

*Rebellion And Repentance in
James Shirley's
The Lady of Pleasure*

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Abstract

This paper argues that, in constructing his realistic comedy, *The Lady of Pleasure* (1635), Shirley employed a dramatic technique in which rebellion and repentance form the two poles of a stanchion, and in between these poles the main characters move to and fro in a semi-antiphonal movement. Those of the characters who rebel are liable to repent, and their repentances are usually private and motivated either by strong appeals made to their inherent goodness, or by didactic pleas of chastity made by virtuous women. Rebellion, on the other hand, is presented as deviation from reason and decency.

Two sets of values are juxtaposed in the play, namely frugality, virtue and the old traditional way of life, on the one hand-prodigality, libertinism and a dissipated fashionable life, on the other. The former is recommended, and the latter condemned. For the playwright's stance ranges between that of the satirist or the sentimentalist's; since rebellion usually evokes social or moral satire, while repentance elicits a sympathetic, or even a sentimental, response. In both cases, however, Shirley has a didactic function to achieve.

The main contribution made by Shirley, in *The Lady of Pleasure*, is that he could strike a vein of dramatic expression that combines what he learned from the great Elizabethan playwrights with what he himself observed around him in his contemporary world. These rich, inspiring sources-modified by Shirley's excellent dramatic abilities and his own personal good nature and diligence-made of *The Lady of Pleasure* one of the most delightful plays of the Caroline age.

The two most remarkable facts about James Shirley's life and dramatic career are the high esteem in which he was held by his contemporary world, and has been still by modern scholarship⁽¹⁾, on the one hand—and the immense output of his dramatic productivity on the other. Although he descended from middle-class origin, he lived on terms of intimacy with the court and was personally esteemed by King Charles II himself (Schelling, 1949: 944). When he set up for a play-maker, his first biographer, Anthony à Wood, relates that Shirley:

gained not only a considerable livelihood, but also very great respect and encouragement from persons of quality, especially from Henrietta Maria the queen consort, who made him her servant (Wood, 1817: 737).

With the single exception of Shakespeare, no other writer among the early English dramatists "bequeathed so many regular five-act pieces to posterity" (Gifford and Dyce, 1833: lxiii). Since he was writing his London comedies—of which **The Lady of Pleasure** (1635) is the peak—for "a specialized, select, well-to-do, coterie audience" (Wertheim, 1972: 71), he had to cater to the values and tastes of his playgoers who liked to see themselves and their life mirrored on the stage.

Professor Gurr observes that in some respects both the Blackfriars and Cockpit—for which Shirley wrote—shaped their offerings to suit the new Caroline respectability and "showed a new respect for the ladies in the boxes" (Gurr, 1988: 179). We are further informed that the Master of the Revels, Sir Henry Herbert, lavishly praised Shirley's play **The Young Admiral** (1633), "and urged other playwrights to copy Shirley's moderation" (Gurr, 1988: 179). When the theatres were closed by the Puritans in 1642, Shirley was the leading London dramatist. And when the theatres reopened "at least eight of his plays were speedily revived" (Spencer, 1933: 1134).⁽²⁾

The Lady of Pleasure is regarded as Shirley's most accomplished comic masterpiece, his greatest achievement in the genre of London comedies (Levin, 1967: 2). It is the play that is best liked by modern readers and — "as does not always happen with successful authors — is also a favourite of his own":

The tone is satirical without heaviness, the dialogue is witty, the verse comparatively regular, with occasional extra syllables internally or at the end, and rather skilful use of run-on lines (Schelling, 1949: 947).

It is noteworthy that Shirley himself was quite conscious that his play was successfully performed on the stage. In his Epistle of the play dedicated to Richard, Lord Lovelace, he refers to the play as "fortunate in the scene" (Huebert, 1986: 54)⁽³⁾.

It will be argued in this paper that, in designing his comedy, **The Lady of Pleasure**, Shirley employed a technique according to which rebellion and repentance form the two poles of a stanchion, and in between these the main characters of the play move to and fro in a semi-antiphonal movement. Those of the characters who rebel are inclined to repent, and their repentances are always seen as private and motivated by intrinsic, deeply rooted human goodness. Rebellion is always presented as deviation from reason, good nature and human decency. In the meantime, the playwright's stance also ranges, in accordance with rebellion or repentance, between the satirist and the sentimentalist, since rebellion inevitably evokes social or moral satire, and repentance usually elicits a sympathetic, or even a sentimental, response⁽⁴⁾. It follows that, in such a technique, two sets of values are placed in contrast, the one against the other.

