

AUDIENCE DECEPTION AND FARCE IN
JOHN LACY'S *SIR HERCULES BUFFOON*

Juan Antonio Prieto Pablos
Universidad de Sevilla
ppablos@us.es

John Lacy's *Sir Hercules Buffoon* (1684) provides one of the earliest instances of audience deception in the history of English drama. This essay analyses the effects that deception may have had in the Restoration audiences in terms of their involvement in the events of the plot, then attempts to explain why Lacy might have deemed it useful to apply such a radical resource. Deception is thus considered with regard to both the conditions of Restoration farce in the first half of the 1680s and the rapport that Lacy, as a farceur, may have sought to enhance in his relationship with his audiences.

KEY WORDS: Restoration drama, John Lacy, farce, deception, audience reception.

1. Introduction

In a brief but highly suggestive essay, “‘Deceptio Visus’: Aphra Behn’s Negotiation with Farce in *The Emperor of the Moon*,” Steven Henderson has debated on the reasons that might have led Aphra Behn to tackle the nuances of farcical *commedia dell’arte* in *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687),¹ at a time when critics of both high and low comedy such as Dryden or Shadwell openly professed their dislike of the genre. Henderson suggests that Behn agreed to write farce in order to meet popular demand, but at the same time she used its motifs in such a way that they disclosed “a position of sophisticated detachment” from the genre that might have been welcome by more select spectators (2000: 64). Behn’s position, he argues, may be assessed mainly in her foregrounding of the motif of farcical deception, which she used “in order to foster the audience’s awareness of the duality of the worlds of the play and the playhouse, the imaginative theatrical space and the social space of the theatre” (2000: 62). Behn effects a splitting of audience perspective from the very beginning of the play, when Scaramouch announces that the characters have agreed to stage a farce which will involve the deception of Doctor Baliardo (Behn 1917: 399). With this, the audience witness two distinct performances, one in the fictional world, the other within the theatre space itself; and, as one is continually supplanted by the other, the audience are also made

1. The date following the title of plays will always correspond to the year of publication. For the sake of chronological location, when there is substantial difference between the play’s premiere and its publication, the date of the premiere is added too, preceded by the abbreviation “prem.”

aware of the presence of “the character as actor, the world of the play as dramatic performance and the whole as deception” (2000: 63).

With this dual perspective, Henderson seems to aim at dignifying Behn’s use of farcical material yet at the same time presents a thesis that seems to be rooted in a view of farce as a genre unworthy of critical consideration (both in the Restoration and nowadays) and, therefore, in the unconscious need to justify its use by Behn and its analysis by the critic himself. In my opinion, his thesis needs to be reconsidered by taking into account, if not the general backdrop of farce in the Restoration 1680s, at least some of the leading contributions of the period, in order to define somewhat more precisely the dramatic, social and emotional effects sought and probably produced by the use of deception in the performance of farce.²

The purpose of this essay is to look at another play, John Lacy’s *Sir Hercules Buffoon* (1684), in which deception plays a highly significant role, and to place it within the context of Restoration farce. Like in Behn’s *The Emperor of the Moon*—and indeed many other plays—deception is a pervasive constituent of the plot, as characters manage to confuse, mislead and conceal the truth from each other. But what makes Lacy’s play a remarkable and rare instance of deception is that a substantial part of the plot involves misleading the spectators into assumptions that are not only difficult to accommodate in the generic context of the play but will eventually prove false. This is a resource that verges on the breach of one of the main principles of fictional communication (the author must provide a “truthful” rendition of the events and situations) and has therefore been used sparsely and with extreme caution by playwrights and fiction writers. If Lacy chose to apply this kind of resource, it was no doubt with a purpose. Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence of the author’s intention; but this essay will attempt to explain the functions performed by deception in *Sir Hercules Buffoon* in terms of the relationship between the play, its genre and its performance, in the first half of the 1680s. The basic premise of the essay is that Lacy’s deception may be justified in two ways: as part of the experimentation that farce permitted its authors to apply to the genre, and as a means to enhance the rapport sought by both actor (*qua* farceur) and audience in the process of dramatic communication. Both ways would come together through the figure of John Lacy.

