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Clara Manco

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Coffee-Houses on the Restoration Comic Stage: *Tarugo's Wiles* (1667) and Other Examples

Clara MANCO
Sorbonne – St John’s College

Since Brian Cowan’s rereading of Steven Pincus’s work, the function of coffee-houses as sociable spaces *par excellence* of the second half of the seventeenth century (indeed since the opening of the first coffee-houses in Oxford in 1651, then London in 1652) has been greatly reevaluated and problematised¹. However disputed their historical role in the birth of the Habermasian “public sphere”, the association of coffee-houses with sedition and the birth of what would later

1 See in particular PINCUS, Steven, 1995. “Coffee Politicians Does Create?: Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture”, *The Journal of Modern history*, vol. 67, n° 4, p. 807-834; COWAN, Brian, 2004. “The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered”, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 47, n° 1, p. 21-46; COWAN, Brian, 2005. *The Social Life of Coffee: Curiosity, Commerce and Civil Society*, New Haven, Yale University Press. I wish to thank the contributors of the Brest conference for insightful suggestions that I have tried to incorporate in this paper.

become Whiggism seems to be confirmed, amongst other evidence, by King Charles II's 1675 attempt, and indeed failure, to close down coffee-houses, which suggests the will to suppress them as an alternative arena of political debate².

Whatever the reality of their organisation and the variety of their customers, the importance and plasticity of coffee-houses in representations, including on the comic stage, is indisputable. The rapid increase in the number of coffee-houses seems to have impressed the Restoration mind, if we are to judge by the number of broadsides, pamphlets and allusions available on coffee drinking. These provide a context, an interpretative framework for the further exploration of the symbolic readability of coffee-houses as a sociable space on stage. In many of the pamphlet sources, which will be the starting point of this article, the fear of a lack of social and political differentiation is stressed, presented as more or less desirable, a trait which corresponds to its use for satirical purposes in an institution with strong royalist ties³. Yet, as we will observe, coffee-houses and coffee drinking in comedies are also inserted in the network of specifically theatrical conventions and traditions, a fact which complicates and sometimes contradicts their readability as satirical sociable spaces. Although, in the majority of cases, coffee-houses are associated with the pointless seditious attempts (and later, Whiggism) of inferior comic butts, their situation as objects of political satire is really a contested one, where contradictory logics of distinction and exclusion are at work.

2 Steven Pincus, amongst other historians and critics, also argues that Arlington sent his spies in dissenting coffee-houses, while some were frequented mostly by Royalists.

3 The “royalism” of the stage is still a much debated issue, and the term is used with caution here, as is the “Whiggism” of comic butts. However, the unprecedented frequency of royal visits to the theatre and the patent system set up from the early days of the Restoration are a few of many clues of the crown’s keen and consistent interest in the stage.

This will lead us to discuss how the social dynamics in the representations of coffee-houses on stage reflect and inform those at work in the playhouse, itself a diverse sociable space strategically situated at the intersection of contradictory societal and political influences reflected in the complexity of these representations.

Politicised consumption: elements of discursive context around coffee drinking

The discourses surrounding coffee-drinking and coffeehouses in the second half of the seventeenth century, at least as they are reflected in pamphlets and broadsides, while being ambiguous and contradictory in their representation of the drink and social practice, also show a certain number of recurrent characteristics which we will later find in the theatrical examples.

The first available source, chronologically speaking, dates back to 1663 and is called *A Cup of Coffee: or, Coffee in its Colours*⁴. This one-page broadside, in the form of a long poem, presents the reader with an overview of the medicinal properties and the imaginative projections surrounding the production and consumption of coffee. Amongst a puzzling catalogue of references, ranging from elements of Greek mythology to allusions to Jacobean playwrights Beaumont and Fletcher, the text presents us with a half comical, half demonic depiction of the drink itself (“coffee’s extraction has its heats from Hell”, and “no draught so loathsome as foul coffee is”). The xenophobic element is stressed, with suspicions towards the foreign origin of the coffee, but above all it is the fear of indistinctness which seems to be the central cause of anxiety. Coffee is also an element of the commonplace triangle opposing it both to wine (suspiciously

4 ANONYMOUS, 1663. *A Cup of Coffee: or, Coffee in its Colours*, London.

expensive, politically connotated and, again, foreign) and to English beer (local and less expensive, but nevertheless alcoholic), which means it is politically situated, even without explicit reference⁵. In this document, the comparison with the other two drinks works mostly to the advantage of coffee, which is linked to a positive vision of abstinence and sobriety: it is a remedy against hangover headaches, but also allows the consumer to abstain sexually (i.e. “from whore abstain”). Despite the positive connotations of these regulating virtues, the ending is decidedly bathetic, with rather unflattering scatological comparisons (see “the rare Juyce that your Back-side affords” and “Turdy Turk”). While there is no direct mention here of a collective mode of consumption, it might still be inferred from the alleged capacity of coffee to make the consumer produce “idle and frantick” speech, especially when paired with “the Book of News”. These founding connotations and imaginative projections (foreignness, scatology, sobriety and unbridled speech) are to be found in later pamphlets.

In *A Broadside against Coffee, or, the Marriage of the Turk* (1672), very similar in its form to the previous example, coffee is again an imaginary object where contradictory fantasies are at work: the coffee bean is represented as masculine, black and, once again, foreign, while water is

5 On the political interpretations of drinking, see for example HAILWOOD, Mark, 2014. *Alehouses and Good Fellowship in Early Modern England*, London, Boydell & Brewer; or MCSHANE, Angela, 2014. “Material Culture and ‘Political Drinking’ in Seventeenth-Century England”, *Past & Present*, vol. 222, supp. 9, p. 247-276.

6 That is not to say that the depiction is entirely positive: in fact, coffee is also described in the same pamphlet as “A loathsome Potion, not yet understood / Syrrup of Soot, or Essence of Old Shooes”.

