Annamaria Lamarra, Bernard Dhuicq

Aphra Behn In / And Our Time

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ALBA GRAZIANO
Università degli Studi della Tuscia

When I first came across this play by Aphra Behn, it was, oddly enough, through a fierce adversary of Restoration comedy in general, the Victorian novelist George Meredith. Making a detour from my favourite studies on Augustan satire, I happened to translate his *Essay on Comedy and the Use of the Comic Spirit* (1897) into Italian.[1] His bitter judgements vis à vis his ideal incarnation of the comic spirit, i.e. Molière, triggered off my curiosity about Restoration comedy. While rediscovering the huge corpus of this subgenre, Aphra Behn appeared to me as the only playwright of her age—except perhaps Dryden—to withstand comparison with the French giant, whose plays everybody in England ransacked for plots and characters but hardly with her lively, original power of adaptation. Thus the very charge of plagiarism raised against *Sir Patient Fancy*[2] motivated my choice to present this text in an Italian context, which would be familiar with Argan's story. And my aim was to show how a talented woman playwright could transform Molière's comedy of character into a weapon of contemporary political propaganda without losing the lightness of an entertaining, "unlabour'd farce".[3]

The decision to translate a play by Aphra Behn put me in the company of a very passionate and competent, though scant, group of Italian scholars of Restoration comedy who have in the past two decades provided not only profound critical insights into, but also fine translations of, some of the masterpieces of this subgenre.[4] And these have worked as unavoidable models for my own attempt. However, none of them has ever considered accompanying their translations with a lengthy reflection on the difficulties implied by this particular enterprise, on the hard, at times hopeless, choices a translator has to make, on the solutions normally due to sheer intuition. This is precisely the sense of my personal contribution to both the publication of *Sir Patient Fancy* translated and to the present debate.[5]

The problems I had to face during the process of translating *Sir Patient Fancy* are both general and specific, and some of them are certainly shared by any translator of a seventeenth-century play from English into any other language. The first challenge comes from the genre of the text, which is not simply a literary text but a theatrical one. Semiotic studies and the general history of the stage agree that theatre is a complex event of communication of which the written text is only a part, the one that tends to be more systematic—the "langue" as it were—but maybe not even the most pertinent feature of the dramatic "parole". However, once performed, even the written text is liable to intralinguistic adaptations, alterations that are internal to the same cultural and linguistic codes. In this light the interlinguistic translation becomes just

one more intervention of transformation, just one more layer in the palimpsest. So much so that George Bastin, editor of the entry "Adaptation" in the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies*,[6] suggests the neologism "tradaptation" to describe this complex phenomenon. And this is also the direction recently outlined by many studies on "theatre translation and cultural relocation".[7]

Yet, this is not what my translation of *Sir Patient Fancy* is nor could have been, since it was not commissioned for performance, nor has it found a director and a company so far to make the dream come true again.[8] One must never despair, given the unexpected revival of Restoration drama witnessed by the British contemporary scene after centuries of marginality.[9] However, I strongly doubt that the Italian stage, for ever stuck in financial crisis, will be as ready to understand the modernity of the existential philosophy embodied by the so called "comedy of manners" (a comedy of fashion, appearance and dandyism *par excellence*) and the radical moral stances presented by some of the plays. For the moment I believe our mission as translators can only be to encourage a regeneration of this theatre in an Italian context and carry out that cultural negotiation which is always implied in the act of interpreting a text in the terms of a different language. This at least has been my scope, all too conscious of the limits inherent in such practice but at the same time with the deep conviction that Aphra Behn would approve of a translation which is respectful of her written "poetic" text rather than fostering a mythologized superiority of improvisation and company authorship. After all, she was the first British woman to champion the profession of writer—not playwright only—and to value the scripts of her plays as "works".

