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Bacchus in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Wine as an Index of Generic Decline

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13. Bacchus in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Wine as an Index of Generic Decline

Literary histories record the decline of drama between 1660 and 1800, linking it to the rise of the novel, the cult of sensibility, and middle-class concern for reform. This essay considers the decline from the intriguing viewpoint of allusions to French wine. Although consumption of French wine itself declined markedly after the 1670s, dramatic references to claret, burgundy and champagne do not: such allusions commonly occur in plays throughout the period. If they suggest that French wine remained more popular than historians of the wine trade allow, these allusions also shed light on literary history because, to the extent that they praise or disparage wine for expressive and structural reasons, they convey much about social and literary ideology.[1]

Restoration and eighteenth-century plays endorse the ritual properties of wine rarely. But this is less important to literary history than the fact that the expressive and structural scope of wine imagery becomes more restricted in the period. While Restoration comedies often associate wine and literary wit, they sometimes also disjoin them. This separation was exacerbated during the eighteenth century. If, in the early plays, witty characters celebrate wine but affectedly witty ones belittle it, witty characters also occasionally disclaim it. Whereas this disavowal often realizes dramatic and moral values, later plays tend to undermine their dramatic and satiric power by preaching against drunkenness or by disparaging wine. The social prejudices of the later plays are more restrictive because in them connoisseurship is limited to effete aristocrats and greedy servants. In the earlier plays, the social backgrounds of those who celebrate wine are more various and the satire is more inventive and less doctrinaire. As the period unfolds, dramatic satire is concerned less with embodying the golden mean than with condemning French culture, less with refining manners than with promoting patriotism. If, in earlier plays, wine is central to debates about sex and values, in later ones it is marginalized since the moral conflicts arising from the pleasures and dangers of wine are avoided rather than confronted.

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Before surveying wine imagery in the plays, it might be useful to outline how wine serves as a sign of social ideology and an index of cultural meaning. For a start, it belongs to a social and economic code. To Garrick's Wilson, in *A Peep Behind the Curtain* (1767), drinking claret is what a landed gentleman with a seat in parliament does (II, 72). This code is upheld amusingly by the central character in Farquhar's *Sir Harry Wildair* (1701) who, set upon by a gang intent on getting him drunk, insists on the gentlemanly privilege of being stifled with claret rather than with brandy like a bawd (I, 192). Wine as a social and economic code clearly involves sexual attitudes. Thus, Worthy, in Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* (1706), says that he has reserved 'the Maidenhead' of a 'fresh Pipe of choice *Barcelona*' for Captain Plume's piercing (II, 51), implying the view that men may enjoy women violently and unhampered by marital bonds: women are to be consumed like wine. Hazzard, the rake in Shadwell's *The Miser* (1672), evidences this sexual consumption of females when he says of a young woman that she looks as if she would melt 'like an Anchove in Claret' (II, 22). Truly dramatic plays allow female characters to question the wine code and its involvement of social, economic and sexual attitudes. Hence, Victoria in Otway's *Friendship in Fashion* (1678) exposes the mechanical ideas about love-making which obsess men who allow themselves to be overcome by 'powerful Champaign' (I, 354), and Oriana in Farquhar's *The Inconstant* (1702) satirizes men who, intoxicated by claret, presume to judge women but, in toasting their healths, destroy their reputations (I, 227).

Wycherley's dramatic treatment of wine is morally effective because he does not tolerate hypocritical or affected reactions against it. In *Love in a Wood* (1672), the socially pretentious Dapperwit disparages burgundy only to expose his witless affectations (17), alderman Gripe, refusing to treat his whores to their customary Rhenish by falsely alleging that it is poisoned with arsenic, betrays how much his lechery involves avarice (62), and Lady Flippant's sexual hypocrisy, like that of the town ladies in *The Country Wife* (1675), is conveyed by ambivalence to wine: she blames it for disabling lovers, yet laments that no burgundy drinkers accost her (31 & 97).[2] In their inconsistencies about wine, Wycherley's characters dramatize its meanings as a code. In *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* (1673), after Monsieur de Paris snobbishly belittles Don Diego's family by linking it to the wine trade (215), he self-indulgently complains that prostitutes are becoming too expensive because they demand fine wines in French restaurants (223): in so complaining, he reveals less about whores and wine than about the social attitudes by which they are consumed. Wycherley shows how wine works as a social code by having his characters praise it hypocrit-

