
SIR GEORGE ETHEREGE'S *THE MAN OF MODE*: ESSENTIALS OF THE BEAU MONDE IN CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: *This study is designed to illuminate the unique insight of Etherege as illustrated in his comedy The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter. The insight given is not only appealing to its audience but also inclusive. It is meant both to amuse at the same time to educate. It exposes and mocks the foibles of so as to possibly improving them. The play hosts all social strata and mainly focuses on the hilarious essentials of the Beau Monde society in London. Their humors, ethos and trends are carefully contrived and flippantly introduced to give a vivid portrait of a morally loose society known for its artificiality and failings. Among the chief essentials, the play reveals and mocks, are the importance of wit and good breeding, reputation and honor, dissembling, love of gossip, the importance of beauty and clothes, the libertine attitude toward love and marriage, affectation and foppery, masks and masquerades, and the vanity of the elite and their disdain to lower classes. All these attributes are skillfully contrived in one smart lump, to yield an everlasting comedy able to please and perhaps awaken audiences despite time.*

KEYWORDS: Etherege, man of mode, the beau monde, restoration society, comedy of manners.

INTRODUCTION

Forward

The Restoration era with its norms and mores was a stark reaction to the period that preceded it, the English Interregnum, or the English Commonwealth. In that era, the State intruded harshly upon the lives of citizens and suffocated them with repressive measures for eighteen years. All sources of entertainment were banded, plays, music, sports and others. Thus with nothing left for people to enjoy doing, they were bored to death and impatiently ready for change. (See Wilson: 1965, Hotson: 2012). Such bitter realities might explain the violent reaction of the public against Puritanism at all. However, the violent reaction against the Puritans' taboos was only one reason behind the change of heart and temper of Restoration society. Another equally important reason lies in the character of *King Charles II*. Once restored, he took aim at Puritanism and outlined instead a new morally loose era. He set the fashion for his rakish court first, then for the rest of the people especially the sycophants among the *beau monde society*, or the so-called the elite of aristocratic society at that time (Beauclerk 2006, Cunningham 1988, Johnson 2004). King Charles II completely ignored the codes of decency, propriety, and modesty. John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, lewdly describes Charles as a *lascivious, merry, scandalous and poor monarch who restlessly roles from one woman to another* (qtd in Ellis 1994). To elaborate further, the *moral code* of society had entirely changed ever since, and the standards of morality were utterly lost during the time of King Charles II. The King's commands, oddities, and whims were soon embraced by people, and found various responses in the world of theater.

Sir George Etherege

Indeed, very little is known about the early life of George Etherege, though it is commonly believed to be the son of a Bermuda planter, a royalist who died in France. The son of Etherege resurfaced in London, shortly after the restoration of Charles II. He was known as a constant companion of the Earl of Rochester, and a fashionable rake who enjoyed literary friendship and royal favors. Etherege was knighted in the late 1670s and married to Mary Arnold, a wealthy widow between 1677--1680 (Mann. D. D. 1981). Like other *court wits* of Rochester's circle, playwriting for Etherege was an amusement, and this might explain why he wrote only three plays, two of which were less successful than the last: *The Comical Revenge*, (1664), *She Would if She Could*, (1668), and *The Man of Mode*, (1676). Among his contemporaries, Etherege was the first to set his plays on the English soil, in the English drawing rooms, the city malls or parks, or the skirting of the court, mostly familiar places to its audience, contrary to the tragedies of the period which distant themselves from native land and often set in exotic and remote unfamiliar places. Critics have accredited Etherege's industrious attempt to portray the manners of fashionable London insomuch as Moliere had done for the Beau Monde of Paris. Both playwrights exposed the follies of the time in such a fashion as to possibly improving them (Miles 1910, Carlson1998).

The Man of Mode

The Man of Mode was the first full-fledged comedy of manners, upon which Etherege's literary reputation rest. Unlike the first two plays, *The Man of Mode*, being well-clothed and well-acted, achieved a tremendous triumph (Cordner 1982). John Dennis describes it as being *well received and believed by the people of England to be the most agreeable comedy for about a half a century* (qtd in Hooker, 11. 243). The playgoers received *The Man of Mode* with great interest, and took it as an honest presentation of the people quality, of both sexes, in court and in town. As well, most critics believe that the play gives a clear insight into all other strata of its own society-high and low, its values, traditions, lifestyle, and trends. Powell notes,

At the very opening of The Man of Mode, we become intimately involved with the quality of life. The first scene....is a delicate exploration of the personalities of the chief characters entirely in terms of business and conversation. Almost nothing happens in it, but we are kept awake and interested throughout and move into the main action of the play with both an intimate acquaintance with the characters feeling for their situation and way of life (Powell 76).

