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A Critique of Exaggerated Libertinism in Thomas Shadwell's *The Libertine*

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Abstract: This article argues that *The Libertine* by Thomas Shadwell, one of the earliest examples of the Restoration comedies, has one of the pioneering roles in portraying the philosophy of the time's courtiers, libertinism. It is obviously seen in Shadwell's play that the characteristics of libertinism are not given entirely truly in this Don Juan adaptation, but rather in an exaggerated and criminalised way. In this light, the paper will first discuss the playwright's socio-political position during the upheaval of the Restoration of Charles II. Secondly, it will set out to explore the play's position in terms of its exemplary nature in the genre of comedy of manners. Last but not least, libertinism and its characteristics will be analysed through their illustration in the play by means of male characters, particularly Don John, the protagonist.

Keywords:

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Thomas Shadwell'in *The Libertine* Adlı Oyununda Abartılan Libertinizmin Bir Eleştirisi

Öz: Bu makale, Restorasyon dönemi komedilerinin ilk örneklerinden biri olan Thomas Shadwell'in *The Libertine* (Çapkın) adlı eserinin, dönemin saraylılarının felsefesi olan libertinizmi tasvir etmede öncü rollerden birine sahip olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Shadwell'in Don Juan uyarlaması olan bu oyununda libertinizmin özelliklerinin tamamen doğru bir şekilde verilmediği, daha ziyade abartılı ve kriminalize edilmiş bir şekilde yansıtıldığı açıkça görülmektedir. Bu bağlamda, makalede ilk olarak II. Charles'ın tahta çıkış dönemi sırasında oyun yazarının sosyo-politik konumu tartışılacaktır. Ardından, töre komedisi türündeki ilk örneklerden biri olması açısından oyunun tür içindeki konumu değerlendirilecektir. Son olarak, libertinizm ve özellikleri, oyundaki erkek karakterler, özellikle de başkarakter Don John üzerinden oyundaki tasvirler kullanılarak incelenecektir.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

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Libertinism, which began as a philosophy in continental Europe in the late fifteenth century and continued to get recalibrated in the subsequent centuries, has been the central theme of several plays in English, especially the comedies written and performed during the Restoration. One of the earliest examples to portray this philosophy is *The Libertine: A Tragedy* (1675) by Thomas Shadwell. Shadwell's portrayal of rakes like the courtiers around Charles II (1630–1685) in the play seems to do an injustice to the true precepts of libertinism, owing to the adapted nature of the work. As such, this paper aims first to provide an authorial background in relation to the socio-political dynamics of the Restoration era, pointing out the problematic nature of the play's genre. Finally, the article will discuss how libertinism is displayed in a highly exaggerated manner through the male characters' accumulating sensationalism by Shadwell.

Thomas Shadwell, in Wm. Hand Browne's critical biographical account, lived between 1640 and 1692, and studied law first at Caius College, Cambridge, and then in the Middle Temple (258–259). Coming from the gentry, he mostly benefited from his royalist family's boons, except for a limited period of financial setbacks that followed the Civil War (1642–1651) (Wheatley, "'Who'" 342). After his education for the bar, he embarked on the "Grand Tour" in which the young gentlemen of the time would travel in Europe through Germany, "Flanders, France, Switzerland, and the north of Italy" (Clark and Popkin 191). Such a European exploration signalled "economic and physical power" and therefore indicated the nobility's "cultural hegemony" (Thompson 387) since such young men would not only explore several countries, philosophies, politics, and customs but they would also get acquainted with the ways of the world for their future public and private affairs. Upon the restoration of Charles II in 1660, Shadwell, a witty and vivacious man of letters, was easily admitted into the circle of the Carolinian courtiers (Browne 260). John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester (1647–1680), for instance, compared the first poet laureate John Dryden (1631–1700) and Shadwell in terms of the qualities of their comedies and declared the latter and Wycherley as the "true Comedy" writers: "Of all our modern Wits, none seems to me / Once to have touch'd upon true Comedy, / But hasty Shadwell, and slow Wycherley" (Wilmot 41–43). In contrast to this praise, Rochester, as the epitome of the Restoration court wits, stated in his poem "Horace's Tenth Satire of the First Book, Imitated" that "Dryden's Rhimes / Are stolen, unequal, nay, dull, many Times" (Wilmot 1–2) and that his works needed to be "censure[d]" due to "his dull Pen" which could "Proceed from Want of Judgment, or of Wit" (Wilmot 88–90). In the end, Shadwell's court-supported writing career proliferated, largely because Dryden's conversion to and defence of Catholicism cost him the laureate position after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Soon after the enthronement of William III (1650–1702) and Mary II (1662–1694) as co-monarchs in 1689, Shadwell was appointed as the new poet laureate as a reward for his principally consistent support of the Whig cause during the Exclusion Crisis (1679–1681) (Hughes 139), anti-Catholic sentiments, and subtle satires of the Restoration wits in his works (Wheatley, *Drama* 460).

