

# The Binary Road of George Farquhar in *The Beaux' Stratagem*

Adil M. Jamil

Department of English, Mazaya University College, Dhi Qar, Iraq

**Abstract**—*The Beaux' Stratagem* is a phenomenal play in all measures. Since its first performance on stage in 1707, it has proved that its magnetic appeal to audiences of different periods has never lost its charm. It ever continues providing gusts of laughter and a profound debate of everlasting sensitive issues on stage. This study endeavors to unravel the factors behind its magnetic appeal, at the same to shed light upon the comic devices standing behind its unprecedented success. *The Beaux' Stratagem* was written at a time when the early attraction of wit, risqué language, rakish behavior of gallants, and exposure of female frailties have been worn out and lost their magnitude. At the dawn of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the theater-goers were fed up with the Comedy of Manners, Farce, and Intrigues, and looking for something different. More possibly, Farquhar made out that the audience wanted to feel rather than to think; thus he curbed a natural bent toward wit and tried to engage a more sentimental side in his plays. However, the *Beaux' Stratagem* did not completely split with the traditions common during the declining period; it blended them with the new overriding vogues of sentimental and exemplary comedy. As a result, Farquhar's play came out as an amazing hybrid, coupling the two norms into one design, and producing a dramatic admixture that sounds more typical and better than the ones encountered in the plays of his predecessors and contemporaries.

**Index Terms**—comedy of manners, sentimental comedies, George Farquhar, exemplary characters, Moralism  
Jeremy Collier

## I. INTRODUCTION

Farquhar's play *The Beaux' Stratagem*, has been a huge success since its first performance in 1707 on the Theatre Royal in London. It was performed more than six hundred times in the 18th Century, and has remained a favorite dramatic piece of entertainment up to the 21st Century (Kenny, 1988). Many theatric and academic groups have performed the play in its original text or with some modification, but mainly the spirit of Farquhar remains intact. Among critics, the play keeps hovering between high estimation of its comic spirit, and some adverse ideas related to its plot. In all measures, the events in *The Beaux' Stratagem* are neatly contrived, yet with some notable setbacks. Like an old tale, its plot relies heavily on coincidences (Hume, 1976; Bevis, 1997; Canfield, 2001). For instance, it is a mere coincidence that Archer is in the house at the time of robbery. It is also a sheer coincidence that Archer strikes out of the blue upon the name Mackshane Foigard, and this forces Foigard to tell the secret he shares with Gipse, planning to rob the house of Bountifuls'. Another coincidence is employed at the end of the play. Lord Aimwell dies unexpectedly, and his younger poor brother Aimwell inherits the title and estate of his deceased brother and happily marries Dorinda. It is also coincidental that Gibbet steals the papers of Mr. Sullen and then those papers fall into the hands of Archer. This coincidental theft grants Mrs. Sullen divorce and gives her the power of law to get her money back from her boorish husband. With such setback marked in its plot, adverse criticism comes to an end.

At large, the play always draws warm reception from theater-goers, and most critics acknowledge its sure-fire comic devices and witty characters, and the innovation and literary contribution of Farquhar to English Comedy. With its creative particulars, it set an early premise for the approaching changes in the dramatic conventions and trends of the 18th Century comedies. More importantly, it formed a gateway to move into the world of sentimentalism, or a sure passageway between what used to be exuberant though fading, and what would eventually prevail. (See Wilson, 1965, Dobree, 1966) Farquhar is actually a transitional playwright trading in both the Comedy of Manners and the Sentimental or Exemplary Comedy. He wrote *The Beaux' Stratagem* in 1707, seven years after Congreve's most popular play, *The Way of the World* performed. Farquhar's play comes out as an admixture of Congreve's temper and the increasing vogue of sentimentalism in English comedies. He neither splits completely with the traditions of Restoration comedies nor entirely adheres to the new traditions. His brilliant blending of the two genres encourages critics to see Farquhar a peculiar playwright, having a foot in both, the ending world of comedies of manners, intrigue and farce, and another foot in the rising vogue of sentimental or exemplary comedy. John Wilson (1965) comments,

*The Beaux' Stratagem is invariably successful because it is made up of sure-fire comic devices and characters, and because it has a mildly sentimental ending. As the last writer of Restoration intrigue comedy and one of the first of the new eighteenth-century sentimental dramatists, Farquhar was a transitional poet with a foot in both worlds. His comedies are*