Having thus made the choice of fitting my translation of *Sir Patient Fancy* in a tradition of academic translations of Restoration plays, I realised I nevertheless had to come to terms with the intrinsically theatrical quality of this farce and the exquisitely performative effect of words. An example will serve to illustrate this. It is notorious that the pronominal subsystem of the English language, with particular reference to the pronouns of address, radically differs from the socalled "T/V" languages, like Italian,[10] so much so as to be identified as one of the classical cases of untranslatability due to almost total incompatibility between linguistic codes.[11] The case is complicated by the great instability of the second person pronoun usage in Early Modern English, that is before the extension of "you" to singular and plural, to formal and informal registers.[12] As a norm in Restoration times the pronouns "thou/thee" were still in use to mark relationships between master and servant, parent and child, superior and inferior, while "you" was reserved to addresses between peers (husband and wife, members of the upper class). However, in the case of more sentimental relationships (friendship, male comradeship or love) the still incomplete standardization allowed flexibility, which was fully exploited in the theatre; at times for no apparent reason at all but often to underline sudden changes of feelings and attitudes in the characters.

Sir Patient Fancy is no exception both to the rules and to the flexibility. As a consequence, on the one hand the Early Modern English and the Italian pronominal systems overlap allowing word for word correspondence between thou-tu and you-voi; on the other hand the quick shift you-thou-you in some dialogues would sound odd to an Italian ear. Equally inconsistent would sound the use of both pronouns between long-time lovers like Lady Fancy and Wittmore. The Italian translator must necessarily stabilise and fix the use of the pronouns disregarding the variation and therefore losing some of the scenic impact of the text. My initial choice had been extending "voi" to all relationships between peers, including Lady Fancy and Wittmore, but while revising the translation I realised how much fun would be lost in all the scenes where the two lovers surprised by Sir Patient manage to cheat him by pretending a formal relationship or, vice versa, relapse into a confidential attitude as soon as Sir Patient is unaware.[13] The Italian translation could benefit a great deal from the sudden pronominal shift between the confidential "tu" and the formal "voi". Exactly the same theatrical effect could be attained in the farcical scene of Act IV with the shift from a stable "voi" to a stable "tu", when the drunken Sir Patient is about to exact marital duties from a terrified and disgusted Lady Fancy who in the meantime is busy hiding her gallant under her bed first, and night-gown later.

Sometimes Aphra Behn herself stabilises the use of the pronouns with the evident function of serving a dramatic strategy. I am referring to the parallel scenes in Act III when the couple of young lovers, Isabella and Lodwick, who constantly address each other with "you", happen to swap their partners respectively with Wittmore and Lady Fancy by mistake,—or better, because both couples have made their dates at night. Although, according to scholars like Peter Holland and J. L. Styan, the possibility of actually bedimming the stage has to be excluded in a non-realist theatre such as the Restoration, the verbally created expectation of darkness would be scenically supported by performance in the upstage, that is by physically distancing the actors from the audience and thus slackening that intimate relationship of identification normally established in this kind of theatre by performance on the forestage.[14] In any case, the result—it seems to me—is that the dramatic action relies totally on words: the personal pronouns comply with a strategy of confusing identities and delaying dénouement. Isabella, addressed with too confidential a "thou" by Wittmore, whom she believes to be Lodwick, recoils in disgust from what she feels as a verbal rape. Lodwick instead, addressed with constant "you" by Lady Fancy, takes a longer time to unveil the real identity of his mistress and so does the audience, who is induced to share the characters' misapprehension either by the change in the lighting or by the actors' distant position on the scene or both. Having opted for "tu" between Wittmore and Lady Fancy in their private encounters and "voi" between the young lovers, the first case of mistaken identity works out exactly the same in Italian as in English. Not so in the second case, where a symmetric choice due to linguistic coherence produces a completely different impact on both character and audience: immediate

surprise and incredulity as in the first situation rather than prolonged delusion.

Something has been lost and something has been gained in this case as in many others, as generally happens with translating, even if one's intention is simply to make a text familiar to a foreign audience. "The way of translation" runs inevitably on a narrow path, between missing the point and catching the spirit, between subtracting and adding signification, between hiding and revealing. Translating is somehow part and epitome of the theatrical game of dressing up and making up: in the estranging process of saying the same thing in a different language it adds one more element of simultaneous disguise and revelation. This is maybe the reason that can justify translating Aphra Behn not as a celebratory act but as a sequel to her own well-known passion for travesty both by means of language and through the stage. And travesty was nature for Restoration culture, not unlike today.

