
UNIT 7: ROYALL TYLER'S *THE CONTRAST* AS A FARCE

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7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- know about Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* as a trendsetting play
- comprehend *The Contrast* as distinctly representative Play
- understand cultural nuances in transition
- The play's impact upon contemporary society
- comprehend a picture of emerging American ideology versus old European values.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to the world of Royall Tyler and his tide-turning efforts to give a 'local habitation and name' to American Drama as well as American literature from the vantage point of indigenous perspective. His is a sort of buying an American idea of how the base or coarse reality is pitied against the imported polished European deception. Tyler's setting and characters, even language he uses, all these elements go to define the Americanism in each sphere and every respect. He is the first Dramatist and his illustrious play *The Contrast* is the first play to argue in favour of an indigenous ideology and a way of life radically different from and scathing protest against the European ideology.

7.2 THE WRITER'S BIO-BRIEF

William Clark Tyler (1757-1826), popularly known as Royall Tyler is a very versatile personality- lawyer, teacher, dramatist and author of the first American comedy *The Contrast*—all rolled into one. To *The Contrast* (1787) of Royall Tyler goes the distinction of being the first American play performed in the public by a group of professional actors. The play is popularly attributed to “several firsts”. It introduced the Yankee character type in the form of Jonathan, and stage singing of “Yankee Doodle” to American audience. Other important plays of Tyler include *The Island of Barrataria*, and three Biblical closet Dramas *May Day in Town*, *The Medium* (perhaps the first American epic drama). Some other plays like *The Happy Tea-Party* (pr. 1795), *The Farm House: Or, The Female Duellists* (pr. 1796), and *The Georgia Spec* are said to have Tyler affiliation manuscripts which are not available. Information about Tyler’s two brief professional stage performances within puritan Boston’s unsympathetic boundaries are sought from his unfinished autobiography *The Bay Boy*. But the meaningful depiction of “the Monkish mystery” does attempt to project dramatic conventions, puritanical restrictions notwithstanding. Tyler’s early exposure to mystery plays and to contemporary drama of Addison’s *Cato* points to a background of some sophistication. The rumour that he was initiated into the vibrant farcical world view of English Comedy of Manners, just two weeks before he wrote *The Contrast* does not seem to have sound base in view of the above disclosure. It simply points to Tyler’s rare talent of exerting drama in an age severely limited to and outlawed by puritanical intervention. Stage plays were forbidden in Boston, Tyler’s birth place, by enacting a law in 1750.

7.3 A SYNOPTIC VIEW OF THE PLAY

The Setting for the entire play is New York City, New York from which the reader becomes aware that it is an American play all the way. Perhaps this is a conscious attempt by Tyler to bring out contrasts both within and outside of America.

The contrast in the play is clear from the beginning as the coquettish Charlotte and Letitia throw light on the impending marriage of Maria and her distress because of father’s premature marriage plans. Billy Dimple’s father was Van Rough’s business partner. Before the death of Dimple’s father, both parents had agreed upon Maria, and Dimple marriage. While Dimple becomes snobbish and wayward in England, Maria betakes herself to books that “improve her taste”: “The contrast was so striking betwixt the good sense of her books, and the flimsiness of her love-letters, that she discovered that she had unthinkingly engaged her hand without her heart.”

The second scene records Maria bemoans the “helpless situation of [her] sex”: “Reputation is the life of a woman - and the only safe asylum a woman of delicacy can find, is in the arms of a man of honor.” Even though Maria reveals to her father a lack of love towards Dimple, old Van Rough insists on her to marry Dimple, arguing that “money makes the mare go”. He makes it clear that money is important and she should give up her nonsensical love affiliations to lead a decent life in the society he further concludes that

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Maria's exposure to various characters in the many novels she has read upon, a novel thing for women to get exposed to novels then, has accounted for a rush of opinion on her actual life. She agrees to her father's proposal unhappily.

In Act II, through Charlotte we are introduced to her brother, the good and honorable Colonel Manly, available in town. Part of the Revolutionary War, and fond of a soldier's attire, he looks out of sorts in the city's high society. Ignorant of each other's affair, Letitia and Charlotte, secretly reveal to the audience that they are also courted by Dimple. Snobbish Jessamy meets simple Jonathan, who has never been to such a big town and almost kissed a "harlot" without realizing it. Manly's innocent manservant Jonathan tries to kiss Jenny, she refuses angrily because she thinks Jonathan is old fashioned for her.

In Act III, Dimple is caught between values and money as he loves Charlotte for her lively character and Letitia's money. He also wants Maria to walk out of the match. Dimple, the villain, meets Manly and finds out that the Colonel is Charlotte's brother – controlling himself in time expressing her general hatred for women. Dimple disappoints the readers when he asserts his love for European culture, despite living in America.

