreted as satire. The resulting chaos is described by Rose Zimbardo:

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68 Kronenberger, pp. 56, 68.
69 Palmer, p. 69.
70 Felix Schelling, quoted in Holland, p. 96.
Generally the consensus is that Wycherley suffered a kind of artistic schizophrenia, that *The Country Wife* expresses that in him which loved to revel in the wicked age while *The Plain Dealer* expresses the triumph over that baser self of Wycherley's puritan instincts. This is a problem we have not faced before, because the facts of Wycherley's life give rather clear indications of the nature of his satiric intent, and we have thus avoided the pitfall which has claimed so many. Nonetheless, the question must be faced: is there any sign of Puritanism or righteous moral correction in Wycherley's satire? That is, did he disapprove of the licentious and bawdy life of the court, satirize it in his plays and poetry, or react to it in his personal life?

As we noted in Chapter III, in the early career of William Wycherley there is no sign that he disapproved of any of the riotous amusements of the court. In fact, Wycherley pursued the life of a rake with enormous enthusiasm and energy, and positively amazed others at the success with which he seduced women, drank copious quantities of wine, wrote bawdy poetry and drinking-songs, and otherwise followed the pace set by his aristocratic superiors. His early poetry, and the three plays written in this period, definitely preach the court ideal in every way, and practice superbly the contemporary

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71 Zimbardo, p. 78.

72 See above, p. 131f.
standards of wit, style, and satiric form. There is very little likelihood that these could be considered satires of "morals" rather than "manners."

The best support for those who believe Wycherley reacted to the drunken, bawdy, and otherwise immoral standards of the Restoration court, will be found in The Plain Dealer, for here he lashes out at the court, curses the infidelity of Olivia, and damns many of the standards of the age. Without the "evidence" supplied by The Plain Dealer, the "moralists" will have an untenable position.

The theme of The Plain Dealer is the clash of idealism and hypocrisy, and the compromises of truth a man makes to maintain himself in society. "Plain-dealing" as such has no connotations of moral reformation; the expression simply meant "social openness," or "directness," and Wycherley applied the term to unfeigned vice, as well as to unfeigned virtue. Twice in The Country Wife, Wycherley used the term to indicate open and unashamed indecency.73

Manly, the chief character of The Plain Dealer, never castigates moral turpitude in the Christian sense, but always stresses hypocrisy and infidelity. This is "morality" in a sense, but a pagan morality, one which stresses earnestness and

simplicity rather than rectitude. Manly does not hate Olivia, for example, because she has committed a moral wrong; he hates her because she is disloyal to him, for he still loves her. Revenge for her infidelity is his final motive for his hatred, as he himself states:

Well, thou hast impudence enough to give me Fits too, and make Revenge itself impotent; hinder me from making thee more infamous, if it can be.\(^7\)

Manly would be a poor choice as an upholder of moral standards, considering his personal character. His attempt to rape Olivia, for example, seems somewhat the unvirtuous thing to do. His doctrine of social honesty bears no relation to our concept of morality, as Norman Holland observes:

Manly is hardly virtuous himself; he prefers his affairs with prostitutes whom he respects (as Wycherley in the prologue does Mother Bennett) to normal social intercourse because, he says, there is no hypocrisy in the paid relationships.

\[\text{What he objects to in society is not wrongdoing, but the unwillingness to admit it — pretense and affectation.}\]^7\)

In *The Plain Dealer*, Wycherley was satirizing the structure of his society, and is not concerned with its moral value. Manly, as one of the plain-dealers in that play, does not concern himself with virtues, but with loyalties and hypocrisies.

\(^7\) The Plain Dealer, Act V, Sc. III., Summers, Volume II, p. 192.

75 Holland, pp. 99, 98.
and attacks the Restoration society solely on that basis. It is also interesting to note that *The Plain Dealer*, supposedly Wycherley's most "moral" play, has a scene which explicitly defends *The Country Wife*, the play which many critics have thought to be Wycherley's least moral work.\(^76\)

If for some reason we might conclude that Wycherley had somehow reformed himself and hence satirized his society in *The Plain Dealer*, we are faced with his complete lack of moral standards in his later life and later works. None of his later poems, for example, pursues the theme of moral turpitude in his society, while many are very harshly critical of court life, social affectation, and similar themes. In his old age, Wycherley relished his prior reputation as a ladies' man,\(^77\) and continued to drink to excess; his intake of spirits seems to have contributed to his death.\(^78\) During his lifetime, Wycherley changed his religion three times, (each time when it would do him the most personal good) and undoubtedly was only prevented from doing so a forth time by the

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\(^{76}\) Act II, Sc. I.

\(^{77}\) John Dennis, *Letters Upon Several Occasions*, p.121.

fact that no one would believe him.\textsuperscript{79} His letters to Pope, written in his old age, are filled with bawdy lines,\textsuperscript{80} and his conversation was not for the timid, as one shocked observer discovered:

My dear Corinna. Here is a great deal of Company. Being but a fresh Comer I can send you no News from this Place; except it be that Yesterday Mr. Wycherley dined with Sir John, whose Conversation I find like his Poetry, is very much decayed; unless plain fulsom Obscenity (not to be borne with in a Young Man, but unpardonable in an Old one) may pass for Wit and good Breeding.\textsuperscript{81}

It seems apparent then, that Wycherley was strictly a social satirist, and we cannot give him the happy, but irrelevant distinction of being a moral reformer. As Montague Summers has noted, "Wycherley was a great satirist, and a great satirist may be, not necessarily must be, a moralist."\textsuperscript{82} Wycherley's qualities as a comic dramatist and social satirist have proven substantial enough in themselves to rank him with the greatest geniuses of the theatre, and we need not seek to devise additional praise for his name.

\textsuperscript{79} Connely, pp. 208-210; Beljame, pp. 6-7.

\textsuperscript{80} Sherburn, Volume I, pp. 14, 50, 65, \textit{et passim}.

