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'Cunning gamesters':
Libertine Theatrical Strategies
in Restoration Comedy

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 2

1. THE BASIS FOR LIBERTINE THOUGHT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LIBERTINE CHARACTERS 8

1.1 CHARLES II'S COURT AND THE KING'S INTEREST IN DRAMA 8
1.2 PHILOSOPHICAL GROUNDS FOR LIBERTINISM AND ITS APPLICATION IN RESTORATION: HOBBES, ROCHESTER AND SHADWELL 17
1.3 THE NEW TRADITION OF COMEDY: LIBERTINE CHARACTER, COMIC PATTERNS AND ITS METATHEATRICAL IMPLICATIONS 30

2. THE LIBERTINE'S MANIPULATION OF THE PLOT: DUPERY, DIRECTION AND PRETENCE 42

2.1 THE CHARACTER'S SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS 43
2.2 "COMIC DECEIT": DISGUISE AND PLOTTING 50
2.3 PLAYING THE PART: THE LIBERTINE AS A DIRECTOR 65

3. LIBERTINE'S METALINGUISTIC SEDUCTION: A MASTER OF LANGUAGE 72

3.1 "HE HAS WITCHCRAFT IN HIS EYES AND TONGUE": WIT AND SPEECH ACTS 74
3.2 THE LIBERTINE'S OUTWITTING THE OTHER CHARACTERS 90
3.3 LINGUISTIC AMBIGUITY AND *DOUBLE ENTENDRES* 99

4. DRAMATIC IRONY: THE THEATRE AND THE AUDIENCE 107

4.1 THE MODEL OF *THEATRUM MUNDI* AND THE THEATRICAL SPACE 108
4.2 INTER-DRAMATIC REFERENCES AND THE AUDIENCE 121
4.3 ASIDE 129

CONCLUSION 137

REFERENCES 141

Introduction

"The curtain rises, and a gayer scene presents itself, as on the canvass of Watteau. We are admitted behind the scenes like spectators at court, on a levee or birth-day; but it is the court, the gala day of wit and pleasure, of gallantry and Charles II!" (1903, 84) thus Hazlitt wrote in a lecture on Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar. Immediately, the parallel between the Restoration age and the court of Charles II is materialised. The plays of the Restoration age are precisely a *gala day of wit and pleasure* where libertines control the stage showing off their wit and ridiculing a puritan side of society. At the court of Charles II, libertines' behaviour did not go unnoticed. Similarly, theatre exploited their popularity in order to create an unforgettable type of drama and comedy constituted a good compromise for its entertaining ability. As a matter of fact, during the Restoration age Dryden supported, often against his contemporaries, that the "the chief end of [comedy] is divertise men and delight" and in particular that wit "moves [us], if not alwayes to laughter, yet to a pleasure that is more noble" (quoted in Hume 1973, 305). Dryden's statement reprises Hazlitt's description of the late seventeenth-century theatre and is particularly useful to understand why in comedies libertines could be themselves without being reproached.

This study investigates the huge complex that is Restoration Comedy lending particular attention to libertine characters and their theatrical significance. It will use ten plays to provide examples of the arguments, these are: *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* (1672), *Marriage à-la-Mode* (1673), *The Country Wife* (1675), *The Plain Dealer* (1676), *The Libertine* (1676), *The Man of Mode* (1676), *The Rover* (1677), *The Double Dealer* (1693), *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of The World* (1700). Such selection has been fundamental for the logical development of the topic to study how the theatre is explored in a larger period of time. The playwrights involved –Wycherley, Dryden, Behn, Etherege and Congreve – dealt with libertinism in several forms. Dryden used the theme as mere entertainment, his libertines are playful and lack the component of a well-developed schemer. Etherege, Wycherley and Behn employed a similar attitude towards libertinism in its usual meaning of a senseless and amoral attitude. Their libertines are rakes, strategists and gamesters. Distinguishably, Congreve stood out from the list for two reasons. Firstly, because he was writing later in time – towards the very end of the seventeenth century – when the claim for moral refinement at theatres and the need to stage admirable characters praised by Jeremy Collier forced the writers to revaluate the

desirability of rakish libertines. Secondly, Congreve's plays are immediately prior to the rise of the sentimental comedy thus his heroes were more like gentlemen in love whose libertine past is hinted at but never shown on the stage. In the previous list of plays figures also a tragedy, Shadwell's *The Libertine*, which is explored in the first introductory chapter as a way to present the comic plays starting from their opposite. *The Libertine* concludes that when libertines are treated in their darkest and coarsest side according to moral terms, they are inevitably doomed to a tragic end. Comedies, on the other hand, still utilise libertine beliefs but those are mitigated by theatrical tropes and devices which reform and refine libertines' behaviour, even if, and it will be analysed, the last word always lies with the audience. In comedies, there is never a predictable way of reading them, but theatregoers understand what they prefer to, an attitude which reduces theatre to a matter of appearance, just as the Restoration reality itself.

Libertinism, as a social and philosophical question, was likely to be appreciated at a court such as that of the 1660s. The closure of theatres eighteen years before and the current struggle to find a proper form of government – different from the monarchy – were both interrupted by the return of the king. Charles II opened, as Keeble (2002) underlines in his perceptive study on the Restoration age, a time of universal festivity, spreading no less than "a carnival air" (41). Keeble writes that "the theatricality of the proceedings surrounding the Restoration manifested the glory of monarchy and situated onlookers in the position of subjects, spectators to be overawed by the lavish excess and magnificence of royalty" (43). The festivity the scholar refers to and which he parallels to a theatrical environment reflects a general stance of freethinking typically following a period of repression. Such liveliness is also typically libertine. Who were those libertines? As social figures of the Restoration age, libertines were members of the court and poets. Wilson (1948) calls them *The Court Wits* whose name encapsulates the link between the libertines as members of the court and the remarkable element of wit. This latter – wit – is also a key element in comedies. It is a term quasi-impossible to translate but which at the same time contains the essence of the comedy of a whole age. Dryden himself praised Congreve in the preface of *The Double Dealer* stating that the playwright "shalt be seen/ High on the throne of wit" and that "in [Congreve] all the beauties of the age we see"[1]. If the term is synonym with cleverness, briskness and raillery, none of these terms really gives wit value. This is why Thomas Fujimura thought it was important to replace the

[1] Dryden's inscription can be found at https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44188/to-my-dear-friend-mr-congreve-on-his-comedy-calld-the-double-dealer.

name ‘comedy of manners’ with ‘comedy of wit’ facing the concept in a unique and inimitable way in his *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (1978). As a corollary aspect of wit there is libertinism. If libertinism is generally conceived as the spirit of a person of loose morals, in the seventeenth century it constituted a specific complex body of behaviours rather than a doctrine and, consequently, these behaviours became theatrical. The libertines staged in comedies were nothing but the foils of the Restoration libertines, only freer to disclose themselves in a public space.

Yet, this study was not conceived as a mere exploration of libertine beliefs, although I needed to hint at those in the first chapter, because the theme has already been extensively examined by Dale Underwood in the preliminary chapters of *Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners* (1957). Nor will it be a performative analysis of libertine characters because Jeremy Webster has already faced the matter more recently in *Performing Libertinism at Charles II’s Court* (2005). This study was rather envisaged as a work which in dealing with libertines talks about theatre. When a work of art reflects art itself, so to speak, when a theatrical piece talks about theatre we enter the realm of metatheatre. As a self-reflexive genre, metatheatre uses typically theatrical tools to reflect on theatre. In doing so, the genre goes ‘beyond’ theatre and discovers that these same tools are similarly employed in reality. The fact that the libertine is both a social figure and a character who masters theatrical devices during the performances is the first instance of this concept. Nevertheless, one of the problems that I had to face has to do with the definition of metatheatre itself since it was originally associated with tragedy (Abel 1963). During a performance, the spectators’ feeling that the events are real is called reality effect. When a play, at some point, stops to provide this effect, so to speak, it shows its fictionality, becomes metatheatrical. Of course, metatheatre works well in tragedy since this has a superior illusionary power. Tragedy, unlike comedy, moves within worlds less likely to exist and where the spectator’s imaginative effort is immense. Thus, the clash between theatre as fiction and theatre as reality is more evident in tragedy where metatheatre can easily pinpoint its theatricality. Comedy, instead, is inspired to ordinary life and stages scenes that the spectator can quickly identify as his/hers without a huge effort. The comedies of the Restoration age staged nothing but the reality of the seventeenth-century London with a vividness and lifelikeness that is often very similar to that of city comedies. Yet, it is precisely through this parallel, theatre and reality, that this study has tried to read metatheatre. By staging the Restoration age, comedies have suggested that if the world of theatre is so similar to reality it is because reality itself

tremendously resembles theatre. And it could not be truer in an age such as the Restoration where the libertines

> were actors who captivated spectators with their scandalous behaviour, the libertines were playwrights who embodied their own reputations in their libertine protagonists, and, through their activities and plays, the libertines were themselves texts to be analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated (Webster 2005, 3).

Libertine plays are plays about libertines written, in most of the cases, by libertines. There is a simile spoken by Eliza in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* which not only exemplifies the concept by relating the world to the stage but also includes the libertine by making the metatheatrical argument a paradigm even more grounded: "The world is but a constant keeping gallant, whom we fail not to quarrel with when anything crosses us, yet cannot part with't for our hearts" (act 2, scene 1, p. 416). Eliza links theatre and libertinism in just one sentence while affirming that she, like us, is a spectator who accepts and understands the world uncritically and not by showing her disgust towards it because, even willingly, *we cannot part* from it.

It might appear that in speaking of metatheatre, comedy and libertinism I am taking for granted the idea of realism. Therefore, before I begin, I need to make a further clarification on the problem of realism. The claim that Restoration Comedy aims at *vraisemblance* is widely discussed. It is grounded on the idea that the Restoration playwrights represented the reality of the Restoration time on the stage and the spectators could identify themselves with characters and situations. It is true that comedy is more realistic than other genres but, as Hume (1973) underlines, the excessive stress on realism might be generated from a confusion of the term with the concept of "natural imitation" intrinsically contained in the definition of comedy. According to Hume, saying that Restoration Comedy is realistic is only a "roundabout flattery of an audience which liked to imagine that it was a little more rakish than it actually was" (313) and cannot be completely true since the audience would have been unlikely happy to see themselves ridiculed. Much of the content of the plays were indeed drawn on a natural imitation of attitudes and behaviours typical of the Restoration age but the extent to which the audience found this identification real is not possible to state. Therefore, this study will use the realistic claim more as a matter of attitude and presentation. Characters are realistic in the sense that they are neither heightened as in tragedy nor ridiculed as in farce. They are, and in this sense, the present study imitates Underwood's impartial position, "at once realistic and artificial" (1957, 4). The characters of the Restoration comedies are

artificial because they are aesthetic products, fictional as any work of art but their behaviours incredibly represent the reality of the age. This view further aligns with the concept of wit, defined by Fujimura (1978) as *natural.* As language, wit is artificial because it can be manipulated but the way characters use it on the stage is never so sumptuous to be considered completely fictional.

Another clarification concerns the opposition between foppish characters and Truewits, another point on which several critics have written about. Such characters' 'opposition' is deeply rooted in the question of manners where, reasoning through binary oppositions, if there is a proper way to behave it means that there is also an improper way. Libertines in the plays further this opposition to show that their way is the best since they are always successful in obtaining what they crave for. The way in which foppish characters are ridiculed is not based on an imitation of reality but it is a fictional pattern that theatre, and libertines, exploit in order to create playful situations in the plots and to demonstrate their briskness.

The last clarification I wish to make concerns the theatrical approach of this study. Throughout the chapters, the analysis of theatre will often recall the semiotics of theatre. Particularly, Keir Elam's *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (2002) and other significant theories such as Austin's or Searle's on speech, are pioneer to study all the signs that theatre deploys to achieve meaning and to communicate with the audience.

Chapter 1 ("The basis for Libertine thought and the development of libertine characters") traces the origins of libertinism by analysing the social context of the court of Charles II and the King's inclination towards theatre. The chapter will introduce main theatrical innovations, such as the *proscenium arch* and the inclusion of actresses onstage. Shifting to libertinism, the topic will be faced in philosophical terms. Particular attention will be given to Hobbes's ideas about *the state of nature* and the primaeval egoistic feeling of self-preservation the philosopher believes man is affected by. Hobbes's ideas were widespread among the Court Wits and the topic of many of John Wilmot's poems, such as *A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind* written in 1675. Rochester particularly lived his life and poetry as if they were a never-ending game and a fight for power. After analysing the consequences of libertine beliefs, such as the over-inclination towards the pleasures of life, the only possible outcome is the inability for these figures to find a compromise with society, a point on which libertinism and Hobbes diverge. Therefore, the study inquires whether there is a dimension where libertine inclinations might be harmless and even amusing. The answer is that the theatrical (comic) dimension of the Restoration

theatre seems the fittest to analyse and understand libertinism. Chapter 2 to 4 focus each on a diverse aspect of theatre. Chapter 2 ("The libertine's manipulation of the plot: dupery, direction and pretence") reflects on the general notion of metatheatre and applies it on a plot-level by exploring the tricking motif. On a last note, the chapter analyses the instances in which the libertine assumes the role of the director, namely, when he, as a director does, instructs the other characters on how to assume a proper behaviour.

Drawing on the contemporary theories of speech acts and assuming that all that happens in a play takes place through language, Chapter 3 ("Libertine's metalinguistic seduction: a master of language") analyses the libertine's manipulation of language without underestimating main linguistic theories of the seventeenth century. The main focus of the chapter is the use of language in its deceiving power which, actually, is not misleading because libertines' repartees are witty and have the power to outwit foppish characters. In the chapter, will be discussed the playful linguistic phenomenon of *double entendres,* often sexual double senses. They demonstrate that language in the theatre is not equivalent to the Saussurean notion of signified=signifying but it can be connotative or denotative according to how characters prefer to read it. Finally, Chapter 4 ("Dramatic irony: the theatre and the audience") explores the complicated apparatus of theatre. By briefly retracing the original meaning of theatre as *mimesis,* the chapter focuses on the metaphor of *Theatrum Mundi* through phenomenological lenses. As phenomenology considers each experience as an existent phenomenon *per se*, so theatre can be addressed as a unique but alternative reality. The audience only is part of the macrocosm of the theatre and, as a supreme spectator of the theatrical reality and the reality outside the theatre, plays a key role in making the theatre as much similar as possible to reality.

As this brief outline suggests, I have tried to give libertinism another voice and to inscribe seventeenth-century libertine characters in a role which in the age immediately following has been attacked for being lavish and made impossible to appreciate. I have insisted that the theatre is precisely a dimension which 'saves' libertines, which suspends our moral judgment about them as social beings and which makes them appealing, now because of their wit, but in the Restoration age also because they were nothing but the reflection of a special society that in forty years had written a new page of English dramatic history.

1. The basis for Libertine thought and the development of libertine characters

Since Jeremy Colliers's attack to the theatre in *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* in 1698, the libertines became stigmatised figures, debauchees which conducted lewd actions on the stage. Playwrights were similarly accused of encouraging such bad acts. Yet, are libertines these miserable figures or would it be worth re-examining and trying to understand who libertines actually were? This chapter tries to explain, without moral implications, the meaning of libertinism in the seventeenth century. It will start from a historical, social and philosophical analysis in order to create a specific category for libertinism from 1660 onwards. Thomas Hobbes's ideas on *the state of nature* constitute the main philosophical background for libertinism and his reflections were influential for the court wits and specifically for John Wilmot Earl of Rochester. He will provide a case study for libertinism by incarnating all those libertine beliefs later attacked. Nevertheless, Rochester was also a brilliant poet and although his poems deal extremely with libertinism, they are also tinged with a fragility which is typical of human beings. After these premises, the chapter shifts to the theatre. In the 1660s, the theatre was full of novelties, starting from technological innovations to the main change of the age that allowed women to play. Comedy in particular, for its dialogic vividness, the briskness and freshness of the plot, constitutes a product unique to the age and opens a new kind of drama which sees the same libertine beliefs exposed on the stage. Yet, these fictional libertines reflect a real society made of appearances, roles and, albeit comically, the Hobbesian egoistic struggle for personal scopes. All this lies on a huge, metadramatic, paradox: libertines represent men playing the part of men playing a part. In the great fair of the Restoration society, appearance and reality are confused, condensed and thus equalled. If the libertine exists in reality, he can also exist in the alternative reality of theatre. The only question remains how. Thus, let us pass the matter over to this introductory chapter which aims to provide the means on which to base the following nuclei of this study.

1.1 Charles II's court and the King's interest in drama

The year 1660 opened a new artistic era in England and the bunch of novelties which supported the artistic panorama were promoted by huge political changes. The Civil War started in 1642 and caused the execution of King Charles I in 1649 and the

subsequent military dictatorship led by Cromwell, which lasted until 1658. In 1660 the King's son, Charles II, who had spent some years of exile in France, was called back with the Declaration of Breda[2]. Although at this stage the Republic seemed an old dream, the years of Civil War (1642-1645) and military dictatorship did not leave the country unaffected. The eighteen years preceding the return of the King were characterised by a staunch Puritanism that had modified the mindset and attitude of citizens. Besides demanding a balanced and moral behaviour, artistically speaking, Puritans rejected any form of entertainment, including theatres. In Puritan terms, the actor's art of impersonating a certain role meant the pretence of being someone different from himself and this was considered immoral. Even more immoral was the practice of gender blurring, typical of the Renaissance theatre, which supposed that women's roles were acted by young boys. The belief in the insincerity and inappropriateness of theatres caused their closure in 1642. The eighteen years of theatrical gap represented a gloomy moment in English literature since drama had always been a major genre and Queen Elizabeth herself had a keen understanding of the staging power.

When Charles II returned from France, his zest was partly directed towards the promotion of the theatrical activity. During his exile, he had the opportunity of observing and admiring the enthusiasm and dramatic liveliness of French theatre and he wanted to transfer the same artistic ferment in his own country. As usual after a period of repression and deprivation, there is a welcoming attitude towards the introduction of novelties, as the need for self-expression. The favourable panorama was furthered by a hedonistic king, appealing for his free and sensual nature, schooled in a certain kind of elegant cynicism by his years in exile which made him far more inclined to enjoy sexual and verbal licence in a cultured but libidinous court. Satirically described by Rochester in *A Satyr on Charles II* as the "easiest King and best-bred man alive" (line 4), the poet provides a sexual portrait of the King: "Peace is his aim, gentleness is such,/ And love he loves, for he loves fucking much" (lines 8-9) and later "Restless he [The King] rolls about from whore to whore,/ A merry monarch, scandalous and poor" (lines 20-21). Scandalous is also the language that Rochester uses to describe the King, however, it provides an exact picture of the seventeenth-century 'merry' court.

[2] On the 4th of April 1660, the Declaration of Breda established the monarchy back in England. Charles II promised indulgence for the crimes committed during the Interregnum, religious toleration and adequate powers to the Parliament.

The court of King Charles was remarkable also because he was surrounded by a group known as the 'Court Wits'. Generally, its members were literary and political men who shared the king's delight in songs, women and wine. They held a scandalous private life, often drunk and with several mistresses at once. But they were also very loyal to the King who granted them protection and public titles. Court Wits were also called Libertines. Their beliefs will be discussed later but, so far, it is enough to state that they presented a dissolute life, regardless of any moral and sensible limit. Libertinism was greatly debated outside the court and common people wondered how far libertines' licentiousness might go and actually often ended in disputes or riots. In this regard, in his book *The Court Wits of the Restoration*[3] Harold Wilson affirms*:*

> The Wits have been variously labelled cynics, skeptics, libertines, Epicureans, pagans and atheists. To a certain extent, some of the terms apply, yet none is strictly accurate. They were cynical (as the King, their master, was cynical) because their limited experience demonstrated that no man was honest and no woman chaste. They were not true skeptics, for they accepted the materialism of Lucretius and Hobbes. They were libertines by instinct (as most young male animals are), but they were libertines by conviction as well, for they saw no ethical values in their world, and no purpose of living save the gratification of their senses (1948, 16-17).

Apart from the King's hedonistic inclination, there were political elements which contributed to the emerging of such figures. The events of the Interregnum left a strong mark on those who in the previous age had been linked to the court. Since the King's exile in France, Royalists had their lands confiscated under the accusation of treason, in favour of Cromwellians. The Wits witnessed this egoistic environment since most of the victims were their fathers and this provoked a distasteful and cynical inclination of this social layer towards society. In addition, most of the fathers of the alleged Court Wits not only were forced to leave England but they also had to abandon their children – the future Court Wits – who grew up without an example to emulate in a mainly patriarchal society. According to Tilmouth[4], this last element has been crucial because a child is more inclined to behave as he wishes, thus lawlessly, when he is raised without a model. Wits were raised with the idea they could discipline themselves to what they considered pleasant in

[3] The work by Harold Wilson is very important in critical terms since it challenges the common belief that libertines were only debauched, criminals and unruled men and which contributed to a demonization of their image. On the contrary, Wilson shows that, albeit libertines partly deserved that connotation, they also were lovers and man of letters. In the seventeenth century, libertinism was not only a dissolute conduct but it also affected society and literature. Wilson's study provides a well-rounded analysis of the figure, including its implications in theatre.

[4] This interesting social and historical analysis is conducted in Chapter 7 of Tilmouth's *Passions Triumphs Over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester*, pp. 288-294.

every aspect of society. They had been marginalised and detached from society during the Interregnum and it was only when the King was restored that they found identification and protection. At the same time, their identification has to be intended within the values that they considered right for themselves. This seems a possible explication of libertines' cynicism, amorality and unconventionality. Also, when the monarchy was restored in 1660, the Act of Indemnity and Oblivion[5] did not mitigate the Wits' spirit, on the contrary, it accentuated their inclinations since the same Act expected the criminals of Interregnum to be forgiven and former Royalists did not receive their lands back. Therefore, the society where libertines were living in 1660 was still indifferent to their birthrights and, consequently, they were indifferent to such a society. This explains why they modelled their philosophy out of Hobbes's theories of a primordial state based on self-interest, passions and bodily pleasure.

It seems necessary to name such Wits: Killigrew, George Villiers Duke of Buckingham, Sedley, Wycherley, Etherege and John Wilmot Earl of Rochester are part of the list. As might be noted, among them are some playwrights and poets who besides their courtly life were deeply involved in the artistic panorama. The strong link they had with the court shows how libertinism was an attitude widely supported by the king and by the general stance of the age. Charles II encouraged libertine behaviour and his court has been defined as a "supercharged bordello catering for all kinds of sexual preferences" (Tilmouth 2007, 259). It is also Samuel Pepys who illustrates this idea of the court. In his diaries, attractive for their meticulousness and realism, he writes that during Charles II's reign "the King doth mind nothing but pleasures and hates the very sight or thoughts of business" (quoted in Keeble 2002, 99). Pepys also defines the Court Wits as the King's "counsellors of pleasure" in contrast to the "Sober counsellors" who provided him with good advice (*ibid.*). Exemplary is the episode, recalled by Pepys, in which Lady Castlemayne had got pregnant with the King but since she was also engaged in a different relationship, the King had refused to recognise his son (Tilmouth 2007, 260). Such episodes involving jealousy, blackmail and impertinence were, starting by the king, very usual among libertines.

[5] The Act of Indemnity and Oblivion was an "An Act of Free and General Pardon, Indemnity, and Oblivion" generally forgiving who committed crimes during the Civil War and Interregnum, with some exceptions. However, the lands confiscated to Royalists and more in general to him who was considered a dissenter during the Interregnum were sold rather than given back to its owners. In actual fact, the *oblivion* refers to the crimes 'forgotten', as the 'forgotten' rights of those who had been marginalised before. More information about the act can be visited at https://www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol5/pp226-234.

Accordingly, it becomes easier to understand Restoration Comedy by considering that the libertine was a figure very close to the seventeenth-century reality. The *Court Wits* (or libertines) represent a bridge between the court and the artistic life of that time. Libertinism represented a means to resist an unfair society also in terms of drama. In the course of the twentieth century, there have been several studies to trace the figure of the Libertine. The above-stated reflections constitute a historical reason for it, the philosophical inclinations and especially the measure Hobbes's ideas shaped libertine behaviour will be the object of the next paragraph.

As for the relation between court and drama, 1660 was a watershed date because theatres reopened to the public after eighteen years.[6] The management of drama was entrusted to two figures: Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant, both connected to the King and the only two licensed to perform on the stage. Sir William Davenant, schooled from Shakespeare, was a playwright and librettist of court masques in the reign of James I and he held a theatrical experience which he could invest in the training of the actors. Thomas Killigrew was a playwright before the theatre closure and a member of the Court Wits, thus an intimate of the King. His social position became an advantage point he exploited since he was favoured the best actors and the monopoly of classic English plays. Killigrew's privileged position pushed his rival Davenant to invest more on the stage, which was embellished with several technological innovations. Killigrew's company was called 'The King's Men' and managed a theatre at Drury Lane; Davenant's company was 'The Duke's Man' and they built a theatre in Dorset Garden, the Lincoln's Inn Field. The two companies merged in 1682 into one company named 'United Company', probably because at some point the King was not able to finance two different companies. Acting became during the Restoration age more likely a profession and, as a matter of fact, people attended theatres not only to follow the events of the play but especially to judge how a specific player was impersonating a certain role. The audience knew the actors by name and the roles they were fitter to play. Thence, the stock-patterns of the Restoration theatre might find a possible explanation for the play's success.

[6] Actually, there is an account that private performances had been held all-the-same between 1642 and 1660. Yet, the reopening to the public and the new 'licensed' theatre are significant innovations which suggest the rise of a new distinguished form of drama.

The new theatres were different from those of the previous age. If *The Globe* had been the leading example of an open theatre with standing-audience and no artificial lights, the Restoration theatres were closed, roofed and lightened so that performances could happen any time in the day. One of the major architectural innovations was the *proscenium arch* with flat wings[7], painted shutters and backcloth which reinforced the illusion of the stage while changing of scenes and which further marked the separation between the audience and performers. This latter element marks the creation of a new performative space. Instead of the action taking place in the *apron stage*, in the Restoration age plays were mainly staged on the forestage and were ornamented with realistic settings which moved the actor closer to the audience, if not in terms of space, in terms of identification. As a matter of fact, the audience belonged to the same social level of the characters represented in the plays with whom they could identify. They were either members of the court or belonged to middle-class society; in any case, they were influenced by the court's tastes. Libertines generally occupied a special place in the theatre as Wilson writes:

> the Wits were the best critics of the period of Charles II, and that Drama (particularly comedy) was superior because a considerable part of the audience were qualified to judge for themselves, and that they who were not qualifies, were influenced by the authority of those who were (1948, 146).

The characters on the stage and the scenery, particularly in comedies, were inspired by life-like situations occurring in London. The contact between the actor and the audience was based on shared values rather than, as in the previous tradition, physical contact. Therefore, either as critics or dramatists, libertines influenced the theatrical genre. Going to the theatre became the moment in which people could see themselves reflected on the stage and gain some pleasure out of it. Libertines were among the most devoted theatregoers, they enjoyed art and drama and theatre represented the occasion where they could flaunt their personality and relate with women. Not surprisingly, many of the libertine comedies have many scenes set in theatres or big halls which held masked ballets[8]. These intertwined situations created many occasions where libertines could

[7] All the stage innovations about theatre mark the beginning of a new age. Flat wings run in grooves across the stage, one behind the other making it possible to change the scene by sliding out a set of flats. The scene was mainly staged in the forestage which constituted a vantage point for everyone not only in visual terms but in this way, the actor's voice was clear and everyone could easily hear the lines. The new theatrical structure along with the grooves were sufficient reasons to consider the comedies in a new completely new kind of theatre.

[8] In Wycherley's *The Country Wife* theatre serves as an important social meeting place for gossip and to meet fashionable people. It is at theatre that Horner 'chooses' his ladies. The characters of Aphra Behn's

employ their duping and seductive ability, precisely as happened in real life. The Restoration age was a "Masquerading age" (Wycherley, *The Gentlemen-Dancing Master,* act 1, scene 1, p. 167) where the real world and the world of the theatre incredibly resemble each other.

Libertines' interest in theatre was probably further accentuated by the hugest innovation of Restoration drama which allowed the women to play. In Elizabethan Drama, women's roles were played by young boys, usually aged between ten and eighteen. Although there was no real law about women's exclusion on the stage, it was a generally accepted convention. On the contrary, Restoration drama allowed woman to participate in the performances obviating thus to the difficulties arising from boys impersonating women. It was also the result of a changing social attitude towards women. In the seventeenth century, women's reputation shifted from a position of inferiority to a necessary counterpart, still excluded from men's social life but an indispensable sex. In addition, England was currently ruled by an openminded King who had a personal experience of the European theatrical tradition where women had been allowed to perform long since, as in France, Spain or Italy. In encouraging the theatre, Charles II's could not overlook this aspect. Consequently, according to records, in the first performance in December 1660, the first actress appeared on the stage playing the role of Desdemona in a production of Shakespeare's *Othello* (Howe 1994, 19). From this moment on, women constituted an important part of theatres, not only as actresses but also as spectators. Theatre became the place where appearance and sexuality were displayed. The concept of sensuality on the stage is intrinsically connected to the general discourse of libertines and also to comedy. Libertines used to attend theatres to choose their mistresses among the beautiful and sensual actresses and they were also allowed to go behind the scenes and looking when they were dressing. Direct references for this habit is found in comedies. Flint for example, who plays the part of a prostitute in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master,* addresses to the "good men o' th' Exchange" stating: "Into the pit already you are come,/ 'Tis but a step more to our tiring-room; […] You we had rather see between our scenes" (Wycherley, Epilogue, p. 267) and also in the Prologue of *Marriage à-la-mode,* Dryden calls the libertines 'warriors in red waistcoats' who come

The Rover spend almost the whole play masked on the pretext of carnival freedom; for instance, Willmore and Angelica will fall in love because of their witty speeches since they do not see each other's face until the end. In Dryden's *Marriage à-la-Mode* masked balls provide a breeding ground for cuckolding since the events are justified by the disguise.

in the actresses' 'tireing room(s)' (p. 6). It is recorded that Rochester had a very long relationship with Elizabeth Barry, the legend tells that he trained her as the best actress of the age. The king himself had some love affairs with actresses, Nell Gwyn was one of those[9]. Not too late, actresses' reputation was compared to that of a prostitute, they could not protect themselves from male advances and, as Howe puts it, "for every Libertine in the Audience will be buzzing about her Honey-pot" (1994, 33).

Another consequence of women's participation on the stage concerns their intent of showing their sensuality and charm on the stage, creating what has been defined 'breeches parts'. The term refers to such roles which involve women showing parts of their body, which became an attractive popular pattern on the stage. These roles created appealing opportunities for the male audience, especially for libertines, and as the critic Pat Rogers observes "it was central to the effect that the actress's femininity showed through" (Howe 1994, 56). In comedies, breeches parts were further accentuated in these situations where for plot reasons women had to be disguised as men but their shape was clearly feminine. Conversely to the fashion of the time according to which women could wear low necklines but their lower body was covered with petticoats or long skirts, in the 'breeches parts' women, disguised as men, had their breasts covered but their backside and legs were highlighted by close-fitting trousers. So, when a woman played the part of a lady, she was dressed like the audience used to see her in ordinary life. Yet, in disguised parts, the male spectators could admire women's legs in public, a vision which, unless on private occasions, they were unfamiliar with. The situation entailed a delightful ambiguity where the audience was aware of what was happening from the beginning while the characters on the stage mistook the actresses' identity throughout the play and showed their surprise only at the final revelation of their gender. In most of the cases, when the disguise would eventually be unveiled and the female identity of the character revealed, the woman unbuttoned her shirt and revealed her breasts. The practice was extremely appreciated by the male audience for its sensual appeal and was considered a source of "erotic overstimulation" (Wilson 1948, 70). This brought such scenes more and more

[9] In *A Satyr on Charles II,* while describing the easy, sexual inclinations of the King, Rochester names two of his mistresses. "To Carwell, the most dear of all his dears/ the best relief of his declining years" (lines 22-23). Rochester refers to Louise de Keroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth who seems the King was very affectionate. Rochester also names Nell Gwyn, a famous actress with whom Rochester himself had an affair too. To her, he is even more straightforward, even describing how she used to 'satisfy' the King:

> This you'd believe, had I but time to tell ye
> The pains it costs to poor, laborious Nelly,
> Whilst she employs hands, fingers, mouth, and thighs,
> Ere she can raise the member she enjoys (lines 28-31).

frequently represented in the plays. An example is Fidelia's disguise in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*. Being secretly in love with the protagonist Manly, Fidelia spends all the play disguised as a man so that she can stand by his side just as a friend. In the second scene of the fourth act she is discovered by Vernish:

> Fid: I am a woman, sir, a very unfortunate woman
> Ver: How! A very handsome woman, I'm sure then: here are witnesses of't too, I confess – [*Pulls off her peruke and feels her breasts; then aside*,] Well, I am glad to find the tables turned; my wife is in more dangers of cuckolding than I was.
> Fid: Now, sir, I hope you are so much a man of honour, as to let me go, now I have satisfied you, sir
> Ver: When you have satisfied me, madam, I will.
> Fid: I hope sir, you are too much a gentleman to urge those secrets from a woman which concern her honour. You may guess my misfortune to be love by my disguise: but a pair of breeches could not wrong you, sir (Wycherley, act 4, scene 2, p. 496).

Such a scene is exemplary of the connection between libertines, sex and women. It must have been really intriguing to have the woman showing off her breast and the man even touching them. Interesting is also the wordplay on the verb *satisfy*, by which Fidelia obviously means he is now *convinced* she is not wooing his wife and Vernish's reply is, of course, a sexual innuendo: he will be convinced after he has been sexually gratified.

Therefore, the attention given to body and physical pleasure reminds of libertine ideas and becomes in the Restoration theatre a pattern which successfully works on the stage. More specifically it creates two key concepts that worked in the theatre as well as in life: love limits pleasure and love after sex never lasts. This also might explain why Restoration actresses were libertines' favourite mistresses.

If on the one hand, the libertine of the plays mistreats his lovers, on the other hand, he eventually finds his perfect match, a woman who equates his libertine spirit, who has the same view of love and who manipulates the other characters and the audience as much as he. This is why critics talk about the 'gay couple', made of the libertine and a woman who shares his values and rhetoric of wit. Since this will be explored in the last paragraph of the chapter, it is enough to say that the women's appearance on the stage will settle a new way to explore the relationship between sexes and that the libertine's involvement in both art and society makes of him the briskest and most fashionable novelty of comedies. Apart from the realm of comedies, in reality, the libertines were far from comic characters. It seems necessary then, to explore the philosophical background of libertinism.

1.2 Philosophical grounds for libertinism and its application in Restoration: Hobbes, Rochester and Shadwell

Libertinism was originally articulated in France at the end of the sixteenth century in the philosophical ideas of Théophile de Vieu. He was part of a group named *les libertins érudits* and praised the power of Nature to favour man's passions and sexual satisfaction. His view shortly became among *les libertines* more materialistic and mingled with egoism and self-interestedness. Their materialistic philosophy ignored social conventions, which were considered merely artificial, and celebrated the superiority of physical sensation over formal learning. The French background was highly influential on libertinism but in England specifically, libertines' ideas were shaped on a branch of the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes known as 'moral philosophy'.

First and foremost, moral philosophy studies "the motions of the mind, namely, *appetite, aversion, love, benevolence, hope, fear, anger, emulation, envy,* &c.; what causes they have, and of what they be causes" (Sorell 2006, 179) and then deals with the "passions and manners of men" (*ibid.*, 180). Before providing a better explanation of what Hobbes meant by passions and what libertines seized from his arguments, it needs to be mentioned what the philosopher affirmed about man's nature. Hobbes writes that man is born in an initial dimension of *state of nature,* a condition in which he acts out of egoism and according to his personal interests. In the present state, man does not accept any other option than what he feels since the *state of nature* assumes that "every man is his own judge" (Sorell 2006, 185) and considers truthful his reason only (*ibid.*, 186). Of course, it is possible that in this *state* men's personal interests clash causing a never-ending competition. Prompted by a desire of self-preservation, men generate a mechanism of self-interest as the result of their egoistic nature. Hobbes does not seem to imply that the *state of nature* is an enduring condition; on the contrary, he believes that politics is the means for mediating man's egoistic attitude, which he defines *natural law*. This would suggest men re-evaluate their passions and keep a peaceful state. However, libertines emphasised the selfish aspect of Hobbes's *state of nature* because it justified their dissolute lifestyle, based on the appealing of senses and a freethinking spirit. Libertines inherited Hobbes's satirical bent and rejection of dogmas by using the *state of nature* as the representation of the life around them. In this sense, the libertine remains outside society, he cannot be integrated into any mechanisms other than his own. In the *state of nature* there is no compromise, no agreement, no morality and no interaction.

More influential was Hobbes's view about passions. He considers that man is driven by intrinsic egoism and acts out of self-interest and desire for power. Nonetheless, passions have a primary role – the driving force of our actions – and as a consequence, Hobbes calls them motivators: "that material, percussive movement (continuous with the motion first imparted to the senses by the object perceived) is all that is 'felt' by the agent" (Tilmouth 2007, 222). Since the experience of pleasure encourages the wish for a succeeding excitement, "there can be no contentment but in proceeding" (*ibid.*, 223). Therefore, the consequence of man's self-interest is the subjection to passions which becomes man's only source of enjoyment in a *state* of constant struggle. Accordingly, happiness can be found only in this ephemeral mechanism of achieving and moving forward:

> Whether a beloved object has just been or is yet to be enjoyed, the reciprocal response of the appetite is always only focused upon the future. […] If a given pleasurable object is yet to be obtained, appetite focuses on procuring it. But if it has been obtained, there is no desire to continue experiencing that present pleasure, which would be the appetitious equivalent of 'aversion' (the desire to escape present pain); rather, there is only a desire to obtain a second, additional pleasure—to move on (Tilmouth 2007, 224).

This element is tantamount to libertinism since it evidences a sense of restlessness and dissatisfaction. As Shadwell's play demonstrates, the libertine's constant pursuit of a new appetite, namely a lady, is an end in itself and, since the only aim to enjoy is the enjoyment, when it is over there is nothing left to crave for. The aesthetic experience is an experience of pleasure where the stimulation of the mind generates the stimulation of the body as well. Hobbes calls this mechanism 'lust of the mind' (Fujimura 1978, 50) implying that man longs for desires which will never be completely satisfied. He even conceives lust in terms of egoistic self-celebration: "The sensual pleasure of lust may be one of delighting in corporeal titillation, but that affection is also accompanied by the mental pleasure of recognizing one's own power to please, 'the delight men take in delighting'" (Tilmouth 2007, 228). The libertine is never content – constantly dissatisfied – so his life never suffers a setback. The consequence of conceiving love as a physical appetite is variety and inconstancy. In libertine terms, it generates a two-fold system: pleasure leads to pain and the search for freedom becomes a prison. This aspect is evident in Rochester's life and in Shadwell's *The Libertine*, which will be discussed later in the paragraph, and it is the result of the above-explained reflections on Hobbes's philosophy. The famous critic Dale Underwood describes the libertine as:

> an antirationalist, denying the power of man through reason to conceive reality […] Accordingly the libertine rejected the orthodox medieval and Renaissance concept of universal order and of man's place and purpose therein […] His ends were hedonistic, 'Epicurean', and embraced the satisfaction of the senses in accordance with the 'reasonable' dictates of Nature – that is, in this case, one's 'natural' impulses and desires […] Finally the libertine considered human laws and institutions as mere customs varying with the variations of societies and characteristically at odds with Nature as, of course, 'right reason' […] At least three philosophic lines of thought are involved: Epicureanism, scepticism, and a type of primitivism or naturalism for which unfortunately there is no other received name but which will be readily recognized of both classical and modern thought (1957, 13-14).