In Act IV, Maria's trust deficit towards Dimple is complete and reveals her secret love for a lovely man full of honor (Manly) to Charlotte. The latter assures her of some help. Manly and Dimple reveal the family relations on stage. Van Rough meanwhile finds out about Dimple's bankruptcy due to gambling and decides against the marriage of his daughter to such a fool. Incidentally he overhears a conversation between Manly and Maria revealing their love and affections to each other.

In Act V, Jonathan does not learn high society's rules of laughing as Jessamy desires, who resorts to a typical natural laugh. Both Charlotte and Letitia know about Dimple's double standards; for him, Charlotte is a "trifling, gay, flighty coquette" and Letitia is an "ugly creature!" Dimple is g dishonored, Maria marries Manly.

Characters like Letitia and Charlotte also go back to hail European values and its oft-talked about "splendor and parade" being brought forward by fashionable European culture. In fact, Jessamy regards Jonathan as "ignorant and unpolished" utterly lacking in grace. Later Charlotte finds sadistic pleasure looking down upon fellow Americans: Charlotte clearly and without guilt, points out that she finds it amusing "to see the faults, foibles, follies, and reputations of our friends" (452). Her attachment to and love for European values is contrasted with Paine's essay "Common Sense" published a decade before *The Contrast*

We have boasted the protection of Great Britain, without considering, that her motive was interest not attachment; that she did not protect us from our enemies on our account, but from enemies on her account, from those who had no quarrel with on any other account and who will always be our enemies on the same account (18)

The Contrast was written and performed in 1787; it brings about the inherent contradiction between the European and American tradition, culture and

historical antecedents. It was a real crowd puller in its stage performances which led to its print form in 1790 and wide circulation in different parts of America like Maryland, New York, Virginia, South Carolina, Massachusetts, Jamaica, and even London.

7.4 THE SETTING AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

American Revolution (1775-1783) has accounted for a constant and deliberate attempt on part of America to lose sight of the British influence in respect of each and every sphere. To look down upon Oligarchies and aristocratic stranglehold was on the priority list of American agenda. The political independence could not help getting rid of the British cultural domination. The ghost of British colonialism still haunted American public both in letter and spirit. *The Contrast* saw a watershed moment in retaliating everything that Britain stood for. The popular imagination was late to react to the innovation and insight that the play brought with it. Copley's famous portrait of Paul Revere 1768 marks a departure from and connection with the Old colonial influence suggesting that allowing freedom superficially was not freedom proper rather freedom of expression and cultural independence was the need of the hour. It is symbolic of American Revolution being figured in "Anglo Saxon" history books suggestive of workaholic culture of New World. There was a constant effort to part ways with traditional British ways projecting a sort of work ethic that is unique about the Americans.

Born and brought up in Boston, Massachusetts (1757) to a well-to-do business class family having membership of king's council, Tyler completed graduation from Harvard University in 1776. His quick-witted jokes had made him infamous in close circles. He took to law practice in Falmouth, Maine with John Adams and later fallen in love with his seventeen years old daughter Abigail, popularly known as Nabby. Their flirting has not gone well with John Adams; he was critical about Tyler and his daughter's romantic intimacy, with a cryptic remark he summed up the relationships thus: "I don't like the subject at all. My child is too young for such thoughts. I am not looking out for a Poet, not a Professor of belle letters" (3). Tyler was passionate about the romantic relationship irrespective of family objections for three years (1783-6) and but fell into depression due to disturbance in the relationship. He shifted to Boston after his romantic heartbreak and boarded in the house of Elizabeth Palmer, and in 1794 he had married her daughter Mary Palmer and had a family boasting of eleven children! Contrary to popular perception, Dimple's servant Jessami also tries to impress upon the audience with his typical European manners in flirting with women at will. How he ascribes to strict strictures in the prescription of rules for laughing also holds significance in the context of the play. Mark the dialogue between Jessamy and Jeny:

Jessamy: Prythee, Jenny, don't spoil your fine face with laughing.

Jenny: why mustn't I laugh, Mr. Jessamy?

Jessamy : You may smile, as my lord says, nothing can authorize a laugh.

Jenny : well, I can't help laughing—Have you seen him, Mr. Jessamy?
Ha, ha, ha! (463)

When the play was performed in 1787, it was titled *The contrast: The American son of Liberty*, Tyler was also hesitant to use his family name in his “risky theatrical experiment”(1) as he did not want to do it by a “citizen of the United States” (1). Despite his doubts the play was a huge success; it had five successive performances and was praised by critics as a “moral lecture,” and “the effusion of an honest patriotic heart” (1). Another important notion from a critic is “He deserves the warmest approbation of his country, and particularly the applauses of the fair, for exhibiting in such true colors the pernicious maxims of the Chesterfield system, of all others the most dangerous to the society.”(1) Chesterfield refers to the 4th earl of chesterfield, who was a British statesman and author, which is claimed “pernicious” and “dangerous to the society.”