ically: in *The Country Wife,* Horner lauds it in order to conceal his lechery from his friends (240) and Sparkish uses it to bolster his anti-social and anti-literary egotism: he takes his own wine to the country when a guest there, just as he entertains himself with his own wit at the theatre (273). While Harcourt is accused of hating marriage as much as bad wine and of putting up with fools as long as they buy him wine (254 & 271), wine does not so compromise him. In fact, he rejects the libertine code which equates wine and women: 'Wine and women, good apart are together as nauseous as sack and sugar' (272). Since sack and sugar are signs of brothel rituals, his disavowal implies sexual scruples. Wycherley gives moral weight to his heroes by enabling them to see through hypocrisy about wine. Thus, Manly in *The Plain-Dealer* (1677) laudibly spurns a usurious alderman who makes his guests drunk on the lees of sack in order to save money by deadening their appetite for food while concealing his avarice under the guise of spirituality (432).

To the extent that it is a code with positive and negative social aspects, wine allows dramatists to discriminate between critical awareness and moral stupidity. Thus, Etherege differentiates between townsmen and country knights. In *The Comical Revenge* (1664), Sir Frederick unthinkingly and stupidly takes wine to be a sign for sexual transactions (24), and the unself-conscious Sir Nicholas who vainly hopes to ravish his woman and outdrink a professional gambler is rendered an impotent and raving dupe by two quarts of wine (34-39). The same contrast between countrymen and townsmen obtains in *She Would If She Could* (1668), where, while Freeman and Courtall shrewdly enjoy the power of burgundy, Sir Oliver and Sir Jolly, who gleefully equate good wine with fine whores, get drunk and impotent (189). Etherege similarly exposes Sir Fopling in *The Man of Mode* (1676). When the knight sings a 'new bachique' celebrating champagne's efficacy in restoring virility, he is inanely conventional about sex and social life (298). Besides satirizing modishness through wine imagery, Etherege makes wine references serve dramatic irony. While Dorimant claims that nature has 'stummed' Sir Fopling's brain, filling it with 'sophisticated' dullness which the 'tasteless multitude' takes for true wit (270), Harriet is able to manipulate Dorimant to where she can say that he is 'made up of forms and commonplaces, sucked out of the remaining lees of the last age' (296).[3]

To playwrights less witty than Wycherley and Etherege, wine also embodies social meaning. Shadwell often documents and undermines the codes relating to wine. In *The Sullen Lovers* (1668), besides recording how urban gentry define themselves by eating a-la-mode and drinking champagne (I, 38), he satirizes a rural gentleman who hypocritically

spurns as a marriage partner a woman who wants a 'Sellar full of Champaign, Chablee, Burgundy' (88). Although, like other country gentry, he enjoys extravagant wine as a sexual rite in London brothels, he will not tolerate wine as a mark of domestic refinement. Shadwell often bases social conflict on the hypocritical consumption and devaluation of wine. *The Humorists* (1671) insists on the gap between the citizen who devalues and the townsman who appreciates wine. Whereas Crazy holds that wine destroys health in order to conceal the diseases caused by his sexual indulgence, Raymund champions burgundy's healthiness, promoting wine as a social bond and inspirer of humane and divine thoughts (I, 195-96). Regarding wine as an instrument of reform, Raymund, the manly hero, despises those who drink claret simply for the conventional reason of increasing virility. The way men debase themselves by using wine as a brothel rite is exposed when Friske and Striker, two rival strumpets, report how their customers compete to drink wine in which the whores have washed (226). Shadwell oftens turns brothel rites against the men who practice them. In *The Miser* (1672), Timothy, Squire Squeezum's son, reveals that he is familiar with brothels when he courts his intended: he asks Theodora to send for sack from a tavern where she has credit, announcing that he carries sugar with him since innkeepers charge too much (II, 36): he insults Theodora by asking her to perform the rake's part. By satirizing the combination of avarice and lechery in country gentry, Shadwell accepts that the code of wine supports character typology. Timothy swallows the gamblers' slogans about claret making a drunk as great as a king (54). Yet, champagne so overpowers him on his wedding day that he is unconscious during the ceremony. In contrast, Theodore the hero, far from being susceptible to burgundy or whores, uses luxurious wines to provoke his father to display his avarice and the unfeeling lechery with which he tries to attach Theodore's lover (69).[4] The social purposes of Shadwell's excusing and blaming the use of wine are similar in *Epsom-Wells* (1673) where he gently reforms town wits who espouse 'lusty *Burgundy*' as a generous discipline but treats Clodpate, a rural justice who hates London wine because it is too expensive, much more roughly.[5] The wits praise drunkenness and debauchery until they meet two women who make them recant, but Clodpate is destroyed by irony. After criticizing 'foolish *French* kickshaw Claret' (II, 150), he gets drunk on ale and sings a song comparing his mistress's lips to two brimmers of claret, her breasts to two bottles of white wine, and her eyes to two cups of canary (152). Shadwell uses wine imagery as a code for saying town wits are more reformable than country gentlemen.