The action of the plot of **The Lady of Pleasure** aims at giving a comic, ironic illustration of these sets of values: frugality, virtue and the old traditional way of life, on the one hand, and prodigality, libertinism and a dissipated fashionable life on the other. It is clear that the first, represented by Sir Thomas Bornwell, is approved, and the latter, represented by his wife, Aretina, the titular character, is rejected and satirized, as evidenced by the latter's repentance at the end of the play. The subplot, too, has for its main concern the rebellion-repentance theme dramatized by Lord Unready⁽⁵⁾ and Celestina, the former attempting the honour of the latter who makes him repent his wrongdoing and forswear his libertinism.

In both plot and subplot the focus is mainly on the ladies: Aretina as a rebel made penitent, and Celestina, conversely, a castigatress of folly, making others, Lord Unready and other coxcombs, repent. The same formula also holds in the case of the men, for while Bornwell stands for moderation and reason in the plot, Lord Unready is the rebel who has to repent. But the variation rendered in the subplot goes beyond the change in gender of the rebelling person into a comic treatment of the idea of courtly Platonic love in fashion at the time.

Shirley also injects his play with a third line of action centring about a student, Frederick, who is summoned from his studies by his fashionable aunt, Aretina, to be moulded to her fashion. Having been made a caricature of folly and drunkenness, he starts courting his own aunt and she, stung by the catastrophic outcome she has brought about her nephew and herself, finally sends him back to the university.

Appropriately, the first scene of **The Lady of Pleasure** introduces us to the plot of the play. It provides skilful survey of the situation Aretina and her husband, Bornwell, have created for themselves. It opens with a dialogue between the lady and her steward which reveals that she made her husband sell their country estates and come to live in the town so that she might en-

joy its pleasures and fashionable life. Though he was nice enough to gratify her desire, even against his will and belief, she has gone astray in her extravagance and dissipation. In retort to her cynical view of the country life they had lived before coming to town, her steward reminds her that she lived there in harmony: "Secure and innocent, beloved of all / Praised for your hospitality, and prayed for;" (I.i. 25/6), and on leaving her he gives her the retort: "Y'are a woman of ungoverned passion, and I pity you" (I. i. 44).

In the following dialogue between her and her husband the situation gets clarified further; Aretina has obviously started on a course of excessive dissipations that is liable to endanger her honour and exhaust her husband's means. He reprimands her for her undue expenses, her many vanities, gambling and revelling at night, and he tries in vain to bring her back to her previous simple and decent life of the country. What Bornwell objects to, on principle, is that his wife is not really to the fashion born, and her ignorance of the game she is playing will sooner or later make her repent a part which is not in her nature:

You make play
Not a pastime but a tyranny, and vex
Yourself and my estate by't. (I.i. 110-11)

Aretina, as her steward described her, is a passion's slave, and the tyranny of her prodigality is read in the play as a rebellion against traditional human decency: an impatience with the restrictions of the marital bond. She is bent on what she calls her liberty, she decries the injustice of having her pleasures circumscribed, and she goes even further:

A narrow-minded husband is a thief
To his own fame, and his preferment too;
He shuts his parts and fortunes from the world,
While from the popular vote and knowledge men
Rise to employment in the state. (I.i. 145-9)

The lines quoted above obviously reveal a rebelling lady who anticipates, in a way, the witty heroines of Restoration comedy. As an ambitious lady of pleasure and fashion Aretina must have been rooted in reality, for in anticipating the playwrights of the Restoration age Shirley was, indeed, "drawing his materials, dangerously sometimes, from contemporary life in fashionable circles" (Harbage, 1937: 35).

In the illuminating introduction to his edition of the play, Professor Huebert observes the significant bearing which prodigal indulgence in the play has on the actual situation of the city of London in the Caroline age, where unnecessary consumption created a social problem in the country (Huebert, 1986: 10). In 1632, the king issued one in a series of Stuart proclamations "designed to prevent the rural gentry from abandoning their

estates in order to set up fashionable London residences." This migration created such problems as excessive expenditure which consumed a great part of the treasure of the realm:

In the London of 1632, conspicuous consumption was a social problem of such magnitude that not even the King could ignore it (Huebert, 1986: 10).