*neither satiric nor witty, but they are wellplotted, genuinely amusing, genial, and humorous.*  
(p.146)

In the light of Wilson's and others', it could be said that Farquhar's work is a fusion of both the Restoration dramatic traditions and the newly rising sentimental vogue. Many critics commend his peculiarity and notable distance from the playwrights who came before and after *The Beaux' Stratagem*. Dobree (1966), for instance, marks the uniqueness of Farquhar as follows,

*Farquhar, it is true, commented upon manners, but such criticism was only a side issue with him. He was more intent upon lively action and the telling of a roguish tale. It is all fun and frolic with him, a question of disguise and counterfeits, the gaining of fortunes, and even burglarious entries. This is the real spirit of Farquhar, a huge gust of laughter... Life was a disgusting and painful thing to him, and the only remedy was to treat it as a game, not the delicate intellectual game of Etherege, but a good Elizabethan romp* (p.162).

Archer and Strauss (1959), ardent admirers of Farquhar, launch thorough comparisons between Farquhar and his contemporaries and predecessors. To Archer and Strauss, Farquhar has a sweeter, cleaner, healthier mind than Congreve and Wycherley. They see Farquhar "more humane, and more inclined to display greater moral standards than most of his contemporaries. Beside moral standards, his dialogue is more natural than others" (p.24). To them, natural humor takes the priority over wit or cynical retorts customarily seen in Restoration comedies. And as noted, wit should either naturally come off, or it should not be forced. In other words, if wit comes not naturally as it should, it had better not come off at all. Farquhar reduced wit within something like the limits of nature, subordinating it to humor, and giving it, at the same time, an accent, all his own, of unforced buoyant gaiety.

## II. FARQUHAR AND RESTORATION COMEDIES

In truth, Farquhar's plays were written at a time when the early attraction of wit, risqué language, rakish behavior of gallants, and exposure of female frailties have been worn out and lost their magnitude, and beginning to give way to a more sentimental and moralized comedies (Hughes, 1997; Evans, 2003; Markley, 2008). More possibly Farquhar made out that the audience of theater had a change of heart, and no more interested in what a traditional comedy of manners and intrigues offer. For such convictions, Farquhar curbed the natural bent toward wit and tried to engage a more sentimental side instead. As implied above, *The Beaux' Stratagem* neither completely overlooks the declining traditions and vogues common in the plays of his elders, nor entirely adopts the rising traditions of the 18th Century. Farquhar makes use of the common traditions of Restoration comedy, albeit with some alteration, and concurrently introduces innovative devices that anticipate the upcoming changes in English Comedy. In *The Beaux' Stratagem*, Farquhar employs the same character types customarily seen in the comedies of his predecessors, Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve, yet he brilliantly modifies and further develops those types to be more amusing and appealing to the audience of his time. In comparison, the character types, Farquhar employs, sound more typical and better examples than those encountered in other Restoration plays, as evident in the following sections:

### A. Country Squire

Farquhar introduces one of the best examples of a country squire, a character type, most often surfaces in earlier comedies of manners and intrigues. Mr. Sullen, the country squire, is attributed with memorable traits like others, yet greatly modified to look more genial and more humorous. Like Sir Willful in Congreve's *The Way of the World*, or Sir Jasper and Pinchwife in Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, Mr. Sullen is fond of drinking, the trade mark of most country squires. His wife, Kate, describes his penchant as follows:

*He came home this morning at his usual hour of four, wakened me out of a sweet dream of something else, by tumbling over the tea-table, which he broke all to pieces; after his man and he had rolled about the room, like a sick passenger in a storm, he comes flounce into bed, dead as a salmon into a fishmonger's basket.* (*The Beaux' Stratagem*, II.I.71-77)

In addition to drinking, blockheadedness and sluggishness are other attributes of Squire Sullen. Boniface, the landlord of the inn where the main characters reside, once gives a better insight of this country squire: [Mr. Sullen] *says little, thinks less, and does nothing at all*. Boniface adds, *But he's a man of a great estate, and values nobody* (*The Beaux' Stratagem*, I.i.99-101). Though alcoholic, boorish, and unthinking, he is a man of pleasure; *he plays whisk [cards] and smokes his pipe eight and forty hours together sometimes* (*The Beaux' Stratagem* II.i.103-105). This card player and voracious pipe smoker is actually an unconfident depressed soul. He spends long hours with low company as Boniface explains once to Sir Charles:

Freeman: *Is Mr. Sullen's family a-bed, think 'e?*

Boniface: *All but the squire himself, as the saying is-he is in the house.*

Freeman: *What company has he?*

Boniface: *Why, sir, there's the constable, Mr. Gauge the excise man, the hunchbacked barber, and two or three other gentlemen.*

(*The Beaux' Stratagem* V.i.8-19)

Unlike other squires, Squire Sullen has a tendency to act and behave like city people do in relation to his wife and to the concept of honor. He is excessively indifferent, neglecting completely whatever his wife does. Nevertheless, like most hypocrites in the Beau Monde community he cares only for the appearance of honor. Like Sir Jasper Fidget, the cuckold, in *The Country Wife*, Squire Sullen pays the least care to the flirting of his wife, provided her extramarital affair is kept concealed, and his public image remains untarnished. On the occasion of finding Count Bellair courting Kate, he raves at the Count and his wife, yet the reason behind his rage is not foreign to his early counterparts':

*Look' ee, madam, don't think that my anger proceeds from any concern I have for your honor, but for my own, and if you contrive any way of being a whore without making me a cuckold, do it and welcome. (The Beaux' Stratagem IV. I. 436-440)*

Like a city cuckold, Mr. Sullen is willing to tolerate her flirting only if she keeps it away from others' notice. Kate, his wife, perhaps goes by the recommendation of Lady Fidget's advice: *Who for business from his wife will run / Takes the best care to have her business done (The Country Wife, II. I. 619-620)*. Like Lady Fidget, Kate has a reason to do so. For being battered and neglected, Mrs. Sullen revenges her indignation by debauchery and flirting, however with no avail since Mr. Sullen gives a blind eye to what she does in private. He is a country squire for sure, yet acts and behaves like a newly initiated city gentleman infected by the social diseases of the Beau Monde.

### B. Gay Couple/ Serious Couple

In addition to the country squire, the play provides one of the most hilarious examples of a gay couple together with a serious couple (Smith, 1971). On one hand, Archer, who assumes the livery of a servant to Lord Aimwell, and Mrs. Sullen, a comely London Lady and unhappily married to Squire Sullen, are a grand example of a gay couple. Their humorous repartees are largely witty, genial, and sometimes risqué as is the common repartee of traditional gay couples if not better. On the other hand, Aimwell, a Londoner who comes to Lichfield and poses as his elder brother Lord Aimwell, together with Dorinda, a wealthy heiress, represent the serious couple. These two soon grow earnest in their pursuit of decent marriage, more probably like Mirabell and Millamant in Congreve's *The Way of the World*. Furthermore, while Aimwell, the protagonist, acts like a rake at least when he first meets Dorinda, he displays attributes different from those of typical Restoration rakes. Unlike most gay and witty rakes, Aimwell is graver than Mirabell, yet less witty, less rakish, and obviously more sentimental than his counterpart. Nevertheless, his exclamations on coming out of an affected fit breach the outward manifestation of sentimentalism in his character: Aimwell utters,

*Where am I? Sure I have passed the gulf of silent death. And now I land on Elysian shore-- Behold the goddess of those happy plains. Fair Proserpine: let me adore thy bright divinity. (Kneels to Dorinda and kisses her hand). (The Beaux' Stratagem, IV.1.185-190).*

Aimwell affectedly continues his rant entreating Dorinda, the lady he desires to take as a wife, and further carries his rant to excessive lengths: *How could thy Orpheus keep his words and not look back upon thee? No treasure by thyself could sure have bribed him to look one minute off thee. (The Beaux' Stratagem, IV.1.191-195)*