The Contrast, ironically enough, was inspired by Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, a British comedy; which was written a decade before he satirizes the British upper class. The key of *The Contrast* is to mock the Americans' who follow British fashions, and indulge in “British vices.” The two male characters of the play are Mr. Billy Dimple and Colonel Henry Manly. Mr. Dimple, is the “American born but British identified,” “a flippant, pallid, polite beau, who devoted the morning to his toilet... and then minces out”(3). He is presented as a villain, a dandy man who juggles with three women. Mr. Manly, the protagonist is sincere, a patriotic, and contrasts Dimple.

Not only does *The Contrast* accurately depict the morals regarding the American man, but also it explores the stance of American women. Maria, the woman who was settled by her parents to marry Mr. Dimple, who later on marries Manly, bemoans her “helpless situation of her sex.” In the second scene she says “Reputation is the life of a woman –and the only sage asylum a woman of delicacy can find, is in the arms of a man of honor.”

Jonathan is certainly an immortal creation of Tyler, who imbibes the characteristics of an Yankee and stereotype of Uncle Sam effectively. Be it American dialect, or the theme of nationalism or still the embodiment of innocence, virtue and sincerity, he is always ahead. The main contrast is between noble Colonel Manley and the self effacing, ‘effete’ European aficionado Dimple; between “inelegant goodness and polished deceit”. The contrast is also between the American values and European showbiz. The simplicity is contrasted with sophistication, innocence with corruption, and innateness with artificiality.

7.5 CHARACTERS

1. **Charlotte:** She is Colonel Manly's sister, lives with her uncle in New York, has friends and good social standing; a coquette. She has fallen in love trap of Dimple
2. **Letitia:** friend of Charlotte and ward of Charlotte's uncle; possesses monetary wealth, which makes her attractive to Dimple
3. **Mr. Billy Dimple:** the villain, a dandy, attempts to manage relationships with Charlotte, Letitia, and Maria at once; in need of money, an

Anglophile fop. Billy Dimple is a rich and spendthrift young man, a "flippant, pallid, polite beau" (1). Manly scathingly remarks Dimple's sexual promiscuity. Mark the gentle rebuke the former directs at the latter: "Death from a man of honour would be a glory you do not merit; you shall live to hear the insult of man and the contempt of that sex whose gendered smiles afforded you all your happiness". He "loves the person of Charlotte and the fortune of Leticia, while he is engaged to Maria".

4. **Maria Van Rough:** daughter of Van Rough, sentimental and virtuous
5. **Colonel Henry Manly:** contrasting character to Mr. Dimple, a persona of America; a gentleman, patriot, and hero
6. **Van Rough:** Maria's father
7. **Jessamy:** Dimple's waiter/servant, as snobbish as his master, a persona of Europe
8. **Jonathan:** Manly's waiter/servant, represents the New England Yankee, an unsophisticated country bumpkin, honest and patriotic
9. **Jenny:** Maria's waiter/servant, Jessamy's friend
10. Servants

The fact that it is the first play to have been officially recognized in the history of American drama gives the edge over other write-ups over negligence and perceived inattention. Its intrinsic merit is beyond doubt and it obviously draws parallel with contemporary English plays, weak plot construction does not deter it from being a force to reckon with because of its "bright, humorous, and natural" appeal; its sparkling genuine wit; and its satire aimed at the evils and follies of the time is keen and incisive. The simple ordinary and innocuous American life has been compared with the polished knavery and hypocrisy of European soil. There lies the justification of the play as it candidly attempts to bring out the contrast between two cultures. It is an innovative attempt at a natural representation of American culture devoid of its European ghost.

The Contrast was first performed at the John Street Theater, New-York City, on the 16th of April 1787 to a rousing reception and instant acceptance by the audience that it appeared again on 18th of April, 2nd and 12th of May the same year as the vindication of its strength and as entertaining out feat.

And though early in life he acquired among literary circles a reputation as a witty and graceful writer of poetry and prose, it is doubtful whether he benefited much by his writings, either peculiarly or in popularity, as an author. They were undoubtedly the recreation of his leisure moments, and thought they were thrown off from time to time without apparent effort, they bear internal evidence of being the result of deep reflection and much reading. Tyler adopted the legal profession, married, settled in Vermont, became celebrated as a successful advocate, was elected a Judge, and later, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Vermont, and died at Brattle-boro, in that State, August 16, 1826.