That Shirley opens both his plot and subplot of **The Lady of Pleasure** with a comic demonstration of the prodigality of the main character attests to the fact that he is a conscientious dramatist deeply concerned about the realistic and urgent issues and problems in his contemporary society. For Celestina, in so far as ostentatiousness and conspicuous consumption are concerned, is no less prodigal than Aretina. The only distinction between the two is that while Aretina's unbridled passion and lack of experience contribute to her adulterous act, Celestina's wit, temperance and steadfastness protect her from falling from grace. Nevertheless, readers and playgoers cannot help reflecting on the general atmosphere of dissipation and flamboyance dominating a whole society. As in Aretina's case, it is remarkable that Shirley introduces Celestina, too, with her steward who also comments on his lady's rebelling nature, manifest in insisting on excessive expenditure at any cost and by any means:

Celestina: I say I will have other,
Good master steward, of finer loom.
Some silk and silver, if your worship please
To let me be at so much cost. I'll have
Stories to fit the seasons of the year,
And change as often as I please. (1.ii.19-24)

When her steward reminds her that "Men's tongues" have been liberal of her character since she began to live thus highly and expensively, she retorts: "Who shall control me? / I live in the Strand, whither few ladies come? To live and purchase more than fame" (1.ii.78-80). She will have her house "the academy of wits," and her balcony "shall be the courtier's idol" (1.ii.85-94). As satirical commentator, her steward cannot help seeing his lady but "mad".

Shirley's technical strategy, which is based on the process of rebellion and repentance, subordinates the comic action centering around Frederick to the juxtaposition of the two heroines. Thus it is indeed easy to follow without any strain the course of the action in his play (Ward, 1914: 553). Frederick, as previously noticed, has been brought back from the university to be made a fine young gentleman of fashion. Before meeting his aunt, Shirley is careful to prepare his playgoers to witness the vanity of Aretina, by making Bornwell raise the value of learning above any other value:

Learning is an addition beyond
 Nobility of birth; honour of blood
 Without the ornament of knowledge is
 A glorious ignorance. (II.i.31-4)

And Frederick himself declares: "I never knew more sweet and happy hours/Than I employed upon my books" (II.i.35-6). Yet upon seeing him, Aretina almost swoons, "support me, I shall faint!..., Is that Frederick/ In black?" and have they sent thee / Home like a very scholar?" (II.i.43-8). Had she anticipated that ruinous effect of learning upon the scholar, she would have sent him to France, where:

They would have given him generous education,
 Taught him another garb: to wear his lock
 And shape as gaudy as the summer,how
 To dance and wag his feather à la mode. (II.i.59-62)

Nor is Aretina alone in her capricious, ignorant outlook on learning; a host of false gallants including Kickshaw, Littleworth and Sentlove, whose names are significant, join hands with her in this caricature of buffoonery. Thus she hands Frederick over to the fops and her steward "to purge / The university that lies in's head" (II.i.91 - 2). When Frederick is left with the steward, the latter surveys the great transformation undergone by the Bornwells from the decent and contented life of the country to the extravagant one in town, where they "do feed / Like princes, and feast nothing but princes / And are those robes fit to be seen among 'em? (11.i.130-2). The converted scholar submits to his wilful aunt's pleasure:

Farewell Aristotle,
 Prithee commend me to the library
 At Westminster, my bones I bequeath thither,
 And to the learned worms that mean to visit 'em. (II.i. 164-7)

Undoubtedly this comical satire is meant to complete the image of the process of rebellion undergone by the lady whose pleasure has multiplied and overreached into such evil dimensions that require a firm stand which Bornwell cannot afford. This may be, indeed, "the closest that Shirley comes to satire in the play" (Parlin, 1914: 15), yet, having seen the damaging effect of his wife's "humour" on her innocent nephew, he contemplates a "stratagem" with which to reduce her to her proper place.

In the construction of **The Lady of Pleasure** the elaborate contrast between the two heroines, Aretina and Celestina, is made inevitable and plausible - especially when (in Act 11, scene ii) Bornwell starts putting his stratagem into effect. He has resolved not only to assume the same dissipated life as his wife's, but to arouse her jealousy by dancing attendance upon Celestina. From a first glance at the latter's fashionable life, as has

previously been seen, it is clear that this beautiful young widow anticipates, in a sense, such distinguished heroines of the later age as Congreve's Angelica or Millamant. Like these, Celestina is beating at matrimonial fetters, bent on protecting and preserving her full liberty, and having wit and humour enough to make herself mistress of her person and situation. Thus in her wit-battle with the other sex, she will "jest, but not love":

I say my prayers, yet can wear good clothes
And only satisfy my tailor for 'em.
I wo'not lose my privilege. (II.ii.17-20)

Though she admits that Haircut is the sweetest of the men who visit her, she will not be accused of being "prodigal" of her favours to any of her guests, nor does she summon (by any wink) a gentleman to follow her to her withdrawing chamber (11.ii.55-9). She has certainly witnessed around her many ladies of fashion whose prodigality and unbridled fancy and caprice ruined them:

Some ladies are so expensive in their graces
To those that honour 'em, and so prodigal,
That in a little time they have nothing but
The naked sin left to reward their servants. (II.ii. 66-9)

Though he is but a lord's barber, ambitious to rise and acquire some position at court, Haircut is admired by Celestina as a gentleman whose seeming plainness of nature and directness charm her. Conversely, Sir William Sentlove is a knight, but no gentleman; "He's called the blistermaker of the town" (11.ii. 153). Hence it becomes more and more conspicuous in the moral atmosphere of **The Lady of Pleasure** that wealth and station "belong to inward virtue" (Holland, 1959:229), a theme which receives a skilful dramatic illustration in the remainder of the play.