At the beginning of this paper I mentioned the political implications of *Sir Patient Fancy* as an original transformation of Molière's *Malade imaginaire*. This very aspect is definitely the one that most eludes translation into an Italian cronotope. It is with regret that one realises how the rich texture of political allusions as well as the whole religious context would be irreparably lost unless retrieved through a critical apparatus. There is no way one can translate the name of the main character and still make the allusion to the ultra Protestant Sir Patience Ward, sheriff and Lord Mayor of London at the time of the Big Fire, transparent. And even translating the word "conventicle" or the French loan "cabal", or the innuendo to the origins of much Protestant wealth in the violent confiscations of the civil war, or the parody of the Puritan preachers' nasal twang cannot be exempted from explanation in the footnotes.

Actually, even the most basic words, which recur in the whole corpus of Restoration comedy, elude precise translation. I do not mean only the names of the character types so peculiar to this sub-genre (the Fop, the Gallant, the Spark, the Women of Quality, the many types of Wits, the Gay Couple, etc.), which moreover build up their identity in the strong intertextuality from one play to the other. The point is that even the simple words used to indicate the setting can be translated only very ambiguously into Italian. Once the complex ideological and social geography of the Restoration is well understood, words like City, Town and Country on one side, "città" and "campagna" on the other become markers of radical cultural incompatibility. If the Italian and English ideas of "country" share the connotations of rusticity and gullibility, so much exploited by the comedy of manners, what the Italian word misses completely, then and now, is the economical dimension of the estate, which is on the contrary an essential part of the social relationships and of the politics of this time as punctually mirrored by the theatre.[15] Moreover, the universally acknowledged urban quality of this kind of comedy exclusively revolves around London, whose topography in this age makes it really incomparable to any urban centre in the Italian tradition. I allude to the three dimensions of *Court* at Westminster, *Town*, the districts of entertainments and theatres, London *par excellence*, and *City*, the business heart, the

den of the thrifty Puritans. Since the conflict between Town and City is absolutely radical, the use of the same Italian lemma, "città", is as paradoxical as it is unavoidable and definitely inadequate to convey the right meaning of sentences uttered by the hypochondriac Cit Sir Patient like "I'l out of Town immediately" or "Pray spare your Hat and Legs Sir, till you come to Court, they are thrown away i'th'City". On the other hand, other possible binary oppositions of these parts of London with the Country reveal much more ambiguous antagonism or even unexpected collusion, which cannot be reduced to the Italian version of this anthropological question. After all, a Country estate was what every Town Gallant was in search for while courting the Woman of Quality, whereas the transactions around matrimony and patrimony were becoming of great interest for the Inns of Court in the City.

Nevertheless, the contrast between Country people and London citizens is a universal source of fun, mostly carried out through the staging of verbal skirmishes like the hilarious confrontation between Sir Credulous Easy and Sir Patient in Act II.[16] A chapter of the general invention of idiolects in order to distinguish the characters, particularly those who need reforming (as Dryden said: "Humour is the ridiculous extravagance of conversation, wherein one man differs from all others"), the translator has the responsibility to render the at times servile at times bombastic nonsense of the Country Fop's pretended wit as opposed to the annoyed and cutting shortness of Sir Patient's lines.

