

# Dramaturgy and the Plausible Wonder in Restoration Fiction, 1660–1670<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:**

Mackenzie's roman-à-clef *Aretina* (1660) seems to foresee or, indeed, to capture the reopening of theatres when, at the end of Book 1, a group of actors present a monster (and a show) "upon a stage, whereon the Commedians used to act," and the narrator subsequently summarises the performance taking place on the palace's neglected stage. Nevertheless, the reopening of theatres had little or no immediate influence on the new English prose fiction published in the 1660s. As far as prose fiction is concerned, scholarly criticism about the Restoration theatre–novel interface addresses the period after—not before—1670. Yet, if areas of intersection are investigated, then a spectrum of quite different, isolated instances will emerge; from Margaret Cavendish's remarks on her contemporary plays to events inspired by theatrical contrivances. This article therefore seeks to explore the presence of theatre and dramaturgy in the new English fiction published in the early years of the Restoration. The first part offers a comprehensive survey of theatrical thumbprints in this corpus of texts by considering the issues raised in literary criticism on the topic, such as dialogues, epistles and soliloquies, historical novels and first-person narratives. The second part pinpoints the episodes in high romances where wonder is no longer caused by magic, enchantment or any other supernatural intervention, but arises from calculated staging effects and devices. Authors of romances in the early years of the Restoration period contributed to the development of the English novel by making the moments of wonder more spectacular for characters, and more credible for readers, in line with the emerging scientific culture.

**Keywords:** English novel; Restoration fiction (1660–1670); Theatre; Wonder

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Theatre became a decisive influence in the formation of the English novel at the end of the seventeenth century. Paul Salzman has remarked that William Congreve's *Incognita* (1692) "produces the effect of watching a play" (1985, 336), and, indeed, in the preface, Congreve himself claimed to have pioneered a new kind of novel when he resolved "to imitate Dramatick Writing, namely, in the Design, Contexture and Result of the Plot" (1692, A6v). More recently, Gerd Bayer has discussed the theatrical influence in novels such as *Peppa, or The Reward of Constant Love* (1689) and *Alcander and Philocrates* (1696), among other works published in the late seventeenth century (2016, 156). However, three decades earlier, drama and fiction had stood worlds apart. The 1660s was a decade of transition in many respects. As far as fiction is concerned, it was characterised by the persistence of established genres, but also by intense experimentation. Salzman has succinctly summarised that "the anti-romance, the picaresque novel, and the last of the long heroic romances, all jostled for attention" (1985, 308), while James Grantham Turner has celebrated the "fascinating experiments with the romance genre, [...] and a general move towards realism, loosely defined" (2017, 73). Nevertheless, in response to the question of whether the reopening of the theatres had an immediate impact on the new British fiction of the 1660s, the reasonable answer would be negative. This can be demonstrated by the fact that scholarly studies of the Restoration theatre-fiction interface take into account narrative works published after—not before—1670, coinciding with the beginning of Aphra Behn's career, while the 1660s' literary texts mentioned in academic discussions are plays, not the fiction of the decade, which remains largely unexplored (despite notable exceptions such as Richard Head, Margaret Cavendish and Henry Neville) and at times completely ignored. This explains the lack of secondary bibliography on this particular matter. Nonetheless, if areas of intersection between drama and fiction are examined, a spectrum of very different, albeit occasional, instances can be identified. This article explores possible debts to, or the imprints of, theatre and dramatic art in the new English fiction published from 1660 to 1670. It offers a comprehensive survey by considering explicit or indirect references to theatre and dramaturgy, as well as the presence or lack of certain issues discussed by Jenny Davidson in her "Restoration Theatre and the Novel" (2017), a recent approach to the topic (though it still exclusively focuses on prose fiction published after 1670). The final part will pinpoint the remarkable incidents of wonder in heroic romances produced by means of dramaturgy or displaying a great dramatic intensity.

The corpus of the new fiction originally written in English and published between 1660 and 1670 comprises 37 titles according to the catalogue produced by Robert Letellier in 1997 (based on previous compilations). He included for the first time Margaret Cavendish's *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664)

and John Bunyan's spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666). While Cavendish's letters do not create an epistolary story, they do sometimes contain short narrative sketches. Bunyan's first narrative lies on the border between truth and fiction, an ontological status shared with criminal biographies and Mary Frith's pseudo-autobiography, albeit that they are quite different in style, matter and purpose. The corpus—though small—attests to the impressive variety of genres and generic hybridity that characterise Restoration fiction, as Bayer has noted (2016, esp. 1–52). The 37 texts of the corpus include examples of twelve of the twenty-five generic categories Salzman has proposed to typify the fiction published in Britain in the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> Although his classification remains valid, he sometimes emphasises a particular feature of a given text in ascribing it to a certain category, though not dismissing the possibility that it could be located in other categories. In his discussion, Salzman himself mentions some texts as examples of another subgenre. This is the case with *Eliana*, classified as a Sidneian romance but also as qualifying as a heroic romance, while *The English Lovers* is labelled as picaresque but also used to illustrate the impure romance. Salzman includes *The Memoires of Monsieur du Vall* in the category of Restoration novel, though he also counts it as a criminal

