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Thomas Southerne's Sir Anthony Love: a critical edition

by

Edward Kenneth Bowen

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The editor has collated 27 copies of the five editions of Sir Anthony Love, published in 1691, 1698, 1713, 1721, and 1774. No authorial revisions or corrections are apparent, but collation has revealed new variants which have been noted, along with complete textual notations of substantive and accidental variations. The intent has been to devise a text accessible to the modern actor and reader, without loss of the original manuscript's flavour. The first edition has served as the copy text, on the assumption that it best approximates Southerne's acting text.

Introductory material to the text begins with biographical information on the playwright, including a synopsis and brief analysis of each of his plays, set against a background of contemporary historical events. This combination seeks to provide a clearer picture of Southerne and to trace development of his major themes.

Chapter two gives the play's production history and explores its theatrical origins, including Aphra Behn's work and Mrs. Behn herself as a possible model for its protagonist. Sources for other characters may be perceived in the biographical information given each member of the original cast.

The third chapter is devoted to analysis of the play, including historical/biographical background, contributory philosophical trends and plot synopsis. The final section deals with the central theme of Sir Anthony Love - the conflict between appearance and reality - and explores Southerne's use of Restoration theatrical conventions to underscore philosophical and social commentary.

The critical view of Sir Anthony Love as a minor, and poorly constructed example of the comedy of intrigue results from lack of

careful examination, understandable, based on its conventional appearance.  
In reality, it is a remarkable example of structural unity: its glossy  
surface conceals a meticulous sceptical examination of contemporary  
values, a metaphorical expression of its central theme.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Restoration drama, together with its playwrights, actors, and curious morality, has been the focus of considerable scholarly attention in the twentieth century. In view of the close academic scrutiny to which this period of theatre has been subjected, it seems remarkable that any seventeenth century playwright could have escaped virtually unnoticed, and even more incredible that the popular Thomas Southerne should have done so. Although Southerne played a significant role in the world of the London stage, the last complete edition of his plays was in 1774, which may partially explain this academic oversight. Certainly the inaccessibility of texts would have guaranteed his exclusion from the modern stage, where the works of several other Restoration dramatists have found a place. Of Southerne's ten plays, fully half were successful in the highly competitive theatrical world of the seventeenth century, but apart from one critical analysis of his works by John Wendell Dodds in 1933, both plays and playwright have, until recently, been little more than a footnote to the history of Restoration theatre. Robert Root's 1981 publication, Thomas Southerne, has provided a long-needed contemporary reappraisal of the playwright's works, and of their place in Restoration theatre. In the academic world, at least, Southerne is beginning to achieve the recognition due him.

Thomas Southerne's most successful comedy, Sir Anthony Love, has been largely dismissed by critics, almost from its debut. The purpose of this study is to rescue the play from its obscurity, and make it available to readers and acting companies alike. It is also an attempt to add to the relatively slight body of knowledge about Thomas Southerne, the man. The Introduction to the text is divided into three chapters, dealing with biographical

and historical influences on Southerne and his work, the production history and original cast of Sir Anthony Love, and a critical analysis of the play itself.

Because the documented evidence concerning Southerne's life is very sparse, any additional information must be derived from a careful study of the ten plays he produced. The dangers of the 'intentional fallacy' have been exhaustively catalogued, and previous critics have maintained a scrupulous separation between Southerne's life and his art. The intent here is to form a clearer picture of Southerne from the only living clues to his personal identity: the thematic concerns apparent in the playwright's work, particularly as they apply to his society and its philosophies, are presumed to reveal some analogous concerns within the man. For this reason, the first chapter combines a summary and brief analysis of each of Southerne's plays with the surrounding biographical and historical events that may have influenced its creation. The goal is to provide a foundation for the two chapters which follow: to trace the development of those thematic elements in Southerne's life and work which led to his creation of Sir Anthony Love.

As Chapter one endeavours to provide a background for Thomas Southerne, the second chapter creates a context for Sir Anthony Love. No piece of dramatic literature can be considered apart from its history, its sources, its theatre and the actors and actresses who gave it life. The facts regarding the production history of the play are even less plentiful than the facts about its author, but they, along with the existing contemporary critical commentary, are included. The impact of the works of Aphra Behn, England's first professional woman of letters, on the style, plots and characters of Sir Anthony Love has to some extent been established. A more intriguing speculation is that Mrs. Behn herself may have served as a model for the protagonist, Sir Anthony Love. The inspirations for

other characters may be found among the original cast, since Thomas Southerne was certainly not immune to the common practice of writing specific roles for particular actors and actresses. Descriptions of the original cast, including biographical, professional and personal information for each member helps establish the relationship between playwright and actors and may provide a clearer picture of the characters. The intent is to explore the theatrical resources and traditions of the Restoration which Southerne used in his creation of Sir Anthony Love.

The third chapter is devoted to an analysis of the style, dramatic structure, action, characters and themes of Sir Anthony Love: or, The Rambling Lady. Beginning with the historical and biographical events which immediately preceded its writing, and continuing with a description of the intellectual climate in which it was created, the goal of this section is to reveal the philosophical and social substance beneath the veneer of comedy. Sir Anthony Love has been categorized as a trivial example of a trivial style, filled with stock characters and conventional situations, and marred by the careless plotting of a young dramatist. What has been overlooked is Southerne's manipulation of these theatrical devices so that they become reflections of the play's central theme: that appearance belies reality. Rather than being a somewhat clumsy example of the standard comedy of intrigue genre, a conglomeration of 'small accidents and raillery,' it is a meticulously crafted, wholly unified work. Its surface simplicity conceals Thomas Southerne's painstaking sceptical investigation of the complex society in which he lived. The confusion of popular philosophies - Epicureanism, Hobbesianism and Libertinism - as well as the moral and social inconsistencies of Restoration London are systematically exposed as flawed. Thomas Southerne, a practical man, was seeking a practical solution to the contradictions of appearance and

reality. Sir Anthony Love seems to be a sort of theatrical experiment, which uses the methodology of scientific scepticism to arrive at such a solution.

Like Southerne, I began work on Sir Anthony Love in a state of sceptical doubt; the critical history of the play was hardly encouraging to a researcher. But the study has been both exciting and rewarding. Not only is Sir Anthony Love a complex and well-constructed play, but also it is a grand piece of entertainment. If this edition helps establish it as good theatre - in the minds of readers and on the stage - I shall be well satisfied.



## CHAPTER ONE

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF THOMAS SOUTHERNE

Thomas Southerne was probably born in 1660, in Oxmantown, Ireland, which is located to the north across the Liffey River in the county of Dublin.<sup>1</sup> He was the third son of Francis Southerne, a leading Dublin brewer. J. W. Dodds reports that he was unable to find parish records of the dramatist's birth, but John Stubbs, in his History of the University of Dublin, quotes the Senior Lecturer notes on Southerne, which indicated he entered Trinity in 1676 'at the age of sixteen.'<sup>2</sup> No further information regarding Southerne's family has been found, although it is believed that his father died in 1678, as 'the will of "Francis Southerne, St. Michan's [the parish church], brewer" was admitted to probate' at that time. The will, however, was destroyed in the fire in the Four Courts in 1922, taking with it all clues to the playwright's family background.<sup>3</sup> All that is known of his early years is that he attended the grammar school of Dr. Edward Whetenhall in Dublin, and matriculated at Trinity College, Dublin, entering as a junior freshman on 30 March 1676, 'under Mr. Giles Pooley as College Tutor.'<sup>4</sup>

The College was considered a training ground for the clergy of the Church of Ireland, and by the latter part of the seventeenth century it was described as 'a famous nursery for learning and good manners; blessing both the Church and State

with many admirable men, eminently useful in their several stations . . .<sup>5</sup> Among those who preceded Southerne were the noted physician, Dr. Alan Mullin, the writer Henry Dodwell, and the dramatist and eventual poet laureate, Nahum Tate; Swift, Congreve, Farquhar, and Goldsmith were some of the famous Restoration and eighteenth century writers who followed after. Listed as contemporaries of the dramatist were Swift's tutor, St. George Ashe, who received his B. A. the year prior to Southerne's arrival, and who remained at the University and was granted his M. A. in 1678; and Thomas Molyneux, a year younger than Southerne, who entered Trinity in the very same year as the playwright. Upon receiving his medical degree in 1683, Molyneux went on to Leyden for further study: and then to London where he met John Locke, with whom he established a correspondence. For forty years, he was the leading physician in Ireland, was elected a member of the Royal Society and eventually became president of the College of Physicians in Ireland. Thomas's brother, William Molyneux, had entered trinity six years earlier in 1670.<sup>6</sup> He too, had entered into a close correspondence with Locke and published many philosophical and scientific treatises, notably The Case of Ireland Stated (one of the first anti-colonial documents) which greatly influenced Swift. In 1685, as Constantia Maxwell relates, 'He was elected a member of the Royal Society.'<sup>7</sup> Both the Molyneuxs were members of the Dublin Philosophical Society (William was one of its founders) which provided an arena for discussion of the 'dernier cri' in

scientific and philosophical thought. Although the Society was not formally founded until October 1683, more than a year after Thomas Southerne's debut as a London playwright, the intellectual influences that went into its making must have been apparent during the time he spent at Trinity College, Dublin. Since his former classmate, Thomas Molyneux, was acquainted with Locke, it may have been through him that Southerne was introduced to the principles of scientific scepticism. Whatever the origin of his interest in the latest philosophical ideas, the discussion of Sir Anthony Love and his other works will indicate that he used the new focus of thought in the late seventeenth century within the structure of his dramatic efforts.

Southerne's academic performance at Trinity is unknown, and there is no record of his receiving his undergraduate degree. Twenty years later, however, when he was at the very pinnacle of his dramatic career, he was awarded an M. A. from Trinity,<sup>8</sup> an indication that he had achieved literary distinction in the eyes of his Irish compatriots.

There is no clear evidence as to just when Southerne left Dublin, but it is known that on 15 July 1680 he was admitted to the Middle Temple,<sup>9</sup> one of the Inns of Court, long popular places of residence for ambitious young men aspiring to the bar, or to an entrée into fashionable London. As such, they attracted many of the bright, talented young men of the age. While in residence there, Southerne could hardly have avoided being introduced to the English theatre; Etherege,

Wycherley, Rowe, Ravenscroft, Shadwell, and Congreve all were, at one time or another, habitués of those intellectual and artistic clubs. It was here, too, and in the taverns and coffeehouses that surrounded the Inns of Court that Southerne was doubtless exposed to vigorous political and cultural discussions. His arrival in London must have nearly coincided with the unsettling events of the famous Popish Plot.

In the wildfire that was the Popish Plot, Southerne had a memorable introduction to the social and political realities of seventeenth century England. The sparks ignited by a 'hair-brained meddling clergyman,' named Israel Tonge, and Titus Oates, a 'renegade Jesuit novice,'<sup>10</sup> should have been extinguished immediately, but instead they were fanned by Charles II's political opponents, and soon raged out of control. Southerne saw a nation set aside reason in favour of allowing their secret prejudices and fears to rule their actions; rumour fed upon rumour, and each accusation against the papists was seized on as fact. Vigilante mobs hunted for priests and searched for stored arms; anyone who questioned them was suspected of collusion in the plot. Political ambition and selfish vanity continually fueled the conflagration, fact and fiction became charred beyond recognition, and innocent people were victimized.<sup>11</sup> For nearly three years the madness persisted, and its effect on the young Thomas Southerne was lasting.

In 1682, after at least two years in the company of London's future intelligentsia, Southerne apparently discarded

his incipient law career, and began writing for the stage. In early February the King's Company, one of only two licensed acting troupes in London at the time, produced Southerne's first play, The Loyal Brother.<sup>12</sup> In his Dedication to the Duke of Richmond, Charles's ten-year-old illegitimate son, Southerne admitted that the play met with 'indifferent success upon the stage.'<sup>13</sup> While it had the obvious failings of any first effort, its lukewarm reception may have been as much attributable to the debut of one of the most popular of Tory tragedies within days of Southerne's play. Thomas Otway's Venice Preserv'd, or, a Plot Discover'd was probably first performed on 9 February 1682<sup>14</sup> by the Duke's Company, and became an immediate success; the King himself was in the audience on the third night. Robert Hume points out the keen competition that was very much a part of the Restoration theatre world in the first decades of the Restoration,<sup>15</sup> and Southerne had lost his first round to a play which would become a classic of the period.

The Loyal Brother, based on an historical novel entitled Tachmas, Prince of Persia, concerns the rivalry of two brothers for the love of a beautiful young woman. Seliman, the vainglorious Sophy of Persia, passionately desires Semanthe for his wife, but she will not submit, being secretly in love with his younger brother, the noble Tachmas. Seliman's jealousy is soon inflamed by the plotting of an Iago-like villain, Ismael, a displaced general, Arbanes, and the general's malevolent sister, Sunamire. Each of the three

seeks the downfall of Tachmas. Together they manipulate the unstable Seliman in an attempt to bring it about. The Sophy is finally driven to condemning his innocent brother to death. Only the pleas of Semanthe and the Queen-mother, at the very steps of the scaffold, save Tachmas from his fate.

This initial failure of the conspirators only inspires them to grander acts of villainy. They convince Seliman of his brother's plans to usurp the throne; Tachmas is recaptured and once more imprisoned. Sunamire, meanwhile, reveals Tachmas's supposed love for her to Semanthe. Although she is heartbroken by this revelation, Semanthe's devotion impels her to see him one last time. In the prison cell the two lovers are reunited and are swearing eternal allegiance to one another when Sunamire appears and announces her plans for their death. Only the intervention of a servant faithful to Tachmas saves them. Bowls of poison intended for the lovers are switched and Sunamire and her brother consume the fatal drink. As they lie dying, Seliman enters with Ismael, who has been caught attempting to rouse the citizens to rebellion. He confesses his treacheries, and is sentenced to death. The two brothers are reconciled, and the Sophy gives his blessing to the now happy lovers. The play ends with both the villain, Ismael, and the Sophy giving words of advice. Ismael offers this admonition:

May treason ever need the people's swords,  
And may they valiantly compound for words;  
And last, may all disturbers of the state  
Grow blindly popular, and meet my fate.<sup>16</sup>

While the Sophy Seliman, who is now 'collected in [his] temper,' suggests:

And may succeeding monarchs learn from me,  
How far to trust a statesman's policy.<sup>17</sup>

The Loyal Brother reveals those influences of the past which are often found in a playwright's early efforts. Obvious traces of Shakespeare, Dryden, Otway and others are visible throughout the play, but the work also contains moments which are pure Southerne, and which give clear indications of the direction in which the young dramatist was headed. Southerne's previous critics have focused on the similarities between his plays and the contemporary dramatic conventions, overlooking the significant shifts in emphasis and treatment by the dramatist. The danger with this work, as with Sir Anthony Love, is to be too quick to categorize it, and in doing so, simply to dismiss it as a minor instance of a type.

John Wendell Dodds, until recently Southerne's only biographer, chooses to dwell on the political themes of the play. He sees it as being 'True Tory,'<sup>18</sup> and credits Southerne with conceiving the play 'as an exaltation to James, Duke of York, who appears as Tachmas,' the virtuous and ever-loyal hero. Dodds pushes the comparison to contemporary political figures further, declaring that 'Charles II is shown as the Sophy Seliman, Shaftesbury as Ismael, and Monmouth is Arbanes.'<sup>19</sup> For him The Loyal Brother fits neatly into the box containing all the Tory plays produced between 1680 and 1682, 'which centers its attack on Shaftesbury.'<sup>20</sup>

Allardyce Nicoll, on the other hand, sees the play as being 'spoilt by political reference,' and finds that, after some political parallels, 'the play is thoroughly heroic.'<sup>21</sup> John Harold Wilson also groups it with the heroic plays which had achieved some popularity following the Restoration, but which were well into their decline among theatre-goers by 1682. Wilson judges it 'worthy of mention,'<sup>22</sup> but goes no further than mentioning it. For those interested in uncovering the contribution Southerne made to the theatre of his age, closer examination of this early play is needed.

The Loyal Brother contains some obvious parallels to the political events of the day, and there are hints of a Tory point of view (although Southerne's portrait of Charles II as Seliman seems less than flattering). It is significant, however, that the extremist rhetoric which flooded the town in the years immediately following the plot's unveiling is not contained within the body of The Loyal Brother. Southerne appears to have a greater argument in mind than the name calling of political propaganda. Even John Dryden, an outspoken Tory who contributed the prologue and epilogue and without whom, Southerne confesses, he would never have 'attempted thus far into the world,'<sup>23</sup> confirms the neutrality of the 'Virgin Poet,' who is 'neither yet a Whig nor Tory Boy.'<sup>24</sup> Neutrality may, however, be the improper term. It is not so much that Southerne occupies a middle ground, but perhaps by virtue of his relatively recent



arrival, he seems to stand outside the confrontation and is able, in The Loyal Brother, to offer an unique perspective on the situation as he observes it. In this way Southerne's play surpasses the host of Tory propaganda pieces with which Dodds grouped it.

The dramatist's own perspective seems best revealed in his hero, Tachmas, the loyal brother. Like Southerne, an observer of the swirling commotion of the 'Plot,' the noble prince stands well outside the primary action of the play, and suffers by doing so. Despite his being the military leader of Persia, Tachmas is presented as primarily an obedient subject. In his first entrance he makes this statement:

O my Imperial Lord! my Godlike Master!  
How has your Servant merited this grace?  
Permit me prostrate on the Earth to fall,  
And pay my Adoration to this goodness.<sup>25</sup>

His death sentence, subsequent banishment, and eventual imprisonment reveal a man at the mercy of greater powers (the intriguers of the court), whose only strength lies in 'the loyalty, and firmness of (his) soul.'<sup>26</sup> Southerne was also outside the political arena, but like his protagonist, was threatened by the consequences of the actions of the inner circle. Southerne's play looks beyond the petty politics of Whig or Tory to the very real concern for the general social and political stability of the state, and for the individual within the state.

In The Loyal Brother, Southerne shows us a country which, like England, is on the brink of political and social upheaval because of individual ambitions and jealousies in high

places. At its helm is a leader who lacks the discretion and self-control to see beneath the superficial flatteries of the predators with whom he surrounds himself. This difficulty in distinguishing between appearance and reality, doubtless inspired by the intrigues and accusations which troubled England during the first years following Southerne's arrival, was to remain a favourite theme of the dramatist throughout his career. Mistaken identity, misread intentions, and disguise, both subtle and overt, are all indicative of the playwright's fascination with the inability to determine truth from fiction. In a very practical sense, Southerne himself must have faced this problem, arriving in London at a time when the social and political fracture was perhaps at its greatest since the fall of Charles I. In The Loyal Brother he shows his recognition of the potential for disaster in the ambitious, plotting world of the court, filled with 'the sad disquiets, and decays of peace, that always haunt the dwelling.'<sup>27</sup> Southerne's arch-villain expresses the lust for power which the playwright distrusted:

Vertue avault! to villages be gone:  
 But haunt the luxury of Courts no more;  
 Much less aspiring Statesmens nobler thoughts.  
 Ambition is our Idol, on whose wings  
 Great minds are carried only to extrems;  
 To be sublimely great, or to be nothing:  
 And he who aims his actions at this mark,  
 Must rush with Manly resolution on,  
 Stopping at nothing when he has begun;  
 Still pass the shortest way, altho' untrod,  
 Not loyter in the beaten, honest road:  
 But let our Masters watch the heights we soar:  
 A States-mans Loyalty is growing power,  
 And we but watch occasion to devour.<sup>28</sup>

Southerne saw little difference in the private sector. The combination of unreasoning loyalty, imperciience and predatory ambition were a danger to statesman and citizen alike. The passivity of Tachmas, coupled with his brother's foolish vanity, and Ismael's lust for power, nearly cause social and political upheaval. If a loyalty to its leaders is a necessary part of any social body, then a fundamental perspicacity in those who govern is the necessary foundation of that loyalty. They must be able to recognize the difference between flattery and devotion. If he possesses that ability, a ruler will earn the faithfulness of his followers, and conversely learn to trust his subjects. Congreve, in his Dedication to The Mourning Bride (1697), remarks that 'Tis from the Example of Princes that Vertue becomes a Fashion in the People, for even they who are averse to Instruction will yet be fond of Imitation.'<sup>29</sup> Conversely, if a prince cannot distinguish between virtue and obsequiousness, how can ordinary people be expected to recognize truth? In all his works, Southerne never strays far from the struggle to separate appearance from reality. For him the intrigues of the court, unveiled in his first effort, differed little from those in society, and in each case passive innocence was seen to suffer.

Despite Nicoll's and Wilson's wish to place The Loyal Brother in the company of the heroic dramas of the period, to do so would be to miss Southerne's distinctive quality. Even at this early stage of his career, Southerne's play is much

closer to the pathetic tragedies for which he will become most famous. As Robert Root points out, Southerne reveals from the first a fascination with women in distress,<sup>30</sup> and a reader of Southerne needs look no further than the emotion-charged scene at the scaffold to see an early example of this predilection. The Queen-mother enters 'in great distraction,'<sup>31</sup> followed shortly thereafter by Semanthe 'in great disorder,' who 'throws herself at his (Seliman's) feet.'<sup>32</sup> For nearly one hundred lines the two women, mother and lover, weep and wail, grasping at the knees of the Sophy, in a desperate effort to save their beloved Tachmas. The Sophy is finally moved by their tears, and as Semanthe tells us:

He yields, he melts, I read it in his looks:  
A blush confus'dly wanders in his Cheeks;  
And now he turns away. O blessed change.<sup>33</sup>

Doubtless the audience also shed a tear or two, as Southerne opened the emotional floodgates. He would return to them again and again in his future works.

Another aspect of the play (already referred to briefly), which distinguishes it from the heroic dramas, epitomized by Dryden's Conquest of Granada, is the passivity of its protagonist. Tachmas, while victorious in battle, is a different sort of hero from the aggressive, flamboyant, Almanzor of Dryden's play; Tachmas is a man made of more modest and self-effacing, yet equally resilient stuff. His are the heroics of sacrifice, not aggression; his strength lies in moral reflection before action, not simply in

reaction. Southerne seems to be looking back momentarily to Descartes and Hamlet when his hero contemplates:

I think, and therefore am: hard state of man!  
That proves his being with an Argument  
That speaks him wretched. Birds in Cages lose  
The freedom of their natures unconfin'd;  
Yet they will sing, and bill, and murmur there  
As merrily, as they were on the Wing.  
But man, that reasoning favourite of Heaven,  
How can he bear it? Tho the body finds  
Respite from torment, yet the mind has none:  
For thousand restless thoughts, of different kinds,  
But thick upon the soul, some are comparing  
The present with the past, how happy once  
I was, and now how wretched: some presenting  
My miseries by others happiness;  
Whilst others, falsely flattering me to Life,  
Tell me my fortune ripens in the womb  
Of time, and I shall yet be happy.<sup>34</sup>

If we gather from the dedication that the poet laureate had influenced the neophyte dramatist, then it was certainly the Dryden of Aureng-Zebe, rather than the author of Granada. Tachmas and Semanthe have much in common with Dryden's Aureng-Zebe and Indamorea. All four are victims of the ambitions, jealousies, desires, and plots of others; and because of their loyalties are unable to defend themselves. This theme, the attempt of the virtuous to survive in a less than perfect world, will become a primary dramatic focus for Thomas Southerne.

The setting, characters, and themes of The Loyal Brother, while applicable to the contemporary political situation, must have had an additional significance for the Irishman recently arrived in London. His concern is with the ability of a society to survive the dangers which exist within itself. He is aware of the Hobbesian lust for power, and recognizes it as

a threat. At the same time, the idealistic young playwright appears to have had faith in the innate virtue of most men, which he felt could enable them to survive the assaults of evil. Perhaps Southerne, in fact, had little desire to create the 'exaltation of James, which Dodds postulates, but rather wished to provide a clear warning about the treacheries of power to both Charles and James (who was only three years away from ascending the throne); if so, it was a lesson the King and his brother would choose to ignore.

Two years passed before Southerne, 'having hardly scap'd the venture of the Stage' in his debut, decided to throw himself 'upon a second trial of the Town.'<sup>35</sup> In April 1684, the United Company (with theatre audiences dwindling, the composite troupe was formed late in 1682, by uniting the Duke's and King's companies) produced The Disappointment or, The Mother in Fashion, employing some of its finest talent, including the leading actor of the day, Thomas Betterton.<sup>36</sup> Despite its somewhat ominous title, the play according to Gildon's Langbaine's Lives, had 'no ill Success, at least with very good Judges,'<sup>37</sup> and was performed for the King and Queen on 27 January 1685, only two weeks before the death of Charles II.<sup>38</sup>

The Disappointment, styled 'A Play' by its author, is a mixed bag of recognizable Jonsonian and Restoration characters, and is based primarily on 'The Curious Impertinent' episode from Don Quixote, with some borrowings from Shakespeare's Measure for Measure. Categorized as a

domestic drama or problem play by critics,<sup>39</sup> it represents another significant shift in emphasis: sentiment (in full flower by the end of the century) is beginning to creep in. Dodds in his 1933 critical work on Southerne regards the play as an important work of the Restoration, primarily 'for its proof that sentimentalism was articulate as early as 1684.'<sup>40</sup>

The play is nearly a tragi-comedy, containing a sub-plot, which loosely parallels the main action of the play, but which is handled in a somewhat lighter vein. Robert Root credits it with being essentially geometric in its arrangement, closely resembling the domestic dramas of the Elizabethans.<sup>41</sup> It would seem that this comparison is in reference to the close interrelation of the plot and sub-plot and the characters in each. At one time or another, the characters in the separate plots are presented in dialogue with each other, so that the result is not so much two separate worlds of the play, as much as it is two halves of the same sphere. At the centre of this dramatic ellipsoid is an aging, but typical Restoration rake named Alberto; both plots revolve around his attempts at sexual conquest. At the opening of the play he has rid himself of his former mistress, Juliana, and is in the process of arranging the seduction of the young Angeline, using the girl's supposed mother as his bawd. In addition, he has set his sights on the virtuous Erminia, wife to Alphonso. The major plot focuses on this second conquest. Alberto has been sending love letters to Erminia over the forged signature of the Duke of Florence. Alphonso has discovered one of the

missives, and is driven to the point of distraction by his wife's apparent disloyalty. His faithful friend, Lorenzo, defends Erminia but Alphonso (very much a domestic version of the Sophy, Seliman), is unable to dismiss the suspicion from his mind. Eventually, Alberto's persistence is rewarded; Erminia's servant, Clara, allows the rake access to the house. Conducted to his assignation in the dark, he believes that he has achieved the sought-after prize. The ill-used, but still devoted Juliana, however, manages to dupe the rascal, and puts herself in place of the virtuous wife.

Lorenzo, who catches Alberto leaving Erminia's house, momentarily loses faith in her goodness, but in a dramatic, tear-filled confrontation with her is ultimately convinced of her virtue, and tells her husband that the villain is not the Duke, but is in fact the notorious Alberto. Alphonso's jealousy, however, is still not laid to rest. He forces Erminia to receive Alberto while he secretly looks on. Alberto, believing he has indeed slept with the lady, makes reference to their 'rendezvous,' and instantly is confronted by Alphonso, who wounds him and then blindly pursues his wife, intent upon her death. Tragedy, however, is averted, the truth is sorted out, and husband and wife are reunited.

The sub-plot concerns Alberto's attempt to seduce Angeline. The rake is again duped by Juliana, who substitutes herself for the innocent girl, much to the relief of Angeline's father, an old campaigner, named Rogero. Eventually Alberto learns of Juliana's ploys, and is so moved



by her devotion and loyalty, that he abandons his gay bachelor life, and agrees to marry her. Angeline's supposed mother, who has attempted to sell her daughter off throughout the play, is revealed as an old 'concubine' of Rogero's, who has only been her 'Mother in Fashion.' The young innocent is given to the worthy Lorenzo, and with confusion at rest, all ends in celebration. Southerne -- as he had in The Loyal Brother -- concludes with a very clear message for his audience:

And Innocence is prov'd: Oh there's the thing.  
 For 'tis a Womans falsest, vainest pride  
 To boast a Virtue, that has ne're been try'd:  
 -----In equal folly too those Husbands live,  
 Who peevishly against themselves contrive  
 By early fears, to hasten on the Day;  
 For jealousy but shews our Wives the Way:  
 And if the forked Fortune be our Doom,  
 In vain we strive; the Blessing will come home.<sup>42</sup>

While The Disappointment has none of the exotic trappings of his first play, a close examination reveals much that echoes The Loyal Brother. In fact, Southerne's second work might be called 'The Loyal Women.' Each of the three leading ladies represents a different traditional role for the female in society, and each reveals a loyalty and faithfulness. Angeline, as daughter, and despite the betrayal of her supposed mother, remains properly devoted to her 'parents.' Through her honesty, obedience, and lack of affectation she shows that she is her 'Fathers own Daughter to a hair.'<sup>43</sup> Erminia is the epitome of the virtuous wife, who, like the noble Tachmas, lives only to serve her 'lord.' In spite of her husband's jealous instability, she never falters in her

love and devotion. Finally, there is the fallen woman and rejected lover, Juliana. Her faithfulness transcends any socially determined roles, and despite her compromised position, Southerne treats her sympathetically. Like Etherege's Bellinda in The Man of Mode (1676), she is admirable because of her open confession of her error, and her love for Alberto, regardless of his imperfections. She foregoes the customary outbursts of scorned women (Such as those of Southerne's Sunamire, in The Loyal Brother or Etherege's Mrs. Lovit in The Man of Mode), saying:

To play the Woman right: now I should soon,  
Call Curses down from Heaven on his head,  
Protest my wrongs, and vow to be reveng'd;  
This were the surest way to please my Sex:44

She rather chooses loyalty and faith to try to win back the man who has ruined her. She willingly forgives him by simply saying:

If he has left me, 'tis his natures fault,  
That cannot be confin'd.<sup>45</sup>

The women are Southerne's virtuous heroines. Only the servant, Clara, and the mother-bawd are treated unsympathetically. Unlike Juliana, whose error was motivated by love, these two become Alberto's panderers because their own greed overrides the loyalty they owe to others.

The constancy of the women throws the male scepticism about their faithfulness into sharp and unsympathetic relief. While this male attitude is prevalent through much of Restoration drama, it becomes particularly suspect in juxtaposition with the virtuous female characters Southerne

gives us. At some point in the play, each man expresses fears about the frailty of women. Each sees them as the descendants of Eve, inherently weak, but also powerful. Alberto is confident of their deep-seated lust which makes them easy prey to his seductions. He brags:

For me, I'm settled in my Faith: I've made  
A study of the Sex, and found it frail:<sup>46</sup>

Alphonso recognizes their hypnotic powers and sees them as temptresses, who weaken men. He tells Lorenzo:

Oh! I am well acquainted with her pow'r:  
I have devour'd the spirit of her Love,  
Till drunk with joy, I reel'd to my undoing.<sup>47</sup>

Southerne reveals that neither infirmity nor strength is the sole possession of one sex, but he chooses through most of his career to favour the virtues of the female. He seems to have been unusually sensitive to the subjugation of women in Restoration England, and to what he viewed as the irrational antagonism that existed between the sexes. The young playwright's concern with the predatory, hypocritical nature of the world, and the ability of the innocent to survive it, so much a part of The Loyal Brother, seem also to dominate his second effort. He simply moves it from the rarified atmosphere of the court, as if to give his message a greater universality of appeal through its domestic setting; ambition, jealousy, and greed exist outside the exotic political arena of Persia, and again the honest and innocent are the victims. Erminia, the virtuous wife, can 'see the snares are set, / And Innocence is doom'd to fall a prey / To the mad Censure of licentious Tongues!'<sup>48</sup> This continued focus on society's

victims leads to the speculation that the playwright, as an outsider, was discovering the difficulty of maintaining his own moral values in the social jungle of Restoration London, with its institutionalized licentiousness and cynicism.

The real challenge for Southerne's characters in both plays is in distinguishing appearances from reality. While they continually make judgements based on what they perceive as real, they are, more often than not, in error. It is these errors in judgement which lead to the fits of jealousy, fear, and anger which occur in the plays. In The Disappointment Southerne begins to experiment with solutions to the problem and uses devices of disguise, mistaken identity, and ill-founded assumptions to distinguish between appearance and reality. His next effort, Sir Anthony Love, represents the full expression of the ideas which are beginning to germinate in his first two plays.

Southerne's 'sentimental problem drama,'<sup>49</sup> while given a domestic setting, contains generic echos of The Loyal Brother as well as suggestions of sentiment. He borrows some of the sustained emotional bursts from heroic drama, and lends them to more common characters, but the fifth act repentance of the rake, the never-failing devotion of the wife, and the shifting emotional extremes of her husband all have the slightly overripe flavour of sentimentality. At this point in his career, Southerne seems to be looking forward to the sentimental drama, but according to Arthur Sherbo, 'his neglect of sentimental situations, with his brevity of

treatment,<sup>50</sup> make it improper to call his play a fully developed sentimental drama. Whether the young playwright, now twenty-four, might have pursued his bent for the sentimental can only be a guess; despite the apparently positive reception accorded The Disappointment, he left London to embark on a new career.

The death of Charles II on 6 February 1685, marked the end of an era, and signalled a change for England, and for Southerne as well. Though from what he tells us, he managed to complete four acts of The Spartan Dame in the interim (The 'Tragedy was begun a year before the Revolution [1687]'),<sup>51</sup> his stage career suffered a six year hiatus. There is no evidence as to why he suddenly turned his back on the stage during the period following The Disappointment, but both historical events and the fiscal realities of the theatre, no doubt, had their influence.

Financially, the Restoration theatre must have been struggling by the middle of the 1680s. George Winchester Stone Jr. points out that after the unification of the two theatre companies in 1682, management adopted a more conservative policy (not surprising, with competition eliminated), and that during the years of Southerne's absence the 'emphasis is naturally on the revival of "safe" old plays.'<sup>52</sup> John Downes recollects that the United Company 'Reviv'd the several old and Modern Plays, that were the property of Mr. Killigrew,'<sup>53</sup> and in Stone's analysis of those plays, he finds that of the eleven potential money

makers, 'nine are by dramatists dead before 1652, and only two by contemporaries (Dryden and Wycherley).'<sup>54</sup> This was also a period of transition in dramaturgy; the old guard was nearly gone. At the time of Charles's death, Etherege was living in exile in a foreign court, Wycherley was in a debtor's prison, Nathaniel Lee was in residence at Bethlehem Hospital for the insane, and within two months Thomas Otway would be dead. The first great chapter in the fifty years designated as Restoration theatre had ended; the beginning of the second significant period was to coincide with Southerne's return to the stage. The actor and playwright George Powell, in the 'Preface to the Reader,' of his play The Treacherous Brothers, written in 1690 (about the time Southerne returned to the theatre), looked back at the unproductive years, saying that the 'reviving of the old stock of Plays, so ingrostr the study of the House, that the Poets lay dormant; and a new Play cou'd hardly get admittance, amongst the more precious pieces of Antiquity, that then waited to walk the Stage.'<sup>55</sup> The playwright's decision to abandon the theatre temporarily may have been influenced by all these signs of diminished prospects for aspiring playwrights. A man seeking a secure future might have to look elsewhere: perhaps in the direction of the new King.

James II, the newly crowned monarch, was scarcely seated on his throne before he was faced with a contender for it, in the person of his cousin, the Duke of Monmouth, Charles's natural son. When Monmouth invaded England at Lyme Regis in

June 1685, Thomas Southerne left London and went to defend his King. The choice may have been an early indication of Southerne's consistency in word and action. His own behaviour seems to sustain his dramatic rhetoric concerning loyalty to, and support of the ruling government, as expressed in The Loyal Brother three years earlier.

Whatever his reasons for leaving the comforts of London, the adaptable Irishman abandoned the stage for the rigours of military life. He must have acquitted himself well as a soldier, for he came to the attention of the Duke of Berwick, James II's favourite son. Years later the playwright tells us, in the Preface to The Spartan Dame, that he was 'most advantageously recommended to him by the famous Colonel Sarsfield of Ireland, afterwards Earl of Lucan.'<sup>56</sup> It was from Berwick that he was granted a commission as ensign in the Princess Anne's Regiment of Foot on 19 June 1685.<sup>57</sup> A year later his rank was raised to lieutenant, and when the Duke took command of the regiment, Southerne writes that 'His Grace gave me a Company, and discovered in a little time, a generous disposition of making my fortune; which, as it would have been no hard matter for the King's favourite son to accomplish, he would have finished, had not the changes of the world deprived his country of his service, and his dependents of his support.'<sup>58</sup> The Revolution of 1688, and the subsequent flight of James II, put an end to Southerne's dreams of military and political fame and fortune. As he sadly relates, 'I was tumbled down from a high expectation.'<sup>59</sup>

Disillusioned with his venture into royal service, Southerne left the army by the beginning of 1689,<sup>60</sup> to begin his most prolific period as a dramatist.

Just a year after leaving the army, Southerne emerged at the front of the London theatre scene with his first major success, a comedy, Sir Anthony Love, the subject of this edition. Since the play will be discussed extensively later in this introduction, it is sufficient here to say that the popularity of Sir Anthony Love brought crowds to Drury Lane, and provided its author with a distinctive indication of success: receipts on both the third and sixth days. This is the first record of an instance where a dramatist was paid for a second benefit performance.<sup>61</sup> If for no other reason than his financial success, Southerne would surely have been considered a major comic writer. The fickle London audience would, no doubt, await his next offering with great anticipation; they were to be sadly disappointed.

In early December 1691, doubtless feeling that he had discovered his forté, Southerne saw his second comedy, The Wives' Excuse or, Cuckolds Make Themselves staged at the Drury Lane.<sup>62</sup> Despite the best efforts of the United Company, including Betterton, Kynnaston, the Mountforts, Mrs. Barry, and Mrs. Bracegirdle, with songs set by Henry Purcell, the play failed, and was subsequently withdrawn from the company's repertoire.<sup>63</sup> The reaction of the critics and audience was not disgust, but indifference, the cruellest fate for any work of art. As Dryden tells the young playwright in his poem, 'To



Mr. Southerne, On his Comedy, called *The Wives Excuse*, 'Nor was Thy Labour'd Drama damn'd or hiss'd, / But with a kind Civility dismiss'd.'<sup>64</sup> In nearly the three hundred years since that ambivalent dismissal, the response to Southerne's only play 'to lie wholly within the framework of the comedy of manners'<sup>65</sup> has been anything but non-committal. James Sutherland sees it as an 'intelligent play,'<sup>66</sup> while Genest declares 'it wants incident badly.'<sup>67</sup> Nicoll sees no virtues in the play, putting it in 'the same class as Sir Anthony Love'<sup>68</sup> but Thomas Evans, contributor of biographical material in the 1774 edition of Southerne's collected works, calls it 'a play abounding in gay, lively conversation, genuine wit, and less licentiousness.'<sup>69</sup> While Southerne's most thorough-going twentieth century critic, John Wendell Dodd's, says that the play is 'a study in mediocrity,'<sup>70</sup> Robert Hume takes the opposite tack, referring to it as 'a brilliant play.'<sup>71</sup> John Harrington Smith goes even further; he considers it 'one of the five most considerable comedies written between 1660 and 1700.'<sup>72</sup> Whatever the verdict, most recent scholars agree that with The Wives' Excuse, Southerne began the shift in comic emphasis which carried through well into the beginning of the next century: the focus is on marriage.

The main plot of the play deals with the moral dilemma of Mrs. Friendall, a bright, virtuous woman, who, through an arranged marriage, is tied to 'an impertinent, nonsensical, silly, intriguing, cowardly, good-for-nothing Coxcomb.'<sup>73</sup>

The husband, of course, sees himself in a more becoming light: 'a man of fashion,'<sup>74</sup> to whom marriage is merely a financial and social convenience. The play is essentially a series of social gatherings, each viewed by Mr. Friendall as an opportunity for a quiet indiscretion with one of his wife's acquaintances. He encourages her to socialize, so that he will be free to court the other ladies present. While he is thus engaged, she is pursued by a libertine rake named Lovemore. He contrives a scheme to expose her husband's cowardice publicly, believing that the husband's humiliation will improve his chances of success with the wife. Discovering the plot, the quick-witted Mrs. Friendall implores her husband to retreat from the arranged provocation, and by preserving his dignity, she retains her own. Despite the justification (her knowledge that Friendall is a philandering coward) and the temptation (the always available Lovemore), Mrs. Friendall refuses to make a cuckold of her husband; she is unwilling to sacrifice her own morality for that of popular fashion.

A second intrigue involves the virtuous spinster, Mrs. Sightly. Two gentlemen, a long-time admirer and friend, Wellvile, and a heartless debaucher, Wilding, contend for her favours: Wellvile seeking her continued 'Platonic' affection, Wilding wishing only to increase his reputation by adding to his collection of trophies. The innocent woman's cousin and 'friend,' a malicious gossip and 'highly efficient amateur bawd,'<sup>75</sup> Mrs. Witwoud, willingly agrees to assist the

avaricious Wilding. Eventually Mrs. Sightly becomes aware of the betrayal, and reproaches Mrs. Witwoud for her treason. Furious at the rebuke, Mrs. Witwoud tells Wilding that she will arrange for Mrs. Sightly's debauch at the Friendall's masquerade, secretly planning to impersonate her cousin, and ruin her reputation. Southerne brings the two plots together in the masked-ball finale, and manages to mete out some justice. In the final scene the scheming bawd succeeds in making Wilding believe that she is Mrs. Sightly, but while she awaits him in another room he is informed by Wellvile that the 'lady in waiting' is not Mrs. Sightly. The two men send the always eager Mr. Friendall to 'Mrs. Sightly' and immediately 'the scene draws.' revealing 'Friendall and Witwoud upon a couch.'<sup>76</sup> The two surprised double-dealers are briefly the objects of ridicule. Mrs. Witwoud storms out and the embarrassed Mr. Friendall, having subjected his wife to an obvious humiliation, agrees to a separation and maintenance. The sexual double standard is clearly evident in Southerne's conclusion: the husband casually remarks to his gentlemen friends that he 'can't be very much displeas'd at the recovery of [his] liberty.'<sup>77</sup> while Mrs. Friendall can only say that she 'must still be your wife, and still unhappy.'<sup>78</sup> The undeserving man has gained his freedom, while the worthy woman is left to choose between upholding a lonely honour, or yielding to a libertine's desires. It is apparent that Lovemore will continue his pursuit as he confesses that 'What alteration this may make in my fortune with her, I don't know;

but I'm glad I have parted them.'<sup>79</sup> Southerne gives no indication of the direction she will take, and, in fact, underscores her plight by excluding her from the comedy's traditional happy ending. At the end of the play, Mrs. Friendall stands in dramatic isolation; the curtain falls before the audience sees her take a step.

Southerne shows a social world dominated by the dictates and desires of the male sex, with the subsequent victimization of women. In The Disappointment the playwright showed three women whose loyalty and goodness were, at last, rewarded. In The Wives' Excuse, he again focuses on three women, but his vision is darker, more realistic; the resolution is less comforting.

It is Southerne's emphasis on the virtuous, innocent victims that suddenly makes the actions of the selfish, unprincipled elements of society so starkly unattractive. Ralph Thorton, in his modern edition of the play, sees Southerne's 'chief contribution' to the continuing development of the comedy of manners 'to lie in the revival and refinement of the character whose actions are marked by an inborn and gratuitous display of malice toward his peers.'<sup>80</sup> While there is certainly truth in Thorton's statement, his objective is to view the work from a distance in order to see where it fits in the overall development of the comedy of manners; the purpose here is to step closer in order to see the playwright's intent more clearly. By enhancing the viciousness of certain characters, Southerne stresses the

pitiable conditions of the reputable members of the play. The nature of the villains, however, is little different than it had been in The Loyal Brother, or The Disappointment. All appear equally motivated (Thornton saw Southerne's most recent cads as displaying a 'seemingly unmotivated and unconscious heartlessness.'<sup>81</sup>), by a selfish ambition for power, reputation, or revenge. The significant difference is in his choice of setting. Instead of Persia, Italy or France, Lamb's 'land-- . . . of cuckoldry--the Utopia of gallantry,' where no good person suffers permanent harm on the stage, the spectator finds himself in 'Christendom,'<sup>82</sup> where actions have consequences, and conquerors leave undeserving victims.

For the first time in his career the dramatist sets a play in London, and in doing so disrupts the complacency provided by the buffer of aesthetic distance. Of course, Restoration audiences were accustomed to seeing themselves and their social circle represented on the stage, but even Wycherley packaged his discontent so pleasantly as to avoid offending them. Southerne's attack appears more direct; what Harold Love sees as a 'mood more critical than saturnalian.'<sup>83</sup> The gay mask of Sir Anthony Love has been removed, revealing 'a society of ruthless sexual predators,'<sup>84</sup> 'a group of realistically conceived characters,' who move through the familiar settings of Restoration life, music meetings, the Mall, and masked balls, guiding us 'in a step-by-step enrichment of our sense of the moral predicament of the central character.'<sup>85</sup> Mrs. Friendall, a thoroughly good

woman, is trapped in an 'unjust World'<sup>86</sup> and like Lucia, in Sir Anthony Love, she is forced to sacrifice her identity. Her imposed marriage has condemned her 'to slavery for life.' Her situation is grim, and her options few. She admits that 'if by separation we get free, then all our Husband's faults are laid on us: this is the hard Condition of a Woman's fate.'<sup>87</sup> Anthony Kaufman identifies this as Southerne's 'central concern' in the play, and credits him with presenting 'clearly the difficult problems facing any intelligent, and virtuous woman married to an unworthy husband,' in such a restrictive and unjust society.<sup>88</sup>

While most critics who have discussed The Wive' Excuse dwell on the predicament of Mrs. Friendall, some brief attention should be paid to other characters caught in their own particular social dilemmas. Southerne's other injured female is Mrs. Sightly. Unmarried and free of the contagious reputation of a spouse, she is Southerne's innocent bystander. Like those characters who preceeded her (Tachmas, Semanthe, Angeline and Erminia), she stands outside the action of the play, but finds herself victimized by the deeds of others. Despite her inviolate morality, she is betrayed by her closest friends. For the seventeenth century woman, reputation was her only possession, and Mrs. Sightly finds hers tarnished despite all attempts to protect it. Southerne leaves her in a situation much like Mrs. Friendall's, where time must finish the work.

It is not only the women who suffer in the confusions and

corruptions of Restoration London. Wellvile, a character who appears curiously like his creator, is a victim of the dichotomy within himself. A man of 'Ceremony and Respect,'<sup>89</sup> he is caught in the social vortex in spite of his disapproval of much of it (even his name connotes a certain disparity within the same individual). As if to reinforce the suggestion that this character could be the playwright, Southerne has Wellvile in the midst of writing a play, appropriately titled The Wives' Excuse or, Cuckolds Make Themselves, and it may be assumed that Wellvile speaks for the author when he says

I am scandaliz'd extremely to see the Women upon the Stage make Cuckolds at that insatiable rate they do in all our modern Comedies: without any reason from the Poets, but, because a man is married he must be a Cuckold: Now, Sir, I think, the Women are most unconscionably injur'd by this general Scandal upon their Sex; therefore to do 'em what service I can in their vindication, I design to write a Play. . .<sup>90</sup>

The injustice done by fashion, not only to women, but also to friendship, honour and particularly marriage, is Southerne's target. His sceptical exploration of social contradictions and antagonisms in Sir Anthony Love had apparently led him to conclude that the only practical solution to the conflict lay in a bond between words and deeds: an individual can be trusted if he does what he says. In the The Wives' Excuse, Southerne applies this same practical solution to the war between the sexes. Marriage is, potentially, the answer---the ultimate harmony between speech and actions---but only if both

husband and wife support their vows with their behaviour. The playwright clearly shows that infidelity is not implicit in marriage, only in certain individuals. He also lays stress on the ways social pressures can undermine the most honourable of human intentions.