The Contrast has really brought out a revolution in the history of American drama the genre which has little reception with a larger audience hitherto

is now surging ahead with full force realizing its potentiality its worth as a watershed work. A single company of English players, the so-called first "American Company," after a long and bitter struggle with the intolerance and prejudices of the Puritan and Quakers, had attained some slight favor in New-York, Philadelphia, and some of the Southern cities; but in New England the prohibitory laws against all theatrical amusements were still in force and were rigidly executed. The Continental Congress, while not absolutely suppressing, had set its seal of condemnation against the theater, so that the most reputable and law-abiding of our people were kept away from all theatrical amusements, if not from inclination, at least by the fear of deviating from the plain path of their duty. But immediately after the production of the 'Contrast,' a radical change of opinion in respect to the drama is apparent.

The characterization of the "fashionable" elements in the dramatist personae is done with the authentic tone of a writer who knew his Sheridan (*The School of Scandal*), but the prologue sounded a national note that was well sustained: Why should our thoughts to distant countries roam When each refinement may be found at home? Patriotism was further emphasized when "Yankee Doodle" was sung during the performance. Beyond this, the action was made interesting to Americans by local references and the celebration of the American character. Colonel Manly's success in breaking up a sinister stratagem (and in his suit of the young lady he has saved from a Chesterfieldian trick) constitutes an endorsement of the American way of life in 1787. American social institutions must set the standards of individual behavior. The success of *The Contrast* on the stage was probably due also to the adroitness(mastery) with which Tyler manages his dialogue and to the introduction, for the first time on the American stage, of a fine example of a Yankee rustic, Jonathan, whose combination of sturdy(macizo, tozudo), though not inflexible, New England morality and childlike innocence makes for comedy, especially in the scene in which he unwittingly (inconscientemente) attends a theater and tries to carry out the foreign servant's instructions as to how to succeed in an amour. Jonathan's attempted amour ends in a rebuff (desaire) which helps to clarify his thinking: "If this is the way with which our city ladies behave, give me the twenty acres of rock, the Bible, the cow, and Tabitha, and a little peaceable bundling(lío, atillo)". *The Contrast* was a lusty embodiment of American ideals in a play which, without pointedly ignoring English tradition, made its own way. Its wit and humor of *The Contrast* were unmatched in American drama until Mrs. Anna C. Mowatt Ritchie's *Fashion* in 1845. What is scandal, says Charlotte, "but amusing ourselves with the faults, foibles (manias, Origenes of the USA Theatre Eusebio V. Llácer Llorca Curso 2009-2010 12 debilidades), follies (locuras), and reputations of our friends". Among the most humorous scenes are Jonathan's attendance at a play, *The School for Scandalization*; Jessamy's lessons to Jonathan on how to court a girl with an object of "cherubim (angelical) consequences"; and his later instructions on how "to laugh by rule". *The Contrast* also has a liberal amount of sentiment, moralizing, and nationalism - necessary ingredients of the successful American play. The patriotism that the Prologue proclaims, EXULT each patriot heart! -this night is shewn A piece, which we may fairly call our own Colonel Manly exemplifies in every action. And the outcome of the play

is a national triumph. The necessary moral sentiment of the play is clear in Maria's "filial obligation". There are particular morals to be drawn too, in the actions of both Charlotte and Colonel Manly. That moralizing was required for Tyler's audience is evidenced by a Boston performance of the play in 1792 advertised as "A Moral Lecture in Five Parts".

7.6 ELEMENT OF SATIRE IN THE PLAY

The Contrast is more a caricature of society than a social comedy. There is much farcical action. Jessamy is the traditional intriguer; Jonathan is the shrewd (sagaz, astuto) but naïve country-bumpkin(pardillo) Yankee who became a major figure in American farce-comedy by the middle of the nineteenth century; Colonel Manly is the serious defender of honor and country -a startling contrast to Charlotte, the witty and indelicate flirt whose "head runs so upon beaux". Although a caricature, Charlotte establishes the pace of the drama with her wit, while her lines contain most of the play's satire upon fashion.

The prologue sounded a national note that was well sustained: Why should our thoughts to distant countries roam When each refinement may be found at home? A spate of dramatic writing followed suit and when the president of the United States himself witnessed the performance of the play in Boston, the stigma attached to American drama is no longer important the penchant for visiting theatrical performances coming full circle. It was also boosted by the intellectual congregation of the power corridor at Boston which helped repelling of the prohibitory acts in connection with theatrical amusements. The stringent law against dramatic movements had become a dead letter in the face of a series of open field performances.

If ours the faults, the virtues too are ours,
why should our thoughts to distant countries roam,
when each refinement is at home? (Prologue 11-13)

This is American spirit and exuberance at its best. Come whatever may, the spirit is sky high for national representation buoyed with and characterized by a clear indication of freedom, not subjugation of any kind, taking the new found freedom to its ultimate culmination. In another context, the authorial intervention, indeed, a much needed one, gleefully acknowledges that natural and indigenous worth are far better than the false European import:

Must come from Europe, and be ready made.
Strange! We should thus our native worth disclaim,
And check the progress of our rising fame.
Yet one, whilst imitation bears the sway,
Aspires to nobler heights, and points the way (29-33)

Imitation of west puts break to national progress which must be dispensed with without much hue or cry. Noble aspirations would show the right way to pursue amidst confusion and lack of clear sightedness.