2 The new English fiction of the 1660s was classified by Salzman into the following categories: Sidneian Romance: anonymous [Pordage's] *Eliana* (1661). Political/Allegorical Romance: Howell's *The Parly of Beasts* (1660), Mackenzie's *Aretina* (1660), Herbert's *The Princess Cloria* (1661). Religious Allegory: Ingelo's *Bentivolio and Urania* (1660). Didactic Fiction: Burton's *The History of Eriander* (1661), Howard's *The History of the Seven Wise Mistresses of Rome* (1663), Brathwaite's *The History of Moderation* (1669), Preston's *Angliae Speculum Morale [...] with the Life of Theodatus and Three Novels* (1670). French Heroic Romances: Boyle's *Parthenissa* (1651–1656, 1669). An English romance closely imitating the French heroic romances). Criminal Biography: *The Life and Death of Mrs Mary Frith* (1662), *The Life and Death of James ... Turner* (1663), *The Triumph of Truth* (1664). Imaginary Voyage/ Utopia/ Satire: Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666), Neville's *The Isle of Pines* (and *A New and Further Discovery of the Isle of Pines*) (1668). Picaresque Fiction: *The Practical Part of Love* (1660), Dauncey's *The English Lovers* (1661/1662), Head and Kirkman's *The English Rogue* (1665), Croke's *Fortune's Uncertainty* (1667). Popular Chivalric Romance: *Guy Earl of Warwick* (1661). Anti-Romance: *Don Samuel Crispe* (1660), Flatman's *Don Juan Lamberto* (1661), *Sir Firedrake* (1663). 'Impure' Romance: Crowne's *Pandion and Amphigenia* (1665). Restoration Novel: Pope's *The Memoires of Monsieur du Vall* (1670). Popular Non-Chivalric Fiction: *The Noble Birth and Gallant Achievements of Robin Hood* (1662), *The Pleasant and Delightful History of Floridon and Lucina* (1663), Head's *The Life and Death of Mother Shipton* (1667), Winstanley's *The Honour of the Merchant-Taylors* (1668), *The Life and Death of Rosamund* (1670). The category of continental romances does not, obviously, apply in this research, while no new English fiction originally published in the 1660s is listed in the following groups: Attenuated short romance, didactic romance, jest book, popular compilation of history, the novella, memoirs, scandal chronicles/secret history, nouvelle historique, nouvelle gallante, political/allegorical novel and oriental tale.

biography. Additionally, it should be noted that some databases catalogue many undated books as published in the 1660s, although most have been found to be reprints or are dated on the grounds of extrinsic factors such as the printers' and booksellers' period of business activity. For the present research, all the corpus texts in Letellier's catalogue were studied, and the influence of drama was mainly observed in certain of the major romances, as will be shown later.

Margaret Cavendish—Duchess of Newcastle—is undoubtedly the most appropriate author to start with, not only because of the astonishing variety of her interests and the genres she wrote within throughout her prolific literary career, including drama and fiction, but also because of the enormous critical attention she has received in the twenty-first century, especially in connection with gender and scientific matters, although aspects of theatre in her fiction are not as relevant to contemporary approaches. Cavendish was a pioneering writer in many respects. In *CCXI Sociable Letters*, in letters CXXIII and CLXII, she articulated “the first general prose assessment of Shakespeare’s drama ever written” (Whitaker 2002, 258). She also sometimes mentions poets when referring to writers in general. Furthermore, her *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (1666) is the only book in the whole corpus that contains references to the Restoration world of theatre and playwrights, first when the Duchess (who fictionalises the author) and the Empress of the Blazing World attend a performance, and later when the Emperor wants to construct a theatre and seeks the Duchess’s advice. Autobiography and literary criticism also find expression in Cavendish’s fiction. Not only does the Duchess complain that her own plays are refused staging, but she also declares her views on the ethics of theatre stating that her contemporary plays “will prove a Nursery of Whining Lovers, and not an Academy or School for Wise, Witty, Noble, and well-behaved men” (part II, 29). Besides the ethical vocation of theatre, Cavendish also appreciates all other entertaining aspects of the show (such as acting, dancing and music) in her explanation to the Empress that the new plays updated old stories: “it was true, that all or most of their Plays were taken out of old Stories, but yet they had new actions, which being joined to old stories, together with the addition of new Prologues, Scenes, Musick and Dancing, made new Plays” (part I, 107).