During the Restoration, Shadwell mostly wrote few serious dramas and several comedies adapted from both his homeland predecessors like William Shakespeare (1564–1616) and the continental playwrights like Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, Molière (1622–1673). However, Ben Jonson (1572–1637) was the one who influenced the playwright most, as Shadwell revered Jonson's theory of "humours" in defining one's true character in comedy. For example, his first comic play, *The Sullen Lovers* (1668), is mainly based on the Jonsonian comedy of humours. Later on, he bettered his understanding of humours in the next comedies *The Royal Shepherdess* (1699) and *The Humourists* (1670) (Browne 261–262). Accepted in the high court circles and gaining first-hand experience of the courtly manners and customs of the new elite, Shadwell turned out to be one of the first authors to pen the primary examples of the newly emerging Restoration comedy. However, one could still observe his admiration of the Jonsonian humours in such comedies of manners as *The Libertine* performed in June 1675, hence rendering it difficult for a critic to categorise the play under the same genre.

Following Jonson's footsteps, Shadwell took refuge in the patronage of the same gentleman as Jonson's, Prince William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Newcastle (c. 1593–1676), as seen in the dedication of *The Libertine*. With the above-mentioned support of the Earl of Rochester as well as of the Duke of Newcastle, he developed a compelling argument with Dryden over "the form and function of English comedy" (Cannan 23), in which Dryden defended the pure comedy of wit or manners and the other stood his grounds on the comedy of humours or at least a mix of them. In opposition to Dryden's emphasis on comedy's function as a matter of delight and amusement, Shadwell believed in the indispensability of moral didacticism in comedies (Corman 52–56; Cannan 23–24). Their debate, by means of their defences and attacks in the prefaces of their dramatic works, underlined two dominant comic theories of the time. Shadwell, addressing both theories, produced his version, mostly adaptation, of the Don Juan story for the stage, *The Libertine*, employing the elements of manners and humours, notwithstanding a hasty and careless style.

Before its premiere at the Dorset Garden Theatre in early June 1975 by the Duke's Company (Fisk xxi), *The Libertine* was written in a short time, as each of the first three acts was penned in no more than "five days" and the final two "were both written in four days" (Shadwell 5). Such short amounts of time to compose a dramatic work were highly preferred by the theatre companies and were regarded as important skills by theatre owners and dramatists since "slow writing is considered a mark of intellectual dullness" at the time (Fisk 334n26). Moreover, the short amount of playwriting is attributed to producing good comedies, as more serious genres such as satires and tragedies would require quite some time and elaboration, the lack of which Shadwell accused his rival Elkanah Settle (1648–1724) in the play's Preface (Shadwell 6), especially after Settle began to work for the same theatre, the Duke's, as Shadwell. Soon after this brief production period, the play immediately became a great theatrical success as it was "very well Acted, and got the Company great Reputation" and Don John, its eponymous libertine,

"perform'd by Mr. [Thomas] *Betterton* Crown'd the Play" (Downes qtd. in Fisk xxii; italics in the original). The playwright also states his pleasure in its success in Preface: "I have no reason to complain of the success of this play since it pleased those whom, of all the world, I would please most. Nor was the town unkind to it, for which reason I must applaud my good fortune to have pleased with so little pains" (5). Preferred as a favourite of the Restoration theatres until the end of the third decade in the eighteenth century (Ungerer 224), the play owed a great part of its triumph to depicting upper-middle-class manners and intrigues through its employment of the well-known conventions in Spanish cloak and sword plays: "the Spanish setting and names, the mistaken identities and nocturnal rendezvous, the duels, the young woman disguised as a man and [a young woman] pursuing her faithless lover, the loquacious and cowardly servant participating reluctantly in his master's dangerous intrigues" (Ungerer 225). Yet again, these conventions do not suffice to label the work as one example of such plays since *The Libertine* also includes the elements of a "comi-tragic play" (Owen 131), "a horror play, . . . a black comedy" (Wheatley, "'Who'" 345), and a comedy of manners.