Sir Cred. Zoz, and that may be as you say Noble Sir: Lady pray what Gentleman's this— Noble Sir, I am your humble servant.
Sir Pat. Oh cry you mercy Sir. *[walks away.*
Sir Cred. No offence dear Sir I protest, 'slife I believe 'tis the Master of the house, he look't with such authority – why who cares, let him look as big as the four Winds, East, West, North, and South, I care not this,-therefore, I Beg your Pardon Noble Sir.
Sir Pat. Pray spare your Hat and Legs Sir, till you come to Court, they are thrown away i'th' City.
Sir Cred. O Lord dear Sir, 'tis all one for that, I value not a Leg nor an Arm amongst Friends, I am a *Devonshire* Sir all the world knows, a kind of Country Gentleman, as they say, and am come to Town to Marry my Lady *Knowells* Daughter.
Sir Pat. I'm glad on't Sir. *[walks away, he follows.*
Sir Cred. She's a deserving Lady Sir, if I have any Judgment, and I think I understand a Lady Sir in the right Honourable way of Matrimony.
Sir Pat. Well Sir, that is to say you have been marryed before Sir, and what's all this to me good Sir?
Sir Cred. Marryed before incomparable Sir! not so neither, for there's difference in men Sir.
Sir Pat. Right, Sir, for some are Wits, and some are Fools!

Sir Cred. As I hope to breath 'twas a saying of my Grandmothers, who us'd to tell me Sir, that bought Wit have brought money to Town for a small purchase of that kind, for Sir, I wou'd fain set up for a Wit—Pray Sir where live the Poets? for I wou'd fain be acquainted with some of them.
Sir Pat. Sir I do not know, nor do I care for Wits and Poets. Oh this will kill me quite, I'l out of Town immediately.
Sir Cred. But Sir, I mean your Fine railing Bully Wits, that have Vineger, Gall and Arsenick in 'em as well as Salt and Flame and Fire and the Devil and all.
Sir Pat. Oh defend me! and what is all this to me Sir?
Sir Cred. Oh Sir, they are the very Soul of Entertainment, and Sir, it is the prettiest sport to hear 'em rail and baule at one another—Zoz wou'd I were a Poet.
Sir Pat. I wish you were, since you are so fond of being rail'd at—if I were able to beat him I would be much angry—but Patience is a Vertue, and I will into the Country. –
[Aside.
Sir Cred. Tis all one case to me dear Sir, -but I should have the pleasure of railing again, *cum privilegio*, I love fighting with those pointless Weapons—Zoz Sir, you know if we men of quality fall out -(for you are a Knight I take it) why there comes a Challenge upon it, and ten to one some body or other is run through the Gills, why a pox on't I say this is very damnable, give me Poets Licence.

SIR CREDULOUS Maledizione, avete proprio ragione, nobile signore. Milady vi prego, chi è questo gentiluomo... nobile signore, sono il vostro umile servitore.
SIR PATIENT Ma per carità! *Fa per andarsene*
SIR CREDULOUS [*seguendolo*] Senza offesa, signore; per Dio, credo sia il padrone di casa, aveva un aspetto così autoritario... chi se ne importa, anche se si gonfia come i quattro venti, Est, Ovest, Nord e Sud, non me ne importa—quindi vi chiedo perdono umilmente, nobile signore.
SIR PATIENT Risparmiate il cappello e le gambe per quando siete a corte, in città sono sprecati.
SIR CREDULOUS Oh Dio, signore, fa lo stesso, non si considera né un braccio né una gamba fra amici. Sono un cavaliere del *Devonshire*, signore, lo sanno tutti, una specie di gentiluomo di campagna, come si dice, e sono qui in città per sposare la figlia di Milady *Knowell.*
SIR PATIENT Mi fa piacere, signore.
Si allontana, [*Sir Credulous*] *lo segue*
SIR CREDULOUS È una signora di gran valore, se posso azzardare un giudizio, e io credo di saper giudicare una donna dal punto di vista di un matrimonio onorevole.
SIR PATIENT Beh, signore, ciò vuol dire che siete già stato sposato, ma a me cosa importa?
SIR CREDULOUS Già sposato, egregio signore! Nossignore, c'è uomo e uomo.
SIR PATIENT Giusto, signore, alcuni sono intelligenti, altri sciocchi!
SIR CREDULOUS Giuro, quant'è vero che respiro, mia nonna soleva dirmi che l'ingegno acquistato è il migliore. Ho portato con me del denaro qui in città, per un acquisto del genere, vorrei tanto essere un bell'ingegno di campagna... Di grazia, signore, dove vivono i poeti? Vorrei tanto conoscerne qualcuno.