It is this emphasis on a married couple, as opposed to the typical 'gay couple' commonly associated with Restoration comedy that distinguishes the final decade of the period from its more cynical beginnings. A. H. Scouten sees The Wives' Excuse as the initiation of this change: 'Southerne has shifted the emphasis by dealing with a husband and wife,' and with 'the incompatibility of the married pair.'<sup>91</sup> Of course, Southerne had dealt with a married couple in The Disappointment seven years earlier, but both its tone, and its distant locale set it apart from his later works. That this major shift of emphasis became a significant theme of the next decade and beyond is clear if one looks at the plays of Vanbrugh (The Provok'd Wife, 1697), Cibber (Love's Last Shift, 1696; The Careless Husband, 1704), and Farquhar (The Beaux Stratagem, 1707). Scouten points out that while Congreve's protagonists in each of his four comedies are unmarried, the less prominent characters in The Double Dealer, and The Way of the World provide numerous examples of marital incompatibility. The Wives' Excuse set the tone for an entire decade of plays, which Robert Root says 'include among them the very best of Restoration comedy.'<sup>92</sup>

In addition to its innovative critical stance it is



possible, as Dryden suggests in his poem, 'To Mr. Southerne,' that the initial failure of The Wives' Excuse was attributable to Southerne's attempt to be all things to all men (and women): 'May be thou hast not pleas'd the Box and Pit.'<sup>93</sup> The young libertines, who would delight in the rake's victory over the virtuous wife, found only disappointment and ambiguity in the fifth act, while, to Southerne's obvious frustration, the ladies, who were quickly becoming a significant force in the Restoration audience, were surprisingly unappreciative of Mrs. Friendall's resolve. Southerne, in his Dedication, tried to explain that the character of Witwoud was designed to make 'amends for her (Mrs. Friendall), in the moral of her character. . .but she was no more understood to the advantage of the men, than the Wife was received in favour of the women.'<sup>94</sup> Quite possibly the ladies in the audience had heard more than enough on the passive 'modest wife' theme at home, and found the aggressive heroines who could give a man what he deserved more to their tastes. Dryden, in his poem, tried to salve the wounds of the injured playwright, and, at the same time, advise him for the future:

But if thou wou'dst be seen, as well as read;  
Copy one living Author, and one dead;  
The Standard of thy style, let Etherege be;  
For Wit, th' Immortal Spring of Wycherley.  
Learn after both, to draw some just Design,  
And the next Age will learn to Copy thine.<sup>95</sup>

Whether Southerne managed successfully to take his mentor's advice is open to conjecture, but we do know from the playwright himself that he was touched by Dryden's remarks,

and by the fact that 'there was more than friendship in his opinion, upon credit of this play, with him falling sick last summer, he bequeathed to my care the writing of half the last act of his tragedy Cleomenes.'<sup>96</sup> It was a play briefly delayed by authorities, but which eventually, with 'the reflecting passages upon [the] government being left out,'<sup>97</sup> opened in mid-April 1692.<sup>98</sup> Unaware that later generations would see his 'failure' as a crucial contribution to the progress of the theatre, Southerne was to wait another season before bringing his third successive comedy to the stage.

A number of factors must have affected Southerne's approach to his next play. The words of advice from the former poet laureate, the disappointing reception of Mrs. Friendall's defense of a married woman's virtue, and the memories of his only real dramatic success, Sir Anthony Love, all must have had some measure of influence. He may have contemplated abandoning the comic mode altogether. For his published edition of The Maid's Last Prayer or, Any Rather than Fail he chose an epigraph from Horace: 'Farewell the comic stage, if denial of the palm sends me home lean, its betrayal plump.'<sup>99</sup> After the play's lukewarm reception, it was to be Southerne's last attempt at pure comedy for over thirty years.

The playwright's general lack of success with the strictly comic mode may have stemmed from his commitment to ideas which deprived him of the detachment necessary for established comic forms. Following Sir Anthony Love, he abandoned the popular

'festive comedy' of Dryden and Behn, for what Harold Love calls the 'realistic social comedy.' Love defines the second type as having 'English settings, a reduced concern with gratuitous plot complication, a greatly increased concern with character, and a real interest in ideas, particularly the ideas of the libertin moralists as they apply to human nature and social institutions.'<sup>100</sup> It grew out of the efforts of Etherege and Wycherley in the seventies, and was revived two decades later in the plays of Southerne, Congreve and Farquhar. This is not to imply that Southerne's successful comedy, Sir Anthony Love, is not a play of ideas; it is. The difference, however, is in the form and the effect. The dramatist's two later 'comedies' 'did not conform to [the] notion of what a play should be.'<sup>101</sup> The tidiness, satisfaction and aesthetic artificiality of the comic tradition had been sacrificed for realism and social criticism. Southerne's problem, somewhat like Wycherley's in The Plain Dealer, was in his failure to temper his criticism with ample divertisement. The pleasures an audience received from wit and repartee would have made the dramatic critique less painful, and the reception perhaps more gracious. Southerne, despite some effort, was apparently unable to produce such a blend. It was William Congreve who discovered the formula. He achieved what The Plain Dealer and The Wives' Excuse had failed to accomplish: a 'greater depth of human concern and still leave the play acceptable at the level of divertisement,'<sup>102</sup> and thus comfortable to the popular

notion of the purpose of comedy. Certainly the young Congreve was influenced by those who had preceded him, but he had also witnessed their reception. While sharing Southerne's earnest social concerns, he also had an awareness of the aesthetic criteria, and found a method for achieving both within the comic mode, succeeding where Southerne had failed. In fairness to Southerne, it appears that the elder dramatist was aware of his shortcomings, and made some effort to correct them. In his last attempt at comedy there is the sense that the playwright is trying to avoid the threatened extremes (purely festive comedy or only realistic social comedy). It represents an effort at melding into one dramatic piece his three dominant concerns: his continued attack on Restoration social and sexual mores, his respect for the traditions of the great writers who came before him, and his desire to appeal more successfully to the appetites of his audience. This desire for renewed popular acclaim was certainly on his mind as he wrote the prologue:

They who must write (for writings a Disease)  
Shou'd make it their whole study how to please:  
And that's a thing our Author fain wou'd do:  
But wiser Men, than he, must tell him how:  
For you're so changeable, that every Moon,  
Some upstart whimsy knocks the old ones down.  
Sometimes bluff Heroes please by dint of Arms:  
And sometimes tender Nonsense has its Charms:  
Now Love, and Honour strut in buskin'd Verse;  
Then, at one leap, you stumble into Farce.<sup>103</sup>

Whether it was this determination to capture the fancy of his capricious audience, or a response to Dryden's insinuation ('Yet those who blame thy tale. . .<sup>104</sup>) that he lacked skill as a plotter, The Maid's Last Prayer is a gallant

effort. In it Southerne presents no fewer than four separate, interwoven plots.

The dominant plot involves a charming, gallant, Gayman, who is pursuing the attractive Lady Malepert. Although married (to a trusting fool, Lord Malepert), she allows herself to be offered to the highest bidders by an elderly bawd named Wishwell. Lady Malepert is attracted to Gayman, but Wishwell, for purely selfish reasons, lives in constant fear of losing her profitable charge. A second intrigue exists between 'a pleasant, snarling Fellow,'<sup>105</sup> named Granger, and the mercenary, vengeful Lady Trickett. The title of the play comes from a third scenario, concerning Lady Susan Malepert, aunt to the foolish lord, who is 'a Youthful Virgin of five and forty,'<sup>106</sup> and who repeatedly throws herself at Granger. Granger delights in encouraging the spinster's infatuation, but finally rejects her, leaving Lady Susan Malepert to settle for marriage to a musical mooncalf named Sir Symphony, deciding, at last, that it is better to have 'any rather than fail.' The final, though admittedly minor plot depicts a second example of matrimonial dissonance, involving Mrs. Siam and her 'Jealous, Old, Coxcomby,'<sup>107</sup> husband, Captain Drydrubb, who round out a shifting tableau of London society.

Unlike The Wives' Excuse, which was criticized for its lack of action, The Maid's Last Prayer recalls some of the spirited success of the 'Rambling Lady.' The play abounds with the same brisk, energetic enthusiasm as he gives us

character after character who 'love running about mightily.'<sup>108</sup> In the twelve scenes in the play the dramatist never repeats a location. The action shuttles between the public watering holes of London society (St. James Park, Rosamond's Pond, music meetings) and the characters' private chambers. The idle rich are anything but idle as they scamper from one place to another, filling their leisure hours with social visits, card games, dinners, and masked rendezvous, all spiced with a wealth of stinging gossip. All in all it is a rich tapestry of the life of London's beau monde.

Southerne also revived some of the farcical elements of Sir Anthony Love, doubtless further evidence of the playwright's desire to appeal to a wider portion of the Restoration audience. It would be foolish, however, to dismiss The Maid's Last Prayer as merely an attempt by Southerne to pander to the public's taste for farce, even though its financial success must have been crucial to a man whose livelihood depended upon his ability to entertain.

Professor James Sutherland explains the public's delight in Southerne's latest reflection of society, when he points out that the characters in The Maid's Last Prayer come 'nearer to a purely comic effect'<sup>109</sup> than those in the The Wives' Excuse. In his Dedication Southerne confesses to being 'a little better acquainted with the Town,'<sup>110</sup> and in The Maid's Last Prayer his comic portrayals are a tribute to both his knowledge of London, and of established Restoration comic

types. Within the world of the play he presents such characters as Lord Malepert, 'one of the most amenable cuckolds in Restoration comedy,'<sup>111</sup> Captain Drydrubb, an 'overcharg'd blunderbuss,'<sup>112</sup> Susan Malepert, a touchingly eager, forty-five year old spinster, and Wishwell, 'a brilliant portrait' of a society bawd.<sup>113</sup> At least fifteen years in the city had obviously made the Irish dramatist well aware of the make-up of London's social circle, and he now possessed the dramatic skill to broaden those familiar to him into acceptable theatrical characterizations. The picture was by no means complimentary, but the theatre audience was much more gracious in their acceptance of it than they had been of the society portrayed in The Wives' Excuse.

Through the creation of more recognizably theatrical characters, and perhaps more significantly, by eliminating the pitiful victims, Southerne has re-established the detachment necessary for comedy. This, combined with the aggressive, jaunty energy that was so successful in Sir Anthony Love, lifts the play out of the realistic arena of moral concern, which was the focus of his previous work, and endows it with a lively sense of fun. This is not to infer that social significance has been entirely sacrificed---it never is with Southerne---but he has made an effort to soften the satire by heightening the comedy.

The dramatist returns to a stylistic mask, such as he had employed in Sir Anthony Love, but the mask is less opaque. John Harrington Smith identifies it as the 'free gallantry'

pattern, the design of Etherege and Wycherley, established early in Restoration. Southerne had apparently taken Dryden's suggestion, but, as Smith points out, Southerne used this conventional pattern not merely to attack immorality and hypocrisy the in women, and folly in the husbands, but to judge and condemn free gallantry itself.<sup>114</sup> He exposes a superficial world, devoid of pleasure, motivated by greed, jealousy, and vengeance, a world where the battle of the sexes is intensified rather than pacified. For Southerne, the continuance of the free gallantry pattern could produce no truce. As in Sir Anthony Love, his only hope seems to be that man will eventually recognize the folly of combat and seek a peaceful compromise through marriage. Even in the incompatibility of the Drydrubbs' union and the mercenary foundation of the Maleperts' marriage, Southerne presents matrimony, however imperfect, as the practical solution. Gayman, a typical young, 'healthy' rake, comes to see the perfidious nature of his society, and becomes, at the end of the play, a rake reformed. Southerne avoids the sentimental by having Gayman simply admit that he is ready to 'repent of some things past,'<sup>115</sup> and then retreat to the 'retirement' of matrimony. The unreformed characters (except for the spinster and her musician) are left angry, ignorant, or alone. Some, like Gayman, see the folly of the old game, but pride or position prevent the others from breaking free.

Kenneth Muir calls the play 'a devastating comment on the society of the day,'<sup>116</sup> while Robert Root sees it as 'a



scathing social document. . . more biting and tough minded than the earlier play.<sup>117</sup> Both are certainly correct, but more striking than its thematic similarities to The Wives' Excuse is the clear modification of dramatic focus in The Maid's Last Prayer. Southerne, perhaps reflecting on his frustration with the female reaction to his previous effort, turns on women, revealing faithless, avaricious, egocentric natures. In this play the women measure love and friendship in terms of personal gain, and loyalty (a dominant quality of Southerne's memorable women) becomes selfish stubbornness. The predatory role, normally associated with the libertine male, is assumed by the females, and at least three different men suffer at their hands. As Root points out, the 'women have accepted the marital and sexual premises of the society, and capitalize upon them.'<sup>118</sup> This seems to echo the central motivation of Wycherley's Horner in The Country Wife, and indeed there are significant parallels between Southerne's works and those of the earlier playwright. Southerne, on Dryden's advice, must have returned to Wycherley, but he creates women who are different from those found in The Country Wife. There is a cold-hearted devotion to money in Southerne's females that is less attractive than any devotion to sex in Wycherley's naturally hot-blooded lovers. Wycherley's women may be foolish hypocrites, but Southerne's are greedy egotists. The result is that The Maid's Last Prayer presents a bleak picture, both of women and of Restoration society in general.

Southerne also appears to have been influenced by

Wycherley with regard to his male characters. Granger, a man with 'a Thousand good Qualities,' which all have 'a tang of his testy Humour,'<sup>119</sup> seems a throwback to Wycherley's own plain-dealer. Like Manly, he falls prey to a woman's design, but finding no Fidelia at his side, to renew his faith, Granger retreats to cynical bachelorhood.

In addition to Gayman and Granger, the other men in the play are also duped in some way by the women, but out of either blind devotion or blind ignorance continue with the charade. At the end of the play, Lord Malepert, oblivious to his wife's many indiscretions, calls for a celebration and the dance begins. It is the traditional comic ending but, like that in Sir Anthony Love, a strangely hollow one.

It was late February 1693<sup>120</sup> when The Maid's Last Prayer opened at Drury Lane. There had apparently been some delay in mounting Southerne's, or any other productions, because of the unexpected deaths of two popular actors, William Mountfort and Anthony Leigh, within a week of one another. This caused some momentary confusion in the United Company. The Gentleman's Journal of December 1692 (appearing not earlier than January 1693) reported that 'We are like to be without new Plays this month and the next; the death of Mr Mountfort, and that of Mr Leigh soon after him being partly the cause of this delay. The first that is promised us is a Comedy by Mr. Southern, whose Plays are written with too much Politeness and Wit, not to be read by you with uncommon pleasure.'<sup>121</sup> Again the United Company supported Southerne's efforts with a fine cast.

although the author in his Dedication hints at being less than satisfied: 'I think it has its Beauties, tho' they did not appear upon the Stage.'<sup>122</sup> In spite of whatever flaws Southerne saw in the production, the results, while not all he might have hoped, were an improvement. The January Gentleman's Journal (published in March) reported: 'Mr. Southerne's New Comedy, call'd The Maid's Last Prayers, or Any rather than fail, was acted the 3<sup>d</sup> time this evening, and it is to be acted again to morrow. It discovers much knowledge of the Town in its Author; and its Wit and Purity of Diction are particularly commended.'<sup>123</sup> In addition to these attractions, Southerne had again included a number of songs set by Henry Purcell, among which were the lyrics by a young writer named William Congreve.<sup>124</sup> It may well have been that this was Congreve's first publication, coming just a month before he was to make his debut as a playwright. It is probable that Congreve had taken his play, The Old Bachelor, to Southerne first, who in turn brought it to the attention of Dryden. As Southerne himself relates, 'Mr. Dryden, Mr. (Arthur) Manwayring, and Mr. Southern, red it with great care, and Mr. Dryden putt it in the order it was playd, Mr. Southerne obtain'd of Mr. Thos. Davenant who then govern'd the Playhouse, that Mr. Congreve shou'd have the prevelege of the Playhouse half a year before his play was play'd, wh(ich) I never knew allow'd any one before.'<sup>125</sup> The comedy was an immediate success, with Southerne naming Congreve as Dryden's successor: 'CONGREVE appears the Darling, and last Comfort of

his (Dryden's) Years.<sup>126</sup> Congreve had produced a work which Dryden called the best first play he had ever seen.

Southerne had obviously been disappointed with the reception of his most recent comedies, as his Horatian epigraph to the publication of The Maid's Last Prayer would indicate, and Congreve's success may have convinced him that comedy was not his forte. Whether he stepped aside in deference to Congreve's skills, or had a feeling that his ever-darkening vision of the predatory nature of society was unsuited to the comic mode, is open to endless speculation. He might simply have detected a change in the popular taste, and responded to what he saw as a growing partiality for sentiment and tears. Whatever the reason, in 1694 he abandoned comedy as his primary mode, though still including comic sub-plots, and tried his hand at his first truly tragic plot.

In February 1694 the United Company again gave Southerne strong support, including their famous three 'Bs' -- Betterton, Barry, and Bracegirdle -- in major roles in their production of The Fatal Marriage or, The Innocent Adultery.<sup>127</sup> The success of the play was immediate, and 'overnight its author became the most popular tragic dramatist of the day.'<sup>128</sup> The Gentleman's Journal of March 1694 gives a strong indication of just how popular it was:

Mr Southern's new Play call'd The Fatal Marriage: or, The Innocent Adultery, has been so kindly receiv'd, that you are by this time no stranger to its merit. As the world has done it justice, and it is above my praise, I need not expatiate on that subject.<sup>129</sup>

A letter from an unknown correspondent, writing from London on 22 March 1694 reports that

It is not only the best that author ever writt, but is generally admired for one of the greatest ornaments of the stage, and the most entertaining play has appeared on it these 7 seven years. . .I never saw Mrs. Barry act with so much passion as she does in it; I could not forbear being moved even to tears to see her act.<sup>130</sup>

Southerne himself in the Dedication gives a great deal of credit to the acting of Mrs. Barry, saying

I could not, if I would, conceal what I owe Mrs. Barry. . .in saying she out-plays herself. . .I made the Play for her part, and her part has made the Play for me; It was a helpless Infant in the Arms of the Father, but has grown under her Care; I gave it just motion enough to crawl into the World, but by her power, and spirit of playing, she has breath'd a soul into it, that may keep it alive.<sup>131</sup>

Southerne also compliments the 'beauty and gayety' of Mrs. Bracegirdle, as the vivacious Victoria, and apologized for having to end her role within the first three acts, saying that 'though I was fond of coming to the serious part, I should have been well pleased. . .to have had her Company to the end of my Journey.'<sup>132</sup>

Styled by Southerne 'a Play' (the same label he attached to his earlier work, The Disappointment), The Fatal Marriage is actually a tragi-comedy in the sense that he, like Dryden, 'tacked two plays together. . .for the pleasure of variety.'<sup>133</sup> His tragic plot, as the author freely admits, comes from Aphra Behn's novel, The Fair Vow-Breaker. In his Dedication to the play he is careful, however, to point out

that he took only 'the hint of the tragical part' from Mrs. Behn's story, being curious just 'how far such a distress was to be carried, upon the misfortune of a Womans having innocently two Husbands, at the same time.'<sup>134</sup>

When a comparison is made between the treatment of Mrs. Behn's plot and his own, it is apparent that Southerne is being more accurate than modest. Mrs. Behn's protagonist is a selfish, guilt-ridden, scheming murderess, who ultimately receives her deserved punishment for breaking her vows. Southerne presents his tragic protagonist in a very different light, using the broken vows only as motivation for the behaviour of the character, while focusing on a pitiful portrait of a faithful wife, who, through circumstances beyond her control and understanding, is driven to self-destruction.

The tragic plot concerns the 'passionate distress'<sup>135</sup> of the virtuous widow, Isabella. Impelled by her husband's disappearance in battle seven years earlier, and the subsequent financial and emotional strain on both her and her child, caused by her father-in-law's repudiation of her (he believes his son's death was the punishment for her renouncing her religious vows in order to marry the young man), she agrees, at her brother-in-law's urging, to marry the admirable Villeroy. No sooner does the marriage take place than the long-lost husband, Biron, appears. He is stunned to discover that he had been given up for dead, because, despite the years in slavery which have prevented his return, he believed he was in correspondence with the family. The letters, however, have

all been intercepted by his plotting younger brother, Carlos, who has prompted Isabella's re-marriage to secure his own inheritance. Isabella, already worn down by endless suffering, breaks under the strain of the sudden revelation that she is an adulteress, however innocently. Near chaos ensues, with each innocent victim of the treachery accusing the others and seeking revenge. Before he can be apprehended, Carlos murders his brother in order to protect his own interests. In the final pathetic scene, having gone completely mad, she stabs herself, gives her child a farewell kiss, and dies at last, leaving a grieving second husband, her child, and a remorseful father-in-law to learn the tragic lesson.

The main plot of The Fatal Marriage has received a good deal of attention from recent critics eager to unearth a step-by-step, play-by-play path leading from the drama of the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century's curious predilection for sentiment.<sup>136</sup> While possessing some of the flavour of Jacobean tragedies of blood (at one point, a scene opens revealing a servant being tortured on the rack), Southerne's treatment of the tragic plot is also viewed as a link between the pathetic tragedies of Otway and Banks, and the eighteenth century pathetic dramas of Nicholas Rowe. At one end of the critical scale is John Harold Wilson, who sees the play as possessing 'all the ingredients of pathetic tragedy,'<sup>137</sup> while another views the introduction of a domestic setting and characters, combined with the 'strained

and intense pathos<sup>138</sup> as being akin to the sentimentalists. Arthur Sherbo, however, in his English Sentimental Drama, fails to mention the play at all, apparently not seeing it as vital in any discussion of the dawn of sentimental drama. Its precise placement in the history of English theatre may be unclear, but its significance, in terms of this study, lies in ascertaining where The Fatal Marriage fits into the Southerne canon.

Though The Fatal Marriage may be associated with earlier and later English tragedies, there is much which immediately recalls earlier efforts of Southerne. J. W. Dodds denies this, saying The Fatal Marriage is a 'tragedy in the true sense.' He expresses amazement at the work, claiming that 'there is little in his previous writing to prepare us for this success.' He sees the dramatist as dealing for the first time 'with love that is domestic rather than heroic, trusting in an appeal to the sympathies of the human heart and not to any gigantic conception of princely love or honor.'<sup>139</sup> Dodds appears to be trying to fit each of Southerne's works into neat categories: The Loyal Brother was politically motivated tragedy in the heroic tradition; The Fatal Marriage an example of the sentimental tragedy. These labels seem more distracting than illuminating. The fascinating part of Dodds statement is that he saw 'little in Southerne's previous work to prepare us for this play;' he seems to have ignored what the dramatist had been doing from the very beginning, for Southerne's latest tragic plot is a natural outgrowth of his



abiding thematic concerns, his established treatment of character, and his renewed awareness of popular theatrical trends.

Thematically the dramatist maintains a clear vision consistent with the concerns of such earlier works as The Loyal Brother, The Disappointment, and The Wives' Excuse. Like Semanthe and Tachmas, Erminia and Angeline, and Mrs. Friendall and Mrs. Sightly, Isabella, Biron, and Villeroy are the innocent victims of a treacherous society, where hypocritical masks hide ambition, greed and selfishness. Southerne has merely moved beyond concern for his characters' tranquility to concern for their very survival. These innocents judge others by their own standards, and seem unaware of the dissembling nature of man. When they suffer, they curse their fates, blame the stars and question Heaven, but Southerne recognizes their difficulties as being of human manufacture. In The Loyal Brother political ambition and professional jealousy nearly destroy the innocent lovers; Erminia and Angeline in The Disappointment only escape the selfish designs of an acknowledged libertine through the actions of a devoted lover; and the honourable Mrs. Friendall and Mrs. Sightly in The Wives' Excuse, less fortunate than their predecessors, suffer betrayal and humiliation at the hands of friends and relatives. Southerne had revealed the same treachery at each social level, with professional colleagues, with friends, and finally with family. The Fatal Marriage operates at once on all three levels, as Carlos

betrays his father, brother, sister-in-law, friend, and even briefly contemplates making a cuckold of his neighbor. Like the betrayal by Edmund, Regan and Goneril in King Lear, Carlos's perfidy 'leaves no human bond secure.'<sup>140</sup> Social and familial bonds do not guarantee loyalty and honour. Carlos recalls earlier Southerne villains who seemingly possess an indigenous evil in their natures. They seize every opportunity to enlarge their statures by destroying those around them whom they envy. This is what Thornton recognized in Mrs. Witwoud (The Wives' Excuse) as an 'inborn and gratuitous display of malice. . .[to] peers.'<sup>141</sup> There is, however, a heartlessness, a calculating consciousness of evil in Carlos which allows him to discuss his motivation for such actions coolly, and then to simply say: 'Now you are answer'd all. Where must I go? I'm tired of your questions.'<sup>142</sup> As with Iago, the villain's insensible calm about his treacheries heightens the horror of them.

In The Fatal Marriage, however, Southerne reveals a more pervasive corruption lurking silently in the shadows, nurturing Carlos's inherent malice against those he should honour. Southerne emphasizes the injustices of the social system, the inequities of inheritance laws, and the conventionally autocratic treatment of children by parents, which have aggravated the young man's resentment and fed his villainy, just as the social and religious stigma of bigamy clouds Isabella's reason, and drives her to her final desperate action. The playwright again appears to turn to Lear, and to

echo the bastard Edmond's frustration with 'the plague of custom and . . . the curiosity of nations',<sup>143</sup> which deprive him of land and title. Carlos complains that 'Younger brothers are / But lawful Bastards of another Name, / Thrust out of their Nobility of Birth / And Family, and tainted into Trades.'<sup>144</sup> Social injustice is a catalyst which, when combined with an evil nature, ensures tragedy. Even the innocent Isabella sees it, saying that there is 'Nothing but villainy in this bad World; / Coveting Neighbours Goods, or Neighbours Wives; / Cuckolds or Cuckold-makers every where.'<sup>145</sup> As in his less successful comedies Southerne shows an awareness of evil and the way it flourishes in a corrupt society, as well as the frailty of human beings caught in the pressures of such injustice and dishonesty.

Dodds perceives Southerne as now 'trusting for his appeal to the sympathies of the human heart,'<sup>146</sup> as if he had painted only cardboard figures before. This is to deny the playwright some of his finest dramatic moments. The pitiful image of the mad Isabella clinging to her dead husband's body<sup>147</sup> is reminiscent of the tearful Semanthe and Queen-mother clutching the legs of the Sophy Seliman as they beg him to spare his brother's life. The devotion, anguish, and endurance which are such major causes of the admiration we feel for Isabella, are equally visible in Erminia, as she patiently suffers her husband's suspicions. Isabella's strength and awareness of her own honour make her akin to the steadfast Mrs. Friendall. Isabella only crumbles because the

playwright has heightened the dramatic tension to such a point that something must give; Mrs. Friendall may shatter one day too, but it will be in the privacy of her offstage world.

To this pathetic drama Southerne adds a comic sub-plot which not only provides needed relief from the horrors of the main plot, but also serves to intensify the tragic elements. It concerns the jealous, miserly Fernando, his significantly younger but faithful wife, Julia, and his children, Fabian and Victoria. The son leads the two women in a plot to reform the suspicious old man by giving him a potion, and convincing him when he awakes that by miracle he has returned from the dead. Upon his supposed resurrection, he learns of the devotion and grief of his three heirs and is immediately transformed into a benevolent husband and father.

The source for the sub-plot is not clear; Gildon sees it as being based on The Night Walker, or, The Little Thief by John Fletcher,<sup>148</sup> while Dodds indicates that he thinks the 'machinery of the trick' may have come 'from a story in Boccaccio's Decameron, the eighth story of the third day.'<sup>149</sup> There is also much in the character of the husband and in the plotting of the children and the stepmother which hints at a familiarity with Molière. This would hardly be surprising, for as Professor Allardyce Nicoll shows, nearly every major writer of the Restoration borrowed from the French comic genius at some point;<sup>150</sup> Southerne surely would not have been an exception. But the story is ubiquitous enough to make precise source-hunting pointless.

The significance of the sub-plot is the way in which Southerne manages to mould what appears to be a completely unrelated series of events into a comic reflection of the tragic plot. Both plots contain fathers who oppose love matches, young men who are motivated by a desire for securing an inheritance, devoted wives, reformed fathers, and even parallel 'resurrections' from the dead. As Robert Root points out, however, the results are very different: 'The main plot is a tragedy of errors magnified by greed, and vindictiveness at the expense of family; the sub-plot is a comedy of greed and suspicion' where cunning and prudence produce a happy ending.<sup>151</sup> While it may be argued that each plot has weaknesses, it must be granted that Southerne expertly merges two divergent elements into a unified whole. Southerne shows in this work, and in his next, Oroonoko, that he has found his métier, using his gift for comedy as seasoning, to enhance the serious flavour of the main dish. The tragic plot provides ample sentiment, an increasingly necessary ingredient in the theatre, and the comic sub-plot contains much of the piquant spirit which shone so brightly in his previous comic successes. As one critic points out, Southerne, 'instead of trying to sustain the same high level of emotional intensity, as Lee tried to do. . . inserts his comic scenes functionally, and by relief and contrast is able to heighten his sad story.'<sup>152</sup> When it came to tragi-comedy, Southerne, like Dryden, may have been unwilling to 'defend that practice,' but also realized that it 'has hitherto pleased them (the

Restoration audience), for the sake of variety; and for the particular taste which they have to low comedy.<sup>153</sup> In fact he freely admits that he has furnished 'a little taste of Comedy' to satisfy 'the present Humour of the Town.'<sup>154</sup> The purist extremes associated with the classical division were not suited to his practical view of life; farce needed substance, satire required sympathy, and tragedy craved relief; his plays would find no place in the cupboards of category. Professor Sutherland's speculation that with a 'better tradition behind him Southerne would almost certainly have been a better dramatist'<sup>155</sup> is doubtless sound, but the fact remains that The Fatal Marriage established his position as a major dramatist of the period. The playwright had found the perfect balance between tears and laughter, and this skillful blend produced his most enduring work.

The Fatal Marriage continued to be popular with audiences well into the nineteenth century, although no longer in its original form. In December 1757 David Garrick offered his adaptation, Isabella, or The Fatal Marriage, which retained the tragic plot, but eliminated the comic subplot,<sup>156</sup> the 'immorality' of which was offensive to the more delicate sensibilities of later eighteenth century audiences. Dodds confirms that there were at least two-hundred-and-three performances of the play on the London stage, either in Southerne's original text, or Garrick's adaptation.<sup>157</sup> The last recorded performance, according to Dodds, took place in America in 1843,<sup>158</sup> nearly one hundred and fifty years after

Mrs. Barry first appeared as the tragic Isabella. Southerne had produced the first real star in his dramatic crown; the next, Oroonoko, was not far behind.

The playwright was ready with his play late the next year, but in spite of its 'uncommon success,'<sup>159</sup> Southerne must have been somewhat apprehensive at Oroonoko's opening, coming as it did on the heels of a 'remarkable Revolution of the Theatre.'<sup>160</sup> Tensions had been increasing between the actors and management throughout the early 1690s. The Patentees, Christopher Rich and Thomas Skipwith, in an effort to reduce expenses (and increase profits), proposed to reduce the salaries of the leading actors and actresses, hoping that by bringing pressure to bear on the most prestigious talent they could more easily take advantage of the less expensive talents of the younger performers. Colley Cibber, who was a young actor with the company at the time, explains that 'To bring this about. . .they [the Patentees] under the Pretence of bringing younger Actors forward, order'd several of Betterton's. and Mrs. Barry's chief Parts to be given to young [George] Powel. and Mrs. Bracegirdle.'<sup>161</sup> The opportunistic Powell jumped at the choice roles, while Mrs. Bracegirdle 'was not to be misled by the insidious Favour of the Patentees. . .and therefore wholly refus'd acting out any Part that properly belonged to her [Mrs. Barry].'<sup>162</sup> Thomas Betterton, sensing the direction events were taking, sought strength in unity, creating an association with the other leading actors. Eventually their complaints were carried to

the Lord Chamberlain, at that time the Earl of Dorset, but while this 'Affair was in Agitation,' the theatrical season was brought to an abrupt halt by the death of Queen Mary.<sup>163</sup> Betterton, Barry, Bracegirdle (the three leading players in Southerne's previous production, The Fatal Marriage) and others must have seen this forced interruption as their chance to air their grievances, and took advantage of it by having the 'Honour of an Audience of the King.' William granted a select number of Betterton's group a 'Royal License, to act in a separate theatre.'<sup>164</sup> A month later Betterton and Company opened at a converted tennis-court in Lincolns-Inn-Fields. For the first time in nearly thirteen years London again had a competitive theatrical scene.

Southerne's allegiance through all this is not clearly documented; in fact arguments could be made for his favouring either side in the dispute. His Epistle Dedicatory of Sir Anthony Love had been to one of the Patentees of Drury Lane, Thomas Skipwith, while his young friend, William Congreve's new comedy Love for Love was the first play to be performed by Betterton's troupe.<sup>165</sup> In an age filled with warring factions, the practical playwright was apparently able to avoid a clear cut decision that might have offended useful friends.

The major concern for the dramatist in 1695 must have been that the company scheduled to present his latest effort was now a mere shell of its former self; the acting ranks had been decimated. Cibber, who remained with the Drury Lane Company,



describes the situation following the mutiny, saying that the 'Company (Drury Lane) was so far from being full, that our Commanders were forc'd to beat up for Voluntiers in several distant Counties.'<sup>166</sup> If this increased Southerne's fears for the success of his latest new venture, those fears were unfounded. The play opened not later than November 1695<sup>167</sup> and was an immediate success, being credited, along with two others -- Vanbrugh's Aesop, and The Relapse -- with keeping the doors of the Drury Lane open for the next 'two or three year.'<sup>168</sup> Jack Verbruggen played the noble savage, Oroonoko, and his playing must have been an agreeable surprise to the dramatist, for he credits the Duke of Devonshire, in his Dedication to him, with suggesting Verbruggen, saying that 'it was your opinion, my lord, that directed me to Mr. Verbruggen; and it was his care to maintain your opinion, that directed the town to me.'<sup>169</sup> In addition to Verbruggen, Mrs. Rodgers created the character of the beautiful, suffering Imoinda, while Mrs. Verbruggen (previously Mountfort) appeared successfully in her fifth Southerne play. Once again, she took on a breeches role (as she had in Sir Anthony Love), and despite 'having thick Legs and thighs, corpulent and large Posteriors. . .the Town. . .receiv'd her with Applause.'<sup>170</sup> These three actors, along with the rest of the company, obviously rose to the challenge of a difficult situation, and the success of the play justified their efforts. The dramatist, now at the height of his powers, had again showed himself keenly aware of public taste at a time

(one of many) when allegiances were sharply divided.

In Oroonoko. Southerne, still basking in the glow of his success with The Fatal Marriage, continued in the tragi-comic mode. Congreve, in his Epilogue to the play, commented that once more Southerne had joined 'mirth and grief together, / Like rain and sun-shine mixt, in April's weather.'<sup>171</sup> He also returned to Mrs. Behn as a proven source of popular characters and plots, saying that he had 'run further into her debt.'<sup>172</sup> Her novel, Oroonoko or The Royal Slave, a narrative of her early adventures as a young girl in Surinam, had been published in 1688, just a year prior to her death. Southerne's continued use of Mrs. Behn's works shows not only his admiration for her artistry and skill at judging the taste of the public, but also his own particular genius. For him Mrs. Behn's short novels of romance, adventure, sentimentality, and suffering provided the kinds of fictional worlds which he could enter imaginatively and develop dramatically to express his own views on matters of current public interest. In his Dedication to Oroonoko he compliments her for having a 'great command of the stage,' but expresses wonder 'that she would bury her Favourite Hero in a Novel, when she might have reviv'd him in the Scene.'<sup>173</sup> Seizing the opportunity Mrs. Behn had lost, Southerne successfully made the adaptation, focusing on the second half of the book, the portions set in Surinam, while using materials from her early scenes, set in Africa, as brief, but heart-wrenching exposition. His decision to focus on the latter part of the

novel reveals the dramatist's desire to 'clear the story of irrelevances and extravagances and to give it a more compact dramatic organization.'<sup>174</sup> Where Aphra Behn's novel was a retelling of a realistic event spiced with romantic exaggerations, 'a tale of fabulous adventures anchored in vivid social particularities,'<sup>175</sup> Southerne's play was, despite its exotic setting, a domestic tragedy which reveals the nobility and dignity of the virtuous characters.

Southerne's tragic plot deals with Oroonoko, a noble African prince, who is deceived by colonial slave traders, captured, and then sold into slavery. Transported to Surinam (then an English colony in South America), the noble savage there discovers his wife, whom he had given up hope of seeing again. Oroonoko tells a sympathetic Englishman how in Africa his jealous father had stolen his beautiful Imoinda, and that since that time he has lost all track of her. Husband and wife are reunited through the actions of Blandford, the Englishman, and though still enslaved, enjoy a brief happiness. Jealousy and treachery, rife in the English colony, lead to their eventual death. 'Native innocence' and decency perish beneath the corrupt, shameful, dishonest 'civilization' of the colonists. The tragic story concludes with the lovers choosing death over continued servitude. In a passionate, tortured scene the black prince, at his wife's urging, kills her, and then, after revenging himself upon the faithless Lieutenant Governour, takes his own life, having, as he says, 'sent his (the Lt. Governour's) ghost / To be a

witness of that happiness / In the next world, which he deny'd  
us here.<sup>176</sup> Southerne, as had been his practice in  
previous tragic plots, concludes with a lesson for his London  
audience, as the decent but ineffectual Blandford offers a  
eulogy:

Pagan or unbeliever, yet he liv'd  
To all he knew: and if he went astray  
There's mercy still above to set him right.  
But Christians guided by the Heav'nly ray,  
Have no excuse if we mistake our way.<sup>177</sup>

While much of Southerne's tragic plot may recall the  
heroic drama popular with audiences twenty years earlier, and  
while he was certainly familiar with that dramatic tradition  
(his first play, The Loyal Brother was heavily indebted to  
it), in Oroonoko his primary focus was not on the conflict  
between love and honour. Under its heroic surface, Oroonoko  
reveals a deep concern with the complexities of social  
injustice and individual vulnerability. The protagonist's  
forced journey to Surinam is his introduction to the harsh  
realities of civilization. Oroonoko, perhaps recalling  
Southerne's own earlier dislocation from Dublin to London  
society, is ill equipped to deal with the complex world in  
which he lands. Robert Root sums up the difficulty, when he  
suggests that Oroonoko is living by a code of conduct which  
assumes too much honour and decency on the part of his  
captors<sup>178</sup> ('Being just myself, I am inclining to think  
other so.'<sup>179</sup>). Oroonoko's principles of honesty, justice  
and loyalty are only employed by others as hypocritical  
disguises in this setting. Greed, ambition, lust, and deceit

are the operative values. Unaware of this, Oroonoko, another of Southerne's innocents, is victimized by his misplaced faith. The play is not, however, as some critics have argued, as simple as black and white. Dodds emphasizes the racial theme, explaining alterations Southerne made in his adaptation of Mrs. Behn's novel, such as the change in Imoinda's colour (Southerne made her the white daughter of a European) by suggesting the implausibility for Restoration audiences of white planters sighing after 'Mrs. Behn's Black Venus.'<sup>180</sup> What he appears to have overlooked is the dimension added to the drama by just that one change. The play takes on a greater universality, as it is no longer confined to the question of racial prejudice, but reveals the double standards which exist within any society. Through much of his work on Southerne, Dodds appears to accept the playwright at face value, while it is more likely that the dramatist's major concern is with the nature of misrepresentation and disguise; the very structure of his plays emphasizes this fascination. In Oroonoko good and evil, honesty and deception, benevolence and selfish malice are shown in black and white, men and women, Christian and heathen, slave and free man. Oroonoko is an unwilling slave of the colonists, but a willing slave to his beloved Imoinda. The Lieutenant Governour is a powerful, free 'Christian,' but a slave to his passions; his desire for Imoinda overwhelms any trace of decency in his character. The contrast between these two rivals is built on their love for the same woman. This is just one example of the complex

perspectives Southerne creates on many of his characters and their relationships and dilemmas. The dramatist, seeing and reading the heroic tragedies of his youth, apparently felt that they were reducing complex problems to simplistic, clear-cut oppositions. Southerne, like every great artist, adapted the conventions to his own sense of the reality they purported to express. His audience would recognize the heroic conventions (exotic setting, noble hero struggling with the irreconcilable claims of love and valour), but he led them on beyond conventional expectations to a new sense of the meaning in an apparently familiar situation. He renovated the cliché by fresh insight into what it reveals and what it obscures.

Southerne also moved through and beyond the heroic tradition by incorporating a mixture of the heroic and the pathetic, creating a hero motivated more by his heart than by his head. Oroonoko is a strong, proud leader who is willing to admit his vulnerability and sensitivity. He is not humiliated by his current predicament ('I am unfortunate, but not ashamed of being so'<sup>181</sup>), and readily reveals his emotions ('I pity the man, who thinks himself above being in love'<sup>182</sup>). For both the reader and viewer, Southerne's hero becomes more plausible as a real man than the Almanzors and Montezumas of the heyday of heroic drama. Novak and Rodes see in this play a 'tendency to draw the tragic plot down from the realm of artificial préciosue heroic drama to a more human level.'<sup>183</sup> The boundless strength, courage, and individual resolve of the Restoration tragic Supermen are tempered in

Oroonoko by gentler human sentiments, and the traditional stalemate of the conflict between love and honour becomes in Southerne's hands a clear victory for the heart: 'Love, love will be my first ambition, and my fame the next.'<sup>184</sup> Throughout the play Oroonoko's actions are motivated by his feelings for others. The conventional roles of leader and warrior are subordinated to those of father and husband. In two different dramatic crises Oroonoko allows his concern for his wife and their unborn child to move him first to rebellion and then to surrender. Part of the play's success can be attributed to the hero's sentiments and the attraction they would doubtless have for the ever-increasing female portion of its audience. Southerne had shown a particular awareness of the importance of female approval ever since his Dedication to Sir Anthony Love, in which he acknowledged

I must take my boast. . . of the Favours  
from the Fair Sex. . . in so visibly  
promoting my Interest. . . I won't from  
their Encouragement imagine I am the better  
Poet, but I will for the future, endeavour  
not to give 'em cause of repenting so  
seasonable a piece of good Nature.<sup>185</sup>

Their presence may have been the primary inspiration behind his acknowledged tendency toward the sentimental, and it may have been their growing influence which helped to nurture the growth of sentimentality and to root out 'immorality' in the eighteenth century. The playwright must have felt that no woman could fail to admire a great warrior and prince who was proud to say:

Let the fools,  
Who follow Fortune, live upon her Smiles.  
All our Prosperity is plac'd in Love.<sup>186</sup>

Southerne had created a hero able to fill the hearts of his audience not only with awe, but with admiration and pity.

Southerne's gift for incorporating a complementary comic plot, which clarified and reinforced the dramatic themes of the tragic story, has been broached in the discussion of The Fatal Marriage. That talent reappeared, perhaps more subtly but just as effectively, in his selection of a comic sub-plot for Oroonoko. The plot, probably borrowed from Sir Anthony Love, (Aphra Behn's Widow Ranter may have also been in his mind) involves a young woman, disguised as a man (played by Mrs. Verbruggen, who had also played the breeches role in Sir Anthony Love). At the beginning, two sisters, Charlott and Lucy Weldon, have arrived in Surinam from London, hoping to find husbands (at the 'advanced' age of twenty-one they had no longer been sought after by eligible gallants of London). Charlot, in man's attire, attracts the attention of an eager old widow, Mrs. Lackitt, and with little difficulty marries her. Charlot then persuades her friend, Jack Stanmore, to consummate her 'marriage' to Mrs. Lackitt, while she arranges to marry Jack's brother, with whom she is in love. Charlot also manages to secure for her sister the hand and inheritance of Mrs. Lackitt's delightfully foolish and naive son, Daniel, leaving both young women in the comfortable, convenient 'slavery' of matrimony at the end of the play.

Some have seen the plots as 'essentially two plays, carried on side by side,'<sup>187</sup> but it is more plausible to expect that at this point in his dramatic career Southerne had



become too skillful an artist to allow such a careless separation to occur. There is more to the relationship between the two plots than is accounted for by Dodds's dismissive suggestion that Southerne was merely catering to public taste. The comic plot, with its emphasis on disguise, deception, parental domination and betrayal, and marriage, not to mention the more obvious metaphor of slavery, underlines and expands our sense of similar subjects in the tragic plot. The disguise and deception which ensnare the noble prince, and lead him to his and his wife's destruction are the very weapons which Charlott Weldon uses to gain freedom and security for her sister and herself. Southerne seems to draw a parallel between the male-dominated slave colony of Surinam into which Oroonoko is brought and the London social structure from which the Weldon sisters have fled. Both were strongly based on a master/slave relationship, and the comparison was frequently mentioned by writers. An anonymous female author of the 1696 Defense of the Female Sex stated: 'Women, like our Negroes in our western plantations, are born slaves, and live prisoners all their lives.'<sup>188</sup> Mary Astell, in Reflections on Marriage (1706) wrote: 'If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?'<sup>189</sup> Ironically Charlott and Lucy escape the 'slavery' of English society and find freedom in the slave-based colony of the new world. However, upon gaining this freedom, they eagerly relinquish it for the slavery of matrimony. In contrast, Oroonoko's journey from Africa to Surinam reduces him from

prince to slave, but, in his subsequent reunion with Imoinda, he regains what he values most: the kingdom of love. Upon seeing his wife once again, he says:

This little spot of earth you stand upon,  
Is more to me, than the extended plains,  
Of my greate father's kingdom. Here I reign  
In full delights, in joys to pow'r unknown;  
Your love my empire, and your heart my throne.<sup>190</sup>

But Oroonoko and Imoinda are doomed, precisely because they refuse to compromise themselves or their integrity, while disguise and dishonesty ensure Charlott's success. Eric Rothstein states that Southerne's comic sub-plot about the husband-hunting Weldon sisters supports and helps to unify the tragic action, enhancing both the grandeur and naturalness of his hero and heroine.<sup>191</sup> The tragedy lies in the fact that such greatness fails to survive.

Despite the thematic bond which connects the two plots in Oroonoko, Southerne also creates a sense of separation between them. Maximillian Novak and David Rodes, in their introduction to a recent edition of the play, see a segregation of the dramatic spheres that 'gives. . .the sense that the tragic actions occur precisely at the same time, that somewhere else, there is comedy and laughter,'<sup>192</sup> thus adding dramatic shading to both the tragic and comic plots. We are unable to give ourselves fully to the sentiments of one, without an awareness of the other. The two dramatic worlds also unite on a number of occasions, and in each instance these interactions enhance the dramatic effect. Professor Sutherland points out that the primary separation of dramatic worlds allows the

comic characters to act, when they are present, as neutral observers of the tragic events, and, as with Shakespeare, this 'deepens rather than disperses the tragic impression.'<sup>193</sup> In The Fatal Marriage characters suffered alone before an audience left to draw its own conclusions, but in Oroonoko Southerne consciously added impartial spectators, who, like the Greek chorus, were not involved in the action but who guided the audience morally and emotionally as they expressed the intended indignation and pity of the dramatist. Despite criticism of the play as not 'Regular enough,' and of the playwright for 'adding a great deal of foulness that is, happily, not in the original,'<sup>194</sup> Southerne created an effective complementary blend of plots, lightening the tragic with a course of mirth. Southerne may have been attempting to meet the standard of dramatic genius set by Dryden, who in talking of tragi-comedy in his Preface to The Spanish Friar (1681) saw the truly accomplished playwright as being comfortable in both worlds, for 'without both of 'em, a man, in my opinion, is but half a poet for the stage.'<sup>195</sup> In Oroonoko, Southerne revealed himself as a complete dramatic writer in Dryden's terms.