\textsuperscript{81} Quoted in Summers, Volume I, p. 59.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid. p. 62.
CHAPTER VI

Throughout this work, we have found it very helpful to turn to Wycherley's contemporaries for evidence of his dramatic and satiric intentions. This approach has been fruitful, because "Wycherley," as Johnson phrased it, was a dramatist who seems to have had among his contemporaries his full share of reputation.¹ Unfortunately, however, this area of the Wycherley scholarship has met with the same general neglect characteristic of his biographical studies. The only serious work in the field, an unpublished dissertation entitled "Wycherley and the Critics," is confessed by its author, William Carstens, to be only an outline.² Thus far in our own study, we have already cited more of the critical opinions of Wycherley's contemporaries than Carstens, who


² Carstens, pp. 3-5.
vows that "the written remains of... Wycherley's..." contemporary reputation are remarkably slight."\(^3\) Having discovered already how useful the commentary of Wycherley's contemporaries can be, we will proceed to do more thorough independent study of his reputation in his lifetime.\(^4\)

Throughout his life, as we have noted, Wycherley enjoyed an impeccable literary reputation and was spared much of the scurrilous and carping satire which so commonly beset the great figures of his society.\(^5\) The reason seems plain enough in view of our past observations: Wycherley was an agreeable man who did not waste his own time with vituperative nonsense, and he was exceedingly popular with the two classes of men most likely to write satires — the professional men of letters and the aristocratic "gentleman-poets."

When Wycherley had first entered the court circle, he had charmed powerful men such as Buckingham despite the most adverse circumstances, and the obvious superiority of his dramatic works made his literary skill beyond reproach. In this

\(^3\) Ibid. p. 17.

\(^4\) It should be noted here that we will not attempt to follow a chronological outline, or even attempt to date most of this criticism very precisely. Many of these comments were published for the first time in collected works after the deaths of their respective authors, and even the greatest scholars have been unable to date them.

\(^5\) See above, p. 137.
period of his life, he was praised as a wit and a gentleman, and there does not appear to be a single satiric line directed against him other than his inclusion in the unpublished satires directed against Barbara Villiers. 6

After Wycherley made his break from the court, and then was permanently expelled by Charles, a few changes were brought against him by members of the aristocracy, but their hearts were not in their work. The worst that the masters of mockery and lampoon could pronounce upon him was that he was "slow" or "too witty" in his plays.

After Wycherley was released from prison, he found himself the hero of the rising professional literary class of a new generation. At a time when the aristocracy was being flayed upon the stage, at a time when the old standards of conduct and literary artistry were being repudiated by a new generation of writers, Wycherley, even in his decline and dotage, was largely immune from the general reassessment of manners and letters. To be sure, Wycherley's poverty made him an easy prey for one or two hacks, but his professional friends moved so swiftly to defend him, that there was no repetition of the offense.

6 See above, n. 40, p. 107.
In the years after his imprisonment, the loyalty of Wycherley's friends was so great that he could publish an excruciatingly bad volume of verse, and only one minor criticism seems to have appeared in print concerning it. His friends apparently tried to dissuade him in private from publishing this terrible trash, but he angrily shrugged them off. When Wycherley persisted in his resolve, not only did Dryden and Pope help finance and amend his works, but others praised his poetry for its "wisdom," when they could not stomach his versification. No greater love hath a man of letters, than that he lay down his artistic principles and literary conscience for his friend. When Wycherley could no longer be praised for his literary abilities, he was praised for anything and everything: his sage advice, his past glories, and even, when his quickness of wit had left him — for the deliberate and considered slowness of his speech. Rather than assigning to Wycherley and his works a long list of contradictory and impossible virtues, it might be simpler and more correct to say merely that he was admired and loved in his old age, and that he had at last found the loyalty and friendship that he had sought so desperately for so many hard years.

Because of the complexity of Wycherley's personal attitudes and the vicissitudes of his life, we may thus divide his reputation among his contemporaries into three different
categories: his fame as a "wit" and gentleman-poet, his renown as a caustic satirist, and his later eminence as a "classic" writer of English comedy. We will take each of these divisions in turn, and exhibit the various commentaries which fall in each category. With a few necessary exceptions, we will not cite examples of contemporary opinion already touched upon in this work.

In Wycherley's early dramatic career, he adhered closely to the court literary and social standards, and as we might expect, the chief wits and rakes of the court were his chief supporters. As we have already noted, Charles Sackville, sixth Earl of Dorset, John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham, and John Sheffield, the third Earl of Mulgrave, were instrumental in forwarding his career. In the anxious competition for literary prestige, however, none of these aristocrats were any too eager to praise a commoner in print, and only two early compliments from this group have been handed down to posterity. The first is the previously cited comment of Mulgrave:

...I will grant that the English Comedy is superior to that of France; but this concession reaches no farther than Ben Johnson, [sic] Shadwell, Wycherley, and some other comic poets of the first magnitude;

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7 Above, pp. 102-106.

8 Above, p. 34.
The second was made by Rochester, in his poems "A Session of the Poets," while describing an imaginary competition for the position of Poet-Laureate:

Brawny Wycherley was the next Man shew'd his Face; But Appolo e'en thought him too good for the Place; No Gentleman Writer that Office should bear, T'was a Trader in Wit the Laurel should wear, As none but a Citt, e're makes a Lord Mayor. 9

While none of the other courtiers chose to laud Wycherley in print, we know that they supported him fully so long as he remained in Charles' favor. Prior, for example, has told us that Dorset played a key role in influencing popular acceptance of The Plain Dealer:

Butler ow'd it to Him, that the Court tasted his Hudibras: Wycherley, that the Town liked his Plain Dealer....10

Knowing that Wycherley was an enormous success in the court circle, we might have expected more substantial praise from his aristocratic friends. But the "friendship" of a courtier, as Wycherley later understood, was in itself a very insubstantial thing; the court masters of the lampoon were not inclined to write praises of a commoner, even one they genuinely liked.

9 DeSola Pinto, p. 105.

When Wycherley was permanently denied court favor, one would have expected the great wits to turn upon him and tear him to pieces in their satires, as Rochester, for one, had already done with Dryden, Crowne, and others. In practice, these giants of the court seemed unwilling or unable to do so. Rochester attacked him for being "slow," but this was a half-hearted and trivial objection:

None have touch'd lately on true COMEDY,
But hasty Shadwell, and slow Wycherley.

Rochester later qualifies his criticism, saying:

But Wycherley earns hard whate'er he gains;
He wants no Judgment, and he spares no Pains.11

A somewhat more serious challenge was the assertion that Wycherley was too "witty," for as court influence declined in literary circles, the old standard of wit was cast aside, and to be known as an author of extreme "wit," became something of a stigma.12 Wycherley was always susceptible to this form of criticism, for he certainly had pursued the standard of wit and given his works all the stylistic touches characteristic of préciosité. He had, in fact, excelled at wit, and that quality was characteristic of his style.