Satirizing the conspicuous consumption of wine by country knights, Shadwell wins fresh dramatic and moral perspectives. In *The Woman-*

Captain (1680), Sir Humphrey Scattergood's inheritance of an estate allows him to fill his cellars with the choicest wines (IV, 23). The 'very good *Langoon* and *Burdeaux*' which satisfied his father Sir Humphrey judges to be fit only for menials. His wines must be more exotic: '*Vin d'aye*, high Country Wine, *Frontiniac*; all the delicious Wines of *Italy* and *Spain*; the richer wines of *Greece* and *Sicily*.' He also orders '*Celery*, *Champaign* and *Burgundy*, with *Vin de Bon*, *Vin Celestine*, and *Hermitage*, and all the Wines upon the fruitful *Rhine*.' His luxury is further signalled by his dressing the wine steward up like the 'God *Bacchus*' and having him squeeze 'twined Wreaths of Grapes' so that his guests and he can bathe in floods of 'Poetick Juyce.' Revealingly, he gives his overworked bawd mere sack (24). His luxury inspires him to rape the wife of Gripe, the jealous financier who gladly supports Sir Humphrey's luxury but hypocritically eschews wine. While Sir Humphrey uses wine for sexual goals and Gripe values it only financially, Mrs. Gripe displays heroic resolution which raises her above both pro- and anti-wine attitudes (64). Associating libertine and capitalistic views with anti-feminism, Shadwell lets women overturn the wine code. Only when his estate is about to collapse does Sir Humphrey consider reforming: he wants just so much wine as to have an appepite for a woman and just so much woman as to have an appetite for wine (70). Such indulgent moderation has no effect on his companions who hold that only fools are merry without wine and who praise wine because it makes the thoughtful man as merry as the coxcomb. Ironically, Sir Humphrey's estate is preserved by his whore.

The Woman-Captain was influential, as Colley Cibber's early play, *Love's Last Shift* (1695) shows, for the latter develops female criticism not just of the code of gentility but of its underlying sexual fantasy by having a genteel man who opposes marriage and believes himself a widower, fall for his own wife, thinking her a whore. Typically decadent, he pawns his estate to buy old wines to help him better enjoy young whores (I, 24). In seducing him with strong wines and showing how automatically he connects wine and amorous courage, his wife controls him completely and raises profound questions about libertinism and the attractiveness of illicit love. Her mental independence, even as she acts the part of a whore, is signalled by her refusal to stoop to brothel ritual; she drinks, she declares, out of nobody's glass but her own (73).

Shadwell's use of wine imagery is not always as inventive and progressive as in *The Woman-Captain*: sometimes his imagery accepts conventional sexual morality, sometimes it simply preaches against it. In *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), Sir Edward, Belfond Junior's adopted father, tolerates young men's vinous excesses on the grounds that the

nation is a drinking one and that it is better to be drunk on wine than phlegmatic (IV, 220). His indulgence turns his foster son into a gentleman. Yet, Belfond Senior's father, Sir William, who denounces drinking, ends up with a riotous son who equates wine with sexual foreplay (243). One may well ask, if preaching furthers the code it seeks to destroy, does toleration of the code lead to reform? This doubt seems to be answered in *The Scowrers* (1691) where Sir Willian Rant's riotous drunkenness and resistance to moderate kinds of reform makes denunciation inevitable. Sir William ignores the advice of Tope, his drinking companion, to take only fine claret with food instead of the 'Spirit of Clary' on an empty stomach (V, 91) and evades the stipulations of his intended to drink no more than three glasses and to do so only with meals if he wants to court her (107). Sir William is so unresponsive, his father has to denounce him as a physical, social and moral ruin, as a man who has turned himself into a claret strainer (138).