Like The Fatal Marriage, Oroonoko enjoyed a long theatrical life. Isabella was a role worthy of and popular with the great dramatic actresses of the next century, and the Royal Slave attracted major actors. Once again, however, Southerne's original version failed to survive past the middle of the eighteenth century, when John Hawkesworth found it

necessary to adapt it, for the sake of the century's more fastidious morals of his age. In 1759 this work was presented with Garrick in the title role, and with all the comic scenes excised. Hawkesworth claims in the Prologue that Southerne had been a 'Slave to Custom in a laughing Age, / With ribbald Mirth he stain'd the sacred Page.'<sup>196</sup>

The comic plot was also adapted in the eighteenth century (1742), as part of a droll in which Southerne's piece was combined with parts of Fletcher's Monsieur Thomas into a two act work entitled The Sexes Mismatch'd, or a New Way to Get a Husband.<sup>197</sup> Two more adaptations of Oroonoko appeared in 1760,<sup>198</sup> and for the next seventy years productions were staged not only in England, but also in Scotland, Ireland, and America. William Hazlitt applauded Edmund Kean's playing of Oroonoko in January 1817, and Ralph Richardson tackled the role in a production at the Malvern Festival in August, 1932.<sup>199</sup> The most recent production was staged in 1983 by the Citizens' Theatre in Glasgow, Scotland.

With the production of Oroonoko, his seventh play and his second consecutive triumph, it appeared that Southerne, now only thirty-six, had hit his literary stride. He clearly knew what would please his audience, and his innate gifts as a dramatist had been enlarged, refined and seasoned through experience. Yet it would be four years before another of his works appeared upon the stage; with more than half of his life yet to live, his successful dramatic career was, for all intents and purposes, over.

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It seems curious that following such notable dramatic achievement, the record of Southerne's personal life again becomes obscure. One explanation for his abrupt retirement from the theatre may have been his marriage at some point in the interval between the success of Oroonoko and his subsequent return to the stage at the turn of the century.

Robert Jordan fills a long-vacant gap in the Southerne biography with convincing evidence that the dramatist married a widow named Agnes Atykins.<sup>200</sup> Though no exact date is given, Jordan feels certain that it took place prior to 2 October 1700, and may, in fact, have occurred within months of the debut of Oroonoko. In 1703, an anonymous satirical poem called 'Religio Poetae: or, A Satyr on the Poets,' mentions 'Soft So-(uther)-n's. . .the Marriage-Yoke he has put on, / He drinks Champaign, and quits the Helycon.'<sup>201</sup> Apparently the widow Atykins was able to keep him in a style he enjoyed, and provided him with a furlough from the rigours of a demanding theatrical arena.

During his four-year respite, however, Southerne was not completely separated from his theatrical cohorts. Colley Cibber, whose earliest recorded role was as a servant in Sir Anthony Love, acknowledges Southerne's assistance in getting his first play, Love's Last Shift, produced: 'Mr Southern, the Author of Oroonoko, having had the Patience to hear me read it, to him, happened to like it so well, that he immediately recommended it to the Patentees, and it was accordingly acted in January 1695 [i. e. 1695/96].'<sup>201</sup>

Cibber, however, confesses that he and Southerne did not see eye to eye on all facets of the production. Cibber chose to take a role in his own play, and 'Mr. Southern, though he had approv'd my Play, came into the common Diffidence of me, as an Actor: For, when on the first Day of it, I was standing. . . he took me by the Hand, and said, Young Man! I pronounce thy Play a good one; I will answer for its Success, if thou dost not spoil it by thy own Action.'<sup>203</sup> When, in spite of Southerne's qualms, both the play and the fledgling playwright's acting were triumphant, Cibber was unable to resist a very human desire to gloat a bit: 'I succeeded so well, in both, that People seem'd at a Loss which they should give the Preference to.'<sup>204</sup>

Southerne's name is also mentioned in connection with a second work which is produced during this period. It was, however, less favourably received. It was reported that 'Pausanius, or Lover of his Country was damn'd tho writ by a Person of Quality, and protected by Southern.'<sup>205</sup> The author was Richard Norton, 'a patron of the stage as well as a modest author,'<sup>206</sup> to whom Cibber had dedicated his first play, and for whom Southerne had written the Dedication when Norton's play was published in 1696. Both these incidents, in addition to casting some doubt on his infallibility as a critic, indicate that at least in the year following Oroonoko, Southerne, while no longer writing plays, was still associated with the London theatre.

Southerne's decision to stop writing plays, even given the

probable interruption and financial support of a marriage, remains perplexing and worthy of some brief speculation. Why should a dramatist at the very height of his powers and popularity suddenly make such an unexpected exit? For Southerne, a man about whom we know so little apart from his plays, the answer may lie between the lines.

In Charles Boyle's Prologue to Southerne's next play, written nearly five years after Oroonoko, the opening lines disclose that 'Our Bard resolv'd to quit this wicked town, / And all poetic offices lay down,'<sup>207</sup> revealing what appears to have been a conscious decision on the dramatist's part, to escape the pressures of London's theatre world regardless of his popular success. It may have been, if we can trust Boyle's lines, that the rapacious society which had victimized Mrs. Friendall, Isabella, Oroonoko and others in the world of his plays, had become too oppressive a part of the dramatist's everyday life. There can be little doubt that it was 'this wicked town' which inspired that abhorrence of hypocrisy and ruthlessness which is so much a part of all of Southerne's plays, regardless of specific locales. In every instance the clever villains, whose dissembling masks their true natures, are finally exposed by their actions which Southerne considers the true index of character, while the admirable protagonists reveal a convincing harmony between words and deeds. As Nicholas Rowe says in The Fair Penitent (1703):

The Brave. . .do never shun the light;  
Just are their thoughts, and open are their tempers,  
Freely without disguise they love and hate,  
Still are they found in the fair face of day,  
And heaven and men are judges of their actions.<sup>208</sup>



Southerne shows that the virtuous only fall prey to the 'dissemblers' because of their willingness to believe that others are honest as themselves. If similar experiences in 'Honest Tom',<sup>209</sup> Southerne's own life motivated his decision to abandon playwrighting, his advantageous marriage may have allowed him the financial freedom to give up a career which required his participation in the society he criticized in his dramatic works. Such behaviour would certainly be consistent with both his practical nature and the philosophy that true character is revealed when words are reinforced by deeds.

A second influence on Southerne's decision to give up the theatre, and apparently to leave London society, may have been the growing intolerance for immortality in English drama. Joseph Wood Krutch states that 'by 1696 affairs were reaching a climax',<sup>210</sup> and Southerne's close involvement with Cibber's subsequently successful play, which 'with the exception of one or two dissenting voices has not only been called a sentimental comedy but has even been claimed as the first English specimen of that genre',<sup>211</sup> may have indicated to him that the public taste had changed and that reformation was approaching. In 1698 a determined, vigorous divine named Jeremy Collier presented his Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage. This skillful indictment of the past and present immorality of English theatre, and specifically of contemporary comedy, created a storm of sufficient magnitude to sweep away much of what had been and still is identified as the best of Restoration theatre.

Collier's true aim, under the guise of reform, was to totally abolish the theatre, to, as Cibber put it, lay 'his Ax to the Root of it.'<sup>212</sup> Fortunately he was unsuccessful, but his assault left an indelible mark on the development of English drama. While Southerne himself escaped Collier's direct attack, a number of the playwright's compatriots, including Dryden, Wycherley, and Congreve, did not. Ironically, when Collier's work appeared, Wycherley had not written a play for more than twenty years, and Dryden was at the end of his long career, and was himself an astute critic of the age of Charles II. Of the three, only the young Congreve, who attempted a less than successful defence against the clergyman (see Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations, etc. 1698), was an active dramatist. Following the Collier controversy he produced only one more major effort for the stage, his classic comedy of manners, The Way of the World (1700). Despite the dispiriting effect it may have had on a great talent such as Congreve, Collier's Short View was looked on favourably by a significant majority of his countrymen. Soon after the work's publication, King William, never a supporter of the theatres, granted the non-juring Jacobite preacher 'an order of "Nolle prosequi," which released him from all further fear of prosecution as a political offender.'<sup>213</sup> Cibber, who was again on the scene (and who was lightly criticized by Collier), confirms the effectiveness of the onslaught, saying 'that his [Collier's] calling our Dramatick Writers to this strict Account, had a very wholesom

Effect, upon those, who writ after this Time. They were, now, a great deal more upon their Guard.<sup>214</sup> The result is evident in Southerne's next effort, as Charles Boyle's Prologue assures the audience: 'here is no wanton scene / To give the wicked joy, the godly, spleen. . . here's nothing can offend, / Nothing to lose one ancient midnight friend.'<sup>215</sup> Southerne went farther than merely eliminating the 'wanton scene,' he discarded the tragi-comic mode altogether. The recent controversy may have convinced him that fewer dangers existed in pure tragedy.

Another influence on his abandoning the successful mixed genre may have been the growing respect shown by his contemporaries for the principles of French and classical tragedy, which adhered more faithfully to the unities of time, place, and action, and required the purity of dramatic genres. Congreve, the year prior to the Collier outburst, had written a tragedy, The Mourning Bride, which became 'one of the most popular of neo-classical 'unified' tragedies.'<sup>216</sup> Southerne had also helped Richard Norton's play, Pausanius, or, The Lover of his Country, reach the stage, and, in fact, wrote the Dedication to the published edition. In it he praised the author for his 'Experiment' built 'upon the Model of the Antients, and according to the reformation of the French Stage.'<sup>217</sup> Both plays come within a year after Oroonoko, and seem to have had some effect (particularly the success of Congreve's effort) on Southerne as he approached his next work, The Fate of Capua.

Southerne returned to the stage in April 1700, and though he was influenced by his contemporaries' growing allegiance to classicism, he by no means felt bound by it. He did, for the first time since The Loyal Brother, write a pure tragedy, but while he maintained purity of genre, his fidelity to the unity of action is debatable. Dodds sees Southerne's two plots as being 'phases of one tragic action,'<sup>218</sup> and credits the dramatist with observation of at least that unity. It would be more accurate to say that the dramatist simply maintained his time-tested dual-plot structure, incorporating two tragic plots rather than one comic and one tragic. Southerne also shows only minimal concern for the remaining unities, paying little attention to unity of time in the play, but loosely maintaining the unity of place by placing all the action within the walls of the doomed city of Capua. The result is the appearance of classical unity, without its limitations. The play, however, has much in it which makes it distinctly English. Dodd's identifies 'the comic epilogue, the inserted irrelevant songs, and the numerous deaths in full sight of the audience,'<sup>219</sup> all of which recall the variety associated with English theatre. The Fate of Capua seems to combine French neo-classical practices, mementos of Southerne's own previous efforts, and elements of the growing tendency toward sentiment. The play consequently falls somewhere between the churning political atmosphere of Otway's Venice Preserv'd, and the numerous 'she-tragedies' which Nicholas Rowe would popularize in the next decade, with just a dash of the old

Jacobean violence, possibly borrowed from Congreve's tragic effort.

The major plot is in what Robert Hume calls the 'classic-stoic'<sup>220</sup> mode, a popular form in the last decade of the seventeenth century, which owed its source to classical literature or history. Southerne selected for his primary plot the very public historical tragedy of the city of Capua. At the opening of the play both the Senate and the populace are in the process of shifting their allegiance from an apparently defeated Rome (which had just lost the battle at Cannae) to the rising star of Carthage, under the leadership of Hannibal. The main proponent of allegiance to Carthage is the clever, ambitious Pacuvius Calavius. He is opposed by Decius Magius, who loyally favours a continued alliance with Rome, despite its momentary misfortune. Following a citizens' uprising, demanding the Carthage alliance, the Senate, with the exception of Decius Magius, join the Carthaginians. That fatal decision is quickly regretted. The tyranny of Hannibal and his troops soon becomes apparent, and Rome regains her strength. The city of Capua is tragically caught 'Between the pass and fell incensed points / Of mighty opposites.'<sup>221</sup> When the city is abandoned by the Carthaginians, the Romans seek revenge for Capua's betrayal. The play ends with the Romans breaking through the gates of the city, prepared to demonstrate to all their empire the price of perfidy. The Capuan Senate, faced with extermination at the hands of their one-time allies, accept responsibility for their desertion,

and in a dramatic show of unity all, including the loyal Decius Magius (whom Rome offers to spare), commit suicide rather than suffer humiliation at the hands of Rome.

As a contrast to this main plot, Southerne provides a sub-plot which is private and domestic, focusing on the virtuous Favonia, daughter of Pacuvius and wife to Virginus. She is torn between her loyalty to her husband, and her love for his best friend, Junius. She remains faithful to her husband even after Junius returns from (reported) death. In a passionate scene the 'lovers' acknowledge the futility of their emotion and face the reality of never seeing one another again. With the beautiful Favonia asleep, Junius steals into her room for one last look at his love. He is seen (though not identified) and Favonia is accused of being unfaithful. Confined for her supposed indiscretion, she is tormented by both her father and husband. Virginus threatens to banish their only child as a constant reminder of his wife's infidelity, while her father supplies her with 'gifts' (a dagger and bowl of poison) to provide for her only real comfort: death. Distraught, she takes the poison, and puts an end to 'the little argument of life.'<sup>222</sup> Virginus and Junius, once the best of friends, discover her body and jealously fight. Both are mortally wounded, though not before Favonia's innocence is confirmed. Virginus gallantly admits his fault, saying just before his death:

Had I been content  
With that fair portion of felicity,  
The Gods bestow'd upon me in a wife;  
How happy had I been! But I must bring

My friend home to usurp upon her right.  
 And what's the consequence! Ruin, and death.  
 The approach of death makes me less sensible.  
 I've lost my wife, and friend, and now my self.<sup>223</sup>

In his discussion of the play Dodds identifies Southerne's historical source for the main plot as the Roman historian Livy, and itemizes the dramatist's close adherence to specific passages in Ab Urbe Condita (books twenty-three, twenty-five, and twenty-six).<sup>224</sup> The sub-plot, however, is not to be found in Livy. Dodds does not identify a source for it, but he needed to look no further than Southerne's own earlier works: Virginius's fervent jealousy recalls Alphonso in The Disappointment; the resurrected lover and the piteous appearance of the suffering woman's child harken back to The Fatal Marriage, and Favonia's strength of character brings to mind Mrs. Friendall of The Wives' Excuse. Further comparison of characters and events could also be made with Congreve's The Mourning Bride and Otway's The Orphan. While sources and influences may be familiar, Southerne's ability to blend the domestic and the historic deserves more critical attention than it has received.

The dramatist once again displays remarkable ability to combine seemingly disparate plots so that they reflect one another thematically (moral questions) and dramatically (action). In The Fate of Capua both stories represent variations on analogous themes from public and private life: faith, loyalty, honour, and friendship. The subplot, perhaps more clearly than in any previous works, is a domestic redaction of the public events. The divided political

loyalties that fracture the city, also divide a father from his son. Favonia, like the Capuans, finds herself pulled between opposing forces, and though innocent, suffers the consequences of others' irrational actions. The parallels are strongly reinforced by the playwright's alternating sequence of scenes, moving back and forth between the two plots, 'which work in tandem throughout the play,'<sup>225</sup> so that the domestic plot reiterates what has been revealed in the world of public affairs. In spite of the play's commercial failure (Downes: 'twas well Acted, but answer'd not the Companies Expectation.'<sup>226</sup>), its structure reveals the playwright's careful craftsmanship. This detailed dramatic structure shows that Southerne was working toward a balanced effect which, perhaps because of the play's critical failure, has not been thought worthy of investigation.

The major criticism of The Fate of Capua is the enormous amount of 'talk at the expense of action.'<sup>227</sup> The play is nearly all talk! To quote Downes once more, it was 'better to Read than Act.'<sup>228</sup> Theatrical 'business' was replaced by four solid acts of rhetoric. Even within the context of the play itself, the aging Decius Magius, admits that 'all my bravery is in my tongue, / I can but talk, and that unminded now.'<sup>229</sup> When the action finally began in Act V, it took the form of Jacobean sensationalism, providing the action-starved audience with three dead lovers and an entire suicidal senate in the last two scenes. Despite the last minute 'flood of blood,' eighteenth century audiences were



apparently disappointed after so much oration to be given so little action, which might explain the play's lack of popularity. However, based on Southerne's past record of critical, as well as commercial successes, The Fate of Capua certainly deserves a more meticulous consideration than dismissal based on little more than public response.

The distinctive thing about The Fate of Capua is that Southerne abandons the tragedy of circumstance, which he had used to create the dilemmas of the title character in Oroonoko and Isabella in The Fatal Marriage. In those two plays the characters had been imprisoned by external events or actions, some of which had occurred before the play began. The English captain's deception had already made Oroonoko a slave in Surinam, and her brother-in-law's intrigue, together with her father-in-law's rejection gave us an exhausted Isabella on her very first appearance. Southerne begins the major plot of Capua before the tragic events occur, in order to expose the internal aspects of human nature which create the external tragedies. The curtain rises on the prosperous city of Capua, whose citizens are 'swill'd in pleasures to the giddy brim.'<sup>230</sup> The defeat of their Roman protectors appears to be the catalyst which generates civil revolt, but Southerne reveals that it is their own internal insecurities and ambitions, their hidden fears and greed which breed their ill fortune. Decius Magius tells the Senate that 'Our country's honour is her chiefest good.'<sup>231</sup> At the point that the pride and honour of the nation are set aside for the selfish

pride of a few, the tragedy begins. The Fate of Capua, rather than being a tragedy of circumstance, might be called a tragedy of moral introspection. It comes, as perhaps all tragedies really do, from within man, not from outside events. The dramatist's earlier tragic works showed his protagonists trapped in a situation where death was the only way out. At the opening of Capua the characters are free from external restraint, with an unlimited number of choices before them; the human motivations behind those choices, to a large extent, determine the events that follow.

Southerne's emphasis on the tragedy of introspection does not mean that his earlier style was completely neglected. The sub-plot involving the needless destruction of the innocent Favonia, her husband, and his best friend is very much in the style of Oroonoko and The Fatal Marriage. These characters become victims of the circumstances created by society. The impact of the domestic tragedy, however, is much more pronounced here, because Southerne has shown the creation of those external factors which, in combination with the characters' internal psychological make-ups, lead to their deaths. By shifting the responsibility from tragic incidents to individual characters who make their own tragedies Southerne guarantees a more poignant denouement than would be expected from the Jacobean bloodletting of the fifth act.

The whole idea of motivation from within, with which Southerne is working in Capua, has a profound effect upon the overall dramatic structure of the play. It is not a play of

action but one of reflection; the focus is on characters' thoughts and feelings. This shift in focus creates a play of talk. Southerne had long been fascinated with the psychological interiors of his characters. Sutherland sees signs of the dramatist's 'unusually acute observation of human behaviour and human motives,'<sup>232</sup> as early as Sir Anthony Love, and in his Dedication to The Fatal Marriage Southerne hints that he is intrigued by the problem of how an individual will react under tremendous pressures, when he says that he was curious just 'how far such a distress was to be carried, upon the misfortune of a Womans having two Husbands, at the same time.'<sup>233</sup> In The Fate of Capua his fascination is evidenced in its purest form. There is little interaction between characters; they are often left alone (almost as if in a scientific experiment) by the dramatist to sort things out by themselves. It is then, when the social mask is unnecessary, that their true natures are revealed. The honour of Junius and Favonia, the loyalty of Decius Magius, the jealousy and doubt of Virginius, and the ambition of Pacuvius are all shown in these isolated moments of contemplation. In the last act, Southerne shows us that a man is most truly himself when he is most alone: when he faces his own death. The dramatist may have been inspired by Montaigne, who not only presents the idea, but also puts it in theatrical terms: Our judgement of a man

should never be ascribed. . . untill he have  
 beene seene play the last act of his  
 comedie, and without doubt the hardest. In  
 all the rest there may be some

masks. . .But when that last part of death,  
and our selves comes to be acted, then no  
dissembling will availe, then it is high  
time to speak plaine English, and put off  
all vizards: then whatsoever the pot  
containeth must be shewne, be it good or  
bad, foule or cleane, wine or water.<sup>234</sup>

The Frenchman then goes on to quote Lucretius, saying, 'For then [in death] are sent true speeches from the heart, / We are our selves, we leave to play a part.' Truth, for Southerne, always the harmony of words and action, appears most purely in a man's final action. In Capua each major character is shown at 'his masterday, the day that judgeth all others'.<sup>235</sup> Thus the goodness of Favonia and Junius is confirmed, along with the honest, deep-seated fidelity of Decius Magius. More significant, however, is the fundamental strength of both Virginius and Pacuvius, despite their cruelty, ambition, and jealousy. In their deaths the mask slips free and merit shines through. In the grand tradition of the classical tragic heroes, they face death with honour rather than humiliation, recognizing their errors, and willingly suffering the consequences. The dramatist who had given the hero of heroic tragedy a heart in Oroonoko, makes him fully human in The Fate of Capua. As a citizen remarks in the play, 'Your heroes, I find, are little more than other men, when you come near to examine 'em.'<sup>236</sup> It must be that, for Southerne, that makes them all the more remarkable. Decius Magius, in the last lines of the play, recognizes that heroism of the men of the Senate, their claim to immortality, is in the way they face death: '. . .we shall mount? / Up to

the skies, in the aspiring flame, / And live immortal in  
glorious name.<sup>237</sup>

Southerne's belief that the truth about men is revealed not in their words but in their actions has changed little since Sir Anthony Love, written a decade before. His method of exploring this theme, however, is different in Capua. It now possesses a subtlety and sophistication lacking in the earlier efforts. Sir Anthony Love was a tentative exploration; The Fate of Capua rings with conviction. Armed with such skill and dramatic confidence, it is unfortunate that, for the ensuing twenty years, Thomas Southerne wrote no more plays.

Once again, Southerne virtually disappears. While his name occasionally arises in a fragment of poetry or an isolated journal, he faded for the most part into the background. As the eighteenth century got well under way, one fact seemed clear: Southerne had retired from the stage. A reference in the Prologue to Charles Boyle's comedy As You Find It (produced at Lincolns-Inn-Fields in 1703), confirms that 'S--(Southerne) writes no more,<sup>238</sup> indicating a finality on the author's part about his involvement in writing for the stage. Some credence can be given to this remark, for Boyle had long been a patron and friend to Southerne. The dramatist had cultivated the relationship a decade earlier when he dedicated his play, The Maid's Last Prayer, to the young man. Since that time the two had obviously remained friends, with Boyle providing the Prologue and a song for The

Fate of Capua. He and the dramatist remained close comrades in the succeeding decade as well, with Southerne greatly 'profiting' from the relationship.

The dramatist did, however, maintain some contact with the theatre. John Dennis, in the Preface to his play Liberty Assented, thanked Southerne for his counsel and advice during the writing of that successful tragedy.<sup>239</sup> In fact, his witnessing of Dennis's success may have given him second thoughts about his retirement. In the Preface to The Spartan Dame, a play the author confesses 'was begun a year before the Revolution,'<sup>240</sup> Southerne tells of showing it to William Cavendish, the first Duke of Devonshire in 1704, and apparently getting Cavendish's approval. The play, however, did not reach the stage that year, for as Southerne himself admits, despite cutting 'out the exceptionable parts, [he] could not get it acted, not being able to persuade [him] self to the cutting off the limbs which I thought essential to the strength and life of it.'<sup>241</sup> It would be another fifteen years before he 'consented to the operation.' In the meantime a wholly different career attracted his attention.

In a carefully documented article in 1979, Robert Jordan showed that by late 1704, Southerne had forfeited the comforts of civilian life for the potentially lucrative 'appointment as a regimental agent.'<sup>242</sup> The post of agent had nothing to do with the modern association of cloak and dagger espionage; an agent was the main overseer of a regiment's finances, a position which Jordan points out could earn the holder a

significant yearly income. The agent was in a powerful position, not only because he controlled the military purse strings, but also because the position was appointed directly by the regimental colonel. In this case the officer in charge was Southerne's old patron, Charles Boyle, Fourth Earl of Orrery. The Earl apparently surrounded himself with military-minded dramatists; both George Farquhar and Francis Manning were a part of the unit which Southerne joined.<sup>243</sup> By October, 1704, Orrery's regiment was complete, and left English soil for a two year tour of duty in the dramatist's home country of Ireland.

The regiment returned to England late in 1706, and for a few brief months the playwright was released from his military obligations, and probably visited London and his family. In February 1707 Boyle gave up his command and took a similar position with a regiment under Marlborough in Flanders. Jordan tells of a pass to Holland, issued on 14 April of that year, which 'was made out in the names of "Charles Earl of Orrery, Mr. Thomas Southerne, Mr. Timothy Quinn and Four Servants."<sup>244</sup> Southerne, travelling in his old post as Orrery's agent, was also, according to Jordan, still the agent for the Earl's former regiment, thus being in the profitable position of nearly doubling his income. How long this luxury continued is uncertain, but it could have been for as long as two years. In December 1710 Southerne's patron changed regiments again, becoming ambassador in Brussels, and taking the dramatist along with him on his new assignment. The

playwright is known to have made frequent official voyages between London and the continent, but apparently remained with his friend and benefactor until the summer of 1714. There is no information as to why Southerne decided to leave such a profitable appointment at this time (the Earl of Orrery did not relinquish his post until July 1716),<sup>245</sup> but speculation suggests concern for the health of his wife. It is known that she was alive in 1711, but she received no mention in his will of 6 November, 1731,<sup>246</sup> and Southerne was referred to, in a letter of John Boyle, Fifth Earl of Orrery, in 1738, as a 'widower of long standing.'<sup>247</sup> There are a great many years between these pieces of evidence, but his sudden retirement from such a rewarding duty, and the subsequent five-year delay in returning to the stage indicate that Southerne's time may have been taken up with domestic responsibilities; he was also now in a position where he did not need to worry about his financial security.

Seizing opportunity had been a persistent theme in his work, and Southerne's canny procurement of patrons, his shrewd management of profits from his dramatic works, an apparently advantageous marriage, and the enterprising use of a military appointment, all reveal that this was something the dramatist practiced as well as preached. From the very beginning of his dramatic career, in his Epistle Dedicatory to the Duke of Richmond, his tribute to James, Duke of York, and his procuring the services of the poet laureate for his Prologue and Epilogue, Southerne displayed an ability to recognize



potential advantage and to pursue it with success. It is obvious that the patronage of Boyle was very lucrative; Southerne's career as his agent made the sometime playwright financially independent for the rest of his life (no small feat, considering the fact that he lived another twenty-five years). In the Dedication to John Boyle, the Fifth Earl of Orrery, of his final play, provocatively entitled Money the Mistress, the dramatist took the

Occasion to confess the Obligations that I must ever have to my great Benefactor the Earl of Orrery, your Lordship's Father. It is to his Favour that I have now in my old Age the reasonable Comforts of life, and that I am not strained in any Conveniences of it. . .248

The decade as regimental agent had paid off handsomely. Just how legitimately Southerne came by his wealth is unknown, but Jordan ventures to suggest that he could hardly be thought to be 'exceptionally spotless.'<sup>249</sup> Nevertheless, the 'exact oeconomist'<sup>250</sup> returned home secure in the knowledge that his fortune was made. Opportunity had come his way, and like Sir Anthony Love, the playwright had learned to 'provide against Accidents: / What I want of my Age, / I must supply with my Diligence.'<sup>251</sup>

The literary hiatus already fourteen years old, continued for another five years while the aging playwright reacquainted himself with family and friends; for the preceding ten years he had enjoyed only brief periods of time in England. During this period of adjustment he presumably took the opportunity to re-establish contact with old theatrical allies. By 1714,

however, the close-knit London theatre fraternity had lost many of its most famous Restoration members: Dryden had been gone nearly fifteen years. Wycherley, who had not written for the stage in nearly forty years, died within the year. Congreve seemed to have only limited interest, preferring the life of a gentleman to that of a playwright. Even Southerne's military comrade, George Farquhar, who had enjoyed a brief success as a dramatist, had died in 1707 at just thirty years of age. Nevertheless, there were new young dramatists who would have been familiar to Southerne, and they in turn no doubt knew of him, either personally, or by way of reputation, through the continued popularity of Oroonoko and The Fatal Marriage. Colley Cibber, who had started his career in Southerne's Sir Anthony Love, and whom Southerne had helped get his first play to the stage, was now co-owner/manager of the Drury Lane Company. Cibber had become a leading actor and playwright of the day. Nicholas Rowe, in addition to becoming Shakespeare's first modern editor, had achieved success with his 'she tragedies,' which recalled the best of Otway and Southerne. John Dennis, whom Southerne had assisted just prior to accepting the military post, had continued to write for the stage, along with his growing critical corpus. The London of 1714 greeted him with some old friends, but the tight circle of dramatists had expanded. Nicoll points out that (in the early eighteenth century) 'fully half of the dramas produced during this time were penned by men unassociated with literature and uneager for literary

glory.<sup>252</sup> Changes had also taken place in the types of plays being successfully produced. Bawdiness had given way to sentiment, and there was a growing interest in tragedies in the Franco-Roman tradition, with an increased emphasis on adherence to the neo-classical rules. Addison's Cato, called by some 'the zenith of English neo-classical tragedy,' and perhaps 'the most esteemed tragedy of the half century,'<sup>253</sup> opened just a year before Southerne's return. Trends which the playwright had seen developing in the last decade of the seventeenth century were now firmly established, and Southerne's next effort, having been kept on the shelf for over thirty years, appeared to be in vogue. Thomas Southerne, at the age of fifty-nine, a man who remembered 'the bards and theatres of Charles the second's reign,'<sup>254</sup> was returning after nearly a twenty year absence with his ninth dramatic offering; it was to be his last moment of theatrical triumph.

Southerne had originally begun The Spartan Dame in the last year of James's rule, 'by the command of the Duke of Berwick'<sup>255</sup> (James's natural son), in whose regiment the dramatist served. The playwright, in his Preface to the play, tells us, however, that with 'Many things interfering with those times, I laid by what I had written.'<sup>256</sup> A wise choice since the main plot of Southerne's play shows a remarkable similarity to the career of Queen Mary, whose husband, William of Orange, took the English throne after the flight of her father, James II. Southerne maintains that he had no design but 'upon the subject, which I took from the

life of Agis of Plutarch.<sup>257</sup> Such a bizarre juxtaposition of life and art, however, certainly gives a reader pause for thought and the playwright's brief defence is hardly convincing proof of his intent. At the time of writing the first four acts he was a member of the King's forces, and such a tribute to the royal family would not have been unusual for the man who had already honoured the King in The Loyal Brother, and who developed a reputation for shrewd financial and social dealings. Southerne had 'high expectations' from his relationship with Berwick, and no doubt left little to chance in trying to please his commander and the 'King's favourite son.'<sup>258</sup> Such an obvious parallel between fiction and history, though, leads to speculation that Berwick's influence on the play may have been greater than has been acknowledged. Southerne's use of the word 'command' suggests that Berwick might have first discovered the similarity between the Plutarchan source and historical fact, and that in anticipation of what he hoped would be his sister's choice of allegiance to her father and country, rather than to her husband and the Whigs, had 'commanded' the dramatist to create a tribute to such loyalty. James's own 'lack of perception'<sup>259</sup> about men and events may have carried over to Berwick and the young playwright, and The Spartan Dame might well have been a conscious preparation for a celebration of strength and devotion which never took place. It seems hard to believe, as Dodds does, that Southerne simply 'began the play in good faith,' and then 'even before he finished it, the

Revolution descended and he saw that Plutarch paralleled with uncanny exactness the England of 1688.<sup>260</sup> The likeness seems too close not to have been planned, and the heroic portrait of James is so clearly more complimentary than Plutarch's original of King Leonidas that it is difficult to think it did not anticipate hoped for developments which failed to materialize, leaving Southerne no choice but to withhold the play for the next thirty-two years.

The story is about Celona, the Spartan Dame, faithful wife of the ambitious Cleombrotus, and daughter of Leonidas, King of Sparta. Cleombrotus has incited the citizens of Sparta to rebellion, and has usurped his father-in-law's throne, driving the deposed monarch into exile. With the sudden revolution a difficult trial of allegiance is thrust upon Celona. She decides that her marital obligations must in this instance be subordinated to civil duty based on her strong belief in the divine right of kings and the need for an orderly succession of the monarchy to preserve the stability of her nation. This determined moral stance forces her to forswear her husband's bed and throne. Cleombrotus, already faithless to his wife, seizes the opportunity thus provided to attempt the seduction of his sister-in-law, Thelamia, wife of Eurytion, who has followed the dethroned King into hiding. Rebuffed by the virtuous new bride, Cleombrotus arranges a deception, aided by his unscrupulous conspirator, Crites. Pretending to be a loyalist, Crites offers to bring Eurytion to the longing Thelamia, but instead arranges for Cleombrotus to slip into

Thelamia's bed.

At the same time, Crites, fearful that Celona will successfully restore her father to his rightful place plans to bring the King back to Sparta, where he will be killed. Leonidas escapes the assassination attempt, and soon learns that his daughter Thelamia has been raped by Cleombrotus. The King and Eurytion seek revenge, and, with the support of the citizenry, pursue the traitors. The play concludes with a dramatic scene at the Temple of Neptune, where the desperate Cleombrotus holds Leonidas's third daughter, Euphemia, as hostage. In a flurry of action Crites is hurled to his death from the temple wall, Thelamia commits suicide, and her vengeful husband slays Cleombrotus. In another of Southerne's heart-rending conclusions the grieving 'Spartan Dame,' who had struggled to save both her kingdom and her spouse, only to lose one at the cost of the other, resolves to withdraw 'forever from a hated world.'<sup>261</sup> She leaves behind her innocent sister, Euphemia (perhaps representing Queen Anne), ready to receive 'the future blessings for the world,' Euphemia being 'the promise of the year.'<sup>262</sup> The restored King Leonidas then speaks, and in doing so, echoes the thoughts expressed in nearly all of Southerne's plays:

The guilty wretch thus does the thunder tear:  
The innocent, involv'd by being near,  
Are blasted, and the spreading ruin share.<sup>263</sup>

Southerne had used Plutarch's 'Life of Agis' as his source, he (or Berwick) more than likely counting on the popularity of the fine translation of the Lives published in

1686. The edition is most often credited to Dryden although he, in fact, wrote only the dedication and a 'Life of Plutarch,' while some forty-one individuals contributed to the actual translation.<sup>264</sup> The dramatist adheres closely to the political background and events of the original, but, at the same time, develops characters and complications more fully, and in doing so increases the play's dramatic effectiveness and its contemporary historical parallels. Southerne eliminates Agis, who in Plutarch shares the throne with Leonidas before his banishment. The dethroned King is given a much more noble character, perhaps further evidence that Southerne was creating a tribute to James. At the same time he heightens the villainy of the King's rival, Cleombrotus, through his usurpation, his infidelity to his faithful wife, and his treachery to his sister-in-law. Southerne's addition of two daughters for the King (sisters to Celona) gives the play a broader domestic scope and again reinforces the political parallel. The innocent Euphemia seems to represent Queen Anne, and the hope for the future, and Southerne leaves the kingdom in her hands and her father's at the end of the play. Southerne, as usual, freely adapted his source material for dramatic power, plot complication, and perhaps also for a political analogy.

The play, despite its Greek setting, is solidly in the traditions of the English Restoration. Even the Greek usurper's disdain of marriage recalls a Dorimant or a Horner, rather than a Spartan lord. Southerne's introduction of new

characters, along with his refocus of emphasis and intricacy of plot, all indicate that the play is a careful reshaping of an old story under the pressures of topical circumstances, Restoration conventions, and the author's distinctive artistic vision. The question then naturally arises: just how much did the play change in the thirty-two years which transpired between its original conception and its eventual performance? Southerne gives no hints as to the revisions it may have undergone, but we know that he showed it to the Duke of Devonshire in about 1704. His lordship's encouragement spurred him to finish it. Finding no company to act it, however, he laid it aside. In the unsigned Preface (attributed to the dramatist) to the 1713 collected edition of his Works the author speaks wistfully of the play's fate to that point:

Eight Plays, I must own, are a numerous Issue for one Man to Father: And yet I have another, which, I am told, might be pleaded in Abatement of the Faults of the rest, a Tragedy, call'd The Spartan Dame, which I should have been glad to have seen among 'em for the Support of the Family: But she has not been allow'd in Publick. . . So wanting the Recommendation of the Stage, that Play is contented to lye by, and wait upon the Leisure of Peace, and the Humanity of the Great Men in Power, to be permitted at one time or another to try its Fortune in the World.<sup>265</sup>

From this statement, it appears that the play was complete before 1713. Yet it would not be logical to assume that further revisions did not occur in the process of preparing it for production in the Georgian world of 1719. Mr. John Allen, who had advised the dramatist years earlier (1694) that the



play would never be successful, confessed upon reading it in 1719 that he 'found it very different from what it was then.'<sup>266</sup> Change was to be expected, if for no other reason than political expediency. To get the play produced Southerne finally consented to an operation he had been postponing for many years: removing 'very near the number of four hundred' lines.<sup>267</sup> Dodds points out that all passages showing Cleombrotus as a usurper with popular support were removed,<sup>268</sup> probably taking with them some of the play's unity and dramatic impact. Political necessity certainly dictated some of Southerne's revisions, but eighteenth century dramatic fashions must have led to further amendments.

The continued fondness for French neo-classical rules had a major impact on the structure of The Spartan Dame. Even if the divided ambitions of Cleombrotus (lust for power, lust for Thelamia) are considered a plot and sub-plot structure, it must be admitted that The Spartan Dame is Southerne's most classically unified work. The overlapping spheres of political and domestic events are connected at every point by closely linked characters, carefully balanced to reveal the intricacies of their public and private roles. All elements have been refined and compressed, resulting in a greater dramatic and thematic clarity than Southerne had achieved in The Fate of Capua. Yet, while the play reveals his compliance with early Georgian tastes, it also retains his distinctive artistic hallmarks: concerns with the links between individual morality and political and social stability;

awareness of the 'hard Condition of a Woman's fate;'<sup>269</sup> a strong sense of the greed, selfishness, and deception which pose a constant threat to the honest, virtuous and honourable. Thelamia expresses the recurrent sense of resignation to be found in Southerne's plays:

. . . This is a world  
The weak will suffer in' and who so weak,  
As a woman thus expos'd, thus naked left,  
Without the care -----270

He shared his age's scepticism about the moral or political virtues of the mob; a pet target of Southerne's which has not previously been discussed was the common citizenry. From their manipulation by ambitious villains such as Ismael (The Loyal Brother) and Pacuvius (The Fate of Capua), to their selfish cowardice when following the brave Oroonoko, Southerne presents a consistent portrait of the common citizenry as faint-hearted, short-sighted, and inconstant creatures whose only strength lies in their numbers. Eurytion and Crites in The Spartan Dame paint Southerne's mocking mural of the masses:

Crites: O, the wise people!  
The pillars and supports of common-wealths!

Eurytion: What are they, but a politick-herded fool?  
Their counsels as tumultuous, as their crowd-----

Crites: Ever in business, always in the wrong.

Eurytion: Merit they have heard of, but they know not how  
To find or value it, but as retail'd  
By the next stander-by-----

Crites: They act and think,  
The self-same way, just nothing of themselves.

Eurytion: Judging upon appearances, and know  
Things only in their names; no matter what  
Their natures are, what mean, or what intend.

Crites: Because a reformation, in plain sense,  
 Promises fair, tho' wicked men pervert  
 The honest meaning word, and change the course  
 And current of affairs, from good to bad,  
 From lawful monarch to tyranny,  
 Or headlong anarchy; the people still,  
 Adoring all things painted by that name,  
 Are pleas'd, and call it reformation still.<sup>271</sup>

Southerne's use of dramatic irony in this passage, where the master dissembler, Crites, agrees with the honourable Eurytion, complicates its meaning, for the even virtuous man must, like the mob, base his judgements on appearance. In The Spartan Dame, though, the public turmoil becomes only a backdrop against which the more intense domestic divisions are played, and subsequently the mob all but disappears from sight. It is almost as if Southerne wanted to demonstrate through its declining significance the ambivalent conformity of the crowd. It is the actions of the leaders which determine the worth of a society; the mob only follows.

In the development of character Southerne also combined past successes with a new refinement. His villain in The Spartan Dame, the double-dealing Crites, a distant relative of Shakespeare's Iago, and a close cousin of the dramatist's own creation, Ismael, in The Loyal Brother, is similar to both, but reveals some subtle modifications. Crites, unlike his predecessor, is not motivated by what he perceives to be a loss of trust or respect, but instead, has the full confidence of every major character in the play from the beginning; he is the playwright's master dissembler, a born masker, motivated by little more than a delight in imposing his will on others. His subsequent threat to all that is virtuous and good is

heightened by Southerne's development of his character within the dramatic structure of the play. From the very start Southerne shows the villain moving quickly and smoothly from one political camp to another without the slightest difficulty. Crites himself tells the audience that he

. . .put on those forms, and features, which  
 Resemble, and come nearest our design.  
 All are not born with handsome faces; then  
 Mend 'em, the ladies will advise;  
 Paint to the fair complexion of the times,  
 And hide the natural deformity.<sup>272</sup>

Crites, is a shrewd judge of human nature, and a brilliant manipulator. He is able to prepare Thelamia for her late-night rendezvous, as well as to lure the King back to Sparta for his planned assassination. His duplicity, however, is vulnerable to the truth, and despite his obvious talents, the unexpected actions of other characters begin to break down his wall of lies and deceit, until at last, both literally and symbolically, he is hurled from the top of that wall.

Southerne also looks to the past in his creation of the 'Spartan Dame' herself. She is a composite of the dramatist's earlier heroines, and in Celona he creates his finest portrait. Her internal struggle between love for her husband and duty to her father and King, is reminiscent of the tragically divided Favonia (The Fate of Capua); her unwavering faith under tremendous stress recalls images of Imoinda (Oroonoko); and her strong awareness that her entire social being is inexorably linked to the actions of her husband harks back to the plight of Mrs. Friendall. As she tells her husband:

My Fame must live but in your Chronicle:  
And as your Actions show to After-times,  
My Memory will be honour'd, or despis'd;<sup>273</sup>

Like all of the playwright's heroic women, she wears no mask;  
she is as she appears:

My Beauties,  
Such as they are, are honest, and my own;  
They go to Bed with me, with me they rise,  
And need not many Hours in putting on.  
Besides, for me to court my Morning Glass,  
And practice Looks, were Loss of Time indeed.  
I am already what the vanity  
Of a fond dressing Pride, in all its height,  
And Wantonness of Expectation,  
Can raise my Wishes to; I am your Wife,  
Most honour'd in that Title; and despise  
Th' Applause and Breath of any other praise,  
Than of my Virtue, and Obedience now.<sup>274</sup>

The significant quality which sets her apart from the noble company of Southerne's other honourable women is that, like Sir Anthony Love, she is a woman of action. Celona is not paralyzed by her dilemma. In spite of opposing allegiances, she quickly makes her decision without the extensive emotional debates associated with the dramatist's former tragic heroines. Once her choice is determined, she pursues it aggressively. This does not imply that her actions are devoid of feeling; she cares deeply for her husband and acts not only out of love for her country, but out of love for Cleombrotus. For her, actions are the proof of feeling. As she admits to her sister and to her husband:

True Sorrow only lives within the Heart,  
And in our Actions best is understood:<sup>275</sup>

Her choice to act is her expression of grief, and it gives her more dignity than any of Southerne's other tragic heroines. Her assertive quality recalls the 'Rambling Lady' of Sir

Anthony Love. In that comic work the dramatist created a character of consequence, a woman who continually responded to events in an active manner. <sup>In</sup> ~~To~~ Celona he creates a tragic heroine with that quality, and in doing so, heightens the tragic effect. The failure of the vigorous and determined has a greater poignancy than that of the weak and ineffectual. Celona resembles the male protagonists of heroic tragedy, strong and assertive, whose defeat, in spite of admirable intentions, excites pity and fear.

With the assistance of his friend, William Congreve, who wrote a letter to Thomas Pelham, the current Lord Chamberlain, insisting 'that it has been a wrong to the town, as well as an injury to the Author, that such a work has been so long withheld from the Publick,'<sup>276</sup> Southerne's long-quarantined play appeared on the Drury Lane stage 11 December 1719, and was an immediate success.<sup>277</sup> The cast included John Mills and Barton Booth as the rival father and husband of the 'Spartan Dame,' Colley Cibber as Crites, Robert Wilks as Eurytion, with Mrs. Anne Oldfield and Mary Porter as the sisters, Celona and Thelamia. The play was acted nine times in the first twelve days, and enjoyed three printings within a month of opening night.<sup>278</sup> Despite all these indications of success, however, some critics have questioned its popularity. Dodds points out that such a cast as The Spartan Dame was blessed with might have succeeded with even an inferior play.<sup>279</sup> The talent of this group of performers, Allardyce Nicoll contends, could even be considered as aiding in the

further decline of eighteenth century drama. Their skill simply encouraged dramatists to pen poor and trivial works, which in turn this fine collection of actors and actresses could pass off on the audience.<sup>280</sup> In addition, the expanding population of London, particularly 'after the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, and the Hanoverian accession of the following year, made it easier to fill the city's theatres, and extended runs became more common.<sup>281</sup> John Dennis, in the very year of Southerne's re-emergence, warned that attendance was not necessarily proof of quality. In discussing comedies he remarked

But you will say, perhaps, that the Play-House was throng'd for eight or ten Days together at the Representation of damn'd Plays, I hope my Ears will no more be stunned with the Noise of the Improvement of a general Taste, and that for the future no Consequence will be drawn from the Numbers of an Audience to their Capacity.'<sup>282</sup> A full house did not automatically guarantee critical acclaim. Even the playwright seemed to express surprise at the play's reception, saying that 'The success of the Spartan Dame has been. . .extraordinary.'<sup>283</sup>

and then seemed genuinely astounded at 'the Bookseller, that. . .paid . . .the extraordinary price of one hundred and twenty pounds for an imperfect picture.'<sup>284</sup> It is difficult to tell if Southerne's last remark was caused by embarrassed modesty at receiving such a sum for his dusty relic, or whether he, too, saw certain failings within the work. Others surely did. The unprecedented bookseller's royalty provoked a strong reaction from the man who once thanked Southerne for his assistance: John Dennis. He took exception to

booksellers who have 'a Hundred and twenty Pounds for the Copy of a Play, for which none of their predecessors would have given five Pound.'<sup>285</sup> However unimpressive some critics may have found it, the play, for a brief period of time, proved a popular and financial triumph for the aging dramatist. Southerne was said to have made a total of five hundred pounds from this one play. The always practical economist was apparently not above increasing his income by selling tickets to his aristocratic friends. In a letter to Lord Harley, Matthew Prior apologizes for squandering a guinea of his friend's money. He justifies his expenditure by explaining that 'Southerne, my old acquaintance, (had) asked my assistance in getting him off with some tickets for his Spartan Dame.'<sup>286</sup> Despite its initial success, the play did not remain a part of the Drury Lane repertoire for long. One comment of the day reveals that 'The Spartan, or as they call it here, The Smarting Dame has just done Tom S----'s business, and both he and the town are satisfied it has been acted, and are not troubled that it is laid aside.'<sup>287</sup> The dramatist was apparently not concerned with posterity. He had seen his thirty-two-year-old play on the stage, he had gained a substantial amount of money by it, and he had given the eighteenth century a glimpse of his earlier days of glory. Elijah Fenton, in his Prologue, speaks of Southerne's latest effort with some reflective admiration for the dramatist's past achievements:



He comes, ambitious in his green Decline,  
To consecrate his Wreath at Beauty's Shrine.  
His Oroonoko never fail'd to engage  
The radiant Circles of the former Age:  
Each Bosom heav'd, all Eyes were seen to flow,  
And sympathize with Isabella's Woe:  
But Fate reserv'd, to crown his elder Fame,  
The brightest Audience for the Spartan Dame.288

In a lengthy 'Epistle to Mr. Southerne' in praise of Southerne, Fenton also mourned the decline in tragedy, and saw Southerne's return with The Spartan Dame, as the start of a new, great tragic era. Referring to the demoted tragic muse, he says:

But now relaps'd, she dwindles to a song,  
 And weakly warbles on a Eunuch's tongue;  
 And with her minstrelsie may still remain,  
 'Till Southerne court her to be great again.  
 Perhaps the beauties of thy Spartan Dame,  
 Who (long defrauded of the public fame)  
 Shall, with superior majesty avow'd,  
 Shine like a goddess breaking from a cloud,  
 Once more may reinstate her on the stage,  
 Her action graceful, and divine her rage.289

Fenton's expectations for the Grecian lady's future glory may have been unrealistic, but The Spartan Dame briefly resuscitated Southerne's reputation, allowing him one last, brief opportunity to bask in the limelight of public acclaim. It can only be hoped that the sixty-year-old playwright savoured this success; it never occurred again.