### C. Label Names

Like other playwrights of the comedy of manners and intrigues, Farquhar retains the same tendency of giving label names to his characters. Archer and Aimwell are given typical label names. Both names suggest fortune hunters, hunters of women, Cupid and love. These two names are also closely connected to the title of the play. Beaux can allude to bow, and stratagem is related to love, in that Cupid is known for planning stratagem, whereas Aimwell is in the habit of aiming only at the right target. Other characters are given label names too. Mr. Sullen's name suggests gloomy, morose, and dismal person with disagreeable moods. Lady Bountiful's given name suggests generosity and openhandedness. She is an old civil, country gentlewoman, often volunteers to cure her neighbors of all distemper, yet she is foolishly fond of her son, Mr. Sullen. Sir Charles Freeman is a London gentleman, coming to free his sister from her brute husband, and the connection between his given name and his conduct is quite perceptible. The same can be said about the given names of Gibbet, a highwayman, and his associates Hounslow and Bagshot. Clearly each given name has something to do with the nature and profession of its bearer, as is the case in other Restoration comedies. To name for instance Mr. Horner, Lady Squeamish, Lady Fidget, and Sir Pinchwife in Wycherley's *The Country Wife*; Mirabell, Millamant, Lady Wishfort, Sir Willful, Mr. Fainall, and Foible, in Congreve's *The Way of the World*; and Mr. Medley Sir. Fopling, Lady Woodvill and Loveit in Etherege's *The Man of Mode*. All these are label names given to specific characters with a related conduct.

## III. INNOVATION AND NOVELTY OF FARQUHAR

Though Farquhar retains some traditions of the Comedy of Manners and Intrigues, he sounds more innovative in *The Beaux' Stratagem*. The innovation of Farquhar can be detected a. in the setting of his play, b. the new purpose of comedy he adopts, c. the role assigned to low characters, d. the blending of high and low worlds, e. the alteration he makes in the portrayal of chief characters, and f. the bold discussion of marriage and divorce. The following sections illuminate Farquhar's innovation and literary contribution:

### A. Locale of Events

Farquhar's first notable split with the common traditions of contemporary playwrights lies in the locale he gives to his play. He moves out the locale of events from the traditional harbor of Restoration comedies, the city, to the country. He sets *The Beaux' Stratagem* in the country rather than the city drawing rooms, the city parks, or malls, the traditional locales of typical Restoration comedies. All the events in Farquhar's play take place at a country inn and a close-by country house. The two major characters, Aimwell and his friend Archer are taken from the city, London, and brought to Lichfield, the heartland of the country, looking for a wealthy heiress in the country to fill their empty coffer.

### B. Purpose of Comedy

The second notable split lies in the purpose of his comedy. As common, the beginning of the 18th Century witnessed a growing shift in tone toward Restoration comedies (See Hume, 1976; Hughes, 1996 & 1997; Cordner, 2000; Gosse, 2004). The new shift received some impetus from the increasing criticism of many moralists and even from some playwrights themselves. Jeremy Collier, the self-appointed paragon of morality, launched a severe attack on the whole enterprise of theater (Rose, 1966; Kaneko, 1997). Long before Collier, the playwright Shadwell took aim at the Comedy of Wit, particularly its immorality. Shadwell vocally resented the publicity of obscenity, sexual explicitness, vices, and risqué language of Restoration comedies, and often called for a moral reform in drama (Armistead, 1984; McMillan, 1997; Nicoll, 1965). In addition to Collier's and Shadwell's, the attitude of women had a hand in the campaign against the immorality of Restoration comedies. Women, actually formed the great bulk of theater goers, and their response to plays was highly considered by authors and producers. To the end of the 17th Century, women's response grew more critical of the themes of libertine seduction, cuckolding, infidelity, frailty of females, rakish behavior of male characters, and the coarse language of comedies. Such attitudes pressured playwrights to modify the tone, language, and trends in their plays. Many playwrights devise dramatic situations and language that suit women's specifications in particular (Nicoll, 1965; Dobree, 1966; Bevis, 1997). On top of the aforementioned factors, one may assume that theater goers in general were fed up with what became a boring stereotype, repeatedly showed on stage for three decades though in different forms and guises. Having or not having a wit, the used-to-be a favorite theme, was no more a point of attraction or a source of laughter. The reminiscent schemes played by a rake upon a helpless woman were no more appealing as before. The audience had a change of heart and anxious to see something novel on stage. In response to the growing criticism, the purpose of comedy took a new turn in the 18th Century: it is no more for entertainment sake only; comedies, supposedly, became a medium of instructions too, not only to amuse but to instruct and give lessons. Such trends formed a major shift in the purpose of comedy.