Preface, as much as proving the play's success, clarifies this amalgamation of genres. Shadwell borrowed so many elements from *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (*The Trickster of the Seville and the Stone Guest*, 1630) by Tirso de Molina (1579–1648) and changed de Molina's tragic plot of Don Juan story. It is also assumed that Shadwell saw the Don Juan plays performed in Paris during his Grand Tour. Gustav Ungerer explains that Italian actors performed *Il Convitato di pietra* (*The Feast with the Statue*, 1658), an Italian adaptation by Giacinto Andrea Cicognini, and it gathered a great amount of attention from the time's young gentlemen (222). Quite a lot of French versions and adaptations were also produced by many playwrights including Molière. He explicates this chain of sources in Preface: "It was first put into a Spanish play, . . . the Spaniards having a tradition, which they believe, of such a vicious Spaniard as is represented in this play. From them the Italian comedians took it, and from them the French took it, and four several French plays were made upon the story" (5). Accepting the diversions he made in this new Don Juan story, he expects "the readers will excuse the irregularities of the play when they consider that the extravagance of the subject forced me to it. And I had rather try new ways to please than to write on in the same road, as too many do" (5). Additionally, he maintains that "the extravagance of the subject" renders it challenging to decide the genre of the play because it incorporates music and theatrical machinery on a great scale as well as "slapstick humour" and "chilling scenes of violence and degradation" (Fisk xxii). Due to "its furiously unstable tone," it is sometimes seen as a "dark comedy" (Neill 128), a "sober-faced burlesque" (Hume 312) or a "morally instructive mock-tragedy" whose often-omitted subtitle might suggest (Jaffe 57). Shadwell is perfectly conscious of his amalgamation as he states in Prologue: "The most irregular play upon the stage, / As wild and as extravagant as the age" (15–16). However, the play is regarded as an example of the Restoration comedy of manners in its

employment of English upper-class manners and the philosophy of the era with an infuriating and hyperbolic theatricality.

Before delving into an analysis of the play's twisted portrayal of libertinism, one might benefit from a basic outline of its plot. *The Libertine* opens out on a street in Seville before the houses of Don John and Maria. The three gentlemen, Don John, Don Lopez and Don Antonio, are introduced along with their so-called libertine philosophy. The trio is solely in pursuit of pleasure at the expense of other people's lives, for which Jacomo, Don John's would-be servant, is in distress due to his worries about his own association with the gentlemen's evil deeds and the probable conventional punishment that would ensue. A series of atrocities are revealed here: Don Lopez's murder of his elder brother; Don Antonio's raping and impregnating his own sisters; and Don John's killing Don Pedro, the Governor of Seville, and plotting his own father's murder. Not having enough of these horrendous deeds, they keep on feeding their evil greed even further, hence strengthening their criminal records. When they go for another mischief, Leonora, the faithful lover of the protagonist, arrives to look for Don John. Although she learns Don John's true character from Jacomo who offers himself as a perfect lover-substitute to Leonora, she insists on being loyal to the rake. In the subsequent scene, Don John murders Don Octavio in order to seduce his beloved Maria. Then, disguising himself in his victim's cloak, he tricks Maria and gets into her private chamber. Upon his identity's revelation, he slays Maria's brother and servants who have come to defend the lady's honour. In the second act, the six wives of Don John are introduced in a comic chaos, each insisting on being called the 'true' wife of the libertine. However, in a series of rapid events, one of them commits suicide to protect herself against Don Antonio's and Don Lopez's attempts at raping her, and the rest flee. Don Antonio and Don Lopez bring an old woman to ravish upon Don John's watch and command. Meanwhile, Maria, demanding revenge after her losses, has hired some assassins who beset the libertine's house. Despite the number of assassins, the Dons are triumphant and run to a ship which would be sunk by a storm and a fire later. In the third act, saving themselves with a lifeboat, the trio reaches a shore in Seville again. In the next act, they seduce Clara and Flavia, the daughters of Don Francisco, who has hosted them as guests at his lodge after the shipwreck, kill the host, and wound the bridegrooms on the eve of their weddings. Don John poisons Leonora to death who has come after him out of love. While escaping from Don Francisco's house, they beat off a group of shepherds and shepherdesses, and rape one of the herdswomen. Finally, hiding in the convent where Clara and Flavia have taken refuge, they try to reach these young girls by setting the convent on fire. In the last act, Don John blasphemes in spite of Don Pedro's statue's revival and demand of repentance, only to be blatantly turned down by him. After the demonstration of some demons waiting for them, his two acolytes are plunged down to hell with the earth loudly cracking for the effect. Even the descent of his two companions into hell cannot make him repent. True to his twisted ideal, without any sign of guilty conscience, and indifferent to the threatening thunderbolts, he sinks into hell in the company of the devils.

