



UNIVERSIDAD DE CÓRDOBA

**“Pleasant Modern Novels”: la *Incógnita* de
Congreve en los orígenes de la novela inglesa**

**“Pleasant Modern Novels”: Congreve’s *Incognita*
in the making of the English novel**

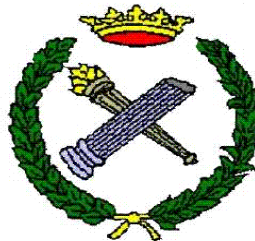
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THESIS TITLE: “Pleasant Modern Novels”: Congreve’s *Incognita* in the making of the English novel

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THESIS SUPERVISORS’ REPORT

This thesis is a thorough investigation of William Congreve’s *Incognita: Or, Love and Duty Reconcil’d* (1692), which performs two main tasks. The first objective it achieves is establishing the literary-historical background to *Incognita*. This involves an exploration of the inheritance from Romance, necessitating treatment of its medieval and early modern manifestations, whereby the candidate appraises chivalry and courtly love in examples that include Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and other Middle English romances. The thesis then moves forwards to the seventeenth century to demonstrate that there was a sceptical response to ‘romance idealism’ in England, a reaction which tended towards realism, but Romance endured in England as well as in France, from whence there was a significant influence on British prose fiction. Congreve’s novel, styled a ‘pleasant modern novel’, is the inheritor of these competing traditions but it also displays the influence of new brands of drama, especially bawdy social comedies, that were popular in England following the Restoration (and it is as a playwright that Congreve is chiefly remembered, as the thesis illustrates). The candidate’s exploration of the literary contexts of the novel makes an original and significant contribution to scholarly understanding of Restoration fiction in general and Congreve’s contribution in particular. The thesis here shows a thorough understanding of important literary critics, including Michael McKeon and Ros Ballaster, who have detailed the novel genre’s scepticism towards romance and the influence on modern English fiction of the drama and of French fiction. The thesis is a rigorous addition to knowledge which productively augments scholarship on the inter-generic and international origins of the English novel.

The second objective of the thesis is a detailed and forensic formal criticism of Congreve’s *Incognita*, which looks at all aspects of its origins, paratexts, language, narrative form, structure, and sources, as well as salient sociocultural contexts including understandings of Providence, gender, and social status. The candidate moves deftly between comparative analysis, such as showing how Congreve draws on but differs from Dryden’s plays, and thematic criticism. The main themes identified are: disguise, satirical treatments of Romance expectations, self-conscious use of letters as plot devices, Providence, love, and the defiance of social norms and expectations. There are original insights that produce, collectively, a richer and fuller understanding of the social and literary importance of Congreve’s work than existing scholarship provides. *Incognita* has not hitherto been subjected to such detailed and dedicated analysis, and so the thesis is original, innovative, and advances understanding. The section that deals with the narrative style of *Incognita* brings together many of the concerns of this thesis, showing that an understanding of the literary heritage

productively informs textual analysis of the innovative narrative strategies in this, Congreve's only novel. Throughout, the candidate demonstrates a full awareness of relevant scholarship and methodologies (bibliographical, feminist, literary historical, and formalist), and the conclusions are situated in relationship to established scholarly knowledge.

The candidate spent three months at The University of Oxford, where her supervisor was Professor Ros Ballaster. Furthermore, during her stay in Oxford in 2019, she participated in the ISECS International Congress on the Enlightenment at the University of Edinburgh. The candidate presented a paper entitled "Congreve's *Incognita*: Female Wit in Restoration Literature". The candidate owes a special debt of gratitude to Ros Ballaster, for her invaluable suggestions and for providing her with vast knowledge of seventeenth-century literature.

There are three main publications derived from this thesis:

"*The Way of the World y Así va el mundo: fidelidad en el texto dramático de Congreve traducido al español por Antonio Ballesteros González.*" *Literary translation and specialized translation discourses. Studien zur romanischen Sprachwissenschaft und interkulturellen Kommunikation.* Bern: Peter Lang, 2018, pp. 73-85. ISBN: 978-3-631-74680-6. Q1 (SPI)

"Fidelidad en el lenguaje y época: la *Incógnita* de Congreve en la traducción de María Jesús Pascual." *Literary translation and specialized translation discourses. Studien zur romanischen Sprachwissenschaft und interkulturellen Kommunikation.* Bern: Peter Lang, 2020, pp. 87-103. ISBN: 978-3-631-80644-9. Q1 (SPI)

"*Incógnita o el amor y el deber bien avenidos: primera traducción al español de la novela de William Congreve.*" *Literary translation and specialized translation discourses. Studien zur romanischen Sprachwissenschaft und interkulturellen Kommunikation.* Bern, Peter Lang. (Forthcoming) Q1 (SPI)

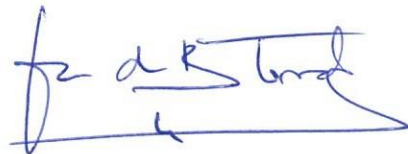
For all the above reasons, the defense of this doctoral thesis is authorized.

Córdoba, 3 May, 2022

Signature of the thesis supervisors



Signed: Nicholas Seager



Signed: Juan de Dios Torralbo Caballero

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Resumen

Esta tesis es el resultado del estudio de la novela publicada por William Congreve en 1692, *Incognita: Or, Love and Duty Reconcil'd*. Esta novela se enmarca en el período de la Restauración Inglesa, a finales del siglo diecisiete. Esta novela fue la primera y única que Congreve escribió. Este autor es más conocido en *les belles lettres* por su producción dramática y por su poesía. Bien es cierto que esto se debe en parte al hecho de que publicó *Incógnita* bajo un seudónimo, Cleophil. Y, además, esta novela nunca llegó a ser incluida en las diferentes ediciones de sus *Works*.

La importancia de esta novela es el objeto de estudio de esta tesis. En ella intento demostrar por qué *Incógnita* se propone como una obra con género híbrido utilizando fuentes primarias y comparándolas con el texto de Congreve, como también la crítica que hay sobre la novela y su lugar en un momento de cambio de siglo y emergencia de la novela inglesa.

La metodología a seguir consistirá de un primer bloque de teoría y contextualización de los tres grandes géneros que se encuentran en la novela. Primeramente, los romances medievales serán introducidos ya que el argumento en *Incógnita* se basa en la ridiculización de temas arcaicos tales como el amor cortés y la figura del caballero andante. Este primer género se introduce en el capítulo 2.2. La dicotomía entre la esfera privada y la pública o la diferencia entre hombres y mujeres y su papel en el cortejo son temas clave en *Incógnita*.

Seguidamente, los nuevos romances importados de Francia en el diecisiete también tienen una fuerte influencia en *Incógnita*. Estos romances eran novelas amorosas que diferían de los antiguos romances en la eliminación de los elementos fantásticos y una búsqueda por parte del autor de *vraisemblance* o verosimilitud. La ficción buscaba un

acercamiento a la realidad ya bien recreando las novelas en espacios reales o utilizando personajes históricos. En el capítulo 2.3. indago sobre la influencia que hubo en el diecisiete en Inglaterra, y cómo se pusieron de moda dejando atrás el arcaísmo previo. En este capítulo comento la teoría marxista de Michael McKeon, donde el “romance idealism” deja paso a un “naïve empiricism” o los nuevos romances que intentan dejar atrás el arcaísmo y los elementos fantásticos para ofrecer un nuevo género basado en la realidad. Sin embargo, una nueva fuerza surge en contra tanto del “romance idealism” como del “naïve empiricism” dando paso a un “extreme skepticism” donde se incluye la novela moderna. *Incógnita* ridiculiza tanto el “romance idealism” como el “naïve empiricism” o esa búsqueda de imitar la realidad a través de la experiencia, como se analiza en el capítulo 3.

Incógnita es una parodia o anti-romance muy en la línea de los anti-romances franceses, tales como Charles Sorel’s *The Extravagant Shepherd or Lysis* (1655). Estas pseudo-historias que fueron traducidas del francés en la segunda mitad del siglo diecisiete tuvieron una clara influencia en Congreve. El autor más destacado por la incorporación de su narrador irónico es Paul Scarron y su *Roman Comique* traducido en 1665 al inglés. El paralelismo encontrado entre ambos narradores en Scarron y Congreve es analizado en el capítulo 3.9. y subcapítulos. El narrador en *Incógnita* es tan importante como la historia en sí. Una de las conclusiones clave de esta tesis es, sin lugar a dudas, la imposibilidad de excluir al narrador de la trama y no perder una parte fundamental de la novela. *Incógnita* no puede ser analizada sin su narrador ni la lectura de esta novela tendría los mismos matices sin su presencia.

El último género de la introducción a *Incógnita* es el del teatro de la Restauración. Una introducción a un período tan prolífico donde William Congreve, discípulo de John Dryden tiene una gran importancia. Su producción teatral no fue extensa, contando con

tres comedias (*The Old Batchelour* (1693), *The Double Dealer* (1693), *Love for Love* (1695) y *The Way of the World* (1700)) y una tragedia (*The Mourning Bride* (1697)), todas ellas consideradas grandes obras de la Restauración. En el análisis de *Incógnita* (especialmente en capítulos 3.2., 3.3., 3.4., 3.5., 3.6. y 3.7.) también pongo de relieve la influencia recibida de dramaturgos como John Dryden, William Wycherley, Aphra Behn o George Villiers, Duque de Buckingham.

Y, por último, el género de la novela (capítulo 2.5.). Como el título de esta tesis sugiere, *Incógnita* no puede clasificarse como novela en el sentido moderno de la palabra, pero sí debe tener su lugar por el papel que jugó en la emergencia de ésta. Durante estos años de investigación encuentro extenso material académico sobre todo del prefacio de esta novela por su distinción clara y directa de *romance* and *novel*. Sin embargo, un análisis completo de la novela me ha sido difícil de encontrar. Tres tesis doctorales previas a esta desarrollan un análisis en más detalle, destacando la de Helga Drougge que Donald McKenzie y Christine Ferdinand incluyen en las obras completas de William Congreve publicadas en 2011 por Oxford University Press. Por tanto, este capítulo sobre los orígenes de la novela contextualiza el por qué *Incógnita* se encuentra a caballo entre géneros o por qué busca romper con el “romance idealism” pero también con el “naïve empiricism” de esos nuevos romances. Parto de la obra canónica *The Rise of the Novel* de Ian Watt (1957) para empezar este capítulo, pero argumento como este libro queda obsoleto después de las diversas investigaciones sobre el origen de la novela desde diferentes perspectivas, no sólo en Inglaterra y no sólo prestando atención a la producción masculina. Además, comparo y contrasto otras diversas teorías por autores como Margaret Schlauch, Margaret Anne Doody, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michael McKeon, Ros Ballaster, Northrop Frye o Lennard Davis entre otros.

El capítulo 3, el más extenso de esta tesis, analiza, evalúa y compara *Incógnita* con obras primarias del período, tanto francesas, como inglesas y españolas. En el capítulo 3.1. me centro en las ediciones y las primeras críticas sobre la novela. En el capítulo 3.2. indago la hibridación de *Incógnita* y cómo en las primeras ediciones de ésta el sobretítulo de “Novel” aparecía en cada una de ellas, de ahí la elección del título de esta tesis “Pleasant Modern Novels”. En este capítulo también se incluyen temas tales como el uso de técnicas dramáticas como monólogos/soliloquios, además del papel de la Providencia en el desarrollo de la novela.

La tesis trata de analizar la novela completa empezando en el capítulo 3.3. por la dedicatoria a su amiga Mrs Katharine Leveson donde ya se percibe el estilo y la elegancia en la manera de escribir de Congreve. El capítulo 3.4. explora el famoso prefacio. En él se hace una distinción de géneros entre romances y novelas, pero también Congreve explica el proceso de creación de la novela, incluyendo el “Dramatick Writing” o utilizar técnicas teatrales, algo que él considera novedoso y no visto antes en una novela. El capítulo 3.5. analizar los personajes, algunos de ellos no permanecen estables durante toda la novela, como por ejemplo, los protagonistas Aurelian e Incógnita. Y sobre todo encuentro interesante el análisis de éstos por lo que representan (valores patriarcales, feminismo, rebeldía) y que ayudan a comprender mejor el texto. Además, Congreve utiliza los nombres de personajes históricos reales para alguno de los personajes de *Incógnita*. En el capítulo 3.6. analiza el argumento de la novela, pero no solamente se incluye aquí un resumen de la trama, sino que también se analiza las fuentes primarias de donde Congreve toma ideas para los acontecimientos (capítulo 3.6.1.). Especial atención a la lectura y análisis del libro de John Raymond, *An Itinerary Contayning a Voyage Made through Italy* (1648), del que Congreve hace suyas las descripciones de Siena y

Florescia. Tambi3n, Congreve toma de su mentor John Dryden dos de sus obras para forjar la trama de su novela, *The Assignation* (1672) y *Marriage-à-la-Mode* (1673).

Por 3ltimo, el cap3tulo 3.7. y subcap3tulos analizan los temas que he encontrado en el an3lisis de la obra. Las diferentes ediciones contempor3neas de *Inc3gnita* junto con la 3ltimo de 2011 me han ayudado en gran medida en mi investigaci3n y a cohesionar todos los puntos que se deben mencionar de la novela. He intentado centrar mi atenci3n en cada uno de los quince 3tems que encuentro importantes para demostrar la hip3tesis de esta tesis. El cap3tulo 3.8. no se incluye dentro del an3lisis *per se* de *Inc3gnita* ya que es el m3s novedoso y tal vez, controversial. Uno de los momentos m3s brillantes de la novela es un *repartee* entre los dos protagonistas en donde un *female wit* o ingenio femenino da la imagen de una mujer empoderada que rechaza abiertamente el amor cort3s. Este personaje femenino es a su vez la protagonista y el t3tulo de la novela en s3. Estudio la estabilidad de este personaje femenino como *rebel figure* a lo largo de la novela, donde hay instantes en los cuales esta teor3a no se puede sostener, tal vez como negaci3n de ese “na3ve empiricism” que apuntaba McKeon. Si bien es sabido, al final de la novela no hay esa reconciliaci3n entre amor y deber y, por tanto, ese rechazo al patriarcado queda invalidado.

Inc3gnita no deber3a pasar desapercibida en los estudios de la novela, al igual que otras muchas obras de otros autores o autoras como Aphra Behn, por ejemplo. La novela se debe estudiar como un proceso de evoluci3n o revoluci3n, seg3n se mire y no como un g3nero que surge *ex nihilo*. Creo firmemente que por ello los investigadores del dieciocho est3n prestando m3s atenci3n a esas novelas primigenias que pueden arrojar luz y aportar matices, y por ello este g3nero nunca dejar3 de sorprendernos. Con esta tesis pretendo aportar mi contribuci3n al mundo acad3mico y, en especial, a la novela inglesa. Pero tambi3n, reiterar de nuevo la necesidad de estudiar esas novelas que a3n siguen

pasando desapercibidas y que necesitan ser releídas y analizadas en un género tan importante y en evolución continua como es el de la novela.

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Chapter 1

Introduction, methodology and expectations

Naming *Incognita*¹ as a “Pleasant Modern Novel” in 1700 is probably to anticipate too much. As widely believed, the first apparition of the modern novel as such took place around the 1700’s with Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)² as Ian Watt stated in *Rise of the Novel* (1957; 2015)³. According to him, the development of the modern novel is related to the rise of Protestantism and economic individualism:

... the novel requires a world view which is centred on the social relationships between individual persons; and this involves secularisation as well as individualism, because until the end of the seventeenth century the individual was not conceived as wholly autonomous, but as an element in a picture which depended on divine persons for its meaning, as well as on traditional institutions such as Church and Kingship for its secular pattern. (84)

¹ *Incognita* has been discussed extensively by critics. Several of them have considered this *novella* as an antecedent which contributes to the later rise of the novel in the eighteenth century. There are several works which deal with this topic in further detail such as John Richetti’s *Popular Fiction before Richardson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp.174-6); Maximillian Novak’s “Fiction and Society in the Early 18th Century” in H.T. Swedenberg, ed. *England in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972, pp. 51-70) and Paul Salzman’s *English Prose Fiction 1558-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, pp. 328-37).

² See chapter IX. “Daniel Defoe: Lies as Truth” in Davis, Lennard J. *Factual Fictions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, pp. 154-173.

³ As quoted in Watt (74): “Robinson Crusoe is certainly the first novel in the sense that it is the first fictional narrative in which an ordinary person’s daily activities are the centre of continuous literary attention”. Marthe Robert also claims that *Robinson Crusoe* is modern in the sense that “expresses very clearly the tendencies of the mercantile middle class which emerged from the English Revolution.” See Marthe Robert. “From Origins of the Novel.” *Theory of the Novel*, edited by Michael McKeon, The Johns Hopkins UP, 2000, p. 68, note 1.

It is true that this work might be a little bit outdated nowadays. In fact, Davis (1996, 102-3), states that Watt's error was to omit previous works to those of Defoe, Richardson or Fielding. Watt (33) does not share the view of the existence of early novels which played an important role in the development of the modern novel. He assures that what Defoe or Richardson did was totally new and without having any sort of relation or influence on previous literary genres or tastes:

La Calprenède, Richard Head, Grimmelshausen, Bunyan, Aphra Behn, Furetière, to mention only a few, had all asserted that their fictions were literally true; but their prefatory asseverations are no more convincing than the very similar ones to be found in most works of mediaeval hagiography. The aim of verisimilitude had not been deeply enough assimilated in either case to bring about the full rejection of all the non-realistic conventions that governed the genre.

My research questions would be: Is *Incognita* a precursor of the modern novel? Is Congreve anticipating a genre which would be consolidated by others just years later? Bearing in mind these questions, I will utilise the only novel he wrote to debate and demonstrate my assumptions: *Incognita: Or, Love and Duty Reconcil'd* (1692). The work is a novel in terms of structure; however, it provides certain features from romance and drama. This conclusion will be sufficiently supported by academic evidence which explores the issue deeply.

Methodology is divided in two major parts. The first part would be the general bibliography related to the three major genres I will discuss in the main body of the thesis. The first genre discussed would be that of romance. To document myself I have mainly employed an extremely notorious book by Barbara Fuchs called *Romance* (2004). In this book, Fuchs reviews the long history of romance from the "Greek romance" to the Gothic one. Fuchs comments how romance as a genre is related and has an impact on Genre Theory. She compiles several definitions of romance which will be commented and

related to *Incognita*. Moreover, she defines romance as a literary strategy and points out that this is more beneficial in a literary work. However, romance loses its efficiency when it functions as a whole genre and cannot be mingled with other genres as well. Furthermore, there is another book which is less recent and deals with this topic; Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance* (1785). There are other references to romance in books dealing with the theory of the novel such as Brean S. Hammond and Shaun Regan's *Making the Novel: Fiction and Society in Britain, 1660-1789* (2006, 29-32) and Marina MacKay's *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel* (2011, 21-33).

When dealing with drama, I will employ references from different articles related to Restoration drama; especially paying attention to the comedy of manners, a genre very close to *Incognita*. One of these articles is Lara Crowley's "Restoration Comedy" in *The Seventeenth-Century Literature Handbook* (2010). Besides, Robert Evans and Eric J. Sterling offer a wide scope of the topic of Restoration plays and fundamentally, comedies, in the same book mentioned before. Moreover, there are authors, such as Peter Ackroyd in his "Foreword to *William Congreve: Incognita*" who points out directly to *Incognita* as a work derived from dramaturgy. Furthermore, in an article written by Susan J. Rosowski called "Thematic Development in the Comedies of William Congreve: The Individual in Society" (1976) there is a further analysis of the dramatic production of William Congreve suitable for the analysis of the dramatic features in *Incognita*.

A specific point while focusing my attention upon the dramatic side of this work is that of the Aristotelian unities described in his *Poetics*. *Incognita*'s plot and structure deserve much attention. I will take into consideration the three unities of drama: action, time and place which play an essential role within the story. I will prove that *Incognita* achieves all the parameters which Aristotle suggests for a play to be performed. Firstly, there is a central action which is carried out by Aurelian and Incognita. There are a few

subplots which are intertwined. Secondly, the story is developed over the course of several nights and days; but not a very long space in time.

In terms of the novel, I will base my argument on proposing *Incognita* as a precursor of the modern novel using canonical books dealing with the notion of the novel from a generic perspective such as Margaret Anne Doody's *The True Story of the Novel* (1996), Michael McKeon's *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach* (2000) or Michael McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* (2002).

Regarding a more specific commentary of the work itself, I will utilise references from two principal articles: "Congreve's "Incognita" and the Art of the Novella" (1969) by Maximillian E. Novak and also "Congreve's *Incognita*: Romance, Novel or Drama?" (1990) by Kristiaan P. Aercke. Also, there are other articles which discuss other aspects of the work such as "Congreve's *Incognita*: The Source of Its Setting, with a Note on Wilson's *Belphegor*" (1932) by E. S. de Beer.

Concerning the structure of the thesis, it will be divided in two major blocks. The former will be related to the theoretical background in which I deal with different genres. The latter will be the practical part of it; that is to say the analysis of the *novella* itself. Needless to say, there will be a connection between theory and examples from the text throughout the second part. Therefore, the first section is a general overview of genres such as romance, drama, *novella* or novel, among others which will be commented briefly. In the following section, the focus will be on *Incognita*, and its exhaustive analysis connected to the previous theoretical background.

As previously mentioned, my expectations regarding this thesis are no others than giving *Incognita* the place it deserves as a pre-novelistic work with nuances from romance and drama. Furthermore, I will point out Congreve as one of the pioneers in mingling different genres; or at least, as professor Sutherland (150) points out that Congreve has to

be praised for “bringing to perfection what other men had done before him.” Bruce King brilliantly describes him in the cover of David Thomas’s book called *William Congreve*:

Congreve is shown to be a superb literary craftsman, writing for a specific group of gifted actors, and in addition a thoughtful political writer for whom there was no distinction between public and private life. For Congreve, consent provided the essential basis in both cases. His plays explore contrasting patterns of consent and coercion in personal and political relationship and show how individual lives and whole societies can be wrecked by appetite and ambition. Ultimately his work is involved in the quest for what makes men and women able to live together in peace, stability and mutual respect.⁴

I want to bring *Incognita* to the fore and trace back its influences. Although it is a short work of fiction, its almost one hundred pages are enough to encompass the whole story. I am concerned with the fact that it is not a completely fresh issue since other authors have attempted to give a response to the question such as Michael McKeon, Kristiaan P. Aercke or Maximillian E. Novak. However, my intention is to analyse *Incognita* in detail and gather all the concepts these critics have used in order to create a consistent answer to my working hypothesis – i.e. that *Incognita* is a transgeneric work which prefigures modern novels.

The only thesis written so far about *Incognita* regarding this hybridity, is by Helga Drougge in 1976 entitled *The Significance of Congreve’s Incognita*. Her explanation of why she has chosen this work for her thesis is that although *Incognita* is “conspicuously old-fashioned for its own time, and which seems like a throwback from the emerging realism of for example Aphra Behn to something not unlike the early version of Sidney’s *Arcadia*,” she found that the novel still is “a single artistic whole, and a significant prologue to Congreve’s plays” (Drougge 10). And I guess, certainly is what Salzman

⁴ This quote is found in the front flap of the book.

(282) thought but in a general manner of course referring to this seventeenth-century period of experiments:

While the French anti-romance turns towards realism ... in England exuberant burlesque turns further away from verisimilitude than the romance itself. Verisimilitude is an experiment conducted within the confines of the heroic romance, while the anti-romance moves towards the power of the imagination, illustrated by mocking exaggeration. The combination of romance and anti-romance, rather than any crude attack on romance, contributed to the familiarity and ironic tone of the Restoration novel.

Chapter 2

Literary genres in question: romance, drama and novel

2.1. Introduction

At the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the terms “romance”, “history”⁵ and “novel” were exchangeable very often. There was not a clear-cut distinction among these terms. However, there was a growing tendency for using both terms as antitheses for representing two different ways of knowing the world (McKeon, *Origins* 25). This tendency for opposing both terms resulted in the will for discovering the similarities as well as the differences between history and romance. Or, in other words, the distinction between what was considered the truth, historical facts; and the fictional, invented events. According to Roger Ascham, the tutor of Elizabeth I and the writer of *The Schoolmaster* published posthumously in 1570, history is didactic, which leads men to behave properly in public life, whereas romance is more for the mere

⁵ From 1640s until 1665, the term ‘histories’ were used as synonym for ‘stories’, however, these stories were romances. In the second half of the seventeenth-century these histories claimed to be true stories, reliable events based on real people. As Zurcher (376-89) points out, in 1661, the romance written by George MacKenzie’s *Aretina* proclaims this shift to a more ‘serious’ romance instead of the romance for pleasure. The title is *Aretina; or, The serious romance Written originally in English*. Also, there is another example of this urgency to distinguish between “serious” works based upon truth or, on the contrary, on fables. This is found at the beginning of Book X in *The Comical History of Francion* by Charles Sorel when it says, “It is true that the stiles Comical and Satyrical, are as profitable as they are delightfull. For your Example, you may here see all things represented to the life. All actions doe appear without dissimulation, when in Books more serious, there are certain respects which doe hinder the Authors from expressing themselves with so much liberty, and this is the Reason that Histories are so imperfect, and filled more with Fables than with Truth.”

sake of delightful reading, more severely, “the product of undisciplined imagination suitable only for women and children” (qtd. in Zurcher 377).

Such is the issue that Lennard Davis in the preface to *Factual Fictions* (xii) states that this fact/fiction controversy deals more with a difference between journalism and novel rather than romance and novel:

... the novel and journalism are intricately interconnected,⁶ perhaps more interconnected than the novel and romance; that cultural attitudes toward fact and fiction shifted during the early modern period; that this shift was influenced by an increasing legal pressure to distinguish levels of proof, veracity, and evidence; that the rise of print culture created new categories of textuality that provoked problems in distinguishing levels of veracity; that there was an interconnection between criminality and fictionality which novels had to try to refute; and finally that the culture enforced this new relation between fact and fiction by isolating narrative forms – news, novels, history – based on their presumed relation to veracity.

Before tackling these questions, I would like to introduce a definition, or at least, a sort of description of what is ‘genre’. It is pertinent to clarify what ‘genre’ as such means to understand later the complexity in the hybridity of *Incognita*, and how genres interrelated in this work.

As a very generic definition, I would like to employ this one by M. McKeon in his introduction to Genre Theory in *Theory of the Novel* (1):

... genres are formal structures that have a historical existence in the sense that they come into being, flourish, and decay, waxing and waning in complex relationship to other historical phenomena. Genres are contingent in the sense that they aren’t necessary: neither their nature nor their transformation, neither their continuity nor their discontinuity, can be predicated in advance.

⁶ See also Paul Hunter, *Before Novels*, “Journalism: The Commitment to Contemporaneity” especially II.

As McKeon points out, genres are formal structures that are conceived by humans in order to categorise texts in literary history. Genres appear and develop according to the needs involved in a particular moment in time and, the consequent historical, political and social forces. They advance in history as the historical pace dictates and its development or behaviour cannot be foreseen until there are enough texts to establish a set of peculiarities attached to that genre in particular.

This thesis focuses its attention towards a short novel, *Incognita* (1692) by William Congreve. This novel is set in the last bit of seventeenth-century England (Restoration Period) and the beginning of the eighteenth-century, known as the epoch of The Enlightenment. This period is also known for being the Age of Reason where intellectual and philosophical doctrines flourished and developed quickly and in a productive manner. In this thesis, the concept of genre is of the utmost importance, since *Incognita* was written with a variety of influences which came from different genres in vogue at that time. This text is a hybrid, in the sense that it cannot be included in a particular genre, *stricto sensu*. This point is shared by almost the majority of academics involved in seventeenth-century fiction, but, until what extent is mainly romance, drama or novel is still not clearly agreed.

During the Restoration period,⁷ which spans from 1660 to the end of the seventeenth century, there were already attempts to make a clear distinction between facts and fiction (novel/romance). There was a generic chaos in the literary world and writers felt the necessity to shed some light on the manners in which the truth could be told in narrative. Thus, in the Restoration period, writers aimed at the necessity to distinguish

⁷ *Stricto sensu* the Restoration Period ended with the Revolution, in historical terms (Morgan, *History of England* 342). Nevertheless, many of the literary features that emerged during the Restoration were kept until the end of the century, that is the reason why experts such as Bernd Dietz (1986) dates the end of the Restoration Period somewhat later, around the very end of the 17th century (Herman 240).

between works based on real facts or invented events.⁸ For instance in the preface to the reader by Aphra Behn, in her short novella, *The Fair Jilt: or, The Amours of Prince Tarquin and Miranda* (4), she claims the story she writes to be authentic:

That it is Truth ... But 'tis a Truth that entertains you with so many Accidents diverting and moving ... For however it may be imagin'd that Poetry (my Talent) has so greatly the Ascendant over me, that all I write must pass for Fiction, I now desire to have it understood, that this is Reality, and Matter of Fact, and acted in this our latter Age.

Nonetheless, this controversy about terminology is constant until the end of the following century. Thus, the term 'novel' in the modern sense will not be properly established until that time. Furthermore, authors presented as the 'canonical fathers' of the novel or 'novelistic triad' (Richardson, Fielding and Sterne)⁹ did not use the term 'novel' to designate their works. As Watt (363-4) concludes, both Richardson and Fielding saw themselves as transgressors, breaking the tradition and the hegemony of romances in literature. They introduced an innovative and different manner in presenting prose fiction. However:

neither they nor their contemporaries provide us with the kind of characterisation of the new genre that we need; indeed they did not even canonise the changed nature of their fiction by a change in nomenclature – our usage of the term “novel” was not fully established until the end of the eighteenth century.

⁸ For instance, one of the paratexts at the beginning of “Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave. A True History” by Aphra Behn, reads thus: “To the Right Honourable the Lord Maitland ... This is a true Story, of a Man Gallant enough to merit your Protection ... ” (54). See also the title and how the work was categorised by the author: “A True History”.

⁹ See chapter 10. “Realism and the Later Tradition: A Note” in Watt’s *Rise* (290-301).

2.2. Old Romances

2.2.1. Medieval Romance

Romance has always been a genre defined as an “unreliable history” or in John Nalson words: “History without Truth or with a mixture of Falsehood, degenerates into Romance” (I, i). This conclusion derives from the fact that “romance” is the evolution of “myth” which constitutes by definition something which is not true, but fictitious. For instance, the Socratic “myth” or Sophoclean tragedy are considered to be early versions of romance in narrative (McKeon, *Origins* 31).

On a historical account, romance was the name given to the genre depicting narrative poems in the twelfth century in France. Originally, the term romance came from the fact that those poems were written in the vernacular or *romance* languages derived from Latin. John Finlayson (46) explains the birth of romance:

Originally, *romance* signified a language derived from popular Latin and also designated a translation from Latin into the vulgar tone... In England the term was used to distinguish Anglo-Norman or French from the native language and literature. From the thirteenth century on, the sense ‘fictitious narrative’ which the word has today predominated, and the word came to be applied to a particular type of fictitious narrative in which the writers in romance languages, particularly the French, chanced to excel.

In these poems, characters were fixed: kings and queens and aristocratic personages such as knights and ladies. In those romances, there was always an idealised love story as well as a knight in pursuit of a quest. The duties of the hero of these medieval poems were predominantly two: the comeback of the hero to the familial environment or the reconquest of the kingdom. The former is associated to a more personal view or private sphere and, the latter is focused towards the political or public sphere.

Middle English romance is typically structured around the adventures of a single knight: the resolution of the knight's initial displacement marks the close of the text. So in *Octovian*, *Isumbras*, *Emaré*, *Lai le Freine*, *Sir Orfeo*, and so on, closure is signalled by re-union with a lost family; in *Beues*, *Horn* and *Havelock*, closure¹⁰ is the regaining of the hero's lost kingdom. (Fewster 19)

In medieval times, we could find romances which came from French origin and were adapted into the English public and customs; in other words, they were 'anglicised'. Although centuries later, this trend will repeat the same pattern in the seventeenth-century when French heroic romances will be translated into English. English writers will imitate the structure and generic peculiarities of these French texts to produce their own literature in English. Therefore, without a doubt, French literature has served as a main source to English literature since the early romances in the Middle Ages. However, the sense of patriotism never abandoned the Britons and their literature, and they always were prone to transform these foreign influences with their special touch.

Within this group, I would like to mention *Ywain and Gawain*, translation from the original in French, *Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion* written by Chrétien de Troyes. *Sir Gawain* for instance, was written following the splendour of the international techniques of romances, but introducing alliteration from English ones. In fact, this work by Chaucer is where he creates a new deep psychological development of characters. In this romance, characters are not the prototypical archetypes or *exempla* conditioned by moral requirements, but new 'autonomous' types. Hibbard Loomis¹¹ goes a step further in her study of the poem stating that the conversation and manners of characters are of a high

¹⁰ See chapter 3 (103-90) in Wittig's *Stylistic and narrative structures*, for further information about closures.

¹¹ See *Mediaeval Romance in England: A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclic Metrical Romances*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1960.

sophistication and often, certain scenes from the romance bear a striking resemblance to a comedy of manners, which would be a genre discussed later.

The characters in *Sir Gawain* possess, even within the 'types' consecrated by tradition, individual characteristic; their actions are motivated by particular impulses and reactions.

Except for Morgan le Fay, none of the characters is really 'flat'. (Boitani 65)

However, as Margaret Schlauch points out in her *Antecedents* (28), *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* would not represent a precursor of the modern novel nor would be an influence in later productions of English fiction. This romance was an achievement in the epoch without a continuum in the subsequent stages of the development of new narrative genres. She explains the motives:

Its dialect was provincial; its complex techniques of language and versification looked to the past rather than to the future, when narrative for entertainment was to be embodied in a single national language understandable by all readers.

However, what is universally agreed is that Chaucer created characters who were not flat¹² although following the archetypes in vogue. There is a continuum in the development of characters along literary history, but as Schlauch says, it is too precipitate to establish a connection between both genres so remote in time and features as medieval romances and comedies of manners. I do agree with this statement. However, as in *Incognita* we can trace episodes and references to old romances, it is a must to at least provide an overview of this genre.

Another example following the English requirements is *Sir Degrevant*. It was written at the beginning of the fifteenth century and it is not regarded as specifically French in origin. However, the setting is evidently an English one. On the other hand,

¹² Flat and round characters are two concepts which appear in E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1927).

there is the group of 'native' production which survived called 'Matter of England'. Certainly, in this group are included *Athelston* and *Havelok* (Boitani 37).

According to the aforementioned distinction, there are two sorts of romances: those which came from French origin and those who were inherently English in essence. Nonetheless, it should be emphasised that French romances appeared in first place rather than the English ones. Romances did not flourish in England until the end of the thirteenth century whereas this genre began a century before in France.

Turning to the following century, in France appeared the first romances in prose. Those poems grouped in the Arthurian Vulgate were to read by Dante himself. It is true though that prose romances were not part of English literature until two centuries forward, in the fifteenth century (Boitani 38).

2.2.2. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

Together with this brief overview of how romance entered Britain, it is compulsory to mention its most outstanding author, Chaucer. His romances written mainly for the Court and aristocratic circles were astonishing productions. In the last part of the fourteenth century, he wrote seven romances which were deeply influenced by the French tradition which at the very same time derived from the Italian mainstream of *avant-garde*.

Basically, what Chaucer did was to introduce a new style and language to the existing romances. Before him, in both the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the sort of romance was called 'popular romance'¹³ which was composed of four-stress couplet with a tail-rhyme stanza. Chaucer used to mock this sort of 'popular romance' in *Sir Thopas*, for instance. However, the public changed tastes and the 'popular romance' was relegated to continue only in the north of England. Whereas in the capital, London and mainly the

¹³ See J. Finlayson, "Definitions of Middle English Romance." *Chaucer Review*, vol. 15, 1981-2, pp. 44-62, pp. 168-81.

rest of the country the romance introduced by Chaucer ruled. This supremacy of Chaucer's poems remained until the fifteenth century. This poet utilised traditional schemes but gave them a sophistication (Boitani 39).

Troilus and Criseyde, one of the greatest masterpieces by Chaucer, is highly important when describing the development of romances. This romance was written before 1388, and very likely around 1385 along with other works as *Boece* and *Knight's Tale*. The latter is a romance which Chaucer transformed into a discussion about problems within society, fortune, or nobility:

The felicitous initiation of an aristocratic young lover into erotic experience, followed by his disappointment or disillusionment – constitutes in fact a useful framework for early experiments in the direction of the novel of manners dealing with upper-class society. (Schlauch 120)

Regarding the content of *Troilus*, the central topic is related to problems and paradoxes in romantic relationships where the main plot is centred around the couple formed by Troilus and Criseyde. These characters cope with the complexity of human reactions. Love which is central to *Troilus and Criseyde* is depicted with sublime realism.

Thus, there are many critics who have conceived this “romantic” work as a clear antecedent of the novel (Schlauch 31). The work is written in verse¹⁴ and not in prose, however, its length (1870 verses in rhyme royal) permits an enough psychological development¹⁵ of the main characters. In the text, we find dialogues (an element which is characteristically novelistic) but also, interior monologues and thoughts (which might be well placed in the dramatic genre). This makes possible the deep roundedness of characters. We must not forget that Watt in his *Rise* (18) stated that two of the major

¹⁴ Romances written in prose did not appear until the fifteenth century. For further details about romance in medieval times see Boitani (36-70).

¹⁵ “A ‘roundedness’ of character” (Boitani 219-20).

characteristics attached to a novel is firstly, an individualisation of the characters, each of the characters possess a set of peculiarities both in behaviour and in appearance, and, secondly, the setting or environment is carefully described. Both singularities make the storyline acquire a sense of realism¹⁶ which lead the reader to think the story could be plausible.

This sense of realism is also conveyed using common or proper names, but this is not happening in Medieval times, nor even in Renaissance times or the Restoration. Readers must wait until the beginning of the eighteenth century to read common names depicting real people. The earliest novelist as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding incorporated commonplace names.

A proper novelistic work is not conceivable without a progression of events in a delimited period of time. This vision of *Troilus* as an antecedent of the novel is also expressed by Boitani who explicitly says that:

Troilus is a romance, and it not only lays bare men's problems and torments with a breadth unprecedented in English literature but treats the characters themselves with such psychological depth and perspicuity that it seems to be moving from the 'romance' towards the 'novel'. (39)

On the other hand, Margaret Schlauch presents this romance by Chaucer as an unclassified piece of work which shares nuances from various genres. Hybridity is not only characteristic of *Incognita*, and many other works which are on the boundary between genres. When a writer deliberately deploys different tools and combine them properly to obtain a new product, literary critics see themselves in a difficult position trying to define the work:

¹⁶ See Chapter 1. 'Realism and the Novel Form' (Watt 9-34).

It is not romance in the old sense, though it is romantic; it is not comedy of manners or social novel either; and yet it shows much of all these genres. It stands by itself and in this position we may be content to leave it without strict classification. (32)

Very likely the above definition could be applied to those pre-modern novels which could not be easily categorised and that still nowadays remain undeciphered from the point of view of genre theory, as *Incognita* itself.

2.2.3. Chivalry and courtly love

The theme of chivalry is key to *Incognita*. Some of the characteristics of chivalric romances appear quite explicitly in *Incognita*, and courtly love is one of them. Chivalric romances were still in literature until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In fact, there was a huge demand of these romances written by author such as Richard Johnson, Henry Robarts and Emanuel Forde.¹⁷ However, seeing as an outmoded genre for the period, these chivalric romances were more often than not mocked.¹⁸ For instance, Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613). A definition of this type of romances could be the following:

The errant knight, in his travels and struggles, draws most of his power from the rigorous norms he follows. Incarnating the *unconditional obligation* to maintain justice, he devotes himself to correcting the world's disorder, and spends his energy in accordance with the laws of chivalry and courtliness he has freely embraced. (Pavel 6)

The hero in these romances is the typical errant knight who in his journey encounters a series of obstacles which will delay the denouement of the story. This hero must be the protector of justice always following the right path and making the right

¹⁷ *The famous history of the seven champions of Christendom* (1696), *Pheander, the Mayden Knight* (1595) and *Ornatus and Artesia* (c. 1598), respectively.

¹⁸ See Salzman (275).

decisions. The hero must profess true love for a lady and behaves accordingly during the whole journey no matter how many obstacles and temptations he finds.

A distinction between the romance knight or hero and the secular legend hero should be made. There is a slight difference which would be important in terms of discussing the hero(s) of *Incognita*. As Childress (317-8) states:

The romance hero pursues his goals energetically, even aggressively, but the protagonist of secular legend must patiently endure humiliation and deprivation and suffering... Havelok, Bevis of Hamtoun, King Horn, William of Palerne, Reinbrun, Tristrem are all unjustly estranged from their patrimonies and must fight to regain them. But the passive heroes of secular legend must wait for God to change their lives.

Regarding *Incognita*, the hero is neither energetic nor aggressive, but he spends the whole narrative waiting for things to resolve without intervention. He is not really an active character. Until the very end, Aurelian does not move in the action and events become more and more entangled. The only thing which makes Aurelian to show a little bit of courage is the chivalric side of his character. When he finds *Incognita* in danger and her life at risk, he is even capable of murdering her assailant. In this way, he is an active character who interrupts the scene and avoids the rape of *Incognita* and the likely death of the heroine.

Adventures in these old romances very often involved a knight who seeks justice across the globe, rescuing damsels in distress and fighting against villains, which is basically the scene from *Incognita* depicted above. Although romances are not necessarily always connected to love affairs, *eros* is part and parcel of many of them. Regarding the concept of *eros*, it is compulsory to mention the concept of *erōtika pathēmata* (Ἐρωτικά παθήματα).¹⁹ This is one of the features which are easily recognised

¹⁹ This term comes from the Greek novelists, who were interested in the romantic/erotic suffering. “Words that indicate suffering are also words that indicate both emotion and experience. Novelists may have been writing prose stories about the engrossing experience of love even at the time of the great writers of

in *Incognita* throughout the relationships between Aurelian and Juliana-Incognita, and Hippolito and Leonora. And as it will be developed in later chapters devoted to the analysis of the story itself, love is one of the things or even the unique trigger which makes the story move forward.

Bryan P. Reardon (5) in his definition of the structure of the courtly romance depicts step by step the different episodes that could be found, and this description could be a general synopsis of *Incognita*.

A handsome youth and a beautiful girl meet by chance and fall in love, but unexpected obstacles obstruct their union; they are separated, and each is launched on a series of journeys and dangerous adventures; through all their tribulations, however, they remain faithful to each other and to the benevolent deities who at critical junctures guide their steps; and eventually they are reunited and live happily ever after.

Romances are inevitable attached to the encounter of marvellous elements. However, these fantastic features are no longer important for my discussion since in *Incognita* marvellous episodes are not found. And these elements are not found because *Incognita*'s main influence comes directly from seventeenth-century heroic romances in which the enchanted elements do not remain. The narrator of the story tells how this work is based on authentic facts, the story is real and he knows key details since the protagonist (Aurelian) has told him. However, this does not imply that the story is certainly true, but a *verisimilitude* is found, a realism which will be developed a century later in the modern novel.

Another peculiarity found in *Incognita* which can be traced back to medieval romances is that of a concern about the private sphere over the public one²⁰, the roles

Augustan literature, Ovid, Horace, and Virgil, all of whom contribute something to love poetry." Doody (27).

²⁰ See the contemporary book by Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) although applied to contemporary life, the distinction between these two concepts has been always reflected on literature.

which for women and how knights experience the feeling of love. In other words, courtly love triggers a social negotiation about the place and import of love. Romance is not a static genre and it will be in constant change depending on the social and cultural demands from 1300 to 1700. It will transform and developed according to authors' needs and readers' demand. For instance, Richardson's plots were consolidated around a courtship.²¹ Particularly, *Pamela* is said to be a 'dilated novel' since its plot was based upon a romantic relationship. This topic was central in *nouvelles* or novellas, however, Richardson takes from romance the length and the storyline is expanded more than usual in novels. (164-5)

Schlauch (13) provides a definition of "courtly love" as "the cult of amorous worship for aristocratic feudal ladies". It has its origin in Southern France at the very beginning of 12th century, although it spreads rapidly over Europe and still it is a recurrent theme in the literature of all times. Watt (136) also states a definition of courtly love which is "in essence the result of the transfer of an attitude of religious adoration from a divine to a secular object – from like the Virgin Mary to the lady worshipped by the troubadour." Therefore, remaining from medieval romances we find the hero and heroine, the courtly love theme around which the main plot is centred, and the conflicts and delays these characters encounter in the development of events. However, giant and witches, marvellous elements and supernatural powers disappear and leave room for a more common romance where mundane events take place. This shift took place around the beginning of the sixteenth century:

Just when the sophisticated romance was rejecting the marvellous in favour of verisimilitude, and exploring, through the influence of Greek romance and the drama, a complex structure for romance rather than an endlessly proliferating narrative, the

²¹ See chapter 5 "Love and the Novel: 'Pamela'" Watt (135-73).

outmoded chivalric romance was eagerly accepted by a new group of readers. (Salzman 98)²²

This mentioned above is what we call “society romance” (Schlauch 17) in which the supernatural and myths disappear to show a more realistic sort of romance. In society romances tales are centred in normal upper-class beings in which narrative technique are used to create more independent characters. For instance: monologues and dialogues, descriptions, etc. *Yvain* written in the 12th century by Chrétien de Troyes²³ is considered one of the most outstanding society romances,²⁴ although it is tracing quite back in time (Schlauch 19):

The persuasions and debates do exemplify social finesse characteristic of the best society romances. The poet shows distinguished skill in the organization of his dialogues, monologues, descriptions of public affairs such as feasts and tournaments.

The knight must face the situation of deciding what to do: love his damsel or take the responsibility as a protector of justice. Supposedly, in *Incognita* both the public and the private spheres are reconciled, as the very title of the novel suggests: *Incognita: Or, Love and Duty Reconcil'd*. There is tension throughout the story between romance and realism, between “idealization and the mundane everyday” (Fuchs 90). Basically, there is a constant opposition between the idyllic romantic and endless love and the duty of the knight in the real world. Idyllic romantic stories in which the heroines follow a pattern or archetype. The ladies who are assuredly related to high class groups are described as untouchable or unobtainable objects. They are flattered to the point of religious worship (Schlauch 13). Regardless of their social status, the ladies of medieval romances

²² See the whole subchapter on “The Popular Chivalric Romance”.

²³ McKeon pinpoints that some scholars such as Robert Hanning have emphasised that we find “individualism” in Chrétien de Troyes, making as something central to human nature, individuality, self-fulfilment in life and self-awareness. (*Origins* 142).

²⁴ Regarding this romance, see Foster Erwin Guyer, *Chrétien de Troyes: Inventor of the Modern Novel* (1960). It is argued how Chrétien commences to introduce elements more peculiar to a narrative mode than to romance.

possessed some liberty to behave and to decide freely. Furthermore, some of them were highly esteemed by their masculine peers (Schlauch 16). This theme will be also interesting from the point of view of *Incognita*. We find different manners to proceed depending on each character and its gender. Aurelian sometimes behaves as the prototypical brave knight, some others he is not able to confront his own father. Incognita/Juliana using her outstanding verbal wit wins Aurelian over, but also, she defies patriarchal authority in not marrying someone she does not love.

The aim of this chapter is to trace back peculiarities from chivalric romances related to the story in *Incognita*.²⁵ Congreve adapted these romances motifs to mock them and to achieve a genuine piece of writing distancing himself from them. That is why *Incognita* is considered an anti-romance. In these anti-romances found in the seventeenth-century, characters were portrayed in a humorous manner even to the point of being ridiculed to the extreme. Sometimes, the habit of reading romances was no longer in fashion and not portrayed as a recommendable reading for being distant from reality, lead people towards madness (*Don Quixote par excellence*). In the following passage, we find here how romance and history appear together. Although in the seventeenth century onwards, the term romance would be associated to fiction; and history would be associated to a real piece of writing.

I bought certaine bookes, which they call Romances, containing the prowesse of the Knights of old, and not long after one of my companions lent me one to read called *Morgant* the Giant, which absolutely bewitched me, having never before read any thing but *Ciceroe's* familiar Epistles, and *Terences* Comedies; at length I was wisht to a Book binder upon the *Pontneuf*, who did sell such like fabulous Histories ... (Sorel, *Francion* Book III, 72)

²⁵ In fact, this is corroborated by what Margaret Schlauch points out in her *Antecedents* (164): "There was a resurgence of interest in chivalric prose romance in the later 16th century, fortified perhaps by the desire of *nouveaux riches* to assimilate themselves to a dignified older tradition."

This sort of literature was produced to entertain and amuse the audience. Contrary to romances, these works did not possess distinguishing elements or romantic effects in their compositions. In fact, this sort of literature moves towards satire and parody, mocking all the recurrent elements found in romances. This characteristic could be shared with Restoration comedies, which will be developed later. Nevertheless, in this ‘comic’ works there was no need to include a moral lesson. They were practically amoral, these stories did not care about men’s actions or to give any judgement about them, either good or bad. The comic tone of the work is emphasising by the verbal wit and astuteness of characters, which is another feature shared with Restoration comedies and *Incognita*.

This brief overview of medieval romances attempts to give a general context to understand better the hybridity I propose for this work. The use of scenes and recurrent themes from medieval romances in *Incognita*, to ironise archaism lead me to provide this previous context. I also want to pinpoint the close connection between French and English literatures, and how even in Medieval romances, as for instance, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, there are some patterns attached to a more novelistic form. This implies that the fluidity of genres is constant and that sometimes the boundaries among them are not so clearly established. Scenes from *Incognita* which are clearly indebted to Medieval romances will be explained in detail in chapter 3.7.

2.3. New romances²⁶

I would not be thought to delight in Romances, having never read a whole one in my life; and if I did believe that these Tales should neither benefit the Life, nor please the Mind, more than what I have read in them, did either instruct or satisfie me; or that they could

²⁶ New Romances refer to the new wave of seventeenth-century *nouvelles* imported from France.

create Amorous thoughts in idle brains, as Romances do, I would never suffer them to be printed, and would make Blots instead of Letters.

(Margaret Cavendish, Preface to *Natures Pictures* 2²⁷)

2.3.1. McKeon's extreme scepticism: a reaction towards romance idealism

There is not a clear-cut division among genres but a transition or evolution. McKeon gives a dialectical model through a Marxist account to explain the development of the novel in his *Origins*. Basically, he proposes that the novel emerged as a reaction against the aristocratic values reigning in romances,²⁸ a truth which is perpetuated via tradition and authority. These values are named under the category of “romance idealism”. Then, “naïve empiricism” is the reaction towards this idealism, a way to find history-like pieces of writing. Nonetheless, “extreme scepticism” is a reaction towards this “naïve empiricism”. Basically, this third stage is precisely what corresponds to the modern novel: “the empiricism of “true history” opposes the discredited idealism of romance, but it thereby generates a countervailing, extreme skepticism, which in turn discredits true history as a species of naïve empiricism or “new romance”” (McKeon, *Origins* 88).

McKeon develops this idea pointing out that:

The traditionality of romance (if not of myth and epic) is seen as explicit in, and crucial to, the formation of the novel. The transition to modernity is specified in terms of the scientific revolution, the Protestant Reformation, and the emergence of print culture. (McKeon, *Theory* 357)

The point in this chapter is to state that there are variations within genres. It is not compulsory for a work to belong to a single genre; for instance, to romance. I concur

²⁷ My own pagination from the edition of 1671.

²⁸ Frye (38-9) claims the novel to be “a realistic displacement of romance, and had few structural features peculiar to itself ... This displacement gave the novel’s relation to romance ... a strong element of parody.”

entirely with Patricia Parker when she concludes that nuances from romance could be found in a text which might belong to another genre. Perhaps, the work might be different from romance in style and structure but shares some features with it. Parker sees romance as a narrative “form that simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object” (4).

Obviously, *Incognita* cannot be classified entirely as a romance. However, there are certain elements which are used as narrative strategies in the text. These strategies are called “romance strategies” (Fuchs 31) which appear inside a particular genre or a combination of several of them. Barbara Fuchs in her book, *Romance* also suggests this notion of romance as a “textual strategy” in which there is:

A concatenation of both narratological elements and literary topoi, including idealization, the marvelous, narrative delay, wandering, and obscured identity ... both pose a quest and complicate it. (9)

I wish to emphasize one of the aspects depicted above: the issue of “narrative delay” which appears in *Incognita*. There is a sense of delaying of events in the *novella* despite its brevity. Although *Incognita* is only a hundred pages long, there is enough space to produce a sense of slow-motion in the concatenation of events. It appears that the real identity of *Incognita* is never going to be revealed. Therefore, “the wish-fulfillment of romance is intimately connected to the pleasure of delayed resolution and extended narrative” (Fuchs 21).

Also, as it appears in the preface to *Incognita*, the debate about whether romances were really a helpful guidance in moral and personal development or a more than evident deceitful piece of writing continued until the beginning of the eighteenth century in novels such as *Moll Flanders*. This point was discussed by the French Bishop Pierre Daniel Huet in his *On the Origins of Romance* (1670). And I would like to contrast two opposite views. One is from a treatise of the second part of the seventeenth century and the other

example is from a novel from the middle of the eighteenth century, where certainly we can clearly notice the opposition to romances of the eighteenth-century authors.

Nothing so much refines and polishes Wit; Nothing conduces so much to the Forming and Advancing it to the Approbation of the World, as the Reading of Romances. These are the Dumb Tutors, which succeed those of the College, and teach us how to Live and Speak by a more Persuasive and Instructive Method than theirs, who deserve the Complement [sic] of *Horace* upon the *Iliad*, “That it teaches Morality more effectually, than the Precepts of the most Able Philosophers.” (Qtd. in I. Williams 54)

Nevertheless, we can find the opposite opinion in *The Female Quixote* (1752) by Charlotte Lennox where we read in Arabella’s words the reaction towards it.

It is the Fault of the best Fictions, that they teach young Minds to expect strange Adventures and sudden Vicissitudes, and therefore encourage them often to trust to Chance. A long Life may be passed without a single Occurrence that can cause much Surprize, or produce any unexpected Consequence of great Importance; the Order of the World is so established, that all human Affairs proceed in a regular Method, and very little Opportunity is left for Sallies or Hazards, for Assault or Rescue; but the Brave and the Coward, the Sprightly and the Dull, suffer themselves to be carried alike down the Stream of Custom. (Lennox 379)

Nonetheless, there are early works which pinpoints this bad habit of reading too many romances and that reminds, of course, of *Don Quixote*. I would like to include this quote at the beginning of the anti-romance written by Charles Sorel’s *The Extravagant Shepherd*²⁹ or *Lysis*³⁰ (6), a work which served as a direct source for *Incognita*:

Instead of *Law-books*, he bought none but a sort of trashy books called *Romances*: Cursed be those that have made them! ... It doth not a little disturb the minds of young people,

²⁹ *Le Berger Extravagant* in the original in French.

³⁰ As Salzman (275) states, and anyone who has read this work, it is very similar to *Don Quixote*, there are many allusions to it, it is impossible not to think of an almost pastoral imitation (instead of ‘knights’ we find fake shepherds). *Lysis*’ madness is going so far as to believe that he becomes a tree, or the fact that Dulcinea is also represented in the persona of Charite.

who as in those Books they find nothing so much mentioned as *playing, dancing*, and merry-making with young *Gentlewomen*, so would they doe the like, and thereby incur the displeasure of their friends.

In the seventeenth-century there is a change in taste, no longer are ‘old romances’³¹ develop around courtly and marvellous situations in fashion, but this century leaves room for a more ‘realistic’ romance, something which is close to everyday lives.

On peut observer un changement considérable dans le goût et voir l’intérêt, concentré jusque-là sur les longues aventures de personnages extraordinaires, se déplacer pour se diriger vers les finesses d’analyse et les situations plus vraisemblables. Les lecteurs commencent à aimer les histoires plus courtes dont les héros nous semblent plus voisins de nous. (Dallas 7)

Daniel Huet provides a modern definition of this new wave of romances which came directly from France:

... l’on appelle proprement Romans sont des fictions d’aventures amoureuses, écrites en prose avec art, pour le plaisir et l’instruction des lecteurs. Je dis des fictions, pour les distinguer des histoires véritables. J’ajoute, d’aventures amoureuses, parce que l’amour doit être le principal sujet du Roman. Il faut qu’elles soient écrites en prose, pour être conformes à l’usage de ce siècle. Il faut qu’elles soient écrites avec art, et sous de certaines regles; autrement ce sera un amas confus, sans ordre et sans beauté. La fin principale des Romans, ou du moins celle qui doit l’être, et que se doivent proposer ceux qui les composent, est l’instruction des lecteurs, à qui il faut toujours faire voir la vertu couronnée, et le vice châtié. (Huet 3-4)

³¹ For instance, in Sorel’s *The Extravagant Shepherd* (“The Translator to the Reader”, Seventh Book), we find this statement made by the translator John Davies talking about the change in trend, “It represents a sort of old Romances, which brought Magicians, Sorceresses, and their Miracles on the Stage.” Therefore, we find that at the beginning of the seventeenth century this distinction between Medieval Romances and the new wave of French heroic ones was a fact.

2.3.2. Seventeenth-century French romances

Thus, these lofty, hyperbolic romances were replaced by a more historical novella, *nouvelle historique*. This use of recent history gives a sense of plausibility which reinforces the idea of reality. For instance, Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678). The primary theme of these types of *nouvelles* was love and the psychological impact of feelings on its characters. They were called historical due to the source of its characters (sometimes historical/real characters) living fictitious events or, historical settings/events using unreal characters.

In the *nouvelle*, one sees a movement deriving from developments already present in the heroic romance: the interest in *vraisemblance*, the attempt to justify the accuracy of the historical setting, the use of the portrait to analyse characters, and the increasing interest in the self-contained *histoire* and *récit*. The movement towards some of the features of the *nouvelle* may be seen in Scudéry's *Clélie*. (Salzman 310)

There were also other genres such as memoirs and autobiographies, but also the 'epistolary novel'³² which gives a sense of immediacy in the telling of characters' inner thoughts. In *Incognita*, we find that a letter is the object of some exchange of information, and a torn piece of paper which serves a great purpose in the story.

Undoubtedly, there was a huge influence which came from France in the seventeenth-century England and both literatures are interrelated during the century. The role of translators was key to accessing these works by the English reader, not only French works but also important literary pieces such as Cervantes' *Novelas Ejemplares* translated to English in 1640. This latter work also has some influence on *Incognita* as we shall see later. The Elizabethan period in England, although long before the publication of *Incognita*, saw the influence from the medieval romance and particularly, the chivalric

³² For instance, the first epistolary novels, *Lettres portugaises* (1669) attributed to Gabriel Joseph de Lavergne comte de Guilleragues, or Madame de Villedieu's *Le Portefeuille* (1674).

one. But also, in the second half of the sixteenth century, we find a revitalised interest in Greek romances where the plot developed around the ‘free will’ of chance, and providence. As Salzman (5) pinpoints, writers such as Sidney, Lodge, and Greene wrote “romances of harmony rather than chaos.” *Incognita* turns out to be highly driven by Providence, and there are many allusions in the text to Providence, fate, and similar words which gives us the sense that these characters are subjected to a higher entity.

Thanks to the information provided by Congreve’s library (Hodges 1955), we know that he owned many works in French, although sometimes he also had the translation into English.³³ On a curious note, Congreve acquired the 1665 French edition³⁴ of the works by Scarron in 1729, the same year he died.³⁵ It is interesting how there was a huge trend of these French romances in England. The thing is that publishers in England realized how these works could be attractive and entertaining for the English middle-class reader. As we read in an interesting article³⁶ about this, Humphrey Moseley was one of these publishers who saw the potential of these romances in England and decided to translate them. But also, there were more who foresaw the success of this kind of fiction in England, for instance, Thomas Dring, William Bentley or John Croke. (131-2)

Therefore, Congreve was particularly influenced by Paul Scarron,³⁷ as we will see later during the analysis of *Incognita*. But it was not him the only author attempted to imitate him, Aphra Behn for example in *The Court of the King of Bantam* (1696) boasts about her being able to imitate Scarron easily (Woodstock 167).

³³ Nonetheless, it must be mentioned that as D. F. McKenzie (“Richard van Bleeck’s Painting” 46) claims, “personal libraries of the time were notoriously unstable, and several books Congreve is known to have had earlier in his life are absent [in the catalogue of Congreve’s library]”.

³⁴ This corresponds to item number 571 — *Nouvelles Oeuvres Tragi-comiques/2 Tom.* Les nouvelles oeuvres tragi-comiques. A Paris, chez Jean Ribou, 1665–79 (or, chez Jean Baptiste Loyson, 1665). 2 tom. 12^o Hodges (1955).

³⁵ See chapter iv. “The Conciseness of Congreve” in Drougge’s *The Significance of Congreve’s Incognita*.

³⁶ Jacqueline Glomski and Isabelle Moreau’s “Marketing Aspiration” in *Seventeenth-Century Fiction: Text and Transmission* (2016).

³⁷ Interestingly, one of the influences in Scarron’s works is María de Zayas’s *novelas*.

These pseudo-histories sold as true stories were translated in the second half of the seventeenth century, for instance, Paul Scarron's *Roman Comique* was translated in 1665, Furetière's *Roman bourgeois* was translated by himself under the title of *Scarron's City Romance made English* (1671). Particularly, from Scarron, Congreve borrowed the ironic narrator³⁸ who is prone to digress quite often during the narrative:

The jocular, self-deprecating way of telling a story, with a chattily intrusive narrator who comments on his story, draws parallels, "proves" that he is telling the truth, or admits that he does not know all the details of what happened, and in general talks to the reader, was first made fashionable in the Restoration period by the example of Scarron. (Mish 306)

What is true to the seventeenth-century romances is that they tried to break the chains attached to old romances, in the Arthurian style. In this century, authors tried to achieve a status of seriousness attached to their works. Works which were not only designed for pleasure's sake or to entertain women and children as Roger Ascham claimed, but also with literary status. In order to fulfil the task, they abandoned some of the characteristics we find in old romances, for example, the marvelous deeds, magical creatures and impossible events.

2.3.3. French's influence on English literature

During the seventeenth century the distinction was not exclusively between romances and the incipient novel. There were other genres which dealt with other kinds of narrative. In the first half of the seventeenth century, we find the following categories. First, tales of sentiment, for instance, Edward Phillips, Milton's nephew, *The Illustrious Shepherd and the Imperious Brother* (1656) or Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle's *Natures Pictures Drawn by Frances Pencil to the Life* published in the same year. Second,

³⁸ The narrator in romances is typically the third-person omniscient one, unlike the narrator found in travel narratives or popular style writing (Fludernik 121-2).

collections of tales. Here it should be mentioned a reprint of Pettie's *Petite Pallace* (1608, 1613). Also, Boccaccio's *Decameron* was translated for the first time in English (1620). It must be mentioned here the influence that came from Cervantes' *Exemplarie Novells* in 1640 by James Mabbe, although it was published in Spain much earlier, in 1613. Regarding France, we must mention Jean Pierre Camus and his love tales, for instance *Admirable Events* (1639).

These works were seen as elevated pieces of literature. However, there were another sort of trade more concerned with popular tastes. Obviously, the language was not so lofty and cultivated, the stories were more realistic made and centered in the everyday lives of middle-class citizens. For instance, jestbooks dealing mainly with the lives, comings and goings and death of a person. To name a few, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1620), *The Pinder of Wakefield: Being the merry History of George a Greene* (1632). Then, cautionary tales dealing with ancient moral precepts. For instance, *The Historie of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Dr. John Faustus* (1608). There was also a miscellany genre in popular fiction, like a 'fiction hodgepodge'. For instance, an anonymous anti-romance called *Don Samuel Crispe, or, The Pleasant History of the Knight of Fond Love* (1660). Last but not least, it comes the picaresque genre, which particularly deserves attention regarding *Incognita* and its anti-romance nature. Obviously, from Spain, *Don Quixote*³⁹ or *Lazarillo de Tormes*, was a common reading in England thanks to the translation in 1576 by David Rowland. His English counterpart would be *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) by Thomas Nashe.

In the second half of the seventeenth century there was a change in tastes. French influence came from those authors such as Madame de Scudéry, Paul Scarron or Gauthier

³⁹ There is a copy of *Don Quixote* in Congreve's library. It is item number 206 *Don Quixote Vida y Hechos* 2 Tom. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547–1616). *Vida y hechos del ingenioso Cavallero Don Quixote de la Mancha*. Amberes, H. y C. (or J. B.) Verdussen, 1697. 2 tom. 8°. (Hodges 1955)

de Costes, seigneur de La Calprenède thanks to translations into English in the middle of the century.

An examination of the publication and translation practices underlying the production of English editions of two of the romances by La Calprenède, *Cassandre* (1642-5) and *Cléopâtre* (1647-58), and three of Madeleine de Scudéry's romances, *Ibrahim* (1641), *Artamène, ou le Grand Cyrus* (1649-53), and *Clélie* (1654-61), indicates that, like their French counterparts, English publishers identified a viable middle-class market for these works, which they actively sought to cultivate and expand. (Glomski and Moreau 131)⁴⁰

Basically, an interest in the construction of characters was demanded, paying attention to their inner thoughts and worries, while dealing with the typical romantic love stories. The rounder a character is, the feasible the story becomes because it mirrors reality, human beings are complex and their relationships to themselves and society are too. This is what we call *vraisemblance* or verisimilitude, mock-reality.

Originally, these French heroic romances (*roman de longue haleine*, *roman historico-épique*, *heroische-galante roman*) came from a primitive romance called *roman d'aventure* dating around 1619 until 1640. These romances of adventures are closer to the old medieval ones dealing with episodic adventures and knights, whereas the heroic romance's interest would lay mainly in love affairs and the development of the plot around these.⁴¹ We will focus our attention on the second wave of romances or *nouvelles*, which are the ones which really deserve the attention regarding *Incognita*.

These heroic romances are dating from 1640 to around 1670. To name a few of these French romances, Madame de Lafayette's *Princesse de Monpensier* (pub. 1662, trans. 1666) and *Princesse de Clèves* (pub. 1678 and trans. 1679), also called the novel of consciousness (Ballaster, "Classical French Fiction" 384).

⁴⁰ See also Salzman's *English Prose Fiction* (178).

⁴¹ Salzman's *English Prose Fiction* (177), see also note 2.

The epistolary novel as I mentioned before, *Lettres portugaises* (pub. 1669). It was published in English with the name *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier* by Sir Roger L'Estrange. Also, Marie Catherine Desjardins' *Les Annales galantes* (1670). The works by this author were published around the 70s as a genre called *le nouvelle gallante*. For instance, *The Annals of Love* (1672) or *The Disorders of Love* (1677). This latter author made use of historical and real names⁴² to add a dash of reality to her fiction. This type of writing called the novel of adventure, with a comic tone, with a love plot and narrated by a female voice (Ballaster, "Classical French Fiction" 384).