Critical approaches to *The Blazing World* do not commonly highlight the influence of drama, though dramatic art is often invoked to describe Cavendish’s public appearances during her 1667 London visit: “Her idiosyncratic dress combined masculine and feminine elements in a parodic masquerade of gender, while her rare and highly theatrical public appearances never failed to draw an audience” (Lilley 1994, xii–xiii). Bowerbank and Mendelson have remarked that Cavendish “included a number of interesting masques and masque-like effects in her writings” (2000, 18). According to these authors, from Ben Jonson’s *Love’s*

*Welcome at Bolsover* she borrowed the episode when the Empress went to fight the enemies of her native country and showed herself to her own people as a goddess-like creature walking on the surface of water, though she was actually stepping over the fishmen who “support her without being seen, and who also carry firestone to illuminate her body. Thus, the hidden labour of her subjects is made visible in the text, though not to her countrymen whom the Empress wishes to subdue or, at least, impress with her might” (Bowerbank and Mendelson 2000, 19). This well-known episode illustrates an instance of a romance’s climactic moments of wonder being triggered by a character deploying staging effects to generate the illusion that a supernatural intervention or force is responsible, but can be rationally explained according to the romance’s intrinsic logics—even when they may be thoroughly fanciful, as in *The Blazing World*.

When the Empress learns that the comedies and tragedies in theatres are not real but feigned, she expresses her desire to attend a performance: the fictional nature of the dramatic story apparently, in her view, adding more charm to the entertainment. This is important because it reminds us that the choice of one specific literary fiction genre among the many available depended on the appropriateness of both the subject matter and mode of persuasion with which to address an increasingly complex and varied public. However, in the early years of the Restoration, while English theatre could boast a solid and glorious tradition, prose fiction was undergoing a phase of instability and hybridity in terms of narrative genres. For instance, Salzman has aptly catalogued *The Blazing World* as “Imaginary voyage/utopian/satire,” although much of it seems to be conceived as a didactic romance to instruct readers on natural philosophy, or at least combined different types of narratives, according to the author’s prefatory note “To the Reader”: “The first part [...] is Romancical, the second Philosophical, and the third is meerly Fancy, or (as I may call it) Fantastical” (Cavendish 1666, b2r). Even though *The Blazing World* represents an extreme case of blending and fluidity of genres, it instances the extent to which early 1660s’ fiction was seen as an arena within which to address a variety of issues and topics that have no place on stage or interest in verse.

Gerd Bayer has examined the ways in which paratextual material, both in drama and in fiction, helped draw attention to the “process of genre making” (2016, 74) at a time when “the pragmatic do-it-yourself approach of would-be novelists” (2016, 91) was paving the way for the future novel. However, while fiction would absorb much of the dramatic dynamics of staging stories by the 1690s, in the 1660s romance authors endeavoured to defend the genre in the face of censorious critics as well as distinguish it from history. The form of Dryden’s “Essay of Dramatick Poesie” (1668) suggests the growing influence of drama in Restoration literature, although it is not so conspicuous in fiction,

either because genres overlap or because the external perspective and plurality of narrative voices blur that potential influence.

The development of literary genres in English literature sometimes converge to the point of hindering sharp divides when theatre and prose fiction are considered. Printed in 1660, James Howell's *The Parly of Beasts; or, Morphandra, Queen of the Incharited Iland* consists in a collection of dialogues between Prince Pererius and a gallery of human beings transmuted by Morphandra into animals. They inhabit a strange island, which is described as a "theatre of wonders" (1). It does indeed provide an experience close to that of a playhouse performance in that Pererius feels curious about the animals' former identities and Morphandra—to please him—restores the animals' ability to speak so that he can converse with them. Howell borrowed the story from Giambattista Gelli's *La Circe* (Florence, 1549), but updated the allegorical, satirical, utopian and ethical elements of Renaissance dialogues by widening the scope to include the contemporary European context. Though in prose, Pererius's conversations with the Mule (formerly a Spanish doctor) and the Hind (formerly a Venetian courtesan) could be turned into alluring and delightful pieces for the stage. The genre of the dialogue therefore lends itself to theatre, except for its essential part—performance—still forbidden at the time that Howell conceived this project. Similarly, a debate on the nature of love and friendship between Argelois and Euripedes occupies most of the overarching story throughout the first four books of *Eliana* (1661), a romance attributed to Samuel Pordage, while the individual stories and the resolution of the frame narrative provide a wide variety of instances demonstrating the excellence of friendship over erotic love. Moreover, the narrator of *Eliana* only recounts what the male hero does, sees and hears. Like other Baroque romance narrators, he never describes the characters' thoughts, which are instead rendered through speech and action. Despite this dramatic presentation, the external perspective seeks to reinforce the teller's credibility and objectivity when narrating what is perceived through the senses, while the characters themselves speak their minds and about their memories. Similarly, past events are not narrated by the overarching voice. Instead, the protagonist or a close witness recounts events to one or several listeners, enacting a kind of theatrical communication for the reader to partake of as just another passive recipient. It goes without saying that the protagonists' or witnesses' stories function as individual monologues about the episodic reports of events, which also include dialogues, speeches, soliloquies and sometimes even letters or other writings. As such, then, the credibility gained by the polyphony of competent narrators is belittled by the unreliable, monologist delivery of past events.