Epicurus, as mentioned in the passage above, was another philosopher dear to libertines. His idea of 'critical minute', qualified as the opportunity to enjoy everything which Fortune puts on your way, is predominant in Rochester's erotic lyrics. The quintessence of the enjoyment is only achievable in a life lived at the pursuit of pleasure, either physical or sensorial. Remarkable also the reference to the 'dictates of Nature' to be intended as the purest form of inclination to freedom and pleasure. For instance, variety, inconstancy, physical appetite and unconventionality are parts of the law of Nature.

A possible opposition which might arise is the claim that Hobbes's description of man is rather that of a beast for the primary role he gives to passions. As a matter of fact, 'Hobbism' was contested in the seventeenth century with the assertion that it encouraged wrongdoings. Yet Hobbes never excluded reason from his analysis but he believed the two aspects – reason and passion – must compensate. The role of reason is to "ensure that the passions' demands are fulfilled to the maximum" (Tilmouth 2007, 236), the ability of reason being that of selecting the most suitable means to realise our passions. In Sorell's terms reason becomes "instrumental reasoning" (2006, 27). This aspect is crucial for libertinism as well; as will be even more evident in comedies, the libertine outsmarts the other characters in his attempt, and further realization, to thrive his passions. To behave as such, he needs to be a strategist in order to benefit from his wishes while maintaining his person undamaged. If the libertine represents the instinctual side of man and follows pleasure, his reason is embodied by an indomitable wit. With his reflections on human nature, Hobbes has been giving the most important contribution to the comedy of the age.

Bearing in mind this philosophical background, libertinism in the seventeenth century is further presented as the rejection of social conventions and institutions, especially marriage, by a preference for instincts and impulses in the pursuit of pleasure. Libertines were 'amoral', in the sense that they willingly considered customs and society manners at odds with Nature's disposition. Rather than contesting generally accepted

dogmas, they replaced those with their own, typical 'libertine'. Amorality was the only possibility they had to please Nature, and free themselves from what was artificial in society, namely conventions. As previously said, the attitude was partly justified at the court of Charles II, which by encouraging libertine's values, entitled them to shiver the law and pursue self-pleasure. Sometimes they were banned or sent abroad for their misbehaviours but they were never properly punished.

This element is well combined with the extravagance, excess and 'wildness', terms which either Hume (1977) or Jordan (1972) use in their seminal studies on the rakes of some of the plays of Restoration comedy. The libertine was to become a standard type in Charles II's society and a stock character in Restoration Comedy. Comedy 'takes' this character and saves him from being a tragic outcast. Before coming to that, it is worth analysing firstly the tragic end the libertine is sentenced to and then shifting to comedy. It will be done by introducing the historical figure which deserves the name of The Libertine, Rochester, as well as Shadwell's play *The Libertine*.

Rochester, or better John Wilmot Second Earl of Rochester, was The Libertine at the court of Charles II. He was the son of Henry Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, one of Charles II's chief advisors who helped the king to escape to France in 1651, saving him from execution. The king was thus not to forget such a man and that explains the affection he felt for his son John Wilmot, who soon became part of the fashionable Court Wits around the King. However, it also seems that between the Earl and the King there was a see-sawing relation, Rochester has dedicated few satiric lines to the King and often mocked him instead of defending his image in front of the King of France, for example. On other occasions, on the contrary, Rochester supported the king's choices also when necessary in public speeches. Perhaps this is just another contradictory aspect of the Earl's personality. For sure, Rochester lived his life according to fashionable libertine principles; a borderline figure between the political and artistic ferment of the time, he has often trespassed the limit of what could be conceived socially acceptable, if not in terms of moral. He was part of the wits group at the court and he shared libertine practices with them, for example, he kidnapped his future wife because her parents did not agree to their marriage. Rochester also participated in the habit of Restoration aristocrats of keeping a mistress. One of the most famous is Elizabeth Barry, whom Rochester trained for the stage and to whom he dedicated some of his lyrics. He was a friend of the most famous playwrights of the age and both Dryden and Etherege praised him: Dryden

dedicated to him the preface of his play *Marriage à-la-Mode* by saying that he had copied "the gallantries of courts, the delicacy of expression, and the decencies of behaviour, from [Rochester's] lordship"; Etherege stated that Dorimant, the libertine of *The Man of Mode* was clearly modelled out of Rochester.

Furthermore, the Earl lived two years of his life disguised as a quack doctor named Alexander Bendo, maybe as an attempt to flee from some punishment. Burnet reports that Rochester practice of disguising was very common: "he took pleasure to disguise himself" either to "follow some mean Amour" or just "for diversion, he would go about in odd shapes, in which he acted his part so naturally" (quoted in Vieth 2002, xlii). This latter element is interesting because one of the motifs in comedy is that of the libertine-trickster who often has to disguise, mask or simply play a different role than that he is already playing. Paradoxically, this metatheatrical device is already hinted at Rochester's own life. Following Rochester's example, the theme of the dissolute, debauched libertine becomes a constant in Restoration Comedy, as does the theme of the disguise and pretence. Disguise is a subterfuge which allows a character to step out of a dangerous situation while confirming his ability of a smart trickster. Rochester's life might have been a model for comedy and this adds importance to the analysis of his personality.

Further proof of his debauched life comes by Vieth, one of the critics who has been extensively engaged with Rochester's career as an author: "For five years together he was continually Drunk: not all the while under the visible effects of it, but his blood was so inflamed, that he was not in all that time cool enough to be perfectly Master of himself" (Vieth 2002, xxvii). Chernaik also describes Rochester in an interesting way:

> There were two Principles in his natural temper that being heighten'd by that heat carried him to great excesses: a violent love of Pleasure, and a disposition to extravagant Mirth. The one involved him in great sensuality: the other led him to many odd Adventures and Frollicks, in which he was oft in hazard of his life. The one being the same irregular appetite in his Mind, that the other was in his Body, which made him think nothing diverting that was not extravagant (1995, 55).

and implies that Rochester actually believed in libertinism but not as a masquerade or a pretence; rather as a natural inclination. What Jordan (1972) describes in terms of extravagance, excess and wildness was part of Rochester intrinsic nature. Hobbist influences on Rochester are clear in the materialism and scepticism of the poet's thought, yet, his lines are tinged with a fragility and preoccupation about pain and sufferance which make them tormented and beguiling at the same time.

Critics have often depicted Rochester as the poet who most evidently deals with Hobbes's philosophy. Actually, it would be more adequate not to generally state that Rochester's works are influenced by Hobbes but rather to analyse how Rochester justified his libertinism out of Hobbes's ideas and made his personal experience of them. Rochester is incredibly fascinating because his attitude is completely libertine: Rochester was the libertine. His poetry demonstrates that he had developed his own libertine philosophy and significantly lived out of it as contradictory as it might be.

The libertine values at the core of Rochester's poetry are described in his famous *A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind* written in 1675. First and foremost, Rochester wished he were a beast: "anything but that vain animal/ who is so proud of being rational" (lines 6-7). Undoubtedly, the rational animal is man. In line with the Hobbesian observations on man's nature, Rochester's inclination is to subdue his senses. In the poem, he describes Reason as an *Ignis Fatuus*[10] (line 12) "which, leaving light of nature, sense, behind,/ Pathless and dangerous wandering ways it takes/ Through error's fenny bogs and thorny brakes" (lines 13-15). Men's desire of knowledge and reasoning is painful because he spends his life trying to be wise while facing the sudden realization that "all his life has been done in the wrong" (line 28). In the attempt of being rational, man has forgotten to be happy since happiness is the result of indulging to pleasure. Hence, Reason is the murderer of happiness in its preventing life to be taken simply as it is. In addition, Rochester criticises Reason's aspiration over the pretensions of infinity by denying Reason any role besides that of organizing our passions. The poet also recalls Hobbes's distinction of 'right reason' in the *state of nature* where each individual believes his reasons to be right in the absence of parameters. Rochester's right reason is

> That reason which distinguishes by sense
> And gives us rules of good and ill from thence,
> That bounds desires with a reforming will
> To keep 'em more in vigor, not to kill.
> Your reason hinders, mine helps to enjoy,

[10] The *ignis fatuus* is translated in English as *fairy light*. It is a flickering light scientifically associated with a phosphorescent swamp gas. In myths, legends or tales, it was believed to mislead night travellers, often causing death. In *Paradise Lost* book IX, Milton compares Satan, disguised as a snake, to a *wand'ring fire* (line 634). By comparing an evil spirit to the *ignis fatuus*, Milton underlines its deceiving power which will then cause the Fall of mankind. With the same emphasis, Rochester says that Reason is the *ignis fatuus* in the mind, responsible for creating an obsession with knowledge and thinking, thus misguiding man. Considering that Milton's work was conceived during Restoration, the comparison makes even more sense. By comparing the *fairy light* to Satan, it further acquires a religious meaning since that flatulence was attributed to an evil spirit which leads man into temptation. In this view, Rochester's comparison is very strong because by underlining the misguiding power of reason he also includes man's temptation to ask questions he is not entitled to inquire.

Renewing appetites yours would destroy.
My reason is my friend, yours is a cheat;
Hunger calls out, my reason bids me eat;
Perversely, your appetite does mock:
This asks for food, that answers, "What's o' clock?"
This plain distinction, sir, your doubt secures:
'Tis not true reason I despise, but yours (lines 99-111).

Rochester does not reject reason in general, but that kind of reason detrimental to enjoyment. He rejects reason which limits man, which ties him to social norms (for example, in the verses, whether exists a most appropriate time to eat). In this sense, beasts are *wisest* because they always achieve what they aim at (lines 115-118). Rochester's idea is that all "Men must be knaves" (line 160) out of a desperate need of self-defence.

Further considerations on Rochester's libertinism are encountered in *A Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country.* Written in verses, Rochester pretends to be a woman who warns her friend in the country on love matters in "this lewd town" (line 33) and in particular on how "the men of wit" (line 5) lead their love affairs. Interestingly enough, she compares love to an act of trade, as happens in plays. The parallel underlines the loss of any pure form of love, now reduced to an agreement, often in terms of money. The reference to a play is also significant because it underlines the fictionality of acting; love, as a play, is only a pretence. This view is confirmed also in the lines the poet wrote to Elizabeth Barry "Leave this gaudy gilded stage"[11] (Rochester, *Song*, line 1) In this sense, considering that love has become an artifice, a custom, also women decide to pursue their pleasures. Libertinism is thus characterised as the pursue of vice:

To an exact perfection they have wrought
The action, love; the passion is forgot.
'Tis below wit, they tell you, to admire,
And ev'n without approving, they desire.
Their private wish obeys the public voice;
'Twixt good and bad, whimsey decides, not choice
(Rochester, *A Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country*, lines 62-67)

Love is a whimsy, deprived of any emotional essence. The poem is interesting because, apart from libertinism, it also tackles a point which is a pattern in Restoration Comedy, the opposition between the wits and the fools. Artemisia tells her friend the story of a 'fine lady' who moved from the country: "When I was married, fools were *à la mode*./ The men of wit were then held *incommode*" (Rochester, *A Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country*, lines 103-104). She associates men of wit with libertines

[11] The date of composition of this *Song* is unknown.

since they are inconstant and objectifies women at their pleasure. From this episode, Artemisia reflects that, although witty men are more fascinating, they are also more difficult to please, thus fools are the best match for women. Artemisia seems to condemn those women who pursue love for a libertine, which ends out being slavery since they deliberately choose to give up their freedom for some hours of enjoyment.

As previously mentioned, libertines bore a sense of restlessness and motion. In *Against Constancy,* Rochester calls constancy a "frivolous pretence" (line 2) or better a "disease, and want of sense" (line 4), again involving the pretences of reason. Constancy, especially in love, was for Rochester artificial since it is impossible to be loyal to a person forever after discovering that person's "own defects" (line 10). Then, Rochester jumps into the poem by including himself in the group whose behaviour diverges from constant fools:

> But *we*, whose hearts do justly swell,
> With no vainglorious pride,
> Who know how we *in love excel*,
> Long to be often tried (Rochester, *Against Constancy*, lines 13-16).[12]

The opposition marked by *but* introduces a contraposition which becomes even more evident when in the second last line he reaches the point: "I'll change a mistress till I'm dead" (line 19). Therefore, the former *we* implies libertines' attitude, becomes then *I,* a strong assertion of personal inclination. Rochester does not share "some easy heart" (line 5) but he is conscious of the social supremacy which his sexual triumphalism accords him (Tilmouth 2007, 322). Inconstancy complies with Hobbes's idea that man is engaged in the valueless repetition of the same action, as soon he achieves a pleasure this becomes meaningless and he needs to pursue another one. Is this mechanism gratifying in terms of happiness? Maybe it only was Rochester's pretence. When the pleasure of the moment has to be replaced, it is not implied that the same happiness and enjoyment will be reproduced. Among the implications of inconstancy, the Epicurean notion of 'critical minute' offers Rochester's possible answer. What he calls "this livelong minute true to thee" (Rochester, *Love and Life*, line 14) is a transitory moment, it is and it is not at the same time. The Epicurean notion suggests that one has to benefit from a situation because the experience of pleasure is unique and it is exactly what Rochester affirms in his lines. When in *Love and Life* he writes "All my past life is mine no more;/ The flying hours are gone" (Rochester, lines 1-2) and "Whatever is to come is not:/ How can it then be mine?"

[12] *Italics* are mine.

(Rochester, lines 6-7) he suggests that the livelong minute extends the past and the present, or rather, it denies the existence of time. The only possible time is the present instant which is at the same time already past and soon future, the former felt in the enjoyment, the latter in the imagination. Time is not wholly graspable, not even that time lived out of libertinism. This explains what was hinted before, that pleasure leads to pain and that the constant call for it becomes miserable itself. Life can be self-fulfilling, yet, Rochester does not deny the sufferance implied. Such impossibility is manifested in later lyrics, such as *The Imperfect Enjoyment* when he describes the failure of the protagonist to perform a sexual act and the visible clash between men's desires and their realization. Rochester's attention to sex is a relevant aspect of his poetry and his sexual lyrics are often scabrous, but similarly to other pleasures, the sexual act is depicted as false and illusionary; it cannot provide the answer to that happiness he was describing in the *Satyr*. Evidently, it is true that enjoyment is merely "dull employment" (Rochester, *The Platonic Lady*, line 8). Therefore, when he rhetorically asks: Then what room for despair, since delight is love's end? (Rochester, *The Submission,* line 12), it is an attempt of self-persuasion which no longer exists. In libertine terms, Rochester seems to imply that after a life spent in the pursuit of pleasure arrives a moment when you realize that everything has been meaningless and that besides the moment of enjoyment, which no longer exists, only remains the bitter flavour of pain. The fear of pain is materialised in Rochester's more mature poetry in the fear 'boundlessness' (Rochester, *Upon Nothing*, line 9), which the poet describes as the perpetual motion towards enjoyment which culminates in loss, dissolution, oblivion and even death. The idea of a boundless death is recurrent in his last poems and might also explain why he died repentant on his deathbed.[13] In *Upon Nothing* Rochester dismisses the Christian myth of God the Creator of the Universe but he rather affirms that Nothing is the raw material of every element of Creation. Man is precisely doomed to return to that Nothing, yet, Rochester cannot hide his preoccupation about the

[13] This idea originates from some writings of the bishop Gilbert Burnet on Rochester's last months of life where he claims that the Earl did actually repent in the last moments before his death and embraced otherworldly beliefs. He writes that Rochester, during his life, "gave many Instances, as their swearing Friendship, where they hated mortally; their Oaths…in their Addresses to Women, which they intended never to make good; the pleasure they took in defaming innocent Persons…because they could not engage them to comply with their ill Designs" (quoted in Tilmouth 2007, 372). However, in his final months Burnet argues that Rochester became "much ashamed of his former Practices…because he had made himself a Beast, and brought pain on his Body" (*ibid*.). As a matter of fact, Rochester died at the age of thirty-three because of syphilis. If Rochester did actually pronounce these words or if it has been only Burnet's attempt to redeem him is impossible to state. However, what reaches us is Rochester complicated and controversial nature. Until death, Rochester had placed himself, as a libertine, in a conflictual position with morality and society norms and this aspect remains undeniable.

idea that his life "into thy boundless self must undistinguished fall" (line 9). The word *boundless* is often repeated in his lines in terms of *oblivion* and *fear* to suggest that Rochester was aware of the intangibility of his moments of pleasure which, albeit licit, would have been blown off by the irreversibility of death.

The last part of Rochester's poetry worth of exploring and in line with the previous reflections on society is the poet's rejection of authorities and conventions. Consistently enough with Hobbes's thought, Rochester seems to reject any form of dogma. There are more than single attacks on society and its norms. The *churchman* of the final section of *A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind* (lines 191-221) is condemned in his assertion that reason is the only means through which men can come to know the intelligible. Rochester, in a very subtle manner, asserts that if reason existed, the uncorrupted and hypocrite clergyman would not preach (lines 191-211). In *The Disabled Debauchee*, Rochester affirms that statesmen are "good for nothing else [than blowing]" (lines 45-48) and urges them to be wise. Of course, wisdom for Rochester is being a debauchee, is enjoyment, is the rejection of dull morals. The aspect of the challenge of authority did not come from Hobbes, or rather, it came from a misunderstanding of Hobbes's idea of a *state of nature*. For the philosopher, in order to be part of a community, it is indispensable to conform to some rules or else we would live in a society when there is no discussion, no comparison, no growth. However, this aspect is considered by Rochester as an artificial construct and has to been avoided at all costs since the sensual and physical experiences only are altogether true. It is the immediacy of the experience, the all-embracing research for self-satisfaction which scrimmages with the implications of morality.

That Rochester impinged upon some main libertine statements is clear for historical and social reasons, we know that he was part of the wits around the court of the King. It is also clear that he was a Libertine throughout his life and his lines lack any form of morality and, at some extent, also decency. But Rochester left his readers with his personal engagement to the theme of libertinism and if his lyrics are not admirable, they are at least deeply felt.

Completely different is the protagonist of Shadwell's *The Libertine*. Don John seems to entangle the same philosophy as Rochester's but he completely lacks any form of humanity. A dissolute character, Don John does not betray any sign of repentance even in the final, hellish scene. Shadwell's character is not innovative but is revived from Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (*The Trickster of Seville and*

the Stone Guest) published in 1624. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Don John's character started a European tradition[14] which would last also in the following centuries. In England, it creates what Underwood has defined 'locus of libertinism' (1957, 11), the starting point of a pattern which would have repeated in those years. Conversely from the original character, Shadwell makes Don John even more senseless and amoral, in short, a monster. He changes the plot and maintains only the last bit concerning the speaking statue and the devils which take Don John's soul to the Hell but he fills the plot with rapes, crimes, murders and violence unable to be converted into redemption. Indeed, it seems also difficult to classify the play into a genre. It is undoubtedly a tragedy but there are also some comic interludes represented by Jacomo, for example, which moderate the otherwise brutal wretchedness of the libertine. Even episodes like Don John's six wives grouped, each of them completely unaware of being wife and lover at the same time, are instances of comic inserts. In addition, the several sexual innuendos of the play[15] also bring it closer to some patterns of the comedies of the time. For sure it is a tragedy and neither Don John nor his friends are praiseworthy characters. Nevertheless, in its dealing with libertine features in such extremes *The Libertine* is an interesting play on which to reflect when we shall go on to comedy.

Don John acts with other two Dons, Don Lopez and Don Antonio, and the three of them represent those elements commonly associated with libertinism: rakishness, freethinking and unconventionality. The element of extravagance, typical of libertines and recurrent also in Rochester is explicitly used by Shadwell. In the preface to *The Libertine*, he begs the reader to pardon the "irregularities of the play when they consider that the extravagance of the subject forced [he] to it" (Shadwell, p. 5). So far, it seems that extravagance is a corollary to libertinism; Shadwell's words seem more a preventive comment in his attempt to show the dangers of such extravagance not mediated by any kind of morality. Interestingly enough, the Dons' actions can be explained in the light of Hobbesian philosophy. As a matter of fact, the play opens with a philosophical debate on sense and reason: "Nature gave us our senses, which we please,/ Nor does our reason war

[14] Here it might be interesting the article by Samuel Waxman 'The Don Juan Legend in Literature', published in 1908. Generally, the original Don John is a gentleman, he kills but to save his honour and he behaves as a trickster with women as well as with men. This shows how in the course of the century, the figure changes its characteristics. For instance, Shadwell's Don John is an aesthetic seducer, impudent criminal and ashamed libertine.

[15] For example, Flavia's use of the verb 'to ramble' (Shadwell, act 3, scene 2, line 264) literary means to enjoy a walk, however it also has the sexual connotation of an escapade. Significantly, a poem by Rochester which openly deals with sex is entitled *A Ramble in St. James Park*.

against our sense./ By nature's order, sense should guide our reason" (Shadwell, *The Libertine,* act 1, scene 1, lines 28-30). It is a model to follow, or at least Don Lopez thinks so when he defines Don John an 'oracle'[16], assigning him the role of the preacher of truthfulness. Don John's truth is the statement "My sense instructs me, I must think 'em right." (*ibid.*, line 145), the result of the Hobbesian philosophy of a man enslaved to his senses and deprived of any form of discipline. On the contrary, Don John agrees that conscience poses a limit to our passions: "[Conscience] A senseless fear, would make us contradict/ The only certain guide, infallible nature" (*ibid*., lines 10-11). From the opening of the play, the Dons reverse the notion of common sense: what ordinary people conceive as sin for them is attainable pleasure; what is believed conscientious for them is cowardice. Another typical aspect of the libertine is the absence of boredom. A possible explanation of Hobbes's enslaving mechanism of pleasure-fulfilment-new pleasure is the fear of the absence of experience, thus boredom. The libertine behaves as such because he hates the ordinary life and the setting of goals exhorts him. As we have seen, Rochester embodies this same fear as the possibility of oblivion, or the possibility of not feeling any pulsion. Dorimant, the libertine of Etherege's *The Man of Mode*, in the first scene of the play affirms that he hates boredom and loves drama, the reason why he keeps discussing with ladies (act 1, scene 1, p. 55). Similarly, Don John affirms: "The more danger, the more delight. I hate the common road of pleasure" (Shadwell, *The Libertine,* act 1, scene 1, lines 345-346) and later "What an excellent thing is woman before enjoyment and how insipid after it!" (Shadwell, *The Libertine,* act 2, scene 1, lines 188-189). The 'common road of pleasure' is the conventional and consensual relationship, it is marriage, in libertine terms, a limit to love and which proves detrimental to pleasure.

More specifically, Shadwell's character lacks the charms of other libertine characters, Rochester included. The episode with the hermit is particularly brutal. After the Dons are forced to escape because Don John has murdered Maria's brother, they are shipwrecked on a shore and the hermit succours them and offers them to stay at the house of Don Francisco, a "rich and hospital man" (Shadwell, *The Libertine,* act 3, scene 2, lines 41-42). However, the Dons have a request:

> Don John: I see thou art very civil, but you must supply us with one necessary more, a very necessary thing and very refreshing.
> Herm.: What's that, sir?
> Don John: It is a whore, a fine, young, buxom whore.

[16] Interestingly enough, also Dorimant in Etherege's *The Man of Mode* is defined as an oracle by his friend Medley: "when I would know anything of woman, I will consult no other oracle" (act 5, scene 2, p. 143).

> Don Antonio and Don Lopez: A whore, old man, a whore.
> Herm.: Bless me! Are you men or devils?
> Don John: Men, men, and men of lust and vigour. Prithee old sot, leave thy prating and help me to a strumpet, a fine salacious strumpet. I know you zealots have enough of 'em. Women love your godly whoremasters.
> Herm.: O monsters of impiety! Are you so lately 'scaped the wrath of heaven thus to provoke it?
> Don Antonio: How! By following the dictates of nature, who can do otherwise?
> Don Lopez: All our actions are necessitated; none command their own wills.
> Herm.: O horrid blasphemy! Would you lay your dreadful and unheard-of vices upon heaven? No, ill men, that has given you free will to good (*ibid*., lines 60-78).

By stating that their actions are necessitated, preordained, Don Lopez is recalling again that moral relativism based on pleasure and the libertine belief that appetite, not reason, governs human action. In libertine terms, not even volition is possible to exist since man is imprisoned in safeguarding self-preservation by appealing to the senses, thus free will cannot exist but as the free run of appetite. This passage is again inspired by Hobbes who claims that in the *state on nature*, since men are all enemies, there is no right and no wrong, no good and no evil. As Jaffe observes "Clearly, Don John, Don Lopez, and Don Antonio are not interested in freedom of belief but rather freedom of action – that is, freedom to commit incest, fratricide, and patricide" (2000, 59). Their interpretation is thus a binary belief according to which society is damaging while nature is to praise.

For self-preservation marriage is denied, being considered a threatening convention for personal satisfaction. Nonetheless, it is interesting that in *The Libertine*, the anti-matrimonial libertine assertion is made by women. At the eve of their marriage day, Clara and Flavia enjoy their last moments of freedom before "the execution day" (Shadwell, act 3, scene 2, lines 344-345), both comparing the sacrament to death. It is the typical libertine idea, inherited by Hobbes, that marriage limits sexual enjoyment. It lacks the necessary lust which makes the relation appealing. The two Spanish girls discuss how libertine behaviours are carried on in England:

> Fla.: In England, if a husband and wife like not one another, they draw two several ways and make no bones on't. While the husband treats his mistress openly in his glass-coach, the wife, for decency's sake, puts on her vizard and whips away in a hackney with a gallant, and no harm done.
> Cla.: Though, of late, 'tis as unfashionable for a husband to love his wife there as 'tis here. Yet 'tis fashionable for her to love somebody else, and that's something (Shadwell, act 3, scene 2, lines 279-289).

And they envy women who have more freedom to choose for their own 'trap of matrimony' (Shadwell, act 3, scene 2, line 293). Ironically enough they will both be

seduced by Don John and secretly marry him. However, with the same irony, their freedom is also the reason for their fall for when the truth comes to the surface, they decide to become nuns for the shame. That Don John represents libertinism is without any doubt. The fact that Clara and Flavia reflect on it offers the reader a different but privileged viewpoint on libertinism.

Other Restoration comedies engaged with the theme, such as Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, contrast the freedom enjoyed by the Englishwomen with the actual restrictions of Spanish ladies. What makes Shadwell's play distinguishable is the extremity to which he takes those principles; it seems legitimate to question whether there is a moral warning besides this 'devilish philosophy' (Shadwell, *The Libertine*, act 3, scene 1, line 104). The answer can open a reflection but the play clearly evidences that being a libertine and leading a dissolute life always leads to pain and death, inasmuch as Hobbesian philosophy demonstrates that the relentless state of motion can be arrested only in death. In addition, the mechanism would also be impossible to expire, for Don John states in the fourth act "But no accident Can alter me from what I am by nature" (*ibid*., lines 124-125), a libertine will always remain a libertine.

Either for Rochester and Don John, a life-like and a fictional character, the reward is an untamed and unrewarded life. The libertine has his personal view of the world which provides him with a room only at odds with society. The Libertine can inhabit only within his world, where to live means to consent to his lifestyle and to reject any behavioural standard. Being outside the social system is the possibility he chooses but at the same time, it constructs and end in itself because the libertine is forced to a tragic end. In real life as well as in fiction, he has to be reproached and not only morally speaking, but because a life lived as one wishes is not socially acceptable, it is a misrepresentation. Provided that the libertine can be a fashionable character but not admirable, the question is whether there is a way for him to become as such. This is what Restoration Comedy is about.

1.3 The new tradition of comedy: libertine character, comic patterns and its metatheatrical implications

Restoration Comedy is a macro-category of the drama of the last forty years of the seventeenth century. Despite the fact that it might seem a short period of time, actually

plays faced different phases. Generally, the comedy of these years is defined 'comedy of manners'. However, as also Hume (1976) notices, the name is quite limiting. It would be restrictive to consider all the comedies of the age about manners since, especially in the last ten years, comedy transformed its functioning. The most influential critical writings about Restoration comedy distinguish between different types of comedy such as the London comedy, the sex comedy, the Spanish plot or the sentimental comedy, one type prevailing over the other also according to the decade. Originally,

> Comedy (says Aristotle) is an Imitation of the worst sort of People… in respect to their Manners… They must be exposed after a ridiculous manner: For Men are to be laugh'd out of their Vices in Comedy. The business of Comedy [is] to render Vice ridiculous, to expose it to publick Derision and Contempt, and to make Men ashame'd of Vice and Sordid Action (quoted in Hume 1976, 33).

However, this view is unlikely to be maintained for Restoration Comedy because it is too simplistic. According to Dryden, the former description applies to the Jonsonian 'comedy of humours' which was one model of comedy during the Jacobean age. If that model implied the representation of a 'natural imitation of folly' (Hume 1976, 36), Restoration comedy is a wittier and more refined type. Unlike the comedy of humours, there is neither a moral nor a satirical intention in those plays but a more benevolent disposition. While the comedy of humours laughed at human folly and encouraged the appealing of lowest human emotions, the comedy of 1660s "moves pleasure" (Corman 2000, 53). At the same time, whether the aim of such comedies was satirical or not is still controversial, for the boundary between benevolent irony and satire is very subtle. Nevertheless, stating that writers such as Wycherley and Etherege lack satirical intentions would be debatable. For the purpose of the present study, the question is not relevant, it is enough to state that the main aim of Restoration comedy was to entertain. In Hume's words:

> The drama of this period was *popular entertainment*, not for the masses (it being both expensive and ungodly), but for a relatively small group of Londoners for whom the plays provided a frequent diversion. Although, for some theatre-going was apparently a special event, occasioned by a *première* or a holiday season, for a lot of regulars to wander in of an afternoon was commonplace – very often people would simply lock in at each playhouse to see what was on (1976, 29).

As has already been said, significantly, the subject and some scenes of the plays were easily identifiable in London ordinary life and especially at the court. The King's interest in and influence on theatre is undeniable and the libertine inclinations supported by the court found its counterpart in theatre. Restoration audience wanted to see a picture

of themselves on the stage and not as they actually were – which would have been ironic – but as they thought themselves to be. Hence a witty, refined, cultural, brilliant collection of plays. Since libertinism was a widespread attitude in the Restoration age, the libertine becomes a stock-character but it loses the defamatory connotation which society used to give him and becomes, instead, a master of these plays by controlling the plot, the conversations and even the audience – its splendour stands in the way the different playwrights make him interact on the stage. Sutherland comments on it by saying: "since comedy is traditionally a Dionysiac revel, expressing the unrestrained and unregenerate nature of man, it might be expected that from its first beginnings Restoration comedy would show that libertine spirit which was to become so characteristic of it" (quoted in Hume 1976, 27). Since an elevated number of studies has already dealt with the characteristics of Restoration Comedy, it is enough to reflect on two points about comedy: the comic pattern and wit. Each element will be present in the character of the libertine.

For some aspects, the comic pattern reflects the tradition of the classic comedy for we have a couple, the parents' opposition to the marriage, tricking sub-plots, cuckolding and the helping maid/servant. What changes is the attention given to the libertine which loses the epithet of 'young debauchee' and becomes a man 'of Wit and Sense' (Hume 1976, 40). It seems that in the course of the forty years the libertine changes, for this reason, Hume talks of the 'extravagant rake' and 'the reformed rake'. The former is "characterized by frantic intensity, promiscuity, crazy impulsiveness, cheekiness, reckless frivolity, breezy vanity, and devasting self-assurance" (*ibid.*, 38). He is an extreme comic figure, exaggerated in his libertine beliefs but eventually he reforms and sets down to marriage. Rather than disturbing, his attitude becomes comic, as in the case of Willmore[17] where he lunges from scene to scene to approach either Hellena or Angelica but he completely forgets the former when he is with the latter and vice versa. The 'rakish gentleman' (Jordan 1972, 6) includes more vicious categories of libertines such as Horner and Dorimant, whose libertinism is real and palpable[18] and a more genuine category including characters such as Rhodophil and Palamede[19] whose libertinism is the alternative to an otherwise boring life. Horner is an interesting libertine because, under the pretence of being eunuch, he can lie with almost every lady in the play. At the same

[17] Willmore is the libertine of Aphra Behn's *The Rover* published in 1677.
[18] Horner is the protagonist of Wycherley's *The Country* Wife, published in 1675 and Dorimant is protagonist of Etherege's *The Man of Mode or Sr Fopling Flutter*. In *The Man of Mode* Lady Woodvill describes Dorimant as "a wild extravagant fellow of the time" (Etherege, act 4, scene 1, p. 112).
[19] Rhodophil and Palamede are the libertines of Dryden's *Marriage a-la-mode*, published in 1673.

time, unlike Dorimant or the other libertines of *The Country Wife*, he will not marry but carry on with his libertine career. In his analysis of Dorimant, Underwood describes libertinism as the

> activities now explicitly and predominantly the expression of what in earlier plays was largely implied and secondary – a Hobbesian aggressiveness, competitiveness, and drive for power and "glory"; a Machiavellian dissembling and cunning; a satanic price, vanity, and malice; and, drawing upon each of these frames of meaning, an egoistic assertion of self through the control of others" (1957, 73).

Therefore, even in comic libertinism remains Hobbes's vision of egoistic man but then, the encounter with a girl as witty as himself is a good enough reason to abandon the previous libertine life and to start a, hopefully, new life. In the case of Rhodophil and Palamede, it is not love what redeems them but jealousy.[20] Nonetheless, even the vilest libertines such as Dorimant and Horner do not generate huge disapproval but their extravagance, either in terms of tricking, distraction or narcissistic self-pleasure becomes more important in the plays than the fact they are libertines.

From Congreve's plays, another type of libertine emerges, what Hume calls the "reformed rake" (Hume 1977, 49). This libertine seems to have already passed his rakish phase of life and wants now to coronate his love. The libertine elements typical of comedy remain, such as the attention to the relation of love and sex and the belief that marriage and pleasure are not mutually conceivable. However, Congreve's libertines are more capable of love. Valentine and Mirabell[21] declare at the opening of the play that they want to marry a lady and their libertinism is employed as a comic trick rather than the sexual ability to pursue such aim. Instances of libertinism recur during the plot, Valentine's former affair left him with the care of a baby for example, but what changes is that libertinism has now become an internalised practice which brought the characters to a more refined conception of love. "Almost every standard-pattern boy-wins-girl comedy involving a love game requires a settlement which implies acceptance of new restrictions

[20] Jealousy was also a possible solution given by Rochester for the fear of not feeling which emerges in his last poems. In *The Mistress*, date of composition unknow, Rochester invokes the jealousy as "sacred" because it raises love to an extreme (lines 25-26). Jealousy delays the feeling of satisfaction that the libertine feels after he has lain with a lady, and which was the cause of his constant dissatisfaction. Thus, it allows him to keep the same mistress without losing interest. In *Marriage à-la-Mode* jealousy is the mechanism which holds the two couples together. It simultaneously accomplishes two actions: it keeps the couples together because they gain new interest in each other but it also opens the possibility of holding future affairs, which increases appetite. Interestingly enough, the play is not only dedicated to Rochester but in the Preface it is hinted that the Earl read the play before it was staged.

[21] Valentine is the protagonist of Congreve's *Love for Love*, published in 1695. Mirabell is the protagonist of *The Way of the World*, published in 1700.

in marriage" writes Hume (1976, 49) and also Dryden, when he is accused of encouraging libertinism, replies that he actually reclaims it from vice: "For so 'tis to be supposed they are, when they resolve to marry; for then enjoying what they desire in one, they cease to pursue the love of many" (quoted in Hume 1976, 49). The idea is that in comedy, romantically or humorously, the extravagance of the rake is reformed.

Perhaps the change towards the end of the century was also due to the circulation of Jeremy Collier's claim for an exemplary comedy which encourages the shift in the 1700s to 'sentimental comedy'. In *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* in 1698 he writes that:

> The business of plays is to recommend virtue and discountenance vice; to show the uncertainty of human greatness, the sudden turns of fate, and the unhappy conclusions of violence and injustice; 'tis to expose the singularities of pride and fancy, to make folly and falsehood contemptible, and to bring everything that is ill under infamy and neglect (quoted in Combe 2008, 297).

Accordingly for Collier, Caroline drama was inconsistent with the purposes of drama and the portrait of the libertine was, in his opinion, "a fine gentleman that has neither honesty nor honor, conscience nor manners, good nature nor civil hypocrisy; fine only in the insignificancy of life, the abuse of religion, and the scandals of conversation" (*ibid.*). The other aspect Collier criticised concerns the relation between the actor and the audience: "now here properly speaking the Actors quit the Stage, and remove from Fiction into Life. Here they converse with the Boxes, and Pit, and address directly to the Audience" (quoted in Howe 1994, 93). He underlines how the Restoration Drama was indeed based on a common philosophy which linked the audience and the actors, who seemed to create a lively situation on the fictional stage. This reflection is very important for a later discourse on metatheatre.

There is actually a last type of Libertine, different from the previous ones because he lacks the sexual aspect, or at least this is less evident. As a matter of fact, these libertines are more connected to Hobbes's idea of freethinking and they are equally important for the claim of realism and idea of decorum, both aspects of libertinism, which are explained by Fujimura (1978). They have wit, nonetheless, their wit does not contain ambiguous double senses but a feeling of superiority and awareness of the fictional mechanisms of society. Among these libertines there are Manly, the protagonist of Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* and Mellefont in Congreve's *Double Dealer*, they serve the plot unmasking some villains by employing honesty. Interestingly, also for them, the

reward is a marriage which appears in the comedies as a 'mitigating' element as will be shortly explored.

The role of women in the plays also should be considered. The libertine always finds his counterpart in the figure of a witty woman who plays his same game. By equating the libertine in terms of cleverness and linguistic ability, she challenges his personality and establishes herself as the only possible match for him. Lines like those which Dorimant says aside "I love her, and dare not let her know it" (Etherege, *The Man on Mode*, act 4, scene 2, p. 107) show that she has moved him in the same way he would have made a woman fall in love and the episode suggests that if Dorimant has to marry at the end, Harriet will be the lady. Harriet is a really interesting character in this sense since in the play she is opposed to Belinda and Mrs Loveit and the three of them are in love with Dorimant. Unlike Harriet, Belinda and Mrs Loveit are unable to hide their feelings for him and it is precisely for what they feel that Dorimant is able to manipulate them. Harriet instead, manipulates him as much as he has been doing and pretends she hates him while she is completely in love with Dorimant. It is the clash between public and private feeling where Belinda and Mrs Loveit fail and Harriet succeeds. She is gifted with wit and it allows her to outsmart not only the two girls but also Dorimant. While Belinda and Loveit merely emerge as cast mistresses at the end of the play by representing a problem for Dorimant, Harriet triumphantly obtains what she has been wishing for from the beginning. The so-called "gay couple" or "witty couple" (Smith 1971) of Restoration Comedy is a pattern which demonstrates that libertinism does not reject love, yet, it cannot exist unless the couple shares the same values. As witty as Harriet there are also Millamant, Angelica, Hellena and Hippolita[22]. They all have in common the same impulse to preserve their freedom which well-espouse the libertines'. In this sense love becomes a game played by "two well-matched players" (Smith 1971, 42) where jesting is the new mode of love. Consequently, marriage also acquires a different meaning and from a simple convention it becomes a kind of 'proviso', the outline of an ideal match where love[23] is involved but without renouncing freedom. The difference between these

[22] These girls are respectively the protagonists of Congreve's *The Way of the World* , Congreve's *Love for Love*, Behn's *The Rover* and Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing Master*.