Let not light Censure on your faults offend,
Which aims not to expose them, but amend.
dress, walk, dance, talk, lisp, languish, and smile

Maria gives her heart to Dimple without love. "Her love was destroyed by the very means she took to support it." Dimple's European visit has disappointed Maria. Her true affection has been contrasted to his European ideals and rejection anything indigenous. "Man of her choice" now turns out to be her bitterest critic with many restrictions and imposition. His European preoccupation with liking of Chesterfield's letters has no takers in New England. What is more troublesome is that he minces out putting those infamous principles into practice on women he chances upon to the utter dismay of Native Americans.

"Metro sexuality" is the word Manly uses to describe the eccentric sexual behavior of urban American people. Hetero sexuality is being replaced by a stereotypical image of gay man. Tyler is perhaps promoting the American vogue for "musical legally blonde", the musical.

A song called "There! Right There!" is about law students trying to decide if a witness is gay or European. It's all about the effeminate nature of European boys and how there is a gray area with foreigners since they don't act the way American men are "supposed" to. The song includes lines such as "depending on the time of day, the French go either way" (3)

"The contrast was so striking betwixt the good sense of her books and the flimsiness of her love-letters, that she discovered she had unthinkingly engaged her hand without her heart" the influence of Europe is very much felt in some human beings. He is the "pink of the prudence" act scene II: But the son of Alknomook can never complain.

Reputation is the life of woman; yet
courage to protect it is masculine and disgusting;
and the only safe asylum a woman of delicacy can
find is in the arms of a man of honour

I should oppose the will of a
parent, or set an example of filial disobedience; at a
parent's command, I could wed awkwardness and
deformity. Were the heart of my husband good, I
would so magnify his good qualities with the eye
of conjugal affection, that the defects of his person
and manners should be lost in the emanation of his virtues.

Family values are being highlighted in the play. A daughter's concern for her father and accepting her father's will unquestioningly is a certain upholding of indigenous values while at the same time presenting a critique of orthodox European values. The values are crumbling in the name of sophistication and elite etiquette and the task of a native American is cut out to protect the native innocence from deceptively cultured Europeanism and its notoriety. More than men, women are subjected to double subjugation. Changing cultural mores and dominant patriarchal ideology where a daughter listens attentively to and abide by what her father dictates at her recklessly: "it is reprehensible to ridicule misfortune" (34) "sad rantipole of a wife" (57)

Jonathan speaks about the New York blues:

it is the School for Scandalization.–

The School for Scandalization!--Oh! ho! no wonder
you New-York folks are so cute at it, when you go to
school to learn it; and so I jogged off. (60)

Manly is weary of complacent attitude of new generation. Instead he
advocates for a vigorous work out of hard work and sincerity which is
devoid of comfort and luxury. The work culture for which America is
famous is shown here:

Luxury

is surely the bane of a nation: Luxury! which
enervates both soul and body, by opening a thousand
new sources of enjoyment, opens, also, a thousand new
sources of contention and want (66)

How luxury can lead a gentle man to take to corrupt means is the focus here.
One should be wary of life of enjoyment because it comes with a cost where
one has to cope with new wants all the time.

Contrast between principal characters is quite interesting here as Dimple
and Manly are pitied against point parleys of every day parlance.

MANLY

An attention to strangers is worthy a liberal mind,
and must ever be gratefully received. But to a soldier,
who has no fixed abode, such attentions are
particularly pleasing.

DIMPLE

Sir, there is no character so respectable as that of a
soldier. And, indeed, when we reflect how much we
owe to the service of their country, and secured to us those
inestimable blessings that we now enjoy, our liberty
and independence we owe to those brave men who have suffered so much in
but how delicious

is it to excite the emotions of joy, hope, expectation,
and delight in the bosom of a lovely girl who
believes every tittle of what you say to be serious (69)

Dimple's wayward and irresponsible behavior is matched by Manly's
polished and down to earth account on women folk and flattery and
pretention to them.

under

pretensions of marriage, can plant thorns in the bosom
of an innocent, unsuspecting girl is more detestable
than a common robber, in the same proportion as
private violence is more despicable than open force,
and money of less value than happiness. (69)

While manly is serious and upright in his dealings with the question of women, Dimple is a very unassuming and uncharacteristic of a man who pays only lip service to woman's needs; all his concerns hardly affect his heart and mind. He does not approve of being principled and honest in his dealings with women. Dimple's treatment of Manly as a stranger and his offer of help in a new place Boston is certainly welcome but when he knows well that Lettitia is Manly's sister he considers her as a 'devil' with the help of a dramatic device aside which is indicative of the true character and real intensions of the brat of a boy. The contrast between these two characters is the high point of the drama of same name.