That the earlier plays tend to dramatize the irrelevance of preaching about wine is confirmed by Otway's *The Atheist* (1684). In this play, Beaugard's father, a frustrated and ludicrous connoisseur who rapturizes about 'smart Racy Canary' as 'it Glorifies through the Glass' with 'the Nits' dancing about 'in't like Attoms in the Sun-Shine' (II, 303), preaches against his son's drinking merely from a sense of jealousy. He dislikes drinking 'paltry Sack' and old hock in comparison to his son's champagne and claret. Once quieted with a cup of 'pretty claret' and a daily allowance of three bottles of sack, he is glad not to say anything against the way his son fortifies himself with '*Burdeaux*' in order to plunder women (335).

Vanbrugh's plays are remarkable for expressing pessimism about reform and conveying a sense of the increasing hypocrisy entailed by wine. In *The Relapse* (1696), Sir Tunbelly, on giving his daughter to Lord Foppington, pledges to get drunk in thanksgiving 'like a good Christian at *Christmas*' (I, 78), Bull, Tunbelly's chaplain, advises Miss Hoyden that marrying two men is as acceptable as getting drunk 'by way of Physick' (78), and Coupler and Young Fashion plan to control Bull by catering to his 'Carnal Desires' and by giving him 'Sack and Sugar,... and a Plump Sister' (81). More bitter is the fact that Loveless, the reformed rake who criticizes his former friends for worshipping Bacchus like 'Beasts' and 'wild Enthusiasts' and who pledges not to touch 'one Reverend Glass to his Divinity' (22), should relapse and ravish Berinthia. Reform in *The Provok'd Wife* (1697) seems possible through the agency of Bellinda who sets out to rival Heartfree's bottle and to conquer 'this Son of *Bacchus*' (I, 151), but her insistence that men should drink only when they are dry is no dramatic answer to Heartfree's conventional reliance on his bottle as an antidote to love. Moreover, in

Sir John Brute Vanbrugh sees no hope of reform. Sir John prefers wine to his wife, but hates marriage so much that if he 'were married to a Hogshead of Claret, Matrimony would make [him] hate it' (130). His companion, Lord Rake, goads Sir John into drinking wine excessively by way of subverting the state, the penal system and religion. While Sir John pretends to acquit his wife out of love after learning of her intrigue, he does so out of cowardice. His unrepentant addiction to wine suggests that the only answer to his sexual code may be divorce.

Although Farquhar's wine imagery exposes social and sexual mores bitterly, he sometimes gives his images a witty topicality which reduces their analytical power. When, in *Love and a Bottle* (1698), Lovewell maintains that 'Our Women are worse than our Wine' because, whereas 'Claret' contains little French wine, women are adulterated with the devil, and Roebuck counters by declaring that women and wine make him equally merry and that after sex he is 'like a Bumper of Claret, smiling and sparkling' (I, 25), the issues underlying their opposed stances remain unexamined. If social implications seem to arise when Mockmode, the would-be beau who equates wit with the smashing of champagne glasses, is contrasted with his servant who keenly appreciates the way champagne 'puns and quibbles in the Glass' (31), topicality overwhelms them. Thus, Roebuck's drinking song, which proposes that France will capitulate only when her claret is exhausted and that he who does not help exhaust it delays peace, does not have its absurd political and military code challenged. Likewise, allusions to the political embargo on French wine frame the action of *The Constant Couple* (1699). At the start, Smuggler, a merchant, indicted for importing French as Portuguese wine, complains that customs inspectors are more of a hindrance to French wines than French war-time privateers (I, 94). His secret agreement with a 'Correspondent at *Bordeaux*' to transport French wine in Spanish casks is finally exposed in order to undermine his influence on the plot rather than to question the political and personal abuse of wine (151). Sir Harry Wildair emblematizes personal abuse: typically, he holds that 'brisk *Burgundy*' will help him sexually assault a woman and excuse him if he fails (131). Not only is his courtship of Angelica inept because he tells her that fifteen successive bumpers of burgundy have confused his head and filled his heart with cupids but also he is gratified with his rhetoric. Inspired by 'victorious Burgundy' to buy her footmen and her, his sense of self is unchallenged: 'I Gad this Burgundy makes a Man speak like an Angel' (141), he declares. His materialist, sexist code is not undermined by the wine imagery.