[23] Many critics have seen Restoration plays lacking the pure and genuine sentiment of love. They have called them "gay flirtations of impertinent coxcomb and coquettes" (Smith 1971, 75). Indeed, those are plays about love. That love is not boasted is true but it is neither denied. At the end, the gay couple cannot do without each other and this is one of the comic instances of the plays; however, marriage becomes eventually a compromise. Even in *The Country Wife* where Horner remains unpunished, Harcourt and Alithea advocate such a love.

women and the rest is that they do not want to play a role – that of the wife – but they want to be persons. As Millamant claims "I'll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure" (Congreve, *The Way of the World,* act 4, scene 5, p. 66). Indeed, they are the perfect match because they also pursue their pleasures.

Connected to the gay couple is the question of marriage. Rather than the convention itself, libertines dislike the forced and mercenary meaning of an act which limits their freedom. As a matter of fact, marriage is despised because it represents an obstacle between love and lust. In libertine belief, love without lust is fruitless since it flattens the main source of pleasure. Marriage is boring because the libertine is restless. Significantly, *Marriage à-la-Mode* opens with a song against marriage:

> Why should a foolish marriage vow,
> Which long ago was made,
> Oblige us to each other now,
> When passion is decayed?
> We loved, and we loved, as long as we could,
> 'Till our love was loved out in us both;
> But our marriage is dead, when the pleasure is fled:
> 'Twas pleasure first made it an oath (Dryden, act 1, scene 1, p. 9).

In the passage, Doralice is not denying that she loves her husband, but it is the monotony of marriage which does not keep up the enjoyment. The point is neither that she is not fond of her husband nor that Rhodophil does not appreciate her for he describes her "a great beauty" (Dryden, act 1, scene 1, p. 12). But it is what he believes "the greatest misfortune imaginable" (*ibid*.): marriage. Also, Harcourt to Alithea comments that "marriage is rather a sign of interest than love; and he that marries a fortune covets a mistress, not loves her" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife,* act 2, scene 1, p. 174) underlining that marriage has nothing to share with love. Hence the cuckolding enterprises on the side of libertines. Cheating is the possibility that libertines have not to fall into the stereotype of unattractive husbands because for them love does not last after consummation Yet eventually, the libertines always have to come to terms with society[24], for otherwise they will end up as Rochester. Marriage becomes a lifesaver because it stops their constant feeling of restlessness and endless motion. Love thus acquires a finer meaning, it ends in marriage but the proviso is that the girl will equate the libertines in terms of wit which keeps their appetite alive. In the end, almost every part is contented.

[24] The only exception is Horner in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* who seems will keep on moving from mistress to mistress.

To conclude in terms of patterns, the second main innovation of Restoration Comedy is the introduction of another stock-character, usually opposed to the libertine, which is the 'fop'. The fop embodies every aspect of the society that the libertine rejects and he attempts to comply, as much exaggeratedly as he can, with social conventions. His figure is almost unimportant for the unfolding of the events and the actions but serves to fill the plot by providing the libertine with the opportunity to exercise his wit. His attention is directed towards fashionable clothes and manners, inevitably of French style. Presumably, the most significant aspect of the fop is his conviction of being *à la mode,* his self-involvement which prevents him to understand that his complacency is the object of the others' derision.

Hobbes's theory of laughter is very significative when dealing with foppish characters and it is strictly connected to the analysis of emotions. According to the philosopher, laughter is not a passion itself but is a reaction to the manifestation of a particular kind of passion, namely glory:

> Sudden Glory, is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves (quoted in Ewin 2001, 29).

It is always generated by an egoistic instinct which derives from man's self-belief of superiority. The human being is profoundly egocentric and has a natural aspiration for self-preservation and by laughing at others he intensifies his quest for power and advantages himself in the struggle against other people. However, it is not a lightmindedness mechanism, laughing is different from jesting and this explains, for example, why the libertine laughs at the fops and not at the other libertines. The fop provides a special point from which libertines can observe their own superiority while pointing out the "absurdities and infirmities abstracted from persons" (Ewin 2001, 31). The fop is not laughable in himself but it is his living in his own world, made of appearances, which makes him a comic character by satisfying the libertines' beliefs of superiority. As Gamini Salgādo brilliantly points out: "The fop is laughed at not because he is trying to be something in itself contemptible, but rather because he is trying unsuccessfully to be something which, if he succeeded, would make him the play's hero." (1986, 17). In the same way the libertine is a comic device to divulge some defects of society, the fop serves to make the libertine's wit emerge.

The second aspect of Restoration Comedy is the importance given to wit. An almost impossible word to explain, wit is defined as "the spirit and the quintessence of speech" (Fujimura 1978, 13) and establishes itself as the soul of Restoration plays. As a matter of fact, the events of the plays are based on an almost unimportant plot since this is not what makes them extremely captivating. The best study on wit has been conducted by Thomas Fujimura in his *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (1978) where, drawing upon Hobbes's division of rational faculties into fancy and judgement, he distinguished between three types of wit. The first includes both fancy and judgement which Fujimura identifies with *ingenium*, a sharp and penetrating activity of the mind (Fujimura 1978, 18-19). The second type of wit includes only judgement "the analytical faculty that dissected and discriminated, that governed the unbridled fancy, organised the work of art" (*ibid*., 20). This type concerns aesthetics. The third type of wit is equated with fancy and it involves rhetoric and all the figures which adorn the work of art. These last two kinds of wit are extremely important for the plays because they create the basis to analyse two breakthrough elements. The first is the comedies' claim of realism for the portrayal of the fashionable lives of the court and the spontaneous mirror of low-life in London. Realism is intrinsically connected to the idea of *decorum*: "expressed more simply, decorum meant natural thoughts naturally expressed; and decorum (true wit) in art meant the exercise of judgement in creative activity" (Fujimura 1978, 21). In this sense, wit acquires the connotation of naturalness and simplicity and it is related to manners. Wit could belong only to a gentleman who had frequented the best society and who had learned how to behave and how to speak. The same *decorum* also applies to language where wit is maybe shown in its splendour:

> Decorum of style meant natural thoughts naturally expressed, and it lead to the "close, naked, natural way of speaking" of the Royal Society. Decorum of characterization required that young men be portrayed naturalistically as amorous, mercurial, and easily aroused, while old men should be feeble, avaricious, and uxorious. In actual practice, the ideal of decorum usually led to idealization and to type characters, but critical discussions of decorum often reveal a naturalistic substratum (Fujimura 1978, 53).

In terms of rhetoric, wit is associated with a specific way of speaking. The vivid and lively speeches of Restoration comic dialogues become through wit the most distinguished elements. 'Conversation' becomes a reflection on the nature of comedy itself, halfway between the claim of naturalness and *decorum* and the artificiality of language. It might seem controversial to refer both to the artificiality and naturalness of wit but it is not. Both in gestures and speeches wit creates referential categories which are

clear to the reader. We are not dealing with comedies which underline the absurdities of human action in a purely aesthetic form but with comedies which draw upon real situations with a genuine hedonistic aim which is real and tangible. The aim of the Restoration Comedy is not to ridicule a society but to enter the domain of *vraisemblance.* The use of wit becomes then a social issue, it is exaggerated because we are in the realm of comedy, but at the same time, it is congenial. Wit creates in the plot and in the dialogue a new category of theatrical action, between reality and the fictional world of theatre, it is metatheatrical.

Wit identifies in Restoration Comedy three types of characters: the Truewit, the Witwound and the Witless which are at the basis of the comic situation. The Truewit is the libertine and consistently with Hobbes's description of man, he is a sceptical freethinker, cynic, inconstant and incontinent. He refuses any form of dogmatism and moralism, and this is the reason why he is often appointed as immoral. As Fujimura (1978) puts it, libertines were against any pretence of morality which they believed to be hypocritical. In short, "the motive for such witty attacks was sincere: it was a desire for truth and honesty" (Fujimura 1978, 70). Significantly, Rochester defines wit as "a true and lively expression of Nature" (*ibid.*, 55), *true* because it concerns reason and *lively* because it concerns passions, which for the libertines were the leaders of man's actions.

Witwound and Witless constitute the fop-type of Restoration Comedy, obsessed with manners and masters of excess, they believe they are Truewits but they actually lack that taste which only a Truewit can possess. They are, in this sense, false. In comedies, they become an object of derision precisely because of their unnaturalness. Truewits "on the other hand, ridiculed those who deviated from nature: the affected coxcomb, the superannuated coquette, the pretender to wit, the lecherous old man, and the lustful woman who affects virtue" (Fujimura 1978, 53-54). Derision is closely related to this point. Truewits are less concerned with laughter because wit involves a "titillation of the mind" (Fujimura 1978, 51). Bearing in mind Hobbes's egoistic theories about laughter Witwound and Witless are the very comic objects. As also Congreve explains in a letter to the Earl of Montague contained in *The Way of the World*, the former are characterised by an affected, thus false wit. The latter are the fools, fops which would "rather disturb than divert" (1).

Since their wit is either pretence or a defective element, it is the Truewit, with whom the audience identifies, who poses Witwound and Witless in a condition of inferiority, where the term inferiority has to be intended as ignorance about the ways of the world.

Hence, Wit is the ability not only of understanding the workings of life and the incongruities of human attitudes but of mastering and manipulating them. And in this sense, the libertine is talented.

Restoration Comedy offers the libertine a second life and a special place, he is able to become a leader and be included in the society from which either Rochester or Don John were excluded. The writings of Rochester undoubtedly encouraged the promulgation of libertine values in drama as well. Rochester was libertinism. However, as has been shown in Shadwell's play, the libertine as such could not be effectively rewarded. The libertine in Rochester's terms is a figure which can only remain outside society. What Restoration Comedy seems to offer is a redeeming opportunity to the character by making him possibly admirable. While maintaining the libertine conduct of the age, comedy wants to give these libertines an opportunity on the stage. Thus, libertine's extravagance is balanced by a brisk wit. After an extensive analysis of the historical, social and philosophical contexts to define who actually the libertine was, it has emerged how such a figure was out of the society. His convictions might have been right for himself, or for the other libertines, but they were irreconcilable with what was generally conceived acceptable. Comedy provides the opportunity for the libertines to be reinserted into society through love. It is not a mutual agreement anymore, instead, love becomes a genuine feeling possible to arise only in some people because it goes hand in hand with a claim for freedom.

In terms of semiotics of theatre, every aspect of the theatrical representation potentially carries a meaning. The scenery, the text, the gestures and the speeches intrinsically create a connection between the actor and the audience and between characters themselves. Each of them pulls out a meaning that might create an agreement or rather a disagreement with the other codes. In the plays, libertine characters mainly manage these meanings. Under the statement that "a fictitious identity may be at least as real as the "real" one" (Vieth 2002, xlii) the libertine is undoubtedly such identity.

The plays this study would like to explore deal with one or more libertine characters and were written in a forty-year span of time. Despite the fact that the character changes some of its features, as has been shown the *rake* of Wycherley is different from the *gentleman* of Congreve, the plays employ the libertine not only as a character – *dramatis persona* – but also as a metatheatrical device. Comedies bring the libertine in a superior position compared to the other characters and contrast him with those in the plays who

are attached to their beliefs, unable to realise that the theatrical stage is fictional as much as the real one. With a mechanism which is possible only in comedy, the libertines will be confronted with this contradiction and with a crucial choice, which in most of the time brings them to terms with their nature in order to create a character which is acceptable on the stage. The libertine becomes a means through which comedy can reflect on its theatricality. The next chapters will analyse how this mechanism works on the stage in three areas: the plot, the language and the audience. By establishing himself as the leader of the plays, the libertine governs the plot for his ability to dupe and trick through disguise and mistaken identities. Further, he is a master of conversation which still allows him to triumph because, through conversation, he resolves most of the misunderstandings generated by the comic pattern. It is in common conversation that the libertine extensively employs a repertoire of ambiguity and *double entendres* which pose him in a border between fiction and reality. The last aspect is his relation with the audience. By employing theatrical devices such as the aside, he creates a metatheatrical dramatic pattern, a sort of 'sub-world' where the play exists. Each of these elements will be the object of the next three chapters in the attempt to demonstrate how an analysis on the implications of theatre itself is tantamount to the libertine's revival in comedy.

2. The libertine's manipulation of the plot: dupery, direction and pretence

In May 1712 Richard Steele wrote that "it is certain that if we look all round us and behold the different Employments of Mankind, you hardly see one who is not, as the Player is, in an assumed Character" (quoted in Freeman 2002, 11) with evidence to the theatrical nature of the early eighteenth-century life. Drama creates a plausible resemblance to human action by modelling characters and settings to social conventions as means of authentication. As a matter of fact, there is an implicit agreement between characters and between characters and spectators that what happens on the stage is real because drama is always a 'representation of' something: the stage and the world reciprocally imitate each other. Chapter 1 has provided some background information about the libertine as a social figure in the Restoration age with particular attention to Rochester. The result, although controversial, was a general degrading of the person to a social and moral questioner whose interests were limited to the pursue of the "three w": woman, wit and wine. Shadwell's tragedy punishes the libertine for his stubbornness and impudence. It is only with the comedies of writers such as Wycherley, Congreve, Aphra Behn, Etherege and Dryden that the libertine can reach a different success; comedy takes place when impudence is disguised as wit. In *The Ornament of Action*, Peter Holland notes that Restoration comedies

> explore over and over again the two concepts of the 'natural', the social ease and the Hobbesian pre-social naturalistic aggression, in the same way that, for example, Charles II himself combined the rituals of majesty with the freedom of instinctual action. The formality of society is reflected in the forms of the comedy; there is a correct way of being witty, of talking with a masked lady, of conducting an affair and that way is not merely a bookish repetition of others' brilliance but an individual's originality combined with a knowledge of the limits of social procedure. […] The whole question of the rake's reintegration into society at the end of a comedy is dependent on the extent to which society is prepared to find the two aspects of the natural compatible with each other and with society (1979, 58).

The question of the libertine's integration in society is dealt with in Jeremy Webster's *Performing Libertinism in Charles II's Court* (2005). The author believes that the force of libertinism in the comedies serves to reconstruct the concepts of marriage and individual honour. The idea of comedies as manuals of correct behaviour is the prelude to the stage success of the libertine and the ridiculing of foppish characters, deficient in wit. On the contrary, the libertines' reiterative actions on the stage grant him a primary

manipulative role in the plots. If in life his personality was hardly unrecognizable and his manners a kind of show, his theatrical role cannot avoid the setting of some metatheatrical patterns. Although metatheatre is a concept which was developed just in recent years[25], Restoration drama is full of metatheatrical references: plays abounding with asides, tricks meant to the creation of subplots and the development of the play-within-the-play device. Moreover, prologues and epilogues became unprecedently popular in this period with the function of enabling players to speak about the play just performed or to give the audience background information about the play they were going to see. Plays were sometimes used by dramatists to defend themselves, as happens in *The Plain Dealer*. In this light Restoration drama is extremely interesting because it represents on the stage the age, the 'manners' of the time, that age-old struggle between appearance and reality.

The libertine is not a casual character to create such mechanisms because on the stage he performs exactly as he would do in real life. His abilities play with his social behaviour but they, instead of being considered damaging, are comic. Harold Weber notes that "The rake necessarily raises ambivalent responses, for the sexual energy that he represents threatens the stability of the social order even while it promises to provide the vitality that must animate the structures of that order" (quoted in Webster 2005, 9). The libertine menaces the order of society, also on the stage, because his ability as a trickster challenges the reality of facts and consequently the fictionality of appearance. The following chapter will explore how this mechanism works in the texts and, more in detail, how the libertine as a character manipulates the staging of the plot. It will be argued that the main feature of the libertine, as of metatheatrical characters in general, is its self-consciousness – the character's awareness of being a character on the stage. This constitutes the premise to explore two theatrical roles of the libertine: the trickster and the director.

2.1 The character's self-consciousness

> Only certain plays tell us at once that the happenings and characters in them are of the playwright's invention, and that insofar as they were discovered they were found by the playwright's imagining rather than by his observing of the world […] they show the reality of the dramatic imagination, instanced by the playwright's and also by that of his characters (Abel 1963, 59).

[25] Metatheatre was named for the first time in 1963 after the publication of Lionel Abel's *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form.* I have defined the concept as 'recent' because the definition is closer to our times than to Restoration drama.

This is the definition that Lionel Abel, the playwright and essayist who coined the term 'metatheatre', formulated of the genre. Abel's insightful study attempts to design and to give a name to a genre which, in his opinion, has replaced tragedy. Abel maintains that in modern age tragedy no longer exists because the plays which were designed as such have failed to fulfil the main requisite of the genre: the creation of illusion. Tragedy had always relied on the characters' belief that what they were representing on the stage was real and they convinced the audience of the same. As a matter of fact, the theatrical illusion is grounded on the audience's conviction that the stage is real, albeit they know it is fictional. According to Abel, this paradigm is no longer possible because characters have stopped providing that sense of reality and have become conscious of their fictional potential. Theatrical illusion is unlikely to be reached. Consequently, what happens is that we have on the stage one or more characters aware of the fact they are fictional beings, they know that reality lies outside the stage, albeit reality is very similar to fiction, and they perform according to this new awareness. Similarly, the audience is not involved anymore in a process of innate belief but is rather conscious of the limit between reality and fiction as represented by characters on a stage. The kinds of plays which provide this feeling have been designed by Abel as 'metatheatre'.

The prefix 'meta' derives from Greek, it literally means 'beyond' and denotes the notion of sharing, pursuit and change[26]. In the definition of 'theatre beyond theatre', metatheatre implies a theatre which reflects on its theatricality. Metatheatrical is then a play which includes several theatrical aspects and represents them on the stage. The most obvious trope is the play-within-the-play[27]. Abel (1963) studies the device by referring to the model that Shakespeare employs in *Hamlet*. "The Murther of Gonzago" is the play organised by the protagonist to discover the murderer of his father but it also allows Hamlet to exploit his characterization or rather, the consciousness of a playwright that he shares with Shakespeare. The device represents the form of play *par excellence* in which the performance is self-conscious and represents itself (Pavis 1998, 270). As also Anne Righter notes, "Hamlet is a tragedy dominated by the idea of the play. In the course of its development the play metaphor appears in a number of forms" (1962, 158). Likewise, in

[26] The etymology of the word 'metatheatre' can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary Online: https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/117150#eid37412815

[27] The play-within-the-play happens when a play is performed as a part of another play which is being performed at the same moment. The external audience watches a performance within which an audience of actors is also watching a performance (Pavis 1998, 270).

Restoration drama, several theatrical tropes are employed within the plays as modes of theatrical self-consciousness.

Already from its origins, drama has posed a threat to reality because both the actors and the stage simultaneously are and are not what they seem to be. Through drama, real elements acquire a fictional connotation and a person might become a character in the same way 'a piece of china' alludes to a sexual performance. Metadrama inhabits a sort of *limbo* between reality and illusion, a space that once explored creates layers of fiction and reality impossible to distinguish. After this premise, it needs to be clarified that when Abel wrote his book aiming to design metatheatre as a new genre, he underestimated the metadramatic potential of comedy. He has relegated the genre to an attitude typical of tragedy and reduced it to a basic dyad: life as a dream and the world as a stage. Metadramatic studies have then expanded to include anything that in drama becomes a reflection of drama itself, a theatre centred around theatre and therefore which 'speaks' and 'represents' itself. The idea that drama is the representation of human action where people are meant to represent people in the form of personages is unique to the theatrical genre. This means that the phenomenon can be studied not only in tragedy but also in other genres, such as comedy. For instance, in *Dictionary of the Theatre* Pavis explains that the "phenomenon does not necessarily involve an autonomous play contained within another. […] All that is required is that the represented reality appear to be one that is already theatrical" (1998, 210). He concludes then that metatheatre is a kind of *antitheatre,* in the sense that it renounces to theatrical illusion, where the line between play and real life is erased (*ibid.*). Therefore, the main assumption for theatrical reliability – the illusion that the stage is real when is actually fictional – is challenged. Enlarging upon the concept of metatheatre suggests that the techniques involved in the genre are diverse: parallel situations through the creation of a play-within-a-play, role-playing, direct or indirect address to the audience, deceits such as disguise or hiding of characters, references to other plays or the employment of physical and metaphorical masks. In comedies, the libertine is he who exploits these tools to accomplish the aim of the play.

Restoration drama is very metatheatrical and that of the Restoration is a very controversial age. In Charles II's licentious reign, the libertine was a womanizer and a moral opponent; his lifestyle was already performative for the rest of the society. Rochester's life demonstrated it. The Earl of Wilmot lived his life as if it were a performance, disguising and captivating the spectators with his scandalous behaviour. The term 'scandalous' fits Restoration society since it was all about façade. Honour

mattered but, at the same time, going to theatre provided men with the opportunity to find a mistress. Men were obsessed with cuckoldry which reflected an almost ridiculous claim for respectability. Women shared the same claim but they were not disconcerted about spending time with libertines. These ideas are widely explored in the comedies where libertinism, as in society, challenges the social ideology on marriage, family and government. As a character, the 'libertine' gains an enormous staging potential in dominating several theatrical aspects and it is precisely in his manipulation of those that he becomes comic because he 'unmasks' a society which is a victim of 'affectation'. As Gamini Salgādo notes, "the new comedy proposed itself the more modest aim of showing manners both exemplified and travestied" (1986, 17) and affectation appears as "one form of disguise; it is disguise which is imperfectly aware of its own nature and objectives, and as such it comes half-way between conscious dissimulation and the candid presentation of the 'real' personality" (*ibid.*, 18). The libertine's meta-theatricality lies in the fact that he is aware of the double perspective offered by the stage: he inhabits a fictional world which mirrors the real one. Reality is extremely fictitious for its attention to appearance, consequently, the fictional world is made very much real. By way of consciousness, the libertine can move in both worlds. His pretence on the stage is extremely fictional for himself and the audience but at the same time, the libertine's understanding of it makes it real for the other characters. He plays with his role through pretence, dupery, wit and disguise in many forms. Depending on the perspective, the libertine is both fictional and real; therefore, he inhabits that *limbo* space between fiction and reality which is at the core of any metatheatrical understanding.

The keywords here are 'character' and 'consciousness'. The *Dictionary of Theatre* marks how, originally, the term 'character' was not used to refer to a dramatist's idea but it designated the dramatic role in Greek theatre for the mask, or the *persona* (Pavis 1998, 122). Interestingly, the Latin world *persona* is the translation of the Greek word *mask.* During the period of Roman plays, the *persona* gradually acquired the characteristic of a human being and satisfied the requisite of theatrical illusion. In *Leviathan,* Hobbes writes that the word person means he

> whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of another man . . . whether truly or by fiction. When they are considered as his own, then is he called a natural person: and when they are considered as representing the words and actions of another, then is he a feigned or artificial person. […] So that a Person, is the same that an Actor is, both on the Stage and in common Conversation; and to Personate, is to Act, or Represent himself, or another (quoted in Sorell 2006, 361).

This definition suggests that the person is also an actor who represents himself, a self-impersonator. The concept is at the core of the boundary between person and actor. The idea of 'person' is also linked to the sociological concept of identity where the stage represents a vehicle for its construction. The above reflections are relevant to the Restoration theatre discourses for two main reasons. Firstly, seventeenth-century theatregoers were keen on seeing themselves represented on the stage. Secondly, the question of *natural* or *feigned* person is at the basis of the distinction of wit into natural and unnatural. Natural is the wit of libertines, unnatural the wit of fools, characterised by distortion and caricature of social behaviour. As Elizabeth Burns insightfully notes,

> this was a continuation of the use made of the play as a weapon in the battles of the wits earlier in the century. The drama was operating on a level at which the manners and style of conduct of the dramatic characters were very close to that of the greater part of the audience, the spectators who came from the Court and the town, plus their servants and hangers-on (1972, 10-11).

And she also states that the mechanism worked "from a growing awareness of the way in which people compose their own characters, contribute to situations and design settings" (*ibid.*). It should be noticed that the concept of 'character' had also acquired a different connotation in the years previous to the Restoration when Ben Jonson used the word 'Character' to name a section of the plays describing each *dramatis persona*, providing information on the nature of the character prior to his appearance on the stage.[28] Peter Holland notes that through descriptions, characters "are established in a real world that is opposite to the awareness of the character as acted. Devices of this type tend to make the play literary not so much in the sense of untheatrical as in a novelistic, fictional way" (1979, 104). Characters then exist not only in the world of the play but as single entities. The idea of identity connected to characters involves a conflict between outward appearance and real persons, which is a deep concern of Restoration society, and drama attempts to balance these two unstable realities. If a character could display manners on the stage, why could he not assume a fictional pose in real life? Whether the stage is mimetic or metadramatic is a question that the libertine raises in the seventeenth century.

According to Abel, metatheatre indicates the modes of theatrical self-consciousness in drama. It is an inclination of the text according to which the characters exist before the playwright brings them to the stage because they are already aware of

[28] Ben Jonson introduced these descriptions when he wrote *Every Man Out of His Humour* in 1599, yet, playwrights did not fully used them until the 1660s.

their theatricality (1963, 60). The character's self-consciousness is a paramount concept in Abel's analysis of the genre since it implies that a character knows that his actions and attitudes will cause other character's reactions and "thus puts them in whatever situation he [the self-conscious character] is intent on being in. He refers to himself because he has the capacity to make others always refer to him" (Abel 1963, 61). The character's awareness has also the power to "dramatize others" (*ibid.*), which means that the character is transformed into a dramatist able to make a situation more dramatic, i.e. fictional, than what the playwright had originally conceived. In the world of metatheatre, staging and acting renounce the illusion and are no longer presented as authentic realities but rather stress the artistic techniques and devices used, accentuating the artificial nature of the performance.

Webster is quoted in Holland's *The Ornament of Action* for his description of an excellent actor as he who "by a full and significant action of body, charmes our attention: sit in a full Theater, and you will thinke you see so many lines drawne from the circumference of so many eares, whiles the *Actor* is the *Center*" (1979, 56). Borrowing the same definition, the libertine is that excellent actor, conscious of his theatrical potential and with a highly superior awareness of the world and its 'manners' in comparison with the other characters. The Restoration libertine, Dale Underwood writes, is "always fully and ironically aware of this reality. He insists, in fact, upon man as naturally self-seeking in motivation and ruthless in his means" (1957, 27). He might thus develop and plan every situation to minimise the risk of failing. Instead of annihilating the audience, by his behaviour, the libertine confirms that the action of the play can be compared to reality as well as the part that he plays. A striking example is provided by the opening scene of *The Country Wife* with a specific framework on which the whole play will be based. Horner is asking the doctor whether he has spread in the town the news that Horner is a eunuch. The play starts already with a plan which involves only Horner, the quack and the audience. The comic effect is set from the beginning and this scene is essential to the unfolding of the whole play. Horner's self-consciousness as a character is shown precisely in this conversation with the doctor who doubts about the efficacy of the plan:

> Quack: […] Well, I have been hired by young gallants to belie 'em t'other way; but you are the first would be thought a man unfit for woman.
> Hor.: Dear Mr Doctor, let vain rogues be contented only to be thought abler men than they are, generally 'tis all the pleasure they have; but mine lies another way (Wycherley, act 1, scene 1, p. 154).

The doctor points out that, generally, young men use rumours to be considered more successful with women rather than less. Conversely, Horner is aware that he already has a virile reputation because he is a libertine and thus he cannot spend free time with married women as he would like to. Unlike the other men, he does not need to be considered wittier because he already is; his lie serves to change the opinion other people have of him from 'harmful' into 'harmless' and this is precisely what Horner understands before the play starts: "Come, come, doctor, the wisest lawyer never discovers the merits of his cause till the trial; the wealthiest man conceals his richest, and the cunning gamester his play" (*ibid.*). Horner is a cunning gamester within the play. His awareness is inscribed in a framing action that represents a framed action within itself. In Pavis's words, this would be an example of *mise-en-abyme*, "a device used to frame or relativize the performance" (1998, 216).

In terms of the semiotics of theatre, the individual is conceived as a "performer whose activities function to create the appearance of a self – a character – for an audience" (Messinger, Sampson & Towne 1962, 104). The self and the character are melted and the attempt by the aware character of "maintaining or changing his 'character' for others" allows him to manipulate "things as props" (*ibid.*). In this case, the rest of the characters are related to the libertine in terms of roles and parts they are supposed to play and which are meant to create a show, to witness the libertine's show, or to clash with his intentions.

The character's self-consciousness manifests itself during the plotline in several forms: disguise, masks, ballets – all of those are meant to achieve a theatrical effect and to take advantage of the performance. Is the use of the fictional tools inside a play, which is already fictional, a way to justify the fictionality of the play? According to Elizabeth Burns, fictionality cannot claim any reality, on the contrary, the situation on the stage is only made doubly fictional. She explains that "fictitious characters take part in fictitious situations in a fictitious world" (1972, 31). In our plays this happens through disguise and plotting; on the other hand, the spectator steps out of an impartial role and becomes, though unintentionally, a fictionalised character too (*ibid.*). Burns defines the device "rhetorical" and this is the starting point by which the audience can accept the character's ephemeralness in his existence on the stage.

Another important convention is the interaction of the actors as characters in the play. Their gestures and speeches imply a connection with the world to which theatre belongs. The theatrical effect is nothing but the play's revelation of its artificiality and playfulness and the libertine is the device for this medium to be achieved. The self-

consciousness of the character brings him to a form of self-referentiality by way of a duplicated performance. As will be shown, the libertine is a metatheatrical character because of his ability to dramatize the others and manipulate them whilst creating a situation in which he drives them to act as he had always intended them to act. In this process, he not only accomplishes the dramatic aim but he also achieves what he wishes in a completely *natural* way for the audience. It is precisely this mechanism which makes the libertine a comic character as well as a perfect 'tool' to explore the always-existing boundary between the stage and life.

To conclude, the chapter will explore, still in the field of self-consciousness as the premise for metatheatre, the idea of role. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines the role as "a person's allotted share, part, or duty in life and society; the character, place, or status assigned to or assumed by a person"[29]. The dictionary also points out the reference to 'part' and in particular to the expression "to play (also act) the part (of): to act as or like; to perform the function of". This latter description of role is more interesting because the libertine is not a role in the sense of 'character' but a role in the sense of 'type' embodying the values of a particular social kind of behaviour. In this sense of role, the libertine becomes, using Pavis's words, "a place of transition between the abstract actantial code and the character and the actor actually staged, it acts as an outline of the search for the final character" (1998, 318). This notion is very similar to the idea of *gestus*, the attitudes that characters assume on the stage in their interaction. The libertine's *gestus* is the trickster's and he maintains it both in the action – in the interaction with the other players – and in the role – as representing a social type. The stage becomes for the libertine the opportunity to manoeuvre the others' behaviour but also to jeopardise the moral obligations he would have had, although unconcerned, in real life.

2.2 "Comic deceit": disguise and plotting

A comic pattern is usually based on the final resolution of the events of the play after a series of tricks, reversals, mistaken identities and obstacles. Events such as role-playing and disguising are considered 'deceits' because they alter the perception of the audience and highlight the ambiguity of the relationship between the actor and the character. A mode of deception that the libertine employs on the stage is the "trickster's". It has been the main structural element in comedy since its Greek origins. The central

[29]Source at https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/166971?rskey=xxk9Ux&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid.

figure in Old Comedy was the "masked buffoon" (Salingar 1974, 1) and his role was tantamount to the audience's enjoyment of the performance. With the rise of New Comedy, the trickster assumed a different role, though maintaining the same comic effect. Several were the uses of deception in Greek and Roman comedy, as Salingar summarises, "tricks involving doubled or feigned *personae* reproduce the 'agreeable mistakes' that evidently cover (and then assuage) a deep-seated feeling of uneasiness" (1974, 127). Castelvetro, a Renaissance scholar, defines the deceit as "not merely the delusions or impostures of the characters, but the structural deceptions that result from an unexpected movement of things in another direction" (quoted in Salingar 1974, 95). Thus, though the trickster is an ambivalent character, his function is indispensable to hold the dual sense of comedy between the fictional and the real. At a metatheatrical level, the deceit takes the form of dramatic fiction when a character is aware of his manipulative potential and the libertine demonstrates this by often commenting upon the deception he plays (then consciously) on the other characters. In this sense, the libertine is similar to the figure of *Vice* in Morality Plays whose dramatic role was to use wit and cleverness in order to successfully tempt man. The Restoration plays about libertines use the trickster motif as dupery at the plot level where duping episodes flank a general dupe plot. An example is when Dorimant, in *The Man of Mode,* pretends his name is Mr Courtage only to impress Lady Woodvill. The episode is inscribed in the general climate of pretence where Dorimant has to lie now and then to keep his three contemporary relationships safe. As Fujimura notes, "Dorimant can see through the devices of others, and at the same time, dissemble well enough so that others cannot see through him" (1978, 107). The act of dissembling presumes a great deal of ease which the libertine seems to possess and which is key to his success on the stage.

The most visible aspect of dupery is disguise. The libertine deploys disguise and explores the ambiguities produced by the costume on the stage. Disguise appears in two forms, the most obvious is the employment of physical disguise when a character wears a mask or is dressed as another *dramatis persona*. The other form is a metaphorical use of disguise as mere plotting, it creates a series of subplots or a play-within-the-play which comically involve all the characters on the stage who respond, or fail to respond, to this performance within the performance. Gamini Salgādo maintains that on the Restoration stage disguise is mainly used in the action as a trope consciously employed and symptomatic of "the new view which these dramatists take of the relationship between outward form and inner nature" (1986, 18). As for the audience, Harold Weber states that

"our love of disguise reflects our attraction to a world of sheer play in which the restricting identities and responsibilities of the working-day world can be disregarded, forgotten, annihilated" (1985, 370). Disguise then is comic and delightful also for the audience and responds to the paradox generated by situations that turn out unexpectedly rather than being planned. As per the second meaning of disguise, the play-within-the-play is a device that had always existed in English literature, yet, in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it came to be used very often. According to Elizabeth Burns, the device can be used "in three ways: as an instrument directly affecting the action, as a means of bringing a special sort of pressure to bear on the characters, or of preparing or arousing the audience for certain kinds of events" (1972, 44). In Restoration plays, the libertine uses it in the first way, as an instrument to steer the character's action towards his direction. Pavis describes the disguise as an *overtheatricalization* of the acting: "it is the basic situation as an actor plays another and his character, 'as in life' appears to others behind various masks depending on his desires and projects" (1998, 108). As a dramatic convention, disguise plays on the concepts of roles, characters and identity and involves a conscious deception where appearance and reality merge but confusedly.

Let us analyse how the libertine uses the two strategies. A common form of disguise in the plays is the pretence of performing another role. In *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, Gerrard is transformed into a dancing-master. When Don Diego, a father-master and Mrs Caution, the aunt obsessed with honour, discover Gerrard and Hippolita together, the couple invents a story where Hippolita is taking dancing classes for her marriage. The pretence accomplishes a double aim: on the one hand, Gerrard is saved from her family's accusations, on the other hand, the couple is granted the opportunity of spending more time alone. In terms of metatheatre, Gerrard will play the dancing-master until the last act: "Well, miss, since it seems you have some diffidence in me, give me leave to visit you as your dancing-master, now you have honoured me with the character" (Wycherley, act 2, scene 2, p. 195). Conscious that he is only a 'character', the dancing-master becomes a character-within-character. The role played by Gerrard equals to wearing a sort of mask. However, he doubts about his performative abilities

> Ger.: But (what's worse) how shall I be able to act a dancing-master, who ever wanted inclination and patience to learn myself?
> Hip.: A dancing-school in half an hour will furnish you with terms of the art. Besides, Love (as I have heard say) supplies his scholars with all sorts of capacities they have need of, in spite of nature:—but what has love to do with you?

> Ger.: Love, indeed, has made a grave gouty statesmen fight duels, the soldier fly from his colours, a pedant a fine gentlemen, nay, and the very lawyer a poet; and, therefore, may make me a dancing master.
> Hip.: If he were your master (Wycherley, act 2, scene 1, p. 196).

Gerrard's hesitation is counterbalanced by Hippolita's love test. Her fear of men brings her to protect herself. The performance she and Gerrard are involved in is a way to obtain a marriage based on love, conversely to what would happen if she married her cousin, and a way to expose the falsity of this "masquerading age" (Wycherley, act 1, scene 1, p. 167)

> Hip.: And would take all the innocent liberty of the town:—to tattle to your men under a vizard in the playhouses, and meet 'em at night in masquerade.
> Mrs. Caut.: […] I know you would be masquerading: but worse would come on't, as it has done to others who have been in a masquerade, and are now virgins but in masquerade, and will not be their own women again as long as they live. […] O, the fatal liberty of this masquerading age! when I was a young woman—
> Hip.: Come, come, do not blaspheme this masquerading age, like an ill-bred city-dame, whose husband is half broke by living in Covent garden, or who has been turned out of the Temple or Lincoln's-Inn upon a masquerading night. By what I've heard, 'tis a pleasant, well-bred, complaisant, free, frolic, good-natured, pretty age: and if you do not like it, leave it to us that do (*ibid.*).

The conversation between Hippolita and his aunt anticipates the masquerade that will be the thread of the play and which draws a parallel between the world of the stage and the world outside it. The *vizard in the playhouses* and the *masquerade* refer to typical libertine situations. Whereas the libertine attitudes of the age are attacked, Hippolita seems to appreciate them and rejects an old-fashioned view of female behaviour. In this respect, Gerrard, by becoming a dancing-master, also serves to fool Mr Paris, Hippolita's fiancé. Originally, it was Mr Paris he who pushed Gerrard towards Hippolita but the only effect has been Gerrard's outsmarting him.

Another theatrical element with which Wycherley plays is improvisation. As a typical device of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, where the players were meant to improvise on the stage, Hippolita and Gerrard are forced to improvise the role of the master-student even if neither of them can dance. When Gerrard tells her "What shall I do?" she answers, "Lead me about […] dance on" (Wycherley, act 2, scene 2, pp. 187-188) and when, some lines after, Gerrard is asked to play the violin, the scene is very hilarious:

> Mons.: ... if you'll play, I'll dance with her.
> Ger.: I can't play neither.
> Don Diego: What a Dancing-master, and not play! (*ibid.*).

Here the verb *play* creates a very comic situation, Mr Paris, who is aware of the plan, has a clear provoking intention towards Gerrard. Yet, when Gerrard answers that he cannot play, he might be referring to the role and not to the ability. In his performative action, Gerrard fits the libertine's typical reputation of a womanizer but he is also a trickster in the traditional sense of buffoon because, conversely to other libertines, he is more clumsy. The only person far from understanding it is Don Diego. Hippolita and Gerrard's pretence is then comic both towards Don Diego and Mr Paris, two characters which choose to immobilise themselves in Spanish and French manners which merely "serve to set off each other's folly" (Fujimura 1978, 136).

A similar situation where pretence is deceptive happens in Wycherley's third comedy, *The Country Wife,* but here the playwright brings trickery a step further. The already-mentioned situation of Horner's pretence of being a eunuch works as a vehicle for him to enjoy unhampered sexual freedom. He is completely successful, and by the first act, he has already convinced Sir Jasper about his innocence, which gives him the pretext to spend time both with Lady Fidget and Mrs Squeamish without arising suspicion. The other libertine, Harcourt, also outwits Sparkish through disguise. Prompted by his love for Alithea, Sparkish's fiancé, Harcourt decides to employ his character's awareness on the day of the couple's wedding with the hope to call it off. Harcourt disguises as a parson and creates a story by which he has a brother in town who is a chaplain. Although the "dull trick" (Wycherley, act 4, scene 1, p. 211) is realised by both Alithea and her maid Lucy, it comically exposes Sparkish who believes that Harcourt and his (fictional) brother are "both in a story" (*ibid.,* p. 210). Sparkish emerges as a fool who struggles to perceive a rather obvious situation; he believes that he is too smart to be fooled and that if Harcourt was pretending – as he actually is – he would have acknowledged it. Harcourt's conviction marks his ridiculing and the audience's spontaneous support of the Harcourt-Alithea relationship.