The Libertine, as can be seen from its plot, rightly falls under the category of the Restoration comedy of manners, which, for Ashley H. Thorndike, has "its chief interest . . . in the exhibition of the habits, manners, and customs of the society of the time" (259). It provides a vivid, though exaggerated, illustration of the period following the enthronement of Charles II as the English monarch in 1660 after the pseudo-Republican era (1649–1660) of Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658). The early examples of the comedy of manners like Thomas Shadwell's *The Libertine* provided a philosophical basis for the atmosphere and content of the genre, before the full representation of the Restoration way of life on the stage by means of the plays such as *The Country Wife* (1675), *The Man of Mode or, Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676), and *The Luckey Chance, or an Alderman's Bargain* (1686) respectively by William Wycherley (c. 1641–1716), Sir George Etherege (c. 1636–c. 1692), and Aphra Behn (c. 1640–1689). Almost all these playwrights, with regard to their individual patronage and ties with the court, both praised and satirised the gentlemen's and ladies' wits and social dealings in their quotidian affairs and official relations.[1] Earl of Rochester was the most popular centre of praise and critique as in the period *The Libertine* was written in, when he – drunk and insolent – upset the king due to his imprudence and destroyed the king's sundial "which stood in the middle of the Privie [Gard]ing" and "esteemed the rarest in Europ" (John Oldham qtd. in Zimbardo 70). For the sake of representing the court as it was, the characters in these comedies were based on real-life courtiers and hence displayed the philosophical ideology of the Restoration shared by the members of the "Court Wits" like Rochester, George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham (1628–1687), Sir Charles Sedley (1639–1701), and Charles Sackville (1643–1706), namely libertinism.

Libertinism has pejoratively been associated with the liberal sexual actions of the elite Restoration gentlemen, perhaps rightly because of their unexemplary lifestyles since the second half of the seventeenth century. In its foundation, however, lies a philosophy that derived several principles from Renaissance scepticism, classical naturalism, (neo)Epicureanism, and Hobbism (Bozer 225–226). "Libertine" as a term was first used to indicate someone with "free-thinking or antinomian opinion" in 1563 (Mintz 134) and was closely linked to the denial of "the truth and relevance of Scripture" during the Protestant Reformation (Turner 78). At the beginning of the seventeenth century, two significant continental figures enabled the term to gain its notorious meaning: the Italian philosopher Lucilio Vanini (1585–1619) and the French poet Théophile de Viau (1590–1626). Both men rejected the scholastic doctrines of Catholicism and challenged the notion of the soul's immortality; yet, such rejections and challenges were outright blasphemies due to their undermining the long-established institutions such as social classes, law, government, family, and marriage (Novak 55). For them, these institutions were artificially constructed, hypocritical, and hindered human senses and bodies from

[1] Some Restoration woman writers like Aphra Behn even destabilized the hedonistic ways of life in the Restoration patriarchal order in their plays, just as their male counterparts did by means of their female characters in the plays (Canfield 216–218; Karabulut 99–101).

providing themselves with the pure pleasure they sought. Such a transformation from a nonconformist religious meaning to a secularly sensational ideology has brought to life further connotations and terms such as "the Priapean, the spark or ranter, the roaring blade, the jovial atheist, the cavalier, the sensualist, the rake, the murderous upper-class hooligan, the worldly fine gentleman, the debauchee, the beau, the man of pleasure, and even the 'man of sense'" (Turner 77–78). This vagueness in its definition fundamentally prevents its simple equation with illicit and irresponsible sexuality; rather, the term might be argued to refer to "merely a person of loose morals" (Underwood 10).