7 The document also mentions coffee’s inexplicable reputation of not burning the tongue, a rumour which can also be found in *A Broadside against Coffee*.

feminine, transparent, English and therefore, unsurprisingly, the comically superior element of the two (“too good for thee”⁹). The mixture is presented as a surprising display of complex sado-masochistic eroticism (“Tis a hot love, and lasteth but a fit”), where coffee is both the slave beaten into obedience and the jealous and violent lover, which discreetly suggests again, in sexual terms, the potential for a more general defiance of patriarchal authority, of a political type in particular. These loose political connotations are subtly reinforced through the use of expressions such as “coffee gives their tongue a clap”, which again link the substance to an idea of excess, of lack of control, in a degraded erotic fantasy that is more generally depicted in association with the Court and Crown⁹. Finally, coffee consumption is also tied to the idea of an overestimation of personal merit, a usurped social credit and an undeserved fascination with novelty, all elements which, this time, carry unambiguous connotations to the political opposition.

In *A Brief Description of the Excellent Vertues of that Sober and Wholesome Drink, Called Coffee* (1674), the discourse contrasts slightly¹⁰. Coffee provides again a sober counterpoint to

8 ANONYMOUS, 1672. *A Broad-side against Coffee; Or, the Marriage of the Turk*, London, J.L. On a sidenote, the idea that one might “turn Turk” (an expression also present in the very first line of “A Cup of Coffee”), that is, convert to Islam, by drinking coffee, was a popular one.

9 The stereotype of the lecherous Cavalier has a long history, started with Civil War pamphlets: in Restoration comedy, the clap is also overwhelmingly associated with Cavalier sexual ethos. For some elements on the subject, see for example NEILL, Michael, 1983. “Heroic Heads and Humble Tails: Sex, Politics and the Restoration Comic Rake”, *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 24, n° 2, p. 115-139; or, more broadly, SANCHEZ, Melissa, 2011. *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern English Literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

10 ANONYMOUS, 1674. *A Brief Description of the Excellent Vertues of that sober and wholesome Drink, called Coffee, its Incomparable Effects in Preventing and Curing most Diseases incident to Humane Bodies*, London, Paul Greenwood.

wine, that “sweet Poison of the treacherous Grape” which “Acts on the world a General Rape” (*sic*) in the second line, and is responsible for the drinker’s loss of reason. What is uncharacteristic however is that the disruptive qualities of drunkenness are associated with more general political and religious disobedience (“Drink, rebellion, and religion too”) rather than with royalism and political loyalty¹¹. Coffee, in contrast, is a godsend and an instrument of regulation and peace, both in the physical body and in the body politic: here again the tempering value of the drink is stressed. Interestingly, masculine vigour is not affected by this general tempering quality. On the contrary, the pamphlet shows a semi-comical insistence on the aphrodisiac virtues of the drink, which is uncharacteristic as wine is normally depicted as the favoured sexual stimulant¹². Political interpretation of these medicinal properties is only one step away, as coffee “a friendly entercourse (...) does maintain” within the “microcosm”. It is

11 The association of drunkenness with the royalist party, presented either positively, as good-natured merriment, or negatively, as dissipation and lack of control, is a long-standing one, especially when wine is the favoured drink. As suggested above, wine is associated with continental influence, above all French, and the drunkenness of royalists contrasts symbolically with the supposed sobriety of the Commonwealth years. This is particularly visible in comedies, including *The Royalist* by Thomas D’Urfe (commented on below), which sees the character of Eitherside proclaim: “Ay, ‘tis strange, but these Cavaliers are such damnable soakers” (D’URFEY, Thomas, 1682. *The Royalist*, London, Joseph Hindmarsh, act I, p. 9). I have departed here from common theatrical practice by designating given passages by their act and page in the original edition. The reason here is a purely practical one: Restoration plays are rarely divided into coherent scenes and there are no line numbers, making page numbers the easiest and most efficient referencing system.

12 Another advertisement which lists the qualities of coffee, called “The Virtue of the Coffee-drink”, praises the fact that it “neither heats or inflames” and is “neither laxative nor restringent”: again moderating qualities. A fair number of the properties of coffee in this pamphlet are proven scientifically today, such as its use against gout.

perhaps in this example that the symbolic meaning of coffee-drinking as a political act is most articulate.

These pamphlets and broadsides show a reliance on common tropes (disruption of order, foreignness, loss of control) yet with unstable and contradictory interpretations. These same tropes allow coffee to carry hellish, sexually aggressive, deeply suspicious and disruptive connotations, where the annulling of hierarchies (be they racial, religious, erotic, rhetorical or political) and the release of the impulses (of the unchecked tongue or of the lower body) it allows are depicted as essentially threatening. Yet at the same time, coffee is praised for its tempering qualities, and is described as the ally of abstinence and polite conversation. These contradictory perspectives shaped by pamphlets and broadsides reflect and inform the representation and reception of the coffee-house in drama.

Scenic presence of coffee-houses

The coffee-house is indeed a heavily invested space for dramatic activity, which encourages comparisons with other popular sociable spaces of Restoration comedy, such as the “plaza” “Covent Garden”, “St James’s Park”, “the Mulberry-Garden” etc. At least three comedies between the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution present coffee-house scenes: John Tatham’s *Knavery in All Trades, or, The Coffee-House* (1664), Thomas St Serfe’s *Tarugo’s Wiles, or, The Coffee-House* (1667) and Thomas D’Urfey’s *The Royalist* (1682)¹³. These comedies will provide the main focus for our study here, with emphasis on *Tarugo’s Wiles* in particular¹⁴.