2. John Lacy and Farce

John Lacy (1615–81) was one of the leading actors in Thomas Betterton’s company from its inception in 1660 to the year 1675, when he retired from the stage. The records of his participation are rather scanty (there is only about a score of references in cast-lists and contemporary documents), but no doubt his contribution in the plays produced by the Duke’s company was a much more regular one.³ His career prompted Gerard Langbaine to assert that Lacy “perform’d all Parts that he undertook to a miracle: insomuch that I am

2. Henderson does indeed comment on the influence exerted by Edward Ravenscroft’s extremely successful *The Citizen Turn’d Gentleman* (1675); but he leaves aside other, non-*commedia dell’arte* variations of the genre.

3. For an account of Lacy’s career, the most convenient source is the entry in Philip Highfill’s *Dictionary* (1973–93).

apt to believe, that this Age never had, so the next never will have his Equal" (1691: 317). His reputation as an actor best suited for playing ridiculous or farcical characters began to grow with roles such as the hypocritical non-conformist Scruple in John Wilson's *The Cheats* (1664) and Sir Politic Would-Be in the Restoration revival of Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (1607); and it culminated with his parodic impersonation of John Dryden as Bayes in the Earl of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* (1672). But this reputation was based above all on roles created by himself: Monsieur Raggou, the knavish French cook in *The Old Troop* (1672; prem. 1664);⁴ Sauny, Petruchio's wily servant in *Sauny the Scot* (1698; prem. 1667), his adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*; and Drench, the country farrier turned physician in *The Dumb Lady* (1672; prem. ca. 1669), this one based on Molière's *Le médecin malgré lui*. All these made Lacy the actor of farces *par excellence* in the early decades of the Restoration. His fourth and last play, *Sir Hercules Buffoon*, was premiered in 1684, three years after Lacy's death and nine years after he retired from the stage.

Lacy's plays were very popular at the time, much to the chagrin of contemporary dramatists who advocated a more serious and refined kind of drama and yet could not help but notice the success that farce met onstage. Dryden had declared his distaste in his Preface to *An Evening's Love* (1671):

That I detest those Farces, which are now the most frequent entertainments of the Stage, I am sure I have reason on my side. Comedy consists, though of low persons, yet of natural actions and characters; I mean such humours, adventures, and designs, as are to be found and met with in the world. Farce, on the other side, consists of forc'd humours, and unnatural events. Comedy presents us with the imperfections of humane nature: Farce entertains us with what is monstrous and chimerical. The one causes laughter in those who can judge of men and manners, by the lively representation of their folly or corruption; the other produces the same effect in those who can judge of neither, and only by its extravagances. (1970: 203)

And Thomas Shadwell joined forces with Dryden in this respect, and defined the audiences who enjoyed farce as "the rabble of little People [who] are more pleas'd with Jack-Puddings being soundly kick'd, or having a Custard handsomely thrown in his face, than with all the wit in Plays" (Preface to *The Humorists* 1668: 185). Almost to this day the attitude towards farce in general, and towards Lacy's dramatic production in particular, has been derogatory (see, for example, Lynch 1926: 159, and Nicoll 1952: 212–13). Only in most recent criticism is it possible to find a less prejudiced perspective. So, according to Rothstein and Kavenik, Lacy's plays are "quintessentially actors' plays" and of a kind that is "universal in its appeal, funny to all audiences in all times if it is well done" (1988: 76). And, moving beyond the merely spectacular aspects of farce, Douglas Canfield regards *The Old Troop* as a comment on "the harsh reality of a countryside ravaged by war and requisitioned into poverty by competing armies, whatever their ideologies" (1997: 174), and *Sir Hercules Buffoon* as "one of the most overtly class-conscious social comedies of the Restoration" (1997: 37).

4. December 1664 is the date of the first clear evidence of its being performed, according to the editors of *The London Stage*, but they also mention that it could have been premiered at an earlier date. Allardyce Nicoll placed its premiere in 1663 (1952: 212).

Whatever our view regarding farce and its practitioners, Lacy's production must be acknowledged as seminal in the introduction and development of farce in the Restoration stage. In *The Old Troop*, Lacy defined the model (Leo Hughes, in his classic study of Restoration and eighteenth century farce, defines it as one of the plays that best illustrates the structure of the genre; see 1959: 26–31); and with *Sauny the Scot* and *The Dumb Lady* he blended his own dramatic experience with the most suitable traditions from both home and abroad. It is thus understandable that, at the height of his career, in the Prologue he wrote and spoke for Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*, he could take pride in what he had achieved, as he asserted: "I'll cry out, Swell'd with Poetique Rage, 'Tis I, John Lacy, have reform'd your Stage" (26–27).