In its protest character, libertinism relied on "the self-aware, philosophically oriented practice of more or less sexualized freedom" (Cryle and O'Connell 2), and hence defied Puritanical structures of private relations and nuptial principles. Similarly, when Puritanism was closely linked with the Whig Parliamentarians, this philosophy directly aligned itself with the royalists. Much influenced by "typified continental thinking," it merged "scepticism with materialism" (Fisk xiii). For the libertines, humans were imperfect, and therefore any social and political institution they structured was doomed to bear the markings of the same imperfection. Reviewing its (anti)religious foundations during the Restoration, Maximilian E. Novak underscores its rejection of artificiality in the above-mentioned social conventions and then its elevation of bodily experiences and senses (55). With its nature disapproving of the strictness imposed by the sentimentalist belief system, libertinism was thought to "infiltrate the popular culture" (Fisk xvi) as soon as it began to echo in the utterances and attitudes of the re-established members of the formerly exiled aristocracy.

The opening lines in *The Libertine* portray these essential assumptions concerning the libertine code of manners embraced by the protagonist, Don John. "Thus far" in their lives, he declares, "we have enjoyed / Our prosp'rous pleasures, which dull fools call sins" and "Laughed at old feeble judges and weak laws" that originated in the notion of "conscience / Which serves for nothing but to make men cowards" (I.i.1–4). He has come together with Don Lopez and Don Antonio to expose their gruel past deeds along with their worldview. For the trio, conscience contradicts human nature which is supposed to stem purely from one's senses: "Nature gave us our senses, which we please, / Nor does our reason war against our sense. / By nature's order, sense should guide our reason" (I.i.28–30). Their verbal exchanges elaborately capture the gist of a Christianised version of ancient natural philosophers' – Epicurus's (341–240 BCE) and Lucretius's (c. 99–c. 55 BCE) – hedonistic schools of thought. Their ideas of atomism and empiricism were linked to Christianity by the French philosopher Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655) who later founded neo-Epicureanism. Declaring "there is nothing in the intellect which has not been in the senses" (qtd. in Wentworth de Witt 356), he explains that experience one can attain through senses is more valuable than acts based on reason. Other than such continental thoughts that the Dons seem to have embraced, their utterances remind the audience of a native voice, that of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). Life, as Hobbes details in *Leviathan* (1651), finds its meaning in one's pursuit of desires and pleasure (34).

While uttering their convictions, the play's libertines also declare war against the Puritans whom they call "dull" or "melancholy fools" in "the dull slavery of pupillage" (I.i.2, 12, 23). Objecting to the ideals of the past, also in the theatrical sense, the Dons even call Jacomo the servant a "phlegmatic coxcomb" with "neither courage not yet wit enough / To sin," when he tries to warn them (I.i.41, 42–43). Such insults toward the believers in the puritanical sentiments of conscience and piety represent the Restoration phenomenon of the courtiers: Both the court and the theatre would revive old norms of socio-politics, and their collaboration referred to a political statement for the re-establishment of royalist ideologies influenced by the continent. Thus, the Restoration theatre, as a class-conscious platform, served its target class in a congenial manner to uphold their manners and philosophical tendencies (Rosenthal 6–7). For Don John, most likely an exaggerated depiction of Rochester who embraced the libertine way of living, the senses "emphasised pleasure and sensual experience over abstract, arbitrary ideals" (Webster, *Performing* 63) such as reason, honour, piety, conscience, and repentance. For Hobbes too, humans are unable to control their desires through such abstract notions related to reason. Right and wrong are total psychological concoctions fabricated by humans to exploit non/human resources around them to their delight, and that is why they differ from one society to another (Montgomery 83). Hobbes argues in *Leviathan*:

> But whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth good; and the object of his hate and aversion, evil; and of his contempt, vile and inconsiderable. For these words of good, evil, and contemptible are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and nothing absolutely so; nor any common rule of good and evil to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the person of the man. (35)

Hence, "good" and "evil" are determined by the use-values humans employ through reasoning. On the contrary, the senses, "the only admissible source of knowledge" (Wilcoxin 192), bring out the ultimate gain, pleasure. Therefore, experience directed by senses in pursuit of desires is the only way of life for the libertines. In this course, such a pursuit is "creative, life-giving, vital" (Birdsall 37). By the same token, the Dons in the play consider their actions as a quest to attain pleasure at the expense of their lives and for the sake of their pleasures while "sense should guide [their] reason" (I.i.30). Then, they declare Don John a "very civil person, a man of honour" (II.i.387) and their "oracle" (I.i.20) who has been a proselytizer of libertinism for the other two. With him in the lead, they become the "fashionable gentlemen of the age" (I.i.47).