11 The Works of Right Honourable the Earls of Rochester and Roscommon, p. 17.
12 See above, pp. 48-53.
Both Dryden and Mulgrave had written satires attacking an unnamed poet of great stature for being too witty, and it was commonly assumed that these severe censures were aimed at Wycherley. These were their comments:

Mulgrave:

Another fault which Does befall
Is when the wit of some great poet shall
Soe overflow, that is, be none at all,
That all His Fools speak sense as if possest
And each by Inspiration breaks his jest.13

Dryden:

I know a Poet...whom out of Respect I will not name, who being too witty himself, could draw nothing but Wits in a certain Comedy of his; ev'n his Fools were infected with the Disease of their Author. They overflow'd with smart Repartees, and were only distinguish'd from the intended Wits by being call'd Coxcombs, tho' they did not deserve so scandalous a Name.14

Dennis later tried to defend Wycherley against those who assumed Dryden and Mulgrave had intended him as the object of their satire. In his letter "A Defense of Mr. Wycherley's Characters in the Plain-dealer," he points out that Mulgrave had been one of Wycherley's best friends, and so was unlikely to be one who would censure him so seriously:


Now...I cannot believe the late Duke...so much as thought of Mr. Wycherley in this severe Censure, not only because the Censure is not true with regard to Mr. Wycherley...but because the Duke, who knew the Value of Money as much as another, would never have done so generous a thing...as the lending him 500 l. upon his own single Bond,...if he had looked upon Mr. Wycherley as a ridiculous Author....15

Dennis unfortunately seems to have been wrong in his assertion: his loyalty to Wycherley was greater, apparently, than his knowledge of Mulgrave's written works. John Sheffield had been rather more specific in his well known "Essay on Poetry:

...For about fifteen years after the restoration, all was gay, all sprightly, and vivacious, and wit every where abounded; ....This spirit of wit...had likewise taken possession of the writers of the greatest fame so far, that they were fonder of saying a witty thing in their comedies, than a just one. Among these poets there was none more eminent than the Author of the Country Wife, and Plain Dealer, nor any one who sinned more against this precept, as is plain from the characters of Novel, the Lord Plausible, and even the very Taras, by which the justness of the characters was lost; and so he grew a very faulty writer, even by the excess of his wit: for of him it is certainly true, 'That ev'n his fools spoke sense, as if possesed, And each by inspiration broke his jest.'16

Mulgrave seems to have remained a close personal friend of Wycherley's, for he had lent him money, aided him in his career and had been instrumental in freeing him from debtor's prison.17 We know of no personal reason why he should attack


17 See above, pp. 161, 204. See also Allen, "Two Wycherley Letters," 257.
Wycherley's "wit," and we might well assume that Mulgrave was defending his class against the assaults of Wycherley, or more likely, was simply expressing his honest critical opinions.

As for Dryden, it does not seem possible that his comment was intended for Wycherley, and he may have been referring to Etherege or one of the great wits who dabbled in drama. Dryden certainly recognized Wycherley as a dramatist of extreme "wit," but he consistently used this term as a form of praise for his old friend, and never as a reproach. In the "Poetical Epistle" to Motteux' *Beauty in Distress*, Dryden wrote:

> Thy Incidents, perhaps too thick are sown;  
> But too much Plenty is thy fault alone;  
> At least but two, can that good Crime commit,  
> Thou in Design, and Wycherley in Wit.  

In the preface to Congreve's *The Double Dealer*, Dryden repeats the same idea:

> In Him all Beauties of this age we see  
> Etherege his courtship, Southern's Purity,  
> The Satire, Wit and Strength of manly Wycherley.  

Dryden goes even further in his preface to Southern's play, *The Wives Excuse, or, Cuckolds Make Themselves*:

> But if thou wouldn't be seen as well as read,  
> Copy one living Author, and one dead.

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18 *Peter Motteux, Beauty in Distress* (London: n.p., 1698), [xxvii.].

The Standard of thy Style let Etherege be; 20
For Wit, th' Immortal Spring of Wycherley.

Dryden not only lavished praise upon Wycherley for his "wit," but actually advised others to model their own witty style upon his. It hardly seems likely then, that he had so abused Wycherley in his "Parallel of Poetry and Painting." Wycherley was one of Dryden's best friends and closest associates, and had influenced him more than one way, as a modern critic of Dryden has declared:

Dryden's praise of Wycherley, and the shift to satire in his own works, seems to indicate that Wycherley had great influence upon Dryden, and indirectly upon the whole comic theatre in the Restoration period. 21

But while we may thus be moderately certain that Dryden did not accuse Wycherley himself, the charge had a good deal of truth at its foundation, and repeatedly returned to haunt Wycherley. A contemporary letter, purported to have come from "A French Gentleman in London," writing "to his Friend in Paris," shows that the accusation had some general currency:

Mr. Wycherley is universally allow'd the first place among the English Comick-Poets, who have writ since Ben. Johnson. His Plain Dealer...is the best Comedy that ever was compos'd in any Language.

20 Quoted in Dennis' "A Defence of Mr. Wycherley's Characters in the Plain-dealer," in Hooker, Volume II, p. 232.

The only Fault that can be found in it, is its being too full of Wit; a Fault which few Authors can be guilty of.\textsuperscript{22}

Shortly after Wycherley's death Charles Gildon took up the question of Wycherley's "excessive wit" in his work, *Memoirs of the Life of William Wycherley*, and decided in the affirmative:

But not withstanding the evident merit of this comedy (\textit{The Plain Dealer}) the author did not escape the Censure of the Judges, who found fault with it for what no other Play in any Language cou'd be arraign'd for, and that is because there was too much Wit in it. I shou'd not take notice of this Objection, did I not find it so just a Criticism.... (Here he quotes Mulgrave's criticism).\textsuperscript{22}

But Gildon, like Dryden and Wycherley's other close friends, goes on to accept this criticism as recognition of Wycherley's singular merit and talent. He writes:

This noble Judge, (\textit{Mulgrave}) seems to make it a frequent Fault, but I confess I can find none but Mr. Wycherley guilty of it. But then at the same Time, we must do him the Justice to say, that he has Humour, and Plot, and all the necessaries of a Just Comedy; and his abounding in Wit is a crime that will never as far as I can guess run into Practice so as to require a Rule against it.\textsuperscript{23}

Having summarized and ordered the objections made to Wycherley's dramatic style and form in his later lifetime, our


condensed criticism might lead the reader to think that the objections to Wycherley's "wit" and "slowness" bulked large in his contemporary reputation. This is not so. We must understand that the debate over Wycherley's "excess of wit" in his comedies spanned nearly fifty years, and was only sporadic in nature. In addition, the charges against Wycherley were quite trivial compared to the satiric barrages other men of the time commonly leveled at each other, and the defensive response of Wycherley's friends and admirers to such vague accusations better indicates the strength of his supporters rather than the number of his detractors. The charge made by Rochester was so absurd that Pope, Dennis, and Lansdowne issued blunt denials, and these appear to have ended debate on this subject. The charge advanced by Mulgrave was attenuated by his known friendship towards Wycherley, and by the praise given by Dryden, Dennis, Gildon, and others. Wycherley's failing of "excess wit," if a failing it was, could only be construed as an error of genius, and the majority of his contemporaries recognized it as such.