His last play, *Sir Hercules Buffoon*, is something of an oddity. Apparently, it was written after Lacy's retirement and therefore probably not intended for him to appear in; and it is unlike his earlier plays in its blend of a more restrained farcical plot and a very sombre one. For Robert Hume, it features a combination of farce and melodrama that makes it "decidedly *sui generis*" (1976: 372); and Douglas Canfield describes it as a "bizarre" play (1997: 37). Both critics point at its hybrid nature as the cause of their relative puzzlement. But what makes it most peculiar is the deceptive manner in which events are presented before the audience, thus forcing spectators (or readers) to make assumptions that displace them from the position of privileged viewers that had typically been granted to them in Restoration and earlier drama.

3. Deception and Suspense in *Sir Hercules Buffoon*

In *Sir Hercules Buffoon*, deception has a capital role, and pervades the play at various levels. It is the main feature of the character who gives his name to the title, and consequently the leading force in the events of the comic sub-plot. Sir Hercules is "a man of great divertissement" who wants to be a wit but "all the tools he has towards it is lying; and that he does so well, that 'tis hard to know when he lies and when he does not" (1875: 219). Throughout the play, and in his goings on over the town and city of London, Sir Hercules gathers a cohort of rakish gentlemen who either take an active part in his merry pranks or merely stand as witnesses of his elaborate lies. There is the occasional deserving victim, like the corrupt judge who is cheated of money and reputation in 3.3 and 5.3; but most often Sir Hercules' lies are produced for the sake of pure self-enjoyment. No serious concern for the possible effects of these lies seems to stop Sir Hercules and his company for even a short while. On one occasion, the gentlemen rave against "the wit of this age" consisting in "cheating your hackney-coachman, link-boy, and your whore, and give 'em nothing," which they consider "a very ungentleman-like wit" (1875: 217); but immediately afterwards, one of them warns his friend to "take heed what you say, for I always do it when I am drunk" (1875: 218).⁵

These practices are not beyond the scope of comedy and farce during the Restoration, and would be of no critical consequence *per se*. Their significance comes from their being paired with another set of deceiving practices, which affects the serious sub-plot and which

5. The general lack of concern regarding the use of lies contrasts with the public attitude towards it in the Restoration, as described by James Thompson (1982).

as a consequence make it much darker and more sinister and perhaps even more disturbing than might be expected in a regular farce. In this plot-line, Sir Marmaduke Seldin has been chosen by his dying brother as the guardian of his two nieces, Belmaria and Innocentia; but, as is often the case in Restoration drama, the dying father has made an ill choice, because Sir Marmaduke covets the young girls' huge fortune of £300,000. He therefore asks his own daughters, Mariana and Fidelity, to collaborate in a plan according to which his daughters will take the place of the heiresses. Fidelity agrees at once, Mariana is reluctant at first but finally relents, and they all agree to get rid of the heiresses by sending them away to Norway and leaving them in the wilderness to die of exposure to the climate and the wild animals. A first layer of deception is thus brought about by the Seldin family, in their lookout for suitors who come in attracted by the wealth of Fidelity-as-Innocentia and Mariana-as-Belmaria.

It is only at the end of the play that the spectators are made aware of the existence of two additional layers of deception, and then only in a progression that evinces that Lacy had specific plans regarding the role that this resource must play. Mariana shows some signs of regret for the first time in 4.1, when she first meets her suitor, Lord Armingier. When he proposes, she refuses to marry him, though she is in love with him. Her decision seems to be triggered by his assertion "I have no falsehood in me" (270), so there are grounds to suspect that there is some underlying remorse that makes her perceive herself unworthy of such an honourable gentleman.

Lord Armingier's perplexity is sustained until their next encounter, in 4.3. Here she finally discloses the truth about her identity and her participation in the crimes committed by her family. These are all facts that the audience were aware of, and their only possible piece of news may come from the realization that she is repentant. For Lord Armingier, however, it is all unexpected news; and his surprise is conveniently enhanced by the manner in which Mariana tells her story. By gradually building up the seriousness of her deeds, she first confesses that she has been involved in bloody acts, then declares that she is an impostor, and finally tells a startled Armingier that she is a murderer:

Mar. I am here by promise, to give your Lordship reasons why you and I must never marry. And prepare yourself, for I've a story; blood and horror are the least things in't.