13 TATHAM, John, 1664. *Knavery in all Trades, or, The Coffee-House*, London, W. Gilbertson and H. Marsh; ST SERFE, Thomas, 1668. *Tarugo’s Wiles: or, the Coffee-House*, London, Henry Herringman; D’URFEY, Thomas, 1682. *The Royalist, op. cit.*

14 Onwards, we can point out Elkanah Settle’s *The New Athenian Comedy*

It is true that the number of actual coffee-house scenes is limited. However, the occurrences where characters (in most cases, secondary ones) allude to going to coffee-houses are far more frequent. The default association of coffee-houses is with the stock character of the comic butt, usually a silly Puritan associated with the City of London (be he a citizen, an Alderman, a shopkeeper *etc*), later also often defined as Whig¹⁵. This character type, despite some variations, presents strong common characteristics : he is constantly busy setting up seditious plots, and his poor masculine performance gets him justly punished with cuckoldry or with an unsuitable marriage in the end¹⁶. The coffeehouse is generally the place where this seditious activity meets and organises, and is broadly opposed to the tavern, where the dominating, often explicitly loyal characters of rakish behaviour gather to drink wine. Coffee-houses are therefore associated with generally inferior characters. In John Dryden's *The Wild Gallant*, Bibber, a tailor and minor butt, confesses that he shamelessly recycles the wit he catches in coffee-house conversations, implying that, unlike the hero, he is unable to produce his own¹⁷. Sir

(1693), Charles Johnson's *The Generous Husband, or, The Coffee-House Politician* (1711), James Miller's *The Coffee-House, A Dramatick Piece* (1737) and *The Usurpers, or, The Coffee-House Politicians, A Farce* (1749) by the same author. Coffee-houses seem to have been perceived as having an essentially comic potential.

15 *Knavery in all Trades* is perhaps the less interesting example in this respect. The comedy in the coffee-house scene of act III lies essentially in a character pretending to be Turk, with emphasis on the exotic associations of the drink.

16 Although these associations are far from being without exception, they are the backbone of this stock character type in a large majority of contemporary comedies.

17 DRYDEN, John, 1669. *The Wild Gallant*, London, Henry Herringman, act IV, p. 47. Bibber is a secondary character and plays no role in the main plot of the comedy: suffice to say that his fascination for the hero's wit allows him to be constantly cheated of his money, despite his wife's constant disapproval. This edition is likely to be the first, despite

Salomon, the comic butt from John Caryll's *Sir Salomon, or, the Cautious Coxcomb*, proves inferior in another way. He mentions his being a regular in coffee-houses precisely at the point where his social and sexual humiliation is the most blatant, when he realises he has lost his own bride right before the wedding:

Sir Salomon – I shall become the Discourse of every Coffy-house
(sic), be Libell'd, Lampoon'd, Acted; and every Fool will think
himself a Wit, when he talkes, and tells Stories of me¹⁸.

As well as reinforcing the stereotype described above, this example presents us with another form of negative uncontrolled speech in the coffee-house: gossip. The object here, cuckoldom, is comparatively harmless, and the laughter surrounding it reminds us of the medieval *charivari*: yet the choice of words ("Libell'd, Lampoon'd, Acted") also evokes potentially more threatening forms of aggression. In the same vein, the comedy *Sir Courly Nice* by John Crown shows us an overenthusiastic Tory, Hothead, coming back bruised from the coffee-house where he went specifically to provoke the Whigs: again the coffee-house is presented as a place for seditious sociabilities to thrive¹⁹.

sources referring to performances on stage by the King's Company as early as 1663 (VAN LENNEP, William, AVERY, Emmett L., and SCOUTEN, Arthur H., ed., 1965. *The London Stage, 1660-1800*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, as for all other references to contemporary performances). The play was then regularly reprinted.

18 CARYLL, John, 1671. *Sir Salomon; or, the Cautious Coxcomb*, London, Henry Herringman, act IV, p. 65. Sexual humiliation, especially cuckoldom, is an overwhelmingly popular trope amongst comic butts in the comedies of the time. The play was a short-lived success, and was only performed (by the Duke's Company) and printed during the 1670-71 season.

19 CROWN, John, 1685. *Sir Courly Nice : or, It cannot be*, London, Richard Bentley and Joseph Hindmarsh, act IV, p. 34. Hothead and Testimony do not play a great role in the plot of this comedy, aside from occasional scenes where they embody two silly and constantly bickering Whig

Finally we could also point to the character of Jonas in *The Royalist* (D'Urfey):

Jonas – There are several of us [*Jesuits*] amongst ‘em. We converse daily with ‘em, talk Treason with ‘em, drink every night Politick Coffee, and when the spirit moves, go to a whore with ‘em²⁰!

In this case, the levelling characteristic of coffee-houses takes the form of an unsavory association between Whig and Jesuit secretly converging interests²¹. The rest of the play, and more specifically the scene from act IV that takes place entirely in a coffee-house, confirm this atmosphere of treason, as the spectator is made to witness Jonas's lack of political trustworthiness first-hand²².

The scene in question is similar to that of *Tarugo's Wiles*, which will be discussed below, insofar as it is unnecessary to the development of the main plot: it constitutes a sort of satiric break in the action, a rather common device in so-called

and Tory supporters. The 1685 edition is contemporary to the first performances by the King's Company, which staged the play regularly until at least 1690.

20 D'URFEY, Thomas, 1682. *The Royalist*, *op. cit.*, act III, p. 22.

21 This convergence of apparently opposing political and religious views through common interests was commonplace. It is obliquely alluded to in a heroï-comical passage of *Tarugo's Wiles*, as testified by this exchange: “*Aleppo* – The long Wars ‘twixt the Ribband-makers Daughters of Athens, and the Bone-lace Weavers of Lacedemon shall be determin’d by a Match at Stool-ball in the Fields of Pharsulia, the patry vanquish’d is to pay a Tanzy-Cake of the quantity of a Mill-stone etc. *1st Scholar* – This people may much conduce to reconcile the Jansinists and Jesuits” (ST SERFE, Thomas, 1668. *Tarugo's Wiles: or, the Coffee-House*, *op. cit.*, act III, p. 24). In the words of Michael McKeon: “Papists, Jesuits, and militant Anabaptists, Independents, Quakers, and Fifth Monarchy men [*were considered*] as virtually interchangeable” (MCKEON, Michael, 1975. *Politics and Poetry in Restoration England: the Case of Dryden's « Annus Mirabilis »*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, p. 133).

22 *Ibid.*, act IV, p. 46 and following.