Among *nouvelles historiques*, we find *The Fatal Beauty of Agnes de Castro* (1688, trans. by Aphra Behn), or *The Life of Count Ulfeld* (1695), to name a few. Clearly Congreve is indebted to these historical novels since he includes references to real historical people in Italy, the Medicis for instance, as it will be discussed in chapter 3.5. The *nouvelle gallante* deals with short stories around an amorous theme, which is basically the same happened in the historical *nouvelles* but in more contemporary settings. As Salzman (310) remarks, some critics do not see the difference between them because is minimal.

Also, there was a trend for Oriental stories. For instance, very famous, Madame de Lafayette's *Zayde* (1670), Mademoiselle La Roche Guilhem's *Almanzaide* (1674, trans. 1676 *Almanzor and Almanzaida*), just to name a few.

The next category is a collection of tales, and here we find the main sources from which Congreve wrote *Incognita*. There was a huge production of translations of French *nouvelles*. For instance, Scarron's novels were translated by John Davies of Kidwelly in 1665. Interestingly enough it is that Scarron at the same time was indebted to Spanish literature, those novels written by María de Zayas y Sotomayor and Alonso del Castillo

⁴² This happened in England as well, the famous "*romans à clef*" were biographies or memoirs in which events and episodes about the lives of famous or eminent people were narrated (McKeon, *Origins* 54).

Solórzano. Here we find also, the anti-romance *par excellence*, Scarron's *Roman comique*. Furthermore, some other works were key to some of the romance-like nuances we find in *Incognita* such as Charles Sorel's *The Extravagant Shepherd* (1653), Antoine Furetière's *The comical History of Francion* (1657), *Scarron's City Romance* (1671) by Antoine Furetière⁴³ which in fact is a translation of his *Le roman bourgeois*.

In terms of popular fiction, the non-literary branch of fiction, we find chapbooks⁴⁴ which were mainly reprints of old romances and middle-age stories, as *Guy of Warwick* or *Robin Hood*. Also, jestbooks like *Nugae Venales* (1675). There were also shorter versions of old romances, for instance, the hack writer John Shirley rewrote *Amadis de Gaule* omitting some pieces. Biographies as *The Pleasant History of Tom the Shoo-maker* (1674) or even anti-romances or parodies of romances as *The Knight Adventurer* (1663).

A new wave of picaresque fiction appeared evolving in a sort of new genre called 'criminal biography'.⁴⁵ These narratives were a blend of fictitious events and authentic material, for instance, *The London Jilt* (1683) or *A new Fairing for the Merrily Disposed* (1688). This genre later develops in authors such as Defoe; *Moll Flanders* is just but one example of this type of criminal biographic genre. In 1922, the year this work was published, we still find in its preface the debate between romances and novels, "The World is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances that it will be hard for a private History to be taken for Genuine" (37).

And finally, we find miscellany works as for instance, hagiography, *The History of the Five Wise Philosophers, or the Wonderful Relation of the Life of Jehosaphat the*

⁴³ On a curious note, Furetière is the author of a universal dictionary in French entitled *Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement tous les mots français tant vieux que modernes et les termes de toutes les sciences et des arts*, 3 tomes, à la Haye et à Rotterdam: chez A. et R. Leers, 1690.

⁴⁴ See the book by Margaret Spufford. *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England*. Cambridge University Press, 1981.

⁴⁵ Ernest Bernbaum sees this genre as the precursor of the modern novel. See his book *The Mary Carleton Narratives, 1663-1673: A Missing Chapter in the History of the English Novel*. Nabu Press, 1914.

Hermit (1672), or the *voyage imaginaire*. An important example is *The History of the Sevarites* written by Vairasse, published in English in 1675. This book is thought to have influenced Daniel Defoe.⁴⁶

The direction of the new French narrative literature was toward the interiorization of fiction, toward psychological analysis and verisimilitude in action and setting, and English narrative followed suit. Various devices were used to achieve these aims: interest in a definite historical milieu, for instance, to achieve a realistic setting, the disappearance of the older romantic hero whose excessive gallantry and feats of arms had come to seem ludicrously hyperbolic, and (especially in Mrs. Behn) the development of the eye-witness narrator. It should again be pointed out, however, that these realistic elements must be evaluated in comparative terms; they may not seem very strong in the light of today's writing, but they do represent a marked change from earlier writing. (Mish 330)

However, the period was so prolific, that there was another "genre", secret histories or scandal chronicles, like a sort of gossip stories, "fictional intrigues of the past to purportedly true intrigues of the present" (Salzman 311). Personal stories told from an amorous affair perspective. For instance, although this trend came from France there were works which imitated these sorts of novels, *The Amours of the Sultana of Barbary* (1689) dealing with Charles II affair with Louise-Renée de Kéroualle, French mistress of the king. Or, Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters* can be considered a hybrid as I do consider *Incognita*. This work is epistolary novel, scandal novel, *nouvelle historique* ... because the story is based upon real facts, although names changed. We even have a reproduction of the trials in which Ford Grey was involved as well as Henrietta Berkeley, sister to Grey's wife to add even more plausibility to the story.

⁴⁶ This distinction among categories is made by Charles C. Mish in his *English Short Fiction in the Seventeenth Century* (1963). I wanted to provide a short yet clear revision of all these types of fiction during the seventeenth century to claim that the distinction among genres was not such an easy task at the time when *Incognita* was written and published. There were many genres and influences in this century and that is clearly noticeable in *Incognita* published at the end of the century (1692) on the verge of the total separation between romances and novels.

Behn additionally should be credited with the introduction into English literature of the consciousness novel, anticipating in surprising detail some of the features noted for *Clarissa*, *The Castle of Otranto* and the writings of Jane Austen ... by experimenting with the (French) novel of letters – and superseding this model in the direction of the realist psychological novel – Behn prefigures in *Love-Letters* the history of the novel from the time of Richardson to the mid-nineteenth century. (Fludernik 130)

There was a change in tastes from the long hyperbolic romance to the short amatory novella, but there were many types of subgenres in between. Around 1670s, the word novel was used more often and as Salzman (308) claims the culmination but, I would say, the clarification took place in the well-known preface to *Incognita*.

This chapter aims to offer an overview of how prolific in terms of romances and *nouvelles* the seventeenth century in England was. The powerful influence which came from French literature and also, the importance of those translations who served as a medium for the imitation of French techniques. Before the analysis of *Incognita*, this context is needed to understand why the concept of hybridity is key to this work and how many different genres can be found in it. *Incognita*, as every scholar would agree cannot be identified as a modern novel, but it is included in the making of it, providing an example of the fluidity of genres and how a single text can be composed of many previous ones.

2.4. Restoration drama

2.4.1. Historical background: reopening of theatres

Our will and pleasure is that you prepare a Bill for our signature to passe our Greate Seale of England, containing a Grant unto our trusty and well beloved Thomas Killegrew Esquire, one of the Groomes of our Bed-chamber and Sir William Davenant Knight, to give them full power and authoritie to erect Two Companys of Players consisting

respectively of such persons as they shall chuse and appoint; and to purchase or build and erect at their charge as they shall thinke fitt Two Houses or Theaters.⁴⁷

(Public Record Office, London, manuscript SP29/8/I.)

Those who define the Restoration period by the blossoming of its theatres tend to date it from 1660 to 1714.⁴⁸ The outset is clearly agreed in terms of political change with the restoration of the monarchy and, the consequently reopening of theatres. These theatres were being closed for almost eighteen years, leaving England devoid of official theatrical production and activity. I use the term “official”, since there were illegal productions in private houses to entertain those who appreciated the stage. The latter date tends to be a matter of dispute between scholars. Some posit that the year is 1688, to declare the end of the Restoration in England when William and Mary⁴⁹ depose the last of the restored Stuart kings, Mary’s father, James II. Rose Zimbardo (786) considers that the Restoration as a period and what it came after the Glorious Revolution are “distinctly different from one another and therefore understandable, in the Foucaultian sense, as different “ages”.”

As Payne Fisk proposes in her preface (xv-xviii), this would make sense politically speaking but it makes less sense in terms of changes in the dominant styles and authors of dramatic productions. For instance, John Dryden and Thomas Southerne were writing until the 1690s, and their last plays were not dissimilar in tone and style from their first ones. We might discern a shift towards ‘softer’ or more ‘humane comedies’ at this interval, but the case is that sentimental comedy⁵⁰ was not fully developed until after

⁴⁷ Qtd. in Edward A. Langhans’s “The Theatre” in Fisk’s *The Cambridge Companion* (1).

⁴⁸ This period was intense in terms of politics. In 1678, there were two key episodes. The first one (Popish Plot) was Titus Oates claim that there was a Roman Catholic conspiracy to assassinate the king, he gave evidence to Sir Edmund Bury Godfrey who was later assassinated. The link between England and France was also interesting. Montagu, who was the ambassador in Paris disclosed dealings between the English administration (by the Lord Treasurer, Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby) and the French monarchy. In fact, Louis XIV provided Charles II with financial support. England underwent three elections, a Civil War, the Exclusion Crisis, and the Glorious Revolution.

⁴⁹ William and Mary of Orange married in October 1677.

⁵⁰ As Hume states in the book *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (1990), the period from 1660 to 1700 has been seen by critics as a very tidy period, and, after 1700 we see a shift

Queen Anne's reign (1702-1714). Therefore, Fisk in her anthology of essays *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre* ends the volume in 1714. Yet within this 'long' Restoration scholars evidence a growing impulse to divide dramatists into different periods. Most modern critics propose two different periods ordered chronologically. The former period is called Carolean and associated with the restored court of Charles II. In this group the playwrights included were born before the Restoration period began: Aphra Behn, the Duke of Buckingham, John Crowne,⁵¹ John Dryden, Thomas Durfey, George Etherege, Edward Howard, Thomas Otway, Thomas Shadwell, William Wycherley.⁵² They were masters of drama between 1660s and 1670s. In fact, Charles II during the 1660s fostered the use of royalist heroic plays in rhyming couplets but Dryden in the next decade changed this into blank verse⁵³ in political tragedy. Owen ("Reading the Politics" 3) points out this transition to be in *All for Love* (1678):

Charles II, an admirer of the French heroic drama of Corneille, and of French heroic romance, encouraged the genre, suggested what the dramatists should write, lent costumes and attended performances. ... The dilemmas of love and honour, and personal versus public good ... (Owen, "Restoration Drama and Politics" 127)

The latter group was born after the Restoration began and significant dramatists include: Susannah Centlivre,⁵⁴ Colley Cibber, William Congreve,⁵⁵ George Farquhar,

from Restoration to sentimental comedy. See chapter 1, "What is 'Restoration' Drama?" for an introduction to the period.

⁵¹ See Owen's "Dramatic and Political Shifts: The Example of John Crowne" (1996).

⁵² In the analysis of *Incognita*, we will see how some of these dramatists such as Behn, the Duke of Buckingham, Dryden or Wycherley, influenced Congreve deeply. Furthermore, we shall see particular examples from their comedies reflected on *Incognita*.

⁵³ In the analysis of *Incognita* we will see how Congreve uses blank verse as well.

⁵⁴ See Hammond's reflection towards the attitude by Pope to Centlivre opposed to that to Congreve in *Professional Imaginative Writing* (206-209). Also, it must be said that Congreve is depicted here as the "forced" heir to Dryden and, the critique by Voltaire does not improve Congreve's persona. Yet Voltaire withdrew his accusations of "vanity", and this is not said in the chapter by Hammond. See McKenzie's "Mea Culpa: Voltaire's Retraction of His Comments Critical of Congreve" (1998).

⁵⁵ Regarding Congreve's drama, there is a book by Emmett L. Avery called *Congreve's Plays on the Eighteenth-Century Stage* (1951) which is a study of the different performances from the early years of Congreve's career until the last stage productions in the 1940s. I find especially interesting chapter VIII called 'Aftermath' where Avery gives details of the performances between 1900-1940 in England and North America.

Delarivier Manley, Mary Pix, Thomas Southerne, Richard Steele, John Vanbrugh.⁵⁶ They flourished as authors after the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

The best comedies of the period cluster around the mid-1670s, and, again, in the mid-1690s. But good comedies are written throughout the period, and the repertory continues to welcome plays from virtually every season; short-lived successes and a considerable number of outright failures, plays that never enter the repertory, are also scattered throughout the period. (Corman 57)

The theatre returned to London's stages. However, seven years before the coronation of Charles II and eleven years after the interruption of total theatrical production during the period of Commonwealth rule (Dobson 40), Aston Cokaine wrote a poem dedicated to the playwright Richard Brome's *Five New Plays* (1653). In this anticipatory work, he wished to have London playhouses alive and anew again, the classics such as Shakespeare or Jonson⁵⁷ returning to be performed and praised by the exalted audience:

Then shall Learn'd *Johnson* reassume his Seat,
Revive the *Phoenix* by a second heat
Create the Globe anew, and people it,
By those that flock to sunset on his *Wit*.
Judicious *Beaumont*, and th'Ingenious Soule
Of *Fletcher* too may move without controule.
Shakespeare (most rich in *Humours*) entertaine

⁵⁶ Congreve and Vanbrugh were closely associated. They were responsible for the foundation and management of the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket. 'New Company of Comedians' was founded by Vanbrugh in 1703 and Congreve was immersed in the running of the company until 1706 for "recovering and fostering a tradition of truly English opera." See McKenzie's "Richard van Bleeck's Painting of William Congreve as Contemplative (1715)" (43), and see also Hammond's *Professional Imaginative Writing* (56).

⁵⁷ See page 15 in Avery (1951), where appears a chart of the major English dramatists. Shakespeare is on top of the list and Congreve in fifth position, before Vanbrugh, Rowe and Farquhar. According to the *Literary and Antigallican Magazine* published in 1758, Congreve surpassed Shakespeare in judgment, was equal in learning and less prominent in genius and versification.

The crowded Theaters with his happy veine.

Davenant and Massinger, and Shirley, then

Shall be cry'd up againe, For Famous men. (A2)

All in all, after the restoration of the monarchy and Charles II as new ruler of England, theatres achieved their maximum glory.⁵⁸ The stage had been previously admired between the years 1576 and 1605, in which some entrepreneurs built seven public theatres (Langhans 2). In 1660, the population of London was of 500.000 inhabitants. However, after those years of Puritan suppression, the public was not so used to attending and appreciating theatre as they did in the earlier years.

Nevertheless, two dramatists emerged to reopen theatres and recover the lost splendour of dramatic production in London: Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant. The first extract of a manuscript which appeared at the beginning of this chapter corresponds to a draft in which these two dramatists acquired shared status to control the London public theatre: “the document went on to authorize Killigrew and Davenant to give performances with scenery and music, to establish ticket prices and employee salaries, and to suffer no rival companies” (1).

There were several spaces which had been used before and after the restoration of the monarchy, as for instance, the Red Bull, Salisbury Court, the Cockpit or Phoenix in Drury Lane. Killigrew and Davenant were working at those spaces for a short period of time. Later, they decided to build new theatrical spaces with smaller dimensions in respectable neighbourhoods to attract a specifically aristocratic public. These spaces were essentially old court tennis reshaped into playhouses. Killigrew wagered on traditionality and used these spaces to perform old plays:

⁵⁸ In 1662, two years later due to a Licensing Act, only certain publishing houses were allowed to print legally. Therefore, the act of printing was given to those publishing houses from London, Oxford, Cambridge, and York. For further research about the controversy between printers and booksellers see Peters' *Congreve, the Drama, and the Printed Word* (1990).

The first dramas Killigrew staged were old, since no new plays were available. He even began with males playing the women's roles, just as in the old public theatre days. Killigrew, who grew up in Shakespeare's London and is said to have played bit parts at the Red Bull when he was a boy, may have assumed that the new theatre of the Restoration would be pretty much like the old. (Langhans 2-3)

On the other hand, although Davenant was thinking of using the old theatrical style as a model, he was also conscious of introducing new trends and theatrical developments which came from the Continent. He also was eager to introduce women to take female roles (Owen, "Reading the Politics" 4). Nonetheless, the first of both dramatists who introduced women to audiences was Killigrew, in a play (*Othello*) whose Desdemona was played by a woman, first on the 8th of December 1660 (Langhans 3). The introduction of women on stage was the result of an act between the royal state and the "Mimic State" as theatre was often known. The King in the warrant to Killigrew's patent⁵⁹ stated, "we do likewise permit and give leave that all the women's parts to be acted in either of the said two companies for the time to come may be performed by women" (qtd. in Thomas and Hare 18). And this must be considered a huge achievement in Restoration drama where professional female actresses started to exert their power as females representing female roles (Ballaster, "Bring(ing) Forth Alive" 186). Also, this was seen as a strategy by Charles II to promote morality on stage, since men acting as women could lead the audience to homosexual behaviours.

Reconsidering the old open-air playhouses of Shakespeare would have been a cheaper option (Hammond 54-55). However, the trend followed in the Continent was roofed playhouses, with scenery and of course, women on stage. In this sense, Killigrew defended the outstanding reshape of the new theatrical spaces:

⁵⁹ 25 April, 1662.

That the stage is now by his pains a thousand times better and more glorious than ever heretofore. Now, wax-candles, and many of them; then, not above 3lb. of tallow: now, all things civil, no rudeness anywhere; then, as in a bear-garden then, two or three fiddlers; now, nine or ten of the best. (Pepys, *Diary* 12th February 1666-7)

All in all, Davenant was an exemplary proprietor. When he died in 1668, his company was in his widow and the actor Thomas Betterton's hands. Killigrew, on the contrary, was not so exemplary and his company was in bankruptcy so that in 1682 the King's players were absorbed by the Duke's ones. Thus, during the next ten years, there were just one company dominated the theatrical scene, the United Company. Later, the senior actors rebelled against the established company and set up a new one at the Lincoln's Inn Fields playhouse.⁶⁰ In 1698, Henri Misson (219-20) in his *Memoirs and Observations* (1719), provides a well-documented description of both theatres in London:

There are two Theatres at *London*, one large and handsome,⁶¹ where they sometimes act Opera's, and sometimes Plays; the other something smaller, which is only for Plays. The Pit is an Amphitheatre, fill'd with Benches without Backboards, and adorn'd and cover'd with green Cloth. Men of Quality, particularly the younger Sort, some Ladies of Reputation and Vertue, and abundance of Damsels that hunt for Prey, sit all together in this Place, Higgedy-piggedy, chatter, toy, play, hear, hear not. Farther up, against the Wall, under the first Gallery, and just opposite to the Stage, rises another Amphitheatre, which is taken up by Persons of the best Quality, among whom are generally very few Men. The Galleries, whereof there are only two Rows, are fill'd with none but ordinary People, particularly the Upper one. (Langhans 16)

From 1688 culture has changed quite a bit. Mary and Anne were not interested in the theatre as much as their predecessors. After 1685, theatres were no longer protected by royal patronage. Therefore, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, two companies

⁶⁰ See Edward A. Langhans's "The Theatre" in Fisk's *The Cambridge Companion*.

⁶¹ The former corresponds to the description of Dorset Garden and, the latter, of Drury Lane.

were struggling under the reign of Queen Anne, who was not a ruler very interested in theatrical entertainment, as was her uncle Charles:

Further, it was a period of moral soul-searching that altered the tone of playwriting. Audiences were changing as more middle-class patrons were attracted to the playhouses; they preferred greater variety on a typical theatrical bill instead of the performance of just a single day. The trend was toward less risqué dramatic offerings, greater visual spectacle, more song and dance entr'actes, bigger theatres, and larger but less sophisticated audiences. (Langhans 5)

The reason was quite straightforward. Aristocratic members were more attracted by Italian opera which was introduced to London in the first decade of the eighteenth century and which required larger theatres with more quality spectacles and well-trained actors and singers. Therefore, by the year 1710, King Charles and Pepys' depiction of theatres were obsolete.

Regarding the profession of being an actor or an actress, during the Restoration period, acting companies behaved exactly in the same way as in Shakespeare's time. These companies made profit, but actors and actresses were hired performers. The company produced plays and provided theatres with suitable equipment and decoration. In fact, there was a non-theatrical side in Restoration drama, it was partially a business in which shares were sold by speculators who were just interested in the earnings given by this cultural practice.

Regarding actors and actresses, each company was integrated by a set of performers who acted during the theatrical season, from September to June. Senior actors were the ones in charge of training the youngest ones, as in medieval times. The performers and crew, together with the house and backstage personnel, were paid according to fixed salaries. Nonetheless, acting at that period was a hugely demanding work. Actors were required to memorise several personages and play any one of them on

very short notice (Langhans 5). Furthermore, dramatists wrote parts having in mind the skills of some actors. Dramatists conceived characters following the aptitudes which corresponded with by the actors. All in all, as Joseph Roach (34) perfectly sketches, actors and actresses in Restoration times were a compendium of “*expectation, vivacity, and enterprise*”.⁶²

On stage, there was a ceaseless changing of groups of performers and scenes. During these brief interruptions called interludes, which corresponded to different acts, music was played to amuse the audience. Sometimes, they also included dance performances. Every time these groups enter and leave the stage, they used to be marked by salutations to the public (Roach 27).

Regarding the plays themselves, these lasted around three hours in which not only was the dramatic work presented but a series of “spectacles” to entertain the audience. Music was played to attract the attention of the theatregoers while they took their seats and waited for the play to commence. Later, the play would close with the announcement of the theatrical show for the next day. In between the outset and the closure of the play, “occurred a variety of exciting incidents calculated to stir involvement: in tragedy a rising pulse of lurid violence, frequently erotic; in comedy a concatenation of intrigues and cross-purposes, always erotic” (Roach 33).

Most dramatists attempted to write at least one comedy in their career, and due to “the likelihood of longer runs (and the resulting financial rewards)” (Corman 56). Clearly, the Restoration period was a prolific time where sublime dramatists born and grew displaying their best dramatic works. Nonetheless, economic interests and audience tastes were leading those authors to produce their works to meet new demands.

⁶² In italics in the original.

Audiences during Restoration considered the theatre as a game. Theatregoers were delighted by those imitations of immorality and licentious behaviour⁶³ as a sort of ‘mirroring spectacle’. These very same scenes were being acted by themselves. King Charles II himself, in the warrant issued in 1660, pointed out the licentious tone and libertinism associated to the art of performing, fostering interest in the theatre even as he apparently censored it. While plays represented the worst moral behaviour in terms of lasciviousness, they did so, it was claimed, to provide “moral instructions of human life” (qtd. in Thomas & Hare 12).

Furthermore, the audience tended to be noisy, often interrupting the actors. Until the later 18th century, the audience could sit on the stage. Nonetheless, actors often addressed the public during plays. Audiences may simply have been responding to these addresses from the forestage. Basically, the performative tone in Restoration theatre was reinforced by the more than recurrent prologues and epilogues. By means of these dramatic devices, actors used to address the public directly, inviting them into the whole stage spectacle, requesting a sympathy to the play itself. Furthermore, the use of soliloquies and asides were also other devices used to entice the audience interact with the performers (Roach 25).

2.4.2. Congreve and comedies of manners

The exploitation of dramatic techniques such as direct address and his sublime use of irony made William Congreve acquire his reputation as a master of comedy and, especially, comedy of manners:

... he stands between these two Worlds of Etherege and Steele. Clearly in some significant ways he belongs more to Charles II’s court than to William and Mary’s

⁶³ See Brian Corman’s “Comedy” in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*.

London ... Mr Herbert Davis usefully reminds us of his familiarity with Plautus, Terence, Corneille, Molière, Shakespeare, and Jonson, as well as with such books as Hédelin's *The Whole Art of the Stage*. But it is his deep attachment above all to the Renaissance humanism, which asserted the relevance of wit to virtue, which explains Dryden's astonishing choice of him as his literary heir in that superb poem 'To my Dear Friend Mr. Congreve'.⁶⁴ (Myers 77)

Congreve's techniques and general use of his pen were highly influenced by the classics, he was really interested in Terence⁶⁵ comedies. It is noticeable how Congreve was well-taught in Classic Literature and the influence derived from it. His style is neo-classical following strictly Aristotle's rules of drama: action, time and place. Nonetheless, because he was born in the last half of the seventeenth century and wrote his major works at the cusp of one century and another, we can see an attempt to redefine genres. In the "Preface" to *Incognita* (1692) Congreve seeks to differentiate between prose genres and especially a form in the process of being made obsolete (romance) and the upcoming genre which was about to emerge as an independent one (novel).

Therefore, after having contextualised the beginning of the Restoration and how theatres were reopened and plays were again on stage, I will focus my attention towards comedy. And this focus is primarily due to two reasons. First, Congreve wrote mainly comedies; in fact, he produced four: *The Old Batchelour* (1693), *The Double Dealer* (1693), *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700). He only wrote one tragedy *The Mourning Bride* (1697). And, secondly, the work analysed in this thesis is

⁶⁴ See appendix 2.

⁶⁵ Congreve wrote himself:

Terence [was] the most correct Writer in the World ... the Purity of his Stile, the Delicacy of his Turns, and the Justness of his Characters, were all of them Beauties, which the greater part of his Audience were incapable of Tasting: Some of the coarsest Strokes of *Plautus*, so severely censured by *Horace*, were more likely to affect the Multitude; such, who come with expectation to Laugh out the last Act of a Play, and are better entertained with two or three unseasonable Jests, than with the artful Solution of the *Fable*. (qtd. in Barnard 104)

In fact, Terence is found in Congreve's library several times, items number 191, 592, 593, 594, 595. (Hodges 1955)

his only novel, *Incognita*, which possesses more characteristics from comedy than from tragedy. However, *Incognita* contains certain events which are serious in tone. For instance, the almost rape of Juliana and likely death. Aurelian's two attempts to be killed and the likely death of Claudio. And although none of the events took place eventually, these events distress the reader.

Congreve's comedies are defined as being part of the subgenre of 'comedies of manners'. Pat Gill (191) defines comedy of manners as "a type of drama that observes with satiric amusement the deportment, wit, and morality of contemporary society, the comedy of manners flirts with a number of developing and unresolved social tensions." Regarding these 'unresolved social tensions', she refers to "definition of gender roles, the regulation of sexual behavior, the characteristics of class, and the compatibility of marriage partners." All of them found in *Incognita*, and they will be analysed in detail in the following chapters.

These new protagonists were expected to have significant incomes, or at least, to expect a wealthy inheritance. Nonetheless, money was not the only important feature. They also were characterized by their wit, or intellectual mastery. Characters in those comedies were able to produce satiric/comical speech, effortlessly, almost casually, elaborated. The 'climax' of these plays is found in the verbal exchange of witty remarks known as "repartee". There is one repartee at the beginning of *Incognita* where female wit is displayed, and I shall explain my reasons in chapter 3.8.

There was a strong influence that came from France; that of Molière who was the father of *Comédie Française*.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the English comedies of that time were also strongly affected by the Spanish *novellas* and comedies, which triggered bustling plots

⁶⁶ For further details, see "Restoration Comedy" (82) by Lara M. Crowley.

and created intrigue and suspense within them. Notably, Calderón de la Barca's comedies were a source for English dramatists. As Corman (55) states in his essay about comedy:

Before Molière, the first new important influence on Restoration comedy was the Spanish *comedia*, most notably the comedies of Calderón. The impact of the *comedia* was early and strong, established by the enormous success of Sir Samuel Tuke's *The Adventures of Five Hours* (1663), a play that treats many of the same issues of love and honor that figure so prominently in the heroic play, while limiting them to the domestic sphere and emphasizing their comic potential most effectively through the use of distinctly unheroic servant.

This Spanish influence continued during the whole period, and it was noticeable in plays as John Crowne's *Sir Courtly Nice* (1685) or William Wycherley's *Love in a Wood*⁶⁷ (1671). Nonetheless, it is quite interesting how Restoration audiences rejected those plays which came from the continent. English theatregoers' taste for multiple plots was at odds with the classical three unities of drama: action, time and place. That is the reason why the vast majority of plays were revisited and modified to satisfy the demands of an English audience. Despite this, English dramatists found very powerful influences from the Continent, and especially French dramatists, foremost among them Molière. A number of plays written by the French playwright were adapted to English audiences. For instance, Thomas Betterton's *The Amorous Widow* (1670), an adaptation of Molière's *George Dandin ou le Mari confondu* (1668); Thomas Otway's *The Cheats of Scapin* (1676), an adaptation of Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (1671); or John Dryden's *Amphitryon* (1690), an adaptation of Molière's *Amphitryon* (1668) (Corman 55).

⁶⁷ We find a reference to this latter play in *Incognita*. See chapter 3.7.14.

The Restoration period, as Dobson (41) points out, “made a great deal, or a great mess, of the plays it inherited, trampling on its dramatic heritage in a misguided and arrogant spirit of innovation”. Playwrights used to “reshape” classics⁶⁸:

For over three years [...] the companies had to resort to revivals of pre-Commonwealth plays and to occasional contributions by the very few playwrights (the patentees themselves, Brome, Tatham) who had survived the Interregnum. It was not until the season of 1664-65 that there began a steady flow of new plays; it would take even longer to develop dramatic formulas suited to the new tastes of the Restoration. (Arrowsmith, Prieto Pablos 20)

Some of them were seen as fiascos, for instance, William Davenant’s *Macbeth* (1663), William Davenant and John Dryden in unison with a revival of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* called *The Tempest, or the Enchanted Island* (1667). In this adaptation, both Caliban and Miranda have sisters to conform with the expectation of contrasting and counterpointing couples in the intrigue comedies. Finally, *The History of King Lear* (1681) was radically rewritten by Nahum Tate, in which the classic tragedy ends with a happy denouement where Edgar marries Cordelia, and King Lear and Gloucester retire peacefully. (Dobson 42)

These revivals seen as fiascos and totally misshaped were blamed on “the theatre managers of the Restoration as ignorant vandals, uncomprehendingly vulgarizing the masterpieces of the previous era in quest of novel but crassly simple dramatic effects and the easy popularity they might earn” (Dobson 42).

On the other hand, there were works successfully reshaped such as, John Lacy’s *Sauny the Scot* (1667), a version of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* (1594); Thomas Shadwell’s *Tempest* (1674), a revision of Shakespeare’s one, George Granville’s

⁶⁸ In Restoration times, there was not still a copyright law or authorship regulations.

The Jew of Venice (1700), a version of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*; or Aphra Behn's *The Rover, I* (1677) derived from Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso* (1654).

During this time, dramatists give moral instruction by means of comedy. The vices and corruption of society were exposed and criticised. According to William Congreve himself (*Amendments*⁶⁹ 78):

For Men are to be laugh'd out of their Vices in Comedy; the Business of Comedy is to delight, as well as to instruct: And as vicious People are made ashamed of their Follies or Faults, by seeing them expos'd in a ridiculous manner, so are good People at once both warn'd and diverted at their Expence.⁷⁰

This fragment is similar to one which appears in the preface of Dryden's *Works* (227):

... for the business of the poet is to make you laugh: when he writes humour, he makes folly ridiculous; when wit, he moves you, if not always to laughter, yet to a pleasure that is more noble. And if he works a cure on folly, and the small imperfections in mankind, by exposing them to public view, that cure is not performed by an immediate operation: For it works first on the ill-nature of the audience; they are moved to laugh by the representation of deformity; and the shame of that laughter teaches us to amend what is ridiculous in our manners.

As Michael Alexander states: "Restoration comedy takes a pleasure in the vices it caricatures, it shows 'the way we live now', pushing current trends to logical extremes" (167). Nevertheless, the ultimate purpose of comedy is to entertain the audience through humour and satire. The ultimate purpose of art was that of instruct, teaching valuable

⁶⁹ Item number 99 in Congreve's library, *Amendments of Mr Collier's/False & imperfect Citations/from ye Old Batchelour &c/Large Paper*. London, for J. Tonson, 1698. (Hodges 1955)

⁷⁰ Should this be compared to one of the main sources to *Incognita*. In Charles Sorel's *Francion* (Book II, 50), in the narrator's words we find the same use of comedy portrayed: "We have here seen *Agatha's* deportments, and heard her speak in termes very dissolute; But the nature of the *Comedie* requires those expressions, rightly to represent the part she was to personate, yet that's not capable to make us wrie our Soules to the desire or practise of Vice; quite contrary it renders Vice more hatefull, to see it so lively pourtraid in its true colour. Hereby we may learn what diverse Persons account delight, is nothing but a debosh'd Brutality, which all well temper'd Spirits will ever abominate and shun."

moral lessons to the audience, as the Horatian uses of literature posits: to please and instruct, “comedies of manners sketch out a new model of marriage as a witty, cultivated alliance of elegant, like-minded individuals” (Gill 191).

It must be said that the restored Court influenced the themes to the very highest degree. The restored Stuart (Charles II) court was notorious for its immorality, cynicism, perversion and lechery; the courts of William and Mary and later that of Anne promoted conjugal virtue and plain dealing in politics more explicitly. But also, the parliament and politics *per se*, for instance, sexual perversion, lust, rape were often themes associated with republicanism and political rebellion by Tories, whereas for Whigs, these themes were metaphors of popery and tyranny.⁷¹

Many of the most influential playwrights in the English world are remembered from this period such as John Dryden, George Etherege,⁷² or John Vanbrugh. Shadwell, for instance, posited that the theory of comedy was that its ultimate purpose was to deliver moral lessons by means of “Figures of Vice and Folly so ugly and detestable, to make People hate and despise them, not only in others, but (if it be possible) in their dear selves” (Dryden, *Works* 184). On the other hand, John Dryden asserted that by addressing vice⁷³ and folly the audience is instructed about negative behaviours and the lowest example of human conduct. He is more on the side of wit comedy, in which the audience is given the opportunity of witnessing how high-born people behave. Nonetheless, it must be

⁷¹ See Susan J. Owen. “Reading the Politics of Restoration Drama” in *Restoration Theatre and Crisis*. Oxford UP, 1996. For an insightful description of Tory and Whig plays see both chapters in the same book aforementioned, “Tory Plays: The Contradictions of Royalism in Crisis” and “Whig Plays: Vitality in Opposition”. My aim is to provide a brief introduction to Restoration drama since Congreve is clearly indebted to dramatic techniques in *Incognita*, but there is not a political interest in the novel, more a social and literary one.

⁷² Etherege together with Wycherley and Congreve are called ‘aesthetics of wit comedy’ by Thomas H. Fujimura in his book *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (1952).

⁷³ In the new novels which appear in the following century this would be also a point but as we can read in the preface of *Narcisse* (1753): “The times are no longer suited to encouraging people to do good, all we can do is distract them from doing evil; they must be occupied with nonsense so as to keep them from behaving badly” (qtd. in Paige 118).

mentioned that comedy was not divided into a homogenous set of subgenres. There was a hybridity, as Dryden assumed, “I will not deny, but that I approve most the mixt way of Comedy; that which neither is all wit, nor all Humour, but the Result of both” (“Preface” *Evening’s Love*).

Eighteenth century comedies were mainly realistic rather than romantic or idealistic. In these “social comedies”, dramatists represented real life; therefore, real settings, and characters are given real names, and lives and behaviour from real life. We know that Congreve’s scenes were taken from direct references from the world the audience knew (Seidel Canby 4). While plots were invented, characters were expected to be as faithful to nature as possible:

The Fable of every Play is undoubtedly the Authors own, whencesoever he takes the Story, and he may mold it as he pleases. The *Characters* are not so; the Poet is obliged to take ‘em from Nature, and to copy as close after her, as he is able. The same may be said for the *Thoughts* and *Expressions*, they must be suited to the *Mouth* and *Character* of the Person that speaks ‘em, not the *Poet’s*. (Drake 219-20)

In fact, comedies were described as “common” and “general”, which is to say, a genre “socially useful precisely because it is accessible across class boundaries” (Dharwadker 468).

From the 1660s to the 1680s authors like Dryden, Shadwell, Robert Howard, George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, and Aphra Behn regard the genres of tragedy, heroic drama, romance, wit⁷⁴ comedy, humours comedy, and farce not merely as pleasing and useful (or offensive and useless) verbal constructs, but as cultural indices with overt class associations. Each genre positions the author as well as his or her audience within a social or intellectual hierarchy, reflecting “high” or “low” values and tastes. (Dharwadker 462)

⁷⁴ “Wit versus humor remains central to the debate about comedy throughout the period” (Corman 53).

Nevertheless, the “realism” of those Restoration comedies was not accepted by everybody. It is believed that scenes on stage came directly from everyday life. To a certain extent, this became fashionable again in the following century with the rise of the novel and “the realism of presentation” (Watt 13) which we will explore further in chapter 2.5.1.

Nonetheless, realism of presentation did not exist in comedies when Congreve was first composing *Incognita*. It might be said that there was a growing impulse for introducing realistic devices on stage for the play to be feasible, and more attracted to the audience. Jeremy Collier in his critique *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698)⁷⁵ judged the profanity of speech⁷⁶ on stage⁷⁷ and criticised the misleading picture of the clergy. Following the Orthodox neo-classical fashion, Collier⁷⁸ considered that comedy should promote morality and good manners, and not freely expose the vices of a corrupted society.⁷⁹ According to Collier, actors were considered “the Devils Factor, that by a strange delusion sends men laughing to hell”. Theatres were places where theatregoers “*sport themselves to hear the Vassals of the*

⁷⁵ Item number 100 in Congreve’s library, Collier’s (Jerem.) View of ye Eng. Stage Jeremy Collier (1650-1726). A short view of the immorality and profaneness of the English stage. London, for S. Keble, R. Sare, and H. Hindmarsh, 1698. 8° (Hodges 1955).

⁷⁶ Nonetheless, there were far more critiques to Congreve’s works after Collier’s. In fact, Collier was just the trigger to a series of critiques in terms of immorality. For instance, Arthur Bedford’s *The Evil and Danger of Stage Plays* (1706) or William Law’s *Absolute Unlawfulness of the Stage-Entertainment Fully Demonstrated* (1726). A record of critiques to Congreve as a dramatist and its works themselves is provided in the book by Avery (1951). McKeon in his *Origins* (96), explains how a quote by Milton was used to refute these ideas by Collier about the immorality portrayed on stage, “Good and evill we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably ... And perhaps this is that doom which *Adam* fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill ... Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us in triall, and triall is by what is contrary ... Therefore the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world ... necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth.”

⁷⁷ See Aubrey Williams. “No Cloistered Virtue: Or, Playwright versus Priest in 1698.” *PMLA*, vol. 90, no. 2, 1975, pp. 234-46.

⁷⁸ For further development of the controversy between the clergy and the stage, see Aubrey Williams article entitled “Priest versus Playwrights, and “Moral Dialogues” versus “Lively Examples” in *An Approach to Congreve* (58).

⁷⁹ Quite the opposite to what Pott states: “ ... even assuming that the moral standards of Restoration comedy are utterly bad, we ought to be able to enjoy the comedies themselves ... All we are justified in asking to the comic writer is that his standards should be consistent, not that they should be right” (3-4).

Devil *scoffing* religion, & blasphemously *abusing phrases of holy Scripture on their stages.*”⁸⁰

In the work previously mentioned by Collier (*Amendments* 89-90), he alluded to the first comedy by Congreve *The Old Batchelour* (1693). Congreve mastering his peculiar wit, counterattacked with a reply in his book *Amendments of Mr. Collier’s False and Imperfect Citations* (1698):

In the Old Batchelour (says he) *Vainlove asks Bellmour, Could you be content to go to Heav’n?*

Bell. *Hum, not immediately, in my Conscience not Heartily –*

Here Mr. Collier concludes this Quotation with a dash, as if both the Sense and the Words of the whole Sentence, were at an end. But the remainder of it in the Play *Act. 3. Scene 2.* is in these words – *I would do a little more good in my generation first, in order to deserve it.*

I think the meaning of the whole is very different from the meaning of the first half of this Expression. ‘Tis one thing for a Man to say positively, he will not go to Heaven; and another to say, that he does not think himself worthy, till he is better prepared. But Mr. Collier undoubtedly was in the right, to take just as much as would serve his own turn. The Stile of this Expression is Light, and suitable to Comedy, and the Character of a wild Debauchee of the Town; but there is a Moral meaning contain’d in it, when it is not represented by halves. (37-8)

Among Congreve’s dramatic productions, I want to mention briefly the following ones. *The Old Batchelour*⁸¹ (March 1693) assured the reputation of the young playwright. He pointed out that the purpose of writing this comedy was “to amuse himself in a slow

⁸⁰ L. S. *Essayes [sic] and Characters* (1661), qtd. by T. S. Graves. “Notes on Puritanism and the Stage” (168).

⁸¹ This play is on second position in Congreve’s ranking. It was performed 300 times. (Avery 155)

recovery from a fit of sickness” (Hunt 24). John Dryden assured that he “never saw such a first play in his life” (qtd. in Peters 44).

In the same year, he published *The Double Dealer*⁸² (December 1693) which failed although the plot was far more elaborate than the previous play. In 1695, *Love for Love*⁸³ became his most outstanding piece of work. In February 1697, his first tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*⁸⁴ was performed at Lincoln’s Inn Fields and was another sublime piece of work. In the preface to *King Arthur* (1697), published in the same year, is read regarding the tragedy by Congreve:

This Poem has receiv’d, and in my Opinion very justly, Universal Applause; being look’d on as the most perfect Tragedy that has been wrote in this Age. The Fable, as far as I can judge at first sight, is a very Artful and Masterly Contrivance. The Characters are well chosen, and well delineated ... (Blackmore vii)

In *The Way of the World*⁸⁵ (1700), his plot is full of complex scenes and witty remarks. Considered as his comic masterpiece, it was too witty for the audience as he states in the dedication of the play to the Earl of Montague: “little of it was prepar’d for that general Taste which seems now to be predominant in the Pallats of our Audience” (qtd. in Thomas 6). Nonetheless, although it was praised in its own time, it is nowadays one of the wittiest comedies of manners in English literature and quite advanced to the tastes and literary trends in techniques from the epoch:

It is not, indeed, an exaggeration to say that *The Way of the World* is a necessary experiment in the process that leads to Lovelace in *Clarissa*, Blifil in *Tom Jones*, and even Bill Sykes in *Oliver Twist*. Precisely as a failure, as a work which does not resolve its own internal tensions according to the conventions on which it is relying for its main

⁸² The least successful of all the works by Congreve with 150 performances. (Avery 155)

⁸³ This play was acted 435 times in the century and was Congreve’s top of the list. (Avery 155)

⁸⁴ Almost as popular as *The Way of the World* with 245 performances. (Avery 156)

⁸⁵ It was in third position in terms of popularity. It was acted 285 times during the century. (Avery 155)

effects, it belongs to the mainstream of our literature, as more perfectly plotted plays, by Farquhar, Goldsmith, and Sheridan, do not. (Myers 92)

All in all, Congreve's plots can be summarised as being paternalistic and traditional in style. His comedies were based upon a love-chase dichotomy, financial problems, mistresses full of jealousy, furious fathers, or matrimony as an alibi for covering fake identities. It must be said that he sometimes was accused of not being fresh and using the same resources again and again, but he certainly knew how to play with them intelligently (Seidel Canby 12). And the truth is that Congreve lived in a period where a shift took place in literary tastes. Therefore, it is undisputable to affirm that Congreve made good use of the 'old' and 'fresh' techniques to elaborate his works.

Traditionalist in terms of influences but, at the same time, innovative in the manner he develops content and form, his work is considered to be outstanding in "the subtle balance he achieves in it between the cool disenchantment of the Restoration and the emotional warmth of the eighteenth century" (Thomas 15). The powerful tool which Congreve sublimely used in his works was witty language, an extremely good use of lexicon to convey the meaning or multiple meanings (his, sometimes, ambiguity). In an essay entitled "Congreve on the Modern Stage", Kenneth Muir (150) finished defending Congreve as a dramatist whose strong point was that difficulty of prose, wittily constructed plots, and characters who both project moral and immoral behaviours:

... Congreve is still a living dramatist; that his plays offer wonderful parts to good actors and actresses, especially to those who allow the wonderfully differentiated speech to possess them; that the plays are not artificial in any straightforward sense of the word; that the characters are not at all heartless; that the plots are not unintelligible to audiences if the plays are properly directed and not reduced to farce or fantasy. It may be observed that the verbal felicity of Congreve has enabled dramatic critics to excel themselves. Finally, I may add that every actor, whether amateur or professional, to whom I have

spoken on the subject, agrees that after acting in Congreve they find all other dramatic prose inferior and more difficult to deliver effectively.

Furthermore, in his plots Congreve used flirtation between couples as a recurrent strategy. In Congreve's dramatic production, gallantry and courtly love are truly romantic. Thus, it is recognised that Restoration drama was strongly influenced by the "old romantic fervor" (Seidel Canby 14). And, as far as gallantry is concerned, Congreve was believed to write more romances than realism since his love stories were mainly idyllic.

Congreve was always concerned about a reformation of technique on stage. He paid attention to three important aspects: dialogue, wit and structure:

The concern for a "more certain measure" of language, the obsession with the distinctions between false and true wit, and the satiric indignation over the misuse of words (which includes not only misapplication and mispronunciation but also jargon and regional accents) are all repeatedly expressed on the stage throughout the later seventeenth century. (Peters 23)

He obtained a bad reputation since his works very often "included sexual double entendres and sexual suggestiveness" (Evans and Sterling 24). In spite of this, he was categorised as being worth of reading "for style only" (1). Undoubtedly, Congreve's style is surrounded by the belief that he was able to convert "ugly deeds into sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not" (6):

Without in any way subscribing to a sentimental view of human nature, Congreve manages to suggest in his late plays that human values can be preserved in an imperfect world and that there is a place for honesty and commitment despite human folly, greed and fickleness. (Thomas 24)

In terms of structure, Congreve follows quite strictly the *Aristotelian* three unities of dramatic representation: action, time and place.⁸⁶ He was a traditional dramatist who always protected and respected the canon, as he explicitly states in *The Double-Dealer*:

I design'd the Moral first, and to that Moral I invented the Fable, and do not know that I have borrow'd one hint of it any where. I made the Plot as strong as I could, because it was single, and I made it single, because I would avoid confusion and was resolved to preserve the three Unities of the Drama, which I have visibly done to the utmost severity.

(H. Davis 119)

As far as characters are concerned, Congreve as a formalist drew flat characters in a quite conventional manner. His virtuous characters are often flawed, witty and self-deceiving, and his villainous characters are often conflicted and driven by good impulses which turn out to be perverse. Nonetheless, the most outstanding peculiarity of Congreve's writings is his use of wit. He was a virtuoso in his use of witticism, sometimes irregular in structure or too sarcastic in speech. The use of wit was extremely productive in verbal constructions. Furthermore, he always opposes examples of true wit with those of affected or false wit. According to Thomas Shadwell, "wit is not the skilful repartee of comic *characters* but an intellectual quality in the *author* that allows him to observe and select appropriate objects of attack within his social world" (Dharwadker 467).

It is widely believed that this was his strongest point and that there was no English dramatist who surpassed him in intellectual mastery as well as precision in creating such speeches (Sherburn and Bond 771-5):

William Congreve shared with Southerne and Vanbrugh a critical moment of balance between an older comedy of wit and a new sentimental comedy, between an age of wit

⁸⁶ The *Aristotelian* unities of dramatic representation are clearly explained in his book *Poetics*, Section 1; Parts VI-VIII, X; Section 2; Parts XIII, XVII-XVIII; Section 3; Part XXIII.

and an age of sentiment; and there is every reason to believe that Congreve, the man as well as the playwright, was a product of his time. (Barton 291)

There were other critics who commented upon the “realistic” effect employed in drama by Congreve. Malcolm Elwin saw in Congreve’s plays a “realistic reproduction of artificial manners”. Bonamy Dobree stated that Congreve’s use of “disillusioned realism” is expressed in both style and diction. Furthermore, Norman Holland remarked that Congreve was characterised by a “sense of schism” (qtd. in Rosowski 387). He analysed Congreve’s plays paying attention to the dichotomy reality-appearance separating faith from reason. Congreve was an advocate for traditional values within Restoration drama and make it ‘new’ and witty was his achievement. Nonetheless, he propelled a reformation in technique and style; as it is displayed in *Incognita: Or, Love and Duty Reconcil’d* (1692).

In this chapter my aim is to provide a brief overview of Restoration drama and Congreve as a dramatist. First, Congreve was indebted to all these dramatists mentioned above (Carolean period), and some of their influences are found in *Incognita* too. I wanted to provide a context for the period, focused on the literary side of it, more than in the historical-political aspect. Nonetheless, history and politics need to be mentioned in order to contextualise certain works. Secondly, I had briefly sketched Congreve’s dramatic works, paying attention more to comedies than his only tragedy regarding the nature of *Incognita*. Also, I aim to pinpoint Congreve’s importance as a dramatist. We cannot talk about an extensive production, but its quality is undoubtedly agreed by every scholar of the period. *Incognita* was his very first piece of writing and his only novel. He was a dramatist and a poet, but we cannot talk about him being a novelist.

Nevertheless, the hybridity in *Incognita* is a fact and its “Dramatick Writing” is found in it. It is peculiar how he chose to publish a short novel before a dramatic work or even a collection of poems, and although he pursued to write a work in prose in the

construction of the story, he had a drama in mind. In chapter 3.7. I expand extensively on the several themes found in *Incognita*, literary references to previous works and so on and so forth. Furthermore, I analyse this concept of “Dramatic Writing” pinpointing to fragments in the text and how closely they resemble a piece of drama onstage.

2.5. The origins of the Novel and the *Novella*

“The novel quotes, parodies and transforms other genres, converting its literary ancestors into mere components of itself.”

(Eagleton, *The English Novel* 1)

2.5.1. Tracing back the origins of the Novel: a revision of criticism

According to Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957; 2015) the origins of the novel took place at the beginning of the eighteenth century in England.⁸⁷ He concludes that the rise of the modern novel took place with writers such as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding.⁸⁸ Watt carried out some quite delimited research⁸⁹ of a new literary

⁸⁷ Watt’s view has been considered ‘anglocentric’, in the sense that he did not allow the possibility of simultaneous ‘rises’ of the novel in different countries to England. For instance, Walter Reed in *An Exemplary History of the Novel* (1981), proposes that the novel first appeared in Spain in the sixteenth century. However, he also specifies that the novel is a ‘multinational genre’ and that “arises and rearises in different regional cultures at different times” (22-3). On the other hand, Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Denver in their book *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel* (12) claims the origin of the novel to be in reality the “cross-Channel invention of the novel.”

⁸⁸ Schlauch (3) also compares these “fathers of the novel” to the following successors of the upcoming centuries:

For all his playful and subtle technique, Lawrence Sterne was close to them. Jane Austen too, that exquisite artist, was pre-eminently social in her interests. The great 19th-century English novelists – Thackeray and Dickens, Meredith and Hardy – followed close after these; and the same may be said of their 20th-century continuators such as Galsworthy and Conrad.

⁸⁹ According to Lennard Davis (“Identity Politics” 317-8), in doing so Watt was ‘naive, sexist, racist, Anglophilic, logocentric, essentialist, positivist, vulgarly materialistic, and probably homophobic.’ There are critics who find the origins of the English novel mainly ‘masculine’. For instance, Deborah Ross in *The Excellence of Falsehood* (12-3) claims that “women’s novels rarely fit well into the theoretical structures designed to explain male novelists” and that is why a “more complete, integrative history of the novel ... still needs to be written.” Yet there is another book portraying a female vision of the origin of the novel in Jane Spencer. *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

genre which appears in English prose narrative between the years 1719 and 1749.⁹⁰ He looks into the origins of the novel and the influences this new genre received from previous ones⁹¹ (Alter 214):

There are still no wholly satisfactory answers to many of the general questions which anyone interested in the early eighteenth-century novelists and their works is likely to ask: Is the novel a new literary form? And if we assume, as is commonly done, that it is, and that it was begun by Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, how does it differ from the prose fiction of the past, from that of Greece, for example, or that of the Middle Ages, or of seventeenth-century France? And is there any reason why these differences appeared when and where they did? (9)

Therefore, “traditionally” the beginnings of the novel were set upon the eighteenth century and this new genre was oriented towards a social perspective⁹² (Schlauch 3). These novels reconstruct the comings and goings of real men and women and their relationships among them and to society in general. The cultural differences and progress between 1688 to 1815 can be traced back to the origins of the novel (Richter 214). Taking a step further, it must be mentioned that around 1700, only the 50 percent of men and 15 percent of women were able to sign for official registers. In the 1820s these figures changed to 65 percent to men and 40 percent to women.⁹³ Basically, the growth of this “mass reading public” due to cultural reasons or simply for entertainment, made it possible the increase in literate population, especially the outstanding figure in women’s rate.

⁹⁰ Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) or Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) are both considered to be the first British modern novels.

⁹¹ For an insight into this topic see J. A. Downie. “The Making of the English Novel” (1997).

⁹² Hunter in *Before Novels* (1990) argues that the formation of a different genre involves mixing and combining a range of materials available at that particular point in time. Therefore, the novel emerges from ‘cultural needs’ that were previously found in different popular works.

⁹³ For further references, see “Literacy in England 1580-1920” in Gregory Clark’s “The Great Escape: The Industrial Revolution in Theory and History” (57).

However, although this book by Watt received great acclaim among critics, nowadays this study is considered to be less exhaustive or not as complete in terms of historical records and works as others already mentioned.⁹⁴ For instance, as Richter (10) points out, “formal realism” features are not so important in Fielding, as they are in Defoe and Richardson.⁹⁵ According to Watt (11), “the novel’s realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it.” As Watt states in *Rise* (Chapter 1), the word ‘realism’ comes from the French school of Realists. In terms of aesthetic nomenclature, ‘réalisme’ was used to describe something which depicted the human truth ‘vérité humaine’, for instance, the sort of painting by Rembrandt. This term was opposed to the contrary movement which was poetic idealism, ‘idéalité poétique’ which depicted neo-classical painting. Then, it was used as a literary term when in 1856, a journal called *Réalisme* born. Therefore, realism was then used to describe real scenarios, opposed to the ideal or idealism not depicting a real portrait of life.

This realism was considered the portrait of real life, which in fact is the opposite to romance. However, that is not totally accurate because, realism of presentation as its term itself suggests, deals with a realism in the way the author presents the story to tell. This does not imply that the story must be necessarily true, based upon real facts, but it is told in a manner that the reader must feel it is, indeed, a real story. Therefore, the novel is the first genre which deals with reality through individual experience: “The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation.” (Watt 13)

⁹⁴ Margaret Schlauch was one of the first academics who saw Watt’s work outdated and not considering previous works which anticipated the origin of the novel quite before Daniel Defoe:

... Watt sees a shift from a preoccupation with universals and abstractions to a concern with individuals and their particular environments. He regards Defoe’s use of the first-person memoir as a defiant assertion of the individual’s primary role in the novel, a phenomenon peculiar to the 18th century. In a general way this is true. Yet the convention of a first-person narrator had already been well established much earlier, as we have seen in Boccaccio’s *Fiammetta*, not to speak of the works of Christine de Pisan and San Pedro. The situation is perhaps less simple than Watt sees it.

⁹⁵ See Chapter X. “Samuel Richardson: Disavowal and Spontaneity” in Davis’s *Factual Fictions* (174-192).

Furthermore, he states that in this particular genre the language is used in a more referential manner than in any other one (102), representative and descriptive uses of the language are outstanding in depicting characters, settings and ambiances. Thus, Fielding uses names for his characters which describe the content and are relevant to understand the personage from a psychological point of view, such as Allworthy or Thwackum. All in all, Fielding is as important as Defoe and Richardson, since as Watt posited these are the fathers of the English novel. In fact, for Watt, Richardson had already been established the novel as an instrument with an artistic, aesthetic and moral purpose, long before Defoe. Richardson would be the very first novelist in the English literary context:

The novel could be considered established only when realistic narrative was organised into a plot which, while retaining Defoe's lifelikeness, also had an intrinsic coherence; when the novelist's eye was focused on character and personal relationships as essential elements in the total structure, and not merely as subordinate instruments for furthering the verisimilitude of the actions described; and when all these were related to a controlling moral intention. (131)

We would not have had a Smollett or Austen without his previous influence or later, Dickens and Thackeray's works. There has been more recent research on this topic which expresses very different opinions from those voiced by Ian Watt in 1957.

For instance, Margaret Anne Doody sheds a different light to the origins of the novel, by tracing back it to the Hellenistic romances. She does not consider a historical background and connection in Genre Theory. She proposes that romance and novel are the same thing, yet in a different disguise. She gives a different perspective of the origin of the novel, stating that it was not Anglocentric (as Watt states) and that it can be traced back to ancient literature. The purpose of this book is to clearly state a sort of connection between genres and an evolution from it. From Ancient Greek to Chivalric Romances, Heroic Romances and the Novel. According to Doody (6), the novel comes originally

from Alexandria which was founded in 331 B.C. by Alexander the Great. This city was full of erudite masters and they even used translation. There were Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria, so the city produced the *Septuagint* which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture. Therefore, the Novel evolved from many Mediterranean civilizations, readers in upper Egypt and Alexandria. Some of the earliest novels were probably Egyptian (Hägg 96-7). The earliest Hellenistic romances⁹⁶ may have been Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* and the outstanding and well-known Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe*: "These were tales of lovers, usually nobly born, beautiful and chaste, whose flight from parental opposition leads them into incredible dangers surmounted by unbelievable artifices" (Richter 2). Doody (26) also comments other ancient works in the shape of the novel. For instance, *Ephesistka* by "Xenophon of Ephesus" a five-book abridgement of a novel originally of ten books, probably from the second century A.D. One complete epistolary novella, called *Chion of Heraklea (Chiōnos Epistolai)*, written around the end of the first century A.D. or beginning of the second one. A lively long novella or short novel, *True History* by Lucian of Samosata, a work usually called by his Latin name, *Vera Historia* (A.D. 125-190).

Mikhail M. Bakhtin (326) also traces back the origins of narrative to the Hellenistic period.⁹⁷

In the era of Hellenism a closer contact with the heroes of the Trojan epic cycle began to be felt; epic is already being transformed into novel. Epic material is transposed into novelistic material, into precisely that zone of contact that passes through the intermediate stages of familiarization and laughter.

⁹⁶ Hunter in his essay about the history of the novel also pinpoints this theory of tracing back the earliest novels to the Greek times. ("The Novel and social/cultural history" 9)

⁹⁷ See also Hammond's *Professional Imaginative Writing*, especially chapter 4 "The Mock-Heroic Moment in the 1690s".

Therefore, Bakhtin (327) considers that the authentic predecessors of the novel were found in Roman times. Inside classical literature, there were different genres included fables, bucolic poems, memoirs, “Socratic dialogues”, and also Roman satire. In Roman satire we find Lucilius, Horace,⁹⁸ Juvenal or Persius. Then, extensive literature of the “Symposia”, Menippean satire, and dialogues of the Lucianic type. All of these narrative genres were the real origins of the novel. These were included under the category of “serio-comical” or *spoudogeloion*.

For instance, the Menippean satire, or less known as the Varronian satire because Varro was a disciple of Menippus, survived only but in fragments. This type of bitter satire since Menippus was a cynic, is later used by Petronius and Apuleius. In terms of structure, the satire by Menippus was written in verse, but it introduced fragments in prose, “The Menippean satire appears to have developed out of verse satire through the practice of adding prose interludes, but we know it only as a prose form, though one of its recurrent features ... is the use of incidental verse” (Frye, “*From Anatomy*” 9). However, it is true that this type of satire deals more with archetypes or ideas than actual people as in the modern novel: “The novelist sees evil and folly as social diseases, but the Menippean satirist sees them as diseases of the intellect, as a kind of maddened pedantry.” (Frye, *Anatomy* 308)

Another vision of the genesis is that of Michael McKeon in *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740*. Despite the fact that the novel emerges in the 1740s as an independent genre, the modern novel as it is known in the present day does not appear until the early decades of the following century. However, paradoxically he points out that there is a “climax” in the origins with Richardson and Fielding (McKeon, *Origins*

⁹⁸ In fact, in Congreve’s library item number 104 is Creech’s (Tho.) *Translation of Horace Thomas Creech (1659–1700). The odes, satyrs, and epistles of Horace. Done into English*. The second edition. London, for Jacob Tonson, 1688. 8°. (Hodges 1955)

410). According to this author, there is not one single origin of the novel but simultaneous ones, which were the precursors of the modern novel as it is regarded nowadays:

For McKeon, the “novel” whose origin he wants to explain takes a multiplicity of forms: Cervantes’s satire on knightly romance, Bunyan’s religious allegories, Defoe’s pseudo-autobiographies, Swift’s Menippean satire, Richardson’s serious and tragic novels in letters, Fielding’s comic and serious narratives and Sterne’s strange mixture of sentimentality and satiric wit. (Richter 12)

There have been several debates about the real origins of the novel. Whether the modern novel has suffered a transformation from previous genres, or whether it is a totally new genre. In fact, McKeon (*Origins* 418-19) is much more concerned about this *embryology* of the novel. His research deals with the previous stages to that conception of the novel as an autonomous and defined genre:

The claim and its subversion [refers to historicity] end in a triumph of the creative human mind, a triumph already prefigured at the moment of the novel’s emergence: in Richardson the triumphant mind is that of the protagonist; in Fielding it is that of the author. The implications of the formal breakthrough of the 1740s are pursued with such feverish intensity over the next two decades that after *Tristram Shandy*, it may be said, the young genre settles down to a more deliberate and studied recapitulation of the same ground, this time for the next two centuries.

What is clear among researchers on this topic is that the novel could be defined as Margaret Schlauch states in her Introductory Remarks (1):

A specifically modern form of fiction, realized at some length in prose (not in verse, as were the ancient and feudal epics), dealing with ordinary men and women (not the supernatural or larger-than-life figures of the age of myth), and making some claims to verisimilitude in its manner of presentation.

Some critics believe that the modern novel deviates from pre-existing formats and is “a partial development of an ongoing generic whole” (*Origins* XX) such as epic,

romance or “the ancient novel”. Others assume that the modern novel is a new generic whole and the debate about its definition is “likely to achieve consensus when conducted in terms that have something like this dialectical reach and flexibility” (*Origins* XX). “The ancient novel” is found in Greek novels, a composition between oral tradition and the literacy of the Hellenistic period. This vision is shared by Margaret Anne Doody who argued that the rise of the novel did not take place in eighteenth-century England but it occurred in the Hellenistic times with romance, as I have just suggested (Alter 214-5). On the other hand, Mikhail Bakhtin (327) traces three different origins for the modern novel. Those are the novel of “adventure time” in the Greek romances⁹⁹ from the second century B.C., the novel of everyday time in the story of *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius, and the “chronotope” centred on biographical time. However, the latter did not produce any kind of novels at that period (Goody 3). Even though, there are traces of prose narrative back in time, I would speak more of a Greco-Roman narrative. Since Roman and Greek times, the distinction between fact and fiction has been ‘a fact’.

As Donovan (4) explains, the novel develops around economic forces whereas that was not the case in any previous genres such as the epic, romance, tragedy or any other literary genre. As Seager (78) clearly explains, “Bakhtin speaks of a ‘prehistory of novelistic discourse’, rather than simply charting a ‘rise’”. This prehistory is key to understand the real origin of the novel which is traced back to classical times. This prehistory is found in Roman texts, particularly in the “serio-comical” label where we find the Roman satire (Juvenal, Persius, Horace, Lucilius) and Menippean satire (*Satyricon* by Petronius included). These authors and their works, according to Bakhtin (327), “were the first authentic and essential step in the evolution of the novel as the genre of

⁹⁹ As Madame de Scudéry stated in her preface to *Ibrahim* (1641), “I have seen in those famous Romanzes of antiquity, that in imitation of the Epique Poem ...”

becoming.”¹⁰⁰ For instance, in *Satyricon* by Petronius,¹⁰¹ there was a mixture between poetry and narrative reflecting a mimesis of low life. Also, the New Comedy of Menander is close to the low mimetic theatre. This type of comedy features an erotic plot involving a man and a woman which face obstacle in order to consecrate their union, normally the patriarchal/parental figure is the opposed force. It has to be a sudden change in the plot or “twist” in order to leave the character achieve their purposes, which is “the comic form of Aristotle’s “discovery”” (Frye, *Anatomy* 44).

In this thesis, I agree with those critics who believe that there were previous works which were precursors of the rise of the modern novel in the eighteenth century; and also, that the novel is not a monolithic genre. But I would not say that the eighteenth-century novel can be traced back as far as ancient times. Although, it has to be recognised that a sort of incipient narrative style might be found.

In fact, there are traces from previous genres which can be found in it. I do not share Doody’s view in *The True Story of the Novel* who argues this ‘same entity’, that romance and novel are the same unity. The novel has replaced romance which can be considered as the “older form”; but the novel is the reaction towards what romances represented.¹⁰² Richter (2) in his book *Reading the Eighteenth-Century Novel* focuses particular attention to what Doody said:

¹⁰⁰ However, as Paige (8) points out, by the same reason, these works “were long denigrated precisely because, like “mere” fables, they lacked the prestige of history.”

¹⁰¹ In the later seventeenth century there was a reprint of this work in Amsterdam, in 1669, and also there was a later edition printed in Rotterdam in 1694. However, at the beginning of the century and long before these modern editions of *Satyricon*, John Barclay published *Satyricon* (1603-1607) also known as *Euphormio*. Doody (253) claims that “is a novel exhibiting the influence of Petronius and Apuleius ... Had Barclay written his story in the vernacular, either English or French, his *Satyricon* might have passed permanently into the ranks of well-known Renaissance works, like its coeval, Thomas Nashe’s *Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), a novel that may also bear the imprint of the *Satyricon* as well as the more open influence of the Spanish picaresque fictions.” See also Salzman (88).

¹⁰² Nicholas D. Paige in his book *Before Fiction* (212, note 69):

I use “romance” to designate the long narratives of the French seventeenth century-works from d’Urfé’s *L’Astrée* (1607-27) to Scudéry’s *Clélie* (1654-60) – that were modeled on Heliodorus’s *Aethiopica*. Unlike many, however, I treat romance as a form of the novel – a form that is morphologically distinct from the pseudofactual novel and the fictional novel.

Doody's claim that "Romance and the Novel are one" (15) has generally been found unconvincing. Although Doody can point to a group of "tropes" (general plot points and themes, like erotic desire and generational conflict) that one can find in both the Greek romances and the English novel of the eighteenth century, this is a very weak claim, since they can be found without looking very hard pretty much everywhere else in literature.

Richetti affirms that "The history of the novel has thus been handed down to us as the triumph of an enlightened realism over reactionary romance, the development or evolution of a superior literary instrument" (*Popular Fiction* 2). In the eighteenth century, the realistic fiction of Defoe and Fielding were in fact fiction but with certain nuances. Between 1700 and 1739, the public rejected the wit of Restoration comedies (Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) is considered nowadays a masterpiece but, at that time it was not considered as such); and also, the new romances were behind the times. Therefore, new genres, not so brilliantly written were demanded (Richetti, *Popular Fiction* 127).