Act III takes place at the lodgings of Lord Unready, presently visited by a Madam Decoy, a procuress who comes offering her service which he at once recognizes as "flesh merchandise" (III.i.38), but which he at once rejects especially when he knows that it is Aretina, his kinswoman, that Decoy is offering. On her way out, she comments: "When next you find rebellion in your blood,/ May all within ten miles o'the court turn honest" (III.i.67-8), words that point to the Lord's rebelling attempt on Celestina's honour later, as well as giving "a side glance into the darker ways of fashionable life" (Parlin, 1914:15). Although Lord Unready is mourning his dead mistress, Bella Maria, and his blood is cold (as he says, he finds there is no "beauty enough surviving/ To heighten me to wantonness" [III.i.70-3]), his final comment on Decoy's departure: "Would any man that meets / This lady take her for a bawd?" (III.i. 76-7), is highly charged with satirical implications. He writes a letter to Aretina warning her that unless she preserves her own fame, Decoy will betray it to her repentance.

Act III, scene ii witnesses Aretina's cautious steps towards more dangerous rebellion. It is ironic that her husband's stratagem, designed to bring her back to her proper sphere, should make her more revengeful and rebellious:

Aretina [Aside]: This secures me: what would make other ladies pale
With jealousy, gives but a licence to my wand'rings. (III.ii. 46 - 7)

Through the secret service of Decoy, Aretina has fixed her choice upon Kickshaw, both to gratify her erotic desire and to take revenge upon her husband for her wounded dignity. A wilful, ignorant lady of fashion, she is so incensed by the insinuating remarks of the fop Littleworth that she employs him and the other coxcomb to insult and humiliate Celestina—a public scandal which they are more than efficient to perform:

Alexander [Kickshaw]: This all? We can defame her if you please,
My friend shall call her whore, or anything,
And never be endangered to a duel.

(III.ii.78-80)

The confrontation between Celestina and the two fops can be regarded as a celebration of the witty young widow's temperance and integrity of character, and a condemnation of the false gallants' triviality and infidelity to human nature and decency. Having full command of her emotions and passions, she, for a while, endures their insults and rudeness, but when she realizes there is a plot against her, she comes up with lashing satire levelled at the shameless witwounds:

You two, that have not 'twixt you both the hundredth
Part of a soul, coarse woollen-witted fellows (III.ii.294-5).

It is this lack of "soul" in them that has reduced them into external out-sides with no essence or internal integrity. In Celestina's apt and stinging characterization of them, they are "bodies made for burdens" — engines for their tailors "To frame their clothes upon and get them custom" (III.ii.97.8). In spite of the lively and eloquent language of her invective against Kickshaw's and Littleworth's frailties and injustice, the note of satire is clear and the moral teaching is, indeed, unmistakable (Nason, 1915:279). Stung by having been seen in their contemptible characters, Kickshaw remarks to Aretina, "I am glad 'tis over, but I repent no service for you, madam" (III.ii. 329). Aretina's soliloquy, at the end of Act III, "I blush while I converse with my own thoughts: / Some strange fate governs me, but I must on;" (III. ii. 349 - 50), suggests that she is deliberately seeking infidelity, and as such she is liable to be given to repentance at the end.

It is in the last two acts of **The lady of Pleasure** that both plot and subplot reach their climax, and the themes, especially those of rebellion and re-

pentance, receive their full dramatic illustration. The whole scene which precedes and prepares for the adulterous coupling of Aretina and Kickshaw is permeated with comical satire against the lascivious profligates of the ambitious middle-class people aspiring to the gentry and aping the fashion in a way Aretina is shown doing in the play. It is this class, indeed, that virtually became "the comic world of the plays" (Underwood, 1957:152).