“Restoration” comedy²³. It opens with a series of unpleasant, secondary characters, who enter a coffee-house “seeming to be earnestly in dispute at another”: the stage direction thus makes explicit both the agonistic nature of the coffee-house (“in dispute”) and the potentially disingenuous character of the debates (“seemingly”, perhaps in contradiction with “earnestly”). The characters’ lowly social status contrasting with their lofty political ambitions is the main source of comedy. Thus later in the scene, a character called Justice Eitherside and a tailor are presented “quarrelling about State-politicks”. Eitherside, whose name accounts for his political opportunism and lack of integrity, attempts to discredit his opponent (“A Tailor, Sir, and talk of Politicks!”) but the latter takes pride precisely in the discrepancy between his intellectual ambitions and his situation (“I’ll have my penyworth of Politicks as well as the best of you”).²⁴ While the two are presented as having common seditious ambitions, their rivalry and spirit of competition take over their goal as Eitherside indignantly exclaims “I am a Justice of Peace, and a Counsellor at Law; and you are an Impudent fellow to contend with a man of my Honour and Authority”. Under the pretense of equality that the coffee-house offers, the comedy exposes more selfish impulses, as will be the case in *Tarugo’s Wiles*.

The use of the word “Cabal” to describe the group introduces the idea of secrecy and sedition that is exploited

23 One other example of such satiric breaks might be found in OTWAY, Thomas, 1681. *The Souldier's Fortune*, London, James Magnes and Richard Bentley, act II, p. 19.

24 D'URFEY, Thomas, 1682. *The Royalist*, *op. cit.*, act IV, p. 48-49 for all quotations in this paragraph. Eitherside is a comic butt in this play, as testified by the ending, which sees him married by mistake to a penniless woman. Turncoats are popular comic figures, but with (perhaps predictably?) ambiguous interpretations: while they are mostly associated with ridicule and shame, it is not systematically the case.

comically throughout the scene²⁵. Another unnamed character is described by Broom as a “former member of the Committee of Abjuration”, who is “without a doubt talking treason” to his neighbour, just like his neighbour Sir Timothy Tyburn who, knighted by the king, now takes arms against him. Conspiracies are an obsession in the coffee-house, as the following dialogue, amongst other examples, shows:

Oldcutt, reading [a newspaper] – Hum; what’s here ? Order’s that a Bill be brought in for Naturalizing, and this Question be debated, Whether a Presbyterian Dog’s Son may not Marry an Independent Bitches Daughter (...) Resolv’d by the Reverend the Judges of the Law, that it shall be present Death for any Phanatick to hang himself. -- Tear it, tear it, don’t let it be seen. -- Tear it, I say.

Broom – How, Sir, Five hundred Jesuits do you say ? (...)

Oldcutt – Ounds, Treason -- I smell Powder -- A second Powder Plot -- The whole State’s in danger. Under the *Thames* ! why who the Devil would have thought it had bin possible ?

1 Com. – This Plot was hatcht in *Rome*, I warrant you.

Broom – These are rare Rogues now.

Merchant – This lye well spread, is enough to raise a Rebellion²⁶.

The tensions of the early 1680s and its failed plots are palpable here. The coffee-house is designated as the place where paranoia can prosper on rumours, misunderstanding and the excessive sense of self-importance of uneducated, heterogeneous crowds. As Broom summarises at the start of the scene:

25 The word could also distantly echo Charles II’s so-called CABAL ministry of 1668, a council formed of Clarendon, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley and Lauderdale.

26 *Ibid.*, act IV, p. 46.

Broom – This Coffee-house is the Epitome of Hell, where all sorts of male-contented Fiends are in office²⁷.

The comparison of the place with “Hell” distantly evokes the “hellish” propriety ascribed to the drink itself in the broadsides, and the reversal the image implies echoes the carnivalesque, parodic government of the “male-contented”.

These examples all show both a convergence of the various aspects of the imagery of the broadsides with those of the plays and the tensions at work within those representations. These examples show how the space, the sociabilities that structure it and the essential qualities of the beverage itself inform and reflect each other in a rhetorically coherent symbolic system, where pamphlets and plays articulate with one another. And from Bibber’s recycling of his betters’ wit, to the opportunistic, underground alliance of dubious seditious practices and the proliferation of unrestrained speech, least ambiguous of all is the levelling quality that characterises the coffee-house as an arena of political debate, which also finds a form in the abundance of parodic elements (parody of government, parody of political debate). The image of the coffee-house in plays could therefore be said to be a stable one in that respect: yet this does not mean, as we shall see now, that the interpretation of this reversal of hierarchy should be a straightforward one.

Echoes of Pamphlets in St Serfe’s Tarugo’s Wiles

The case of *Tarugo’s Wiles, or, The Coffee-house* stands out amongst all these examples for the length of its coffee-house scene (which occupies, in fact, a whole act) and the variety of sociabilities it represents. *Tarugo’s Wiles* was produced at the Duke’s Theatre at least four times in October 1667, with one edition (in 1668), which makes the play, if not

27 *Ibid.*

exactly a blockbuster, at least a reasonable success for the times. Amongst its sources are a Spanish play, *No Puede ser* by Augustin Moreto y Cabana, itself a rewriting of Lope de Vega's *El Mayor Impossible*. The play is the first by Scottish author Thomas St Serfe, "gentleman" (as the front page of the first edition states), son of a wealthy Loyalist who served himself under Montrose during the Civil War. St Serfe's personal royalist credentials are beyond question, as the play's praise of the dedicatee's "loyal gratitude" during the "late Fanatick Commotions" confirms²⁸.