Wycherley's defenders against these attacks were usually the professional men of letters, including the literary stars of the younger generation, who looked upon Wycherley as the hero

24 Spence, pp. 151-152; Dennis, "A Defence of Mr. Wycherley's Characters in the Plain-dealer," in Hooker, Volume II, p. 233; Boyer, pp. 254-255.
of their class: Congreve, Pope, Dennis, Southerne, and others. We have had occasion already to cite at length the evidence of the attitude of Wycherley's friends towards The Plain Dealer and its satire of the court, but it should be observed that even more objective literary men supported his just defiance of his superiors. At least one serious literary man of the aristocracy, George Granville, Lord Lansdowne, had been converted to Wycherley's point of view, and had objected bluntly to the personal injustices Wycherley had suffered at the hands of the court.\(^{25}\)

After Wycherley's death, Lansdowne demonstrated again that he had completely sympathized with the old dramatist in all his trials:

This Man, alas! lived to see himself, in a short time, Neglected by his FRIENDS, Forsaken by his Relations, and in the end, Condemned, by the Iniquity of his Fate, to Suffer under a Close and Long Imprisonment. And when, after many years, he was, at last, set at Liberty from That Restraint, and might seem, by the Death of his Father, to be lifted up into higher Expectations, and an Easier Seat in Life, he not only found himself still Fetter'd in his Fortune by the Narrow Settlement his Father had made of his Estate; but what was Worse, Afflicted with Sickness, and Dying, he was so conscious of this his declining Condition, that upon Publishing, Ten or Eleven Years before he Died, a Book of VERSES to Which he Prefixed a PRINT, that had been taken from the Picture Sir Peter Lely had formerly Drawn for him, he ordered This Motto to be placed underneath it:

'Quantum Mutatus ab illo!'

How much it has changed from that (which it was)?

A MELANCHOLY EJACULATION! 26

Shortly after Wycherley left debtor's prison, he began to edit his poems for publication. Since he had no source of income, his need for cash was now very acute, and he was forced into the market-place very much against his will. By 1693, Wycherley's poems were ready for publication and Dryden was drumming up support for the ventures, as his letter to William Walsh shows:

Mr. Wycherley's Poems will not come out, till Michaelmas term; if his versification prove as well as his wit, I shall believe it will be extraordinary. However Congreve and Southern and I, shall not fail to appear before it And if you will come in, he will have reason to acknowledge it for a favor. 27

Unfortunately, while Wycherley's friends may have agreed with his principles, they could not praise his verses. The early poems were clever and nicely written, but they were out of style. The later poems exhibited the angry anti-court attitudes now popular with the professional men of letters, but these were written after Wycherley's illness, and were simply terrible in their style and technical finish. Wycherley's

friends were appalled, and they attempted to talk him out of publishing his book of verse. But Wycherley was angrily adamant, and shrugged off all criticism, as his bitterly incoherent preface to that work shows:

...Therefore, 0 Readers! or Criticks! whom I wou'd call my Friends, to make you so; but to expect you to be so, or hope, that you (who have no other way of gaining your Reputations, but by taking other Men's from them) shou'd for any Cause, speak well of any Author, or Book, I shou'd more Disparage my little Sense, Judgment, or Wit, than you wou'd, or could do for me. ...28

There was much difficulty in obtaining subscriptions for the new work, and then in the confusion, Wycherley's publisher seems to have purloined some of the subscribed money. Wycherley brought suit, and in 1704, his book was finally published.29

When his book of verse came out, none of Wycherley's now-famous young friends had endorsed it; Dryden was dead, and none of the young poets meant to risk their reputations upon such an obviously inferior collection of rhymes. Nonetheless, his friends were still loyal to him. While the lesser wits certainly must have laughed at his poetry among themselves, there was a general conspiracy of silence among the greater literary

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men, and not an ill word was said of the tragic volume by any of the major authors. The men of letters could not praise Wycherley for this egregiously bad poetry, but they had no obligation to hurt the kind and distinguished old man.

Only one thin, disrespectful voice seems to have broken the silence: four years later, in 1708, a minor poetaster named Ozell translated Boileau's Lutrin, and inserted this satire on Wycherley's Miscellany Poems:

All arm themselves with ammunition-Books,
Contract their Brows, and threaten with their Looks:
One with vindictive Hand light Durfey shakes:
Another, Wycherley more weighty takes;
A third tore Wesley from the dusty Wood,
Where long untouch'd the Mouldy Epick stood. 30

This slighting remark by an insignificant hack might have gone unnoticed but for the fact that Nicholas Rowe, a much more respected literary man, had contributed a highly commendatory preface to the translation, and it seemed to some that he approved of Ozell's petty slur. While none of Wycherley's literary friends apparently approved of Wycherley's calamitous poetic work, they quickly moved to protect him against Ozell and Rowe. Soon a satiric epigram was circulated about the town which attacked Ozell, Rowe, and Sanger, the book-seller who had ordered the translation. The poem, entitled "An Epigram occasioned

by Ozell's *translation of Boileau's Lutrin* was generally attributed to Wycherley, and later inserted in his *Posthumous Works*. In reality, however, that satiric barb was written anonymously by Pope,31 probably because he did not wish to be placed in the embarrassing position of defending a work as inferior as the *Miscellany Poems*. The poem reads as follows:

Ozell, at Sanger's Call, invok'd his Muse,
For who to sing for Sanger could refuse?
His Numbers such, as Sanger's self might use.
Reviving Perault, mur'd'ring Boileau, he
Slander'd the Ancients first, then Wycherley:
Not that it much that Author's Anger rais'd
For those were slander'd most whom Ozell prais'd:
Nor had the toothless Satyr caus'd complaining,
Had not sage Rowe pronounc'd it Entertaining.
How great, how just, the Judgment of that writer!
Who the Plain-dealer damns, and prints the Biter.32