Following his victory with The Spartan Dame, more than six years elapsed before he put up his final dramatic offering, on 19 February 1726 'a Play,' entitled Money the Mistress.<sup>290</sup> This was the first complete play the sixty-six year old playwright had written in more than twenty-five years (The Spartan Dame having been begun in 1687), and sadly, it was not

up to his previous standard. Leonard Welsted, who had written the Prologue for Steele's The Conscious Lovers, also wrote the Prologue for Southerne's new play. In it, he hints at the author's own reservation about his stamina, saying:

But much, he fears, at length,  
Is wasted of his Fire and wonted Strength.  
The Suns decay; the brightest Lustre wains;  
Nor is he all he was in former Reigns:<sup>291</sup>

Friends tried to warn Southerne off his final venture, as he tells us in his Dedication, saying that some of the 'best Judges of Dramatick Performances. . . believed it would not take with the Town.'<sup>292</sup> He insisted, however, on seeing the production through. The reception was not congenial. Once again the author turned to a favourite portion of the audience, the ladies, for their support. Welsted's Prologue confessed that:

To you, ye Fair, for Patronage he sues:  
O! Last defend, who First inspir'd his Muse!  
In your soft Service he has pass'd his Days,  
And gloried to be born for Woman's Praise:  
Deprest at length, and in your Cause decay'd,  
The good old Man, to Beauty bends for Aid;  
O! Then protect, in his declining Years,  
The Man, that fill'd your Mothers' Eyes with Tears!  
The last of Charles's Bards! The living Name,  
That rose, in that Augustan Age, to Fame!<sup>293</sup>

But even his faithful ladies forsook him at the end. Benjamin Victor, backstage at Lincolns-Inn-Fields on the opening night of the production, relates that he

was very sorry to find that the Audience did not take the Age, as well as the great Merit of the Author, into their Consideration, and quietly dismiss this last weak Effort to please them. When they were hissing dreadfully in the fifth Act, Mr. Rich, who was standing by Mr. Southern,

asked him, if he had heard what the Audience were doing? His Answer was, "No, Sir, I am very deaf."<sup>294</sup>

In spite of this unappreciative reception, the comedy, perhaps in tribute to his earlier glories, did manage to run two more nights, providing Southerne with some financial satisfaction, but the blow to his artistic ego was mortal; he retired from the theatre this time for good.

Money the Mistress represented an obvious attempt on the part of this flexible dramatist to adapt to the changes in eighteenth century drama. Richard Steele's play The Conscious Lovers was staged in 1722, and brought with it a shift of comic concerns, 'from the comedy which ridicules folly to that which exemplifies virtue.'<sup>295</sup> The play's success could hardly have escaped Southerne's notice. Apparently unwilling to describe his work as a comedy, he created 'a Play,' with characters worthy to be held up as models of proper behaviour. His Dedication reveals his striving to include everything necessary to suit the contemporary taste of the audience. He claimed 'the Disposition of the Business, natural, and easy; the Incidents proper. . .the Sentiments honourable and virtuous. . .the Characters in Nature, the Manners instructive of Youth,' and declared proudly that he had 'punished Infidelity in the Lover, and Falseness in the Friend.'<sup>296</sup> Despite his efforts, judging from the public reaction, he had either misjudged the necessary ingredients, or, at the very least, the proportions.

Southerne chose a romantic and sentimental travel book of

the Comtesse d'Aulnoy, The Ingenious and Diverting Letters of the Lady. . .Travels into Spain as his source,<sup>297</sup> expanding and embellishing both the plot and characters. He even added a sub-plot of his own, reminiscent of the libertine days of the seventeenth century, but with eighteenth century justice and repentance.

Set in the exotic locale of Tangiers, the play recalls the early period of the playwright's career. The English had gained the Mediterranean port city from Portugal upon the marriage of Charles II to Catherine of Braganza in 1662. The city had been abandoned by the English and left to the Moors in 1684, the last full year before the playwright abandoned the theatre for his stint with the military.

The main story revolves around an attractive young Spanish woman, Mariana. She is loved by two officers in the English army: the dashing French Mourville, and the rich, gallant Warcourt. While Mariana favours Mourville, her father, Davila, seeks a union with Warcourt's fortune, and determines to force his daughter to marry the man of his choice. Mourville is taken captive by the Moors, and Mariana, with the prospect of a forced marriage if she remains at home, plans to escape with her enterprising friend Harriet and release Mourville. Disguised as Jewish women, Mariana and Harriet bribe the unsuspecting Davila to lead them to the Moorish camp. Harriet persuades the Moorish guard to allow Mariana to take Mourville's place in prison, assuring the guard that the family will pay for her ransom much more quickly than the

English government will for a Frenchman. Mourville, somewhat reluctantly, agrees to make the switch, and leaves with Harriet, hoping to secure Mariana's ransom. But Mariana's father has suffered financial reversals, so it is Warcourt who redeems her, but without obligation, leaving her free to follow her lover. Harriet, meanwhile, has persuaded the Frenchman that he will never be happy with the now impoverished Mariana, and that she, herself, is a much better catch; 'mistress money' is a powerful argument and the two secretly marry.

In the concluding scene Harriet, has been discovered, and Mariana is apprised of the double betrayal. After an inspired swoon, the young woman promises Warcourt that in time she will become his wife. The fifth act creates the impression that Southerne is working from an established formula as he offers a generous portion of poetic justice; the traitorous couple, Harriet and Mourville, are suddenly reduced to poverty, while the fortunes of Davila and Mariana are miraculously restored, leaving the heroine free to marry Warcourt out of love, not out of need. Just as the author had promised, evil has been punished and virtue reigns.

The sub-plot involves an attempt by Don Manuel, a Spanish captain of the horse, to seduce Diana, the wife of a French officer and daughter of the English governor of Tangiers. Following a serious flirtation, Diana informs her husband, who chooses to tease the severe Spaniard by turning the tables on him. The prank results in a minor duel in which the rake is

quickly defeated, suffering only from a bruised ego. At this point he repents, realizing that the days for such philandering have passed: 'I see I have play'd the fool, and own I am grown old in that folly!'<sup>298</sup> Dodds quickly passes over the 'minor action' of the play as having little importance, appearing as it does only 'spasmodically towards the end, and is dismissed with a couple of scenes.'<sup>299</sup> This does not do justice to the sub-plot. Rather than its being a hastily conceived addendum, as Dodds implies, it probably represents the fundamental plot of Restoration drama. Southerne has placed it in direct contrast to his attempt at the popular contemporary style: a 'joy too exquisite for laughter.'<sup>300</sup> The playwright, like Don Manuel, may have been teasing his audience with the introduction of the sub-plot, threatening an indiscretion not to be tolerated. He may also have realized that in terms of dramatic custom he too had 'grown old in that folly.' The words of the repenting rake could as well have been those of the dramatist offering an explanation for the inclusion of this out-dated plot, when he says 'I confess I had no more provocation to proceed. . . than gentlemen who swear in cold blood; and I have only to say with them, in a silly excuse, that I have got a nonsensical habit of it.'<sup>301</sup> Nearly fifty years had passed since Thomas Southerne had first arrived in London, when Dorimant and Horner commanded the stage; it was more than thirty years since Dryden had advised the dramatist on the standard for his style: 'let Etherege be: / For wit, th'

immortal spring of Wycherley.<sup>302</sup> Surely an old man could be excused for a brief excursion into the past.

Southerne's last play was for the most part an uninspired attempt at an eighteenth century moral comedy, designed more for the instruction of the audience than for its entertainment. It affirmed a world in which virtue and constancy were rewarded, and dishonesty and selfishness were punished: an ordered universe in which justice would eventually prevail. It recalled Steele's The Conscious Lovers of four years earlier; like the virtuous Indiana and Bevil, Warcourt and Mariana were 'made for one another as much as Adam and Eve were, for there is no other of their kind but themselves.'<sup>303</sup> It was, however, a world the playwright rarely visited, and one in which he did not seem to feel at home.

Since Sir Anthony Love (his first play after his disappointment of 1688) Southerne had set each of his dramatic works against the backdrop of an Epicurean universe, 'perfect and uniform, but without a design.'<sup>304</sup> He had consistently shown that the individual actions of men, like the Greek philosopher's random atoms, caused them to carom off one another, thus changing the course of both. Outcome was infinitely plastic, and resolution unpredictable, as unpredictable and as infinitely varied as the actions of men. For Southerne it was not the end result, but the motivation underlying the action that mattered. In his dramatic world, as in any ultimately orderless universe, good and bad did not

automatically determine who would be winners, and who losers. His was a world which allowed the devoted Mrs. Friendall to end up still a wife 'and still unhappy';<sup>305</sup> a society which crushed the delicate natures of Isabella and Imoinda under the pressures of avarice and lust; a place where even the truly great like Oroonoko and Celona must be forced either to die or to flee 'for ever from a hated World.'<sup>306</sup> In Money the Mistress Southerne provided an ordered universe where the virtuous are rewarded and the dishonest are punished, but his own commitment to such a vision of reality is questionable.

At the final curtain, Mariana does not fall immediately into Warcourt's waiting arms, she hesitates. Her brief pause suddenly shifts the play from the sentimental world of poetic justice to Epicurus's random universe where man, (or woman) the unpredictable, has the final word. Perhaps Mariana's hesitation is Southerne's instinctive attempt to inject a little of his own reality into the neatly balanced eighteenth century, but it robs Money the Mistress of that complete unity of design, so much a part of his previous works.

The aging playwright's final production was not wholly without merit. Occasional bursts of his former genius were visible in Money the Mistress. One example was his creation of the captivating Harriet, another in a long line of Southerne's psychologically intriguing characters. Her spirit and enthusiasm must have mesmerized the audience at first, just as they did Mariana, making her shameless deception and calculating justification for her actions the more shocking.



She takes pride in being the play's 'prime mover,' as she tells Mourville:

'Mariana, I own, is the shining character in the play, and engages all concern of the audience -- but 'tis Harriet conducts the design, and has carried it successfully so far. . . The undertaking was mine: I won't part with the merit of it.'<sup>307</sup>

Despite her initiating the treacherous action, she is unable to control it. Although she gets the man she wants, the final reversal, required by the popular taste for poetic justice, leaves her impoverished. Thirty-five years earlier, Harriet might have been Southerne's heroine---she has many of the characteristics of 'the Rambling Lady'---but the eighteenth century demanded that the wicked be punished, so punished she must be.

In contrast to the opportunistic Harriet and Mourville, Southerne produces two individuals who are very models of eighteenth century moral idealism. Dodds saw Warcourt as a completely new type of character for Southerne, describing him as 'the faultless hero of honest intent and ready moralization.'<sup>308</sup> While very clearly a 'Post-Collier man,'<sup>309</sup> it is misleading to suggest that Southerne had never approached the creation of such a character before. The faithful Lorenzo, in The Disappointment, and the devoted Villeroy in The Fatal Marriage are clearly forerunners of the English colonel. Admittedly both of these earlier creations have brief moments of weakness, but for the most part they are men of honour, generosity, and loyalty. Perhaps the nearest to Warcourt's moral constancy is the 'Spartan Dame,' Celona,

whose devotion to 'right' far exceeds social obligations. Through her actions she reveals a sincere, deep-felt love of father, country, and husband. The selfless actions of Warcourt also verify his goodness and love. His generosity to Mariana and Davila, both in paying her ransom and in freeing her from any social obligations to him, reveal an external and internal harmony of nature. Warcourt, however, shows a perspicacity not possessed by Southerne's earlier characters of selfless concord. There is a sense that Warcourt, despite his honesty and generosity, will never become, as other of the dramatist's worthy characters have, a victim of the treacherous and deceptive. He is a man of the world who clearly sees its workings, and is not taken in by them.

In many ways, Mariana is the perfect complement to Southerne's ideal hero. She possesses the same outward-inward agreement, and her actions are the evidence of her sincerity; like the 'Spartan Dame,' true love exists for her only through demonstration. There is, however, a significant difference between Warcourt and Mariana in their experience of the world. Mariana's innocence allows her to be victimized by both friend and lover. Warcourt tells her plainly, at the end of the play, that when it came to friends she was 'mistaken in the Choice of 'em.'<sup>310</sup> Like so many of Southerne's earlier women, she had not learned the 'Way of the World,' and consequently found disillusionment and disappointment. For Mariana the play is a cruel lesson about the workings of society. There is a hope that she has learned from the

experience and that in time she will be the perfect mate to Southerne's perfect model of virtue and worldly wisdom; her hesitation at the last suggests that her loss of innocence has made her wary.

Although there is much in the play which recalls the poet's earlier works, and he created some admirable, even diverting characters, Money the Mistress must be considered the last creative indulgence of an old man. It lacks the vigorous energy of the youthful dramatist, the passion of the experienced tragedian. 'The present humour of the Town' had changed, but Southerne's dramatic vision had not. His theatrical life had been devoted to stripping away social masks, not to creating further illusions. Certainly, in a retirement where he was not strained 'in any of the conveniencies. . .by what could happen to the play,'<sup>311</sup> he could afford to dabble with the trends of the day. They were, after all, trends he had, consciously or not, helped to inspire. Southerne has been credited with some of the earliest examples of the developing trend toward sentiment, but in its final form, the sentimental comedy was incompatible with his unique talent.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the diminished vitality in Southerne's last work was reflected in his personal life, or signalled the end of his perennial enthusiasm for the theatre. Although he was sixty-six at the opening of Money the Mistress, the retired dramatist had another twenty years of active life ahead of him, and

according to available sources he apparently lived it to the fullest. He continued to encourage and influence contemporary writers for some time to come. He was nearly seventy when his former classmate at Trinity, Samuel Madden, had his tragedy Themistocles produced, and Madden admits that whatever reputation it may have had 'is not a little owing to the warm Declarations, and hearty zeal, which Mr. Southerne (my old Acquaintance and worthy Friend) was pleased to recommend it with, where-ever he came.'<sup>312</sup>

When not offering professional theatrical advice, Southerne was apparently enjoying a rich social life, a remarkable tribute to his personal charm. Thomas Evans remarks that Southerne 'was honoured with the friendship of the most illustrious and eminent of his contemporaries.'<sup>313</sup> His companions included a diverse collection of eighteenth century notables, such as John Boyle, Fifth Earl of Orrery, the son of his old friend and patron, Charles Boyle, Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope. The fact that he was welcome in a variety of social circles may be attributed to that same unusual versatility found in his dramatic efforts; those who mentioned his visits always recorded their pleasure in his company. Orrery, in a letter written in the dramatist's seventy-eighth year, pays tribute to Southerne's charm:

' . . . I'll pass on to sing of that Nestor of Westminster, Tom Southerne. He still possesses his good humour to roast Beef and Mutton Pye. Whilst we staid at London We had him every Day at our Table. He was in Love with Lady Orrery, or at least, with the Dinners. He even admir'd her Music, tho' he is deaf, and repeated so much of

his Plays to her that she became deaf also. Two young Ladies, her Cousins, protest they never heard so many Magic Strains under so comic appearance since the Hour of their Birth; and for my Part, He has so far infected Me that I speak to my Servants in blank verse, and call for my Buskins instead of my Boots.<sup>314</sup>

Orrery's picture is representative of most contemporary portraits of the engaging old man, and his circle of friends remained constant for many years.

Although he made numerous journeys to Somerset and Wiltshire, and even across the sea to his native Ireland, the majority of his last years were spent making the rounds in London. Theophilus Cibber reports that

Mr. Southerne lived for the last ten years of his life in Westminster, and attended very constant at divine service in the Abbey, being particularly fond of church music. He never staid within doors while in health. . .having a circle of acquaintances of the best rank, that he constantly dined with one or the other by a kind of rotation.<sup>315</sup>

In 1742, at a birthday party Orrery held for the eighty-two-year-old dramatist, Pope graced the occasion with some lines of tribute, saying:

This day Tom's fair account has run  
 (Without a blot) to eighty-one.  
 Kind Boyle, before his poet, lays  
 A table, with a cloth of bays;  
 And Ireland, mother of sweet singers,  
 Presents her harp still to his fingers.  
 The feast, his tow'ring genius marks  
 In yonder wild goose and the larks!  
 The mushrooms show his wit was sudden!  
 And for his judgment, lo a pudden!  
 Roast beef, tho' old, proclaims him stout,  
 And grace, altho' a bard, devout.  
 May Tom, whom heav'n sent down to raise  
 The price of prologues and of plays,  
 Be ev'ry birthday more a winner,

Digest his thirty-thousandth dinner;  
Walk to his grave without reproach,  
And scorn a rascal and a coach.<sup>316</sup>

Four years passed before that day arrived. Thomas Southerne died on 26 May 1746, and his passing was appropriately commemorated in the Gentleman's Magazine, with this anonymous verse:

Prais'd by the grandsires of the present age,  
Shall Southern pass unnoted off the stage?  
Who, more than half a century ago,  
Caus'd from each eye the tender tear to flow;  
Does not his death one grateful drop demand,  
In works of wit, the Nestor of our land?  
Southern was Dryden's friend: him genius warm'd,  
When Otway wrote, and Betterton perform'd.  
He knew poor Nat, while regular his fire:  
Was Congreve's pattern ere he rais'd desire:  
Belong'd to Charles's age, when wit ran high,  
And liv'd so long but to behold it die.<sup>317</sup>

He was survived by his only child Agnes, and by a host of theatrical progeny, among them the intriguing Sir Anthony Love.

CHAPTER TWO

SIR ANTHONY LOVE: PRODUCTION HISTORY

I.

There is no record of the first performance of Sir Anthony Love, or, indeed, of any subsequent performance.

The play is one of a group which is commonly assigned to September--December, 1690. The London Stage, using references in the Prologue to a 'lonely summer past,'<sup>1</sup> and William of Orange's expedition into Ireland to put down the forces of James II,<sup>2</sup> places the premiere in late September; it could have taken place as late as October of that year.<sup>3</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, in his 'Hand-List of Restoration Plays,' lists it as opening at Drury Lane in December 1690, citing an advertisement of the play's publication in the London Gazette, 18--22 December 1690, as the reason for the late dating.<sup>4</sup> Depending on the source consulted, the September to December span for the play's debut still remains; it was entered in the Term Catalogues in February 1690/91.<sup>5</sup>

There is no clear evidence to confirm any later performances of the play, either in the remainder of the seventeenth or in the eighteenth century, although the Gentleman's Journal, January, 1692, upon the opening of Southerne's next play, The Wives' Excuse, credits it with being written by 'Mr Southern, who made that [play] called Sir

Anthony Love, which you and all the Town have lik'd so well.'<sup>6</sup> This brief remark seems to indicate that there were other performances during the year-and-a-half following the premiere of Sir Anthony Love, despite the lack of documentation of specific dates.

A second edition of the play was published in 1698, and this would tend to suggest a revival of the play at that time. The London Stage fails to mention a possible revival, and while Nicoll corroborates the entry in the Term Catalogues of June, 1698, he does not give any information as to a possible performance.<sup>7</sup> In a notation, J. W. Dodds tells of a revival at Lincolns-Inn-Fields in 1698, but gives no source for the information, and provides no specific date for the production.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the fact that Downes's groups it with plays which failed to succeed 'more than indifferently,'<sup>9</sup> there is every indication of Sir Anthony Love's initial success. Southerne, in his Epistle Dedicatory, takes a moment to pay tribute to the ladies of the audience for 'so visibly promoting my Interest, on those days chiefly (the Third and the Sixth) when I had the tenderest relation to the welfare of my Play.'<sup>10</sup> His reference is to the dramatist's benefit performances which were a primary source of his revenue, and therefore of the utmost importance to a professional man of letters such as Southerne. The practice of allotting to the author the receipts (above the House Charges) on the third night had begun early in the Restoration, but the advent of an



additional benefit on the sixth day of performance in the initial run is uncertain. Southerne's remark is the first evidence of a second benefit, and is an excellent indication of the play's popularity.<sup>11</sup>

Langbaine, in his Appendix to the English Dramatick Poets, also confirms the play's success, saying that it 'was acted with extraordinary Applause, the Part of Sir Anthony Love being most Masterly play'd by Mr[s] Montfort: and certainly, who ever reads it, will find it fraught with true Wit and Humour.'<sup>12</sup>

Apparently the initial positive response to the play faded quickly, and even with a possible revival in 1698, it was no doubt dropped from the company's repertoire by the end of the decade. There is no indication of any performance in the eighteenth century, although Nicoll notes that the central idea of Leonard Welsted's The Dissembled Wanton; or, My Son Get Money (L.I.F., December, 1726) 'seems to be taken from Southerne's Sir Anthony Love.'<sup>13</sup> Part of the rapid demise of Southerne's play may have been attributable to the Collier controversy, with its attendant swing from wit and bawdry to sentimental moralizing, something which is definitely missing from Southerne's more purely comic style.

SOURCES FOR SIR ANTHONY LOVE: MRS. BEHN AND HER WORKS

## II.

Until fairly recently, the source for the tangled skein of disguise and romantic intrigue in Sir Anthony Love has remained unknown, or at least unrevealed. In 1973, Robert Jordan partially filled the gap regarding likely sources when he suggested an Aphra Behn novel as the source for a portion of the plot of Sir Anthony Love.<sup>14</sup> Since Southerne would later turn to Mrs. Behn for the inspiration for his two most successful tragedies, The Fatal Marriage, and Oroonoko, it is certainly possible that he was looking to her novels for material as early as 1690.

According to Jordan, Mrs. Behn's novel, The Lucky Mistake, influenced Southerne in the creation of his first 'true comedy.' Published in 1689, nearly two years prior to the production of Southerne's play, and about the time he was returning to London from his disappointments in the Revolution, the book is a romantic tale of two lovers' undying devotion to one another, despite the machinations of a father and younger sister to part them. Presented in a somewhat simplistic, almost fairy-tale style, it is a novel which suggests a world of long ago and far away. 'The very novelty of the novel'<sup>15</sup> in the late seventeenth century would no doubt have captured Southerne's attention upon his return, and his previous familiarity with Mrs. Behn's name (she was the

most prolific dramatist in London when Southerne first came to the city in the late 1670s) might have increased his curiosity. During the years that Southerne had been caught up in the complexities of civil strife, Mrs. Behn had published six of her novels.<sup>16</sup> Upon discovering her romantic fictions, Southerne apparently saw within them the nucleus of dramatic works, and after the author's death, 10 April 1689, probably felt little compunction about borrowing from them, with the idea of bringing her characters to life on the stage.

The plot of The Lucky Mistake served as the framework for Southerne's love-intrigue plot in Sir Anthony Love, which involves the libertine Valentine's efforts to marry Floriante, in spite of the wishes of both her father and her husband-to-be.<sup>17</sup> In the original, the Count De Pais has two daughters, Atlante and Charlot, and intends to wed the former to his good friend, Count Vernole, and send the latter to a nunnery. Atlante, however, is in love with the 'boy next door,' the honourable and virtuous Rinaldo, and both have vowed never to wed another. There are numerous similarities in the two plots, but the dramatist made significant alterations in characterization and emphasis. The roles of the father, Count De Pais (Canaille), and the prospective bridegroom, Count Vernole (Verole) were greatly reduced by Southerne, giving each only brief, but nevertheless effective, appearances. He preserved the father's concern with reputation and filial obedience, and his Verole displays all the haughtiness, cowardice and Spanish affectation of Mrs.

Behn's rival Count.

The character of Ilford, Valentine's best friend, does not exist in Mrs. Behn's novel (nor does the object of his desires, Volante), but Robert Jordan suggests that her Count Vernole may have influenced the creation of Ilford, as well as that of Verole. Jordan speculates that the playwright 'may well have split one of Mrs. Behn's characters to make two of his own.'<sup>18</sup> In addition to the qualities of Vernole already mentioned, Mrs. Behn described him as 'of a humour nice, delicate, critical and opinionative. . .out of humour with the world. . .always Satiric upon it.'<sup>19</sup> He was also noted for 'a stiff formality in all he said and did, yet he had wit and learning.'<sup>20</sup> Few of these qualities appear in Southerne's Count Verole (Jordan says 'none,'<sup>21</sup> but a strong argument could be made for Verole's being 'critical and opinionative' -- see Act II, 1.), although they are very much a part of Ilford's nature: he is 'one of those fellows who if you divide from in one thing, will never close with you in any.'<sup>22</sup> Constantly pictured as grave, sad, and over-serious, but also witty enough to be the close companion of a free spirit like Valentine, Ilford is seen by Jordan as a forerunner of some of Southerne's most intriguing characters (Wellvile, The Wives' Excuse; Granger, The Maid's Last Prayer).<sup>23</sup> Each of these characters appears to be engaged in a constant internal battle, struggling between social and moral propriety.

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lovers who are the primary focus of Mrs. Behn's book. Her young people, Atlante and Rinaldo, are an idealized pair of lovers. The purity, intensity, and fidelity of their love is worthy of the best of heroic drama; for them sickness and death are the only alternatives to separation. Ecstatic joy or desolation are the only emotions they feel. They reflect the increasing predilection for sentiment that was already popular in the novel, and would soon find a growing audience in the theatres as the seventeenth century moved into its last decade. Despite the fact that Southerne has often been considered a leader in the movement toward theatrical sentimentality, this was not the approach he took in his adaptation of the romantic characters in Aphra Behn's story. Valentine and Floriante, the counter-parts to Mrs. Behn's lovers, have a relationship which is not in any way idealized. To begin with, in the context of the play they are virtual strangers to one another; they only appear together once ever so briefly, prior to their marriage, and even then they are not alone. In addition to isolating them from each other, the playwright has removed all visible signs of love between them. The steadfast devotion, which made Mrs. Behn's lovers objects of admiration, is gone; in fact, Southerne puts Valentine to bed with an old flame just hours before his nuptials. The flawless, faithful Rinaldo has been exchanged for a typical Restoration rake, who cheerfully sleeps with any complaisant woman, saying, 'I may be a lover, but I must be a man.'<sup>24</sup> Natural appetites supplant idealized emotion in

Southerne's lover; Mrs. Behn's protagonist appeared to be all, and only, heart.

The passionate, ever-faithful Atlante, Rinaldo's ideal mate, was replaced in Sir Anthony Love by the enigmatic Floriante. Southerne created a partner for Valentine who is as much a mystery to the audience and reader as she must be to her beloved. When Floriante finally escapes the confines of her father's control, something she has struggled to achieve throughout the play, she is presented by Southerne not as a confident young woman, happy to be with the man she loves, but as a fearful, insecure girl, who has only doubts about the future. This certainly was not the sort of conclusion Mrs. Behn had in mind for her novel.

One other alteration worth mentioning was made by Southerne in his translation of Mrs. Behn's story into dramatic form: his treatment of Atlante's younger sister, Charlot. She is clearly the inspiration for the dramatist's character of the same name, and possesses many similar qualities. She is an intelligent, sensible, unaffected young woman, who provides for herself without ever compromising her own honesty and dignity. While a similar pluckiness exists in Aphra Behn's original, and they have analogous practical natures, the significant difference lies in their willingness to sacrifice others for their own ends. Mrs. Behn's Charlot attempts to betray her sister, and marry Rinaldo herself. Southerne's Charlott, although she is attracted to Valentine, and has her father's consent to marry him, realizes the folly

of trying to come between the lovers, saying that she 'knew there was no parting them.'<sup>25</sup> For her perfidy, Behn's character suffers the just reward of being wedded to the jealous, splenetic Vernole, while Southerne deals with his Charlott in an equally just manner, marrying her to his sensible Count Verole. The modifications that the playwright made in both characters allow their union to become a mutually happy ending which each has earned.

Southerne took from Mrs. Behn's novel only the primary romantic situation and its resultant conflicts. The difference in literary genres made some alterations mandatory, but the most significant changes are those Southerne made in order to reinforce the overall, unified scheme for his comedy.

Southerne, however, accomplished more than a mere modification of Mrs. Behn's story; he added a vital ingredient which James Sutherland indicates was missing from most early forerunners of the novel: 'psychological insight.'<sup>26</sup> Mrs. Behn seems little more than a detached narrator, relating the events of a make-believe world, devoid of understanding or concern for her characters; Sutherland refers to her narrative style, in a discussion of one of her other novels, as 'merely moving pieces around on the board.'<sup>27</sup> Southerne, on the other hand, shows both comprehension and compassion. In Sir Anthony Love he starts to probe beneath the surface, the mere 'moving of pieces,' and, to quote Sutherland once more, he begins to show 'some signs of an unusually acute observation of human behaviour and human motives.'<sup>28</sup> Southerne took the

shell provided by Mrs. Behn, and breathed life into it. The human complexity of his characters and his sympathy for their situations removes the work from the romantic pedestal of its source and places it firmly on the ground of Restoration reality. His story, despite its farcical appearance, is set in a realistic world, which shifts the focus of the play from entertainment to a subtle, perhaps too subtle, social commentary, something far removed from Aphra Behn's original intent.

Before leaving the works of Mrs. Behn and their influence on Southerne's comedy, a little time should be devoted to looking at her dramatic efforts, and the way in which they too may have provided inspiration for the dramatist. Sir Anthony Love is very much in the comedy of intrigue tradition, which had its roots in the Spanish drama, but which had been adopted by Restoration playwrights early on, beginning with Samuel Tuke's The Adventure of Five Hours (1662/63). After its success, a number of Restoration playwrights followed suit in those highly competitive first two decades of the period, and the Spanish comedy of intrigue became a staple of the English theatre of the seventeenth century. It was Mrs. Behn, however, who enjoyed the most success with the formula (Nicoll devotes an entire chapter to 'Comedy of Intrigue: Mrs. Behn'<sup>29</sup>), and it appears that in his writing of Sir Anthony Love Southerne closely studied Mrs. Behn's popular style.

Southerne would certainly have been familiar with the dramatist's works, for his arrival in London nearly coincided



with her most prolific period. Between 1676 and 1682 Mrs. Behn had eleven plays produced on the London stage,<sup>30</sup> the last of which was staged just a month after Southerne had his own play, The Loyal Brother, produced at a rival London theatre. Following this theatrical burst, Aphra Behn did not offer a play for the next four years, but her previous successes were often revived during the years that Southerne remained in London before going to war, giving him ample opportunity to observe her work.

It would probably be possible to reveal influences from a number of Mrs. Behn's comedies which Southerne might have seen during her most fruitful period. There is one, however, which seems, because of its similarities in plot and characters, and its continued success on the stage (including a sequel which appeared four years after the debut of the first part), to have been more significant in its influence upon Southerne and his writing of Sir Anthony Love than the others. The play is Aphra Behn's The Rover.<sup>31</sup> Produced in March, 1677,<sup>32</sup> its debut was perhaps prior to Southerne's arrival in London, but at some point he may have seen one of the play's numerous revivals, coming as they did in 1680, 1685, 1687, and 1690.<sup>33</sup> Of course, there may very well have been other performances for which there is no record, but using the dates confirmed, along with the sketchy schedule of Southerne's comings and goings, it is possible that he saw a 1680 performance and / or the production in early 1685. Interestingly enough, the last two performances on record

prior to the death of Charles II were Mrs. Behn's The Rover (22 January, 1685), and a revival of Southerne's own play, The Disappointment (27 January, 1685).<sup>34</sup> With these productions and the subsequent death of the King, the Restoration, in a technical sense, came to an end. Theatre activity following Charles' death, through the reign of his brother and on into the Revolution, was minimal. With only one theatre company in London, the dramatic fare following the King's death consisted primarily of revivals of established successes. Dryden, Shadwell, and others had fallen away from the theatre even before Charles's death.<sup>35</sup> Southerne, with Sir Anthony Love, seemed to forecast a return to the kind of theatre that had been so popular when he arrived in London. Interestingly enough, the decade of the 1690s did become the second great age of the Restoration; the era of Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar was about to begin. The 1690 production of The Rover came only a month or two after Southerne's successful comedy (depending on what debut date is arrived at for Sir Anthony Love), and it could well have been that the astute company managers, seeing the popularity of Sir Anthony Love and recognizing its source and style, quickly revived The Rover.<sup>36</sup> Regardless of these circumstances, a comparison of the two works reveals a good deal of evidence which indicates that The Rover played an influential role in the creation of Sir Anthony Love.

Mrs. Behn's play opens with the introduction of two sisters, Florinda and Hellena, each of whom is bemoaning her

fate. Like Southerne's Floriante, Florinda is being forced to marry someone other than the man she loves. Meanwhile, her younger sister is to be banished to a nunnery. Both girls reflect the youth, beauty, and fortune of Southerne's women, although Mrs. Behn's two characters possess a spirit lacking in Southerne's creations (especially Floriante). With such a dominant character as Sir Anthony, it would be necessary to reduce the strength of the other characters in the play, so Southerne mutes the aggressive spirit of his two sisters. Of the two, Charlott is more assertive, occasionally echoing some of the sentiments of the outspoken Hellena. She makes it clear that she 'had rather be a nun, than be nothing at all,'<sup>37</sup> while Hellena tells her sister that she 'had rather be a nun than to be obliged to marry as you would have me if I were designed for it.'<sup>38</sup> Both, in the course of their respective plays, eventually provide for themselves, escape their celibate fates, and arrange their own marriages.

The aggressiveness of Hellena could well have been part of the inspiration for Southerne's own protagonist, Sir Anthony/Lucia. Both Hellena and Lucia reject helpless docility, going on the offensive instead; they adopt bold methods of attack to improve their situations. Hellena even takes on the disguise of a man for a brief period of time, though it is certainly less extreme than Lucia's as the libertine, Sir Anthony. It could have been, however, that the scenes between the high-spirited Hellena and the Rover, Willmore, the epitome of Restoration inconstancy, inspired the

dramatist to blend the two and arrive at his own unique creation. The battle of wits between Mrs. Behn's two characters could as easily have been the man and woman within Sir Anthony [the character] in conflict:

Willmore: . . . Therefore, dear creature, since we are so well agreed, let's retire to my chamber; and if ever thou wert treated with such savory love! Come, my bed's prepared for such a guest all clean and sweet as thy fair self. I love to steal a dish and a bottle with a friend, and hate long graces. Come, let's retire and fall to.

Hellena: 'Tis but getting my consent, and the business is soon done. Let but old gaffer Hymen and his priest say amen to't, and I dare lay my mother's daughter by as proper a fellow as your father's son, without fear or blushing.

Willmore: Hold, hold, no bug words, child. Priest and Hymen? Prithee add a hangman to 'em to make up the consort. No, no, we'll have no vows but love, child, nor witness but the lover: the kind deity enjoins naught but love and enjoy. Hymen and priest wait still upon portion and jointure; love and beauty have their own ceremonies. Marriage is as certain a bane to love as lending money is to friendship. I'll neither ask nor give a vow, though I could be content to turn gypsy and become a left-handed bridegroom to have the pleasure of working that great miracle of making a maid a mother, if you durst venture. 'Tis upse gipsy that, and if I miss I'll lose my labor.

Hellena: And if you do not lose, what shall I get? A cradle full of noise and mischief, with a pack of repentance at my back? Can you teach me to weave incle to pass my time with? 'Tis upse gipsy that, too.

Willmore: I can teach thee to weave a true love's knot better.

Hellena: So can my dog.

Willmore: Well, I see we are both upon our guards, and I see there's no way to conquer good nature but by yielding. Here, give me thy hand: one kiss, and I am thine.<sup>39</sup>

Angeline Goreau, in her book on Aphra Behn, sees Willmore as 'the very pattern of a libertine hero; he is witty, extravagant, irresistibly attractive to women, and promiscuous.'<sup>40</sup> He was a model whom Southerne could have studied carefully. Granted, the reputation of Sir Anthony in the play is largely superficial, but both Southerne's impersonator and Behn's classic hero adhered to the standard libertine philosophy. The libertine saw marriage as 'a bane of love,'<sup>41</sup> and would rather enjoy 'all the honey of matrimony but none of the sting.'<sup>42</sup> He sought only life's pleasures, and recoiled from its restrictions, or pursued a way around them. Lucia casts herself in the role of the dashing rake, who is 'as famous for her action with the men, as for her passion with the women;'<sup>43</sup> what better model than the sword-wielding cavalier, who risks life and limb for friendship and reputation, while pursuing every attractive woman in sight? Reportedly based on John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, himself the epitome of Restoration debauchery, Mrs. Behn's character would be a natural paradigm for Lucia's characterization.

Mrs. Behn, as did Southerne, added a third young woman, Valeria, to her plot. Like Volante, she is a cousin of the

two rebellious sisters, and joins them in their romp. Volante, like Hellena, demands marriage as the price for her virtue, and holds out until the exasperated gallant (Sir Anthony) gives in. Despite the libertine convictions of both Willmore and Sir Anthony (perhaps even more remarkable in the case of Southerne's rake who is a woman), they find themselves capitulating to determined females.

Southerne must surely have been looking at Mrs. Behn's delightfully bumbling, good-natured Ned Blunt when he created his own fool, Sir Gentle Golding. Each fancies himself a ladies' man, but in pursuit of women both end up as dupes and laughing stocks. Ned Blunt, a wealthy country squire, is deceived by a 'jilting wench,'<sup>44</sup> who lures him into a trap, and then robs him of his money, his clothes, and whatever dignity he may have had. Sir Gentle Golding, Lucia's foolish keeper, is also robbed of his money and clothes, and is eventually lured to a rendezvous by the clever Lucia, where he suffers the humiliation of a second robbery. Both Aphra Behn's and Southerne's witless creations are literally and figuratively stripped naked, and then exposed to the ridicule of their countrymen. Southerne even echoes a bit of Mrs. Behn's dialogue in remarkably similar circumstances. When the eager fools are escorted to their rendezvous, each is accompanied by a servant who treats him with the utmost respect. Blunt comments on the treatment by exclaiming, 'adheartlikens, by this garb and gravity he might be a justice of peace in Essex, and is but a pimp here.'<sup>45</sup> Sir Gentle,

responding to the kindness of Wait-well, remarks that he 'can't take this civil gentleman for a pimp, tho' I have occasion for him.'<sup>46</sup> Both fail to see beneath the surface of manners and affectation, and allow their own vanity to lead them into humiliating traps, followed by ill-conceived schemes of revenge.

The Rover and Sir Anthony Love also have similarities in their basic structures. Each is divided 'into two "camps of characters."<sup>47</sup> Mrs. Behn's play, set in Naples at a time when it was part of the Spanish kingdom, involves Spaniards and English cavaliers; Southerne sets his play in Montpellier, dividing his characters between the native French and the sojourning English. In both plays three Englishmen (in Southerne's play, including Lucia in disguise) pursue three 'foreign' girls and all three couples are eventually married. The paths along which both chases proceed are filled with the use of elaborate disguise, mistaken identities, misreadings of intentions and situations, late night encounters, attempted escapes and ambushes, and moments of farcical tom-foolery resulting in the lively, energetic romps which drew rave reviews from the theatre-going public of the seventeenth century. The etiology of characters, events, and even dialogue in Sir Anthony Love repeatedly indicates Mrs. Behn's play. The important differences between The Rover and Sir Anthony Love proceed from Southerne's different thematic objectives. As in other cases where her works provided sources for his plays, Aphra Behn gave him inspirations which

he developed in his own distinctive way.

Aphra Behn's influence on Southerne's plot and characters in Sir Anthony Love, and the two writers' corresponding sympathies with the struggle of women in a male-dominated society, lead to speculation: could the dramatist's inspiration for his play have gone beyond the already indicated literary works of Mrs. Behn to the lady herself? Could Mrs. Behn have been, at least partially, the model for Southerne's spirited protagonist, Sir Anthony Love? It is only supposition, but the parallels between the two -- Southerne's bold lady in disguise, and 'the first woman in England to earn her living by her pen'<sup>48</sup> -- are remarkable enough to justify a moment's conjecture.

Most critics have viewed Southerne's Epistle Dedicatory to Thomas Skipwith as providing clear evidence that the character of Lucia/Sir Anthony was created 'with Mrs. Montford in mind.'<sup>49</sup> But a careful reading of the Epistle reveals an ambiguity in the words of the playwright, leaving the meaning of the entire paragraph about his source for the character open to question. Is the paragraph simply an extended tribute to the personal charms and talents of Mrs. Mountfort, or is there a subtle shift of subject which only an 'insider' such as the company manager, Thomas Skipwith, could fully comprehend? Does Southerne change focus between his discussion of 'the Original Sir Anthony,' and his taking 'the occasion of mentioning Mrs. Montford?' There is reason to believe that he does, and that a primary candidate for the



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'original' could very well have been the authoress of his primary sources for the play, Aphra Behn.

Before looking at the evidence which points to Mrs. Behn as a likely model for Lucia/Sir Anthony, it is necessary to note the distinction in Southerne's remarks between what he says about inspiration for the role, and what he says about Mrs. Mountfort's subsequent portrayal. To accomplish this we must look closely at the third paragraph from the Epistle Dedicatory:

You know the Original of Sir Anthony, and therefore can best judge, how the Copy is drawn; tho' it won't be to my advantage to have 'em too narrowly compar'd; her Wit is indeed inimitable, not to be painted: Yet I must say, there's something in my Draught of her, that carries a resemblance, and makes up a very tolerable Figure: And since I have this occasion of mentioning Mrs. Montford, I am pleased, by way of Thanks, to do her that publick Justice in Print, which some of the best Judges of these Performances, have, in her Praise, already done her, in publick places; that they never saw any part more masterly play'd: and as I made every line for her, she has mended every Word for me; and by a Gaiety and Air, particular to her Action, turn'd every thing into the Genius of the Character.<sup>50</sup>

We could easily be led to believe that only Mrs. Mountfort is being discussed in this paragraph, but it is also possible that Southerne changes subject in the middle of the paragraph as he expands his treatment of 'the Original of Sir Anthony.' He talks first of his character's resemblance to the original, and that his creation 'makes up a very tolerable figure.' These first eight lines appear to be directed specifically to Thomas Skipwith, and have a sense of intimacy about them which

is lacking in the remainder of the paragraph. In those lines he brings in Mrs. Mountfort's name, and confesses he created the role for her, paying public tribute to her for her skill in bringing the character to life. He was doubtless very familiar with her acting talents, surely having seen her in a number of productions, including his own. As Susanna Percival, she had originated the role of the devoted but jilted mistress, Juliana, in The Disappointment, and Southerne probably kept her playing of that role in mind when he began to form his next play, Sir Anthony Love. It was not uncommon for authors who were writing for specific acting companies (there was only one in London in 1690) to create characters with particular actors and actresses in mind. The London Stage relates the story of Nahum Tate's disappointment at the unavailability of the comedian James Nokes for a major role in Cuckold's Haven (1685). Tate confessed that it was Nokes 'for whom it was design'd, and only proper.'<sup>51</sup> William Congreve was also noted for creating roles with specific actors and actresses in mind; 'his most gracious heroines' were created 'with Anne Bracegirdle as the model.'<sup>52</sup> Distinctive physical attributes, rhythms of speech, styles of delivery, general personality traits, and even special talents could be included in the creation of a character. Authors could, as Southerne apparently did, make every line for a specific actor or actress. The creation and playing of a character, however, is not the same as being the source for a character, and clearly Southerne was aware of the difference. In his final

remark in the paragraph, he credits the 'Gaiety and Air' of Mrs. Mountfort with turning 'every thing into the Genius of the Character.' If the actress had been the 'original,' no such transformation would have been required; Southerne's model must have been elsewhere.

The source or inspiration for a character is that intellectual spark which ignites the whole artistic process. The result is not necessarily a replica of the original, but, in a general sense, is traceable back to that source; so it may have been with Aphra Behn and Lucia/Sir Anthony.

Philosophically there is a more than casual resemblance between the first professional woman writer and Southerne's heroine. Both had a strong belief in the freedom to follow their natural inclinations, and an equally strong distrust of the social institutions and morality which attempted to limit them. Mrs. Behn's moral system 'defined what was right as what came naturally.'<sup>53</sup> 'Society and its morality, based on false assumptions, were responsible for the corruption of relations between sexes.'<sup>54</sup> Lucia/Sir Anthony is also an 'enemy of forms,'<sup>55</sup> and prefers to follow her natural desires. In both instances this philosophy led to sexual freedom. Natural inclination was the only sanction necessary for love. Both the outspoken Mrs. Behn and Southerne's protagonist expressed 'a radical impulse for freedom and a demand for the right of human beings to act according to individual conscience.'<sup>56</sup> Throughout Sir Anthony Love there are examples of plots and disguises which fail because they

run counter to individual conscience and inclination. Lucia's initial success comes from her allegiance to her desires. Her compliance with conscience (or her absence of any) allows her the freedom to portray the young rake. This emphasis on individual freedom and distaste for traditional moral codes are easily recognizable as aspects of libertinism which figured largely in the creation of the Restoration rake.

Both Mrs. Behn and Southerne's protagonist also seem to have the libertine's distaste for the institution of marriage. Aphra was married briefly to a Mr. Behn, but following his death, she was never to wed again. Sir Anthony also expresses a distaste for such permanency, saying that marriage 'is the only game where nobody can be a winner.'<sup>57</sup> Despite her philosophy, however, she marries twice within the play, once as a man (the spurious wedding to Volante), and the second time as a woman. Her second marriage, to Sir Gentle Golding, appears to be motivated more by reasons of financial security than by any true affection for the foolish knight. Aphra also may have had security in mind when she married Mr. Behn, who was described by Gildon as an 'eminent' London merchant.<sup>58</sup> If, like many other young women without doweries, Aphra was forced to marry a rich older man, she evidently found the experience as distasteful as Lucia found her forced alliance with Sir Gentle. Goreau comments that 'No characters in all Aphra Behn's literary work are described with so much antipathy as older city merchants who have the vanity to marry young girls, forced into the match by

financial necessity or by tyrannical parents.<sup>59</sup> Her husband is presumed to have died within eighteen months of the wedding, most likely in the plague which struck London in 1665--1666. This released her from the bondage of matrimony, though she apparently did not enjoy the financial benefits that Lucia received through Golding's agreement to a separate maintenance. If Aphra had given up her cherished freedom for financial security, she was doubly a loser, for Mr. Behn's death left her with almost no resources. Her agreement to become a spy for Charles II must have been occasioned not only by her loyalty to the Stuarts and her love of adventure, but also by a need for gainful employment. She had only forty pounds and a few rings to pawn when she arrived in Antwerp to begin her career in espionage. In addition to establishing her as a real-life 'Rambling Lady,' the element of deception and the invasion of the masculine sphere involved in Mrs. Behn's activities as a spy seem a parallel to certain aspects of Lucia's adventures. Throughout Southerne's play his young heroine shows an awareness of the connection between money and independence. Angeline Goreau points out that following the debts Mrs. Behn incurred while a spy for Charles II, she too began 'to understand that real independence required a financial base.'<sup>60</sup> Both women, using their wits in different ways, set out to secure such a base.