The coffeehouse is advertised in the subtitle of the comedy, a choice that indicates an attempt at putting forward the originality of the play, presumably for commercial reasons. The coffee-house "scene" is, of course, absent from the sources and has very few links to the main plot: it

28 *Tarugo's Wiles* was not only St Serfe's first play, it was also the first play written by a Scot presented in London. Its short-lived success seems to have been limited to the 1667-68 season, which saw the only edition and known representation. St Serfe insists on presenting himself as an "outsider", a "stranger" in the play's prologue (although not stating his exact origin), which is all the more unusual as the name of the playwright was not normally advertised on the playbills. Why such apologetic insistence? Perhaps, precisely, as an attempt on St Serfe's behalf to capitalise on this originality as potentially attractive? After this moderate success, St Serfe seems to have been active in theatrical circles in Scotland, and to have translated various texts from French. Although there is very little evidence concerning his income, he most probably didn't manage to live off the stage. There are relatively few sources on the reception of *Tarugo's Wiles*: Pepys finds it one of the stupidest plays he has ever seen (an honour actually disputed by many), while a poem attributed to Charles Sackville is less dismissive, though admittedly rather vague ("Tarugo gave us wonder and delight / When he oblig'd the world by candlelight"). For full references on the history of the reception of *Tarugo's Wiles*, see Markman Ellis' introduction to the play (ELLIS, Markman, 2006. *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture*, New York, Routledge, vol 3). On St Serfe himself, see SCULLION Adrienne, 1997. "Forget Scotland": Plays by Scots on the London Stage, 1667-1715", *Comparative Drama*, vol. 31, n° 1, p. 105-128.

certainly constitutes the only original part of an otherwise unremarkable play. To sum up the immediate context, Tarugo, a gentleman and younger son of an aristocratic family, is being followed by a gang and hides in a coffee-house disguised as the coffeemaster, where he hears and takes part in various group conversations²⁹. The stage directions, which are generally scarce and occasionally unreliable in Restoration drama, clearly point in this case to the coffee-house's characteristic social indiscrimination, as they indicate right before the start of the scene “enter several Customers of all Trades and Professions”. This indication echoes the unusual precision with which the *dramatis personae* had already described the play's location as “A *Coffee-House*, where is presented a mixture of all kinds of people³⁰”. The diversity of coffee-house sociability is stressed both ways: however it is worth noticing that the variety described in the stage directions (“all Trades and Professions”) is in fact socially much more limited than the one announced by the *dramatis personae* (“all kinds of people”). The former seems to essentialise coffee-house sociability more precisely as characteristic of the traditional comic butt type of the shopkeeper, the tradesman or the lawyer, implicitly stressing the absence of courtiers or noblemen from the place³¹.

The scene opens with an echo of the type of broadsides examined earlier, with an improvised speech on the origins

29 Tarugo's being a younger son is another point where St Serfe departs from his sources. The name itself, Tarugo, suggests a trickster character as it means “idiot” in Spanish. To give such a name to an aristocratic character is a rather bold choice, unless St Serfe couldn't read Spanish himself and used now lost intermediary sources.

30 ST SERFE, Thomas, 1668. *Tarugo's Wiles: or, the Coffee-House*, *op. cit.*, act III, p. 17.

31 Although there are notable exceptions, these social positions are widely associated with support for the Crown in Restoration comic tradition.

of coffee which, as the coffee-master, Tarugo is expected to explain to curious customers:

Tarugo – I'll assure you, this is of the first fruits brought home from the Gardens of *Sestos* and *Abidos*.

Customer – What places are those ?

Tarugo – They are two houses of Pleasure four miles from *Constantinople*; the one belongs to the Grand-Sieur's Tallow Chandler, the other to the Gold-finer of the *Seraglio*³².

The exoticism of the Turkish reference, though under a parodic form again (parody implying a certain confidence on the author's behalf in the prospective audience's knowledge of the reference), is combined with the vague eroticism ("houses of pleasure", "seraglio"). Remarkably, the passage transposes the prevalent carnivalesque reversal of social hierarchies, generally associated with the Cromwellian regime and the political opposition, to a vaguely exotic setting ("Grand-Sieur's Tallow Chandler³³"). Tarugo then moves on to the medical properties of coffee, handing to his client a senseless advertisement for his product, parodic of the broadsides examined above:

32 ST SERFE, Thomas, 1668. *Tarugo's Wiles: or, the Coffee-House*, *op. cit.*, act III, p. 17. It is unclear whether this incorrect geographical indication is meant to trigger laughter, or if it is the product of the playwright's ignorance. The importance of commerce with Constantinople, for example by the Levant Company, might suggest the former. Another possible interpretation could be that these imaginary exotic houses of pleasure conventionally stand for closer houses, more familiar to Londoners.

33 In various other plays, the tallow-chandler serves as an "everyman" figure: Otway's *The Souldiers Fortune* being an example (OTWAY, Thomas, 1681. *The Souldiers Fortune*, *op. cit.*, act II). Tarugo himself is a gentleman in disguise (an addition of St Serfe's from the sources), another reversal of social hierarchies.

Customer (reads) – The Physical operations of Coffee, are dissolving of Corns, correcting Convulsion-fits upon the Temples of the Posteriors, and cooling those fiery Blisters upon the Liver that's procur'd by extraordinary drinking of *Lemonado* that's warm'd with the frosted Christal of the *Alps*. As for its operations upon the faculties of the Soul, that varies according to the several Climats ; for in *Spain*, when the steam is apply'd to the eyes, it renders the Inhabitants there most foreseeing and perspicacious in forreign Discoveries ; and when under the Ears of a *French*-man, it fills his head so full of Pantaloons, and Sarabands, that he can no more forbear Dancing, then if he were bit with a Tarantula. In *England* agen it has more politick Effects in appearance, but little to the purpose, for every Pragmatical fellow will be cementing the Cracks and Flaws of the Government, especially when the vapour mounts into the Noddle of a snivelling Lay Elder ; for there commonly it fixes till it has dissolv'd all the ligaments of Loyalty. But 'tis most usefull to the Hollanders; for when their brains are stupif'd with condens'd Clouds, by eating and drinking too much Hair-grout and Brandee, then they use it by way of Glyster to remove these knotty impediments; but instead of making these Dull vapours transpire through the passage of the head, by way of repercussion, they come tumbling down the body, and fly into the Breeches with as great fury as a Cork does from English Bott-le-Ale³⁴.