George Granville, Lord Lansdowne, was even more loyal in defense of his friend Wycherley. He openly defended Wycherley's poetry, even though he tacitly confessed his friend's failure in style:

There are those who object against his Versification; but a Diamond is not less a Diamond, for not being polish'd: Versification is in Poetry, what Colouring is in Painting, a beautiful Ornament:
But if the Proportions are just, the posture true, the Figure bold, and the Resemblance according to Nature, though the Colours happen to be rough...yet

31 Summers, Volume IV, pp. 70-71. The *Biter* was a poorly written, unsuccessful work done by Rowe.

the Picture shall lose nothing of its Esteem:
Such are many of the inestimable pieces of Raphael...\textsuperscript{33}

Lansdowne, like Congreve, Dryden, and so many of Wycherley’s professional admirers, praises him for the strength of his satire in no uncertain terms. We have already noted that George Granville despised the court, and entirely sympathized with Wycherley’s plight;\textsuperscript{34} nonetheless, it still comes as a surprise to see the extent to which an aristocrat of that time could align himself with the man who had so roughly satirized his own class:

I would not be unreasonable to [\textit{give}] some...
Advice to many of our present Writers who seem to lay the whole Stress of their Endeavors upon the \textit{Harmony} of Words: Like \textit{Rumours} they sacrifice their \textit{Manhood} for a \textit{Voice}, and reduce our Poetry to be like \textit{Echo}, nothing but \textit{Sound}. In Mr. \textit{Wycherley}, everything is \textit{Masculine}; his Muse is not led forth as to a \textit{Review}, but as to a \textit{Battle}; Not adorn’d for Parade, but for Execution: He would be Try’d by the sharpness of his \textit{Blade}, and not by the \textit{Finery}: Like your Heroes of Antiquity he charges in Iron, and seems to despise all \textit{Ornament}, but intrinsick \textit{Vertue}; and, like those Heroes, has therefore added another \textit{Name} to his own; and by the Unanimous \textit{Assent} of the World, is call’d The Manly \textit{Wycherley}.\textsuperscript{35}

There is no mistaking Lansdowne’s meaning here, for almost the only severe satire in Wycherley’s poetry is found in

\textsuperscript{33} "A Character of Mr. Wycherley," in Boyer, pp. 255-256.


\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.} p. 256.
his anti-court themes. Lansdowne had something of Wycherley's idealism, and approved Wycherley's stand against the court; for the sake of the satire, his noble friend was willing to overlook the terrible flaws of Wycherley's poetic form.

After the defenses made by Pope and Lansdowne, it is possible that either Rowe or Ozell threatened Wycherley with retaliation, but we cannot be certain. All we know is that Pope's mocking epigram was generally attributed to Wycherley, and that later Wycherley was threatened by some minor writer.

The evidence which serves as the basis for our conjecture is found in Wycherley's short poem, "To a damned SCRIBLER, who threaten'd to write against the AUTHOR:"

That thou wilt write against me, thou hast said,
A Threat, alas! which I but little dread;
Since what Thou writ'st by none but Thee is read.
Yet if it were, such wretched Stuff 'twill be,
It more will scandalize Thyself, than Me.
Thy Pen, much like the Coward's Sword, thy Shame
Will by thy weak Defense but more proclaim.36

There is, however, no tangible evidence to link this poem with Ozell or Rowe, and we can only say that after the defenses mounted by Pope and Mulgrave, none of the other minor men of letters dared attack Wycherley's Miscellany Poems, and Ozell did not repeat his offense.

36 Summers, Volume IV, p. 247.
On the basis of the evidence we have seen, we can conclude that from his release from prison, (c. 1686) until his death in 1716, Wycherley was respected, aided, and protected by the professional men of letters in every demonstrable circumstance. After his satires against the court initiated the reaction against the petty persecutions of the courtiers, the literary professionals had accepted him as one of their own. Even in his dotage, Wycherley was shielded from the malice of petty men, and he never lost the love of his peers. As late as 1709, when Wycherley seems to have been well advanced into a forgetful old age, Pope wrote to his friend Cromwell:

"...the love of some things rewards itself, as of Virtue, and of Mr. Wycherley. I am surprised at the danger you tell me he has been in, and must agree with you that our nation would have lost in him as much wit and probity, as would have remained (for ought I know) in the rest of it. ...I love him above all men." 37

All the major professionals who lived in the period of Wycherley's later life seem to have adopted an entirely uncritical attitude towards him, and praised him lavishly. Dennis believed Wycherley to be the greatest living English author, and constantly compared him to other authors:

37 Sherburn, Volume I, p. 73.
But the contrary of whatever has been said of Scaron is certainly true of Butler: There is seen much of a Gentleman in his Burlesque; There is so much Wit and Good Sense to be found in him, and so much true observation on mankind, that I do not believe there is more, take Volume for Volume, in any one Author we have, the Plain Dealer only excepted...38

[To Congreve]

Whatever I have said my self of his [Jonson's] Comedies I submit to your better Judgment. For you who, after Mr. Wycherley, are uncomparably the best Writer of it living; ought to be allowed to be the best Judge too.39

While a small number of important critics such as Thomas Rymer did not actually praise Wycherley in print, we have no grounds for assuming that they disapproved of Wycherley's works or his person. Rymer knew Wycherley well, and appears to have allowed him to read his Edgar before publication.40 Dennis gives a rather clear indication of Rymer's attitude towards Wycherley in his Socratic essay, "The Impartial Critick:"

Beaumont: ...But prithee tell me before we part, your Opinion of Mr. Rymer's Judgment of our English Comedies.

Freeman: Never was their a more righteous Decree. We have particularly a Comedy which was writ by a Gentleman now living, that has more Wit and Spirit

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39 Letters Upon Several Occasions (London: Published by Mr. Dennis, 1696), p. 79.

than Plautus, without any of his little contemptible Affectations; and which, with the Urbanity of Terence, has the Comick force which the Great Caesar requir'd in him.

Beaumont: What Comedy can that be?
Freeman: What indeed can it be, but the Plain-Dealer?
Beaumont: I find then, that you do not dissent from Mr. R__ in every thing.
Freeman: No, I should be very sorry if I should do that....

Rymer, then, can be categorized with the other major professionals of his time as an admirer of Wycherley. This reverence for "the old lion in satire" might well have been the only common point which all the great literary men of his age agreed perfectly.