Essentials of the Beau Monde

The insight given in *The Man of Mode* is not only appealing but also inclusive. The play delicately exposes foremost the essentials and lifestyle of the *Beau Monde* society in London. The *Beau Monde* is a class of people with certain humors, ethos and trends, and it was open for young and old gallants to subscribe. To assume eligibility, a member of this class stratum is expected to display a set of attributes very well-defined and embraced by the elite, especially the court wits. In the play, all essentials are carefully contrived and flippantly introduced. Among the major essentials are the importance of wit and good breeding, reputation and honor, dissembling, love of gossip, the importance of beauty and clothes, the libertine attitude toward love and

marriage, affectation and foppery, masks and masquerades, social strata, high and low, and the social barriers and crossings. All these attributes are skillfully contrived in one smart lump, something which reflects brilliant craftsmanship that produced a vivid and amazing portrait of the Restoration society. The artificiality and foibles are exposed in such a fashion as to possibly improving them. The following sections are carefully designed to tackle the major essentials of the *Beau Monde* as introduced in the play:

Wit

The main essential that the *Beau Monde* aspire to have is unequivocally *wit*, the most and foremost concern for all. The importance given to *wit* can be seen through constant allusions to it in the play; such allusions are usually generated in relation to whether a person's having or not having it, though the concept was quite elusive even to the Restoration society. As a concept, *wit* acquired a new definition during the Restoration era, different from the one attached to it before. Before, *wit* was generally known as synonymous to *intelligence*, strictly identified with intellect. During the Restoration, this definition expanded and outstretched to dovetail a specific understanding. Out of the numerous allusions to *wit*, one may recognize the common understanding and the hilarious obsession of the audience by this elusive concept. In the play, a character is looked upon as a *true wit*, if he/she achieves *effectiveness* through the ridicule of others. A true wit is expected to be intelligent without being dull, glib without being tedious, with a sense of humor and a biting tongue. He/she is able to engage in a repartee and comes out having the upper hand, puncturing his target with smart verbal jabs. The possession of these attributes became the main source of admiration and amazement, meanwhile its absence is a source of detraction and ridicule.

Early in the play, the characters' obsession of *wit* is illustrated. Dorimant, the major true wit, asks first if Harriet, the young lady he desires, has wit or not. Medley, his close companion, assures that her wit is "*more than is usual in her sex, and as much malice*" (I. I. 161). Harriet's malicious wit is not unusual, for it is expected to sting and ridicule especially when it is addressed to a *fop* or *false wit*, no matter the enemies it might accumulate. Dorimant's wit is malicious too in that it wins him a number of both admirers and enemies, *I perceive you are of the number of those fools, his wit has made his enemies*, as noticed by Loveit, his cast-off mistress (II. II. 46--47). Anyhow, being malicious is but one aspect of Dorimant's wit; it might be blistering and harmful too. Loveit notes:

Those noisy fools you despise them, have good qualities which you weigh more (or ought at least) with us women than all the pernicious wit you have to boast of. (V. I. 120--123)

Despite his malicious and pernicious wit, Dorimant is ironically still seen by young gallants as an extraordinary role model to ape. To Loveit, however, Dorimant is merely a "*prodigy of ill-nature*" (V. I. 296). Such judgment uttered by a cast-off mistress is usually taken by his philistine audience as a compliment not an injury or a defect in his personality.

In additions, there is another feature attached to true wit. It has to be natural and new, and must be acknowledged to be just upon first production; otherwise, it would be considered false and untrue. Like the obsessed audience, Emilia eagerly wonders, *if any (new) wit has come to town*