Jenny Davidson has suggested that "the epistolary novel owes a great debt to drama [...] in the sense that it allows individual characters' voices to be heard most

distinctively and with only occasional authorial or editorial mediation” (2017, 445). With Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) in mind, Davidson not only includes the unmediated rendering of the characters’ consciousness, as if in soliloquies, but also the heroine’s description of “her own actions that recalls the precision and accuracy of an actress or a theatrical professional” (2017, 445). In this, Davidson is, of course, considering the dramatic imprint of late seventeenth-century theatre. However, eighty or seventy years before *Pamela*, letters—as well as soliloquies—represented compelling passages in prose fiction. They were often highlighted by the use of a heading or a different type of font. In high romances (where narrators observe a strictly external perspective), letters, soliloquies and speeches allowed authors a suitable, natural way “to express inward passions and hidden thoughts” (Person of Honour 1661, A3r), while readers were “put [...] in mind of what they may say or do another time, with more advantage to themselves or imployment” (1661, A3r). Moreover, soliloquies and letters as a means to communicate the character’s interiority implied an important step towards formal realism when compared with the songs, sonnets, and eclogues in some Elizabethan romances, such as Thomas Lodge’s *Rosalynde*, where the artistic, poetical craft prevailed over the realistic or instructive aspects. Furthermore, it must be remembered at this point that romance reading was often communal, and possibly some parts were recited or performed before an audience, whether of the domestic circle, guests or both. The only text of the corpus that mentions this practice is *The Princess Cloria* (Person of Honour, 1661). In its prefatory note, the author distinguishes two types of “communication, either of recreation or Discourse”—i.e., silent reading or reading aloud to an audience. He complains that this latter way of “communication” sometimes takes five or six hours, without intervals, which makes people “tired, either with hearing or making such relations; and indeed almost impossible to be performed by any of what profession soever” (A2r). In addition to reports of events, speeches and soliloquies, the high romances contained many episodes of great dramatic intensity, as will be illustrated later. However, exactly which parts of a romance were conceived or shaped by their authors with an eye to being recited or performed is a matter still to be explored.

Adaptations and borrowed stories constitute another field of interest. In Mackenzie’s *Aretina*, at the King’s daughter’s wedding festivities at the end of Book 1, a fellow entered and “told his Majesty that he was to shew him a Monster. The King desired he might present it upon a stage, whereon the Commedians used to act” (1660, 68). Though set in ancient Egypt, *Aretina* explores the political upheavals that had taken place in the recent past in Britain in roman-à-clef format and, as such, it recorded the period of inactivity in the theatre, this being the sole reference to this historical fact in the whole corpus of texts. The character who appears on this neglected stage is described as “an old

fellow, with a pair of large Harts Horns” (1660, 68) and the narrator’s ensuing summary recalls a play in the style of Molière’s *Sganarelle ou Le cocu imaginaire* (*The Imaginary Cuckold*). What is more, some of the stories that the characters tell are likely inspired by plays. For example, Megistus’s landlord’s tale in Book 2 echoes the plot of Molière’s *Les Précieuses ridicules*—if the sex of the characters is changed. Megistus’s tale of an Old Man who woos a young lady, and is eventually ridiculed by a young suitor, could also have been inspired by an interlude or a short play considering its dramatic potential. However, it is unlikely that a naked body ever appeared on a Renaissance stage, which is what happens at the end when the Old Man rises in haste from a chair, and his breeches fall down “leaving his thighs like two leafless and withered branches, in whose top an Owl nested; or like an Egyptian Mummy embalmed by Art” (Mackenzie 1660, 139). The lawyer Mackenzie had recently been admitted to the Edinburgh bar when he undertook the writing of *Aretina* in order to improve his language skills and, as he puts it: “to form to my self a style” (1660, A5v). Although Mackenzie’s literary interests principally focused on legal, political and moral matters, and he was eventually appointed Lord Advocate, his early and only romance also contains other episodes inspired by theatre and dramaturgy, as will be shown later.

In Thomas Howard’s *The History of the Seven Wise Mistresses of Rome* and in the anonymous short romance *The Pleasant and Delightful History of Floridon and Lucina*, both published in 1663, there are also elements which recall previous plays. In the former, the Fifth Mistress’s exemplum freely sketches Robert Greene’s *The Pleasant Historie of Dorastus and Fawnia* rather than Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale* (Monterrey 2021, 23). *Floridon and Lucina* recalls to some extent elements from Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* with two of the female characters, who number only three, being called Isabella and Mariana. Sir Malpas, who has long desired Lucina, abducts her when her betrothed Floridon is captured and held prisoner by robbers. Eventually, Sir Malpas’s falsehood and lechery are exposed when Mariana discloses that he was formerly her suitor but never fulfilled his promises. Nonetheless, there is no governor’s ban on love that triggers the plot of the romance, as is the case in both the play and its Italian hypotext.