From this point on, we will find it increasingly difficult to organize the remainder of the opinions of Wycherley's contemporaries into any coherent pattern. To the vast majority of minor professional and amateur commentators, Wycherley was a giant of letters alive in their own lifetimes, and they praised him in whatever terms came to mind. These authors often had no understanding of Wycherley's intended aims or of the nuances of the struggle between the Restoration court and its men of letters; they expressed their appreciation of Wycherley's art and personal virtues without regard to literary quarrels or 41 "The Impartial Critick," in Hooker, Volume I, pp. 40-41.
current trends in taste. Thomas Brown, for example, praised Wycherley's "pure wit" at a time when that expression had certain derogatory connotations among the major men of letters. In his verses entitled "An Epitome of a Poem truly call'd, A Satyr against Wit...," Brown complains that wit has declined since the last age, and suggests that a "bank of wit" be organized, so that the literary men of his own time may draw "funds" of wit from greater men. He pauses to think, however, of the injustice of this distribution:

What will become of S_th_n, W_ch_y
Who by this means will grievous Sufferers be?

In the same vein, Charles Hopkins wrote a letter "To Anthony Hammond, Esq.:" praising the wit of Wycherley:

When you and Southern, Mooie, and Congreve meet,
The best, good men, with the best-natur'd Wit
Good Wine, good Company, the better Feast,
And whene're Wicherly is present, best.
Then, then your Joys are perfectly compleat,
And Sacred Wit is at the Noblest height.

Other praises of Wycherley's wit can be found in Matthew Prior's later poem, (1708) "Paulo Purganti and His Wife: An Honest, But a Simple Pair:"

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43 Hopkins, p. 10.
Thus in the Picture of our Mind
The Action [of a story] may be well design'd
Guided by Law, and bound by Duty;
Yet want this Je ne sais quoy of Beauty;
And tho' its Error may be such,
As Knags and Burgess cannot hit;
It yet may feel the nicer Touch
Of Wycherley's or Congreve's Wit. 44

It would thus appear that while Dennis, Pope, and other
major literary figures were defending Wycherley against the
charge of being "too witty," some lesser professionals were still
praising Wycherley for that quality. There apparently were pro-
fessionals who had not aligned themselves with the "anti-wits,"
and who saw no stigma attached to being called a "wit," even as
late as 1708.

To many, Wycherley was a "classic" author of English
Comedy, and a man to be revered as the surviving relic of a
Golden Age in drama. The literary historians, for example, who
wrote biographical accounts of the poets of their age, spoke of
him in glowing terms:

Gerard Langbaine:

WILLIAM WYCHERLEY. A Gentleman, whom I may boldly
reckon amongst the Poets of the First Bank: no Man
that I know, except the Excellent Johnson, having out-
done him in Comedy; in which alone he has imploy'd his
Pen, but with that Success, that few have before, or
will hereafter match him. 45

44 Wright and Spears, Volume I, p. 260.
45 Gerard Langbaine, An Account of the English Drama-
Charles Gildon:

William Wycherley. A Shropshire Gentleman, who, has excell'd all Writers in all Languages, in Comedy, and most of the Poets of the present Age in generous Dealing with those he owns his Friends....

With the decline of the stage in the approximate years 1677-1695, many of the contemporary commentators looked back upon the plays of Wycherley and Etherege as the last great English comedies. In 1691, Shadwell was complaining in his prologue to Bury Fair:

To what hard laws you Comick Writers bind!
Who must at every turn New Humor find;
Theo' the great Masters of the former Age
Had all the choice of Humor for the Stage;
And they that plenteous Harvest feap'd so clean,
Their Successors can little else but glean
...............................................................
...the Plain-dealer, and Sir Poplin you
Have seen, and justly have applauded too.

In 1694, James Wright, the author of Country Conversations, had one of his characters deplore the decline of comedy since the great days of Wycherley and Etherege:

I am absolutely of your mind, said Lisander;
and I think one may say, that the Plain-dealer, and
Sir Poplin, were the last of our English Comedies
as properly and as truly, as Cremutius Cordus cou'd
say, that Brutus and Cassius were the last of the
Romans.

When Jeremy Collier's explosive pamphlet *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* burst upon the heads of the playwrights, Wycherley was at the height of his reputation. Scholars have long debated the reasons why the men of letters did not immediately retaliate, and part of the explanation seems to be that they were simply waiting for Wycherley to marshal his forces:

Although the first blow of Collier's lash had been given to Wycherley he is not the first to reply. Many expected that he, well known for his plays and extremely popular in some circles for *The Plain Dealer*, would retaliate in the out-spoken manner for which his dramatic style was noted. 49

There was every reason to expect that Wycherley was the man who would oppose Collier; he was famed for his ferocious and clever satires of the court; he was as learned and scholarly as Collier; he was one of the leading men of letters and had enormous prestige throughout England. When Collier openly mentioned Wycherley by name, it must have been immediately assumed that he would lead the forces of the men of letters.

Collier's attack upon the playwrights is based upon the principle that "the business of Plays is to recommend Virtue, and discountenance Vice...." a principle often spoken of, but

rarely practiced upon the Restoration stage.\textsuperscript{50} He attacks with vehemence almost every single playwright of the era by name, and uses every scholarly and literary device to make his opponents ridiculous.\textsuperscript{51} Yet Collier's rebuke to Wycherley is much milder than any meted out to the other dramatists. Collier is kind, almost deferential to Wycherley; while he feels obliged to point out examples of anti-clerical and indecent conversation in \textit{The Country Wife} and \textit{The Plain Dealer}, he calls him "an author of sense,"\textsuperscript{52} and even refers a minor point to his judgment.\textsuperscript{53} Sister Rose Anthony, who has done the most intensive analysis of the Collier stage controversy, has this to say about Collier's attack on Wycherley:

Collier for some reason best known to himself, treats Wycherley with the greatest deference. He takes for correction but two of his plays, and when he refers to them, his censure is not abusive. Although the \textit{Viewer} is acknowledged an adept in the use of sarcasm and satire he does not indulge in it at Wycherley's expense. We find no coarseness or raillery where the \textit{Plain Dealer} is concerned. If justice compels him to lash the \textit{Country Wife} and \textit{Plain Dealer}, kindly feeling tempers the smart....\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} Jeremy Collier, \textit{A Short View of The Immorality, and Profaneness, of the English Stage} (London: S.Keble, 1698), p. i.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. p. 48.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. pp. 173-174.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. p. 175.