In an attempt to provide for a secure future, both Restoration ladies found it necessary to adopt a duality of character which would allow them to follow their radical

philosophies. Both showed an awareness of their society's double standard, and each had come to believe that any victory over it was attainable only through subjugation of self. What Goreau describes as Mrs. Behn's 'revolutionary attack on the concepts of social hierarchy, property, and repressive sexual codes'<sup>61</sup> would also be an apt description of Sir Anthony/Lucia's aggressive actions as she comes 'a Collonelling' into France.<sup>62</sup> Both commandeered the uniform of male libertinism in order to achieve the freedom denied them as women; Mrs. Behn adopted the rhetoric and behaviour of a libertine, while Sir Anthony assumes a physical disguise as well. Southerne provides his heroine with a sword in place of Mrs. Behn's pen (the phallic nature of both seems inescapable), and thus armed, both invaded the male world of their society. At first, they appear successful. Lucia, as the engaging knight, is quickly 'one of the boys,' and proceeds to lead the young rakes in pursuit of the young women; Mrs. Behn, nearly as quickly, joined the town wits of the literary world at Will's Coffee House, and before long became a leading member. Lucia's adoption of male dress seems little other than a dramatic metaphor for the masculine pursuits of Mrs. Behn's own life. Aphra Behn makes repeated references to her sexual duality, and her allusion to 'my masculine part, the poet in me,'<sup>63</sup> makes it apparent that she felt compelled to adopt 'a masculine self in a woman's body'<sup>64</sup> in order to achieve her goal as a writer. Her contemporaries make constant reference to this melding of the

male and female. John Adams, a minor poet of the Restoration, wrote of Aphra:

Neither sex do you surpass alone,  
Both in your verse are their glory shown,  
While in the softest dress you wit dispense,  
With all the nerves of reason and of sense.  
In mingled beauties we at once may trace  
A female sweetness and a manly grace.<sup>65</sup>

Another writer credits Aphra Behn with revealing 'the beauties of both Sexes joined.'<sup>66</sup> Even a more modern critic admits that the woman's 'success depended on her ability to write like a man.'<sup>67</sup> She appeared to sit 'astride two spheres,'<sup>68</sup> seeking, like Lucia, dominion over a 'Universal Empire.' Neither would 'be stinted to one province.'<sup>69</sup> Mrs. Behn, like Sir Anthony, was, as the Abbé puts it: 'all in all; the whole company thyself; thou art every thing with every body.'<sup>70</sup>

Underneath Mrs. Behn's desire for independence and equality in the male world, however, was an obsession with her 'womanly modesty.' A result of her upbringing, this demureness created a constant battle within the playwright; the very sexual antagonism of her society seemed to be taking place within her, as it does within Sir Anthony/Lucia. Angeline Goreau points out that her 'fighting declaration of entry into the sphere of the wits is equivocated by her reluctance to risk being considered unfeminine. Her desire to be taken seriously is countered by her wish to charm.'<sup>71</sup> Mrs. Behn appeared to be well aware of the struggle, and it seemed a continual point of frustration: 'What in strong



manly verse I would express, / Turns all to womanish tenderness within.'<sup>72</sup> Southerne gives a certain 'womanly modesty' to his character, and although it is not greatly emphasized, it does have significance. When Lucia's disguise is revealed to all, at the end of the play, and she resumes her feminine role, her fabled 'wit' seems to desert her; she falls completely silent, and despite all the proof of her ability to fend for herself, she leaves her fate to the men. Valentine represents her, and negotiates the agreement with Sir Gentle. The suddenly modest Lucia has returned to the feminine sphere, where a lady is to wait, while men make decisions for her. In his play Southerne reveals a sensitivity to the plight of a woman who attempts to survive in a male world. He creates a character who, like Mrs. Behn, has to struggle continually with the double standard, and who ultimately loses the battle of wits. As the curtain falls, Lucia is isolated from her former 'friends,' both male and female. Aphra Behn died, in 1689, virtually alone and destitute. Her epitaph reads: 'Here lies a proof that wit can never be defense against mortality.'<sup>73</sup>

If there ever was a 'rambling lady' during the Restoration, only Aphra Behn could hope to wrest that title from Southerne's heroine. Her adventure in Antwerp was not her first journey out of England. In 1663 she had accompanied her family to Surinam, on the eastern coast of South America. Her father, who had been appointed Lieutenant General of the colony, died on the voyage, and consequently the young woman,

her mother, and her sister found themselves alone on the far side of the Atlantic, without benefit of a man to depend upon. It may well have been this forced independence which gave Mrs. Behn a taste of freedom and the confidence to 'go it alone' as a writer. Years later her experiences in Surinam were retold in her most famous novel, Oroonoko, upon which Southerne would base his popular tragi-comedy. The comic sub-plot of Southerne's Oroonoko is reminiscent of his earlier comedy. J. W. Dodds identifies the situation as 'an old one, used by Southerne before in Sir Anthony Love.'<sup>74</sup>

Mrs. Behn's novel, published in 1688, is essentially autobiographical, and it may have been here that Southerne hit upon the author as an inspiration for his stage character. In the story of her adventures in Surinam, Southerne would have read of a young woman, virtually on her own, faced with the prospect of trying to survive in an exotic, primitive, male-dominated society. Mrs. Behn's novel is a first person narrative and Southerne, in his dramatic adaptation of Oroonoko, includes a character who bears a strong resemblance to both the novelist and Lucia/Sir Anthony Love. Like Aphra, Charlott Welldon is a young woman who flees England for the shores of Surinam, but like Sir Anthony, she adopts a male disguise upon her arrival, eventually marries a woman and then puts the lady to bed with a man. Dodds correctly identifies the plot as a replaying of Southerne's earlier comic success, Sir Anthony Love. The very fact, however, that when Southerne puts Oroonoko into dramatic form, he chooses to include a

duplicate of Lucia/Sir Anthony with Mrs. Behn's personal history leads to the speculation that Charlott Welldon was inspired by the authoress's own presence in the original story. If Mrs. Behn is the model for Charlott Welldon (a character unmistakably like Sir Anthony Love), then the notion of Mrs. Behn being the 'original' Sir Anthony Love seems to have some credence. Added to the fact that the publication date of the novel is just two years prior to Sir Anthony Love's debut, the conjecture, while only that, is not without some foundation.

There are numerous other parallels between the two women, some more and some less significant, some accepted fact, and others simply unconfirmed rumour. Mrs. Behn's reputation for wit, her atheistic tendencies, the rumours of her possible bisexuality, and her relationship with the notorious libertine, John Hoyle, all in some way suggest ties with Southerne's heroine.<sup>75</sup> It is, of course, impossible to prove the relationship of the two, and there is not even any clear evidence that Southerne personally knew Mrs. Behn, although, since they had mutual friends, it is probable that he did. But such acquaintance would not have been necessary for the dramatist to build a character around her. He could have been satisfied with the character revealed through her literary works, and embellished with the many rumours concerning this woman who worked in a man's world. There is a great deal in Southerne's comedy, Sir Anthony Love, which recalls the dramatic efforts and romantic novels of this

fascinating Restoration woman, and in the title character Southerne may well have captured the dramatic Aphra Behn herself.

THE ORIGINAL CAST OF SIR ANTHONY LOVE

III.

The three hundred years that have elapsed since the debut of Sir Anthony Love, along with the fact that the play received only minimal contemporary commentary, make any sort of accurate recreation of the production a hopeless task. It is possible, however, to create some sense of that first performance by investigating the theatrical styles of the period, and by revealing what is known about the cast of ~~in~~ the original production.

The social relationship of actor to audience, and vice versa, in Restoration theatre helps us to imagine the overall spirit and mood of a particular production. Since the theatre-going public in the last decade of the seventeenth century came from a rather small segment of society, the atmosphere was that of any social gathering where the majority of individuals are familiar with one another. Pleasantries were exchanged, the latest gossip disseminated, the young men flirted with attractive young ladies (who were attending the theatre in growing numbers), who naturally flirted back

(within the bounds of womanly modesty), and, on occasion, debate and disagreement would get out of control and a fight would ensue. Professor Nicoll paints a portrait of the audience, saying that 'On they went with their loves and their quarrels and their sallies, heedless of the play before them. It was at the theatre that Wycherley had his first conversation with his later mistress, the Duchess of Cleveland, she sitting in the front row of the King's box and he standing in the pit. It was at the Dorset Garden Playhouse that Langbaine saw Mr Scroop killed by Thomas Armstrong during a performance of Macbeth.<sup>76</sup> Peter Holland, in The Ornament of Action, says Nicoll's descriptions are somewhat sensational, and credits the audience with a sophistication about the theatre. He sees the audience as

made up of regular visitors to the playhouse, an audience that would recognize the changes that a playwright might make in an established mode. When they entered the theatre, they had a set of preconceptions of patterns, of predictions that the playwrights could fulfil or frustrate.<sup>77</sup>

Both descriptions seem to have some validity. The atmosphere described by Nicoll would naturally evolve from habitual attendance, yet the sophistication appears likely also for a play like Sir Anthony Love to have the impact Southerne no doubt intended. The Restoration theatre prior to the raising of the curtain (and often after the curtain had gone up) had a festive, circus-like atmosphere. Also, because there was only one acting troupe, the social intimacy of the audience must have extended beyond the footlights. While the actors and

actresses of the Restoration were by no means social equals of the majority of the aristocratic audience, they were, as they are today, fascinating, attractive people, and must have been well known by the regular theatre patrons, if not personally, then at least by reputation. Recognition, must have worked both ways; performers must have picked out familiar faces in the audience, and, whether it was suitable or not, may have boldly acknowledged the fact. There existed in the Restoration theatre an intimate, but high-spirited congeniality, an electricity which coursed in three directions simultaneously: from one member of the audience to another; from the audience to the stage, and from the stage back to the spectators, either directly or indirectly. While this intercommunication might hinder particularly dramatic styles, it could only enhance an active, farcical comedy like Sir Anthony Love.

The traditional dramatic convention of a Prologue also aided in establishing a special rapport between spectators and performers. The presentational remarks were designed to get the attention of the rambunctious gathering, and, to establish a mood which would carry through to the beginning of the play. The lovely and popular Anne Bracegirdle, a woman who rarely failed to gain an audience's attention, delivered Southerne's Prologue to Sir Anthony Love. Almost in the style of the young she-knight herself, Mrs. Bracegirdle upbraided the male members of the audience for their recent neglect of London's ladies, and combining those barbs with some

contemporary political remarks, threatened to find some real men among the ranks of the returning soldiers (returning from fighting against James II in Ireland). It was just the right tone with which to pique the audience's interest and prepare them for the action of the play.

The excitement in the theatre during Sir Anthony Love may well have been increased by the appearance from the very start of the play of an actress 'bare above the knee.'<sup>78</sup> There is little doubt about the popularity of 'breeches roles' in the Restoration, and the temperature inside the theatre must have risen a degree or two above normal when one of the ladies of the theatre showed her legs. John Harold Wilson identifies eighty-nine new or alterations of pre-Restoration plays between 1660 and 1700 which 'contained one or more roles for actresses "in Boy's Clothes," or "in Man's Clothing."<sup>79</sup> Southerne took fullest advantage of the public's predilection for a shapely limb, by putting his heroine in breeches from the very beginning of Sir Anthony Love until all but the final moments, when she changed clothing with another young lady -- giving the audience a new pair of legs to look at.

Finally, the physical relationship of actor to audience must be remarked before proceeding to the individual performers in Southerne's comedy. While there had been significant changes in theatre architecture between the theatre identified with Shakespeare and that of the Restoration, the physical intimacy between performer and spectator had not been sacrificed. In fact, it may well have

been enhanced by putting a roof over the theatre, thus cutting off the sense of exposure that must have been prevalent in a structure such as the Globe. The adoption of the Italian proscenium or picture frame stage in the Restoration created greater scenic possibilities behind the actors, but the wide apron of the forestage (in front of the proscenium) allowed for the continuation of the Elizabethan propinquity of player and viewer. As Hugh Hunt confirms in his essay on 'Restoration Acting,' 'almost the whole of the play took place on the forestage.'<sup>80</sup> With this proximity, and the use of presentational devices like asides and soliloquies, the exchange, whether literal or spiritual, between performer and spectator increases. The action and energy generated on stage more easily carries to the audience, and their response more readily returns. Holland indicates that 'Restoration comedy emphasised its close connection with its audience. . .by placing the action principally on the forestage (in front of the proscenium arch).'<sup>81</sup> The closer the actor is to the audience the stronger is the audience's recognition of the actor as an individual behind the role.<sup>82</sup> This, combined with the intimacy of the London theatre community, prevented the performer's true identity from being ever wholly submerged in his character. Southerne seemed to have a good sense of the dynamics of his theatre and used it to great advantage in his creation of Sir Anthony Love. He also had a good eye and ear for casting. Using Holland again as the source, he states that 'nearly all the major dramatists' seem to have taken care



over the casting of their plays.'<sup>83</sup> They also, in most instances, directed the rehearsals of their plays, 'often aided by the theatre-manager. . .when. . .the manager was also an actor.'<sup>84</sup> Southerne had an awareness of the talent of the United Company as it stood in 1690, as well as of the preconceptions of the audience toward the players. Both are quickly evident in a detailed look at the members of his original cast.

A description of the acting talents and the unique personalities and reputations of the individual actors and actresses involved in the popular premiere of Sir Anthony Love will add to the understanding of the play as originally staged and help to shed some light on Southerne's conception of the characters. With only a single acting company in London at the time the play was first staged, the author could create most major roles with certain actors and actresses in mind, as he tells us he did for Mrs. Mountfort. The creative process became a sort of two-way traffic. Southerne envisioned characters in terms of particular company members, and their individual personalities and theatrical skills in turn would colour the dramatist's perception of his own characters. Holland remarks that

The intervention in performance is in part derived from the actor's intervention in the creation of the play itself. The practice of writing parts for an individual actor opens the way for various literary, personal and theatrical influences as embodied in the actor himself to work -- and be made by the author to work -- on the text as performed. . .Without looking at the cast, the critic can only see the

interaction of the play with [the author's] own work and a limited theatrical context. But the play depends for its meaning upon the transformation of a particular series of established patterns, many of which are apparent only through the casting. The audience must see the actor as an individual and understand his significance.<sup>85</sup>

It seems appropriate to begin a discussion of the original cast of Sir Anthony Love with Susanna Percival Mountfort, the lively young actress who swaggered her way through the title role. Southerne, in his Epistle Dedicatory, makes special mention of her portrayal, saying that public consensus was 'that they never saw any part more masterly played.'<sup>86</sup> He credits her 'Gaiety and Air' with turning 'every thing into the Genius of the Character,'<sup>87</sup> and confesses to having created the character specifically for her and her considerable talents.

By the premiere of Sir Anthony Love Susanna Mountfort had been appearing on the stage for a decade. The daughter of Thomas Percival, a minor actor with the Duke's Company,<sup>88</sup> she first appeared in Thomas D'Urfey's Tory satire, Sir Barnaby Whigg, in September, 1681, at the age of fourteen.<sup>89</sup> In the early years of the new United Company she played a variety of roles, including the abandoned but faithful mistress, Juliana, in Southerne's The Disappointment. On 2 July 1686 she married the rising young actor, William Mountfort,<sup>90</sup> and for the remaining years of Mountfort's life the two were often paired together on stage, and enjoyed great success as a theatrical comic couple.

During those years Mrs. Mountfort's reputation as a comic actress continued to grow. She played the spirited Gertrude in Shadwell's Bury Fair, and Florella in her husband's Greenwich Park, and Mrs. Witwoud in Southerne's unsuccessful The Wives' Excuse.<sup>91</sup>

On 10 December 1692 William Mountfort died. He had suffered a wound the night before at the hands of Captain Richard Hill, a man insanely jealous of Mountfort's supposed relationship with the well-known Anne Bracegirdle. His widow returned to the stage in February of the following year, first appearing in Southerne's The Maid's Last Prayer.<sup>92</sup> She completed the year 1693 by playing Mrs. Froth in Congreve's The Double Dealer.

On 31 January 1694, still a young woman at only twenty-six, she remarried, this time wedding a rising young actor of the company, John Verbruggen.<sup>93</sup> The secession of the Betterton group from the Drury Lane Company created some difficulties for the newlyweds. In 1695, when they were apparently eager to follow the disgruntled actors, the Lord Chamberlain ordered the Verbruggens to remain with the Drury Lane Company.<sup>94</sup> Jack Verbruggen did eventually change camps, but Mrs. Verbruggen did not, apparently because the Betterton Company refused to grant her a full share in the troupe.<sup>95</sup> Consequently, she finished her career with Drury Lane. Her last recorded role was in Estcourt's The Fair Example, in April 1703.<sup>96</sup> Cibber reports that the Company acted in Bath in the summer of that year, while Queen Anne was

in residence there, and that 'it happen'd, that Mrs. Verbruggen, by reason of her last Sickness (of which she some few Months after, dyd'd) was left in London.'<sup>97</sup> Thomas Davies confirms her death, reporting that the 'admirable comic actress died in child-bed, 1703.'<sup>98</sup> An anonymous Preface to The Female Wits in 1704 pays tribute to the popular comedienne, saying her death was a 'Loss we must ever regret, as the Chief Actress in her Kind, who never had anyone that exceeded her.'<sup>99</sup> Her name and some measure of her comic talents continued to live for a while, however, as her oldest daughter, Susanna Mountfort, was apparently a successful comic actress from about 1703 until 1718.<sup>100</sup>

While John Genest says Mrs. Mountfort was a 'naturally pleasing Mimic and had the skill to make that talent useful on the stage -- her elecution was round, distinct, voluable and various --',<sup>101</sup> the best portrait of the actress comes from Colley Cibber, who, by all accounts, made his debut in Sir Anthony Love. The noted actor, playwright, and theatre manager remembered Mrs. Mountfort as a 'Mistress of more Variety of Humour, than I knew in any one Woman Actress. . .attended with an equal Vivacity, which made her excellent in Characters extremely different.'<sup>102</sup> He particularly remembered a part she acted in D'Urfey's The Western Lass, where 'she transform'd her whole Being, Body, Shape, Voice, Language, Look, and Features, into almost another Animal.'<sup>103</sup> Southerne's praise for her contribution to the success of his play seems well-deserved. Cibber

recognized her ability to bring characters to life, saying that 'Nothing, tho' ever so barren, if within the Bounds of Nature, could be flat in her Hands. She gave many heightening Touches to Characters but coldly written,' and that she was best suited for 'the Gay, the Lively, and the Desirable.'<sup>104</sup> She must have been a most attractive young woman, for Davies, in his Dramatic Miscellanies, remarks that 'The Stage, perhaps, never produced four such handsome women, at once, as Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Bracegirdle, Mrs. Mountfort, and Mrs. Bowman.'<sup>105</sup> As Cibber tells us, however, Mrs. Mountfort's beauty, nor 'her Humour [was] limited to her Sex; for, while her Shape permitted, she was a more adroit pretty Fellow, than is usually seen upon the Stage: Her easy Air, Action, Mien, and Gesture, quite chang'd from the Quoiif, to the cock'd Hat, and Cavalier in fashion. People were so fond of seeing her as a Man, that when the Part of Bays in the Rehearsal, had, for some time, lain dormant, she was desired to take it up,' and upon doing so, Cibber saw her act the role 'with all the true, Coxcomby Spirit, and Humour, that the Sufficiency of the Character required.'<sup>106</sup> In addition to playing Lucia/Sir Anthony in Southerne's play, Mrs. Mountfort appeared as Mrs. Jenkins in Ravenscroft's Dame Dobson, Anabella in Powell's A Very Good Wife, Charlott Welldon in Southerne's Oroonoko, and others; each of whom spent some period of time on stage in man's dress.

The very nature of the demanding role Southerne created speaks to the talents of Mrs. Mountfort. Lucia/Sir Anthony

was the vitality of the play, the life force that generated the energy by which the entire production moved. The tremendous technical skill and the intense spirit of the actress must have been generally acknowledged for the young playwright, after nearly six years away from the London theatre, to risk making 'every line for her.' Mrs. Mountfort's reputation for portraying both sexes convincingly on the stage was tailor-made for the playing of the adaptable Lucia, and it is easy to imagine the delight of the audience as she made each transformation smoothly and effortlessly. The loud, enthusiastic cheers can almost be heard when, after a host of character metamorphoses, she suggests switching clothes with the bewildered Floriante, exclaiming as she dashes off stage, 'Now for my Petticoats agen.'<sup>107</sup> Like all great actors and actresses, Southerne's leading lady doubtless possessed that mystical quality that demands attention -- a charismatic 'something' that electrifies an audience upon her entrance and obliges the spectators to follow her implicitly. John Harold Wilson acknowledged her considerable talents, saying that when it came to breeches roles 'Mrs. Mountfort was unique; in the opinion of her contemporaries she was "a Miracle." The other actresses notable for comic breeches parts. . . were all her inferiors.'<sup>108</sup>

Undoubtedly the most famous member of Southerne's cast of Sir Anthony Love, at least from a modern point of view, was 'the Celebrated Virgin,' Anne Bracegirdle, who played the practical Charlott, and delivered the Prologue. Brought up by

the family of Thomas Betterton, the supremely beautiful young woman first appeared as the Page in Thomas Otway's The Orphan (March, 1680), at the age of sixteen, but was not listed as a member of the company until 12 January 1688.<sup>109</sup>

She was a lovely Height, with dark-brown Hair and Eye-brows, black sparkling Eyes, and a fresh blush Complexion; and, whenever she exerted her self, had an involuntary Flushing in her Breast, Neck and Face, having continually a cheerful Aspect, and a fine set of white Teeth; never making an Exit, but that she left the Audience in an Imitation of her pleasant Countenance.<sup>110</sup>

Called by Cibber 'the Darling of the Theatre,'<sup>111</sup> she inspired playwrights to write for her, and 'the most eminent Authors always chose her for their favourite Character.'<sup>112</sup> For Southerne, she played the betrayed Mrs. Sightly in The Wives' Excuse, Lady Trickitt in The Maid's Last Prayer, and the lovely Victoria in The Fatal Marriage. Congreve's greatest roles were designed with her in mind. Nicholas Rowe, the tragic playwright of the early eighteenth century, was even said to have courted the actress through the dialogue of his plays, particularly in Tamerlane, and The Fair Penitent.<sup>113</sup>

In addition to her talent for pathetic roles in tragedy and for sophisticated heroines in comedies, Mrs. Bracegirdle is credited with being perhaps the first singing actress of the period. Previously, songs had been handled by professional singers.<sup>114</sup> Cibber confirms her musical ability by saying that in characters 'where singing was a necessary Part. . .her Voice and Action gave a Pleasure, which

good Sense, in those Days, was not asham'd to give Praise to.<sup>115</sup>

In 1695 she was one of the founders of the new acting company, along with Betterton and Barry, and in that troupe played some of her most famous roles, including Millamant in Congreve's The Way of the World. In 1707, at the age of forty-four, seeing the young Anne Oldfield beginning to challenge her for roles, she 'retired from the Stage in the Height of her Favour from the Public,<sup>116</sup> appearing only one other time, at a benefit for Thomas Betterton. She died 12 September 1748, at the age of eighty-five.<sup>117</sup>

Despite her label as the 'Celebrated Virgin,' and the fact that she never married, her reputation for virtue left her open to numerous lampoons. In a Comparison between Two Stages one critic remarks that Mrs. Bracegirdle 'Is a haughty conceited Woman, that has got more Money by dissembling her Lewdness, than others by professing it.'<sup>118</sup> Tom Brown created a fictional letter from Aphra Behn to the actress in which the dramatist expresses amazement at the skill of Mrs. Bracegirdle's management of her reputation, saying that 'For a Woman to cloak the frailties of Nature with such admirable ceremony as you have done hitherto, merits in my opinion, the Wonder and Applause of the whole Kingdom! . . . But for a woman of your Quality to first surrender her honour, and afterwards preserve her Character, shows a discreet management beyond the Policy of the Statesman.'<sup>119</sup> Apparently Mrs. Bracegirdle was as adept off stage as on.



Colley Cibber, who joined the United Company the very year of Sir Anthony Love, comments that at that time Mrs. Bracegirdle 'was now but just blooming to her Maturity; her Reputation as an Actress gradually rising with that of her Person.'<sup>120</sup> Although she had not yet reached the pinnacle of her career, which would come quickly with the advancing years of the decade, the casting of Mrs. Bracegirdle, as the spirited, practical Charlott seems perfect. Her almost immediate popularity with the audience would draw them to Southerne's 'subtle heroine.' The structure of the play, with its misleading appearance and well-disguised substance, not to mention its strong, charismatic protagonist, required an equally strong, attractive performance by the actress playing Charlott. Floriante's younger sister was Southerne's 'real' heroine and her 'nobility' had to be apparent at the end of the play for it to properly convey the dramatist's message. Whether the young actress's private life matched her public reputation was unimportant. What was crucial in terms of the play was that the actress playing Charlott convinced the audience of her goodness. Mrs. Bracegirdle's public respectability and her 'Potent and Magnetick Charm'<sup>121</sup> must have served the playwright and his character admirably.

The role of the independent Volante was taken by Frances Maria Knight. Born probably not later than 1662, she first appeared with the King's Company as Lettice, the maid-servant in Wycherley's The Plain Dealer (December, 1676).<sup>122</sup> Following a second role in that same year, she disappeared

from the theatre for the next seven years, but reappeared as the innocent Angeline in Southerne's The Disappointment with the United Company in 1684.<sup>123</sup> In addition to her roles as Angeline and Volante, she appeared in two other Southerne plays, as the faithful wife, Julia, in the comic sub-plot of The Fatal Marriage, and the desperate and eager widow, Lackitt, in Oroonoko. With the defection of the leading actresses (Barry and Bracegirdle) to Betterton's company in late 1694, Mrs. Knight became the chief tragic actress of the Drury Lane Company. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, she began to lose roles to younger women, such as Jane Rogers and Anne Oldfield. With perhaps a year off following the 1705-06 season, she continued to act, playing Gertrude in a revival of Hamlet, the first play of the new United Company (15 January 1708)<sup>124</sup>. In 1714 she was one of the 'deserters' who joined John Rich, Christopher's oldest son, at the New Theatre in Lincolns-Inn-Fields, and continued to perform for another five years, being last heard ~~from~~<sup>of</sup> in 1719.<sup>125</sup>

As was usual for ladies of the theatre during the Restoration, Mrs. Knight had a less than pristine reputation. Tom Brown represented Peg Hughes as 'insisting that she had never sold her favours for gain, like "Madam Ja[m]es, or Mrs. Kn[ig]ht of Drury Lane,"<sup>126</sup> and the anonymous author of a letter, arguing against condemnation of the stage because of the private characters of the players, said, 'if we should see Mr. Powel acting as a Brave, Generous and Honest Part; or Mrs.

Knight, a very Modest and Chaste one, it ought not give us Offence; because we are not to consider what they are off the Stage.<sup>127</sup> For a large city, London, theatrically, was a small town, and Mrs. Knight was clearly as well known off stage as on.

Very little is known about Mrs. Knight beyond her dubious reputation, and any indication we get about her can come only from her casting. In the first three Southerne productions in which she appeared, she consistently played young, attractive, virtuous women, who, despite being the object of plotted seductions, managed to remain honourable. Regardless of her off-stage notoriety, she must have been convincing as a character of purity and goodness. Her later success as a tragic actress, particularly in villainous roles, indicates a powerful and dominant stage presence, both of which, in a controlled, way, would work well for the superficially strong-minded Volante.

Mrs. Butler, who according to Cibber 'had her Christian Name of Charlotte given her by King Charles,<sup>128</sup> played the young Floriante, sang, and delivered the Epilogue to Southerne's play. 'The Daughter of a decay'd Knight,<sup>129</sup> she was recommended to the theatre by the King, joining the Duke's Company in the 1679-80 season. There is some speculation that she may have been a member of the company as early as 1673-74,<sup>130</sup> but her first recorded role was in Otway's The Orphan, where she played Serina, and spoke the epilogue.<sup>131</sup> This handsome black-eyed brunette continued

with the Duke's Company and then the United Company for the next four years, but apparently left in 1684, to try her fortunes as a singer. She returned to the United Company in 1689, taking the role of Sophia in The Fortune Hunters.<sup>132</sup>

While her repertory of roles increased over the next few years, including Bellinda in The Man of Mode, her opportunities for singing also grew. Cibber remarked that she could 'sing and dance to great Perfection. In the Dramatick Opera's of Dioclesian, and that of King Arthur, she was a capital, and admired Performer,' and that 'In Parts of Humour. . .she had a manner of blending her assuasive Softness, even with the Gay, the Lively, and the Alluring.'<sup>133</sup>

Clearly a popular attraction in the theatre, Mrs. Butler, in 1692, sought a ten shilling salary increase. The request was denied by the manager, Christopher Rich, and apparently the talented singer/actress found an alternative. Joseph Ashbury met her conditions, and in the 1694-95 season she played at the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin.<sup>134</sup> There is no record of her returning to the London stage, so she must have chosen to end her career in Ireland.<sup>135</sup>

It may have been Mrs. Butler's experience with breeches roles that suggested her for the role of Floriante in Southerne's play. Granted, the 'breeches' aspect of the part is brief, but the actress brought a good deal of experience (and probably attractive legs) to the role, having played no fewer than four other breeches roles prior to Sir Anthony

Love. Her attractive appearance and feminine liveliness made her an appropriate partner in conspiracy for Mrs. Bracegirdle. Together their black-eyed loveliness must have made them the most enchanting of sisters. Also, with three songs in the play, her 'Perfection' as a singer would have made her a natural choice for Southerne, and perhaps she shared the musical duties with Mrs. Bracegirdle. Mrs. Butler was obviously popular with Restoration audiences, a fact proven by the frequent opportunities given her to speak the prologues and epilogues to plays.

Since the discussion of the actresses in the original production of Sir Anthony Love began with Mrs. Mountfort, it seems only just that a description of the actors in the play should begin with her husband, William Mountfort. He acted opposite his wife in Southerne's production, playing the part of her former lover, the rakish libertine, Valentine. William Mountfort had joined the Duke's Company in the 1677-78 season,<sup>136</sup> and as Downes notes, by the end of 1682 'Mr. Monfort and Mr. Carlile, were grown to a Maturity of good Actors.'<sup>137</sup> From then on, for the next decade, Mountfort's physical attributes and technical skills allowed him to play a wide range of characters. Cibber described him as 'tall, well made, fair, and of an agreeable Aspect: His Voice clear, full, and melodious.'<sup>138</sup> He was equally effective in both tragedy and comedy. Cibber recalls that 'In Tragedy he was the most affecting Lover within my Memory,'<sup>139</sup> while 'In Comedy, he gave the truest Life to what we call the Fine

Gentlemen. . .He had a particular Talent, in giving Life to bons Mots and Repartees.<sup>140</sup> Cibber was evidently most impressed with the actor's ability to blend the natural with the art of the actor, saying that 'The Wit of the Poet seem'd always to come from him [Mountfort] extempore, and sharpen'd into more Wit, from his brilliant manner of delivering it.'<sup>141</sup> Apparently, as did his wife, Mountfort had 'a Variety in his Genius, which few capital Actors have shewn. . .he could entirely change himself.'<sup>142</sup> For Cibber, William Mountfort was 'a complete Master of his Art.'<sup>143</sup> Nicoll credited him with giving 'life to the wonderous Sparkishes [Wycherley's The Country Wife] and Sir Courtly Nices [Crowne's Sir Courtly Nice] of the comedy of manners,' and points out that he created such significant Restoration characters as 'Young Belfond in Shadwell's The Squire of Alsatia (D.L.1688), Wildish in the same author's Bury Fair (D.L.1689), Young Reveller in his own Greenwich Park (D.L.1691), and acted the Rover in Mrs. Behn's play of that same name (evidently after the Union of the Companies).'<sup>144</sup>

Mountfort was among the first of the actor-playwrights who came along late in the period, 'preparing the way for the advent of Colley Cibber at the very end of the century.'<sup>145</sup> His first play was called The Life and Death of Doctor Faustus. Made into a Farce. . .With the Humours of Harlequin and Scaramouche (1686), and between it and his death in 1692 he had four other works brought to the stage, most notably his comedy, Greenwich Park, performed in 1691.

Despite his talents as both an actor and dramatist, William Mountfort 'was cut off by a tragical Death, in the 33d Year of his Age.'<sup>146</sup> Luttrell relates the events which robbed the theatre of one of its finest leading men:

10 December 1692: Last night lord Mohun, captain Hill of collonel Earles regiment, and others, pursued Mountfort the actor from the playhouse to his lodgings in Norfolk Street, where one kist him while Hill run him thro' the belly: they ran away, but his lordship was this morning seized and committed to prison. Mountfort died of his wounds this afternoon. The quarrel was about Bracegirdle the actresse, whom they would have trepan'd away, but Mountfort prevented it, where they murthred him thus.<sup>147</sup>

Eventually Mohun was brought to trial; and was found innocent, while Captain Hill fled the country, only to be killed some months later in a confrontation abroad. The death of Mountfort was a blow to the Drury Lane Company, and to London theatre-goers, in particular the ladies, with whom he had been very popular. A poem on his death entitled 'The Ladies Lamentation for their Adonis' was written, along with a play, The Player's Tragedy or Fatal Love, which was a fictional treatment of the events surrounding the affair.<sup>148</sup> Mountfort was clearly a leading figure among Restoration actors, second only to the great Betterton, and would have no doubt climbed to even greater heights had he not met with such an untimely end. Cibber, who greatly admired the actor, said that 'he was in great Esteem, as a tragedian, he was, in Comedy, the most complete Gentleman that I ever saw upon the Stage.'<sup>149</sup>

The combination of William Mountfort and his wife on the same stage must have made those scenes between Sir Anthony and Valentine literally sparkle. The sight of two of the leading players of the day matching wits with one another may have taken the play to dramatic heights of which the playwright never dreamed (or perhaps of which he felt he could only dream). The success of Mrs. Mountfort as Sir Anthony is documented, but there can be little doubt that the talent of her husband contributed to the overwhelming approval given the play. As the consummate Restoration stage-gallant he must have brought to Southerne's character the air of sophistication and style which was necessary to the role; he would have been a rake worthy of Lucia. If Sir Anthony was created for Mrs. Mountfort, then it is probable that Southerne envisioned no one other than her husband on stage opposite her. The dramatist was fortunate, just two years later this powerful acting duo no longer existed.

Within a week of Mountfort's murder, a second member of the original cast of Sir Anthony Love also died. Anthony Leigh, who had portrayed the naughty, homosexual Abbé in Southerne's play, 'Upon the unfortunate Death of Montfort. . .fell ill of a Fever, and dy'd within a Week after him, in [22] December 1692.'<sup>150</sup> The deaths of two major actors' coming in such quick succession delayed the resumption of the theatrical season; there is no record of a play being performed until Southerne's The Maid's Last Prayer opened in early February of the following year.<sup>151</sup>



Leigh's career spanned more than twenty years, beginning with his debut in the Duke's Company in 1671.<sup>152</sup> Billed as a successor to the famous comedian, James Nokes, Leigh is described by Cibber as an actor 'of the mercurial kind, and though not so strict an Observer of Nature [as Nokes], yet never so wanton in his Performance, as to be wholly out of her Sight. . . He had great Variety in his manner, and was famous in very different Characters.'<sup>153</sup> Most notable among his more than seventy-five roles were those characters associated with the 'Dotage, and Follies of extreme old Age.'<sup>154</sup> His predilection for the lecherous and sexually off-beat led him to portray the raucous Sir Jolly Jumble in Otway's The Soldier of Fortune (Leigh played opposite Nokes; Leigh 'was all Life and laughing Humour; and when Nokes acted with him in the same Play, they returned the Ball so dexterously upon one another, that every Scene between them, seem'd but one continued Rest of Excellence.'<sup>155</sup>) and the wicked (nicky-nacky) Antonio in the same author's Venice Preserv'd. Another memorable performance was in the title role of Dryden's Spanish Friar (November 1680).<sup>156</sup> Cibber recalls that he 'was so eminent in his Character, that the. . . Earl of Dorset. . . had a whole Length of him, in his Friar's Habit, drawn by Kneller.'<sup>157</sup> Anthony Leigh's talents apparently impressed the King himself. Cibber is once again the source, saying that Leigh was so much 'admir'd by King Charles, who us'd to distinguish him, when he spoke of, by the Title of his Actor.'<sup>158</sup>

Leigh's contribution to the original production of Sir

Anthony Love was less than Southerne had hoped. As the author explained in *The Epistle Dedicatory*, 'The Abbé's Character languishes in the Fifth Act for want of the Scene between him and Sir Anthony, which I plainly saw before, but was contented to leave a Gap in the Action, and to lose the advantage of Mr. Lee's [Leigh] Playing.'<sup>159</sup> Considering Anthony Leigh's bent for the bizarre, it is lamentable that the homosexual seduction scene was removed prior to production. While the Abbé still plays a significant role in the action of the work, his scene with the pretty young knight could have been the actor's piece de resistance. Southerne was forced to shelve the confrontation which he had doubtless created clearly with the popular comedian in mind, and Leigh had to be contented with a less controversial role.

George Powell was another of the actor/dramatists who appeared in the final decade of the seventeenth century. He took the role of the Protean Palmer, the 'shifter of Shapes and Names,' in Southerne's comedy. Born in 1658, Powell grew up in the theatre; his father, Martin Powell, was a member of the King's Company.<sup>160</sup> The younger Powell was first listed as a member of the United Company in the 1686-87 season, apparently making his debut in Nahum Tate's The Island Princess.<sup>161</sup> As the years passed, events took place which gave the young actor opportunities to strengthen his position in the company, and, seemingly never a modest sort, Powell took fullest advantage of each occasion that came his way.

Upon the untimely death of William Mountfort, George

Powell came into the 'possession of all the chief Parts' of the popular actor.<sup>162</sup> In the controversy which led to the eventual breaking away of Betterton and his sympathizers, Powell again revealed his opportunism. Christopher Rich had, in an effort to cut expenses, begun to parcel out some of Betterton's and Mrs. Barry's major roles to the younger (and cheaper) Mr. Powell and Mrs. Bracegirdle. While Anne Bracegirdle saw through the scheme, and remained loyal to her peers, 'the giddy Head of Powel,' as Cibber reports, 'accepted the Parts of Betterton.'<sup>163</sup> With the split of the United Company in 1695, Powell, who remained with Rich, became one of Drury Lane's leading players. Soon, however, he found himself at odds with another rising star of the London stage, Robert Wilks.

Cibber, who clearly favoured Wilks over the arrogant, abrasive Powell, testifies that Christopher Rich [the company manager] clearly felt that Powell 'was a better Actor. . .when he minded his Business (that is to say, when he was, what he seldom was, sober).'<sup>164</sup> Cibber, however, does admit that

in Voice and Ear, Nature had been more kind to Powel, yet he so often lost the Value of them by an unheedful Confidence. . .Nor was his Memory less tenacious than that of Wilks; but Powel put too much Trust in it, and idly deferr'd the Studying of his Parts, as School-boys do their Exercise, to the last Day.<sup>165</sup>

The actor's talents were confirmed in The Spectator by Addison who, despite a distaste for Powell's ranting style (Powell would 'raise himself a loud clap by his artifice'<sup>166</sup>) confessed that the actor was 'excellently formed for a

tragedian and, when he pleases, deserves the admiration of the best judges.<sup>167</sup> Despite the criticism of the ranting style, it was very much to the public's taste, and by all reports Powell was a master of the fashion. A poem titled 'The Stage' (1713) by Francis Reynardson described him at his most intense:

Powell forbids, and with a haughty tone  
Frowning, demands to have his merits known,  
And great they are and worthy to be sung,  
But oh! still dwelling on their owner's tongue;  
Big as the voice of war he mouths his role,  
Each accent twangs majestically full.

When by Hermione's disdain undone,  
Distraction seizes Agamemnon's son  
With artful rattling wheeze, he draws his breath,  
Seems in the very agonies of death;  
He foams, he stares, he storms, a madding note,  
And all the fury thunders in his throat.<sup>168</sup>

By standards of the period, Powell had all the requisites for being a truly great actor, but throughout his career he remained his own worst enemy. His arrogant, difficult nature, combined with his weakness for drink made him constantly irresponsible and unreliable. Vanbrugh, in his Preface to The Relapse, relates that Powell

drinking his mistress's health in Nantes brandy, from six in the morning to the time he waddled on upon the stage in the evening, had toasted himself up to such a pitch of vigor, I confess I once gave Amanda [the actress, Mrs. Rogers] for gone.<sup>169</sup>

Always involved in some sort of confrontation or another, Powell was nearly as notorious off stage as he was popular on stage. Steele, in the Tatler, commented on the actor's egocentricity, referring to 'Mr. George Powell, who formerly

played Alexander the Great in all places, though he is lately grown so reserved as to act it only on the stage.'<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, the player enjoyed considerable success, and during his career created a number of significant comic and tragic roles, including Bellamour in Congreve's The Old Bachelor, and Lothario in Rowe's The Fair Penitent. In addition to his portrayal of the dissembling Palmer, Powell went on to play three other roles in Southerne plays: the splenetic Granger in The Maid's Last Prayer, Carlos in The Fatal Marriage, and Aboan in Oroonoko.

Powell's rivalry with Wilks eventually reached the boiling point, and as Cibber tells it, 'being uneasy, at the Favour, Wilks, was then rising into,' Powell, in the 1700-1701 season 'left Drury Lane Theatre, and engag'd himself to that of Lincolns-Inn-Fields.'<sup>171</sup> Powell remained with Betterton's troupe for two full seasons, but by the spring of 1704 was back at Drury Lane. Despite an occasional appearance at Lincolns-Inn-Fields during the next decade, Powell remained with the Drury Lane Company, apparently preferring to play second fiddle to the likes of Cibber and Wilks, rather than not to play at all. His last recorded appearance on the stage was on 18 June 1714 in the role of Banquo in Shakespeare's Macbeth.<sup>172</sup> By the end of the year the disagreeable actor was dead.

Powell also had a limited playwriting career, perhaps as a means of providing himself with better roles. He wrote a total of seven plays, all of which came to the stage during

the last decade of the seventeenth century, although none enjoyed any particular success. Representative of the reaction to his works was a fictional conversation in response to his play, A Very Good Wife (1693):

Sullen: Oh an excellent Author's! one George Powell's, the Player.

Ramble: What was it's Fate?

Sullen: Damn'd, damn'd, as it deserved.<sup>173</sup>

A year later The Cornish Comedy, a play that does not appear to be wholly Powell's, received similar treatment at the hands of the critics: 'No Matter whose, 'twas Dam'd.'<sup>174</sup> One of his works, Bonduca (1695), did enjoy several revivals in the early eighteenth century, but the repetition of dramatic failures seemed to discourage him from further writing, and by 1697 he had set his pen aside.

From the mixed reports on George Powell it is difficult to speculate about just what sort of performance he turned in as Palmer in Sir Anthony Love. At the time of the play's debut Powell was still a very junior member of the United Company, playing only his fifth full season in London. Betterton was still with the troupe, and Mountfort was also a dominant force. While at times he may have been difficult, he was probably a young actor trying to impress his peers and learn his craft, and for the most part on his best behaviour. Whether Palmer was a role specifically created with Powell in mind is impossible to say, but certainly Southerne was blessed with a talented actor in the part. The role, while definitely secondary, was showy enough to appeal to any thespian. It

allowed Powell to demonstrate a good deal of variety as he transformed himself from pilgrim, to confessed rogue, to wealthy English knight. It was a small gem, and Powell surely must have delighted in the opportunities it presented.

Colley Cibber, the man whose Apology provides so much information about the people and events of the period, was also a young actor in the cast of Sir Anthony Love. Playing Sir Gentle Golding's servant and speaking only fourteen lines in the play, Cibber went on from his first official appearance on the stage to be one of the most influential, and occasionally the most controversial men of the theatre in the eighteenth century.

Born on 6 November 1671, Colley was the son of sculptor Caius Gabriel Cibber. His father wanted him to enter the church, but after failing to gain entrance to Winchester College, the young Cibber went to London to seek his fortune.<sup>175</sup> Following brief service in the army during the Revolution of 1688, he returned to London, and by 1690 was a member of the United Company. A man obviously enchanted with the theatre, Cibber worked for the first nine months without a salary, admitting that the 'Pay was the least of my Concern; the Joy, and Privilege of every Day seeing Plays, for nothing. . . was a sufficient Consideration.'<sup>176</sup> During those months he probably did walk-on and bit parts, but his first role of record was that of the foolish knight's servant in Sir Anthony Love.<sup>177</sup>

Like any young actor, Cibber had great hopes of playing

the leading man opposite some Restoration beauty, such as Anne Bracegirdle, but that was not to be. Physically Colley Cibber could never rival actors such as Mountfort, Powell, Wilks, or Betterton; he was suited for comedy, and it would be there that he would find his greatest success. The actor himself admitted that his ambition to play the hero 'was soon snubb'd, by the Insufficiency of my Voice; to which might be added, an uninformed meagre Person. . .with a dismal pale Complexion.'<sup>178</sup> The Laureat, a publication less than kind to Cibber, describ'd him as

of the middle Size, his Complexion fair, inclinable to the Sandy, his Legs somewhat of the thickest, his Shape a little Clumsy, not irregular, and his Voice rather shrill than loud or articulate, and crack'd extremely, when he endeavour'd to raise it. He was in his younger Days so lean as to be known by the Name of Hatchet Face.<sup>179</sup>

Another source compares 'his thin, sharp features, aquiline nose, bright small eyes, together with his solemn strutting air' to some kind of 'grotesque bird,' and later, after he plumped up, to a 'partridge.'<sup>180</sup> He was evidently not the stuff of which heroes are made. Cibber saw his strength as the 'Aptness of my Ear; for I was soon allow'd to speak justly, tho' what was grave and serious, did not become me.'<sup>181</sup> Playing the title role in his own adaptation of Shakespeare's Richard III, a version which was favoured over the Bard's well into the nineteenth century, Cibber received from The Laureat a stinging critique: he 'screamed thro' four Acts. . .and when he was kill'd. . .the good People were not



better pleas'd that so execrable a tyrant was destroy'd, than that so execrable an Actor was silent.<sup>182</sup>

In his early years with the United Company Cibber did meet with some notable success. His first memorable role was as the Chaplain in Otway's The Orphan, where the actor Cardell Goodman, after seeing Cibber in the role, predicted that 'If he does not make a good Actor, I'll be d--d!'<sup>183</sup> Congreve offered his praise of the young player when he served as a last-minute replacement for the ailing Edward Kynnaston, in the role of Lord Touchwood in The Double Dealer. Cibber was met by the author after the play, where Congreve

made [him] the Compliment of saying, that [he] had not only answer'd, but had exceeded his Expectations, and that he would shew he was sincere, by his saying more of [Cibber] to the Masters.<sup>184</sup>

The next payday Cibber received a five shilling raise, from fifteen to twenty shillings a week.

For Cibber, as for Powell, the Betterton mutiny gave him greater opportunities. Cibber remained with Drury Lane, and while choice roles were slow in coming his way, he provided himself with his own part in his first play, Love's Last Shift (1696). Southerne had helped the play to reach the stage, and when it opened Cibber took (against Southerne's advice) 'the Part of Sir Novelty [Fashion] which was thought a good Portrait of the Foppery then in Fashion.'<sup>185</sup> It was with that role, and in Vanbrugh's sequel to Cibber's play, The Relapse, where Sir Novelty is transformed into Lord Foppington, that Cibber's reputation as a comic actor was

firmly established.

In the early years of the eighteenth century, already established as both playwright and actor, the energetic young man began to move into the management of Drury Lane. In 1701 Cibber was appointed advisor to Christopher Rich. A decade later Rich was out and Cibber was on top. By November 1710 a theatrical triumvirate, consisting of Cibber, Thomas Doggett, and Robert Wilks had charge of the actors and Drury Lane.<sup>186</sup> For the next twenty years, the three (with Barton Booth replacing Doggett) ruled the London stage, and Cibber devoted his energies to the theatre, as actor, manager (often the peace-keeper between his partners) and playwright, although he wrote little for the theatre after 1720.

1730 saw Cibber angling for the poet laureateship, and by the end of the year the post was his.<sup>187</sup> While he continued his acting and management responsibilities at Drury Lane for a while, Cibber finally retired from the theatre at the end of 1732-33 season. It was not, however, a lack of energy that brought about his exit from the theatre. In his last full season, at the age of sixty-two, Cibber played nearly his entire repertoire of roles. Among his most notable parts that season were Bayes in The Rehearsal, Foppington in The Relapse, Fondlewife in The Old Bachelor, Sir Fopplington in The Man of Mode, Sir John in The Provok'd Wife, Witwoud in The Way of the World, and Tom in The Conscious Lovers.<sup>188</sup> Cibber had clung to roles he had originated as well as those he had acquired over the years, and later, in his Apology, confessed

that criticism, not weariness had driven him from the stage a year or two before he was ready: 'I left the Stage before my Strength left me.'<sup>189</sup> Cibber continued to perform sporadically for more than a decade following his retirement, and it was not until 1745, at the age of seventy-three, that he made his last appearance on the stage.