7.7 COMEDY OF MANNERS

Comedy of manners is a typical 18th century product on offer for public appreciation. Excess mannerism, follies and foibles of contemporary society, eccentric behavior of young men and women and an underlying urge for moral correction are some of the salient features of this typical genre that took 18th theatre going public into storms. As a general characteristic of the age society is being treated as a mirror onto itself. Characters represent only typical eccentrics of society. No wonder, caricature and exaggeration are treated as potent weapons of such a kind of interpretations.

American public could learn from artistic representations a sort of pleasure or amusement with a prevalent motive of "moral instruction". There is hardly any doubt about the trouble of transition immediately after the war of independence. But art, scientific knowledge and literary pursuits continue to attract the attention of the American public in right earnest. Sentimentalism is a way of life, especially while expressing an American identity free from the shackles of European dominance. But the more it tried to free itself from the British clutch, the more it gives way to English ideals as is seen in case of Maria and Dimple alluding to English plays and ideals exclusively. However, two contrasting ideologies are placed side by side to provide the American public with more choices to part with the old European ideology and accept indigenous ideology of strength and moral character. The war of independence does not help Americans to part with old European values; Dimple's resort to Chesterfieldian values, Charlotte and Lettitia's fascination for and preoccupation with the European fashion world, Maria's appetite for British writing material point to cross cultural connection between an old European society and the new indigenous value system. Preoccupation with independence and establishment of a unique American identity have not in any way changed the attitude and treatment of people towards women and more so in case of young women. Davidson argues in a perceptive way that young women are usually considered the property of their parents and the cause of women does not get its desired upliftment. She observes:

In sentimental fiction, too, the unmarried young woman was, for all practical purposes, the property of her father. The common *Clarissa* theme of the avaricious parents who essentially sell their daughter into an economically advantageous marriage was not just an extravagant borrowing from earlier British fiction but was an apt

metaphor for the legal status of the postrevolutionary [sic]
American girl. (118) (Rogers 4).

Yet the transition from orthodox European dominance to liberal American independence is a crucial one. Rise of sentimental fiction helps writers to advocate the concept of “companionate marriage” where a woman can exercise choice. Maria’s conflict between her own choice to thwart the arranged marriage with wayward Dimple and reconsider her relationship with Manly is surely a moral boost for American liberalism and freedom of expression. Katherine

Binhammer’s seminal essay “Knowing Love: The Epistemology of *Clarissa*,” argues in a convincing way that “The affective revolution set off by the rise of companionate marriage, or marriage by choice, introduces the expectation of romantic love between husband and wife and places a new emphasis on women’s consent to sexual relations in theory” (859). Women certainly get independence to choose her partner owing to her private love affair. Dimple’s amoral affairs is contrasted with Manly upright standards in keeping with the new found freedom in American society.

The initial focus on European fashion, social faux pas and gossip reveals that Maria’s acceptance of Billy’s hand is “it will be without her heart” (Act I, Sc.I 48). Her change of mind owes to allegiance to reading material. Letitia observes keenly that while Dimple was abroad, “Maria, like a good girl, to keep herself constant to her known true-love, avoided company, and betook herself, for her amusement, to her books, and her dear Billy’s letters” (1.1.67-70), only to find that “Her love was destroyed by the very means she took to support it” (1.1.71-2). Her association with the reading material obvious brings comparison between the protagonists of her reading with Dimple’s inadequacy, in terms of love and otherwise. Similarly Dimple’s exposure to and acceptance European culture enables him to repudiate the established American culture of remaining true to his commitment to Maria upon his return to America.

Maria’s wide reading, Letitia observes, – *Sir Charles Grandison* and *Clarissa Harlowe*, both by Samuel Richardson; the poetry of William Shenstone; and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* by Laurence Sterne – helps her widen her intellectual horizon both in letter and spirit. Dimple, on the other hand, resorts to Chesterfeildian stock mannerism in his social interactions become inimical to change. He falls victim to the very means of conservative sentimentalism he accuses Maria of. More than Charlotte and Letitia, it is Maria who represents the new liberal image of American woman who can accept changes if situation arises so. Further, Maria’s marriage is a marriage of convenience; financial gain is at the end of such a relationship, not love. Clarissa seems to be a role model for new women in her robust defiance social order; her independence insight, be it marriage, love or otherwise, no doubt, comes at her own life’s expense, but her sense of independence will definitely inspire a generation of women to follow her footsteps. She advocates a sort “autonomous sentimentalism” something of a mixture of love, independence and asserting her position in society. Clarissa provides the backdrop for Maria’s independence, she in turn becomes the spokeswoman for Tyler to advocate his agenda of American independence.