The trick contrived by Madam Decoy, according to which Kickshaw is brought, blindfolded, into a dark room to bed with the disguised Aretina, borders on the coarse and grotesque rather than the obscene or immoral. Shirley does, indeed, here lug in the bawd and the beldam scene "neither of them necessary" (Schelling, 1949:948). It is the aftermath of the act of infidelity and the process of repentance following it that the play actually focuses on. Aretina has efficiently succeeded in keeping her secret between herself and Decoy, and as such she has protected her honour from exposure to public scandal. She has also made sure, in a dialogue with Littleworth and her licentious partner, that she is not suspected: "I am confident he knows me not, and I were worse than mad to be my own betrayer" (IV.ii.171-2). Presently her husband enters and, from a glance at her, unattended and dejected in demeanour, he wonders:

Why is the music put to silence?
Or ha' their instruments caught cold, since we
Gave 'em the last heat, I must know thy ground of melancholy.
(IV.ii. 178-81)

In her newly-acquired melancholic tone, Aretina chides him for having been merry-making with Celestina, and his speech that follows is permeated with harsh irony. Still innocently assuming the role of the prodigal fine gentleman of fashion, he feigns rejoicing in his sensual pleasures with Celestina, and his words take on a meaning and ironic implications of which both he and his wife are innocent. But the bitter irony that Bornwell, a decent and respectable character, should be cuckolded is, as Professor Huebert observes, "a deeply personal affront", one that cannot be easily forgiven the dramatist:

There is a point at which reticence becomes evasion, and Shirley is dangerously close to it; what appears to be simply a technical fault in dramatic construction is also a failure of nerve (Huebert, 1986: 17).

In reaction to her husband's praise of the young widow, she speaks about true beauty as beyond any comparison, and recalls the "glories of a face or body's elegance"

That touches but our sense; when beauty spreads
Over the soul, it calls up understanding
To look what thence is offered, and admire.
(IV.ii.198.201)

And she starts admiring Celestina in a tone of sincerity that puzzles her husband, who soliloquizes on human frailty, and praises the value of those who dare the temptation yet can restrain their desire—a remark that at once recalls the significant distinction between Aretina and Celestina. In praising this happy equilibrium between moderate liberality and restraint acquired by the young widow, Aretina is obviously inwardly absorbed in her ambivalent experience. Thus one basic theme in **The Lady of pleasure** is commending that happy golden mean which only a true-wit like Millamant or Harriet has, or a Celestina who declares that

“a thrift in our rewards will keep/
Men long in their devotion, and preserve/
Our selves in stock, to encourage those that honour us.”

(II.ii.70-2)

It was remarked earlier that Shirley is deeply concerned about the process of repentance undergone by the erring Aretina and, of course—to a lesser degree—about that experienced by Lord Unready in the subplot. Aretina's repentance may seem unconvincing or “pretty perfunctory” (Spencer, 1933: 1134), yet seen in its context and in relation to the basic themes thus discussed, it is, I think, well timed and convincingly motivated:

I throw my own will off
And now in all things obey yours: my nephew
Send back again to th' college, and myself
To what place you'll confine me.

(V.iii. 176-9)

Act V opens with Aretina's husband still in his disguise as a dissipated gentleman of fashion now deeply indulged in gambling. Aretina has been taken in by the ingenious ruse employed by Bornwell:

His miming of her affections and extravagance acts as a comic mirror to show her the flaws in her own life, which she first sees vaguely and then, as his deception continues and bankruptcy threatens, perceives in full degree (Morton, 1966: 241).

Nor is this all that fills Aretina's mind with fear and heart with chagrin; there is still much further humiliation in store. Looking at her at the beginning of Act V, scene ii, Decoy perceives a melancholic countenance, upon which Kickshaw and Frederick, Aretina's nephew, enter. The young scholar, already made—by his aunt's instructions—into a young man of fashion, has grown wild in his drunkenness, “My blood is rampant, too; I must court somebody. As good my aunt as any other body” (V.ii. 20-1). In his most nauseating and bawdy language, while attempting to practise his gallantry upon his aunt, Frederick, too, is a mirror reflecting an ugly and distorted monster.

At this specific moment of Aretina's recognition of the vanity of her own way of life, Kickshaw notices that she looks without a sunshine in her face (V.ii.

87), and then they engage in a dialogue permeated with biting dramatic irony. Curious and anxious to hear from Kickshaw about his last adventure that enriched his revenue, he tells her unwittingly that he bedded with "an old witch, a strange ill-favoured hag" (V.ii. 146). "Twas a she-devil, too, a most insatiate, abominable devil with a tail thus long" (V.ii. 157-8). This most shocking image, drawn of Aretina by Kickshaw, functions as a mirror which reflects how deformed and ugly her inward self has become: "Tis a false glass; sure I am more deformed. What have I done? My soul is miserable" (V.ii. 178-9).

Her final appearance is appropriately that of a submissive penitent in an encounter with her husband, quoted above, at the end of the play:

With the penitent's "Aside": "Already / I feel a cure upon my soul, and promise / My after life to virtue" (V.iii. 92-4), and her bidding Kickshaw to purge his foul blood by repentance, it follows that the Bornwells go back to their proper sphere in the country.