\textsuperscript{54} Sr. Anthony Rose, p. 48.
So far as we can ascertain, Wycherley gave no reply to Collier; even the anonymous work, The Vindication of the Stage once thought to be his, has now been attributed to Charles Gildon. We cannot know why Wycherley chose not to enter the controversy, but we do know that his contemporaries were quite disappointed that he stood aside while minor authors battled Collier. A letter appended to the second edition of Collier's Dissuasive From the Playhouse contains these passages:

When Mr. C. made so vigorous an Attack upon our stages, as shook the Foundation; what was the Reason in so desperate a Juncture (when the whole Posse of Parnassus was expected up in Arms) that only the Minor Poets appear'd? Where was the mighty W_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _? 

But during these Skirmishes, where was, say you, the mighty W_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ ; a Wit, certainly, of the first Magnitude; and with so great a Fund of Sense, that, besides his Contributions to the Stage's Divers

While Wycherley may have disappointed his friends by his lack of action, his course was in the long run the proper one. Both he and Dryden refused to defend the stage against the assault of a Philistine, and in the end, the playhouses were none the worse for it. Wycherley had always refused to involve himself in such quarrels in the past, and his lack of interest


56 Jeremy Collier. Mr. Collier's Dissuasive From the Play-House....To Which is added, A Letter Written by Another Hand (London: Sare, 1704), pp. 21-22.
in Collier's carping accusations did not seem to harm his reputation. The Correspondent, in the letter cited above answered his own questions:

To this I must tell you, He [Wycherley] was never a Retainer to the Theatres, but a Person of too much Judgment to engage in the Quarrel. Besides he had fore-cluded himself, and already decided the Case, in his dedication to Madam B. (Bawd by Profession whatever was her Name)... He is too much a Plain Dealer to retract his Evidence. 57

Dennis, in his essay "The Usefulness of the Stage," 58 and John Oldmixon, in his pamphlet Reflections on the Stage, 59 both defended Wycherley against Collier's attack but it was entirely unnecessary. Wycherley's reputation was helped, if anything, when he refused to become embroiled in such a petty squabble. Dennis, for one, scorned Collier as a fool for making such petty accusations against a man of Wycherley's stature:

But what Mr. Collier has said of Mr. Wycherley is sufficient to shew us what Candor, nay, and what Justice we are to expect from this Censurer of the Stage. For in giving Mr. Wycherley's Character, he had shewn himself invidious and detracting, even in his Commendation... of the greatest of our Comic Wits.... 60

57 Ibid.
58 Hooker, Volume I, pp. 157f.
60 Hooker, Volume I, p. 157.
In the years after Collier's attack upon Wycherley, the reputation of the old dramatist was stronger than ever. His contemporaries realized that his years of useful writing were over, and they pointed to him as a classic author of the past who had created their finest dramatic works. Samuel Garth advised young writers to read the works of Dryden and Wycherley in order to perfect their own art:

In Sense and Numbers if you wou'd excel,
Read W_ _ _ _ _ y, consider D_ _ _ _en well.
In one what vigorous turns of Fancy shine,
In th' other, Syrens warble in each Line.61

In the critical literature of the period, constant comparisons were being made between the great authors of the past and the weaker contemporaries, and Wycherley always was included in the list of superior authors. In an anonymous work printed in 1702 entitled A Comparison Between The Two Stages, the author inserted this dialogue between Ramble and Sullen (gentlemen) and a critic:

Ramb. But you'll grant the latter part of this age has produc'd some extraordinary Men? [of letters]
Cri. As it produces a Comet; once in twenty years; and then its the discourse of all the world.
Sull. Nay, now you're too severe; what think you of Etheridge, Dryden, Wicherley, Otway, Congreve, and Vanburg?

Cri. And what think you of Dryden's, Dunciacy.
Gildon, Settlement, Burcham, and who not? 62

Similar comments were made by Abel Boyer, in The
English Theophrastus, and Charles Gildon, who edited The Post-
Man Robb'd of his Mail:

Boyer:

We allow Poetry to be a Divine Art, and the name
of the Poet to be Sacred and Honourable, when a
Sophocles...a Virgil...A Shakespear...a Wycherley
bears it. 63

Gildon:

...Ben Jonson was the first, that ever gave us
a true entire comedy. Since him we have had Etheridge,
Wicherly, Shadwel, and Crown in some of his plays.... 64

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by Staring B. Wells. (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1942), pp. 31-32. The insertions were made by Wells.

63 Abel Boyer. The English Theophrastus: Or The
Manners of The Age, Being The Modern Characters of the Court,
The Town, and the City. (London: W. Turner, 1702), Reprinted
by the Augustan Reprint Society, Series One: Essays on Wit.
(1947).

64 Charles Gildon, ed. The Post-Man Robb'd of His
Mail; or, The Packet broke open. (London: A. Bettesworth,
1719), p. 112.
But while Wycherley was now loved and honored, he was no longer understood; a new morality had changed all attitudes towards literature, and Steele, for one, spoke of The Country Wife as of some foreign monstrosity. He was sympathetic enough to Wycherley, but his criticism of Wycherley's best play shows that the age was in the extremes of reaction to the old Restoration morality, and even the plays of the most distinguished Restoration dramatist now required to be excused rather than admired and understood:

The character of Horner, and the design of it, is good representation of the age in which that comedy was written, at which time love and wenching were the business of life.... To which only it is to be imputed, that a gentleman of Mr. Wycherley's character and sense, condescends to represent the insults done to the honor of the bed, without just reproof; but to have drawn a man of probity with regard to such considerations, had been a monster, and a Poet had at that time discovered his want of knowing the manners of the court he lived in, by a virtuous character in his fine gentleman, as he would show his ignorance by drawing a viscious one to please the present audience.65

Wycherley had long outlived his audience. In 1715 and 1716, The Country Wife was "carefully revis'd" to suit the tastes of the new audience, and Wycherley's last two plays had a popular revival.66 But Wycherley may have been spared the sight


66 Avery, The London Stage, Part II, Volume I, shows at least ten performances in 1715, more than is recorded for the previous ten years.
of these emasculated forms of his plays; he died December 31, 1715.