As a typical Restoration dramatic technique to titillate the audience, disguise is employed in *The Country Wife* also in another moment. Pinchwife has learnt that Horner is in love with his wife and his obsession with cuckoldry is not even palliated by the rumours about Horner's impotency. He decides to dress-up Mrs Pinchwife as a male:

> Alith.: Let her put on her mask.
> Pinch.: Pshaw! a mask makes people but the more inquisitive, and is as ridiculous a disguise as a stage-beard: her shape, stature, habit will be known. And if we should meet with Horner, he would be sure to take acquaintance with us, must wish her joy, kiss her,

> talk to her, leer upon her, and the devil and all. No, I'll not use her to a mask, 'tis dangerous; for masks have made more cuckolds than the best faces that ever were known.
> Alith. How will you do then?
> Mrs. Pinch. Nay, shall we go? The Exchange will be shut, and I have a mind to see that.
> Pinch.: So—I have it—I'll dress her up in the suit we are to carry down to her brother, little Sir James; nay, I understand the town tricks. Come, let's go dress her. A mask! no—a woman masked, like a covered dish, gives a man curiosity and appetite; when, it may be, uncovered, 'twould turn his stomach: no, no.
> Alith.: Indeed your comparison is something a greasy one: but I had a gentle gallant used to say, A beauty masked, like the sun in eclipse, gathers together more gazers than if it shined out (Wycherley, act 3, scene 1, pp. 188-189).

Pinchwife refuses to put a mask on his wife's face because in Restoration 'wearing a mask' was the synonym for being a prostitute. He decides then that the best option is to disguise her which, in terms of theatre, is paradoxically the same. However, he underestimates a core libertine notion that the more someone or something is kept secret, the more suspense arises. Horner, conscious of the device, will play on the situation and while he believes that "he is so handsome he should not be a man" (Wycherley, act 3, scene 2, p. 203), he feels authorized to kiss him (her) because he is doing no wrong. Horner thus traps Pinchwife who, consequently, has got himself in a ridiculous situation from which he cannot extricate himself but he can only complain about his despair aside to the audience.

With enough sophistication, in *The Country Wife*, Horner's and Harcourt's sensitivity towards stage techniques allows them to see behind the guise of social pretence by which society is affected and the play as such serves to laugh at all the pretences of honour and to expose the hypocrisy of the time. Horner's successful plan shows that what matters is that a person's identity lies in "what is said about them, not what they actually do" (Webster 2005, 92), precisely as in the Restoration world.

The Rover explores the question of pretence and mask by setting the play in Carnival times in Naples. Written after Wycherley's and Etherege's plays, Behn's inevitably displays the same ambiguity in dealing with libertines. The complexity is further highlighted by the fact that Aphra Behn was a woman and she distinguished herself from the male writers because she used the libertine not only as a social figure but also as a way to explore "the darker side of male sexuality" (Hughes 2004, 35). In the play, the general Carnival atmosphere appears as a kind of ritual, a ceremony which justifies the libertine attitude.[30] It provides the excuse to stage comic situations which at

[30] Several studies have underlined how both in Eastern and Western countries drama emerged from rituals, particularly religious rituals. As a matter of fact, religious performances depended on rules which regulated movements, gestures and speeches. Medieval drama in England - Morality and Miracle plays - was strictly

the same time remain tied to an amusing climate. The lively Carnival context is referred to from the beginning, Hellena soon claims her intent: "I'm resolv'd to provide my self this Carnival" (Behn, *The Rover*, act 1, scene 1, p. 2) and when her cousin Callis is sceptical about going in Masquerade (*ibid*., 5), she responds "that which all the World does, as I am told, be as mad as the rest, and take all innocent Freedom" (*ibid.*)[31]. Her audacity is shared by Willmore who, only some lines later, says "[…] and my Business ashore was only to enjoy my self a little this Carnival" (Behn, *The Rover*, act 1, scene 1, p. 8). The Carnival setting is also confirmed by the reference to disguise in the stage directions and throughout the text, we read: *enter several Men in masquing Habits; Women drest like Curtezans* or *Men drest all over with Horns of several sort* (*ibid*., p. 8-9), the latter a clear reference to cuckolding as one of the main structural element of libertine plots. Hellena indeed is *drest like Gipsy* (*ibid.*, p. 10) and this is to be the costume she wears until the end of the play. Hellena is always masked; Willmore, on the contrary, only wears a *vizard* now and then. Their love, rather than physical, as happens between Willmore and Angelica, is caused by their mutual wit. In act 2, Willmore asks his friend Belvile why he is disguised and he replies:

> Bel.: Because whatever Extravagances we commit in these Faces, our own may not be oblig'd to answer 'em.
> Will.: I should have chang'd my Eternal Buff too: but no matter, my little Gipsy wou'd nor have found me out then: for if she should change hers, it is impossible I should know her, unless I should hear her prattle (Behn, *The Rover*, scene 1, p. 17).

Belvile, who for his libertine attitude is more similar to Harcourt, provides an explanation for the disguise. Willmore's reply is completely metatheatrical and shows the character's awareness of the function of pretence but remarks his choice as a character – to remain as he is – and provides a reason for that – to be recognised by Hellena.

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linked to the Church and blended religious symbolism in it. Similarly, in popular tradition, comedy and festivity were often associated, along with magic elements, to rituals as means to sweep away evil and start a new cycle of life. It presumed that characters assumed different identities as per the outside circumstances given by rituals. Also comedy, as folkloristic tales, explores the comic possibilities favoured by love, marriage or family intrigues. Interesting books on these topics are Elizabeth Burn's *Theatricality*, especially chapter 3 'From ritual to drama'; Leo Salingar's *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy*, especially chapter 1 'The unfaithful mirror' and Jonas Barish's article 'Exhibitionism and the Antitheatrical Prejudice'.

[31] Notice how recurring is the quasi-oxymoronic association of *innocent* and *freedom* in the plays. Hippolita talks about *innocent liberty* when she discusses with her aunt about *this masquerading age* (Wycherley, act 1, scene 1, p. 167). Also Alithea uses the same expression in a discussion with her brother (Wycherley act 2, scene 1, p. 169). Freedom, as a metaphor for libertinism, is conceived by these females as a rather sensible concept which clashes with the more conservative ideas of Mrs Caution or Pinchwife. It must not be a case that those who speak this way are the libertines' witty girls.

Willmore's refusal of masquerading, which represents a reflection on theatre itself, is a metatheatrical claim for his libertinism.

Interestingly, Adam Beach (2004) describes Behn's play as a celebration of English nationalism with veiled attacks on the court. Drawing upon Mikhail Bakhtin's theories about carnival[32] and its development, he notes that "by mirroring in her play the carnival atmosphere of the theatre itself she [Behn] attempts […] to break down the already fragile 'fourth wall' that separates spectators from actors in Restoration theatre, and to channel the unruly energies of the crowd into a nationalistic, unruly Royalism" (5). Besides the political argument, should not be underestimated the meaning of Carnival – thus signalled by masks – as a metaphor for a lively society as Restoration one was.

Therefore, within Behn's play, Carnival symbolises a world of freedom which mimetically mirrors Charles II's court and the libertines' values. Yet, the playful setting concedes some of the excesses in a mixture of violence and fascination. Elin Diamond (1989) notably suggests that the entity of "Willmore" must have been a portrait of the court womanizer Rochester – John Wilmot – as also the name contains "the word ('mot') 'will'" (528). Previously, I hinted at the fact that the metatheatrical concept of role is very similar to the idea of *gestus*, "the moment in the performance that makes visible the contradictory interactions of text, theatre apparatus, and contemporary social struggle" (Diamond 1989, 519). Unlike other plays, *The Rover* shows the contradictions of a society victim of affectation as the libertine in the play is a prototype for a patriarchal law of values. Yet, if Willmore's consciousness might be disturbing, it is justified by the Carnival context. It will never be clear, albeit comic, how the extent to which Willmore's interaction with Hellena and Angelica makes him forget about the former when he is with the latter. It only inscribes the play and Willmore's libertinism in the exuberant environment generated by Carnival.

As metaphors for theatre, physical masks assume a deceptive role in Dryden's *Marriage à-la-Mode.* In the second scene of the fourth act, Palamede and Rodophil enter the scene with "Vizor-Masques in their hands" (Dryden, p. 58) and they reflect on the nature of the masquerading, one defining it a *most glorious invention,* the other *extremely pleasant.* The following lines are particularly interesting:

[32] In his analysis on Rabelais, Bakhtin argues that there is an opposition between the folk culture, characterised by spontaneity and laughter in the spirit of carnival, and the official culture, represented by the Church and the State. Thus, what he defines as *Carnivalesque*, the Carnival spirit, represents a site of resistance to any form of repression. Its subversive presence in the text creates comic reversals and laughter.

> Rho.: Masquerade is only vizor-mask improved; a heightening of the same fashion.
> Pala.: No, masquerade is vizor-mask in debauch, and I like it the better for't, with a vizor-mask, we fool ourselves into courtship, for the sake of an eye that glanced; or a hand that stole itself out of the glove sometimes, to give us a sample of the skin: But in masquerade there is nothing to be known, she's all *terra incognita;* and the bold discover leaps ashore, and takes his lot among the wild Indians and savages, without the vile consideration of safety to his person, or of beauty, or of wholesomeness in his mistress (*ibid.*, p. 59).

It is precisely the masquerade with his comic potential which provides, as Carnival did, the opportunity to play a social game. In the scene, Doralice is dressed as a man and she can openly flirt with Palamede in front of her husband, who believes her sick at home. We have already seen how the mask is related to the concept of *persona,* thus to character and identity. Through masks, actors become other than they originally are and gradually set a pattern of actions whereby they 'impersonate' in the very etymological sense of 'going into a new mask'. In this play, as in general for Restoration drama, the mask symbolises 'otherness' and it implies contradictory acting possibilities which represent diverse states of self-awareness. Yet, the character, who is aware of being a character, understands the mask precisely in its function to create tensions on the stage. He – the character – is able to balance the external demands of the social context by assuming the quality of disguise. In theatre about theatre, the mask is a hybrid element that reflects both the reality of a social context and the reality of the individual.

The characters in Dryden's play are aware of their dramatization as well as of the theatrical space. During the masquerade meeting between Doralice and Palamede, she tells him "shall we out of the pit, and go behind the scenes for an act or two", clearly drawing on a typical Restoration habit of men meeting actresses in the tiring rooms. The play draws on this device to underline the pretence of social behaviour which the play epitomises in marriage. "Yes, sure, the scene is done, I take it" (Dryden, act 3, scene 1, p. 38) is Doralice's exclamation after having embraced and spoken sweetly to her husband in front of other characters. It underlines how marriage has to do with a social pretence and is transformed in a series of performances and artificial exchanges. The two couples, Rhodophil-Doralice and Palamede-Melantha, switch their partners and the pattern constitutes the main comic action of the play. The struggle beneath marriage – and more in general social conventions – is a pure game of sociability: "I am confident we had all four the same design: 'tis a pretty odd kind of game this, where each of us plays for double stakes" (Dryden, act 3, scene 2, p. 53). This game is one that the libertine is keen on playing to overcome his philosophical quest for new pleasures. A game which on the stage, conversely to life, the libertine needs also to balance with a social sense. If the

libertine on the stage can comically reject his moral obligations, he still has eventually to meet a sense of reality which would otherwise condemn him.

The last 'deceit' that the libertine metatheatrically employs is madness. The libertine either employs madness as a disguise or plays on other characters' forms of madness. During the Restoration age, if on the one hand, madness meant a lack of judgement, on the other hand, a possible nuance was the concept of hobbyhorse which, according to Locke, led "to the complete transformation of objective reality into fiction" (Marshall 1989, 413). This concept is connected to the theatre because it suggests that a character is 'affected' by an obsessive tendency which makes it impossible for him to read the reality and this becomes comic. On the Restoration stage, characters such as Sparkish and Pinchwife belong to these categories, the former obsessed by honour and the latter by the idea of cuckolding and they are the object of ridicule in their distorted sense of reality which "dramatizes all it perceives" (*ibid.*, 425). These characters fail to read the signs created by the libertines and lack perspicacity. On the contrary, the libertine employs madness differently, conscious of its dramatic power and of the reactions such a character generates among the other characters. Thus, they use it to heighten other character's rigid perceptions and confine them in their foolish roles. Generally, in the depiction of a mad person, there is already a double layer of meaning constituted by the fictional reality that the mad person believes in, which is real according to that person, and the reality which everyone else accepts. In *Love for Love*, madness becomes Valentine's conscious performance to cover a double-aimed plan: not losing his father's heritage and testing Angelica's love. This metatheatrical aspect is hinted at a few times before it is performed as if the characters and the audience would need preparation for it. The opening scene of the play stages Valentine and Jeremy discussing Valentine's poverty since, as a typical libertine, he has squandered all his money. Nevertheless, Valentine is aware that he still owns something priceless, his wry wit, and he wants to use it to write plays as contemporary poets do:

> Val.: I will take some of their trade out of their [the poet's] hands.
> Jer.: Now Heav'n of mercy continue the tax upon paper! You don't mean to write!
> Val.: Yes, I do; I'll write a play (Congreve, act 1, scene 1, p. 268).

The reference to poets might be to some contemporary playwright or even to Congreve himself. However, by this affirmation, Valentine is already drawing on the fictional layer of theatricality and the character's dramatic awareness suggests that

writing a play means that it has then to be performed and the performance is always fictional. He also comments on the structure of Restoration comedies in his intention to teach Jeremy "to make couplets to tag the end of the acts" (Congreve, act 1, scene 1, p. 269). As a matter of fact, in Restoration comedies, as also during Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, characters usually close the acts, the dialogues or generally the interactions with a couplet. Its function is to provide a commentary on a particular scene or a theme[33]. Valentine seems not only aware of his theatricality but also of the structure of a theatrical text. In act 3, at some point Scandal and Valentine exit because the former has "something in [his] head to communicate" (Congreve, scene 1, p. 310) to Valentine. Scandal is the other libertine of the play and his thoughts predict a trick. However, despite these allusions, it is not until the fourth act that the performance of Valentine's madness is acted. This is set in Valentine's lodging but, through Scandal and Jeremy's conversation, the audience immediately understands they are conspiring a trick:

> Sca.: Well, is your master ready? Does he look madly and talk madly?
> Jer.: Yes, sir, you need make no great doubt of that. He that was so near turning a poet yesterday morning can't be much to seek in playing the madman today.
> Sca.: Would he have Angelica acquainted with the reason of his design?
> Jer.: No sir, not yet. He has a mind to try whether his playing the madman won't make her play the fool and fall in love with him, or at least own that she has loved him all this while, and concealed it (Congreve, act 4, scene 1, p. 326).

Needless to say, this scene is wonderfully written. *Yesterday* refers to the opening scene of the text and it marks an evolution in the character of Valentine from a playwright-to-be to a perfect actor. Interestingly, the verb 'to look' serves to hint at Valentine's pretence. Then, the whole passage gives a reason for the plan and shows Valentine's smartness despite his debauchery.

The other intent of the libertine's performance of madness, which is not stated in the previous exchange, is to avoid signing a voluntary waiver of his heritage. Sir Sampson, Valentine's father, is reluctant to entrust his son with his money because Valentine is already full of debts. He would rather like his second son Ben, allegedly more responsible, to care about it. Let us see how the plan works. In the case of Angelica, at first, she doubts "to have a trick put upon [her]" (Congreve, act 4, scene 1, p. 367). Her

[33] Frequent are libertines' couplets on libertinism. Notice Mirabell at the end of the first act "Where modesty's ill manners, 'tis but fit/ That impudence and malice pass for wit" (Congreve, *The Way of The World*, scene 9, p. 23) or Horner's "But he who aims by woman to be priced,/ First by the men, you see, must be despised" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 5, scene 4, p. 256). Not less interesting are couplets on love, marriage and women, such as Valentine's "That woman are like tricks by slight of hand,/ Which to admire, we should not understand" (Congreve, *Love for Love*, act 4, scene 1, p. 346).

intuition assumes several degrees of awareness, for next she states "I fancy 'tis a trick. I'll try. I would disguise to all the world a failing which I must own to you" (*ibid.*) and then "Nay, then I'm convinced, and if I don't play trick for trick, may I never taste the pleasure of revenge" (*ibid.*). Yet, Valentine still does not resign himself and wants to challenge Angelica's conviction that he is not mad. He takes advantage of an overheard conversation between Mrs Frail and Mrs Foresight in which the latter suggests Mrs Frail should exploit Valentine's madness and pretend to be Angelica so that they lie together and he will be forced to marry her. Valentine creates a subplot, as part of his already fictional drama, where he will play exactly Mrs Frail and Mrs Foresight's plan so that he might convince Angelica of his 'real' madness and test her love further. Again, the plan is presented first by Scandal and Jeremy:

> Sca. [*to* Jeremy]: And have you given your master a hint of their plot upon him?
> Jer.: Yes, sir; he says he'll favour it, and mistake her for Angelica.
> Sca.: It may make sport.
> […]
> Val.: The sooner the better. Jeremy, come hither; closer, that none may overhear us. Jeremy, I can tell you news. Angelica is turned nun, and I am turning friar, and yet we'll marry one another in spite of the Pope. Get me a cowl and beads, that I may play my part, for she'll meet me two hours hence in black and white, and a long veil to cover the project, and we won't see one another's faces, till we have done something to be ashamed of; and then we'll blush once for all (Congreve, act 4, scene 1, pp. 338-340).

Valentine's lines follow what the audience has previously learnt from Scandal and Jeremy plus the instance of Valentine's mad speech. He is talking to Mrs Frail – pretending she is Angelica – and his lines are completely unconnected and without sense, which shows Valentine's good skills as the actor of his own performance. Curious is the sentence *I may play my part* in a situation in which he is indeed *playing* a part. Coming back to Angelica, it is at this point that her love contradicts her and she revaluates the whole situation: "I never loved him till he was mad" (Congreve, act 4, scene 1, p. 340).

As for the second aim of the plot, Valentine's play-within-the-play allows him to preserve his money because the lawyer is forced to question the validity of any document until Valentine's sickness is over: "Sir, I can do you no service while he's in this condition" (Congreve, act 4, scene 1, p. 330). Valentine's pretence has converted him in a richer bachelor and he can marry the woman he loves now that he knows she returns his love. Almost towards the final scene, everything has come back to the place it belonged but there is a passage which is worth mentioning:

> Val.: You see what disguises love makes put on. Gods have been in counterfeited shapes for the same reason; and the divine part of me, my mind, had worn this mask of madness, and this motley livery only as the slave of love, and menial creature of your beauty.
> Ang.: Mercy on me, how he talks! Poor Valentine.
> Val.: Nay, faith, now let us understand one another, hypocrisy apart. **The comedy draws toward an end and let us think of leaving acting, and be ourselves;** [34] and since you have loved me, you must own I have at length deserved you should confess it (Congreve, act 4, scene 1, p. 344).

After claiming that his love justified his pretence – we must remember that Congreve's libertines belong to the tradition of the 1690s and are devoted to love more genuinely – he also closes the play with a brilliant metatheatrical reference. There is a moment between drama and reality where masks fall and what remains is *real selves.* This is what Valentine has done and what he wants the audience to remember when he shall leave the stage. What Rochester had said to his lover Elizabeth Barry with the lines "Leave this gaudy gilded stage" (Rochester, *Song*, line 1), Valentine is telling now. In a world which is full of pretences and masks, he bids his audience to be kinder since "a clear stage won't do, without [the audience's] favour" (Congreve, *Love for Love*, Epilogue, p. 365)

As is evident, Congreve's treatment of libertinism is very different from Wycherley's or Etherege's and also plotting has a different meaning for the playwright. For Congreve, it always carries a more benevolent and genuine connotation which makes the libertine's wit even more fascinating.

The Double Dealer and *The Way of the World* use disguise as plotting but with a different outcome. The former play is moral in its intention and lacks a well-developed Truewit character. In the latter, almost every character is plotting against each other and this create a real division of characters in groups which confuses the plotline and undermines the reader's understanding of the play. *The Double Dealer* is defined by Harold Weber a play which shows "masked intentions articulated, of words, actions, and faces that obscure themselves even while speaking the truth" (1985, 378). The libertine-villain Maskwell is a double-dealer, he wants to marry Cynthia and plots against Mellefont, in love with her too. His motto is to behave in the same way both when he lies and when he does not because "dear dissimulation is the only art not to be known from nature" (Congreve, *The Double Dealer*, act 2, scene 8)[35], yet, he also affirms that "No Mask like open Truth to cover Lies/ As to go naked is the best disguise" (Congreve, *The*

[34] The bold is mine.
[35] All the quotations from Congreve's *The Double Dealer* included in the present text refer to a play's online edition available at https://www.fulltextarchive.com/page/The-Double-Dealer/.

Double Dealer, act 5, scene 1). For Maskwell deceiving means converting truth into a lie so that it does not appear as a deception but as a way of turning reality into appearance. Maskwell, as also his name suggests, is a bright deceiver, he embodies libertinism in its most cynical and egoistic form but, unlike Mellefont, his plans cannot succeed because he carries his egoism to a point that is destructive for society. One of the reasons libertines were so fascinating on the stage is because of the characters' social integration at the end of the play. After the audience had experienced four acts of witty deception, they attended the libertine's redemption which was necessary to end the game of social pretences. This does not happen with Maskwell. A similar pattern characterises *The Way of the World* where the Mirabell-Waitwell plot is meant to deceive Lady Wishfort while the Mirabell-Mrs Fainall's is aimed to unmask the couple Mr Fainall-Marwood, who created their own plot to impede Mirabell and Millamant's wedding. Already in the prologue, Mr Betterton – the actor who played Fainall – presents the play as "some plot we think he has, and some new thought;/Some humour too, no farce – but that's a fault" (Congreve, Prologue, p. 5), introducing a play about schemes, plotting and full of jokes. The play opens with Mirabell and Fainall playing cards[36] when the former seems very anxious. In the next scene, he talks to a servant asking if "the grand affair [is] over" (Congreve, act 1, scene 2, p. 11) which introduces a subplot where Waitwell should disguise as Sir Rowland, Mirabell's supposed uncle. From the beginning, Mirabell emerges as a schemer and anticipates his role of director. Also Fainall, when conversing with Mrs Marwood, recognises the need to "prevent their [Mirabell-Waitwell] plot" (Congreve, act 3, scene 18, p. 57) since "'tis against al rule of play that [he] should lose to one who has not wherewithal to stake" (*ibid.*, p. 58). As in *The Double Dealer*, the two libertine characters, Mirabell and Fainall, are both plotting against each other so that at some point the whole fiction seems a play-within-the-play and the audience also does not know which plot they are watching. Relevantly, in the transition between act 4 and act 5, Mirabell-Waitwell's plan has been discovered while it seemed safe at the end of the previous act. The presence

[36] Playing cards works as a metonymic aspect for the performance and this because it creates the opportunity of raising some theatrical metaphors. Fainall: Have we done?/ Mirabell: What you please. I'll play on to entertain you (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, act 1, scene 1, p. 9). Entertaining is the scope announced in the Prologue and Mirabell draws on the ambiguity that the term creates and might allude to the fact that he, as a character, is *playing* to *entertain* the audience. It is really interesting how the awareness of the character intermingles with the awareness of the performance. Noticeably, *The Way of the World* is not the only play which ambiguously works on playing cards but also in *The Country Wife* Dorilant claims "but Heavens keep me from being an ombre-player with them" (Wycherley, act 2, scene 1, p. 181). According to the OED, the Ombre-player is *a trick-taking card game for three people using forty cards*. What Dorilant means here is that he does not want to be a tricked player in his life-game with women and he expresses it by the playing cards-performance metaphor.

of offstage plotting scenes marks Congreve's transition to another type of drama, which violates the conventions of Restoration stage while trying to keep them within the plot. Yet, what the libertine's use of plotting in the scene demonstrates is the revelation of the play's artificiality. Charles Lyons argues that in Congreve's last play disguise reflects

> a real world of human experience [which] is in tension with the worlds created by personal and social rituals which are, in a clear sense, disguises. The comedy concerns characters who construct elaborate images of themselves because they are unable to function successfully within their true identity or are unable to apprehend their true identity. In fact, the primary expenditure of energy in this work is the imposition of some form of mask upon the real self (1971, 259).

However, what the play still explores is the libertine's manipulation of appearances to unveil those aspects of society hidden by a mask of affectation. In *The Way of the World*, the most affected character is Lady Wishfort who, notably, remains outside the plots but is unconsciously manipulated by both. When she has to meet the fictional Sir Rowland, she prepares herself and behaves according to the conventions of the coy mistress. She believes this will allow her to save her appearance while creating an illusion of love since her logic of affectation supports "that there is a great deal in the first impression" (Congreve, act 4, scene 1, p. 61):

> L. Wish.: […] I shall never recompose my features to receive Sir Rowland with any economy of face. This wretch has fretted me that I am absolutely decayed. Look, Foible.
> Foi.: Your ladyship has frowned a little too rashly, indeed, madam. There are some cracks discernible in the white varnish.
> L. Wish.: Let me see the glass. – Cracks, say'st thou? Why, I am arrantly flayed. I look like an old peeled wall. Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes; or I shall never keep up to my picture.
> Foi.: I warrant you, madam; a little art once made your picture like you; and now a little of the same art must make you like your picture. Your picture must sit for you, madam (Congreve, act 3, scene 4, p. 44).

The cosmetic mask is a metonymic element which foils the element of disguise and illusion. The meeting between Sir Rowland and Lady Wishfort is a brilliantly comic scene which fulfils our microcosm of expectations of desirability that winds up in ridicule. Examples of characters like these are also recognisable in other plays, such as Lady Fidget in *The Country Wife* or Lady Woodvill in *The Man of Mode*. Conversely, the reason of the libertine's success on the stage is precisely because he goes against the mainstream and does not fully matter about social conventions: he just accepts the world as it is. Throughout the play, Mirabell has understood that planning for the worst while giving people the option to act well is a better approach than simply, as Fainall does, thinking the worst about other people and then acting terribly toward them. Chernaik notes that in

this play "by the ingenious twists and turns of the plot, we have been led through a world of moral uncertainties, where all appearances deceive and no one is to be trusted, to one in which both love and friendship are possible" (1995, 39). In *The Way of the World*, the two swinging modes have the function of revealing how the libertine can be saved if only he encourages generosity and affection, which is not detrimental to his liberty, as the proviso scene suggests (Congreve, act 4, scene 5). On the contrary, Fainall is converted from a rake into a villain, precisely as Maskwell. In both characters, the Hobbesian self-preservation instinct is inimical to civil life. Interestingly, 'way of the world' means precisely a world – or the world of the stage – where characters are continuously concealing from each other. The libertine is just a tool to expose the way members of society manipulate appearances and masks and disguises are only parts of the social game they all play. Harold Weber says that the comedy of the age "suggests that individuals hardly exist apart from the masks they don, the appearance they manipulate in order to live with and dominate others" (1985, 371). The connection between the libertine's social behaviour in the Restoration age and the dramatic performance is one of the most insightful aspects of these plays.

It is interesting to point out how the mechanism of disguise is further employed by the witty girl the libertine often marries at the end of the play as the opportunity to test each other. Taking as an example the last discussed play, the metaphoric mask is worn by Millamant in a game of indifference towards Mirabell. She pretends, as a matter of fact, to be interested in some Witless of the play, a game that Mrs Marwood recognises as "a fine gay glossy fool should be given there, like a new masking habit, after the masquerade is over and we have done with the disguise. For a fool's visit is always a disguise; and never admitted by a woman of wit but to blind her affair with a lover of sense" (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, act 3, scene 10, p. 48).

The disguise is not the only device explored by the libertine so we should now expand on another brilliant role by which the character manipulates the plot.

2.3 Playing the part: the libertine as a director

Apart from the trickster, the other ability where the libertine displays his staging consciousness is the direction. Needless to underline, the director is not to be confused with the playwright but it refers to those instances in the plays where the libertine gives theatrical directions to other characters. It corresponds to Abel's definition that "these

characters are themselves dramatists, capable of making other situations dramatic besides the ones they originally appeared in" (Abel 1963, 62). Role-playing happens when a character acts a role – *dramatis persona* – different from the one the playwright had designed him. In theatre, Elizabeth Burns notes, "the script is written for the actor: he does not invent the role. Yet it is precisely at this point that the limits of the analogy reveal themselves" (1972, 1). The character – the libertine in this case – is converted into a dramatist and creates different dramatic situations. The main task of a director is to give "verbal or mimed instructions concerning an aspect of acting" (Pavis 1998, 103). The kind of plays which accomplish the definition are relished as occasions for exploring the concerns of a particular age. When an actor enters a character, thus becoming *in-character,* he brings on the stage the problem of the representation of identity. When a character starts to use different *identities* on the stage, so to speak, he designs himself for more than one role, this means there is another existing sublevel that the audience has to understand and which ties that character to a situational and artificial understanding.

Congreve's plays are much special in this sense. In *Love for Love,* the libertine Tattle instructs the naïve Miss Prue on the right way of making love:

> Tat.: You must let me speak Miss, you must not speak first. I must ask you questions, and you must answer.
> M. Prue: What, is it like catechism? Come then, ask me.
> Tat.: De'e you think you can love me?
> M. Prue.: Yes.
> Tat.: Pooh, pox, you must not say yes already. I shan't care a farthing for you then in a twinkling.
> M. Prue: What I must say then?
> Tat.: Why you must say no, or you believe not, or you can't tell.
> M. Prue: Why, must I tell a lie then?
> Tat.: Yes, if you would be well-bred. All well-bred persons lie. Besides, you are a woman, you must never speak what you think. Your words must contradict your thoughts, but your actions may contradict your words. So, when I ask you if you can love me, you must say no, but you must love me too. If I tell you are handsome, you must deny it, and say I flatter you. But you must think yourself more charming than I speak you, and like me, for the beauty which I say you have, as much as if I had it myself. If I ask you to kiss me, you must be angry, but you must not refuse me. If I ask you for more, you must be more angry, but more complying. And as soon as ever I make you say you'll cry out, you must be sure to hold your tongue.
> M. Prue: O Lord, I swear this is pure. I like it better than our old-fashioned country way of speaking one's mind. And must not you lie too?
> Tat.: Hum – yes. But you must believe I speak truth. (Congreve, act 2, scene 1, p. 303)

In this lengthy passage, the libertine is doing nothing more than teaching her the ways of the world. Tattle employs the verb 'must' in a mimetic sense. At the opening of

the chapter it was hinted at the stage as a manual of behaviour: there is a right way of being witty and a right way of making love. Passages like these tie the world of the stage with the Restoration world and both share the notion that pretence is as much real in theatre as in real life.

As a director might do with his actors, Tattle and Miss Prue make a rehearsal of a love scene and when he asks her to give him a kiss, she replies "No, indeed, I'm angry at you" (*ibid.*). When he asks her to lead him to her bedroom, she replies "No, indeed, won't I But I'll run there, and hide myself from you behind the curtains" (*ibid.*). She has learnt the lesson and she has been *more angry, but more complying* as per the instructions given to her. In her reply, Miss Prue seems aware of rehearsing on the stage as a theatrical space and this is suggested by the reference to the curtain; a pattern which many theatregoers of the time must have appreciated for the comic and ambiguous meaning.

As any rehearsal to be respected, it needs then a performance. Miss Prue wanted some instruction in order to impress Ben and a few pages later she puts Tattle's lesson into practice:

> Ben: Come mistress, will you please to sit down? […] There, an you please to sit, I'll sit by you.
> M. Prue: You need not sit so near one. If you have anything to say, I can hear you farther off. I an't deaf.
> Ben: […] The short of the thing is this, that if you like me, and I like you, we may chance to swing in a hammock together.
> M. Prue: I don't know what to say to you, nor don't I care to speak with you at all (Congreve, act 3, scene 1, p. 313).

Still remaining on Congreve, the other plotter-director is Mirabell. In *The Way of the World,* in her plan Mrs Fainall directly asks Mirabell "Whom have you instructed to represent your pretended uncle?" (Congreve, act 2, scene 4, p. 32), a sentence which shows Mirabell's directing skills and also the other character's appointing him as an instructor. The reference to Mirabell's instructions is a continuous motif in the play: "I have instructed her as well as I could. If she can take your directions as readily as my instructions, sir, your affairs are in a prosperous way" or "But I told my lady as you instructed me" (Congreve, act 2, scene 8, pp. 38-39). When Waitwell has to disguise as Sir Rowland, Mirabell asks him "will you endeavour to forget yourself – and transform into Sir Rowland?" (*ibid.*). Mirabell is employing the playwright's consciousness of drama and mastering the character's actions. Nevertheless, Mirabell shares this role with Fainall. This latter orders Mrs Marwood: "hide your face, your tears. You have a mask: wear it a moment" (Congreve, act 2, scene 3, p. 31). The framework of the play where

Mirabell's plot is opposed to Fainall's takes the form of a struggle between two playwrights but only one of their 'deceit and frivolous pretence' (*ibid*., p. 30) is supposed to be successful. Actually, even in directing the key is always the same: understanding the *ways of the world*. Fainall has been so involved in his plan that he has forgotten to act, and he has left his egoism and greediness prevail over the spontaneity of love as represented by Mirabell. The ending of the play is revealing. At the end of the last act all the characters are gathered in the same scene: "Hey day! what are you all got together like Players at the end of the last Act?" (Congreve, act 5, scene 13, p. 95) whose effect is a continuous setting of the theatricality of the event: theatricality and reality are interwoven. The epilogue of the play spoken by Millamant reinforces the idea: "So poets oft do in one piece expose/ Whole *belles assemblées* of coquettes and beaux" (Congreve, p. 95) . Should we look too closely to characters in the play, we would only discover that they are based on reality.

Another play in which this element of direction is beautifully explored is Etherege's *The Man of Mode.* Young Bellair and Harriet have been matched by their parents, yet, they know they are not in love with each other since the libertine Bellair is in love with Emilia and Harriet really likes Dorimant. They create a subplot when they pretend being in love:

> Young B.: If we give over the game, we are undone! What think you of playing it on booty?
> Har.: What do you mean?
> Young B.: Pretend to be in love with one another. 'Twill make some dilatory excuses we may feign pass the better.
> Har.: Let's us do't, if it be but for the dear pleasure of dissembling.
> Young B.: Can you play your part?
> Har.: I know not what is to love, but I have made pretty remarks by being now and then where lovers meet (Etherege, act 3, scene 1, p. 81).

To play it on booty, as indicated in the footnotes (Salgādo 1986, 81), means "to join with other players to cheat one". Thus, the passage shows Young Bellair and Harriet's plan of pretence and dissembling further underlined by the metatheatrical expression *can you play your part?* Their ability is soon tested by the entrance of Old Bellair and Lady Woodvill and the feigned couple is immersed in a play of mutual directions:

> Young B.: Now for a look and gestures that may persuade 'em I am saying all the passionate things imaginable –
> Har.: Your head a little more on one side, ease yourself on your left leg, and play with your right hand.

> Young B.: Thus, is it not?
> Har.: Now set your right leg firm on the ground, adjust your belt, then look about you.
> Young B.: A little exercising will make me perfect.
> Har.: Smile and turn to me again very sparkish.
> Yong B.: Will you take your turn and be instructed? [….] Play your fan, roul your eyes, and then settle a kind look upon me.
> Har.: So?
> Young B.: Now spread your fan, look down upon it, and tell the sticks with a finger. […] Clap your hands to your bosom, hold down your gown, shrug a little, draw up your breasts and let 'em fall again, gently, with a sight or two, etc. […] Clap your fan then, in both your hands, snatch it to your mouth, smile, and with a lively motion fling your body a little forwards. So – now spread it; fall back on the sudden, cover your face with it, and break out into a loud laughter – take up! Look grave, and fall a-fanning of yourself – admirably well acted (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 3, scene 2, pp. 82-83).

In the first part of the passage, it is Harriet who gives instructions to Young Bellair then he exchanges the favour. As a director, Young Bellair wants Harriet to perform well and at the end, he compliments her by saying *well acted.* Furthermore, there is another element which adds value to the metatheatrical essence of the passage. Old Bellair and Lady Woodvill are observing as if they were the audience attending general rehearsals. They believe in the couple's love while the instruction scene clearly spoils the pretence. Harriet recognises in Young Bellair the libertine who "from innocent looks make scandalous conclusions" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 3, scene 2, p. 82). Young Bellair answers that he has learnt by observing "every glance that passes at a play and i'th'Circle" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 3, scene 2, p. 83). It is very compelling that he is paralleling the world of the stage with something that commonly happened in the 'circle' of fashionable society, where theatre was one of the main sources of love affairs for libertines. Interestingly enough, it is a comment which makes even more sense during a play which refers to plays in general.

In the next act, Harriet is called to perform according to the received instructions in front of Dorimant who is caught by her manners. Their exchange (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 4, scene 1, pp. 106-107) is all about manners, affectation and full of parallels with theatre for she describes herself differently from those women who "at plays [make] the deux yeux to a whole audience and at home cannot forbear 'em to their monkey" and she says that "beauty runs a great risk exposed at court as wit does on the stage, where the ugly and the foolish all are free to censure" (*ibid.*). Harriet is a fine actress, she acknowledges the power she has over him and, through her performance, she achieves the love oaths of a lover rather than of a rake, which distinguishes her from both Belinda and Loveit. This playful game of direction and theatrical parallel is underlined by verbs such as *put on, turn* and *drop* "If it be on that idle subject, I will put on my serious look,

turn my head carelessly from you, drop my lip, let my eyelids fall, and hang half o'er my eyes – thus – while you buss a speech of an hour long in my ear, and I answer never a world. Why do you not begin?" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 4, scene 1, p. 107). It is love that engages them in this game of instructions, roles and fiction.

It seems rather playful to conclude the chapter with a worse example of direction to further stress why the device is so brilliantly used by libertine. The example concerns Pinchwife's comic instructions to his wife about the letter she has to write to Horner. As has already been stressed, Pinchwife is a ridiculous character, he has a deep concern for cuckoldry with prompts him to act out of impulse. After his plan of disguising Margery as her artificial brother had sorted no other effect then ridiculing him, he now wants her to write Horner a letter by her own hand. The scene is full of imperatives which comically echo all the 'must' of the previous examples:

> Pinch.: Come, begin. [*Dictates*] 'Sir' –
> Mrs. Pinch.: Shan't I say, 'Dear Sir'? – You know one says always something more than bare 'Sir'.
> Pinch.: Write as I bid you, or I will write whore with this penknife in your face.
> Mrs. Pich.: Nay, good bud. [*She writes*] 'Sir' (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 4, scene 2, p. 215).

The whole scene develops with the same pattern, Pinchwife gives orders and Mrs Pinchwife obeys them. Wycherley brilliantly confronts the stage directions about Margery's actions with her husband's directions: *writes, takes the paper and reads, holds up the penknife, reads, she writes, she writes on,* all respond to what Pinchwife has told. By keeping her under control, Pinchwife unconsciously liberates her since he has now taught her how to write a proper letter. It is not a coincidence that the libertine is involved – though passively – in the situation. As soon as Pinchwife leaves the room to get some wax and a candle, Margery writes her own letter to Horner and replaces the former. With much spontaneity and naivety, she skilfully deceives him by switching the two letters so that the right one might reach Horner. With undistinguishable cleverness, Horner understands the game and plays his part: Is this a trick of his or hers? (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 4, scene 3, p. 226) and when Pinchwife asks him whether he expected a kinder letter, he answers "No faith, not I, could I?" (*ibid.*, p. 227).

> Hor.: Well, I mu e'en acquiesce then, and be contented with what she writes.
> Pinch.: I'll assure it was voluntary writ. I had no hand in't, you may believe me.
> Hor.: I do believe thee, faith.
> Pinch.: And believe her too, for she's an innocent creature, has no dissembling in her.

> Hor.: Pray, however, present my humble service, and tell her I will obey her letter to a tittle, and fulfil her desires […] (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 4, scene 3, p. 228).