His career was controversial. Criticism of his acting, playwriting, and managing always followed him; his battles with Pope and Fielding are legendary. In spite of the constant attacks on him, there is no denying his success. He was a popular comic actor; with his very first play he established a dramatic trend for the ensuing century; and as company manager he ran Drury Lane effectively for more than twenty years. Even as poet laureate, while not the finest, he was certainly not the worst. Leonard Ashley, a Cibber biographer, points out he was 'the best Laureate England had had since Dryden.'<sup>190</sup> He has been much maligned, but it cannot be denied that Colley Cibber, despite his often rude, tactless manner, had a significant impact on the English theatre for more than forty years.

Southerne must have taken a liking to the relatively inexperienced young man who made his acting debut in Sir Anthony Love, for it was the elder dramatist who assisted the younger man in the commencement of his career as a playwright some five years later. Just how effective Cibber was as an actor in his debut is questionable. The young man's physical qualities, and later reputation as a comic actor lead to

speculation that Cibber did an admirable job as the bantam servant who in the course of minutes manages to mistake his own master, twice. It was, however, Southerne's later apparent lack of respect for Cibber's acting skills that creates doubt about Cibber's stage inauguration; when he came to recommending Love's Last Shift Southerne was very much opposed to Cibber taking a role in the production. As Cibber reported it, Southerne told him: 'Young Man! I pronounce thy Play a good one; I will answer for its success, if thou dost not spoil it by thy own Action.'<sup>191</sup> Just what prompted Southerne's remark is unclear, but he may have recalled his own experience with the young novice. Since Cibber played mostly small roles in those early years with the United Company, Southerne may have seen little improvement in the player's skills, and had little hope for his future as an actor, but the playwright did have the occasion to use Cibber in one other of his productions. Nearly thirty years later Cibber took the choice role of the dissembling Crites in Southerne's The Spartan Dame.

The senior actor in Sir Anthony Love, Samuel Sandford, played the arrogant coward, Count Verole, and was the only member of the cast whose career went all the way back to the beginnings of the Restoration. Sandford joined the Duke's Company in the 1661-62 season and appeared as Captain Worme in Cowley's The Cutter of Coleman Street (December 1661).<sup>192</sup> His reputation was built upon his portrayal of villains, but as Cibber explained, the excellent actor was

not a Stage-Villain by Choice, but from Necessity; for having a low and crooked Person, such bodily Defects were too strong to be admitted into great, or admirable Characters; so that whenever, in any new or revived Play, there was a hateful or mischievous Person, Sandford was sure to have no Competitor for it.<sup>193</sup>

His strong association with the wicked and foul made any variation of roles nearly impossible, for 'so unusual had it been to see Sandford an innocent Man. . .that when ever he was so, the Spectators would hardly give him Credit in so gross an Improbability.'<sup>194</sup> Cibber saw him as Shakespeare's ideal Richard III, and King Charles is reputed to have favoured him with the title of 'best Villain in the World.'<sup>195</sup> Nicoll sees him as the one who 'gave birth to the Machievellian villains with which the Restoration tragedy and tragi-comedy abounds.'<sup>196</sup> Among his most memorable roles were Malignii in Porter's The Villain, Gonzalez in Congreve's The Mourning Bride, and Creon in Lee's Oedipus. It was in this last production that a real tragedy nearly occurred. Luttrell relates that:

On Thursday last (13 October 1692) was acted the tragedy of Oedipus king of Thebes at the theatre [Drury Lane or Dorset Gardens], where Sandford and Powell acting their parts together, the former by mistake of a sharp dagger for one that runs the blade into the handle, stabb'd the other three inches deep.<sup>197</sup>

Despite the report that the wound was mortal, Powell lived to act again. Sandford also continued on the stage for nearly another fifteen years, apparently resigned to his type casting. Richard Steele offered a tribute to the archetypal

Restoration villain, saying that

When poor Sandford was upon the stage, I have seen him groaning upon the wheel, stuck with daggers, impaled alive, calling his executioners with a dying voice, cruel dogs and villains! And all this to please his judicious spectators, who were wonderfully delighted with seeing a man in torment so well acted.<sup>198</sup>

The use of Sandford, renowned actor of villains, in the role of Count Verole leads to conjecture about Southerne's relationship with the player. Sandford was, as Cibber confirmed, a concrete example of the Restoration's emphasis on the outer man. Despite considerable acting talent, he was locked into playing characters of a hateful nature because the audience perceived his physical being as an indication of his inner character. Southerne, by casting Sandford as Verole exposed the unreliability of appearance as a determiner. The critical analysis of the play will demonstrate that the 'low and crooked' Sandford, rather than any character of a more pleasing aspect, was Southerne's hero. The 'best villain in the world' was not, after all, a villain. Southerne's subtly sympathetic treatment of the Count in the play may have come from an intimate knowledge of the actor playing the role. In Sandford's predicament Southerne may have discovered a metaphor for Restoration society.

Another of the more experienced members of the original cast of Southerne's play was Joseph Williams, who portrayed the moody Ilford. Apparently trained as a seal cutter, he became apprentice to the actor Henry Harris in the 1670s.<sup>199</sup> By the early 1690s he was reported to be earning

about three pounds a week,<sup>200</sup> but in August 1692 he 'left the playhouse for several months' because of the precarious state of the finances of the United Company.<sup>201</sup> According to Nicoll, 'Williams returned to the theatre in January 1692/93,' and took over a number of significant roles including Vainlove in Congreve's The Old Bachelor, and Biron in Southerne's The Fatal Marriage.<sup>202</sup> When the Betterton troupe left for Lincolns-Inn-Fields, Williams, along with Mrs. Mountfort, were denied full shares with the company, and chose to remain with Rich's Drury Lane Company.<sup>203</sup> Nicoll reported that the actor was 'still performing in 1705,' although how long his career continued is not definite.<sup>204</sup> He did live a long life, however, dying in 1731, at the age of sixty-eight.

Little is known of Williams, although Cibber did refer to him as a man who 'loved his Bottle better than his business.'<sup>205</sup> Luttrell relates the incident of a duel (19 March 1691/92) which was 'fought between captain Hoard of the Provo, and Williams the player; the former was killed.' No other details are available.<sup>206</sup>

The choice of an actor to play Ilford must have seemed a vital one to Southerne. The character-type, which he created on several occasions, seemed to have a fascination for the dramatist: the man caught between a desire for social acceptance and a deep-seated disapproval of the mores of that same society. Whether Williams's nature tended to the morose or whether he was adept at such roles is unknown. There is,

however, evidence of Southerne's respect for this player, as Williams takes on major roles for the playwright in three future productions: the predatory rake, Wilding, in The Wives' Excuse; the resurrected husband in the tragic portion of The Fatal Marriage; and the wicked Lieutenant Governour in Oroonoko. His casting is the only tribute that remains to his theatrical talents.

William Bowen took the role of Sir Gentle Golding in Sir Anthony Love. An Irishman, Bowen may have actually made his debut at the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin as early as 1683,<sup>207</sup> but his first London performance, as a valet in Shadwell's Bury Fair, was in 1689.<sup>208</sup> Bowen was a friend of Congreve's, and the young playwright apparently tailored the role of Sir Joseph in The Old Bachelor to the advantage of the actor's strong voice.<sup>209</sup> Despite some reservations by Betterton about his being worth '50 s. per week,'<sup>210</sup> Bowen departed with the veteran actors and actresses who revolted from Drury Lane Company. He took the role of Jeremy in the new company's premiere, Congreve's Love for Love. He remained an actor with Betterton's troupe until 1698, when he played a season at the Smock Alley. He was, however, back with Betterton the following season (perhaps at Congreve's request), and took the part of Witwoud in The Way of the World.<sup>211</sup> In November 1700, Bowen apparently left the stage abruptly, reportedly 'convinced by Mr. Collier's Book against the Stage [that] a Shop keepers life was the readier way to Heaven, [he opened] a Cane Shop.' The venture was



however, evidence of Southerne's respect for this player, as Williams takes on major roles for the playwright in three future productions: the predatory rake, Wilding, in The Wives' Excuse; the resurrected husband in the tragic portion of The Fatal Marriage; and the wicked Lieutenant Governour in Oroonoko. His casting is the only tribute that remains to his theatrical talents.

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short lived, for in the 1--4 March Post Boy of the following year, it was reported that

the famous Comedian Mr. William Bowen, who had discontinued acting on account of some differences between him and the rest of the Sharers of the New Theatre, is to have the Committee. . .play'd. . .for his benefit.<sup>212</sup>

According to the notice it was to be his last performance on the English stage, as he was once again going to Ireland. Plans must have altered, however, for he did not leave, and, in fact, managed to have three benefits played in his honour during 1701. He remained in London the following season before finally playing in his homeland. He was away just a year, and returned to the London stage in the winter of 1704. He finished out his career, which lasted until 1717, in London, but by 1710-11 he had begun to lose status, with the increased competition of the rising young stars of the eighteenth century: Cibber, Estcourt, and Johnson.<sup>213</sup>

Bowen was apparently prone to violence, and on three separate occasions his name was mentioned in connection with such incidents. There is reason to believe that on 9 September 1702 he may have killed a man.<sup>214</sup> The facts, however, are confusing, and it may have been his nephew, John Bowen. John is on record as having been involved in a similar difficulty, and it is unclear as to which details go with which case, or, indeed, if the evidence overlaps into both cases. Years earlier, in the summer of 1702, Bowen had taken umbrage when a man spoke against Queen Anne.<sup>215</sup> The actor took it upon himself to defend her, and wounded the man. Word

of the deed eventually reached the Queen, and Bowen was granted one hundred pounds for his efforts.

His final confrontation did not end so fortunately. Following some insults to another actor, Mr. James Quin (who responded in kind), Mr. Bowen challenged the man, and was fatally wounded and died three days later, on 29 April 1718. Always close to those in high places, Bowen was buried with curious pomp and ceremony by a fashionable Covent Garden undertaker. From the description of 25 April 1718, the corpse was

put on board the Prince Fredrick Yacht. . .in order to be carried to Leigh in Essex to be Interr'd; while they are going thither a Gun is to be fir'd every Minute, and they are to Salute all Ports with the falling of the Sail.<sup>216</sup>

William Bowen's penchant for the theatrical remained with him to the very end.

In contrast to his apparently fiery temper off stage, Bowen's strength on stage was in the creation of the bumbling, foppish characters who were so often dupes of the clever 'Truewits' of Restoration comedy. As the originator of Congreve's Witwoud in The Way of the World (also Sir Joseph Wittol in the same author's The Old Bachelor), William Bowen became, in a sense, the epitome of those 'contemptible and ridiculous creatures' of the comedy of manners.<sup>217</sup> Besides his casting, the only tribute to his acting is Betterton's comment that he 'studys his p[ar]ts very quickly and Acts w<sup>th</sup> vigour.'<sup>218</sup> Congreve's use of the actor to play such 'pretenders to wit' may have been influenced by Bowen's

performance as Sir Gentle Golding. Despite having only two seasons of London theatre to his credit, his talent in such roles must have been evident from the beginning of his career. His performance in Sir Anthony Love was apparently satisfactory because Southerne used the actor in a similar role two years later, casting him as the foppish Sir Symphony in The Maid's Last Prayer.

Lucia's faithful servant/governour, Wait-well, was played by Mr. George Bright, another actor who probably began his career with the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin before coming to London and joining the Duke's Company in the 1678--79 season.<sup>219</sup> In the first decade of his career he played mainly small parts, but by the fall of 1690 he began to move into more substantial roles. He was especially noted for his playing of 'comic dullards, fops, and bouncy servants.'<sup>220</sup> At the time of the division in ranks, Bright signed with Betterton's company, playing, among others, the justice of the peace in Vanbrugh's The Provok'd Wife (April 1697), and the inventive servant, Wait-well, in Congreve's The Way of the World (March 1700).<sup>221</sup> Bright, however, is most noted as being one of the actors charged by authorities in complaints against the immorality of the stage. He was accused of saying the words 'a God's name' while playing old Bellair in Etherege's The Man of Mode, and despite his defence that he 'did humbly conceive, yet there was neither immorality or prophaineness therein,' he was fined the substantial sum of ten pounds 'besides Costs and Charges.'<sup>222</sup> That apparently

began a run of financial bad luck for Bright. He returned to acting on 19 May 1701 and remained with the Betterton troupe until the opening of the new Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket in 1705. He went on to the Drury Lane Theatre shortly afterwards, where he acted sporadically. His financial problems worsened and he was arrested for debts and imprisoned in Marshalsea for eight weeks in 1707-08. Although he extricated himself from prison, he found himself gradually squeezed out of the Drury Lane Company,<sup>223</sup> and then he simply disappears from record. During his career he played roles in two other Southerne productions, portraying Ruffle in The Wives' Excuse, and the foppish dupe, Rancounter, in The Maid's Last Prayer.

With George Bright in the original cast, Southerne was blessed with another Drury Lane actor doing what he did best in comedy. Wait-well, governour and confidant to the scheming Sir Anthony Love, was a role that gave Bright the opportunity to shine, as the character carries out the designs of the lady-knight. His later casting in the plays of Southerne, Congreve and others is evidence of his skill in secondary roles of this kind. While personal problems may have been responsible for a premature end to his career, George Bright made a significant contribution, appearing on the London stage for more than twenty-five years.

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formed in that year.<sup>225</sup> His first recorded role was as one of the title characters in Powell's The Treacherous Brothers in January 1690. That impressive debut casting (and the record of a benefit in 1721 for 'Mr. Hodgson, formerly a Comedian in King's Company' would indicate that he had acting experience sometime before the uniting of the two companies in 1682.<sup>226</sup> Hodgson accompanied Betterton and company to Lincolns-Inn-Fields and apparently continued to act until 1701, when there is no further record of his inclusion in any acting troupe.

Little else has come to light about John Hodgson, who was sometimes referred to as Captain, an indication that he may have done military service before coming to the stage. His name, however, does appear in two instances: he testified at the trial of Lord Mohun concerning the death of William Mountfort,<sup>227</sup> and he was involved in a theatre riot caused by an attempt to arrest him. Hotson, describing the atmosphere of Restoration London and its theatres, quotes Luttrell's depiction of the second incident. As Luttrell told it, on

Saturday night (17 June 1699) one Brown, a bayliff, with 13 more, beset the playhouse, in order to arrest Capt. Hodgson; but the players coming out in a body, beat and wounded them, and in the scuffle Captain Hodgson's man was cowardly run through the back by a bayliff and immediately dyed, having nothing but a stick in his hand.<sup>228</sup>

No other details are available, and with that unpleasant tale Hodgson's theatrical career disappears.

John Hodgson's casting as Count Canaile in Sir Anthony

Love is another indication of his having acting experience prior to the 1688-89 season. While by no means mandatory, type casting (the choosing of an actor by his age and physical similarities to the character) was obviously prevalent during this period in the theatre; Hodgson portrays the brother of the Abbé, and would have been, most likely, a more mature actor to perform opposite someone like Anthony Leigh who had been an actor since 1671. His casting in the one other Southerne play in which he appeared would suggest both the strong stage presence, and the fullness of years suitable to a character deserving of respect. In 1700 Hodgson appeared in The Fate of Capua as the leader of the Hannibal faction, Pacuvius Calavius, opposite an aging Thomas Betterton, who played his son-in-law. There is little information available about this actor, but Southerne apparently felt that he was adept at projecting strong-willed individuals whose own ego and ambition lead to their downfall. For Canaille, the consequences are trivial, he merely loses his daughters to the English gallants; for Pacuvius, it means his death and the death of his city.

Even less is known of the three minor actors who rounded out the cast of Sir Anthony Love. Thomas Kent, playing the servant to Ilford, joined the United Company in the 1690-91 season.<sup>229</sup> He is referred to as 'Tommy' or 'Young Kent,' at least through 1694, so his father may have been the Thomas Kent who was House servant for the King's Company.<sup>230</sup> Sir Anthony Love is the first play in which he is known to have



been cast, and he only appears in the Dramatis Personae of four plays before the break-up of the company. He stayed with Rich's Company at Drury Lane and continued to act with it until 14 February 1707, when he left in mid-season and is not heard from again.<sup>231</sup>

Michael Lee, who played the tailor's man Courtaut, was also a recent arrival to the United Company, having joined during the 1689-90 season.<sup>232</sup> He apparently had some skill, for he was in at least six productions during 1690, and stayed with the company in a host of secondary roles for the remainder of the decade.

Mr. Kirkham, who played the merchant, Traffique, apparently had a very brief sojourn in the ranks of employed actors. He seems to have performed only in the 1690-91 season, and appeared in four productions before disappearing from the rolls.<sup>233</sup>

Despite the possible limitations imposed by his access to only one theatre company, Southerne apparently had a remarkably fine cast for his production. Each of the major performers in the play seemed to be portraying a character for which he or she was well suited, their roles were based on their established professional reputations. There is a strong sense that prior to his writing Sir Anthony Love Southerne had become very familiar with the individual players and their particular strengths, and had created characters based upon them. The Mountforts, Sandford, Leigh, Bowen, and Bright all were simply doing what they always did well. A number of new

actors and actresses had also come into the United Company in those years of the playwright's absence, and, though relatively inexperienced, they possessed a great deal of natural talent which would show itself in the years to come. George Powell, Colley Cibber, and Anne Bracegirdle all were fairly recent additions to the company, and each would go on to become major players in London well into the eighteenth century.

The timing of the production may also have been a crucial factor in the play's original success. It appears, from what is known of the individuals involved, that Sir Anthony Love was produced when the company was at its peak. There was an excellent mixture of experienced performers and talented newcomers in the production, which would have provided both a solid foundation in the quality of the acting and the contagious enthusiasm typical of young thespians. Two years later the atmosphere could have been very different: Mountfort and Leigh would be dead, Powell, with more experience, would perhaps be more difficult to deal with, and the growing dissension between the patent-holders and the actors might have robbed the play of some of its vitality. But the young playwright was fortunate; the premiere of Sir Anthony Love was blessed with a strong company. The Mountforts, Leigh, Cibber, Powell, and Anne Bracegirdle were among the most prominent performers of their day, and each made a significant contribution to Southerne's first major theatrical success.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF SIR ANTHONY LOVE

I.

An Introduction

The difficulty in discussing Thomas Southerne's play Sir Anthony Love critically lies in a paradox. Its superficial simplicity is mated to an underlying structural and thematic complexity. While appearing at first glance to be just another of the dozens of comedies of intrigue produced during the Restoration, it is in reality an exacting sceptical exploration of post-Revolution English society, its theatrical conventions, its philosophies and its popular mores. If the theatre holds a mirror up to nature, then Southerne's theatrical offering, Sir Anthony Love, is a house of mirrors, presenting a multitude of reflections, each image viewed from a wide range of perspectives, and each possessing its own reality. The playwright uses recognizable theatrical styles, conventional characters and stock situations, but he deals with them in a variety of non-traditional ways. He investigates the popular philosophies of the late seventeenth century, revealing their inadequacies. He exposes the accepted social values of the Restoration as inconsistent and destructive. But all of this is effectively concealed by the

conventional surface of Sir Anthony Love. The play itself thus becomes a metaphor for contradictions between appearance and reality. Thomas Southerne's intent was to penetrate the confusion created by the philosophical and social dissembling of Restoration society, and to discover some practical truths concerning survival in such an environment, truths which the playwright sets at the very heart of the remainder of his dramatic works.

Southerne's atypical use of a typically theatrical style, conventional characters, and stock situations supports his central theme: that appearance belies reality. On the surface the play seems to be a comedy of intrigue, with the usual jumble of romance, disguise and adventure. A careful examination, however, discloses that the play will not fit neatly into the comedy of intrigue category. In fact, it reflects nearly all the comic styles prevalent in the Restoration period, and these reflections comment sceptically on each other.

The characters in the play have been most often perceived as simply duplicates of the countless men and women who preceded them in the comedies of the age. While this critical observation is not without merit, it overlooks Southerne's specific manipulation of those traditional characters. Although initially they appear to be familiar types, the playwright allows us to view them from unusual angles. His characters become more than just conventional exteriors; they reveal a psychological complexity not usually associated with

comedies of intrigue.

Dramatic situations in the play also appear to be those so often employed in the intrigue genre. Once again, however, closer analysis of the events in the play reveals the dramatist's scepticism about such conventional appearances. The isolated events may be reminiscent of those which occurred time and again in earlier plays, but Southerne's individual treatment of them, and the angle of vision the playwright prescribes, force a reappraisal of the obvious.

The shifting reflections of a familiar image are also applied to the popular philosophic assumptions of the day, exposing the difficulties and contradictions inherent in any supposed 'certainty.' The tenets of Epicureanism, Hobbesianism, and libertinism are all operative in the play, but like the style, characters, and situations, none of the precepts which appears in Sir Anthony Love survives the thorough inspection Southerne demands. Philosophies provide no practical answers to the questions they raise.

Southerne presents social morality in Sir Anthony Love as similarly problematic; moral guidelines derive whatever authority they have from popular acceptance, and such precepts fail to withstand the play's sceptical tests. Moral action is a masquerade carried out in the hope of social acceptance and social protection. Characters adopt social masks as they do physical disguise: to gain further power within the society, or to avoid losing what power they have. In Sir Anthony Love disguise is the most obvious metaphor for the disparity

between appearance and reality. Lucia's masquerade as the womanizing rake, Sir Anthony Love, is at the centre of the contradiction. She is a walking, talking, sexual, social, and philosophical contrariety; she belies all that she appears to be. In his examination of disguise Southerne reveals the complexities of dissembling. Appearance and reality threaten to become hopelessly confused, and the play develops into a kaleidoscope of images and their dislocated reflections, leaving both characters and audience uncertain about the validity of all perceptions. Vigilant doubt appears the only path the playwright leaves open, but even there Southerne exposes the inadequacy of thorough-going scepticism as a basis for understanding or action.

The play, however, does arrive at some practical conclusions about judging appearances. It does not leave the questions it raises unresolved, but suggests that a prudent man can know enough of the truth to avoid being systematically duped. What truth there is in a society based on appearances must lie in a harmony between words and actions; what an individual says must be consistent with what he does. The audience learns the lesson of prudence as the play moves from conventional expectations, through growing incongruities, to the surprising harmonies of its conclusion. In a dramatic world where disguise is both an offensive and a defensive weapon practical truth lies only in the reciprocal relation of discourse and conduct. Such truth is all that a man can hope for in the midst of the complexities of masquerade.

The sketchy and generally dismissive critical history of the play has for the most part commented only on the superficial level of the work, emphasizing the play's appearance as a 'comedy of intrigue.' It seemed useless, no doubt, to critics to pursue the obvious; the formula was clear, the outcome seemed pre-determined, so the play fitted easily into the appropriate Restoration type. It needs to be rescued from its history of critical neglect; its depth and complexity need to be explored. Such a thorough examination reveals the richness of the play. More than merely a work of 'small accidents and raillery,'<sup>1</sup> it is a meticulously designed, socially significant play created by Southerne as a sceptical 'experiment' to solve the dilemma inherent in a society strongly founded on conventional appearances. With the influence of the scientific movement behind him, Southerne starts at the outer shell, the popular images of theatrical, philosophical, and social conventions, and reveals the hidden perplexities of each. The play then goes beyond the sceptical exposure of surface fallacies to arrive at some practical social and philosophical conclusions. Beneath the veneer of comic facade is a on-going search for understanding in a problematic world of deceptive appearances.

The play, however, was created primarily as a piece of live theatre, and as such it was extremely popular in its debut. Susanna Mountfort was delightful in the title role, and from all reports the rest of the cast followed her talented lead. The play's energy and enthusiasm, its non-stop

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action, and infectious comic spirit apparently enchanted one and all. Regardless of Southerne's social concerns and philosophical preoccupations, Sir Anthony Love was successful as pure entertainment. While the underlying insight of the author was most significant, the diversions and delights of the play should not be ignored or underestimated. An exploration of the dramatist's complex but wholly unified artistic conception reveals how effective Southerne's play is on two fronts: the theatrical and the literary. Sir Anthony Love is a successful dramatic effort and is worthy of inclusion in both Restoration repertoires of acting troupes today, and in the Restoration scholar's canon of significant plays.

## II.

### Plot Synopsis of Sir Anthony Love

At the centre of all the various threads of the plot of Sir Anthony Love is, of course, Sir Anthony Love. Sir Anthony is, as Southerne quickly reveals, actually a young English woman, Lucia, the victim of a mercenary aunt who sold her to a foolish but rich old gentleman some time prior to the rise of the curtain. At the opening of the play, she has robbed her keeper of five hundred pounds and come to France to be near her former lover, a libertine rake named Valentine. She



adopts the disguise of a young baronet, travelling on the continent accompanied by her guardian. When we first see her she has not only befriended Valentine, but has established herself as the most formidable of Restoration rakes: acclaimed as a lover among the women, and as a wit among the men. It is around this dominant, theatrically engaging character that Southerne weaves three different actions, separate and distinct, yet unified in the character of Sir Anthony Love.

The play is set in Montpellier, and the first strand of the plot reveals Sir Anthony as both companion and rival to two English gallants who have come abroad in search of love and adventure. One is her beloved Valentine, and the other is Valentine's friend, Ilford. In her disguise as a young wit, Lucia joins them in their pursuit of two wealthy, young French girls, Floriante, daughter of the Count Canaille, and Volante, her cousin, and ward of the Count's brother, the Abbé of Montpellier. Valentine, believing his true love, Lucia, lost, pursues Floriante, but her father has promised her to the arrogant Count Verole. Ilford is in love with Volante, an independent young woman who is determined to marry the man she chooses. Rejecting the serious Ilford, the 'man' she chooses is Sir Anthony, who, to preserve her male disguise, is forced to 'marry' Volante. Unable to continue the charade into the bridal suite, she relinquishes her connubial rights to a surprised, but grateful Ilford. However, when he is recognized by the anxious bride, Ilford shows himself more a

gentleman than a rake. He chooses not to take advantage of the opportunity presented to him by the sportive knight, and his honourable actions express his sincere love and affection for Volante. The disillusioned young woman is free once again to make her own choice, hopefully with more wisdom.

With Valentine, Sir Anthony adopts a second disguise, becoming a mysterious veiled lady who 'entertains' the young libertine. Following their lovemaking, she reveals her true identity to him. Valentine immediately regrets his obligation to Floriante, but Lucia makes it clear that she neither desires nor deserves marriage. She is much more comfortable with Floriante as Valentine's wife, preferring the role of mistress for herself. Later, she helps her lover steal Floriante from a nunnery in a midnight rendezvous, and makes it possible for them to escape their pursuers and eventually to wed.

On the fringe of these intrigues is Floriante's younger sister, Charlott. She has been banished by her father to life in a nunnery. A practical girl, Charlott decides that marriage to any man is a more attractive than a life of celibacy, and takes matters into her own hands. She escapes the nunnery disguised as her sister, and is captured by Count Verole, who believes her to be his fiancé. In the end Charlott gets the Count for her husband, and Floriante is free to marry Valentine.

A second strand of the plot concerns Lucia's revenge upon her former keeper, Sir Gentle Golding, who has recently

arrived in France. His humiliation at Lucia's hands is public knowledge in England, and the subsequent gossip and laughter have caused his flight. Ironically, his effort to escape sends him back into the clutches of the clever Lucia, who in her disguise as the young English knight, promises to arrange an assignation for the wealthy culley. When the eager 'ladies man' arrives for his mysterious rendezvous, he discovers his nemesis, Lucia, who manages to rob him again. Still not making the connection between Lucia and Sir Anthony, Sir Gentle marries a lady he believes to be Floriante, only to find that his new bride is actually his former mistress, Lucia, dressed as Floriante. To rid himself of his ungovernable lady, who is now his quite respectable wife, he agrees to a separate maintenance of five hundred pounds a year, declaring that 'When we have Mistresses above our Sense, / We must redeem our Persons with our Pence.'<sup>2</sup>

As if the various threads of Southerne's plot are not already confused enough, the third strand is complicated by the fact that the playwright was required by the producers to do some editing before his comedy was allowed to appear on the stage. Southerne himself tells us, in his Epistle Dedicatory to the play, that we will find 'Seven hundred Lines more in Print than was upon the Stage, which I cut out in the apprehension and dread of a long Play.' He goes on to admit that there were other considerations in the judicious cutting, in particular the fear of 'offending the Women,' although the dramatist is quick to assure the reader 'that

there is not one indecent Expression in it.'<sup>3</sup> All this explanation and defence refer primarily to one particular section of Sir Anthony Love, a scene where the playwright brings together his protagonist and the lascivious Abbé. The Abbé, the 'very Pope of Montpellier,'<sup>4</sup> has been the Englishmen's entre to the town's best social circles, and has shown a particular interest in Sir Anthony. He eventually manages to lure the boy-knight to a private assignation, on the pretext that he is a woman. Upon Sir Anthony's arrival, the Abbé reveals himself, and begins to make advances to the handsome young man. The tables are quickly turned, however, when Sir Anthony is forced to reveal her true sex. The embarrassed and 'plaguily disappointed' clergyman immediately rejects her, and admits to having no interest in 'being so familiar with the Ladies--'<sup>5</sup> Valentine's hitherto unsuspected presence at the unsuccessful seduction adds to the Abbé's humiliating predicament. His indiscretion has put him at the mercy of the two 'confidants,' and he is forced, for the protection of his position and reputation, to assist Valentine and Ilford in obtaining the women they love. As noted above this unconventional confrontation failed to materialize in the original staging, and, as Southerne was well aware, left 'a Gap in the Action.'<sup>6</sup> Without this climactic scene, the actions of the Abbé at the end of the play are difficult to comprehend.

The loose end of this portion of the plot is a Tartuffean rogue named Palmer. He appears early in the play in the

disguise of a pilgrim, hopeful that the piety of his attire will carry him through France to the safety of Spain. Sir Anthony, mistrustful of such ostentatious sanctity, determines to expose the impostor. Once she gets the pilgrim alone, she tricks him into confessing his past transgressions, and then, with the aid of a sleeping potion, robs him of his jewels and a record book of his rogueries. The plotting young knight's design to expose Palmer is spoiled when the trickster, who has been left in the gullible Sir Gentle's custody, forces the cowardly knight to exchange clothes with him, after which he makes his escape. Eventually Palmer is apprehended and finds himself at the mercy of the scheming Abbé, who immediately employs him as a pimp for the seduction of Sir Anthony. Palmer, however, is again duped by the clever knight, and finally flees Montpellier before anything worse can happen.

Despite the three separate actions of Southerne's script, the presence of such a vivacious and dominant spirit as Sir Anthony manages to give the play a strong sense of unity; the threads are woven together by the dexterity of the resourceful heroine. There is little in the play which does not in some way concern the lady in breeches. She is the primary instigator of the play's actions, and when she is not scheming against others, she is usually the object of their plots. Her aggressive, vigorous, spontaneous nature permeates the world of Southerne's play; she fills it with a gay, lively spirit that must have been responsible, in part, for the play's success with Restoration audiences. She is a master juggler,

delighted with the prospect of balancing plot upon plot and wearing disguise over disguise; and she is exhilarated rather than frightened by those precarious moments when masks threaten to slip and bring schemes tumbling down. The play is filled with late-night rendezvous, planned escapes, sword fights and ambushes, disguises and mistaken identities (what J. W. Dodds calls 'a dizzying shift in the course of events,'<sup>7</sup>) and Southerne and his protagonist manage to keep them all up in the air at one time. Dramatic tension builds as the pace increases. Suddenly, both playwright and protagonist step away, allowing all the pieces to fall with unexpected tidiness into their final order. It is in the resolution of the play that Southerne especially reveals his artistic control of the disparate parts. Dodds sees it as being 'almost as if each man got the woman who was standing next to him when it was time for the play to end.'<sup>8</sup> While the finale has that appearance, there is a definite significance to the order with which things fall into place, and Southerne's play is anything but 'an intricate series of tricks' in a 'play which is as rambling as its title would indicate.'<sup>9</sup> It is a play which merits close examination, and which reveals Thomas Southerne's remarkable dramatic skill.

III.

The Historical Perspectives of Sir Anthony Love

Historical events just prior to Southerne's writing Sir Anthony Love seem to have influenced the sceptical temper of the play significantly. Southerne's second dramatic work, The Disappointment (1684), was one of the last plays to be seen by King Charles II. Shortly afterwards the King was taken ill, and died in February 1685. For many the glorious age of the Restoration died with him. John Harold Wilson, in fact, points out that by the beginning of the decade of the 1680s, the saturnalia had lost its primary celebrants:

By the end of 1680 the Wits had disintegrated as a group. [John Wilmot, the Earl of] Rochester and [Sir Carr] Scoope were dead; [Sir Charles] Sedley had retired to domestic life in the country; [George Villiers, Duke of] Buckingham, in political disgrace, was allied with the anti-Court party; [John Sheffield, Earl of] Mulgrave had quarreled with his associates and turned to war and politics; [George] Etherege and [William] Wycherley wrote no more plays.<sup>10</sup>

The party was indeed coming to an end; the death of Charles and the subsequent flight of his brother James in 1688 were to crush the reckless excitement which had characterized their troubled reign.

The years of the rule of James II, from 1685 to the Revolution of 1688 were years of seemingly continual turmoil, with an ending which no one could have predicted. There was, even before the coronation, distrust and disapproval of a

Catholic monarch, but there was also a strong desire to avoid open rebellion. Memories of the 1640s remained too vivid in the minds of Englishmen for them to contemplate another such civil disturbance. Southerne went to the defence of his King in 1685 when the landing of Monmouth threatened the crown. His Preface to a later play, The Spartan Dame (1719), makes it clear that the dramatist believed in the cause of James II, and was secure in his choice of sides:

I was a Lieutenant in his [the Duke of Berwick's] regiment, when most advantageously recommended to him. . . His Grace gave me a Company, and discovered in a little time, a generous disposition of making my fortune; which, as it would have been no hard matter for a King's favourite son to accomplish, he would probably have finished, had not the changes of the world deprived his country of his service, and his dependents of his support.<sup>11</sup>

Southerne's rapid rise in rank suggests that he enjoyed the respect and admiration of influential friends, including the 'King's favourite son.' With such advantages so close at hand the dramatist must have been confident about the future. He must have expected that once the conflict had subsided, and the King had re-established order in the realm, he would have a place in the privileged circle surrounding the sovereign. Fortune, however, did not smile on James's cause, nor on that of the young Irishman. His hopes collapsed with the arrival of William of Orange in 1688. As he himself wrote, 'I was tumbled down from a high expectation.'<sup>12</sup> Southerne's subsequent release from the royalist army must have been attended by disappointment and disillusionment. In early



1689, the young idealist who had gone to war, returned to London a sceptic. His designs and expectations had been dashed; the contradiction between appearance and reality had been driven painfully home, for Thomas Southerne was one of its victims. The effect of such a series of seeming certainties and subsequent reversals undoubtedly coloured his perspective as he started to work in the theatre once more.

Assuming that Southerne, at the time of his enlistment, was more than a plotting opportunist (a loaded word in Sir Anthony Love), he fought with conviction (a philosophy he expressed in his first play, The Loyal Brother). The lesson of 1688 was certainly a painful one: right and wrong, justice and injustice, good and evil are only matters of perspective. Thomas Hobbes's statement that such grand moral terms are

ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves<sup>13</sup>

was proved to be true. Southerne's sense of the virtue of the Stuart monarchy, and his loyalty to established powers proved to be only images in his mind. With the defeat of James, those images were reversed. William, whom he had perceived as the usurper, became the reigning monarch, whom Thomas Southerne must support if he was to uphold his convictions. An epistemological scepticism naturally grows out of such a dramatic revelation: life following such a rude awakening requires reassessment.

Sir Anthony Love can be seen as Southerne's re-evaluation

of conventional Restoration assumptions. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes may have provided part of the inspiration. Hobbes saw a dramatic piece as requiring both 'Judgement and Fancy, with the Fancy. . .more eminent,' while he recognized that in a 'rigorous search of Truth, Judgement does all.'<sup>14</sup> Southerne created a dramatic vehicle which combined both functions of the mind: on the surface it is a lively, fanciful entertainment, while beneath it is a sceptical analysis of the deceptive nature of appearances. The reversals of history had left him unsure about how to interpret the world, so he began his own 'search for Truth' in the manner he knew best; his sceptical mode of inquiry is the theatre, and his empirical experiment is his play, Sir Anthony Love.

#### IV.

#### Epicureanism, Hobbesianism, Libertinism and Sceptiscism: The Shifting Images of Philosophy in Sir Anthony Love

The themes, dramatic structure, action and characters of Sir Anthony Love all reveal the playwright's interest in contemporary philosophical trends. Within the play, the ideas of Epicurus and Hobbes and the phenomenon of libertinism, which borrowed its peculiar tenets from both, are subjected to the scientific method associated with seventeenth century

scepticism.

The prominence of Epicurean philosophy in Southerne's late seventeenth century comedy is hardly surprising. The system of thought developed by Epicurus in fourth century B.C. Greece gained great popularity in the mid-seventeenth century. In his book, Epicurus in England 1650-1725, Thomas Mayo points out that between 1650 and 1700 at least thirteen books dealing with Epicurus and his followers, Lucretius and Petronius (whom Southerne chose to quote in his epigraph on the title page of the play) were published.<sup>15</sup> The climax of the 'Epicurean vogue' came in 1685, when four major Epicurean texts were published, including Dryden's translation of five passages from the De rerum natura of Lucretius. Three years earlier, in the year when Southerne's first play was staged, Thomas Creech had published the first complete English translation of Lucretius's work, which was highly acclaimed. Evelyn and Otway were among those who praised it, and Aphra Behn was particularly appreciative that the principles of Epicurus and his disciple were now available to those without the benefit of a classical education.<sup>16</sup>

For the true Epicurean, the universe, including man and his affairs, was simply a random mingling of atoms, a belief which eliminated any rational pre-determination of man's existence, divine or otherwise.<sup>17</sup> The gods existed, but were indifferent to the affairs of men, and powerless to control or punish them. This effectively eliminated any need for man either to fear death or to worship the gods which

Epicurus saw as the two primary causes of man's personal pain. The proper pursuit of life, according to Epicurus, was pleasure, and by removing fear of the gods and the related fear of death, it was obtainable. Although the Epicurean emphasis on the pursuit of pleasure has often been subject to misinterpretation (particularly by the libertine for his personal convenience), the ethical foundation of the philosophy was moderation, based on self-control, and it was essentially conservative in its ethos. The pleasures of rest, physical health, and peace of mind were perceived as superior to those of motion, sensual pleasures, and ambition, which might potentially cause distress.

The Epicureans also believed that the chance mingling of atoms and the lack of divine interference allowed for an analogous complexity in human affairs owing to man's free will. Epicurus, in his explanation of the physical world, posited a slight 'swerve,' significantly complicating the atomic theory of the continually downward falling particles which made up the universe. This seemingly slight alteration allowed the particles to take on a random motion, setting up a universe which was no longer predictable. When Epicurus extended this atomic swerve as an explanation of human behavior, the unpredictable, the fortuitous, followed from the analogy with free will. Without interference from the gods (or the threat of divine retribution) man, each man, could, like the swerving atom, freely determine his own actions with incalculable consequences. If each individual in a society

possessed the prerogative of choice, it was no longer possible to predict consequences because of the opposing actions of other free-willed individuals; man's social world, despite his own possible ignorance of the fact, was a random universe. It is this unpredictable world of Epicurus that Southerne used as the framework for Sir Anthony Love.

A second popular philosophy of the Restoration period was inspired somewhat by the atomic notions of Epicurus, but primarily by the geometry of Euclid and Galileo's theories of motion. The methodology of Thomas Hobbes, and his desire to find the fundamental causes of human behaviour, were well known and much debated in the late seventeenth century.

Hobbes, who did not come to philosophy until he was in his early forties, constructed a theory of the behaviour of men, and subsequently of the form of government necessary to their continued peace and stability. Hobbes's proclaimed passion for geometry as the ideal method of reasoning, and his interest in Galileo's ideas about motion led him to some basic assumptions. When the gap was widening between Charles I and the English Parliament, Hobbes felt the necessity to demonstrate the proper relationship of the sovereign to his subjects and vice versa, and thus help to promote peace and security for all.<sup>18</sup>

Hobbes applied his notions of the great machine of nature to the behaviour of men. Their actions were reducible to the mechanical effects of the sense organs, nerves, muscles, imagination, memory, and reason responding to external

stimuli. In addition, the philosopher recognized that within each man was a sort of self-motion: a desire or endeavour to keep going to avoid death. It was man's desire to carry on which for Hobbes ultimately determined the whole of human activity: 'man is in constant movement toward what will help him continue his motion, and away from that which will impede it.'<sup>19</sup> Hobbes called the motive forces that propelled man, 'appetites' and 'aversions.' Through a process of deliberation, involving memory, imagination, and reason, acting on the data of sense perception, the mechanical man pursued his desires and fled his fears.

Hobbes acknowledged that appetites and aversions were different in different men, and were subject to change throughout a man's life; nevertheless, they were always present: 'Life it selfe is but Motion, and can never be without Desire, nor without Feare, no more than without Sense.'<sup>20</sup> Each man possessed desires (for security, riches, honour, etc.), but each was satisfied by reaching his particular level of attainment. At this point in Hobbes's ultimate work, Leviathan, he described the phenomenon of man's insatiable appetite for power.

Hobbes defined power as man's 'present means to obtain some future apparent Good.'<sup>21</sup> As with appetites and aversions, all men sought some power; not all yearned for as much as others; some desired more than they had. As long as each individual was a being in isolation, whose selfish needs did not affect others, Hobbes's hypothesis appeared harmless.

But when a man, with his desires and need for power, entered into a society with other men of similar, but not identical needs, serious consequences developed. Each man used 'the faculties of Body and Mind' plus what further powers he acquires by using them in competing for his portion of power.<sup>22</sup> In Leviathan Hobbes claimed that 'every man's power resists and hinders the affects of other men's power. . .one man's power may be simply redefined as the excess of his over others.'<sup>23</sup> The struggle for power was a major source of conflict, for no man gained power except at the expense of others. Hobbes carried this idea further, suggesting that society was an arena for predators. While some individuals were satisfied with lower levels of power, Hobbes suggested that others were voracious without limit. When the insatiable sought limitless power, a struggle ensued, as those with more modest needs battled to protect what little they had. Hobbes summed up his assessment of man's appetite for power, by positing:

a general inclination for all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire for Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death. And the cause of this, is not always that man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath at present, without the acquisition of more.<sup>24</sup>

Men, even those with essentially moderate needs for power, were hence pulled into the struggle, if only to defend themselves from their rapacious fellows. In the game of life,

man had to be both offensive (seeking to satisfy desires and to gain more power), and defensive (seeking to protect what he already had). Lillian Hellman, three hundred years later, in her play, The Little Foxes, restated the Hobbesian notion of man, saying that 'there were people who ate the earth and other people who stood around and watched them do it.'<sup>25</sup> Hobbes saw that at some point the 'watchers,' out of a natural desire for self-preservation (for fear of losing what power they already possessed) would cease to be bystanders, and would finally take action against those who threatened their security.

Hobbes's portrait of man was the foundation upon which he built a social and political model which could protect all of a society from the dangers inherent in man's apparent natural inclinations. For Southerne, however, who was writing a sceptical play for an audience familiar with Hobbes's philosophy of human nature, this portion of Leviathan was central; the political theory was secondary. The Hobbesian view of the human condition (Professor Underwood sees Hobbes's philosophy as one of the two major views of man and society in Restoration comedy.<sup>26</sup>) strongly influences both the characters and the dramatic action of Sir Anthony Love.

A third popular philosophy of the seventeenth century which finds expression in Sir Anthony Love is libertinism. As the 'prominent and pervasive concern of the seventeenth century,'<sup>27</sup> it is the focus of Southerne's dramatic experiment. Restoration libertinism was the popular lifestyle



which expressed the more general and theoretical ideas of the Epicurus and Hobbes.

In Etherege and the Seventeenth Century Comedy of Manners (1957) Professor Dale Underwood shows libertinism to be not so much a formal, intellectual system, as a code of manners expressing 'predilections of temper and behavior. . .'.<sup>28</sup> Libertinism, in fact, could scarcely by its nature have become a philosophic system. It might rather be called. . . a "way of life."<sup>29</sup> As Underwood pictures it, libertinism brought together three major philosophical lines: Scepticism, Epicureanism, and Naturalism and merged them in such a way as best to fit its underlying purpose.<sup>30</sup> In tracing the philosophical influences on libertine thought, Professor Underwood reveals its inherent contradictions. As a sceptical anti-rationalist, the libertine saw man as lacking the ability to perceive reality accurately, but as a follower of Epicurus, he was required to trust his senses as reliable guides. Yet the libertine, unlike the Sceptics and Epicureans, was not content with a conservative tolerance of social customs and institutions, but leaned towards the primitivists' desire for revolt against established conventions. As Underwood points out, 'what the libertine, particularly in the Restoration, selected from these sources was determined chiefly by the extent to which the ideas negated conventional thought and values.'<sup>31</sup> The fundamental element in this revolt was a faith in nature as a social and moral guide, and a distrust of the artificial customs and conventions of men. It was 'an

attempt to free the whole natural man.'<sup>32</sup> If a man could shed the shackles of 'society,' he could more successfully pursue his own personal pleasures; the only limitations placed on him were his own common-sense and the boundaries of natural law.

Libertinism was egocentric. The interests of the individual took precedence over any sort of commitment to the common good. This emphasis on self-indulgence within the context of a society leads directly to the natural man as portrayed by Hobbes. Unrestrained liberty eventually produces a social 'state of war,' and as Underwood indicates, 'the Restoration libertine. . . is always fully and ironically aware of this reality.' The Libertine saw man in Hobbesian terms, 'as self-seeking in his motivation and ruthless in his means.'<sup>33</sup> In terms of Restoration comedy this surrender to one's natural desires, one's physical appetites, was figured in the rake's sexual adventures and his revulsion for the social institution of marriage. The libertine doctrine of 'free love' encouraged variety and inconstancy, while denigrating fidelity and the selfless ideals of courtly love. The libertine gave free rein to his physical appetites, which were considered sufficient justification for predatory behaviour. Only man's superior cunning differentiated him from the beasts; all were creatures of nature, meant to roam free from the restrictions of civilization.

Libertinism, it seems, is the culminating expression of all the sceptical pre-Restoration traditions, and is therefore

the primary target for Southerne's dramatic exposé of his society's most cherished assumptions.

In order to investigate the sometimes contradictory implications of these assorted popular philosophies, Southerne chose an approach based on the method of reasoning which had grown out of scepticism.

While scepticism is widely associated with seventeenth century culture, the term actually refers to three different epistemologies. It is first associated with an entire system of Greek thought, originating with Pyrrho, carried through the Middle Ages to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the works of Sextus Empiricus. It was primarily Thomas Stanley's English translation of Empiricus and the popular Essays of Montaigne which brought sceptical Pyrrhonism to the attention of the seventeenth century. The fundamental tenet of this sceptical thought was that all knowledge was problematic and relative. The only way to acquire knowledge was through sensory impressions, but there was no way of testing the validity of those impressions. Therefore individuals often had inadequate information, and hence a false impression of the world around them. One Pyrrhonistic proof of the misinformation provided by the senses was the example of the square tower which when seen from a distance appeared round. The logical outgrowth of this kind of doubt was the suspension of judgement in all matters of speculation. This scepticism stressed the relativity of all ideas, and therefore recommended a conservative attachment to tradition and

convention. Against every proposition the wise man balanced the contrary view, and in doing so revealed the futility of the quest for certainty. For the Pyrrhonist there was only eternal doubt. If all knowledge was suspect, the simplest, safest course of action was to adhere to the customs and institutions of one's society. If man could be certain of nothing, then arguments for change were only insubstantial speculation, and for the good of all, things should be left as they were.