(II. I. 162). Emilia's longing to see natural and fresh expressions of wit may reflect the longing of theatergoers to see a real wit on stage. A true wit often feeds on the foolishness of others, hence the creation of a character type called the false wit, a replica of foppish young men who combed their periwigs and displayed their clothes, and usually occupied the area closet to the stage, known as the Fop's Corner (Lynch, J. 1971, and Smith, D. 1978). In comparison to the true wit, the false wit is portrayed to be ridiculed, concurrently to show the importance of true wit to the *Beau Monde* society. In the play, Mr. Fopling is seen by all characters, and perhaps the audience as a fop and false wit, and a source of laughter. He has a bizarre personality, and is often indifferent to the cynical remarks or mockery of others. All his attempts to sound witty among his auditors raise more mockery and even disdain. Sir Fopling arrives in town after spending time in France, and amuses the others with his oddities and affectation. He often bores his audience with a few worn-out sayings in French, and ironically soon runs out of assets, and becomes tedious and dull. In common, the Restoration audience especially the theatergoers, hold that *wit* is a talent naturally acquired like satire, and thus cannot be taught or learned. Those who lack it had rather not claim it; otherwise they suffer the ridicule of other witty characters. The following exchange illustrates this common idea:

Busy: *She is indeed a little too pretending.*
 Harriet: *That woman should set up for beauty as much in spite of nature as some men have done for wit!* (III. I. 20--23)

Emilia and Dorimant strike upon the same idea of natural wit as opposed to false wit or pretense, while discussing Sir Fopling's. To them, wit must be either natural or better not come at all:

Emilia: *However you may despise him, gentleman, I will lay my life he passes for a wit with many.*

Dorimant: *That may very well be; Nature has her cheats, stumps a brain, and puts sophisticate dullness often on the tasteless multitude for true wit and good humor.* (III. ii. 301--306)

In the same connection, the exchange between Young Bellair and Harriet gives another reminder of the naturalness and easiness of true wit while debating Dorimant's wit. They admire him for being easy and natural, with some reservation however:

Harriet: *He is agreeable and pleasant, I must own, but he does so much affect being so, he displeases me.*

Y. Bellair: *Lord, madam, all he does and says so easy and so natural.* (III. iii. 28--31)

In additions, a witty character, or a true wit, is given the ability to engage in swift *verbal duels-repartees*, and emerges as manifesting proud elation, and draws laughter upon rival. Dorimant, the ideal character to the *beau monde*, is in complete possession of this quality (Weber 1986). His wit proves effective and knocking down on different occasions. To mention but a few, his

witty answer to Loveit's inquiry about the masked lady seen with him at the playhouse is a grand example of natural and blistering wit:

Loveit: *Without sense of love, of honor, or of gratitude, tell me for I will know, what a devil masked she was you were with at the play yesterday?*

Dorimant: *Faith, I resolved as much as you, but the devil was obstinate and would not tell me.* (II. ii. 175-179)

Witty expressions are often tuned in a way to suit the addressee and the context of its delivery. The above rude and casually insulting expression of Dorimant comes off as a result of his growing disdain to Loveit. By contrast, his wit sounds *humorous* and *affectionate* when delivered before a woman he admires. His witty words to Harriet are entirely different from those addressed to Loveit:

Dorimant: *You were talking of play, madam, Pray, what may be your stint?*

Harriet: *A little harmless discourse in public walks, or at most an appointment in a box, barefaced, at the playhouse: you are for mask and private meetings, where women engage for all they are worth, I hear.*

Dorimant: *I have been used to deep play, but I can make one at small game when I like my gamester well.*

Harriet: *And be so unconcerned, you'll ha' no pleasure in it.*

Dorimant: *Where there is a considerable sum to be won, the hope of drawing people in makes every trifle considerable.* (III. iii. 77-91)

The concept of **wit** is further illuminated through the attributes attached to Harriet, the ideal heroine. On many occasions, she proves in every sense a real match to Dorimant, the ideal rake. She is witty and a brilliant wealthy heiress. Like Dorimant, she can also be tart and nasty when she feels cornered. In Dorimant's words, she is *wild, witty, lovesome, beautiful, and young!* (III.iii.407-408). Such attributes were dearly embraced by the audience and idealized its possessor. Young Bellair, another replica of young gallants, is fascinated by Harriet's *wit* more than by her beauty, "*her wit is better than her face,*" said he (III. iii. 69-70). Sometimes, Harriet's wit surpasses even Dorimant's as evident in the following verbal contest:

Dorimant: *.....That demure courtesy is not amiss in jest, but do not think in earnest it becomes you.*

Harriet: *Affectation is catching I find; from your grave bow I got it.* (IV. i. 125-128)

On other occasions, her *wit* comes off excessively *malicious* especially with the people she despises, or when she feels wronged:

Sir Fopling: *Are you women as fond of a vizard as we men are?*

Harriet: *I am fond of a vizard that covers a face I do not like, sir.* (IV. i. 225-226)