Not only Margery has outwitted her husband after his overplayed rage, but Horner also reinforces the comic effect of his ridiculing. Until the moment of the letter, Deborah Payne writes, "Margery fails to connect acts deceitfully, the only proper way in which language, gesture, and meaning can be connected in the world of this Restoration play" (1986, 406). Horner's manipulative effect on Margery affects her prelapsarian naivety of a *country wife*. Pichwife's directing abilities are opposed to Horner's who, just in the previous scene with the Quack, improvised the role of a director and instructed the Quack to behave as a member of the audience: "step behind the screen there, and but observe; if I have not particular privileges, with the women of reputation already, Doctor, already" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 4, scene 3, p. 219). As a dramatist, Horner sets a stage where he controls the Quack's and Lady Fidget's actions and, with the latter, he will stage the famous "China Scene". At the end of the play, Horner's directions demonstrate that he constantly forces those around him to forget about common notions and to respond to his same distorted sense of reality and make play of it.

This chapter has tried to show what happens when a character gains awareness of his artificiality and employs it in the mechanisms of the plot. As a figure, the libertine uses manners, wit and charms, all weapons he takes from the reality of the Restoration context, to make his actions spectacular. By recognizing the ridiculing potential of his contemporaries, epitomised in the other characters, he funnels their action, so to speak, plays with their façade of honour and with a general baroque aesthetics which privileges appearance over the essence. He does so by exploiting typically theatrical devices, such as disguise, a main element of duping plots, and directing. On the one hand, the libertine serves to display mimetically a cultural and social reality, on the other hand, he offers a quasi-satirical allegory of the culture itself he displays.

The libertine's manipulative abilities, which played so pivotal a part in this chapter, will also be reprised in the next section of this study but with particular attention to the language that the character uses and its rhetorically deceiving value.

3. Libertine's metalinguistic seduction: a master of language

"Comedy is a Representation of common Conversation" (1976, 39), thus Hume enters the huge debate about the comedy of manners and whether its aim was mere entertainment or ridiculing. However, the libertine's language in the plays is all but 'common', so, at the least, we must refer to some ideas about language in the seventeenth century. First and foremost, the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that the original meaning of the word 'conversation' indicated the "manner of conducting oneself in the world or in society; behaviour, mode or course of life" and it is during Restoration that its meaning starts to shift to the more recent "interchange of thoughts and words; familiar discourse or talk"[37], yet, the former legacy of the word was still maintained until the first half of the eighteenth-century. The fact that the Restoration plays employ a language implicated with manners and tinged with contradictory moral meanings is evident enough, as it is evident that the libertine is a character who directly plays on these attitudes by drawing on the idea that language is a primary vehicle to jeopardise the moral obligations of speeches.

As we have seen, Hobbes was an inspiring philosopher for libertines but it has not been pointed out yet that his thoughts also concerned language. Originally, language was conceived as a means to express the truth about a sentence, what first Plato and then Aristotle defined *logos.* It meant that "speech endow[ed] us with a sense of self and provid[ed] the means to order our lives relative to the world and to others" (Sorell 2006, 331) and that no world could exist outside language. As a consequence, language was the expression of truth. Contrarily, Roman rhetoricians, Cicero and Quintilian especially, had used language differently, considering that not always what was expressed through language was reliable but language was simply a *token* by which we could express something that might also not be the case. Then, when language can be manipulated, we enter the world of rhetoric. Returning to Hobbes, the philosopher, in line with seventeenth-century ethics, supports a scientific use of language because of its clarity and lack of ambiguity, yet, he still recognizes the power of rhetoric to improve social and political matters. Hobbes, as Foucault three centuries later, suggests that language has an effect of power and, interestingly, such a theory started to take form, albeit unsystematically, in the seventeenth century. Although Hobbes opposes an exclusive

[37] Source at https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/40748?isAdvanced=true&result=1&rskey=rxG1at&.

rhetorical use of language, he still recognises that the power of speech on the mind is partly rhetorical. He shares with the ancient schools the notion of a demagogic power of speech, he maintains that truth without elocution is powerless and that any speech would need *energeia,* that force which makes it rhetorically compelling for an audience. If we apply the concept to the libertine, it is not what he says in the comedies, which might be morally argued, but it is the way he conducts his discussions that simultaneously convinces us and empowers him.

The diverse seventeenth-century theories about language have all the same aim: to dismantle the former leading idea of *lingua humana,* that is, Adam's natural innate ability to name things, which implies a univocal correspondence between signifier and signified[38]. We should keep in mind that the Restoration years are transitory between Renaissance and Enlightenment where the focus on science and mathematical discoveries are symptomatic of the need for a plainer language by which philosophers could speak the truth. As a matter of fact, the main issue about language is whether rhetoric, with its artifactuality, is able to do so. At the beginning of the century, John Milton's classical idea of rhetoric blames the speaker for the meaning of the words he uses. Milton believes that the speaker can use words to manipulate a discourse and that eloquence is the best ornament of a speech. Yet, he does not oppose eloquence to truth but recognises that eloquence shows "how good, how gainful, how happy must needs be to live according to honesty and justice" (quoted in Thompson 1984, 15). In order to do so, the speaker must know the subject – the truth – of his speaking. Knowing the truth and knowing how to persuade are complementary arts. Towards the end of the century, in 1689, John Locke wrote *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* where he tried to explain the understandings of the mind. He claimed that, at first, our mind is a *tabula rasa,* a blank empty slate which acquires understanding thanks to the experience coming through the senses. These acquisitions that our mind gains are called 'Ideas' and Locke maintained that our empirical knowledge of the world is made of complex and compound ideas. Also language is an idea. Thus, Locke completely reverses the notion of a *natural language* as

[38] The so-called Adamic language or Edenic speech is the language that, according to Genesis, Adam used to name all things mandated by God. This golden myth of a transparent and pure language was very popular in Renaissance philology and influential in later theories. Milton, for example, writes that *linguae divitus procludubio datae sunt*, languages are without doubt divinely given (Thompson 1984, 33). Yet, the Genesis also narrates that after man's attempt to reach Heavenly knowledge, God confused languages in the Tower of Babel. So, while mankind had originally spoken the same language, it had later become largely influenced by man. The main theories about language in the seventeenth century try to 'restore' the original integrity that language had lost and to use it as a vehicle for truth.

described in the Bible but implies that language is *arbitrary*. And if language is an idea marked in our mind, it can be manipulated by the use of reason.

The libertines' way of speaking happens half-way these two positions and on these preliminary notions, the chapter will explore how their ability works upon other characters' minds, which is not a purely rhetorical ability but rather a deep awareness of the notions of wit and society. The emphases that Restoration society places on appearance and libertinism are the two poles on which the comedy of the age is based. If by exploiting his role, as I have explored in Chapter 2, the libertine can play on these poles, he can replicate the same behaviour with language. In particular, the libertine explores through language two significant concepts for the Restoration age: the pursuit of truth and a 'correct' social ideology. As will be argued, the age's concept of truth implies a condemnation of lying. Yet, paradoxically, the libertine is able to express the truth by lying and by employing a suited "gentlemanly conversation" with no other than a parodic aim. This is because the character employs 'wit', that untranslatable concept introduced in Chapter 1. Before going deeper into these matters as employed by the plays, this chapter will hint at some ideas about language in the second half of the century and also at the more contemporary theory of speech acts, extremely important to understand the performative potential of language for the theatre and, particularly the libertines', because, as Peter Holland says, "every fragment of the event potentially carries meaning" (1979, 19). In this sense, the dramatic potential of verbal events becomes limitless.

3.1 "He has witchcraft in his eyes and tongue": wit and speech acts

In its function to impress the speaker, rhetoric has often been compared with theatre because also the latter employs a series of figures of speech but on the stage. In a very insightful work, Rose Zimbardo (1998) works on language ideas in Restoration, which she defines, borrowing Hans Blumenberg's terminology, 'zero point', the moment in which a prior order of thinking is deconstructed and it coincides with the predisposition towards a new one. The point of departure for her is that "it is not possible to conceive 'reality' nor to experience anything except through the mediation of language" (4). Thus, she has demonstrated the impossibility of understanding the Restoration comedies without analysing the meaning of language because language is intrinsically connected with experience. Let us then explore some of the main points about language in the Restoration age in order to approach the plays. The seventeenth century breaks with the

previous belief that logic and rhetoric belonged to the same art, differing only "in the degree to which they amplified the truth they conjointly discovered (i.e., "invented") in the process of disseminating it" (Zimbardo 1998, 23). Thus, since language can be manipulated, it means that truth, expressed through language, can be manipulated too. On the contrary, the prevailing position of the century is that language must be mimetic. Both Wilkins and Boyle, Locke's predecessors, believe that since reality is empirically observable, language functions as the expression of that empirical reality. 'Judgment', indeed, was a compulsory faculty which tested the validity of any truth expressed through language. For Locke, language is a psychological matter since, as a result of the Ideas of our mind, it is "the servant of thought" and "a passage to knowledge" (Thompson 1984, 21). The important step that language did in the seventeenth century was to be considered "discourse", that is to say, to be able to convey a meaning rather than being meaning itself. So to speak, judgment along with a language which spoke the truth were the two basic requisites. Needless to say, these philosophers were against the art of wit, considered dangerous in terms of semiotics and unstable in its meaning. Boyle's concern, in particular, sees language as a "two-edg'd weapon", an ambiguous means and, since it cannot claim any "intrinsic truth value" (Markley 1988, 30), it might also be ontologically subversive. In particular, Boyle argues against wit as a dangerous form of discourse. On the contrary, the 'gentlemanly conversation' is a polite, ideal and fashionable style of conversation to be adopted. Rhetoric starts to be reckoned as a corrupt way of speaking and an obstacle to reasoning. Significantly, what these philosophers attack is the rhetorical use of metaphors, Hobbes in particular, says that "metaphors, and senseless and ambiguous words, are like *ignes fatui;* and reasoning upon them, is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities; and their end, contention, and sedition, or contempt" (quoted in Markley 1988, 42).

The purpose of this chapter is not to list the different positions on language in the seventeenth century and, since other scholars have already done so[39], we might only summarise that the main contradiction of the age is that, albeit almost every writer is concerned with the implications of language, none is able to create a proper theory. In

[39] Really good texts on the matter are James Thompson's *Language in Wycherley's plays*, especially Chapter 1 'Restoration Philosophies of Language' and Chapter 2 'Restoration Ethics of Language'; Robert Markley's *Two Edg'd Weapons*, especially Chapter 1 'The Dialogics of Style', Chapter 2 'Contrary Affections: Language and Ideology in the Late Seventeenth Century' and Chapter 3 'Nature in Disorder: Fletcher, Dryden, and 'the Comick stile'; Rose Zimbardo's *At zero point*, especially Chapter 1 'From *Words* to Experimental *Philosophy*: Language and Logic at Restoration zero point' and Chapter 2 'The Semiotics of Restoration Deconstructive Satire' and Paul Arakelian's essay 'The myth of a Restoration style shift'.

addition, while these writers claimed that rhetoric was detrimental to the pursuit of truth, sometimes playwrights continued using elements of rhetoric – metaphors, similes and anaphors – for their dramatic potential. For the ethics of the century, all the components of rhetoric should be banned as charged with a message astray from truth.

Dryden's criticism about style and its involvement with comedy are distinctive. As one of the first playwrights in 1660s, he masters both the rhetoric of the previous age – Shakespeare, Fletcher and Jonson – and incorporates new stylistic ideas in his own plays. Dryden believed that during the Restoration age language was 'refined':

> It is therefore my part to make it clear, that the Language, Wit, and Conversation of our Age are improv'd and refin'd above [those] of the last…Let us consider in what the refinement of a language principally consists: that is, either in rejecting such old words or phrases which are ill sounding, or improper, or in admitting new, which are more proper, more sounding, more significant (quoted in Thompson 1984, 48).

This notion of refinement is intrinsically connected to the writer's notion of wit as the "propriety of words and thoughts" (*ibid.*, 78). This propriety belongs only to a 'self-willed rebel' who knows the limits between wit and morality. According to Dryden, wit intermingles satiric truth and fashionable style and so it becomes a verbal construct that does not reduce comedy to a low style but, on the contrary, brings the genre to a more complex understanding. Restoration Comedy is based on the efficacy of linguistic communication to create action and one of the functions that Dryden attributes to wit is "the aesthetic ideal that gestures towards, rather than strictly defines, codes of language and behaviour" (Markley 1988, 78). Using wit represents a sort of compromise not to sacrifice, in the comedies, an expected linguistic ideal. In Dryden, as also in the other playwrights of the time, wit is mainly used by libertines as a way to justify their call for pleasure and to verbally manoeuvre the other characters in a pretence-devoted society. Furthermore, wit is an important part of libertines' sexual attractiveness. Maybe, one of the reasons this has been mostly attacked is precisely its reading as sexual licencing. The problem with language, and this is probably a problem of all times, is that it is always connected to a kind of ideology. All linguistic theories, Mary Pratt explains, encode certain social values or "ideological determinants" (1986, 59). This is the problem with wit; if it is meant to represent the ideology of a social form it is then defined as an unnatural form of speaking because it does not constitute, for the ethics of the time, a plain form to express the truth.

But how does the issue of representing truth influence the plays? The seventeenth-century discourse about the obscurities of language self-referentiality is actually dismantled in the plays that, on the contrary, use language precisely as a 'two-edg'd weapon', still expressing the truth about a social status. Also Dryden's acknowledged comic masterpiece, *Marriage à-la-Mode,* uses linguistic wit to explore the limits of a socially accepted ideology, in this case, about marriage. The playwright claims it from the dedicational letter to Rochester and affirms that in terms of wit, he has "copied the gallantries of the courts, the delicacy of expression, and the decencies of behaviour from [his] lordship" thus establishing a clear link with the use of language as the mirror of social matters for its own sake. As Loftis and Rodes note,

> The deployment of language in *Marriage A-la-Mode* is indeed so accomplished that it becomes not only an act of communication and lively characterization but of pleasure, fulfilling, perhaps for the first time in Restoration comedy, at least to so high a degree, Hobbes's definition of the fourth use of civilized speech: "to please and delight ourselves and others, by playing with our words, for pleasure or ornament, innocently" (1978, 482).

Also, the reiterative use of the word 'wit' in the dedication introduces us to the play by highlighting that all action is based on a social use of language. As for the compromise between language and truth, it is also connected to the notion of wit. The baroque aesthetic of Restoration pays much attention to appearances, attacked by libertines as mechanisms of 'affectation'. In the plays, libertines attacked, by the use of wit, what they considered false and a pretence of morality and religion. Yet, the reason for such attacks arose from a desire for truth and honesty. Manly's plain dealing has precisely this aim: not to "whisper [his] hatred or [his] scorn; call a man fool or knave by signs or mouths over his shoulders, whilst you [Lord Plausible] have him in your arms" (Wycherley, *The Plain Dealer,* act 1, scene 1, p. 397). The plain dealer recognises the need for truth but also that this is an age of "false countenances" (*ibid.,* p. 406) where "truth is a fault as well as wit" (Wycherley, *The Plain Dealer,* Prologue, p. 395). Relevantly, Hobbes links the idea of wit to judgement so that he does not consider wit a purely rhetorical concept, as attacked by the moralists of the eighteenth century, but a quality of the intellect which corresponds to the idea of *decorum.* This concept has already been analysed in the first chapter but let us recall that *decorum* "was never an artificial code of manners […] It was a vital ideal, a standard of thought and conduct to which the intelligent and cultivated person aspired, and it implied not only intellectual discrimination, elegance and sound judgement, but naturalness" (Fujimura 1978, 27).

Hobbes's reflections on wit show that the concept is not opposed to a call for truth and clarity but is rather a means for *naturalness.* "And where else, but on stage, do we see/ Truth pleasing, or rewarded honesty?" (Wycherley, *The Plain Dealer*, Prologue, p. 395). As a philosopher dear to libertines, Hobbes not only provides some indirect philosophical background of their behaviour but also the direct justification that their verbal actions are not immoral as much as the expression of the true nature of a gentleman, which is intellectual. So 'judgment', the faculty so praised by the seventeenth-century philosophers of language, can also be an aspect of what they considered dangerous since wit *is* a form of intelligence.

Nevertheless, the question is not so clear-cut because the libertine's nature of a dissembler, also in terms of language, complicates the matter. In the seventeenth century, lying was controversial not only for the question of saying something false but rather for speaking with the intention of deceiving. At the end of the century, Pepys lamented "what an age is this and what a world is this, that a man cannot live without playing the knave and dissimulation?" (quoted in Thompson 1984, 13). But, are we sure that our libertines lie? And to which extend lying is to be condemned? The intention is at the core of lying because words 'weight' and they are not relative. In Martin Dzelzainis's analysis of Bacon's essay "Of Simulation and Dissimulation", he says that the philosopher distinguishes between three stages of lying:

> The first, secrecy, is when a man leaveth himself without observation, or without hold to be taken, what he is. The second, Dissimulation, in the negative; when a man lets fall signs and arguments, that he is not that he is. And the third, Simulation, in the affirmative; when a man industriously and expressly feigns and pretends to be that he is not (quoted in Dzelzainis 2002, 238).

So, there is a deliberate simulation which intends to deceive and an acceptable dissimulation which aims to mislead. These aims give rise to two linguistic phenomena: when the libertine 'simulates' he consciously creates patterns of linguistic ambiguity; when he 'dissimulates' he outwits the other characters. Seventeenth-century scholars argue over the literal and figurative use of language, so to speak, when words are not *natural* but become *artificial.* From thence, the afore-stated condemnation of metaphors considered in ancient rhetoric "the infallible sign of the mastery of language" (Thompson 1984, 30) and the inclination by poets and playwrights to shift the linguistic focus to the notion of 'turn'. As a device widely employed in poetry, a turn is responsible for suddenly 'turning', then changing, the topic of a line. According to Fujimura, the device contributed

to the "pointedness and consummate elegance of the dialogue" (1978, 23) and was appreciated because its vividness allowed characters to express their feelings about a topic in a more natural and clear form. It worked even if the topics used were not immediately connected because the attention *turned* from the quibbling rhyme to the thought. This short-hand communication is witty because it is plain, clear and lively. First examples of turns are what Dryden recognises as a trademark in the poetry of Waller, particularly appreciated by Rochester and often quoted in *The Man of Mode*.[40] Dryden says that once he recognised those elements in Waller, he noticed that he himself had already used them in the plays, albeit randomly, and that soon other authors also started to use 'turns' as elements for witty dialogues in the plays (Fujimura 1978, 23). Brilliant examples are Horner's "a marriage vow is like a penitent gamester's oath, and ent'ring into bonds and penalties to stint himself to such a particular small sum at play for the future, which makes him but the more eager, and not being able to hold out, loses his money again and his forfeit to boot" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 1, scene 1, p. 165), "Women, as you say, are like soldiers, made constant and loyal by good pay, rather than by oaths and covenants" (*ibid.*, p. 166), Palamede's "You're like a gamester who has lost his estate; yet, in doing that, you have learned the advantages of play and can arrive to live upon't" (Dryden, *Marriage à-la-Mode*, act 1, scene 1, p. 13) or Willmore's "Virtue is but an infirmity in Woman, a Disease that renders even the handsome ungrateful; whilst the ill-favour'd, for want of Sollicitations and Address, only fancy themselves so" (Behn, *The Rover*, act 4, scene 2, p. 56). Characters also use them in witty repartees, for example in this exchange between Doralice and Palamede where the anaphora lends force to the turn:

> Dor.: O, you charge your faults upon your sex! You men are like cocks; you never make love, but you clap your wings and crow when you have done.
> Pala.: Nay, rather you women are like hens; you never lay, but you cackle an hour after, to discover your nest (Dryden, *Marriage à-la-Mode*, act 3, scene 2, p. 50).

Turns are particularly startling because they draw the listener into areas of meaning alien to him and link semantically the world of fiction and reality.

Coming back to the question of lying and whether it constitutes a real obstacle to the achievement of truth, perhaps the best way to understand the question is to let the plays speak. In *The Plain Dealer*, Fidelia follows Manly to sea in man's clothes because she is in love with him. Throughout the play, she is addressed as a man and when in the final scene her gender is unveiled, she confesses that her lying was driven by her love for

[40] See the opening of the play, act three or act five.

Manly and the fear of his refusal (Wycherley, act 5, scene 4, p. 523). Similarly, also Valentine's lying about his madness is a way to make love eventually triumph (Congreve, *Love for Love*). A less genuine form of lie is what Dorimant makes Belinda tell Mrs Loveit, that she saw him with a lady at a ballet (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 2, scene 2, p. 71). However, also in this case the lie works because Dorimant wanted Mrs Loveit to be jealous and to distance herself from him. In an exchange between the two, Dorimant justifies himself: "what we swear at such a time may be a certain proof of a present passion, but to say the truth, in love there is no security to be given for the future" (*ibid.*, p. 75). Although Dorimant's plan is over-elaborate, his speech is true because it is consistent with his statement that after "the heat of the business is over" love becomes a "dull thing" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 1, scene 1, p. 49). In fact, he can fall in love only with a lady who dissembles as well as him (Harriet). Wycherley's *The Country Wife* is maybe the most striking example of lying since the whole play is based on a lie. Yet, Horner statement that he is a eunuch functions in the play to unveil false pretences. When Horner tells: "I know not, but your reputation frightened me as much as your faces invited me" (Wycherley, act 5, scene 4, p. 247), it leads to a discussion about honour when Lady Fidget exclaims,

> Our reputation! Lord, why should you not think that we women make use of our reputation, as you men of yours, only to deceive the world with less suspicion? Our virtue is like the statemen's religion, the quaker's word, the gamester's oath, and the great man's honour, but to cheat those that trust us (*ibid*.).

The scene unfolds with each of the ladies, Lady Fidget, Mrs Squeamish, Mrs Dainty Fidget, who until that moment believed they were singularly sharing Horner's secret, gaining knowledge that actually all have been manipulated. Faced with the truth there is nothing more to say:

> Lady Fid.: Well then, there's no remedy. Sister sharers, let us not fall out, but have a care of our honour. Though we get no presents, no jewels of him, we are savers of our honour, the jewel of most value and use, which shins yet to the world unsuspected, though it be counterfeit.
> Hor.: Nay, and is e'en as good as if it were true, provided the world think so; for honour, like beauty now, only depends on the opinion of others (Wycherley, act 5, scene 4, p. 249).

While a few lines before Lady Fidget said that women do not care about honour, then she affirms that honour is the only precious thing she possesses. When in the face of the truth, she has to retreat to save her appearance, and this is moved by a lie. Horner knows that what matters in Restoration society is not how people behave but how people

think they behave. Lady Fidget's definition of honour as a value is extremely contradictory because she and all the ladies have blatantly lost it, yet, they are concerned about pretending they have not. Here, Horner's lie served to make the truth emerge in another way.

If we see words with the connotation that they had in the seventeenth century, namely, implying standards of right behaviour where the speaker "does not so much master language, molding words to his will, but rather struggles to fit his thought into an unalterable order that exists outside and beyond him" (Thompson 1984, 34), characters appear less free about manipulating words but, for a change, they consciously use words to state things. This is the meaning of lying, to look at truth from another perspective. This mock-rhetoric and non-isomorphic use of language in the plays shows how actually is impossible not to include a metalinguistic argument in the Restoration analysis about language and how a semiotic, rather than a rhetoric, approach is more adequate.

Already Bakhtin, in the 1960s, had formulated a dialogic theory of language. He rejects the idea that language is only semantic but he maintains that words constitute *living utterances,* tension-filled speeches. His theory complicates the entire notion of style and, in the plays, it has important consequences for the concepts of identity and ideology. Language, for him, is not ahistorical but it is involved in the social and ideological conveyance of multiple meanings. As Thompson summarises "style is essentially a performance. It seeks to represent 'nature', yet, explicitly advertises that it is a representation, a fiction, or, in Dryden's terms, a costume that can be changed at will" (1984, 26). Bakhtin's dialogic view of language introduces us to a more recent theory about language, particularly appreciated by theatre semioticians: the speech-acts theory.

Firstly formulated by John Austin in his pioneer work *How to do things with words,* a collection of lectures published in 1962, the philosopher opposes the traditional approach of statements' division in true or false, what Aristotle calls *dianoia*. Austin brings to attention the fact that, on the contrary, statements are almost always performative utterances which seldom have something to do with truth or falseness. On these premises, he says that there are three types of performative acts: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are those more employed in drama. The former is the performance of "an act *in* saying something as opposed to performance of an act *of* saying something" (Austin 1962, 99). It is the 'illocution' which constitutes the speech act proper (Elam 2002, 141) and happens, for

example, when asking questions or making promises. The latter are "performed by means of saying something, such as persuading someone to do something" (*ibid.*). Not all illocutionary acts cause a perlocutionary effect but the reverse is not possible, so to speak, every perlocutionary act is caused by an illocutionary one. The theory of speech acts implies that a differentiation between *lexis* and *praxis* stops to exist but every act of language is, in Pirandello's words, a 'spoken action' (Elam 1984, 6). In a play, "the action rides on a train of illocutions" (Ohmann quoted in Elam 2002, 140). The theory of speech acts is particularly relevant to drama because it claims that language is always concerned with action. In drama, it is not so much the performance, but rather the dialogue, to be the first instance of action – or interaction – on the stage. The question foregrounding speech acts theory is "what type of acts are performed through language?" (Elam 2002, 140). Among the most valid contributions to the theory, there is Grice's cooperative principle. He formulates four rules, or maxims[41], which should regulate each speaking if the aim of speaking is coherence. Much of the comic action, indeed, happens when a character abuses one or more conversational rules aimed at linguistic cooperation. Despite the fact that Grice's maxims constitute a great theoretical and regulative system, they are seldom applicable to every act of speaking. This happens for two reasons. The first is what Mary Pratt (1986) recognises as a problem of ideology, the fact that in linguistic interaction each speaker brings his own ideological background and relates it to the risks of acceptance or critique; this happens because language is always a "social practice" (60). The other problem is that, at the theatre, these conversational principles are continuously broken because of the plot's sake and the characters' conflicts (for example, the libertine's outwitting the other characters). On the contrary, what the language of libertines does is to use these principles the other way round, creating acts of deception based on such abuses. And the abuse itself creates many of the ambiguities and unspoken meanings. Another problem is fiction itself. Mary Pratt has defined the problem as 'poetic language fallacy', a critique against those linguists who believe that language functions in literature differently than it does in real life. I do not want to enter the technical problem of this marginalization because it is not the subject of this study but the perspective that will be adopted is that of a linguistic representation which "acknowledges that representative discourse is always engaged in both fitting words to world and fitting world to words"

[41] These are the maxims of quantity, the maxims of quality, the maxims of relation and the maxims of manner. The first three maxims require the linguistic contribution to be respectively restrained, true and adequate. The maxim of manner requires to avoid obscurity and ambiguity.

and that "representative discourses, fictional or nonfictional, must be treated as simultaneously world-creating, world-describing, and world-changing undertakings." (Pratt 1986, 71). Fiction is still made of statements related to life-discourses and as such we can adopt the same view.

Among the clearest violations of conversational principles there is the lie or, as said, the disguise of truth. It violates the maxims of quality: "try to make the contribution one that is true" (Elam 2002, 153). Even if violated, the lie is one of the most obvious strategies of linguistic manipulation. Dissimulation is the libertine's most sophisticated tricking ability also through language. When Dorimant pretends to be Mr Courtage, he describes himself as the opposite of what he is:

> Dor. [*to* Lady Woodvill]: All people mingle nowadays, madam. And in public places, woman of quality have the least respect showed 'em.
> Lady W.: I protest you say the truth, Mr Courtage.
> Dor.: Forms and ceremonies, the only things that uphold quality and greatness, are now shamefully laid aside and neglected (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 4, scene 1, p. 103).

An ability that Harriet recognises as persuasive: "he fits my mother's humour so well, a little more and she'll dance a kissing dance with him anon" (*ibid.*, p. 104) and that convinces Lady Woodvill: "I protest, Mr Courtage, a dozen such good men as you would be enough atone for that wicked Dorimant, and all the under debauchees of the town" (*ibid.*). Dorimant/Mr Courtage's perlocutionary rhetoric has convinced her but while Lady Woodvill's sentence is comic because it is the result of a trick she is a victim of, Dorimant's violates a conversational rule since it contrasts the libertine attitude he has shown throughout the play. All has happened through language.

The libertine's verbal actions represent, thus, the narrative force of the play. This force is purely rhetorical when rhetoric is to be understood as the libertine's manipulation of truth rather than the expression of falseness. This is exemplified in the characters' statements: "Oh! He has a tongue they say would tempt the angels to a second fall" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 3, scene 3, p. 95); "Oh, he has witchcraft in his eyes and tongue" (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, act 5, scene 9, p. 88); "I know he is a devil, but he has something of the angel yet undefaced in him, which makes him so charming and agreeable that I must love him, be he never so wicked" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 2, scene 2, p. 69); "His word go thro me to the very Soul" (Behn, *The Rover*, act 2, scene 1, p. 27); "he has a way so bewitching that few can defend their hearts who know him" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 2, scene 2, p. 72). Rhetoric, dominating art in the

ancient world, is in the seventeenth century commonly designating an artificial, over-elaborate dangerous language, subjected to the attacks of moralists. Precisely as happens for dupe plots, thanks to wit, libertines employ a sort of metalanguage, a self-reflexive use of language and the awareness that it can be explained by their understanding of language processes. The fictional speech is borrowed as a comic object to reflect dramatic contemporary concerns about style. The entire performance might be considered as a multi-message action, at once verbal, scenic and gestural. Better, the libertine, as a character, constitutes the play's linguistic sign.

Let us explore some of these speech acts. In the first scene of the first act, in a conversation with Medley, Dorimant explains to him "his business":

> Dor.: I will make you comprehend the mystery; this mask, for a farther confirmation of what I have been these two days swearing to her [Belinda], made me yesterday at the playhouse make her a promise, before her face, utterly to break off with Loveit; and because she tenders my reputation, and would not have me do a barbarous thing, has contrived a way to give me a handsome occasion. […] She intends, about an hour before me this afternoon, to make Loveit a visit, and having the privilege by reason of a professed friendship between'em, to talk of her concerns. […] She means insensibly to insinuate a discourse of me, and artificially raise her jealousy to such a height, that, transported with the first motions of her passion, she shall fly upon me with all the fury imaginable, as soon as ever I enter. The quarrel being thus happily begun, I am to play my part, confess and justify all my roguery, swear her impertinence and ill humour makes her intolerable, tax her with the next fop that comes into my head, and in a huff march away, slight her and leave her to be taken by whosoever thinks it worth his time to lie down before her (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 1, scene 1, p. 56).

In thirteen lines, Dorimant has already explained all the action of the play to the audience and has transformed language into action. This is a perceptive example of a performative use of language, a series of illocutionary acts – commissive and directive[42] – that will cause a perlocutionary effect (Mrs Loveit's rage). Dorimant's language suggests that the action will take place in the form of action-reaction-consequence sentences (she will do this because I will do that). This happens because Dorimant masters the arguments of a proper lover and he knows that Mrs Loveit, in love with him, will follow the script.

Another form of metalinguistic reflection happens when language is used to talk about language. A kind of stock situation concerns the use of *borrowings* from other

[42] The denomination of commissive and directive illocutionary acts belongs to the work of another linguist, John Searle. He distinguishes between five types of illocutions and creates a proper 'taxonomy' of these acts. Illocutionary acts can be representative, or mere assertions; directive, commands or directions; commissive, promises or vows; expressive, thanking or greeting; declarative, statements which create acts such as marrying a couple or entitling to kingship.

languages, in particular from French, in the plays. Wycherley says that a synonym for ignorance is the

> Vanity of expressing our selves in *obsolete* Terms, and out of the Road of polite Conversation; of drawing down Words, perhaps good in themselves, that have not been heard since our Forefathers wore *Ruffs* and *Shoestrings*: Whereas fine Words out of Use are as ridiculous as fine cloathes out of *Fashion*. What is still more barbarous, is, that every Scribbler thinks he has the Priviledge of minting *Words* and *Phrases*, of tossing about *Metaphors* at Discretion, and making his own *Jargon* the Standard of a Language. These are Fops in Literature, that make as awkard a Figure as Apes in Humane Cloathing. It is only the business of great Wits to legitimate Words and Modes of Speech, as it is of great Gallants to invent and introduce the Modes and Fashions of Garb (quoted in Thompson 1984, 33).

Monsieur Paris is such a type of character and through him, Wycherley plays on metalinguistic arguments:

> Mons.: Vel, vel, my father was a merchant of his own beer, as the noblesse of Franch of their own wine.—But I can forgive you that raillery, that bob, since you say I have the eyre *Français*:—but have I the eyre *Français*?
> Ger.: As much as any French footman of 'em all.
> Mons.: And do I speak agreeable ill Englis enough?
> Ger.: Very ill.
> Mons.: *Véritablement*?
> Ger.: *Véritablement*.
> Mons.: For you must know, 'tis as ill breeding now to speak good Englis as to write good Englis, good sense, or a good hand (Wycherley, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, act 1, scene 2, p. 171).

Monsieur Paris is wondering about his English-speaking abilities, which, albeit ill, he believes agreeable. Yet, his talking about language, in a metalinguistic argument, is characterised by words wrongly pronounced (vel, Englis) and French insertions. Gerrard, on the contrary, literally copies Paris's word *véritablement* demonstrating a huge understanding of the linguistic argument and the proper use of language. Of course, Gerrard's statement is referred to the illness of Monsieur Paris's speaking but which the latter fails to recognise and so language, for Monsieur, becomes the representation of his foolishness and for Gerrard the way to make Monsieur ridicule.

Wycherley's previous quotation on the value of language pinpoints an important use of the French borrowings in the plays: the metaphor of speaking as wearing a dress. The same metaphor is also recognised by Norman Holland while discussing the feeling that in the seventeenth century human conduct was inclined to show what "*ought not to be* a true reflection of what is" (1959, 50). The scholar says that "language itself was regarded as an outside – clothing, ornament, or, in general, a shell of accidents – within which the real substance, thought, lay hidden" (*ibid.*, 51). It is in this definition that we

understand that dissimulation is always also a matter of language and that a Truewit is he who is able to dissimulate, linguistically also, because he understands that it is a necessity. From thence also comes the libertine's success and the ridiculing of the fop: while the former knows how to dissimulate without never covering the truth, the latter is the victim of affectation and simulates to conceal and avoid a reading beneath the appearance. In the interaction – or linguistic action – between Monsieur Paris and Don Diego, the equation between language and clothing is consisting and very comic because it seems rather an important requisite for Don Diego. He bids Monsieur Paris to "leave off [his] French dress, stammering, and tricks" (Wycherley, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, act 3, scene 1, p. 206) linking his bad dressing with his ill speaking. An action which Monsieur is not keen on doing: "How! must I leave off my jantee French accoutrements, and speak base Englis too, or not marry my cousin, *mon oncle* Don Diego? Do not break off the match, do not; for know, I will not leave off my pantaloon and French pronunciation for ne'er a cousin in England't, da" (*ibid.*). In this metaphor, there is an evident problem of surface, both Don Diego and Monsieur are hiding behind good clothing and right speaking their foolish concerns for the merits of French or Spanish respectability. Gerrard, on the contrary, is a *gentleman,* not just in the moment in which he becomes a dancing-master, but because he has demonstrated that he knows how to be wise. In fact, the notion of wit as *decorum* is never an "artificial code of manners" (Fujimura 1978, 23) but an inclination taught by nature and conversation.

Dryden's Melantha is another example of such a character and she shares with Monsieur Paris her 'Gallomania'. Melantha uses this linguistic trick to be more attractive for Rhodophil and because, she believes, she does not risk vulgarity. In the third act, her servant Philotis brings her a paper full of French words:

> Mel.: O, are you there, minion? And, well, are not you a most precious damsel, to retard all my visits for want of language, when you know you are paid so well for furnishing me with new words for my daily conversation? Let me die, if I have not run the risque already, to speak like one of the vulgar; and if I have one phrase left in all my store that is not thread-bare *et usè,* and fit for nothing but to be thrown to Peasants (Dryden, *Marriage à-la-Mode*, scene 1, p. 41).

And then they start reading and practising:

> Mel.: O, my Venus, fourteen or fifteen words to serve me a whole day! Let me die, at this rate I cannot last till night. Come, read your works: Twenty to one, half of them will not pass muster neither
> Phil.: *Sottises*. [Reads

> Mel.: Sottises: *bon*. That's an excellent word to begin withal; as for example, He, or she said a thousand *Sottises* to me. Proceed.
> Phil.: *Figure*: as what a *figure* of a man is there! *Naive, and Naiveté*.
> Mel.: *Naive*! as how?
> Phil.: Speaking of a thing that was naturally said; It was so *naive*: or such an innocent piece of simplicity; 'twas such a *naiveté*.
> Mel.: Truce with your interpretations: make haste.
> Phil. *Foible, Chagrin, Grimace, Embarrasse, Double entendre, Equivoque, Esclaircissement, Suittè, Beveue, Facòn, Panchant, Coup d' etourdy, and Ridicule* (*ibid.*, p. 42).

This metalinguistic scene is made much comic by Melantha's misuse of French words and her scarce interest in learning their real meanings. For her, speaking is like wearing a dress, a mere ornament, and she will wear it when interacting with Rhodophil. An ability that he much appreciates, yet, indirectly recognises as an affectation: "No lady can be so curious of a new fashion, as she is of a new French word: she's the very mint of the nation; and as fast as any bullion comes out of France, coins it immediately into our language" (Dryden, *Marriage à-la Mode*, act 1, scene 1). Maybe this is the reason why Melantha will be nothing more than a mistress for Rhodophil, and in the play, she is "only the satiric outrunner of the play's interest in splendid language" (Loftis & Rodes 1978, 482).

Sir Fopling Flutter, in Etherege's *The Man of Mode*, in a similar but less foppish exchange than Monsieur Paris's, uses French words for clothing to show off his elegance:

> Emi.: He wears nothing bat what are Originals of the Most Famous hands in Paris.
> Sr. Fop. You are in the right, Madam.
> L. Town.: The Suit.
> Sr. Fop. Barroy.
> Emi.: The Garniture.
> Sr. Fop. Le Gras —
> Med.: The Shoes!
> Sr. Fop.: Piccard
> Dor.: The Periwig!
> Sr. Fop.: Chedreux.
> L. Town. and Emi.: The Gloves.
> Sr. Fop. Orangerie. You know the smell, Ladies.
> Dor.: I could find in my heart for an amusement to have a Gallantry with some of our English ladies (Etherege, act 2, scene 2, p. 90).

In the passage, he translates every English word spoken by characters in the equivalent French words. An affectation that Dorimant recognises in the ladies, "that's the shape our ladies dote on" (*ibid.*). The libertine's language offers a privileged rather than confusing point to reflect on the ideology of the Restoration and, like in *The Gentleman's Dancing-Master*, while Sir Fopling's speech is comic, Dorimant's is wise

because in his two sentences he has remarked Restoration's social game of appearances and defined Sir Fopling as 'witless' by letting him believe his French is indeed very witty. Notice the remark that Dorimant makes in the fourth act: "Sr Fop.: In a glass a man may entertain himself —/ Dor.: The shadow of himself indeed" (Etherege, scene 2, p. 118). It is still a remark that Sir Fopling is all externals, appearance and there is no interiority, and Dorimant underlines it by using the fop's own words. What the three characters above (Monsieur Paris, Melantha and Sir Fopling) share is the belief that speaking French will make them better mannered and less affected. The libertine's ornamented but not-abstruse language shows, on the contrary, that speaking is also an action and, in this case, it is a jeering one.