After the turn of the century, wine imagery as a comic device which analyzes drinking and reforms social attitudes is gradually marginalized.

This is even true of *The Way of the World* (1700). Congreve may laugh at Witwoud's view that 'friendship without freedom is as dull as love without enjoyment, or wine without toasting' (164), and he may make Lady Wishfort's impulse to marry a drawer in order to have Mirabell's wine poisoned amusing (180). Yet Sir Wilful, the drunken country knight, is less questioned than casually dismissed by the action. He jokes about the sun being a red-faced drunkard because Apollo has a cellar in the antipodes and he rejects being called an infidel Turk since Mahometans do not believe in the grape and orthodox is a Greek word for claret (201). But his humour is not treated reflexively, nor are the contradictions between his lechery and sexual incompetence or between his social pretensions and unmannerliness given proper satiric value.

There are ideological reasons for the marginalization of wine imagery. In comedies written after the century's turn, abuse of wine is attributed more often to town wits and aristocrats than to citizens and the gentry. So, too, the imagery often opposes wits and aristocrats. The trend is evident in Mrs. Centlivre's plays. In *The Beau's Duel* (1702), Toper, as his name suggests, makes drinking a profession because wine displaces his need for a wife, letting him use whores to ease his passion (I, 70). His typical association of wine and sex is criticized, but his love for champagne, which prompts him to toady to the aristocracy, is not. That Toper finds more charms in champagne than in music, admiring 'no Music like Wine rattling in the Throat of a Flask, with a Chorus of Drawers' (77), is a simple contrast to the modish decadence of Sir William who reveals poor discrimination in his wine dealings. Sir William serves champagne at his levees but is above admiring it. When ordering wine, he criticizes some Hermitage for not tasting as brisk as the previous vintage, yet, on the merchant's mere assertion that there is none better in London, he orders four dozen bottles, along with four dozen each of champagne and burgundy (90). While his shallow interest in wine emphasizes Sir William's social affectation, Toper's antifeminist attitudes to wine are not challenged on their own terms. What Centlivre's plays suggest is a divergence between wine imagery used for topical analysis and sentimental characterization. In *A Gotham Election* (1715), she shows how wine corrupts the political process. Tickup, a candidate, orders wine for his constituents from the local inn at the same time as disavowing bribery. But the topicality of the satire and Tickup's transparency prevent Centlivre from carrying her social criticism far. On the other hand, Bevil, the drunken lover in *The Platonick Lady* (1706), is heroic merely by contrast to the world of bawds and rakes. Unhappy in his love for Lucinda, he takes his servant's advice that he drink a bottle of burgundy to arm himself to court his new mistress, Mrs. Dowdy. Typically, he also uses champagne to wash

Lucinda from his thoughts and to drown his love (II, 234). Drunkenly he sings the cherry-brandy-drinking Mrs. Dowdy a song about worshipping Bacchus until his mistress becomes kinder (237). In fact, his drunkenness betokens fidelity to Lucinda and inability to court Mrs. Dowdy; it is a sign that, lacking courtly powers, he has a true heart. However, the sentimental presentation of him leaves his sexist attitudes unchallenged.

In his treatment of wine codes, Fielding attempts to reconcile topical and sentimental concerns. He is particularly inventive with the professional drinker, Sotmore, in *Rape upon Rape* (1730). Sotmore exposes legal corruption and sexual aspects of drinking. At first, his feelings for wine make him anti-feminist. Complaining that whores rob him of drinking companions, he would give the world for a hogshead of claret rather than for love. As a worshipper of Bacchus, he rejects the view that wine is a sexual stimulant. His friends may argue that whores and burgundy are mutually refreshing, but he finds it preferable to enjoy violating women in his drunken imagination (853). After his friends, Ramble and Constant, have rapes sworn against them, he changes his views under the influence of Hilaret, the heroine, who, in drinking with him, shatters his image of women. He even prefers her company to burgundy (863). As a result, he helps her expose Justice Squeezum, who uses his judicial power to find out how young women have been ruined in order to incite himself to enjoy them sexually. Squeezum treats young women to pints of mountain in taverns in the avaricious, lecherous tradition. Although Sotmore continues to drink excessively, Fielding, somewhat sentimentally, suggests that he is an honest fellow. If reform of drunkenness is less important to Fielding than that of moral attitudes, the sentimentalism of Sotmore's characterization is offset by the way he turns against his former sexual views.