Yet critics may quarrel with Shirley over the lack of retribution for the sinful heroine.⁽⁶⁾ In the light of the foregoing analysis, it will not be far-fetched to say that Aretina has repented her act of infidelity to her husband, whose treatment of her has been much too lenient and indulgent, especially when he gratified her desire to leave the country for life in the town. Again, his trick only succeeded in making her case worse by accelerating her fall from grace. Furthermore, the series of private humiliations, usually more stinging than public ones, to which Aretina has been subjected, and the transformation and repentance she has undergone, clearly show that she has genuinely repented and been reclaimed. It is, indeed, possible that "a dramatist can show a convincing reformation without the external urges of public scorn or poetic justice" (Morton, 1966:241).

It was previously observed that, in the subplot of **The Lady of Pleasure**, involving Celestina and Lord Unready, the latter tries to trespass the boundaries of witty liberality by encroaching upon decency and virtue. Consequently the rebelling lord has to receive, at the hands of fair and witty Celestina, such a lesson that reduces him into a humble penitent. The first confrontation between them in Act V, scene iii, reveals two experts in the art of courtly flattery, not to say flirtation. Celestina showers him with such lavish praise of his great parts and virtues that he becomes conceited, and she may be taken for being easy-going morally—a tendency in her character that encourages him to try her honour in their subsequent encounter, as well as showing her character occasionally as "not entirely consistent" (Schelling, 1949 : 948). She reproaches him for having ignored love that tempts his eye to admire a glorious harvest:

And everywhere, as full blown ears submit
 Their golden heads, the laden trees bow down
 Their willing fruit and court your amorous tasting. (IV.iii. 117-120).

Then she refers to the court and its delights and pleasures in a tone of idolatry, reprimands him for having lost these "with thought of one turned ashes" (IV.iii. 134), and ends her plea with wondering whether he might "have played / The surgeon" with himself (IV.iii. 137-8). Lord Unready, however, is quite ready to prove himself worthy of her admiration:

I could convince your fears with demonstration
That I am man enough, but knew not where
(Until this meeting) beauty dwelt. (IV.iii. 140-2).

From the remainder of their dialogue on this occasion, it appears that Lord Unready had, in a former meeting with Celestina, the intention to affect abstinence from pleasures, so that he might boast of his fortitude on meeting Kickshaw, Seentlove and Littleworth. When these fops, earlier in the play, praised Celestina for her unique beauties, the lord challenged them and desired that he see and speak with her to show his "fortitude," which Sentlove to ironically, but aptly, equates to "frailty" (III.i. 208-9). Although Professor Huebert argues that Shirley is less candid in humiliating his profligates drawn from the nobility or gentry than he is in the case of those drawn from the lower social hierarchy (Huebert, 1986 : 12), Shirley's satirical treatment of Lord Unready is obvious. This may find evidence even in the dramatist's attitude to actual facts about his contemporary way of the world. In his association with the court from 1629-1636,

Shirley became less and less tolerant of the moral laxity, the triviality, and the sometimes humiliating injustice of court life (Morillo, 1971:109).

That Lord Unready's abstinence from playing the libertine with Celestina, in their earlier encounter was, merely affected is certified by his lascivious behaviour when they meet later on. Ironically enough, he laments not having dared the combat and behaving naturalistically at that time:

Celestina. I observed
No such defect in your lordship, but a brave
And noble fortitude.

Lord. A noble folly!
I bring repentance for't. (V.iii. 38-41).

Speaking ironically, the lord repents having not rebelled when they first met. Thus he starts courting her, praises her for one composed of harmony, and then offers to become her lover "In the now court Platonic way" (V.iii. 54). This invitation is followed by an elaborate appeal made to Celestina which, in its classical allusions to the delights of love and its sensual pleasures, may recall Volpone's pleas to Celia in his libidinous attempt upon her chastity.⁽⁷⁾ In spite of Celestina's mocking retort to his "linsey-woolsey" language, appropriate only

to his wanton purpose, he offers to embrace her, and her resistance, "Good my Lord, forbear" (V.iii.104), indicates "that her imagination is not enthralled by his verbosity" (McGrath, 1966 : 329). Unfortunately for Lord Unready, Celestina is essentially more of a steadfast than a naive young lady, and as such he has to restrain himself and be virtuous. She suggests that he sell his glorious coat of arms and get wealth enough for it, which he at once rejects:

Lord. I'll sooner give these arms to th'hangman's axe—
My head, my heart, to twenty executions—
Than sell one atom from my name. (V.iii. 134-6).

Thus she reproaches him for cherishing and protecting the mere "painted honour" of his house:

But that which grows and withers with my soul;
Beside the body's stain, think, think, my Lord,
To what you would unworthily betray me. (V.iii. 141-3).