In additions, there is another feature of *wit* that highly gratifies the audience and wins loud ovation. That is the *figurative language* used by witty characters; well- contrived conceits and forced images. Its possessor is expected to have the intelligence needed to enable him/her to perceive similarities in dissimilar things, and in accord be able to strike fresh and ornate

expressions with which he confronts and overpowers opponents. Samuel Johnson defines the concept of wit as *discordi concors*, the yoking of dissimilar images (Holman, 558). Etherege, in *The Man of Mode*, makes his witty characters utter overabundant expressions laden with brilliant conceits and strained metaphors. The brief repartee between the gay couple, Harriet and Dorimant brings this feature to full fruition:

Harriet: *Could you keep a Lent for a mistress?*

Dorimant: *In expectation of a happy Easter and, though time be very precious, think forty days well lost to gain your favor.* (III. iii. 101-104)

Good Breeding

Wit to the Beau Monde was an essential that everyone should acquire and display among peers. Yet if someone does not possess this greatest social necessity, he might minify the lack of it by another essential that is *good breeding*. *Good breeding*, which is synonymous to courtesy and genteelness, could make the character more agreeable among peers than its counterpart, *ill-breeding*. Young Bellair, for instance, does not *abound in wit*, yet he is *the most tolerable of all the young men*, for he is *handsome and well-bred*, comments once Dorimant (I. i. 480-482). Medley also sees Young Bellair *ever well-dressed, always complaisant and seldom impertinent* (I.i.483). Unluckily however, Bellair's good breeding is disadvantageous as noticed by Medley too: *Your good breeding, sir, gives you much trouble* (I. i. 459-460). And worse, fine ladies are often suspicious of gentility and good breeding, mistaking these traits as acts of pretense and affectation. They often suspect that some deceptive male characters might use the appearance of good breeding only for bluffing gullible people:

Busy: *Well, the man, in my mind, is a fine man.*

Harriet: *The man indeed wears his clothes fashionably and has a pretty, negligent way with him, very courtly and much affected; he bows, and talks, and smiles so agreeably, as he thinks.*

Busy: *I never saw anything so genteel.*

Harriet: *Vanished over with good breeding, many a blockhead makes a tolerable show.* (III. i. 46-53)

The *Beau Monde* have their own standards of the complete gentleman. Young gallants, for good or ill, strive to live up to those standards. A good illustration of those standards can be ironically seen in the catalogue of Sir Fopling:

the character of a complete gentleman, who according to Sir Fopling, ought to dress well, dance well, fence well, has a genius for love letters, an agreeable voice for a chamber, be very amorous, something discreet, but not over constant. (I. i. 440-445)

Surface Appearance and Foppery

Beside wit and good breeding, *surface appearance* was also of utmost importance to the *Beau Monde* as well a target of Etherege's mockery. Physical beauty and fancy clothes were among the essentials that most characters aspire to possess and show. Etherege vividly highlights this point through numerous references to such obsession. The man par excellence Dorimant is often obsessed with the beauty of ladies. When Medley, for example, informs him of Harriet's being an heiress and vastly rich, Dorimant hurriedly asks, *and handsome?* To his curious inquiry,

Medley immediately replies, *the beautifullest creature I ever saw* (I. i. 145-155), and proceeds surveying her physical beauties. Having a beautiful mistress was a source of pride and pleasure for the *beau monde* to brag about among peers. More crucially, beauty would not be precious unless it is endorsed by the host of gallants. For such a whim, Dorimant asks Harriet, right after initiation into his love, to appear before the inner circle at court, so critics might pass judgment on her beauty. This silly demand is fiercely rejected by Harriet, the relatively dignified woman:

And expect to be taken in pieces, have all my features examined, every motion measured, and on the whole be condemned to be but pretty, or a beauty of the lowest rate. What think you? (IV. i. 159-162)

Physical beauty was a chief concern to fashionable people. No wonder, the *beau monde* spends much time discussing others' beauty or the lack of it, or the means of achieving it. The song of Sir Fopling highlights the position beauty and handsomeness hold in their society: *We to beauty all day/ Give the sovereign sway/ And her favorite nymphs devoutly obey* (IV. i. 475-477).

Old fashioned, however, do not share young gallant's their obsession with physical beauty, yet they themselves often show no less obsession. Old Bellair is irritated by the *rogues -that- ha` got an ill habit of preferring beauty no matter where they find it*, instead of money (III. ii. 155-156). Regardless of the old people's reservation, beauty remains a major essential for the *Beau Monde* society.

