



The Beaux Stratagem's style is lively and entertaining, particularly in the rapid banter between Cherry and Aimwell.

Fans of modern romantic comedy will recognise . . . the assumptions of Restoration comedy: that love will win out in the end, that the characters who spar with each other will end up together, that a little disguise and trickery is necessary to achieve a happy ending. As soon as Archer tells Aimwell "Ay, you're such an amorous puppy, I fear you'll spoil our sport; you can't counterfeit the passion without feeling it", we are firmly in the territory of Romantic Comedy."

– Jem Bloomfield, Suite101.com



George Farquhar (1676/7–1707) was born in Londonderry, one of seven children of an Anglican clergyman. Though little is known about his childhood, in 1696 he joined the acting company in the Smock Alley Theatre (Dublin), but stage fright and a weak voice hampered his performances. According to biographers, his friend Robert Wilks suggested that Farquhar leave acting and write comedy -- and

that's precisely what he did. He is famous for his creation of a new kind of rakish hero, less extravagant and foppish and more believably human. At twenty-one years old, he was by far the season's most successful playwright.

Although his genius lay in comedy, he dabbled in many other genres. During the spring and summer of 1701 he published letters and poems in several miscellanies. Unfortunately, frequent bouts of illness marked both his life and his writings. Farquhar perhaps suffered from rheumatic fever; he often wrote of long and debilitating fevers, rheumatism, and aching extremities, particularly his hands. Yet during the last fifteen months of his life he produced his two best-known, liveliest comedies, *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux' Stratagem*. He died soon afterward and was buried at St Martin-in-the-Fields on 23 May.

His entire career had spanned a mere eight and a half years. Seven comedies, an afterpiece, a novella, a miscellany, a discourse on comedy, poems, songs, prologues, and epilogues, not to mention a military career, marriage, and parenthood were comprehended in that short span. He influenced the evolution of Restoration Comedy with his believable characters, fallible and funny, humanly inconsistent, foolish yet endearing. [adapted from the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*]

Synopsis

"...highwaymen, marriage-hunters, a French chaplain, a locked moneybox and a lot of odd disguises..."

Set in 1707 in Lichfield, England, *The Beaux-Stratagem* tells the story of two young bucks who, having spent all their money by living too well, leave London and roam from town to town in search of love and fortune. In order to find a wealthy heiress for at least one of them, they pose as master and servant – exchanging roles from one town to the next. In Lichfield, with Aimwell posing as his older brother Lord Aimwell and Archer becoming the servant, the two meet the lovely, wealthy Dorinda and her equally desirable sister-in-law, Mrs. Kate Sullen. They set their caps for these women, but problems abound. Kate is married to a drunken sot who despises her; the innkeeper's saucy daughter, Cherry, has set her cap for Archer; Dorinda's mother, Lady Bountiful, mistakenly believes herself to be a great healer of the sick, and she guards her daughter like a dragoness; and a band of brigands plans to rob the house of Lady Bountiful that very night, putting all schemes in jeopardy. The men fend off the robbers, but the love-struck Aimwell confesses their scheme to Dorinda only to find that his older brother has died, leaving him the title and the wealth. The two lovers agree to marry and, after the Sullens agree to dissolve their marriage, Kate and Archer are also free to wed. [Adapted from *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*]

On the contrary

"Charmed with the spirit of Archer and Aimwell, the reader may not, perhaps, immediately perceive that those two fine gentlemen are but imposters; and that the lively, though pitiable Mrs. Sullen is no other than a deliberate violator of her marriage vow. Highly delighted with every character, he will not, perhaps, at first observe that all the wise and witty persons of this comedy are knaves, and all the honest people fools." – Elizabeth Inchbald, *British Theatre*. 1808.

The Beaux' Stratagem opened on 8 March 1707 at the new Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket. Robert Wilks (a brother Irishman), who performed Archer, was the foremost actor of the day. He was Farquhar's lifelong friend, and appeared in almost all his plays. The comedy was immediately successful, and the theatres competed shamelessly by running other Farquhar comedies against it. It played 632 times during the eighteenth century, 194 times as benefits for actors and others, who picked the most popular plays to assure good receipts. It was published on 28 March 1707; more than fifty editions appeared during the eighteenth century.

In its day, *The Beaux' Stratagem* was a great success with the London audiences. It became part of the standard repertoire of Restoration comedies, and Boniface's catchphrase "as the saying is...", became part of English slang for a time. The name of Lady Bountiful is still used today, though generally to describe a condescending person.

"Wrapped up with a happy ending, *The Beaux' Stratagem* sparkles with sharp wit that skewers the conventions of 300 years ago -- and a few of our own time as well." – Michael Toscano, *Theatremania*

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