SIR PATIENT Non lo so, signore. Non mi interesso di begli ingegni e poeti. Oh, questo mi uccide, andrò subito via di città. *A parte*
SIR CREDULOUS Ma, signore, io intendo quei begli ingegni ringhiosi, pieni di aceto, fiele e arsenico oltre che sale, fiamme, fuoco e tutto il resto.
SIR PATIENT Oh, insomma! Ma io cosa c'entro?
SIR CREDULOUS Sono l'anima della festa, signore: è davvero divertente sentirli abbaiare e ringhiare uno contro l'altro.—Accidenti, come vorrei essere un poeta.
SIR PATIENT Vorrei anch'io che lo foste, visto che vi piace tanto farvi prendere in giro—se potessi lo picchierei, ma la pazienza è una virtù, e me ne andrò in campagna...
A parte
SIR CREDULOUS Per me fa lo stesso, signore... è che vorrei avere il piacere di rispondere alla presa in giro, *cum privilegio*: mi piace combattere con quelle armi spuntate. Perbacco, signore, se noi uomini d'onore litighiamo (vedo che anche voi siete un cavaliere) ne deriva una sfida, e dieci a uno qualcuno viene infilzato. Accidenti, dico io, questo è riprovevole, preferisco una licenza poetica...

Another interesting set of decisions faces the translator when it comes to the witty linguistic mélange of the source text. The challenge is particularly daunting in this farce since Aphra Behn makes show of her remarkable capacity as a *pasticheur de langues*, hybridising French, English, Dutch and classical languages in macaronic sequences of speech, parodying juridical and medical discourses, inventing neologisms and puns, imitating foreign accents, mixing prose and verse. This is Wittmore falsely wooing Isabella in the hyperbolic and Frenchified style of the Fop (II, I, pp. 58-59):

Witt. [...] Madam,-as Gad shall save me, I'me the Son of a Whore, if you are not the most Bell Person I ever saw, and if I be not damnably in love with you, but a pox take all tedious Courtship, I have a free-born and generous Spirit, and as I hate being confin'd to dull cringing, whining, flattering, and the Devil and all of Foppery, so when I give an heart I'me an Infidel, Madam, if I do not love to do't frankly and quickly, that thereby I may oblige the Beautiful receiver of my Vows, Protestations, Passions, and Inclination.
Isab. You're wonderfull ingaging Sir, and I were an Ingrate not to facilitate a return for the Honour you are pleas'd to do me.
Witt. Upon my Reputation, Madam, you're a civil well-bred Person, you have all the Agreemony of your Sex, *La Bell Talie, la Boon Mien, & reparteé bien*, and are *tout oue toore*, as I'me a Gentleman, *fort agreeable.*

WITTMORE [...] Signora... che Dio mi salvi, sono un figlio di puttana, se non siete *la plus belle* che ho mai visto e se non sono maledettamente innamorato, ma al diavolo la noia del corteggiamento, ho uno spirito libero e generoso io: come odio limitarmi a inchini, gemiti, adulazioni, complimenti e tutto il solito repertorio di fatuità, così, quando do il mio cuore, sarei un cane infedele, signora, se non amassi sinceramente e subito e in modo da accontentare la bella destinataria delle mie promesse, passioni e preferenze.

ISABELLA Siete estremamente affascinante, signore, e sarei un'ingrata a non ricambiare l'onore che vi compiacete di farmi.
WITTMORE Vi giuro sulla mia reputazione, signora, siete una persona civile e ben educata, avete tutta l'agrodolcezza del vostro sesso, *la belle talie, la bonne mienne e reparté bien*, e, sul mio onore di gentiluomo, *toute intour beaucoup agreable.*

And these are a few examples of Lady Knowell's eloquence, the *femme savante* of this play, who loves to stuff her lines with juridical terms and botched quotations in Latin and Greek:

La. Kno. O Faugh Mr. *Fancy* what have you said, Mother tongue! Can any thing that's great or moving be exprest in filthy *English*,-I'le give you an Energetical proof Mr. *Fancy*, observe but Divine *Homer* in the *Grecian* Language—*Ton d'apamibominus, Prosiphe, Podis Ochus Achilleus*! ah how it sounds! which English't dwindles into the most grating stuff: -then the swift Foot *Achilles* made reply, -oh faugh.