Fashionable ladies display the same obsession with beauty. The scene of Harriet's rage under Busy's "*officious fingers*" and their reflection on Lady Dapper show women's desperate strife to *make one's self agreeable*. They often complain of men's baffling attitude toward them and their beauty. Lady Townley, for example, reproaches Sir Fopling that *Wit, I perceive, has more power over you than beauty, ... else you would not have let this lady stand so long neglected* (III.ii.197-203). To most gallants, beauty can be more appealing if coupled with wit, and often the highest honor is given to wit over beauty. Harriet, for instance, is idealized for accumulating both beauty and wit; her *wit is better than her face*, though, as Young Bellair commends (III. iii. 69).

In addition to physical beauty, *the excessive attention to clothes* is another aspect of surface appearance displayed and mocked in the play. Sir Fopling, as his name suggests, is a typical fop who stands not only for himself but for most foppish young men who comb their periwigs and display their clothes, and occupy the fop corner at the theater house. However, the excessive concern Sir Fopling pays to his foppish clothes is provocative of spontaneous laughter and mockery. His obsession is a real portrait of the folly of affectation of his type. In Elwin's words, *His clothes are his creatures, like his legs and arms, they are part of his person, without them he would be a cripple* (Elwin 1994). Most of the characters, Dorimant, Medley, Lady Townley, and Emilia ridicule his foppish clothes- *gloves up to the elbows, and a periwig more exactly curled than a lady's head newly dressed for a ball* (I. i. 419-421). Queerly enough, Fopling hilariously defends his outfits and oddities (Casey 1998). To him, it is not fashionable to be in a *set dress, 'tis more cavalier to appear now and then in a dishabille* (IV. ii. 128-129). A *dishabille* is a loose and disordered way of dressing, and in fact highly artificial like the *wild garden* of the period. What is ironic here is the idea that not only Fopling appears in his *dishabille*, but other characters do the same. Belinda reports to Loveit that she saw Dorimant talking to *a lady masked*

in a pretty dishabille (II. ii. 95). And Belinda herself as well as others foolishly express fascination to such artificial dress and the excessive foppery of the *Beau Monde*.

Affectation

Beside foppery, *affectation* stands out as another target of Etherege's mockery, though there is a fine line between the truly fashionable and the affected fop. The distinction is hard to tell. To the readers of our age, most characters are all quite affected. In fact, discernment of affectation is a gift given to only a few and those obviously never discern it in themselves. Affectation can be understood as antonym of naturalness. It is an artificial behavior meant to impress others, though it may yield backfire. More often, it stimulates laughter and mockery rather than admiration. Sir Fopling, the most exquisite conception of the muse, receives most of the ridiculing jabs for his hilarious affectation. His lisping, his affected postures, his use of French words, his iterated expressions, such as *Madam, I kiss your hands*, and oaths such as *Damn 'em*, his dancing by himself, his frequent demands for mirror to watch himself or to practice preening, and his high interest in himself are all subject to jesting and jeering. Undoubtedly, the mockery of affectation extends beyond Fopling. It strikes upon all those foppish gallants roaming at the playhouse combing their periwigs and displaying too fancy clothes. This point is also brought to light by the elaboration of Medley upon books dealing with affectation and by his synopsis of *The Diversions of Bruxelles*, and *The Art of Affectation* (II. i. 164-176).

Dissembling, basically another form of affectation, is used by the less affected characters when necessary. Like affectation, dissembling was common among the *Beau Monde*. It is an act of hiding one's true feelings and intentions and showing almost the contrary. It comes off mainly in love situations, and it is used for both good and bad intents. Young Bellair and Harriet resort to dissembling to avoid the anger of their parents. In the mock-scene of love, they instruct one another how to perform affectedly before parents:

Y. Bellair: *Clap your fan, then, in both hands snatch it to mouth and smile with lively motion, fling your body a little forwards. So! Now spread it, fall back on the sudden, cover your face with it and break into a loud laughter, take up, look grave, and fall a-fanning of yourself admirably well-acted* (III. ii. 196-203).