In the later portion of his life, Wycherley seems to have found something of the loyalty and friendship he had sought in vain at the court of Charles. He had been honored and respected by his peers, defended against the petty literary quarrels of the time, and loved by a wide circle of friends. As Pack tells us, after his early years of "disappointment and ill usage," he seems to have found some peace:

...he died with so little Reluctance, that he might be said to Drop off the Tree of LIFE, like Fruit that had hung long Expecting to be Gathered. 67

But the memory of his plays will always live after him. As John Evelyn had once expressed it,

As long as Men are false and Women vain,
Whilst gold continues to be virtue's bane,
In pointed satire Wycherley shall reign. 68

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68 This set of verses is often quoted, but its exact source and date are unknown. The earliest citation of this triplet I have been able to find is in Langbaine's Account of The English Dramatick Poets, p. 515.
CONCLUSION

In the course of this study we have shown that William Wycherley possessed an enormously complex and variegated personality, and that the intricacies of that personality necessarily were reflected in his dramatic and poetic works. The mere fact that Wycherley was feted and lauded for his comedies by two disparate social classes in two different generations, in a period when literary taste was rapidly changing, should indicate to us that many different interpretations of his major plays can be assessed valid and valuable.

At the same time, there is a great deal of difference between formulating a dramatic interpretation of a play, and advancing that interpretation as the "original" or "standard" meaning — the meaning as intended by the author and/or as understood by his contemporaries. In Wycherley's case, any attempt to determine authorial intent has been balked by the
lack of sufficient basic scholarship. The only full-length biography of Wycherley, for example, is almost entirely useless except as a casual collection of facts from largely secondary sources, and scholars have declared its lack of value in the most blunt and even insulting terms.¹ As a result of the lack of basic studies, the criticism of Wycherley's plays has been chaotic; commentators have made oversimplified and uninformed judgments about Wycherley's character and tagged him, and his works, with extraliterary generalizing terms: "immoral," "moral," "sensualist," and Puritanic."²

In this work, we have not tried to supply the biographical study needed, but only attempted to prove that a more intense study of the facts of Wycherley's life and the circumstances surrounding the creation and reception of his plays can be fruitful in criticizing his comic satire. We have, for example, seen that Wycherley adhered to the court standards with exceptional devotion and fidelity throughout the period in which he composed his first three comedies, and showed every indication that he was attempting to reproduce the manners of his time in those plays. No matter then, how distasteful the moral conduct

¹ See above, vii.
² Holland, pp. 96-98; Zimbardo, pp. 1-3.
of Wycherley's characters may be to critics who do not share the Restoration frame of reference, we must conclude that Wycherley's satiric purpose in *The Country Wife* and his earlier two comedies was the conventional Restoration aim of the amused exposure of hypocrisy, and not an indictment of the morals of his contemporaries. It is not necessarily true, however, that modern critics of Wycherley's *Country Wife* have "missed the mark." Man gains in wisdom by re-evaluating his past, and *The Country Wife* must be appreciated in a modern context as well as in the light of the intentions of its author. We only take issue with those critics who believe, on the basis of the slimmest of aesthetic and non-historical proofs, that somehow Wycherley intended to satirize the basic beliefs of his society and his class in *The Country Wife*. There is every sign that *The Country Wife*, Wycherley's finest play, was also the highest expression of the Restoration ideal, and not an ironic parody of its basic values.

Wycherley's later works, including *The Plain Dealer*, we have shown to be reactions to the petty persecutions of the court society and the failure of the patronage system to adequately support the men of letters. The anti-court and anti-wit satire in Wycherley's later poetry is unmistakably blunt, and we cannot doubt that he had changed his attitude towards the court circle in the last half of his life. It was in the period when Wycherley wavered between acceptance and rejection
of the court, when he was snubbed by the nobility, when he could no longer maintain himself, when his friends were being persecuted by courtiers, that he wrote *The Plain Dealer*, in which he expressed his impotent rage and vexation. *The Plain Dealer*, we have concluded, was an important social satire of the court, and helped to force the withdrawal of court domination over literary and theatrical pursuits. Wycherley then became the hero of the professional men of letters, just as he once had been the toast of the gentleman poets.

In all his satire, we find little indication that Wycherley disapproved of the dissolute and immoral conduct of his courtier friends. But this is not surprising: there are many types of satire, and a man may, like Aretino, indulge in and approve all the sweet pleasures of his age, and yet be a magnificent satirist. The major prerequisites of character for great comic satire, as Samuel Clemens once stated, are a sense of justice and a distaste for hypocrisy — qualities Wycherley had in abundance:

> With all its lightness and frivolity, it has one serious purpose, one aim, one specialty, and it is constant to it —the deriding of shams, the exposure of pretensions falsities, the laughing of stupid superstitions out of existence;...and whosoever is by instinct engaged in this kind of warfare is the natural enemy of royalties, nobilities, privileges and all kindred swindles, and the natural friend of human rights and human liberties.\(^3\)

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In the end, this was Wycherley's satiric purpose, and the cause of his greatness. In *The Country Wife*, Wycherley expanded the conventional Restoration theme of hypocrisy to include all of mankind; in *The Plain Dealer*, he took the final step of applying his idealistic satire to the pretentions and cruelty of his own chosen class. When Wycherley left the court he was expressing in the most obvious way the indignant sense of justice and honesty found in his *Plain Dealer*, personal qualities common to all great satirists. While his contemporaries used their satire to enforce conformity in trivial social matters, Wycherley transcended the limitations of his time, and made the conventional literary themes of his age meaningful for all men in *The Country Wife*. The final criterion of Wycherley's personal greatness was that his idealism finally brought him into open conflict with his own society, in the savage satiric exposure called *The Plain Dealer*. To the vast majority of modern theatre-goers, the remainder of the "satiric" comedies written in Charles' reign are now dramatic and historical curiosities: the plays of Etherege, Sedley, Howard, even Dryden, are very rarely revived. But the two great plays of Wycherley have endured, and they will continue to be revived upon the stage so long as audiences can appreciate the idealism of a man who loved the truth and despised pretense — the "Plain Dealer" of English comic theatre.
THE EDITIONS OF WYCHERLEY'S PLAYS

Love in a Wood, or, St. James's Park

--- London: 1672.
--- London: 1693.
--- London: 1694, (2 issues)

The Gentleman Dancing-Master

--- London: 1673.
--- London: 1693.
--- London: 1702.

The Country Wife

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London: Thomas Dring, 1675.

--- Third edition. 1688.
--- London: Samuel Briscoe and Daniel Dring, 1695.

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The Country Wife, a Comedy, in two acts. Altered from


The Country Girl. In Bell's British Theatre, Volume V, 1791.
Volume XIII, 1791.


The British Drama, Volume I, Philadelphia: M. Pollock, 1853.


The Plain Dealer


________. Second issue. 1677.

________. Second edition. 1678.

________. London: R. Bentley and M. Magnes, 1678.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by James E. Kasprzak has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Jan. 17, 1967
Date

Signature of Adviser