Arm. Bless me! it startles all my spirits to hear sweet innocence talk of blood. You must be virtuous; such sweetness cannot deceive.

Mar. My Lord, I am false,—a lewd impostor, and not the heiress whom you came to marry.

Arm. How? You have not left me sense enough to wonder! My blood wants motion, and life is stealing from me, and not sensible. Speak again, for 'tis impossible you should e'er be wicked.

Mar. I am not the heiress, but Sir Marmaduke Seldin's own daughter; and the true heiresses, my dear and lovely kinswomen, are ——

Arm. Are what? Where? Speak!

Mar. Murdered! What opinion have you of my virtue now, my Lord? (1875: 281)

There is surprising news for the audience, too, eventually. After further suspense and much pain inflicted upon Lord Armingier, who refuses to accept the image that Mariana projects of herself, she corrects her story and declares that the most important part of her previous confession was in part a lie. The new truth is that she and her sister had in fact deceived their father and that they did not murder their cousins: they did not send the true

heiresses to their death but, on the contrary, helped them to lie in hiding in a safe place (1875: 282). Inasmuch as it is unexpected (as indeed it must be, since there is no earlier hint in the play that could warn us about it), this turn of events is truly remarkable, and must have been no less surprising for the spectators than it is for Lord Arminger. But for the audience this may also have come as a shock, and perhaps not a welcome one.

Throughout the play, the audience have been given information that has forced them to accommodate events in a manner which was not fully consistent with the kind of play they might have expected to see. As the play was written by John Lacy, they would have expected a farce. But during the performance of the first four acts of the play, it is not quite clear whether the story will unfold as a comic farce—as the farcical subplot would seem to indicate—as a tragedy—since the criminals must pay for the death of the innocent sisters—or as something altogether new and different, and therefore unpredictable. This would probably turn out to be rather disturbing, with the audience unable to work out a coherent set of expectations about what is to happen in the story and to define their position regarding the events shown onstage. The situation can indeed become “bizarre,” for example, if we realize how uncomfortable a spectator may have felt during the conversation between Fidelia and Squire Buffoon in 3.2, in which she playfully makes fun of him, knowing that Fidelia is a criminal and yet being prompted to laugh at her pranks. To the audience, she is one of the villains, due to her willing participation in Sir Marmaduke’s plans; she is therefore someone with whom the audience would ordinarily establish no kind of identification. Laughing *with* her at Squire Buffoon would be embarrassing, and seemingly inconsistent with what one would expect to feel for her.

The situation in which the audience would find themselves corresponds to what is commonly known as suspense. This has commonly been defined, in rather simplistic terms, as the emotional condition (anxiety or tension) provoked by a cognitive condition of uncertainty regarding a delayed outcome of events. But the production of suspense entails a complex system of cognitive, psychological and emotional activities, mainly provoked by the fear of the loss of control over the flow of events (Prieto Pablos 1998). When faced with an unresolved outcome, readers do not just wait: moved by the need to regain control of unresolved situations, they seek for hints or clues which, as Gerrig and Bernardo (1994) have pointed out, could allow them to elaborate their own hypotheses about what the final outcome may be. While the resolution is delayed, readers are held in a state of tension provoked by both the hope that all will be solved according to their expectations and the fear that this may not happen. As Roland Barthes asserted in *Image Music Text*, “suspense . . . offers the threat of an uncompleted sequence, of an open paradigm . . . that is to say, of a logical disturbance, it being this disturbance which is consumed with anxiety and pleasure” (1977: 119). If the readers’ expectations are being confirmed during the reading process, the level of tension is relatively unremarkable; on the contrary, tension increases if they are unable to elaborate coherent expectations and cannot find confirmation for them, in other words, if they believe that they have lost control.