A second form of scepticism in the seventeenth century was based on the reasoning of the Christian sceptics. While it too recognized the fallibility of man's senses, it did so with a specific ulterior motive: 'If reason was inadequate as a source of knowledge, man could know his divine relationship to God only, or primarily, through faith.'<sup>34</sup> Man was incapable of knowing anything for certain, as the Pyrrhonists had clearly proved, so it was only through his faith in the guidance of God and His revealed word that man could follow the true path through life. Dryden's opening lines in 'Religio Laici' echo the thoughts of the Christian sceptic:

Dim as the borrow'd beams of Moon and Stars  
 To lonely, weary, wandring Travellers  
 Is Reason to the Soul: And as on high  
 Those rowling Fires discover but the Sky  
 Not light us here; So Reason's glimmering Ray  
 Was lent, not to assure our doubtfull way,  
 But guide us upward to a better Day.  
 And as those nightly Tapers disappear  
 When Day's bright Lord ascends our Hemisphere;  
 So pale grows Reason at Religion's sight;  
 So dyes, and so dissolves in Supernatural Light.<sup>35</sup>

The third form of 'scepticism' is that which Professor

Underwood traces 'from Socrates through the New Academy to Cicero, and particularly from thence to the Renaissance.'<sup>36</sup> By the time this reached the seventeenth century it was not so much a theory of knowledge as a method of reasoning which required an open and unbiased mind. Phillip Harth, in Contexts of Dryden's Thought, shows how this altered definition of scepticism, 'inherited from Francis Bacon,' began to appear 'at about the time the Royal Society was founded,' and strongly influenced Dryden's approach to criticism.<sup>37</sup> Primarily it turned the notion of scepticism from 'a destructive use of doubt' to a constructive method of arriving at truth.<sup>38</sup> Robert Boyle, an influential member of the Royal Society, expressed this positive side of sceptical reasoning: 'I propose doubts not only with design, but with hope of being at length freed from them by the attainment of undoubted truth.'<sup>39</sup> Unlike the Pyrrhonists, this new breed of sceptics who grew out of the scientific movement professed tactical doubts which were a means to an end, not an end in themselves.

Southerne's close relationship with Dryden, and his contacts at Trinity College Dublin (Thomas and William Molyneux who were deeply involved in the new science both in Ireland and in England<sup>40</sup>), make the possibility of his having applied this mode of inquiry to his dramatic work quite plausible.

In the spirit of the scientific movement, the play's scepticism lies in its methodology. It shows initially a

'modesty and diffidence' toward accepted social and philosophical 'truths,' along with an unbiased, free inquiry into questions of appearance and reality.<sup>41</sup> The conclusions drawn from the 'dramatic experiment' are based on evidence adduced in the play. It is carefully constructed to balance social and moral patterns against their corresponding but opposite reflections, to the end of separating whatever truth there is from false appearances, and facts from the fictions of social prejudice.

The Pyrrhonists had chosen unrelenting doubt because they could not confirm the validity of the information their senses gave them; Southerne's play was a test designed to provide some proof of our ability to discern the truth. Using a playwright's skill to vary the angles of perception, measure the reliability of sensory impressions, and weigh the relative soundness of ideas, Southerne hoped to move beyond the Pyrrhonists and arrive at some dependable conclusions.

#### V.

#### Theatrical Convention and its Reflection

If the sceptical Pyrrhonist, believing that all knowledge was relative, depended on conservatism for security, then Southerne's adoption of a very conventional dramatic style indicates a sceptical conservatism in his approach. The

initial impression created by Sir Anthony Love is that of a Spanish comedy of intrigue, the dominant theatrical genre of the 1680s. This style, borrowed from the pre-Commonwealth adaptations and translations of Calderon and others, was 'action-centred,'<sup>42</sup> and had been an immediate favourite of King Charles. Harold Love sees it as the mode of most of Dryden's comedies, and associates it with 'the Continental pre-Lenten carnival.'<sup>43</sup> He identifies Sir Anthony Love as being very much in 'the carnival tradition.' The whole notion of a carnival is a sort of inverted image of traditional social behaviour. It is a licensed mocking of established authority and values, a sceptical response to everyday realities: reality, in fact, turned upside down. A lowly clown rises to be king, while the conventionally elite are toppled. Southerne's conclusion seems to support this reversal of traditional social hierarchy. The cowardly Verole becomes a hero, while the 'Rambling Lady' 'dwindles into a wife.'<sup>44</sup> Sir Anthony Love has a good many of the distinguishing characteristics of the festive carnival style:

a marked preference for foreign settings. . .plot materials are practical jokes, maskings and impersonations. . .sexual pursuits with women (often disguised as men) the aggressive partners, and a fierce guying of authority and religion. Its comic appeal is in the spectacle of instinct explosively liberated from constraint.<sup>45</sup>

This aptly characterizes Sir Anthony Love as far as it goes. Professor Love's codification is correct; the problem lies in the fact that it stops too soon. Southerne only starts with

the 'intrigue' appearance, and almost immediately shifts perspective to introduce other popular theatrical traditions.

While the comedy of intrigue is the genre identified by most critics of Sir Anthony Love, an audience, without the advantage of the critics' overview, might make other initial assumptions. First impressions become for them, at least temporarily, the reality of the world of the play. Southerne began his comedy with one of the most recognizable of Restoration openings, and in doing so established some immediate expectations in an audience familiar with the theatrical conventions of the day. Peter Holland points out that by 1668 the opening of a Restoration comedy was already a tradition: 'the rake-hero is seen either dressing or waking, but in either case, is in control both of his world and the sympathies of the audience.'<sup>46</sup> The 'tradition' Holland is talking about is identified with the 'sex comedies' of the first two decades of the Restoration, particularly those of Etherege and Wycherley. Southerne, while not specifically picturing his heroine as 'dressing or waking,' does adopt the vital aspect of the Restoration opening for Sir Anthony Love. At the beginning, Sir Anthony is seen in firm control of her dramatic world, having at the rise of the curtain gained the 'Reputation of a Whoremaster. . .the erran'st Rake-hell of 'em all.'<sup>47</sup> Her Machiavellian desire for 'Universal Empire' sets the play clearly in the traditions established by the Dorimants and Horners fifteen years before. Her success at the outset in overcoming the most difficult of obstacles,



sexual transformation, makes her sense of control even greater, and creates in the audience's mind the expectation of her continued domination of the play's action. Rather than connecting Sir Anthony Love with the 'comedy of intrigue,' the opening suggests a play in the tradition of the comedy of manners, with the additional complexity of disguise. The first impression, however, rapidly shifts, and as it does, so do the assumptions of the viewer.

Although Sir Anthony employs the rhetoric of past rakes, the fact that Southerne puts this bravado in the mouth of a woman playing the role of a 'reputed' libertine opens up the possibility that the play will be a satire on libertine philosophy. From the start, Sir Anthony gives the impression that her transformation has been an easy one, and that her acceptance into the select circle of rakes has been a simple matter of adopting a few external features. By merely putting on the 'Fashion of the World,'<sup>48</sup> she gains her reputation. The appropriate dress, the wearing of a sword, 'clever' conversation, and a contempt for danger are the only ingredients required for the creation of a rake; armed with these, she slips effortlessly into the supposedly restricted male world. The opening seems to ridicule the whole concept of libertinism, and implies a satirical approach.

In the 1680s, the Spanish comedy of intrigue was a style most closely associated with the work of Aphra Behn. In fact, Mrs. Behn's play The Rover was the last play of record seen by Charles II before his death brought an end to the era of the

true libertines. It may be that Southerne selected The Rover as his inspiration because, for him, it symbolized, both in style and substance, that reality of which only a reflection remained.<sup>49</sup>

In 1690, <sup>five</sup>~~six~~ years after Charles' death, libertinism was merely a pose, not a position. As the years of Charles's reign receded into the past, and public intolerance for the cynicism and excesses of those years increased, the rake and his self-indulgent philosophy as a satirical target would not be surprising, and would perhaps even have been welcomed. In the sentimental drama of the next decade rake after rake would discover the error of his ways before the play came to an end. Southerne himself had employed the device of a fifth-act repentance in The Disappointment, and his audience might reasonably expect another attack on the swaggering Restoration bravos in Sir Anthony Love. Professor Kenneth Muir suggests that Sir Anthony was used by Southerne 'to satirize the behavior of the gallants of the period,' and hints that this is the play's central theme.<sup>50</sup> Lucia, in men's clothes and flippant about her easy transformation into a successful rake, could be expected to turn the tables and mock the conventional 'sex comedy' design by her very success in its previously exclusive male world. Thus, in the opening lines of the first scene of the play Southerne creates ambiguous expectations by evoking a complex image of the familiar hero of the comedy of intrigue, both as a successful libertine and as a facilely disguised parody of the type.

A third shift by the playwright changes the viewpoint once again. Sir Anthony confesses to Wait-well that she has taken the drastic step of disguise 'to be better employ'd; to recommend me to Valentine. . .now I am sure he likes me; and likes me so well in a Man, he'll love me in a Woman; and let him make the Discovery if he dares.'<sup>51</sup> This early confession creates the romantic expectation that ensuing action will be motivated by devotion, and recalls the women of Shakespearean romantic comedies who adopted disguise in order to follow safely the men they loved. It now appears that Lucia has assumed her disguise and travelled to France in order to be near her beloved Valentine; at the appropriate time she can reveal herself and, perhaps like those earlier lovers, they will live happily ever after. It now appears that neither a celebration of the hard edge of libertinism nor the bite of satire will be the evening's fare, but the delight, the reassuring sense of order and justice produced by romance.

In the first two pages of his play Southerne subtly suggests the unreliability of appearances by using three conventions of the theatre which evoke contradictory expectations about the meaning of Lucia's disguise. In doing so he alerts his audience to the danger of trusting such appearances. The expectations established in an audience by their recognition of popular theatrical conventions are largely responsible for the meanings they attach to the images in an opening scene. Three times Southerne shifts perspective

and by doing so neutralizes conventional assumptions. In his rapid alteration of expectation, Southerne undercuts the reliability of conventional responses, and thus prepares his audience for the 'modesty of free inquiry,' for a fresh look at what they thought they knew. Like the scientists of the new age, they are now ready to view familiar phenomena from new perspectives.

Southerne, who relied on popular theatrical styles to establish the complex opening image in his play, also filled Sir Anthony Love with many easily identifiable stock characters from Restoration theatre. As with the theatrical conventions he used, however, it is not the mere fact that such stock characters are present that matters, but his manipulation of those known quantities. The plays of the period contain many characters not only of similar persuasion, but with identical names. Valentines, Wait-wells, Charlotts, and Palmers appear often. The libertine rake, the arrogant Spanish nobleman, the foolish English knight, and the hypocritical clergyman were all familiar to Restoration audiences. Similarly, audiences had doubtless come to anticipate the victory of the rake, the humbling of the arrogant Spaniard, the duping of the foolish knight, and the unmasking of the hypocritical cleric. Southerne, counting on the audience's assumptions about his characters, presents them in their most recognizable external appearance. Then through dialogue and plot the playwright rotates the angle of vision in order to reveal unexpected new meanings.

A good example of this procedure can be seen in the handling of the character and actions of Count Verole. Presented initially in dialogue as a 'Singular, Opinionated, Obstinate, Crooked-temper'd, Jealous-pated Fool'<sup>52</sup> of strict Spanish breeding, the Count presumes to be the rival of the handsome libertine rake, Valentine. Even before Verole appears, theatrical convention has dictated his fate: he will lose the lady he seeks to the witty, charismatic young Englishman. The casting of the roles reinforced this stock expectation.

Valentine was played by William Mountfort, the 'Adonis' among current Restoration actors in the eyes of the ladies, while Verole was played by Samuel Sandford, the man King Charles called the 'best Villain in the World.'<sup>53</sup> Good and evil, hero and villain, were easily distinguishable. As the plot develops, however, we begin to see distortions of these initially clear images. Verole has the reputation of a coward, but offers a sanely rational defence of his distaste for pointless violence.<sup>54</sup> His reason for not fighting Valentine is, as Sir Anthony finds, not debatable: 'Passion will fire the coldest Elements; The Lees of Wine ferment the dullest Phelgm. . . If such extravagancies / Make the Brave, Madmen are Heroes.'<sup>55</sup> The coward becomes, through a shift in perspective, a man of wisdom; the Restoration stereotype yields to a richer human character. Sir Anthony attempts to tear off what she takes to be the Count's hypocritical mask of confidence, but it is soon apparent that he wears none.

Verole is gradually revealed to be a consistent character; regardless of the angle from which Southerne exposes him, he is always the same.

The true nature of the play's presumed hero, Valentine, is not as easily discerned. Very much the aggressive libertine rake, he is Sir Anthony's 'Example in the ways of the world,' a seeker of pleasure, a man about town cast from the mould of many young Restoration gallants. His leadership in the scornful attack on the passing pilgrim shows his contempt for the respectable customs and traditions of his society; he appears to be the Rake-hell and whoremaster Sir Anthony professes to be. After that initial impression, however, Southerne forces a comparison between appearance and a deeper reality on the viewer. Contradiction, which Professor Underwood saw as very much a part of the informal libertine philosophy, is obvious in Valentine.<sup>56</sup> Moments after his attack on the passing pilgrim, Southerne shifts the perspective and reveals an underlying tolerance in Valentine, which seems in direct opposition to his earlier bigoted abuse. Valentine chastises his friend Ilford for not seeing the sense in Sir Anthony's conservative Pyrrhonic approach to religion, asking him:

Why must [your] Capacity be the Measure of another Man's Understanding? And all men be in the wrong, who don't dance i'th' Circle of your thoughts? . . . No Opinion ever sprung out of an Universal Consent; Truth can no more be comprehended, than Beauty: We have our several Reasons for one: And Fancies for the other.<sup>57</sup>

This hardly sounds like the ideology of an egocentric

libertine. But after such a liberal profession, Valentine reverts to further intolerant abuse of the pilgrim. By thus shifting perspective, Southerne reinforces both the transmutative qualities of libertinism, and the deceptive nature of appearances, either physical or verbal. Valentine has a late-night assignation with the mysterious English woman. After making love to her, he indulges in the sexual bravado usually associated with the Restoration rake-hero, saying that he is 'fitter, a great deal, for an Intrigue with your Ladyship, both in discretion and performance---'.<sup>58</sup> Yet moments later, upon discovering the lady to be his long-lost Lucia, the rake's tone and treatment disappear. His boasting gives way to genuine concern for Lucia. Valentine is neither a typical 'rake' nor a typical 'hero.' Such labels are no more applicable in Southerne's play than they are in society.

Valentine's companion, Ilford, also at first appears cut from the rakish pattern of his comrades, but like his friend Valentine is revealed to have more substance. His professed cynicism, that 'every Man to his own Interest tends',<sup>59</sup> recalls the Hobbesian egocentricity of the classic Restoration rakes, and yet Ilford's behaviour belies his libertine rhetoric on several occasions. His willingness to help Valentine secure the woman he desires, his quiet suffering of abuse at the hands of Volante and Sir Anthony, and most tellingly, his unselfish behaviour toward Volante, despite circumstances that no self-respecting libertine would pass up,

are actions which reflect a more generous nature than would be expected in a stereotypical rake.

Other characters are also shown to be more complex than their assumed Restoration roles. Volante appears to be a strong, independent young lady like Etherege's Harriet, or Wycherley's Hippolata. She knows what she wants and is unwilling to settle for less. Yet on her wedding night her confidence quickly melts and she becomes a frightened, insecure girl at the mercy of others. The conventional comic type gives way to a touchingly realistic image easily recognizable to many seventeenth century women who left the security of their families for the uncertainty of wedlock. Sir Gentle Golding in one light appears to be a conventional Restoration 'witless,' struggling to pass himself off as something he clearly is not. In soliloquy, however, he shows himself to be a basically decent man, who realizes his inability to play the role of libertine with conviction. As he prepares for an arranged assignation, he muses: 'I have a villanous Suspicion, that when I see this Lady, I shall take her for a civil Gentlewoman; Abuse her a way she does not deserve: Think too well of her and lose my Labour.'<sup>60</sup>

Southerne first presents stock character types which create established expectations in the audience, but then, by opening new perspectives on these characters, reveals human contradictions and complexities. The spectator is forced to reassess conventional labels. 'Heroes,' and 'villains,' and 'rakes' are not so easy to categorize. The obvious may be



misleading. The audience is ready to build a more valid image of life based on a sounder interpretation of the facts.

If critics have tended to assign the play to the 'festive comedy' and 'comedy of intrigue' genres, then the obvious surface action of the play should be very much in those traditions -- and it is. The foreign setting, impersonations, incidents of mistaken identity, night-time rendezvous, and sword play are all associated with those Restoration 'carnival' comedies, and are all important parts of Sir Anthony Love. Again, however, critical assessment of these dramatic situations has too often ceased at the superficial level, only identifying the stock situations without regard to their relationships to other events in the play, particularly the conclusion. It is in his handling of the consequence of a specific incident that Southerne alters our anticipated perspective, an alteration which makes the familiar suddenly strange and conventional meanings subtly unconventional. The struggle of Valentine to rescue the woman he loves from the constraints of her family is a dramatic situation which occurs time and again in Restoration drama. Southerne's treatment of it, however, is anything but typical. In terms of the play's dramatic action, we never see them as lovers. There are no secret meetings, no vows exchanged, no stolen kisses. In the course of the play they never appear alone together on stage. And when they are at last united, prepared to take their wedding vows, following four acts of striving to be together, there is no joy, but only apprehension. Floriante, perhaps

seeing her husband-to-be clearly for the first time, hesitates, saying 'Men of your Conversation and Experience in the World,/ Valentine, seldome like the Women you marry,' but 'since Marriage at best is a Venture, I had as good make it myself, as let another make it for me, at my Cost.'<sup>61</sup> Instead of giving us the culminating romantic image we expect at their successful union, the ideals of love, marriage, and devotion are reduced to the sceptical terms of a 'gamble.' Earlier in the play, after failing to attain Floriante, Valentine shows no hesitation in making love to a stranger, saying, 'I may be Lover, but I must be a Man.'<sup>62</sup> Separated as the two actions are in the play, they might appear to be nothing more than isolated, conventional incidents. Placed side by side, however, the two events make a major statement about the couple's prospects for the future. Floriante is taking a gamble and the odds are very much against her. The comic ending is thus darkened, as in Measure for Measure, by the strains the playwright has put on the conventional happy ending of marriage.

Each of the romantic relationships in the play makes a similarly conventional impression, and then some subsequent dramatic action changes our view of that particular pairing. The spirited Charlott is first seen deriding the avaricious Count Verole for his plot to disinherit her. Any union between the two seems inconceivable; they appear to be the two most diametrically opposed characters in the play. Yet, in the frenzied final actions Southerne brings them together;

Verole proclaims his 'Good Fortune' at having both Charlott and her 'Consent,' and without further explanation they plan to be married.<sup>63</sup> Such a dramatic turn of events forces an audience to wonder. Superficially, the future of the relationship appears bleak, but the very oddity of the pairing causes conventional interpretations to be called into question. In this instance, Southerne requires the audience to attempt to find for themselves a perspective from which to understand this strange union.

The bringing together of Volante and Ilford, while less surprising than the union of Charlott and Count Verole, also involves shifts of perspective which alter conventional expectations. Ilford's assistance in arranging the mock marriage of Sir Anthony and Volante seems to point toward the familiar scene in which another man takes the husband's place in bed (Sir Anthony even predicts that this theatrical convention will follow), but the expectation is thwarted, which forces a rethinking of the meaning of the scene. Rather than taking the anticipated advantage of the situation, Ilford reveals the truth, and frees Volante from both her 'marriage' and from any obligation to himself. This action is contrary to the familiar comedy-of-manners code, and changes the outcome of the scene as well as the perception of Ilford's character.

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of one so lost--<sup>64</sup>) and the debt she owes to Ilford's decency. In gratitude, she promises him what he most desires: her love. The anticipated anger and humiliation associated with such discovery scenes is conspicuously absent, and so is the potential romance. Volante simply accepts both the truth and Ilford, with very little display of passion in regard to either.

Sir Anthony and Sir Gentle, the last couple to be united in the play, in some ways present the most significant alteration of comic conventions. Their 'wedded bliss' is simply a financial agreement. Sir Anthony's assumed libertine aversion to matrimony leads to the expectation that she would use any means to avoid the altar. By her own design she marries her former keeper, Sir Gentle Golding, and creates another traditional expectation in the viewer -- she has perceived his essential goodness and now loves him.

Another shift occurs when Sir Gentle refuses to play his expected role in this conventional comic resolution. Its failure to materialize is all the more surprising because throughout the play Sir Anthony has been the character who seems most in control of all aspects of the action. Nevertheless she loses that control in the final moments, and this lapse undoes the anticipated conclusion. Her husband refuses to remain married to a woman cleverer than he, and while Sir Gentle has consistently been shown as weak and ineffectual, he is firm about a continued relationship with Lucia. The determination of the knight (He's willing to pay

handsomely for his freedom.) and the sudden impotence of Lucia (now that her 'Sir Anthony' mask has been discarded) shift the audience's perception yet again. Southerne provides the wedding that is expected as the 'happy ending' for a comedy. But it is not a marriage and it is not happy.

Sir Anthony Love appears at first to be a redaction of the typical forms of Restoration comedy, but Southerne has rearranged and reshaped the familiar elements to create a new, deeply sceptical effect. He does much the same thing with several popular philosophic trends of his day.

Epicureanism, Hobbesianism, and libertinism were prominent in the climate of English opinion in the decade prior to Sir Anthony Love's premiere; the tenets of each are major forces shaping the world of the play. As with theatrical conventions, however, they are subjected to a sceptical scrutiny and seen from a variety of perspectives. The initially compelling image of each philosophical school soon reveals its imperfections when viewed from new angles.

The basic dramatic structure responsible for much of the play's energy, lying just beneath the surface of the popular theatrical intrigue, is that of 'Epicurus's World. . .Perfect, and Uniform, without a design.'<sup>65</sup> It is a philosophical universe created and destroyed merely by chance; the 'random mingling of atoms, which created and destroyed without intention, devoid of aspiration.'<sup>66</sup> Southerne's characters inhabit such a world, but are clearly ignorant of its nature. In it, an English lady adopts a rake's disguise and catapults

herself headlong into male society. She seems to set off an Epicurean chain-reaction which J. W. Dodds conservatively refers to as 'dizzying shifts in the course of events.'<sup>67</sup> Characters, like Epicurean atoms, literally bounce off one another, plotting and counter-plotting in their attempts to impose their intentions on the dramatic design, and all racing madly in several directions at once. The godless world of Epicurus, in which forms are created and annihilated by the unpredictable swerves of individual free will, operates effectively beneath the theatrical surface of the play. Southerne focuses on the fashionable Restoration themes of honour, reputation, revenge and intrigue, revealing them to be rather futile human attempts to impose design on a formless world. Count Canaille strives to enhance his honour through an advantageous disposal of his daughters, Volante seeks a secure reputation in her marriage to Sir Anthony, Sir Gentle pursues a satisfying revenge through his marriage to the alleged Floriante, and the lecherous Abbé plots an assignation with a pretty young man. Each design, each proposed pattern in the chaotic universe of the play, ends in failure.

The absence of design confirms the folly of expectation; it will only bring disillusionment. Yet Southerne's characters are blind to the folly of expectation. Time after time they rush impatiently toward some contrived but elusive denouement. Secure in the belief that their design is bound to succeed, they repeatedly leave themselves open to frustration. Each character, despite his apparent ignorance

of the fact, is, as Ilford warns,

One, who in spight of having been once  
undone, / Will have no more profit from his  
Experience / Than to fall into the same  
folly agen, with the same occasion.' The  
Abbé responds by saying, 'Then hang him for  
a Fool, enough of him.'<sup>68</sup>

Their failure to perceive the lack of order in the Epicurean world of the play and their persistence in marching blindly on 'in the Teeth of Fortune'<sup>69</sup> makes all these characters foolish, and within the play all are victims of their own folly at one time or another. There is, in fact, throughout the play, a strong sense of the Hobbesian notion that the future is 'but a fiction of the mind,'<sup>70</sup> and those that appear most foolish are those who, despite previous experience, still lack the prudence, or perhaps humility, to realize the uncertain consequences of their own actions. In the haphazard world of Sir Anthony Love control, security, and realized expectation do not exist except in the minds of the characters, and Southerne reveals human fancy to be a dynamic and dangerous image-maker.

The Epicurean universe of Sir Anthony Love is not only a random, unpredictable world, but it is also a godless one. Epicurus's idea that the gods are nothing more than disinterested spectators who decline to interfere in the trivial matters of mankind, leaves man alone to operate as he sees fit. He can exercise his free will without fear of divine punishment or hope of divine favor. The absence of divine interference associated with Epicurean thought was part of what Norman Holland saw as the growing 'sense of schism'



between the earthly and the spiritual worlds which was developing in the seventeenth century.<sup>71</sup> The secular and the religious became 'parallel and independent provinces governed by different laws, judged by different standards, and amenable to different authorities.'<sup>72</sup> The separation between the two varied according to individual outlook, but was perhaps most distinct among the Epicureans. It was this aspect of Epicureanism that made it so popular with the Restoration libertines. Moral guidelines were no longer the edicts of a remote deity, but the manners of one's society: 'the Examples and Customs of the World.'<sup>73</sup>

The shift of focus from absolute moral values to the moral relativism of social mores, and from divine sanction to personal inclination is evident in Sir Anthony Love. Southerne's characters have no concern with divine response, but instead are guided by social acceptance or rejection. They esteem nobility, not virtue; they worry about reputation, not honour; they fear shame, not guilt; and, they are indifferent, not tolerant. In the dramatic world of Sir Anthony Love God has been deposed, and society sits on the throne of judgement. The problem, as Southerne proves repeatedly, is that society is a far more jealous and demanding god than any supposed deity. The attempt to conform to popular morality results in distorted ideals and values, judgements based on social taxonomy rather than individual merit, a diminished freedom to act as one chooses and even the loss of personal identity. In the world of Sir Anthony Love.

reputation is identity.

Each character in his own way struggles to create, maintain, or live down a particular reputation; public reaction is the force which shapes their choices. Social acceptance and respect are the goals, while public ridicule is the feared punishment.

The young Lucia, after adopting the disguise of a young knight travelling abroad, must establish her reputation. At the rise of the curtain the groundwork has been laid; she has achieved 'as Considerable a Character in as short a time. . .for the Credit of my Country-men, and the Reputation of a Whoremaster, / As the erran't Rake-hell of 'em all.'<sup>74</sup> She has been 'pushing at reputation,'<sup>75</sup> and with it firmly in place, her burden becomes one of sustaining the established image. When the disguised Palmer presents the she-knight with the opportunity for a rendezvous with a married lady, she must accept; reputation requires perpetuation, and her fame as a ladies' man ('I have not spoke to a Woman this half hour.'<sup>76</sup>) gives her no other option: 'I have a Reputation among 'em; and if I don't keep it up, by answering their Expectations;--I shall fail of mine. . .'<sup>77</sup> To maintain her reputation as a rake, Sir Anthony places herself in a situation that is immoral by most standards, and impossible by any. Society must be served, whatever the cost.

By shifting the point of view slightly, Southerne reveals another aspect of his characters' concern with maintaining a social identity: the impoverishment of the ideal of personal

honour.

In her desire to sustain her reputation, Sir Anthony finds herself trapped into marrying a very determined Volante. After admitting to her rival, Ilford, that the situation has gone farther than she anticipated, she claims it is honour which pushes her on. Despite the absurdity of the predicament, she is willing to renege on the marriage promise only if she can 'do it with Honour.'<sup>78</sup> Her use of the word 'honour' in a situation wholly created by lies and deceit is patently ridiculous. What she is determined to maintain is her reputation. Her compulsion to protect her social identity at any cost to her personal identity ultimately robs her of both, and this leads to her paralysis at the end of the play.

Count Canaille's reputation has been long established by his social position and family title. There is little requirement for him to 'push' for respectability and acceptance; he is solely concerned with maintaining the status quo. His decision to marry his daughter, Floriante, to Count Verole is based wholly on the latter's nobility, no other qualifications are necessary; his daughter's happiness is not a consideration. As his disapproving brother, the Abbé, remarks, 'Virtue created first Nobility, / But in our honourable Ignorance / Nobility makes virtue.'<sup>79</sup> The Abbé perceives that the ideal of virtue, like that of honour has been corrupted; the social virtue of nobility stands in its place, blinding Canaille to any accurate perceptions of a man's individual worth. Like Sir Anthony, the Count soon discovers

the restrictions inherent in obedience to such unreliable social guidelines. Fearful that Floriante will compromise his own nobility by marrying Valentine, Canaille imprisons both his daughters in a nunnery. His determination that they 'shall do nothing to dishonour (him),' and to put 'it out of their power had they a mind to it,'<sup>80</sup> places him at the mercy of reputation, and he becomes its slave. As his opinion of Count Verole declines and his opinion of Valentine rises, he discovers that his emphasis on sustaining the honour of his family's name denies him the freedom to act: 'I'm out of my own power and choice,' and even though 'I do respect it [Valentine's worthiness]. . .my word / And reputation are engag'd. . .'<sup>81</sup> His situation is much like Sir Anthony's prenuptial dilemma: not only virtue, but even reason, must be sacrificed to sustain his reputation. His free will is no longer free; it belongs to society.

As reputation replaces honour in the godless, Epicurean universe of Southerne's play, so too shame replaces guilt. In Sir Anthony Love the characters seldom regret having done something wrong, but instead worry about the dishonour and disgrace, the social embarrassment, that may arise from a faux pas.

In the controversial scene where the homosexual Abbé attempts to seduce the young knight, morality is never mentioned. In fact, once Lucia reveals her real identity as a woman, she is perfectly willing to carry through with the assignation, saying that 'Tho' you know me to be a woman, / I

may make amends in my own---,<sup>82</sup> The ethics of sexual promiscuity are not even considered. What is primary, at least in the mind of the Abbé, is the fear of shame. His position as the 'very Pope in Mompelier',<sup>83</sup> is at stake, and everything possible must be done to preserve it. As with the concern for reputation, Southerne reveals that fear of shame also leads to a restriction of one's actions. The Abbé, once indispensable to the Englishmen's 'pleasurable living,' suddenly is now at the mercy of Sir Anthony and Valentine, and therefore quickly assents to their blackmail: he pays one hundred Luidores 'To muzzle the Scandal',<sup>84</sup> and agrees to arrange the marriages they desire. The price of avoiding shame is high, but the social expense incurred by scandal is seen as even greater. A sin against society demands an exorbitant penance.

The foolish knight, Sir Gentle Golding, enters the world of the play desperately trying to live down his reputation. Lucia, in the disguise of Sir Anthony, tells how she

Robb'd him of Five Hundred Pounds, run away from him;  
and so expos'd him, that he has been the common  
Rhyming Theam, the Hackney Pegasus for the Puny Poets  
to set out upon.<sup>85</sup>

The guilt he feels at being 'the first that undid her [Lucia]' has caused him some pangs of conscience, but the shame resulting from public knowledge of her revenge has exacted a far more painful expiation. Sir Gentle has been forced to leave his home and come to France in the vain hope of escaping his reputation as a fool. But society can no more be eluded than 'the Hound of Heaven'.<sup>86</sup> The knight falls into the

hands of those who already know of his shame, and regardless of his efforts he cannot avoid society's vengeance. Each scheme he initiates in order to live down his reputation ends in failure. In fact, his schemes turn on him, making him the victim, and thus perpetuating his established reputation as a fool. Only the prestige of his family title and his wealth allow him to maintain his place in a social sphere that would normally not tolerate his folly. He can afford the price of shame, but he cannot escape it.

Indifference to moral virtue and stress on social reputation also reveal themselves in the characters' attitudes toward religious and national differences. The love affairs between English Protestant men and French Catholic girls elicit no fears about 'mixed marriages.' This superficially humanitarian image of religious and political toleration, however, is soon exposed as merely apathy on the part of Southerne's characters. Principled distinctions are simply ignored because they have no social relevance. Count Canaille's objection to the young men who wish to marry his daughters has nothing to do with their nationality or their religion; it is the fact that 'they are not men of quality,'<sup>87</sup> and they would therefore not enhance his prestige if his daughters married them. His brother's acceptance of the young men, on the other hand, is based only on the fact that they are 'All men of Fortune.'<sup>88</sup> The Abbé worships the twin deities of money and society; he is not concerned with matters of nation or creed.

The only religious scruple in the play is shown by Ilford, who displays shock at Sir Anthony's casual remark concerning the Abbé as being 'a fit Head. . .for such sinful Members as we are.' Ilford reminds her that she 'is a Protestant.'<sup>89</sup> She exhibits her indifference to such distinctions by proudly announcing her convenient Epicurean philosophy: 'I am always of the Religion of the Government I am in.'<sup>90</sup> Her only consideration is whether she will gain by the relationship: 'I regard the Man, not his Religion; / And if he does my Business in this World, / Let him do his own in the next.'<sup>91</sup> Self-interest makes her indifferent, not tolerant, for tolerance, honour, virtue, and guilt are all equally alien to Southerne's Epicurean dramatic universe. Success attends an individual's ability to assimilate the manners and customs of his society and to acquire and to sustain a fashionable reputation, avoiding the shame attached to unfashionable behaviour. For the attainment of society's favour, no scheme is too elaborate, no personal sacrifice too great. But in a random world where society reigns, all designs are doomed: the most impregnable reputation cannot withstand the vagaries of fortune.

In addition to this iterative image of a random Epicurean universe, Southerne's play also reflects a deeper affirmative reflection of this apparent disorder. There is the sense that the unreliability of expectation produces a sort of desperate faith that 'there is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we may.'<sup>92</sup> When Valentine indicates the

lack of design in 'Epicurus's World,' he also notes that it is 'perfect and uniform.' The conclusion of Sir Anthony Love confirms this idea, and, despite many critics' demurrals, gives a unity to the play. It is the unexpected that brings the play to a structurally perfect, symmetrical, though apparently random, ending.

J. W. Dodds commented in his critical analysis of the play that at the close of the curtain 'it is almost as if each man got the woman who was standing next to him when it came time for the end of the play.'<sup>93</sup> In one sense Southerne would probably have been pleased with the critic's remarks, but not for the reason Dodds offered. He attributed the jumbled ending to the playwright's lack of skill as a plotmaker. He failed, however, to credit Southerne with managing to bring together each character with his proper dramatic counterpart, while at the same time achieving the superficial appearance of happenstance. The random universe of the play asserts its control, and, despite the schemes of men with pre-determined aims, brings about a balanced and uniform conclusion.

From that point in the play where Count Canaile, wisely gives up trying to impose his will on a world without order, saying 'This matter will clear of itself,'<sup>94</sup> the chaotic dramatic universe does exactly that, in spite of frantic human attempts to thwart it. In the flurry of action that follows, Sir Gentle, selfishly trying to further his own designs, betrays his countrymen (as a means of revenge) and offers to facilitate Count Verole's search for Floriante. This



unforeseen assistance (the normally insouciant Count says, 'It is indeed Sir, more than I expected.'<sup>95</sup>) leads to a dramatic chain-reaction which carries the play to what Dodds mistakenly saw as a formless ending. Blind fortune achieves what no character in the play has been able to accomplish, and it is each character's spontaneous ability to seize opportunity when it presents itself, not calculated plans, that produces the satisfactory conclusion. Ilford, only by means of the opportunity Sir Anthony gives him, is able to win Volante; Valentine, only through accidents of timing, is provided the opportunity to regain Floriante; Lucia, only by a chance exchange of clothing, and Sir Gentle's inept scheming gains the opportunity to become an 'honest woman' and a financially secure one; Charlott and Count Verole, only by their submission to the vagaries of fortune and their awareness of opportunity, find one another. The Count tells his wife-to-be that 'When you fell into my hands to Night; had I known my good Fortune, I had improv'd it then: But now I have it, in having you.'<sup>96</sup> Opportunity, created by the random actions of others, presents itself to him twice; the first opportunity he misses, but he prudently grasps the second chance.

The random world of the play subverts design after design, but at the same time its continual fortuitous motion presents endless opportunities. The wise man will learn to recognize the propitious occasion, seize it, and by doing so bring some order out of the chaos. Sir Anthony advises his fellow countrymen to 'put themselves in the way of fortune, tho' you

know her to be blind.'<sup>97</sup> Opportunism, then, in a random universe, becomes man's only hope, and he must be ready to seize the main chance when it appears. The Epicurean philosophy offers no other practical solution to the problem of how man is to live in a random, godless universe. In fact, with the gods replaced by society, more problems are created.

The ideas of the prominent seventeenth century philosopher Thomas Hobbes surface most clearly in Sir Anthony Love in the character of Southerne's lady libertine, Sir Anthony. From the outset she reveals a Hobbesian desire for power. Her disguise itself is her most obvious 'present means to obtain some future apparent good.'<sup>98</sup> She adopts it to be near the man she loves, and with an almost military aggression, she comes 'a Collonelling. . .into France.'<sup>99</sup> Once she lands, she employs what Hobbes called 'the faculties of body and mind plus what further powers [s]he acquires by using them,'<sup>100</sup> to gain increased power. Her physical grace and her quick and clever mind help her to acquire an exalted reputation, and all of these are employed for personal gain. Sir Anthony's adversaries, that is, those from whom she tries to wrest power, are those whom she perceives as superior.

The passing Pilgrim, her companion Ilford, and Floriante's proposed husband, Count Verole, all seem to Sir Anthony to separate themselves from the 'common herd,' and by doing so become targets for her animosity. Hobbesian power, as it is revealed in the play, is always won at the expense of others, for personal benefit. Sir Anthony's immediate, almost

instinctive attack on the passing Pilgrim, and her obsession with what she assumes to be his hypocrisy, are apparently motivated only by her aversion to his professed piety. In the young knight's eyes this threatens to elevate the Pilgrim above her, and is sufficient cause for her to attack him. Her unmasking of the rogue, however, results not in the revelation of religious hypocrisy, but only in the discovery of another temporarily adopted disguise.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, Sir Anthony's desire for power is unbounded, and with her captive rendered helpless, his jewels and table-book secure for 'some future apparent good,' she pushes on for greater glory, seeking to increase her power in the eyes of others.

The ambitious nature of men in Sir Anthony Love is by no means restricted to Southerne's title character. Other characters in the play follow their natural instincts for power, but their success ratio is not nearly as impressive as Sir Anthony's. They lack both the natural gifts and the intense desire of the young knight. Sir Gentle makes a number of feeble attempts at playing the aggressor, using his only real source of power -- money -- but each endeavour ends in failure and humiliation. The Abbé uses his 'excess' power over Palmer to try to increase his dominion over Sir Anthony, but that bid also fails, and results in the clever knight turning the tables and benefiting from the reversal. Even the practical, level-headed Charlott, when her only option appears to be confinement in a nunnery, asserts her prerogative to go on the offensive, in the hope of getting sufficient power to

escape the coercion of others. Hobbes's claim about man's appetite for power permeates much of Sir Anthony Love, but as both Hobbes and Southerne saw, the struggle for power was not limited to offensive strategy but involved continual vigilance and defensive strategy to maintain achieved power.

In the dramatic world of the play, dominated by the aggressive, insatiable lady-knight, it is inevitable that at some point her 'restlesse Desire for Power after power' should push her potential victims to defend what little power they possess. Southerne seems aware that Hobbes's entire system of thought was based on social antagonism and that therefor, not only the acquisition of power but also the defence of one's position against that appetite, provided a stimulating source of dramatic action. Hobbes claimed that social man was in continual motion, a constant movement toward what will help him continue his motion, and away from that which will impede it. The aggressive actions of Sir Anthony and others, within the context of the play, result in corresponding attempts by characters to retain their own freedom to move. Southerne's play reveals the image of the offensive assault as well as the reflection of the defensive counter-action.

Sir Anthony's first major aggression (aside from her initial adoption of her disguise) is that against the Pilgrim, and Southerne's development of the Pilgrim scenes provides a good example of the continual readjustment the characters make from offense to defence, as they seek to acquire or retain power. Once Sir Anthony succeeds in stripping away the pious

mask of the trickster, and the opiate renders him unconscious, she has the Pilgrim carried to the Abbé's house for the purpose of exposing and ridiculing him before everyone. The prospect of Sir Anthony's planned public humiliation, and the possible criminal action that might be brought against him because of the captured evidence of his memoranda and jewels, force the Pilgrim into taking aggressive action in order to protect his last vestige of power, his freedom. He forces Sir Gentle, who has been given the responsibility of watching Sir Anthony's victim, out of his clothes. The foolish knight himself twice attempts to gain some power at the Pilgrim's expense (once he tries to belittle him, and a second time tries to convince the Pilgrim that the servants will stop him on sight), but both attempts fail. Pretending to hold Sir Gentle at gun point (it is actually an inkhorn), the Pilgrim forces the knight into the ultimate Hobbesian defensive position, the cowering fear of death, and takes Sir Gentle's clothes, and flees.

With the Pilgrim gone, the naked knight is left alone to deliberate on his next action (in Hobbes's terms, 'the whole summe of Desires, Aversions, Hopes and Fears continued until the thing either be done, or thought impossible'<sup>102</sup>). Faced with the ridicule originally planned for the pilgrim, the knight, who moments before had been in a defensive posture to protect his life, now must go on the offensive to save his reputation. The imagined pain of ridicule, the thought of being at the mercy of others (as the Pilgrim had been earlier)

drives him to put on the discarded dress of the Pilgrim, saying, 'It can't be worse with me---.'<sup>103</sup> He settles for what he sees as the lesser of two evils. The Hobbesian pursuit of power is very much a two-way street; men must both attack those who are weaker and defend themselves from those who are stronger in order to satisfy their appetite for power. As Ilford admits when he comes to beg Sir Anthony to spare Volante, 'I come to strike up a Friendship, offensive, and defensive with you.'<sup>104</sup> He wants to protect what power he has with the popular young knight, but at the same time he wants to gain power by convincing Sir Anthony to relinquish Volante.

Sir Anthony, of course, is involved in exactly the same duality, but because of her superior skill, Ilford falls prey to the young knight's thirst for power. He is not completely at home with the carefree, egocentric spirit of his libertine companions, but Sir Anthony sees Ilford's gravity of demeanor and sincerity of emotion as only a disguise adopted to set himself above and apart from his comrades; he must therefore, like the Pilgrim, be attacked and unmasked. On this occasion Sir Anthony purchases her power at the expense of two individuals, Ilford and Volante. Seeing 'Volante. . . as fit for [her] purpose / Of Tormenting' Ilford,<sup>105</sup> the lady knight has become Ilford's rival in spite of her obvious inability to become Volante's lover. Using her natural and acquired attributes of a quick mind and a winning reputation, Sir Anthony, on two separate occasions, humiliates Ilford

before the woman he loves, and delights in her victories. Even her eventual, and inevitable, relinquishment of the lady to Ilford is predicated on the Hobbesian desire to affirm her superiority and Ilford's confession of his own inferiority:

Sir Anthony: When you come to your self, you may repent---

Ilford: I do repent, and confess my self---

Sir Anthony: Well; what do you confess your self to be?

Ilford: A Fool, an Ass, to pretend to vie with you in any thing.

Sir Anthony: And will you always keep in this humble Opinion Of your self? And allow me the Ascendant?

Ilford: I shall be an Ass if I don't.

Sir Anthony: But you must confess your self a Coxcomb---

Ilford: Aye, any thing.

Sir Anthony: For pretending to Censure, Before you understood my design.

Ilford: You told me I was a Coxcombe before; And now I begin to believe it my self.

Sir Anthony: Well, upon your penitence, I pardon And take you into favour agen.<sup>106</sup>

Sir Anthony's conquest is not complete until she has underscored her supremacy, and luxuriated in her rival's humiliation.

The full impact of Sir Anthony's lust for personal power at the expense of others is not fully realized until Southerne presents the reflection of those selfish actions. The playwright shifts the focus to the unsuspecting victim. Such a dramatic shift exposes the self-interest and cruelty of events which first appear as trivial and comic. The portrait

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of Volante in the scene which follows Ilford's comic humiliation shows the dark side of the Hobbesian sport. Volante is shown troubled and alone in her bedchamber, awaiting a husband who will never come. We know that offstage Sir Anthony is rushing to another adventure, devoid of conscience, without guilt. The contrast reveals the selfish, heartless 'games' of Sir Anthony from a new and none-too-flattering perspective. She is no longer attacking deserving sharpers; her victims are now undeserving, innocent men and women whose very sincerity makes them easy victims. Volante is merely a pawn used by Sir Anthony to torment Ilford and is forced to suffer despite her blamelessness.

The contrast of the high-spirited revelation of her plot to Ilford, and the subsequent humiliating disclosure of the truth to Volante, gives the scope of Sir Anthony's desire for power a new significance. She seeks 'Universal Empire' at all costs. She is no longer engaged in the kind of isolated offensive and defensive struggle we perceived earlier in the play, but is now waging a complex social battle which encompasses a far greater sphere, and from which no one is immune.

Southerne's plays often showed a concern for the plight of the innocent in a Hobbesian society of insatiable appetites for power. Characters, mostly women, despite virtuous intentions, found themselves caught up in the ambitious designs of others. Semanthe, in The Loyal Brother, and Erminia, in The Disappointment, preceded the unsuspecting

Volante, while Mrs. Friendall and Mrs. Sightly, in The Wives' Excuse, Isabella, in The Fatal Marriage, and Imoinda in Oroonoko followed after. Throughout his career Southerne showed an awareness of the effects of contrasting dark and light. For the most part his greatest successes were tragi-comedies, which did exactly that. The tragic plots were intensified by the contrasting comic sub-plot and vice versa. While he used the effect sparingly in Sir Anthony Love, when it did appear the impact on his audience must have been dramatic and incisive.

The dark side of Hobbesian philosophy, its inability to provide for the innocent victims of man's egocentric need for power, is vividly revealed by the playwright. Southerne's sceptical inquiry shows that the Hobbesian need for power, like the random universe of Epicurus, provided no solution: it only created a rationale for the problem.

Finally, Southerne focused on the seventeenth century phenomenon of libertinism. Because it was an informal, at times paradoxical philosophy drawn eclectically from the tenets of other philosophies, the multiple perspectives Southerne created on the ideas of Hobbes and Epicurus applied also to his treatment of libertinism. Self-centred motivation, devotion to natural inclination, and distaste for established customs and institutions, the 'Golden Rules' of the libertine, all represent one angle of vision, and while these rules are often expressed in rhetoric, Southerne shows them to be frequently broken in action. The dramatic

contrasts between the dogma of libertinism and the actions of the characters thus comments sceptically on popular belief and helps to prepare the audience for Southerne's revelation of a more accurate picture of the libertine way of life.

The egocentric motivations behind the actions of the play's leading libertines, Sir Anthony and Valentine, are apparent upon cursory review; both characters seem continually to act out of a need to satisfy their own immediate desires, whether social or sexual. Yet there are moments in the play where each is shown to violate the libertine code by the acting out of some sincere feeling for another. Sir Anthony is fully prepared to let Valentine make love to another woman, saying, 'So long, I can part with you; to provide for your pleasure as well as my own.'<sup>107</sup> Personal satisfaction, while not completely surrendered is to some extent set aside for the sake of another. Sir Anthony tells Valentine, at the anticipation of a rendezvous, that she will 'not to make a Custom of it, . . . hold the Candle for [him]'.<sup>108</sup>

Valentine too shows concern for someone other than himself. At the beginning, when he takes Sir Anthony for a fellow rake, Valentine demonstrates a friendly willingness to act in 'his' behalf. He tells Ilford: 'I am resolv'd he shall want nothing I can oblige him in, Pocket or Person. . . he shall have it, tho' I borrow it for him.'<sup>109</sup> Libertinism, despite its claims, often entailed more than simple self-indulgence. Valentine's final negotiation of Lucia's separate maintenance reveals, in one complex action,

the ambiguity produced by the multiple perspectives that Southerne created on all the philosophical themes in Sir Anthony Love. From one angle Valentine's action appears to be benevolent, done out of a sincere worry about Lucia's future security; from another it could just as easily be interpreted as a self-centred act designed to assure that his future mistress will be well provided for. Libertine self-interest and charitable kindness become impossible to distinguish.

