

THE CONTRAST

by Royall Tyler

Jessamy (19) - Jonathan (18)

The Play: Written in 1787 and most likely patterned after Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, *The Contrast* is considered to be the first American comedy. Dimple, just back from a trip to Europe, scorns all things American. His silly affectation is in sharp contrast with the more rough-and-ready character of Colonel Manly, who served under Washington, and is the brother of Charlotte, whom Dimple hopes to take as his mistress. After Dimple breaks off his engagement with Maria, a girl of simple means, he attempts to marry the wealthy Letitia and woo Charlotte. Colonel Manly comes to his sister's aid, however, foils Dimple, and wins the hand of Maria for himself. In the process, the play attempts to answer the question: should Americans cultivate their own customs and manners, or should they follow the fashions of the Continent? Much of the play's humor derives from the contrast between Jessamy, Dimple's affected servant, and Jonathan, Manly's bumbling but true, blue Yankee servant—the first of his type in American theater, and one which was popular on the stage throughout the 19th century.

The Scene: Dimple's servant, Jessamy, is walking on the Mall hoping to find some pretty girls when he encounters Jonathan, Colonel Manly's "waiter." Jessamy seizes the opportunity to have some fun with his less sophisticated counterpart.

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(*The Mall. Enter Jessamy.*)

JESSAMY: Positively this Mall is a very pretty place. I hope the city won't ruin it by repairs. To be sure, it won't do to speak of in the same with Ranelagh or Vauxhall; however, it's a fine place for a young fellow to display his person to advantage. Indeed, nothing is lost here; the girls have taste, and I am very happy to find they have adopted the elegant London fashion of looking back, after a genteel fellow like me has passed them. —Ah! who comes here? This, by his awkwardness, must be the Yankee colonel's servant. I'll accost him.

JESSAMY: *Votre très-humble seigneur, Monsieur.* I understand Colonel Manly, the Yankee officer, has the honour of your services.

JONATHAN: Sir!—

JESSAMY: I say, Sir, I understand that Colonel Manly has the honour of having you for a servant.

JONATHAN: Servant! [Sir, do you take me for a neger,]—I am Colonel Manly's waiter.

JESSAMY: A true Yankee distinction, egad, without a difference. Why, Sir, do you not perform all the offices of a servant? do you not even blacken his boots?

JONATHAN: Yes; I do grease them a bit sometimes; but I am a true blue son of liberty, for all that. Father said I should come as Colonel Manly's waiter, to see the world, and all that; but no man shall master me. My father has as good a farm as the colonel.

JESSAMY: Well, Sir, we will not quarrel about terms upon the eve of an acquaintance from which I promise myself so much satisfaction;—therefore, *sans cérémonie*—

JONATHAN: What?—

JESSAMY: I say I am extremely happy to see Colonel Manly's waiter.

JONATHAN: Well, and I vow, too. I am pretty considerably glad to see you; but what the dogs need of all this outlandish lingo? Who may you be, Sir, if I may be so bold?

JESSAMY: I have the honour to be Mr. Dimple's servant, or, if you please, waiter. We lodge under the same roof, and should be glad of the honour of your acquaintance.

JONATHAN: You a waiter! by the living jingo, you look so topping,

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I took you for one of the agents to Congress.

JESSAMY: The brute has discernment, notwithstanding his appearance. —Give me leave to say I wonder then at your familiarity.

JONATHAN: Why, as to the matter of that, Mr.——; pray, what's your name?

JESSAMY: Jessamy, at your service.

JONATHAN: Why, I swear we don't make any great matter of distinction in our state between quality and other folks.

JESSAMY: This is, indeed, a levelling principle. —I hope, Mr. Jonathan, you have not taken part with the insurgents.

JONATHAN: Why, since General Shays has sneaked off and given us the bag to hold, I don't care to give my opinion; but you'll promise not to tell—put your ear this way—you won't tell? —I vow I did think the sturgeons were right.

JESSAMY: I thought, Mr. Jonathan, you Massachusetts men always argued with a gun in your hand. Why didn't you join them?

JONATHAN: Why, the colonel is one of those folks called the Shin—Shin—dang it all, I can't speak them lignum vitae words—you know who I mean—there is a company of them—they wear a china goose at their button-hole—a kind of gilt thing. —Now the colonel told father and brother,—you must know there are, let me see—there is Elnathan, Silas, and Barnabas, Tabitha—no, no, she's a she—tarnation, now I have it—there's Elnathan, Silas, Barnabas, Jonathan, that's I—seven of us, six went into the wars, and I staid at home to take care of mother. Colonel said that it was a burning shame for the true blue Bunker Hill sons of liberty, who had fought Governor Hutchinson, Lord North, and the Devil, to have any hand in kicking up a cursed dust against a government which we had, every mother's son of us, a hand in making.