While the language of the fop is unintentional, libertines consciously use language as the expression of their libertinism. The libertine is who, Valentine explains, "follows the examples of the wisest and wittiest men in all ages; these poets and philosophers whom you naturally hate, for just another reason; because they abound in sense, and you are a fool" (Congreve, *Love for Love*, act 1, scene 1, p. 268). In the plays, libertines voice their core beliefs, such as the idea that a long relationship is unappealing, "the very Thought of it quenches all manner of Fire in me" (Behn, *The Rover*, act 1, scene 2, p. 15), the frenzied need of looking for a new mistress after an affair, "Next to the coming to a good understanding with a new mistress, I love a quarrel with an old one" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 1, scene 1, p. 55), "the pleasure of making a new mistress is that of being rid of an old one: and of all debts, love when it comes to be so, is paid the most unwillingly" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 1, scene 1, p. 157), the idea that love and lust are complementary, "Flesh and blood cannot hear this and not long to know her" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 1, scene 1, p. 53) and that marriage is the end of sexual enjoyment, "and we lie with our backs to each other, so far distant, as if the fashion of great beds was only invented to keep husband and wife sufficiently asunder" (Dryden, *Marriage à-la-Mode*, act 1, scene 1, p. 13).

The seductive appeal of the libertine is also a matter of language and the character often uses it as flattery. To conquer Angelica, Willmore uses a metaphor which relates her beauty to a fighting wound (which is particularly consistent since he has just participated in a duel), "I saw your charming picture, and was wounded: quite thro my Soul ach pointed Beauty ran" (Behn, *The Rover*, act 2, scene 1, p. 24). To conquer Hellena, he uses the language of courtly love, "Heav'n, I never saw so much Beauty. Oh the Charms of those sprightly black Eyes, that strangely fair Face, full of Smiles and

Dimples! Those soft round melting cherry lips! And small even white teeth! Not to be exprest, but silently adored! – Oh one Look more, and strike me dumb, or I shall repeat nothing else till I am mad!" (Behn, *The Rover*, act 3, scene 1, p. 36). A similar language is used by Valentine who compares Angelica to an angel, as the name suggests, following the tradition of courtly love as well, "You're a woman; one to whom heaven gave beauty, when it grafted roses on a briar. You are the reflection of heaven in a pond, and he that leaps at you is sunk. You are all white, a sheet of lovely spotless paper, when your first are born" (Congreve, *Love for Love*, act 4, scene 1, p. 342). Gerrard flatters Hippolita by imitating her because she is a sweet being, "I only repeated the words because they were yours, sweet miss; what we like we imitate" (Wycherley, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, act 2, scene 2, p. 182). These charming examples of language suggest how the libertines were able to fit different linguistic and semantic contexts and their flexibility is what grants them appeal and success.

The last performative aspect of the libertine's use of language is a form of linguistic cooperation characterised by the illocutionary commissive act of promising. These linguistic exchanges defined by critics as 'provisos' are particularly interesting because they exploit the potentiality of language to flatter, make requests and promises in witty banters. The most famous scene is when Mirabell and Millamant (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, act 4, scene 5, pp. 66-67) outline the terms of their ideal marriage in a language which seems almost contractual such as in this extract,

> Mir.: I thank you. *Imprimis*, then, I covenant that your acquaintance be general; that you admit no sworn confidant or intimate of your own sex; no she friend to screen her affairs under your countenance, and tempt you to make trial of a mutual secrecy. No decoy-duck to wheedle you a *fop-scrambling* to the play in a mask, then bring you home in a pretended fright, when you think you shall be found out, and rail at me for missing the play, and disappointing the frolic which you had to pick me up and prove my constancy.
> Mill.:. Detestable *Imprimis*! I go to the play in a mask!
> Mir.: *Item*, I article, that you continue to like your own face as long as I shall, and while it passes current with me, that you endeavour not to new coin it. To which end, together with all vizards for the day, I prohibit all masks for the night, made of oiled skins and I know not what—hog's bones, hare's gall, pig water, and the marrow of a roasted cat. In short, I forbid all commerce with the gentlewomen in what-d'ye-call-it court. *Item*, I shut my doors against all bawds with baskets, and pennyworths of muslin, china, fans, atlases, etc. *Item*, when you shall be breeding –

Mirabell is not inscribing her in a role, he is just asking Millamant not to be as the ladies of the Restoration society, as Lady Wishfort is, a pretence of social decorum and a

pathetic creature. A similar language is adopted by Dorimant towards Harriet, "I will renounce all the joys I have in friendship and in wine, sacrifice to you all the interest I have in other women – " (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 5, scene 2, p. 136) where the verbs in a future form imply Dorimant's repentance as a libertine, the awareness that it is the only opportunity he has to be successful.

The extraordinary metadiscoursive density of the libertines' speeches in the plays is the source of their rhetorical self-awareness which infuses the plays with comic complexity. This chapter will now analyse in detail two linguistic situations where the libertine chairs a performative use of language.

3.2 The libertine's outwitting the other characters

The mechanism of outwitting the other characters, which is always linguistic, is shaped in the plays in two ways. First and foremost, the libertine, through verbal actions, draws the other characters to believe what he says is true. Secondly, by driving their actions, he not only achieves what he wants but also saves himself. Such tactic involves the character's deep awareness not only of his fictional characterization which enables him to manipulate plot devices within the comedies but also the awareness of language as a self-referential device. The language of wit in the plays is both a natural device that the libertine uses – a reflection of his character – and a device for manipulation. We have suggested that the libertine's use of language is not to be condemned as false speaking but rather to be regarded as the consciousness of metalogisms as elements of speaking. The character's rhetoric aims to say the truth but in another way. For example, comparing the speeches of libertines to those of the fops, we have seen how libertines are wittier even if not over-elaborate. According to one of Addison's most famous definitions, "*True Wit* consists in the Resemblance of Ideas, and *false Wit* in the Resemblance of Words" (quoted in Holland 1959, 51). Interestingly, the word *resemblance* is very theatrical but while the libertine is able to express his ideas playing on what is and what is shown, the fop only cares about what is shown, thence, 'resemblance of words' means that foppish characters use words at a shallow, superficial level. According to this distinction, 'outwitting' means that the libertine speaks what these characters want to listen to, the process leading the affected characters to believe they are wittier than they actually are and the libertine, understanding he has outwitted them, shows the key for his success on stage. Another consequence is the creation of linguistic ambiguities, which will be

explored in the next paragraph, and which work in a similar way: through the use of words the libertine means something that is interpreted quite in the opposite way and by which every character is satisfied.

One of the most playful outwitting is the verbal deception in the third act of Dryden's *Marriage à-la-Mode* when Rhodophil and Palamede bring their mistresses to the same grotto for the same reason and they try to conceal the truth to each other. The quartet composed by Rhodophil and Doralice, married, and Palamede and Melantha, the future couple, is disjoined, as the main plot of the play, in Rhodophil and Melantha being lovers and Palamede and Doralice starting an affair. When Palamede bumps into Rhodophil and Melantha and asks about what is going on, Rhodophil says, "Why, I heard you were here alone, and could not in civility but bring her to you" (Dryden, act 3, scene 2). He is bringing his argument to a question of *civility* and *intelligence.* Some lines after, Palamede betrays himself:

> Pala.: But let me tell you, we came hither so very privately, that you could not trace us.
> Rho.: Us! What us? You are alone.
> Pala.: Us! The devil's in me for mistaking: – me, I meant. Or us, that is, you are me, or I you, as we are friends: That's us (*ibid.*).

Notice how just the (mis)use of the deictic 'us' has created a different reality, obscure to Rhodophil until that moment. Further complicating the situation is the entrance of Doralice who unbalances the scene since, so far, the only 'culpable' were Rhodophil and Melantha. Yet, Doralice is much ready to sort things out "[To her husband] O, gentlemen, have I caught you i'faith! Have I broke forth in ambush upon you! I thought my suspicions would prove true" (*ibid.*). And Palamede retreats: "I'll be hanged then, if the same party, who have you intelligence I was here, did not tell your wife you would come hither. Now I smell the malice on't on both sides" (*ibid.*). Language has shifted the point from a flirt (how the scene started) to a misunderstanding and then to a love test. In this situation, the four are both deceived and concealed and this because in this play there are no real witless characters but both Rhodophil and Palamede are former examples of a genuine libertinism. They are deceived by language (Palamede's use of 'us') and they are reconciled by their ability to make up a story in which, actually, none believes but everyone pretends to do.

Two years after *Marriage à-la-Mode* and borrowing Holland's sentence, Wycherley "hit the jackpot" (1959, 73) with *The Country Wife*. Perhaps this is the play in which a verbal engagement is most evident. The first linguistic action of the play is the

rumour about Horner's impotence that will dominate almost all the following events of the play. The rumour is symptomatic of the importance of pretence in Restoration society and even more of the necessity of demonstrating that sexual desires are not pursued (while of course, they represent one of the main social affectations). Wycherley's play is probably the most apt to use language figuratively and where we mostly see how Horner gains power over the other characters by exploiting their words. Markley, for example, notes that a large part of the dialogue of the play "is about comparisons, as character's similitudes are commented upon, expanded, completed, or corrected. […] There is an acute consciousness about metaphor" (1988, 73) besides the fact that the device was largely contested in the seventeenth century.

Let us explore how Horner uses language and rhetorical figures of speech to outwit characters in the play. In the first scene of *The Country Wife*, Horner already introduces us into the device:

> Sir Jasp.: Nor can I stay longer. 'Tis, let me see, a quarter and half quarter of a minute past eleven. The council will be sat; I must away. Business must be preferred always before love and ceremony with the wise, Mr. Horner.
> Hor.: And the impotent, Sir Jasper.
> Sir Jasp.: Ay, ay, the impotent, Master Horner; hah! hah! hah!
> Lady Fid.: What, leave us with a filthy man alone in his lodgings?
> Sir Jasp.: He's an innocent man now, you know. Pray stay, I'll hasten the chairs to you (Wycherley, act 1, p. 156).

Sir Jasper believes in Horner's impotence, yet, it is interesting to observe that when Horner underlines the 'magic' word impotent, he perfectly cooperates with what Sir Jasper wanted to listen and, as a matter of fact, he is convinced of Horner's innocence and will let him in his house. The results are not long in coming:

> Sir Jasp.: Come, come, here's a gamester for you; let him be a little familiar sometimes; nay, what if a little rude? Gamesters may be rude with ladies, you know.
> Lady Fid.: Yes; losing gamesters have a privilege with women.
> Hor.: I always thought the contrary, that the winning gamester had most privilege with women; for when you have lost your money to a man, you'll lose anything you have, all you have, they say, and he may use you as he pleases.
> Sir Jasp.: He! he! he! well, win or lose, you shall have your liberty with her.
> Lady Fid.: As he behaves himself; and for your sake I'll give him admittance and freedom.
> Hor.: All sorts of freedom, madam?
> Sir Jasp.: Ay, ay, ay, all sorts of freedom thou canst take. And so go to her, begin thy new employment; wheedle her, jest with her, and be better acquainted one with another (Wycherley, act 2, scene 1, p. 183).

While Sir Jasper believes he is humiliating Horner, it is actually Horner who is mocking him because Sir Jasper not only does not understand what Horner means by

freedom but also provides him with the go-ahead for enjoying 'all sorts of freedom'. Horner's language demonstrates that the members of Restoration society believe so much in scandals that they prefer to believe in the most scandalous idea (Horner's impotency) rather than questioning whether it is reality indeed to be so scandalous (pretences of honour). Horner tells Lady Fidget "to take [his] word" (*ibid.*) thus establishing a link between the language that he speaks, a figurative language, and the language that she understands. In the same passage, Horner talks about his desire to be tried ("I desire to be tried only, madam") and Lady Fidget answers that "all men of honour desire to come to the test" (Wycherley, act 2, scene 1, p. 184). The act closes with Horner having been granted free admission to Sir Jasper's house and entertaining there with Lady Fidget, Mrs Dainty Fidget and Mrs Squeamish. Furthermore, Sir Jasper's chiasmus "go, go, to your business, I say, pleasure, whilst I go to my pleasure, business" (*ibid.*) closes the act by legitimizing and approving verbally Horner's actions which, clearly, he would not intend to otherwise.

Also the other libertine, Harcourt, uses language to outwit Sparkish. In the third act:

> Har.: But why, dearest madam, will you be more concerned for his honour than he is himself? Let his honour alone, for my sake and his. He! he has no honour—
> Spark.: How's that?
> Har.: But what my dear friend can guard himself.
> Spark.: O ho—that's right again.
> Har.: Your care of his honour argues his neglect of it, which is no honour to my dear friend here. Therefore once more, let his honour go which way it will, dear madam.
> Spark.: Ay, ay; were it for my honour to marry a woman whose virtue I suspected, and could not trust her in a friend's hands?
> Alith.: Are you not afraid to lose me?
> Har.: He afraid to lose you, madam! No, no—you may see how the most estimable and most glorious creature in the world is valued by him. Will you not see it?
> Spark.: Right, honest Frank, I have that noble value for her that I cannot be jealous of her (Wycherley, scene 2, p. 195-196).

Again, the language plays on matters of honour. Harcourt is saying that Sparkish cares for none but himself and Alithea understands it: "You mistake him, he means you care not for me nor who has me" (*ibid.*). In the passage, Sparkish interrupts Harcourt's sentence because he does not want his friend to say something against him. Yet, Harcourt rephrases the concept by using language in generic terms "what", "my dear friend" and "himself" are all de-contextualised words which Sparkish interprets as he wishes. The use of the deictic "here" is, for the semiotics of theatre, a world-creating element and it separates the reality that Alithea and Harcourt mean from that of Sparkish. Sparkish

believes that Alithea's reactions are dictated by jealousy and that she is misinterpreting Harcourt's friendliness, consequently, he bids her not to wrest a man's meaning by his words. Nevertheless, although Sparkish seems to understand that words might be deceiving, he fails to understand that he himself is deceived by words. Harcourt is speaking about Sparkish's foolishness in front of him with words which the latter takes as compliments. Complementary to speaking, there is also the role of gesture which, hugely employed in theatre, is used both as a speech act and an element of deception as well as language. When Harcourt tells Alithea in the same scene, "So much I confess, I say I love you, that I would not have you miserable, and cast yourself away upon so unworthy and inconsiderable a thing as what you see here" (Wycherley, act 3, scene 2, p. 197) he claps his hand on his breast and quickly points at Sparkish. This latter believes that when Harcourt names the *unworthy and inconsiderable thing,* he is speaking about Harcourt himself and he is convinced: "his meaning is plain" (*ibid.*). Ironically, what Sparkish fails to catch is Harcourt's double gesture. Harcourt indicates himself when he confesses his love to Alithea (I confess, I love you) but he points at Sparkish when referring to the *unworthy and inconsiderable thing.* Also, the use of the deictic *here* misleads Sparkish. In the generic space *here* there are only Sparkish, Alithea and Harcourt; Alithea is obviously not the unworthy subject so Sparkish takes for granted that Harcourt is talking about himself. Sparkish falls into the same trap also later, when Harcourt claims "who loves you more than women titles, or fortune fools. [*Points at* Sparkish]" and Sparkish replies "he means me still" (Wycherley, act 3, scene 2, p. 198). Again the fop believes that Harcourt gesture refers to "love", while the libertine actually indicates him when he says "fool". The scene is a triangular metalinguistic game of speaking and interpreting where Harcourt uses language and gesture figuratively and Sparkish interprets them mimetically. Alithea, who understands the allusions, uses the right word to comment on Sparkish's attitude in the passage: "Ridiculous!" (*ibid.*). In addition, Harcourt manifests a similar linguistic ability when he is disguised as a parson in the fourth act: "I must suit my style to my coat, or I wear it in vain" (Wycherley, scene 1, p. 211) and he starts to speak words such as "heavenly creature", "seraphic lady", "munificent patroness" which Sparkish believes indistinguishable signs of the language of chaplains and that again Alithea only gets as a pretence in a clear ironical verve "he speaks like a chaplain indeed" (*ibid.*).

Both Horner's and Harcourt's verbal force lies in their misleading use of language. Their quickness and audacity not only distinguishes them from the other character's

unmatchable speeches, but further allows them to explore the boundaries of the most common Restoration themes of love, lust, marriage, infidelity and honour in front of these figures which represent "the constant blurring of [these] conventional distinctions" (Markley 1988, 85).

In *The Man of Mode*, we have dealt more than once with the Dorimant/Mr Courtage's episode and seen how Dorimant's awareness of a 'right' use of language wins Lady Woodvill because he is able to utter her own view of the world. Dorimant's language, Markley notices, is "unusually concise and controlled, always calculated for its theatrical effect" (1988, 125) and when he speaks, he continuously adapts his language to the dramatic role he plays so that language itself becomes a role. Two of the characters that Dorimant verbally outwits are Mrs Loveit and Belinda.

When Dorimant visits Loveit in the second act, he already knows what is going to happen:

> Mrs Lov.: Without sense of love, of honour, or of Gratitude. Tell me, for I will know, what Devil masked she was you were with at the play yesterday?
> Dor.: Faith, I resolved as much as you, but the devil was obstinate, and would not tell me.
> Mrs Lov.: False in this as in your vows to me. You do know.
> Dor.: The truth is, I did all I could to know.
> Mrs Lov.: And dare you own it to my face ? Hell and furies! [*Tears her fan in pieces*]
> Dor.: Spare your fan, madam, you are growing hot, and will want it to cool you (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, scene 2, p. 75).

It is evident from the passage why Dorimant's way of speaking has been defined by critics *sprezzatura*, that composed linguistic skill which turns language into wit rather than censure. Dorimant in the passage is speaking like an oracle, in generic terms, almost through idioms rather than properly answering to Mrs Loveit's provocations. The question also complicates when he accuses Belinda of Mrs Loveit's discovery about his betrayal (which is part of Belinda-Dorimant's plan):

> Bel.: Y'are the most mistaken man i'the world.
> Dor.: It must be so. And here I vow revenge, resolve to pursue, and persecute you more impertinently than ever any loving fop did his Mistress, hunt you i'the Park, trace you i'the Mall, dog you in every visit you make, haunt you at the plays, and i'the drawing room, hang my nose in your neck, and talk to you whether you will or no, and ever look upon you with such dying eyes, till your friends grow jealous of me, send you out of Town, and the world suspect your reputation. [*In a lower voice*] At my Lady Townley's when we go from hence. [*He looks kindly on* Belinda] (*ibid*., 74).

Dorimant's use of active verbs creates a hyperbolic understanding of the passage. The final shift to Belinda, which is clearly a date, shows that Dorimant's previous sentences were a false outburst of jealousy. If by his feigned speech he has outwitted

Loveit, he is also granting himself Belinda's trust, since he is keeping the plan, and forcing her to maintain the role he had thought for her, that of a mistress. Markley also notes that in this passage "the exaggerations of his [Dorimant's] mock-heroic voice also emphasize that the hero, too, is part of a society that reduces passion to game-playing or ridicule. Dorimant's language becomes his means of controlling his attraction for Belinda by placing it within the context of a created mock-reality" (1988, 127). Dorimant's stratagem, apart from being comic, is also rhetorical since it has turned the situation upside down and he can definitely free himself from Loveit by blaming her and pretending jealousy for an alleged affair with Sir Fopling, which he himself has created, further insinuating that she never loved him, "I am so far from expecting that you should, I begin to think you never did love me" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 5, scene 1, p. 127) and when she asks what is her fault, he replies "A thing that puts you below my scorn and makes my anger as ridiculous as you have made my love" (*ibid.*). Markley defines Dorimant's acting as a 'dialogical actualization' (1988, 128), a brilliant expression to describe the libertine's linguistic manipulative abilities which maximise his own desires and his search for power. His language is the expression of libertine wit as well as the social mask that he wears in order to play different roles within the plays.

A character who uses language in a similar way is Valentine in *Love for Love*. He first speaks the language of libertines (Congreve, act 1, scene 1) and shifts then to the language of madness both towards Angelica and Sir Sampson and outwits them to obtain love and money. Yet, unlike Horner or Dorimant, Valentine's language has less than the libertine pursuit and more of sentimental statements. In his description of Angelica, Valentine compares her to a series of witty images to reflect on the indecipherability of his lover's attitude,

> She is harder to be understood than a Piece of Egyptian antiquity, or an Irish manuscript; you may pore till you spoil your Eyes, and not improve your knowledge […] They say so of a witch's prayer, and dreams and Dutch almanacs are to be understood by contraries. But there's regularity and method in that; she is a medal without a reverse or inscription, for indifference has both sides alike. Yet, while she does not seem to hate me, I will pursue her, and know her if it be possible, in spite of the opinion of my satirical friend, Scandal, who says
> That women are like tricks by sleight of hand,
> Which, to admire, we should not understand" (Congreve, act 4, scene 1, p. 346).

In his statement, Valentine shows a huge awareness of language and the ways of the world: women speak the contrary of what they mean. During his madness, Valentine largely employs proverbs to speak, a device which allows him to tell the truth even when

he is dissembling and to condemn the hypocrisy of the time. Valentine's exchange with his father,

> Who's that, that's out of his way? I am truth, and can set him right. Hearkee, friend, the straight road is the worst way you can go. He that follows his nose always will very often be led into a stink. Probatum est. But what are you for? Religion or politics? There's a couple of topics for you, no more like one another than oil and vinegar. And yet those two beaten together by a state-cook make sauce for the whole nation (Congreve, act 4, scene 1, p. 332).

convinces him that his son is mad, "Ouns, that you could not foresee that the moon would predominate; and my son be mad" (*ibid.*, p. 333). Also, Valentine's repeated sentence during his feigned madness "I am Truth"[43] is very significant because he hides beneath his mad speeches what he knows is true and, peculiarly, he is able to condemn hypocrisy by being he himself a pretence of what he is not. He demonstrates this in a passage with Foresight:

> Val.: Oh, prayers will be said in empty churches at the usual hours. Yet you will see such zealous faces behind counters, as if religion were to be sold in every shop. Oh, things will go methodically in the city: the clocks will strike twelve at noon, and the horned herd buzz in the exchange at two. Wives and husbands will drive distinct trades, and care and pleasure separately occupy the family. Coffee-houses will be full of smoke and stratagem. And the cropt prentice, that sweeps his master's shop in the morning, may ten to one dirty his sheets before night. **But there are two things that you will see very strange: which are wanton wives with their legs at liberty, and tame cuckolds with chains about their necks. But hold, I must examine you before I go further. You look suspiciously. Are you a husband?**[44]
> For.: I am married.
> Val.: Poor creature! Is your wife of Covent Garden parish?
> For.: No; St. Martin's-in-the-Fields.
> Val.: Alas, poor man; his eyes are sunk, and his hands shrivelled; his legs dwindled, and his back bowed: pray, pray, for a metamorphosis. Change thy shape and shake off age; get thee Medea's kettle and be boiled anew; come forth with lab'ring callous hands, a chine of steel, and Atlas shoulders. Let Taliacotius trim the calves of twenty chairmen, and make thee pedestals to stand erect upon, and look matrimony in the face. Ha, ha, ha! That a man should have a stomach to a wedding supper, when the pigeons ought rather to be laid to his feet, ha, ha, ha!
> For.: His frenzy is very high now, Mr. Scandal (Congreve, act 4, scene 1, pp. 338-339).

Valentine is plainly telling Foresight that his wife cheats on him – and we know it is true since she has an affair with Scandal – but Foresight considers Valentine's outcome pure folly. Valentine demonstrates that he holds the plot, as well as the linguistic

[43] "I am truth! And come to give the world the lie" (Congreve, *Love for Love*, act 4, scene 1, p. 330); "For my part, I am Truth, and can't tell;" (*ibid.*); "Truth must give place" (*ibid.*, p. 333); "I am Truth, and can teach thy tongue a new trick." (Congreve, *Love for Love*, act 4, scene 1, p. 338); "I am Truth; I never come there." (*ibid.*); "I am Truth, and hate an old acquaintance with a new face" (*ibid.*, p. 341).

[44] Bold is mine.

power of the play, a tool that helps him to succeed while maintaining his wit. Valentine's wit is not ambiguous or scandalous but proceeds through similes and images that shape the figure of a sensitive and reflexive libertine.

The other hero of Congreve's, Mirabell, uses language to outwit Mr Fainall, who shares his same libertinism but has turned it into villainy which prevents him to achieve success. From the beginning we are meant to see the linguistic differences between the two characters:

> Fain.: You are a gallant man, Mirabell, and though you may have cruelty enough not to satisfy a lady's longing, you have too much generosity, not to be tender of her honour. Yet you speak with an indifference which seems to be affected; and confesses you are conscious of a negligence.
> Mir.: You pursue the argument with a distrust that seems to be unaffected, and confesses you are conscious of a concern for which the lady is more indebted to you, than your wife. (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, act 1, scene 1, p. 11).

This passage follows a discussion where Mirabell blames Mrs Marwood for confessing Lady Wishfort he is in love with Millamant and so the lady is impeding their marriage. Fainall, on the contrary, believes that Mirabell has only himself to blame for the low opinion that others have of him. Mirabell picks Fainall's syntax (You speak with an indifference/ You pursue the argument with a distrust) using the same structure "conscious of" and transforming negligence into concern. Furthermore, the exchange is full of innuendos, while Fainall is accusing Mirabell of having seduced the lady only to obtain her niece, Mirabell replies suggesting that Fainall has an adulterous affair with Mrs Marwood – which is actually true. But Mirabell is still ahead, he knows that Mrs Marwood is in love with him and that Fainall is only a second-best. This innuendo further raises Fainall's jealousy. Mirabell is a true wit because he knows how to speak caustically but at the same time, his wit and decorum are matters of the heart. He hints at Fainall's infidelity because he knows that (Restoration) society is a world of affairs. Unlike Mirabell, Fainall's speeches are the hateful reactions to verbal defeats. The libertine-villain speeches are always over-elaborate, Machiavellian, constructed through antitheses and in a consequential logic:

> Fain.: Why, faith, I'm thinking of it. Let me see. I am married already; so that's over,—my Wife has plaid the jade with me; well, that's over too. I never loved her, or if I had, why that would have been over too by this time. Jealous of her I cannot be, for I am certain; so there's an end of jealousy. Weary of her, I am and shall be. No, there's no end of that; No, no, that were too much to hope. Thus far concerning my repose. Now for my reputation: as to my own, I married not for it; so that's out of the question. And as to my part in my wife's—why she had parted with hers before; so bringing none to me, she can

> take none from me, 'tis against all rule of play, that I should lose to one, who has not wherewithal to stake.
> Mrs Marw.: Besides you forget, marriage is honourable
> Fain.: Hum! Faith, and that's well thought on: marriage is honourable, as you say; and if so, wherefore should cuckoldom be a discredit, being derived from so honourable a root? (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, act 3, scene 18, p. 58).

This is how Fainall reasons, through 'no's', 'so's', 'as to's' he attempts to convince himself he is superior, that he does not love his wife and that marriage and cheating go hand in hand. Conversely, Mirabell's logic is always plainer, which does not mean he is not a libertine but that, as a Truewit, he embodies that intelligence and awareness of the world which render him 'true'. He demonstrates it in the second-last scene of the play (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, act 5, scene 13) when he reveals that Mrs Fainall's fortune was entrusted to him and not to her husband through a document signed during an event happened before the play took place. This is Mirabell's language, ironically enough, he outwitted Fainall even before the play started.

By outwitting the other characters, the libertines create a verbal fiction. This fiction divides the characters into who is able to read the meanings of language in-context and who understands them as the denotative relation between signifier and signified.

3.3 Linguistic ambiguity and *double entendres*

Linguistic ambiguities in the comedies derive from the abuse of the conversational maxims of manner which suppose to "avoid obscurity". In drama, and especially in comedy, language does not always holds a mimetic meaning but it can also be used ambiguously. The entire action of comedies happens through language (speech acts) where characters can be classified according to their speaking abilities (Truewits and Witless). It is through wit and outwitting the other characters that the libertine achieves his conquest. Thus, wit involves also a linguistic manipulation and the stratagem that the libertine adopts to circumscribe words in the sense that he means and relegate fools in a literal, unambiguous level.

The theory of language games (*Sprachspiel*) proposed by Wittgenstein is completely alien to the period. Yet, similarly to the theory of speech acts, Wittgenstein employs the term game to indicate any "distinct form of language use subject to its own rules and defined within a given behavioural context" (Elam 1984, 10) taking into consideration that "words cannot be understood outside the context of the non-linguistic human activities into which the use of the language is interwoven: the words plus their

behavioural surroundings make up the language game" (*ibid*., 11). Speaking wittily for a libertine is always a game, 'to speak' equals 'to play'. As a type of play, the *double entendres* are among the most interesting forms of linguistic deception in the plays as well as their main comic source. The term means "double meaning; a word or phrase having a double sense, especially as used to convey an indelicate meaning" [45] and interestingly enough, it seems that the word was used for the first time in Dryden's *Marriage à-la-Mode*, precisely in the afore-commented scene of Melantha's Gallomania. This is significant because it signals the fact that in this period *double entendres* are widely explored in comedies and that their comic value lies in the meanings that characters intend or understand. Yet, it is neither detrimental nor alien to seventeenth-century requests for truthfulness. *Double entendre* does not mean to lie but to speak the truth that each character wants to understand, it marks the division between the literal and figurative meaning of words, not mutually exclusive in terms of semantics but simultaneously true. In terms of the semiotics of theatre, *double entendres* could be defined as misframing, "what is said or implied about language really does correspond with what is being done with it" (Elam 1984, 29). For example, the same verb 'to lie' – to be flat on a surface – can also be 'to lie' – to say something that is not true. The ambiguity is clear to Hellena who asks Willmore, "is there no difference between leave to love me, and leave to lie with me?" (Behn, *The Rover*, act 1, scene 2). Hers is a language-game, she plays on the alliteration "leave-love-lie" in a debate with Willmore about love and lust. Then, the pleasure of exploring language meanings depends on how characters read them and we cannot say that one meaning is more appropriate than the other.

Among the most comic and naughty *double entendres*, there are those which implicitly refer to sex. Wycherley is maybe the writer who exploits them more ambitiously. In *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, after Don Diego is convinced that Gerrard is actually a dancing-master, Gerrard and Hippolita finally gain some time alone to 'practice' a dancing class. When Gerrard thanks Don Diego, he reassures him that they "[will] make good use of [their] time when [he is] gone" (Wycherley, act 3, scene 1, p. 212). The sexual implication is clear to everybody but Don Diego, who believes in the literal sense of 'use of the time' as Hippolita's opportunity to improve her dancing skills. To remark his misunderstanding, after a while, Don Diego exclaims: "Well, I hope by

[45] The source is the online OED: https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/57032?redirectedFrom=double-entendre#eid

this time […] you have done all" (*ibid.*, p. 215). The equivocation of the exchange does not escape even if it is held in generic terms since the ambiguity raised by the term 'all' refers to another use of the time that the couple has made and not to what Don Diego suggested. Gerrard continues to play on the situation and tells Hippolita to keep in mind the instructions, such a piece of advice that Don Diego completely shares "Ay, girl, be sure you do" (Wycherley, act 3, scene 1, p. 217). While Don Diego believes the topic is still the dance, Gerrard's instructions are about his plan to escape with Hippolita. The scene creates two semantic levels of understanding, one literal, one allusive.

Wycherley seems particularly keen on such scenes and probably, for this reason, critics have often located his comedies in the subgenre of the 'sex comedy'. *The Country Wife* provides maybe the most notorious explanation of this definition for its 'china scene'. In this passage, Markley brilliantly notes that "all of the characters believe that they are perpetrating jokes on others, yet all are victims of languages that they finally cannot control" (1988, 173). The *innocent* meaning of 'china' is in this play forever corrupted. The scene starts with Horner and Lady Fidget discussing matters of honour,

> Lady Fid.: Ay, but if you should ever let other woman know that dear secret, it would come out. Nay, you must have a great care of your conduct; for my acquaintance are so censorious – oh 'tis a wicked, censorious world, Mr Horner! – I say, are so censorious and detracting that perhaps they'll talk to the prejudice of my honour, though you should not let them know the dear secret.
> Hor.: Nay, madam, rather than they shall prejudice your honour, I'll prejudice theirs; and to serve you, I'll lie with 'em all, make the secret their own, and then they'll keep it. I am a Machiavel in love, madam (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 4, scene 3, p. 220).

and while Lady Fidget prays him to keep their affair secret to save their honour, he is already suggesting that he will 'lie them all', thus using the verb in a very ambiguous sense. Yet, in this case, Horner condenses both meanings of 'lie' in the statement since he has several mistresses and his plot is about a lie. Then, Horner is not wrong in identifying his role as a Machiavel and highlighting his self-consciousness as an actor (schemer). The scene is interrupted by Sir Jasper's entrance. Lady Fidget informs her husband that Horner "knows china very well, and has himself very good, but will not let [her] see it lest [she] should beg one" (*ibid.*, p. 221). She provides her husband with a preliminary explanation for chasing Horner, but the misunderstanding lies in the three character's use and interpretation of the word 'china'.

> *Exit* Lady Fidget, *and locks the door, followed by* Horner *to the door*.

> Hor.: […] Oh women, more impertinent, more cunning, and more mischievous than their monkeys, and to me almost as ugly! Now is she throwing my things about, and rifling all I have, but I will get into her back way, and so rifle her for it.
> […]
> Sir Jasp.: Wife! My Lady Fidget! Wife! He is coming into you the back way.
> Lady Fid.: Let him come, and welcome, which way he will.
> Sir Jasp.: He'll catch you and use you roughly, and be too strong for you.
> Lady Fid.: Don't you trouble yourself, let him if he can. (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 4, scene 3, p. 222)

Needless to say, even the most innocent reader would understand the sexual innuendo behind the scene. Firstly, Horner addresses Sir Jasper's sexual inadequacy by calling him *monkey*, as also Markley (1988, 173) notes, and then a series of sexual double meanings proliferate without control. While Sir Jasper uses directions in terms of space, Horner and Lady Fidget use them obliquely. Ironically enough, it has been Horner the first to use the expression 'back way' with a figurative meaning and Sir Jasper understands and replicates the reference with a literal meaning. Lady Fidget, instead, does not mind corrupting her honour, she is ready to welcome him 'each way'. The double senses multiplicate even more when Mrs Squeamish and Old Lady Squeamish enter the scene, the former looking for some 'china' as well. Sir Jasper tells them that his wife is "playing the wag" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 4, scene 3, p. 222) with Horner. However, while he uses the expression quite ironically, Mrs Squeamish interprets it mischievously and suspects that Lady Fidget knows Horner's secret. The peak of ambiguity is reached when Horner and Lady Fidget come back to the scene:

> *Enter* Lady Fidget *with a piece of China in her hand, and* Horner *following.*
> Lady Fid.: And I have been toiling and moiling for the prettiest piece of China, my Dear.
> Hor.: Nay, she has been too hard for me, do what I could.
> Mrs Squeam.: Oh Lord I'll have some China too, good Mr. Horner. Don't think to give other people China and me none. Come in with me too.
> Hor.: Upon my honour, I have none left now.
> Mrs Squeam.: Nay, nay I have known you deny your China before now, but you shan't put me off so, Come -
> Hor.: This Lady had the last there.
> Lady Fid.: Yes indeed, Madam, to my certain knowledge he has no more left.
> Mrs Squeam.: Oh, but it may be he may have some you could not find.
> Lady Fid.: What? D'ye think if he had had any left, I would not have had it too? For we women of quality never think we have china enough.
> Hor.: Do not take it ill. I cannot make China for you all, but I will have a roll-wagon for you too, another time.
> Lady Squeam.: Thank you, dear toad (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 4, scene 3, p. 224).

This passage, which critics never tire of quoting, seems a linguistic struggle between which character masters the meaning of the word 'china' the most. Notice, for

example, how Horner catches the meaning of Lady Fidget's 'toiling and moiling' and makes it ironically explicit 'too hard'. Among all the illocutionary acts (declarations, promises), no sentence escapes the realm of ambiguity. The proof that the whole speech has been constructed in double meanings is provided by Horner himself who invites Lady Fidget not to worry because Mrs Squeamish has an "innocent literal understanding" (*ibid.*), confirming the fact that the scene should not be taken literally but metaphorically. Lady Fidget and Horner, on the contrary, divorce from the words' commonly accepted meanings to entertain themselves within the boundaries of language corruptibility. And if Horner's language abounds in similes, Lady Fidget's long periphrasis demonstrate that she also has been taught how to manipulate language. How do we respond to the play? If on the one hand the audience is called to share Horner and Lady Fidget's meanings, on the other they are also meant to judge them morally. Nevertheless, Horner seems to have been nothing different from what he has established as his role from the beginning: a liar. The play is a clear example of the way men and women use language to indicate the subversive morality of Restoration society. For example, Chernaik significantly notes that Wycherley anatomises a society in which sex is a "quantifiable commodity both for women and for men, and in which, as in the model of human behaviour proposed by Hobbes, all members of a society are locked in an unceasing struggle for dominance, masked by the polite formulas of decorum" (1995, 5).

One of the masks of *polite formulas of decorum* is the ambiguous use that characters make of the word 'honour'. When Mrs Squeamish understands the true meaning of the expression "play the wag" she does not reveal it to Sir Jasper because she has to protect her corrupted reputation. The ending of the fifth act is genuinely sympathetic towards women trapped in a life of hypocrisy and they hope that by drinking, just as men do, they can "throw [their] masks" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, scene 4, p. 245). Lady Fidget's final sentence "we are savers of our honour" is both ridiculous and necessary and she implies that life is an eternal circuit that oscillates between cuckoldry and pretence. The only character who does not understand it is Margery, the country wife. She still believes that marriage is based on love, and her naivety makes her speak, "Don't I see, every day at London here, women leave their first husbands and go and live with other men as their wives? Pish, pshaw! You'd make me angry, but that I love you so mainly" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 5, scene 4, p. 250). Yet, as her statement also demonstrates, her London sojourn has taught her that one can be successful just pretending and so when she is asked whether she is innocent or not, she replies "Since

you [Horner]'ll have me tell more lies – yes indeed, bud" (*ibid.*, p. 256). Margery, as all the characters of the Restoration stage, has understood that saving one's honour is what matters and if the price is to pretend, then all life is a lie. The libertine is the character who observes this mechanism from the outside, he uses the theatrical devices consciously and his actions mirror his view of life as a pretence. And at least in this, he speaks the truth and does not need to simulate. The word honour is often replaced by similar words such as "quality" or "reputation" but characters misuse their meaning. Alithea says that she must marry Sparkish otherwise her "reputation would suffer in the world else" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 2, scene 1, p. 175) and Harcourt remarks that on the contrary, it is by marrying him that her reputation "suffers in the world" (*ibid.*). With a playful anaphora, Harcourt remarks that her view of honour is based only on keeping an oath while she would suffer more by marrying a fool. Alithea has a different understanding of honour from Lady Fidget's, for Lady Fidget holds that a 'woman of quality' is one yearning to have sex. Yet, the play suggests that both meanings are wrong and that the character's usage of the word moves in several directions at once highlighting that people understand what they want to understand. It is not a case that the characters that mostly use the surface of decorum are those most affected, like Olivia, "for you know we women love honour inordinately" (Wycherley, *The Plain Dealer*, act 2, scene 1, p. 435), Belinda, "He's tender of my honour" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 5, scene 2, p. 140) or Lady Wishfort, "you have found a person who would suffer racks in honour's cause" (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, act 4, scene 13, p. 75).

Another *double entendre* is the figurative use of words belonging to the semantic group of fruit. Both Etherege and Wycherley explore the ambiguity created by fruit and physical appetite. In the first act of *The Man of Mode*, an orange-woman enters the scene and she is the first one who compares women to fruit, "Nay, gad, there are few finer women, I tell you but so, and a hugeous fortune they say. Here, eat this peach, it comes from the stone, 'tis better than any Newington y'have tasted" (Etherege, act 1, scene 1, p. 50). Dorimant eats the peach but exclaims, "This fine woman, I'll lay my life, is some awkward ill-fashioned country toad" (*ibid.*) counterposing the image of a tasteful fruit to that of a toad. By opposing his deduction to her statement, Dorimant is shown as concerned to display his verbal superiority and create a linguistic world where he can play with irony. Yet, the metaphor of fruit also takes a sexual connotation when Belinda realises that Dorimant has betrayed her and seems to faint, the explication given is "She has eaten too much fruit" (Etherege, act 5, scene 1, p. 125).