LADY KNOWELL Puah! Mr. *Fancy,* cosa dite, lingua madre! Si può davvero esprimere qualcosa di grandioso e commovente nel nostro lercio idioma? Ve ne darò una prova energica, Mr. *Fancy,* prendete il divino *Omero* in lingua greca—*Ton d'apamibominus, Prosiphe, Podis Ochus Achilleus*! Ah, come suona bene! Nella nostra lingua si ridurrebbe a qualcosa di stridulo:—*Piè veloce Achille rispose*—per carità! (I, i, pp. 22-23)

Sir Pat. Oh abominable! you had best say, she is none of my Daughter, and that I was a Cuckold.-
La. Kno. If I should Sir, it would not amount to *Scandalum Magnatum*, I'le tell thee more; thy whole Pedigree,—yet for all this *Lodwick* shall marry your Daughter, and yet I'le have none of your Nephew.-

SIR PATIENT Oh, abominevole! Tanto valeva dire che non è mia figlia e che sono cornuto.
LADY KNOWELL Se lo dicessi, signore, non sarebbe uno *Scandalum Magnatum*, anzi, dirò di più: tutto il vostro *pedigree*... e nonostante tutto *Lodwick* sposerà vostra figlia e io non voglio sapere niente di vostro nipote... (II, i, pp. 68-69)

La. Kno. Be not amaz'd at this turn, *Rotat omne fatum*, -but no more,-keep still that mask of Love we first put on, till you have gain'd the Writings, for I have no joy beyond cheating that filthy Uncle of thine, -*Lucretia* wipe your eyes, and prepare for *Hymen*, the hour draws near. *Thalessio, Thalessio*! as the *Romans* cry'd.

LADY KNOWELL Non vi stupite di questa svolta, *Rotat omne fatum*... ma ora basta... **mantenete la maschera** da innamorato che ci siamo messi prima, finché non avremo le **carte con la donazione**, poiché non ho altro scopo se non di buggerare quel vecchio schifoso **di vostro zio.** Lucrezia, asciugati gli occhi e preparati per Imene, l'ora si avvicina. ***Thalessio, thalessio!*** Come gridarono i *Romani.* (V, i, pp. 166-167)

Finally, a feast of language is reached in Act V during the typical consultation of the quacks around Sir Patient's imaginary illness. These are some of the diagnoses and the medicines prescribed by the international assembly of fake doctors with my attempt at rendering the ridiculous mixture of languages making up the quacks' jargon:

... a *Whirligigoustiphon* as the *Greeks* have it ...
... una *vertiginistiphon*, come dicono i Greci ...
... in *Latin* 'tis a *Stronggullionibus*.
... il termine latino è *stranguglionibus*.
... a Dose of my Pills *Merda quecrusticon*, or the Amicable Pill.
... una dose delle mie pillole *Merda medicrusticum*, meglio nota come pillola amica.
... At night twelve Cordial Pills, *Gallimofriticus*.
... La sera dodici pillole di cordiale, *Fricasseaticus*.
... threescore restorative Pills call'd *Cheatus Redivivus*.
... sessanta pillole rigeneratrici chiamate *Creatinus redivivus*.
... I cur'd the Arch-Duke of *Strumbulo*, of a *Gondileero*, of which he dy'd, with this very *Aqua Tetrachymagogon*.
... ho già curato l'arciduca di Strombolo, affetto da un *gondiloma*, di cui poi è deceduto, con l'*Aqua tetrachymagogon*.