JESSAMY: Bravo! —Well, have you been abroad in the city since your arrival? What have you seen that is curious and entertaining?

JONATHAN: Oh! I have seen a power of fine sights. I went to see two marble-stone men and a leaden horse that stands out in doors in all weathers; and when I came where they was, one had got no head, and t'other wern't there. They said as how the leaden man was a damn'd tory, and that he took wit in his anger and rode off in the time of the

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troubles.

JESSAMY: But this was not the end of your excursion?

JONATHAN: Oh, no; I went to a place they call Holy Ground. Now I counted this was a place where folks go to meeting; so I put my hymnbook in my pocket, and walked softly and grave as a minister; and when I came there, the dogs a bit of a meeting-house could I see. At last I spied a young gentlewoman standing by one of the seats which they have here at the doors. I took her to be the deacon's daughter, and she looked so kind, and obliging, that I thought I would go ask her the way to the lecture, and—would you think it?—she called me dear, and sweeting, and honey, just as if we were married; by the living jingo, I had a month's mind to buss her.

JESSAMY: Well, but how did it end?

JONATHAN: Why, as I was standing talking with her, a parcel of sailor men and boys got round me, the snarl-headed curs fell a-kicking and cursing of me at such a tarnal rate, that I vow I was glad to take to my heels and split home, right off, tail on end, like a stream of chalk.

JESSAMY: Why, my dear friend, you are not acquainted with the city; that girl you saw was a—*(Whispers)*

JONATHAN: Mercy on my soul! was that young woman a harlot!—Well! if this is New-York Holy Ground, what must the Holy-day Ground be!

JESSAMY: Well, you should not judge of the city too rashly. We have a number of elegant, fine girls here that make a man's leisure hours pass very agreeably. I would esteem it an honour to announce you to some of them. —Gad! that announce is a select word; I wonder where I picked it up.

JONATHAN: I don't want to know them.

JESSAMY: Come, come, my dear friend, I see that I must assume the honour of being the director of your amusements. Nature has given us passions, and youth and opportunity stimulate to gratify them. It is no shame, my dear Blueskin, for a man to amuse himself with a little gallantry.

JONATHAN: Girl huntry! I don't altogether understand. I never played at that game. I know how to play hunt the squirrel, but I can't

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play anything with the girls; I am as good as married.

JESSAMY: Vulgar, horrid brute! Married, and above a hundred miles from his wife, and thinks that an objection to his making love to every woman he meets! He never can have read, no, he never can have been in a room with a volume of the divine Chesterfield. —So you are married?

JONATHAN: No, I don't say so; I said I was as good as married, a kind of promise.

JESSAMY: As good as married!—

JONATHAN: Why, yes; there's Tabitha Wymen, the deacon's daughter, at home; she and I have been courting a great while, and folks say as how we are to be married; and so I broke a piece of money with her when we parted, and she promised not to spark it with Solomon Dyer while I am gone. You wou'dn't have me false to my true-love, would you?

JESSAMY: May be you have another reason for constancy; possibly the young lady has a fortune? Ha! Mr. Jonathan, the solid charms: the chains of love are never so binding as when the links are made of gold.

JONATHAN: Why, as to fortune, I must needs say her father is pretty dumb rich; he went representative for our town last year. He will give her—let me see—four times seven is—seven times four—nought and carry one,—he will give her twenty acres of land—somewhat rocky though—a Bible, and a cow.

JESSAMY: Twenty acres of rock, a Bible, and a cow! Why, my dear Mr. Jonathan, we have servant-maids, or, as you would more elegantly express it, waitresses, in this city, who collect more in one year from their mistresses' cast clothes.

JONATHAN: You don't say so!—

JESSAMY: Yes, and I'll introduce you to one of them. There is a little lump of flesh and delicacy that lives at next door, waitress to Miss Maria; we often see her on the stoop.

JONATHAN: But are you sure she would be courted by me?

JESSAMY: Never doubt it; remember a faint heart never—blisters on my tongue—I was going to be guilty of a vile proverb; flat against the authority of Chesterfield. I say there can be no doubt that the brilliancy

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of your merit will secure you a favourable reception.

JONATHAN: Well, but what must I say to her?