Farquhar picked the clue. He soon felt the shift in tone and insightfully responded. His play *The Beaux' Stratagem* renders a different purpose, perhaps responding to the growing debate on the purpose of comedy by critics, influential moralists, and theater-goers. While other playwrights continued playing up burlesque and mockery and playing down instruction, Farquhar modified his theatric presentation to mesh with the new temper. He embraced the idea that the sole purpose of comedy should not be only entertainment, but also instruction. Both should go hand in hand in a comic presentation. His inclinations to instruct while entertaining soon found their way to the comedies of his contemporaries and also to the comedies of Sentimental Age in which the blending of instruction and entertainment became customary.

Equally important, one may infer that Farquhar's moving the comedy setting out of the city into the country is apparently done for an instructional purpose. More likely, his move is meant to provide a more realistic image of the country and its people, an image often distorted by Restoration playwrights. Both William Archer and Louis A. Strauss (1959) in their introduction to the edition of *The Beaux' Stratagem* commend Farquhar's skills for brilliantly portraying,

*the life of the inn, the market place, and the manor house. He showed us the squire, the justice, the highwayman, the innkeeper, the recruiting office, the country bell, the chambermaid, and half a score of excellent rustic types.* (p. 24)

The portrayal of the country in *The Beaux' Stratagem* is different from what the audience was accustomed to see before. The country is neither entirely fascinating nor completely disdainful. Like the city, it comprises the virtuous and the vicious, the intelligent and the blockhead, the witty and the dull, the brute and the kindhearted. In *The Beaux' Stratagem*, some citified characters express disdain and contempt toward the country and its people, yet others express a graceful attitude. For example, Mrs. Sullen mocks the idea of *leaping of ditches, and clambering over stiles*; and she thinks when *a man would enslave his wife, he hurries her into the country* (*The Beaux' Stratagem*, II.1.33-34). Nevertheless, her unpleasant assessment of the country can be taken as merely an individual case, especially if we know that Kate Sullen is a London lady whose fate has recently thrown her into the lap of a vicious country squire. Mr. Sullen, a boorish and rude country squire, displays the ignoble norms of some country people. Opposed to Sullen, some country individuals are decent enough to offset the contemptible attitude held by city people toward the country and its people. Dorinda, is a country lady, yet she is fresh and intelligent. Like the city lady, Harriet, in Etherege's play *The Man of Mode*, and Millamant in Congreve's *The Way of the World*, Dorinda is so compassionate and possesses no less charm and far more wit and worldly wisdom than her counterparts. Lady Bountiful, a country lady too, is earnestly philanthropic and ready to kindly and generously serve her neighbors. At large, Farquhar seems more "*sensitive to the charms of simple country life than his contemporaries do*" (Stone, 1975, p. 349). His presentation of both sides is meant to rectify the common attitude wrongly publicized on stage by other playwrights.

### C. Role of Low Characters

The role of low characters is modified too in *The Beaux' Stratagem*. The low characters, country boobies and servants, are assigned more important roles than that given before to their counterparts, such as those given to Sir Willful, in *The Way of the World*, or to Pinchwife and Sir Jasper in *The Country Wife*. The introduction of low, yet important characters, is another notable contribution. Farquhar employs and develops bewitching personalities of new types. Both Mr. Bonniface, the country innkeeper, and his daughter Cherry, a great favorite to audiences, give expression to the genial side among low characters. Both are insightful, witty, and cheerful. Their vivid presentation is quite appealing not only to theatre goers, but also to several 18th Century playwrights. Following the footsteps of Farquhar, Goldsmith later used the idea of an innkeeper and his daughter to complicate the case of a mistaken identity in his renowned play *She Stoops to Conquer* (Jeffares, 2002). Gibbet, another low character, is portrayed as an entertaining rogue whose witty remarks and gay retorts add an amusing flavor to the play. When Archer claps a pistol to his breast and says, *Come, rogue, if you have a short prayer, say it*, Gibbet wittily retorts, *Sir, I have no prayer at all; the government has provided a chaplain to say prayers for us on these occasions* (*The Beaux' Stratagem*. V.iii.184-188). Another instance of freshness and high spirit can be detected in Gibbet's remark to Bonniface about Cherry,