John Dauncey pioneered the first—or one of the first—novelisation of a play into high fiction. He was a translator and historian, and is best known for his biography of Queen Henrietta Maria. *The English Lovers* (1661) signifies an exceptional experiment and a major contribution to the development of English fiction in its conversion of Thomas Heywood’s two-part *The Fair Maid of the West* into the format of a Baroque, heroic romance—in vogue in the early 1660s. Instead of merely retelling in straightforward fashion the storyline following Heywood’s linear chronology, Dauncey reshaped the dramatic plot to meet the in-medias-res convention of the Baroque romances. This involved creating two levels of narrative



and their calculated segmentations, a gallery of narrators, new characters and the illusion of a stage or setting. Nonetheless, Dauncey did faithfully reproduce the original tale of the English characters' adventures against a late sixteenth century historical background (when the Earl of Essex and Sir Walter Raleigh attacked Faial, in the Azores) and the intermittent conflict between two north Italian duchies. However, he also added stories of his own creation, and introduced some variations that invite a reinterpretation of the play in the context of the Restoration. Apart from the plot and characters, what sounds fresh and modern in Dauncey's craft and style does not derive from the language of theatre, but rather from the syntax and style of history. This is a significant point because Dauncey possessed the narrative skills and the appropriate hypotext to enable him to have written the first English novel: his prose avoids the elevated style of heroic romances, and Heywood's main characters are neither royal nor aristocratic, while the improbable plot earns some credibility with the benefit of involving a stage performance.

Heywood's play achieved some popularity in the early years of the Restoration and, perhaps for this reason, *The English Lovers* was deemed to be a sales hit. Three or four booksellers participated in its publication by the end of 1661–early 1662, prefacing the narrative with several commendatory poems.<sup>3</sup> Dauncey had clearly succeeded in producing the kind of romance readers enjoyed. He strove to retell *The Fair Maid* in the mosaic-like, labyrinthine structure characteristic of the Baroque romance, with his gallery of narrators and reinforcement of the heroic atmosphere of the play, and the “constant loves and invincible Courages of Hero's [and] Heroins, [...]” (Congreve 1692, A5v). Though the genre was doomed to decline and disappear, Dauncey's “Language and Contrivance” was also praised by William Winstanley in his *Lives of the most Famous English Poets* (1687, 206), which attests to the critical esteem of Dauncey's literary achievement.

In contrast, the rendering of this decade's fiction into performing arts is exceptional since novels—rather than romances—are more suitable for adaptation. In 1662, Mme de La Fayette's *La Princesse de Monpensier* appeared in France. It set the model of the *nouvelle galante* or *nouvelle historique* and is thus considered one of the first modern novels—the antecedent of La Fayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678). Despite its aura of formal realism, *The Princess of Monpensier* received a cold reception in Britain when it was translated in 1666, and was not reissued until the contemporary age (1805). This suggests that a realistic, historical account about real characters involved in factual events

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3 Besides Henry Marsh, Francis Kirkman and Henry Broome, it is apparent that Dorman Newman also participated in the publication of the romance, since his books are advertised at the end of the copies for Marsh. The romance must have appeared in March 1661/2 (Julian calendar), i.e., March 1662 (Gregorian calendar).

could be written in the 1660s, but this type of narrative did not yet appeal to the taste of the English readership.

La Fayette's *The Princess of Monpensier* combines authentic historical background, balanced structure, credible characters and a powerful story of seduction, passion and dis/honour—a story suitable for performing arts. Indeed, in 2010, the eponymous movie was released in France, to general acclaim. The first years of the Restoration cannot boast such a text for a film or a play with realistic characters; nonetheless, *The Memoires of Monsieur Du Vall* (1670), attributed to Walter Pope, or at least the highwayman's life, inspired the Victorian comic opera *Claude Duval* (1881), by Edward Solomon.

Salzman classified *Du Vall* as a “Restoration novel,” and explained that it “satirized criminal biography and Francophiles” (1985, 377). The narrator in *Du Vall* adopts a journalistic point of view, relying on informants and claiming to have evidence to support his version of truth. His growing intimacy with the reader turns him into a kind of dramatised character (Booth 1983, 212; Davidson 2017, 444). He becomes an increasingly personalised subject because of his animosity towards the charismatic highwayman and his strong anti-French sentiment, which eventually causes him to be hated and abandoned by his own wife. One of the exceptional narrators in the new fiction of the 1660s, he turns out to be biased and prejudiced, and consequently dishonest and unreliable.