They dissemble being in love, just to divert the attention of Old Bellair from knowing the truth: *Let us do it, if it be for the dear pleasure of dissembling* (111. i. 131-132). On another occasion, Harriet acts affectedly to conceal her knowledge of Dorimant. When Dorimant steps down gently and bows to her, *she starts and looks, and looks grave*, and negligently asks Young Bellair, *Who is this?* In truth, she not only knows Dorimant but also eyeballs him wherever he goes. Dorimant himself uses the art of affectation and dissembling to fool others. Loveit also dissembles love for Sir Fopling only to kindle jealousy in Dorimant. Despite aversion to Fopling, she appeals sensually and asks him familiarly for a walk at the presence of Dorimant. As expected, her dissembling does not escape the cynical scrutiny of Dorimant,

I know she hates Fopling and only make use of him in hope to work me in again: had it not been for some powerful considerations which will be removed tomorrow morning. I had made her pluck off this mask and show the passion that lies panting under (III. iii. 382-387).

Beside love, some characters dissemble *aversion*. Old Bellair for instance dissembles aversion to Emilia before his son, though this old heck drools for this young lady. The art of dissembling was quite customary in the Restoration comedies, and its effect extended even to the 18th Century comedies. In the Laughing Comedy, the methods of dissembling expanded and made famous by the most popular gay couple Tony Lumpkin and Constance Nevil in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (Engsberg 1999).

Masks and Masquerades

Dissembling is closely connected with another aspect of Restoration society, i.e. its penchant for masks and masquerades. During the Restoration era, masking became quite popular and used frequently by all strata of society. Even the King and Queen often attended theatric public performances and gatherings incognito. (See *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*). Etherege mirrors such a fancy in *The Man of Mode*. The play opens with references to masking. In the first scene, Dorimant remembers a mask watching him in the strand (I. i. 69). In the same scene, Medley mentions that he saw Dorimant at the playhouse dallying with a *vizard*, a masked lady, Belinda actually (I. i. 215-219). Masking surfaces in the reference to a masked lady, *whom Dorimant entertained with more respect than the gallants do a common vizard* (II. ii. 95-97). It can be noticed also in what Emilia says about Medley: *he loves the sport of persuading masks off.... to make discoveries* (II. i. 136-137). By contrast, some sensitive characters are vocally critical of this obsession. Harriet thinks that masks *shadow and conceal* (III. i. 29). With Dorimant, she prefers *a harmless discourse in public walks, or at most an appointment in a box, barefaced, at a playhouse, to masks and private meetings* (III. iii. 79-83). To please Harriet, Dorimant dissembles aversion to masking, *'Tis endeavored to be kept on foot still by some who find themselves/ the more acceptable the less they are known*. Medley thinks that *a fool is very troublesome when he presumes he is incognito*. Such adverse blows put the issue of masking into an ironic perspective, which is certainly what the playwright endeavors to cultivate against the obsession of masking and masquerade.

Reputation and Honor

The concepts of reputation and honor as held by the fashionable world are repeatedly mocked. While many of the characters, both males and females, are quite libertine, they seem affectedly jealous in relation to their reputation and honor. Yet, what matters to them is the appearance of honor, or the public image, which is often the opposite of the one they conceal. Such a hypocrite attitude is exposed and ridiculed. A grand example can be seen in the love scene of Belinda and Dorimant. After a long session of crimson love, Belinda whines, *I have a thousand fears about me. Have I not been seen, think you* (IV. ii. 5-6), and then over and over questions Dorimant's discretion-whether or not he *will be discreet*. Needless to say, Dorimant keeps the honor of mistress intact while the intrigue is still in progress, but not necessarily afterwards. And worse, a rake takes *more pleasure in the ruin of a woman's reputation than in the endearments of her love* (V. i. 216-217), as Mrs. Loveit once comments. Her remark often holds true. When Harriet asks,

She [Mrs. Loveit] has been a famed mistress of yours, I hear, Dorimant answers without any qualm, She has been, on occasions (V. ii. 287-28).

Gossip

The jealous guarding of reputation is largely triggered by another aspect of society- *love of gossip*. The *Beau Monde* thrive on rumors and intrigues. Without reservation, they keep backbiting one another for a reason or not. The character that best represents this type with no match is Medley. His name and deeds suggest meddling or intervening in others' affairs. Lady Townley laughably sketches out his personality as follows,

He's a very necessary man among women: he's not scandalous in the least, perpetually contriving to bring good company together, and always ready to stop up a gap at ombre; then he knows all the little news of the town (II. i. 105-109).