*Look 'ee, my dear Bonny—Cherry 'is the goddess I adore,' as the song goes; but it is a maxim that men and never have it in their power to hang one another; for if they should, the Lord have mercy on them both!* (*The Beaux' Stratagem*. V. I. 187-191)

#### D. Blending of High and Low Worlds

Farquhar's innovation excels in blending the two worlds, the high and low. The two are brilliantly combined and then made complementary to each other in several manners. First, the high and low worlds are linked through Archer, in that he poses as Aimwell's servant, though a real gallant and rake. With such a guise, he is able to move freely in both worlds. Secondly, the two worlds ironically complement each other in another manner. When Aimwell, together with his fake servant Archer, comes to the inn and asks Bonniface to keep his horse saddled for he may leave at a minute's warning, his command confuses the host and his daughter. Cherry immediately concludes, *Ay, ten to one, father, he's a highwayman* (*The Beaux' Stratagem* I.i.344). Indeed, Archer and Aimwell are highwaymen, yet of a more refined type. Their approach is different, yet the goal is the same. Still, the blending does not stop there. The attempted breaking and robbery of the house occur at the time Archer is attempting to rob Mrs. Sullen of her virtue:

Mrs. Sullen: *I hope you did not come to rob me?*

Archer: *Indeed, I did, but I would have taken nothing but what you might ha' spared.* (*The Beaux' Stratagem*. V.ii.110-113)

In additions, the combining of the two worlds surfaces in other events. Archer and Aimwell, the high people, have a reserve fund of two hundred pounds to use to find a wife in France if he fails in Lichfield. Similarly, Gibbet, the real highwayman, has spared two hundred pounds to save his life at the session. *Yes, sir, I can command four hundred but I must reserve two of them to save my life at the session*, Gibbet says to Archer (*The Beaux' Stratagem*. V.iii.197-198).

#### E. Portrayal of Chief Characters

Another notable innovation of Farquhar can be seen in the portrayals of Aimwell and Dorinda, the main characters. They are portrayed as more sentimental in nature, less rakish in behavior, and to some extent exemplary in conduct. They are depicted as role models to be admired and imitated, and not to be ridiculed. In all measures, they are different from the stereotypes seen in other plays. The heroine Dorinda, though genuinely in love and serious in her pursuit for marriage, expresses serious fear of disillusionment in marriage. She draws upon some discouraging experiences of married couples. She reasons out, as does a rational person, before she decides. Her reflection on the unhappy marriage of Mrs. Sullen, her sister-in-law Kate, discourages her of hurrying heedlessly into matrimony. Bewildered by what she sees, Dorinda expresses serious inhibitions before Aimwell: *But first, my lord, one word, I have a frightful example of a hasty marriage in my own family; when I reflect on it, it shocks me* (*The Beaux' Stratagem* V.iv.8-10). Her frankness and genuine compassion make it more probable the reform of the rake, her lover. Aimwell, who hides his roguish identity, proposes to Dorinda as Lord Aimwell and his proposal wins her liking, though. Yet under the compunction of his sincere love for Dorinda, he decides to confess. His conscience is over stricken at the thought of marrying under false pretenses, and thus confesses to Dorinda his being fraud, falsely bearing his brother's title, and scheming to marry her for money, not love. Luckily, his honesty pays off. It touches Dorinda's sensitive heart, and she takes him a husband in spite of his empty coffers.

#### F. Themes of Marriage and Divorce

*The Beaux' Stratagem* might be the first play to throw into a serious debate the question of marriage and more importantly the question of divorce. Such a peculiar debate can count as another expression of a growing shift in the purpose of English comedy. Through sensitive characters, Aimwell and Dorinda, the theme of marriage and love is, at all rate, treated more earnestly. The serious pursuit of marriage is indicated in Dorinda's suggestion that Aimwell should know her better before they get married, despite the passionate love they share:

*I should not cast a look upon the multitude if you were absent. But my lord, I'm a woman; colours, concealments may hide a thousand faults in me – therefore know me better first. I*

*hardly dare affirm I know myself in anything except my love (The Beaux' Stratagem V.iv.16-21).*