As L. Davis (200) clarifies according to his *simulacrum theory*, Fielding wanted to clarify what he was not an historian nor a romancer. He stated that he has nothing to do with history or journalism. Therefore, he is writing pure fiction without influences: "Fielding has made his break with the news/novels discourse by claiming to be writing not a document, but a fiction, and in so doing disbanding the simulacrum theory of the novel."

It was not the kind of experiential truth; but the literal truth based on facts (Goody 5). The author of a novel basically employs recurrent methods to develop their texts as for instance, epistolary texts exchanged among the characters, a narrative mingled with dialogues and varied commentaries from the narrator. The point of view could be subjective or objective, immersed in the story or partly or totally detached from it (Schlauch 1). Regarding the theme of epistolary exchange, Schlauch (152) proposes a

shift from romance to novel in the fact that the “artificiality” disappear in style from the sixteenth century onwards:

The 16th-century model letters are couched in the courtly artificial style, and are directed to social groups which had little taste for natural discourse and action. A middle-class culture was necessary in England to ensure the success of modern novels, epistolary and other, which aimed primarily at some sort of realism in preference to rhetoric.

Richard Burton (18) proposes the same concept of a ‘shift’ from romance to novel in the sense that although the origins of fiction in prose style originated in medieval times and Tudor’s, Richardson was indeed the creator, the artificer of the novel in the modern sense. Therefore, he “introduced a more truthful representation of real life than had obtained in the romantic fiction deriving from the medieval stories.” In this sense, it should be mentioned the definition of novel provided by Ernest Baker in *The History of the English Novel* (1924-39),¹⁰³ “the interpretation of human life by means of a fictitious narrative in prose.” According to this author, there was not a creation or a birth of the novel, but a compendium of different efforts, in different epochs. However, yet he proposes Defoe as the father of the modern sense of the novel and followed by Richardson and Fielding as the conquerors of the genre who “gave fiction an intellectual meaning and an artistic schem” (vol. I, 299). I do agree with Baker in the sense that he concludes that there are no traces of consistent development in Medieval Times, as Seager (25) explains “due to a lack of conscious artistry and a lack of freedom of expression.” Therefore, according to Baker the ‘real development’ started in Elizabethan times, yet the novel did not appear until the eighteenth century, as previously mentioned, when Defoe; and later, Richardson and Fielding put pen to paper. In Baker’s view (vol. III, 169), the first novel

¹⁰³ Reprinted in 1950 by Barnes and Noble (vol. 1, 15).

was, as commonly known, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe. And I quite concur with this statement.

Furthermore, Sir Walter Raleigh in his work called *The English Novel* (1894) also saw a 'shift' in this case from allegory to narrative realism during the Reformation and a 'shift' from verse to narrative prose which eventually triggered the birth of the novel. As Seager (21) rewrites Raleigh's words in his book, "the seventeenth century saw the 'rise, decline, and fall' of heroic romance, a descendent of chivalric romance, which represents 'a resistance to realism'." Yet the romance made its comeback when the novel was already a distinctive genre in 1750s. As Seager (22) highlights the romance appeared again in the disguise of Gothic novels which at the very same time gave birth to domestic satire in the hands of Burney, Austen or Edgeworth.

More than a shift, or a change in literary tastes, what occurred in England in the seventeenth century was an opposition or a break in the rules which predominated during the past centuries. The miraculous and very often, predictable romance with an almost happy ending and marriage between high rank aristocrats, moved onto the realism which novels attempted to achieve imitating common deeds.¹⁰⁴ Fictive stories based upon the lives, memories, comings and goings of ordinary, common people. Stories which could be easily inspired by real people, or simply, readers could empathise with characters, settings and experiences. According to L. Davis (113), the theory of the novel in the seventeenth century (the shift from romance to novel) was in reality a false theory or a *simulacrum* theory:

The initial frame of fabrication ("this work is true") permits the ensuing plot-events to be improbable, fanciful, illogical – in short, novelistic ... First, the novel is based on a theory

¹⁰⁴ According to Turner (85), "In fiction there is no Realism, only realisms, local wonders that a particular generation 'receives as true'." And as Genette points out, realism in fact is what Aristotle called mimesis, the imitation of nature. (*Narrative Discourse Revisited* 15)

which is inherently reflexive in its simultaneous call for overt moral verisimilitude and covert actual verisimilitude – and on the contradiction between these two varieties of truth. At the same time, on the second level, an entirely other assertion of truth is taking place that in effect frames the first contradiction. This second contradictory assertion falsely maintains that the work is not a fiction at all.

The word “novel” appeared in the English language from the Romance languages (those derived from Latin) at the very end of the fifteenth century meaning “news”. In 1486, and with the aid of the printing press, Henry VII began to publish occasionally diplomatic accounts as well as news and announcements. Later, in the Elizabethan Age, some groups apart from the government used this media for domestic affairs in the form of ballads. Then, these ballads were replaced by the newsbook or news pamphlet as a sort of journalism in the following century. Prose was replacing poetry to tell society the events taking place. “Novels” were the term used for these ballads; the counterpart of the French *nouvelle* or the Spanish *novela*.¹⁰⁵ Those people searched a new genre but without raising the question of fact versus fiction. Later on, in the sixteenth century (1566 according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*), the term was used to refer to a tale or a short story; similar to Boccaccio’s *Decameron*,¹⁰⁶ for instance. Finally, in the seventeenth century, the term was used as it is known nowadays, as a long fictional prose narrative opposed to romances with a close relation to real life (Goody 18). In fact, those French *nouvelles* were a reaction towards the romance type of writing. These writers wanted to change the tradition and offered a new sort of genre, and the influence came directly to England.¹⁰⁷ In fact, these *Nouvelles* also stated the distinction between romance and

¹⁰⁵ See Salzman’s *English Prose Fiction*, chapter 2 “The Novella”.

¹⁰⁶ Congreve had a copy of this work in his private library, item number 68, *Boccae.s’ Nouels English Entry by the second hand. Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375). The decameron containing an hundred pleasant nouels*. London, Isaac Jaggard, 1620. 2 vol. fol. STC 3172 (Hodges 1955).

¹⁰⁷ Joan DeJean in her article “Transnationalism and the Origins of the (French) Novel” (38) says: “from 1660 to 1750, the prose fiction created both in England and in France was massively ‘French’”. As we see above in chapter 2.3.3.

novel, as we find in the English prose fiction as in the preface of *Incognita* (1692).¹⁰⁸

There is a fragment written by Jean Regnault de Segrais in *Les Nouvelles Françaises* and quoted in L. Davis (34):

... we have tried to recount things as they are and not as they should be: moreover it seems to me the difference between the romance and the novel is that the romance writes these things as *bienseance* requires and in the manner of the poet, whereas the novel must partake more of history and strives more to give images of things as we ordinarily see them than as our imagination might picture them.

According to Doody the term “novel” refers to a longer work of prose fiction. As previously said, before adopting the term “novel” in the eighteenth century, “prose fiction” was the one employed to refer to an extended fictitious prose narrative in the previous century (McKeon, *Origins* 27). According to Doody, romances are quite primitive or ancient, and also static and unsophisticated. On the other hand, the novel is articulate and complex (Fuchs 33). This assumption has been widely believed by others critics who pointed out that romance has been undervalued and the novel has been always the privileged term (Novak, “Congreve’s “*Incognita*” 330). While dealing with the distinction between romance and novel, she asserts that the novel is produced when the romance finally grows up (Doody 1-5). She again alludes to the fact that the novel is an evolution of romance. Novel is just the “maturation” of the ancient romance. Interestingly, Reeve’s account also proposes a continuity from the very ancient romance to the modern novel; in other words: “how the modern Novel sprung up out of [romance’s] ruins (8). For instance, Northrop Frye (*Anatomy* 38) avers that the modern novel is basically a “realistic displacement of the romance” having few symbolic features to the genre itself. On the one hand, the novel is personal in the sense that it deals with

¹⁰⁸ See chapter 3.4.

characters in a deep psychological level. The novel tells how these characters are immersed and develop within a particular society, in a particular context. Characters in romances are heroic, and heroes do not have social tensions or have to find their place within society. Otherwise, they would not be heroes, but common people, individuals and the protagonist of novels.¹⁰⁹

The book *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* written by Sheldon Sacks, gives account of how the author's beliefs are involved in the narrative itself: "If his novel is coherent, then the writer's relevant beliefs, like all other qualitative parts, must be subordinate to the artistic end which informs the work" (61).

There are different types of fiction, which are at the same time 'mutually exclusive'. First, 'satire' is presented through Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). He states that satire represents "a work organized so that it ridicules objects external to the fictional world created in it." (26) The second type is that of 'apologue'. Apologue is represented through the work written by Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas* (1759). According to Sacks, an apologue is "a work organized as a fictional example of the truth of a formulable statement." (26) Last but not least, the third type of fiction is called 'represented action'. Sacks utilises various works to explain this term such as *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Tom Jones* (1749), and *Amelia* (1751), all written by Henry Fielding. Sacks defines what occurs in a work with 'represented actions': "characters about whose fates we are made to care are introduced in unstable relationships which are then further complicated until the complications are finally resolved by the complete removal of the represented instability" (15). The end to these works might be happy or unhappy, comic or tragic endings to the story and to "the characters with whom we are most in sympathy" (22).

¹⁰⁹ See Frye's "*From Anatomy*" (5-13).

Basically, readers judge events and could have their own opinion, even disagree with the turn of events.

Nonetheless, there are critics who do not agree with the assumption that the novel emerged from the previous romance or was a reaction against it. L. Davis (41), for example, explains that:

While I have argued here¹¹⁰ that there was a profound rupture between novel and romance, I do not think we can usefully see this discontinuity simply as a reaction against romance. Rather, to understand the complexity of this shift we are forced to move to an explanation outside the purely literary.

Seager (67), in his book *The Rise of the Novel* (2012), comments Lennard Davis' approach to this issue:

Davis denies that the novel constituted a reaction to any other fictional form, such as romance. Romance and the novel have fundamentally different approaches to the representation of reality: romance presents the world idealistically (as it should be), whereas the novel depicts the world in a reportorial, realistic manner (as it actually is). ... *Don Quixote*¹¹¹ and heroic romances are, for Davis, red herrings in the search for the origins of the novel: romances do not present uncertainty as to whether they are fact or fiction, which is characteristic of the new form, because they flourished *before* fact and fiction were at issue in genre.

Yet not only did the novel 'evolve' or was a counter-genre to romance, but theatrical drama was also involved in this evolution. As Peters (172) points out in her book about Congreve and the Drama. He states that the novel learnt how to use some devices from theatrical representations "interweaving descriptions of "offstage" action increasingly over the course of the eighteenth century, with the descriptions becoming

¹¹⁰ Chapter II. "The Romance: Liminality and Influence" (25-41).

¹¹¹ According to Marthe Robert, *Don Quixote* is considered to be the first modern novel if this modern connotation means "the self-searching, self-questioning literary movement which uses as subject matter its own doubt and belief in the value of its message" (68, note 1).

ever more complex, vivid, and entangled.” This sort of union comes from the epistolary genre in which by means of letters and descriptions appears a representation of scenes. Therefore, theatre and novel are interwoven during the seventeenth century until there is a more clear-cut separation between both genres:

In the novel, such a technique [epistolary] becomes a way of invoking the theatre and increasingly a way of conjuring the presence that the printed page lacks — a presence fully achieved in the elimination of boundaries, which the *style indirect libre* of the nineteenth-century novel could bring about. In the theatre, such description is a novelistic gesture, one that tries to approximate the power of showing more than one scene at a time and the power of descriptive narrative, which are the prerogatives of the novel. (172)

All in all, I will propose as a proper definition of the modern novel the one provided by Richetti (1) in his Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion*: “a long prose narrative about largely fictional if usually realistic characters and plausible events.” Thus, I say ‘modern novel’ because he emphasises the fact that this definition really worked out at the beginning of the nineteenth century around writers such as Jane Austen, Ann Radcliffe or Walter Scott. As said previously, Richetti points out that the ‘novel’ we study in the eighteenth century is not a novel as such but a preliminary novel, a novel in the early stages of its development (I would not say birth, because it is more a process than a point in time). Therefore, he proposes that these ‘novels’ are “the early and truly formative phase of the novel as a genre of prose fiction.” (1) Nonetheless, as this thesis proposes and some other researchers mentioned here, there is a slightly previous stage in prose fiction before the eighteenth century. In this particular case, we are dealing with the novel written by Congreve, *Incognita*, as the corpus to demonstrate the hypothesis. However, there are other authors, contemporary to Congreve or even before him who were writing prose fiction long before the eighteenth century. During the thesis, the constant idea that the ‘origin’, ‘birth’, ‘rise’ of the novel is not a specific point in time or

a drastically change in tastes. The novel did not appear *ex nihilo*. It was the result and consequence of a long period of new ways to tell stories, new ways to deal with characters; less heroic, more mundane. Trivialities of the everyday were central to the plots, and less pomposity was attached to the protagonists.

There is another term which is worth commenting: the *novella*. Strictly speaking, *Incognita* is categorised as a *novella* rather than a novel as such. In the eighteenth century in England, there was a sort of narrative which was much shorter than the novel (Heiserman 221). There were authors of that time who celebrated a new shorter sort of fiction. Novels were evolved from these *novellas*, particularly from the Italian *novella* and having the same origin as the French *nouvelle*, “a diminutive story whose material is fresh, untraditional, and whose resolution is extraordinarily surprising” (4, note 2). *Novellas*, at that time, were thought to have clear connections to romances.¹¹² The *novella* goes back to 1560s and 1570s to *novella* such as Boccaccio’s *Decameron*¹¹³ came to England by means of translations and adaptations. Also, in England, we must mention William Painter’s *The Palace of Pleasure* (a compilation of *novellas*, 1567-1575).¹¹⁴

Novellas often described human imperfection represented as a truth which is unexpectedly revealed along the action. Interestingly, a *novella* takes place around a single event located in a setting which is supposed to be real. Furthermore, in the most serious *novellas* the topic is very often the cruelty of fate and the unwavering virtue of characters (Pavel 13). These new narratives were described as follows by Delarivier Manley:

¹¹² As Samuel Johnson defined in 1755 in his dictionary, ‘the *novella*’ is ‘a small tale, generally of love.’

¹¹³ In Jean Lafond. *Nouvelles du XVIIe siècle* (1997) the preliminary study it is discussed how Pietro Toldo states that the *nouvelle* came from the Boccaccian style whereas Gaston Paris claimed the origins of the *nouvelle* was French and popular in style.

¹¹⁴ See Salzman’s *English Prose Fiction*, chapter 2, “The *Novella*”. Particularly interesting is the analysis of the two types of *novellas* in the Elizabethan period. The one dealing with plot and the unity of action and the other type which deals more with character’s development and the role of the narrator.

These little pieces which have banish'd Romances are much more agreeable to the Brisk and Impetuous Humour of the English, who have naturally no Taste for long-winded Performances, for they have no sooner begun a Book but they desire to see the End of it.
(Preface to *Queen Zarah*)

In *novellas*, it was compulsory to create a sense of verisimilitude. Although a fictitious narrative, the writer must create the feeling that what is told is real. Regarding this concern, the moral realism present in the *novella* and, later in the sort of social realism of nineteenth-century novels aim at the creation of verisimilitude (Pavel 13). Therefore, there is a clear connection between *novella* and novel. Both genres aim towards the creation of verisimilitude. However, at the same time both are part of fiction and therefore, they create stories which are not real.

Modern critics refer to these shorter narratives as passionate romances or amatory *novellas* (Fuchs 104). Supposedly, these amatory *novellas* were a recapitulation of heroic romances. This French heroic romance predominantly influenced English literature reflected in the works of such authors as Aphra Behn or Eliza Haywood. For example, this influence came from works by Madame de Lafayette, *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1662) and *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678).¹¹⁵ The former was considered a 'novel'. In 1664 was listed as one by Charles Sorel together with other works by Cervantes, Segrais, Scarron or Voiture (L. Davis 39): "Sorel's criteria seem to have been that the events recounted had recently happened, that the whole story is rather short, and that the stories are true to some particular human experience."

Nonetheless, according to Watt (30) these heroic romances were too highly sophisticated which lose the impression of authenticity. French fiction was stylish and lofty to suggest a reality close to the novel:

¹¹⁵ These romances were called "petit roman" opposed to the "grands romans" by the Scudérys (George and Madeleine) Kukkonen (1).

In France, the classical critical outlook, with its emphasis on elegance and concision, was not fully challenged until the coming of Romanticism. It is perhaps partly for this reason that French fiction from *La Princesse de Clèves* to *Les Liaisons dangereuses* stands outside the main tradition of the novel. For all its psychological penetration and literary skill, we feel it is too stylish to be authentic.

However, as John Richetti states the “popular” romantic *novella* was rather “a simplification or vulgarization”.

The great majority of the amorous novellas written in English before 1740 merely condensed the excesses of the heroic romance, substituted a debased and inflated but simplified heroic rant for the involved *préciosité* of the romances, and used that style to deliver stories of some external complication but of extreme moral and emotional simplicity. (*Popular Fiction* 172-3)

I do not agree completely with this statement by Richetti. I would not say that before 1740 we cannot find interesting pieces of writing in the shape of *novellas* or short novels, or even novels. We must remember that in the many editions of *Incognita* (See appendices) the word ‘Novel’ appears as the appropriate category for this work. Furthermore, although the plot in *Incognita* could seem to be silly at first, if we read carefully some fragments, we find that there are plenty of themes which deserve our attention.

My aim in this chapter is to provide the long criticism about the origins of the novel and as we have seen there is not a clear consensus about it. And I think this debate would be open for a very long time because it depends on what you consider a piece of writing to have the category of ‘Novel’ or not. I find interesting this overview of the most valuable contributions by scholars to the debate in order to contextualise why I believe *Incognita* to be part of the making of the English novel. Obviously, it cannot be categorised as a Novel *per se* as, for instance, *Robinson Crusoe* but at that time it was

considered as such. And, this reflection is quite important. Every work needs to be studied and understood in the period when it was written. At that time, those short pieces of fiction were considered to be novels because they provided stories which differed from romances. Stories which readers found closer to their own lives and interests and some of them even would help them to discern between fact and fiction.

Chapter 3

Incognita: Or, Love and Duty

Reconcil'd (1692)

Incognita is important in the history of the English novel, but not for the reasons usually given. It is also important as a prologue to the plays Congreve was so soon to write. There he would again illustrate, though in more subtle and complex terms, the ways in which men and women, even the most witty and urbane, may be thwarted by their own ingenuity, be delivered or defeated by seemingly casual or negligent events, find a guerdon, or meet disaster, through a “mistake.”

(A. Williams, *An Approach* 106)

3.1. First editions and early criticism

The first edition of *Incognita* was published at the end of February (18-22) 1692¹¹⁶ in *The London Gazette* (no. 2742) in duodecimo format (Buck). It was licensed on 22 December 1691. There were more reprints: one in 1700¹¹⁷ in octavo format and two more in 1713 (Wellington) in octavo and duodecimo formats¹¹⁸ (Bateson 505). Interestingly, Congreve did not include his first and only novel, *Incognita*, in his three-volume works published

¹¹⁶ Bodleian copy of 1692, (shelf-mark T. II4 Art). British Museum 1700 (I25II. bb. 8), 1713 Dyce Library (2435. I6. E. II), and that of 1743 (private copy). According to Mr. Seymour de Ricci's *Book Collector's Guide*, there are two copies of the first edition in private libraries. (Brett-Smith xvii)

¹¹⁷ It is believed that Congreve, presumably, wanted *Incognita* to remain anonymous since he never included it in his collected works. (Peters 50)

¹¹⁸ On a curious note, in this edition, at the beginning and at the end of the book, it could be read: “BOOKS sold by R. Wellington, at the Dolphin and Crown, in St. Paul's Church yard”; and at the bottom of the same page: “Where is sold all sorts of Histories, Romances, Poetry, Novels and Plays.” See appendix 6.

in 1710.¹¹⁹ In all of them, the term "novel" appears in the title: (reissued four times, with one abridged edition) (Brett-Smith v).

The narrator's historical pomposity is made possible by the patent fictitiousness of the work, by the words *a Novel* flashed on its title page (an unnecessary warning in later works, as the genre becomes more common, and the claims to truth are protected by an implicit contract between the writer and the "knowing" reader), and by the authorial intrusions themselves. (Peters 115)

There were more editions of *Incognita* after Congreve's death. There was one, in particular, that I would like to comment on: that published in 1730: "The most ingenious Corinna", was the responsible person for an abridged version of *Incognita*. As Brett-Smith (vi) observes, this version "so completely failed to perceive the merit of the original that she economised space by omitting the author's digressions and making a précis of the narrative."

Thus, in the middle of the eighteenth century (Brett-Smith v), *Biographia Britannica* proclaimed that Congreve "aimed at perfection from the very beginning, and his design, in writing this novel, was to show how novels ought to be written" (Novak, "Congreve's "Incognita"" 329). The same notion was shared by Ackroyd, who points out: "If it is not 'perfection' in itself, *Incognita* is perfect of its kind" (viii). But *Incognita* also elicited less generous criticism. Dr. Johnson wrote about it emphasising that "It is praised by the biographers, who quote some part of the preface, that is indeed, for such a time of life, uncommonly judicious", "I would rather praise it than read it" (Novak, "Congreve's "Incognita"" 329). The answer could be easily found in *The Rambler* No. 4 (Kelly 35), where Johnson comments upon this attempt to differentiate romances from

¹¹⁹ Item number 96, Congreve's (Wm.) *Works* 3 Vols. *L. Papr.* London, for Jacob Tonson, 1710. 3 voi. 8°. (The pages of the large paper edition in the Huntington Library measure approximately 5½ by 8½ inches) Hodges (1955).

novels: “Its province is to bring about natural events by easy means, and to keep up curiosity without the help of wonder”.

One of the concluding remarks made by critics is that of Brett-Smith (xii) who states that *Incognita* is “probably the most important as well as the most deliberate achievement of the English novel between *The Unfortunate Traveller* in 1594 and *The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* in 1719” because “Congreve has none of Nashe’s restlessness or Defoe’s police-court realism; he manipulates his puppet stage with a single eye to effect, and the quiet urbanity of his reflections on life has a salt of its own.” (xiii) But, I would say, after reading Aphra Behn, for instance, that this statement is generalising too much. *Incognita* must be situated in literary history, but Congreve did draw upon many different sources that cannot be neglected.

Despite the fact that *Incognita* has been considered by many critics to be a predecessor of the modern novel, it is overlooked in important works about the novel, such as Ian Watt’s *Rise of the Novel* (1957, 2015), Francis Stoddard’s *Evolution of the English Novel* (1900), Phelps’ *Advance of the English Novel* (1916), Cross’ *Development of the English Novel* (1899) and Richetti’s *The English Novel in History 1700-1780* (1998).

3.2. Hybridity in *Incognita*

3.2.1. Novelistic form

At the very end of the seventeenth century, *Incognita* reflected a change in the socio-literary context of the era, as there was a transition from the aristocratic romance to bourgeoisie¹²⁰ short fiction.

¹²⁰ Franco Moretti. *The Bourgeois. Between History and Literature*. Verso, 2013.

Along the way we may observe certain milestones, narratives – like William Congreve’s *Incognita* (1691) – which elegantly achieve the double negation that is characteristic of the form: first, of the fictions of romance, and then of naïve empiricism itself. (McKeon, “Rethinking the Rise” 388)¹²¹

Other critics attempted to assert that *Incognita* represented a transition from drama to novel. Nonetheless, based on the length of *Incognita*, it cannot be considered a novel *per se*. This is one of the features that makes it peculiar and unique. It is true that the narrative, the plot and the prose connect directly with the novelistic genre.¹²² As Northrop Frye (9-13) in his *Anatomy* explains, we can find strains from different genres in works considered to belong to particular defining genres. For instance, he says that in *Pamela*, we find elements of the novel, romance and confession; and the novel, romance, and anatomy in *Don Quixote*. Stevick states in his book *The Theory of the Novel* (2): “The novel, moreover, is a mixed genre. Its origins lie in a dozen different forms: essay, romance, history, the “character,” biography, comic and sentimental drama, and so on.”

Incognita relies heavily on techniques inappropriate to or impossible on the stage: a great deal of detailed historical description; a pseudohistorical narratorial voice; and claims to the truth of that voice, claims suggesting that a redemption of the theatrical is possible only through the scholarly voice of a narrator exposed to historical books. (Peters 113)

In the 1692 edition the complete title is *Incognita: Or, Love and Duty Reconcil’d. A Novel* (Editions 1). In the anthology published in 1700, a collection of stories is defined as “A Collection of Pleasant Modern Novels” (Editions 2). *Incognita* appears as the second story, together with *The Heroine Musqueteer: Or, the Female Warriour. A True History* and *The Pilgrim. A Pleasant Piece of Gallantry*. The first story is defined as a reliable, true story. In fact, the story is defined as being part of history, which means facts,

¹²¹ See McKeon’s “Rethinking the Rise” (382-99).

¹²² In Peters’ words (194): “Congreve attempted to overcome the solitude of novelistic reading by giving the novel a theatrical form.”

real events. The second story is called a novel, like *Incognita*. I have taken the title of this anthology to name this thesis since I consider *Incognita* to be a novel or, better defined, a precursor of the modern novel. At this point, novels are also considered to be fictitious pieces of writing. Nonetheless, their events are more plausible than those in romances. “There is, to an even greater extent than in the comedies, a heightening of all which emphasizes the delights of amorous pleasure-seeking, of all which throws a glamour over rakishness” (12). Novels “leave the habitual reader disgusted with everything serious or solid” and “make young people fancy themselves capable of judging of men and manners” (qtd. in Mackay 2).

Thus, Richetti argues that “Novelistic specificity focuses on social relationships that promote self-awareness in characters balanced (or torn) between individualism and communal identity. The effect is to render individuals as (potentially) both socially constructed and individually defined” (*The English Novel* 8). But I must say that this last bit of Richetti’s definition does not apply to *Incognita*. Psychological development is not entirely developed in this work, the complete psychological development will come in the eighteenth century with Richardson’s *Clarissa* among others. Although sometimes we find in the text signs of revolution, in the end they all behave according to well-defined stereotypes. Ultimately, there is no need for such reconciliation between love and duty because none of the characters have to challenge the established rules.

Philosophically speaking, society approached individualism through a ‘philosophical triad’: Francis Bacon (1561-1626) through *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Thomas Hobbes’s (1588-1679) *Leviathan* (1651) and John Locke’s (1632-1704) *Two Treatises of Government* (1690).¹²³ These English empiricists¹²⁴ articulated social,

¹²³ These two latter works can be found in Congreve’s library, items number 281 and 348. (Hodges 1955)

¹²⁴ See Loretelli’s “The Aesthetics of Empiricism” (83-109).

political and ethical theories according to which the individual discovers himself by means of experience.

Therefore, romances tend to feature astonishing adventures that do not happen or are not likely to happen to ordinary people. In this way they have the power to astonish readers, who can escape from the established canons of pure realism. Nonetheless, novels are more predictable, in a way, since the events they depict may happen in everyday lives. From a radical point of view, Tobias Smollett, in the preface to his book *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748) states that:

Romance, no doubt, owes its origin to ignorance, vanity, and superstition. In the dark ages of the world, when a man had rendered himself famous for wisdom or valour, his family and adherents availed themselves of his superior qualities, magnified his virtues, and represented his character and person as sacred and supernatural.

As Seager (7) mentions in his book about origins of the novel, Smollett also provided an early vision of the novel as a product of progress due to quality learning and greater rationality.

Lennard J. Davis in his book *Factual Fictions*¹²⁵ (40) offers a group of nine items specifying the basic differences between romance and novel as genres:

1. The romance is set in the distant, idealized past; the novel is set in a more recent, less heroic, setting.
2. The romance is based on the epic; the novel is modeled on history and journalism.
3. The romance is usually not set in the country of the author but in a remote and exotic location; the novel tends to be set in the

¹²⁵ See Chapter II. "The Romance: Liminality and Influence" (25-41) for an insight into the threshold regarding romance and novel, and also on the influence of French heroic romances and *nouvelles* and their role in the development of the modern novel.

locale of the author, that is, the novel tends to be a national form of literature.

4. The romance depicts the life of the aristocracy and is designed for an upper-class reader; the novel tends to be more middle class in scope and is geared to a slightly less aristocratic readership, although this statement is less true in France of the seventeenth century than in England.
5. Romances tend to be long and episodic; novels are shorter and more compact of plot.
6. Romances value the preservation of virtue and chastity; novels tend to focus on illegal doings and forbidden passions.
7. Novels of the eighteenth century tend to be written in the first person or in letter form; romances are never written in these forms.
8. Romances make clear that they are mixing fact and fiction to create an essentially fictional plot; novels tend to deny that they are fictional.
9. Romances follow the rules of *bienseance* and *vraisemblance*; novelists openly reject these rules since they claim to be writing history or recording life as it is.

All these items will be discussed extensively in the analysis of *Incognita*. I shall explain how this work imbued with features of both romance and the novel.

3.2.2. ‘Dramatick’ Writing and Providence

Not only is an anti-romantic hue present in this work, but a “dramatic” construction is also found in it too. Particularly, the dramatic tone comes from the “comedy of manners”

or “social comedy” genres. Richter (6) defines *Incognita* as a comedy of manners¹²⁶ in a novelistic form:

Incognita, unfortunately out of print, reads a bit like a “novelization” of a Restoration comedy with a marriage plot: Congreve has hit upon a way of writing fiction using comic form; what he lacks is a way of making us visualize the characters and the reality of the dramatic situation without the presence of stage actors. In other words he “tells” his story but does not know how to “show” it.

During the seventeenth century, there were novelists who also wrote dramatic works.¹²⁷ In order to infuse their prose works with verisimilitude, these writers very often introduced what was called a dramatic “subtext of performance” (Aercke, “Congreve’s *Incognita* 296). These subtexts of performance were used to indicate theatrical devices to be employed, such as characters’ movements and gestures, the representation of backgrounds, speech, and three-dimensional effects of sound and light. The technique was based upon the creation of scenes to immerse the reader in the story. In other words, to turn the reader or narratee into a spectator, an audience member. As Aercke (“Congreve’s *Incognita* 297) points out, in *Incognita* the task of the narrator is “to chain such dramatic scenes together by means of often lengthy digressions of telling”.¹²⁸ Furthermore, *Incognita* has been called a “theatrical” novel in the Introduction (6) to Peters’ *Congreve, the Drama, and the Printed Word*.

¹²⁶ Mish (299) agrees with the ‘dramatick’ nature of *Incognita*, “...even if the technique of presentation of the story is dominated by dramatic conceptions, the net effect of the exotic setting, the socially elevated characters, the somewhat likely and certainly *haut ton* plot, is to make it a romantic story in the manner of Scarron.”

¹²⁷ For instance, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Scarron, Georges de Scudéry, Tristan L’Hermite, Théophile de Viau, Catherine Bernard, *inter alia*. In the English world Thomas Dekker, Robert Greene, Roger Boyle, Aphra Behn and William Congreve stood out.

¹²⁸ See McKeon’s “The Eighteenth-Century Challenge to Narrative Theory” (43).

These digressions in the story interrupt the normal flow of the narrative. This is particularly characteristic of seventeenth-century French heroic romances and *histoires*, from which Congreve must have borrowed this technique:

The poets, both English and foreign, are well represented. And surprisingly enough, there are more than one hundred items of prose fiction, chiefly French. The influence of this fiction, if any, on Congreve's own *Incognita*, and the influence of the library criticism on his essay *Concerning Humour in Comedy*, are only two of many studies that might be based on Congreve's book list. (Hodges 15)

However, this use of digression would be found in novels years later. Adam Smith, in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, talks about the recurrent use of this technique in 'Lecture XVII' (Wednesday January 5th, 1763). He does not see the point in including non-important subplots or storylines complementing the main one, so as not to reveal the denouement prematurely. However, this technique must be used carefully to not stray from the story's main thread by including unnecessary delays in the narration of events:

One method which most modern historians and all the Romance writers take to render their narration interesting is to keep their event in Suspense. Whenever the story is beginning to point to the grand event they turn to something else and by this means get us read thro a number of dull nonsensicall stories, our curiosity prompting us to get at the important event, as {Ariosto in his Orlando Furioso.} This method the ancients never made use of, they trusted to the readers curiosity alone, but relied on the importance of the facts and the interesting manner in which they narrated them ... This method has besides this advantages that we can then with patience attend to the less important intervening accidents, which if the great event had been entirely concealed, our curiosity would make us hurry over; We could count the pages we had to read to get to the event, as we generally do in a Novel. (96-7)

It is hardly surprising to see Congreve structuring the novel as a play, since he mastered dramatic works and, particularly, comedies. Readers, glimpse certain features from theatre in *Incognita*, including monologues, desperate dialogues, meetings between strangers and suspenseful gatherings. Novak (“Congreve’s “*Incognita*”” 333) is one of those critics who points out that “Congreve’s homage to the drama is meaningful, since it suggests a hierarchical mimetic theory which established that art is best that comes closest to everyday reality, a theory which had strong roots in contemporary criticism.”

I would like to emphasise one of the “labels” offered in the previous description of *Incognita*. As A. Williams (106) states in the novel appear certain episodes that remind us more of a tragedy than a comedy in itself:

Incognita is a witty and charming and ingenious “Essay,” as Congreve called his first work. But it is certainly worth remembering that it has its more somber content: two deaths by dueling, the near death of Claudio, two escapes from death by Aurelian, the near rape and death of Juliana.

Therefore, although when we talk about “a tragedy” we instantly turn our attention towards a “bloody set of actions” involving the main characters, I think this definition does not apply to *Incognita*. Rather, more applicable it is the definition provided by Abbé d’ Aubignac¹²⁹ written in 1659 (140):

Tragedy represented the Life of Princes and great people full of disquiets, suspicions, troubles, rebellions, wars, murders, and all sorts of violent passions, and mighty adventures. ... Now, to distinguish Tragedies by their *Catastrophe*, they were of two sorts; the one were calamitous and bloody in their Events, ending generally by the death, or some great misfortune of the *Hero*; the others were more happy, and concluded by the felicity of the chief persons upon the Stage, ... many people have thought that the word

¹²⁹ In fact, in Congreve’s library, item number 10, it is Francois Hédelin, Abbé d’Aubignac. *The whole art of the stage. Containing not only the rules of the ‘dramatick’ art, but many curious observations about it, Which may be of great use to the authors, actors, and spectators of plays.* London, for the author, and sold by William Cadman, Rich. Bentley, Sam. Smith, & T. Fox, 1684. 4^o (Hodges 1955).

Tragical never signifi'd anything but some sad, bloody Event; and that a Drammatick Poem could not be call'd a *Tragedy*, if the *Catastrophe* did not contain the death of the chief persons in the Play; but they are mistaken, that word, in its true signification meaning nothing else but a *Magnificent, serious, grave Poem, conformable to the Agitations and sudden turns of the fortune of great people.*

Regarding this position, together with the “tragedy” label there appears those of “Providence” and “poetical justice”. These two terms are placed on the same line, stating that “every Tragedy, ought to be a very Solemn Lecture, inculcating a particular Providence, and shewing it plainly protecting the Good, and chastizing the Bad” (Dennis vol. I, 200). However, Doody (6) states that providence is not something necessarily related to religion or God, as, previously, pagan works referred to an outer force that controls what happens on Earth:

A belief in Providence, joined with the secularisation of that belief, has often been attributed to the readers and writers of the so-called “early novel” of the eighteenth century; recent critics in the British-American tradition (such as Watt and Damrosch) have made a good deal of the supposed connection of our fiction with Protestant Puritanism. But a belief in Providence, or a reference to it, is neither Puritan nor Protestant. It is not even necessarily Christian or Jewish. We will find the pagan novel writers playing upon providence, the providence of god, *theou pronoia*.

From a narratological point of view, Fludernik (371) sees poetical justice as a mechanism employed by the author himself to punish his own characters who do not behave according to established moral codes and where the narrator is not able to intercede:

The narrator cannot threaten his characters, nor will they be physically compelled to obey his will. Poetic justice, which mirrors the Christian doctrine of divine retribution, on the other hand, belongs within the jurisdiction of the *author*, whose shaping designs

determine the course of events and in the final act mete out deserved punishment to those who have offended against the prevailing moral code.

In R. D. Hume's *The Development of English Drama*, specifically in the chapter entitled "Theories of Serious Drama" (175-6), there is a classification of tragedies in terms of virtue. Therefore, four different types are presented regarding the function or the outcome of virtue.

- (I) Virtue may be rewarded: the positive exemplary drama (*The Conquest of Granada*).
- (II) Virtue may be shown amiable though unfortunate – also essentially exemplary drama, though with a pathetic tendency (St. Catharine in *Tyrannick Love*; *Cleomenes*).
- (III) A 'mixed' character, virtuous but flawed, may survive happily (*The Mourning Bride*) or fail to do so (Shadwell's *Timon*).
- (IV) Vice may be shown temporarily ascendant but detestable; almost invariably, though, it is finally punished – negative exemplary drama (Crowne's *Thyestes*; Dryden and Lee's *The Duke of Guise*).

Furthermore, this novel anticipates archetypical techniques that Congreve would later employ in his comedies: "narrator's own ready and somewhat cynical wit, and foreshadows his invocation of 'Providence' in the most delicate and refined social situations." (Ackroyd ix)

Regarding the preface, Congreve mentions the Unity of Action which "may pretend to no more than an Unity of Contrivance" (*Incognita* 4). These terms, Unity of Action and Contrivance, are used in comedies to reflect the idea of overcoming obstacles to achieve a particular objective. In this sense, contrivance is seen as an innovation by Congreve. Clearly, it is a dramatic influence from his comedies. Contrivance is responsible for producing a unified, dramatic narrative of "showing"; displaying a

neoclassical view of drama where the three unities work for “the-sake-of-verisimilitude” (Aercke, “Congreve’s *Incognita*” 298). This assertion of a ‘unified dramatic narrative of showing’ and neoclassical patterns were predominant much later, mainly thanks to Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* (1711). During the second half of the eighteenth century there were still novelists who claimed to have produced the same effect of “showing”, while, at the same time, “telling”; that is, causing the same effect and sensations on the reader as if they were experiencing a play on stage.¹³⁰

The contrivance¹³¹ is the narrative representation of what would be shown on stage. Nonetheless, Aercke states that “the young lovers in *Incognita* have no genuine obstacles to overcome, save their own adolescent social ineptitude” (“Congreve’s *Incognita*” 295). According to him, there is no tragic fate in this story, but only the immaturity of its characters.

William Congreve conceived *Incognita* as a work of art more than a narration. Walter Allen stated that Congreve is a writer of fiction in the tradition of those who later would develop the modern novel, such as Austen, Fielding and James¹³² (Novak, “Congreve’s “*Incognita*”” 331). All these writers shared an idea of fiction as a reality of art more than a reality of life. While writing *Incognita*, Congreve tried to establish some rules for his *novella*. For instance, the story takes three days instead of the twenty-four hours of a conventional dramatic representation. However, it must be said it is possible to condense three days into a hundred pages, on stage. Furthermore, the plot features a comical tone in its action, but, at the same time, a serious climax. Its characters’ positions

¹³⁰ For an insight into aesthetic techniques and the influence of Empiricism on the rise of the novel see Rosamaria Loretelli. “The Aesthetics of Empiricism and the Origin of the Novel.” *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2000, pp. 83-109.

¹³¹ “The period’s sense of itself as an artful (as opposed to a natural) age (as a “dissembling” and “flattering” age), expresses itself in the vocabulary of the period: *art, artifice, artful, design, plot, dissimulation, disguise, and contrivance*” (Peters 182).

¹³² For instance, Fielding, at the beginning of *Joseph Andrews*, defines the work as a “comic-epic poem in prose” (3). Furthermore, the narrator in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* initiates a debate on what is considered to be a novel at that time.

in society are somewhat low, but they are able to rise to higher ones. Richetti's *dictum* can be applied to the characters: "Fictional characters may be said to move through social spaces with vaguely defined borders, where the domestic and the public overlap" (*The English Novel* 12). The language is neither too low nor too high, with appropriate manners. *Incognita* can be included in this sort of new trend in short fiction, distancing itself from long romances:

These new forms of writing often appear to lack direction, structure, and consistency, despite their brevity and immediacy of action. The complex patterning, structuring, and embedding of adventurous action of the romance is replaced by short complete stories. Narrators move in and out of the reader's consciousness and that of their characters. Narrative conclusions are left hanging or not delivered at all. (Ballaster, "Classical French Fiction" 385)

3.2.3. The anti-romantic narrator

There are other authors who do not consider *Incognita* to be particularly theatrical. As Aerccke observes, there is not much dialogue between its characters. In fact, the narrator very often refuses to give characters a voice by using direct speech, something that is crucial for the plot and the adequate psychological development. Moreover, the narrator is not theatrical at all, his digressions and interruptions produce the opposite effect of what the contrivance is supposed to produce ("Congreve's *Incognita*" 298, 303).

Congreve adopted several techniques in the novel, such as a self-conscious narrator (Toolan 76-9), an anti-romance¹³³ narrator of a romantic *novella* (Novak, "Congreve's "Incognita"" 340). Although we are dealing with novelistic parameters, the term "antiromance" should be discussed. Certainly, by the fifteenth century the genre of

¹³³ This narrator has been associated very often with old-fashioned techniques of authentication of French comic-realistic romance (Aerccke 298). See also McKeon's *Origins* (62).

“romance” was consolidated; and one work is worth mentioning: William Caxton’s translation of *Reynard the Fox*, in 1481. According to Margaret Schlauch, in her *Antecedents of the English Novel, 1400-1600* (1963), this was a landmark ‘antiromance’ work, understanding the romance as it existed during that period (78-81). In fact, she points out (79) that there is a certain sense of realism in this anti-romance: “There are realistic scenes in which ordinary human beings also appear as actors, and these could well have aided in the development of a realistic literary style for English fiction.” However, it should be clarified that, according to Taine, the term ‘anti-romance or anti-romantic novel’ began in the eighteenth century (qtd. in Seager 19).

The narrator in *Incognita* is very important, as he executes three tasks. Firstly, the narrator is constantly mocking his own characters and their motivations. Secondly, he makes asides to the reader and narrates in the middle of the story,¹³⁴ breaking the sequences of the storyline, as it is highlighted in Fowler (20):

The novellas of Behn and Congreve are particularly relevant as they present narrators that become almost like diegetic characters because of their performance of narration. Their narrators are involved in the narratives that they relate through the use of metanarrative comments and direct addresses to readers. This is the type of narrator that is employed and developed by Haywood throughout her career.

However, the narrator’s main function is to constantly interrupt the narrative to give his own view of the situation, or to change the scene to another one. This technique is commented in an essay on the influence of Aesthetics in seventeenth century and also, eighteenth-century prose fiction:

Discontinuity produces “wonder” in the reader, and so his memory and “imagination” begin to “fluctuate” in search of the information or intermediate events capable of accounting for it and restoring continuity. In this operation, the reader returns to the

¹³⁴ This technique is characteristic of eighteenth-century novels like those by Sterne and Fielding.

textual past, recalling what he has already read, and projects himself towards the textual future through anticipation. (Loretelli 98)

Although this is applicable to works from 1700 onwards, as *Incognita* lies on the cusp of a new century, this technique of discontinuity in the storyline is, in my view, applicable. As it is hypothesised throughout the thesis, *Incognita* is of a hybrid nature, which results in nuances from ancient literature (Aristotelian pillars, lofty language from seventeenth-century French literature) and new techniques that play with style:

In the drama and the prose of post-Restoration England ... there is a tendency for forms to emerge that break down boundaries between monologic discourses deriving from epic and dialogic, polyglossic, carnivalesque-comic discourses. Typically, the forms of the 1690s are mixed: tragicomic, sentimentalized drama and fiction that admits realistic elements into romance paradigms. (Hammond 112)

1692, the year when *Incognita* was published, is just 27 years before the publication of *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, considered to be the first to attempt to break with the canon in literary tastes and trends. Furthermore, writers were searching for different ways to engage readers through individualised stories that the common reader could identify with. The reader is forced to use his imagination to fill in the blanks during digressions, which is what Henry Fielding did in *Tom Jones* (1749).¹³⁵ Loretelli (98), disagreeing with Watt's opinion on Richardson being the first modern novelist, states:

This is the first truly modern novel [*Tom Jones*], where the variety of the events, characters, and objects comes to form a unity built up in the course of reading through constant stimulation of the reader's memory and predictive capacity.

Finally, the narrator is the most important critic. Ackroyd defines the narrator as "in a certain sense detached from the action, so that the story itself can be viewed and admired as a work of pure artifice" (x). Needless to say, the narrator is sardonic and

¹³⁵ See Chapter 9. "Fielding as Novelist: 'Tom Jones'" in Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (260-89).

sympathetic; he interacts with the characters and their stories. As Hammond and Regan add: “The story is told by a narrator who is familiar with romance descriptions and storytelling strategies, and who is determined to have fun with them” (30). He also creates a sort of connection with the reader. The reader trusts the narrator. Thus, the story is plausible, due to the empathy generated between the narrator and reader. However, there are other authors who feel that the narrator is responsible for destroying and undermining “the grand designs of the dogmatic preface” (Aercke, “Congreve’s *Incognita*” 298).

The narrator is a vital part of the story. He boasts that he knows the story, a “true history”, reality, *vraisemblance*. However, readers must be careful with the way they read the story. This concept of *vraisemblance* is one of the basic precepts of romances. Apart from following the Greco-Roman models of romance, some others were incorporated:

... the romancers added or codified a theory of writing that amounted to a set of rules for writing romances, and they explicated these in their prefaces¹³⁶ ... The rule of *vraisemblance* demands that though the work is a fictional one, the actual foundations for the work should be true and the characters should conform to historical reality. (Davis 28)

Apart from this *vraisemblance*, there is another key precept in writing a romance: the concept of *bienseance*. Basically, this is what we would today call decorum and good manners. In a romance, improper behaviour cannot be accepted, vulgar manners or coarse language are not allowed. Virtue should be always rewarded, and folly and vice, punished. Furthermore:

... the mores and customs of the period in which the story takes place be changed and adapted to the current conventions of good manners. In the case of stories set in Rome,

¹³⁶ See Preface to Madeleine de Scudéry. *Ibrahim. Or the Illustrious Bassa. An Excellent New Romance*. London, 1641.

Persia, or Greece, this would mean that various forms of excess, particularly sexual ones, could not be allowed to appear in romance. (32)

In the preface Congreve wishes to make it clear that the story is not a romance. He wants to gain prestige. However, as it will be demonstrated, it does indeed contain certain nuances or parameters from romances (courtly love, for instance). The philosopher David Hume, in *A Treatise on Human Nature* (398-9), talks about this issue and the importance of reading these kinds of “hybrids” as romances or as “true histories”:

Nothing is more evident, than that those ideas, to which we assent, are more strong, firm and vivid, than the loose reveries of a castle-builder. If one person sits down to read a book as a romance, and another as a true history, they plainly receive the same ideas, and in the same order; nor does the incredulity of the one, and the belief of the other hinder them from putting the very same sense upon their author. His words produce the same ideas in both; tho' his testimony has not the same influence on them. The latter has a more lively conception of all the incidents. He enters deeper into the concerns of the persons: represents to himself their action, and characters, and friendships, and enmities: He even goes so far as to form a notion of their features, and air, and person. While the former, who gives no credit to the testimony of the author, has a more faint and languid conception of all these particulars; and except on account of the style and ingenuity of the composition, can receive little entertainment from it.

Thus, Congreve decided to tell a story of true and sincere love narrated by a cynical and often sarcastic commentator. The narrator pretends to have forgotten to tell certain events to the readers. In these cases, he opts to relate the event quickly and not in detail: “He delivers a lecture on silence and mockingly states that he intends no reflection on his audience’s intelligence” (Novak, “Congreve’s ‘Incognita’” 340). Thus, *Incognita* is a story about reliability and verisimilitude with a narrator and a preface we cannot entirely trust. As Auerke superbly describes:

... the text *Incognita* is interesting not so much because of the rather silly plot of adolescent adventures, but because of an implied philosophical-epistemological debate on the means of achieving verisimilitude between the antithetical voices and interests of the preface and the narrator. (“Congreve’s *Incognita*” 298)

The use of classical sources also warrants some comment. Like most of his contemporaries, Congreve was educated in the tradition of classical authors, so it is very common to find classical sources among his works. For instance, he employed the typical Platonic laments and the language of eyes and hearts burning, which is also a Petrarchan motif employed very often by authors like Shakespeare in his Sonnet 130 (who deal with it in an ironic way). In his classically balanced and well-ordered style, words appear to come naturally, with rhetorical precision and lexical accuracy. There is an example that perfectly reflects this feature: a soliloquy by Aurelian in which he expresses the love he feels for *Incognita*, and rejects any obligation to love another woman imposed by his father. In prose fiction, we may call it a monologue, though there is an obvious similarity to a theatrical soliloquy here. These were employed to express feelings. In fact, the imitation of dramatic soliloquy in works of prose was common long before the seventeenth century and well into the next, in works such as Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote* (1752) and Eliza Haywood’s *Betsey Thoughtless* (1751), to portray the character’s state of mind and feelings towards a particular situation (Fludernik 170). As Novak points out, this kind of rhetoric in narrative works “vitiates prose fiction” (“Congreve’s “*Incognita*”” 338).

must I lose my Love, the Extract of that Being, the Joy, Light, Life, and Darling of my Soul? No, I’ll own my Flame, and plead my Title too — But hold, wretched *Aurelian*, hold, whither does thy Passion hurry thee? Alas! the cruel fair *Incognita* Loves thee not! She knows not of thy Love! If she did, what Merit hast thou to pretend? — Only Love — Excess of Love. And all the World has that. All that have seen her. Yet I had only seen

her once, and in that once I lov'd above the World; nay, lov'd beyond my self, such vigorous Flame, so strong, so quick she darted at my Breast; it must rebound, and by Reflection, warm her self. (*Incognita* 42)

In the eighteenth century, poetry was a fundamental part of *novellas*; for instance, in *The Unfortunate Bride; or, The Blind Lady a Beauty* by Aphra Behn, in which the character of Frankwit sends a poem to Belvira, and she writes her own letter with a poem and sends it back to him (Behn 329-330; 330-331). Nonetheless, this was precisely the sort of tradition Congreve wanted to ridicule. We find an example in this passage:

He was, to tell the Truth, naturally addicted to *Madrigal*, and we should undoubtedly have had a small desert of Numbers to have pick'd and Criticiz'd upon, had he not been interrupted just upon his Delivery; nay, after the Preliminary Sigh had made Way for his Utterance. (*Incognita* 54)

Not only is poetry ridiculed by Congreve, but also romantic love. The omniscient narrator in *Incognita* is constantly observing society from a critical point of view. He realises and learns how love works, and the fact that it is simply stupid, in essence. Nonetheless, people keep falling in love over and over again. According to Ackroyd “That is why certain critics have interpreted *Incognita* as a parody of conventional prose fiction, in which the promptings of romance are stronger than the claims of perceived reality” (x).

Incognita was written with the idea of describing the effects or consequences of certain behaviours. The plot is developed upon the decisions that characters make and the events they are involved in. In fact, we can comprehend what is happening in the story due to its characters' monologues and reactions. Congreve gives prominence to their minds. According to Novak, “Congreve shows a precocious insight into the irrational processes of behaviour that underlie a rational exterior” (“Congreve's “*Incognita*”” 340), while Corman suggest that “Congreve's richer, more well-rounded characters receive a

more humane treatment than earlier, simpler comic types” (Fisk 67). In fact, Congreve’s characters are so well developed that in his *Amendments* (78) he had to encourage readers not to make the mistake of confusing the author’s very plausible characters with his own self:

I desire that it may not be imputed to the Perswasion or private Sentiments of the Author, if at any time one of these vicious Characters in any of his Plays shall behave himself foolishly, or immorally in Word or Deed.¹³⁷ I hope I am not yet unreasonable; it were very hard that a Painter should be believ’d to resemble all the ugly Faces that he draws.

And Peters (195) completes the equation by stating that this psychological development in the characters’ minds and their interpretations are related to the theatre and the burlesque romance’s influences at the very same time.

The novel is the first genre to give emphasis to the genesis of the individual through experience. The novel seeks a response to the philosophical question of whether morality is something connected to the world, and why moral ideals seem to be so obscure and distant from human behaviour. Moreover, there is a clear focus on why moral values are imposed on us, as humans. We are directed by normative rules that unconsciously control the way we perceive reality. In fact, this individualism in confronting reality is not something totally new:

... from the Renaissance onwards, there was a growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality; and this transition would seem to constitute an important part of the general cultural background of the rise of the novel. (Watt 14)

This paragraph points to the shift from romance to novel, which started in early Renaissance literature, followed by the Restoration period, which saw the birth of narrative prose and the earliest novels, not fully consolidated until the beginning of the

¹³⁷ See McKeon’s reflection upon this in “The Eighteenth-Century Challenge to Narrative Theory” (67-8).

eighteenth-century, and the Enlightenment, which spawned the modern novel as an independent genre.

As Motteux responded about the inclusion of novellas in his journal: “As for Novels, I need not Apologize for them otherwise than by saying that the Ladies desire them; besides they are short, and, as often as possible, not only true but Moral” (qtd. in Novak, “Congreve’s “Incognita”” 330). Thus, the novel asks the question as to whether humans should defend their inner feelings and ideals or resist conventions and “try to defend moral order, or concentrate on trying to correct their own frailties” (Pavel 3). According to this author, to explore these issues the canonical novel has focused its attention on romantic love and the formation of couples. And this is exactly what Congreve does in his *novella*. He used the romantic relationship between both couples, especially between Aurelian and Juliana-Incognita, to reflect upon morality and established social conventions.

Thus, premodern narrative genres, such as the Greek novel, chivalric romance and the pastoral, focused their attention on heroes who defend a moral order within a disorganised world. Other genres, such as the elegiac narrative, the picaresque and the *novella*, are more centred on the imperfections of human beings and their behaviours. Thus, during the transition between these pre-novelistic genres and the rise of the modern novel (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) all these different genres coexisted, resulting in a combination of idealizing and extolling moral ideals while condemning human frailty and vices (Pavel 3).

Within the premodern *novella* there is moral realism found in individuals who are dependent on each other and whose passions and interests depend on the demands of a vigilant and judgmental society. Thus, there are two sorts of novellas. On the one hand, in Italian and most Spanish ones there is a representation of the inner worlds of their

characters according to universal motivations. They might be termed “casuistic” psychological novellas. On the other hand, there is the “Augustinian” novella (Novak, “Congreve’s “*Incognita*”” 330), which explores the forces, passions and the self-blindness of most of the characters (Pavel 14). Specifically, this influence is found in the “humane comedy”, a term Hume (143) adopted referring to those comedies featuring the same norms as “Augustan comedy”, in which writers “tend to be benevolists, and a strong didactic element frequently produces ‘reform’ plots and even overtly exemplary models.”

In the case of *Incognita* the morality of the characters depends upon the sort of adversity they face. They confront, for instance, a family’s opposition to marriage, unfaithful couples, or the travails of life. In the case of this *novella* Aurelian confronts his father over his compulsory marriage to Juliana, which, in fact, turns out to be his true love. Therefore, our male hero is portrayed here as the hero depicting in the fourth category indicated by Frye (122-3):

If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience. This gives us the hero of the *low mimetic* mode, of most comedy and of realistic fiction.

Therefore, the hero of *Incognita* corresponds to the archetypal hero of comedy or realistic fiction. The description of the hero of romances does not describe at all the personality of Aurelian and his relationship to the rest of characters:

If superior in degree to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of *romance*, whose actions are marvellous but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him, and enchanted weapons, talking animals, terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans of

miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established.

Moreover, Providence complicates the plot for characters, who appear as merely helpless players, or rather puppets, in its game. In these situations, characters act as antagonists to the forces that threaten them and that actually cause the progression of the action (Pavel 14).

To conclude this brief introduction to the work, I shall reiterate that the preface to *Incognita* has attracted more attention than the novel itself. According to Peters (116), the preface has three different purposes: to “invoke the verisimilar presence of the theatre”, to “mock the pedantry of the actual historian”, and to “emphasize the author’s understanding of historical methodology”. These three pillars serve, at the same time, the purpose of warning the reader not to believe everything that is written; and of false historical events, or what is behind masques, which is central to the plot itself.

Some critics have called it “the critical *locus classicus* in English” since novelists were more concerned with the replacement of the “improbable and marvellous” romances than with the consistency of real facts and psychologically developed fiction (Aercke, “Congreve’s *Incognita*” 294). Furthermore, the preface also claims that *Incognita* is pioneering in being a novel that pursues and finds verisimilitude by dramatic means – i.e. by “transposing the unities of place, time, and action into “a Unity of Contrivance”” (Aercke, “Congreve’s *Incognita*” 296). However, as Aercke explains, the preface is not interested in the semi-journalistic techniques of authentication (pseudo-historical evidence, sources, eyewitnesses). Those techniques were employed by the dramatist Aphra Behn and would later contribute to the formal realism of the following century (“Congreve’s *Incognita*” 296). Watt explains that the literary technique employed in the novel was that of “formal realism”, which is defined as “the text’s explicit notation of the circumstantiality of the dramatic events” (Richter 8); or, in Watt’s own words (32):

... the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms.

In the plot of *Incognita* Congreve included the surprise and intrigue of traditional *novellas*, following the technique employed previously by François Hedelin in *Whole Art of the Stage* (1657). Basically, this technique was based on keeping the characters involved in the action. This is similar to the *liaisons des scènes* from French classical drama (Novak, “Congreve’s “Incognita”” 334). Also, he created a plot that prepares the readers for future events. Sometimes, as Wagenknecht points out, the action fosters “easily anticipated results” (Novak, “Congreve’s “Incognita”” 334). Readers predict how the action is going to unfold, and also the incidents that, at some points in the story, slow down the progression of the action. However, all this was precisely Congreve’s intention.

3.3. Dedication

A Clear Wit, sound Judgment and a Merciful Disposition,¹³⁸ are things so rarely united, that it is almost inexcusable to entertain them with any thing less excellent in its kind.

These are the words at the beginning of *Incognita*. They appear in a dedicatory letter to Mrs Katharine Leveson.¹³⁹ This introductory statement summarises Congreve’s

¹³⁸ McKenzie (*The Integrity* 17) points out that this statement was the motto in Congreve’s life. Also, he provides a brief sketch of Congreve as a man showing “a profound sense of the fragility of true happiness, the importance of compassion for those whom the world betrays, and a proper modesty in acknowledging, that while art may offer the admonitions, the beauty, and the pleasures which make a hurtful world tolerable.”

¹³⁹ She was the daughter of Robert Leveson of Willenhall in Staffordshire. According to Hodges in his biography of Congreve (30), he would have met this woman when he visited Stretton Hall on his way from Ireland to London in 1689. Interestingly, Congreve dedicated his first and only work in prose to a woman, and later, in 1697, his only tragedy *The Mourning Bride* to Anne Stuart, Princess Royal; the latter Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. The rest of his dramatic works (all comedies) were dedicated to men.

integrity,¹⁴⁰ both literary and personal. During his whole literary production, the use of a clear wit is exceptionally important. Especially throughout his plays, he shows ‘Truewits’, ‘Witwouds’ and ‘Witlesses’¹⁴¹ representing different sorts of wit and intelligence in social and personal contexts. Not only does he emphasise a good practice of wit but he also wants to ridicule pretentious people who pretend to impersonate true wits. In this sense, a sound judgment is essential to sift and evaluate people’s behavioural patterns. One of the values that Congreve had as a human being was that of being a man of common sense and sensible in his actions. Charles Hopkins in his dedication of *Boadicea, Queen of Britain* (1697) wrote about Congreve. In this dedication¹⁴² the dramatist Hopkins thanks Congreve for being a real friend, who taught him how to write drama, and praises his merciful disposition towards him. In this poem, he depicts Congreve as a man of quality both as a writer and as a human being:

Clear is your Sense, and your Expression sweet.
Rich is your Fancy, and your Numbers go
Serene and smooth, as Crystal Waters flow.
Smooth as a peaceful Sea, which never rolls,
And soft, as kind, consenting Virgins Souls.
Nor does your Verse alone our Passions move,
Beyond the Poet, we the Person Love.
In you, and almost only you; we find
Sublimity of Wit, and Candour of the Mind. (Erskine-Hill 104-5)

¹⁴⁰ See McKenzie’s *The Integrity*.

¹⁴¹ For an insight into Congreve’s archetypes see Rosowski’s “Thematic Development”.

¹⁴² See appendix 1.

The dedication Congreve wrote to *Incognita* is not as naïve as it might be considered.¹⁴³ After the introductory sentences, he directly addresses the lady, explaining his intention in writing the novel.

First of all, we encounter the word ‘Trifle’ describing the piece of writing she is offered to read. According to the *OED*, ‘trifle’ is ‘a thing of little value or importance’. Bearing this in mind, did he really consider *Incognita* as a trifle? I do not think so. The false modesty implied in the dedication is part and parcel of the story itself. Congreve did not write a single word without a purpose, and although he was really young when his first novel was published (22 years old), he was truly conscious of how to design a plot for the reader to read between the lines. In fact, McKenzie calls this use of the word ‘trifle’ part of a modesty topos. Congreve will use it later on several occasions. In the dedication to the Earl of Dorset and Middlesex in *Love for Love* (vol. 1, 250), he closes by pledging not to “detain Your Lordship any longer with the Trifles of, MY LORD...”. In Letter 64 (vol. 3, 183) addressed to Giles Jacob, he writes “I shall be very ready to give you the Account of my own poor Trifles and Self”. Also, in conversations with Voltaire (vol. 3, 446),¹⁴⁴ Congreve talked about his plays as ‘trifles’, and in fact it was due to this false modesty that Voltaire criticises him for his vanity. According to McKenzie, the best example is found in his latest comedy, *The Way of the World* (vol. 2, IV. iv. 10), in Millamant’s words, “That foolish Trifle of a Heart”. However, the term ‘trifle’ is also found in Fainall’s words, “What I warrant he’s unsincere, or ’tis some such Trifle” (vol. 2, I. vi. 78). In *The Old Batchelor* (II. i. 72), in Sharper’s words: “I esteem as a Trifle repay’d with Interest”. In *The Mourning Bride* (vol.1, II. vii. 37), in Osmyn’s words, the word is used as a verb to signify a waste of time, something unedifying: “Or trifle Time

¹⁴³ See the doctoral thesis by Rodríguez Loro’s *The Female Dramatic* (2019). Although it is more centred on female playwrights, it offers an interesting view of the importance of patronage and dedication at the beginning of plays in Restoration times.

¹⁴⁴ See also McKenzie’s “Mea Culpa: Voltaire’s Retraction”.

in thinking”. In *The Double Dealer* (vol. 1, III. iv. 32), Mellefont scoffs: “Ha! – Pho, you trifle”. In his translation of Ovid’s Third Book of the *Art of Love* (425-426), Congreve again resorts to the pretence of being ashamed: “Of some odd Trifles I’m asham’d to tell, / Tho’ it becomes the Sex to trifle well”.

Congreve presents himself as a noble writer who would like to have the approval of the lady: “My knowledge of you were a sufficient Caution to me, to avoid your Censure of this Trifle, had I not as intire a knowledge of your Goodness” (*Incognita* 3). Using the metaphor of a child who needs protection: “Novel unarm’d, naked and shivering at your Feet.”¹⁴⁵ He flatters Mrs Leveson to that extent but also I am sure he knows perfectly well that the lady would be pleased with the reading. This is confirmed at the end when he finishes the dedication; he is sure the lady will be delighted reading the novel, as much as he enjoyed the process of writing it:

It has been some Diversion to me to Write it, I wish it may prove such to you when you have an hour to throw away in Reading of it: but this Satisfaction I have at least beforehand, that in its greatest failings it may fly for Pardon to that Indulgence which you owe to the weakness of your Friend; a Title which I am proud you have thought me worthy of, and which I think can alone be superiour to that.

One of the peculiarities of *Incognita*, among many, is the fact that it was published under a pseudonym, Cleophil. This name was not chosen by chance either. Cleophil comes from Greek and it means ‘a lover of good report or praise’ (κλέος) (Ferdinand & McKenzie vol. 3, 191). McKenzie states that this praise is bestowed upon the ‘Honoured and Worthily Esteem’d’, in this case, Mrs Leveson but, it could be a way to suggest, in an indirect and witty manner, his desire to be praised for his first novel. Undoubtedly, this

¹⁴⁵ See Dustin Griffin. *Literary Patronage in England 1650-1800* for an insightful research on this topic. Congreve is mentioned several times regarding his own relation with patronage on pages 7, 18, 19, 22, 30, 40, 49, 84, 95, 97, 139, 142 and 227. Yet in *Incognita* the dedication goes to her friend, Mrs Katharine Leveson and he is not particularly seeking patronage’s aid.

subliminal message only could be read by literate readers with some knowledge of ancient Greek.

All in all, the young writer followed the norm in order to present a worthy novel to the public. Maybe, he was never entirely self-confident in the quality or maturity of the work. Firstly, because he did not use his name and secondly, because in later editions of his works, he did not want to include *Incognita*. The later editions of Congreve's works were published posthumously and they did include *Incognita*. I guess, at that moment, he did not realise how frequently *Incognita* would be commented in the history of English literature.

3.4. Preface

SOME Authors are so fond of a Preface, that they will write one tho' there be nothing more in it than an Apology for its self. But to show thee that I am not one of those, I will make no Apology for this, but do tell thee that I think it necessary to be prefix'd to this Trifle, to prevent thy overlooking some little pains which I have taken in the Composition of the following Story.¹⁴⁶

The preface to *Incognita* is one of the most (if not the most) commented in academic works about the origins of the novel¹⁴⁷ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or in the romance versus novel discussion. This preface is one of the most cited regarding novel theory because of the distinction made between romances and novels. Yet Sorel in *Francion* (XI, 12-3) had already discussed the importance of prefaces in works, claiming they were sometimes even more important than the stories told themselves:

¹⁴⁶ See appendix 4.

¹⁴⁷ For instance, J. Paul Hunter's "The Novel and social/cultural history" (9); Maximillian Novak's "Defoe as an innovator of fictional form" (41); Lennard J. Davis's *Factual Fictions* (103-4); or in Michael McKeon's "From Prose Fiction: Great Britain" (602), just to name a few.

I dare assure you, That it is most necessary oftentimes to make an Advertisement, or a Preface to the Reader; for many particulars are there oftentimes contained, which conduce unto the advancement of our Understanding; neverthelesse most men are so carelesse, that they seldom, or never, read the Preface, not knowing, That oftentimes there is more there than in all the rest of the Book, and the Author there makes manifest with what spirit he is endued.