Hopefully my attempt at rendering the several phenomena of linguistic travesty in *Sir Patient Fancy* have met with some success, but as often happens with translating from English the most difficult decision concerned a more basic socio-linguistic aspect: which selection of general Italian should be adopted by the less typified characters (generally the ones with ordinary names), upon whose standard the idiosyncratic swerving of the others is tested (say the ones with emblematic names: Sir Credulous Easy, Sir Patient Fancy and Lady Knowell)? Especially in the case of Sir Credulous Easy, the main figure of fun in this comedy, two elements are at work: firstly, the usual rhetorical clichés pertaining to the Country Fop, secondly a certain amount of regional variation. His discourse is not only crammed with heavy doses of cursing, trite proverbs, archaic idioms, nonsensical rhetoric, but, his being a Country Gentleman from Devonshire, and so carrying the weight of the thematic opposition Country/Town, it is also interspersed with a few dialectal features (markedly, the double negation). Linguistically in fact the privileged London setting implies that the language spoken by the people of fashion in these plays is that variety of English which had been on the way to becoming the national standard for little more than two centuries. Any regional variation from this linguistic model is felt as a deviation from the code of good manners shared by the witty winners and is automatically subject to ridicule. So I do not doubt that performing Sir Credulous Easy on the British stage would inevitably imply emphasizing his regional variety. It can be said that the socio-linguistic situation of the Italian language today, having finally developed

into a national standard alongside surviving dialects or at least regional accents, somehow parallels the English one much more than in the 17th and in the following centuries. Nevertheless, choosing a middle register of contemporary standard Italian, which is what I did in compliance with the target reader, completely obliterates the above mentioned solidarity between national standard and setting in the capital city: ours is in fact a language which has developed mainly thanks to a centralized school system and through twentieth-century mass-media. In this process the final choice of the capital city has played a very marginal role.

On the other hand, I do not doubt that the character of Sir Credulous Easy brought onto the Italian stage would finally resort to dialect at least in some scenes: after all, the Italian comic theatre is all vernacular and even the recent substantial generation of TV or film comedians cannot do without at least a strong regional accent. But since every Italian dialect is so strongly connoted and full of cultural echoes, which dialect should one choose? A Southern or a Northern one? Otherwise, a dialect of an inland area, a peasant area, as opposed to an urban sub-standard? But not always in our comic tradition does the peasant embody stupidity, on the contrary. Should we choose a variety from a mountainous area then? we would depart from the connotations of the English Country even more. I confess I did not dare to risk over-interpretation. In the case of Sir Credulous I preferred to disregard the (however scanty) vernacular occurrences and base his characterization on the other elements of his idiolect without taking short cuts or indulging in simplification. Having made up my mind to translate a written text, I left the interpretation of its mainly oral potential to the imaginary actor who would like to endorse the role.

In conclusion, another issue calls for further exploration. Lamenting the lack of an Italian tradition of comedy in the national standard language suggests another relevant difference: the parallel want for women's comedy, written by women comedians and featuring strong female comic characters. I wonder if translating Aphra Behn does not conceal a secret desire to challenge the Italian theatre tradition, where women have had a melodramatic impact rather than an intelligent comic one, with the infection of her political and erotic wit. According to Meredith, this operation might make up not only for the absence of comic spirit but also for our poor, faulty civilisation. Certainly it duplicates the signs of Aphra Behn into a different language and thus guarantees her further dissemination in time and space.

Notes

1 *L'idea di commedia*, Viterbo, Settecittà, 2000. The same series of translations with parallel texts ("Anglia"), which I direct, also hosts my translation of *Sir Patient Fancy* (2003). All references will be to this edition.

2 Aphra Behn herself bemoans this accusation in the famous address "To the Reader": "Others to show their breeding (...) cryed it was made out of at least four *French plays*, when

I had but a very bare hint from one, the *Malad Imagenere...*" (pp. 10-1).

3 "Epilogue" (pp. 204-5).