The play's first scene aims to portray a gushing outburst of libertinism in its most extravagant form, even beyond what Hobbes might have imagined regarding such actualisation in life or on stage. Declaring this extravagance, Don John addresses the ones around him about how to spend their lives:

> Let's on and live the noble life of sense.
> To all the powers of love and mighty lust,
> . . .

> What ways soe'er conduce to my delight,
> My sense instructs me, I must think 'em right. (I.i.143–144, 146–147)

In their "noble sense of life," their pleasure principle is that "There is no right or wrong but what conduces to or hinders pleasure" (I.i.125–126). Relying on this principle, Don John has a long list of criminal records like "Some thirty murders, rapes innumerable, frequent sacrilege, parricide" (I.i.121–122). Believing that "the pursuit of pleasure is a worthy activity in and of itself," these libertines argue that "pleasure allows us to experience and experience gives one greater knowledge" (Webster, *"This"* 18). They might fight against any economic, social, or institutional structure that might chain them down whereas they could not help but exploit their aristocratic advantages in their pursuit of pleasurable experiences. They use their educated verbosity to convince women like Leonora who says in Don John's praise, "How eloquent were all his words and actions!" (I.i.179–180) and "His person and his parts are excellent" (I.i.181). He confirms this advantageous manipulation in the next act when he responds to Leonora's accusations: "Pish, 'tis nothing but a way of speaking which young, amorous fellows have gotten" (II.i.83–84). Their gentlemanly manners also guarantee them a safe house after the shipwreck when "Don Francisco, a rich and hospitable man" identifies them as "cavaliers" (III.ii.41–42, 130). They regard fashionable speech and personal interactions merely as a "game" or instruments to empower their "adventure" (I.i.283, 284), so much so that they kill Don Octavio just to forcefully possess his beloved Maria.

Consonant with their pleasure pursuit, the libertines regard marriage as "another burdensome, ill-conceived practice to be avoided at all costs" (Novak 55) and "a mercenary and social affair" (Barnard 8). The libertine rakes avoid the marital precepts and impositions made by the elderly who were less capable of experiencing senses than those libertine youths. Along with the pleasure principle, Hobbes's notion of "good" and "evil" can be traced in Don John's exploits of his 'harem.' Upon his six wives' simultaneous arrival at his home, Don John tries to get rid of them by offering them to his two fellows, Don Antonio and Don Lopez. The epithalamium cherished by these men repeats the same hedonistic chants:

> But the silly, fond animal, man,
> Makes laws 'gainst himself, which his appetites sway;
> Poor fools, how unhappy are they?
> . . .
> . . . I'll live like a man,
> Who, by nature, is free to enjoy all he can.
> Wise nature does teach
> More truth than fools preach[.] (2.1.280–283, 296–299; italics removed)

Their disbelief in and ridicule of the credibility of the marriage institution also resonates staunchly all throughout Clara's and Flavia's lines before their wedding day. The two sisters, potential female libertines, become the mouthpiece of libertinism when they condemn their arranged marriages since a "Spanish wife has a worse life than a cooped chicken" or a "singing bird in a cage" (III.ii.250–251, 252). Then, they express their envy

for ladies in England where, according to their imaginations, "wives run and ramble whither and with whom they please and defy all censure" (III.ii.264–265). Their image of nuptial relations in England does not actually coincide with the case of all the women in England but rather echoes Shadwell's satirical perception of court affairs and a libertine's defamatory liaisons with married women. When the sisters see potential English husbands as "the prettiest, civil, easy, good-natured, indifferent persons in the whole world," their wedding day as their "execution day," and the wedding vow as a "curse" (III.ii.272–273, 245, 317), they are unaware that the three Dons – also Spanish but suiting their ideals – will become the cause of their forthcoming familial destruction.