Moreover, the tradition of comic drama was based on the audience’s privileged position with respect to the information offered from the stage. This position is determined—to use the classic terminology applied by Bertrand Evans (1960) in his analysis of Shakespearian drama—by the audience’s superior degree of awareness of the *practices* undertaken by the characters. Comic effects depend to a large extent on a sufficient discrepancy between what

some of these characters (pre-eminently the *practisées* or dupes) fail to be aware of and what some others (the *practisers* or tricksters) and the audience know. The premise is that lack of awareness entails lack of control of the situation in which one is involved and thus makes him or her ridiculous (see Evans 1960: VIII–IX). The underlying assumption is that the writer should avoid placing the audience in a position of lower awareness, or risk the consequences derived from the audience's perception of themselves as object of ridicule. As Victor Freeburg comments,

the average spectator would rather be given certain dramatic causes and conflicts with a chance to guess at the probable outcome, than watch the unfolding a dramatic story which ends with the disconcerting revelation that he had all the way through been ignorant of the cardinal fact in the story. If there is a secret, the spectator wants to be let in . . . But if the secret is held back, the spectator may feel that he has been victimized as much as the gulls in the play. (1915: 13)

In *Sir Hercules Buffoon*, Sir Marmaduke might be considered to deserve the treatment given by his daughters, as it helped the girls avoid the dangers he threatened them with. But the spectators have also been denied the same kind of information, and have been placed at the level of the deserving *practisée*, when they have done nothing to be paired with him. This is a very serious situation as far as the terms of the relationship between audience and playwright, during and after the performance of *Sir Hercules Buffoon*, are concerned. But an even more serious problem is that deception has not just been limited to concealing the truth from the audience. Resorting to *non-informing* is, as shall be explained below, not particularly rare in Restoration and pre-Restoration drama. What makes the play exceptional is that what is said onstage was actually meant to *mis-inform* the audience and thus to mislead them into trying to accommodate events that are not easily compatible with the generic ascription of the play (how can murder and comedy come together?) and that will make them lose control over the flow of events. To the puzzlement for their lack of familiarity with the development of the story, the audience would add their discomfort for the realization that they have failed to ascertain what really went on—not because of a fault attributed to them, but because the author has misled them into making the wrong assumption about a substantial part of the plot.

John Lacy was no doubt aware of the possible consequences of such a build-up of layers of deception, and yet he chose to give it a centrality that has almost no equivalent in the drama of his time. It must therefore be concluded that he saw certain advantages in it which outweighed the risks that audience deception entailed. Two main sets of reasons can be offered to explain the pervasive occurrence of this kind of deception in *Sir Hercules Buffoon*. Each of these sets seeks to place the play in a larger context, and thus to feature it as representative of a specific movement within that context. They are discussed in the following sections.

4. Restoration Farce: Its Development in the 1680s

One of the explanations for Lacy's use of deceit can be found within the context of Restoration farce and its evolution in the 1680s. Though the genre was not unknown in

earlier periods, the term “farce” was first applied to it in the early years of the Restoration, and was in fact regarded as an import from France, via Molière and its rich farcical tradition of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, as Peter Holland (2000) has observed, there is also a native branch, which had its sources in popular culture and had shown itself in drolls and market-place performances of the kind encountered in collections such as Francis Kirkman’s *The Wits* (1662) or *The Muse of Newmarket* (1680). According to Holland, this branch of farce represents “the margins of known Restoration and Interregnum drama, examples of dramatic activity that is rarely considered or even glimpsed” (2000: 113). Its influence was mainly exerted throughout the role played by the farceurs—i.e. the actors who specialized in farcical roles—both in pure farces and in plays which may not be ascribed to the genre but had some farcical episodes in them. The Restoration stage had a fair number of eminent farceurs: James Nokes, Anthony Leigh, Cave Underhill, Joseph Haines, Thomas Jevon and Thomas Doggett are some of the actors that competed with Lacy or replaced him after his early retirement. Some of these also contributed with the composition of plays which, understandably, belong to this generic type: Thomas Jevon wrote *The Devil of a Wife* (1686); Thomas Doggett, *The Country Wake* (1696); and Cave Underhill may have had a hand in the composition of *Win Her and Take Her* (1691).

The structural nature of this English subcategory is comparatively more elusive than that of its foreign counterparts. It shares with them the same looseness, which makes its plots episodic and fantastic—that is, not dependent on realism or verisimilitude—and also more flexible with regard to what can be included in the story. Moreover, it feeds on earlier plays and thus on other generic forms, to the extent that, as one of the players in Davenant’s *The Playhouse to be Let* (1673) asserts, “Your Farces are a kind of Mungril Plays” (18). English farce draws mostly from comedy (and, as Rothstein and Kavenik have noted, interacts dynamically with it in the structure of low comedy; see 1988: 75), and even from tragedy and romance, which it often uses for parody and burlesque. In consequence, it can become a sort of hybrid form which might seem to escape clear-cut classification. Such is the effect in *Sir Hercules Buffoon*, due to its combination of a farcical plot and one that recalls the elements of romance or melodrama.