The supposed physical properties of the drink in this passage have differentiated effects all across Europe: it triggers the great colonial enterprises in Spain, is responsible for irrepressible joyful expressions in France, and has laxative effects in Holland. England's place in this burlesque gradation, right before the scatological ending, is suggestive of the tensions that run through the representations of collective coffee drinking. While it still carries associations with bodily fluids ("snivelling"), it is also made responsible for the appropriation of high political debate by an undeserving and disloyal populace. Its effects on the English and on the Hollanders being essentially the same (both involving the

34 ST SERFE, Thomas, 1668. *Tarugo's Wiles: or, the Coffee-House*, op. cit., act III, p. 18.

dissolution of “vapours”), the end of the heated political debates of the English coffee-house is likely to be, just like that of its neighbours, yet another farcical fart. Coffee-house conversations may seem threatening, but should in fact not be taken seriously: like the fart, they are noisy, but ineffectual. Yet some elements of doubt remain: once the “ligaments of loyalty” have been dissolved, the “cracks” of the government exposed, what guarantees that a peaceful return to order is still possible ? If the coffee-house community does not constitute here a convincing force of opposition in positive, constructive terms, its destructive potential is not entirely dismissed.

The Coffee-house : Sociable or Unsociable Space ?

The play moves on to representing a series of diverse conversations within the coffeehouse, around the sociable circle of the (pseudo-)learned and of the scientific communities in particular³⁵. The coffee-master introduces his house rather pompously as a new “School of Athens”, a gathering on equal terms of the finest minds of the city, capable of discussing every subject with equal competence and intelligence: this time the levelling principle is described as positive, albeit with strong ironic undertones³⁶. The presence of scientific debate in coffee-houses is an attested historical fact: Pepys mentions various encounters in such places with Hooke, who would come to boast and make speeches

35 The presence of scientific debate in coffee-houses is unsurprising: it is perhaps no coincidence after all that the first one opened in Oxford rather than London. The coffee-houses were also popularly (and perhaps also ironically) nicknamed “Penny universities”.

36 The full quote goes as follows: “Gentlemen, these rude words do not become the Gravity of my house, which I have you to understand, is like the School of *Athens*, where all things are debated with reason”. The stress on “debate” and “reason” again suggests parliamentarian associations. The play later makes another playful allusion to ancient Greece.

about his latest discoveries³⁷. The variety of the topics of conversation is striking. From philosophy and rhetoric, to natural philosophy, painting, geography, astronomy and, finally, politics and current affairs, no subject is considered beyond the reach of the coffee-house customers.

Rather predictably, despite its claim to being a space of informal interaction and exchange of knowledge, the coffee-house quickly proves problematic as a sociable space. The “two Schollars” first entering the house refuse to mingle with the others, whom they dismissively call the “Illiterati”. These snubbed laymen are not discouraged in their endeavours, which gives the following scene:

At another end of the Table there's a hot debate, and the Disputants standing up.

1st Customer – Yonder Gentlemen are very eager in their dispute; Heav'n forbid they do not quarrel (...) What's the Debate, Gentlemen ?

4th Customer – He maintains by this new invention of the Vertuosi of Transfusion of the blood, that he is able to perpetuate himself to Eternity ?

1st Customer – Which way ?

4th Customer – When once his own blood decays through Age, that by letting it out, and filling its place with the blood of a young Hog, then immediately he returns into the Age of Fifteen.

1st Customer – But why a young Hog ?

4th Customer – Because of all Beasts, it resembles most a Man.

³⁷ In *Sociable Knowledge*, Elizabeth Yale stresses the importance of this type of sociable exchange, and indeed, coffeehouse conversation, within the community of scientists, while also recognising its shortcomings (YALE, Elizabeth, 2015. *Sociable Knowledge: Natural History and the Nation in Early Modern Britain*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press).

2d Customer – You may judge Sir, whether I have not reason for my opinion, for the other day being at Vertuoso-Hall, I saw a decay'd Weather, replenish'd with the blood of a Bull-calf, which so soon as it was settl'd with a Ramish bravery, it broke from the gripes of the Vertuosi Operators, charg'd through Ten thousand Spectators, and most valiantly mounted a Barbary-Mare in view of the multitude.

1st Customer – Then it seems it participates of the Drain'd Creatures Faculties by way of Transmigration.

3d Customer – Nothing more certain ; for when I was in England where such Experiments are frequent, there was an old Usurer past 80, bought a young Welsh Thief from the Gallows, whose blood by this way of Transmission, having restor'd him to youth ; this same Usurer, contrary to his former practice, was taken stealing of Cheese, for which I saw him whipp'd at a Post³⁸.

The looming menace of debate degenerating into a brawl comes close to being realised here (as it does in *The Royalist*), just as the scientific experiment degenerates into a burlesque interspecies intercourse, two elements which would frame this passage as farcical³⁹. Comparable experiments did take place around that time in “Vertuoso-hall”: in this case, Gresham College rather than the Royal Society. If we are to believe Pepys, a first blood transfusion experiment on two dogs took place on the 14th November 1666, followed by a man receiving the blood of a sheep on the 21st November 1667⁴⁰. But such allusions tell us less about coffee-house sociabilities than they do about theatrical sociabilities. Unless

38 ST SERFE, Thomas, 1668. *Tarugo's Wiles: or, the Coffee-House*, *op. cit.*, act III, p. 19. “When I was in England” reminds us that the play is supposed to take place in Spain, despite the transparent allusions to London current affairs.

39 The “barbary-mare” probably refers to a Barb (or Berber) horse, known for its particular vigour, while a wether is a castrated male sheep.

40 See www.pepysdiary.com (consulted on 29th December 2019). The man who received the blood of a sheep is said by Pepys to have been paid only 20 shillings, a sum he finds shockingly low.

this particular reference was added especially for the printed version, which appeared slightly after the performance, the playwright must have been (and supposed the original October 1667 audience to be) well-informed about the latest scientific experiments, an optimism confirmed in a rather learned and obscure reference earlier in the play to the work of Ambroise Paré⁴¹. How many members of the audience would have been expected to understand the joke? If only a few, why would a playwright want to address them particularly, and to what effect? Although these questions are impossible to answer with certainty, such learned allusions might inform us, through the representation of the coffee-house, about theatrical audiences and sociability. It gives us clues, for example, on how elitist the theatre audiences might have been, and how this section of the audience might have been expected to occupy the space of the theatre: cryptic allusions and in-jokes are often expected to create a feeling of strong mutual understanding, of closeness between the theatrical personnel (actors and playwright in particular) and the insiders to the joke in the audience, a distinction of the “happy few” from the rest of the spectators.