In comedies of the middle and later years of the century, wine imagery is obviously marginalized and narrowed in scope. For instance, Garrick refers to wine almost entirely to censure aristocratic decadence. Hence, in *Lethe* (1740), Lord Chalkstone ignores the harm habitual indulgence in wine does him. He will not 'abstain from French wines' to save his life, needing them to kill time (I, 28-31)! In *The Male-Coquette* (1757), Chalkstone's nephew, Daffodil, is too refined to ruin women: he trifles rather than makes love, just as he daintily sips rather than drinks tokay (I, 152-53). In *Bon Ton* (1775), Lord Minikin's headache prompts his feeling that he 'must absolutely change' his wine-merchant since one taste of poor champagne makes him ill for a week (II, 264). Minikin, like Daffodil an effete philanderer, does not think to give up champagne. In *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766), the target remains

aristocratic decadence, although most wine images are voiced by a servant and a businessman. Brush, Lord Ogelby's valet, who keeps trying to seduce the chambermaid, excuses his grossness by pretending that the port served him is too strong for a 'claret-drinker' (I, 321). An appendage of his master, Brush is a sign that sexual rationalization, like indulgence in French wine, spreads down the social scale. Even the money-grubbing Sterling who hates aristocrats, still has to outdo them in conspicuous consumption. That such a wretched burgher feels compelled to serve aristocratic guests champagne better than that enjoyed by dukes is a sign of the corrupting influence of the noble order (271).

While, like Garrick, he makes French wine a sign of aristocratic decadence, Foote also relates it to patriotism. In *The Englishman Returned from Paris* (1756), he presents a baronet so affected by Parisian culture that he prefers French *chansons à boire* and pleasures of the table to the cold formality of English meals from which, he derisively claims, the lady departs 'drenched with a bumper,' as the husband treats male guests to port and politics (I, 20-21). In fact, the play denounces French manners sarcastically and champions British political rights uncritically. Foote is not so doctrinaire in *The Knights* (1754). Objecting to the English habit of equating wealth and virtue, Hartop insists that the English copy French concern for birth and character rather than French fashions. He claims the English aggravate French decadence by esteeming a man only if he can afford to drink French wine (I, 9). Foote's contempt for French wine serving as a status symbol is amusingly conveyed by the character of Mrs. Cole, the old bawd in *The Minor* (1760). When a whore, she drank burgundy with her clients. But, since she has become a reborn Christian, she will not touch French wine, although she buys burgundy for her girls and enjoys old hock and strong liquours (I, 30). Mrs. Cole's sexual and religious hypocrisy is treated so indulgently that her questionable antipathy to French wine is a positive sign of her cultural nationalism.

Wine imagery in the plays of Goldsmith and Sheridan also reveals that satire of the drinking code is restricted by sentimental and nationalistic ideas. In *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), Tony is the vulgar drunkard who equates drinking and genius and who enjoys sex frankly. Yet, because he is good-natured and instrumental to the plot, the play does not consider his drinking a matter for reform. Even though Marlow's sensibility is the object of the plot, his drinking attitudes are not probed. He enjoys Hardcastle's claret-cup, but disclaims being a serious drinker. Hence, he sends his servants to drain Hardcastle's cellar. While Marlow is too superior and concerned with French manners to like drinking, his belief in the double standard and use of wine imagery to seduce

Kate prove that he conventionally embodies the drinking code. While she evades his imagery, Kate is more interested in winning Marlow for a husband than analyzing the social causes of his faults. When he asks to taste the nectar of her lips, she pretends that nectar must be a French wine. In reply to his insistence that the nectar he wants is of true English growth, she claims that it is strange she has not heard of it since they brew all sorts of wine in the inn (40). The gentle satire on country inns with its implicit nationalism indicates that the play avoids analyzing the code of drinking.