Marriage to Farquhar renders a religious overture. It is no more a trap to be avoided at all cost, as most Restoration rakes are accustomed to do. Instead, it is a heavenly ordained knot; however, this knot might be dissolved in case it contracts two individuals with different tempers and minds. In line with this, Mrs. Sullen, on one hand, ponders more often on what should be there to invigorate the holy wedlock and keep it intact, and on the other hand she ponders on what should make it dissolvable,

*Wedlock we ordained by heaven's decree. But such as heaven ordained, it first to be –  
Concurring tempers in the man and wife, as mutual helps to draw the load of life (The Beaux' Stratagem. IV.i.505-508).*

The same ideas can be detected in the words of Sir Charles Freeman when trying to relieve his sister from the constraint of her husband. Freeman underscores that the absence of mutual understanding and unison of minds may give a legitimate excuse for married couple to dissolve marriage, regardless of the unreasonable yokes the society imposes on married people in tabooing divorce, as evident in Freeman's words to Mr. Guts: *You and your wife, Mr. Guts, may be one flesh, because you are nothing else, but rational creatures have minds that must be united (The Beaux' Stratagem V.i.64-66)*. In other words, without mutual understanding and unison of minds, marriage should be dissolved. As some critics observe, Farquhar is the first playwright to call for a better understanding of divorce and divorcees. To them, Farquhar's inclinations reach boldly beyond all precedent in Restoration comedy by bringing the concrete discussion of divorce upon the stage (Bruce, 1974; Stone, 1975). The thought of divorce, which was tabooed in Farquhar's society, is openly debated via the exchange of Mrs. Sullen and Dorinda. Mrs. Sullen often complains of the taboo the society holds against divorce, despite the absence of what keeps marriage alive. To her, the boorishness, heavy drinking, and neglect of her husband can be taken as reasonable and legitimate grounds for divorce. In Act IV, Mrs. Sullen calls for a better understanding of married people compelled to untie the matrimony knot, as evident in her exchange with Dorinda:

Dorinda: *But how can you shake off the yoke? Your divisions don't come within the reach of the law for a divorce.*

Mrs. Sullen: *Law! What law can search into the remote abyss of nature? What evidence can prove the unaccountable disaffections of wedlock? Can a jury sum up the endless aversions that are rooted in our souls, or can a bench give judgment upon antipathies? (The Beaux' Stratagem IV.i.488-495).*

The call of Mrs. Sullen for better understanding of divorcees has its echo in the concluding speech of Archer. While the group celebrating the wedding of Aimwell and Dorinda, and concurrently the divorce of Mrs. Sullen and her husband, Archer thoughtfully ponders:

*'T would be hard to guess which of these parties is the better pleased, the couple joined or the couple parted, the one rejoicing in hopes of an untasted happiness, and the other in their deliverance from an experienced misery (The Beaux' Stratagem. V. iv. 330-334).*

At large, the debate over marriage and divorce is meant to educate and calls for a serious review of the shackles the Law puts before people when applying for divorce. Debating openly the idea of divorce was something unprecedented in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century English comedy.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

To conclude, one may say that *The Beaux' Stratagem* draws warm reception from theater-goers and critics. Its sure-fire comic devices, witty characters and profound insight give grand expressions to Farquhar's literary contribution to the English comedy, and sustain the play's lasting appeal to audiences. With its innovative particulars, the play sets an early premise for what was felt as a new twist in the dramatic conventions and trends of English comedy. By and large, the play forms a gateway to move into the world of sentimentalism, and constructs a notable bridge between what would be fading and what would be eventually rising. It was a time when the Comedy of Manners, Farce, Intrigues were losing charm, and the Sentimental or Exemplary Comedy was gaining momentum by most concerned parties, moralists, women, and other theater-goers. Farquhar picked the clue and brilliantly responded and produced his masterpiece. With his unrivalled theatric presentation, Farquhar would remain a remarkable playwright whose phenomenal play *The Beaux' Stratagem* provides a lasting entertainment to audiences of all ages.

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**Adil M. Jamil**, associate professor of English and Creative Writing; educated at Basra Univ., Iraq; Marshall Univ., USA; MTSU, USA; NCST, USA; with a long experience in university teaching, training, and administrating across the Middle East and a fair academic experience in the States. He published seventeen scholarly articles, in addition to two books: *From George Villiers to Oliver Goldsmith: Studies in English Comedy*, and *Applied Writing: A Handbook*.