Alongside marriage, the rakes define religion with its "phlegmatic coldness" (II.i.126). Unlike Epicurus, Lucretius, and Hobbes, they declare all authority illegitimate and "parasitic on man's fear of freedom" rather than challenging their falsities (Chernaik 25). In contrast to Hobbesian reverence before God's unconceivable "greatness" and "power" to be honoured by humans (19), the Dons are completely sceptical about religion and eventually disregard the presence of a divine being. Hence, Don John as their cult leader becomes the epitome of the most common atheist archetype toward the end of the play. Turning into "a youthful villain" or "an artist of destruction" who individually shapes his own life and, at the same time, destroys those of the others in pursuit of his own "sinful" pleasures (Ungerer 229), Don John frequents churches to commit murder or theft (I.i.114–115), rapes and wounds nuns (I.i.117–119), and eventually sets "fire on the nunnery" (V.i.44) to abduct Clara and Flavia who has confined themselves there for repentance. He cannot stand Jacomo's prayers like "Heaven bless us!" (I.i.91) and even offends the helpful Hermit by asking him to find them "a whore, a fine, young buxom whore," upon their immediate landing on the shore (III.ii.63). Hermit's confusion upon their request is the outcome of the conflict of their appearance with their real nature. He affirms they are gentlemen "by their outsides," yet he adds that "their insides declared them devils" (III.ii.174–175). As much as they deny any religious authority, they do not believe in the act of repentance which, to them, is for "Cowards and fools" (I.i.102). Even when they are thunderstruck (III.i.48–51), or when they see Don John's father's ghost warning them to repent (II.iii.84–90) and Don Pedro's statue's coming alive in the last act, they prefer to ignore these heavenly admonitions. Dedicated to blasphemy, murder, and rape, such libertines deem being hanged "an honour," which fops like Jacomo "will ne'er have courage to deserve." (I.i.61–62). For such reasons, Don John is described as "the first that ever set up a religion to the devil" by his servant (II.i.6–7).

Don John's actions, as well as Jacomo's description of his master, suggest that the libertine ideals are not Don John's guide, but his cruel sense of nature and his phallus-centred pleasure: "If he were to live here [in Seville] one month longer, he would marry half the town, ugly and handsome, old and young" (I.i.194–195) just as he "has married six within this month and promised fifteen more, all whom he has enjoyed and left" (I.i.205–206). Don John's courage transforms into a series of acts of arrogance imitated by his sidekicks. In their company, he seeks and finds pleasure in the variety of sins. When

confronted, they put the blame on the shoulders of nature which has created them as such: "Our constitutions tell us one thing and yours another; and which must we obey? If we be bad, 'tis nature's fault that made us so" (III.ii.110–112). Obviously, these men have the characteristics of libertine men in Restoration comedies which appear in their fully-developed forms as Dorimant in *The Man of Mode*, Horner in *The Country Wife*, and Gayman in *The Luckey Chance*. Nonetheless, they confuse the means and ends while seeking a life of pleasure and demonstrate "the absurdity of fashionable hedonism" (Wheatley, "'Who'" 346) at its extreme. Through these anti-rationalist rakes, Shadwell shows that the "misuse of reason results from man's inability to reconcile the conflict between reason and nature" (Mulcahy 77). Violating socio-political, familial, and religious conventions, the Dons are given an exaggerated portrayal of libertinism which excels through their festive modes of murder, sacrilege, and parricide.

On the whole, Shadwell's libertines are one-dimensional and almost like caricatures in *The Libertine* of the others in the court. The play might be providing defences of expiation and Christianity; however, these defences remain, indeed, much weaker and shorter than the praises for the twisted libertinism. Rather, it highlights the libertine sceptic worldview of the era. While doing so, the playwright grotesquely embellishes the libertines in numerous crimes and extends his strong satirical statement that is performed in front of the same coterie who used to visit theatres to watch themselves acted on the stage. In terms of genre, one cannot certainly find particular characteristics of a Restoration comedy of manners in *The Libertine* like the sensible couple, which is briefly hinted at by the relationship of Maria and Don Octavio—but no more, the fast-paced series of intrigues, and a sub-plot. The libertine couple is also absent in the play because no female character is equal to the wit and manners of Don John. On the other hand, the five-act structure of the play, the ample use of disguises in very few simple intrigues, and foppish characters like Jacomo make the play fit in the early oeuvre of such genre works at the onset of the Restoration comedy. Thus, more like a transitional comedy between humours and manners, *The Libertine* demonstrates the common ideals of the Restoration aristocracy that imported these ideals specifically from the Continent, albeit in a highly hyperbolic manner. Therefore, a foreign setting is integral to its emphasis on the chasm between the Commonwealth morality of the Puritan past and the Royal novelty of the libertine present at that time. The play alerts the audience/readers to the beginnings of a new era seething with scepticism, sensations, sensuality, and entertainment which would inevitably bring horror to the faithful ones of the time.

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