The same metaphor of fruit is also maintained by Wycherley who, in the scene between Horner and Mrs Pinchwife when she is dressed as a boy, uses fruits to justify what happened between the two characters:

> Hor.: What, not gone yet? Will you be sure to do as I desired you, sweet sir?
> Mrs. Pinch.: Sweet sir, but what will you give me then?
> Hor.: Anything. Come away into the next walk (*The Country Wife*, act 3, scene 2, p. 204).

And when they come back, Margery is *full of oranges and dried fruit:*

> Mrs Pinch.: O dear bud, look you here what I have got, see!
> Pinch.: And what I have got here, too, which you can't see.
> Mrs Pinch.: The fine gentlemen has given me better things yet.
> Pinch.: Has he so? Out of breath and coloured! I must hold yet.
> Hor.: I have only given your little brother an orange.
> Pinch.: Thank you sir. You have only squeezed my orange, I suppose, and given it me again (*ibid.*).

It is the sequence of the two passages which makes the scene equivocal. Horner's promise of giving Margery 'anything' reflects the genericity of the 'all' that Gerrard promises to Hippolita, yet, vagueness is the comic key. The image of fruit solves and complicates the reading and, as for 'china', it acquires a sexual connotation but at the same time also appears to be an innocent gift. If something physical has happened between Horner and Margery it will remain hidden in the image of the fruit. In the passage, there is also a cooperation between language and gesture. In the semiotics of theatre, kinetic signals are intrinsically connected to language since both belong to the physical context of the stage and transform a deictic gesture into a statement. When Pinchwife replies to the scene by stating that he also has got something but it is not visible, he refers to the cuckold's horn, thus adding himself a sexual reading of the passage. What further links fruit and sex is the reference to China oranges, where 'china' is Horner's codeword for sex, in a later scene when Mrs Pinchwife says, "He sent away a youth that was there for some dried fruit and China oranges" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 4, scene 2, p. 212). Interestingly, Horner's non-mimetic use of language makes these scenes the most obvious examples that language is dialogical and that meanings can be corrupted according to character's own purposes.

A last example of *double entendre* is the alternative use of the verb *ramble,* which literally means 'to walk'. Already Rochester had corrupted its meaning in *A Ramble in St. James Park,* a celebrated poem which openly adopts a sexual language. Rochester uses the poem to oppose an idealised view of the park and aims to tell what actually went on during his promenades. In the plays, some characters use the word with this ambiguous

sexual sense. What does Hippolita mean when in the opening of the play laments not to "take a ramble to the Park nor Mulberry-garden" (Wycherley, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, act 1, scene 1, p. 157)? Not a case that the Mulberry Garden was situated at the extremity of the Mall in St. James's Park, the same place where Rochester set his poem and which was praised for its wilderness. Also Lady Fidget uses the word in a context where she is complaining that noblemen spend time with prostitutes, "Fie, fie, fie, for shame sisters! Whither shall we ramble?" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 2, scene 1, p. 179). Hellena too uses it ambiguously when she says to her sister, "Come put off this dull Humour with your Clothes, and assume one as gay, and as fantastic as the Dress my Cousin Valeria and I have provided, and let's ramble" (Behn, *The Rover*, act 1, scene 1, p. 5) and, according to the unfolding of the play, ramble has not an innocent meaning.

As a productive source of verbal comedy, ambiguities and double senses place language in the realm of metacommunication, where a character – the libertine – exploits language more freely than any other genres.

The analysis conducted in this chapter has tried to demonstrate that language is not an impartial medium but rather a colourful metatheatrical device employed in the plays. Keeping in mind the Restoration concerns about rhetoric, the chapter has suggested that the contemporary theory of speech acts is a fit instrument to study the phenomenon of language within the theatre. By claiming that every linguistic sign is an action, the libertine has been able to occupy a privileged position in the plays by outsmarting the other characters in a twofold way. The first step has been to explore how the libertine possesses a linguistic awareness superior to the other characters. The second has been to analyse the playful presence of *double entendres* in the plays. It is the libertine's involvement in the Restoration vivid dialogues which lends force to wit comedy. The next and last section of this study will be dedicated to the metaphor of *Theatrum Mundi* to show how the libertine and the audience cooperate within the theatrical world and to demonstrate that if the libertine is successful on stage it is because of his sensitivity to its 'meta' conception, a *par excellence* understanding of the fact that the Restoration world and the world theatre mirror each other .

4. Dramatic Irony: the theatre and the audience

"I have considered our whole life is like a play: wherein every man forgetful of himself is in travail with expression of another, though the most be players, some must be spectators" (Jonson quoted in Burns 1972, 11). Ben Jonson's quotation brings to light two corollary aspects of theatre, the parallel between the world and the theatre and the role of the audience. In Chapter 2, I have presented a great paradox of theatre, the way the genre explores reality and fiction by way of a character, the libertine, who has a high theatrical awareness. Yet, I approached the metatheatrical matter on a plot-level, without considering the other theatrical element which renders the performance realizable: the audience. The reason why I have not introduced, if not only accidentally named, the audience before is dictated by the logical development of my argument. If so far I have just focused on the 'small' world of the play is because by its understanding I can now expand on the macrocosm that theatre represents. As a matter of fact, a theatrical piece is written to be represented and who, better than human beings can participate in a fictitious social space of other human beings?

This following and final chapter will examine the model of *Theatrum Mundi*, already employed in the theatre of the sixteenth century and surely not alien to the poets of the seventeenth century. In order to understand the model and explore its significance for Restoration Comedy, I will use a phenomenological approach. Since phenomenology is based on a theory of perceptions, the idea of theatre as a phenomenon is particularly fit both to understand the metaphor of *Theatrum Mundi*, since it assumes that the theatrical world is to be perceived as real, and to study the role of the audience, directly and indirectly implicated in the model. The same fact that theatre presents itself as a social reality entails the mutual acceptance, by characters and the audience, of a shared code of conventions. Among these, the idea of theatre as space is particularly interesting within a model which transforms 'places' into 'settings'. The alternation of public and private settings, of characters who see and characters who are seen mirrors the world of theatre. I will show, for instance, how the plays use the setting and, often connotatively, tie it to the themes of the plays.

At the basis of the model of *Theatrum Mundi*, also intersecting the main topic of the chapter, there is the idea of dramatic irony, a mechanism by which the audience is involved in the world of the play and observes parts of it that some characters might

ignore. Dramatic irony confuses characters and spectators reproducing the same game of reality and illusion that the stage and the world propound. Not unexpectedly, the libertine drives the audience in the world of the play and becomes a bridge-character between the stage and the world. The libertine's use of some dramatic techniques, such as the aside or eavesdropping, will be addressed as particularly useful to understand his relation to the audience and the character's metatheatrical essence.

4.1 The model of *Theatrum Mundi* and the theatrical space

The model of *Theatrum Mundi,* exemplified in the metaphor of the world as a stage, is as old as the first forms of representation ever. In 300 B.C., Aristotle was already engaging with theatre and his doctrine of mimesis holds that theatre is a natural imitation, a transposition of men's action.[46] The theatrical 'mechanism of dissociation' (Nelson 1958, 6) suggests that the spectator enjoys the play because of its illusionary power. The illusion comes from the belief that the performance is real while it is actually a fictional representation of real life. Such illusion foregrounds the *theatrical effect* and leads to the huge paradox of theatre, namely, the feeling of pleasure that the spectator gets by seeing something that he knows to be fictional. Borrowing Coleridge's famous expression, it involves a *willing suspension of disbelief* of what is external to the world of the play. This is why the theatre is magic: it suspends our view of reality by allowing us to enter an alternative fictional world which we believe real at least for the time of a play.

In Middle Ages, the metaphor of *Theatrum Mundi* was implicated with rituals and religion and it bestowed on God the role of the master playwright of the world where imperfect human beings perform. Therefore, ritual play and religion symbolise "man's relation to the world-totality" (Krell 1972, 85). In the Renaissance, when translations of Aristotle's *Poetics* circulated, the Aristotelian idea of theatre as imitation created an idea of reality as valuable as the external one because the philosopher believed that through reproduction, i.e. imitation, the artist was able to capture and represent the form of things,

[46] Actually, even before Aristotle, Plato judged art and talked about *technē,* which means "art, technique" and that he associated to the model of craftsmanship. Similarly to a craftsman, the poet also creates his product, which is art. Yet, while the craftsman's product actually exists, what the poet produces is only an appearance. Thus, Plato defined art as "mimesis miméseos", an imitation of an imitation, since it is limited to be a reproduction of events that are, in turn, a reproduction of the ideas (the only ontological reality where things exist and which serves as the perfect model of our imperfect world). Therefore, art for Plato is illusionary and has to be banned. Aristotle develops the same concept of imitation but allocates to art a different worth. He considers that the mimetic quality of art is not illusory since it is not mere appearance but a representation of reality which can become an object of knowledge.

namely reality. It is Castelvetro, a Renaissance scholar, he who reads and spreads the Aristotelian concept of realism and identification of the character with the spectator. Theatre then is the place where reality and illusion can be condensed. In the sixteenth century, Shakespeare transformed the metaphor from an allegory into a proper paradigm of understanding and some of his characters manifested this concern on the stage (Hamlet, Prospero). From Shakespeare on, the metaphor of the world as a stage reflected the comparison between acting on stage and behaving in real life, implying that the world of the stage could also represent a socially acceptable reality. The idea of drama as a self-contained world is at the basis of a metatheatrical approach to plays and of the idea of theatre as a phenomenon. The *Theatrum Mundi* metaphor was acquainted by the writers of the Restoration, and Wycherley's verses, for example, demonstrate it:

> Why are harsh statutes 'gainst poor Players made,
> When Acting is the Universal trade?
> The World's but one wide Scene,
> Our Life the Flay
> And every Man an Actor in his way (quoted in Marshall 1982, 1).

His verses are redundant with some of Shakespeare's passages about the world as a stage and the stage as a world. In *As You like it* we read: "This wide and universal theatre Presents more woeful pageants than the scene Wherein we play in" and "All the world's a stage/ And all the men and women merely players" (Shakespeare, act 2, scene 7, lines 1034-1038) and in *Macbeth*, a brilliant passage is "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/ And then is heard no more. It is a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing" (Shakespeare, act 5, scene 5, lines 24-28). For Shakespeare, life and the stage are a mirror of each other and as life on the stage quickly fades away, similarly does real life itself.

The world of the Restoration particularly is extremely 'fictional', several scholars have underlined the liveliness and licentiousness of the period where social pretences of respectability were the core values. Elisabeth Burns, for instance, notes that

> the new Restoration theatres belonged exclusively to the world of pleasure and entertainment, to the secular sector of life. Attention was focused less on the fundamental conception of life as dramatic invention, more on the histrionic aspects of ordinary public and private behaviour. Interest in the theatre was stimulated by the comparisons that could be made between acting on the stage and acting in ordinary life, a comparison later stereotyped by Richard Steele: The player acts the world, the world the player;/ Whom still that world unjustly disesteems./ Though he alone professes what he seems (1972, 10).

The libertine distinguished himself from this reality and acted precisely as Burns describes. This is why the character provides the comic occasion for the play, he was concerned with making his real-life extremely fictional by his behaviour similar to how he tried to convert the life of the play into true and valuable reality, also if this meant to pretend – or perform – in order to expose the social reality of Restoration.

I have already analysed the meaning of metatheatre and its significance for comedy, which, in the definition of the genre, is an imitation of human behaviour. I have also considered that metatheatre works on two poles: the theatrical and reality effects. However, a point on which I have not expanded yet concerns the nature of the supposed metatheatrical rupture of reality and illusion and which has a lot to do with the model of *Theatrum Mundi.* Metatheatre makes use of the metaphor and expects us to step out of the illusionary world of theatre and understand the stage as a paradigm of human life. As Elizabeth Burns notes, through metatheatre, "the world of the play becomes an alternative and frangible reality" (1972, 19) and Nelson maintains that "the play is a *piece de thêatre*, mirroring only a piece or a portion of society, offering only a 'partial perspective'. The theatre no longer contains the world, it is itself contained in the world" (1958, 9). Therefore, the semiotics of theatre assumes that reality and illusion are shifting terms, complementary concepts, both providing a partial image of the world. For this reason, metatheatre relies on some conventions, devices and tools by which the audience can connect the stage to their knowledge of the world and by the same knowledge understand the stage. Interestingly, in the twentieth century theatre semioticians have focused more on the concept of reality than on that of illusion[47], on analysing the fact that not only the play is an illusion but reality itself tremendously resembles the illusion of the play. This approach shares much more with the model of *Theatrum Mundi*. As has already been stated in Chapter 2, metatheatre cannot be reduced to the dyad of the world as a stage and life as a dream as the metatheatrical model also involves the characters, the audience and the conventions that bridge these two elements.

[47] By reality and illusion I mean the effects generated by the theatrical piece. The theatrical illusion is what the audience achieves, the suspension of the belief that there is a world outside the play. Thence, the audience believes the play is real. What the audience labels as reality is the world in which they believe. The audience's conception of this reality, the 'lenses' through which they look at a play is paramount for the model of *Theatrum Mundi*.

In her analysis of the nineteenth-century theatre[48], Katherine Newey provides a brilliant definition of metatheatre. She defines it as "a self-referential sign system which exploits the playfulness and artfulness of the theatre to a high degree. Such artfulness assumes that the spectator understands and accepts these codes and conventions, not simply as theatrical ploys, but as an approach to theatrical representation which is deliberately self-conscious and self-reflexive" (1997, 85). The emphasis on metatheatre as *deliberately self-conscious* means that the genre makes of the clash between the perception of reality and the theatrical illusion its trademark.

A response that I consider particularly pertinent is the phenomenological approach, which tackles the problem of reality in the relation between the knower – in this case the audience – and the object of knowledge – theatre. Developed by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the twentieth century, phenomenology is primarily concerned with the representation of things before our consciousness. Husserl maintains that our experience is always an experience *of* something, so to speak, our consciousness is intentional, always directed towards an experienceable object. In order to understand our consciousness, Husserl outlines a method that he calls the phenomenological reduction or *epoché*. The term *epoché* is translated as "abstention" and generally addressed as "bracketing". It means that when we experience a phenomenon, we 'bracket' that particular kind of event and we suspend the "belief in the reality of the world and events external to the occasion so framed" (Burns 1972, 19). *Epoché* means the construction of an alternative frame in which we exclude the world around us. For Husserl, this is the only way to abandon a superficial idea of the world and adopt a phenomenological attitude which considers the world an ensemble of acts of perception. The actual experience of art, phenomenology suggests, is available in the perception: "the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived" (States 1983, 374). In this way, objects and actions become estranged from their 'usual' meanings and acquire some anew, also because such perceptions are always personal. Since the theatre is based on the perception of reality, what phenomenology shares with metatheatre is the attention to the theatrical perception, which similarly to the perception of reality is self-reflexive. The *epoché* suggests a double level of reality, one which includes our commonly accepted view of the world and one which frames and brackets the

[48] Katherine Newey's essay "Melodrama and Metatheatre: Theatricality in the Nineteenth Century Theatre" written in 1997 provides a metatheatrical analysis of some plays. Even if the period is not that of the plays I am analysing here, I am using her definition of metatheatre since I find it particularly incisive.

phenomenon. Similarly, metatheatre is not exclusively about the conflict between reality and illusion but such an approach converts the metatheatrical issue into the overlapping of two realities and one of these is the 'bracketed' reality of the theatre. Phenomenologically, "there is a sense in which signs […] achieve their vitality – and in turn the vitality of theater – not simply by signifying the world but being *of* it" (States 1983, 373). As a matter of fact, metatheatre is a theatre that reflects on theatre itself, a theatre which takes the direct experience of theatre and encourages a theatrical reading of reality. This is the meaning of T*heatrum Mundi,* a theatre which "consumes the real in its realest form" (*ibid.*, 383).

In the essay "*A Phenomenological Approach to the* Theatrum Mundi *Metaphor"*, Pearce conducts a phenomenological analysis of such metaphor and states that

> the privileged reality that we accept as certain, substantial, and enduring is converted by the protracted metaphorical relations. In calling into question that base of certain reality, the metaphor reduces the distinction between the real and the fictional and raises the ontological question. […] Our imaginative engagement with the metaphor effects the phenomenological *epoché,* places the actual world and assumptions about it in that dialectic of similarity and difference, mutual re- flection, that opens rather than resolves the question of reality; that is, the play of imagination produces, not a Coleridgean suspension of disbelief, but a suspension of belief. The solid world stands back, yielding to the play, as the play speculates about reality (1980, 44).

The idea is that the only way to avoid a dyadic reading of theatre is to suspend the real existence and "to put into play the possibilities inherent [in the life-stage metaphor], in which subject and object are engaged in an open, questioning, uncertain experience" (*ibid.*, 46). Theatre is but the phenomenal representation of something perceived when the stage represents the *epoché*.

Eugen Fink develops Husserl's phenomenology and, in some of his works, he is devoted to understanding the ontological problem of the play. Jan Halák's reading of Fink's importance of the play aligns with the phenomenological problem of the relation of the play with the world as a totality, which, as a problem that Aristotle had formerly formulated as 'imitation', has interested and continues being a fascinating aspect of the theatre. In his seminal essay "Beyond Things: The Ontological Importance of Play according to Eugen Fink", Halák approaches the problem of the play from its counterpart reality. If by reality we mean what is observable, the phenomenon which we experience, the outcome of a play is uncertain and indefinite, a mixture of being and non-being: "in consequence, if we strive to understand play, we need to adopt the perspective of play itself, which is that of players, or of its understanding spectators, not that of those who

describe it as a matter of fact" (Halák 2016, 202), which is actually what Husserl's *epoché* promotes. The play interconnects some elements from reality, "the factual entities integrated into the play" (*ibid.*) and some others which belong to the imaginary world of the play, so, to understand a play, we should "transcend mere realities and [understand] how it is connected to them" (*ibid.,* 203). But how does the play relate to the world? Fink's analysis starts from a critique of Plato's conception of the play, and generally of art, as an inferior and imperfect reproduction of serious reality. I will not reprise Fink's arguments against Plato since I would go beyond the scope of this section, but I will just summarise that Fink concludes that Plato's interpretation of art is "disenchanted" and "one-sided" (Halák 2016, 208) since the object and its reproduction are not necessarily connected but "the bearer of the appearance" can also not correspond to "the appearance itself", as in the case of a painting (*ibid.,* 207). Consequently, Fink postulates that the phenomenon of a play is the "*interpenetration* of its imaginary and real dimensions, the imaginary-implanted-in-reality" (*ibid.,* 208). He concludes that "play paraphrases life" (Halák 2016, 209) in the 'as if' mode, drawing on reality (consider for example the play's use of time and space) but simultaneously being an independent structure itself. The metaphor of *Theatrum Mundi* is thus transformed into a symbol: "If play, for Fink, is a symbol of the world, this means that the individual realities we encounter inside the world are, when integrated into play, again connected with the totality of the world from which they were separated insofar as understood as circumscribed individual beings" (Halák 2016, 209-210). Therefore, the world of the play and the real world mirror each other insomuch as the world of the play imports some elements of real life. Yet, this 'borrowing' does not constitute the play as a mosaic of fragments of reality but it simply assists the play-world in the creation of its own reality.

The 'as if' paradigm is the mode on which (meta)theatre is based. In the performance, it is as if human beings are human beings, as if a city is a city, as if a bedroom is a bedroom and a chair is a chair. Borrowing Hamlet's famous sentence, "The play's the thing" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 2, scene 2, line 600), the play establishes itself as a supreme moment of revelation by showing things *as if* they were true. The 'as if' mode implies that theatre is a "hypothetical construct" where dramatic worlds are recognized "as counterfactual states of affairs but are embodied as if in progress in the actual here and now" (Elam 2002, 90). Also Stanislavsky says that "'if' is the lever which lifts us out of the world of reality into the only world in which we can be creative" (quoted

in Shaughnessy 2018, 39). Wycherley uses 'if' exactly in this sense when he works on the metaphor of *Theatrum Mundi*. In *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, Hippolita states:

> I am thinking if some little, filching, inquisitive poet should get my story, and represent it to the stage, what those ladies who are never precise but at a play would say of me now;—that I were a confident, coming piece, I warrant, and they would damn the poor poet for libelling the sex. But sure, though I give myself and fortune away frankly, without the consent of my friends, my confidence is less than theirs who stand off only for separate maintenance (Wycherley, act 5, scene 1, pp. 252-253)

Ensconced in the world of the play, Hippolita and Gerrard have created an alternative reality, a plan *en abyme* which has placed them in comparison with the other characters' follies and beliefs. Hippolita evaluates her reality by comparing it to fiction and wondering whether a contemporary poet would find her story interesting enough to convert it into a dramatic piece. Her story is to be understood in the creative and aesthetic world *as if* it were a theatrical performance. She further compares herself to the ladies of the age who, conversely, *stand off only for separate maintenance*. Hippolita brings the outside world within the world of the stage and reminds the audience that what they are looking at is a play, but also that the play is life-like. Hippolita's statement is extremely theatrical and reveals the character's consciousness of being also a real person through the play-within device, connecting the audience to the theatrical world.

The Restoration age develops a hedonistic view of life where ostentation and exhibitionism appertain to an aesthetic of excess. As a social figure and a character, the libertine participates in this metatheatrical world and is himself, and the characters he sometimes involves, the cause of the *epoché* and responsible for creating an *ad hoc* frame of reality. Interestingly, the libertine is a figure directly borrowed from the reality of the Restoration age but that, albeit maintaining the same characteristic, is transposed on the stage as a new, successful figure. A phenomenological reading of the *Theatrum Mundi* might also explain while metatheatre is the only dimension where the libertine can be comic: in the *epoché* the audience is freer to suspend any moral judgement. By using the phenomenological approach we can create a metatheatrical level where reality and illusion coexist. I will return on the phenomenological *epoché* in the following paragraph about the audience's perceptions and their participation in the plays. But let us highlight that through this reading of metatheatre, the libertine and the audience share a vantage point. The audience is offered the lenses by which they can meditate on the theatrical

nature of the world. In doing so, the audience often becomes a character in the performance or simply shares with the libertine a different meaning of the play.

A phenomenological approach to theatre provokes some reflections on the theatrical space since the metaphor of *Theatrum Mundi* considers the space of theatre equal to the space of the world. Peter Holland treats the theme in his brilliant *The Ornament of Action* and states that the "the peculiarities of staging comedy on the Restoration stage allowed the audience to 'read' the scenery, not just absorb it" (1979, 19). It was comedy that, aiming at *vraisemblance*, shows "the actor as in a situation potentially analogous to their own, rather than in a totally fictive world" (*ibid.*, 29). The new setting of the Restoration theatres employed elaborate scenery which framed the physical world of theatre contributing to the idea that the dramatic world is just an alternative reality.[49] Thus, a phenomenal view of space implies that the space of the play is analogous to a social space, meant as a scaled reproduction of the outside world. Interestingly, Elizabeth Burns maintains that space, and she is commenting on the Restoration stage, has a double effect in theatre:

> it set limits to the theatrical world into which the audience was not supposed to stray. It also presented this world as a contrary or alternative reality. The illusion could be created, with the co-operation of the audience, that the events that occurred on the stage were temporarily as real as those that occurred outside the theatre. In fact the audience was now asked to make a greater imaginative effort to sustain the illusion that the stage itself represented the world of the play rather than the world of the actors (1972, 77).

The spatial setting, thus, works similarly to language and it constitutes an authenticated shared code between the actor and the spectator which relates it to social reality. Space becomes a container of a self-contained play. The space of the theatre, this frame of an alternative reality, draws on the legitimization of theatrical codes which would otherwise render the performance incomprehensible. The action and the setting are mutually depending and the audience might also witness different settings in a single play. The scene, paramount to the action, often offers a reading or a commentary of the action itself. Before shifting to some examples from the plays, let us approach some ideas about the theatrical space, both semiotic and phenomenal. In *The Dictionary of Theatre,* Pavis distinguishes between the *stage space*, the actual space where characters move, and the

[49] In the seventeenth-century theatrical architecture, the introduction of the *proscenium arch*, inherited by a previous use in masques, is particularly significant in terms of setting since it visually put a frame around the action, a sort of border out of which the audience enjoyed the play.

theatre space, the space occupied by the audience and actors during a performance (1998, 344). Yet, there is also a third dimension, the *dramatic space*, which is the space of the imagination, the fictionalised space that the audience creates in his mind. This space is particularly important since it allows the plays to be set in Sicily, in Naples or London travelling through the audience's imagination. Pavis, then, considers space as a 'sign' which oscillates "between tangibly perceptible *signifying* space and the external *signified* space" (1998, 361), yet,

> what is represented on stage is not the manifestation of another reality that is not represented, and therefore not figurative – it is as much the reality of the observer who projects himself into it as of the director who outlines it through the stage location and the presence of actors. To represent or figure the stage is to use a rhetorical figure to make the transition from one element – tangible space – to another, imagined space, what is beyond the stage, and dramatic space (*ibid.*).

His definition introduces the idea of space as 'transposition', the abstraction and reproduction – thus the *epoché* – of a social event in a reality framed as phenomenal. Only through transposition, objects are likely to become real objects that can be hermeneutically identified in the fictional world. Transposition, which *per se* needs that the process of authenticated conventions between the audience and the performers has concluded, namely, that both elements have accepted the *epoché,* is what renders the theatre *Mundus.* Henri Lefebvre, drawing on main phenomenological concerns, specifically deals with space as a social product. As Pavis, the philosopher also postulates a three-dimensional analysis of space: the *spatial practice* is the physical, material dimension of social interaction; *the representation of space* refers to space as it is conceived and the *spaces of representation* are the symbolic dimension of space. The three dimensions correspond to the respective phenomenological concepts of perceived, conceived and lived. Perception, which we have already highlighted to be at the basis of phenomenology, means that space can be 'perceived' through our experience. The last dimension (spaces of representation) is interesting for theatre since Lefebvre identifies the *lived space of representation* as the space of art. It is a space

> directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of the "inhabitants," and "users," but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated—and hence passively experienced—space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said, though again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs (Lefebvre quoted in Prigge 2008, 52).

Lefebvre conceives space in dialectical terms, a constant process of concealment and *unconcealment* of the social reality which both the actors and spectators have to subdue. The theatrical reality asks the audience to "formulate the appropriate definition of the situation which they need to grasp the composition of action deployed on the stage. […] [Such action derives from] conventionalised renderings of rhetorical procedures familiar enough in real life" (Burns 1972, 62). The world of drama is always based on the world of the spectators; thus it is always accessible. The accesses that the audience gains in the theatrical space are provided through language. The problem of space is, above all, a linguistic problem since the theatre is made of language[50] and characters refer to space by the use of language. When Rhodophil greets Palamede back in Sicily, he is providing information about the place (Dryden, *Marriage à-la-Mode,* act 1, scene 1, p. 11). Also Pedro in *The Rover* gives Belvile an appointment at St Peter's Church, "The place begins to fill; and that we may not be observ'd, do you walk off to St. Peter's Church, where I will meet you, and conclude your Happiness" (Behn, act 4, scene 2, p. 53). When Lady Wishfort has to receive Sir Rowland, she describes how to move in the room, "Shall I sit? No, I won't sit, I'll walk,—ay, I'll **walk from the door upon his entrance[51]**, and then turn full upon him. No, that will be too sudden. I'll lie,—ay, I'll lie down. I'll receive him in my little dressing-room; there's a couch—yes, yes, I'll give the first impression on a couch." (Congreve, *The Way of the World,* act 4, scene 1, p. 61). These are probably simplistic examples of a much vaster concept, yet, the idea is that characters on the stage 'borrow' objects, places and directions from the world outside and they ask the audience to imagine and conceive them within a symbolic space[52]. Characters ask to consider Lady Wishfort's couch a couch in a bedroom and not on a stage framing a bedroom. Space is the point of interaction between the real and the non-real.

Time in the plays works alike. The Aristotelian belief of the action of a play set in one day and condensed in a three-hour play is probably the most unlikely to be adapted. Often in the plays libertines are coming back from a journey, like Willmore or Palamede, a process which highlights how theatre also expands time as if it were real. "Who thought to have seen you in Sicily?" asks Rhodophil, to whom Palamede replies in antithesis,

[50] Both the semiotic and the phenomenal approach to the theatre are grounded in theories of language and signs.
[51] The bold is mine.
[52] Relevant to the topic might be a theatrical reading of the interesting semiotic theory of the *semiosphere* by Yuri Lotman, defined as the cultural space where all semiotic signs coexist in generating new meanings. A theatrical *semiosphere* might be the theatrical space embracing the stage, the audience and the characters all involved in creating an alternative reading of the world.

"Who thought to have found the court so far from Syracuse?" (Dryden, *Marriage à-la-Mode*, act 1, scene 1, p. 11) underlining that the period abroad implies a temporary dislocation of experiences and, in this case, also of rules as signalled by the absence of a royal figure. Like space, time is only an analogue of real time, an imitation of the real-time world. When in the opening of *The Way of the World* Mirabell exclaims, "Ha! Almost one a' clock" (Congreve, act 1, scene 2, p. 11) his sentence provides a semblance of reality, a symbolic way to underline that he has been waiting. During the *mise-en-scène*, and Pavis uses a brilliant expression, "*le texte deviant texture*" (1996, 129) highlighting the fact that the performance is the make-physical of language and gestures, the codes of social behaviour in the real world.

In dealing with space and the use of symbolic spaces in Restoration Comedy, Peter Holland (1979) produces a case study of discovery scenes. Even if the main action was staged in the forestage, the Restoration stage made large use of the space behind the shutters, i.e. flat wings, as scenic space. The shutters ran in grooves across the stage, making it possible to change the scene and 'discover' another scene behind. Such staging device was exploited in comedy and Holland analyses the use of discovery scenes in some plays to show how the theatrical space could align with a symbolic understanding of the play or with some of its themes. In addition, the Restoration stage, conversely to the previous age, made large use of painted scenery to arrange a semblance of reality. Thus, the audience had no longer to use only imagination but the movement of painted flats allowed them to realise where the scenes were set. The visual aspect was, then, utterly engaging in the Restoration plays. Among the works that Holland comments upon, there is *The Man of Mode* (39-40). The scholar maintains that Dorimant makes his entrance from the proscenium doors directly onto the forestage. This device allows the libertine to sympathise with the audience and proposes the reading of himself as a bridge between the audience and the world of the play. In the fourth act, the scene is set in Dorimant's lodging where Handy is "*tying up linen*" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, scene 2, p. 115). Dorimant and Belinda enter on the forestage which, in terms of space, places Handy "behind the scenes" (Holland 1979, 39) and makes his presence a symbol for "the sordidness of Dorimant's sexual athleticism" (*ibid.*). Dorimant asks Handy to bring a chair on the scene and whereas Belinda expresses to him her love, Dorimant's engagement with the setting clearly suggests his sexual intentions. The chiasmus "we should do it, should we not"? (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 4, scene 2, p. 116) and Dorimant's subsequent confession to Medley, "nature has done her part" (*ibid.*, p. 117)

are indexes of the fact that something physical has happened in the bedroom. During the play, Dorimant's lodging represents the place where he plans, plots and drinks as if that setting was reduced to Dorimant's unique possibility to act. Also in *The Country Wife*, the setting has a deeper significance for the audience. Most of the scenes are set either in Horner's bedroom or in Pinchwife's lodging. According to Holland, these two settings confront "sexual excess/success and sexual failure, impotence as disguise and impotence in fact" (Holland 1979, 49). Acknowledging the ambivalence, the audience is brought more in the world of the play. An aspect that *The Country Wife* further brings to light is Horner's awareness of the theatre as a space of performance where a certain behaviour can be the result of pretence, just as people feign in real life. In the first scene of the opening act, Harcourt and Horner discuss the fact that they went to a play the day before. As a usual social habit, going to the theatre is immediately recognised as paralleling the world of the stage and the audience. Actually, their conversation is transposing them and the audience in a setting alike, he is describing something that he has done in relation to what the audience is experiencing right now:

> Har.: Come, your appearance at the play yesterday has, I hope, hardened you for the future against the women's contempt and the men's raillery, and now you'll abroad as you were wont?
> Hor.: Did I not bear it bravely?
> Har.: With a most theatrical impudence; nay, more than the orange-wenches shew there, or a drunken vizard-mask, or a great bellied actress; nay, or the most impudent of creatures, an ill poet; or what is yet more impudent, a second-hand critic (Wycherley, act 1, scene 1, p. 158).

The *theatrical impudence* is just another theatrical strategy of the libertine. This speech has transformed the setting in a self-conscious reflection on the theatrical nature of life where Londoners attend the theatre as a social place for rumouring about other fashionable people, for making an appearance rather than watching the play, just as characters do on the stage. Ogée stresses the visual aspect as crucial in the idea of the world as a stage: "what we have here is indeed a court society watching itself upon the stage […] in a play in which fiction and reality are so uncomfortably blurred, no marble truth, no lasting commitment is possible" (1989, 91).

Aphra Behn, critics have noticed, is the writer who more than anyone almost obsessively plays with scenery and discovery scenes in her plays. In *The Rover*, there are stage directions such as "*The scene changes, and discovers Blunt, creeping out of a Common Shore, his Face, &c., all dirty*" (Behn, act 3, scene 2, p. 42) where the scene changes from a house to a shore and that was meant to be comic since the audience knows

that Blunt has been deceived by a woman and left penniless on the road. Also, there are two discoveries in the fourth act. The first scene, set in a room "*Discovers Belvile, as by Dark alone*" (Behn, scene 1, p. 49). The second scene changes from a street to a chamber and "*discovers [Blunt] sitting on Couch in his Shirt and Drawers, reading*" (Behn, p. 65). Apart from the discoveries, also within the scenes not properly marked as discoveries, there are sudden changes or scenes happening '*whilst*' another scene, symptomatic of the fact that Behn was keen on playing with the theatrical space. Derek Hughes (2004, 39) pinpoints that the playwright, in alternating all those setting, plays with the idea of boundary. Whereas women are often framed in windows or balconies such as Angelica's appearance in act 2, *in the Balcony* drawing a *Silk Curtain* (Behn, *The Rover*, scene 1, p. 20) or Florinda communicating with Belvile from a window (Behn, *The Rover*, act 3, scene 1, p. 37), men are shown freer to move among the doors on the stage. Interestingly, Angelica's first appearance in the play is not physical, she is metonymically described through a painting outside a door. The insertion of the painting in the play is only another form of representation which directly plays with theatre. The painting is a miniature of people just as actors are miniatures of human beings. Following phenomenology, Heidegger talks about the work of art not as a portrait of how things look like but as the occasion for those things to present themselves, procuring him who is experiencing art with an aesthetic feeling. Heidegger's example of such feelings concerns painting, that is why Behn's use of a painting to present Angelica – and she will do something similar also with Florinda's miniature – enhances a metatheatrical effect of dislocation for the audience, as a reminder that they are witnessing fictional objects on the stage but that that fictionality is inspired to real people and the stage, just as the world, is symbolically representing them. A symbolism that, in *The Rover* specifically, is emphasised by the carnivalesque atmosphere which directly plays with masking-unmasking devices. Behn's three-dimensional use of the stage to represent huge roads where masked *défilées* could be staged – a symbol that is metatheatrical *par excellence* – serves to stage the ambiguity of reality and fiction. In this way, "neither audience nor actor", John Franceschina notes, "can become comfortable with patent interpretation of signs but must constantly reevaluate discourse and activity to attain substance" (1995, 33). This is the result of the phenomenological *epoché* and the essence of metatheatre.

Additionally, the onstage door before which the painting lies is in *The Rover* a symbol for 'framing' and dividing who controls the situation and who does not. When Willmore steals the painting, he suggests to the audience that in the scene there is a

division between an untamed male libertine and a manipulated woman. Significantly, the door has a similar meaning also in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* in the 'china scene'. In that case, the door symbolises the clash between two understandings of the scene, one denotative embodied by Sir Jasper and one connotative performed by Lady Fidget and Horner and understood by the audience and the quack (who is hidden). On the one side of the door, Horner and Lady Fidget are having a sexual intercourse, on the other side, Lady Fidget's husband believes his wife is seeking out some china.

In all these examples about space and scenery, a contact point is the libertine. In the majority of the plays, the first scene opens with a libertine who literally 'takes the scene' and recognises his privileged position with the audience. The libertine is responsible to involve the audience in the world of the play.

4.2 Inter-dramatic references and the audience

In the Restoration age, there was a strong connection between actors and the roles they played and the audience was acquainted with the player's roles. Almost as if an actor never stopped being an actor also outside the world of the theatre. A similar process involves the audience as well. The theatrical illusion is constructed within the paradigm of the 'fourth wall theatre', an "imaginary wall separating stage from audience. […] The spectators watch an action that is supposed to be unfolding independently of them, behind a transparent barrier. They are invited, as voyeurs, to observe the actors, who behave as if they were protected by a fourth wall and the audience were not there" (Pavis, 1998, 154). Yet, the role of the audience is paramount for the performance to be considered as such. The phenomenological concept of *epoché* functions both to understand the *Theatrum Mundi* model and also to define the role of the audience. The audience has a huge responsibility to create a theatrical frame. It can be done only by accepting the fact that the theatre represents an alternative reality. The audience is subjected to the effects of transposition I have talked about the previous paragraph: the audience has to *transpose* human actions and events in a fictional world. Another effect, that of dislocation, is typical of metatheatre. When the spectator understands the theatrical effect, thus identifies theatre as theatre, his knowledge becomes metatheatrical, he is, in Elam's terminology, a 'privileged onlooker' (2002, 79). Therefore, the audience can shift the real world and the world of the play as they like. But how comes to the audience to be dislocated? In Restoration theatre, it is the libertine who mediates between the audience and the fictional

world of the theatre. In chapter 2 and 3 I analysed the audience's metatheatrical understanding of the play as fictional through plot-devices and language games, this and the next paragraph will be dedicated to an analysis of the dramatic devices that connected the audience to the dramatic world of the Restoration.

In comedies, one way in which characters exemplify this concept is through the use of inter-dramatic references as modes of textual embedding. In the third act of *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* Monsieur Paris discusses the role he plays by referring to the Italian *Commedia dell'arte*: […] I didde go to the Italian academy at Paris thrice a-week to learn to play de fool of Signior Scaramouche, who is the most excellent personage in the world for dat noble science. Angel is a dam English fool to him" (Wycherley, scene 1, p. 200). Scaramouche was the mask of a foolish military braggart and the actor who interpreted the mask inimitably was Tiberio Fiorillo. Significantly, the actor was playing at the Italian theatre in France during Wycherley's times. Monsieur Paris refers to Angel and, in the next lines, to Nokes and compares their foolishness to that of Scaramouche. Angel and Nokes, Holland notes, were the actors playing respectively Don Diego and Monsieur Paris, the two fools of the play (1979, 63-64). By acclaiming his acting superiority, Paris/Nokes's comic reference takes the form of a self-praise through the comparison with a well-known comic actor but it also engages the audience in a metatheatrical commentary on roles and role-playing. Insertions like these are not uncommon, Mirabell in the second act of *The Way of the World* draws a parallel with Ben Jonson's notorious character: "If your mother, in hopes to ruin me, should consent to marry my pretended uncle, he might, like Mosca in the *Fox*, stand upon terms" (Congreve, scene 4, p. 33). In the passage, Mirabell is discussing with Mrs Fainall the role of Waitwell, Mirabell's valet, in the sub-plot that Mirabell elaborates to win Millamant. In *Volpone*, Mosca is Volpone's servant and he has been entrusted with the task of spreading the news of Volpone's illness and convincing Volpone's possible heirs that each one has been named. Waitwell and Mosca are both servants and endorse the role of the servant-helper/deceiver. A parallel that the Restoration audience would have quickly understood. In the same play, there is also a reference to a character of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*: "D'ye think my niece will ever endure such a Borachio? You're an absolute Borachio" (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, act 4, scene 10, p. 71). As the name suggests, Shakespeare's character *Borachio* has been used by Lady Wishfort to refer to a drunk person, in the play, Sir Willful.