JESSAMY: Say to her! why, my dear friend, though I admire your profound knowledge on every other subject, yet, you will pardon my saying that your want of opportunity has made the female heart escape the poignancy of your penetration. Say to her! Why, when a man goes a-courting, and hopes for success, he must begin with doing, and not saying.

JONATHAN: Well, what must I do?

JESSAMY: Why, when you are introduced you must make five or six elegant bows.

JONATHAN: Six elegant bows! I understand that; six, you say? Well—

JESSAMY: Then you must press and kiss her hand; then press and kiss, and so on to her lips and cheeks; then talk as much as you can about hearts, darts, flames, nectar, and ambrosia—the more incoherent the better.

JONATHAN: Well, but suppose she should be angry with I?

JESSAMY: Why, if she should pretend—please to observe, Mr. Jonathan—if she should pretend to be offended, you must— But I'll tell you how my master acted in such a case: He was seated by a young lady of eighteen upon a sofa, plucking with a wanton hand the blooming sweets of youth and beauty. When the lady thought it necessary to check his ardour, she called up a frown upon her lovely face, so irresistibly alluring, that it would have warmed the frozen bosom of age; remember, said she, putting her delicate arm upon his, remember your character and my honour. Mr master instantly dropped upon his knees, with eyes swimming with love, cheeks glowing with desire, and in the gentlest modulation of voice he said: My dear Caroline, in a few months our hands will be indissolubly united at the altar; our hearts I feel are already so; the favours you now grant as evidence of your affection are favours indeed; yet, when the ceremony is once past, what will now be received with rapture will then be attributed to duty.

JONATHAN: Well, and what was the consequence?

JESSAMY: The consequence! —Ah! forgive me, my dear friend, but

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you New England gentlemen have such a laudable curiosity of seeing the bottom of everything;—why, to be honest, I confess I saw the blooming cherub of a consequence smiling in its angelic mother's arms, about ten months afterwards.

JONATHAN: Well, if I follow all your plans, make them six bows, and all that, shall I have such little cherubim consequences?

JESSAMY: Undoubtedly. —What are you musing upon?

JONATHAN: You say you'll certainly make me acquainted? —Why, I was thinking then how I should contrive to pass this broken piece of silver—won't it buy a sugar-dram?

JESSAMY: What is that, the love-token from the deacon's daughter?—You come on bravely. But I must hasten to my master. Adieu, my dear friend.

JONATHAN: Stay, Mr. Jessamy—must I buss her when I am introduced to her?

JESSAMY: I told you, you must kiss her.

JONATHAN: Well, but must I buss her?

JESSAMY: Why kiss and buss, and buss and kiss, is all one.

JONATHAN: Oh! my dear friend, though you have a profound knowledge of all, a pugnency of tribulation, you don't know everything. *(Exit)*

JESSAMY: *(Alone)* Well, certainly I improve; my master could not have insinuated himself with more address into the heart of a man he despised. Now will this blundering dog sicken Jenny with his nauseous pawings, until she flies into my arms for very ease. How sweet will the contrast be between the blundering Jonathan and the courtly and accomplished Jessamy!

THE DIVINERS

by Jim Leonard, Jr.

Buddy (mid-teens) - Showers (30)

The Play: Set in a small town in Indiana in the 1930's, the play deals with events leading to the death of Buddy, a young, troubled, boy. When he was very little he and his mother were in a traumatic accident that resulted in his mother drowning. Since the accident, he has developed a phobia of water, so much so that he doesn't even wash. However, Buddy's acute fear had lead to his ability to "divine" water. Raised by his father and sister, he needs more help than they can provide to overcome his fears. These are poor people living in difficult times with little if any assistance available for troubled children. Seen as the "idiot boy" by the twonspeople, life has stopped going forward for Buddy until Showers, a young preacher, comes into his life. Doubting his faith and his ability to preach, Showers has left his home and family in search of a new purpose in life. He secures a job as a mechanic working for Buddy's father and becomes involved with Buddy's sister. The town, in need of a good preacher, tries to persuade Showers to take on the responsibility. As the play progresses, Showers resists the townspeople, while at the same time becoming more and more determined to help Buddy overcome his fears. The play reaches its startling climax at the river when finally Showers persuades Buddy to let him help him wash. The town sees this as a baptism and startles the boy who eventually slips away and drowns. This very human story of youth, troubled by circumstances beyond their control, is told theatrically and poetically. The characters are rich and the relationships intriguing and sensitive.

The Scene: It is early in the morning. By this time in the play's action, Buddy has begun to place some trust in Showers. They are outdoors.