Another difficult point here is to identify the exact butt of the satire (one of the sources on the reception of the play deems it, rather vaguely, “very satyricall⁴²”). The experiments might be farcically described, but they are really not that far from scientific exploits that actually took place at the time. Considering this, are the customers ridiculed for their gullibility, for believing the scientists’ extravagant claims, the scientists then being essentially a revamped model of classic comedy quacks? Or are they laughed at for distorting the

41 ST SERFE, Thomas, 1668. *Tarugo's Wiles: or, the Coffee-House*, *op. cit.*, act III, p. 25.

42 Quoted in SCULLION, Adrienne, 1997. “Forget Scotland” : Plays by Scots on the London Stage, 1667-1715”, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

truth about legitimate experiments, that is, for the hubris of their pretences to share the knowledge of their superiors? Alternatively, is it the *virtuosi* themselves, whose pride defies the natural order of things, who should be justly punished with ridicule and popular laughter? The cynical undertones of the passage (with hogs “most resembl[ing] men”) might suggest: all of the above. But identifying one or the other as comic butt would lead to very different depictions of the coffee-house, and in turn very differing political implications. Embodying the customers as either wise or foolish in their endeavours to appropriate a discourse that is normally above them is, in itself, a political choice that is never explicitly exposed in *Tarugo’s Wiles*. The following dialogue on astrology, which mentions both the constellation of the “Geneva-witch” and the “popish” interpretation of stars, only blurs the matter further⁴³.

The discussion then focusses on politics and current affairs, with the coffee-master entering the place with a gazette in hand:

Enter a Barber and a Baker.

Barber – Neighbour, do you find the Pollitick grow upon you since your drinking of Coffee.

43 St Serfe, although Scottish, was not Presbyterian. The allusions to religion are too sparse in *Tarugo’s Wiles* to identify a definite position on the matter, however the following are worth mentioning: “*2d Schollar* – Pray what old Woman’s this with a pair of Scales ? *1st Schollar* – That’s a Geneva-Witch, weighing the French League against the Tripple-corded Covenant”; “*1st Schollar* – ... Meeting-place of his *Synod*, when he congregates ‘em to knead *directory Discipline* ; and observe it is the exact *Antipodes* of the *propaganda side at Rome*” (both ST SERFE, Thomas, 1668. *Tarugo’s Wiles: or, the Coffee-House*, *op. cit.*, act III, p. 22). On the same page, even looser allusions to “Non-conformity”, a “case of sanctifi’d Rebellion” or “*Presbyter-John*” are to be found.

Baker – So far from the hopes of being a Councillour of State, that I now despair the preferment of a Constable.

8th Customer – Friends, you are both mistaken, if you think the Spanish-Coffee perfects any man in the Politicks ; ‘tis onely in England where the advantages of the Air, with a particular way of preparation improves the Coffee-drinkers in these Misteries (...)

1st Customer – I pray Sir when you were at London, did you know e’re a Coffee house that went by the Title of the Politick Speculators of the Roundtable.

3d Customer – Those were the ballating Projectors, when the Government was off its hinges, but that sort of people are no more, for alas but fools would debate whether the Hen or the Egge was first; for so they have stated the priority of propriety and Government, and Heav’n knows how in order to that, what Havock they made of Bodin, Matchioval & Plato⁴⁴.

The echoes between the first extract and this passage are clear, with the specific consequences of English coffee-consumption. Again we find the humble drinkers’ undue appropriation of high political discourse (expecting offices that match their “competences”, too) ridiculed, with the new heroi-comical model of sociability of the Round Table replacing that of the School of Athens⁴⁵. Noticeable are also again the learned references to Bodin, Machiavel and Plato, which suggest that the jokes were meant, again, to trigger a complicit sneer specifically from the most educated part of the audience.

If we are to follow the dichotomy between the normative and the practical public sphere developed by Brian Cowan in “Gender and the Coffeehouse”, the source of comedy in both these passages lies in the tension between the ideal

44 ST SERFE, Thomas, 1668. *Tarugo’s Wiles: or, the Coffee-House*, *op. cit.*, act III, p. 20. Again, the allusion to “Spanish-Coffee” reminds us that the play is supposed to take place in Spain.

45 While both imply the idea of a society of equals, the first adds to it the idea of heroism, while the other stresses the political aspects.

of the coffee-house and its practice, from an undefined yet towering, superior point of view⁴⁶. While well aware of the limitations of this distinction, Cowan considers the difference between ideal and practice specifically from a gendered point of view, pointing out that the normative public sphere was an imagined, ideal masculine community, challenged in deeds by the tension between what he calls the civil and the uncivil elements of coffee-house sociability, tensions which are represented essentially by anxieties around the threat of effemimation. The presence of feminine elements is what symbolically characterises a broader fall of the coffee-house from order to disarray. In *Tarugo's Wiles* too, debate degenerates into brawl. Intellectual experiment dwindles into a burlesque joke. The Round Table and the School of Athens become places for endless, useless and ignorant chatter. But this distinction opens in turn more questions, especially if we compare the last two extracts. Are the customers laughable because they are incompetent to grasp these subjects correctly (which we have seen was not necessarily the case in the previous example about the scientific experiments)? Or because of their appropriating a culture that is above their class, whether successfully or not? Is their talk mocked because it is threatening (“when the Government was off its hinges”), or because it is harmless (see later – “our Gazettier has discover'd no State secrets truely; many are of the opinion they have none to discover⁴⁷”)?

46 COWAN, Brian, 2001. “What was Masculine About the Public Sphere?”, *History Workshop Journal*, n° 51, p. 127-157. Juan Prieto-Pablos considers, in his chapter “Coffee-houses in Restoration Drama”, that almost all depictions of coffee-houses before 1700 are derogatory in nature. I wish to offer a slightly more nuanced perspective (PRIETO-PABLOS, Juan A., 2010. “Coffee-houses in Restoration Drama”, in GILL, Cathie, ed., *Theatre and Culture in Early Modern England*, Burlington, Ashgate).

47 This line is spoken by the coffee-master (ST SERFE, Thomas, 1668. *Tarugo's Wiles: or, the Coffee-House*, *op. cit.*, act III, p. 26).