Novels such as *Du Vall* and criminal biographies and autobiographies can therefore show—as Davidson has argued—that “[t]he novel more generally—particularly first-person fictions—can be considered a transitional genre, with the performative aspects of storytelling in the first person representing a natural and comfortable alternative for writers reared in the oral and performative world of the theatre” (2017, 437). However, the new fiction of the 1660s owes more to romance and history than to drama. Certain parts of the intense dramatic action in criminal stories were not actually invented by their authors, rather the facts were already well known by the public, and they expected to find them on the printed page. One of the most theatrical (and humorous) such episodes occurs in *Du Vall*, when the highwayman and his gang stop a certain knight travelling with his wife and carrying 400 pounds in ‘cash’. The lady plays the “flageolet” (Pope 1670, 8) to show she is not worried by the highwaymen, who themselves play the flute. *Du Vall* asks her husband's permission to dance with her. After the dancing, *Du Vall* tells the husband he has forgotten to pay for the music. The husband replies that he has not, and produces a hundred pounds that he gives to the thief. This action satisfies *Du Vall* and prevents him from demanding the other three hundred from him.

Criminal biographies, autobiographies, prostitute stories and picaresque fiction all contain occasional episodes rich in dramatic action. They generally lack a solid plot, but recount the protagonist's life in full, focusing on the most famous

episodes, aiming for satire or moral instruction, or meeting the market's demand for the full life of certain infamous characters, such as the fictional autobiography of Mary Frith (the "roaring girl"), and the journalistic reports of the life, robberies and death of Colonel Turner, who became so popular that at least two versions of his life and death, and the proceedings of his trial were published. Unlike romances, these stories do not explore character, perhaps with the exception of Mary Frith because of her bizarre singularity (cross dresser, smoker, pickpocket, among other peculiarities) and because her home was a notorious headquarters of the London underworld.<sup>4</sup> Bunyan's spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding* (1666)—though very different in design and purpose—could also be included in this group. However, it should be noted that many of the vigorous descriptions of the protagonist's daily life, so full of dramatic potential and narrative appeal, are in fact missing in the first edition, only being added later—the only record of them being in the third edition of 1678/9 since there is no extant copy of the second edition.

The influence of theatre on fiction is more evident in some of the high romances by younger writers (George Mackenzie, John Dauncey, Samuel Pordage, John Bulteel, John Crowne) than in those by senior writers Roger Boyle and Percy Herbert, the earlier part of whose romances were published in the 1650s, and clergyman Nathaniel Ingelo's religious allegory *Bentivolio and Urania* (1660). The younger writers, as in the example from Cavendish's *The Blazing World* above,<sup>5</sup> made use of dramaturgy to parody or experiment with the genre, and to contrive plausible moments of wonder by introducing theatrical effects in the plot of the only romance written by each of them, with the exception of Bulteel.<sup>6</sup> His *Birinthea* (1664), inspired by the biography of Cyrus, follows the French heroic models of La Calprenède and Scudéry more closely than the romances by Dauncey, Pordage and Crowne, and no influence of theatre is noticeable in any of the stories, all of which were in fact unfinished.

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4 Mary Carleton's autobiography (1663), and thus formally non-fiction, must be mentioned here since her life was nothing but theatrical because of the false identities she enacted in her numerous relationships with men. She even played herself (Madam Moders) in Thomas Porter's *A Witty Combat, or, The Female Victor* (1663). Francis Kirkman wrote her fictional autobiography in *The Counterfeit Lady Unveiled* (1673).

5 Margaret Cavendish was the same age as Ingelo and Boyle, but she wrote most of her plays before *The Blazing World*. The younger writers published their respective romances before they became playwrights. This was also the case of Roger Boyle who wrote *Parthenissa* in the 1650s and plays in the Restoration. In 1669, he added a sixth part to *Parthenissa* at the request of Queen Henrietta Maria, but he himself became tired of the project and put a definite end to the story by suggesting that his characters' lives had turned out to be unpleasant for a romance.

6 John Bulteel, the author of *Birinthea*, translated Corneilles's *Amour à la mode* as *Amorous Orontus: or, The Love in Fashion* (1665).