Having been shown the ugliness and injustice of his desire, he repents and promises to be a servant to her goodness in chaste love hereafter. It is not surprising then, that:

Many suspected that the relationship between the "mistress" and the host or "servants" at her feet was likely to be somewhat less purely spiritual than advertised (Morillo, 1971 : 111).

It is remarkable that in both the main lines of action of **The Lady of Pleasure** the reclamation of the profligate stems from, or is brought about by, the inherent goodness or the chastity of a woman. Aretina's repentance, in the main action, is brought about by her inherent goodness. In the subplot, Lord Unready's repentance and reclamation are made possible both by Celestina's chastity, wit and charming personality, as well as by the lord's own inherent goodness and insight. This tendency injects the play with an obvious aspect of sentimentalism, and shows that it has a serious moral purpose to fulfil. With the possible exception of Thomas Heywood, Professor Reed remarks:

no Elizabethan playwright prior to Shirley indicated a well-considered consciousness of man's inner goodness (Reed, 1955 : 151).

It is significant that man's inner goodness, in general, and woman's virtue, in particular, are themes that recur in Elizabethan and Jacobean literature. In Sonnet 1 of Spenser's **Amoretti**, for instance, the poet recognizes heavenly aspects in his beloved, being "Of Helicon where she derived is" (Abrams, 1979:709), and in Sonnet 15, he sees "Her mind, adorned with vertues manifold" (Abrams, 1979 : 710). The concept receives its most interesting illustration in plays such as Fletcher's **The Faithful Shepherdess** (1607-8) and Beaumont and Fletcher's **Philaster** (1609). In the latter play, Philaster ultimately attains his honour and becomes himself through the great influence

of Arethusa's constant and sincere love, and Euphrasia's virtuous and selfless devotion to him.⁽⁸⁾

In the realistic comedies of Shirley the concept recurs in more significant and elaborate manifestations, not only in **The Lady of Pleasure**, as has been discussed, but in other comedies such as **Hyde Park** (1632). In the latter play the theme of rebellion and repentance receives an equally elaborate treatment in the relationship between Lord Bonville and Julietta that parallels that of Lord Unready and Celestina in **The Lady of Pleasure**. Lord Bonville persists in his attempt to seduce the virtuous young lady who keeps resisting the temptation and reproaching him for his rebellious attempt at her honour—a tendency in him, she warns, that would ultimately bring shame and disgrace upon them both. Julietta's powerful plea of chastity so much awakens the lord's conscience and sense of goodness that he repents his unworthy attempt and becomes himself:

If this be true, what a wretched thing should I
Appear now, if I were any thing but a lord?
I do not like myself.⁽⁹⁾

In Restoration comedy, too, the reclamation of a rake is always brought about by the sincere efforts of a virtuous and witty woman. Through Angelica's chaste and energetic endeavours, for example, dissipated Valentine is reformed, Sir Sampson is punished and ridiculed for his tyranny of nature, and Scandal abandons his cynicism and is converted to faith and belief in woman's goodness, constancy and virtue:

Well, madam, you have done exemplary justice in punishing an
inhuman father, and rewarding a faithful lover; . . . I was an infidel to
your sex, and you have converted me.⁽¹⁰⁾

The fact that Shirley frequently emphasized man's inner goodness and feminine purity in his realistic comedies argues that he strongly believed in these concepts. At the same time, this tendency in his plays points to his commitment to a didactic function of art that must have contributed to making many of his comedies popular at the advent of the Puritan regime in 1642, as well as that of the Restoration age in 1660.

An attempt has been made in this study to show that in constructing his realistic comedy, **The Lady of Pleasure**, Shirley employed a technique according to which rebellion and repentance form the two poles of a stanchion, and in between these the main characters of the play move to and fro in a semi-antiphonal movement. Those of the characters who rebel are inclined to repent, and their repentances are usually private and motivated either by an innate sense of goodness, or by an awakened conscience resulting from didactic pleas of chastity made by virtuous women. Rebellion is always presented as deviation from reason, good nature and decency. In this

technique, two sets of values are placed in contrast, the one against the other: frugality, virtue and the old traditional way of life, on the one hand, and prodigality, libertinism and a dissipated fashionable life on the other. The former has been seen recommended, and the latter derided.

In the meantime, the playwright's stance also ranges between the satirist and the sentimentalist, since rebellion inevitably evokes social or moral satire, while repentance usually elicits a sympathetic, or even a sentimental, response. In either case Shirley is clearly committed to a didactic function of art that must have contributed to his popularity during times which appreciated or looked for a moral thesis.

The main contribution Shirley makes in **The Lady of Pleasure**, is that he could strike a vein of dramatic expression in which he managed to combine what he learned from the great Elizabethan comic dramatists with what he himself observed around him in his contemporary world. These rich, inspiring sources—modified by Shirley's excellent dramatic abilities and his own personal good nature and diligence—made of **The Lady of Pleasure** one of the most delightful plays of the Caroline age.