In all cases, when a group of soldiers starts talking about a battle the discussion actually dwindle into the dreaded fight and the participants are kicked out of the coffee-house. The “sober company” supposed to practise “true gallantry” meets, of course, a bathetic ending, and the coffee-master concludes: “Gentlemen, I pray be gone; this rudeness becomes a Suburb-Tavern, rather then my Customers shall be disturb’d in this fashion, I had better want your change⁴⁸”. The civil coffee-house is, despite its lofty ambitions, nothing more than a new version of the old tavern⁴⁹.

Not everybody has to leave nonetheless. After the exit of the fighters, the “2d Scholar” dismissively comments: “Did you not observe how their ignorance for want of Logick brought them presently to blows⁵⁰?”. In this superiorly “civil” attitude, which reminds us of the scholars refusing to mingle

48 *Ibid.*, act III, p. 27.

49 The coffee-master eventually comments on the economic implications of his trade, comparing it to other drinking-places: “*Coffee-master* – I suspect this trade will not hold out, for I perceive the *Vertuosi* are a company of empty fellows, and most of ‘em come here only to change their breath with the stem of my Coffee. The truth is, the Claret-Philosophers (though they be few) are my best Customers, for when they come reeling in, no less than half a score Dishes they require to settle their Stomacks. Well’, I’le try it yet a month longer, and if I fail then, I am resolv’d to take a House near a Pump, and with a stock of rotten Raisons and *Salsa-parilla*, set up a brewing of a Dyet-drink” (*Ibid.*, act III, p. 28). Although the expression “Claret-Philosophers” is not explained, the consumption of wine is generally associated with Cavaliers’ characters, as is financial prodigality. The interchangeability of drinks and the echoes between the coffee-master and a classic comedy mountebank suggest again that coffee-houses are nothing truly new.

50 *Ibid.*, act III, p. 28. The scholars also refused to recognise Tarugo’s education by testing him on his knowledge of sophisms (“*Tarugo* – I suspect this is a *Sophysma*, and such a one that I cannot tell where it lies, though I was four year in the Philosophy-Classe. *2d Scholar* – Ha, ha, ha; Four year at Philosophy, and cannot dissect a *Sophysm*!”, *Ibid.*, act III, p. 19).

at the start of the scene, we find perhaps the true target of satire concerning the coffee-house: behind the ostensible ideal of equality and sharing lies a much less presentable struggle for separateness, superiority and distinction. The fiction of the society of equals is only instrumental to a spirit of competition and eagerness to impress and exclude rather than to cooperate. The coffee-house in *Tarugo's Wiles* therefore represents not so much the threat of a carnivalesque reversal as the illusion of this promise. The characters in the coffee-house do not directly threaten political order as they are already too busy competing for dominance against one another: they are content with words without action.

Conclusion : inclusion and exclusion in sociable spaces

The discourses surrounding coffee-houses in the broadsides and in the plays are tightly intertwined, with multiple allusions and representations in the latter. Amidst complex, contradictory networks of representations, the coffee-house egalitarian promise stands out as a regular trope, being interpreted either as an ideal or through a carnivalesque lens, sometimes both. In some cases, it is even difficult to determine what is being satirised in the coffee-house, and for the amusement of what audience. The play *Tarugo's Wiles* in particular situates the so-called egalitarian discourse: it presents us with the coffeehouse as a social circle in its own right, but even more as the intersecting place of superficially diverse social circles (scientists, scholars *etc.*), in fact only within the middling classes.

Their other point in common is, of course, that all characters are men⁵¹. The homosocial function of the space

51 According to Steven Pincus, coffee-houses were generally railed for the sexual indifferentiation and soberness they encouraged, which led to accusations of “effeminacy”, while the tavern or alehouse, with its brawls and prostitutes, offered more opportunity for displays of male

is only once threatened, in *Tarugo's Wiles*, when the “Bakers Wife” barges in in the middle of the act, acting as a sobering principle of reality:

Baker's wife – O ! you are a fine man indeed ! to leave the Government of the Oven now, when ‘tis cramm'd with the *English Consulls* pastry (...) since my Husband came to be a *Vertuoso-Hunter* in these Prating-houses, he has altogether left off the caring for his poor family⁵².

The coffee-house is for the woman nothing more than a “Prating-house”, and the fake “government” that is exercised there is presented as inferior even to that of the oven. Humiliating her husband’s virility (“you are a fine man indeed!”), the baker’s wife also excludes him from the homosocial competition, dragging him out and forcing him back to his duties. The fact that the baker’s pastries were destined for an actual politician only adds to the irony.

Of course, theatre itself functions as a social circle where the audience is invited, through laughter, to position itself towards the characters and actions, to judge and distance itself, or to admire and cooperate. The comparison of theatres with coffee-houses is a rather topical one, as we can see in the prologue from John Crown’s *City Politiques* :

The Coffee-Houses Theatres were grown,
Where Zealots acted in a furious tone,
Oliver’s Porter Damming Babylon⁵³.

performance (PINCUS, Steven, 1995. “‘Coffee Politicians Does Create’: Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture”, *op. cit.*, p. 824).

52 ST SERFE, Thomas, 1668. *Tarugo's Wiles: or, the Coffee-House*, *op. cit.*, act III, p. 23.

53 Prologue in CROWN, John, 1683. *City Politiques*, London, Richard Bentley and Joseph Hindmarsh.

Like the coffeehouse, the theatre is a dialogical site, where mingling with other social classes does not exclude intra-class competition for dominance of wit and intellect, rendering inclusive and exclusive purposes in fact indistinguishable. Such a similarity was certainly not lost on our playwright, who playfully represents himself within the coffee-house, looking for inspiration:

2d Customer – I wonder what kind of man that is who is so busie with his Table-book ?

3d Customer – I suspect this a *Dramatick Poet* of weak memory, come to pick up material to help his fancy...

This metatheatrical inclusion of the curious playwright in the middle of the coffee-house scene is a unique occurrence. It seems to confess, behind the professed satirical intentions, that the specificity of the place, namely the tension between an egalitarian ideal and an undying appetite for competition, is precisely what produces its distinct fascination and excitement.

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