The irrelevance of reforming the drinking code is an important aspect of Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777). Charles Surface, an extravagant imbiber, satirizes society through wine images: he maintains his contemporaries are degenerate because they do not drink. In their luxury, they abstain from wit and wine: there is no 'social spirit of raillery ... to mantle over a glass of bright Burgundy.' Contemporary conversation, he says, is like spa-water; it has the pertness and flatulence of champagne without its spirit or flavour (305). At the same time as implying that wine heightens his moral awareness, Charles cavalierly and conventionally asserts that he takes champagne to deaden his sense of gambling losses and to discover which of his mistresses he loves. He partly excuses his indulgence in burgundy on the grounds that it neither corrupts nor improves a man's character but simply reveals it. Sir Oliver, who very much both likes 'good wine' and dislikes prudence in young men, ignores Charles's drinking excesses on account of the latter's sentimental bond with his uncle. This bond makes reform of the drinking code irrelevant, even though it is a questionable aspect of their bond.

Wine imagery abounds in Hannah Cowley's plays, but is even less satirical than in Goldsmith and Sheridan. Her titles reveal that she was more intent on imitating earlier plays than on scrutinizing contemporary manners.[6] When, in *A Bold Stroke for a Husband* (1784), she imitates Shadwell and Cibber by having a husband unknowingly reveal his addiction to debauchery and burgundy to his wife, the satirical effect is weak: nothing unsettles the code which declares that a 'woman without prattle, is like Burgundy without spirit' (I, 3). In *The Belle's Stratagem* (1782), the satire on sexual ethics does not go far, for when Letitia disguises herself to distract Doricourt, her reluctant lover, from his bottle, the debt to Goldsmith overrides satirical implication. The ritualistic use of wine at the end of the play does imply reform: Letitia's father orders every drop of his 'forty-eight' to be drunk by the parish in celebration of her marriage, keeping a dozen bottles back for the eventual christening (I, 82).[7] But, if this wine imagery displaces the rakes' use of wine, it does so in too gentle a manner. When Cowley

gives her wine imagery satirical bite, it singles out aristocratic vices. Thus, Tippy, an impersonator of an aristocrat in *The Town Before You* (1795), gets invited to the best dining parlours and wine cellars, because he has learned to be a connoisseur of art and wine: besides knowing what grapes go into what wines, he knows how to pass judgment on tokay and old hock (II, 22). Tippy's function is to show that aristocracy is a mirage because its manners can be so easily imitated.

Negative images of aristocratic drinkers and sentimental images of middle-class ones abound in Holcroft's plays. Hence, in *Seduction* (1787), he makes Sir Frederick Fashion out to be a monster who prides himself on seducing women and injuring their fathers and husbands. To Sir Frederic, merely enjoying a wife is 'A turtle feast without French wines' (I, 26). It is wine to him when he can make a prospective father-in-law 'foam and bounce like a cork from a bottle of champagne' with desperate anger (33). Yet this monster turns out to be totally ineffective: his evil is casually dismissed by the plot rather than seen as a serious social problem. On the other hand, Harry Dornton in *The Road to Ruin* (1792), is a good-natured gambler who is willing to marry a rich widow to restore the fortunes of his father. He drinks 'three bottles of Burgundy' to put himself in the proper amorous frenzy to court the widow but wins her by acknowledging his drinking (I, 65). Containing his sense of self-sacrifice, he rescues a friend from prison, sensitively encouraging him with champagne (75). His drinking, then, is virtuous both when excessive and when moderate. That this play is merely derivative of Centlivre's *The Platonick Lady* partly explains why its sentimental presentation of wine prevents it from contributing to generic and satiric renewal. The undramatic and social fantasy towards which eighteenth-century comedy moves is evident in Holcroft's *The Man of Ten Thousand* (1796) where a whimsical, unworldly character, Hairbrain, who knows nothing about business and is made to to feel inferior by his aristocratic friend, Dorington, wins a lottery which he gives to the aristocrat to enable him to restore his fortune by marriage. Dorington's superciliousness is undermined by his material dependence on Hairbrain and by Hairbrain's more spontaneous and sensitive appreciation of the aristocrat's burgundy.