Medley himself often brags *for having plenty of scandals to discover*, and often delivers a lengthy account of the city affairs before the night cabals at Lady Townley's drawing room. After the delivery of his daily reports, he boasts, *You have had an exact account, from the great lady in the box down to the little orange wench (III. ii. 4-6)*. He even wishes he might set up an office of intelligence to look into others' affairs. Lady Townley encourages his suggestion, *You would have great dealings with country ladies (III. ii. 12-13)*. Belinda loves *gossip* too and once she invests the Country Ladies' desire for gossip for her own advantage:

Belinda: (aside) *Now to carry on the plot... 'Tis time to begin, lest Dorimant should come before her jealousy has stung her. (laughs then speaks on). I was yesterday at a play with `em, where I was fain to show them the living as the man at Westminster does the dead: That is Mrs. Such a - one, cried up for a wit: that is Sparkish, Mr. Such-a- one, who keeps reverend Mrs. Such -a-one and there sits fine Mrs. Such -a-one who was lately cast off by my Lord Such -a-one. (II. ii. 79-90)*

As she plans, her cynical allusion outrages Mrs. Loveit, the castoff mistress, who bursts in tears and asks, *Did you see Dorimant there?* To add fuel to the fire, Belinda bluntly assures, *I did, and imagine you were there with him and have no mind to own it (II. ii. 91-93)*. Actually, the lady with Dorimant is Belinda herself.

Libertine Approach to Love and Marriage

The attitude of the *Beau Monde* toward *marriage* and their *libertine approach to love* are also revealed and mocked. These two essentials develop into major underpinning themes in the forms of marriage for obedience to parents, for money, and for love, together with the common idea that marriage ends love (Webster 2012). Such whims are satirically revealed through the Shoemaker's enchantment to ape his superiors in the fashionable world:

Like a gentleman with his wife ... we speak to one another civilly, hate one another heartily, and because it is vulgar to lie and soak together, we have each of us our several settle-bed (I. i. 339-342).

As the Shoemaker reiterates, love has no place among married couples, if it ever exists. Marriage is a curse not a grace to him as is to the *Beau Monde*. And worse, it is a source of corruption. *Nothing corrupts her but a husband*, remarks Dorimant upon the decency of Emilia. He urges Young Bellair to couple with Emilia instead of Harriet, perhaps to enjoy the would-be-corrupt wife Emilia. Dorimant further claims,

Indeed, the little hope I found there was of her, in the state she was in, has made me by my advice contribute something towards the changing of her condition (I. i. 511-514).

These *fashionable ideas of marriage* find another outlet in Medley, the casual mouthpiece of the *Beau Monde*. He mocks the marriage of Young Bellair and Emilia and anticipates regret not joy in marriage: *Do not let us see repentance in thine we daily do in married faces* (V. ii. 1-2). The mockery of marriage for love grows deeper as Medley sums up the idea of gallants toward marriage: *their marriage would not be warmly taken by others; to the contrary the whole town would laugh at Young Bellair for marrying for love* (I. i. 540-546). Not only young gallants, but also old people have their own reservations toward marriage for love.

Lady Woodvill and Old Bellair desperately try to arrange an economically motivated marriage for their children, Harriet and Young Bellair. They exert excessive pressure on them and threaten with disinheritance, if disobey. *He tells me he has made a match for me/ and bids me resolve to be obedient to his will or expect to be disinherited* (I. i. 533-535), Young Bellair complains. Like Young Bellair, Harriet suffers the same, and bitterly expresses discontent before her maid, Busy, over the design of her mother: *Shall I be paid down by a covetous parent for such a purchase? I need no land; no, I'll lay myself out all in love. It is decreed--* (III. i. 77-79). She does not give in to mother's nagging, but joins forces with Young Bellair to frustrate the design of parents, and finally manage to couple with the ones they love, Dorimant and Emilia.

The plan of Harriet and Young Bellair to marry for love is at odds with the attitude common in the fashionable world. Many would agree with Old Bellair's views - *a wife is no curse when she brings the blessing of a good estate with her* (II. i. 81-82). To actualize his goal, Old Bellair carefully looks into the family fortune of Emilia, the woman he plans to marry perhaps without knowing that she is the sweetheart of his son. Dorimant, the role model of the *Beau Monde*, is also after money in his pursuit for marriage. He frankly tells Young Bellair that he himself might fall into the snares of marriage; but, *the wise will find a difference in our fate; You wed a woman, I a good estate* (IV. ii. 216-218). On another occasion, he defends his plan of marrying Harriet before his castoff mistress, Mrs. Loveit. It is *to repair the ruins of my estate that needs it*, says Dorimant (V. ii. 338-339).