More than being *Incognita* praised for the actual content of the novel, it has been discussed by literary critics due to its preface. Although the discussion about the difference between romance and novel was not something new, the manner in which Congreve presented and clearly defined ‘Romance’ and ‘Novel’ as two different genres, two separated categories, it is, indeed, new. As Nicholas Seager states in his book, *The Rise* (6), Congreve “maintains the ‘devolutionary’ connection” between them [both heroic romance and novel in *Incognita*]:

Congreve is again a significant figure in the theorizing, if not so much in the practice, of narrative prose that also manifests a move towards contemporaneity at this time. In the Preface to *Incognita* (1692), he couches a distinction between romance and the novel in terms of familiarity and plausibility that is again evidence of a Bakhtinian ‘novelization’ process at work. (Hammond 110)

The preface is directly addressed to the reader and it is structured in the shape of a letter. In doing so, “it invites readers to feel recognized, trusted, admitted, even initiated into some sort of undefined community” (Hunter, *Before Novels* 159). The reader becomes an entity in Congreve’s *Incognita*. Throughout the entire narrative, the reader will be addressed and the continuity of the narration will be disrupted by an intrusive narrator. In the preface, the relationship is established between the implied author and the implied reader (Booth 1983), as a general entity which comprises every single reader who

approaches the novel. In the novel, the narrator is not necessarily the same as the author himself.

Most prefaces are simply headed “To the Reader,” but many are called “An Epistle to the Reader” – a letter of introduction, a credentialing, a personal-impersonal passport to the private closet. In either case, the reader – you – is addressed directly, as if the text itself is constructed for a readership, but the preface is for just one person, whoever you are. This is the language of print, but it self-consciously tries to carry over the habits of conversation and personal interaction. Books were trying to be what letters then were, a presence-in-absence, a communication (even a connection) not too intimate and yet thoroughly personal. (Hunter, *Before Novels* 159)

Therefore, the preface to the reader begins with an author explicitly stating that he is not one of those authors who uses the preface to their works as an opportunity to make an apology for the work not read yet. Ironically, in his dedication to Mrs Leveson, he already apologises in a subtle manner for the possible faults she could find with the story: “in its greatest failings it may fly for Pardon to that Indulgence which you owe to the weakness of your Friend” (3). This detachment from other authors, in a sense, paved the way to what he is about to say in the following paragraph. The preface attempts to convey the fact that Congreve is pursuing an experiment in genre, but without changing the neoclassical principles of drama.

Therefore, the author would not apologise for the following work but he would like to describe the problems he did encounter while writing the story: “to prevent thy overlooking some little pains which I have taken in the Composition of the following Story”. These little pains are none other than the clarification or the aim to discern the distinction between romance and novel.¹⁴⁸ Congreve wanted to create something new, to

¹⁴⁸ See Ros Ballaster’s “Classical French Fiction and the Restoration Novel” (382); and James Grantham Turner’s “‘Romance’ and the Novel in Restoration England” (59).

pursue novelty, as the very genre of 'The Novel' implies. Although *Incognita* cannot be considered as a novel as such, it is in the right path towards it.

*Romances*¹⁴⁹ are generally composed of the Constant Loves and invincible Courages of Hero's, Heroins, Kings and Queens, Mortals of the first Rank, and so forth; where lofty Language,¹⁵⁰ miraculous Contingencies and impossible Performances, elevate and surprize the Reader into a giddy Delight, which leaves him flat upon the Ground whenever he gives of, and vexes him to think how he has suffer'd himself to be pleased and transported, concernd and afflicted at the several Passages which he has Read, viz. these Knights Success to their Damosels Misfortunes, and such like, when he is forced to be very well convinced that 'tis all a lye.

According to Brett-Smith (71), this fragment is reminiscent of a conversation between Johnson and Smith in *The Rehearsal* (I, i) when Johnson talks about the 'new' kind of wits and Smith asks about what kind it is that he is depicting. At this point the same words appear in Johnson's speech: "Why, your Blade, your frank Persons, your Drolls: fellows that scorn to imitate Nature; but are given altogether to elevate and surprise." But Smith still needs a further explanation and asks: "Elevate, and Surprise! pr'ythee make me understand the meaning of that." To which Johnson answers: "Nay, by my troth, that's a hard matter. I don't understand that my self. 'Tis a phrase they have got among them, to express their no-meaning by. I'll tell you, as well as I can, what it is. Let me see; 'Tis Fighting, Loving, Sleeping, Rhyming, Dying, Dancing, Singing, Crying; and every thing, but Thinking and Sence." Also, in *The Rehearsal* (I. i.), "the grand design

¹⁴⁹ "These Books are called ROMANCES; and to speak properly, 'tis Poetry in Prose; there are a many fashions of them. The first that ever were seen in France, treat only of Knighthood, but they are such Monsters as I shall not meddle with... Instead of their Enchantments, there are books which treat of things with much more likelihood, and that in my judgement, whereon they were all begotten, is the Romance of Heliodorus. That Fable made after the manner of a History, is not free from the sottishness of the ancient Poets." Sorel's *Lysis* (XVIII, 61).

¹⁵⁰ See Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* (1672, IV. i): "Bayes. Is not that good language now? is not that elevate?"; "Bayes. ... for the chief Art in Poetry is to elevate your expectation, and then bring you off some extraordinary way." Prieto Pablos states in "Audience Deception" (67) that Bayes is a "parodic impersonation of John Dryden".

upon the Stage is to keep the Auditors in suspence ... every line surprises you, and brings in new matter.” Congreve had a copy of *The Rehearsal*, a 1687 edition, item number 406 (c) (Hodges 1955). McKenzie found another allusion in *The Double Dealer* (II. ii. 57), when Brisk says: “Because my Lord’s Title’s *Froth*, I’ gad, ha, ha, ha, Deuce take me very a *Propos* and surprizing, ha, ha, ha.”

In the very first part, Congreve defines romance in the chivalric form, or as that is generally known, ‘Old Romances’. He describes these old romances as typically centred its plot on a love story in which there are high ranking characters as heroes and heroines, kings and queens. The sort of language employed in romances is highly elevated (‘lofty language’). There are marvellous occurrences (‘miraculous contingencies’) combined with impossible events (‘impossible performances’) which produce surprise and delight the reader. He also suggests that the reader is transported through the different passages as living a dream or a pleasant wonder. There is always a happy ending where the knight succeeds in rescuing the damsel. However, the last statement is conclusive, “when he [the reader] is forced to be very well convinced that ’tis all a lye”. Congreve in this paragraph defines romance as a genre which is fictitious, a lie. The story, characters and events are not credible but produce pleasure and transport the reader to another world, a more desirable one than reality.

Novels are of a more familiar nature; Come near us,¹⁵¹ and represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with Accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unpresidented, such which not being so distant from our Belief bring also the pleasure nearer us.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ As Keymer (170) points out “For Congreve, the novel was not yet some miraculous technology for representing the minute particulars of experience, but in no less significant a sign of generic advance, it could already reflect on itself in sophisticated ways.” Hunter (*Before Novels* 26) states that Congreve used the term “novel” “in a way that, in a quite general sense, points to our modern idea.”

¹⁵² Sarah Tindal Kareem (40-1) in her book about wonder in The Enlightenment, brings up Addison’s belief that “wonder’s interplay between passive marvel – associated with the great – and active curiosity –

However, this distance can be found before: “in Behn, who distances her “history” *Orronoko* of 1688 from “adventures ... manage[d] at the poet’s pleasure”; in Congreve, whose preface to his 1693 novella *Incognita* not only theorizes the difference between “romance” and “novel” but even uses those terms” (Paige 63). An earlier example of this can be found in France in Jean Regnault de Segrais’s *Les Nouvelles Françaises ou les Divertissements de la Princesse Aurélie* (1990, I, 99), “c’est la différence qu’il y a entre le roman et la nouvelle, que le roman écrit les choses comme la bienséance le veut et à la manière du poète, mais que la nouvelle doit un peu davantage tenir de l’histoire et s’attacher plustot à donner les images des choses comme d’ordinaire nous les voyons arriver, que comme notre imagination se les figure.”

Later, Clara Reeve’s points out in *The Old English Baron* (viii) that “there is required a sufficient degree of the marvellous, to excite the attention; enough of the manners of real life, to give an air of probability to the work; and enough of the pathetic, to engage the heart in its behalf.”

Congreve considers that the relationship established between the reader and a novel is more intimate. As Paige (63) contends in his book about the emergence of these novels in France and England:

Literary historians on the other side of the Channel have had to contend with a similar sense of déjà vu, since so-called novels – starting perhaps with *Oroonoko* and *Incognita* and extending at least to the works of Fielding – often look uncomfortably like romances, incorporating, as in France, their themes, plot devices, and modes of characterization.

And Terry Eagleton (3) in his book about the novel, provides us with an abridged yet very similar definition of both genres, contrasting and pinpointing its main differences:

associated with the novel.” Following the middle course, “insufficient wonder (dullness) or excessive wonder (astonishment or stupor), both of which impair the capacity for attention.”

Romance is full of marvels, whereas the modern novel is nothing if not mundane. It portrays a secular, empirical world rather than a mythical or metaphysical one. Its focus is on culture, not Nature or the supernatural. It is wary of the abstract and eternal, and believes in what it can touch, taste and handle. It may still retain some religious beliefs, but it is as nervous of religious debate as a pub landlord. The novel presents us with a changing, concrete, open-ended history rather than a closed symbolic universe.

Novels do not portray miraculous events which the reader assumes for the sake of pleasure, but plausible stories about credible characters which cause a sort of empathy in the reader. He explains that readers are hooked by intrigues in the plot but those intrigues or events are not as strange or difficult to believe as those found in romances. Therefore, as our brain does not find an extreme difficulty to process and mentally recreate the story, it is easier for us to experience the pleasure of reading a novel. He concluded with his famous statement “*Romances give more of Wonder, Novels more Delight*”:

Il me semble que c'est la différence qu'il y a entre le roman et la nouvelle, que le roman écrit ces choses comme la bienséance le veut et à la manière du poète, mais que la nouvelle doit un peu davantage tenir de l'histoire et s'attacher plutôt à donner des images des choses comme d'ordinaire nous les voyons arriver que comme notre imagination se les figure. (Segrais 99)

The following part of the preface deals with his life-long ethics about dramatic principles. He warns that being “the Parallel kept at due distance, there is something of equality in the Proportion which they [Romance and Novel] bear in reference to one another, with that between Comedy and Tragedy.” And the fact is that, according to him, Drama stems from Romance and History. Renaissance tragedies were composed around historical personages (history) immersed in marvellous and fictitious plots (romance). Congreve truly believed in the power of drama to convey meaning through words and representation on stage. When a story is brought to the audience, the reality on stage is

closer to reality at that particular moment in which is taking place. Or, as Congreve remarks:

'tis the Midwife to Industry, and brings forth alive the Conceptions of the Brain.

Minerva¹⁵³ walks upon the Stage before us, and we are more assured of the real presence of Wit when it is delivered viva voce –

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,

Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, & quæ

Ipsæ sibi tradit spectator. –

*Horace.*¹⁵⁴

In the following paragraph we find an assertion that found a bit of criticism because Congreve openly states that what he wrote in 1692 was a new experiment, and that was not totally accurate.¹⁵⁵

*Since all Traditions must indisputably give place to the Drama, and since there is no possibility of giving that life to the Writing or Repetition of a Story which it has in the Action, I resolved in another beauty to imitate Dramatick Writing, namely, in the Design, Contexture and Result of the Plot. I have not observed it before in a Novel.*¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Roman Goddess of wisdom, arts and war. She is analogous to the Greek Goddess Athena. Daughter of Jupiter is the protagonist of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Congreve was familiarised with this work since he translated Book X. *The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice* into English published in 1717 edited by Samuel Garth. See also Ros Ballaster's "'Bring(ing) Forth Alive the Conceptions of the Brain'" (183-197).

¹⁵⁴ Horace, *Ars Poetica*, II. 180-2. Translation by Francis Howes in *The Epodes, Satires, and Epistles of Horace* (231).

Those which a tale shall through the ear impart
With fainter characters impress the heart,
Than those which subject to the eye's broad gaze
The pleased spectator to himself conveys.

Jonson was the first dramatist to quote Horace in the first folio edition of his works in 1616, "I do not work so that I will be admired by the crowd, but am content with a few readers" (*Satire I. x*, qtd. in H. Weber 367).

¹⁵⁵ According to Helga Drougge (Chapter ii), there are evidences of writers who made previously distinctions between romance and novel. For instance, she proposes Jean Regnault de Segrain in *Les Nouvelles françoises: ou Les Divertissemens de la princesse Aurelie* (1656-7). Yet Drougge considers (and so do I) that what Congreve did was revolutionary in 1692 because in that year, old romances were still in print. Therefore, such a clear distinction between both genres paved the way for a later complete detachment.

¹⁵⁶ See Kukkonen's "Neoclassical Poetics and the Rise of the Novel" particularly subchapter 1.1. "Beating the bounds of the rules in *Incognita*" (2-8).

The point in this fragment is the fact that Congreve used ‘Dramatick Writing’ to create a novel. The hybridity of *Incognita* is what makes it special from a literary point of view. As Paul Salzman (114) claims, “The fiction of the period [seventeenth-century fiction] is far from being stagnant, for its authors constantly explores new forms,” and also he refers to the preface in *Incognita* and the conscious contrivance of Congreve as author in producing a work which imitates drama in narrative disguise. But he also says (316) that Aphra Behn was first in “imitating Dramatick Writing” rather than Congreve. However, we must recognise that at least, he put it down on paper, so to speak. And also, he mixed more than one genre in *Incognita* as we shall see in the analysis of the story.

Congreve was not the only writer who experimented writing works of a different nature to what he then devoted his life to. There were other authors who, mostly being dramatists, poets, or writers of romances, attempted to write novelistic works. Among them, Aphra Behn, Charles Gildon, Delarivier Manley and John Dunton. Furthermore, confirming this shift from romance to novel, later authors such as Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollet who are well-known for being among the first novelists, came to London in the 1730s and 1740s to write plays. However, the trend in taste for novels was real in the 1750s and 1760s. Basically, authors varied in genre preference according to what society demanded (Hunter, “The Novel and social/cultural history” 27-8).

Incognita’s hybridity could be explained because of the period in which the work was created and read. The shift from romance to novel made possible some experiments in terms of genre as it turned out to be *Incognita*. As Salzman (114) points out:

This sense of experiment is also evident when one considers the foreign influences on seventeenth-century fiction. During the century, English readers were quickly introduced to the prose fiction of the continent: the Spanish novella and picaresque novel; the French heroic romance and anti-romance.

Congreve attempted to create something new which was named ‘novel’ precisely because of the fact that it was something¹⁵⁷ not previously seen before.

In the seventeenth century, the poetics of drama were of course more highly regarded than those of all other genres, and it seems natural that authors of novels, who were very often also playwrights, would try to solve certain technical problems by turning to poetics they knew. The introduction of a set of “unities” in French and then in English novels, in order to promote verisimilitude, is a good example of this influence. It is my contention that such an adaptation of techniques resulted, sometimes, in novels that seem “modern” to twentieth-century readers because they “show” rather than “tell.” This is especially the case in England. Nashe’s *Unfortunate Traveller*, Behn’s *Oroonoko* or *Fair Jilt*, or Congreve’s *Incognita* are again read today. (Aercke, “Theatrical Background” 120)

All in all, he succeeded in writing his first novel imitating dramatic writing. We find several patterns from drama which will be discussed later on in the analysis of the story:

The design of the Novel is obvious, after the first meeting of Aurelian and Hippolito with Incognita and Leonora, and the difficulty is in bringing it to pass, maugre all apparent obstacles, within the compass of two days. How many probable Casualties intervene in opposition to the main Design, viz. of marrying two Couple so oddly engaged in an intricate Amour, I leave the Reader at his leisure to consider.

In this fragment Congreve uses the term ‘design’¹⁵⁸ in two different ways. First of all, he talks about the design of the novel, which is a synonym of the structure of the story itself. So, in this sense, it refers to the form of the novel which is composed around two

¹⁵⁷ If we look to the work of Margaret Anne Doody (1996) we cannot deny the existence of pieces of writing in prose in Ancient Greece and Rome which resembles novelistic patterns found in novels.

¹⁵⁸ Drougge (71) notes the distinction between both senses of ‘design’. Whereas the first use of ‘design’ corresponds to the French term *dessin* which means, according to the *OED* ‘a plan in art’; the second use of the word ‘design’ means ‘the thing aimed at; the end in view; the final purpose’ as in the French term *dessein*. As McKenzie notes this term is highly important during his entire production, the term ‘design’ appears in *Amendments* (II. 826-20); *The Double Dealer* (III. Iv. 14-15; IV. xxi. 10-11); *Love for Love* (V. i. 6); *The Way of the World* (II. iv. 26-7). See McKenzie’s notes on *The Double Dealer*, “Dedication”.

couples: Aurelian and Incognita, and Hippolito and Leonora. Whereas later on, when he talks about ‘the main design of the novel’ he refers to the plot. A central story which is the love story between Incognita and Aurelian but also parallel stories which have some connection to the main one. The term ‘design’ is introduced in the story as well.

As McKenzie (vol. 3, 192) points out, Congreve will use the term design again in *The Double Dealer*, in his dedication to Charles Montague and in II, 9-26. However, throughout his dramatic production, the term ‘design’ will be of outmost importance to Congreve. As McKenzie notes, Congreve might have used this term from Aristotle and especially the translation by Thomas Rymer of Rapin’s *Reflections on Aristotle’s Treatise on Poetry* (1674). For instance, in XVIII, 23:

The Art of *Poetry* in general, comprehends the matters of which a Poet treats, and the manner in which he handles them; the invention, the contrivance, the design, the proportion and symmetry of parts, the general disposition of matters, and whatever regards the invention ...

The following examples are the many times the word ‘design’ appears in *Incognita*:

... were arriv’d at *Florence*, where they would furnish themselves with Disguises and other Accoutrements necessary for the Prosecution of their Design of sharing in the publick Merriment; the rather were they for going so early because *Aurelian* did not think fit to publish his being in Town for a time, least his Father knowing of it, might give some restraint to that loose they design’d themselves. (*Incognita* 9)

Hippolito sent for the Fellow up, who was not so fond of his design as not to be bought off it ... (*Incognita* 11)

... she knows not upon what design; however she would have you ... and contemplating the hazard he had ignorantly brought himself into, forgot his design of informing the Lady of her mistake. (*Incognita 17*)

... he [Hippolito] had been ruminating with himself how to bring something like this about, and had almost despair'd of it; when of a suddain he found the success of his design had prevented his own endeavours. (*Incognita 19*)

His design took; for she immediately gave him hers: which indeed accordingly he apply'd to the only Wound he was then griev'd with; which though it went quite through his Heart, yet thank God was not Mortal. (*Incognita 21*)

He was extreamly surpriz'd, as were the Prisoners, who confess'd their Design to have been upon *Lorenzo*; grounding their Mistake upon the Habit which was known to have been his. (*Incognita 27*)

Aurelian laid himself down to rest, that is, upon the Bed; for he was a better Lover than to pretend to sleep that Night, while *Hippolito* set himself again to frame his Letter design'd for *Leonora*. (*Incognita 31*)

You told me something that concern'd me nearly, as to a Marriage my Father design'd me, and much more nearly in being told by you. (*Incognita 32*)

... that it was *Aurelian* she no longer doubted, for had it been a Villain, who had only taken his Name upon him for any ill Designs, ... (*Incognita 35*)

... several Ladies of her acquaintance came to accompany her to the place designed for the Tilting, where we will leave them drinking Chocholate till 'tis time for them to go.
(*Incognita* 36)

This thing was only designed for show and form ... (*Incognita* 37)

The excuse was so handsomely designed, and much better express'd than it is here, that it took effect. (*Incognita* 38)

Another prominent matter in this fragment is the specification of the length the story takes: two days. This remarks the literary ethics of Congreve as a neoclassic writer. Although *Incognita* is an experiment in genre, he undoubtedly will follow the classical rules of action, time and place:

I design'd the Moral first, and to that Moral I invented the Fable, and do not know that I have borrow'd one Hint of it any where. I made the Plot as strong as I could, because it was single, and I made it single, because I would avoid Confusion, and was resolved to preserve the three Unities of the Drama.¹⁵⁹

Regarding the Unities of Drama which Congreve so devotedly follows, there is an allusion to Dryden's 'Essay of Dramatick Poesie'¹⁶⁰ (1668), when we read: "as also whether every Obstacle does not in the progress of the Story¹⁶¹ act as subservient to that purpose, which at first it seems to oppose":

As for the third unity, which is that of action, the ancients meant no other by it than what the logicians do by their *finis*, the end or scope of any action; that which is the first in

¹⁵⁹ Epistle dedicatory To the Right Honourable Charles Montague, one of the Lords of the Treasury in *The Double Dealer*, McKenzie (vol.1, 127)

¹⁶⁰ See McKenzie (vol. 3, 192), when he notes that Dryden, at the same time, is indebted to Pierre Corneille's *Discours des Trois Unités* (1660). See also Aristotle's *Poetics* translated by Anthony Kenny (p. xxxvi). A copy of Dryden's work is in Congreve's library, item number 406 (a) (miscellanies) in Hodges (1955).

¹⁶¹ Compare this to *The Mourning Bride* (III. iv. 29-30):

Whom Chance, or Fate working by secret Causes,
Has made perforce subservient to that End.

intention, and last in execution. Now the poet is to aim at one great and complete action, to the carrying on of which all things in his play, even the very obstacles, are to be subservient; and the reason of this is as evident as any of the former. (Dryden, *Works* 307)

Congreve explains that in the design and composition of a plot even those obstacles which seem to delay the final outcome of the story in reality are part and parcel of its evolution. We find in Dryden's *An Essay* (28) the following words, "the obstacles which hindered the design or action of the play once removed, it ends with that resemblance of truth and nature, that the audience are satisfied with the conduct of it". Therefore, *Incognita*'s design is based upon a dramatic scheme yet following the structure of a novel. The astonishment relies on the fact that Congreve started his career as a writer with a play in form of a novel. The difficulty in mixing both genres in a hybrid and not resulting in a failure is why *Incognita* is praised by critics. Congreve changes the name of Unity of Action for that of Contrivance. According to the *OED* contrivance means 'a device, especially in literary or artistic composition, which gives a sense of artificiality'. This implies the fictitiousness presented in the work. Widmayer (126) agrees on this use of 'Unity of Contrivance': "the unity of action would strike the reader as a 'contrivance', thus underscoring his novel's fictiveness rather than its vraisemblance."

The Scene is continued in Florence from the commencement of the Amour; and the time from first to last is but three days. If there be any thing more in particular resembling the Copy which I imitate¹⁶² (as the Curious Reader¹⁶³ will soon perceive) I leave it to show it self.

¹⁶² Brett-Smith's edition (1922, 71), he points out that there was a misinterpretation of this sentence by the compiler of the edition of 1730 when he believed that Congreve was considering *Incognita* as a translation of another work, because of the word 'copy' but in reality, he was talking about the imitation of dramatic writing in the novel.

¹⁶³ Compare to the digression in Scarron's *The Comic Romance* (Second Part, XVI, 233): "The discerning reader may be curious to know what the peasants had against Ragotin and why they didn't do anything to him. The circumstances are surely difficult to divine, and cannot be known unless they are revealed."

The Unity of Place is now mentioned (Florence) and again the Unity of Time (three days, from first to last). The whole story takes place in the same city (although there are different settings). According to Aristotle and Greek comedies, a play's action must last no more than 24 hours. Here, we have a different timing but still a fixed one and clearly defined since the very beginning, the preface.

As previously stated, the reader is addressed in the middle of the narration. Nonetheless, this technique employed by Congreve starts here in the preface. In the first edition (1692), this sentence is far bigger than the rest of the text, and preface and reader appear in capital letters, so as to remark the importance of this to be read by the reader. Then, the preface (5-6) is in the form of an epistle beginning with a 'Reader,' and throughout the preface we find "I leave the Reader at his leisure to consider", "(as the Curious Reader will soon perceive) I leave it to show it self" and ending with a request for praise:

I have gratified the Bookseller in pretending an occasion for a Preface; the other two Persons concern'd are the Reader and my self, and if he be but pleased with what was produced for that end, my satisfaction follows of course, since it will be proportion'd to his Approbation or Dislike.

3.5. Characters

Aurelian¹⁶⁴ was the only Son to a Principal Gentleman of *Florence*. The Indulgence of his Father prompted, and his Wealth enabled him, to bestow a generous Education upon him, whom, he now began to look upon as the Type of himself;¹⁶⁵ an Impression he had made in the Gayety and Vigour of his Youth, before the Rust of Age had debilitated and

¹⁶⁴ As McKenzie points out in his edition of *Incognita*, Congreve could be indebted to *The Most Excellent History of Antonius and Aurelia: Or, The Two Incomparable Lovers* (1682) for the composition of the beginning.

¹⁶⁵ McKenzie's reference to Korshin (233).

obscur'd the Splendour of the Original: He was sensible, That he ought not to be sparing
in the Adornment of him, if he had Resolution to beautifie his own Memory.

(*Incognita* 7)

The story starts by presenting the male protagonist, Aurelian, a young Italian aristocrat. He is well-educated and wealthy, and represents an alternative to his father. In a sense, there is a correlation between the archaic patriarchal figure, which is represented by his father, and Aurelian as a new type of aristocrat which we will see further in the narrative's attempts to revolt against tradition. Korshin argues that the protagonist is described from the very beginning as a biblical type. Korshin describes *Incognita* as a novel in which 'an occasional allusion or an undefined sense of prophecy provides a hint of predictiveness' (Korshin 233). This means that there are anticipatory omens, so to speak, which will appear later transformed in actual events during the denouement of the story.

Don Fabio,¹⁶⁶ his father is the next character to appear in the narrative, which at this point is told by the third-person narrator. This character is referred to as 'Old Gentleman', so it confirms this dichotomy between the antiquated and youthful. The narrator also asserts that Don Fabio sometimes might feel miserable for being conscious of his own decline and joyful for knowing that his son possesses his own same attributes. Personally, I reached the same conclusion before reading Korshin's book which concludes: "the father sees his son as a postfiguration of himself as a young man" (Korshin 233): "whether it were for regret, at the Recollection of his former self, or for the Joy he conceiv'd in being, as it were, reviv'd in the Person of his Son" (*Incognita* 7).

¹⁶⁶ The name may have been taken from Scarron's short tale "The Two Rival Brothers" in his *Comic Romance*. In fact, this tale "Les deux frères rivaux" is an adaptation from Castillo Solórzano's short novel *La Confusión de una noche*. Other names appear in Furetière's *Scarron's City Romance*, for example, Hippolita, Juliana, Lorenca. For an insightful analysis of the adaptation by Scarron of Solórzano's short novel see the doctoral thesis by María Manuela Merino García entitled *La novela corta en el siglo XVII: Scarron y sus modelos españoles* (2002), particularly chapter III. 5.

Aurelian is an active character in the narrative. He appears in most of the scenes and has speeches of his own. Although there is not a deep psychological development of characters in *Incognita*, since archaic archetypes were still present, we find certain interesting features. First of all, at the beginning of the story we are told that he is eighteen years old, and mockingly the narrator says that all that he wants is ‘a beard’. The irony is reinforced by the statement that a beard is something that “the most accomplished Cavalier in Florence could pretend to” (*Incognita* 7). Aurelian is depicted as highly literate due to the education his father has provided, but he is also a wealthy gentleman who lives comfortably. In a sense, the irony of the narrator gives the impression that he considers Aurelian to be a little spoilt. However, reading the story, we find certain behaviours in Aurelian which surprise the reader. In a way, the events which Aurelian has to confront makes him evolve. At the end of *Incognita*, we cannot consider Aurelian to be the same ‘spoilt’ young gentleman we encountered in the first few pages:

... he had been Educated from Twelve Years¹⁶⁷ old at *Siena*, where it seems his Father kept a Receiver, having a large Income from the Rents of several Houses in that Town. *Don Fabio* gave his Servant Orders, That *Aurelian* should not be stinted in his Expences, when he came up to Years of Discretion. (*Incognita* 7)

Our male protagonist is presented as someone who depends economically, and to a certain extent socially, on his father: “to confer many Obligations upon Strangers of Quality, and Gentlemen who travelled from other Countries into *Italy*” (*Incognita* 7-8). He is not the best example of a hero or a cavalier, not even an adventurer, but a childish grown up whose current aspiration is ‘to have a beard’.

¹⁶⁷ Ferdinand & McKenzie (*Biography* 2) bring up the issue of an autobiographical note. Congreve enrolled at Kilkenny College (1682) when he was almost twelve years old. At this time, Congreve met Jonathan Swift (who left college in April 1682) and Joseph Keally.

Apart from that, the relationship of Aurelian and Don Fabio represents the patriarchal hierarchy of aristocratic families. Aurelian's obedience to, or even fear of, his father is portrayed from the very beginning: "Aurelian did not think fit to publish his being in Town for a time, least his Father knowing of it, might give some restraint to that loose they design'd themselves" (*Incognita* 9). This patriarchalism is challenged when he decides to marry the woman he loves and not the one chosen by his father. The irony in this novel is that, eventually, there is not such challenge, since both women are the same person.

The following character to be mentioned is "a Gentleman of Quality of *Spain*, and Nephew to the Archbishop of *Toledo*" (*Incognita* 8), Hippolito. He is Aurelian's best friend and noble companion. Their friendship is depicted as truly and reciprocally sincere. In fact, they probably are so good acquaintances because they are almost *the same*.¹⁶⁸

... and something of resemblance in Feature and Proportion, that he look'd upon him as his second self. *Hippolito* ... thought himself either alone or in ill Company, if *Aurelian* were absent... (*Incognita* 8)

Hippolito is not independent either; he has a governor who takes care of him and his activities. Although he is not a main character and does not appear very often in the story. Even the title that the character of Claudio has is imported from *An Itinerary*, when the author explains that in Italy "the common title to a Gentleman here being *Signor Conte*, as much as my Lord" (Raymond 222). Claudio, Hippolito's governor is quite loyal to Hippolito, and there are some instances where he helps him even more than he should, up to the point of being wounded and risking his life. Furthermore, both Aurelian and Hippolito have servants who help them in their daily routines:

¹⁶⁸ Stephenson (336) shares the same idea.

By this time *Aurelian*'s Servant had taken a Lodging and was returned, to give his Master an Account of it ... a Servant of *Hippolito*'s came up and ended the Controversie... (*Incognita* 10)

Then, there are three characters which are not wholly Congreve's invention and who are based upon historical facts. First, the Great Duke is based on Ferdinand II, Great Duke of Tuscany. Second, Donna Catharina is based on Caterina de' Médici, Ferdinand II's aunt. In *Incognita* we only know that she is a kinswoman to the Duke. The third historical character, Don Ferdinando de Rovori, is a hybrid between Ferdinando I Gonzaga and the surname of Ferdinand II's wife, Vittoria della Rovere.¹⁶⁹ In the story, Don Ferdinand de Rovori is about to marry Donna Catharina. (Westcott 40-8)

*Incognita*¹⁷⁰/Juliana's behaviour varies during the course of the story. At the very beginning, when Aurelian meets her in the masquerade, she shows herself as a determined and witty woman who does not seem to be grateful for being flattered. In a sense, we may get the feeling that she is not even comfortable with Aurelian's infatuation.

Characters in Restoration drama frequently use disguises and masquerades to fulfil their personal desires and agendas, displaying an instinctive consciousness of the power of manufactured facades. However, though strategic self-fashioning might facilitate the achievement of individual desires, it also engenders an endemic uneasiness about apparently sincere assertions. A theater that gleefully appropriates the comic possibilities inherent in the play of assumed facades also faces the problem of affirming *any* persona as unequivocal. (Gollapudi 23)

In Chapter 3.8. we gain an insight into the scene where both characters first meet. *Incognita* is by far the character who mostly attracts my attention and it is not coincidental that the title of the novel refers to her too. In Congreve's whole production, we know

¹⁶⁹ This is explained in more detail in Chapter 3.6.

¹⁷⁰ "It was a Byzantine habit (possibly stemming from Late Antique custom) to refer to a novel by the name of its heroine." (Doody 498, note 4)

more about characters from their dialogues than from the descriptions we get of them. It is true when a text is intended to be performed such descriptions are not needed. The audience get to know each character according to what they do on stage.

However, in *Incognita*, his only novel, Congreve has the chance to explore his skill in describing scenes. In the case of *Incognita*, he cannot deploy ‘showing’ to tell his audience the story he wants to transmit but ‘telling’, and using just words to convey feelings, thoughts and emotions is more difficult. And this is how ‘Dramatick Writing’ is present in *Incognita*. *Incognita* is not described to any great extent; even the narrator is not interested in giving much detail about her: “I should by right now describe her Dress, which was extreamly agreeable and rich, but ’tis possible I might err in some material Pin or other” (*Incognita* 16). Readers get to know *Incognita* by means of the instances the narrator ‘gives’ permission to characters to talk, or, when he considers it is the right time to describe her, through Aurelian’s eyes. *Incognita* plays the role of heroine, adapted from heroic romances where a hyperbolic idealisation of the lady is a constant. Indeed, characters in *Incognita* belong to the world of pure romance. As McKeon (*Origins* 62) says comparing it to one of the main sources of *Incognita*, Charles Sorel’s *Lysis* (1653), “Congreve’s personages are figures out of an idealizing romance, satirized most of all for an indefatigable credulousness that economically evokes also the gullibility of the average romance reader.”

Not only is her body and complexity praised but also her behavioural pattern and manners. Something which is fairly important is the fact that *Incognita* is praised for not being affected. At the end, body and psyche are united to reinforce *Incognita*’s perfection. And Aurelian clearly points out that her manners, her simplicity yet authenticity in behaviour is what makes him to aspire to win her love:

His Soul was charm'd to the movement of her Body: an Air so graceful, so sweet, so easie and so great, he had never seen. She had something of Majesty in her, which appear'd to be born with her; and though it struck an awe into the Beholders, yet was it sweetned with a familiarity of Behaviour, which rendred it agreeable to every Body. The grandeur of her Mien was not stiff, but unstudied and unforced, mixed with a simplicity; free, yet not loose nor affected. If the former seem'd to condescend, the latter seem'd to aspire; and both to unite in the centre of Perfection. (*Incognita* 22)

Although *Incognita* is not the most sublimely depicted character by Congreve it is the embryo for the following heroines. There is a progression towards the reinforcement of feminine values beginning with *Incognita* and ending in *Millamant*, considered by many as a proto-feminist archetype:

The last of these fine women are the best, for *Angelica* and especially *Millamant* are wonderful portraits in the play-world whose ideas of feminine independence and wit project beyond the seventeenth-century into the modern world. Congreve's virtuous women and the plays in which they appear are reasons enough for the continued interest in Restoration comedy. (Young 162-3)

In opposition to *Incognita*, we find *Leonora*.¹⁷¹ She is responsible for the entanglement when she mistakes *Hippolito* for her cousin *Lorenzo*. We find her to be quite naïve and to a certain extent not very intelligent. The narrator portrays *Leonora* as someone gullible. *Hippolito* takes advantage of her naivety to approach her, even to touch her.

There are other characters in the story. First, *Don Lorenzo*,¹⁷² is *Leonora*'s cousin and the trigger of all the confusion. *Don Mario* is *Leonora*'s father, *Don Fabritio* is

¹⁷¹ Very likely this character is based partly on Scarron's *Leonora* in *The Comic Romance*, see chapter XIII, the love story between *Destiny* and her in Italy.

¹⁷² The names of *Lorenzo* as well as *Fabio* appear in "La Señora *Cornelia*" in *Novelas Ejemplares* by Miguel de Cervantes. In Congreve's library there is a copy in French of this work by Cervantes. It corresponds to item number 116, —Nouvelles 2 Tom. Nouvelles . . . traduction nouvelle. Seconde édition, augmentée de plusieurs histoires. A Amsterdam, chez Claude Jordan, 1709. 2 tom. 12°. Hodges (1955). As a curious

Incognita/Juliana's brother, and the Marquess of Viterbo is Don Fabritio and Incognita/Juliana's father.¹⁷³

Don Fabritio represents the archetype of the gentleman who seeks revenge due to past offence to one of the members of his family. Patriarchal and family lineage values are represented in this quarrel between families. There is also a strong Renaissance influence and a sense of archaic plot structure, a little bit outworn for the very end of the seventeenth century. Therefore, Don Fabritio wants Hippolito to pay his debts, who is thought to be Lorenzo during the first half of the story. The situation is further complicated when we realise that Leonora is Don Lorenzo's cousin and Hippolito falls in love with her under the disguise of his cousin.

These are the main characters who appear more than once in the story and who are essential in the events which take place. There are some characters who are not active participants in the story but their mere mention is necessary for the thread of the story. Some others may appear as "extras" to produce backgrounds in which the main characters encounter. There are characters whose name appears totally or partially: name, surname or nickname. On the other hand, there are some others who appear in the story as real human beings who take the part of someone involved in a specific scene but whose name is not provided, just a generic reference: for example, servant, lady, knight, man or aunt, just to name a few.

note, Congreve used to purchase French editions of Spanish works because he was not really well versed in the Spanish tongue.

¹⁷³ The name of this character may be an allusion to Raymond's *An Itinerary* (63): "Leaving *Monte Fiascone*, one goes downe into a plaine, wherein about two mile from *Viterbo*". Viterbo is a city in central Italy which appears in Raymond's travel book.

3.6. Plot

A *URELIAN* was the only Son to a Principal Gentleman of *Florence*. The Indulgence of his Father prompted, and his Wealth enabled him, to bestow a generous Education upon him, whom, he now began to look upon as the Type of himself; an Impression he had made in the Gayety and Vigour of his Youth, before the Rust of Age had debilitated and obscur'd the Splendour of the Original: He was sensible, That he ought not to be sparing in the Adornment of him, if he had Resolution to beautifie his own Memory.¹⁷⁴

3.6.1. Overview: contextualising *Incognita*

Incognita is set in Florence, yet the year, or even the period, in which the story takes place is never precisely indicated. However, due to the masquerade¹⁷⁵ and the joust surrounding the celebration of the nuptials we might surmise that the story is set during the Renaissance. Although masquerades were still common in England until the eighteenth century, the joust is held just for the sake of simulating an “authentic” one, as part of the festivities. Yet there is another event which tells us so: the wedding between Caterina de’ Médici and Ferdinando I Gonzaga in 1617, as we shall see later.

Some early criticism attempted to define *Incognita* as a *roman à clef* (McKeon, *Origins* 63) – i.e. a story based on real events. Charles Wilson (125),¹⁷⁶ for instance, even insinuated that he knew the real truth of the story: “as some of the persons are dead, and others living” yet ’till they are gathered to their Father, I dare not presume to decypher any one Character, especially since some Folks more grand in their Talk than their

¹⁷⁴ See appendix 5.

¹⁷⁵ During the Restoration period masquerades were also popular. These masquerades were seen as important events, where public display entertained people to the highest level: “All the court beauties made their appearance in masks and other effectual disguises, which afforded the greatest satisfaction to the king, who was ever favourably disposed towards intrigue” (Connor Sydney 367).

¹⁷⁶ This was an abridged version of *Incognita* published in 1730, in Part II of *Memoirs of the Life, Writings and Amours of William Congreve Esq.*

Power,¹⁷⁷ threaten to prosecute us to the Extent of their Fortune” (qtd. in Novak “Congreve’s “*Incognita*”” 329-30).

Incognita was not original in presenting its story as a true one. We find similar assertions of factuality in, for instance, Behn’s *Oroonoko* (1688, 1995), in which the author claims to have met the protagonist of the story, Oroonoko, in Guyana, and to have written the story she heard from him. Another example, years after the publication of *Incognita*, is that of Defoe, who employs the same device in *Moll Flanders* (1722, 1989), in which the protagonist refuses to state her real name, and in the preface, it is explicitly said that the work is not a romance, but rather an autobiography based on real events. In this sense, the author states at the beginning of the preface that it is neither a romance nor a novel, but rather something “genuine”. But, due to the proliferation of these other “fictional” works, it would be rash to take these claims seriously:

The World is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances, that it will be hard for a private History to be taken for Genuine¹⁷⁸ where the Names and other Circumstances of the Person are concealed, and on this Account we must be content to leave the Reader to pass his own Opinion upon the ensuing Sheets, and take it just as he pleases.

The Author is here suppos’d to be writing her own History, and in the very beginning of her Account, she gives the Reasons why she thinks fit to conceal her true Name, after which there is no Occasion to say any more about that. (Defoe 37)

Incognita was a *novella* addressed to an audience interested in moral denouements and intriguing events. In fact, some readers might consider the story to be credible,

¹⁷⁷ As Frye points out, “one very obvious feature of romance is its pervasive social snobbery” (*The Secular Scripture* 161).

¹⁷⁸ Writers of French Romances from the seventeenth century already made use of this technique. For instance, Scarron, in the last part of his *Comic Romance* (234), reinforces the feeling of veracity by sharing in his digression technical problems related to the printing of the work: “... he had to change printers several times, and eventually he came across the one who printed the book you are reading, where he read several pages of the story I have been telling you. ... He knew the inaccuracies in my story and, having communicated them to my printer who was quite surprised (because he thought, like many others, that my novel was a made-up story)”.

partially or even totally in disguise, but ultimately reliable. In this sense, Congreve's debt to Behn is noteworthy. He found ideas in typical Restoration *novellas*, such as *The Fair Jilt* (1688), as we shall see later on in particular examples. In these sorts of *novellas* the plot was "expected to delight the readers by chance meetings or characters, sudden "turns" of fortune, and surprising repetition of events" (Novak, "Congreve's "Incognita"" 331), with these very same features prevailing in *Incognita*. Interestingly, Peter S. Stephenson (335) has linked Congreve's *Incognita* directly to the influence of Miguel de Cervantes and his *Novelas Ejemplares*, but also to the Spanish *picaresca* in general, "Neither "Incognita" nor a Spanish novela can be said to have real developments; instead we find a rapid succession of fortuitous episodes that ingeniously delay the lovers' union."

The story tells us about the fortunes and misfortunes of two couples: Aurelian and Incognita, and Hippolito and Leonora. The two couples take risks and overcome obstacles to finally achieve their objectives: "The design of the Novel is obvious, after the first meeting of Aurelian and Hippolito with Incognita and Leonora, and the difficulty is in bringing it to pass, maugre all apparent obstacles, within the compass of two days" (*Incognita* 5). Or, as we read in the middle of the story as a reflection of Aurelian's own concern: "... all the Hopes he could presume upon, were within compass of the Two Days Merriment yet to come; for which Space he hop'd he might excuse his remaining conceal'd to his Father" (*Incognita* 30). Certainly, the plot is characteristic of such seventeenth-century romances in France: "La fin de ces récits embrouillés amène, naturellement, le mariage heureux et tout s'arrange d'une façon vraiment réconfortante après tant d'obstacles surmontés" (Dallas 36).

But this is also one of the characteristic features of Restoration drama: the play's protagonist must overcome a set of difficulties, and the hero is tested in terms of whether

they are worthy of a reward, or should be punished for their vices. As Aubrey notes, “we need to recognize also how frequently a principal character’s faith or merit is “tried” in Restoration drama, in comedy as well as in tragedy. Such “trials,” besides being inherently dramatic, have the additional virtue of making an individual’s reward or punishment seem more “earned” or “deserved” (A. Williams, *An Approach* 48-9).

From the outset, the plot is an ironic reversal of the usual romance plot, familiar from Shakespeare’s comedies, in which young lovers are prevented from consummating their love by an older generation that is determined to frustrate their natural inclinations, thereby forcing the youngsters to devise witty ruses to gain their ends. (Hammond and Regan 29)

The central character in *Incognita* is Aurelian, the heir of Don Fabio of Florence, accompanied by his friend Hippolito, a young Spaniard. When the two arrive in Florence, the city is immersed in a period of celebration due to the marriage of the Duke’s kinswoman.¹⁷⁹ During a ball the friends meet their future wives. Aurelian falls in love with Incognita (whose actual name is Juliana). Providing a spoiler, the great irony in this novel is that Aurelian’s father wants him to marry her (Juliana).

Congreve, an able playwright considerably influenced by French dramatic practices, used the forestage for the majority of his plays, focusing the audience’s attention upon a succession of pairs of characters. With *Incognita*, despite its origin in Dryden’s play, *The Assignment*, Congreve similarly frames the romance-inspired narrative around couples, neatly divorcing them from other characters around them, even in crowded scenes like masked balls. (Widmayer 8)

Meanwhile, his friend Hippolito falls in love with Leonora, Don Mario’s daughter. There is an encounter between them, during which Hippolito appears disguised

¹⁷⁹ Compare these two friends who leave the city where they were studying to Don Antonio de Isunza and Don Juan de Gamboa in “La Señora Cornelia,” *Novelas Ejemplares* by Miguel de Cervantes.

as her cousin Lorenzo (who was severely injured in a duel). Hippolito is rapidly won over by her beauty. However, here comes the tangle in the story: Aurelian introduces himself as Hippolito, as he is afraid of giving his real name. At the same time, Hippolito's life is in danger. Having assumed the identity of Lorenzo, he could be attacked by his enemies since he killed Don Fabritio's kinsman:

If we regard the happy endings for hero and heroine as the evidence for optimism, for love as some kind of salvation from the petty intrigue and folly of the societies Congreve presents, we still have to deal with the fact that these endings are perfunctory, depending ... upon a sudden revelation of love, or requiring us to suppress concern about elements outside the main action. (Parfitt 35)

Aurelian is the protagonist of *Incognita* and the main plot and subplots revolve around him. However, there is a female protagonist too: Incognita. Congreve used to "delay the first entry of the heroine of his play" (D. Thomas 25), which he does with his first heroine in a novel. This plot is quite comical, in a sense, with touches of suspense in the middle:

The plot, or "Fable," of *Incognita* is indeed "conventional." But far from being "no more than a useful compositional device," as Simon¹⁸⁰ thinks, the plot of *Incognita* would have been recognized as an instructive emblem, as well as an "entertainment," a diverting parable, in romance terms, of the way man's wandering footsteps, amidst his living darkness, may be guided by Providence: a fanciful parable, indeed, in its most crucial episode and in almost fairy-tale terms, of the way man's very "stumblings" may be providentially directed for his salvation. (A. Williams 92)

Aurelian must marry Juliana-Incognita confronting his father. Supposedly, his father has chosen a different wife for him. Nonetheless, as the reader progresses through the text he discovers that Incognita and Juliana are the same person. At the same time,

¹⁸⁰ Simon (20-3).

Hippolito must also reveal his real name to Leonora. Despite the confusion of identities, love and duty are finally reconciled, as the very title of the story suggests, or was there not such a former conflict?¹⁸¹

In other words, we are dealing with what McKeon (*Origins* 264) categorises as the “struggle between the freedom of love and the archaic constraints of tradition”. The duty of Aurelian is to marry Juliana, his true love. Providence, at the very end, is fair enough and reveals how Juliana and Incognita are the same person. Duty and love have, ultimately, the same objectives. Each mix-up that happens is key to driving the work’s action, and the intrigue in each development is what keeps the reader in suspense throughout the *novella*. As Ackroyd (ix) suggests:

Congreve set himself a double challenge — both to order intricate events so that what may seem to hinder the action only serves to accelerate it, and to fashion a graceful and stylised prose that can express the more sensational and impassioned moments of love intrigue.

3.6.2. The History behind the Story: the source of its setting

As stated above, *Incognita* has been defined as a *roman à clef*. These sorts of novels are based upon contemporary incidents and real events. In fact, F.W. Bateson (Novak, *William Congreve* 64) suggested that the story was set in London and not in Italy, and that, based on Congreve’s correspondence, he never travelled far enough to really know Italy in detail. In fact, the farthest country he had ever travelled to was the Netherlands.¹⁸² He went a step further by arguing that the balls and masquerades (Crowley 80) that take

¹⁸¹ One of the sources influencing Congreve here is Jean Pierre Camus’ *A True Tragical History of Two Illustrious Italian Families: Couched Under the Names of Alcimus and Vannoza*. London, 1677. It corresponds to item number 14 in Congreve’s library, Alcimus & Vannoza, a Trag. Hist. of 2 Illuſtr/Italian Families. Jean Pierre Camus, Bishop of Belley (1584-1652). A true tragical ſtory of two illuſtrious Italian families; couched under the names of Alcimus and Vannoza. Written in French.... Done into English by a perſon of quality. London, for William Jacob, 1677. 8°. Hodges (1955)

¹⁸² See D. F. McKenzie. “William Congreve in Dutch (1695) and His Travels Abroad (1700)”. Bodleian Libraries Online Resources. University of Oxford. Accessed 11 July 2019.

place in the novel were based on the coronation of William and Mary, which took place on 11 April, 1689. There was a carnivalesque atmosphere surrounding this kind of festivity. Moreover, E. S. de Beer, in his article “Congreve’s *Incognita*: The Source of Its Setting, with a Note on Wilson’s Belphegor” also comments upon the real setting¹⁸³ of *Incognita* and the sources Congreve draws on to create the ambiance of his *novella*. It is widely believed that Congreve read and used John Raymond’s *An Itinerary Contayning a Voyage Made through Italy* (1648), as it contains many descriptions of Siena and Florence. De Beer (75) explained in his article that:

The acquisition led me to compare the topographical passages in *Incognita* with Raymond; and to look for the relevant passages in other English works on Italy; I think the passages quoted below show that Congreve was relying on Raymond for his local colour. The discovery of his particular source is not so important as his evident regard for accuracy of detail.

The depiction of the setting is vital in *Incognita* and I agree, after carefully reading Raymond’s book, that it is undeniable that Congreve made use of this book for this purpose. Therefore, Congreve never travelled to Italy, but rather obtained a copy of a travel diary by Raymond to obtain enough information to furnish his novel with realistic descriptions of its setting. From the point of view of the novel, a real, exact and well-depicted setting is crucial for the proper contextualisation of the story. Congreve introduces historical buildings and subtle details typical of a person who was there, *in situ*, although this was not the case. Being accurate in contextualising the setting is something that the first novelists considered; “... there is no doubt that the pursuit of verisimilitude led Defoe, Richardson and Fielding to initiate that power of ‘putting man

¹⁸³ In R. D. Hume (*The Development of English Drama* 140), and according to statistics, of 85 comedies written between the years 1661-1709, and which stood out, among others, for their success, or historical importance, 15 of them had foreign settings.

wholly into his physical setting' which constitutes for Allen Tate the distinctive capacity of the novel form" (qtd. in Watt 27).

If we read through the pages of John Raymond's *An Itinerary Contayning a Voyage Made through Italy*, we find many borrowings from it in *Incognita*. First of all, its description of Italy and its language is almost an exact match:

... being a Town most delightfully Situate, upon a Noble Hill, and very well suiting with Strangers at first, by reason of the agreeableness and purity of the Air: There also is the quaintness and delicacy of the *Italian* Tongue¹⁸⁴ most likely to be learned, there being many publick Professors of it in that place; and indeed the very Vulgar of *Siena* do express themselves with an easiness and sweetness surprizing, and even grateful to their Ears who understand not the Language. (*Incognita* 8)¹⁸⁵

Siena formerly a free State of it self, now subject to the Duke of *Florence*, stands aloft covering the back of a hill; so that in the hottest time of the yeare, this City is still refresht by coole gailles of winde; The ayre is very wholesome, much agreeing with the constitution of strangers, the Inhabitants very curteous, a great deale suiting to the humours of foreigners, and besides the purity of the *Italian* Language, is here profest, and spoken; these and the like conveniences make it much frequented by Travellers, and indeed mov'd us to settle our selves there, for some Moneths. (Raymond 49-50)¹⁸⁶

After an introduction by the omniscient narrator in the third person for about two pages, the story commences when the narrator depicts the start of Aurelian and Hippolito's journey. In order to write this paragraph, Congreve turns to *An Itinerary* again to portray the scene, and also to introduce new characters, using the proper names of real people:

¹⁸⁴ In Book I of Count Baldesar Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) there appears a whole dissertation about Tuscany, its language and its charm. See the edition of 1901 by Leonard Eckstein Opdycke.

¹⁸⁵ Here Congreve uses a well-known *urbis encomium* among seventeenth-century writers.

¹⁸⁶ This book corresponds to item number 518. Hodges (1955)

... not being able easily to reach *Florence* the same Night, they rested a League or two short, at a *Villa* of the great Duke's called *Poggio Imperiale*, where they were informed by some of his Highness's Servants, That the Nuptials of *Donna Catharina* (near Kinswoman to the great Duke) and *Don Ferdinand de Rovori*, were to be solemnized the next day... (*Incognita* 8)

There is a slight similarity to Madame de Scudéry's *Clelia* (20), not only because there is a double marriage, but also because its description of the festive atmosphere is reminiscent of Congreve's at the beginning of *Incognita*.

In the mean time, The Nuptials (of the two *Phenicians*, exchanged for the two *Carthaginians* the day we arrived there) were solemnized, and as these marriages were performed at the Republicks expences, there was a great Feast made, and nothing but publick acclamations of joy during the space of eight days.

And, if we look at Raymond's example, we find similarities to Congreve's lines: Going out of *Florence*, at the *Porta Romana*, one leaves *Poggio Imperiale a Villa* of the great Dukes, which I had omitted above. At the entrance of the walkes of *Cypres*, that leads to it are the statues of the *Tybre* and *Arno*; those of the famous old and new Poets, *Virgil*, *Ovid*, *Petrarche*, and *Dante* ... To conclude my description of *Florence*, the houses are high built, the streets pav'd with great stones, even and long, many Fountaines, and other publick ornaments, declaring the magnificence of the great Dukes. For eight mile round about the City there seemes another *Florence*, so full are the fields speckled with Country seats. Neither are those delights to private men alone, but there are likewise publike walkes, wnesse that of Pines two mile long; that of *Cypresses* leading to *Poggio Imperiale*, and many more. (Raymond 48; 45-6)

Congreve imports these aforementioned names from *An Itinerary*.¹⁸⁷ "The wife of this present Grand Duke, *Ferdinand* the second of that name, comes from the Duke of

¹⁸⁷ According to I. M. Westcott in his article "The Role of the Narrator in Congreve's *Incognita*" and included in McKenzie's commentary of *Incognita*, Congreve might have known the following information: Caterina de' Médici married Ferdinando I Gonzaga in 1617; and his sister, Claudia de' Médici married

Urbino, of the family of *Rovori*” (Raymond 47). In this case, the Great Duke is Ferdinand II, or Grand Duke of Tuscany, married to Vittoria della Rovere, the last granddaughter of the last Duke of Urbino in 1633.

... looking upon a large Gold Cup set with Jewels, in which his Royal Highness had drank to the Prosperity of the new married Couple at Dinner, and which afterward he presented to his Cousin *Donna Catharina*. (*Incognita* 16)

The future husband, then, is Don Ferdinand de Rovori, who, historically, is Ferdinando I Gonzaga who married Caterina de Médici, Ferdinand II’s aunt. This took place in 1617. The only difference is that Congreve changes or mixes names here. To create this last character, he uses his first name, Ferdinando, but deleting “Gonzaga” and introducing “de Rovori”. This surname (della Rovere in Italian) corresponds to the wife of Ferdinand II (the Grand Duke of *Incognita*), Vittoria della Rovere.

The use of historical characters is a technique found particularly in seventeenth-century romances¹⁸⁸ in order to generate a sense of *vraisemblance*, or verisimilitude:

Pour arriver à cette apparence de vérité, on recommande l’usage des sujets historiques, l’emploi restreint du merveilleux et surtout et par-dessus tout le souci de la raison. (Dallas 23)

Later on, in the narrative we find that not only have historical characters been imported from *An Itinerary*, but also local settings as well. A sense of realism is provided when Florence is depicted in a natural manner:

... Scaffolds erected around the Spacious Court, before the Church *Di Santa Croce*, where were usually seen all Cavalcades and Shews, performed by Assemblies of the Young Nobility. (*Incognita* 9)

Federico Ubaldo Della Rovere in 1621. This theory is plausible since Congreve mixes the first name of Caterina’s husband with the surname of that of his sister.

¹⁸⁸ See Paige (60), “The liberties taken in Bremond’s *La Princesse de Monferrat* (1676) are unsurprising because it takes place in medieval Italy; just as Lafayette herself did in *Zayde*, Bremond uses familiar family names and the license provided by sketchy sources to create characters whose historical counterparts may or may not have existed.”

Next to these though much distance, *Santa Croce* deserves seeing. Before it is a faire spacious Court, in which (it being *Carnavall* time while wee were at *Florence*) we saw the play at *Calce*, with *Cavalcades*, shewes, and other assemblies of the Nobility. (Raymond 44)

Before Sun rise they entred *Florence* at *Porta Romana*, ... the Streets were crowded with all sorts of People passing to and fro, and every Man employ'd in something relating to the Diversions to come; so that no notice was taken of any body; a Marquess and his Train might have pass'd by as unregarded as a single Fachin¹⁸⁹ or Cobler. (*Incognita* 9)

Neither is the Rout lesse propense to that though with lesser skill and art; There's no *Fachin* or Cobler but can finger some Instrument.¹⁹⁰ (Raymond Introduction, unnumbered)

... but out of the *Porta Romana*, the City seemes to raise it selfe with a great deale of Majesty; chiefly because of the many Towers it hath. (Raymond 50-1)

¹⁸⁹ In de Beer's aforementioned article, he states that this term 'Fachin' appears also in Anthony Munday's *Zelauto*, published in 1580. There we find "som poore *Fachine* héere in *Verona*" (110). It was a trend to set Restoration plays in Italian settings, so it makes sense that Congreve could have read this term also from this work. See McKenzie (vol. 3, 193) and Brett-Smith (71, note 12).

¹⁹⁰ Interestingly, in *Incognita* the name of an instrument appears: *Theorbo*. In the edition by Montague Summer (245), he adds the definition to this instrument which is the following: "A large kind of lute with a double neck and two sets of tuning-pegs, the lower holding the melody strings, and the upper the bass strings, much in vogue in the seventeenth century." To this information, I would add that the instrument appears in the short tale by Scarron named "The Two Rival Brothers" (*The Comic Romance*), which reminds us of the plot in *Incognita*. In page 257, we read: "They heard instruments being tuned up under Dorotea's windows, followed by excellent music, after which a lone voice accompanied by a theorbo sang the lengthy complaint of a tigress turned into an angel." And, again in Furetière's *Scarron's City Romance* (58) the instrument also appears: "it struck against a Theorbo a Neighbour had set against the Wall". I have found another reference in John Evelyn's *Diary* (136). The entry is from 27 January, 1685, seven years before *Incognita* was published, "I dined at Lord Sunderland's, being invited to hear that celebrated voice of Mr. Pordage, newly come from Rome; his singing was after the Venetian recitative, as masterly as could be, and with an excellent voice both treble and bass; Dr. Wallgrave accompanied it with his theorbo lute, on which he performed beyond imagination, and is doubtless one of the greatest masters in Europe on that charming instrument."

... if at any time they want a body for the *Anatomy* Lecture, they make it a small business to kill a poor *fachin*, or *porter* to put his body to that use. (Raymond 210)

The Ceremony was performed in the Morning, in the great Dome,¹⁹¹ with all magnificence correspondent to the wealth of the great Duke, and the esteem he had for the Noble Pair. (*Incognita* 11)

Least I should dwell too long amongst these earthly delights, wherewith *Florence* is fill'd, I will goe and meditate in the Churches; and first in the *Dome*, which I conceive either for the exquisitenesse of the worke, or worth of so vast a Bulke of Red, Black, and white Marble, to be the fairest Cathedrall without, that ever man laid eyes on. (Raymond 39)

Hippolito had sent to *Poggio Imperiale* for a couple of fine led Horses which he had left there with the rest of his Train at his entrance into *Florence* ... attended only by two Lacqueys, toward the Church *di Santa Croce*. (*Incognita* 36)

...the Gates of the Convent of St. *Lawrence*.¹⁹² (*Incognita* 52)

It is impossible not to see the similarity, almost an exact replica of the paragraph found in *An Itinerary*. However, Congreve's choice of Florence as the setting for his first *novella* is not coincidental. Other cities of Italy appear in this book. However, he chose Florence. This city is an emblem of art in itself, as the entire city exudes and transmits sublimity, which has been expressed by seventeenth-century authors too. For instance, in Joseph Addison's *Remarks on several parts of Italy*, particularly in the chapter devoted

¹⁹¹ Montague Summers (245) notes that this Dome could refer to the Duomo, Santa Maria del Fiore. Arnolfo di Cambio started to build it in 1296, and it was not finished until 1461.

¹⁹² The Convent of San Lorenzo was the church of the Medici, an influential and important noble family in Florence during the Renaissance.

to Florence we find historical facts found in *Incognita*. The church of St. Laurence, the Great Duke of Tuscany or the Medici family are mentioned.

There are some beautiful Palaces in *Florence*; but as *Tuscan Pillars* and *Rustic Work* owe their Original to this Country, the Architects always take care to give 'em a Place in the great Edifices that are rais'd in *Tuscany*. The Duke's new Palace is a very noble Pile, built after this manner, which makes it look extremely Solid and Majestick. (270-271)

Therefore, even the city was chosen on purpose to give the story this air of glory and so that his first novel would be artistically well-regarded and possess the dignity he wanted for his debut in *les belles lettres*.

3.6.3. John Dryden's influence: *The Assignation* (1672) and *Marriage à-la-Mode* (1673)

In his edition of *Incognita*, Montague Summers pinpoints the close plot's parallelism with John Dryden's *The Assignation; or, Love in a Nunnery* (1672). Some names in *Incognita* are previously found in Dryden's work. For instance, Aurelian, who is a Roman gentleman, "this old Signior *Mario*" (*Works* 362), the governor of Rome, Fabio, who is the servant of Mario, Hippolita is a nun (in this case the gender changes). There is also a change in identities. This occurs for instance, in I. iii, in the garden where Violetta and Laura are about to see Camilo and Aurelian. Supposedly, Laura is Beatrix, Violetta's woman, and Aurelian is Benito, his own servant. As it happens in *Incognita*, we have two simultaneous incipient relationships where one of each couple is using someone else's name.

The part of *The Assignation* that strikingly has serious similarities to the one in *Incognita* is Act III, Scene ii. Undoubtedly, Congreve is indebted to Dryden for the

masquerade ball¹⁹³ in *Incognita*. The Duke sees Lucretia at the ball and, after watching her dancing around, he suddenly falls in love with her: “all I see of her is charming, and I have reason to think her face is of the same piece” (*Works* 397). This is very similar to the kind of infatuation we find in Aurelian. The following repartee between the Duke and Lucretia also influences the witty exchange between Aurelian and Juliana. However, at the end, Lucretia escapes with the aid of the duke’s son, Prince Frederick. She does not want to be discovered, but for a very different reason than in *Incognita*.

Furthermore, the masquerade setting is also part of the plot in Dryden’s *Marriage à-la-Mode*, where in IV. ii, (304-5), we see how Palamedes explains the very nature of *terra incognita* in masquerades, and in IV. iii, there is a whole confusion of identities because of the masquerade clothing. Congreve very likely linked these two ideas in order to choose the name of the heroine. *Incognita*, as a proper name, could have been taken from this paragraph by Palamedes, particularly the line: “But in masquerade there is nothing to be known, she’s all *terra incognita*”.

Pala. No, masquerade is vizor-mask in debauch, and I like it the better for’t: for, with a vizor-mask, we fool ourselves into courtship, for the sake of an eye that glanced; or a hand that stole itself out of the glove sometimes, to give us a sample of the skin: But in masquerade there is nothing to be known, she’s all *terra incognita*; and the bold discoverer leaps ashore, and takes his lot among the wild Indians and savages, without the vile consideration of safety to his person, or of beauty, or wholesomeness in his mistress. (*Works* 304-5)

There is also a sort of resemblance when Benito/Aurelian and Beatrix/Laura are mutually discovered by candlelight (IV. v). A similar revelatory scene happens in

¹⁹³ “The masquerade in life and in fiction represents an escape from the demands of realism, as it does from *les convenances*. The craze for masking in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries imports into social life not only dramatic but novelistic elements. Novelists in turn quickly responded to the *ekphrastic* [representation of a visual scene] possibilities of such representations” (Doody 401).

Incognita, but in just one direction, when Aurelian discovers that the young boy he has just rescued is, in reality, a woman and also his beloved *Incognita*.

Lau. I find you are an impostor: you are not the same Benito: your language has nothing of the serving-man.

Aur. And yours, methinks, has not much of the waiting-woman.

Lau. My lady is abused, and betrayed by you: But I am resolved, I'll discover who you are. [*Holds out a lanthorn to him*]. How! the stranger?

Aur. Nay, madam, if you are good at that, I'll match you there too. [*Holds out his lanthorn.*] O prodigy! Is Beatrix turned to Laura?

Lau. Now the question is, which of us two is the greatest cheat? (*Works 423*)

Furthermore, later on there is a misunderstanding between Prince Frederick and Aurelian (IV. vi), and they are about to fight for no good reason. This also reminds us of the scene in which Aurelian and Hippolito, in darkness, begin fighting with their swords, which will be analysed in depth in the following chapter.

Fred. 'Slife, we are betrayed; but I'll make this rascal sure. [*Draws and runs at him.*

Ben. Help! Murder, murder! *Runs off.*]

Enter AURELIAN and CAMILLO; LAURA and VIOLETTA after them.

Aur. That was Benito's voice: We are ruined.

Cam. O, here they are, we must make our way. [*AUR. and the Prince make a pass or two confusedly, and fight off the stage. The Women shriek.*

Asca. Never fear, ladies. – Come on, sir; I am your man.

Cam. [*Steeping back.*] This is the prince's page, I know his voice. – Ascanio?

Asca. Signior Camillo?

Cam. If the prince be here, 'tis Aurelian is engaged with him. Let us run in quickly, and prevent the mischief.

[*All go off. A little clashing within. After which they all re-enter.*

Fred. [*To AUR.*] I hope you are not wounded.

Aur. No, sir; but infinitely grieved, that – (*Works* 424-5)

In this chapter my aim was to provide a context for the plot, where it came from, and the tools Congreve employed to create time and space, but also characters. Furthermore, I wished to show that Congreve must have done extensive reading before writing this first novel, paying attention to his master, John Dryden, who introduced him to the literary circle. I would say this is not a mere imitation, but rather a process of learning how to write a novel, as the author strives to distancing his writing habits from the dramatic sphere, but he is unable to completely eliminate elements from the theatrical tradition. Thus, the result is a play in novelistic form, a hybrid which was the first attempt to provide the world with his sublime literary gift.

3.7. Themes in *Incognita*

“Dans la vie, comme au théâtre et dans les romans,
l’amour incite aux grandes actions.”