If Restoration and eighteenth-century comedies variously recognize wine to be a code which reflects economic, social, sexual and literary values, they also appropriate this code, with different degrees of self-consciousness, to discriminate between their characters for social and ideological purposes. The greater self-consciousness with which the early plays adopt the social code of wine means that it becomes more thoroughly part of the literary code of comedy. In other words, as well as being a referential and satirical device, the wine code is in Restoration

plays a means of heightening and fusing comic, generic and moral consciousness. Instead of explicitly dealing with reform, the earlier comedies make wine references structurally and implicitly powerful. By so addressing and reforming the wine code, they also implicitly defend and sustain the reformative value of literary awareness. Later plays tend not to relate the wine code to generic self-consciousness. They seem merely to assume an unquestionable relation between social and dramatic codes. Moreover, whereas the early plays use the wine code to satirize a wide range of social classes and especially give female characters dramatic opportunities to react against conventional aspects of the wine code, later plays satirize a much smaller social range in more dogmatic ways, at the same time reducing female characters' dramatic and critical scope. This is to say that in the later plays, wine imagery loses its analytical and generic power. By relying on unexamined social ideology and on either a moralistic or sentimental doctrine of reform, the later comedies strip the wine code of referential and reflexive force. This essay supports literary history's view that drama declines in the eighteenth century on the somewhat unusual grounds that the comedies gradually stop confronting wine as a social code and cease incorporating it for generic purposes. A survey of wine imagery in Restoration and eighteenth-century comedies freshly confirms that the drama does not renew itself to the extent that it fails to treat the wine code seriously as both a social fact and a generic property.

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Notes

1 According to the plays of the period, claret remained popular and available, despite political embargoes and restricted supply. Scoredouble, the innkeeper in Mrs. Centlivre's *A Gotham Election* (1715) reports that, while he does a small trade in port which the poorer sort drink, his business relies on claret which the gentry insist upon (III, 158). The availability of claret to dedicated drinkers is suggested in Samuel Foote's *The Maid of Bath* (1771) by a reference to a 'claret-club' that meets during the season in the Bear Inn at Bath (II, 7). For background information about the drama, the wine trade and social history, this essay is indebted to the following studies: Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760* (New Haven, 1981); A.D. Francis, *The Wine Trade* (London, 1972); and W. A. Speck, *Society and Literature in England 1700-60* (Dublin, 1983).

2 Although corrupt innkeepers and vintners do appear in plays of the period (see note five), Restoration plays tend to emphasize ulterior motives in detractors of wine. Goldingham, in Shadwell's *The Miser* (1672), is, like Gripe, an avaricious and mean-spirited Londoner. Goldingham pretends that he cannot treat Squire Squeezum to sack since the vintners put 'Horse-flesh, dead Dogs, mens bones, Molossus, Lime, Brimstone, Stumme, Allom, Sloes, and Arsnick into their Wine' (II, 35). That he buys the squire ale is a sign of avaricious rationalization. In *The Country Wife*, the town ladies claim that men abandon them for drink. But they themselves celebrate the juice of the grape in song and fact (328). Indeed, they urge Horner to drink so they can use him sexually.

3 As regards reform and drinking, Etherege is a realist. Hence, when Dorimant enthusiastically promises that he will renounce wine and other women for Harriet (322), she counteracts his raptures by telling him she wants him devout, not fanatic!

4 It is a common motif in Restoration plays that women who are thrifty and do not drink wine become the objects of avaricious lechers who not only want to keep them as sexual slaves but also gloat at the prospect of not having to share wine with them.

5 In this play, Shadwell's wine images also reveal much about social prejudice. He sneers at citizens who take the waters in order to overcome the effects of claret, also laughing at them for not knowing better than to drink 'stum'd wine' (II, 187 & 113). In *Bury-Fair* (1689), country inns are condemned for serving poisoned or 'damn'd Wine.' Yet, if London supplies the best wine, it is also seen as a drunken bedlam (IV, 336). The corruption of innkeepers is reflected in the figure of Bonniface in *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1706). In addition to sponsoring thieves and highwaymen, he is in the habit of passing off his ale as burgundy and charging highly for it (ii, 126). He speaks with comic affectation about spleen caused by stagnating wages. Sackbut, the vintner in Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718), encourages a friend to be deceitful by insisting that he himself has had the assurance to pass off 'White-wine dash'd with Sack for Mountain and Sherry' (III, 225). That prejudice about drinking remains an important dramatic motif throughout the century is evident in Cowley's *Which is the Man* (1783) where Lord Sparkle despises country people partly because he has to drink their vile port. However, that Belville enjoys burgundy in town and milk in the country is a sign that aristocratic prejudices against the country are once again under attack (I, 2-5).

6 She names her plays after Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem* and Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*.

7 If this reference to Mr. Hardy's 'Forty Eight' is to port, as seems most likely, it is a further sign of the social and nationalistic bias of the play, given the fact that port is commonly associated with rural conservatives.

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