7.8 THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

The Contrast, no doubt, is the most popular play by Tyler, boasting musical adaptation. The play has a spell binding effect on contemporary American audience “because of its steadfast censure of affectation at all social levels, because of its avowed concern to emphasize the corrective function of Thalia (the Comic Muse), because of its intelligent yet humorous depiction of human behavior in terms of seemingly interminable contrasts, and because of its refusal to fit easily within the bounds of a single comedic genre” (E. notes on Critical Essays of Tyler’s *The Contrast*).

The play has really revolutionized American theatre representing indigenous ideals free from European culture. The woes of transitional culture are minimized through the contrasts on various grounds. Both comic relief and serious situations come to the aid of the reader who can take solace from the fact that its play highlighting everything an average American would cherish to nurture. Indeed, it represents a watershed moment in the history of American Literature inspiring a whole lot of generation to fall in love with American history, culture and tradition.

7.9 ROBUST CULTURAL NUANCES

Tyler’s play gives a good background to elite etiquette and sentimentality that helps the cause of American Identity. Maria’s acceptance of Dimple initially is a mere arrangement than anything trust and love. Letitia offers an interesting explanation that “The old folks, about a year before Mr. Van Dumpling’s death, proposed this match: the young folks [Maria and Billy] were accordingly introduced, and told that they must love one another” (1.1.56-8). it is a marriage of arrangement not of love and affection. The final result, Maria’s turn towards Manly is a step ahead of her times to accommodate a marriage of trust and intensity than following the rule book arrangement of minds.

The cause of liberal woman has been espoused by Tyler in keeping with the trends of his time which seems contemporary and universal at the same time. The new woman thinks independently ahead of her time. In his seminal book *A Colonial Woman’s Book Shelf*, Kevin Hayes asks a pertinent question “in what contexts and for what reasons did early American women read,” which augurs well for Tyler’s line of thought. He points out that by including Mary Astell (*A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest*, 1694 – 97) and Eliza Haywood (*The Female Spectator*) in the colonial and post-revolutionary libraries” (Brooks 8) the cause of women represented by Maria gets furthered to a great extent.

Astell’s writings are revolutionary in nature which gives women a platform to voice their needs and immediate requirements. It questions the conservative attitude of late 17th century women thus: “For since GOD had given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them? Since he has not denied us the faculty of Thinking, why should we not ... employ our Thoughts on himself their noblest Object, and not unworthily bestow them on Trifles and Gaities and secular Affairs?” (Astell 52-3, Rogers 9). Such a kind of ideology considered taboo in England is an

accepted phenomenon in America where the intellectual freedom has been taken up seriously in keeping with the mission of American identity free from the clutches of European culture. Through Maria Tyler advocates a similar sort of intellectual freedom encouraging female readership in a large way to help the cause of American identity.

The situation is certainly ripe for Tyler to take up the issue of Maria's novel reading with the help of the play within the play device. A sort of experimentation also gives the playwright an edge to make the issue of American identity public with a tacit understanding of the question of intellectual freedom of women.

7.10 EUROPEAN SENTIMENTALISM VERSUS AMERICAN INDIGENOUS IDEOLOGY

With the rise of American novel as a popular trope in the 18th century, Drama took to American identity for self expression and survival in the long run. In addition, access to direct stage representation also brought about the concrete levels of contrast between early American values and the newly formed ideologies; difference between American new insight and European and English cultures. American Declaration of independence becomes the watershed moment for the flourishing of theatre. We find many references to English and European plays and dialogues in order to contrast with the New Englishism.

In theatre the break from English and European traditions clearly marked, yet complete compartmentalization from European values, as it were, is very slow to take off. Joseph Roach notes that one of the aspects of the "earlier history of the American theatre is its bogus and sycophantic anglophilia,"¹ that was in turn combined with the "American hatred of tyranny" to form hypocritical acts of "snobbery" that can most certainly be classified as a "particularly obnoxious subcategory" of that same tyranny. (Rogers 2). Tyler's play *The Contrast* provided an authentic American material for public consumption.

Obvious parallels with Sheridan's *School for Scandal* (1777) and Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops Conquer* (1773) prove that the play *The Contrast* is a pale shadow of its European counter parts. Yet glimpses of brilliance in portrayal of American Yankee in Janathan and Henry Manly stand apart. Emphasis on American Values over European "decadence" is also there. More importantly, the "post revolutionary" fervor makes the distinct American accent discernible. It seeks to describe the best that is available within European culture imbibing the indigenous developments pretty well. An attempt has also been made to emphasise the indigenous American Values only by pitying these values against decadent European culture. The contrast between newly formed American sentimentality and "British Elitism" also helps the case of Tyler well. Devices like use of novels and plays of English origin gives models to Tyler to argue in terms of contrasts. Readymade availability of material due to rise of novel as a literary mode also makes the contrast between two dominant literary forms prominent; drama is striving hard for its very survival.