This kind of hybridising can be regarded as Lacy’s attempt to introduce new elements in a genre which in the first two decades had depended almost exclusively (and perhaps excessively) on physical action and sexual innuendo for the sake of laughter. That farce was in need of some refurbishing may be perceived in Edward Ravenscroft’s and Aphra Behn’s attempts to bring in the format of the Italian *commedia dell’arte* with his *Scaramouch a Philosopher, Harlequin a School-Boy, Bravo, Merchant and Magician* (1677) and her *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687), and also in the movement toward the supernatural in some of the farcical plays written in the 1680s (e.g. Nahum Tate’s *A Duke and No Duke*, 1685; and Thomas Jevon’s *The Devil of a Wife*, 1686). These may seem to diverge from Lacy’s line of work; but they all display some commonality in that they offer new types of engagement with the audiences, blending laughter with other kinds of emotional response. The immersion in a world of magic and fantasy may have added some thrill to laughter, as the plays toyed with the projection of certain fantasies (predominantly, with the fantasy of becoming—if only temporarily—someone above one’s social rank, as in *A Duke and No Duke* and *The Devil of a Wife*); and the occasional inclusion of devils, ghosts and other more or less surprising effects may have induced some fearful response as well (e.g. in *The*

Life and Death of Dr Faustus). Even though fear might seem to be somewhat contradictory with the main goal of farce, it may be played as a complement when the fearful situation is resolved into a pleasurable outcome (see the section below). Lacy's option is somewhat more radical. The existence of a serious plot with clear melodramatic overtones is not intended to stand as a parodic addition to the farce. As long as it is held that Fidelity and Mariana are truly conspirators and then murderers, the audience are forced to respond to situations which seem to be inconsistent with the nature of farce and evolve in ways which resist easy accommodation into any recognizable narrative pattern.

The audience's discomfort would have been intensified by the fact that the kind of situation to which they had to respond was quite exceptional in the recent history of the Restoration stage. Although there were dramatic precedents in which false information is given about characters and events, in most of them the audience would have no awareness of any inconsistency or oddity until the truth is revealed. This is the case of a number of Jacobean and Caroline plays which featured the final discovery of false identities, catalogued by Victor Freeburg (1915) as "disguise plays." Ben Jonson's *Epicoene* (1609) is credited to be the first in the line; after it there came a long succession of plays in which there is an unexpected turn in a character's identity, to the extent that it became a conventional (and perhaps not entirely surprising) resource in Jacobean and Caroline romance, and also in early Restoration plays belonging to this genre.

The plays in which audience deception also leads to difficulties in accommodating that false information are much scarcer. The false death of Hermione (and her supposed resuscitation by Paulina) in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (ca. 1610) comes to mind as an early illustration of both the situation and the effects upon its audience and as an early precedent of what takes place in *Sir Hercules Buffoon*. With her death, the play seemingly ceases to be a comedy and the audience are forced to change their mood and their expectations in order to adapt themselves to what must lead into a tragic dénouement; but puzzlement and tension are also possible, if it was perceived that there is no confirming evidence of a shift to the tragic mode, and if the spectators were accordingly unable to accommodate the death of a central character in the context of a comedy.⁶ More distressing situations are provided in stories of seemingly incestuous relationships, from Fletcher's *A King and No King* (1611) to Aphra Behn's *The Dutch Lover* (1673), as audiences are forced to expect resolutions which must involve some kind of punishment for such a capital sin (the lovers are brother and sister), even if at the same time they find evidence that leads to other, less clearly foreseeable but more desirable, alternatives (the lovers truly love one another and should enjoy their love).

John Lacy himself had made an early attempt to provoke the audience's failure to accommodate specific situations in *The Old Troop*. Throughout most of the play, the spectators are aware that two of the central characters, Dol Troop and Tell-Troth, share a secret that they do not care to disclose either to other characters or to the audience. In this particular case, the author played with suspense by resorting to non-information. In *Sir Hercules Buffoon*, Lacy adopted a more daring type of deception. As in *The Old Troop*, he allowed Mariana and Fidelity to keep relevant information to themselves; but by doing so they also maintain the lie before both the rest of the characters and the audience.