4 Very little of the whole corpus of Restoration drama has been translated into Italian. After Gabriele Baldini's anthology, *Teatro inglese della Restaurazione e del Settecento* (Firenze, Sansoni, 1955, rpt. 1991), only the following comedies have appeared or reappeared in Italian: Aphra Behn, *The Rover/Il Giramondo* (Viola Papetti(ed), Milano, La Tartaruga, 1981); William Congreve, *Love for Love/Amare per amore* (Mary Corsan (ed), Genova, Il Melangolo, 1992); William Wycherley, *The Country Wife/La sposa di campagna* (Masolino D'Amico (ed), Milano, Rizzoli, 1993); George Etherege, *The Man of Mode/L'uomo alla moda* (Viola Papetti (ed), Milano, Rizzoli, 1993); William Congreve, *The Way of the World/Così va il mondo* (Alberto Rossetti (ed), with an introduction by Viola Papetti, Milano, Rizzoli, 1995); Aphra Behn, *The Luckey Chance/Un caso fortunato* (Roberta Falcone (ed), Bari, Adriatica, 1995).

5 My edition of *Sir Patient Fancy* contains explanatory notes to both the English text and the Italian translation and a final essay entitled "Così va il tradurre", where many of the crucial decisions I hint at here are discussed at length.

6 Mona Baker (ed.), London, Routledge, 1998.

7 See David Johnston (ed) *Stages of Translation*, Bath, Absolute Press, 1996; Carole-Anne Upton (ed.), *Moving Target. Theatre Translation and Cultural Relocation* Manchester, St. Jerome Publishing, 2000.

8 Viola Papetti's version of *The Rover*, adapted by Giuseppe D'Agata and herself under the title *Cavalieri senza patria*, was performed in 1982 by the company "Il cerchio di gesso" directed by Ugo Gregoretti. If ever all the stage materials could be recovered, a comparative analysis of translation, adaptation, prompt book and final performance would surely represent an interesting case study of drama tradaptation in analogy with the recent critical interest of translation studies for the strategies of film dubbing.

9 See Sara Soncini, *Playing with(in) the Restoration: Metatheatre as a Strategy of Appropriation in Contemporary Rewritings of Restoration Drama*, Napoli, ESI, 1999.

10 The definition can be found in R. Brown and A. Gilman, "The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity", in John Laver and Sandy Hutcheson (eds.), *Communication in Face to Face Interaction*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1960.

11 See Gunilla Anderman, "Untranslatability: The Case of Pronouns of Address in Literature", *Perspectives. Studies in Translatology*, 1 (1993), pp. 57-67; also by Anderman, "Drama Translation", in Mona Baker (ed.), *op.cit.*

12 The subject has been fully discussed by historians of the English language. Among others see Quirk, Barber and Mulholland's essays in Vivian Salmon and Edwina Burness (eds.), *A Reader in the Language of Shakespearean Drama*, Amsterdam, Benjamins, 1986 and ch. 3 in Gert Ronberg, *A Way with Words*, London, Edward Arnold, 1992.

13 See for example Act II in the initial and ending scenes (pp. 46-49; pp.74-75); Act IV, ending of scene ii (pp. 132-139).

14 Studies from the Sixties on the structure of Restoration theatres allowed the possibility of darkening the stage almost completely on the evidence of stage directions such as "Sink lamps" (see, among others, E. J. Burton, *The British Theatre 1100-1900*, London, Herbert Jenkins, 1960), evidence which was later rejected in favour of a less naturalistic interpretation of the relationship between performance, scenery and audience (see Peter Holland, *The*

Ornament of Action, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979; J.L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986). Thus the stage directions on top of the two scenes regarding Lady Fancy and Lodwick, which mention the settings as "by (the) dark", indicate the typical "discovery" scenes performed in the upstage. These were used by Aphra Behn more than by any other author, not only to ensure spectacle (as in the pageant of the elephant in this same play), but for night scenes and mainly for situations of dressing, undressing and bedrooms.

15 Following the line of Raymond Williams' seminal book, *The Country and the City* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1973), J. Douglas Canfield revisions the economic ideology of Restoration comedy and shows its cultural and political ambivalences in *Tricksters and Estates*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 1997.

16 It is worth mentioning that the actors James Nokes and Anthony Leigh, who played the roles, were the most successful comic duo of the age.