(Dorothy Frances Dallas, *Le Roman Français* 31)

Disguise, concealment and identity are themes present in *Incognita*. This novel is set in the Italian Renaissance. If we read between the lines *Incognita* is not as simple as it seems because it was written following a careful design. Those who have read this novel already know that *Incognita* deals precisely with the concealment of identities, people in incognito, nothing is which seems to be.

3.7.1. The beginning: disguise and concealment

The narrator starts with the narration, depicting characters and setting. In the first pages there is not a single dialogue between characters, just the narration in third person by an omniscient narrator.

The story starts when Aurelian wants to enter Florence in disguise so that his father will not be able to recognise him. Thus, from the very outset we find the protagonist willing to hide his real identity. This aura of concealment starts when characters are introduced by the narrator, "... they would furnish themselves with Disguises and other Accoutrements necessary for the Prosecution of their Design of sharing in the publick Merriment" (*Incognita* 9).

From the seventeenth century there is not only a new emphasis on fashion, and thus on clothing as a kind of costume, but also a growing awareness of the possibilities of remodeling one's image for pleasure. In eighteenth-century novels, characters dress up to participate in masquerades, and in doing so they take on an abundance of deliberately dissociative as well as associative meaning. (Doody 401)

The second example happens a little bit later in the narration when due to the wedding's festivity everybody in town is in the streets. Therefore, Florence is overcrowded, everybody celebrating the nuptials without paying attention very much to foreigners. The Great Duke forbids to work during these three days of celebration and he will pay for everything involved in it.

That all Mechanicks and Tradesmen were forbidden to work or expose any Goods to Sale for the space of three days; during which time all Persons should be entertain'd at the Great Duke's Cost; and publick Provision was to be made for the setting forth and furnishing a multitude of Tables, with Entertainment for all Comers and Goers, and several Houses appointed for that use in all Streets. (*Incognita* 9)

Our characters want to take advantage of this to freely get immersed in the celebration without being recognised. They want to attend the nuptials without the permission of their parents, in incognito. Therefore, their plan is to disguise in such a manner to go unnoticed and look like locals: "... a Marquess and his Train might have pass'd by as unregarded as a single Fachin or Cobler" (*Incognita* 9).

3.7.2. Mocking romance I: hyperbolic language

The general tone of a mock-heroic romance is noticeable from the very beginning. First of all, although our cavaliers are depicted basically as spoilt young nobles who are supported economically and socially by their respective families, sometimes the narrator calls them ‘adventurers’ as seen in the quote below. The main events during the wedding celebration are a tilting and a masquerade at court. Both scenes are typically romantic and old-fashioned. These two elements will be used as a parody of these real events found mostly in old romances.

The next Morning was to be a Tilting, and the same Night a Masquing Ball at Court. To omit the Description of the universal Joy, (that had diffus’d it self through all the Conduits of Wine, which convey’d it in large measures to the People) and only relate those effects of it which concern our present Adventurers. (*Incognita* 11)

If we pay attention to the passage where the masquerade ball is depicted, we definitely see the best example of a hyperbolic description:

You must know, that about the fall of the Evening, and at that time when the *æquilibrium* of Day and Night, for some time, holds the Air in a gloomy suspence between an unwillingness to leave the light, and a natural impulse into the Dominion of darkness ... such a prodigious number of Torches were on fire, that the day, by help of these Auxiliary Forces, seem’d to continue its Dominion; the Owls and Bats apprehending their mistake, in counting the hours, retir’d again to a convenient darkness; for Madam Night was no more to be seen than she was to be heard; and the Chymists were of Opinion; That her fuliginous Damps rarefy’d by the abundance of Flame, were evaporated. (*Incognita* 11)

Since the beginning of the story the language in general has been a plain one but in this paragraph changes. Here, Congreve uses what he had previously criticised as ‘lofty language’ regarding romances in the preface. This paragraph is the description of the scene at dusk as if it were something miraculous or magical. The hyperbolic description

of this change in light is something typically romantic and archaic as if marvellous elements were in the narration all of a sudden: “holds the Air in a gloomy suspence” (11). And later, day and night seem to be in dispute for supremacy, as if we were talking about two identities with self-control and determination to stay or to leave: “such a prodigious number of Torches were on fire, that the day, by help of these Auxiliary Forces, seem’d to continue its Dominion”. Doubtless, there is a gothic tone in this, we can appreciate this in the use of ‘owls’ and ‘bats’ and ‘Madame Night’ (11), yet the gothic ambience is interrupted by the triumph of light by candles and torches. Darkness has no place tonight or invitation to the celebration. Everything at this party is light and delight.

3.7.3. Mocking romance II: the skirmish

There are several instances where the mock-heroic romance is portrayed by means of our characters’ behaviour. One of those moments takes place when Aurelian is coming back to his lodgings in order to find his beloved friend, Hippolito and tells him about his meeting with Incognita. However, what happens is unexpected and superbly comic even though both characters’ lives are at stake for some minutes. On his way back to his lodgings Aurelian first encounters a man who was defending himself from other two men. They were clearly fighting. Aurelian thinks that this man could be his friend Hippolito, this thought is confirmed by the sight of Hippolito’s diamond buttons placed on his sleeves. Therefore, without doubting it Aurelian rushes to help him with all the “Eagerness and Resolution” (*Incognita* 26) as the brave knight he is. The following passage is ironic when the unknown man (supposedly Hippolito) wants to thank Aurelian his heroic deed:

The Person rescued by the Generous Help of *Aurelian*, came toward him; but as he would have stoop’d to have saluted him, dropp’d, fainting at his feet. *Aurelian*, now he was so near him, perceiv’d plainly *Hippolito*’s Habit, and step’d hastily to take him up. Just as

some of the Guards (who were going the Rounds, apprehensive of such Disorders in an Universal Merriment) came up to him with Lights, and had taken Prisoners the Two Men, whom they met with their Swords drawn; when looking in the Face of the Wounded Man, he found it was not *Hippolito*, but his Governour *Claudio*, in the Habit he had worn at the Ball. (*Incognita* 26-7)

The scene is comical when all of a sudden, we find Hippolito's Governour involved in this situation. *Incognita* is a novel of entanglement, confusing situations and sudden turns of fortune. Were it in dramatic form, surely it would be a comedy.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, Aurelian has just saved the life of Hippolito's governor who is dressed with his garments but we do not the reason why. Claudio is about to be murdered because the criminals believe him to be Lorenzo. Lorenzo never appears as a real character yet two other characters are about to die because of his persona. Aurelian had proved to be brave enough to rescue Claudio. However, in the following scene Hippolito and Aurelian are involved in a mock-fighting which automatically devalues the previous scene:

... leaving him [*Claudio*] to his Rest, went to give *Hippolito* an Account of what had happened, whom he found with a Table before him, leaning upon both his Elbows, his Face covered with his Hands, and so motionless, that *Aurelian* concluded he was asleep; seeing several Papers lie before him, half written and blotted out again, he thought to steal softly to the Table, and discover what he had been employed about. Just as he reach'd forth his Hand to take up one of the Papers, *Hippolito* started up so on the suddain, as surpriz'd *Aurelian* and made him leap back ... (*Incognita* 27-8)

The scene, in my opinion, together with the joust is which best represent the mock-heroic tone of *Incognita*. The lack of determination of our heroes and their clumsy response are satirised and ridiculed. Hippolito believes someone wants to murder him. Therefore, he immediately jumps out of the bed and look for his sword with such a bad

¹⁹⁴ See Kristiaan P. Aercke. "Theatrical Background in English Novels of the Seventeenth Century." *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1988, pp. 120-136.

fortune so as to throw the candles and the room remains in darkness. They are going to die irremediably by friendly hands:

Hippolito, on the other hand, not supposing that any Body had been near him, was so disordered with the Appearance of a Man at his Elbow, (whom his Amazement did not permit him to distinguish) that he leap'd hastily to his Sword, and in turning him about, overthrew the Stand and Candles. Here were they both left in the Dark, *Hippolito* groping about with his Sword, and thrusting at every Chair that he felt oppose him. (*Incognita* 28)

This mock-fighting scene in darkness is getting more and more ridiculous when *Hippolito* is described groping around the room without seeing anything, trying to stab every chair he finds along the way. *Hippolito* in this scene reminds of Don Quixote¹⁹⁵ fighting against the windmills.¹⁹⁶ It is true that Don Quixote's hallucination of the windmills is due to his madness, but there is a sort of paranoia in *Hippolito* when he finds himself in darkness and starts to stab every object in an uncontrolled way. We find this scene in chapter viii in the first volume of *Don Quixote*:

... bien cubierto de su rodela, con la lanza en el ristre, arremetió a todo el galope de Rocinante, y embistió con el primer molino que estaba delante, y dándole una lanzada en el aspa, la volvió el viento con tanta furia, que hizo la lanza pedazos. (Cervantes 66)

In this case it is *Aurelian* the windmill of *Hippolito*. He is about to commit 'amicide' (28)¹⁹⁷ as Congreve explains because of his sudden paranoia:

Aurelian was scarce come to himself, when thinking to step back toward the Door that he might inform his Friend of his Mistake, without exposing himself to his blind Fury; *Hippolito* heard him stir, and made a full thrust with such Violence, that the Hilt of the Sword meeting with *Aurelian's* Breast beat him down, and *Hippolito* a top of him, as a

¹⁹⁵ See in Congreve's library items number 206, 207, 208, 209, 210. (Hodges 1955)

¹⁹⁶ "*Lysis* takes it not well to be compar'd to *Don-Quixot*, for extravagant as he is, he thinks himself wiser than that Knight." (Sorel, *Lysis*, The Translator to the Reader, Fourth Book)

¹⁹⁷ As McKenzie points out, 'amicide' is a neologism coined by William Congreve meaning 'to kill a friend' from the Latin 'amicus' and '-cidium' from 'caedere' meaning 'to kill'.

Servant alarm'd with the noise, came into the Chamber with a Light. The Fellow trembled, and thought they were both Dead, till *Hippolito* raising himself, to see whom he had got under him, swoon'd away upon the discovery of his Friend. (*Incognita* 28)

Another example of a possible reference to *Don Quixote* is when Aurelian says that he wants to tell the truth to Hippolito, to discover that there is not such an enemy or danger in that room but without putting himself at risk of being hurt. He truly fears Hippolito 'blind fury', blind because it is not real, the whole situation is just a mere product of his imagination. The fight is not real, the enemy is not real, but he just feels the impulse of thrusting at his 'imaginary' enemies. This is pretty much what happens in chapter viii in *Don Quixote*, the knight does not listen to his faithful squire but just with a 'blind fury' stabs and fights against windmills believing they are giants. In *Don Quixote*, the blind fury is represented through the madness of the character, he cannot see because his mind is projecting a distorted image of reality. In *Incognita*, the blind fury is something less metaphorical, literally he is blind, he cannot see what is around him, therefore he, in a sense, projects a 'probable' reality. Nonetheless, at the end of the scene, Hippolito's sense is restored "blaming his own temerity and weakness, in being so easily frightened to Disorder; and last of all, his blindness, in not knowing his dearest Friend" (*Incognita* 28)

The scene ends up when Hippolito stabs Aurelian, but not even this produces a real wound, at least an element of heroic narrative. In reality, he has just caused Aurelian a bruise with the hilt of the sword on his breast. If we look careful at every detail in this mock-skirmish, there is not a real fight, enemies or even a wound. A servant comes to the room providing enough light to discover all the foolery. The servant thinks they are both dead. At the end of this passage, we have the feeling that we have just seen two little boys fighting than two gentlemen having a proper duel. It ends with Hippolito begging pardon and feeling deeply sorry for what he was about to do.

3.7.4. Mocking romance III: the tilting

The tilting scene is another example of *Incognita* as an anti-romance. It is not a real one but a mock-tilting just for the sake of entertaining. Furthermore, the manner in which this scene is narrated is humorous and ridiculous. As McKeon puts it, *Incognita* is a “self-conscious antiromance” (McKeon, *Origins* 112) and also compares this ‘impulse’ to seek truth inside the storyworld itself, or in the development of the plot to that of Aphra Behn. However, sometimes both writers do not make use of the right amount of “extreme scepticism” and what happens is that the plot feels ‘blant’. Particularly, in *Incognita* is quite easy to see this. Congreve is attempting to mix genres, keeping the Unities accordingly, and at the same time experimenting with an anti-romance or a parody of a romance while providing the reader with mock events easily attached to themes such as courtly love, joust, masquerades, aristocratic and patriarchal values. But sometimes it feels we are immersed in the reading of an actual romance, nothing interested or new is told, we are expecting something “novel”. Nonetheless, other times we find events ironically well-told, showing Congreve’s wit and vivacity, making the reader laugh at times. For example, the scene in which Aurelian and Hippolito fight in darkness almost hurting each other severely mentioned above, or the confusion in the mock-tilting when both gentlemen behaves as if they were part of a joust. The reader is a confidant to the narrator who is openly mocking the characters for not being the sufficiently intelligent to realise the joust was just mere symbolism of old times. And yet we can feel the solemnity and the courage of the two gentlemen while we are reading the pages almost laughing at the ridicule. That is self-parody of a genre, and that is almost implacable at times as McKeon comments (*Origins* 112).

The scene begins with a more than detailed description of Aurelian and Hippolito's special costumes for the occasion which reminds us more of an Arthurian¹⁹⁸ romance:

Our Cavaliers had by good Fortune provided themselves of two curious Suits of light Armour, finely enamelled and gilt. *Hippolito* had sent to *Poggio Imperiale* for a couple of fine led Horses which he had left there with the rest of his Train at his entrance into *Florence*. Mounted on these and every way well Equipt, they took their way, attended only by two Lacqueys, toward the Church *di Santa Croce*, before which they were to perform their Exercises of Chivalry. *Hippolito* wore upon his Helm a large Plume of Crimson Feathers, in the midst of which was artificially¹⁹⁹ placed *Leonora's* Handkerchief. His Armour was gilt, and enamell'd with Green and Crimson. *Aurelian* was not so happy as to wear any token to recommend him to the notice of his Mistress, so had only a Plume of Sky-colour and White Feathers, suitable to his Armour, which was Silver enamelled with Azure. (*Incognita* 36)

In this fragment there are several references and allusions to romances and in a quite archaic manner. Our protagonists called 'cavaliers' are going to "perform their exercises of Chivalry" wearing armours made of gold and silver and wearing all sort of flamboyant feathers with bright colours. On the one hand, Hippolito chooses the red colour to attract the attention of Leonora also placing her handkerchief in the middle of his helmet. Also wearing a golden armour in crimson and green colours. On the other hand, Aurelian is more cautious and not so determined to attract *Incognita's* attention or reveals his position. He chooses a light blue (sky blue colour) for his feathers and not a gilt armour but a silver one with an azure tone.

¹⁹⁸ In Congreve's library item number 13, Arthur's (King) Life & Death, wth: ye Knights/of ye Round Table. wants ye Title./Printed by Wynkyn de Worde [La mort darthur. Translated from the French by Sir T. Malory.] Black Letter. London, Wynkyn de Worde, 1529. fol. STC 803. (Hodges 1955)

¹⁹⁹ Please note that this adverb might lead you into a confusion. In this case, "artificially" means 'according to the laws of art' as McKenzie points out in the edition I am using throughout the thesis. It is an archaic and obsolete meaning of this adverb but it does not imply something affected or false.

At this point, the tilting scene must be commented in detail. The scene is massively described. The narrator, when he pleases, is capable of introducing the reader to the very exact moment and recreates for us the environment even the nerve-wrecking situation for both our cavaliers.

The Exercise that was to be perform'd was in general a running at the Ring; and afterwards two Cavaliers undertook to defend the Beauty of *Donna Catharina*, against all who would not allow her preheminance of their Mistresses. This thing was only designed for show and form,²⁰⁰ none presuming that any body would put so great an affront upon the Bride and Duke's Kinswoman, as to dispute her pretensions to the first place in the Court of *Venus*. (*Incognita* 37)

As we have previously seen the scene in which Hippolito loses his sense and beings to stab the air in search of his supposed enemy (Aurelian), in this case there is another parody of romance. The tilting is just a mere show regarding the nuptial festivities. As the narrator explicitly remarks it was just 'designed for show and form'. However, our cavaliers mistakenly believe that we are part of a real joust. They want to demonstrate their valour and courage as the two gentlemen they are. The source of the mistake is described in a perfectly vivid manner:

But here our Cavaliers were under a mistake; for seeing a large Shield carry'd before two Knights, with a Lady painted upon it, not knowing who, but reading the Inscription which was (in large Gold Letters) *Above the Insolence of Competition*, they thought themselves obliged, especially in presence of their Mistresses, to vindicate their Beauty ... (*Incognita* 37)

The whole scene is a comic nonsense told in a pretty formal manner. Both cavaliers wish to show the maximum respect for the ladies. In this sense they believe that

²⁰⁰ See Aspasia Velissariou. "“This thing was only designed for show and form”: The Vicissitudes of Resemblance in Congreve's *Incognita*." *Journal of the Short Story in English*, vol. 39, 2002, pp. 1-14, for an analysis of *Incognita* using Foucault and the (mis)interpretation of signs in the novel.

what they must do is to be the cavaliers who should defend the beauty of Donna Catharina against the ones who might not agree. However, as the narrator clearly explains this is just intended to divert the audience as part of the celebration. Nothing else.

The scene turns out even more comical when a gentleman has to prevent them from making a fool of themselves. However, Don Ferdinand is concerned with the insolence of those cavaliers and even invites the Duke to leave if he pleases. He, on his part, does not want to leave the ring. Still, and as rules of cavalry at medieval times stipulate, these gentlemen are required to regain their honour due to the offence committed.

... whereupon a Civil Challenge was sent to the two Strangers, informing them of their Error, and withal telling them they must either maintain it by force of Arms, or make a publick acknowledgment by riding bare headed before the Picture once round the Lists.
(*Incognita* 38)

Mistake and error are two words which are repeated in the scene several times. The narrator, to my mind, wants to clearly states how ridiculous are our gentlemen. Even Don Ferdinand is incapable of believing that these two gentlemen are being naive in a way and that is way, he believes they are being insolent and challenge his authority. The cavaliers following the protocol would “not decline the Combate”²⁰¹ (*Incognita* 38); therefore, they are sensible of their own acts, acknowledging their error and accepting their misfortune.

To the Bride they sent a Complement, wherein, having first begg'd her pardon for not knowing her Picture, they gave her to understand, that now they were not about to dispute her undoubted right to the Crown of Beauty, but the honour of being her Champions was

²⁰¹ In McKenzie's edition as well as in the first one of 1692, there are two different spellings of the same word. The first time the spelling is 'combate' and afterwards we find 'combat' in page 39, line 1232: "every thing in great form settled for the Combat."

the Prize they sought²⁰² for, which they thought themselves as able to maintain as any other Pretenders. Wherefore they pray'd her, that if fortune so far befriended their endeavours as to make them Victors, that they might receive no other Reward, but to be crown'd with the Titles of their Adversaries, and be ever after esteem'd as her most humble Servants. (*Incognita* 38)

The whole scene is characteristic of romances and patriarchal hierarchy. The respect both gentlemen show to the bride and Duke's kinswoman is hyperbolically expressed by means of apologetic responses such as "begg'd her pardon", "her undoubted right to the Crown of Beauty" or "the honour of being her Champions as the Prize they sought for". They are massively flattering in this context, even though it has been an offense. Therefore, we switch from a 'mock tilting' to a 'real Combate' just due to a mere mistake, which in fact it is even more ironical when the whole *Incognita*'s plot is all about misleading deeds.

The following scene in which Aurelian and Hippolito must fight against two other cavaliers is even more ridiculous.

The Cavaliers were all in good earnest, but orders were given to bring' em blunted Lances, and to forbid the drawing of a Sword upon pain of his Highness's Displeasure. The Trumpets sounded and they began their Course: The Ladies Hearts, particularly the *Incognita* and *Leonora*'s, beat time to the Horses Hoofs,²⁰³ and hope and fear made a

²⁰² McKenzie (2011) points out that there is a common mistake in spelling shared by Brett-Smith, Dobrée and Jeffares' editions. Whereas in the first edition of *Incognita* in 1692, the long 's' is used in 'sought for', the rest of the editors read this 's' as a 'f', therefore they interpret 'fought for' which in the context it makes sense though. In the edition of 1700, where *Incognita* appears as part of a collection of "Pleasant Modern Novels" the long 's' appears in 'sought for'. Also, in the edition of 1713 the long 's' is correctly written. However, the 'f' is used in the edition by Montague Summers in 1923, in the edition of 1930 by Bateson and in the edition of 1951 by Philip Henderson when again it is read "fought for". Later in the story (44, 1450) we find again the same verb 'sought for' which confirms us that the aforementioned used of 'f' was a mistake in spelling "....if he could give them any Account of the Persons they sought for."

²⁰³ Although not matured enough, here there is a hint of the ladies' real feelings. In Ballaster's words, "in novelistic irony, the audience is aware of an unconscious desire not (yet) recognized by the character to whom the desire belongs. And often, in the novel, it is these lapses of self-knowledge that are the prompt for narratorial insight shared with the reader about the nature of human character in general." "Bring(ing) Forth Alive" 194).

mock Fight within their tender Breasts, each wishing and doubting success where she lik'd: But as the generality of their Prayers were for the graceful Strangers, they accordingly succeeded. (*Incognita* 39)

First of all, in this fragment there is a meta-reference to the own genre itself. The whole scene is constructed around two characters (cavaliers) who are taking in a deeply serious manner to restore the honour they were about to lose. For them, it is not a nonsense the very fact of having an actual combat, to risk their lives to demonstrate how ashamed they are of their mistake. However, when it seems we are ready to see a proper combat both are brought 'blunted lances'. They are not allowed to use even a real sword to fight due to his Highness' command. The beginning of the fight is dramatized by the preoccupation of our ladies. Their heartbeats are at the same pace of their horses' hoofs while "hope and fear made a mock Fight within their tender Breasts" (39). Although being conscious of the falsehood of this combat (the word mock is used) they behave as if it were real, showing concern and sorrow.

Our cavaliers end up winning and restoring their honour as a good romance should achieve. A chivalric environment surrounds the scene:

Aurelian's Adversary was unhorsed in the first Encounter, and *Hippolito's* lost both his Stirrups and dropt his Lance to save himself. The Honour of the Field was immediately granted to them, and *Donna Catharina* sent them both Favours, which she pray'd them to wear as her Knights. (*Incognita* 39)

Both cavaliers show their skills in combat and are rewarded by *Donna Catharina* accordingly. Honour is restored in the most chivalric manner.

Nonetheless, the huge stir caused by the tilting makes *Don Fabio* think of the possibility that those two knights are in reality his son and his beloved friend, *Hippolito*. And the fact is that he "was well enough pleased with his humour of remaining *Incognito*" and the answer for that feeling is because "the surprize of his Discovery would add much

to the Gallantry he had shown in Masquerade” (*Incognita* 39). Therefore, Aurelian is called *Incognito* because since the very beginning he is hiding from himself, using an identity different to his own and all of this because he wants some diversion behind his father’s back. Aurelian is challenging his father’s authority and, in this manner, challenging patriarchy. He owes respect to his father since he depends economically on him, but, as an act of rebelliousness or simply to feel ‘free’ he is operating incognito. However, his father acknowledges the fact that his son has acted with such courage and bravery in masquerade that he needs to discover his whereabouts. *Incognita*, for her part, is also challenging Aurelian’s right to be her suitor and also, she wants to have the advantage of remaining unknown, nameless. A name gives you an identity, a family, a status and duties. But if you are no one you have the freedom to decide who you want to be.

Nonetheless, Don Fabio realises the courage and bravery of his son due to the flattery around the company’s comments. But in reality, it is not just splendid *hauteur* as a father what he feels but, as the narrator says, the vanity of showing off who his son is and being conscious that the duke is talking of him with such respect. Aurelian’s father sees the possibility to amend past offences and to use his son as the one who will restore order and maintain the honour:

... but hearing the extraordinary liking that every body express’d, and in a particular manner, the great Duke himself, to the Persons and Behaviour of the unknown Cavaliers, the Old Gentleman could not forbear the Vanity to tell his Highness ... what reason he had to believe the one to be his Son, and the other a *Spanish* Nobleman, his Friend.
(*Incognita* 39-40)

Thus, our cavaliers panic when they discover everybody in town know about their identity. All of a sudden, they are vulnerable and they feel helpless about their future relationship with *Incognita* and Leonora. On the one hand, Aurelian is “stark mad at the

News” (*Incognita* 40) since he is aware that his father has already sent someone to bring him back, and the likely event of confronting his father and the consequences of his disobedience does not please him. On the other hand, Hippolito may have left town if it were not for the fact that he is “desperately in Love” (*Incognita* 40). He is deeply concerned about Leonora’s discovery of his real identity and the fact that he has deceived her twice. Therefore, Aurelian is worried about the disobedience committed regarding his duties as a son. Love and duty seem to be irreconcilable at this point in the novel.

3.7.5. Ironizing pre-judgments and affectation

Another instance where we find a satirist tone during a third-person narration is when Aurelian and Hippolito attend the ball. In a very ironic way, yet written in a ‘objective’ manner this part is worth of commenting:

A more glorious Troop no occasion ever assembled; all the fair of *Florence*, with the most accomplished Cavaliers, were present; and however Nature had been partial in bestowing on some better Faces than others, Art was alike indulgent to all, and industriously supplied those Defects she had left, giving some Addition also to her greatest Excellencies. Every body appear’d well shap’d, as it is to be supposed, none who were conscious to themselves of any visible Deformity would presume to come thither. Their Apparel was equally glorious, though each differing in fancy. (*Incognita* 12)

We find sharp criticism in this passage with a dash of humour. The narrator explains that all the high nobility of Florence is present at the ball, however he does not care about their social status or rank in society but purely to their physical appearance. He mocks and openly laughs at the fact that some of them are not precisely beauties but that ‘Art’ has provided some other ‘addition’ to balance their lack of it. Then, it was not enough to call them unattractive but he reflects upon none of them would have a ‘deformity’ or any sort. Otherwise, they would not come to the ball showing it publicly.

In a sense, this is just criticism to Congreve's society. This is just the beginning of what he would develop later in all his plays. He was an excellent dramatist and deployed satire and irony to mock and, ultimately, redefined the vices and foolishness he found in his own world.

In short, our Strangers were so well bred, as to conclude from these apparent Perfections, that there was not a Masque which did not at least hide the Face of a Cherubim. Perhaps the Ladies were not behind hand in return of a favourable Opinion of them: for they were both well dress'd, and had something inexpressibly pleasing in their Air and Mien, different from other People, and indeed different from one another. (*Incognita* 12)

Our heroes were worried about the image they were projecting to the rest of the assembly. They show a naivety in the way they think, they consider that among such an amount of people, behind those masks (we have to remember during the whole passage that everybody is dressed up and wearing masks), pretty faces compared to "Cherubim's faces" should be found. The narrator presents Aurelian and Hippolito as true gentlemen: "for they were both well dress'd, and had something inexpressibly pleasing in their Air and Mien, different from other People, and indeed different from one another." In this way, he is paving the way to the following scene in which Aurelian and *Incognita* have their first conversation.

The ambience that a masquerade provides is that of concealment. It is a great chance to present yourself without external prejudices. While a mask is put on a face, there is not judgement on beauty or physical traits, therefore it is a purer way of falling in love without the sexual component. We should be reminded that this story is a mock-heroic romance but for the story to be so, there has to be some features of romance. In this case, although masques were common at that time and later on in the century, there is a denial of 'romantic love' due to the damsel's beauty. During the first encounter between Aurelian and *Incognita* none of them are able to see each other and, interestingly,

both develop a sort of interest. It is true that this will be reinforced when Aurelian discovers Juliana/Incognita's face and confirms his feelings and his "thoughts" about her beauty.

The first encounter between Hippolito and Leonora reminds more of a play rather than a novel. When we, as readers, reconstruct the scene in our mind we might do it as if this were happening on stage.²⁰⁴ Hippolito's behaviour towards the confusion and the unexpected and sudden torrent of love he feels for Leonora and Leonora's complete naivety make the whole scene comical and theatrical:

... she address'd her self to him in this manner: 'Signior *Don Lorenzo* (said she) I am overjoy'd to see you are so speedily recovered of your Wounds, which by report were much more dangerous than to have suffered your coming abroad so soon; but I must accuse you of great indiscretion, in appearing in a Habit which so many must needs remember you to have worn upon the like occasion not long ago ... (*Incognita* 16-7)

Leonora's mistake and Hippolito's concealment of truth is what make the story entangled but also it adds a humorous tone to the whole sentimental story between Aurelian and Incognita. Therefore, the gullible Leonora firmly believes Hippolito to be his cousin Lorenzo, and we find Hippolito quite comfortable playing a role for the mere sake of being in Leonora's company. In this first exchange between Leonora and Hippolito we discover a little bit about both characters. First, Leonora's naivety contrasts with Incognita's easy way of performing in a gentleman's company. Secondly, we find that Hippolito is probably no such a good-natured man as Aurelian shows to be. Hippolito consciously takes advantage of Leonora's mistake. The reckless gentleman prefers to be involved in a delicate dispute between families and put his own life at risk than telling Leonora the truth and not being able to see her anymore.

²⁰⁴ Or as Stephenson (342) puts it, "appealing to the visual imagination". See also, Salzman, *English Prose Fiction* (336), "*Incognita's* designs produces the effect of watching a play."

Leonora shows her face to Hippolito by mistake. She believes him to be Lorenzo and not a complete stranger. Hippolito leaves her to behave freely but his behaviour should be censured since he is not being totally honest with her. This relationship is not so attractive from the point of view of the reader since at the very beginning, Hippolito discovers Leonora's physical appearance and there are no expectations regarding it. The romantic and idealistic suspense is totally suspended at the beginning; therefore, we cannot expect much about these two, except Leonora's rejection:

Yet in Complaisance to your ill Memory, I will put you past doubt, by shewing you my Face'; with that she pulled off her Mask, and discovered to *Hippolito* (now more amaz'd than ever) the most Angelick Face that he had ever beheld. (*Incognita* 17)

Another interesting question would be the fact that not only does Hippolito see her but also he freely touches and have physical contact more than once: "Having taken him familiarly by the Hand, now she had made her self known to him" (*Incognita* 17). Hippolito's sudden infatuation is satirised by the narrator with great vivacity. The hyperbolic description of this love is romantic to the extent of being anti-romantic, yet ridiculous. Hippolito expects the lie to continue across time as if they were kids playing a game when his life is at serious risk:

He was in a hundred Minds, whether he should make her sensible of her Error or no; but considering he could expect no farther Conference with her after he should discover himself, and that as yet he knew not of her place of abode, he resolv'd to humour the mistake a little further. Having her still by the Hand, which he squeez'd somewhat more eagerly than is usual for Cousins to do ... (*Incognita* 18)

The sort of infatuation Hippolito experiments is different in nature by that of Aurelian. Hippolito does not feel attracted towards Leonora because of her witty display of words. She is not talking about anything intellectually special, not even she shows herself as courageous since she seems quite scared of what Don Fabritio and his father

are able to do with him. Hippolito emphasises that his infatuation is based upon aesthetical pleasure, Leonora's face and touch. He falls in love with her for the aesthetic pleasure produced by her beauty and also the contact with her skin when she takes his hand. References to any other sort of attraction, more spiritual or intellectual are not found yet. On the contrary, Aurelian does not fall in love because of Incognita's beauty. In any case, it could be a product of his imagination, but still this would be a mock-romance allusion. Quixotic elements are found regarding the anti-romantic tone of *Incognita*, and one of them is the idealistic love, emotional responses and hyperbolic language, "the Quixotic delusions of Congreve's heroes, although primarily amatory, are occasionally military, as when they mistake a ceremonial chivalric joust for the real thing" (McKeon, *Origins* 62).

... his Thoughts were wholly taken up with the Beauty of the Face he had seen, and from the time she had taken him by the Hand, a successive warmth and chillness had play'd about his Heart, and surpriz'd him with an unusual Transport. (*Incognita* 18)

Later on, there is another hyperbolic passage when Hippolito confesses Aurelian which feelings he has for a lady he has met. In this paragraph we find three pronouns ('hast thou', 'thee', 'thy') used in the archaic manner. This pattern is not repeated consistently in the whole text, but just in a few instances. We might think that Congreve deliberately uses these archaisms in order to provide a sense of old-fashioned background to the whole scene and certainly, courtly love theme. As it is found in:

'Your *Florentine* Cupid is certainly' (said he) 'the most Expert in the World. I have since I saw you beheld the most Beautiful of Women. I am faln desperately in Love with her ... *Leonora!* (continued he) 'how hast thou stamp'd thine Image on my Soul! How much dearer am I to my self, since I have had thy Heavenly Form in keeping! Now, my *Aurelian*, I am worthy thee; my exalted Love has Dignified me, and rais'd me far above thy poor former Despicable *Hippolito.*' (*Incognita* 29)

The reader's opinion of Hippolito might change due to the narrator's bitter irony and how Leonora is portrayed as (ironically expressed too) a naïve lady who is talking too much about private affairs to a stranger. We cannot forget that this scene is taking place at a masquerade. She is the one who recklessly has discovered her identity to an unknown mask. Principally these masquerade balls attracted a lot of people because of the secrecy provoked by the fact that everybody could be someone else. In fact, she herself tells him that very possibly Aurelian and his beloved friend, Hippolito are there in the masquerade; and that Don Fabritio is suspicious and worried about not having the chance to discover it. In the same paragraph, and told by the narrator, who plays an essential role in the story telling process, compares Hippolito's cunning thoughts and Leonora's good-natured soul. Not only does not Hippolito reveal the truth about his identity but he also resolved to keep lying to Leonora and he openly assumes Lorenzo's identity:

... and avoiding as many words as handsomely he could, at the same time, entreated her to give him her Advice, toward the management of himself in this Affair [The conflict between both families]. *Leonora*, who never from the beginning had entertain'd the least Scruple of distrust ... (*Incognita* 19)

In the preface to *Incognita*²⁰⁵, we find that Congreve tells us about how he changes the 'Unity of Action' for 'Unity of Contrivance'. In the following fragment the term 'Contrivance' appears in the scene when Hippolito is considering if he should tell Leonora the truth:

A thousand things came into his Head in a minute, yet nothing that pleased him: and after so many Contrivances as he had formed for the discovery of himself, he found it more rational for him not to reveal himself at all that Night. (*Incognita* 20)

²⁰⁵ See chapter 3.2.2. for a detailed analysis of 'Unity of Contrivance'.

Hippolito deceptively assumes the identity of someone else that night by means of 'Unity of Contrivance' which means 'artificiality'. According to the *OED* 'contrivance' means "a device, especially in literary or artistic composition, which gives a sense of artificiality". Hippolito is not being honest to Leonora, there is a sense of artificiality in their relationship at this point. Therefore, it is difficult to think that Leonora's feelings will be mutual.

He is reluctant to tell the truth not because he cares about Leonora's judgement but because he will lose the chance to woo her as if she were a sort of trophy. Hippolito's intentions are not being fair and he is not a trustworthy character. He is thinking too carefully in order to be in love. Real love has no room for rationality. The narrator devotes some time to explain the inner conflict Hippolito has in his mind and how resolute he is in terms of his own interest. There is a hybridity between what he feels and how he has to behave in order to pursue that love, he finds himself "with a Heart full of Love, and a Head full of Stratagem" (*Incognita* 21)

... he could not foresee what effect the surprize would have, she must needs be in, at the appearance of a Stranger, whom she had never seen before, yet whom she had treated so familiarly. He knew Women were apt to shriek or swoon upon such Occasions, and should she happen to do either, he might be at a loss how to bring himself off. (*Incognita* 20)

This paragraph implies a sexist connotation in the manner he depicts women in general and how they normally react towards this sort of "surprises". First, the narrator is speaking through Hippolito's thoughts. Therefore, in this case is not the narrator's own judgement but Hippolito's. The general prejudice or assumption that women usually react fainting or yelling when they are given news is sexist and excessive.

Nonetheless, the real contrivance is the design of a plan to guarantee that he will see her again, no matter the cost. Hippolito performs a real theatrical moment when he feigns that he is feeling worse and he needs urgently to return home:

It came into his Head too, that under pretence of giving her an account of his Health, he might enquire of her the means how a Letter might be convey'd to her the next morning, wherein he might inform her gently of her mistake, and insinuate something of that Passion he had conceiv'd, which he was sure he could not have opportunity to speak of if he bluntly revealed himself. (*Incognita* 20)

Therefore, his contrivance is to ask her address in order to send a letter telling in what condition he will be the next morning. In this letter,²⁰⁶ he will explain everything to her and apologise for the unintentionally mess they got into due to his lack of determination.

... he of a suddain fetch'd his Breath violently as if some stitch or twinging smart had just then assaulted him ... He told her he found himself so ill, that he judged it more convenient for him to go home while he was in a condition to move, for he fear'd if he should once settle himself to rest he might not be able to stir. (*Incognita* 20)

Leonora trusts him completely, and she tells him about a window where they could exchange letters the next morning and keep in touch without risks. However, to Hippolito this is not enough and he again displays all his dramatic skills:

... when seeing him search hastily in his Pocket, she ask'd him if he miss'd any thing; he told her he thought a Wound which was not thoroughly heal'd bled a little, and that he had lost his Handkerchief. His design took; for she immediately gave him hers: which indeed accordingly he apply'd to the only Wound he was then griev'd with; which though it went quite through his Heart, yet thank God was not Mortal. (*Incognita* 21)

²⁰⁶ Qtd. in Palmer, *Fictional Minds* (242), Richardson described the letter as “the only natural Opportunity ... of representing with any Grace those lively and delicate Impressions which *Things present* are known to make upon the Minds of those affected by them.”

Hippolito is overflowing with love and little by little he believes his own lie. At the end of this passage he has demonstrated to be a highly skilled actor. It is noteworthy the fact that in this passage the narrator uses significant terms such as ‘contrivance’ and ‘design’. Both are employed by Congreve to explain the process to write. Therefore, Hippolito has a design which he executes by means of a ‘Unity of Contrivance’ which is basically an instrument to provide an artificial outcome. This happens intradiegetically, since it is a character who uses it to his own interests. However, as a parallel situation and extradiegetically, Congreve also uses the same Unity of Contrivance in the “Design, Contexture and Result of the Plot” (*Incognita* 5).

The scene ends with Hippolito receiving the delight of having the chance to kiss Leonora’s hand. And, in a very smart way, the narrator ends the paragraph with a superb summary of what he narrates for almost two entire pages. The fact that whereas the good-natured Leonora was really worried about whom he believes to be her cousin, Hippolito, on the other hand, was toying with her and unfairly approaching her in an improper manner if we have in mind that Hippolito is a complete stranger to her:

... and telling her that he did not doubt to receive a considerable Proportion of ease from the Application of what had so often kiss’d her fair Hand. *Leonora* who did not suspect the Compliment, told him she should be heartily glad if that or any thing in her power might contribute to his recovery; and wishing him well home, went into her House, as much troubled for her Cousin as he was joyful for his Mistress. (*Incognita* 21)

Thus, Hippolito’s only chance to see Leonora again is by means of her handkerchief. This object indirectly links both characters and leaves the reader the possibility of seeing each other again. The handkerchief symbolises ‘ardent passion’ or ‘zealous love’:

... a suddain snatch out of his Bosom a Handkerchief, which having kiss’d with a great deal of Ardour, he took *Aurelian* by the Hand ... And this Handkerchief which I so

zealously Caress, is the Inestimable Token which I have to make my self known to her.

(*Incognita* 29)

3.7.6. The letter

Regarding the letter addressed to Leonora,²⁰⁷ a couple of things must be said. Firstly, the introduction of this epistle gives an insight into Hippolito thoughts and a ‘real’ example of the story without being filtered through the narrator. Secondly, the hyperbolic and pompous vocabulary, archaic and exaggerated expressions to express Hippolito’s feelings is reflected in this letter²⁰⁸ in all its splendour. As we read in this fragment:²⁰⁹

... at the suddain Appearance of that Sun of Beauty, which at once shone so full upon my Soul. I could not immediately disengage my self from that Maze of Charms, to let you know how unworthy a Captive your Eyes had made through mistake. ... Your Tongue pursued the Victory of your Eyes, and you did not give me time to rally my poor Disordered Senses, so as to make a tolerable Retreat. (Incognita 32)

In this fragment, a sentence is reused again in *The Double Dealer* as it is mentioned by McKenzie in his notes about *Incognita*. Therefore, in Act IV, Scene II, we find a dialogue between Careless and Lady Plyant:

Lady *PLYANT*. The last of any Man in the World, by my Purity; now you make me swear – O Gratitude forbid, that I should ever

²⁰⁷ The hesitation in opening the letter is previously found in the anonymous work *The Most Excellent History of Antonius and Aurelia: Or, The Two Incomparable Lovers* (1682), if we compare both scenes:

... shy espyed the Letter, and admiring what should be the Contents, or how it should come there, she read the Superscription, and thought to look no further into it, but throw it away, which her heart would not suffer her to do till she had opened it to view the inside, but striving to over-master her affections, she tare it in the middle, yet when she had done so, she was angry with her self that she had not first seen the Contents, therefore laying the two pieces together before her, she read it all over (9-10, my own pagination).

She was once in a Mind to have burn’d the Letter, or to have stay’d for an Opportunity to send it again. But she was a Woman, and her Curiosity opposed it self to all thoughts of that Nature: at length with a firm Resolution, she opened it, and found Word for Word, what is under-written. (*Incognita* 32)

²⁰⁸ This letter echoes the one in *The Most Excellent History* (7-8, my own pagination), both of them at the beginning warn the addressee not to be surprised at the rashness of the letters.

²⁰⁹ The exchange of love letters or ‘billet-doux’ among lovers in novels at that time was very common.

be wanting in a respectful Acknowledgment of an intire
Resignation of all my best Wishes, for the Person and Parts
of so accomplish'd a Person, whose Merit challenges
much more, I'm sure, than my illiterate Praises can
description –

*CARELESS. [In a whining Tone.] Ah Heav'ns, Madam, you ruin me with Kindness;
Your charming Tongue pursues the Victory of your Eyes,
While at your Feet your poor Adorer dies. (IV. ii. 10-20)*

Whereas the letter should serve the purpose of clarifying the whole mess that they have caused and reveal their true identity, Hippolito denies being his cousin Lorenzo but he again lies to Leonora for the second time telling her that his real name is Aurelian. Therefore, normally in this type of novels about romances the epistle gives us or a particular character a revelation about something which has been hidden in the narrative. Every time a letter appears interrupting the narration for a moment is because something relevant to the development of the story is going to be told. However, in this case, the letter does not help the reader.

However, in this letter, an important theme in the story is found. On the one hand, Hippolito in Aurelian's costume expresses this sentiment of rejecting his duty and consequently, bringing a dishonour to his father. But, on the other hand, the character reflects upon his own inner wish to be happy with the person he wants to marry and not the imposed one. Thus, we find Hippolito talking as he was Aurelian praising and open his heart to Leonora which in reality is Incognita/Juliana's best friend. At this point in the story, we do not know yet that Juliana and Incognita are the same person, otherwise, the story line would not be so intricate and the reader would not be so much hooked on these sudden and violent infatuations among characters.

For Heaven's sake, disclose not to any Body your Knowledge of me, that I may not be forced to an immediate Act of Disobedience; for if my future Services and inviolate Love, cannot recommend me to your Favour, I shall find more comfort in the cold Embraces of a Grave, than in the Arms of the never so much admired (but by me dreaded) Juliana.
(Incognita 32-3)

In the last part of the letter, Hippolito shows all his courtly love skills addressing her as the one who has the power to control his happiness. As we have seen in the first encounter between Aurelian and Incognita, she is the one who acts as the subject and who controls the whole exchange of puns and ironies. In this case, Hippolito openly remarks the fact that is Leonora the one who has to decide what to do. He begs and asks in a quite desperately manner not to reveal his whereabouts since he is being looked for by his father (Aurelian's father), and also, the wish that he does not want to marry Juliana:

Think, Madam, of those severe Circumstances I lie under; and withal I beg you, think it is in your Power, and only in your Power, to make them happy as my Wishes, or much more miserable than I am able to imagine. That dear, inestimable (though undesign'd) Favour which I receiv'd from you, shall this Day distinguish me from the Crowd of your Admirers; that which I really applied to my inward bleeding Wound, the welcom Wound which you have made, and which, unless from you, does wish no Cure; then pardon and have pity on, O Adored Leonora, him, who is your's by Creation as he is Heaven's, though never so unworthy. Have pity on

Your

Aurelian. (Incognita 33)

And there is wordplay with the concepts of 'mistake', 'error', 'deceit' and eventually this metareference to a whole story in which identities are deceiving:

Pardon, Madam, the Continuation of the Deceit, and call it not so, that I appear'd to be other than my self; for Heaven knows I was not then my self, nor am I now my own.
(Incognita 32)

Hippolito is now playing the role of Aurelian and the letter ‘pulls the knot’ tighter. At this point it seems there is no way back for Hippolito to confess the truth but to continue with the mischievous thread of lies.

3.7.7. Archaism: the illusion of defying patriarchal authority

Patriarchal values and parental authority are two of the main themes. Congreve’s main concern in his production was to mirror and criticise contemporary society in order to provide a better example and eradicate foolishness. As a mock-romance or anti-romance,²¹⁰ patriarchal or archaic values are portrayed but also satirised. In order to explain this, we have to look at the plot. First of all, the complication in the plot results from the animosity Don Fabritio and his father, the Marquess of Viterbo (Incognita/Juliana’s brother and father) have against Don Lorenzo (Leonora’s cousin). According to Incognita’s siblings, Don Lorenzo killed a kinsman to them. Therefore, they are seeking revenge for such an insult. However, there is a solution to solve the problem which is the marriage between Juliana and Aurelian, Don Fabio’s son. The reconciliation of past offenses between two families by means of an arranged marriage is archaic, yet sexist and violate Juliana and Aurelian’s right to decide. If this was not clear enough, the narrator explicitly notes so:

I have another thing to inform you of, [Leonora to Hippolito (apparently Don Lorenzo)]
That whereas *Don Fabio* had interested himself in your Cause, in Opposition to the Marquess of *Viterbo*, by reason of the long Animosity between them, all hopes of his Countenance and Assistance are defeated: For there has been a Proposal of Reconciliation²¹¹ made to both Houses, and it is said it will be confirm’d (as most such

²¹⁰ Or as Hammond (110) pinpoints, “a spoof romance, a carnivalized form that would provide one of the novel’s generic roots. A gentle irony controls the narrative throughout, a mannered distortion of romance motifs that makes everywhere for anti-romantic bathos.”

²¹¹ The same theme appears in *The Most Excellent History* (4, my own pagination), “to procure the reconciliation betwixt their two Families”.

ancient Quarrels are at last) by the Marriage of *Juliana* the Marquess's Daughter, with *Aurelian*, Son to *Don Fabio*. (*Incognita* 18)

Basically, the whole plot of *Incognita* evolves around Aurelian's resolution about his duty as a son and his feelings for Incognita. He is certainly aware of the importance of making the right decision and more importantly, he knows that his happiness depends on which path he will follow. As a character he is more concerned with his own happiness when he says:

Aurelian commended his Prudence, in not discovering himself; and told him, If he could spare so much time from the Contemplation of his Mistress, he would inform him of an Adventure, though not so Accidental, yet of as great Concern to his own future Happiness. So related all that had happened to him with his Beautiful *Incognita*. (*Incognita* 30)

Aurelian reflects about his chances and what to do in order to not let his father down and behaves as expectedly but also, do not ruin his life and his chance to be truly happy with someone that he deeply loves:

... his Father knew of his being in Town, whom he must unavoidably Disoblige if he yet concealed himself, and Disobey if he came into his Sight; for he had already entertain'd an Aversion for *Juliana*, in apprehension of her being Imposed on him. (*Incognita* 30)

Aurelian has these two concerns, if he remains concealed in town he is being deliberately unfaithful to his father (for he knows he is in town already). However, if he goes to see him and he disobeys his father not accepting the arranged marriage, he is also being unfaithful to his duty as son.²¹² As we have read at the beginning of the story, his father has provided Aurelian with the best education and all the resources he might need. Therefore, Aurelian feels the inherited duty of obeying his father and give him back all

²¹² The protagonist of Behn's *The Fair Jilt* (16), prince Henrick, has the same dilemma, "how to divide his Soul between Love and Obedience."

the favours he gave to him first. But also, Aurelian explicitly expresses his neglect to that arranged marriage even going further, the ‘aversion’ he feels towards a person that he does not know yet just for the mere sake that it is imposed and that he would not have the chance to decide upon her. Obviously, Aurelian’s thought on this would might be different if he would not have met Incognita. She is quite the trigger of Aurelian’s opposition to his father. His feelings for her might be stronger than his responsibility as a son and here lays the fight between love and duty.

Congreve’s fatuous if loveable young noblemen believe everything they have ever heard about the idealism of romantic love. But they are also in revolt against tradition, for Congreve’s intricate plot hangs upon the fact that Aurelian is to be a pawn in a patriarchal, arranged marriage aimed at patching up an “ancient quarrel” between two houses, and the young Florentine spends most of the plot convinced that the forced marriage cruelly violates his naive liberty and requires an act of filial “disobedience”²¹³ ... The progressive resonance of this struggle between the freedom of love and the archaic constraints of tradition is reinforced when Congreve at one point compared Italian family feuds to English primogeniture, since according to harsh Italian law, revenge²¹⁴ must “descend lineally like an English state...”. (McKeon, *Origins* 263-4)

The conversation between the Marquess of Viterbo and Don Fabio is contextualised drinking wine. The scene results even more ironic providing they end up being a bit inebriated by wine:

²¹³ Certainly, we find this fear of disobeying the father in William Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1623, I, iii) in the character of Proteus, for instance:

Thus haue I shund the fire for feare of burning,
And drench’d me in the sea, where I am drown’d.
I fear’d to shew my Father *Iulias* Letter,
Least he should take exceptions to my loue,
And with the vantage of mine owne excuse
Hath he excepted most against my loue.
Oh, how this spring of loue resembleth
The vncertaine glory of an April day,
Which now shewes all the beauty of the Sun,
And by and by a clowd takes all away!

²¹⁴ Here, Sir Walter Raleigh (102) sees “a foretaste of the quality of Fielding.”

Having waited till the Wine had taken the effect proposed, and the Company were raised to an uncommon pitch of Cheerfulness, which he also encouraged by an Example of Freedom²¹⁵ and Good Humour. (*Incognita* 40)

An ironic portray of noble society is displayed in the following lines when we find the rest of the company all agree on praises and flattering words to both Aurelian and Incognita which in fact feels a bit affected and sycophantically contrived: “a large Encomium upon the Graces of *Aurelian* and the Beauties of *Juliana*” (*Incognita* 40). To what the two noblemen reacts in a positive manner showing their pride for having such admired descendants.

And in fact, this falseness is contrasted by the good-natured Duke which since the very beginning is portrayed as a truly noble character. We feel that he is really happy for the marriage even though he knows that it is arranged but the way in which the narrator introduces this character is not as affected as the others. The following paragraph deserves our attention to comment upon that:

... the Duke perceiving, out of a Principle of Generosity and Friendship, urged the present Consummation of the Marriage; telling them there was yet one day of publick Rejoycing to come, and how glad he should be to have it improved by so acceptable an Alliance; and what an honour it would be to have his Cousin's Marriage attended by the Conjunction of so extraordinary a Pair, the performance of which Ceremony would crown the Joy that was then in Agitation, and make the last day vie for equal Glory and Happiness with the first. (*Incognita* 40-1)

The duke is rejoiced by the fact that both marriages are going to be held at the same time But, it is explicitly said that this cheerful feeling comes from his generosity and friendship since he does not really have any social or political interest in it. However,

²¹⁵ See Pliny's *Natural History* (Book XIV, XXVIII, 278-9): “volgoque veritas iam attributa vino est”, “and truth has come to be proverbially credited to wine”. Here Congreve is referring to the proverb *in vino veritas*.

the way in which the marriage is still portrayed is seen more as a deal rather than the union of two people in sacred matrimony. In fact, marriage was seen as a contract normally to gain social status or income provided by your spouse's inheritance. This is explicitly said in the story, when Incognita is telling Aurelian her story, "Having been in my Infancy Contracted to a Man I could never endure," and the subsequent rejection and opposition to this "my Parent being likely to be forced to Marry him ... the great occasion of my grief" (*Incognita* 49).

Eventually, Aurelian and Incognita/Juliana's destiny is decided by means of a shake of hands between their respective fathers. Their wills are neglected and their future from now on is framing according to their fathers' own interest to resolve an ancient quarrel.

3.7.8. Aurelian-Hippolito dichotomy: loss of identity

Regarding Aurelian there is not a clear explanation of why he decides not to reveal his own identity. He takes Hippolito's identity, bearing in mind that he was a foreigner from Spain and he could handle being him as we read at the beginning of *Incognita*: "and something of resemblance in Feature and Proportion, that he look'd upon him as his second self" (*Incognita* 8). There is a whole paragraph where Aurelian tells Incognita who he is and asks her to reveal her identity as well. The thing is that whereas he is making his discourse he takes off his mask. Physically he is exposed but his real name remains unknown:

Whether Happiness or Misery will be the Consequence of that Curiosity, I am yet in fear, and submit to your Determination; but sure I am, not to depart *Florence* till you have made me the most miserable Man in it, and refuse me the fatal Kindness of Dying at your Feet. I am by Birth a *Spaniard*, of the City of *Toledo*; my name *Hippolito di Saviolina*: I

was yesterday a Man free, as Nature made the first;²¹⁶ to day I am fallen into a Captivity,
which must continue with my Life ... (But I had forgot to tell you, That *Aurelian* kept off
his Mask from the time that he told her he was of *Spain*, till the period of his Relation.)
(*Incognita* 23)

Regarding Aurelian-*Incognita* relationship, none of these characters seem to trust each other. *Incognita*'s prudence makes her not to reveal her real name, nor even gives clues about her lodgings. Aurelian also does not feel the impulse to tell his real name and thus, he uses Hippolito's identity. Aurelian makes himself clear about his feelings to Hippolito and also, the narrator explicitly remarks so to the reader, we find that Aurelian does not trust entirely *Incognita* or even her feelings for him: "... could he not Comfort himself with any Hopes when he should see her: He knew not where she lived, and she had made him no Promise of a second Conference" (*Incognita* 30). Yet Hippolito's fortune is not any better, he feels disheartened for not having been entirely sincere to Leonora. He is already in love with someone who does not have a single clue about him. He is invisible to her, nobody.

But what terrified him most of all, was his being an utter Stranger to *Leonora*; she had not the least knowledge of him but through mistake, and consequently could form no Idea of him to his Advantage. (*Incognita* 30)

²¹⁶ In Brett-Smith's edition of *Incognita* (1922), he points out that there is an allusion to John Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada* (7). Then we find the following lines by Almanzor. I believe this is a sort of praising allusion in his first work to Dryden, who was his mentor.

Almanz. No man has more contempt than I, of breath;
But whence hast thou the right to give me death?
Obey'd as Sovereign by thy Subjects be,
But know, that I alone am King of me.
I am as free as Nature first made man
'Ere the base Laws of Servitude began
When wild in woods the noble Savage ran.

In Congreve's library, item number 160 corresponds to Dryden's (Jno.) Comedies, Tragedies/& Opera's. 2 Vols. Large Papr. John Dryden (1631–1700). The comedies, tragedies, and operas. . . . Now first collected together, and corrected from the originals. In two volumes. London, for Jacob Tonson, Thomas Bennet, and Richard Wellington, 1701. Fol., in John C. See also items number 165, 166, 167, 168, 170, 171 (Hodges 1955). See also appendix 3.

At this point in the narration, a new and different problematic situation appears. Depicting the plot in a graphic manner, at the beginning of the story we find a thread. Along the course of the narrative this thread is being tangled. At this point we find two knots, one made by Aurelian and one made by Hippolito. Aurelian is supposed to be Hippolito and Hippolito is supposed to be Lorenzo, Leonora's cousin. But they are aware that both ladies might know each other and comment about their meetings. The denouement of this conversation would be the revelation that Hippolito has been wooing both women at the same time:

He look'd upon it as an unlucky thought in *Aurelian* to take upon him his Name, since possibly the Two Ladies were acquainted, and should they communicate to each other their Adventures, they might both reasonably suffer in their Opinions, and be thought guilty of Falsehood, since it would appear to them as One Person pretending to Two.
(*Incognita* 30-1)

However, in order to solve the problem Aurelian thinks to be better if Hippolito writes to Leonora using his name. Now, there is another knot where Hippolito denies to be Lorenzo but Aurelian. In doing so, the "Unity of Contrivance" explained by the author in the preface is portrayed in the story:

Well this was concluded on, after a great many other Reasons used on either Side, in favour of the Contrivance; they at last argued themselves into a Belief, that Fortune had befriended them with a better Plot, than their regular Thinking could have contriv'd.
(*Incognita* 31)

Regarding metareferences found in the text, there is another one if we dare to find the parallelism. There is a relation between the novelty of the work itself and the newness of the adventure Leonora believes she is about to begin with Hippolito (Aurelian):

... the Novelty of the Adventure made her repeat her Curiosity ... At last her Familiarity with the Expressions grew to an Intimacy, and what she at first permitted she now began

to like. She thought there was something in it a little more serious, than to be barely Gallantry. (*Incognita* 33)

The character of Leonora reflects about the novelty of the adventure which attracts her attention and also provides her with the enough motivation to read the letter. In the same manner, readers are attracted to *Incognita* for the supposed newness in it. Something called ‘A Novel’ presupposes something different for the quasi-old-fashioned romances. In fact, she proceeds stating that she feels close to the expression used in the letter, which grows to a sort of intimacy. But also, she adds that all the flattery connected to archaic courtly love is not part of Hippolito’s wooing. That rejection of courtliness is Leonora’s opinion, although we realise this is being mocked by the narrator throughout. This ‘newness’ in how events are expressed in a more humane and realistic manner is formally explained in the preface:

Novels are of a more familiar nature; Come near us, and represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with Accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unrepresented, such which not being so distant from our Belief bring also the pleasure nearer us. (*Incognita* 4)

3.7.9. The care of Providence

Providence is another theme which is quite recurrent in *Incognita*, and has been commented extensively in books and articles on Restoration literature. Providence and poetical justice are both present in *Incognita* and as we shall see, characters’ fate depend massively on it.

But such was the extraordinary Care of Providence²¹⁷ in directing the Sword, that it only past under his Arm, giving no Wound to *Aurelian*, but a little Bruise between his Shoulder and Breast with the Hilt. (*Incognita* 28)

Incognita inherits the figure of Providence from Protestantism.²¹⁸ Characters are presented as puppets of fate. Although they do not seek risky adventures or do not deserve calamities, they face obstacles provided by destiny. As Fuchs (23) explicitly says “fate seems to have it in for them no matter what they do”:

... during the Restoration period, poetical justice is, on the contrary, not only aesthetically important for the way it regulated the “Fable” (the plot or design) of most Restoration plays, comedies as well as tragedies, so that vice and folly would be shown as punished or scorned and virtue, even if unfortunate, as approved. (A. Williams, *An Approach* 37-8)

In *Incognita*, all characters are subdued by the contrivances of Providence which supposedly is the entity which manipulates characters as it pleases. Because, “... nothing is so casual and uncertain, as to be exempted from the disposal of Providence. For what seems accidental to us, is not chance, but Providence” (Sherlock 42). At the very beginning, Aurelian has the impression that Providence is in his part, but it is just a mere mirage: “*Aurelian* could not contain the satisfaction he conceiv’d in the welcome Fortune had prepar’d for his dear *Hippolito*” (*Incognita* 9).

²¹⁷ As McKenzie pinpoints, this same sentence appears later in Congreve’s tragedy *The Morning Bride* (III. ii. 74-79):

HELLI. The Care of Providence sure left it there,
To arm your Mind with Hope. Such Piety
Was never heard in vain: Heav’n has in Store
For you, those Blessings it with-held from him.
In that Assurance live; which Time, I hope,
And our next Meeting will confirm.

²¹⁸ See Alexandra Walsham. *Providence in Early Modern England*. Oxford UP, 2011 to have a proper background of the importance of Providence.

Providence²¹⁹ is the agent which regulates every single event in the story. As Williams describes it; “the beautifully carved images of a Providential justice that governs all human affairs” (Williams, “Poetical Justice” 541). Thus, there are religious references in the story, as for instance, the “Spirit of Contradiction and of *Eve*”²²⁰ (*Incognita* 35). In the Old Testament, Eve was regarded as a sinner. It is believed that there is a reference to John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667-74)²²¹. In this masterpiece, Eve is the responsible one for being the first who feed herself from the Tree of Knowledge. Nevertheless, Adam also fed himself from the Tree in order to feel compassion and love for her, for her disobedience.

Certainly, there are many instances where the word Providence is overtly stated in the text:

... but, as Providence would have it, there was only some very small matter forgot, which was recovered in a short whisper. (*Incognita* 13)

But such was the extraordinary Care of Providence in directing the Sword, that it only past under his Arm, giving no Wound to *Aurelian*. (*Incognita* 28)

... by the greatest Providence in the World, going backwards fell down over some loose Stones that lay in his Way. (*Incognita* 46)

²¹⁹ Providence will continue to be a theme clearly important in later fiction. For instance, in Henry Fielding’s novels, the care of providence is part and parcel of the fortune and misfortune of his characters. As Williams (104) states, “from *Joseph Andrews* and *Jonathan Wild* to *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*, proceed by way of the most strange and startling coincidences, the most amazing and fortuitous mishaps, the most extraordinary encounters and intrusions of persons necessary to the relief or deliverance of a hero or heroine.” See especially chapter 5 in *An Approach* (91-106).

²²⁰ We find a similar reference to Eve and its ‘spirit’ often affecting women in Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (III, i):

Sp.

Item, she is proud.

La.

Out with that too:

It was Eues legacie, and cannot be t’ane from her.

²²¹ In Congreve’s library item number 381. (Hodges 1955)

There are other terms which relate to Providence. These are luck, fortune, chance, or mistake. For example, the word luck and its opposite appear in the following examples, “when he unluckily miscarried” (13), “at the luckiest Accident” (29), “an unlucky thought” (30), “unluckily the Bit of Paper” (45). The word fortune, “the welcome Fortune” (9), “by good fortune” (15), “you had the fortune” (17), “at his good Fortune” (21), “the Misfortune of his Governour” (29), “that Fortune had befriended them” (31), “by good Fortune” (36), “if fortune so far befriended” (38), “the Contemplation of his Misfortunes” (45), “But so was his Fortune” (54), “lamenting the Misfortune of her loss” (61). The word chance, “by good Chance” (43), “happy chance” (61). The word mistake, “apprehending their mistake” (11), “she had mistaken him” (16), “the Lady of her mistake” (17), “to humour the mistake” (18), “inform her gently of her mistake” (20), “grounding their Mistake” (27), “inform his Friend of his Mistake” (28), “he was mistaken for *Lorenzo*” (30), “through mistake” (30), “made through mistake” (32), “removing her father from her Mistake” (33), “*Leonora* was indeed mistaken” (36), “were under a mistake” (37), “told them their mistake,” “concerned for their mistake” and “better of their mistake” (38), “she found her Mistake,” “had mistaken the Lodgings” and “Guilty of a Mistake” (44), “she was still mistaken” (60), “unknown and mistaken Rivalship” (62).

Nonetheless, providence and poetic justice are recurrent themes throughout Congreve’s entire literary career, providence will be the supreme entity which will pull the strings in terms of characters’ fate and development of the story. McKenzie’s research of Congreve’s works gives us a useful insight into how much Congreve repeatedly deploys this term and its function. These are several examples we find in the rest of his production.

ALMERIA. Mercy! Providence! O speak,

Speak to it quickly, quickly; speak to me,
Comfort me, help me, hold me, hide me, hide me,
Leonora, in thy Bosom, from the Light,
And from my Eyes. (*The Mourning Bride* II. vi. 5-9)

ALPHONSO. ...

Seest thou, how just the Hand of Heav'n has been?
Let us who thro' our Innocence survive,
Still in the Paths of Honour persevere ... (*The Mourning Bride* V. Last scene 41-43)

To whose rich Cargo they may make Pretence,
And fatten on the Spoils of Providence:
So Criticks throng to see a New Play split,
And thrive and prosper on the Wrecks of Wit. (*The Mourning Bride*, epilogue, 23-26)

Sir *PAUL PLYANT*. ...

I should die of 'em, like a Child, that was cutting his Teeth –
I should indeed, *Thy* – therefore come away; but Providence
has prevented all, therefore come away, when I bid you. (*The Double Dealer* II. iv. 83-
85)

MASKWELL. ... Let me

think: Meet her at eight – hum – ha! By Heav'n I have
it – If I can speak to my Lord before – Was it my Brain
or Providence? ... (*The Double Dealer* III. iii. 13-16)

MASKWELL. Mean? Not to disappoint the Lady I assure you – Ha, ha,
ha, how gravely he looks – Come, come, I wont perplex

you. 'Tis the only Thing that Providence could have contriv'd to make me capable of serving you, either to my Inclination or your own Necessity. (*The Double Dealer* III. iv. 43-47)

Sir PAUL PLYANT. Your humble Servant. I am I thank Heav'n in a fine way of living, as I may say, peacefully and happily, and I think need not envy any of my Neighbours, blessed be Providence – Ay, truly, Mr. *Careless* ... (*The Double Dealer* III. vi. 57-61)

Sir PAUL PLYANT. ... and it is a great Grief to me, indeed it is, Mr. *Careless*, that I have not a Son to inherit this – 'tis true, I have a Daughter, and a fine dutiful Child she is, though I say it, blessed be Providence I may say; for indeed, Mr. *Careless*, I am mightily beholden to Providence – A poor unworthy Sinner ... (*The Double Dealer* III. viii. 8-14)

Sir PAUL PLYANT. O PROVIDENCE, what a Conspiracy have I discover'd – But let me see to make an end on't ... But Providence has been constant to me in discovering this Conspiracy; still I am beholden to Providence, if it were not for Providence, sure poor Sir *Paul* thy Heart would Break. (*The Double Dealer* IV. ix. 1-2, 24-28)

Sir PAUL PLYANT. The Company, gads-bud, I don't know, my Lord, but here's the strangest Revolution, all turn'd topsie turvy; as I hope for Providence. (*The Double Dealer* V. xx. 5-7)

VALENTINE. *Tattle*, I thank you, you would have interposed between me

and Heav'n; but Providence laid Purgatory in your way –

You have but Justice. (*Love for Love* V. xii. 87-89)

SURE Providence at first design'd this Place

To be the Player's Refuge in Distress;

For still in every Storm, they all run hither,

As to a Shed, that shield 'em from the Weather. (*Love for Love* V. xii. 87-89)

If we pay attention the word 'Providence' in *The Double Dealer* is always used by the same character, Sir Paul Plyant. This recurrent use of the word providence in reference to Heaven and God was very much criticised by Jeremy Collier and Congreve brought the issue back in his *Amendments*:

His next Objection is, that Sir *Paul*, who he Observes bears the Character of a Fool, makes mention too often of the word *Providence*, for says Mr. *Collier*, *the meaning must be* (by the way, that *must* is a little hard upon me) *that Providence is a ridiculous Supposition; and that none but Blockheads pretend to Religion.* What will it avail me in this place to signifie my own meaning, when this modest Gentleman says, I *must* mean quite contrary? (McKenzie, *Amendments* III, 92)

3.7.10. 'Dramatick Writing'

Incognita seems to be a novel in form, using a dramatic style. *Incognita* could be easily performed on stage and divided into acts and scenes. This technique is what Congreve called "Dramatick Writing".²²²

Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, William Congreve, and Henry Fielding imported dramatic techniques into their early fictional works to provoke readers' and authors' meta-awareness of the constructedness of prose fiction ... The reading audience, like the

²²² As Ros Ballaster asserts in her article "Classical French Fiction" (385), one of the pattern English writers imitated from the French was "an attention to performance and the ways in which prose writing can imitate the sense of physical and bodily presence given in dramatic performance."

audience at a play, is expected to help shape meaning instead of passively viewing or ingesting a text. (Widmayer 2)

One of the points in the narrative where McKenzie tells us of the presence of Congreve's dramattick writing is when Leonora is accompanied by several ladies to the place the tilting is going to be held. In this moment, the narrator explicitly says: "where we will leave²²³ them drinking Chocholate till 'tis time for them to go" (*Incognita* 36).