Closely related to the attitude of the *Beau Monde* toward marriage is the libertine approach to love, or the idea of inconstancy in love. Constancy or inconstancy becomes a dominant theme discussed by both serious, and libertine lovers and rakes. Dorimant sees it *is not a virtue of reason, to be constant*, and goes on spinning a witty conceit to defend his point: *Youth has a long journey to go, madam; should I have set up my rest at the first inn I lodged at, I should*

never have arrived at the happiness I now enjoy (II. ii. 218-221). And further he puts further excuses for breaking vows to women:

What we swear at such a time may be a certain proof of a present passion, but to say the truth in love there is no security to be given for the future (II. i. 240-244).

On many occasions, Dorimant swears oaths to mistresses, but those oaths soon evaporate. *I will a thousand oaths. By all---* he promises Belinda at passionate moments, yet abides by none afterwards (IV. ii. 42). The inconstancy of rakes distracts and confuses even the most serious lovers. Emilia, for instance, casts some doubt when Young Bellair swears oaths on constancy to her, *Do not vow. Our love is frail as is our life and full as little in our power; and are you sure you shall outlive this day* (II. i. 34-36).

Vanity of the Beau Monde

The vanity of the beau monde can be clearly seen in their disdain to other social strata. With no reservation, they display aversion and disdain to country people and lower classes. Their *attitude toward the country* surfaces early in the play when Dorimant discovers Harriet's attraction to him. He suspects she might be *some awkward, ill-fashioned, country toad* (I. i. 58), unfit for love, just because she resides in the country. Belinda on her part expresses aversion to country people; she disdains the three gentlewomen, *whose conversation has been more insufferable than a country fiddle* (II. ii. 68-69). The other city ladies also mock country women for being out of style and for having odd diversions. The country ladies' desire for knowledge of modes and intrigues of the city faces only haughtiness and mockery. Even Harriet, the newly citified woman, can't endure seeing the country in hangings and landscapes (III. i. 113-114). She is frightened by the idea of returning to Hampshire--the country, and being *mewed up in the country again*. She fears she might be forced like the rest of the country girls *to marry to a man I do not care for* (V. ii. 45-46). To her nothing is *more dismal than the country* (V. ii. 492). Further, she agrees with Dorimant that *anything beyond High Park is a desert* (V. ii. 173). Even in the concluding scene Harriet takes a final jab at the country as a place of boredom, melancholy and loneliness. She resents going

To a great rambling, lone house that looks as it were not inhabited, the family's so small. There you'll find my mother, an old lame aunt, and myself, sir, perched up on chairs at a distance in a large parlor, sitting moping like three or four melancholy birds in a spacious votary. (V. ii. 482-487)

The vanity of the *Beau Monde* can be seen also in their attitude toward the aspiration of lower classes to mingle with and ape superiors. Their desire to ape fashionable people and to cross the social barriers is not taken at ease by the fashionable world. Low classes foolishly aspire to be witty, to keep mistresses and whores, to use profane language, and to imitate even the fashionable attitude toward marriage and love. The Shoemaker, for example, boasts challenging,

There is never a man in the town lives more like a gentleman with his wife than I do. I never mind her motions, she never inquires into mine; we speak to one another civilly (I. i. 336-339).

But such aspirations do not win the approval of the beau monde. For instance, early in the play, Dorimant warns the Shoemaker of imitating his betters:

I advise you as a friend, reform your life. You have brought the envy of the world upon you by living above yourself. Whoring and swearing are vices too genteel for a shoemaker. (I. i. 296-299).

Lady Woodvill expresses resentment toward mingling and aping. She resents what she sees these days and keeps longing for *the form of civility of the last age* (I. i.138-139). She laments the by-gone days when there was neither mingling nor aping. In here, Etherege ridicules both the foolish aspirations of lower classes, at the same time the vanity of the fashionable world.

In conclusion, *The Man of Mode* reveals brilliant craftsmanship of Etherege, even though to Etherege playwriting is an amusement only, not a profession. In his dramatic design, he ridicules the essentials of the Restoration society, especially of those embraced by the elite of aristocratic society at that time. All those essentials are skillfully contrived in one smart lump. Not only the beau monde society and its essentials are the object of his mockery, but also the play spots light the aspirations of low classes in matters of aping and crossing social barriers. Concurrently, the vanity of the elite and their contempt of country people are also exposed and made objects of laughter. By and large, *The Man of Mode* would ever remain one of the best comedies that vividly and exclusively portray the foibles of Restoration society (Holland 1959, Dobree1966).

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