Ilford also joins his libertine comrades in espousing a selfish creed: 'Charity is a Free-will Offering; and we part / With nothing, we can keep, I assure you-----'110 But later in the play this swaggering rhetoric is exposed as pretense, and the claims of friendship and love, the professed enemies of the true libertine, assert themselves in generous acts.

The libertines' revolt against the customs and institutions of their society is also exposed only as a partial reflection of the libertine code. It exists primarily in the daily discourse of the libertine, and is often contradicted by his actions. Sir Anthony illustrates this libertine contradiction. She professes herself to be an 'Enemy of Forms,'111 and yet, at the very moment of that declaration, she exists purely as form; instead of revolution, the lady rake preaches Epicurean conservatism, and is satisfied with professing 'the Religion of the Government' she is in. While she seems to desire freedom from the restraints of the customs and conventions of society, she adopts the most

distasteful of social conventions for the libertine marriage, not once, but twice! Despite telling Valentine that marriage is something 'I neither desire, nor deserve,'<sup>112</sup> she marries on two separate occasions, first as a man and then as a woman -- neither time as herself. She is Southerne's quintessential libertine; the image has no more substance than the reflection.

This is the difference in the revelations produced by the examination of more formal philosophical systems and those produced by the dramatic treatment of libertinism. The ideas of Hobbes and Epicurus have some validity in the dramatic world of the play, although they fail to provide any clear answers. Libertinism, on the other hand, with Sir Anthony as its principal representative, appears to be a viable code of conduct only at the most superficial level.

The great libertines of Charles II's reign were only a memory, and their style had become only a shadow of what had once been a living code of word and deed. Social changes had undermined the libertine facade, and that the playwright was well aware of them is revealed in Sir Anthony Love in an early exchange between Sir Anthony, Valentine and Ilford:

Ilford:            If you were in London-----

Sir Anthony:    There I grant you,-----Where the young  
Fellows begin The Reputation of their  
humour, and wit, in a Pint Glass, Carrying  
'em, without intermission of sense, or  
jest, To the end of the third Bottle; and  
then thro' the publick places, and folly of  
the Town.

Valentine:        There you wou'd be at a loss

- Sir Anthony: I shou'd indeed:  
Where they go to Taverns, to swallow a  
Drunkenness;  
And then to a Play, to talk over their  
Liquor.
- Ilford: I thought that folly fell off with their  
Fathers
- Valentine: The Entertainment of it did indeed.
- Ilford: Who, as they began it in their frolick,  
Supported it in their wit.
- Sir Anthony: And since the Sons are so plainly  
disinherited of the sense; they have no  
title to the Sins of their Fathers.
- Valentine: Unless they kept 'em more in Countenance.
- Ilford: Yet they would do something, like their  
Fathers.
- Valentine: As an ignorant Player in England, whom I  
saw Undertaking to Copy a Master Actor of  
his time;  
Began at his Infirmity in his feet;  
And growing famous for the imitation of his  
Gout,  
He cou'd walk like him,  
When he cou'd do nothing else like him.<sup>113</sup>

Southerne shows his age to be only the 'Disinherited Son' of the glorious Restoration, both in life and art. The libertines of that past age, and their heightened images on the stage, had started 'in their frolick,' but more importantly had 'supported it in their wit.'<sup>114</sup> The new age, after the Revolution, is 'so plainly disinherited of the sense; they have no title to the Sins of their Fathers.'<sup>115</sup> Popular libertinism had become a sham, and its followers were only 'ignorant Players,' copying the mannerisms, but falling short of the special genius of a Rochester or a Dorimant. While the legitimate philosophical systems retained their

vitality, the popular libertine tradition was for Southerne an inanimate thing. The libertine mask of manners and rhetoric might hide the social and theatrical realities of the contemporary age, just as her dress and clever conversation hide Lucia beneath the facade of Sir Anthony Love. But the disguise could not survive close scrutiny. Rather than shifting dramatic perspective to expose a distortion or inadequacy, as he had done with the ideas of Epicurus and Hobbes, Southerne presented libertine philosophy as an empty facade, containing nothing whatever of value.

## VI.

Appearance and Reality: The Image and Reflection  
of Sir Anthony Love

In order that Southerne's dramatic, sceptical examination of Restoration conventions should arrive at the attainment of undoubted truths, the playwright had to confront directly what Norman Holland sees as the 'central concept in Restoration manners, morals, pranks, politics, science, and literary and linguistic theory,'<sup>116</sup> the contradiction of appearance by reality. While Southerne's shifting dramatic perspectives exposed the fallacies in some conventional Restoration assumptions about theatrical genres and characters, and opened some popular philosophical systems to reassessment, his real

challenge lay in turning his dramatic mirror on the social and moral appearances of his society to reveal their distortions of the truth. Any investigation of Southerne's inquiry into such inconsistencies must begin with the playwright's handling of the title character. It is through its treatment of this shifting image that the play explores the contradictions between the way things look and the way they really are.

Sir Anthony Love is, in a sense, a microcosm of the later years of the Restoration: a creature of shifting shapes, inconsistent philosophies, and an almost schizophrenic adaptability -- a phantasm of appearances cloaking a problematic reality. Her actions and dialogue reveal the variety of social and moral oppositions in seventeenth century society. The most fundamental of these are the sexual combatants, man / woman, followed by a long list of moral and social ambiguities such as good / evil, public / private, word / action, obligation / freedom, and many others. Throughout the play Southerne uses his hero/heroine to explore the differences between the overt and the covert, between ornament and substance. Sir Anthony is both image and reflection in the play, and as such serves as our guide both into and out of the maze of social scepticism that constitutes the play. She lives out the contradictions between appearance and reality, initially through the most popular of Restoration theatrical gimmicks, the use of disguise.

In the course of Southerne's play his protagonist adopts three different costumes, allowing her to become, as the Abbé



tells us, 'all in all; the whole company thyself. . . a man among the women, and a woman among the men.'<sup>117</sup> She is, she says, for 'Universal Empire,' and in her three disguises she almost manages to achieve it. As Sir Anthony Love, Lucia takes on the role of a libertine rake; wearing Floriante's clothing, she assumes the character of another woman, and finally she masquerades as herself, confessing that she 'is best disguised in (her) own sex and cloths.'<sup>118</sup> Her Hobbesian quest for 'unlimited power' is complicated because each disguise requires a different social role: as a rake, she becomes the 'husband' of the unsuspecting Volante; as Floriante she allows herself to become Sir Gentle's wife; and, in her own 'sex and cloths,' she hopes to be Valentine's mistress.

The dichotomy between appearance and reality, which the playwright initiates with the various disguises of Lucia, is nearly universal in the world of Sir Anthony Love. Palmer, the admitted 'shifter of shapes and names,'<sup>119</sup> adopts a role in which 'the virtue of the habit covers the vices of the man.'<sup>120</sup> Lucia's choosing to adopt the character of her sexual opposite is reflected in Palmer's decision to take on the appearance of his moral opposite; he selects the costume of the pious pilgrim to hide his dishonest interior. Palmer like Lucia, seems unable to exist without some adopted identity. After his unmasking as a 'man of God,' he acquires Sir Gentle's clothes and manages to carry off the character of the foolish knight convincingly enough to fool even the

knight's own servant. Once he is discovered in that masquerade he takes on a new role, as a 'pimp' for the Abbé's plot, and successfully persuades Sir Anthony to meet the expectant 'lady.' So adept is he that, despite being unmasked each time, he is able to fool the first people he meets in each of his new disguises.

Most of the major characters, at some point in the play, make use of the theatrical device of disguise. Sir Anthony's governour, Wait-well, becomes the servant to the mysterious French woman; Valentine briefly plays a servant to Sir Anthony in her clandestine meeting with the Abbé; and, Sir Gentle puts on the pilgrim's robes when Palmer has robbed him of his own clothes. Even the grave and serious Ilford dresses as a priest who 'marries' Sir Anthony and Volante, while the chief priest of Montpellier, the Abbé, assumes the titular identity of a married woman in order to lure Sir Anthony into his planned seduction.

The widespread use of disguise in a play serves two dramatic functions which support the very role of theatre: to delight and to instruct. Almost from the inception of the drama, disguise had been a successful comic device. The earliest Greek and Roman comedies are filled with examples of disguise. It creates a strong sense of dramatic irony, and gives an audience that comfortable sense of superiority to the characters on stage which increases their enjoyment. It is also the most obvious way of exposing to an audience the whole complex notion that appearance belies reality. Southerne's

play explores the inconsistency between how things appear and what they really are in more subtle ways, but the most obvious, the most easily perceived, by viewer and reader alike, is through the liberal use of disguise.

In The First Modern Comedies Norman Holland discusses at length the significance of the use of disguise in Restoration comedy. He recognizes that in the use of the theatrical device of disguise the playwrights of the Restoration were 'probing some of the most basic assumptions of their age and ours.'<sup>121</sup> For centuries most men had assumed agreement between what they witnessed in the natural world around them and the way things actually were. 'The whole structure of natural law, of the teleological universe, indeed of life itself, was bound up in the concept of the interrelation of appearance and nature.'<sup>122</sup>

Up to the seventeenth century man was believed to be the primary dissembler, the natural world was considered fairly reliable. But the scientific advancements of the seventeenth century, in particular the telescope, suddenly opened up a new dualism in man's knowledge. In time, such discoveries brought about changed perceptions; not only man, but also nature disguised its real workings behind deceptive appearances. Unseen forces were responsible for observed behaviour; the reassuring correspondence between appearance and reality ceased to be. 'Scientific discoveries had shown that truths which not so long before had seemed obvious were in fact purely and simply not so. Men's senses were not to be

trusted, and it was science that had shown their unreliability.<sup>123</sup>

Scientific scepticism led to a distrust of surface appearances in all spheres, and in turn explains the renewed interest in the sceptical thinkers who had preceded the scientific revolution. It was out of this tradition that the popular use of disguise emerged in the Restoration, and it was in the spirit of this scientific scepticism that Southerne was working in Sir Anthony Love.

While Southerne's use of theatrical disguise provides a large part of the entertaining action of the play, it also works effectively as a metaphor for the complexities inherent in trying to separate appearance from reality. Sir Anthony and Count Verole, the purest images of the two extremes, are also the most convincing as their antitheses. Sir Anthony, who seems devoid of affectation is a complete sham, while Verole, who appears completely artificial, is wholly genuine. If such confusion is possible in our assumptions about the most obvious cases, what confidence can we have in our assessments of those characters in whom the contrast is more subtle, where the shades of difference are less distinct? Beyond that, if blatant physical disguise can pass undetected, then how does one penetrate the more cunning masks of social disguise; the dozens of masks people daily assume in order to conform to the standards of any given social code?

There are endless examples of disguise in the play, both physical and social. What soon becomes apparent are the

distinctions Southerne makes among those characters adopting disguise: some are able to carry it off, while others seem to constantly fail in their attempts to put on a new identity. Lucia and Palmer are masters of disguise, despite the fact that Palmer is unmasked at one point by Sir Anthony. But in that instance we have the sense that the young knight, within the random world of the play, is merely lucky, and is nearly as surprised at the revelation as the audience at discovering the accuracy of Sir Anthony's perception of the pilgrim. That this was a chance occurrence is suggested by the fact that twice, following this fortunate unmasking, she fails to recognize Palmer in his new roles.

So adept are both Palmer and Lucia at putting on another's character that we rarely see beneath the mask. So insubstantial are their inner selves, that within the world of the play they seem to exist only in the disguises they adopt. Inevitably, Lucia's attempts to be 'all things to all' ends in failure; she is nothing to anyone: asexual, amoral, emotionally barren. Although twice 'married,' she is neither husband nor wife, her marriage is based on financial expediency, and her future place in the affections of her lover is far from secure. With the disguises all removed Lucia almost literally disappears. From the point of her final unveiling to the end of the play, the previously high-spirited, loquacious young woman, stands absolutely silent among the revelry of future brides and bridegrooms. It is not until the formal action of the play is concluded that

she is allowed to speak.

Palmer's inner self is revealed only in his 'table book:' the detailed record of his crimes and booty which Sir Anthony takes from him. With that gone, along with the pious habit he had chosen to conceal it, he simply adopts any identity that seems expedient. Although initially successful, each disguise ultimately fails, and its purpose is frustrated. As Sir Gentle, he acquires money, but not his freedom; as a pimp, he provides the Abbé with a companion, but of the wrong sex. Palmer's attempt to be 'All things to All' is as useless as Lucia's, and Southerne simply removes him from the action of the play. Devoid of any identity, assumed or real, he concludes, 'My business is over in this town. . .'<sup>124</sup> and vanishes.

Other characters in the play seem to possess a relative balance between their internal characters and their external disguises. Consequently, the masking they perform is mostly of a superficial nature, requiring none of the elaborate trappings of a Palmer or a Sir Anthony Love. Valentine, the Abbé, Floriante, Charlott and others reveal the ability to masquerade, but only in a very minimal sense. At no time are they pressed to adopt a full-fledged impersonation, and because of the relatively minimal demands of their dissembling, they are successful. The temporary roles they take on never seem to run counter to their internal, natural inclinations. Where Lucia assumes a whole set of moral and social values with each disguise, the others merely adopt

a. posture which requires little more than a physical covering or disguised voice to create the illusion; their individual moral and social codes are never in conflict with the masquerade. Charlott's use of disguise, for example, reflects both her ability to help herself and her willingness to help others. Her masquerade as Floriante is designed to simplify her sister's elopement and provide for her own escape from the nunnery. By merely answering to Floriante's name, she convinces Count Verole that he has captured her sister, and achieves both goals. It is intriguing that both Charlott and Lucia are able to assume successfully the appearance of the most amorphous character in the play, Floriante. The freedom with which they take on and put off her identity seems to indicate that Floriante could be anyone, or, more correctly, that almost anyone could be Floriante.

There are, however, in any society, those whose internal natures are so strong that they resist all attempts at concealment. Sir Gentle Golding is such a character. His one attempt at physical disguise is an immediate and complete failure, and his repeated attempts to assume the fashionable facade of a libertine rake are equally unsuccessful: he can never be anything other than a basically decent, though foolish, man. Conscience (his internal character) plagues him from beginning to end, and consequently, the other characters in the play, 'know (him) in any disguise.'<sup>125</sup> Try as he may to be a part of the ruthless libertine society of his countrymen, adopting the latest fashion of the beau monde, he

is easily recognized as an impostor. Even he is aware of his inability to carry off the required social impersonations, but, bungler that he is, he continues to make the attempt.

Just prior to his arranged assignation with a mysterious French lady (Lucia in yet another disguise), he says

Wou'd Sir Anthony were here, to encourage me with his Impudence: When I have Company to halloo me, I can fasten like a Bull-Dog. But I have a villainous suspicion, that when I see this lady, I shall take her for a civil gentlewoman.<sup>126</sup>

His wish for Sir Anthony's presence to encourage and support him reveals the motivation behind Sir Gentle's attempted libertinism: his desire for social acceptance is so strong that he constantly attempts to disguise his decent inclinations. The play exposes the libertine shift in morality which turns simple human decency and respect into a 'villainous suspicion.' Sir Gentle, unlike Palmer and Lucia, has been unable to abandon all moral scruples, and consequently lacks their almost instinctive chameleonic skill.

Count Verole, too, reveals his true nature, but the difference between him and Sir Gentle is that at no time does the Count make any attempt to appear other than what he is. The authenticity of Verole's character frustrates Sir Anthony's attempt to discredit him. The Count proudly tells the belligerent knight: 'I wou'd be nothing else. . .I would be nothing, if I were no Count.'<sup>127</sup> The action of the play proves his statement true; he is precisely what he appears to be. Regardless of social or moral consequences, in Count Verole appearance and reality are one; disguise of any sort is



foreign to him. Where Lucia and Palmer are, in effect, all surface appearance, Count Verole is through and through himself. Where they lack any consistent moral centre, Verole's centre is never in doubt. The presence of characters in the play representing the two extremes of appearance and reality, as Sir Anthony and Count Verole seem to do, increases the difficulty of distinguishing one from the other. While appearance may disguise the true internal realities of some characters, there are also characters whose natural inclinations resist all attempt at disguise, and, of course, there are those who fall somewhere between.

For the serious Ilford the disguise required for social acceptance seems to run counter to his natural inclinations, and yet he also possesses the ability, unlike Sir Gentle, to suppress, for the most part, his internal self. He is the first of a number of Southerne's characters who struggle to submerge their true identities in order to adjust to the manners and morals of society. Like Wellvile (a name that in itself reveals the conflict between the inner and outer being) in the playwright's next effort, The Wives' Excuse, Ilford attempts to conform to the largely libertine philosophy of his companions, Sir Anthony and Valentine, and is for the most part successful. While he too seems to be 'pushing at Reputation,' busily establishing a convincing social disguise, his true personality sometimes seems to chafe at the ill-fitting mask. On two separate occasions, because of a random remark, in violation of the prevalent libertinism of

his cohorts, he finds himself on the verge of social ostracism.<sup>128</sup> Outnumbered two to one, he desperately attempts to recover his friends' favor, and finally does so by compromising his inner convictions to popular opinion. His strong personal identity is successfully submerged, out of the view of the public eye. Even Sir Anthony, who prides herself on her perceptiveness, is fooled by the disguise of Ilford. She sacrifices Volante to him, fully expecting Ilford to take full advantage of the situation. She tells Valentine that the two lovers 'may have occasion to morrow, for. . . what they are doing to night.'<sup>129</sup> But she misreads the 'rake;' Ilford uses the opportunity not for sexual gratification, but for a demonstration of his sincere love. Ilford is adept at wearing the disguise of popular manners, but he is quick to remove it when it is safe to do so. The strain of such duality may explain the 'gravity' of his nature.

Sir Anthony is a free spirit because she experiences no conflict between the character she adopts and her amorphous inner being; Count Verole shows no signs of strain because his appearance and reality are one. But Ilford lives torn between two unreconcilable needs: he is attracted to the lifestyle of popular morality, yet he despises it at the same time. He is Southerne's dramatic example of the way in which an individual's attempt to meet the demands of his society increases the confusion between what is real and what is apparent.

Even more than its physical counterpart, social disguise

involves a myriad of incompatible oppositions: men/women, good/evil, public/private, obligation/freedom, and many others. Southerne's sceptical dramatic mirror reveals each half of these pairs as an opposite, but equally valid reflection of the other. Therein lies the difficulty: how does one make reliable judgements when both of the opposing possibilities appear circumstantially valid?

Reputation is the primary concern in the godless universe of the play, and the determiner of reputation is the individual's society. Reputation, however, in such a world, is really nothing more than an individual's perceived success or failure in adapting to the established code. In order to maintain membership in the community, the attitudes and manners of the group must be maintained. If social practices and values run counter to the natural inclinations of the individual, one of two things must occur: either the individual accepts the standards of his society and suppresses his true self (that is adopts a social disguise), or he rejects the rules and suffers ridicule and ostracism. Reputation emerges out of the decisions one makes regarding social disguise. Southerne's play questions the values of society, any society, by demonstrating that contrary social standards are equally plausible. In Sir Anthony Love, Southerne presents multiple social images, side by side with their equal, but opposite, reflections, and then exploits the doubt created by our momentary quandary as motivation for reassessment.

In the dramatic 'society' of Sir Anthony Love Southerne presents many recognizable standards and beliefs, the complexities and contradictions within them, and the ignorance of his characters about those complexities and contradictions. The whole concept of society infers an interdependent system of obligations and freedoms, but the seventeenth century libertine rejected this idea, demanding the right to follow his natural inclinations without restraint. Southerne begins with an example of what appears to be complete libertine freedom, and then explores the contradictions within such a concept, ultimately revealing that obligation and freedom are inseparable: freedom implies obligation, just as obligations contain freedom.

Sir Anthony, as befits her adopted libertine philosophy, seems to seek freedom to follow her own natural desires. At the opening of the play she appears to have achieved enviable freedom. She has managed to escape the bondage of Sir Gentle Golding, and her disguise allows her to move at will between the male and the female spheres of society. She possesses, ostensibly, the best of both worlds. The cost of her freedom, however, is high; it requires a loss of self. To recapture her identity, she must forfeit her freedom. At the end of the play, she chooses to relinquish her libertine emancipation for the obligation of marriage. Sir Gentle's refusal to accept her as a wife and the ensuing negotiation of a separate maintenance, 'frees' her once more, and again she appears to have the best of both worlds: personal independence and

financial security. But although the bonds of matrimony are admittedly insubstantial, she has both a legal and financial obligation to a man who wants no part of her (Sir Gentle is saddled with a monetary obligation which, in effect, buys his freedom). Even Valentine's role in negotiating her freedom implies a further sense of obligation to her former lover. Freedom, her prime objective throughout the play, is at the end as elusive as ever; it is a social mask which may be tolerated for brief periods, but social obligations eventually force its relinquishment.

Others in the play follow Sir Anthony through the revolving door of freedom and obligation. Volante gives up her cherished freedom for the obligation of marriage to Sir Anthony. She is 'resolv'd to venture,'<sup>130</sup> but then finds that her marriage, as well as her husband, is a sham. Greatly relieved at learning that her supposed husband is in fact a woman, she announces, 'I am free indeed.'<sup>131</sup> But rather than being truly free, she is obliged to Ilford, who not only assured her freedom, but also did not press her obligation to him.

Even the young English libertines, who profess a freedom devoid of obligation in their pursuit of young women, are in fact very much obliged to the French Abbé. They admit that

there's nothing to be done without him. . . All (their) Fortunes. . . at present depending upon his Favour. . . No Dancings, no Balls, no Masquerades, in a sweet Circle of Society. . . without his Introduction and Gravity to qualifie the scandal.<sup>132</sup>

Valentine and Ilford are further beholden to Sir Anthony.

because without the presence of the young knight they 'are no body.'<sup>133</sup> The play exposes libertine independence as a fiction. True freedom for the characters in Southerne's dramatic world is impossible, unless, perhaps, they embrace Floriante's romantic notion and seek freedom 'in the Arms of Death.'<sup>134</sup>

Floriante's sister, Charlott, is one of the few characters in Sir Anthony Love who is under no illusions regarding the attainment of freedom and the extinction of obligation. She is aware that the nunnery is 'wholly disagreeable to (her) humour,'<sup>135</sup> and the obligation of matrimony far more compatible with her nature, since she prefers 'any Man's Company rather than the Company of all Women,'<sup>136</sup> but she is far too practical to sacrifice her life for the attainment of freedom: 'I had rather be alive upon any terms, than dead upon the best.'<sup>137</sup> She recognizes the obligatory aspects of all 'social freedom,' and can also see the potential freedom in obligation, a perspective which escapes most of the other characters in the play. Her concern is not with the myth of unadulterated freedom, but with a harmony between her natural inclinations and the conditions of her existence. Such agreement allows freedom within the accepted constraints of obligation. Count Verole, too, is in personal and social harmony. He accepts the social obligations which accompany his title, and enjoys the freedom it gives him; he desires nothing else. When he comes to woo Floriante he acknowledges his obligation to the girl's father for the opportunity to wed

her, but also states that his character hardly requires such assistance:

Madam, you hear your Father, and I come  
Thro' his Authority, to speak my Love;  
Tho' bating his Authority, I must think  
There need not many arguments to move,  
More than your knowing me, and what I am. 138

This sounds like the expected arrogance of a stock Spanish nobleman, but in Sir Anthony Love it turns out to be more a plain statement of fact. Neither Charlott nor Count Verole seeks the illusory ideal of freedom, or fears contracting obligations. They alone, seem aware that libertine 'freedom' is merely a social mask to confuse the credulous: obligation/freedom, like Siamese twins, are inseparable.

The necessity for social disguise also creates confusion between such moral opposites as good and evil. A sceptic might deny man's ability to distinguish one from the other, but Southerne has his protagonist carry sceptical doubt to its logical extreme: Sir Anthony believes that the appearance of good always hides the reality of evil. Oblivious to the actual complexities of the problem, she never suspects that the reverse may also be true, or that one aspect of evil may conceal another.

Throughout the play, Sir Anthony operates incognito, but she persistently tries to strip away the disguises of others, particularly those who seem to set themselves above her. Convinced that behind any appearance which she perceives as superior to her own lies a hypocritical reality, she makes the pursuit of 'honesty,' the revelation of interior character

through the destruction of deceptive appearances, her raison d'etre. It never seems to occur to her, however, that when her unmaskings uncover a new layer, it may simply be another disguise. This, in part, explains her inability to recognize Ilford for what he is. Her suspicions are aroused only when his inner decency is exposed, never when he is wearing his libertine facade -- which she perceives as 'honest.' When her 'friend,' the Abbé, presents himself to the young knight as a fellow libertine, making no pretense of priestly piety, she admires him and willingly accepts him as an honest fellow; she never suspects that the cleric's professed womanizing is a disguise to conceal his homosexuality. Palmer, the unmasked pilgrim, escapes a second exposure by Sir Anthony when he adopts the disguise of a lowly panderer. In his more humble masquerade he successfully deludes the 'adroit' Sir Anthony by promising to arrange an assignation. Shrewdly aware of Sir Anthony's desire to expose superiority as affectation, Palmer puts the young knight off her guard by confessing himself a pimp. She immediately responds positively to such apparent honesty: 'Sir, I honour you, if you are one.'<sup>139</sup> Her original success at reducing others to her level produces a sort of Hobbesian 'internal gloriation or triumph of the mind,'<sup>140</sup> making her as easily taken in by a debased exterior as others are by an exalted one. She suspects hypocrisy only in those who dare to place themselves above her. Her youth and inexperience have yet to give her knowledge of the dangerous dissembling of those who profess to



be her peers or inferiors. Her cynicism gives her no clearer perception of truth than Sir Gentle's credulity provides for him. Good and evil are as difficult to separate as freedom and obligation. Southerne seems to suggest that such words have no intrinsic meaning. They are simply another form of social disguise, creating further conflicts between appearance and reality.

Perhaps the most extreme dichotomy in Restoration society was that of the public/private opposition. Rigid social separation of the sexes and the powerful influence of Charles and his court on Restoration fashion allowed the libertine philosophy of unrestrained freedom to flourish and, in effect, smother less self-indulgent feelings. The seventeenth century social world was really two worlds, the outer public world of the man, and the inner domestic world of the woman.<sup>141</sup> In Sir Anthony Love Southerne shows that a similar division exists within each individual. Each character in the play, particularly the men because they have easiest access to the arena of public affairs, is shown to be two characters, a public one as well as a private one, and often the two are not congruent. Lucia is a perfect example of this division. As a woman she occupies the private, domestic domain assigned to her sex. The moment she escapes her customary milieu, she takes on a public disguise in order to function successfully in the world of libertine rakes. She suppresses her private character to achieve public acceptance, and public acceptance in the world of the play seems to demand a libertine outlook.

The distinction between the public and private facets of character, and the roles they play in the whole game of social disguise, is a vital part of the structure of Sir Anthony Love. Beneath the random appearance of his dramatic world Southerne neatly juxtaposes private scenes with an equal number of public ones. Scene locations, as well as character groupings, emphasize the difference between the home and the marketplace, and between public and private roles. Southerne presents his characters in both public and private situations, and then in the tradition of the scientific empiricists his audience can assess the validity of the conflicting evidence.

In privacy Southerne's characters are free to remove their social masks temporarily. In these moments Southerne reveals the inner perplexities of his characters through the use of soliloquy. As Hobbes relates in Leviathan. it is in privacy that:

The secret thoughts of a man run over all things, holy, prophane, clean, obscene, grave, and light, without shame, or blame; which verball discourse cannot do, farther than the Judgement shall approve of the Time, Place, and Persons.'142

Once alone, Sir Anthony, the triumphant rake, confesses her struggle to maintain her disguise, and thus her reputation; Ilford admits his frustration and jealousy at having to compete for Volante's affections with the younger, more charming Sir Anthony; and, within the private chambers of a new bride, Volante reveals her apprehension about marriage. Each private character is distinctly different from the character that appears in public.

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The private character of an individual is also displayed, although less reliably, in scenes involving just two people, in a sort of 'privacy' together. Then the social scale of shame is balanced and both feel a sense of control, since each is equally vulnerable. As Palmer (in the role of a Pilgrim) announces, it is 'a privacy in Communication, and a retirement from the Eyes of the World'<sup>143</sup> that makes it possible for the public man to let his private self out of the closet. For example, we have Southerne's classic 'private' meeting of the Abbé and Sir Anthony Love. Thinking himself to be alone with the 'boy', the 'very Pope of Mompelier' is able to attempt his homosexual seduction with only slight risk to his reputation. Obviously anxious to take advantage of the moment, knowing that 'Delays are dangerous, when Opportunities are scarce,'<sup>144</sup> the Abbé reminds the young knight that they are 'very luckily alone, and shou'd make good use of [their] time; no body will come to disturb us.' Only the privacy of a one-on-one relationship will allow such secret revelations, and with the entrance of another, the social scale will be tipped and public facades must quickly be put back in place. But the balanced intimacy of such assignations is no guarantee of candour. Earlier, Sir Anthony has posed as a murdering rogue to get the pilgrim to reveal himself.<sup>145</sup> In other words, she feigns removal of her public mask, in order to persuade Palmer to lay his aside. In reality, she has simply added another layer of disguise. Truth is revealed, but only by one of the characters, and thus Palmer finds himself at the

mercy of the young knight. Limited privacy is not as reliable in producing candour as solitude, but it does offer greater opportunity for sincere behaviour than does a public arena.

As with all aspects of Southerne's sceptical comedy, the reliability of such social labels as public and private is problematic. A balance of social power often turns out to be only an illusion, and the real imbalance is sprung on the unsuspecting victim. Valentine's hidden presence at the Abbé's 'private' seduction attempt leaves the Abbé at the mercy of Sir Anthony and his witness. The third party is 'like an Evidence,'<sup>146</sup> which threatens to expose the secret and true character of the outnumbered victim. Valentine joins Sir Anthony in threatening to unmask the Abbé's private self, but had he sided with the Abbé, Sir Anthony's public self would have been in jeopardy. In this context, three is not only a crowd, it is a potential lynch mob.

In Sir Anthony Love many characters publicly profess the libertine ideals of freedom and natural desire, while they scorn social obligation, traditional decencies, and sentiment. Yet their actions in the course of the play seem at odds with their words. Sir Anthony boasts of her 'design to lie' with Volante; Sir Gentle accounts himself 'a Knight of Intrigue;' Ilford claims that 'every man to his own Interest tends;' and even the Abbé expresses envy for the young men's lust for the ladies -- libertine sentiments all. Southerne's play, however, reveals private contradictions of these public claims. Sir Anthony lacks the 'private' resources to support

her public reputation; Sir Gentle possesses a private decency which is only subverted by public opinion; Ilford's private charity belies his Hobbesian selfishness; and the 'normal' libertine lust for ladies feigned by the Abbé, is really a private desire for pretty young men. Libertinism, once a sincere expression of revolt, appears in Sir Anthony Love as merely an outmoded social disguise, but the need to maintain it has forced a separation between the public and private aspects of the individual which is a reflection of his society -- a society in which the separation was most pronounced between its primary pair of opposites: men and women.

Marriage, and the continuous struggle between men and women to establish some sort of social truce, were of particular interest to the Restoration dramatists. The seventeenth century's rigid separation between the public outer world of the man and the private inner world of the woman offered a wealth of dramatic possibilities. The battle of the sexes was thrown into sharp relief against the background of these two 'contiguous, but irreconcilable universes.' It was on this 'sexual antagonism,'<sup>147</sup> as John Harrington Smith terms it in his book The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy, that Restoration comic dramatists focused and which they displayed on the stage. They saw that

. . . young people, while wanting love, may at the same instant not want it, and that love may be complicated by a kind of pride which has its basis in the individual's individuality. . . Courtship may be characterized by an element of sex antagonism as well as sexual attraction.<sup>148</sup>

Men and women, while naturally drawn to one another, were at the same time apprehensive about the sacrifices that the marriage bond implied. This remains a part of Restoration comic drama as late as Congreve's The Way of the World.

Smith sees an evolution in the male/female relationship as it was portrayed on the Restoration stage. It progresses from a witty game involving 'two well-matched players,' to the rather brutal business of male dominance, to the sentimental formula of female fidelity and male reformation.

In the first fifteen years after the Restoration the characteristic comedy featured a 'love duel' between two young people, what Smith termed the 'gay couple' of Restoration comedy. The man possessed a libertine spirit while the young woman was an equally spirited opponent. Despite their railing against the institution of marriage, eventually the two came to some sort of agreement, and they married. While they were well matched, the woman proved the stronger in that she finally got her wild gallant to settle down. Etherege's The Comical Revenge and Dryden's Secret Love were primarily responsible for establishing this popular pattern.

About the middle of the second decade of Charles II's reign, not long before Southerne's arrival in London, the pattern began to change, and the male rake became the dominant character. Beginning with Wycherley's Horner in The Country Wife, followed closely by Dorimant in The Man of Mode, and on into the sex-intrigue comedies of the eighties, cuckolding and seduction became the dominant themes. The female, once

successful in taming her free spirit, now found herself the victim of the appetites of the rapacious hero, only able to strike back by faithlessness or by gulling fools.

As the century headed into its final decade the pattern changed again. Smith sees sympathy and sentiment replacing the love game and seduction patterns of earlier comedy. Chastity and constancy now became the prized qualities of at least one member of the pair. Final-act reformations by libertine rakes and patient devotion from ill-used wives and mistresses led to marriage based on the ideal of mutual love. Southerne includes each of the traditional Restoration courting patterns within the five proposed marriages in Sir Anthony Love. The 'love duel' convention of the early years of the Restoration is seen in Volante's success in 'winning' the libertine Sir Anthony as her husband. The trend to male dominance which came in the mid-seventies is seen in the relationship of Valentine, whose attitude toward infidelity is already clear, and Floriante. The third pattern, emphasizing chastity and constancy is represented with a twist in the relationship of Ilford and Volante. Ilford's unflagging devotion to Volante, despite her attentions to Sir Anthony, and Volante's eventual repentance of her foolish behaviour give the relationship some similarities to the sympathetic style of the previous few years.

All of the courtship patterns which Smith identifies start from a common assumption. The libertine spirit of freedom from any social obligation is prominent at the opening of each



of the popular stylistic conventions. It is then either worn down by an opponent of equal determination, defeated by a stronger, more diligent force, or it survives and continues to victimize. The popular social code of the libertine carries through Restoration comedy, in some form or other, from the beginning to the very end.

Southerne saw this aspect of libertinism as the most devisive form of social disguise which, rather than uniting the two sexual spheres, threatened to keep them apart. As he brought his play to an end, he explored what he perceived to be the only practical way to close the gap: the playwright shifted his focus to the major target of libertine prejudice, the custom of marriage.

Southerne's methodology throughout Sir Anthony Love was to present a popular image, an expected formula, or a conventional attitude, and then to follow it with an equally valid reflection. He exposed the lack of substance behind the social masquerade of libertinism, and offered new perspectives on the philosophies of Hobbes and Epicurus. He showed that the public's adherence to popular social misconceptions could create painful divisions within society, but his ending suggested that a union was possible. The conclusion of Sir Anthony Love points not to sustained conflict in the battle of the sexes, but to a truce. The opposing factions, after much confused scheming are at last brought together, and a compromise between the two 'contiguous, but irreconcilable universes'<sup>149</sup> is agreed upon; marriage is the symbol of that

potential peace.

While marriage is presented by Southerne as an alternative to continued sexual warfare in society, it is not a panacea. Unlike the libertines' indiscriminate condemnation of marriage, Southerne's presentation of marriage, as with the other aspects of society he explores within the play, depends on perspective. Each of the four marriages which conclude the action of Sir Anthony Love offers a slightly different view of wedlock. The attitudes and actions of the pairs involved provide evidence upon which to judge their future happiness. It is not marriage that deserves the libertines' scorn; the reputation of the institution is at the mercy of the individuals involved. The social denigration of matrimony had become a popular social disguise to avoid the reality of individual responsibility.

The first marriage, and in fact the only one that actually takes place in the play, is that of Lucia and Sir Gentle. The wedding provides, at one level, a wonderful sense of poetic justice. Sir Gentle, who admits that he has been 'too barbarous to the poor Devil [Lucia], considering [he] was the first that undid her,'<sup>150</sup> inadvertently makes an honest woman of Lucia. When he discovers the true identity of his bride (who has been disguised as Floriante) he accepts the fact, but that is where he wishes the relationship to end; he willingly pays to see that it goes no further. If marriage for Southerne was a compromise, a truce between the 'sexual antagonists,' then the difficulty revealed in the marriage of

Lucia and Sir Gentle is the obvious incompatibility of the partners. Sir Gentle, for all his apparent folly, sees the problem immediately and wants out, saying at the very end of the play, 'When we have Mistresses above our Sense,/ We must redeem our Persons with our Pence.'<sup>151</sup> Lucia is as adept at dissembling as Sir Gentle is clumsy. Their union promises not peace, but endless warfare. The match appears to be based on a desire for reputation and financial gain on Lucia's part, and although such matches were very much a fact of life in Restoration England, Southerne seems to be exposing them as no basis for future happiness. The element of disguise and the motives of both partners -- desire for revenge on Sir Gentle's part and for security on Lucia's -- suggests an ominous gap between appearance and reality in their marriage. It has no future, and Southerne suggests none.

The union of Valentine and Floriante, which has been anticipated from the very beginning, and which has provided a major portion of the action of the play, should be a happy event. Once achieved, however, it appears even less promising than that of Lucia and Sir Gentle, based on our knowledge of the individuals. Valentine displays a seemingly uncontrollable allegiance to his natural desires, as well as to his former mistress, Lucia. Floriante, who began as a hopeless romantic, has already become suspicious of her fiancé, even though she scarcely knows him. Their marriage, like the previous one, is little more than a scheme to advance their selfish interests. It allows Valentine to conquer a

woman he cannot get in any other way, and Floriante to escape her father's domination. This could well become the sort of relationship that gave marriage such a bad reputation in the Restoration period; it seems unlikely as a symbol of peace. Appearance and reality are still unreconciled: Floriante and Valentine have no real knowledge of each other beneath the facade of social disguise.

Another proposed union, that of Ilford and Volante, seems to have somewhat brighter prospects for the future. Ilford's decent behaviour toward Volante, when she was abandoned by Sir Anthony, was a demonstration of his sincere affection for her, and she is certainly aware of his love and his generosity. Two things, however, threaten this marriage. Ilford's internal struggle with his own identity, his reluctance to repudiate the libertine code of cynical indulgence, poses a danger. Although he loves Volante, the conflict between his private nature and his desire for social acceptance may lead him to follow Valentine's example. There is a hint of the same doubt which prompted Vanbrugh to look again at the reformed rake of Cibber's Love's Last Shift, and to discover Loveless suffering a 'Relapse.' Ilford's willingness to impersonate a priest so that Sir Anthony can practice a cruel deception on his future wife reveals a weakness in Ilford's efforts to withstand the pressures of popular morality.<sup>152</sup> Volante, for her part, and for all her professed independence, enters into a marriage based not on mutual love and respect, but on a sense of obligation. Marriage is some kind of reward

for Ilford's timely assistance. There are worse reasons for marriage, but there are certainly better ones. Neither Volante nor Ilford has demonstrated the consistency of character, which might lead to a truly harmonious marriage.

The fourth marriage, which Southerne appears to create from thin air, is that of Charlott and Count Verole. Critics have seen this union as a fault in the script, and have written it off as the result of the inexperience of the young writer. The matching of Verole with Charlott, however, is not a careless error on Southerne's part. For all its haphazard, unromantic appearance, it is for Southerne the culminating action which defines what the play is about. Critical oversight in failing to recognize its significance is excusable, for Southerne's design required that he mask it with misleading expectations.

Compared to the more dashing and conventionally romantic lovers in the play, Verole and Charlott are not idealized in any way. The husband is an older, unattractive (Sandford played the role), arrogant, cowardly Count, while the wife is a young girl with little or no experience in the world. They are only observed together in two scenes. In the first Charlott berates Verole for his willingness to sacrifice her to a nunnery, and promises to 'be reveng'd on him---- / Do as much mischief as I can while I am in the World.'<sup>153</sup> In the second he betrays her (He thinks she is Floriante.) by returning her to her father. These episodes do not lead us to expect romance. Southerne, however, has already undermined

the pretensions of romantic artifice, and now in the marriage of Verole and Charlott he offers a more practical view of the institution.

The major difference between this last marriage and the three others which occur in Sir Anthony Love lies in the consistency of both characters. They are what they appear to be. Charlott takes on none of the social disguises the other women employ. Thought by her sister to be 'a mad Girl,'<sup>154</sup> she is in reality a practical, plain-dealer who refuses to wear the masks of social deception. With the single exception of answering to her sister's name during her attempted escape from the nunnery, she is straightforward in her dealings with everyone. What she says and what she does are 'of a piece.' There is no division within Charlott: her public and private characters exist in harmony, she is what she appears to be.

Count Verole is an unexpected but worthy match for the unassuming Charlott. By theatrical standards he may not be a likely romantic hero, but such conventional standards have been Southerne's target throughout the play, Verole's worthiness lies not in his conformity to expectation, but in the fact that he is honest and consistently himself. Even Sir Anthony is quick to recognize that: 'There's nothing like you, you are your self.' The Count replies that 'He wou'd be nothing else.'<sup>155</sup> Sir Anthony is right, there are indeed no other characters in the dramatic world of the play like the Count, except his future wife. He adopts no disguises, and he adapts to no standards other than his own.

Conventional value judgements are dislocated in Sir Anthony Love, for most social images have equally valid contrary reflections. The Count may be viewed as a coward from one perspective, but from a more practical point of view his refusal to fight is sensible, just as Charlott's unromantic view of love and marriage appears sensible when compared to the views of the other women in the play. There is no right or wrong in the world of Sir Anthony Love independent of the perspectives Southerne created. Count Verole and Charlott may not be the conventional heroes and heroines of romantic or Restoration comedy, but they are Southerne's hope for a peaceful solution because they are the only major characters who appear undeluded and consistent regardless of perspective, whether in public or private, both in actions and words.

Southerne's sceptical examination of appearance and reality has arrived at one possible 'undoubted truth.' What cannot be discerned through philosophies, society or morality can be found within individuals. Regardless of what a man says, or the motivations and expectations involved, the most reliable clue to his true nature lies in his actions. It is only in this way that appearance can merge with reality. If the marriage of man and woman offers the only potential solution to the antagonisms of the social world, then perhaps the rational application for the individual, the union of the inward and the outward man, lies in wedding what he says to what he does. The key to peace, the only chance for undoubted

truth, is consistency.

John Wendell Dodds criticizes Sir Anthony Love for being 'half again as long as it should be,' saying that

The first two acts are padded out with an indefatigable display of wit and the last three acts are loaded with vigorous not to say boisterous action. It is as if Southerne felt at first the necessity of giving the expected display of witty fireworks; with that out of his system he could settle down to the more agreeable task of devising amusing situations.<sup>156</sup>

Nothing could be further from the truth. The play is certainly divided exactly as Dodds perceived, but it seems a conscious division; a well made design rather than inexperienced fumbling. Southerne uses the very structure of the play to demonstrate the chasm that may lie between words and action, reinforcing the problems of social disguise and his own philosophical questions.

In the first two acts of 'indefatigable' words Southerne introduces all his major characters. But it is literally an 'introduction;' they talk and talk, but action is virtually absent. Expectations are created based on dialogue: the first impressions created by two acts of words are strong, but Southerne use the next three acts to undercut those expectations: to demonstrate another image of reality.

At the start of Act Three the characters are set in motion. As they become involved in the events of the plot, the verbal masks of the first two acts begin to slip. The pilgrim's behaviour is anything but pious; Sir Gentle cannot quite bring off the casual lust he professes in Act Two;



Canaille, the dictatorial father, joyfully forgives his daughters' disobedience at the first opportunity; Ilford reveals the loyal and generous spirit beneath his original attitude of intolerant selfishness; and, Sir Anthony's exuberant sound and fury are reduced to the idiot's tale, signifying nothing. In each case action belies words, and the audience is forced to re-examine its first impressions.

The spectator gradually becomes aware that the most significant characters in the play are not the magniloquent intriguers, but those who maintain consistency between words and actions. The value Southerne perceives in this intrinsic harmony makes its first appearance in a late scene between Ilford and Sir Anthony, where the action of the play appears to come to a halt for the sake of philosophy:

Ilford: . . .I have observed some women live themselves into a second reputation--

Sir Anthony: And other women, who by natural negligence, never setting up for any, from the freedom of their behaviour, have pass'd uncesur'd in those public places, and pleasures, which would have undone ladies of a sprucer conversation but to have appear'd in.

Ilford: So that 'tis not what they do, but not doing all of a piece, that ruins their character and undoes the women--

Sir Anthony: And condemns the men too: for 'tis not any man's opinion, but his shifting it to the occasion, that makes him a rascal; as let his opinion be what it will, if he continues the same, and acts upon a principle, he may be an honest man:157

Southerne's quest is not for a moral philosophy, but for a practical truth that is of value to ordinary man. He finds it in the consonance of those whose allegiance to their ideals is confirmed by their behaviour. This new concept of truth dramatically alters contemporary value judgments. The conventional scale of expectation is inverted; the last becomes the first.

The collection of couples at the end of Sir Anthony Love is a spectrum of conventional Restoration comic pairings. Sir Anthony and Sir Gentle are a reversed image of the libertine who succumbs to marriage with a foolish and incompatible wife, but in the next moment manages to break from its restraints, while the 'gay couple,' Valentine and Floriante, the formal couple, Ilford and Volante, and the practical couple, Count Verole and Charlott, all stand on the verge of matrimony. The final staging appears to correspond to traditional expectations. The comic action of multiple courtship arrives at a resolution in which the lovers pair and celebrate their good fortune. Valentine calls for 'a Dance to the weddings.'<sup>158</sup> Established comic conventions, at first glance, appear to be satisfied. But this culminating image would produce a conventional sense of love triumphant only if the final scene were viewed in isolation, cut off from the previous dialogue, and past events. With only one marriage actually performed, and it an immediate failure, the revelry becomes a hollow ritual, almost a wake for the demise of romantic love. The characters are celebrating a separation

not a union, and beyond that the prospects of a problematic future. The dance is a final example of their habitual attempts to disguise reality by adopting the conventional forms of an ordered and meaningful world. The final tableau expresses the major themes of the play in a telling image. Valentine and Floriante, Volante and Ilford begin to dance, flanked by the isolated figures of the bride and groom. Charlott and her Count, arm in arm, stand apart: an ironic comment on a scene of continuing delusion. The contrasting images of the giddily spinning couples, the tranquility of Verole and Charlott, Lucia dancing her solitary jig of hollow triumph and Sir Gentle fretting over his purse, set all the mirrors of the play turning, revealing the kaleidoscope of appearances which the play has examined. For the viewer it becomes a sort of dream-like dance of marriage where motion slows, the music goes off key, and the layers of disguise fall away, leaving the unmasked dancers, like Vladimir and Estragon, saying 'Shall we go?' 'Yes, let's go!'<sup>159</sup> -- but going nowhere. Only Count Verole and Charlott provide any sense of reality.

Sir Anthony Love begins in a spirit of scientific scepticism. Southerne attempts first to create a sense of universal doubt about conventional appearances. He creates a complex dramatic experiment that subjects preconceived ideas to dislocating sceptical perspectives. Theatrical, philosophical, and social formulas are presented, and then called into question by unexpected consequences or

inconsistent development. Appearances in the dramatic structure, in characterization, in the dialogue and action of Sir Anthony Love are continually contradicted, and our sense of the underlying reality begins to blur. As in a house of mirrors, all directions appear as a way out, and, simultaneously, none do. As his comedy draws to a close, however, we get a glimpse of an 'undoubted truth.' The constant shifting of perspective in the play occasionally reveals an abiding image in its reflection, the image of consistency between words and deeds.