Therefore, this moment reminds of a change of scene. The narrator, apart from digressing very often, is making the reader involved in the action.

There are two doctoral dissertations, these of Wilhelm Krohne and Günter Schopper,²²⁴ where they even dared to provide a dramatic structure²²⁵ in acts and scenes:

Thus Wilhelm Krohne thinks that *Incognita* has an easily perceived three-act structure with five scenes in each act, while Günter Schopper prefers a five-act structure. Besides, Schopper notes as resemblances to the drama that there is very little psychological motivation and description of inner states in the book, and that most of the information is conveyed to the reader in dialogue. (Drougge 74-5)

Later in the story there is another reference to his particular dramatic manner of telling events when we find: "Well, we will leave them both fretting and contriving to no

²²³ Compare to Scarron's *The Comic Romance* (145), when the narrator says at the end of chapter I, Second Part: "It's enough you know he got lost in the woods and that, sometimes unable to see a thing and sometimes lit by the moon, at daybreak he came upon a small farm where he thought it was time to let his horse feed, and here we shall leave him." Congreve's own a copy in French, items number 569, 570 Scarron *Romant Comique*. Paul Scarron (1616–1660). *Le romant comique*. A Leiden, chez Jean Sambix, 1655. 12° and —Ditto *Le romant c.omique*. 3 pt. A Amsterdam, chez Pierre Mortier, 1695. 12°. He also owned a translated edition to English, item number 572, —'s *Comical Works Translated by/ Mr Tho. Browne* The whole comical works of Mon. Scarron. . . . Translated by Mr. Tho. Brown . . . and others. The third edition, revised and corrected. London, for J. Nicholson, J. and B. Sprint, R. Parker, and Benj. Tooke, 1712. 8°. (Hodges 1955)

²²⁴ See Krohne's *Congreves Novelle Incognita* (50-3) and Schopper's *Aufbau und Sprache von Congreves "Incognita"* (5).

²²⁵ I am currently working in a new project, which is a concise study of the only (as far as we know) adaptation to theatre of Congreve's *Incognita*. I found the manuscript of this play while researching about *Incognita* in Oxford, at the Bodleian (Weston Library). The play was written by Alexander Dalrymple in 1795 (MS Don. e. 55).

purpose” (*Incognita* 40) in which the narrator leaves both character worrying about their discovery and the consequence this will cause to their relationship with the two ladies.

Thus, there is a sense of changing scene for a moment, leaving both characters in this precise moment. We, as readers change place and go to another location leading by the narrator who is the one in charge of deciding when to stop or resume each scene. Congreve gives us the sense of being part of a play telling without showing and in fact that is exactly what he wanted to provide the audience (readers) with *Incognita*.²²⁶ (Salzman 328)

Another instance of dramatic writing is when Aurelian and Hippolito realise that they have been discovered and that Aurelian is forced to marry a woman to resolve an ancient quarrel. Hippolito unable to process what was happening asks Aurelian what to do. Aurelian adopting a dramatic tone replies “We must suffer” (*Incognita* 42) and in this moment Aurelian rises his voice and let his speech flow.

Characters in romantic fiction habitually spend valuable time declaiming (if possible to a receptive audience) instead of acting to improve their situations. Congreve brilliantly satirizes this unhealthy habit of self-indulgence in “fine” feelings. (Stephenson 339)

Were it not for the fact that this is not a play, we must consider Aurelian’s speech as a powerful soliloquy. In fact, Congreve in *Incognita* is constantly mixing between direct and indirect speech, between the stage and the narrative world, between showing and telling. As McKeon points out quoting Genette, imitation at its simplest is a “‘direct representation’ ‘borrowed from the theatre’, and its project as ‘making one forget that it is the narrator telling’, creating a ‘feeling [...] of literal fidelity’” (McKeon, “The Eighteenth-Century Challenge” 44). And this happens “when immediately raising his Voice, he cry’d out,” (*Incognita* 42) the following:

²²⁶ See Salzman, *English Prose Fiction*, Chapter 17 “The Restoration Novel” particularly subchapter IV on Congreve’s *Incognita* entitled “*Incognita*: The Elegant Balance” (328-337).

‘Oh ye unequal Powers²²⁷, why do ye urge us to desire what ye doom us to forbear; give us a Will to chuse, then curb us with a Duty to restrain that Choice!²²⁸ Cruel Father, Will nothing else suffice! Am I to be the Sacrifice to expiate your Offences²²⁹ past; past ere I was born? Were I to lose my Life, I’d gladly Seal your Reconcilement with my Blood. But Oh my Soul is free, you have no Title to my Immortal Being, that has Existence independent of you Power; and must I lose my Love,²³⁰ the Extract of that Being, the Joy, Light,²³¹ Life, and Darling of my Soul?²³² No, I’ll own my Flame, and plead my Title too

²²⁷ Compare this to Osmyn’s speech in *The Mourning Bride* (II. vi. 10-12):

[*Coming forward.*] Amazement and Illusion!
Rivet me, and nail me where I stand, ye Pow’rs,
That motionless I may be still deceiv’d.

But also, in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, where ‘Powers’ is a category in the celestial world. It corresponds to number 6. There are references in Book I, 622; Book II, 11, 310, 456, 522, 958; Book III, 100, 213, 320, 390, 397; Book IV, 63, 939; Book V, 601, 694, 740, 769, 821, 837, 838; Book VI, 22, 61, 85, 686, 786, 898; Book VII, 162; Book VIII, 379; Book IX, 136, 600, 1048; Book X, 34, 85, 186, 395, 460; Book XI, 221; Book XII, 577 in the edition by McHenry (1996). See also, John Milton. *Paradise Lost Books I & 2*, eds. A. N. Jeffares and Suheil Bushrui and notes by Richard James Beck (20), for an explanation of the different types of celestial orders.

²²⁸ Compare also to Etherege’s *The Comical Revenge* (III. vi. 16-19):

Lovis.
What shall I do! Ye Powers above be kind,
Some counsel give to my distracted mind:
Friendship and shame within me so contend,
I know not how to shun or meet my Friend.

²²⁹ “To expiate his Treason [Man’s disobedience]” in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (Book III, 207).

²³⁰ Aurelian’s indecision reminds a bit of Palmyra’s in Dryden’s *Marriage-a-la-mode* in the shape also of a soliloquy (V. i. 338):

Palm.
Duty and love, by turns possesses my soul,
And struggle for a fatal victory:
I will discover he’s the King; Ah, no:
That will perhaps save him;
But then I am guilty of a father’s ruine.
What shall I do or not do? either way
I must destroy a Parent, or a Lover.
Break heart; for that’s the least of ills to me,
And Death the onely cure.

²³¹ Compare to Camus’ *A True Tragical History* (141), where Vannoza compares Alcimus to light, which is a recurrent metaphor in *Incognita*: “O thou Light of my Eyes how art thou clouded! those short and little glances of thee which I once enjoyed, did give me some sort of consolation.”

²³² As Destiny puts in, in Scarron’s *The Comic Romance*, “a man who is in love is not preoccupied for long by any feeling other than his own passion” (94). And certainly, this ‘strange’ behaviour of gentlemen in love is also ironized in Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (II, i), when Speed is making fun of his master Valentine for being in love:

Marry by these speciall markes: first, you haue learn’d (like Sir *Proteus*) to wreath your Armes like a Male-content: to relish a Loue-song, like a *Robin*-redbreast: to walke alone like one that had the pestilence: to sigh, like a Schoole-boy that had lost his *A. B. C.* to weep like a yong wench that had buried her Grandam: to fast, like one that takes diet: to watch, like one that feares robbing: to speake puling, like a beggar at *Hallow-Masse*: You were wont, when you laughed, to crow like a cocke; when you walk’d, to walke like one of the *Lions*: when you fasted, it was presently after

– But hold, wretched *Aurelian*, hold, whither does thy Passion hurry thee? Alas! the cruel fair *Incognita* Loves thee not! She knows not of thy Love! If she did, what Merit hast thou to pretend? – Only Love – Excess of Love.²³³ And all the World has that. All that have seen her. Yet I had only seen her once, and in that once I lov'd above the World; nay, lov'd beyond my self, such vigorous Flame, so strong, so quick she darted at my Breast; it must rebound, and by Reflection, warm her self.²³⁴ Ah! welcome Thought, lovely deluding Fancy, hang still upon my Soul, let me but think, that once she Loves and perish my Despair.' (*Incognita* 42-3)

At the beginning he is addressing in his utter desperation to the “unequal powers” which are leading him towards frustration. This own monologue by Aurelian to its inner thoughts and passions out loud is indeed an explicit description of the human soul. Therefore, Aurelian asks himself why we have a tendency towards what it is doomed or forbidden. He is asking for a will to decide and not being trapped in the irrational behaviour. He is openly showing his human weakness in deciding. Now, he is a simple human soul begging for a solution, he is fretting himself for his inability to design (using Congreve terminology) a plan to set him free.

In this first paragraph there is an allusion to Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*, Helga Drougge compares and claims the similarities between Aurelian's dilemma and that of Volscius. The fictitious dramatist in the play, Bayes, comments upon the scene where Volscius is having a “combat betwixt Love and Honour”²³⁵ (III. ii). Interestingly, the

dinner: when you look'd sadly, it was for want of money: And now you are Metamorphis'd with a Mistris, that when I looke on you, I can hardly thinke you my Master.

²³³ Compare to Camus' *A True Tragical History* (49), “Those that say that this malady is an excess of Love, as the Fever is of natural heat, do therein confess that though it be a sort of Love it is but a sick one; and as a hot and burning Fever brings us even to the neighbourhood of death, so a hot and flaming jealousy is easily brought to consume the fewel of Love that feeds it”.

²³⁴ “His Mistresses eyes were Suns, and that his were two Chrystal balls, which receiving their rays in their centre, reflected them on his heart, which by that means was burnt” In Sorel's *Lysis* (The Translator to the Reader, Seventh Book).

²³⁵ “The conflict between love and honour which is a central theme in heroic drama modulates in the political tragedy of the Exclusion Crisis into a tormented sense that political conflict vitiates both the macrocosm of state and the microcosm of family; but the most we can say is that this prefigures the eighteenth-century focus on the domestic sphere.” (Owen 31)

prince Volscius is reflecting upon his own dilemma by means of soliloquies in the very same manner Aurelian does:

*[Volscius fits down to pull on his Boots: Bayes stands by and over acts the Part as he speaks it]*²³⁶

Vols. How has my passion made me *Cupids'* scoff!

This hasty Boot is on, the other off,

And sullen lyes, with amorous design

To quit loud fame, and make that Beauty mine.

My legs, the Emblem of my various thoughts,

Shew to what sad distraction I am brought.

Sometimes, with stubborn Honour, like this Boot,

My mind is guarded, and resolv'd to do't:

Sometimes, again, that very mind, by Love

Disarmed, like this other Leg does prove.

Vols. Shall I to Honour or to Love give way?

Go on, cryes Honour; tender Love says, nay:

Honour, aloud, commands, pluck both boots on;

But softer Love does whisper, put on none.

What shall I do? what conduct shall I find

To lead me through this twy-light of my mind?

For as bright Day with black approach of Night

Contending, makes a doubtful puzzling light;

So does my Honour and my Love together

Puzzle me so, I can resolve for neither.

²³⁶ This stage direction appears in Q3 (1675).

[Exit with one Boot on, and the other off.]²³⁷

Then, he starts to place the blame on his father, his “cruel father” to whom “nothing else suffice.” He, indeed, is the one chosen by his father to redeem the honour of the family for deeds committed long before he was even born. He is placing himself against the patriarchal control of his father who wants to use him as the “scapegoat” to restore peace between the two noble families.

If we pay close attention to this particular address to his father, maybe we find parallelisms to another chapter in history. “Am I to be the Sacrifice to expiate your Offences past; past ere I was born? Were I to lose my Life, I’d gladly Seal your Reconcilement with my Blood” (*Incognita* 42). Undoubtedly, there are references here to the Bible. We find words like “sacrifice”,²³⁸ “offences”, “reconcilement” and “blood”. Jesus Christ was sent by God to Earth to reconcile humankind. This reconciliation comes after Adam and Eve’s betrayal who were doomed to wander on Earth after being dispelled from paradise.²³⁹ Aurelian cannot be compared to Christ in any sense, but he represents the archetype of the saviour who is responsible for restoring order.

In the middle of his confusion, he even offers his life and his blood, his entire existence to solve the ancient quarrel. To my mind, this cannot be said seriously, it is more a sudden fit of anger and courage to show his father how brave and determined he could be. Since he is talking to himself out loud and the only person who is currently listening to him is his beloved friend Hippolito he is being too extreme. I even dare to say that very likely this is the instance where we, as reader, will be able to see the most real face of Aurelian throughout the story.

²³⁷ I have used a modern spelling of the long ‘s’ throughout the quote. In Q3 (1675) there is a slight modification of this stage direction, Volscius “goes out hopping with one Boot on, and the other off.”

²³⁸ See Korshin’s *Typologies* (87).

²³⁹ John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) plays a crucial role and is massively influential during Restoration times. Indeed, there is a book published in 2016 which is entirely devoted to this topic called *Milton in the Long Restoration*, edited by Blair Hoxby and Ann Baynes Coiro, Oxford UP. See also *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, edited by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, Oxford UP, 2008.

Readers are experiencing a real process in Aurelian's mind. It must be remembered that the paragraph is in direct speech so it is Aurelian's own voice.

He stands as an independent being, whose soul is free. He even addresses his father directly, "you have no Title to my Immortal Being" (42). In a sense, it is a way to express that his father will not ever be able to control what he feels and even though he forces him to marry someone else, that does not imply that he controls his own soul. Our souls are immortal beings, the only thing that cannot be touched or controlled by others. Thus, he declares to have an "Existence independent of [her father] Power." Later, by means of a rhetorical question he wonders his own feelings for Incognita. I consider this to be the validation of "the match" between Aurelian and Incognita for Aurelian's part; "must I lose my Love, the Extract of that Being, the Joy, Light, Life, and Darling of my Soul?". To what he answers to himself, "No, I'll own my Flame, and plead my Title too" (42). He is determined and thorough in his convictions and desires, and he is the doer of his destiny and, apparently, he will fight for what he considers is his right to be truly happy.

The last part of the monologue corresponds to his doubts about Incognita's feelings for him: "But Hold, wretched *Aurelian*, hold, whither does thy Passion hurry thee? He is self-conscious²⁴⁰ of his overflow of emotions. His own rationality in an act of self-discovery warns him to reduce the speed of his calculations. But, who can impose rationality on a lover? Aurelian switches to the negative side of it, taking for granted that Incognita does not love him. However, in case she knows about his feeling, how valuable is that? (according to Aurelian), since Incognita awakens everybody love for her, Aurelian

²⁴⁰ William Congreve and Henry Fielding bring their characters closer to their reading and viewing audiences. In essence, there is a shift from representational to presentational dramatic or dramatic-narrative techniques being used to structure early novels. In broad terms, reading and viewing audiences are expected to engage with dramatic and novelistic characters after the turn of the eighteenth century, whereas before, during the Restoration, the audience was kept at a distance. (Widmayer 233)

being in love is just a mere consequence of Incognita's charms, nothing else, "Only Love – Excess of Love. And all the World has that. All that have seen her" (42).

He concludes with a self-deprecating thought on his love for Incognita. He being aware that he just saw her once, not enough to feel such a magnificent love he is sure to feel for her. Yet he explicitly confirms he loves her more than himself, there is a "flame" inside him which is so strong that entered his breast. The metaphor of the fire is used twice in the paragraph. First, he declares himself owner of his own flame, meaning owner of his own sentiments. Second, this flame enters his inner self from Incognita. It is a "vigorous Flame, so strong", fire, among the elements the most powerful but the intensity of fire could produce a pain of the highest level, as Aurelian feels. Therefore, Aurelian's passion for Incognita, to my mind, is not so bland as it may appear. I deduce, this relationship could develop into a more passionate of its kind and not into a so "politically correct" one, in a similar vein, say, to Aphra Behn's romantic affairs. His fit of rage in the shape of a monologue/soliloquy concludes with the hope of ever being loved by her, "let me think, that once she Loves and perish my Despair."

Undoubtedly, the scene is powerful in speech. Were it to be performed on stage, it would be a powerful soliloquy.²⁴¹ The narrator tells us in what condition Aurelian left himself, "as if he had mustered up all his Spirits purely to acquit himself of that passionate Harangue" (*Incognita* 43). Unable to articulate a word, he remains in silence and being compared to an alarm clock,²⁴² "insensible" and being deprived now of energy enough to compose himself after spending "all its force in one violent Emotion" (*Incognita* 43). His beloved friend had to bring his conscience back to the world being unable to do so, "*Hippolito* shook him by the Arm to rouze him from his Lethargy" (*Incognita* 43).

²⁴¹ "... fairly common in early third-person narration, particularly acute emotions spur the protagonist to soliloquize: when thoughts are reported, the first person is never far behind. (The technique is clearly adapted from the dramatic monologue.)" (Paige 108)

²⁴² Alarm Clock.

This episode in *Incognita* reminds of a similar one in *The Mourning Bride*.²⁴³ Even part of the sentence uttered by Osmyn is extremely similar to that found in *Incognita*: “By Heav’n thou’st rouz’d me from my Lethargy | The Spirit which was deaf to my own Wrongs ...” (III. ii. 32-32).

... however remote the genre and circumstances of *Incognita* may be from *The Mourning Bride*, the complaints of the protagonists against heavenly justice in each work are countered almost immediately by events which demonstrate plainly how quickly Heaven may work, through human error or blindness or even wickedness, to bring about a happiness the complainant may have thought lost. (Williams 184-5)

Later on, we encounter a series of scenes intertwined and mixed together which remind of an on-stage sequence. This scenario has a comic tone because of the rapid coming and going of characters.

... the strategy of the early novelists aimed at an ultimate metaphor by identifying the mimesis of the “stage of the world” (the content of all narration) by means of the mimesis of the actual theatrical stage. The reader would then be expected to feel as though he were looking at a stage. Theoreticians, too, interpreted novels in this way, and novelists themselves liked to subtitle their works with terms taken from drama. (Aercke, “Background” 131, note 2)

The first character who leaves the scene is Aurelian when he realises (told by a lacquey) that his father might be the one in the coach outside the same building looking for him. He decides to leave the lodging through the garden and then the street. Suddenly, a woman enters the room when Hippolito remains thoughtful about what to do next. This woman is half-veiled,²⁴⁴ thus, concealing her own identity. The first thing Hippolito concludes is that it was Leonora, that was a sudden rush of emotion and the need he has

²⁴³ See Drougge (87).

²⁴⁴ See Scarron’s ‘The Two Rival Brothers’ in *The Comic Romance* for a similar scene (250).

to talk to her, to explain everything. But, then putting in practice his rationality he concludes the woman could not be Leonora, she differs in height. The woman tells Hippolito that she is looking for Hippolito di Saviolina to talk about a matter of utmost importance. We now deduce she has to be no other than Incognita. Hippolito realising he was not the person wanted remains in silence. Recalling the adventure told by his friend, he recognises her to be Incognita and Hippolito to be in reality Aurelian. He says to the lady that in this moment Hippolito is not there.

Another change in setting takes place, now it is Hippolito who abandons the room and leaves the lady alone there. He himself wanders along the house and the garden in search for his friend. The narrator comes back to the room where the lady is, and described what she is about to do. Feeling impatient she decides to put pen to paper and write a letter. At the end of her writing she unexpectedly hears a noise, we deduce it could be Hippolito coming back from his unsuccessful quest. Taking for granted her recently written letter is of no purpose because now she will have the time to talk to the gentleman she tears the letter into pieces. But it turns out to be two old gentlemen. Automatically she regrets her sudden decision of tearing up the letter. Now, two new characters enter the room and accompanied the lady in the same scene, Don Fabio and the Marquess of Viterbo; Aurelian's father and Incognita's father.

To my mind, in this peculiar intertwined of scenes when characters change setting very rapid to the whole pace of the narration, it is a self-reflection of the irony of the novel itself. *Incognita* deals with concealment and in this particular moment, a father and a daughter are in the same room treating each other as strangers. Clearly, the lady (presumably Incognita) knows and has the advantage of being half-veiled but she knows him to be his father. The two gentlemen leave the room ashamed of having frightened the

lady. However, she does not feel uneasy about her father looking for the same man as herself.

They apologise to the lady for their indiscretion and she, without uttering a single word, leaves the room and go directly towards her coach and abandons the scene as fast as she could. Now, the two gentlemen are in the room alone thinking about their mistake and the weirdness of the situation when again Hippolito enters the scene coming back from his search. Hippolito finds no lady and two old gentlemen instead. He wants to tell the lady the ‘Errant’²⁴⁵ gentleman’s whereabouts but she is gone.

Hippolito masters the situation twice when he realises that one of the gentlemen could be Aurelian’s father recalling the memory he has of him from the recent tilting. Hippolito displays a certain amount of wit and intelligence dealing with this situation in which he appears to be the main character pulling the strings: “being confident he was not known to him, he ventur’d to ask him concerning a Lady whom just now he had left in that Chamber” (*Incognita* 44). The two gentlemen quite embarrassed for having forced the lady to abandon the house in that manner, apologise again to Hippolito and ask about the whereabouts of two gentlemen who they think are in these lodgings. Finally, Hippolito gives no identity of himself and remains in an advantageous position. He says to them that he is a stranger to that place and only a mere servant to the lady. With the perfect excuse of his duty as a servant to find if the lady was fine he leaves the room and look for Aurelian to tell what happened and that his father and Juliana’s father are looking for him.

²⁴⁵ The use of the word ‘errant’ to describe Aurelian wandering and escaping from his father could be an allusion to mock-romance. As we know the utmost expression of this archetype is the knight-errant Don Quixote, the example *par excellence* of mock-heroic romances. This archetype of the errant knight is found in one of the main sources for *Incognita* which is Sorel’s *Francion* (Book IX, 6), “he till this instant resembled those Knights errant of whom we have so many Histories, who travelled from Province to Province to repair disorder, to doe Justice to all the world, and to correct Enormities. It is true, that his Adventures are not attended with so much Bloud; they are therefore the more honourable.”

The two gentlemen who need answers finally encounter a servant of the house and are led to Signior Claudio's bedroom. Being the two gentlemen in the room, Aurelian comes back to the house. In the scene, Hippolito and Incognita are left aside, but Aurelian reincorporates and share setting (at least the same building) with his father and Juliana's father. He is warned by a servant that they are in the house. He realises that it is a matter of time to be found since Claudio for sure has already told them about his whereabouts.

Another example of Dramatic Writing in the story is when we change scene from Aurelian's lodgings to Hippolito going to the Convent of St. *Lawrence*;²⁴⁶ "In the mean time, it may be convenient to enquire what became of *Hippolito*" (*Incognita* 52). As pausing a scene to resume another one, the narration of one of the multiple knots *Incognita* has it stopped for a while, and another one is "played" to continue. On stage, actors and actresses leave the proscenium and permit the following actors to enter. In a narrative, we forget it and for a time it lingers in our memory until previous events are recalled by the narrator who is the guide to the reader.

Congreve's ballroom is very large, his streets always have an unexpected turn, no door but it opens suddenly to let another shade slip through. For the first time in British fiction, both character and reader miss part of the action for lack of the dominating "bird's-eye" view ... Congreve created a realistic environment rather than a mere background. (Aercke, 'Theatrical Background' 130)

²⁴⁶ In McKenzie's edition of *Incognita* (196), San Lorenzo, the church of the Medici.

3.7.11. The torn piece of paper: an example of Providence

Aurelian finds the letter written by Incognita at his lodgings in the shape of scattered pieces of paper, and he encounters the name of Incognita written on one of the pieces. Then, he resolves to take all the pieces to compose the letter and read it.

Coming by a Light which hung at the Corner of a Street, he join'd the torn Papers²⁴⁷ and collected thus much, that his *Incognita* had Written the Note, and earnestly desired him (if there were any reality in what he pretended to her) to meet her at Twelve a Clock that Night at a Convent Gate; but unluckily the Bit of Paper which should have mentioned what Convent, was broken off and lost. (*Incognita* 45)

Certainly, we find echoes of this passage in *The Mourning Bride* (2011), Congreve's only tragedy. The scene evolves upon similar features, "In a dark Corner of my Cell I found | This Paper, what it is this Light will show" (III. i. 6-7). Osmyn is about to read a paper he found in his cell in darkness as well as Aurelian did with the torn letter by Incognita.

Providence and fortune are not on Aurelian's side since the piece of paper which might provide him with some useful information was lost. The only thing which Aurelian

²⁴⁷ Compare to John Dryden's *Marriage-a-la-mode* (II, I, 255) when Amalthea is telling Artemis the story of the false king, Polydamas and the fact that he possibly has an heir to the throne.

Amal.

—What became
Of her, and them, since that, was never known;
Onely, some few days since, a famous Robber
Was taken with some Jewels of vast price,
Which, when they were delivered to the King,
He knew had been his Wife's; with these, a Letter,
Much torn, and sulli'd, but which yet he knew
To be her writing.

Arte.

— Sure, from hence he learn'd he had a Son.

Amal.

—It was not left so plain:
The Paper onely said, she dy'd in childbed:
But when it should have mention'd Son, or Daughter,
Just there it was torn off.

can extract from it is the fact that Incognita wants to meet him in a convent at twelve o'clock. However, there is no way for him to know which convent is, and thus, he is completely lost. Throughout the story we see how Providence takes part in the development of events. In the following paragraph this is portrayed even clearer:

Here was a large Subject for *Aurelian's* Passion, which he did not spare to pour forth in Abundance of Curses on his Stars.²⁴⁸ So earnest was he in the Contemplation of his Misfortunes, that he walk'd on unwittingly, till at length a Silence (and such as was only to be found in that part of the Town, whither his unguided Steps had carried him) surpriz'd his Attention. I say, a profound Silence rouzed him from his Thought; and a clap of Thunder could have done no more. (*Incognita* 45)

Here, we find Aurelian cursing his own fate for not having the only piece of paper which could reunite him with his beloved Incognita. Providence is playing tricks and we know how the character loses his temper so as to utter an "Abundance of Curses on his Stars." He is so deeply immersed in his own misfortune and despair that he starts wandering without paying attention and thus, a sudden silence and not a noise is what recovers himself. There is a parallelism, he is physically wandering but his mind wanders too, explicitly in a "unwittingly" manner, not being rational enough to think of a plan to solve the situation he just gives free rein to his emotions. In parenthesis, it is pointed that he arrives to a place where his "unguided Steps had carried him" (45). However, to be honest, I do consider this to be an irony. I do believe that he was wandering around guiding in an unconscious way by Providence towards his destiny. To my mind, here we find a metaphor of Providence as a ruler of destiny. Even though it seems that he is lost in his own misfortune, fate pulls the trigger to finally find a way.

²⁴⁸ Compare to Charleton's *The Ephesian Matron* (109): "He exclaims even against *Heaven*; he defies *Fate* to make him more miserable; he reproaches *Fortune* with her giddiness, he curses the malevolence of his *Stars*; and renounceth *Providence*." And also, compare to Aphra Behn's *The Fair Jilt*, "After a thousand Reflections on his hard Fate, and bemoaning himself, and blaming his cruel Stars, that had doom'd him to die so young; after an infinity of Sighs and Tears, Resolvings and Unresolvings" (17).

Aurelian then is surprised by a powerful silence, and the narrator repeats the fact that it is a silence what catches his attention where “a clap of Thunder could have done no more” (*Incognita* 45).

This silence²⁴⁹ foreshadows the storm which is about to occur. In the middle of the night he hears a disruptive voice which comes from a place he cannot discern, thus breaking the perturbing silence. The voice seems to be attached to “a Person whose Breath had been stopp’d by some forcible Oppression” (*Incognita* 46), thus, we guess there is someone in trouble. The narration continues explaining how this voice also gives the impression of someone trying to escape from this oppressed situation with a “violent Effort” (*Incognita* 46). Direct speech is allowed for a moment and we discern that there are two people involved, one is being forced by another: “... Forbear – and I’ll forgive what’s past’ – ‘I have done nothing yet that needs a Pardon, (says another) and what is to come, will admit of none” (*Incognita* 46).

Although not being explicitly said this is the scene in which *Incognita* is almost raped by a man. However, the reader and Aurelian alike are not able to discover the truth until later in the storyline. Furthermore, it is not even considered to be a rape at first since Aurelian believes her to be a boy.²⁵⁰

In this scene we find a woman being oppressed by a man, the struggle is depicted in a quite distressing manner where we empathise with the person being forced.

Here the Person who seemed to be the Oppressed, made several Attempts to speak, but they were only inarticulate Sounds, being all interrupted and choaked²⁵¹ in their Passage.
(*Incognita* 46)

²⁴⁹ See chapter 3.9. where the metaphor is explained by the narrator to help the reader understand the gist of the scene.

²⁵⁰ One of the possible sources of *Incognita* is Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In this play (II, vii) the character of Julia also dresses herself up as a man.

²⁵¹ This scene may have been based upon Chapter XV (*The Comic Romance*) where a man tried to do some violence to Monsieur de Saldagne’s sister. Destiny finds her in a deplorable state, with blood and bruises, “Her hair was a mess, and the kerchief that covered her breast was bloody in places, as was her face”, “She

Incognita explicitly tells the man to stop (forbear) she is refusing to be raped and also, she employs all the effort and strength she might have to stop the deed. However, she is not able to do so, she is quite in a desperate position. Also, the bitter cynicism with which the man speaks to her, even he makes an ironic comment on the fact that she would forgive him if he immediately releases her. To his plea he answers not to worry about what is going to happen, nothing to forgive or beg a pardon, he has not done anything yet. But, what it is even more outrageous is the fact that what is next to come also needs no pardon. We can guess that he is even providing her with a pleasant experience which she will not regret and thus, she would not have to forgive him.

Nonetheless, in the middle of this disgusting situation Providence and Poetical Justice come into play. Order restoration is brought in the shape of Aurelian whose “stroll” brings him up to this place in the precise moment where his beloved lady is about to be assaulted (45-6). Thus, he approaches the site where it seems the voice comes from but being the place surrounding by ruins of an old monastery he causes a resonant sound when some of them rolled out. This moment adds a touch of suspense if we imagine this silence broken by a desperate voice and the rumbling of some stones. This triggers a reaction and the two people involved in the quarrel suddenly feel agitated by the fact that someone may be near them. The woman takes her advantage and calls for help, to this reaction Aurelian replies to a courageous and intrepid response, “... and immediately drawing his Sword, demanded what was the Matter” (*Incognita* 46). But his knight-sword is of no help here and is mock in a sense bearing in mind that his adversary has a pistol ready to be fired. Aurelian is at a loss; his sword is not going to save either his life or the

was so choked with emotion she couldn't go on.” She mistakes Destiny for the criminal and says: “And you didn't, as I requested, bring me here, where you tried to do violence unworthy of both you and me?” (88-9). In this case, the criminal is Saint-Far, an acquaintance of her brother, Monsieur de Saldagne, to whom she asks to provide shelter for her. As in *Incognita*, the rape-attempt is implied: “She bit him, scratched him and bloodied him. His reaction to all this was none other than to go to bed and sleep as peacefully as if he hadn't attempted the most unreasonable act there is.” (90)

life of the other person. It seems that the scene is over when unexpectedly Providence plays its role in the events:

... by the greatest Providence in the World, going backwards fell down over some loose Stones that lay in his Way, just in that Instant of Time when the Villain fire his Pistol, who seeing him fall, concluded he had Shot him. (*Incognita* 46)

The reader is left with a quasi-tragic scene in which the hero seems to be defeated but in reality, he is just lying on the floor because he stumbled and fell. Tragi-comedy tones are found, although the scene is the interruption of a rape and the likely loss of his own life to rescue a stranger, the way in which he saves his life is humorous to a certain extent. In fact, he saves his life because of an opportune slip without putting so much effort to the endeavour. The villain believes him to be shot because of him falling on the ground but hearing how he still murmurs threatens him with a small dagger. It appears that even Providence is not going to serve its purpose in this story. But, Aurelian gathers up all the bravery he might find inside and being not sure about his own state, gets up and directing himself towards the man, yells at him the following: ““Turn, Villain, and look upon thy Death”” (*Incognita* 46-7).

Then, Aurelian reacts accordingly to the gentleman he is and showing no sign of benevolence towards the villain, he proceeds with his enterprise. Without uttering a word, his sword goes through the villain’s heart leaving him dead at his feet.

The identity of the dead body remains unknown since the villain extinguished the candle when he fell down on it. Aurelian remains impassible, “He would have seen who the Person was he had thus happily delivered” (*Incognita* 47). This determination and self-assurance can be attached to chivalric values. This is rounded by the fact that he approaches the person who he believes to be a young man. And here the reader is provided with a more than resembling scene in which the courtly knight rescues the damsel

(dressed as a man here), and the damsel displays all the gratefulness, treating the stranger as a saviour to the point of worshipping.

... he was answered with nothing but Prayers, Blessings and Thanks, called a Thousand Deliverers, good Genius's and Guardian Angels. And the Rescued would certainly have gone upon his Knees to have worshipped him, had he not been bound Hand and Foot; which *Aurelian* understanding, groped for the Knots, and either untied them or cut them asunder but 'tis more probable the latter, because more expeditious. (*Incognita* 47)

Even the manner in which *Aurelian* releases *Incognita* here suggests a heroic scene in the way he cuts the knots, not untying them but directly cutting them or at least, that is why the narrator guesses and we, as readers, prefer to believe because it is more heroic and romantic.

The romantic tone continues when they leave the scene, leaving behind the dead body. They are not being careful about what has just taken place but they want to reach a safe space. The irony in this scene is that *Aurelian* is leading out of the ruins by the hand of the young man who in fact is *Incognita*. So, there is actual physical contact without even realising it, at least for *Aurelian*'s part. Firstly, by means of the moonlight²⁵² and then, thanks to the streets light *Aurelian* is able to discern the surprising beauty of the young boy²⁵³ he has just rescued, just "a little pale and disordered with his late fright" (*Incognita* 47).

There is a very similar scene in *Sorel's Francion* (Book XII, 10) where this moonlight trope is used to reveal a woman's identity. However, in *Incognita* a happy surprise is followed by this revelation:

²⁵² "Congreve's scenes are often set at night, with moonlight or torches – a favorite stage-effect in Restoration drama and again a confirmation of the dominating *Sein und Schein* theme" (Aercke, "Theatrical Background" 130).

²⁵³ Compare to Dryden's *Marriage-à-la-mode*, when Doralice appears wearing boy's clothing at the masquerade ball (IV. ii).

I found the Door of the House only put to, and not latched, I therefore entred into the Hall, where *Emilia* did attend my comming, having with her no light but that of the Moon, who darted her beams into a little window, the Casement whereof was open. I thereupon had light enough to discover that I was not deceived, and that I had before me that wonderfull Beauty ...

The narrative leaves us clues of whom this stranger could be; whose disquieting beauty reminds Aurelian of someone: “*Aurelian* thought these last words were delivered in a Voice, whose accent was not new to him ... he now was sure he had somewhere seen before” (*Incognita* 47). But, our Aurelian was clueless at whom this person could be, he asks him if maybe there was a chance of the two met in Siena.

Both gentlemen resolve to go to Aurelian’s lodgings. At first, he is reluctant to it since he does not know if his father could be there waiting for him. Being there, and thanks to some light brought by a servant, Aurelian can discern the beauty in the boy’s face described as if were a cherub’s face: “a more lively Flood of Crimson, which with a modest heat glow’d²⁵⁴ freshly on his Cheeks”²⁵⁵ (*Incognita* 48). Then, *Incognita* decides to discover her real identity and Aurelian’s reaction is described as an emotional rhapsody:

... the Youth still struggling with his Resolution, with a timorous haste, pulled off a Peruke which had concealed the most beautiful abundance of Hair that ever graced one Female Head; those dishevelled spreading Tresses,²⁵⁶ as at first they made a discovery of, so at last they served for a veil to the modest lovely blushes of the fair *Incognita*; for she it was and none other. (*Incognita* 48)

²⁵⁴ “To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool” (Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* II. ii. 200-214). The same reminiscence is used by Congreve to describe *Incognita* face.

²⁵⁵ Compare to Milton’s description of Eve, in *Paradise Lost* (Book V, 1-25), where we find “His wonder was to find unwak’nd *Eve* | With Tresses discompos’d, and glowing Cheek” (9-10).

²⁵⁶ “the Tresses of her Hair” (Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, II. ii. 200-214).

In this case, the hair in *Incognita* is a symbol of female beauty as Aurelian himself describes when he has the chance to see it. But also, the scene could be interpreted as an erotic one since the tresses of her hair function as a veil to hide the “modest lovely blushes” of *Incognita* (48), very likely for being alone with a man and stranger, for revealing her identity in secret and for being the hair of a woman a symbol of femininity and sexuality. The scene is reinforced when Aurelian believing all to be a lie, a vision, or a sort of dreaming fantasy, is taken by the hand by *Incognita*.

There is a recurrent use of the metaphor of light and sight, darkness and blindness²⁵⁷ to describe certain scenes in the story. We have seen some of them where light comes always to allow us to see the truth, or, to reveals something of importance to the plot. Light is also accompanied by sight, and sight is a key theme in *Incognita*. William Congreve himself had trouble with his sight during the last part of his life.²⁵⁸ It is true that his sight worsened when he was older, but we do not know if he started to have problems before (maybe myopia or any other disfunction).

For instance, we find Aurelian constantly doubting about his own sight, it could be a metaphor of not being a sense you can always trust. But also, he plays with the idealisation so common among lovers who depict their beloved ones in a more positive light than they are.

... May I trust my Sight?²⁵⁹ – Or does my fancy now only more strongly work? – For still
I did preserve your Image in my Heart, and you were ever present to my dearest Thoughts
– ’ (*Incognita* 49)

²⁵⁷ Compare this metaphor to John Milton’s Sonnet XIX: “When I consider how my light is spent” (*Complete Poems* 168).

²⁵⁸ See the correspondence of William Congreve, especially Letters 51, 57, and especially Note 10 in Letter 1. Also, see McKenzie’s “Richard van Bleeck’s Painting of William Congreve” (46-47).

²⁵⁹ ‘Sight’ metaphors also appear in *The Mourning Bride* (2021, II. viii. 1-6). For instance:

OSMYN. YET I behold her – yet – And now no more.
Turn your Lights inward, Eyes, and view my Thought,
So shall you still behold her – ‘twill not be.
O impotence of Sight! Mechanick Sense,

Aurelian is so immersed in his inner passion that Incognita has to warn him about his excessive overflow of emotions: “enough of Rapture” and “moderate your Joy” (*Incognita* 49).

3.7.12. Incognita’s refusal: patriarchal values challenged

Aurelian’s illusion for his future happiness fades away when she tells him the obstacle for their happiness. The despair and unhappiness felt by Incognita and Aurelian is depicted in a sublime manner by the narrator (who assures readers of the veracity of the description since it was told by Aurelian himself) who conveys emotional meaning by means of metaphors and the use of synaesthesia. Certainly, there are moment of narrative development when we find certain poetic nuances:

... a Sigh diffused a mournful sweetness through the Air, and liquid grief fell gently from her Eyes, triumphant sadness sat upon her Brow, and even sorrow seem’d delighted with the Conquest he had made. See what a change *Aurelian* felt! His Heart bled Tears, and trembled in his Breast; Sighs struggling for a vent had choaked each others passage up: His Floods of Joys were all suppress’d; cold doubts and fear had chill’d ’em with a sudden Frost,²⁶⁰ and he was troubled to excess; yet knew not why. (*Incognita* 49)

First of all, Incognita’s state is described as a “mournful sweetness” (49) is expelled to the air in the shape of a sigh, then, all the pain is expressed by means of “liquid grief” which in fact means tears all over her face. A glooming sadness looks as if has

Which to exterior Objects ow’st thy Faculty,
Not seeing of Election, but Necessity.

Furthermore, in the last scene (16-20), the similarity cannot be doubted, in this case in Almeria’s words:

ALMERIA. Giv’n me again from Death! O all ye Pow’rs
Confirm this Miracle! Can I believe
My Sight, against my Sight? And shall I trust
That Sense, which in one Instant shews him dead
And living? ...

²⁶⁰ “... sitting very pensively down in a close Arbour, bathing her self in tears, she discharged her self of part of her sorrows, in exhaling these following regrets, often interrupted with deep sighs” (Camus, *A True Tragical History* 59).

camped in her brow, “triumphantly”, and sorrow as if were a real entity which is glad for such a conquest it has made. In the same vein, Aurelian’s heart is crying with tears, beating at a high speed in his chest, he sighs²⁶¹ as Incognita does, but they find difficulty in his way out of his body being trapped in his throat. Then, elements of nature, particularly of the weather are used to continue with the description of grief. For instance, “Floods of Joy” to express Aurelian excessive flattering upon Incognita, “cold” and “Frost” referring to doubts and fears paralysing him. He is being far beyond “excessive” in his demonstration of love to her, and if this paragraph is not enough, at the end it is explicitly declared that “he was troubled to excess; yet knew not why.” Even though, according to the narrator this self-reflection of his inner passions is told by Aurelian and we assume that the narrator is just a mere transceiver, the character is not able to give a rational explanation of why he is being so intense.

One of the most powerful moments is when Incognita declares her love for Aurelian in an honest and open manner, “having put all her Sighs into one great Sighs, she discharged her self of ’em all at once” (*Incognita* 49). Sighs are the mechanisms by which the soul relieves the overflow of emotion which cannot keep inside.²⁶²

I fancy’d (continued she) something so Generous in your Countenance, and uncommon in your Behaviour, while you were diverting your self, and rallying me with Expressions of Gallantry, at the Ball, as induced me to hold Conference with you. (*Incognita* 49-50)

²⁶¹ The theme of sighing among lovers is recurrent in *Incognita* and characteristically employed in seventeenth-century French romances: “Leurs héros magnanimes qui se sont distingués dans des aventures extraordinaires ne demandent pas mieux que de soupirer auprès de leurs belles cruelles” (Dallas 41). However, the action of ‘sighing’ is also ironised in Scarron’s *The Comic Romance*, particularly in ‘The Tale of the Invisible Lady’ where there is an irony about it when the narrator is describing the prototypical heroes in romantic stories, where lovers “sigh and daydream instead of eating ...” (29). Also, we find a ‘sigh-scene’ in *Love-Letters* by Aphra Behn (136-7). The same metaphor is used here regarding the sighs being “choaked each others passage up” (49) (reminds of us “they were only inarticulate Sounds, being all interrupted and choaked in their Passage,” (46) mentioned before when Incognita tries to call for help.

²⁶² See for instance, in *The Mourning Bride* (III. vi. 33-36):

ALMERIA. Give me that Sigh.
 Why dost thou heave, and stifle in thy Griefs?
 Thy Heart will burst, thy Eyes look red and start;
 Give thy Soul way, and tell me thy dark Thought.

She is giving way to her passion for him, declaring Aurelian to be her match. What is noticeable of her love declaration is not just the mere charming vocabulary of the expression of love but the way in which she claims to “freely confess” to him and “out of design”. He named as a “generous Stranger” but who provides more trust in his integrity than any of her acquaintances who are forcing her to the abyss of an unwanted marriage: “every day my Friends urged me to the Match they had agreed upon for me, before I was capable of consenting” (*Incognita* 50).

Incognita as a character is reflected upon her own decisions. Aurelian listens to her patiently without judging her. More importantly, she is realising that her own destiny is not in her own hands but in others, she wants to reject this plan which is prepared for her but she does not know how. She is at a loss since she would have to confront her father and very likely being socially judged for not obeying his father’s command and restore honour to her family. Her helpless state is repeated twice in her monologue, at the beginning and at the end.

... I found I must either consent, which would make me miserable, or be miserable by perpetually enduring to be baited by my Father, Brother and other Relations. (*Incognita* 50)

This is the summ of my present Condition, bating the apprehensions I am in of being taken by some of my Relations, and forced to a thing so quite contrary to my Inclinations.’ (*Incognita* 51)

Yet she has already taken a decision to put in first place her happiness to others’ commands. She trusts Aurelian. Despite her duty as a daughter, she is free to choose her own path: “I resolved yesterday, on a suddain, to give firm Faith to the Opinion I had conceived of you” (*Incognita* 50). As she openly rejects to be married to someone who she does not love (or even know), she resolves to go to a monastery. There is another

character who wants to help Incognita, her aunt. She is briefly mentioned but apparently, she is the only member of the family who agrees on Incognita's free will to reject the marriage, her aunt is "averse to the Match" (*Incognita* 50).

She then explains the unpleasant situation in which she gets involved in the ruins of the monastery. As she went to Aurelian's lodgings but she did not find her she resorted to an old servant of hers for help, and her brother was the villain who tried to rape her in the middle of the night. Providentially, Aurelian appeared in the precise moment to stop the rape attempt and saved her from a horrendous deed: "where it pleased Heaven, by what Accident I know not, to direct you" (*Incognita* 51).

Although Aurelian wishes to be of aid to Incognita and a true servant to her purposes, he is reluctant to leave her in a monastery, "Your commands, Madam, (replied he) are Sacred to me; and were they to lay down my Life I would obey them" (*Incognita* 51). It is not a non-sense for a lover to mourn the fact that her beloved lady is going to willingly lock her up in a monastery to prevent her from a lifelong unhappy marriage. However, we witness how Incognita cares about Aurelian's feelings, "a Countenance so full of sorrow [Aurelian's] as moved Compassion in the tender hearted *Incognita*" (*Incognita* 51). Thus, these two lovers are involved in an unwanted destiny fostering by external forces which in the case they are their own families. The lady being forced to resort to a convent to preserve her dignity as a free woman who deserves to take her own decisions;²⁶³ and a gentleman who is already mourning her lady due to the impossibility of marrying her.

She then concludes to stay at his lodging during that night since she has had enough adventures for a day. Incognita asks for advice about how to hide in town until

²⁶³ " ... since I can't be his wife, I'll never be another's and I'll spend the rest of my days in a convent." These words spoken by Dorotea in Scarron's "The Two Rival Brothers" (*The Comic Romance* 258-9) reminds of Incognita.

the time to go to the monastery comes. This time, for fear of Incognita running away from his lodging does not tell the truth to her, who he was, that he is in the very same position as herself due to the arranged marriage to Juliana. In fact, if he would tell her the truth, about Juliana, she herself would have realised that everything was misunderstanding and there was nothing to solve.

Ironically, she is staying in the same lodging of the man she is running away from, “if she had not as great an aversion for him as the Man whom she now endeavour’d to avoid” (*Incognita* 52). Aurelian tries to convince Incognita of going to the monastery as a way to reject and confront her family’s commands but I guess his intention is that she would stay there until he manages to resolve his own circumstances. Obviously, he is not very eager to lose Incognita.

He demonstrated to her, that the disobligation to her Parents would be greater by going to a Monastery, since it was only to avoid a choice which they had made for her, and which she could not have so just a pretence to do till she had made one for her self. (*Incognita* 52)

He is planning a design to ultimately fulfil his desire to marry her. However, on the other hand, indirectly he is encouraging her to do what she pleases, to take a decision by her own. In a sense, he helps her to gather up enough courage to confront his father.

Interestingly enough is the fact that Incognita is determined in her thoughts, she does not look like the submissive lady who accepts and is easily manipulated. He tries to use “A World of other Arguments” to convince her but still “she contradicted as long as she was able, or at least willing” (*Incognita* 52). Finally, she resolves to consult her pillow to decide which plan to follow in the morning. Aurelian leaves her in his lodgings and goes to sleep on a pallat²⁶⁴ instead.

²⁶⁴ Archaic or obsolete spelling for ‘pallet’(n.), ‘a straw-filled tick or mattress’, according to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Accessed 11 July 2019.

3.7.13. Hippolito and Leonora: the garden scene

We find Hippolito wandering and looking for this church where Aurelian has set the place to have an encounter there. He feels astonished when he realises the gates are opened at that time of the night. When Hippolito enters the convent, he finds that the novices are not able to talk and make signs to him to indicate that he has to enter the building. Immediately the narrator depicts the candles in the large room illuminating everything. He is seeking someone to ask about the mysterious scene. One of the friars tells him that there is a ceremony for the soul of a gentleman who recently died. To Hippolito's amazement the cavalier is no other than the famous Lorenzo, Leonora's cousin.

Hippolito sneaks in through a private door from the convent's garden to the private house of Don Mario, father to Leonora. His plans have changed and he is no longer looking for Aurelian but to his beloved Leonora. Hippolito enters the garden of the house and again the light offered by the moon allows Hippolito to distinguish among the foliage: "for the Moon was then about to rise, and had already diffused a glimmering Light,²⁶⁵ sufficient to distinguish a Man from a Tree."²⁶⁶ He is determined in his pursuit but there is a high risk of being discovered by his father. However, he has designed a perfect plan since he knows how to escape quickly in case he needs it.

He took his Stand behind a well-grown Bush of Myrtle,²⁶⁷ which, should the Moon shine brighter than was required, had the Advantage to be shaded by the Indulgent Boughs of

²⁶⁵ "Yet, if we look more closely, we shall find | Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind: | Nature affords at least a glimm'ring light; | The lines, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right" (Pope, *An Essay* 19-22).

²⁶⁶ Compare Wycherley's *Love in a Wood* (5.1. 361-3):

VINCENT When the moon, at this instant, scarce affords light enough to distinguish a man from a tree, how can you know her?

²⁶⁷ "with Myrtle crownd" in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Book IV, 262). Other references in the same book, 694, "Laurel and Mirtle" (694), "With Myrtle" (Book IX, 219), "Gently with Mirtle band" (431) and "Beyond a row of Myrtles" (627). There is also a reference in one of the possible resources which Congreve must have read before writing *Incognita*. In Furetière's *Scarron's City Romance* (102) for example, there is a tale about Cupid where we find: "Venus often threatned to whip him, but did it not, though to make good her menaces, she steeped twigs of Mirtle in Vinegar, which did nor a little terrifie him." This edition

an ancient Bay-Tree.²⁶⁸ He was delighted with the Choice he had made, for he found a Hollow in the Myrtle, as if purposely contriv'd for the Reception of one Person, who might undiscovered perceive all about him. He looked upon it as a good Omen, that the Tree Consecrated to *Venus*²⁶⁹ was so propitious to him in his Amorous Distress. (*Incognita* 53-4)

Hippolito hides behind a bush of myrtle in order to be able to see what occurs but discreetly remained incognito. The moon appears as an omnipotent entity. The heavenly body apparently is shining more than usual so Hippolito is aware of how easy is to discern shapes and bodies even though everything is taking place in the middle of the night. However, there is a *Laurus nobilis* or laurel bay to provide him with a shadow. It seems that Providence is playing its part again helping our gentleman, he finds a hollow to hide in the myrtle itself, as if were designed especially or as put it in the text “purposely contriv'd” for one body to fit. He describes this happy chance as a good omen²⁷⁰ providentially designed for him to not be discovered and thus, look at Leonora from a vantage point. The lover is hiding in a tree attached to Venus, the Roman goddess of love to help him in his intention of having a conversation with her beloved lady.

The reference of Venus consecrated to the myrtle is found in *Naturalis Historia* by Pliny the Elder²⁷¹ (Gaius Plinius Secundus; A.D. 23-79). This book composed of 37 books is well known for being an encyclopaedia containing subjects from mathematics to anthropology or even horticulture. I use the English translation by Loeb Classical Library, particularly volume IV, books 12-16.

is found in Congreve's library, item number 573. However, in fact this work is the translation into English of Furetière's *Roman Bourgeois* published in 1666.

²⁶⁸ See *Natural History*. There are references to this tree, for instance in Book XIII, LI, (180-1) ('laurea' 'the bay-tree'). However, they remain in a botanical/typological context, nothing of intertextual interest to this fragment.

²⁶⁹ This reference is found firstly in the edition by Summers (1923) and later in McKenzie's (2011).

²⁷⁰ Compare 'good omen' in Congreve's *Incognita* to 'prophetic and remarkable augury' in Pliny's text.

²⁷¹ Item number 474 in Congreve's library (Hodges 1955).

The fragment where Venus is referred as being the goddess attached to the myrtle is the following one.

fuit ubi nunc Roma est iam cum conderetur, quippe ita traditur, myrtea verbena Romanos Sabinosque, cum propter raptas virgines dimicare voluissent, depositis armis purgatos in eo loco qui nunc signa Veneris Cluacinae habet: cluere enim antiqui purgare dicebant. et in ea quoque arbore suffimenti genus habetur, ideo tum electa quoniam coniunctioni et huic arbori Venus praeest, haud scio an prima etiam omnium in locis publicis Romae sata, fatidico quidem et memorabili augurio.

At the time of the foundation of Rome myrtles grew on the present site of the city, as tradition says that the Romans and Sabines, after having wanted to fight a battle because of the carrying off of the maidens, laid down their arms and purified themselves with sprigs of myrtle, at the place now occupied by the statues of Venus Cluacina, *cluere* being the old word meaning ‘to cleanse.’ And a kind of incense for fumigation is also contained in this tree, which was selected for the purpose on the occasion referred to because Venus²⁷² the guardian spirit of the tree also presides over unions, and I rather think that it was actually the first of all trees to be planted in public places at Rome, fraught indeed with a prophetic and remarkable augury. (Book XV, XXXVI 368-9)

quin et ara vetus fuit Veneri Myrteae.

Moreover, there was also an old altar belonging to Venus Myrtea. (Book XV, XXXVI 370-1)

myrto Veneris victricis.

²⁷² There is a mention to Venus Myrtea in Book XII, II (4-5). Veneri myrtus, “the myrtle to Venus”.

the myrtle of Venus Victrix. (Book XV, XXXVIII 372-3)

A reference to poetry is found right before the song by Leonora, which in fact it is the first poem published by Congreve. Hippolito remarks that he debts his luck to (also) the muses since they have provided him with a shelter²⁷³ (laurel bay) and have crowned his heart with bay leaves. The leaves of the bay laurel were used in ancient Rome to elaborate crowns for victorious warriors. Also, Daphne when being pursued by Apollo transforms into a laurel tree. He feels so inspired by the help of Venus for providing him with the myrtle to hide inside it, but also to the muses for providing him with shadows to be almost invisible, that “had like to have set him a Rhyming” (*Incognita* 54).

He was about to make use of this poetic inspiration to provide readers with a madrigal²⁷⁴ when he was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Don Mario, Leonora’s father. Hippolito remaining in darkness and hiding in the tree is a witness of the scene as if hypothetically on stage he was part of the audience himself. But, to such degree it was his “Fortune” that night, that Don Mario was called by a priest to come and say farewell to Don Lorenzo who was expiring at that same moment. At first, Don Mario feels reluctant to have to face the farewell to Don Lorenzo since their familiar relationship had not been the best, however, his position as uncle and blood ties force him to attend his duty and cannot reject the task, “his Duty to be reconciled to him” (*Incognita* 54) which could be as a self-reference to the title of the novel.

Leonora enters the garden; her father tells her to go and pray for the soul of her cousin. Such was the despair of the lady that she was almost undressed, only accompanied by a woman.

²⁷³ Compare this scene with the one found in Scarron’s “The Two Rival Brothers” (261) in Don Manuel’s garden when Don Sancho and later Don Juan hid themselves in the laurel trees.

²⁷⁴ A song made in pieces to be interpreted by several voices without instruments accompaniment commonly found in the Renaissance. This genre was developed in Italy around the fourteenth century. We find a reference to this in Aphra Behn’s *The Fair Jilt* (8).

She was in an undress, and by reason of a Melancholy visible in her Face, more Careless than usual in her Attire, which he thought added as much as was possible to the abundance of her Charms. (*Incognita* 54)

This scene might be depicted as erotic, in a very subtle manner. Leonora appears almost naked, very likely wearing a robe or a nightgown, so that he is able to distinguish “her charms” which could be interpreted as her breasts, her hips, her arms, and parts of her body which were hidden until then.

It is important to keep in mind that ‘loose dress’ could include many gradations of erotic female display. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many aristocratic women had their portraits painted in ‘loose dress’ which is a sumptuous loose gown that allows a glimpse of the white linen shift inside but does not show any especially large expanses of skin ... On the other hand, as portraits of Nell Gwynn and Elizabeth Bracegirdle suggest, the portraits of actresses in dishabille could be very revealing, with their breasts almost completely on display. (Qtd. in Gollapudi 34)

This “Beauteous Vision” is a sort of epiphany which transports him to a state of agitation but at the same time he is not able to escape from this whirlwind of emotions:

... leaving him Confounded with Love, Admiration, Joy, Hope, Fear, and all the Train of Passions, which seize upon Men in his Condition, all at once. He was so teased with this Variety of Torment, that he never missed the Two Hours that had slipped away during his Automachy²⁷⁵ and Intestine Conflict. (*Incognita* 54)

The meaning of “Men in his Condition” could either mean men in love or men who have witnessed a woman they “decorously” court and now they are aware of the physical charms, she is no longer a sort of ethereal being but a sexed woman. Nonetheless, this is an interpretation. Hippolito is observing her without her consent, nor she has even the slightest idea of being stared by a gentleman in such indecorous (“careless” for

²⁷⁵ Automacy, ‘the quality, state or condition of being automatic; automaticity’. *OED*. Accessed 17 July 2019.

Hippolito) look. This sort of epiphany is completed when later he has the chance to hear her sing a song, a melodic poem mourning her inner passions and love for him. Then, we read “the Ecstasy he was then rapt, I believe he would have been satisfied to have expired with it” (*Incognita* 55).

Hence, he needs almost two hours to recover from such a rapture that left him unable to make a move. He calls himself “variety of Torment” (54) to portray the mental state in which he was immersed for two hours. I guess, to him it is a torment since he is incapable of explaining what is happening inside his mind, a rush of different emotions mingled together which left him helplessly muted, inactive, shocked. There is an internal conflict between his “Automachy” and his “Intestine Conflict” (54) which responds to the expression trust your guts. I would like to suggest that the character here is having an emotional struggle.

The metaphor of brokenness is reinforced when Leonora comes back to the garden and we read “*Leonora’s* Return settled his Spirits, at least *united* them” (*Incognita* 54).²⁷⁶

3.7.14. Leonora’s intimacy: Congreve’s first published poem

Leonora wants to be alone and mourn her melancholy. She tells her maid to shup up the door of the garden so that his father cannot enter it. Then, she asks her to leave as well and literally “leave her to her self in the Garden” (*Incognita* 55). She needs to heal her despair through music. Her woman brings her a lute.²⁷⁷

Leonora is about to play the lute and sing a song. Hippolito’s soul is rushing with emotion. In a quite dramatic way, he considers this to be the time of his life in order to

²⁷⁶ The word ‘united’ in italics is mine.

²⁷⁷ Compare to Pandora in Lyly’s *The Woman in the Moon*, “How oft have I leant on her silver breast, | She singing on her lute,” (IV. i. 23-4). There are also some comparisons of Pandora to Venus, “rosy cheeks” (IV, i. 30) or to the bay-tree or laurel, “A love as chaste as is Apollo’s tree” (IV, i. 38). Another reference is found in Aphra Behn’s *The Fair Jilt*, “She sung delicately, and danc’d well, and play’d on the Lute to a Miracle.” (11). And also in *The Most Excellent History of Antonius and Aurelia* (11), when Antonius in woman disguise plays the lute. My own pagination.

conquest Leonora's heart. Both characters are so close from each other that Hippolito is able to hear accurately. In a manner, there is an intimate atmosphere since Leonora believes to be alone. Her intimacy is shared by Hippolito without her consent. She uses music as a tool to give vent to the passions of the soul which need a way out of it, otherwise conducting to madness and lunacy. Here is the song-poem.²⁷⁸

I.

*Ah! Whither, whither shall I fly,*²⁷⁹

A poor unhappy Maid;

To hopeless Love and Misery

By my own Heart betray'd?

*Not by Alexis*²⁸⁰ *Eyes undone,*

Nor by his Charming Faithless Tongue,

Or any Practis'd Art;

Such real Ills may hope a Cure,

But the sad Pains which I endure

Proceed from fansied Smart.

II.

'Twas Fancy gave Alexis Charms,

Ere I beheld his Face:

Kind Fancy (then) could fold our Arms,

²⁷⁸ The introduction of this poem corroborates Congreve's skills as a poet. *Incognita* was his first published work and in consequence, these his first verses. However, *Incognita* was published under the pseudonym of Cleophil, therefore the authorship remained unknown. McKenzie (523), highlights this, also adding that it would not be a non-sense to include the song in *The Way of the World* (1700). Certainly, it would be a great curiosity and self-praise to include his first published poem from his first and only work in prose in the last and most sublime comedy of his dramatic production. Nonetheless, according to Congreve's biography by Gosse (15), Congreve would have written some verses "upon the Death of his Master's Magpie" while in Kilkenny school.

²⁷⁹ Compare to Lyly's Pandora (V. i. 60), "A spirit! A spirit! Whither may I fly?" This song was set by John Eccles in *A Collection of Songs* (1704). For more details about this see McKenzie (vol. 2, 540), "Notes to Music".

²⁸⁰ A classic name in pastoral songs, it also appears in Dryden's *Marriage-à-la-mode* (IV. iii, 309) in a song by Argaleon.

And form a soft Embrace.

But since I've seen the real Swain,²⁸¹

And try'd to fancy him again,

I'm by my Fancy taught,

Though 'tis a Bliss no Tongue can tell,

To have Alexis, yet 'tis Hell

To have him but in Thought. (Incognita 55)

Leonora's acceptance of Hippolito as a match is reinforced by the following monologue. This is another example of Congreve's "Dramatick Writing" which reminds us of a soliloquy uttered in the middle of the stage. Together with Aurelian's monologue, these are two noticeable examples of powerful 'soliloquies':

'Unhappy *Leonora* (said she) how is thy poor unwary Heart misled? Whither am I come? The false deluding Lights of an imaginary Flame, have led me, a poor benighted Victim, to a real Fire. I burn and am consumed with hopeless Love; those Beams in whose soft temperate warmth I wanton'd heretofore, now flash destruction to my Soul, my Treacherous greedy Eyes have suck'd the glaring Light, they have united all its Rays, and, like a burning-Glass, convey'd the pointed Meteor to my Heart²⁸² – Ah! *Aurelian*, how quickly hast thou Conquer'd, and how quickly must thou Forsake – Oh Happy (to me unfortunately Happy) *Juliana*! – I am to be the Subject of thy Triumph – To thee *Aurelian* comes laden with the Tribute of my Heart and Glories in the Oblation of his broken Vows – What then, is *Aurelian* False! – False! alas, I know not what I say; How can he be False, or True, or any Thing to me? What Promises did he ere make or I receive?

²⁸¹ A young lover or suitor.

²⁸² Again, we find here a tendency towards the use of blank verse.

Sure I dream, or I am mad, and fansie it to be Love; Foolish²⁸³ Girl,²⁸⁴ recal thy banish'd Reason – Ah! would it were no more, would I could rave, sure that would give me Ease, and rob me of the Sense of Pain; at least, among my wandring Thoughts, I should at sometime light upon *Aurelian*, and fansie him to be mine; kind Madness would flatter my poor feeble Wishes, and sometimes tell me *Aurelian* is not lost – not irrecoverably – not for ever lost.²⁸⁵ (*Incognita* 56)

It cannot be denied this lengthy paragraph to have the shape of a proper soliloquy. It is not just the fact that we appreciate a character talking to her own self for almost a whole page, but the analysis of the speech would give us enough reasons to classify this as a dramatic piece of writing.

At the beginning of the speech, Leonora is asking herself what she should do to handle her despair. There is a metaphor employed here related to fire, burn, destruction. Certainly, we can associate a flame which that of the incipient love but also an uncontrolled fire can cause severe injuries. That is why she at first, explains how the lights given off led to an incipient flame (false and deluding because not real from Aurelian's (Hippolito) part). And really quickly, the flame converts into a real fire. She burns and consumes herself as if she were in hell. There is a self-deprecation for being greedy and a wanton woman soaking up those rays of love because, according to her, warms her soul until the heat was too excessive so as to function as a burning-glass and transform it into a meteor directed to her heart. Therefore, Leonora is deeply consummated for this incandescent love which burns her soul.

²⁸³ *Gunophilus*. I was ne'er in love with her till now. Oh, absolute Pandora because foolish – for folly is women's perfection! To talk idly, to look wildly, to laugh at every breach and play with a feather is that would make a Stoic in love, yea, thou thyself. (Lyly's *The Woman in the Moon*, V. i. 119-123)

²⁸⁴ "Qu' une femme est folle quand elle aime! ou qu'elle est malheureuse quand elle a de la vertu & de l'amour!" (Mme de Villegieu 41)

²⁸⁵ As Ballaster ("Bring(ing) Forth Alive" 187) points out, these new short fictions or 'new' romances called novels, deals very frequently with "women caught in moral conflicts and conflicting desires whose psychology is carefully explored by a sympathetic narrator."