6. The situation in *The Winter's Tale* is often discussed in essays on the play. Detailed analyses can be found in Bertrand Evans (1960: 289–315), Bruce McIver (1979), and A. P. Riemer (1987–88).

In all the examples mentioned here, the effects of deception are somehow balanced by a resolution that restores order both in the plot-lines and in the performance and thus releases the tension that the audience may have suffered until then. Paulina's "miraculous" resuscitation of Hermione at the end of *The Winter's Tale* brings the events back into the comic mode; and the final discovery of the siblings' true relationship in Fletcher's *A King and No King* and Behn's *The Dutch Lover* (the lovers are in fact not brother and sister) permits a pleasurable resolution. Likewise, the events in *Sir Hercules Buffoon* are brought to a happy end after the disclosure of the truth. This occurs not without some additions to the tension, however, caused by further though minor cases of deception: Sir Marmaduke pretends to repent and then stabs Mariana, who is carried away as if she was dead; then, eventually, she reappears, but she still refuses to marry Lord Armingier, until she is deceived and persuaded by him into accepting his proposal. None of these lies are known to be such by the audience until the truth is disclosed by the flow of events or by the characters themselves. But then, at last, the spectators are placed on more stable and familiar grounds, and their anxiety and even the possible feeling of unpleasantness at being deceived can be washed away by the realization that, after all, everything ends as it should, that is, as would have been expected in a play that started as a farce and continued as a farce, despite its strangely hybrid nature. Dramatic tension is thus used as the means to enhance the final release of pleasure brought about by the happy ending.

5. The Farceur and His Audience

In his essay on Restoration and eighteenth-century farce, Leo Hughes stated that "[t]he chief, even the exclusive, business of farce is to stimulate the risibilities of the audience" (1959: 19). Laughter is, however, but the physiological expression of an underlying yet at times neglected goal, the release of pleasure, which in turn is the means for a further goal: to facilitate a condition which, for lack of a better term, could be called a rapport, a pleasurable feeling of belonging to a community shared by spectator and author. This sense of belonging may be based on just the mutual share of pleasure; hence the definition of the whole process as a game played by both author and spectator or reader, by critics from Roger Caillois (1961) to Wolfgang Iser (1989, 1993). As the latter has asserted, "authors play games with readers, and the text is the playground" (1989: 250). This is particularly so in drama, as Laura Giannetti has pointed out in a recent essay on the functions of the "gioco" (game) in Italian Renaissance drama: "the pleasure of the *gioco* becomes an imaginative and innovative moment not just for the characters of the comedy but often for the audience as well, providing an explicit central moment of contact between the stage and the audience" (2001: 58). This contact is perhaps more intense in farce, since it is based on the audience's acceptance that the rules of the game are exclusively dramatic (that is, they have little or no bearing with the world outside the stage), due to the unrealistic nature of the events and situations involved. Henderson's reference to the audience's awareness of the duality of the worlds of play and playhouse in his analysis of Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* finds its full implication in this context.

The achievement of this emotional rapport is rooted in the confidence on the part of the spectator (or reader) that the author will always operate according to pre-agreed compositional rules. This is a necessary premise in the participation of the reader in the

process of literary communication; but it applies more aptly when there is a prior acquaintance between author and reader, above all when this acquaintance also involves physical contact, as in dramatic performances; and it reaches its highest condition in those instances in which, on top of the previous conditions, author and actor are the same person. The role of the farceur in the manner developed by John Lacy during the first two decades of the Restoration is a very suitable illustration of these conditions, especially when he impersonated characters created by himself. As Katherine Scheil has commented with respect to Lacy's adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, "[f]or a Restoration audience, John Lacy's presence in the title role of *Sauny the Scott* would have overshadowed other appeals the play may have had for modern readers . . . Theatrical evidence shows that Lacy's original audiences would have been drawn to the theatre simply for a chance to catch the most popular comic actor of the day in a featured role" (1997: 66).

