



The Beaux' Stratagem (New Mermaids)

By George Farquhar

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It attests to Farquhar's stature as a man that he composed this warm-hearted and vibrant play while he was dying. Like *The Recruiting Officer*, the play is set in a provincial town and its plot is slight: Aimwell and Archer, two impecunious London gentlemen, arrive in Lichfield looking for an heiress to marry. Aimwell, posing as his elder brother, falls in love with his 'prey' Dorinda and confesses his imposture to her; his 'man-servant' Archer arouses the wistful interest of the unhappily married Mrs Sullen. The introduction to this edition discusses the play for its theatrical merits and argues that it dramatises the ills of marriage in early modern England, shown by Farquhar to be more injurious to the wife than to the husband, and calls for a reform of the divorce laws.

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Editorial Review

Review

Five-act comedy by George Farquhar, produced and published in 1707. Farquhar finished the play on his deathbed and died on the night of its third performance. The story concerns Archer and Aimwell, two penniless antic rakes from London who decide that one of them must wed a wealthy lady. Aimwell therefore courts Dorinda, the daughter of wealthy Lady Bountiful; meanwhile Archer, who is posing as Aimwell's servant, and Lady Bountiful's daughter-in-law, Mrs. Sullen, fall in love. In the course of events, Aimwell and Archer manage to foil robbers, thereby becoming heroes. Eventually Aimwell inherits the family estate, Mrs. Sullen separates from her brutish drunkard of a husband, and the play ends happily. In addition to its lively comedy, *The Beaux' Stratagem* presents a bold argument for divorce, which is voiced by Mrs. Sullen. Lady Bountiful's name became a byword for a rich, generous, and somewhat credulous philanthropist. -- *The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature*

About the Author

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