Congreve's *The Double Dealer* also plays with Shakespeare. In Sir Paul's soliloquy (act 4, scene 9) after having discovered his wife's plan to cuckold him, Congreve uses the same metaphor that Othello addressed to Desdemona, "O my Lady Plyant, you were chaste as ice, but you are melted now, and false as water". Othello's lament was similar, "She was false as water" (Shakespeare, act 5, scene 2, line 159). Playgoers would have understood and appreciated the reference, even if Shakespeare's play is a tragedy. Let us remember that although Shakespeare was writing almost a century earlier, when theatres re-opened in 1660, the licensed companies started with staging Shakespearean plays. Also, lines in the plays were strongly linked to actors and when playwrights wrote them, they had in mind a particular actor for that part so that such intertextualities gained more power as for the player who played them.

A very interesting passage is Lady Wishfort's list of the books on her bookshelf in *The Way of the World*. In the first scene of the third act, she suggests that Mrs Marwood might read some one of those while waiting. Among her list, there is the *Short View of the Stage,* I believe a clear reference to Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* published two years before Congreve's play. In this pamphlet, Collier attacks contemporary writers such as Dryden, Wycherley and Congreve with arguments lying on the amorality, blasphemy and indecency of their plays. His major accusation was that those plays incited to debauchery and vice[53]. It is not a casual choice that the book is praised by a character such as Lady Wishfort, a pretended moralist who in the play inveighs against Mirabell but only because he has refused her. Lady Wishfort is one of those characters who, like Lady Woodvill or Olivia, hide their mischievous inclinations under a mask of social rigorism. And where else than the stage to play on this? The antitheatrical argument disclosed by the inter-dramatic reference is subtle and complex but aims at offering to the audience contemporary views about theatre, actually proving that the theatre reflects the Restoration society and is a pretence.

Wycherley skilfully masters this same argument in *The Plain Dealer*. In the second act, Olivia and Eliza are discussing the obscenities of Wycherley's former play *The Country Wife* but from two distinct viewpoints, thus formulating a future response to Collier's argument even twenty years before. Olivia condemns a lady just because she went to see the *Country Wife* at the theatre holding that a modest woman is unlikely to

[53] In his pamphlet, Jeremy Collier attacked both *The Double Dealer* and *Love for Love* for some lines that he considered blasphemous and brought Congreve to revise them. An in-depth analysis of the topic is in Holland's chapter 'Text and performance (3): the comedies of Congreve' (1978, 204-244).

"see the hideous 'Country Wife' without blushing or publishing her detestation of it" (Wycherley, *The Plain Dealer*, act 2, scene 1, p. 429). She maintains that the same name Horner recalls the image of a town-bull that, consequently, defiles "honest men's beds and couches, rapes upon sleeping and [wakes] country virgin under hedges, and on haycocks" (*ibid.*). Olivia associates the theatrical plays to obscenities and she is disgusted by the play's 'china scene'. For her, the word china has been so erotically connotated that she is unable to separate the sexual from the social use of the word. Such inability prompted her to throw away all the china objects in her house, blaming the poet for creating an unfit meaning of the word. Olivia's argument is a proliferation of sexual meanings which actually mainly lie in her own imagination. Contrarily, Eliza considers her cousin's reaction excessive. Eliza embodies Wycherley's attitude in the attempt, not specifically to defend his text, but to pinpoint the risks of interpreting the signs of a play ambiguously even beyond the author's real intentions and of rushing the audience, as a consequence, into that arbitrary interpretation. Eliza reflects upon the present and upon writing: "All this will not put me out of conceit with china, nor the play, which is acted to-day, or another of the same beastly author's, as you call him, which I'll go see" (Wycherley, *The Plain Dealer*, act 2, scene 1, p. 430). That *china* figuratively indicates sex is undeniable but Olivia's dangerous interpretation is a clear example of theatrical misreading. Her statement immediately loses value when at the end of the play she is unveiled as a manipulator of puritan appearances precisely as the same characters of *The Country Wife* she is attacking. It is her cousin Elisa to notice it when in the fifth act promotes a series of accuses to Olivia's double-dealing, "You condemn the obscenity of modern plays only that you may not be censured for never missing the most obscene of the old ones" (Wycherley, *The Plain Dealer*, act 5, scene 1, p. 499). In this, Olivia is very similar to the Restoration theatregoers.[54]

A similar critique of theatre is provided in *The Country Wife* itself. I might dare say that the whole play is based on a paradoxical antitheatrical paradigm. It is during a play that Horner noticed Margery and Pinchwife does not want Margery to see the plays because she might "like the actors, and the gallants may like [her]" (Wycherley act 2, scene 1, p. 171). Theatre is perceived in the play as a place where libertines could gaze in admiration at female playgoers – and also players – thus starting a network of high jinks and cuckoldry. The perception of theatre in Restoration society was close to Wycherley's

[54] On the topic, I suggest a reading of Jennifer L. Airey's seminal essay 'For fear of learning new Language: Antitheatricalism and the Female Spectator in The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer'.

description, a market for appearances where fancy people entertained themselves. Also Sparkish promotes an argument against theatre but his self-oriented vision is dismantled by Horner, Harcourt and Dorilant. In the third act, Sparkish derides Horner underlining that people at the previous-day play were laughing at his impotence:

> Har.: Yes, but I thought you had gone to plays to laugh at poet's wit, not at your own.
> Spark.: Your servant, sir, no. I thank you. Gad, I go to a play as to a country treat, I carry my own wine to one, and my own wit to t'other, or else I'm sure I should not be merry at either. And the reason why we are so often louder than the players is because we think we speak more wit, and so become the poet's rivals in his audience. For to tell you the truth, we hate the silly rogues. Nay, so much that we find fault even with their bawdy upon the stage, whilst we talk nothing else in the pit as loud.
> Hor.: But why shouldst thou hate the silly poets? Thou hast too much wit to be one, and they, like whores, are only hated by each other: and thou dost scorn writing. I'm sure.
> Spark.: Yes, I'd have you to know, I scorn writing. But women, women, that make men do all foolish things, make 'em writing songs too; everybody does it. 'Tis even as common with lovers as playing with fans; and you can no more help rhyming to your Phyllis than drinking to your Phyllis.
> […]
> Dor.: But the poets damned your songs, did they?
> Spark.: Damn the poets! They turned 'em into burlesque, as they call it. That burlesque is a hocus-pocus-trick they have got, which by the virtue of hictius doctius, topsey-turvey they make a wise and witty man in the world a fool upon the stage you know not how. And 'tis therefore I have 'em too, for I know not but it may be my own case; for they'll put a man into a play for looking a-squint. Their predecessors were contented to make serving men only their stage fools, but these rogues must have gentlemen, with a pox to 'em, nay, knights. And indeed, you shall hardly see a fool upon the stage but he's a knight; and to tell you the truth, they have kept me these six years from being a knight in earnest, for fear of being knighted in a play, and dubbed a fool.
> Dor.: Blame 'em not; they must follow their copy, the age.
> Har.: But why shouldst thou be afraid of being in a play, who expose yourself everyday in the playhouses, and as public spaces?
> Hor.: 'Tis but being on the stage, instead of standing on a bench in the pit.
> […]
> Spark: Come, damn all your silly authors whatever, all books and booksellers, by the world, and all readers, courteous and uncourteous (Wycherley, scene 2, pp. 192-193).

This lengthy passage is a metatheatrical reflection on theatre and theatregoers. Sparkish goes to the theatre to nurture his ego, he believes he is funnier than the players. It seems that Wycherley is displaying the disrespectful attitude of many Restoration theatregoers who attend the theatre just to show off that they are fashionable people. Sparkish hints at an episode in which he wrote some songs that the poets used for foolish characters. He accuses them to have thus offended his position in society turning him from a 'knight' into a 'fool'. What Dorilant (a libertine friend with Horner) interestingly notices is that poets *follow their copy, the age* underlining that the main task of a Restoration playwright is to portray and transpose on the stage the world as it is. As an alleged writer, Sparkish would like to be flattered for his talent but he does not risk being

mocked on the stage, yet, when he is in the pit, he anonymously laughs and cries at the players. In their attacks to Sparkish Horner, Dorilant and Harcourt are foils to Wycherley in their idea of theatre as an ironic, albeit comic, social irony.

Hiding and eavesdropping are also devices directly connected to the audience. In *The Way of The World*, Congreve uses both situations to create a third subplot which contrasts Mirabell's main subplot in the play. Mrs Marwood hides out in Lady Wishfort's closet when the latter receives Foible's visit (Congreve, act 3, scene 4, pp. 42-45). However, Mrs Marwood remains in the closet also after the scene ends so that she overhears another conversation between Foible and Mrs Fainall, where not only the former spoils Mirabell's plan (Mirabell makes Waitwell disguise as Sir Rowland to woo Lady Wishfort) but she also warns Mrs Fainall against Mrs Marwood. This is a striking example of dramatic irony, when Foible exclaims "I believe Madam Marwood watches me" (Congreve, act 3, scene 6, p. 46), the audience exclusively knows that it is literally happening. Again, especially comic becomes Mrs Marwood's subsequent aside, "Yes, I shall watch you" (Congreve, act 3, scene 7, p. 46) which reprises Foible's same verb. In Congreve's *The Double Dealer*, Mellefont hides *behind the hangings* (act 4, scene 17) of Lady Touchwood's chamber to discover her and Maskwell kissing and thus he is able to identify Maskwell's role of the villain. "May all treachery be thus discovered" Mirabell utters when leaping out, accentuating the use of the theatrical device.

Something similar happens also in *The Country Wife* where Horner uses hiding to prove to the quack that also women of honour "drink and sing bawdy songs" (Wycherley, act 4, scene 3, p. 219) and that his trick (being a feigned eunuch) is successful. This scene happens before the famous 'china scene': "Now we talk of women of honour, here comes one. Step behind the screen there, and but observe if I have not particular privileges with the woman of reputation already, doctor, already. (Quack *hides behind screen*)" (*ibid.*). The libertine uses the device fully aware of its dramatic potential, he hides the doctor to make him discover a piece of information. Whereas Horner is a conscious performer and during the following scene he knows he is being watched, the quack has been expelled by the world of the play and has assumed the position of the audience. With the audience, the quack shares the condition of him who sees but is not seen and his location 'behind the screen', whose reference might allude to a curtain, suggests how, metaphorically, the quack physically enters in the world of the audience. Interestingly, the quack *per se* is a hybrid figure because he is not properly a physician but he is believable enough to

diagnose Horner's impotency. His false diagnosis aligns his role with Horner's deceiving nature but also his position as a spectator with the audience. His comments on the themes of the play might easily be those of the audience such as when during the china scene he exclaims "This indeed, I could not have believed from him, nor any but my own eyes" (Wycherley, act 4, scene 3, p. 222) and "I will now believe anything he tells me" (Wycherley, act 4, scene 3, p. 225). His commentary further helps the audience's reading of some events such as Pinchwife's entrance, "What's here? Another cuckold? He looks like one, and none else, sure, have any business with him" (*ibid.*). The quack's identification with the audience, made possible by Horner, forces us to consider the metatheatrical aspect of the play. Since the quack merges with the audience, the audience also lapses, more than ever, into the world of the play as supreme spectators of Horner's redirected performance.

Diverting the audience's attention is the use of Prologues and Epilogues. Although they are no novelty introduced in the Restoration age but they were already similarly used in Elizabethan or Jacobean theatre, they gain unprecedented popularity in this period, in this "blessed times of Reformation" as Aphra Behn calls it (Behn, *The Rover*, Epilogue, p. 89). Apart from referring the audience, Prologues and Epilogues seem to become proper reflections on the age and parallel the world of the play to that of the theatre. First and foremost, they metaphorically frame the play because they signal its beginning and end. As devices of 'presentation' for the semiotics of theatre, writers in the seventeenth century employ them not only as apologies for their plays but also to relate the play to the audience. Prologues and epilogues abound with lines describing the Restoration society and its theatregoers. Another aspect is that they were designed, as parts in the plays, for specific actors, a fact that, also thematically, ties the person who delivers the verses to the role he/she plays within the play. Let me remind the readers that actors in the Restoration age usually played a stock role in the plays and they were hired by companies for a period of time to perform the same type of character, almost as if the actor himself became a stock actor. During the performance, the audience used to appreciate or dislike the actor's performance of a role rather than the role itself within the plot. In this regard, famous was the "pointing" technique that consists in "bracketing off a set speech from the course of action and directing that speech, along with a set of gestures, at the audience" (Freeman

2002, 31) which the audience immediately recognised as specific of a certain actor[55]. Often, the Prologues and Epilogues indicated the actor who spoke it. In *The Way of the Word*, for example, the prologue is spoken by Mr Betterton, the actor who played Fainall. The fact that the actor, rather than the character, speaks the prologue symbolises Congreve's playing with the character-role dialectic highlighting that characters are just pretending in a play which consistently emphasises pretence. Similarly, the Epilogue of *The Country Wife* (Wycherley, p. 357) is spoken by Mrs Kneep, the actress who played Lady Fidget. Her role in the play, we have seen, is akin to typical Restoration ladies' attitude. In the Epilogue, she lists several male behaviours, there is a man who "leads women on" but does not follow them once seduced, one who like "Falstaffs of fifty" is fooled since he courts a woman who cheats on him (she might be referring to Sir Jasper or Pinchwife) and one who uses women only to show off his vanity (like Sparkish). Eventually, among the public, there is the last category which includes men such as Horner, but she warns them: "But gallants, have a care, faith, what you do./ The world, which to no man his due will give,/ You by experience know you can deceive,/ And men may still believe you vigorous,/ But then, we women – there's no coz'ning us". In the world of the Restoration, similarly to the play, men can strut about how beautiful or rich are they, yet, women are not easily fooled and will only be impressed by men who satisfy them as lovers. The Prologue of *The Man of Mode* underlines how characters of the play are drawn on real people: "Nor is it strange that you should like so much/ That kind of wit, for most of yours is such/ […] The stage, like you, will but more foppish grow" (Etherege, Prologue, p. 47). The main material for playwrights comes from observing the audience's follies, what the audience see on the stage reflects what they admire in everyday life. This is redundant with the Epilogue of *The Rover* where Behn more fiercely claims that her play mocks the audience and that as much her play might seem exaggerated, real life will be always more ridiculous (Behn, p. 90).

On a final note, the Prologue of *The Plain Dealer* needs some attention too. As a libertine, Manly diverges for his sharp sense of plainness. Yet, on the stage he only "act(s) a part" (Wycherley, p. 394) by which he wishes to display the audience's real nature: "But the coarse dauber of the coming scenes/ To follow life and nature only means,/

[55] As Horner imparts to the audience in the Prologue to *The Country Wife* (p. 149), the role of the actor is highly different from the playwright. The former is just an actor whose main aim is to please the audience even if that might implicate a bad performance. Interestingly, Horner underlines that the performance is entirely controlled by the character/audience relation.

displays you as you are" (*ibid.*). The fact that the audience's nature is akin to the character's aligns the world with the stage and "underscore the theatrical nature of the world depicted in the plays and call attention to the acting that is a crucial part of the life there" (Keller 1982, 66). If the play is the way to reflect the world of the audience, it means that reality lies in that world and so the characters reflected on the stage are "sitting in the playhouse and [the play is] nothing but a play within the larger play of life" (Ogée 1989, 92). Epilogues and Prologues, which drama has always employed as playwrights' defences or apologies for the outcome of the play, serve now as a strong reminder to the audience that by closely looking at characters they discover only that those are based on reality.

To establish a stronger link with the audience, characters often address directly to them as to involve the audience in the play or to divert their attention to a particular action. Hellena does it in the last act of *The Rover* when she confesses her brother that she would rather marry than become a nun:

> Hell.: I have consider'd the matter, Brother, and find the Three hundred thousand Crowns my uncle left me (and you cannot keep from me) will be better laid out in Love than in Religion, and turn to as good an Account – let most Voices carry it – for Heaven or the Captain?
> *All cry, a Captain, a Captain.*
> Hell.: Look ye, Sir, 'tis a clear Case (Behn, act 5, scene 1, p. 85).

'Most Voices' is the audience, who, through a stage direction, enters the text/performance by sympathising with Hellena. Sometimes, characters were talking to the audience directly on stage. But when the audience is addressed in the dark about other characters, we are talking of asides.

4.3 Aside

To conclude the chapter, one of the most interesting examples of dramatic irony is the aside, a technique that Restoration comedies exploit for its incredible comic potential. The aside is a mediating device "by which", Anne Righter masterfully describes, "the audience might be referred to indirectly without disturbing the illusion of the play" (1962, 86). When she talks about 'disturbing the illusion', she means that the aside invades the authenticated conventions between the characters and the audience that allow the play to be considered another reality. Yet, the effect is not confusing. She also states that the aside associates the world with the stage and that it "remind[s] the audience that elements of illusion are present in ordinary life, and that between the world and the

stage there exists a complicated interplay of resemblance that is part of the perfection and nobility of the drama itself as a form" (*ibid.*). As per its semiotic definition, the aside is a "speech that is not meant for another character" (Pavis 1998, 29) but it is specifically meant for the character himself and the audience. Unlike the other conventional devices of language, like monologues or, more commonly in tragedies, soliloquies, asides are shorter. The aside appears more a "slip of tongue" (*ibid.*) which results in a comic revelation or commentary rather than a structured speech and aims, more successfully than any other tool, at shortening the distance between the actor who delivers it and the spectators. This is far from saying that monologues and soliloquies do not relate the characters to the audience, contrarily, they are mostly used to explore characters' heartfelt themes of which the audience is asked to share the depth. However, the aside completely involves the audience in the play-world and in some cases it serves to provide them with the possibility of a different reading of a play. None the less, it enhances the 'sense of theatre' (Burns 1972, 64) and involves both the audience and the characters in a genuine and enjoyable complicity. In comedies, the aside jeopardises the action and creates a double play, one witnessed by the audience and the character who speaks aside and the other by the other characters who continue playing. Restoration comedies use the device clearly to create equivocal dramatic situations of hermeneutic irony that encourage the identification of the audience with the protagonist. The protagonist, the manipulator of interpretations, the catalyst of the audience's attention, he who deftly weaponizes the device is the libertine. The aside is used by libertines in a twofold way. If they address it to the audience to reveal some comic information as if the audience were their confident, libertines also use the tool to gain the audience's complicity when they outwit the other characters.

In *The Country Wife*, the role of the aside is evident from the beginning since Horner's first line is aside: "a quack is as fit for a pimp as a midwife for a bawd; they are still but in their way both helpers of nature" (Wycherley, act 1, scene 1, p. 153), which immediately introduces the audience to Horner's leading role. It is an unusual starting for a play, the pimp and the bawd are not socially respectable figures to compare with a doctor. Yet, the pimp, the bawd and the midwife are somehow related by sex and so will be the quack in the play, whose role is to spread the news about Horner's impotency. Robert Markley offers an interesting reading of the passage and maintains that if 'nature' appears corrupted because the aside reduces it to a matter of sexuality, the 'still but' construction mitigates such a negative construction (1988, 162-163). Therefore, Horner's

opening aside functions to present to the audience the theme of the play and to suggest that *the ends justify the means*, so that, even if Horner will embody that same sexual corruption, he will merely use it to expose the vices of the Restoration society. His role is to wear a mask to unmask the other characters and, in doing so, he needs the complicity of the audience and the quack. The unmasking process happens also aside and Horner is very witty in this. In the second act, Sir Jasper comments on his wife's honour, "Ay, my dear, dear of honour, thou hast still so much honour in thy mouth…" and the libertine ends the sentence aside, "That she has none elsewhere" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, scene 1, p. 174). His knowledge clearly alludes to their sexual affair. Horner uses the aside also to steer the audience's reading of a scene such as he does before the china scene, "China house, that's my cue, I must take it" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 4, scene 3, p. 220). *That's my cue* gives to the audience the key to read the scene and establish the word 'china' as a codeword for sex. Also in the final scene, when all characters are gathered on the stage each one bringing his/her convoluted information, Horner prepares the audience, "Now must I wrong one woman for another's sake, but that no new thing with me; for in these case I am still on the criminal's side, against the innocent" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, act 5, scene 4, p. 250). Since the audience knows that Margery, in order to deceive her husband, has dressed herself up as Alithea and pretended that Alithea was in love with Horner, they readily understand Horner's sentence.

It is ironic to notice that Pinchwife, whose former libertinism is turned into foppery, tries to imitate Horner's use of the aside but he is unsuccessful and rather than becoming more intimate with the audience, he indirectly promotes his self-ridiculing. In the third act, Horner and Margery dressed as a boy go behind the scenes alone. She returns with a handful of oranges attempting to solve the ambiguous appearance of the situation. Pinchwife thanks Horner but then turns aside, "You have only squeezed my orange, I suppose, and given it me again; yet I must have a city patience" (Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, scene 2, p. 205). The fact that he understands but is unable to act prevents any sympathetic response from the audience conversely to he who uses the aside very wittily.

Gerrard, in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master,* comments on Don Diego's inability to grasp his affair with Hippolita directly with the audience aside:

> Don.: What! You do not steal her, according to the laudable custom of some of your brother dancing-masters?

> Ger.: No, no, sir; steal her, sir! Steal her! You are pleased to be merry, sir, ha! Ha! Ha! – [*Aside*] I cannot but laugh at that question (Wycherley, act 3, scene 1, p. 208).

This exchange is comic for two reasons. Firstly because Don Diego believes that Gerrard is a dancing-master and the audience knows that it is not true. Secondly, Gerrard cannot avoid laughing because his plan is precisely to escape with Hippolita, which the audience knows as well. When he addresses such a sentence to the audience, he is also asking them to laugh with him. He will, in fact, reformulate the same sentence in several asides, "I shall not be able to hold laughing" or "My laughing may give him suspicions, yet I cannot hold" (*ibid.*, 209) throughout the scene.

Also in Dryden's *Marriage à-la-Mode* the aside confers on the audience the role of the caretaker of plot's events. A section of the first scene of the second act (pp. 26-27) contains seven asides, all disclosing a piece of information that each of the main four characters of the play tries to conceal. Palamede shows his mistress, Doralice, to Rhodophil and the audience knows that she is Rhodophil's wife. Rhodophil shares this feeling with the audience, "By all that's virtuous, my wife!". Doralice is she who apparently manages the problem with the characters onstage because she claims that she had never seen Palamede before, yet, she retracts it with the audience by stating her jealousy towards him "[Aside] I find he has wit, he has got off so readily; but it would anger me, if he should love Melantha". Palamede confesses his relief to the audience by commenting on Doralice's action, "Thanks, fortune, thou hast helped me" and he benefits from Melantha's entrance to say that he meant her to be his mistress (she is actually his fiancé). At this point, the audience discovers, through Rhodophil's aside, that Melantha is Rhodophil's mistress, "Now, I could even wish it were my wife he loved; I find he's to be married to my mistress". Palamede realises it because he confesses, "[Aside] O Jupiter! What a blockhead was I, not to find it out! My wife, that must be, is his mistress", yet, he adds, "I must keep in with Rhodophil, because I love his wife". These asides have created a confusing game of revelations which immerses the audience only in the intrigue of the play. Such intrigue will be shared by the single characters and the audience because neither Rhodophil nor Palamede will ever publicly unearth it but aside.

A device which works similarly to the aside is the *apart*[56], when a character delivers parts of his speech only to another character. Whereas in the aside only the

[56] The 'apart' will be indicated in italics because such device, unlike the aside, is not always marked in the plays as a proper stage direction.

audience and the character share a piece of information, in the *apart* an additional character is involved too. Etherege, unlike Wycherley for example, uses the *apart* far more frequently than asides. Although they are normal speeches – the aside is usually marked as something different in the text – *apart* has a comic effect on the audience and seems to be used by Etherege as part of Dorimant's manipulative attitude. This is shown from the first scene of the play between Young Bellair, Medley and Dorimant:

> Young Bell.: [*to* Dorimant]. How stand your affairs with Belinda of late?
> Dor.: She's a little jilting baggage.
> Young Bell.: Nay, I believe her false enough, but she's ne'er the worse for your purpose; she was with you yesterday in a disguise at the play.
> Dor.: There we fell out, and resolved never to speak to one another more.
> Young Bell.: The occasion?
> Dor.: Want of courage to meet me at the place appointed. These young women apprehend loving as much as the young men do fighting at first; but once entered, like them too, they all turn bullies straight (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 1, scene 1, p. 60).

The audience knows that this is an apart also because Young Bellair had anticipated to Medley that he was going to whisper something to Dorimant. In the passage, Young Bellair is commenting on Dorimant's relationship with Belinda but Dorimant's reply confuses both Young Bellair and the audience. It is a vague simile intended not to be understood. When Young Bellair exits, Medley asks Dorimant, "What was that whisper?" to whom Dorimant replies, "A thing which he would fain have known, but I did not think it fit to tell him; it might have frighted him from his honourable intentions of marrying" (*ibid*., p. 61). First and foremost, Medley pinpoints that the speech happened apart. Furthermore, Dorimant's periphrasis underlines that he lied. In commenting the passage, Sauer (1993, 37) suggests that since the audience does not know Dorimant yet and at this point of the play is still unaware about the libertine's plan, the *apart* serves but as an Etheregean doubly deceiving staging device. As a matter of fact, if we take a passage when Dorimant speaks aside, for example in a conversation with Harriet, "I love her, and dare not let her know it; I fear she has an ascendant o'er me, and may revenge the wrongs I have done her sex" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 4, scene 1, p. 107) he seems to use the device with its theatrical significance of a confession to the audience. Dorimant is in love with Harriet but he informs the audience that he will not confess his love to her straightaway but rather pretend a little more. Ironically enough, Harriet had anticipated the same aside, "I feel as great a change within; but he shall never know it" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 3, scene 2, p. 94), being likely to use the device

as Dorimant[57]. In this way, the audience looks already with another perspective at the following scenes (*The Man of Mode*, act 4 and 5), so to speak, the audience knows that the future exchanges between Harriet and Dorimant are literally fictional. Another irony of the play takes place in the fifth act. The audience knows about the Dorimant-Belinda's plan and that Belinda is pretending friendship to Mrs Loveit while she is Dorimant's lover. Out of desperation and after a quarrel with Dorimant, Mrs Loveit confesses to Belinda, "I'll find out the infamous cause of all our quarrels, pluck her mask off and expose her bare-faced to the world" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, scene 2, p. 131). Mrs Loveit does not need to look too far since that person is in front of her. Belinda, who grasps her sentence, can only confess to the audience her feelings, "[*aside*] Let me but escape this time, I'll never venture more" (*ibid.*). Actually, the audience, supreme interpreter of the play, has already *masked her off*. Even more, dramatic irony works insofar as the audience has further ridiculed Belinda since they know that Dorimant is in love with Harriet and that probably Belinda will soon be abandoned precisely as Mrs Loveit.

Returning to the *apart*, Etherege uses it ambiguously also at the end of *The Man of Mode*, whose ironic crossfire in the final scene suggests that things are not always what they seem, nevertheless, the audience can interpret the play at their convenience, having been the accomplice of characters' *aparts* and asides during the whole play. Dorimant has agreed to marry Harriet and to move into the country with her, an act which is profoundly controversial for his libertine nature but that at the same time is the only demonstration he could give Harriet of his love. Not less significantly, it is the only way a comedy can end if Dorimant wants to remain an agreeable character. Actually, the contradiction is highlighted by the two *aparts* spoken to Belinda and Mrs. Loveit, after the two ladies come to know about his marriage with Harriet:

> Dor.: [to Loveit]: I has trusted you with this secret but that I knew the violence of your nature would ruin my fortune as now unluckily it has: I thank you madam.
> […]
> Mrs Lov.: Was it no idle mistress then?
> Dor.: Believe me, a wife, to repair the ruins of my state that needs it. […] Belinda!
> Bel.: Do not think of clearing yourself with me, it is impossible. Do all men break their words thus?

[57] This use of the aside, to conceal the characters' true feelings from the other characters but reveal them to the audience, occurs also in other plays. Hippolita and Gerrard's impressions on their first meeting are given aside. Gerrard says that "She is beautiful beyond all things" and Hippolita that she "[likes] him extremely!" (Wycherley, act 2, scene 2, p. 182). The audience is thus able to recognise their following speech as a coquettish flirt, a play with each other because they have both already declared they are in love.

> Dor.: Th'extravagant words they speak in love. 'Tis as unreasonable to expect we should perform all we promise then, as do all we threaten when we are angry. When I see you next – (Etherege, act 5, scene 2, p. 140).

To Mrs Loveit, Dorimant begins blaming that she has ruined his plan by wooing Sir Fopling and that, to save himself economically, he is forced to marry Harriet because she is an heiress. Simultaneously, after apologising, he tries to date Belinda in the future, "We must meet agen" (*ibid.*). It has been noted (Sauer 1993) that Dorimant's attitude might be read as an attempt to soothe the ladies' feelings of betrayal and that he is talking for their benefit and not according to his feelings. This might be confirmed by his final declaration to Harriet "The first time I saw you, you left me with the pangs of love upon me, and this day my soul has quite given up her liberty" (Etherege, *The Man of Mode*, act 5, scene 2, p. 144). Yet, the less mischievous might only read the final *aparts* as some of the ironies of the play. What is certain, is that both the aside and the *apart* catapult the audience in the world of the play and reveal that those are favourable tools. The audience can trust Dorimant's good faith but probably, the Restoration playgoers themselves would understand that the play is deliberately left open for the audience to choose whether Dorimant is lying to one or to all of them.

The aside, that Burns classifies as a device of 'exposition' (1972, 62), enables the audience to "formulate the appropriate definition of the situation" in relation to the onstage action. What she interestingly underlines is that such a device is not "peculiar to the theatrical occasion but [is] a conventionalised rendering of rhetorical procedures familiar enough in real life. The difference lies in the need to make public to the whole audience what is ordinarily a matter of confidential conversational traffic or remains unvoiced in the business of everyday life" (*ibid.*). The world of theatre is a world where both the character and the audience take a step toward each other and the libertine with his theatrical knowledge is the helper of such a process.

In this chapter, I have explored the extensive concept of theatricality and tried to use Restoration Comedy to better understand it. I have used the phenomenological method as a framework to read the *Theatrum Mundi* paradigm because it concludes that "if art is a way of endowing the world with meaning, it is also a way of allowing the world to express itself" (States 1983, 374) and, since it is mainly grounded on perception, the approach suggests that theatre is a world where things are exactly what they seem to be. The *Theatrum Mundi* model is not only the metaphor of the world as a stage but it includes

those mechanisms that in real life might be theatrical and that on the theatrical stage are made real. This not only allows the audience to appreciate the play but encourages their full participation as well as the creation of an 'intersubjective world' (Burn 1972, 88) where the audience's and the character's common experiences are joined. The Restoration age is staged as a fair of excesses and vanity where its members' fear of ridiculing, of damaging their reputation is discovered by the libertines' use of theatrical tools as the space to fool these character's ruling passions. The libertines' understanding of theatre is a kaleidoscopic employment of dupery, disguise, play-within devices, asides and rhetoric in a process which involves the audience with no other aim but to fuse – and confuse – the Restoration world to the world of the theatre .

I shall leave to the Conclusions a reconstruction of the threads connecting the thematic units of this study.

Conclusion

This study was conceived as an analysis of the development of libertine characters in the forty years from 1660 to 1700, in their fascinating and contradictory theatrical attitude. I approached the problem by analysing the libertine as a social figure. Barely in the history of theatre characters have absorbed so much by social figures. There are kings, queens, maidens and servants but those are drawn on stereotypes coming from every age. On the contrary, the Restoration libertine is peculiar to the Restoration age. In this study, I concentrated on theatre but I did not overlook the historical period of Restoration and the reason for Charles II's reign being particularly fit to give rise to libertine movements. Before introducing the theatrical theme, I reminded the reader that libertines were members of Charles II's court, the *court wits*, so that I could not ignore that they were first of all historical and social figures. Behind their unethical and sinful behaviour in society lies a holistic approach to the nature of man and the need to preserve himself in society, an instinct originated in fear. This view of the man is inherited from the ideas of Thomas Hobbes who was writing just before those years. As theatrical characters, libertines are indeed rooted in the tradition of Don John, a ruthless womanizer, reluctant to respect the law and unwilling to restrain also before death. But unlike Don John, the libertine is not a tragic figure. In Restoration Comedy, libertine characters transpose their ideas about the world and use the theatre to stage them before an audience who, if it does not share his same ideas, at least is able to understand them.

In developing the argument of this study I wondered why libertine characters became so engaging. It is a given fact that in literature bad characters are more attractive than moral ones. I believe that a reason for this lies in these villains' ability to impersonate our primaeval passions. Unlike moral characters who act for an explicit moral purpose, bad characters seldom explicate their aim. They are never villainous just for the pleasure of committing harmful actions but they act according to a wider spectrum of reasons that we, as readers or spectators, can only ponder over most of the times. We find those characters fascinating because by entering in their fictitious world, we find a dimension where we also can be amoral but without fearing an external judgment. Hobbes maintains that man is born in a *state of nature* where he is confronted with his passions. The philosopher describes passions as the "beliefs about what sort of power we possess and what we can do with it" (Sorell 2006, 184). As a matter of fact, in this *state* where man lives unregulated, he can only stick to those beliefs and consider he is right if what he

does procures him pleasure. Acknowledging this mechanism, Hobbes further develops the idea that rules are important because if men do not find a compromise with society, they will always be left astray of it. The Restoration libertines absorb Hobbes's philosophy but they just focus on the idea of the *state on nature*, living within society but driven by their outmost passions. This is why in the Restoration society they were appointed as amoral. For this reason, I went through an analysis of libertine philosophical concerns trying to explain their amoral behaviour. I did not neglect a poet, member of the *court wits*, who deserved the name of "The Libertine", John Wilmot Earl of Rochester, criticised because of his licentious behaviour at court but whose sophisticated poems demonstrate that the aesthetic dimension is often the only one where controversial characters might expose themselves. Rochester's life inspired Thomas Shadwell's play *The Libertine* that unites the strong Hobbist beliefs of the seventeenth-century libertines to Don John's myth in the creation of a tragedy with an ultimate significance: if the protagonist does not repent, he will die. The character's choice of the second possibility brought me to wonder whether there was a dimension in which those libertine beliefs might be accepted. The answer is that this dimension is comedy. At the theatre, libertines behave as if they were in the *state of nature* but their opportunities of unleashing their passions are limitless because inscribed in the domain of the fiction. Nevertheless, these opportunities are not tragic because of the libertines' ability to mask them miming on the stage the same game of reality and appearances that the Restoration society proposed. As a character, the libertine was particularly popular in Restoration Comedy, a genre that Dryden describes as "a natural imitation of folly" (Hume 1973, 304) but with an entertaining aim. Nevertheless, Dryden's definition of imitation does not imply an inclination towards the ridicule but rather the "exemplary display of social grace and witty refinement" (*ibid.*, 306). In comedy, the libertines mask their ruthless battle against society with politeness and natural decorum. Dissimulation and pretence are libertine values that the character shares with the theatre but which do not annoy the spectator because they directly play with the boundaries of nature and art. Significantly, the Restoration age works alike, things are never what they seem to be and people conceal reality from each other. If in the Restoration age there was a branch of Puritan rigorism which refused the idea that sex might be enjoyable, the libertine curiously stages the contrary aspect, that is, the pleasing nature of coquetry and sex. The sexual paradigm foregrounds many of the comedies and has also been particularly useful in Chapter 3 to talk about language games and *double entendres.*

Apart from the first chapter, each following section of this study aimed at analysing how libertine characters were successful on the stage because of their employment of theatrical tropes. Metatheatre as a genre suggests that there are some characters in the history of theatre that stand out for their ability to separate the theatre from reality but that on the stage consciously use theatre to provide a sense of reality. Among the writers of Restoration, Rochester, Etherege and Wycherley were *court wits* so most of the plays here analysed are plays about libertines written by libertines. I have chosen three main theatrical aspects to focus on which constitute a common thread for all the writers. On a plot-level, I have analysed the libertines' duping abilities by the character's use of the trickster motif. I then switched to language, essential in theatre since it allows the performance to resemble human conduct, to show how the libertines' persuasive and superior linguistic strategies made him manipulate the other characters. Finally, I have described the audience's involvement in the plays. By rendering the stage an alternative of the real world – the libertine can do this only through a conscious use of theatrical strategies – he has thus offered a new reading of the *Theatrum Mundi* metaphor. Behaving on the stage as he would have done in real life, the libertine draws a different reading of Restoration society, a topsy-turvy of attitudes and values by which he emerges as a victim rather than a perpetrator. By the use of the aside, for example, libertines offer the audience their reading of the play, manipulating it.

One of my goals in pursuing this research was to apply the wider notion of metatheatre to a genre, the Restoration Comedy, that has never properly been designed as such. This has happened partly because, in its origins, Abel (1963) defined metatheatre as a genre alternative to tragedy and partly because the majority of critical works about Restoration comedy has concentrated on the study of 'manners'. This latter argument is intrinsically connected to the theatre's self-reflexivity because the stage displays the manners of the age but I tried to avoid a separation of the world of fiction and reality to state that these two worlds are connected by the significance of libertines, which can be theatrical precisely because they are too real.

On a final note, a further brief remark on future studies on this theme. Each section of my study concentrates on a specific theatrical level, and although they are connected by the libertines' theatrical strategies, each section might be further expanded. In Chapter 2, I have analysed the libertine's nature of a trickster only hinting at some previous tradition of the character. I found really interesting Righter's study (1962) on the tradition of comedy. In analysing Shakespeare's comedies, she deals with the impact of classical

tradition and the Morality plays. She identifies in the character of the Vice the schemer and the manipulator of plot and more generally, of theatrical strategies. The same tradition is, for example, reprised by the Jonsonian trickster in the early seventeenth century as Tosi (1998) highlights in Chapter 1 of her analysis of Ben Jonson's comedies. The libertine shares with those characters some duping aspects and it would be interesting to outline the character's legacy and evolution from the first forms of theatrical representation in England to his more recent models. In Chapter 3, I have dealt with language and a point which I did not develop not to stray from the main focus of this study is the limit between irony and satire. Irony is maybe the most difficult rhetoric device to capture in a text and, for this reason, it has often been confused with satire. The Restoration writers' use of language is always ironic because it is not meant to express a literal meaning. Yet, Characters as Manly and Horner have been defined as consistent with the satyr-satirist tradition (Zimbardo 1961, 1998). Rose Zimbardo considers the classical satiric form as a bipartite structure of thesis and antithesis. The thesis is the attack on a specific vice, the antithesis represents the opposite virtue. She demonstrates how Restoration playwrights, especially Wycherley, respect this structure, nevertheless I refrain from saying that any of the writers I have dealt with has particular satirical purposes: they are often critical with the display of Restoration society but they never show a code of value strong enough to become an alternative to that of the Restoration age.

In analysing the libertines' theatrical strategies in the comedies of Dryden, Etherege, Wycherley, Behn and Congreve I have also tried to reflect on the meaning of 'play' and I considered the phenomenological approach as the more apt to understand the boundary between reality and fiction and the metaphor of the world as a stage. The 'framed' reality of art that such an approach suggests might be, I believe, a heuristic starting point for further research on Restoration plays.

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