These young authors' relationship with the theatre varies considerably. As shown above, although Mackenzie was a man of laws and eventually appointed Lord Advocate, *Aretina* contains several episodes inspired by theatre and dramaturgy. Very little is known about translator and historian John Dauncey, the author—as mentioned earlier—of *The English Lovers*, the romance adaptation of Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West*. Samuel Pordage, to whom *Eliana* is attributed, translated and edited Seneca's *Troades* in 1660, and is also attributed with two tragedies.<sup>7</sup> His romance, which he described as juvenilia, offers a series of well-plotted stories (some of them including cross-dressing male characters—Lonoxia and Dardanus), substantial philosophical dialogues in the overarching narrative and psychological insight in soliloquies, letters and actions of his characters. *Eliana* also contains scenes of high dramatic tension, such as when the hero Argelois speaks his mind, tries to kill himself and is saved by his friend Dardanus (Anon 1661, 186–190), the episodes where Caligula attempts to rape Dardanus (212–214, 218–220), and in Araterus and Queen Amarilis's love story (245–286). Pordage, for his part, timidly observes the unities of time, space and matter within the frame story, at least to the extent that a 200,000-word Baroque romance permits it. It should be added that the individual stories are told in the exuberant grotto of two misanthropic male characters, which thus creates a utopian dwelling space for imagination and storytelling. John Crowne published *Pandion and Amphigenia: or, The History of the Coy Lady of Thessalia* (1665) in his mid-twenties, and would later make a career in the theatre world.<sup>8</sup> His romance is probably the most histrionic of all, especially because of the confusion of characters' identities, through either appropriation (there are two Pandions, one of whom changes his name to Danpion) or disguise. The most notable example of this is when Pandion carefully dresses his page up as an angel and makes him fly, singing, over Amphigenia as she slumbers.

He [Pandion/Danpion] attires his beautiful Boy like one of heavens swift Pursivants, with golden Wings, which by reason of a private Engine, so poyzed his body in the Air, like Archytas Dove, that as if some secret spirit lurkt in those gilded plumes, he could convey himself whether he pleased. About his fair naked body was girt a silken weed, which partly of a Caerulean-colour, sweetly intermixed with purple streaks, seemed as if he had been clothed in a piece of Aurora's mantle, and partly of a misty gloomy colour, artificially interwoven with Gold, looked as if he had snatcht a Sun-beam, sheathed in a dewy cloud; that

<sup>7</sup> *Herod and Mariamne* (1673) and *The Siege of Babylon* (1678).

<sup>8</sup> He wrote several plays, including *Juliana; or, The Princess of Poland* (1671), *The History of Charles VIII of France* (1672) and *The Country Wit* (1675).

golden Zone that encompassed his middle, looked like the Zodiack, the Jewels wherewith it was embost, like the Planets, and the rich Carbuncle, that served for a button, whose nature is to be most resulgent in the darkest night, shone with so much resplendency, as in the midst of that darkness, it most lightsomely represented the Sun. In the one hand, he put a Harp, and in the other a Letter, which was thus superscribed.

Venus Queen of Beauty, to Amphigenia, her Successor.

In this Garb he conveys him into the room, through a secret passage, like a trap-door, made in the roof of the Chamber, that he had carved out for that purpose. The lovely Boy, being thus entred into the room, and instructed in all things, gently moves his Air-dividing Pineons, and marrying his sweet quavering voyce, to the Harpes ravishing Airs, as he flies, sings this Song. (1665, 175–176)

Though medieval theatre also made use of similar devices, this enchanting event in the story recalls the closing scene of Thomas Thompson's play *The Life of Mother Shipton* (1670), which is partly based on Richard Head's *The Life and Death of Mother Shipton* (Gómez-Lara et al. 2014, 471).

The element of wonder is an intrinsic aspect of prose fiction. In the new English titles published in the first decade of the Restoration, the exciting moments of wonder involve practices and contrivances of dramaturgy. Most probably influenced by the emergence of the scientific mentality, the manifestation of awesome wonder does not find its explanation in the supernatural, occultism or magic but rather in the rational, dazzling illusion that only dramaturgy can create. Like Pandion's page in angel attire playing the lute and flying above the heroine, these episodes occur in the realm of the household, in the domestic, familiar, private world, enacted or devised by (one of) the hero(es), sometimes in collaboration with his page, and to the awe and amazement of other protagonists. Ironically, readers usually know the cause of the illusion in advance and enjoy both its staging and the characters' reaction to the wonder they are experiencing.

In addition to the Empress's revealing her identity to the army of her native country in Cavendish's *The Blazing World* and Pandion's flying page in Crowne's romance, there are two more occurrences of this kind in the new English fiction of the 1660s. In *The English Lovers*, Dauncey transforms Heywood's Muslim character Joffer Bassa into the hero's (Spencer's) brother—and thus into an Englishman despite his dark skin and senior rank as Viceroy of Algiers and chief bashaw at the court of King Mullisheg of Fez. When Joffer Bassa discloses his true identity, “[t]he whole presence was left in great admiration at this strange adventure, being unwilling to believe what they yet did believe; but at the return of the Bassa (for we shall still so call him) their wonder [...] increased to see him so soon changed from a deep black, into a pure white complexion” (1661, 159–

160). His black hue has important moral, racial and cultural implications in line with Dauncey's perception of Muslims at the outset of the Restoration period. However, for the purpose of this paper, this metamorphosis (once the tincture is removed from his face) creates the romance's most spectacular element of wonder, produced not by any curse, spell or magic, but by a rationalistically explainable cause—ironically by means of theatrical make-up—and in front of those at the Court of Florence. In his new, natural appearance, Joffer Bassa tells his tale, where the mystery of the tincture is disclosed.