Notes

¹For the biography of James Shirley (1596-1666) see Arthur Nason, **James Shirley, Dramatist**, (University Heights: New York, Arthur H. Nason Publisher, 1915); and William Gifford and Alexander Dyce, **The Dramatic Works and Poems of James Shirley**, six volumes, vol. 1, (London: John Murray, 1833). It is noteworthy that thirty-three regular dramas by Shirley are printed in the six volumes edited by these editors.

²But **The Lady of Pleasure** seems not to have been among them, apparently because of its satire on courtly people.

³All subsequent references to, or quotations from, the play are made to this edition.

⁴The term "sentimental" is here essentially based on definitions provided by **The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English**, as a) (In art) moving quality resulting from artist's sympathetic insight into what is described or depicted; and b) tendency to be swayed by feeling rather than by reason, emotional weakness, mawkish tenderness or the display of it, nursing of the emotions, etc.

The term, as used in this article, is closely related to the drama of the eighteenth century, denoting an overemphasis on arousing sympathetic response to the misfortunes of others. Sentimental faith is based on the idea that "man is by nature good", and that evil in him is accidental, or a degeneration that comes about because of dire circumstances or the artificial repressions of civilization.

In his dissertation on Goldsmith, J.H. Pitman ascribes the tendency toward sentimentalism to certain philosophical and intellectual forces—particularly those expounded by Descartes, Locke and Hume—which, he argues, paved the way for rational thinking. As man cannot endure pessimism for long, he ignores evil, or considers it slight in comparison to the amount of good. This type of "deism", Pitman remarks, gave rise to the literary phenomenon of sentimentalism which "Saved the eighteenth century from the wave of materialistic skepticism that swept the nineteenth." (James Hall Pitman, **Goldsmith's Animated Nature, A Study of Goldsmith** [New Haven: Yale University, 1924], pp. 98-99).

The most remarkable example of this sentimental trend in drama can be found in Sir Richard Steele's **The Conscious Lovers** (1722). Hugh Kelley's **False Delicacy** (1768) marks a later development of the genre. Since this type of sentimental, or lachrymose, comedy seeks to exhibit the virtues of private life rather than to expose the faults of mankind, it is illegitimate and uninspiring.

That late in the eighteenth century Goldsmith and Sheridan opposed this genre of sentimental comedy is a commonplace of criticism. In their plays generally, and in **She Stoops to Conquer** (1773) and **The School For Scandal** (1777) in particular, they assume a "satirical" stance to sentimentalism.

Satire, as used here as well as in this study, is mainly based on the dictionary definition of **The Concise Oxford Dictionary**, as: "use of ridicule, irony, sarcasm, etc., in speech or writing for the ostensible purpose of exposing and discouraging vice or folly." In this sense, and with the foregoing brief discussion of "sentimentalism" in mind, when a dramatist like Sheridan, in the above-mentioned comedy, exposes the hypocrisy of a character like Joseph Surface, the "man of sentiment" who mouths moral and pious maxims while he designs for his brother's ruin, this can be said to be "satire." In this case "comical satire" results from modifying satire by means of irony, wit, or humour—when the designs of the unsympathetic characters only serve as traps for them. A good example of "comical satire" is Ben Jonson's **Volpone** (1606) where Volpone derides Corbaccio and other birds of prey for their covetousness, while he himself is deeply vulnerable to the vice, and hence more deeply involved in, and exposed to, satire. In this case, he is the satirist satirized!

Conversely, when Shirley endeavours to convince his audience that Aretina has repented her act of adultery in **The Lady of Pleasure**, overlooking or ignoring some serious related problems, he can be said to be more of a sentimentalist than a satirist.

⁵Professor Huebert refers to Lord A, who is not given a name by the dramatist, as Lord Unready, which actually has the advantage of avoiding verbal confusion with any other personages in the play, terrestrial or celestial. See Huebert, p.103.

⁶See, for instance, A.S. Knowland, ed., **Six Caroline Plays** (London: O.U.P., **The World's Classics** 583, 1962); and Hoselton Spencer, *op.cit.*

⁷Even Lord Unready's warning, "You need not fly out of this circle, madam" (V.iii. 106) suggests Celia's relentless chase by the fox in Jonson's play.

⁸Beaumont and Fletcher, **Philaster** (London: Edward Arnold, 1975).

⁹James Shirley, **Hyde Park** (Stratford-upon-Avon: Methuen, 1987), p.40.

¹⁰William Congreve, **Love For Love** (London: Ernest Benn, 1969), p.127.

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