The second stage in her speech addresses Juliana and Aurelian as if they were there, asking questions. She depicts Aurelian as a conqueror who has taken possession of her feelings, and then, he presents them as trophies to Juliana who is really the person meant to be with him. Also, Aurelian as a sinner for having broken the vows he has made to Leonora, and interestingly here, there is an allusion to the oblation at mass. The oblation is the presentation of bread and wine to God during the Eucharist. Therefore, Aurelian presents to Juliana (as if were a goodness) her heart and glories as if were bread and wine, but obviously breaking his vows to Leonora as if he were the figure of a priest.

Thus, she is ruminating the possibility of Aurelian being a rake yet she is not entirely sure of what to think. At some point, she even doubts of her own capacity to discern between reality and fantasy. Indeed, from a psychological perspective, it is interesting how this character self-reflects, “How can he be False, or True, or any Thing to me? What Promises did he ere make or I receive? Sure I dream, or I am mad.” She is unable to understand why Aurelian has decided to marry someone else. Thus, she starts to think that maybe she has misunderstood him: “Foolish Girl, recal thy banish’d Reason” (*Incognita* 56).

Her mind wanders so as to believe that maybe there is one possibility that Aurelian could be hers. Aurelian’s memory lingers on her mind as if it were a chance for an encounter but in reality she knows that everything is a lie and that this is contrived by her “kind Madness” which “flatter [her] ... feeble Wishes, and sometimes tell [her] *Aurelian* is not lost – not irrecoverably – not for ever lost” (*Incognita* 56).

Leonora refers to Hippolito throughout his monologue but she thinks his real name is Aurelian. And Providence permits Hippolito to hear it. Her ravishing and honest reflection upon her own feeling leaves Hippolito in a sort of (again) ecstasy. He cannot restrain himself to tell her the truth or at least to confirm that he also loves her (he will

need more time to explain to her his own identity). He approaches her as if she were a divinity,²⁸⁶ “Sacred Shrine” (*Incognita* 56).²⁸⁷ It is curious how Congreve intertwines allusions and references to pagan Gods and Goddesses, for instance, Venus, but as we have read in Leonora’s monologue, for instance, there is also reference to Christianity.²⁸⁸

The occasion is contrived by Providence, “... think that Heaven conducted me to hear my Bliss pronounced by that dear Mouth alone, whose breath could fill me with new Life” (*Incognita* 56-7). Leonora has emptied her whole soul in one single speech and her beloved suitor was there to carefully listen to it. And, as he was hidden in a tree and she was not aware of his presence, her speech remains entirely true and honest. Love without censure, not an affected one. In a comic description, we find that neither of them regret the situation. Hippolito, for his part, overhearing Leonora’s speech, “confessed it to be a Crime he had now repeated.” Leonora also in her inner self feels “no doubt was very glad it was past and done.” Hippolito is honest about this happy chance they both have, and openly transmits his joy to her. Nonetheless, Leonora, being a woman, has to restrain herself a bit more, and here we find a clear distinction between both sexes in terms of decorum, “she might hide her Guilty Head, and not expose her shame before his [Hippolito] Eyes ... Witnesses of her Crime.” However, Hippolito places his actions at the same level of hers, as a crime too breaking her privacy (treachery) and her right to talk to himself without being heard. And she insists on demonstrating her value and decency as a lady (constricted by social values), “after some decent Denials, she consented to be Conducted by him through the Garden...”

²⁸⁶ This is mocked in Sorel’s *Lysis* (84), when Clarimond is trying to restore some rationality to Lysis, “you have spoken of your Mistress as of somewhat divine, though you cannot but know she is a mortal creature that eats and drinks as any of us do.”

²⁸⁷ Compare to Congreve’s tragedy *The Mourning Bride* (1697) where there are references to ‘shrine’ and ‘bay-trees’: “At this fair Shrine to lay my Laurels down, | And raise Love’s Altar on the Spoils of War” (I. vi. 59-60).

²⁸⁸ He studied Greek at Trinity College (Dublin), and that knowledge led him to translate several satires by Greek poets. See William Congreve’s biography in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* by C. Y. Ferdinand and D. F. McKenzie published in 2004.

Both lovers cannot wait for their sacramental union and they resolved to marry in that precise moment. It is funny in a way how they have to convince an “scrupulous Old Father” (*Incognita* 57) to marry them. But, eventually he accepts. From now on, the pace in *Incognita* is vertiginously fast, the reader needs to pay close attention to follow the story.

Going back to the scene, Hippolito and Leonora are just married when Don Mario, father to Leonora enters the church looking for her daughter to ask her for Juliana/*Incognita*’s whereabouts. In a very humoristic manner, the situation is told, “It would have asked a very skilful Hand,²⁸⁹ to have depicted to the Life the Faces of those Three Persons, at *Don Mario*’s Appearance” (*Incognita* 58). We, as readers, have to almost laugh at this ingenious comment. Indeed, we frame the situation in our minds as a comic scene which were to be performed on stage, the audience would laugh.²⁹⁰

He that has seen some admirable Piece of Transmutation by a Gorgon’s Head, may form to himself the most probable Idea of the Prototype. The Old Gentleman was himself in a sort of a Wood,²⁹¹ ... (*Incognita* 58)

The narrator description of Leonora’s father as being “in a sort of a Wood” (*Incognita* 58) gives us clues of possible references to previous works. The first one pinpoints by McKenzie is Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.²⁹² The reference is found in (2.1. 188-94) where Demetrius rejects Helena’s love. He is desperately looking for his Hermia, but he is not able to find her in the woods. In note 192 of the critical

²⁸⁹ See chapter 3.9. below for the importance of the digressive narrator in *Incognita*.

²⁹⁰ This is characteristic of Restoration comedy. See note 250 to the edition of *Moll Flanders* (1989, 443) by David Blewett where this is also ironised in this book: “Forced, tricked, clandestine, and mock marriages were a familiar feature of Restoration comedy.” In this case, the marriage between Leonora and Hippolito is totally out of the blue and quickly performed in the overall pace of the narration. Also, Leonora’s father makes an appearance right after the deed is done and his reaction is ironised by the narrator who even claims to be unable to express with words the expression in the face of Don Mario, Leonora and Hippolito.

²⁹¹ McKenzie in his edition pinpoints two different possible sources, one is Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1595-6) and William Wycherley’s *Love in a Wood; or, St James’s Park* (1672).

²⁹² Congreve owned several editions of Shakespeare’s works. See items number 541, 542, 543, 544. (Hodges 1955)

edition by Peter Holland (2008), the term ‘wood’ means both ‘mad with anger’ and ‘wooded’. However, in the case of *Incognita* it is the first sense Congreve took.

DEMETRIUS

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.

Where is Lysander, and fair Hermia?

The one I’ll slay, the other slayeth me.

Thou told’st me they were stol’n unto this wood,

And here am I, and wood within this wood

Because I cannot meet my Hermia.

Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.

The other reference is found in William Wycherley’s *Love in a Wood, or, St James’s Park*. The meaning appears in the very title of the comedy. In the edition used by Peter Dixon, the note explains that “in a wood” means “bewildered, in difficulties” (400). Leonora’s father, acting as a *senex iratus*, was in a state of rage mixed with perplexity, not being able to react to the image of his daughter being just married without his consent.

In Shakespeare’s comedy we find some features which are easily detected in *Incognita*. It goes without saying that the moon has a highly important role, as almost it was another character in Shakespeare’s comedy. In fact, there is a reference in 3.1. 45, where Pyramus and Thisbe have to meet by moonlight so the actors try to guess if there will be a full moon the day of the performance. In *Incognita* the moon also has her role in the whole picture of the story. The ‘riskier’ events which take place in the novel occur at night with a shiny moon. We find the presence of the moon when Aurelian has a moment alone with *Incognita* after rescuing her from a rape attempt and is admiring the beauty in what he believes to be a young man. Then, the moon (about to rise, to be in its zenith) helps Aurelian discerns all that happens in Don Mario’s garden when he is looking

for Leonora hidden among the trees. It is confirmed that both our gentlemen are guided in a manner by moonlight to be able to ‘see’ their ladies.

There is something in *Hermia* which reminds us of *Incognita*. She rejects her father’s will to marry her with Demetrius because she is in love with Lysander. *Incognita* rejects her father’s will as well, he wants to marry her with Aurelian but, she loves Hippolito (who in reality is Aurelian). Both women prefer to be secluded in a nunnery before getting married with a man they do not love. Patriarchal authority and marriage as a contract are two themes in both works. Both women are forced by their father to marry someone chosen for her.

The only reference to ‘dreams’ in *Incognita* is when Leonora is in doubt of her own psychological state. She self-reflects asking herself “Sure I dream, or I am mad, and fansie it to be Love” (*Incognita* 56). She assumes that she mistakenly believes Aurelian to be in love with her because she daydreams.

The reaction of Leonora’s father when he is asked to offer his blessing to the newly married is powerful. The scene turns to be the most dramatic one in *Incognita* when he bursts in rage, even to the point of having to restrain himself so as to not commit “some extravagant Action” (*Incognita* 58). The tempest which is placed upon Leonora’s conscience is massive since her father²⁹³ is cruel to her:

‘Ah! Ungrateful and Undutiful Wretch (cry’d he) how hast thou requited all my Care and
Tenderness of thee? Now when I might have expected some return of Comfort, to throw

²⁹³ Compare the relationship between Leonora and her father at this moment to III. vii. in *The Mourning Bride* and the King’s diatribe and subsequent despair of Almeria:

KING. Hell, Hell! do I hear this, and yet endure!
What, dar’st thou to my Face avow thy Guilt?
Hence, e’er I curse – flie my just Rage with speed;
Lest I forget us both, and spurn thee from me.

ALMERIA. And yet a Father! think I am your Child.
Turn not your Eyes away – look on me kneeling;
Now curse me if you can, now spurn me off.
Did ever Father curse his kneeling Child!

thy self away upon an unknown Person, and, for ought I know, a Villain; to me I'm sure he is a Villain, who has robb'd me of my Treasure,²⁹⁴ my Darling Joy, and all the future Happiness of my Life prevented. Go – go, thou now-to-be-forgotten *Leonora*, go and enjoy thy unprosperous Choice; you who wanted not a Father's Counsel, cannot need, or else will slight his Blessing.' (*Incognita* 58)

Don Mario is being quite severe to his daughter. However, I believe that he is not being gratuitously repudiating her daughter because of the marriage itself, but he feels that she let him down for not telling him. In a sense he feels miserable for not being able to inculcate her daughter trust ("who wanted not a Father's Counsel" (*Incognita* 58)) so that she will feel comfortable to talk to him about her lately relations. Don Mario does not symbolise an archaic force who imposes his will. To my mind, he is not playing the same role as, for instance, the Marquess of Viterbo. Don Mario is full of rage because he is deeply worried about her. He believes that Hippolyto is a rake who has robbed her precious "treasure" (*Incognita* 58) and he cares about her daughter's integrity.

Don Mario's diatribe against her daughter was so powerful that she faints. Indeed, we will expect him to leave the scene because of the harshness of his words but in a very moving manner, her father reacts as an affectionate father more than an authoritative figure. "Compassion and Fatherly Affection" (*Incognita* 58) appear in his heart and he cannot resist to embrace her daughter who is unconscious. And, thus, we find a very dramatic scene of a father with a daughter in her arms bursting into tears trying to bring

²⁹⁴ Compare this scene to 2.2. in William Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-master* (208-217):

HIPPOLYTA (turning about) Oh my father, my father! Poor father! You are welcome; pray give me your blessing.

DON DIEGO My blessing, *en hora mala!*

HIPPOLYTA What, am I not your daughter, sir?

DON DIEGO My daughter? – *mi mal, mi muertè.*

HIPPOLYTA My name's Hippolyta, sir; I don't own your Spanish names. But pray, father, why do you frighten one so? You know I don't love to see a sword. What do you mean to do with that ugly thing out?

DON DIEGO I'll show you. *Traidor, ladrón de mi honra*, thou diest.

her back to a conscious state. Here again, there is an echo of the end of Wycherley's play *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* when Hyppolyta's last lines say (5. i. 709-712):

So, so. Now I could give you my blessing, father; now
you are a good complaisant father, indeed.

When children marry, parents should obey,
Since love claims more obedience far than they.

The dramatic scene is not over yet, when it seems that she is recovering from her indisposition and Hippolito is rubbing her temples in order to force her to wake up, she opens her eyes and curses him for how miserable he has turned her life, "*Oh my Aurelian – how unhappy have you made me!*" (*Incognita* 59). Hippolito taking her in his arms and holding her up, asks for forgiveness and mercy to her father, as if his acceptance of this matrimony will bring back Leonora's spirits. When Don Mario hears her daughter to call him Aurelian, suddenly there is a change in his attitude and rapidly we assume that he knows the state of Aurelian as a well-bred gentleman with a more than sufficient patrimony so, in reality, he is a good match for her: "The Old Man hearing his Daughter name *Aurelian*, ... began to hope Things were in a pretty good Condition" (*Incognita* 59).

3.7.15. Fast pace ending

In the next three pages and last ones we will find a mixture of characters talking to each other, deceiving each other, concealing his identities and real intentions until the whole situation collapses as if it were a sand castle where the truth is revealed.

First of all, early in the morning Don Mario conducts his new son and her daughter Leonora to his house, and there they find some servants of Juliana's father because they are looking for her and they do not have any clue where she might be. Don Mario and Leonora seem surprised by the news, and they are totally aware of the arranged marriage between her and her new husband. They ask about the Marquess's whereabouts and his

son and brother to Juliana, Don Fabritio and himself are on their way to Aurelian's lodgings. (We know that Incognita is there).

Don Mario tells the servant that Juliana had not been there, at his house. Then, he starts planning how to hide Aurelian from his father, Don Fabio and also, the Marquess. Hippolito is impressed by the determination in contriving a plan, "*Hippolito* could oftentimes scarce forbear smiling at the old Man's Contrivances who was most deceived himself" (*Incognita* 59). Hippolito suggests going to his lodging and explains everything to his father. Nonetheless, his true intentions are to find Aurelian there at his lodgings and with his aid explains everything to Don Mario and Leonora but at the same time he is forced to discover himself, and in a sense Hippolito is forcing him to end all the tricky mess that they have caused.

Hippolito, being alone in the coach with Leonora, thinks to be the right time to confess her the truth. She reacts in a pretty pleasant manner, not turning into furious replies. At first, she is even quite disconcerted by the fact that she was mistaken about Hippolito's identity. We must remember that the first time they met, Hippolito told her he was her cousin Lorenzo, and later, in the letter he confessed to be Aurelian. Therefore, Hippolito has deceived Leonora twice. The reason why she is not mad at him is because Hippolito is at the same level of Aurelian, "his Person was altogether as agreeable, his Estate and Quality not at all inferiour to *Aurelian's*" (*Incognita* 60).

Aurelian comes towards Incognita's room where she is dressing herself, and at the same time, Don Mario comes upstairs to talk to the Marquess of Viterbo and Don Fabio. They both believe him to have loosen his mind. Surprisingly, Don Mario is begging for forgiveness on behalf of Aurelian. Of course, they do not know what he is talking about, but he is referring to the sudden and secret wedding. The Marquess would

like to know her daughter's whereabouts and continues asking Don Mario about her, but Don Mario's insistence on the forgiveness of Aurelian turns out to be humorous.

The scene changes and Don Mario unable to persuade Don Fabio asks Hippolito and Leonora to come to the house and they are conducted to the dining room where another action is taking place (*Incognita* 60). They find the real Aurelian begging to his father upon his knees. Although Aurelian is begging her father for forgiveness, he is openly rejecting his father's designs for him and stating his will: "he had already disposed of himself" (*Incognita* 61). Certainly, Aurelian is not the best example of courage since he is scared of his father's. Nonetheless, Don Fabio does not really know how to react towards his son's confession and he looks at the Marquess, Juliana's father and in that precise moment they are aware that the only element which could ever restore peace between the families is no longer of use, "as if the Cement had been cool'd which was to have united their Families" (*Incognita* 61).

Comically, Hippolito and Aurelian greet each other as they are reunited after a while. Hippolito tells the truth to Aurelian and the purpose of being there with Leonora and her father. Don Mario cannot believe it when he hears Aurelian naming the newly husband of her daughter, Hippolito. He looks as her daughter trying to find an answer. Things get even worse when the Marquess' servants come without news of Juliana. It seems that she has fled. The Marquess, and her brother, Don Fabritio are suffering from despair and uneasiness, while Hippolito tries to persuade Don Fabio of the reason of her leaving the house, her aversion to the match with his son. Don Fabio restrains his temperament due to Hippolito's quality as a gentleman and talk to Aurelian. In a subtle way, Don Fabio assumes that the cause of his son's betrayal to his family is a woman.

... with a stern Look and angry Voice, and asked him where he had disposed the cause of his Disobedience,²⁹⁵ if he were worthy to see her or no; *Aurelian* made answer, That he desired no more than for him to see her; and he did not doubt a Consequence of his Approbation and Forgiveness – Well (said *Don Fabio*) you are very conceited of your own Discretion, let us see this Rarity. (*Incognita* 61)

In fact, we can deduce that Don Fabio has curiosity to see who is the cause of this misfortune. Also, he pinpoints the fact that his son has been ‘conceited’ upon his will to do the right choice for his own life, and he calls her a “rarity” (*Incognita* 61).

Juliana’s father and brother are about to leave the house, in a state of disappointment, sorrow and preoccupation. However, as a happy chance, Don Fabio asks them to stay for a moment until his son comes back with her. *Incognita* enters the room, her face is half-covered with a veil, to add more suspense:²⁹⁶

But *Don Fabio* came bluntly forwards, and ere she was aware, lifted up her Veil and beheld the Fair *Incognita*, differing nothing from *Juliana*, but in her Name.²⁹⁷ (*Incognita* 61)

Incognita and *Juliana* are the same person, there is nothing to be reconciled. “The individual merit of the protagonists in resisting aristocratic tyranny evaporates in this effulgence of ignorance, along with the illusion that there ever was a problem of status inconsistency for the constant lovers to overcome.” (McKeon, *Origins* 164)

²⁹⁵ “Of Mans First Disobedience” (Book I, 1) by Eve’s fault, Adam was “fondly overcome with Femal charm” (Book IX, 999). See Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (93 and 269). Furthermore, in one of the possible sources of *Incognita*, Camus’ *A True Tragical History* (109), the male protagonist, Alcimus is compared to Adam for disobeying God in attempting to court a married lady: “Where art thou Adam? Do you think thus to hide your nakedness from my sight with Fig-leaves? I may justly threaten you, if you persevere in this course” This statement is uttered by a priest.

²⁹⁶ This ending reminds us of the ending in “La Señora Cornelia,” *Novelas Ejemplares* by Miguel de Cervantes, where Cordelia appears to the astonishment of her brother, Lorenzo and the gentlemen, Juan and Antonio.

²⁹⁷ The same happens in Paul Scarron’s “The Tale of the Invisible Lady” (39) in *The Comic Romance*, where at the end we discover that Princess Porcia and The Invisible Lady are the same person. Also, the set story is set in another Italian city, Naples and there is a ball where masks are involved to hide citizens’ identities.

Juliana explains to Aurelian why she has never revealed her real identity. The reason was that he believes him to be Hippolito and she was aware that he was a friend of her fiancé. She could not risk their relationship because of that, so she opted for concealing her real name. Juliana's father is in shock. Our lovers are astonished with joy, love, and content 'to see how happily their Loves and Duties²⁹⁸ were reconciled.' (*Incognita* 62)

Leonora and Juliana relate for a while about their fortunes and misfortunes, and also laughing at the ironic rivalry they both had had because of two gentlemen who were meant for each other since the very beginning. Happily, the story ends, with a hopeful reconciliation or with a funny anecdote because was there such a reconciliation between love and duty? McKeon claims not to be such the case, even the title is a parody of the story: "*Incognita* does not give us "love and duty reconciled," because here, at least, they are never at variance. But it does "solve" a real problem: it does "compleat the happy reconciliation of two noble families" in a way that is not only a decided improvement over perpetual revenge²⁹⁹ but that also coincides with personal preference." (McKeon, *Origins* 265)

Having diverted themselves with many Remarks upon the pleasing surprize,³⁰⁰ they all thought it proper to attend upon the Great Duke that Morning at the Palace, and to

²⁹⁸ Compare to Palmyra's speech in Dryden's *Marriage-à-la-mode* (V. i. 340):

Palmy.

—Now all my prayers are heard:

I may be dutiful, and yet may love.

Virtue, and patience, have at length unravell'd

The knots which Fortune ty'd.

²⁹⁹ The well-known Italian *vendetta* is also portrayed in Sorel's *Francion* (Book XII, 27), "those who were present were all surprized with wonder, to hear so many malicious and bloody contrivances, which proceeded from the revengefull Spirits of the Italians."

³⁰⁰ The double marriage theme appears in Scarron's *The Comic Romance* (XV, 94), "With much joy, he then told me that the whole affair would be resolved by a double marriage ..." And also, in "Las Dos Doncellas" *Novelas Ejemplares* by Miguel de Cervantes; Marco Antonio married Teodosia and Rafael married Leocadia. Furthermore, there is another reference to the celebration of a double marriage in Madame de Scudéry's *Clelia* (20), but also the narration reminds us of the same style in which Congreve introduces the nuptials of Donna Catharina and Don Ferdinand de Rovori.

acquaint him with the Novelty of what had pass'd; while, by the way, the two Young Couple entertained the Company with the Relation of several Particulars of their Three Days Adventures.

*FINIS.*³⁰¹

3.8. Repartee and Female Wit

“All great passions have a violent beginning, and that there is nothing which more demonstrates an ardent and durable Love, then when it is born in an instant without consulting our reason.”

(Madame de Scudéry, *Clelia* 21)

Incognita is first introduced as a woman gifted in repartee.³⁰² The fragment which I would like to focus my attention on is the first encounter between Aurelian and Incognita,³⁰³ but there are some more instances during the story where we discern witty female replies.

³⁰¹ Compare the end in *Incognita* to the end in Scarron's "The Two Rival Brothers" (266) in his *Comic Romance*. In this case, "The three marriages happened the same day. Everything worked out well for everyone concerned and for a long time, which is food for thought."

³⁰² Later on, female outstanding reparteers will appear, as for instance, the famous one by Moll Flanders, when she is trying to preserve her dignity and accuses the elder brother of being a coward when she asks him: "are all your Protestations and Vows to be shaken by the dislike of the Family? (78). But the greatest example that Moll leaves us is the following:

If then I have yield to the Importunities of my Affection, and if I have been perswaded to believe that I am really, and in the Essence of the Thing your Wife, shall I now give the Lye to all those Arguments, and call myself your Whore, or Mistress, which is the same thing? And will you Transfer me to your Brother? Can you Transfer my Affection? Can you bid me cease loving you, and bid me love him? is it in my Power think you to make such a Change at Demand? No Sir, *said I*, depend upon it 'tis impossible, and whatever the Change of your Side may be, I will ever be True; and I had much rather, since it is come that unhappy Length, be your Whore than your Brothers Wife. (80)

³⁰³ See Widmayer's *Theatre and the novel from Behn to Fielding* (140) for a comparison between Dryden's *The Assignment* and Scarron's "Les deux freres rivaux". Widmayer states that *Incognita* is closer to Scarron's work because of the percentage of lines where two characters speak alone. Also, she compares Congreve's only work in prose to the rest of his dramatic production and she finds that the supremacy of lines where two characters speak alone is a tendency Congreve has in the way he writes (141).

Both characters meet by chance at a masquerade³⁰⁴ in Florence. One of the possible sources for this scene is Paul Scarron's *The Comical Romance* (1665), particularly chapter IX "The Tale of the Invisible Mistress", in French "Histoire de l'amante invisible". Furthermore, the constant ironic comments from both narrators are the same. It should be noted that at the same time, Scarron is indebted to a Spanish work by Alonso de Castillo Solórzano called *Los alivios de Casandra* (1640), indeed, this tale is an adaptation from "Los efectos que haze amor".³⁰⁵ But also, more inspiration for this first encounter and prolific repartee is found in Chapter XIX "The Two Rival Brothers". The characters of Dorotea may remind us of Incognita and Don Sancho of Aurelian. However, to my mind, the wit and bitter irony employed by Congreve surpasses the narrative skills in repartee by Scarron.

The particular interest of this chapter is to analyse Incognita's replies to Aurelian showing how sublimely she masters witticism.³⁰⁶

'If I do not usurp a privilege reserved for some one more happy in your acquaintance, may I presume, Madam, to entreat (for a while) the favour of your Conversation, at least till the arrival of whom you expect, provided you are not tired of me before; for then upon the least intimation of uneasiness, I will not fail of doing my self the violence to withdraw for your release.' (*Incognita* 13)

Aurelian presents himself as the humblest servant and approaches Incognita with such respect that, in a sense, it makes him seem a bit boring and conventional. His use of courtliness sometimes feels affected, which in fact is used as a literary strategy to mock

³⁰⁴ See Castle's *Masquerade and Civilization* (chapters 1, 2 and 3) for an insightful description of this phenomenon. However, in *Incognita*, a masque is not a 'degrading' event since at the very beginning we find that is part of a wedding's celebration: "to illustrate the Solemnity with Balls and Masques, and other Divertisements" (9).

³⁰⁵ See Merino García's thesis, *La novela corta en el siglo XVII: Scarron y sus modelos epañoles* (2002) particularly, Chapter III. 2. where the imitation/translation is analysed.

³⁰⁶ An excellent book regarding this topic is Josephine Donovan. *Women and the Rise of the Novel, 1405-1726*. Palgrave, 2013.

romances, and thus present *Incognita* as an anti-romance.³⁰⁷ Some critics have focused their attention on this particularity of *Incognita*. For instance, Maximillian Novak (“Congreve’s “Incognita”” 340) depicts the narrator as an anti-romantic one telling a romantic *novella*. Interestingly, in this fragment, the lady’s words are in indirect speech. Therefore, her wit is not completely displayed since it is focalised through the narrator’s words, who plays an essential role throughout the story:

The Lady made him answer, she did not expect any body; by which he might imagine her Conversation not of value to be bespoke, and to afford it him, were but farther to convince him to her own cost. He reply’d, ‘She had already said enough to convince him of something he heartily wished might not be to his cost in the end.’ She pretended not to understand him; but told him, ‘If he already found himself grieved with her Conversation, he would have sufficient reason to repent the rashness of his first Demand before they had ended: for that now she intended to hold discourse with him, on purpose to punish his unadvisedness, in presuming upon a Person whose dress and mien might not (may be) be disagreeable to have wit.’ (*Incognita* 13)

Incognita replies by saying that she was not expecting anybody, and he might think, for that reason, that he is not interested in her conversation. At this point, the reader must realise *Incognita*’s false modesty. She is aware of her own worth and Aurelian’s interest in her, but she prefers to play the role of courted lady and being flattered for a while, typically of a Restoration comedy’s heroine who “walks a fine linguistic line: she engages in provocative banter but never indecorous innuendo” (Gill 198-9).

This attitude in *Incognita* makes Aurelian react in the opposite way and convinces him even more of how peculiar and interesting *Incognita* is. She is consciously testing

³⁰⁷ Basically, an anti-romance is a parody of a romance. See Salzman’s *English Prose Fiction*, Chapter 15, “Reaction to Romance” particularly subchapter II, “Anti-Romance”. Salzman wants us not to forget that romance and anti-romance are interconnected and that the latter cannot “function” without the former, “one cannot see anti-romance as an attempt to destroy or refute romance” (271).

until what extent Aurelian will follow her ‘love-duel’ and, in that way, show his wit to its maximum splendour, ““absolute Freedom of Speech” between strangers was the rule. Joking, giggling, flirting – everything encompassed by “raillery” – became acceptable” (Castle 34).

When he replies, he states that what she says is enough to him to be sure of what he thinks and, hopefully, he will have the chance to speak to her. To which Incognita replies with a second display of witty remarks and pretending not to understand Aurelian’s intentions; she says that if he finds her to be boring and uninteresting, he still has the chance to leave his venture: “If he already found himself grieved with her Conversation, he would have sufficient reason to repent the rashness of his first Demand before they had ended.” Incognita is trying to make Aurelian walk away from her but, in reality, what she achieves is the opposite. Little by little he is becoming more and more interested in her company. And little by little, she has proof that Aurelian could be her perfect ‘match’. This love-test also appears in *The Double-Dealer* between Cynthia and Mellefont and it is also Cynthia who questions whether Mellefont is suitable for her as a partner.

In the last part of her reply, she is satirising the common and bad habit of judging people due to their apparel.³⁰⁸ Also, the art of ‘pretending’ is a main theme in Congreve’s novel. The dichotomy between reality and pretence is found in his later comedies. An example of a character who satirises this ‘pretence’ is Millamant³⁰⁹ when she refuses to feign at social meetings once she gets married to Mirabell (IV.v. 57-63):

... and chuse Conversation with regard only to my own Taste; to have no Obligation upon me to converse with Wits that I don’t like, because they are your Acquaintance; or to be intimate with Fools, because they may be your Relations. (*The Way of the World* 184)

³⁰⁸ See McKenzie’s “Richard van Bleeck’s Painting of William Congreve” (49-50).

³⁰⁹ See Al-Ghalith’s “Congreve’s Comedy Heroine: Progress Toward Self-Awareness” (283-92).

Therefore, Incognita is ‘punishing’ him for approaching her due to her appearance. She may be ‘pretending’ to dress in an elegant way but not being such a stylish lady.

‘I must confess (reply’d *Aurelian*) my self guilty of a Presumption, and willingly submit to the punishment you intend ... that probable conjectures may be made of the ingenious Disposition of the Mind, from the fancy and choice of Apparel.’ (*Incognita* 13-4)

To which Incognita superbly and wittily replies:

‘The humour I grant ye’ (said the Lady) ‘or constitution of the Person whether melancholick or brisk;³¹⁰ but I should hardly pass my censure upon so slight an indication of wit: for there is your brisk fool as well as your brisk man of sense, and so of the melancholick. I confess ’tis possible a fool may reveal himself by his Dress, in wearing something extravagantly singular and ridiculous, or in preposterous suiting of colours; but a decency of Habit (which is all that Men of best sense pretend to) may be acquired by custom and example, without putting the Person to a superfluous expence of wit for the contrivance;³¹¹ and though there should be occasion for it, few are so unfortunate in their Relations and Acquaintance not to have some Friend capable of giving them advice, if they are not too ignorantly conceited to ask it.’ (*Incognita* 14)

Aurelian replies feeling ashamed of this ‘presumption’ and recognises that it is not fair to judge someone for their appearances. His sudden change of mind is not reliable, since it seems that he is trying to please the lady agreeing on what she says.

Incognita starts her reply saying that she will not consider his defects (“‘The humour I grant ye’ ... for there is your brisk fool as well as your brisk man of sense, and so of the melancholick”), which in fact it is, in a sense, a way of mocking how Aurelian is conducting the whole conversation. It should be said that ‘humour’³¹² as it is understood in the text corresponds to personal defects or flaws. She can understand his personal

³¹⁰ See Buckingham’s *The Rehearsal* (I. i. p. 5), “...what humour I’m to be in: whether angry, melancholy, merry, or in love.”

³¹¹ See McKenzie’s “Richard van Bleeck’s Painting of William Congreve” (49-50).

³¹² See Congreve’s ‘Concerning Humour in Comedy’ vol 3. 65 (II, 92-107).

defects, as every human has, but the bad use of wit is almost unpardonable (“I should hardly pass my censure upon so slight an indication of wit”).

Incognita continues her speech, pointing out that it is possible to detect if someone is a fool in the way that person chooses their dress or in the colours used for that occasion. And then, she concludes that decorum is so important in the manner of dressing, ‘a decency of habit’, which according to her, is the target of a sensible man. This decency of habit must be acquired by means of custom and example. Therefore, good manners and decorum must be spread by means of good practice of both. This statement is produced by a woman to a man, in an unusual reversal which puts Incognita in a position of power. Decorum and decency of habit were a must for women rather than for men. In a manner, Incognita is being ironic about how important it is to mind your manners publicly or, at least, pretend to do so (“which is all that Men of best sense pretend to”).

Nevertheless, this decency in manners cannot be acquired wasting an unnecessary amount of wit for the cause (“a superfluous expence of wit”). Putting your effort and intellect on attempting to look respectable to the public opinion is not worthwhile. According to Incognita, it is better to ask a friend or an acquaintance about how to choose your garments. And in doing so, she uses a second irony, stating that someone must be really unfortunate for not having a friend to ask about it; or, if that person is too vain to ask for advice.

After these examples of wit and intellect by Incognita, Aurelian is at pains to provide a reply with the same level of astuteness. He is so astonishingly pleased about how the lady responds to his comments that he forgets to make a reply. Ironically, it is the gentleman who is unable to provide an answer and the lady the person who is expecting some kind of counter-argument. Therefore, she is ‘forced’ to move on and use a trigger to make the dialogue continue along the same lines, (“she had a mind to put it

upon him to turn the discourse”). What is most remarkable is how the narrator depicts the way Incognita feels, being conscious of her own worth (again), as it is said “justly sensible of her own Perfections, she soon perceived he did not grudge his attention”. Although Aurelian seems to be incapable of providing a good answer to Incognita’s argument, the cause is not Aurelian’s loss of interest but the pleasure of listening to her.

The last part of the repartee is without a doubt one of the most sublime moments in the novel, and where Incognita shows a great display of her own wit. At first sight, it seems that Aurelian is little by little conquering Incognita’s heart by his arguments and expostulations. However, Incognita finishes the dialogue in a clever and ironical manner which makes Aurelian, for the second time, feel amazed and speechless. He tries to flatter the lady a bit more (if this is even possible), and openly says that she knows everything in this world but her own perfections. First of all, he is not flattering her by virtue of her beauty but her intellect. It is true that he cannot use her beauty as a tool to please her because he is unable to see her face, but during the whole conversation the attraction has been mutually verbal. Having reached this point, he wants to emphasise that she is really aware of the world in which she lives, or in other words, she is not a fool: “you know every thing in the World but your own Perfections.” Secondly, he also points out to the fact that she is modest in the sense that she is not aware of her own worth: “because ’tis the top of Perfection not to know them.” Furthermore, Congreve employs a pun here with ‘perfections’ and ‘perfection’. The first one corresponds to the virtues a person might have and the second means the whole sense of perfection which basically is only found in God or Divinity. It should be mentioned that this comparison between the lady and a Deity is found later in *The Old Batchelour*. Vainlove although being a rake desperately falls in love with Araminta and compares her with a Goddess: “You are the Temples of Love, and ’tis through you, our Devotion must be convey’d.” (II. vii. 29-30)

Then, her reply is, to my mind, the best performance in the novel and it is read: “I thought it had been the extremity of knowledge to know ones self.”

Therefore, according to Incognita, the most intelligent person is the one who knows himself or herself more than anything in this world. The real wittiness resides in the power of knowing your own identity and value. Authenticity more than appearances is the real power, knowledge about who you really are and not about what you pretend to be. And the result, as I said before, is Aurelian feeling amazed and impressed by the power of Incognita’s words and the good sense of her expostulation.

Aurelian had a little over-strain’d himself in that Complement, and I am of Opinion would have been puzzl’d to have brought himself off readily: but by good fortune the Musick came into the Room and gave him an opportunity to seem to decline an answer, because the company prepared to dance: he only told her he was too mean a Conquest for her wit who was already a Slave to the Charms of her Person. (*Incognita* 15)

Incognita, in this passage, shows her qualities as a person. She shows her rationality and smartness in testing Aurelian’s psyche. After this declaration of love by Aurelian, she answers the following:

She thanked him for his Complement, and briskly told him she ought to have made him a return in praise of his wit, but she hoped he was a Man more happy than to be dissatisfy’d with any of his own Endowments; and if it were so, that he had not a just Opinion of himself, she knew her self incapable of saying any thing to beget one. (*Incognita* 15)

Incognita does not provide a direct remark to Aurelian’s compliment. She excuses herself for not having the knowledge to do so. However, she concludes that Aurelian must be a happy man not worrying about any fault in his endowments or virtues. Therefore, although she uses the word happy, she may be referring to sensible, in the fact that he is

not worried about superfluous things. Nonetheless, if this was the remote case, she says that she would not be able to give an opinion of himself.

Incognita behaves in a much more prudent manner than Aurelian, with all the excess of love. She does not want to make hasty judgement about the gentleman, nor does she want to flatter him too soon without being sure of how intelligent the gentleman is to be worth of her flattering.

Aurelian did not know well what to make of this last reply; for he always abhor'd any thing that was conceited, with which this seem'd to reproach him. But however modest he had been heretofore in his own thoughts, yet never was he so distrustful of his good behaviour as now, being rally'd so by a Person whom he took to be of judgment.

(*Incognita* 15)

Aurelian considers that Incognita behaves with all the pedantry, and this is something he cannot tolerate. Therefore, in this case he cannot make a reply since he is not really comfortable with this lady who seems to be witty but at the same time quite conceited. She is not easy to be flattered and he starts to feel tired of it. He has always been proud of his good-natured temperament but now he feels betrayed by a person he considered to be trustworthy.

In this scene, we find a pure display of hyperbolic romantic love and the disillusion or disbelief in just a few lines. The feeling Aurelian depicts through the narrator is one of the examples which describes best a mock-heroic romance. The romantic hero is being tested and partially rejected by a heroine which does not want to be treated as a lady (in the courtly-love manner). She listens impassively to Aurelian's flattering comments without even showing a sign of emotion or reciprocity. Therefore, Aurelian questions himself and his attitude as a noble and courtly suitor, yet judging incorrectly Incognita. Incognita is considered conceited since she is breaking with the established laws about courtly love. If you are being flattered by a kind gentleman, why

not react accordingly? Simply because she is not interested in this kind of courtesy; being flattered is not enough, at least to her, she is far more interested in wit, intelligence and manners.

In the end, he decides to drop the subject and asks her to dance with him. She, of course, does not accept immediately but resolves to tell him that she would not dance with anybody. But, all of a sudden, the narrator tells us how Incognita has already accepted Aurelian as her suitor. This is what she really feels towards him although she has expressed a lack of interest.

... for notwithstanding her tartness, she was upon equal terms with him as to the liking of each others Person and Humour, and only gave those little hints to try his Temper; there being certainly no greater sign of folly and ill breeding, than to grow serious and concerned at any thing spoken in rallery ... (*Incognita* 15-6)

Therefore, here we find the confirmation of this love-testing. Incognita wittily tests to what extent Aurelian's wit and temperament are worth. This love-test or wit-test will develop through time culminating in *The Way of the World*, his last play. McKenzie (2011)³¹³ points out how, in the following scene, there is a contrast:

MILLAMANT. And yet our Distemper in all likelihood will be the same; for we shall be sick of one another. I shan't endure to be reprimanded, nor instructed; 'tis so dull to act always by Advice, and so tedious to be told of ones Faults – I can't bear it. Well, I won't have you *Mirabell* – I'm resolv'd – I think – You may go – Ha, ha, ha. What wou'd you give, that you cou'd help loving me?

MIRABELL. I wou'd give something that you did not know, I cou'd not help it.

MILLAMANT. Come, don't look grave then. Well, what do you say to me?

MIRABELL. I say that a Man may as soon make a Friend by his Wit, or a Fortune by his Honesty, as win a Woman with Plain-dealing and Sincerity.

³¹³ See note to lines 39-40 in *The Way of the World* (II, vi).

MILLAMANT. Sententious *Mirabell*! Prithee don't look with that violent and inflexible wise Face, like *Solomon* at the dividing of the Child in an old Tapestry Hanging.

MIRABELL. You are merry, Madam, but I would persuade you for a Moment to be serious.

MILLAMANT. What, with that Face? No, if you keep your Countenance, 'tis impossible I shou'd hold mine. Well, after all, there is something very moving in a Love-sick Face. Ha, ha, ha – Well I won't laugh, don't be peevish – Heigho! Now I'll be melancholy, as melancholy as a Watch-light. Well *Mirabell*, if ever you will win me woo me now – Nay, if you are so tedious, fare you well; – I see they are walking away.

MIRABELL. Can you not find in the variety of your Disposition one Moment –

MILLAMANT. To hear you tell me *Foible*'s Marry'd, and your Plot like to speed – No.

MIRABELL. But how you came to know it –

MILLAMANT. Without the help of the Devil, you can't imagine; unless she should tell me her self. Which of the two it may have been, I will leave you to consider; and when you have done thinking of that, think of me. (*The Way of the World* II, vi, 23-56)

In this scene, Mirabell encourages Millamant to be a little bit serious, since they are not taking about trifles. He is trying to woo her but she is making fun of the whole situation. This contrasts with what happens in *Incognita*, where she is the one who finds Aurelian “grow[s] serious and concerned at any thing spoken in rallery”. Although showing herself as someone hard to deal with, in a sense “'tis all a lye” to quote Congreve himself. For *Incognita*, this testing-game takes the form of entertainment while at the same time she is discovering in what way she could be involved with this man. Not only is she mastering repartee and verbal wit but she also is leaving Aurelian without replies and leaving him frustrated and lost. She, then, emphasises that he is certainly too serious and oversensitive regarding her derisive comments.

Yet at this moment it seems that the couple is not meant to be together. The narrator tells us about Aurelian's contradictory feelings:

for his part, he was strangely and insensibly fallen in love with her Shape, Wit and Air;³¹⁴ which, together with a white Hand,³¹⁵ he had seen (perhaps not accidentally) were enough to have subdued a more stubborn Heart than ever he was master of; and for her Face, which he had not seen, he bestowed upon her the best his Imagination could furnish him with.³¹⁶ (*Incognita* 16)

He falls in love with her in an ‘irrational’ manner. Although we get the impression from what the narrator tells us that maybe Aurelian is not quite sure about Incognita’s behaviour and sincerity towards him. In this way, Incognita has been the one who truly woos Aurelian with her witty language and she has conducted the conversation reaching the point she pleases, when in fact, she did not miss any reply and Aurelian did.

According to the narrator’s description he has fallen in love with her in three different layers. First of all, ‘Shape’ which corresponds to physical appearance. Although they are not able to see each other, everybody may intuit a shape beneath a dress. Secondly, ‘Wit’ and it is needless to say why. We have seen in the previous pages how Incognita displays all her verbal intelligence in all her splendour not leaving Aurelian any chance to reply to her and even makes him doubt his right good-nature and sincerity towards her. And, thirdly, ‘Air’. In this case, we may consider manners and attitude. This is certainly linked to witticism and how the lady behaves in public. Certainly, this is highly difficult to discern since this should be told to the reader by ‘showing’ and not by

³¹⁴ A “je-ne-sais-quoi” very well explained in Dominique Bouhours’s *Les Entretiens d’Ariste et d’Eugène, entretien* number 5. This work corresponds to item number 31 in William Congreve’s library (Hodges 1955); d’Ariste et Eugene Entretiens. [Le P. Dominique Bouhours (1628–1702).] *Les entretiens d’Ariste et d’Eugene*. Seconde edition. A Paris, chez Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1671. 12°.

³¹⁵ “When he asked to see her face, she told him he wasn’t ready yet, that she would find a better opportunity ... she took off her glove and, showing the Spaniard the loveliest hand he had ever seen ...” (Scarron’s “The Tale of the Invisible Mistress” 27)

³¹⁶ The theme of love at first sight is discussed in Madame de Scudéry’s *Clelia* (21). Clelia states: “I cannot conceive that it is possible to one to love, that he hath not the leisure to know, I easily imagine that a great beauty pleaseth at first sight, but cannot conceive how Love should be produced in a moment, and I am strongly perswaded that one cannot at the first time that they see a person, as amiable as can be imagined, feel any thing in his heart but some disposition to love.” To what Horatius replies that “one may love at the first sight if they see a person that is capable to be beloved”, because according to him “Love at first is Love, though it is but newly begun.”

‘telling’. There are certain things which are really complicated to tell with words and the ‘Air’ of a character is one of these things. However, it could be achieved by means of a sublime description of the character itself, but we do not have this in *Incognita*, nor *Incognita* is a play, unfortunately.

Apart from these three features, the narrator also points out how ‘accidentally’ *Incognita* shows a white hand. This white hand could be interpreted as a symbol of purity and chastity. Although he is not able to see her, his imagination is enough to create a picture in his mind.

Incognita brings up a theme which could be easily adapted to currently feminine issues. She turns out to be worried about discovering herself because of the image he would display about herself and her integrity and so she expresses her concern:

I had not brought my self to the Inconveniency of being censur’d, either of too much easiness or reservedness; but to avoid, as much as I can, the extremity of either, I am resolv’d but to discover my self in part, and will endeavour to give you as little occasion as I can, either to boast of, or ridicule the Behaviour of the Women of *Florence* in your Travels. (*Incognita* 24)

She is thinking of pros and cons of discovering her identity. If she shows her face, she might be considered too open to strangers and her reputation could be at stake. However, if she decides not to show her face she could be easily mocked for being too prudish. She resolves not to give room for either of the extremities and decides to discover just a bit of herself. She even laughs at the fact that he might tell this as a joke when he talks to his friends about his travels. In part he would laugh at this event if she just shows a little bit of her body mocking how exaggeratedly reserved she is or, on the other hand, he could brag about seeing more than he should. The important thing here is that *Incognita* is sensible so as to propound a middle ground and not being too prudish or too open. And what is more she is mature enough to leave the possibility of being mocked or criticised

by this gentleman whom she has just met. In a manner, she is showing her self-confidence, but also testing Aurelian and his good nature as a man and as a suitor.

Aurelian passes the test, once again answering in the courtliest manner. He promises her that he would make Florence his residence whatever commitments he would have abroad. She is the one who stops Aurelian's infatuation from time to time; her rationality confronts Aurelian's sentimentalism. And in fact, until this point we have the feeling that Incognita is testing Aurelian in a more objective yet impassive manner, she is not expressing her feelings openly and what is more, she is restraining Aurelian's love. But, this does not impede the climax to this sudden infatuation of Aurelian to happen:

Aurelian who was really in Love ... Well, what follow'd? Why, she pull'd off her Mask, and appear'd to him at once in the Glory or Beauty. But who can tell the astonishment *Aurelian* felt? He was for a time senseless; Admiration had suppress'd his Speech, and his Eyes were entangled in Light. (*Incognita* 24)

Nonetheless, up to this point this passage seems to be the 'real' ecstasy in Aurelian infatuation but as long as the story continues the 'volume', so to speak, in Aurelian's praise is increasing hugely. There is a moment which is worth commenting from the point of view of Incognita's disbelief. Even though she has already uncovered her face after little conversation and dancing she is still prudent to discover her identity. She does not seem to be naïve or excessively confident in Aurelian's feelings. She tells him that "his Passion was too suddain to be real, and too violent to be lasting" (*Incognita* 26). There is a break in the romantic reader's expectation of the lady trusting and accepting the suitor after more than the required wooing. Aurelian replies to Incognita's 'reprimand' denying the rush that she claims and explaining with a passionate metaphor how he has fallen in love with her little by little:

Indeed it might not be very lasting, (with a submissive mournful Voice) but it would continue during his Life). That it was suddain, he denied, for she had raised it by degrees

from his first sight of her,³¹⁷ by a continued discovery of Charms in her Mien and Conversation, till she thought fit to set Fire to the Train³¹⁸ she had laid, by the Lightning of her Face; and then he could not help it, if he were blown up. (*Incognita* 26)

Although Aurelian points out that the first sight of her was the first step in his infatuation I must say that he declared himself in love once they were involved in a proper, witty conversation. Her charms in mien and conversation were the real triggers in Aurelian's desire to know her face, to discover if her smartness and perspicacity correspond to each other in quantity and quality. It is not Incognita's beauty what attracts Aurelian in first place, but her intelligence and resolution, the way she replies to every comment and flattery he directs to her, how she (more than once) leaves him speechless and metaphorically at her mercy. All these feelings and emotions are exacerbated by Aurelian's vision of Incognita's beauty and how perfectly it matches with her deportment.

The passion Aurelian feels for Incognita, now in a more physical manner is depicted by means of a sublime metaphor. He 'accused' Incognita of having chosen the perfect moment to set fire to the train she had laid. This means that Incognita waits until he has passed the love-test and proves his smartness. After a proper conversation in equal terms, without seeing each other so that other 'appetites', different to the intellectual ones, meddle in. And, of course only when she is ultimately aware of Aurelian's love is that she decides to reveal her face. In metaphorical terms, Incognita stabs him with her beauty and leaves Aurelian severely wounded, inevitably in love. She has set fire to the train he had laid, and now it has exploded, there is no way back to Aurelian, as the narrator tells us: "then he could not help it, if he were blown up".

³¹⁷ Compare to Dryden's Aurelian in *The Assignment*: "For my part, I never found so much disposition in myself to love any woman at first sight. Handsome she is; of that I am certain." (I. i. p. 364)

³¹⁸ 'Set fire to the train' in which the train means, according to the *OED*, "a trail of gunpowder for firing an explosive charge".

Incognita replies to Aurelian using a judicial metaphor, where Incognita adopts the role of a judge and Aurelian that of the convict.³¹⁹ This time she rejects to tell her real name and adopts that of Incognita:

... she should find a time to make some Trials of him; but for the first, she charged him not to follow or observe her, after the Dissolution of the Assembly. He promised to obey, and entreated her to tell him but her Name, that he might have Recourse to that in his Affliction for her Absence, if he were able to survive it. She desired him to live by all means; and if he must have a Name to play with, to call her *Incognita*, till he were better informed. (*Incognita* 26)

There is a crucial moment in the story when Aurelian reflects on the possibility of seeing Incognita again, when he tells the story to Hippolito. We find Aurelian a little bit disheartened since he has not seen enough interest in Incognita to warrant another meeting. There is little chance that these two characters would meet again and Aurelian is aware of it. Nonetheless, the point here is the conscious regret of the character for not having paid attention more to the intellectual side of Incognita and rather being astonished by her beauty. As it is said above, Aurelian's inability to articulate words due to Incognita's beauty and witty remarks made him look stupid and not determined. Certainly, Incognita won this first repartee, and he knows it: "Then did he repent his inconsiderate Choice, in preferring the momentary Vision of her Face, to a certain Intelligence of her Person" (*Incognita* 30).

Later on, at the same level both cavaliers greet both ladies, but as well as their own relationship their attitudes are slightly different. Furthermore, the words employed by the narrator are consciously modified to portray the difference.

³¹⁹ On a biographical note, it should be reminded that William Congreve studied Law at the Middle Temple. He was admitted there before the 21st March 1691. However, he wrote *Incognita* before this happened, during his stay in Staffordshire. This could have been a hidden allusion to his studies, however this seems to be unlikely due to the order of events. See the latest edition of William Congreve' biography in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* by C. Y. Ferdinand and D. F. McKenzie published in 2004.

Our Lovers soon perceived the Stars which were to Rule their Destiny, which sparkled a lustre beyond all the inferiour Constellations, and seem'd like two Suns to distribute Light to all the Planets in that Heavenly Sphere. *Leonora* knew her Slave by his Badge and blushed till the Lilies and Roses in her Cheeks had resemblance to the Plume of Crimson and White Handkerchief in *Hippolito's* Crest. He made her a low bow, and reined his Horse back with an extraordinary Grace, into a respectful retreat. *Aurelian* saw his Angel, his beautiful *Incognita*, and had no other way to make himself known to her, but by saluting and bowing to her after the *Spanish* mode; she guess'd him by it to be her new Servant *Hippolito*, and signified her apprehension, by making him a more particular and obliging return, than to any of the Cavaliers who had saluted her before. (*Incognita* 37)

In this fragment, *Hippolito* and *Aurelian* encounter *Leonora* and *Incognita* at the very same time. It is the first time both couples are in the same place at the same time. The narrator starts with a metaphor of astronomy. He remarks that these two women are like stars in the sky giving light to our gentlemen. Again, the theme of Providence reappears, particularly when it says "Rule their Destiny". In this case, both women are the responsible ones for the future of both gentlemen as if they were in charge of the following events coming to pass. They are the responsible ones for giving light and a warm environment for living creatures to survive. The same light they give to them to exist as well. However, this dependence which both cavaliers (according to the narrator) develop is reinforced but the later comments referring to *Hippolito* and *Aurelian* as a 'slave' and a 'servant'. Firstly, the 'slave' for his part shows respect making 'her a low bow, and reined his Horse back with an extraordinary Grace, into a respectful retreat.' *Hippolito's* adoration of *Leonora* is evident, to the extreme of being called 'slave'. (*Incognita* 37)

Secondly, the 'servant' does very much the same thing 'saluting and bowing to her after the *Spanish* mode' since as we must remember *Incognita* believes *Aurelian* to

be Hippolito, the Spaniard. However, although he is called ‘her new servant’ in a quite pejorative manner, there is an implied sign of ‘acceptance’ of him as a new suitor more than a new servant. When the narrator says that she greets him in a more particular and obliging manner so as to indicate that she has noticed his presence. Yet this more particular manner of greeting Aurelian is contrasted to the other way she has used to salute the rest of the gentlemen, so we may think that she is becoming interested in Aurelian.

Incognita is found to be a proactive character since when the mock-fight at the tilting is over and our cavaliers’ honour is restored, both sneaked out of the scene:

The Crowd breaking up, our Cavaliers made a shift to steal off unmarked, save by the watchful *Leonora* and *Incognita*, whose Eyes were never off from their respective Servants. There was enquiry made for them, but to no purpose; for they to prevent their being discovered had prepared another House, distant from their Lodging, where a Servant attended to disarm them, and another carried back their Horses to the *Villa*, while they walked unsuspected to their Lodging; but *Incognita* had given command to a Page to dog’em till the Evening, at a distance, and bring her word where they were latest housed. (*Incognita* 39)

All of a sudden, they who do not want to be found: they are consciously hiding from the ladies. As the paragraph says, they even have changed house to not be found. However, the shrewd Incognita has already sent a servant to find where they were staying as the very same instance they were “walked unsuspected to their Lodging”. So, it seems that these ladies and particularly Incognita are one step ahead of their actions.

Another instance in which Incognita’s response is worth commenting on is when she discovers her father’s intentions to marry her to a gentleman whom she does not yet know:

Juliana was confounded at the haste that was imposed on her, and desired a little time to consider what she was about. But the Marquess told her, she should have all the rest of

her Life to consider in; that *Aurelian* should come and consider with her in the Morning, if she pleased; but in the mean time, he advised her to go home and call her Maids to Counsel. (*Incognita* 41)

It is noteworthy that the narrator employs the term “desire” when showing the preference of *Incognita* to have some time to think about the news. However, not only is it the fact that she has to marry a stranger and she apparently is not allowed to refuse, but also the marriage is going to be held as soon as possible. She is a passive object of exchange used to resolve some ancient quarrel between two noble families and her father does not even consider his own daughter’s feelings about it. He is even ironically playing with the fact that she will have the rest of her life to think about the matrimony which is cruel given that he is putting his daughter’s happiness at risk.

Incognita’s rejection of her arranged marriage is contrasted to *Leonora*’s thoughts about it. This engagement is the trigger for her to realise how much she loves *Aurelian*. We should remember that she believes *Hippolito* to be *Aurelian*. But in fact, this sudden rush of emotions on her part feels a bit of a childish-like nature. Thus, the moment she knows she is going to lose him forever is the time she “found her self seized with a more violent Passion than ever for *Aurelian*” (*Incognita* 41). To my mind this is a ridiculous manner to put into practice the fact that we, as humans, need the necessity to feel the loss of something to realise how much we care about it. *Leonora* has been so sure about *Aurelian/Hippolito*’s feelings that now that an external force is putting them apart she realizes this is something unbearable to her.

Now upon her apprehensions of losing him, her active fancy had brought him before her with all the advantages imaginable, and though she had before found great tenderness in her Inclination toward him, yet was she somewhat surprized to find she really lov’d him. She was so uneasie at what she had heard, that she thought it convenient to steal out of

the presence and retire to her Closet, to bemoan her unhappy helpless Condition.

(*Incognita* 41-2)

Leonora is surprised by her own feelings for Aurelian/Hippolito. At this point, she realises the difference between emotions and feelings. Until this point, her exchange of words and flattery has been a game to her, feeling wooed by Aurelian/Hippolito was pleasant to her and obviously she had indeed emotions for him, called 'Inclination' in the narrator's words. However, the upcoming marriage triggers something deeper in Leonora's inner self, which to her is real love. Her despair is so huge up to the point of needing some privacy for her sorrow.

Nonetheless, female wit is not consistent and has flaws during the narration. For instance, we find *Incognita* excusing herself for being found by Aurelian accompanied by a man when he prevents her from being raped. She feels ashamed and would like to explain herself and why she was with a man as if the attempt to be raped was caused by her imprudence or recklessness; or in other words, her fault: "... I shall not blame your severest Conjectures; but I hope to convince you, when you shall hear what I have to say in justification of my Vertue" (*Incognita* 48).

She feels the necessity or obligation to defend herself for having found in such an embarrassing situation. Even she pinpoints to the fact that she would not get upset if he believes her to be responsible for the rape attempt. She then is about to give the pertinent justification in order to safeguard her reputation. To this, Aurelian answers in an extraordinary manner from the point of view of a feminist perspective.

'Justification! (cry'd *Aurelian*) what Infidel dares about it!' – Then kneeling down, and taking her Hand, 'Ah Madam (says he) would Heaven would no other ways look upon, than I behold your Perfections – Wrong not your Creature with a Thought, he can be guilty of that horrid Impiety as once to doubt your Vertue – Heavens! (*Incognita* 48)

Not only does not Aurelian ask for a justification, but he also is indignant that someone could even doubt about her innocence or virtue. To him, the thought of considering the rape attempt as Incognita's fault is inconceivable. Furthermore, he does not even think for a second why she was with a man alone in the middle of the night. He respects her privacy and does not judge precipitately what he has just seen without contextualisation. In a courtly manner, he kneels down and praises Incognita's perfections which reminds us of the first encounter between the characters at the beginning of the story. What is even more interesting is the fact that he (the male figure) is the one who reinforces Incognita's self-esteem telling her not to doubt about her virtue.

This chapter aims at analysing those instances in which I find consistent examples to comment on female wit. Also, Leonora as the second female example is suitable for a comparison between both. Nonetheless, Incognita/Juliana as a character is not consistent throughout the story as a stark subversive figure but the scenes where we find it have been commented above.

A wide range of interpretations are possible, but still we cannot deny that *Incognita* is a proto-novel which paved the way for Congreve's later comedies where the feminist approach is more appreciated.

3.9. The narrator in *Incognita*

“Now the Reader I suppose to be upon Thorns at this and the like impertinent Digressions, but let him alone and he'll come to himself; at which time I think fit to acquaint him, that when I digress, I am at that time writing to please my self, when I continue the Thread of the Story, I write to please him; supposing him a reasonable Man, I conclude him satisfied to allow me this liberty, and so I proceed.”

(William Congreve, *Incognita* 11-2)

3.9.1. Third-person narrator

At the beginning of *Incognita*, when the first two characters are introduced, Aurelian and Don Fabio, the narrator makes his first appearance:

I never took upon me to enquire, but suppos'd it might be sometimes one, and sometimes both together. (*Incognita* 7)

The narrator has previously told how Don Fabio feels about the fact that he is decaying due to his own age and being conscious of his only son to have grown with 'the Gayety and Vigour of his Youth' (*Incognita* 7). At this point, in the first paragraph of the story the narrator includes his own opinion of the matter. He remarks that although he never really thought about it, he supposes that sometimes Don Fabio might feel one way or both at the same time. We, as readers, get the feeling that he might be acquaintance to the character or any relative because the story is not distant from his judgement.

The narrator³²⁰ appears more often than not in the story. Sometimes, his intrusions are camouflaged inside the narrative process so that it is not easy to detect it in a conscious manner.

Authorial intrusions are typically characterized, and criticized, as interruptions to a narrative that disrupt the illusion of fictional truth to varying degrees. In this way, intrusions highlight by contrast our sense of two formative elements of the genre: its narrative structure and its referential status. (Dawson 145)

While reading the story, an uninterrupted flow of words and sentences takes place without paying too much attention to those little 'digressions' in the actual narrative line. For instance, as an example of this we shall read the following paragraph:

You must know, that about the fall of the Evening, and at that time when the *æquilibrium* of Day and Night, for some time, holds the Air in a gloomy suspence between an

³²⁰ According to Widmayer (157) the character of Heartwell in Congreve's first play, *The Old Bachelour*, is a "reinterpretation of the narrator in *Incognita*. Like the novel's narrator, his monologues upon the true nature of love are meant to be compared to those of the primary love pairs."

unwillingness to leave the light, and a natural impulse into the Dominion of darkness, about this time our Hero's, shall I say, sally'd or slunk out of their Lodgings ... (*Incognita* 11)

3.9.2. Digressions and irony: its main sources

There are several works which clearly had an impact on Congreve and his first novel. Some of them have an English origin and some others are French works. They were anti-romances or *novellas* published in the same century, some of them just years before. After a thorough reading of these works, I found certain paragraphs worth commenting and contrasting with paragraphs from *Incognita*. In this manner, when both examples are compared and analysed it is undeniable how clearly Congreve owes to them. It must be said that Congreve had an extensive private library which was catalogued and it can be found in Hodges (1955). Also, I have researched if these works were part of Congreve's private collection, although it is not entirely reliable since he could have read some of them borrowing them. Still, the vast majority of works which consider to have connections to *Incognita* in any particular way are included in the library of William Congreve.

One of the possible sources to *Incognita*, which is the work by Walter Charleton's *The Ephesian Matron*³²¹ (44-5), we find instances that remind us very much of the same digressions in the middle of the narrative and also, the interaction with the reader in a quite close manner.³²²

³²¹ Thomas Keymer, in his article 'Restoration Fiction' (165), explains how this work by Charleton is "a sensuous intellectually elaborate rereading of one of the bawdy Milesian tales interpolated in Petronius' text".

³²² Although very distant from the decorous style of *Incognita*, Sorel's narrator in *The Comical History of Francion* being in first person (the character of Agatha) also feels close to the reader. For instance, in Book II (42), "which, perchance, in your judgements, will savour of much impiety; However it is no matter, I come not hither to make you believe I repent of my past iniquities".

In the mean time, we beg excuse for thus long digressing³²³ into so grave and unsuitable a Speculation, (which yet we could not well avoid) from our Story; and for holding you upon the rack of suspens; while your good nature makes you impatient, till you are assured of the Ladie's perfect recovery.

The narrator directly addresses the reader³²⁴ using the second person.³²⁵ This technique is called parabasis.³²⁶ Widmayer (3) brings back the definition of parabasis found in the *OED* applied to its ancient use in Greek comedy:

'In ancient Greek comedy: an interlude in the action of the drama in which the chorus dance and sing, addressing the audience', as well as its later incorporation into a prose: 'a digression in which an author addresses the audience on personal or topical matters'.³²⁷

This is the first time; the narrator calls the reader in a direct and conscious manner while he is narrating the scene. The informal and close tone he uses to make him sure that the reader is following him is not new but there is a huge difference in registers between the one used by the narrator to address the audience from an outside point of view (outside the narrative line) and the sort of language the narrator uses immediately after.

The self-consciousness shared by Restoration and eighteenth-century drama and early novels casts the reading audience in the role of active participant in the fiction-making, just as a theatre audience's vocal approbation or disapproval affected the action onstage.

These playwright-novelists are keenly aware of our presence. (Widmayer 166)

³²³ The use of digressions in *Incognita* is partly indebted from Joseph Kepple's narrator in *The Maidenhead Lost by Moonlight* (1672) which is one of its main sources. Interestingly, this is a translation of a satire by Erycius Puteanus called the *Comus*, published for the first time in 1608. As Mish points out (298), "It appears a self-conscious narrator who tells the story according to his own personal knowledge and also with more than often intrusions to the storyline. The plot is a novella type, with a quick action and also telling the story of two couples." For instance, we find the first digression (13), and explicitly it is named as a pause in the storyline: "Now we are forc'd to a small digression, to make you acquainted that the Country and all it's Sports, with all the perswasions of his Friend *Paneutus* ..."

³²⁴ First category in authorial intrusions by Dawson (150): "direct addresses to the reader".

³²⁵ Compare this use of the pronoun 'You' directly addressing the reader to Kepple's narrator: "Long you may imagine she had not studied before she found out a Plot" (8), or "*Cherestratus* you may imagine was in a sweet kind of taking to think that he had lost his Mistress before he had her ..." (18).

³²⁶ See also Kareem's *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (118).

³²⁷ See also Fry's *Anatomy* (265), the origin is found in the 19th century Greek word *parabainein* meaning 'go aside'.

At this point, I would like to mention a passage from Charles Sorel's *The Comical History of Francion*,³²⁸ particularly Book VIII (23), where the narrator addresses the ladies directly, in this case it is not just the reader in general but a particular sector of the audience:

Fair Ladies, you that without blushing cannot endure to hear those things spoken of which best of all you do love, I know well enough, that if you cast your eyes on this passage, and on many other places of this Book, you will presently lay it by, and peradventure will hate me, or at least will so dissemble to doe, to shew your selves chaste and retired; Neverthelesse I love the truth so much, that for all the coynesse of your humour, I will conceal nothing, especially of that, which doth profit more by being divulged, than by having it buried in silence.

However, there are more examples in which the narrator stops the storyline or pauses in the middle of the narration to address the reader in an informal or amiable manner. For instance, "If our Cavaliers were dazled at the splendour they beheld without doors, what surprize, think you, must they be in, ..." (*Incognita* 12).

This familiarity from the narrator to the reader is found previously in the anti-romances of Scarron or Sorel. For instance, this passage from Charles Sorel's *The Comical History of Francion* is quite a good example of this. Francion is accepting the fact that although he had a sexual intercourse with Lucy, he is still in love with Florence, her servant.

You do believe (I do assure my self) that the familiarity which I had with *Lucy* did take me off from courting any more her beautifull Servant, but you are infinitely deceived, for

³²⁸ Paul Salzman in his *English Prose Fiction* (210), states that Charles Sorel's *Francion* published in 1623 but not translated until 1655 was not really an influential work until the eighteenth-century. The truth is that *Incognita* was published at the very end of the seventeenth-century yet *Francion* has already an impact on it. Sorel's work is more incisive with almost constant sexual overtones far from *Incognita*'s decorum but the irony in the narrator is indebted from the French work, undeniably.

I loved her still more passionately than I am able to expresse, and in whatsoever place I did meet her, I did not fail to testifie as much unto her. (Book VI, 18)

Nonetheless, there are other sorts of digressions by the narrator in the text but these new ones differ from the previous ones in that they are found in separate paragraphs. I would suggest that there are two patterns followed by the narrator. The first group corresponds to those requests for attention to make the reader stay focused. Sometimes, when we encounter too much information in the narration we might lose track at some point. The second group corresponds to those overt digressive paragraphs which break completely the storyline to leave the narrator space in the middle of it to tell something to the reader. The feeling is that the narrator needs to stop for a moment to tell us something interesting.