In Mackenzie's *Aretina*, when Philarites meets the heroine, he bows "as low as the verge of her garment, being deserted by strength, and overpowered by admiration, did fall dead at her feet" (1660, 15). After the confusion, cries and tears, and actions to revive him, he "began by groans, to vomit up his Melancholy" (1660, 16) and was taken to his chamber. Philarites's friend Megistus, to accelerate his recovery, devised a stage-like contrivance to convince him that Aretina was destined to be his wife. Mackenzie presents this episode in three steps. First, the theatrical contrivance is explained to the reader:

He [Megistus] commanded him [Kalodulus, Megistus and Philarite's page] to convey himself secretly up to the Seiling of the Chamber, and to take a hollow tree with him, through which he should (after he found Philarites awake, and beginning to complain) cry with a counterfeit voice, Philarites, the gods, as a reward of thy vertue, have allowed thee ARETINA for thy Wife; and, to confirm thee in this truth, have desired thee to send to morrow to that great Oak, which is sacred to Iupiter, and there thou shalt find a Ring, with this inscription, Believe the Gods. (1660, 17)

The second step, like the gods' designs in the Homeric poems, is the realisation, the performance itself, just as it has been previously announced to the reader: "Kalodulus, who waited this opportunity, spoke as he was taught, and that so cunningly, as that Kalodulus passed really for Mercury (the trunche-man of the Gods) in Philarites conceit" (1660, 18). Finally, there is the comic effect of irony as Philarites is led to believe he truly received a message from the gods: "Philarites called for him [Kalodulus], asking if he heard any thing? who answered, No, sure, for he was asleep: but the other pressing an answer, Kalodulus said, that it was only the effects of his distemper. The night being past, Philarites entreated Kalodulus, to go and dig under the root of the sacred Oak, to see what he could find" (1660, 19). This episode pertaining to a moment of wonder at the beginning of the romance parodies the conventional oracle—as in Sidney's *Arcadia* or in Boyle's *Parthenissa*—which introduces the supernatural formulation of a character's destiny or the unfolding of the future, and, thus, sketches the story's design. Megistus had got

the ring with the inscription *Believe the Gods* “from one of his fathers Magicians, who had foretold him many fortunat events, and at his departure had bestowed this Ring upon him” (1660, 17). In Mackenzie’s experimental, quasi-metafictional romance, the magician’s job and foretelling are seen as antiquated activities (albeit not completely void of sense, at least for the romance narrative), while Megistus’s theatrical contrivance underlines the move from the previous generation’s faith in the supernatural and the occult to his generation’s lack of belief in such practices contrary to rationally explainable phenomena.

Other incidents in *Aretina* have performative potential, such as the sudden appearance of mad Moragapus when the heroes and heroines are talking about love in the garden at the beginning of the fourth book (1660, 349–352), and when Philarites, Aretina and Aristobulus are kidnapped by a group of masked people (1660, 408–413). However, despite their dramatic intensity, their significance lies in Mackenzie’s consistent parody of the genre in these episodes, in particular the question-of-love scene and abduction by pirates or bandits in the structure of traditional high romances.

The influence of theatre on the new English fiction is more conspicuous after 1670, as scholarly publications have shown not only in the vernacular production, but also in translations.<sup>9</sup> Walter Charleton’s translation of Erycius Puteanus’s *The Cimmerian Matron* was published in 1668. In this story full of dramatic potential, while the female protagonist is enjoying her lover, her angry husband cuts off the nose of the bawd, who had arranged the adulterous encountering, wrongly thinking she was his wife. In 1671, Puteanus’s dream of the orgiastic party at the god Comus’s palace was translated by Bryce Blair as *The Vision of Theodorus Verax*, which is striking because of its completely scenic presentation (the dream proper) of what the attendants—including the noseless bawd—are doing. The narration produces an effect that comes closest to reporting action as if it were staged at Comus’s palace.

In the 1660s, as we have seen, the influence of theatre on fiction was very limited, though at times it was remarkable, such as in Dauncey’s adaptation of Heywood’s *The Fair Maid* and the use made of dramaturgy devices to generate plausible wonders, matching the context of the emergent scientific thought. With the exception, perhaps, of Crowne’s *Pandion and Amphigenia*, theatre costumes, staging and painted landscapes did not enhance the writers’ imagination. In general, the 1660s was not yet the decade in which descriptions of space or the characters’ gestures and acting subtleties would move into English fiction

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9 During the 1660s, see for example the ending pages of the anonymous [Alonso de Castillo Solórzano’s] book of picaresque stories *La Picara, or The Triumphs of Female Subtilty* (Anon. 1665, 290–304).

and gain prominence over the merely episodic narration and codes of symbolic signification. Nevertheless, theatre provided resources and contrivances to enact moments of wonder that amazed characters due to their uncanny weirdness, and delighted readers of their crafty ingeniousness.

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