Sentiments of early American literary field coupled with a strong urge to read for self improvement and self expression is also significant for popularity of the play. Traces of sentimentalism is found in Maria and Billy dimple frequent reference to English plays during the course of their conversion which seems to be the key to develop American identity. It is but natural that American independence only provided independence in theory but in practice English values are still lingering in American horizon which has made it difficult for the writers and intellectuals to enhance their creativity.

Tyler employs the technique of play-within-the play well to achieve good effects in use of both theme as well as character. Thematically this type of experimentation helps the cause of American identity. The female characters like Maria, Charlotte and Lettitia get good grounding over espousing the cause of women emancipation. Maria though her personal indulgence in act of reading on the stage becomes an active agent on whom such practices are being applied. Novels like *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* help Maria to know about 18th century masculinity and early American femininity assuming agency and identification. Mark her sense of self assertion in the following passage:

Maria: Who is it that considers the helpless situation of our sex, that does not see we each moment stand in need of a protector, and that a brave one too. ... Ten thousand temptations allure us, ten thousand passions betray us; yet the smallest deviation from the path of rectitude is followed by the contempt and insult of man, and the more remorseless pity of women: years of penitence and tears cannot wash away the stain, nor a life of virtue obliterate its remembrance. Reputation is the life of woman; yet courage to protect it is masculine and disgusting; and the only safe asylum a woman of delicacy can find is in the arms of a man of honour.

(1.2.25-42)

Maria is aware of her sense of duty and honour parallel to man's virtues. Maria's painful awareness of female virtue is already expressed by Clarissa. Although Clarissa never willingly submits to Lovelace and is subjected to a brutal rape, her intrinsic value has been debased, and therefore, innocent or not, her only recourse is death. Thus Maria, through her own awareness of her situation, makes the effort to emulate Clarissa's goodness, while holding up the virtues illustrated in *Sir Charles Grandison* as her romantic ideal

7.11 UNIVERSITY OF THE PLAY

The play has, no doubt, a universal appeal being the first of its kind, and the way it took the American public in its stride really stands out. It articulated the American true emotion and sentiment, the language and the characters also support the cause of American indigenous values. In a sense, the play has awakened the American public to cherish American values in an unprecedented way. The contrast with European values actually works wonders for focusing on indigenous values. It serves as a wakeup call for the wayward American people who are wavering between spurious

European ideals and unpolished but robust American culture. There lies the importance of the play and its universal appeal.

Pleasure principles are easy to follow and worship but to maintain a high moral standard is to relinquish comfort and ways of easy success and to opt for signals of sacrifice. Contrast between moral standards and pleasure principles are also intricately woven into the structure of the play. The characters also confirm to the respective contrasting stands. One set of characters led by Manly upheld native values based on intense suffering and self sacrifice. The fact that Manly is a colonel is indicative of hard work, discipline, sincerity and strict regimen. The other set of characters, whose number is certainly more, led by Dimple opt for pleasure and enjoyment, even at the expense of self respect and blatant lying, is certainly the way of comfort, luxury, freedom in a limited sense for the category of people are after their vested interests following the deceitful and cheap ideological launch pads.

7.12 SUGGESTED READING LIST

1. Richard Moody, *Dramas from the American theater*, The World Publishing company, 1966.
2. "Paul Rever, John Copley, 1768" by Picturing America Artwork, Essay, and Activities, Online at <http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/downloads/pdfs/Resource_Guide_Chapters/PictAmer_Resource_Book_Chapter_2A.pdf>
3. "Royall Tyler, The Contrast." *Wikipedia.org*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royall_Tyler> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Contrast_\(play\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Contrast_(play))>
4. INTRODUCTION BY THOMAS J. McKEE
5. Kandou Patricia S. Royall Tyler's "The Contrast": Satire in "the Contrasts" America and Europe in Post-1776 Era accessed from net on 22.10.2019

7.13 SUMMING UP

This unit has exposed you to understanding Royall Tyler's Play *The Contrast* as

- a play of transition which exclusively pronounced American values for the first time.
- it exposed European sentimentality to its utmost limit.
- the contemporary appeal of "America First" gets good exploration in the play.
- it wins the race with its universality of the appeal.
- a play of employing elements of several firsts.

7.14 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How does the play represent American ideal?
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Musicals and Farce

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2. What cultural changes does the play *The Contrast* effect in American society?

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3. The play *The Contrasts* brings out the inherent contradiction between European and American ideology. Do you agree? Give your opinion.

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4. Discuss the play *The Contrast* as a Satire.

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5. Bring out the contemporary relevance of the play *The Contrast*.

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6. Show your acquaintance with the character Colonel Manly.

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7. Do you consider Dimple as the real villain of the play? Elaborate.

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8. Attempt a character sketch of women characters in the play.

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