But the true scope of the spectator's confidence in the farceur lies in the freedom he is allowed throughout the performance. As Leo Hughes stated, in order to elicit laughter, farce "must be fitful, full of shifts and surprises" (1959: 21). If I may be allowed the pun, according to the compositional rules of the "game" of farce, surprises were to be expected (in a way, moreover, that did not happen in comedies or even in tragedies) but were to play with the unexpected, if the author intended them to have any surprising effects at all. Surprising behaviour on the part of the actor (with improvisations and other diversions from the script) and discoveries on the part of the author (with diversions from conventional plot-lines) are thus agreeable with the nature of farce. Lacy the actor was no doubt allowed to do so. With Lacy the author, this prerogative would extend to the introduction of means that could displace the audience from their position as mere recipients of information and puzzle them with "bizarre" situations. Moreover, if we take Bertrand Evans' description of dramatic practices once more into consideration, all deviations from the script could be regarded as so many appeals to the complicity of the audience, at the cost of those who were not familiar enough with Lacy (or any other farceur's) dramatic practices; and therefore as evidence of the existence of a select community of interests already shared by farceur and knowing audience.

The possibility of exclusion from the community could never be disregarded, as a matter of fact. After all, the confidence in the farceur's compliance with the rules of the game made the spectators dependent on him, and their awareness of this dependence may be used to undermine that confidence. This may develop into a state of tension, if the spectator fears that he or she may have been excluded by the author, or worse, that he or she has failed to comply with the requirements that participating in this narrative entails. As far as *Sir Hercules Buffoon* is concerned, the tension might seem to be somewhat justified: Lacy had been dead for three years, and as his role onstage had been taken by Joseph Haines (another popular comic actor, yet a different one)⁷ so too the general rules of cooperation between author and audience might have been modified by whoever had a hand in the final elaboration of the script. The pervasive presence of deception (both onstage and outside the playhouse) might after all condition the general framework of

7. Haines' relationship with the audiences was rather irregular. He had started his career with the King's Company in 1668, but from 1679 to 1684 he seems to have joined a company of strolling actors. His popularity would come after his participation in *Sir Hercules Buffoon* (Highfill 1973–93, Cameron 1970).

author-audience relationships. However, when he brings in a surprising resolution which is both unexpected and yet satisfies the audience's primary expectations, tension resolves into pleasure (though not necessarily into laughter); and the tension experienced adds a special zest to the pleasure of being finally confirmed as part of the community of author, actor and audience.

6. Conclusion

To some Restoration dramatists' disappointment, farce was an extremely popular genre. All kinds of people, from the apprentices to the king, were drawn by it to the playhouses. Its power of attraction puzzled its critics and placed them at odds to explain it. People like Dryden seemingly failed to see that farce, through its resort to shifts and surprises, could also appeal to a feeling of belonging to a community that laughed together. The controlling voice, whether it be the actor's or—through him—the author's, was the catalyst for such participation; hence their pre-eminence in the context of farce, and the value of those practices that contributed to break the conventional modes of dramatic communication: improvisations, asides, and other kinds of apparent diversion from the expected, played a significant role in enhancing the relationship between farceur and spectators, as they promoted specific kinds of response from them. The farce within the farce that the audience are invited to witness and, to a certain extent, participate in, during the performance of Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon*, served that purpose. In a different manner, the state of anxious uncertainty to which they are submitted during the performance of *Sir Hercules Buffoon* does so too, by forcing the audience to reconsider their expectations in the light of its hybrid and seemingly elusive generic classification, and by challenging but eventually confirming the grounds of their confidence in the author or actor. All these possibilities displace the audience from their usual, comfortable, and comparatively passive position, and bring to the surface the nature of drama as spectacle. But eventually, too, they lead the audience into the pleasurable sensations that come with belonging to a community which centred its attention on the stage, and above all on the position of the farceur.

Sir Hercules Buffoon was not as successful on the stage as Lacy's other plays.⁸ Langbaine attributed this to Lacy's absence from the stage at the time of its production: "I am confident had the author been alive to have grac'd it with his action, it cou'd not have fail'd of Applause" (1968: 318); but another reason may be found in the fact that Lacy dared to resort to narrative devices that required very specific conditions in order to operate properly. For readers and spectators today, the kind of deception applied in *Sir Hercules Buffoon* would seem rather unexceptional, as it has become a common resource in popular narrative and above all in film, from Alfred Hitchcock to David Mamet; but the evidence that it was a fairly radical attempt to play with the audience can be attested by the fact that it remained absent from the English stage (and indeed from all narrative) for quite some time after the Restoration. This is, ultimately, what makes Lacy's experiment the more remarkable.

8. *The London Stage* records only one performance of the play between 1684 and 1700 (van Lenep 1965: 327–28).

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