Now the Reader I³²⁹ suppose to be upon Thorns at this³³⁰ and the like impertinent Digressions, but let him alone and he'll come to himself; at which time I think fit to acquaint him, that when I digress,³³¹ I am at that time writing to please my self,³³² when I continue the Thread of the Story, I write to please him; supposing him a reasonable Man, I conclude him satisfied to allow me this liberty, and so I proceed. (*Incognita* 11-2)³³³

³²⁹ We find this use of the 'I' in the narrator in Walter Charleton's *The Ephesian Matron* (16) for instance and also, the manner in which he reports some parts of the story: "These reflections (I say) quickly recomposed her, so that she was able to demand an account of him of his being there. Which she did in this manner."

³³⁰ A literary pattern adopted from the French writers, "an explicit metatextual attention to the expectations, frustrated or fulfilled, of an imagined reader" (Ros Ballaster's "Classical French Fiction" 385).

³³¹ As McKenzie notes in his Commentary (194). In the first edition of *Incognita* (1692) we find 'degress' instead of 'digress'. He remarks that the previously use of 'digression' before in the paragraph and the obsolete use of 'degress' even at that time make pertinent to use 'digress' in this edition (2011).

³³² For instance, in *Moll Flanders* (409), the narrator who is herself telling her story at the very end of it offers the following digression in which she excuses herself but at the same time finds this to be compulsory and necessary.

As the publishing this Account of my Life is for the sake of the just Moral of every part of it, and for Instruction, Caution, Warning and Improvement to every Reader, so this will not pass I hope for an unnecessary Digression concerning some People being oblig'd to disclose the greatest Secrets either of their own or other Peoples Affairs.

³³³ This 'concern' for the reader's state at the moment of reading and the consequent (mis)interpretation of the narrator's events is also found in this passage in Sorel's *Francion*, "But I shall not trouble you any more with the severall passages incident thereunto, and which befell me during the said time, for I feare, it would

This vain attitude of the narrator making clear his willingness to please himself while digressing is also found in Sorel's *Francion*. The digression is quite long and I quote just two pieces of it, but it is a perfect example of this type of ironic narrators, with a clear influence on *Incognita*'s one:

The stories which are here to be read, are not so guilty that they were made on purpose to prompt you unto Vice; Our design is, to make you expressly to hate it, by setting before your eyes the bad successe of enormous enterprises ... But if my excuses are of no validity, and you can find nothing in this Book to please you, Readers, whosoever you are, doe not read it the second time, I did not make it for yours, but for my own particular pleasure. (Book VIII, 24)

If we compare for instance, this digression by Furetière in *Scarron's City Romance* (19), we find the same patronising attitude by the narrator to the reader and also this necessity of the narrator to explain himself and why he stops the storyline from time to time:

I am afraid there is not any Reader (be he never so courteous) but will cry out here is a pitiful *Romancer*. This Story is neither long nor intricate, and a Wedding resolved already, which is not wont to be till the 10th Volume; but I beg his pardon for cutting short, and riding post to the conclusion, and think him not a little obliged to me for freeing him from the impatience that torments many Readers to see an Amorous History last so long, without being able to divine the conclusion; yet he may please to observe that many things fall between the Cup and Lip: and this Wedding is not in such forwardness as he imagines.

In a similar vein, this happens in Sorel's *Francion* (Book X, 12):

You may observe that I have not represented to you in what place *Nays* was at the *Waters*, whether it were at *Pougues*, or any other place; neither have I given you the Name of the

but offend your eares, and I have almost tyred my selfe with relating such fopperies, since I may give you a more pleasant entertainment" (Book III, 77).

Fortresse where *Francion* was a Prisoner, nor of the Village where he was a Shepherd, or of the City where *Iocunda* lived. It is a sign I have no desire you should know it; because I do not name it to you. Let us content our selves that [the story continues].

And another example comes from Madame de Scudéry's *Clelia* (trans. to English, 1678). In this case it is Aronces (Book I, 16-7) telling his own story, (so it is a first-person narrator), about how he met Clelia and in which circumstances. However, there is also this sway back and forth between first-person and a third-person narration reporting what the character is saying, using for instance, "Aronces say". This is found in *Incognita* where there is not a consistent use of narrating, but giving free discourse to the characters sometimes using the first person and other times the narrator is the responsible one in the narrating process using the name of the character and a reporting verb as for instance, say, tell or think.

I shall not trouble my self Madam to exaggerate to you all her first attraction, though I have heard *Aronces* say, she testified so much spirit, even before she could speak, for as I have things of more importance to tell you, I shall not weary your patience by a recital of that nature, and I shall content my self to assure you, ... neither shall I trouble my self Madam, to tell you many particularities of the Grandeur and Magnificence of *Carthage*, to make you comprehend that these two Persons could not be better in any place of the Earth.

The narrator starts asking the reader that he *supposes*, which is in fact ironic,³³⁴ of course he is fully *aware* of this disturbance (Salzman 180). Nobody wants to be cut in the middle of a story. Then, even when he is making the reader be annoyed, he wants to ensure at the same time that the reader is completely engaged and that he would not abandon the story because of being boring. When the narrator speaks to the audience, he

³³⁴ Wydmayer (15) and Ramond (*Roman et théâtre au XVIIIe siècle* (204)) agree in the fact that an ironic narrator is one of the features of the hybrid nature between drama and novels.

wants to reinforce what the story itself should do, and that is to not permit the reader to put down the book. According to Charlotte Morgan (64), Congreve was the author who “was the first to employ it [digression] so largely and so consciously”. I do not concur with this statement entirely, I would say that we find these long digressions in Scarron’s *Comic Romance* as I will state later by means of different examples from the text. However, what I do find interesting and new in Congreve is the connection between long digressions and his ironic tone. The narrator in *Incognita* explains his reasons about why he needs to introduce a digression, although the reader might consider this not to be important. I share this view with Paul Dawson (155): “Congreve finds it necessary to playfully apologize for his digressions and explain their presence, and this practice continues throughout the eighteenth century in both fiction and history.”

Then, for the narrator the process of storytelling is as pleasurable as the reader might experience while reading the story. Therefore, the narrator tells the reader that when he digresses in the story is because he wants a little bit of entertainment for himself and when he proceeds with the narration is because it is the reader’s turn to enjoy. But this is a lie in itself. The author, Congreve, writes a story told by an omniscient narrator (Genette 1972) who we do not know anything about but from whose story we can figure out that he knows more than he tells.

Thus, the narrator is testing the reader’s patience to discover little by little the whole story as in the same way *Incognita*’s tests Aurelian’s patience. In this first dimension (extradiegetic) which is outside the narrative world, the story is provided in a quickly way (less than 100 pages long) but with the condition of digressions spread along the story. Whereas in the second dimension (intradiegetic) (Genette 1972), our characters need less than 100 pages long to finally discover that *Incognita* and *Juliana* are the same person and that there is not such a thing as ‘Duty and Love Reconcil’d’ because from the

very beginning none of them were in conflict with each other, happily for our characters and happily for the reader as well. Although in appearance, *Incognita* could seem to be a romance, in reality is not.

Seventeenth-century English prose romances are usually long, and with few exceptions have not been edited or reprinted since they first appeared. They tend to be episodic, rather than following the bell-curse structure later borrowed from drama by the novel; their various episodes are often recounted retrospectively, in the first person, by many different narrators; they intersperse myriad ‘discourses’ among their plot elements; and they feature a bewildering number of characters rarely differentiated from one another by appearance or disposition. (Zurcher 379)

However, certainly, it is an anti-romance³³⁵, because in order to ridicule romances Congreve needs to deploy the themes but not the structure.

There are some other instances where we find certain words or sentences added by the narrator during the storyline, sometimes are opinions, thoughts or even interpretations of the story. For instance, when Aurelian greets *Incognita*, there is extra information which is provided by the narrator to the reader but it is not part of the narrative body itself:

He had taken no small pains in the mean time to put himself in a posture to accost the Lady, which, no doubt, he had happily performed had he not been interrupted; but scarce

³³⁵ One of the main sources in *Incognita* has been claimed to be Charles Sorel’s *The Comical History of Francion* (trans. in 1655). In fact, in Congreve’s library we find it in item number 296 —Comique de Francion 2 Tom. Charles Sorel, Sieur de Souvigny (c. 1597–1674). *La vraie histoire comique de Francion*. Leyde, Hackes, 1668. 2 tom. 12°. *National Library (Florence)*. A copy of a Rotterdam edition of 1668 has not been found. I have read and cited the translation to English (1655). This work is said to be influenced by Cervantes’ style in terms of the stress by the narrator to add introductory material to the story. In Booth’s “The Self-Conscious Narrator” (168) he pinpoints Books I, VII and X regarding this issue.

had he acquitted himself of a preliminary bow (and which, I have heard³³⁶ him say,³³⁷ was the lowest that ever he made³³⁸) ... (*Incognita* 13)

The piece of information provided in brackets is a technique used by the narrator to provide a sense of realism to the story itself. He notes that this privileged information is true since he has heard it from the protagonist of the story itself. Therefore, the reader gets the impression that the story was told by Aurelian to the narrator (who we do not know his identity but we can figure out that he was not present at the time of the event, but he was told the story in a very specific manner with plenty of details). This impression is confirmed later in the narrative when the narrator explicitly says “as Aurelian tells the Story” (*Incognita* 41).³³⁹ The narrator is about to describe the state in which Aurelian is after discovering that his beloved Incognita is forced to marry someone else against her own will. The indication that the story is told by Aurelian himself reinforces the sense of veracity of the story. A story told by a narrator who heard the story from the protagonist.

Furthermore, when Aurelian and Incognita have their first conversation. The narrator again offers extra information which is not essential for the understanding of the scene.

... for that now she intended to hold discourse with him, on purpose to punish his unadvisedness, in presuming upon a Person whose dress and mien might not (may be) be disagreeable to have wit.’ (*Incognita* 13)

³³⁶ Compare this to Scarron’s *The Comic Romance* (26) same pattern which allows the reader to believe in the stories he tells: “You will hear this story in the next chapter, not as Ragotin told it, but as it was told to me by one of those who heard it. So Ragotin isn’t the one who is speaking; I am.”

³³⁷ Sixth category in authorial intrusions by Dawson (150): “metaleptic insertions of the author as a character”. Although not an actual character inside the narrative world, but he presents himself here as a witness of the story by means of the direct telling by Aurelian.

³³⁸ Second category in authorial intrusions by Dawson (150): “gnomic statements that establish correlations between the fictional world and the actual world”.

³³⁹ Nonetheless, there are other instances where he assumes the control of the story-telling process, for instance we notice in the same page: “and formed the Relation you are just about to Read.” This is characteristic of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries writers, the claim of authenticity, the plausibility of the story they are telling. This is called, the pseudofactual, “novelists of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries routinely assert – though ambiguously, half-heartedly, or ironically – the literal reality of their books” (Paige 12).

In the first information we find in brackets, ‘may be’, there is a subtle subjectivity by the narrator. In this scene Aurelian and Incognita are having a conversation and interacting to each other. Incognita criticises Aurelian for having the prejudgement of considering her worth of conversation due to her apparel. She explains that although she gives the impression of being a person of wit, the case might not be always so. The narrator inserts in this sentence ‘may be’ as an ironic remark stating that very likely Incognita could not have had such an impressive outlook. Therefore, sometimes the narrator gives the impression of not being totally reliable, and more often than not, he shares his own thoughts which we cannot affirm that are not part of the story itself. This unreliability is portrayed when the narrator introduces the text (told by him, although by means of a dialogue): “he accosted her in these or the like words” (*Incognita* 13).

Furthermore, at the end of the repartee between Aurelian and Incognita, the narrator gives his opinion again, yet this time directly expressing it:

Aurelian had a little over-strain’d himself in that Complement, and I am of Opinion would have been puzzl’d to have brought himself off readily: but by good fortune the Musick came into the Room and gave him an opportunity to seem to decline an answer. (*Incognita* 15)

Here, the narrator shows to the reader how well he knows Aurelian, that even he is able to depict his inner thoughts or feelings.³⁴⁰ In the previous paragraph, Aurelian told Incognita that she knows everything in this world but her own perfection, as a sort of compliment to her. However, Incognita instead of blushing or showing her delight for

³⁴⁰ One of the strategies which English writers adopted from the French ones was “an exploitation of the capacity of narrative diegesis to provide access to psychological process ‘within’ character not available in dramatic mimesis.” (Ballaster, “Classical French Fiction”, 385). Related to this, I would like to quote a passage from Sorel’s *Francion* (Book 5, 21) where this is clearly portrayed:

It much grieved me, I confesse, but I protest unto you I entertained rather thoughts of Indignation than of Jealousie; For it seemed to me, that *Diana* forsaking me, and chosing *Melibeus* was sufficiently punished for her own blindnesse, and why should I be grieved at that for which she ought herself to lament; I did comfort my self with this, that to Court her any more was to employ time to losse; she will have a Courtier, let her therefore pursue and enjoy her own Fancie.

those kind words she replies in a different way, not expected by Aurelian or even the reader: “I thought it had been the extremity of knowledge to know ones self” (*Incognita* 15). Aurelian’s compliment is hyperbolically made but Incognita’s reply is not far from it. They are testing each other’s wit, yet Incognita in a more rational manner than Aurelian’s emotional tone. However, the narrator here depicts how he feels relief by the sudden played music which gives him an alibi to drop the subject. The narrator giving his opinion is another technique to add plausibility to the storyline, telling us in an unconscious way how well the narrator knows Aurelian and how closely this story is told for us.

Nonetheless, regarding the narrator there is something which is not clear about his knowledge of the story. It is supposed that he knows the story because Aurelian has told him it. However, in more than one occasion we find that the narrator also gives his own opinion about characters which are not Aurelian. Therefore, how can he be so sure about inner thoughts of other characters if the story is told through Aurelian’s lens? To show how this works, here there is an example, when the narrator expresses his own opinion about Incognita’s thoughts or we may say, feelings: “She promised him to Dance with no body else, nor I believe³⁴¹ had she inclination” (*Incognita* 15). Later on, he judges whether Incognita shows her hand in an ‘accidental’ manner. This narrator does not leave the reader to make his own thoughts out of the story he is telling but he sometimes introduces his very own opinion, to suggest a different version. For instance, when Incognita shows her hand he tells this in the following manner: “... together with a white Hand, he had seen (perhaps not accidentally) were enough to have subdued a more stubborn Heart than ever he was master of ...” (*Incognita* 16). Therefore, in a conscious way, he is suggesting

³⁴¹ The narrator’s opinion also is a feature indebted from Kepple’s *The Maiden-head Lost*, where we find, for instance, “... I think there was no smile in the case; however *Cherestratus* who came *communi Animantium appetitu*, did not care to satisfie his Lady in that point, ...” (19)

the reader that this action was not accidental, Incognita very likely has showed her hand in order to attract Aurelian's intention. Bearing in mind that they were in a masquerade, this action would mean the conscious act of showing more than anybody could see, a fragment of her skin, white and pure.

Later, the narrator with a subtle³⁴² irony tells how he should describe Incognita's dress and appearance as in romances. The heroine's or lady's garment is depicted and described as part and parcel of the description of the character. The narrator considers himself in the middle of the storyline that he should describe the lady's dress, however he does not seem to consider this of importance.³⁴³ Ironically, he says that her garment is beautiful and rich but that he might make a mistake in describing a pin or any sort of adornment. Subtle details which very likely are more important than the garment itself due to these little details are the responsible ones to fully dressed the lady. This constant mocking tone in the way he depicts characters and circumstances makes Incognita a mock-heroic romance.³⁴⁴

³⁴² Salzman (323) compares Oldys's narrator to the one found in *Incognita*, but still "not nearly as subtle as the narrator of *Incognita* ... but still amusing and personal."

³⁴³ This willing to omit details which the narrator finds insignificant reminds, for instance, of Kepple's *The Maiden-head Lost*'s beginning where we read: "My little Skill in Geography will not let me give you any better Account, then that in part of the Dominions of the great *Comus*, dwelt a young Gentleman, by Name *Cherestratus*; I shall not trouble my self nor you with a tedious Relation of his Ancestors, and how many of them were *Lord Mayors*." Or, simply because the narrator is not in the mood to tell a particular point in the story, "I would have strove for a Little Poetry, but that at present I I am not in the Humour, but if I make a modern Poet of ours describe it better then perhaps I should have done, I supposed 'tis all one. [The poem]" (21). Or, Furetière's *Scarron's City Romance* when the narrator informs the reader: "After other discourses of the like nature, which I purposely omit, not for want of Information, (for I have heard them a thousand times) ..." (49) or; "This Lady, whose Name was *Polymathia*, had not inherited so much Beauty, but her Deformity exceeded it, and I am unwilling to give a full description of her, lest I distaste such Readers as are of a queasie stomach" (110-1). Also, in Camus' *A True Tragical History*, we find the very same willingness by the narrator to omit or interpret bits of the story as he pleases: "This note in few words, discovered Wonders, wonders that are fittest to be veiled in silence, and interred in oblivion; yet why in oblivion? since this paper undertakes to transmit unto posterity the blackest mischiefs, to make them be so far shunned in like occurrences, as the Reader shall abhor them by reading this recital: Let us onely say then, that she advertised *Alcimus* as followeth" (150). This latter work is included in Congreve's library, item number 14, 14 *Alcimus & Vannoza*, a Trag. Hist. of 2 Illustr/Italian Families Jean Pierre Camus, Bishop of Belley (1584-1652). A true tragical history of two illustrious Italian families; couched under the names of Alcimus and Vannoza. Written in French. . . . Done into English by a person of quality. London, for William Jacob, 1677. 8°. (Hodges 1955)

³⁴⁴ "The criticisms of both Heartwell [*The Old Bachelor*] and the narrator in *Incognita* expose the impossibility of 'real' love existing within relationships that are self-consciously performed" (Widmayer 160).

With the teasing interruptions of story and self-conscious jokes about reader response, Congreve goes on in the body of the work to make the virtuosity of his own narration more important than the plot he narrates, expressing frequent scepticism about the mimetic capability that would later become the central claim of the genre. (Keymer 170)

When we think we will encounter a typical pattern in romances, we find that irony and satire are the constant here. Therefore, the narrator cannot be taken seriously as well as he seems to not take the story very seriously himself:

I should by right now describe her Dress,³⁴⁵ which was extremely agreeable and rich, but 'tis possible I might err in some material Pin or other,³⁴⁶ in the sticking of which may be the whole grace of the Drapery depended. (*Incognita* 26)

Another instance in which the narrator refuses deliberately to describe something physical or simply something that we cannot see as readers since we were not there is the following:

I shall not describe the Habits of any other Cavaliers, or of the Ladies; let it suffice to tell the Reader they were all very Fine and very Glorious,³⁴⁷ and let him dress them in what is most agreeable to his own Fancy. (*Incognita* 36-7)

Compare this to two passages very similar in Sorel's *Francion* (Book V, 23; Book VII, 6) where the narrator in this case Francion himself does not want to give many details about his other relationships after his infatuation with Diana:

³⁴⁵ Compare to Scarron's *The Comic Romance* (12): "I could tell you a hundred strange things about her [Madame de La Rappinière] but I won't, for fear of being long-winded." Or, "... I won't tell you very precisely where in our hemisphere the cottage was where Ragotin led his future brothers ... I'll therefore only tell you that the house was on this side of the Ganges, not far from Sillé-le-Guillaume." (230)

³⁴⁶ It seems that the narrator cannot remember exactly the description of the lady, the same feeling is given by the narrator in Kepple's *The Maiden-head Lost* (12), when the narrator explicitly tells the reader he is not able to remember every bit of the story: "The ill connection of it, as all other Chambermaids discourses, makes me I can't remember it, only this I am sure was in it, that he was a fine proper Man, handsom Leg'd, and she'd warrant as good a Woman's Man as any in the Shire." Or, the narrator's skills to relate the story is put into question by himself: "I will not undertake to give you an account in this place of their infinite pleasures, It is a task beyond my ability." (Sorel's *Francion*, Book VIII, 15)

³⁴⁷ This attitude in the narrator of not telling what he considers is of no importance to the reader is indebted to Scarron. For instance, in *The Comic Romance*, Second Part, Chapter XVIII, "I won't tell you the details of the meal. You will only know that a great time was had by all and that huge quantities were eaten" (243-4). This category of authorial intrusions corresponds to number four in Dawson (150), "self-conscious statements about the narrative act."

After her, I loved many more, of whom I will not speak, the Story will too much trouble you; It may suffice, that for the greatest part of them our affections were reciprocal, and there was not any of them but gave me the testimony of a vehement passion, in granting me their dearest favours.

I observed many other wild postures of rusticity, which are too long in this place to recite. It may suffice that I saw a new Art of Love practiced, quite contrary to that while gentle *Ovid* did describe.

Chronologically in order, and almost at the end of the story, the narrator again refuses to narrate Hippolito's use of his sublime rhetoric in order to resolve how to do with their love (Leonora and his) and also Leonora's replies and refusal to accept such a rush to proceed.

'Twere tedious to tell the many and ingenious Arguments he used, with all her Nice Distinctions and Objections. In short, he convinced her of his Passion,³⁴⁸ represented to her the necessity they were under, of being speedy in their Resolves. (*Incognita* 57)

It is noticeable how self-confident this narrator is in his free-will to tell what he considers. However, in this particular fragment we encounter that he even gives the reader the right to imagine. Therefore, the reader is an active part in the story and in consequence, different imaginative responses would be begotten by each reader.

³⁴⁸ Here we find the same tendency in omitting details in the narration of a particular event and leave the reader to their own consideration to "fill" the blanks and imagine a sort of mental image of the situation described. This is indebted from Scarron, if we look at "The Tale of the Invisible Woman" (32), there is a similar situation, "I leave it to the reader to imagine the names he called them, and how he reproached them for unfairly outnumbering him. He even tried to win them over with promises, but instead of persuading them, he only succeeded in making them more careful, depriving him of any hope he might have had of freeing himself through courage or strength." Also, this is found in Sorel's *Francion* (Book III, 70; Book VIII, 12), "Nor shall I need to trouble my selfe to name them farther, you need but to repaire to *Pauls* Church yard, or to *Duck Lane*, where you may know them by their workes"; "he began to touch it, and at the same time did sing an Air, the ditty whereof I care not if I do here insert. And I am so true an Historian, that I know not what should withhold me from giving you the Note also, that so I may forget no circumstance, and the Reader may have a thorough knowledge of it."

However, this is not the only moment when the narrator decides deliberately not to describe or narrates something in particular. Later on, when Hippolito writes a letter to Leonora explaining that he is not his cousin in reality and that he is called Aurelian. To make things worse, he decides not to describe Leonora's reaction towards the letter: "It were a vain attempt to describe *Leonora's* Surprise, when she read the Superscription" (*Incognita* 31-2). In this case, that is not true. Although he says that it would be really complicated to describe her reaction, he tries its best to describe what she feels and thinks. This narrator is quite intrusive sometimes. It should be reminded that the story is told by Aurelian to him (his identity remained unknown), but when he is able to describe in such a detail characters' thoughts and emotions, we get the impression that it is an omniscient narrator more than a witness or, in this case, someone who is retelling a story which was told to him in first place. The following paragraph exemplifies what was aforementioned said:

After she was a little recovered from her Amaze, she recollected to her self all the Passages between her and her supposed Cousin, and immediately concluded him to be *Aurelian*. Then several little Circumstances which she thought might have been sufficient to have convinced her represented themselves to her; and she was in a strange Uneasiness to think of her free Carriage to a Stranger. (*Incognita* 32)

One of the most impressive comments of the narrator is when he says that Leonora feels a sort of 'uneasiness', or discontent for having being a little bit open to a stranger, and provides him of a 'free' carriage with her. In this case, the narrator in a very subjective manner assumes certain behaviours about women referring to Leonora when she is not sure about reading the letter.

She was once in a Mind to have burn'd the Letter, or to have stay'd for an Opportunity to send it again. But she was a Woman, and her Curiosity opposed it self to all thoughts

of that Nature: at length with a firm Resolution, she opened it, and found Word for Word, what is under-written. (*Incognita* 32)

The narrator states that she has the thought of burning the letter or send it back to the sender without opening it. But, being a woman, she resolved to read it, because women are supposed to be curious. Being curious is not a pejorative adjective, but the tone used to describe it is. And it is not just the tone but the relation established or the prejudice that women just for the mere sake of their gender are curious creatures. Immediately, the narrator reverses a bit his speech, describing Leonora as a woman with a 'firm resolution'. Therefore, she is determined to open the letter and read what is written despite the likely disturbing content.

After this self-reflection moment by Leonora, she goes deeper in her own reflections about the character of Hippolito but also about her own behaviour as a woman towards this stranger who she has given free entrance to her life. In a manner, she is amazed at how little she is mad at him for what he has done. He has lied to her but even though she is conscious about it, she tries to excuse him (by means of the narrator), to explain Hippolito's good-natured intentions.

... and smil'd to think of his Excuse to procure her Handkerchief; and last of all, his sifting out the Means to write to her, which he had done with that Modesty and Respect, she could not tell how to find fault with it. (*Incognita* 34)

The following paragraph is an extensive comment upon Leonora's self-doubt about her integrity as a woman (mainly) regarding her lack of reservations and her display of naivety. She goes so far in her auto-reprimand that she is even considering the chance of going backwards in time and changed the past and what occurred at that moment.

She had proceeded thus far in a maze of Thought, when she started to find her self so lost to her Reason, and would have trod back again that path of deluding Fancy; accusing her self of Fondness, and inconsiderate Easiness, in giving Credit to the Letter of a Person

whose Face she never saw, and whose first Acquaintance with her was a Treachery ...

(*Incognita* 34)

Thus, she is swinging back and forth in her own thoughts and she ruminates her past choices. However, she does not entirely regret them and these doubts are interesting from the point of view of the psychological development of Leonora as a character.

In the last bit of the paragraph what really catches my attention is a metareference.³⁴⁹ There is a parallelism or metareference between the apparent fallacy and the theme discussed in the preface.

... he who could so readily deliver his Tongue of a Lye upon a Surprize, was scarce to be trusted when he had sufficient Time allow'd him to beget a Fiction, and Means to perfect the Birth. (*Incognita* 34)

Leonora describes Hippolito's plan as a premeditated and designed one where he had time to plan in advance and in that way, gaining Leonora's trust. If we look at the following paragraph in the preface we find certain words repeated:

Romances are generally composed of the Constant Loves and invincible Courages of Hero's, Heroins, Kings and Queens, Mortals of the first Rank, and so forth; where lofty Language, miraculous Contingencies and impossible Performances, elevate and surprize³⁵⁰ the Reader into a giddy Delight,³⁵¹ which leaves him flat upon the Ground

³⁴⁹ Fifth category in authorial intrusions by Dawson (150): "metafictional commentary on the work itself and its generic form". See Sorel's *Francion* (Book VIII), the beginning where the narrator reflects upon the story of *Francion* from an external perspective.

³⁵⁰ According to Brett-Smith (71) (and later in the edition by Montague Summers (244)), this reminds us of a conversation between Johnson and Smith in *The Rehearsal* (I, i). When Johnson talks about the 'new' kind of wits and Smith asks about what kind is that he is depicting. At this point the same words appear in Johnson's speech: "Why your Virtuosi, your Civil Persons, your Drolls: Fellows that scorn to imitate Nature; but are given altogether to Elevate and Surprise." But Smith still needs a further explanation and asks: "Elevate, and Surprise! Prithee make me understand the meaning of that." To what Johnson answers: "Nay, by my troth; that's a hard matter: I don't understand that my self. 'Tis a phrase they have got among them, to express their no-meaning by. I'll tell you, as near as I can, what it is. Let me see; tis Fighting, Loving, Sleeping, Rhyming, Dying, Dancing, Singing, Crying; and every thing, but Thinking and Sense." Congreve had a copy of *The Rehearsal* of a 1687 edition (Hodges 1955). McKenzie (2011) found another allusion in *The Double Dealer* (II. ii. 57), when Brisk says: "Because my Lord's Title's *Froth*, I' gad, ha, ha, ha, Deuce take me very a *Propos* and surprizing, ha, ha, ha."

³⁵¹ In the same vein, Furetière through his narrator in *Scarron's City Romance* (24) warns the reader that if he digresses from time to time is for his own benefit: "I give you notice betimes, because I design not to surprize you, as some malicious Authors are wont to do, who aime at nothing else."

whenever he gives of, and vexes him to think how he has suffer'd himself to be pleased and transported, concernd and afflicted at the several Passages which he has Read, viz. these Knights Success to their Damosels Misfortunes, and such like, when he is forced to be very well convinced that 'tis all a lye.

In an unconscious or deliberate manner, Congreve introduces here the same connotations and even lexicon from his previous description of Romances. Hippolito then, is the designer of a plan intentionally made as a Fiction, a 'lye', something that is not true. Contrary to that, we, as readers, expect to find truth in *Incognita* as the work is called *A Novel* and very much defended in the preface.

The narrator continues his account of Leonora's feelings using rhetorical questions supposedly used by her. There is a long self-reflection of this feminine character by means of the narrator as a catalyst:

How did she know this to be *Aurelian*, if he were? Nay farther, put it to the Extremity, What if she should upon farther Conversation with him proceed to Love him? What Hopes were there for her? Or how could she consent to Marry a Man already Destined for another Woman? (*Incognita* 34)

Helga Drougge in her thesis on *Incognita* notes a reference to the last sentence of this paragraph in The Duke of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*. In the fifth act, '*The Argument of the Fifth Act*'. If we read the passage we find the following story:

Cloris at length, being sensible of Prince *Prettyman*'s Passion, consents to marry him; but, just as they are going to Church, Prince *Prettyman* meeting, by chance, with old *Joan* the Chandler's Widdow, and remembering it was she that first brought him acquainted with *Cloris*, out of a high point of Honour, breaks off his Match with *Cloris*, and marries old *Joan*. Upon which, *Cloris*, in despair, drowns her self, and Prince *Prettyman*, discontentedly, walks by the River side.

It makes sense that there may be a connection between this story found in *The Rehearsal* and what Leonora is wondering might happen to her. She already knows that Aurelian³⁵² is forced to marry someone who he does not even know. So, she is contemplating the possibility of following his proposition but at the same time she knows that there is the possibility that he leaves her before getting married and runs away with the other woman. She is totally aware of the fact that being opposed to an arranged marriage is risky and even more when this marriage means the reconciliation of two families.

... a Woman that was her Friend, whose Marrying with him was to compleat the happy Reconciliation of Two Noble Families, and which might prevent the Effusion of much Blood likely to be shed in that Quarrel: Besides, she should incur share of the Guilt, which he would draw upon him by Disobedience to his Father, whom she was sure would not be consenting to it. (*Incognita* 34)

Incognita deals basically with these two opposed categories (or it seems that they have to be opposed): love and duty. Regarding these thoughts, there is a key reference to *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, found in notes in the edition by Jeffares (1966). It seems that Congreve wished to show all his knowledge of the classics but also of the previous masters in his first novel, which it should have been his “cover letter” to enter the literary world as a professional writer. The following fragment must be analysed in a twofold manner. First, regarding the interference of the narrator and the importance of his words. Second, there is an ironic and stereotypical manner in which Leonora is compared to Eve.

’Tis strange now, but all Accounts agree, that just here *Leonora*, who had run like a violent Stream against *Aurelian* hitherto, now retorted with as much precipitation in his Favour. I could never get any Body to give me a satisfactory Reason, for her suddain and dextrous Change of Opinion just at that stop, which made me conclude she could not help

³⁵² I use the name Aurelian because it must be reminded that it is Hippolito using Aurelian’s name who wrote the letter. Leonora does not know yet Hippolito’s real identity so when she talks about the addresser she uses the name of Aurelian.

it; and that Nature boil'd over in her at that time when it had so fair an Opportunity to show it self: For *Leonora* it seems was a Woman Beautiful, and otherwise of an excellent Disposition; but in the Bottom a very Woman.³⁵³ This last Objection, this Opportunity of perswading Man to Disobedience, ...³⁵⁴

Therefore, *Leonora* is wondering about the possibility of having a second meeting with *Aurelian* but at the same time she is worried about the consequences of her behaviour. As *Jeffares* first notes and *McKenzie* as well comments upon that, Milton's depiction of *Eve* and the fall is almost explicitly present. If we read through *Book X* (1-4, 213) we find instances where *Eve* is presented as the sinner and seducer who leads *Adam* to eat the forbidden fruit. What is more, in the poem, *Adam* is addressed by 'thee' where *Eve* is referred as 'the woman' or 'this woman'.

Meanwhile the heinous and despiteful act
Of *Satan* done in Paradise, and how
Hee in the Serpent had perverted *Eve*,
Her Husband shee, to taste the fatal fruit, ...

This Woman whom thou mad'st to be my help,

³⁵³ As *McKenzie* (vol. 2 461-2) notes, this sentence recurs in a song written by *Congreve* called 'Tell me no more I am deceiv'd in the play *The Maid's Last Prayer* (1693) by *Thomas Southerne*:

I.
*TELL me no more I am deceiv'd,
That Cloe's False, and Common:
By Heav'n, I all along believ'd,
She was a very Woman:
As such I lik'd, as such caress'd,
She still was Constant, when possess'd,
She cou'd do more for no Man.*

II.
*But oh! her Thoughts on others ran;
And that you think a hard thing:
Perhaps she fanci'd you the Man;
Why what care I one Farthing.
You think she's false, I'm sure she's Kind:
I'le take her Body, you her Mind;
Who has the better Bargain?*

³⁵⁴ See *Jeffares'* edition of *Incognita* (61).

And gav'st me as thy perfet gift, so good,
So fit, so acceptable, so Divine,
That from her hand I could suspect no ill,
And what she did, whatever in it self,
Her doing seemd to justifie the deed;
Shee gave me of the Tree, and I did eate. (Book X, 137-143, 217)

Between Thee and the Woman I will put
Enmitie, and between thine and her Seed;
Her Seed shall bruise thy head, thou bruise his heel. (Book X, 179-181, 218)

And, if the reader might have any doubt of the clear-cut connection between *Paradise Lost* and *Incognita*, the narrator makes the mention of Eve explicit. In a sense, the narrator quite ironically and obviously, in a misogynist way compares Leonora as 'A woman' who comes from Eve and who has inherited all the recklessness and weakness stereotypically attached to the feminine gender.

... the Spirit of Contradiction and of *Eve* was strong in her; and she was in a fair Way to Love *Aurelian*, ... to make particular Remarks of his Behaviour that Day in the Lists, which should it happen to Charm her with an absolute liking of his Person, she resolv'd to dress her self to the best Advantage, and mustering up all her Graces, out of pure Revenge to kill him down right. (*Incognita* 35)

Even though Leonora is not totally sure of Aurelian's intentions she is determined in her plan to seduce him. Previously, the narrator has ironized the fact that Leonora is not really interested in Aurelian per se but as mostly all women in the country during the seventeenth century, to find a suitable partner. The narrator mocks about this sort of arranged marriages where love is the last thing to consider. When it says "determined the Matter in Favour of *Aurelian*, more than all his Excellencies and Qualifications, take him as *Aurelian*, or *Hippolito*, or both together" (*Incognita* 34-5). This joke about the fact that

maybe she could easily take both of the gentlemen since both follow the same archetype as they were like twins, thinking and behaving exactly the same manner. This is portrayed at the very beginning of the story when we read that Hippolito is ‘the second self’ of Aurelian.³⁵⁵ And twice this sense of ‘doubleness’ is depicted when both are exactly as good as each other.

Aurelian as he had good Credit, so he had a good Stock to support it, and his Person was a good promising Security for the payment of any Obligation he could lie under to the Fair Sex³⁵⁶. *Hippolito*, who at this time was our *Aurelian*, did not at all lessen him in appearing for him: So that although *Leonora* was indeed mistaken, she could not be said to be much in the wrong. (*Incognita* 36)

Therefore, she decides that she has to show up all her ‘perfections’ to conquer Aurelian’s heart as a matter of revenge for his lie. The irony here is that Leonora has already made a decision about him, even though she has talked to him once, and he has lied to her since the very beginning. But to her this is no offense since they were together *alone* and he respected her. And she is decided to represent the best version of herself to the best advantage and literally kill him down with her beauty and manners. Twice the irony is rendered, the narrator in this part of the narration attacks quite incisively the attitude of women, which certainly is mere prejudice when he states these assumptions in such a general manner:

... the Women seldom find that out; for though they do not see so much in a Man as was promised, yet they will be so kind to imagine he has some hidden excellencies which time may discover to them, so are content to allow him a considerable share of their esteem, and take him into Favour upon Tick. (*Incognita* 35-6)

³⁵⁵ See chapter 3.5.

³⁵⁶ Meaning women in general. Another expression used to describe women and their behaviour in the most general manner, stereotypically ironizing with categories.

More often than not, the narrator addresses the reader and, in that way, he leads them to think what he pleases. He is quite invasive during the narrative process. In the following passage, he even addressed the author of the book itself as if it were a different person than himself. Therefore, William Congreve is the author of the book, where he (remained unknown) is the narrator, supposedly the same person to whom Aurelian told the story: “I would not have the Reader now be impertinent, and look upon this to be force, or a whim of the Author’s, ...” (*Incognita* 35).

The narrator not being enough satisfied in his own satiric comments upon Leonora, he continues his narration attacking women. I personally consider this to be a mere reflection of some kind of women who react like this towards matrimony and relationships. The portray of *Incognita* in the first repartee is far different from this portrait of Leonora, at least at this very beginning. He is ridiculing Aurelian and Hippolito as well, that is the real literary effect of Congreve. He mocks archetypes which could be easily found in society to depict affected behaviours, to denounce in a way the kind of false relationships. The first dart is directed towards women in general, particularly the example of Leonora.

... that a Woman should proceed so far in her Approbation of a Man whom she never saw, that it is impossible, therefore ridiculous to suppose it. Let me tell such a Critick³⁵⁷, that he knows nothing of the Sex, if he does not know that a Woman may be taken with the Character and Description of a Man, when general and extraordinary, that she may be prepossess’d with an agreeable Idea of his Person and Conversation; and though she cannot imagine his real Features, or manner of Wit, yet she has a general Notion of what

³⁵⁷ Congreve is clearly indebted to Scarron in the manner he creates his narrator. For instance, in *The Comic Romance* (6) we find: “Now some critic will probably grumble about this comparison because of the disproportion between a tortoise and a man, but I am referring to the giant tortoises found in the Indies and, moreover, I have it on my own authority.” Or, “I won’t comment on this for fear of passing judgement too lightly, and I haven’t wanted to delve too deeply into this question because it isn’t worth the trouble and I have far more important things to write about” (44-5).

is call'd a fine Gentleman, and is prepar'd to like such a one who does not disagree with that Character. (*Incognita* 35)

The narrator in fact warns or, I would say, scolds the reader for thinking that this sudden and quick 'approbation' of Leonora is forcibly introduced in the narration at this point. We cannot exactly tell if this 'Author' is referred to Aurelian for being the person who told him the story; or, in the contrary he is referring to Congreve himself as the figure of author outside the realms of fictionality.

At his point in the reading of *Incognita* it is fair to say that there are two narrative levels. While reading the story, we follow a smooth narrative line, characters are appearing little by little, and setting and local environments are being described to us. Certainly, the storyline is not difficult to follow and is constructed around a prototypical Renaissance amatory *novella*. However, sometimes when we are engaged in the narration, the narrator halts it for a bit (he calls it himself 'digressions') to make judgements, observes characters from outside the story world, and also to have a chat with the reader. The closeness of the narrator regarding the reader is notable, he scolds, apologises, advises, comments, suggests the reader in every way possible; and for that period of time (some times a whole paragraph) we are outside the fictional world, as if we were in direct dialogue with the narrator. The following example is one of the most characteristic in terms of how smoothly the narrator changes from the digression to the story.

I could find in my Heart to beg the Reader's pardon for this Digression, if I thought he would be sensible of the Civility; for I promise him, I do not intend³⁵⁸ to do it again throughout the Story, though I make never so many, and though he take them never so

³⁵⁸ The intention or willingness of the narrator to digress is something characteristic of the narrator in Camus' *A True Tragical History* (185-6), "I will not trouble my self nor the Reader with a Discovery of the progress and success of the artifices used in this unfortunate infection (I would say affection, but have spoken more properly then I intended)".

ill. But because I began this upon a bare Supposition of his Impertinence, which might be somewhat impertinent in me to suppose, I do, and hope to make him amends by telling him, that by the time *Leonora* was dress'd, several Ladies of her acquaintance came to accompany her to the place designed for the Tilting, where we will leave them drinking Chocholate till 'tis time for them to go. (*Incognita* 36)

This paragraph is quite ironic when the narrator apologises for interrupting constantly the narration (digressions). Firstly, he scolds the reader for making assumptions which are not made by the reader but by himself. Then, he apologises in very kind manner because he has made some prejudgments of the reader's thoughts about Leonora's choice. As a way to amend and, in a sense, to win the reader's trust he proceeds with the story at a particular time where Leonora is found with some ladies, friends of hers.

The truth is that the narrator masterly introduces his own conclusions making it seem to be part of the story itself. In this paragraph, he is even crossing the line of fictionality addressing the reader for a moment in the closest way possible as if they were two friends discussing about something: "Let me tell such a Critick".³⁵⁹ In this way, the narrator is trying to teach how a woman behaves and feels. Although in reality Leonora does not know how Aurelian is, she has a clear idea of what a gentleman is and which behavioural patterns and manners must have. This implies the fact that women (as well as men) choose their partners according to a socially accepted standard of behaviour and good manners. In this sense, there is no room for love when dealing with suitors, the choice is rationally thought: "though she cannot imagine his real Features, or manner of

³⁵⁹ Compare this to Sorel's narrator in *Francion* (Book VI, 18), "If some severe Censurer should now hear me, he would say that I was perfidious to play the wanton with her, having promised *Clerantes* to gain her good will for him." Basically, *Francion* had a sexual intercourse with Lucy who *Clerantes* was wooing. Therefore, the narrator and protagonist of the story is foreseeing the response by the reader to this cheating to his friend.

Wit, yet she has a general Notion of what is call'd a fine Gentleman, and is prepar'd to like such a one who does not disagree with that Character" (*Incognita* 35).

Nonetheless, the irony is that this 'fine Gentleman' is not as such. Aurelian is not more than we expect. This is another issue which is criticised in *Incognita*: that of expectations. Nobody is as perfectly well-behaved and polite as it seems. What society in real life shows publicly is but the mere portrayal of good manners and feigned politeness. In this type of amatory novels, we discover characters' real intentions, motivations and thoughts by means of a narrator that usually is presented as a witness or an omniscient one who, as in this case, relates characters' inner thoughts and feelings. An example of this, for instance, is Aphra Behn's *The Fair Jilt* (9) narrator who claims to be a witness and thus, presenting the story as true.

I do not pretend here to entertain you with a feign'd Story, or any thing piec'd together with *Romantick Accidents*; but every Circumstance, to a Tittle, is Truth.³⁶⁰ To a great Part of the Main, I my self was an Eye-witness; and what I did not see, I was confirm'd of by Actors in the Intrigue, holy Men, of the Order of St. *Francis*: But for the sake of some of her Relations, I shall give my fair *Jilt* a feign'd Name, that of *Miranda*; but my *Hero* must retain his own, it being too illustrious to be conceal'd.

Aurelian, as he bore a very fair Character, so was he extreamly deserving to make it good, which otherways might have been to his prejudice; for oftentimes, through an imprudent Indulgence to our Friends merit, we give so large a Description of his excellencies, that People make more room in their Expectation, than the Intrinsic worth of the Man will

³⁶⁰ In McKeon's terms the empiricism of a "true history" is an opposed force to the idealism of romance. But at the same time, this generates an extreme scepticism, which discredits these true histories as something called "naïve empiricism" also called "new romances" (*Origins* 266). In fact, there is a reference to these "new romances" in Sorel's *Francion* (Book II, 39), "he related the adventures of his amorous stealths, esteeming his money well employed, and desiring so remarkable a History should be eternized by the Pen of some famous Author in a new *Romance*."

fill, which renders him so much the more despicable as there is emptiness to spare.

(*Incognita* 35)

Nonetheless, the narrator's ironic³⁶¹ comments are directed towards other characters. Although the narrator's privileged knowledge is supposed to be provided by Aurelian, he certainly describes feelings and emotions of other characters in scenes where Aurelian was not present. Therefore, when Hippolito and Leonora meet the first time, the narrator adds some information about the way in which Hippolito feels towards all the confusion. In this scene, Leonora is talking during the whole encounter without leaving Hippolito speak very much. Whereas she is talking, he is thinking about what he should do, deciphering Leonora's face and pretty much falling in love with her, all at the same time. So, whereas Leonora's speech is rendered by means of direct discourse,³⁶² the narrator uses indirect speech to talk about Hippolito's inner thoughts and emotions.³⁶³ Of course, this should not be considered as a psychological development of a character as we find in modern novels, but as a technique where an omniscient narrator (Genette 1972) has the privilege to search through a character's thoughts and to tell the reader:

Yet in Complaisance to your ill Memory, I will put you past doubt, by shewing you my Face'; with that she pulled off her Mask, and discovered to *Hippolito* (now more amaz'd than ever) the most Angelick Face that he had ever beheld. He was just about to have made her some answer, when, clapping on her Mask again without giving him time, she

³⁶¹ Regarding this bitter irony, we must pay attention to the narrator in Kepple's *The Maiden-head Lost* (28), where he overtly mocks the two couples in the story and ridicules their sexual relations: "... and they two huddled to Bed together, for better for worse, where I suppose they had as much satisfaction of one another, as *Cherestratus* and *Myrtilla* did before, besides the advantage they had of a softer Bed."

³⁶² In Camus' *A True Tragical History* (56), the narrator relates the story in indirect speech, but for instance, here he uses direct speech when *Vanozza* speaks: "But, said she, were I Mistress either of his affections or of some others, I would have recourse to it for the recovery of my lost liberty: In my happy days I was so little concerned for others misfortunes that now there is none trouble themselves to succour me in the multitude of my own."

³⁶³ As Genette describes (171-3) and applied by McKeon to novelistic history, there are three types applied to inner speech. 'Transposed of indirect speech' also known as reported speech is less mimetic than direct or reported speech where characters 'freely' use the words on their own. See McKeon's "The Eighteenth-Century Challenge" (48-9).

happily for him pursu'd her Discourse. (For 'tis odds but he had made some discovery of himself in the surprize he was in). (*Incognita* 17)

The ancient animosity between families, that is to say, between Aurelian's father, Don Fabio and the Marquess of Viterbo, Incognita/Juliana's father is ridiculed. When the narrator provides the reader with this information, he adds a comment or opinion which is of his own but adds a lot of humour. We must remember that Hippolito's life is at risk:

... whereas *Don Fabio* had interested himself in your Cause, in Opposition to the Marquess of *Viterbo*, by reason of the long Animosity between them, all hopes of his Countenance and Assistance are defeated: For there has been a Proposal of Reconciliation made to both Houses, and it is said it will be confirm'd (as most such ancient Quarrels are at last) by the Marriage of *Juliana* the Marquess'd Daugther, with *Aurelian*, Son to *Don Fabio*. (*Incognita* 18)

Note that every time the narrator wants to give his own opinion or simply add a comment to the whole narrative of the story, he uses parenthesis. These comments could have been introduced as part of the body of the text without separating them of the rest by parenthesis. However, I believe this sort of separation from the narrative is a technique employed by Congreve to suggest the own authority of the narrator, as an entity which is able and have permission to tell what he pleases.

However, not every time the narrator adds a bitter comment upon characters is in parenthesis. If we read carefully, there are other instances where we find this in the middle of the narrative: "Having her still by the Hand, which he squeez'd somewhat more eagerly than is usual for Cousins to do" (*Incognita* 18). This sentence corresponds to the part of the story when Leonora and Hippolito meet and they hold hands. Obviously, the humour contained in this sentence cannot be denied. The reader knows perfectly well that Hippolito is not Lorenzo and that Leonora is being deceived. However, the narrator (as

always) does want to ironically stress the fact that Hippolito is taking advantage of his position as his cousin.

... she kindly told him, ... go to her House, where they might with more freedom discourse about a business of that importance, and where he might take something to refresh himself if he were (as she conceiv'd him to be) indisposed with his long standing. Judge you³⁶⁴ whether the Proposal were acceptable to *Hippolito* or no;³⁶⁵ he had been ruminating with himself how to bring something like this about, and had almost despair'd of it; when of a suddain he found the success of his design had prevented his own endeavours. (*Incognita* 19)

In this paragraph, Leonora's naivety is depicted in the fact that she invites Hippolito to her home. She is willing to let him enter her home, to be alone with her in a private space. Obviously, she is so kind and open due to the fact that she believes him to be his cousin. This is never seen as something lascivious, although the whole scene implies so. So, the narrator introduces "as she conceiv'd him to be" (*Incognita* 19) clarifying that she truly believes he is indisposed.

But then the narrator addresses the reader directly using the second person. He asks the reader to judge according to their own perspective or knowledge of the story. Obviously, I would say this is a rhetoric question, the answer is affirmative. By chance or fortune, or Providence, he finally would have the opportunity to be with her alone, and, of course to reveal his own identity and talk to her about his feelings. However, the fact is that the reader does not want to judge whether Hippolito fancies going to Leonora's house or not, but to study Hippolito as a character and his choices. Our impression about

³⁶⁴ The importance of the reader's judgement is indebted from Scarron or Sorel. For instance, this passage from *Francion* (Book VI, 17) reminds us of the same attitude by the narrator, in this case Francion, "I leave it to you to judge if this gallant young Lady were not touched with them; ... I who observed all her actions, took great pleasure to behold her ..."

³⁶⁵ This sort of narrator and its digressive formulae appear in Camus' *A True Tragical History* (43) "Judge then whether this were an action becoming a Nation who account themselves (and perhaps not untruly except in these affairs) the most sage and prudent in the world."

Hippolito is partially biased. The powerful narrator is consciously leading us to think what he wants us to think. The story is not being told in an objective way, he is not limiting himself to just tell a sequence of events. He adds subjective information and sometimes both the story and his comments are so intricately connected that it is not easy to separate them. Quite often it seems that he overenjoys the process:

Whoever had seen the Joy that was in *Hippolito's* Countenance, and the Sprightliness with which he follow'd his Beautiful Conductress, would scarce have taken him for a Person griev'd with uncured Wounds. (*Incognita* 19)

After the meeting between Hippolito and Leonora, the narrator takes the chance to introduce another digression before telling Aurelian's whereabouts. This time the digression is quite long and he tells what happened. In the first part of this digression the narrator makes fun of the reader and challenges him:

... let me take the liberty to digress a little, and tell the Reader something which I do not doubt he has apprehended himself long ago, if he be not the dullest Reader in the World ... (*Incognita* 21)

Digressions can have different meanings but more often than not they are used as a warning sign for the reader not to lose track of the story. Therefore, he assumes that at this point the reader must have been sufficiently clever to understand that Hippolito's integrity is at risk because he is assuming the role of Lorenzo whose life is seriously threatened:

... yet only for orders sake, let me tell him I say, That a young Gentleman (Cousin to the aforesaid *Don Fabritio*) happened one night to have some words at a Gameing House with one *Lorenzo*, which created a Quarrel of fatal Consequence to the former, who was killed upon the Spot, and likely to be so to the latter, who was very desperately wounded. (*Incognita* 22)

The paragraph itself is just the narration of what happened the night Lorenzo killed a kinsman to Don Fabritio. However, the way in which the narrator introduces the story is quite disconcerting. He says: “yet only for orders sake”. Whose orders? Is he telling the story because someone has told him to do so? Are there more people involved in the narration of the story apart from the narrator? How does he know so well what happened that night? We cannot possibly know. This narrator is peculiar since his unreliability makes the reader ask from time to time if this story is real or, if on the other hand is being manipulated by him. However, the truth is that although this time we know what Lorenzo did that night, the narrator gives a new insight to the events. We discover then that the kinsman is Don Fabritio’s cousin and that the murder took place at a gaming house and that in the middle of an argument Lorenzo killed this man.

In the following paragraph, patriarchal and lineage values are represented again. Therefore, romantic elements invade *Incognita*’s story but just as a manner to mock them:

Fabritio being much concerned for his Kinsman, vow’d revenge (according to the ancient and laudable custom of *Italy*) upon *Lorenzo* if he surviv’d, or in case of his death (if it should happen to anticipate that, much more swinging Death which he had in store for him) upon his next of Kin, and so to descend Lineally like an *English Estate*, to all the Heirs Males of his Family. (*Incognita* 22)

In this scene, Don Fabritio is presented as the archetype of a high-born knight who is seeking vengeance for his cousin’s murder. It is explicitly said that this is a law (ancient and laudable), therefore, archaic yet necessary to regain the family’s honour. Fabritio’s rage is directed towards Lorenzo who is the responsible one of his cousin’s death. However, bearing in mind that he was profoundly injured and that there is a possibility that he will die soon, the next kin in the family must pay his debts. This is just a sample of how *Incognita*’s plot is based upon archaic features and values as if were written in Renaissance times.

So, Reader, having now discharg'd my Conscience of a small Discovery which I thought my self obliged to make to thee, I proceed to tell thee, that out Friend *Aurelian* had by this time danced himself into a Net which he neither could, nor which is worse desired to untangle.³⁶⁶ (*Incognita* 22)

That the narrator has changed 'You' for 'thee' is unclear. This archaic form of 'you' was used almost a century before with Shakespeare but this sudden change in the way he addresses the reader has no sense. However, he sublimely introduces us to the next chapter in Aurelian's journey to conquest *Incognita's* heart. He mocks with the fact that Aurelian is getting involved in a mess from which will be difficult to escape, or as he says it is even worse, he will not desire to release himself from it.

There is an instance of utmost importance in the story when Aurelian discovers his face to *Incognita*. This scene happens when they finish dancing and she asks him to reveal his identity. Aurelian does not feel comfortable with the thought of discovering who he is in reality (we should remember that he does not want to be recognised since his father does not know he is there). Therefore, he considers that is safer to tell her that he is another person and who better than Hippolito. What attracts my attention in this chapter is the narrator function here. In this scene he gives Aurelian permission to speak on his own and he uses direct speech to do so. He very likely employs direct speech and gives voice to Aurelian to make the scene more realistic and also that he is a witness to what Aurelian confesses at that time. This part is also essential to understand the whole entanglement of the story. Since at this point both our heroes are completely changed. Hippolito is thought to be Don Lorenzo, Leonora's cousin and Aurelian is thought to be

³⁶⁶ Booth in his essay "The Self-Conscious Narrator" (170) claims that "although he employed a new element in his several elaborate and clever "apologies" for digressions, his narrator is given no consistent characterization." And yet "it is the most "advanced" of English novels before Fielding, it is still far behind the continental tradition." Let me but disagree with this statement. I consider the narrator in *Incognita* to be less naïve than Booth considered. There are many instances, developed in this chapter, where the narrator's bitter irony actually has an impact in the reader's response to the narrative and its characters.

Hippolito, his Spanish friend. After almost an entire page of Aurelian giving his discourse and presenting himself as Hippolito di Saviolina, the Spaniard. The narrator changes to indirect discourse and he follows the scene in this manner:

Here a low bow, and a deep sigh, put an end to his Discourse, and signified his Expectation of her Reply, which was to this purpose – (But I had forgot³⁶⁷ to tell you,³⁶⁸ That *Aurelian* kept off his Mask from the time that he told her he was of *Spain*, till the period of his Relation.) (*Incognita* 23)

First of all, he did not forget telling the reader since at the time Aurelian was telling *Incognita* his identity. Therefore, we were immersed in the “showing” process and not the telling. But, as he is prone to stop and interrupt the narration every time he pleases, that is the reason why he is apologising. It is hilarious see how, according to the narrator, his digressions are beneficial and helpful to the reader. Contrary to the impression to the reader which is that he meddles in the story excessively. Then, ironically, one of the most important revelation which is Aurelian’s face is told in one single line in parenthesis, an additional comment which the narrator fails to tell in the exact point in time in the storyline.

The narrator keeps on his peculiar manner to add further information to the plot, and we find a special case if we continue reading. When *Incognita* tells Aurelian about the pros and cons of discovering her face and reveals her identity,³⁶⁹ the narrator appears again. This time, he is depicting Aurelian’s behaviour towards *Incognita*’s reticence to show her face to a stranger. Aurelian knows that *Incognita* does not entirely trust him, she still does not believe his sudden infatuation. Therefore, Aurelian decides to swear that

³⁶⁷ Scarron’s narrator in “The Tale of the Invisible Lady”(34): “I forgot to tell you that I think he washed his mouth, for I am told he took great care of his teeth.”

³⁶⁸ The same sort of unreliable narrator happens in Kepple’s *The Maiden-head* (11): “But they were scarce acquainted, when *Hyleus* came in from Fishing, and presently *Circe* deliver’d her message very diligently, and if I am not very much mistaken, ‘twas just thus: [the content of the message].”

³⁶⁹ See chapter 3.8.

he is being honest and promises her that he even would change his residence to Florence, no matter the commitments he might have.

Aurelian interrupted her, and swore very solemnly (and the more heartily, I believe, because he then indeed spoke truth) that he would make *Florence* the place of his abode, whatever concerns he had elsewhere. (*Incognita* 24)

The narrator is supposed to be telling the story in an objective manner. However, when he wants to add a subjective comment or something which came from his mere sense of perception he adds this information in brackets. Yet it is not always as consistent as we would expect. As we have seen in previous examples there is a sort of tendency but this playful narrator is not consistent along the narration in the way he introduces his comments in the text.

The narrator's opinion changes a bit our perception of *Aurelian*. This means that, the narrator 'believes' that *Aurelian* is in fact deeply in love with *Incognita*. He openly says that *Aurelian* is speaking with all his heart and that he believes it is the truth. *Aurelian* is not merely flirting with *Incognita*. He is uncovering his emotions to her and if the reader is not yet so sure about *Aurelian*'s good-nature intentions here is the narrator to convince them.

When finally, *Incognita* decides to show him her face and *Aurelian*'s ecstasy is depicted, the narrator interrupts the storyline for a moment and makes allusions to the preface:

... she pull'd off her Mask, and appear'd to him at once in the Glory of Beauty. But who can tell the astonishment *Aurelian* felt? He was for a time senseless; Admiration had suppress'd his Speech, and his Eyes were entangled in Light. [The narrator starts speaking subjectively] In short, to be made sensible of his condition, we must conceive some Idea of what he beheld, which is not to be imagined till seen, nor then to be express'd. Now

see the impertinence and conceitedness of an Author, who will have a fling at a Description, which he has Prefaced with an impossibility. (*Incognita* 24)

The narrator describes the process of assimilating *Incognita*'s beauty from the point of view of Aurelian's emotions. Three adjectives are used to describe the amazement Aurelian felt to that glorious vision: senseless, suppressed and entangled. For a moment, Aurelian loses all his self and is eclipsed by *Incognita*'s beauty. The narrator explains that although he tries to describe the scene it is impossible for the reader to grasp the entire sense of what Aurelian felt. Words, in this case, are not enough to fully describe the complexity of Aurelian's sentiments, this must be seen and even in that case it is quite difficult to describe.

3.9.3. Philosophy, Art and Literature: allusions in *Incognita*

According to McKenzie in his commentary of *Incognita* (2011, 189-96), there is an allusion to William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the following lines, the narrator addresses the author regarding his impertinence for the impossibility in describing what Aurelian felt in that precise moment, but immediately after saying this he would describe *Incognita* like a goddess for she is compared to Venus.³⁷⁰ It is quite noticeable how the narrator calls himself 'Author' as if he was the very owner of the story, as if he was William Congreve. If we compare these paragraphs with those in Shakespeare we find a similitude which cannot be denied:

One might have seen something in her Composition resembling the Formation of *Epicurus* his World,³⁷¹ as if every Atome of Beauty had concurr'd to unite an

³⁷⁰ *Incognita* is a work where there are intentionally "predictive imagery and structures" (Korshin 233).

³⁷¹ Compare to Charleton's *The Ephesian Matron* (34-5): "For, Here some witty Disciple of *Epicurus* (arresting us in the middle of our Narration) may take advantage to disparage the *excellency and immortality* of that noble essence". This author stated that *Epicurus* was "a sublime wit, a profound Judgement, and a great Master" (Mayo 35).

excellency.³⁷² Had that curious Painter lived in her days, he might have avoided his painful search, when he collected from the choicest pieces the most choice Features, and by a due Disposition and Judicious Symmetry of those exquisite parts, made one whole and perfect *Venus*.³⁷³ Nature seem'd here to have play'd the Plagiary, and to have molded into Substance the most refined Thoughts of inspired Poets. Her Eyes diffus'd Rays comfortable as warmth, and piercing as the light³⁷⁴; they would have worked a passage through the straightest Pores, and with a delicious heat, have play'd about the most obdurate frozen Heart, until 'twere melted down to Love. Such Majesty and Affability were in her Looks; so alluring, yet commanding was her Presence, that it mingled awe with love; kindling a Flame which trembled to aspire. (*Incognita* 24-5)

ENOBARBUS I will tell you.

The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne
Burned on the water. The poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were lovesick with them. The oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggared all description: she did lie
In her pavilion – cloth of gold, of tissue –
O' erpicturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature. On each side her

³⁷² Compare to *The Ephesian Matron* (36), “Why should not men believe, with his Master *Epicurus*, that the Soul is nothing else but a certain composition or contexture of subtle Atoms, in such manner figured and disposed, and natively endowed with such activity, as to animate the body, and actuate all the members and organs of it...”

³⁷³ “... Cyprian Queen, guider of loving thoughts” (II. i. 102) in Lyly's *The Woman in the Moon* (71).

³⁷⁴ This metaphor also appears in Camus' *A True Tragical History*, where Vannoza compares Alcimus to light, which is recurrent metaphor in *Incognita*: “O thou Light of my Eyes how art thou clouded! those short and little glances of thee which I once enjoyed, did give me some sort of consolation” (141).

Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,

And what they undid did. (Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra* II. ii. 200-214)

This passage reveals the majesty of Congreve's prose and the sublime literary lexis Congreve openly was proud of in his first novel. In the same passage there are references to Shakespeare, Epicurus, Venus and Apelles.

Incognita is compared to Epicurus's theory of collision of atoms³⁷⁵ and the void; theory which he inherited from Democritus. We could say that Epicurus's doctrine not just his Physics had an influence on Congreve.³⁷⁶ According to Epicureanism the three great maxims in life are: a conscious community of supportive friends, the use of intelligence in daily basis activities and atomist theory:

He would have learned an atomism in which ethics is comparatively unimportant – though perhaps more closely integrated with physics than in Democritus – and which is concerned not so much to change human life and to promote happiness as to describe the world in which we live and the psychological realities which govern our behaviour. (Rist 4-5)

Incognita's beauty is depicted as if every atom in her would join together in such a perfection so as to create the person that she is. The use of Epicurus is the first revelation about Congreve's past education and how he is capable of introducing his philosophical background to his literary piece. Then, he addresses to a "curious Painter" which in fact corresponds to Apelles. This Hellenistic painter is famous for his Venus (Aphrodite) rising out of the sea. Venus (Roman) and Aphrodite (Greek) were both goddesses of love.

³⁷⁵ He was an Athenian philosopher born in Samos in 341 B.C. He was the student of Nausiphanes of Teos who was a follower of Democritus' theory of atoms. For an insight into Epicurus's influence see Long (2011); especially Chapter III on Epicureanism.

³⁷⁶ For an insight into Epicurus' influence on Congreve, see Mayo (158-163). According to Mayo, the moment of highest influence of the Epicuren vogue took place around the year 1685, the last bit of Charles II's reign. See Chapter V, "High Tide" (77-96).

The mural is quite representative of the glory found in the beauty of Venus, and Congreve wants to compare his heroine to a Goddess. Therefore, the narrator says that if Apelles had lived at the time of Incognita, he would have used her as a model to paint his Venus, her “Disposition and Judicious Symmetry of those exquisite parts” (*Incognita* 24), and use all of them to create “one whole and perfect *Venus*’. A perfection which is found only in God, or in this case, in a Goddess, Incognita.

It is a hyperbolic passage which in fact is taken from a play by Shakespeare and describing another feminine and powerful figure of all times: Cleopatra. The narrator accuses nature of plagiarising the poets’ thoughts and give shape to Incognita with all the poetic substance, as if she was a sort of sublime poem shaped in human form. Following the neoclassical patterns of beauty, he continues describing her eyes compared to light, and being able to surpass even the pores on the skin with warmth. A warmth capable of melting down the coldest heart. Incognita’s physical appearance looks radiant, good-natured, friendly but at the same time expressing a sort of authority and self-confidence which provoke both love and awe. As explicitly said she provokes a flame to kindle which trembles to aspire. She triggers something in Aurelian, more than an infatuation, opposing feelings between passion and certain reservations. She does not look like being easily pleased.

In the passage from Shakespeare’s play, Enobarbus describes Cleopatra in similar terms comparing her to a goddess. He starts depicting how she looks like in her vessel like a ‘burnished throne’ which ‘burned in the water’. Then, the vessel depicted is made of gold and silver. The poop is made of gold whereas the paddles of silver. The sails are purple and the wind seems to fall in love with them due to the perfume they give off. Enobarbus says that Cleopatra ‘beggared all description’ as in the case of Incognita, the narrator eventually cannot deny the description of Incognita, or it might be considered as

a narrative strategy to give a little bit of suspense to the ecstasy. When he describes Cleopatra, he says that she surpasses Venus herself “where we see the fancy outwork nature” (*Anthony and Cleopatra* II. ii. 200-214). The passage by Congreve is very much indebted to this one.

In *Incognita* we find an overlong paragraph depicting and praising *Incognita*’s virtues. Therefore, whereas in Shakespeare, Enobarbus depicts Cleopatra in not a really long intervention, the narrator in *Incognita* expands to the maximum his commentary of her in more than a page.

Before commenting on Shakespeare’s influence, we should have a look at the comment by the narrator when he says that the aforementioned description of *Incognita* was provided by Aurelian: “from whom I had every tittle of her Description” (*Incognita* 25). Therefore, there is a reaffirmation that the story is not fictitious but a sort of autobiography of Aurelian’s and *Incognita*’s love story told by the narrator to whom the story was told directly by one of the lovers involved.

In the above fragments by Congreve’s novel and Shakespeare’s play we find similarities. Congreve’s description of *Incognita* having a nest of Cupids around her hair is comparable to Shakespeare’s description of Cleopatra being surrounded on each side by dimpled boys reminding of little cupids. These same cupids fan *Incognita* and Cleopatra adding a little glow to their cheeks:

... fancy'd he saw a little Nest of Cupids³⁷⁷ break from the Tresses of her Hair, and every one officiously betake himself to his task. Some fann'd with their downy Wings,³⁷⁸ her glowing Cheeks.³⁷⁹ (*Incognita* 25)³⁸⁰

On each side her

Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,

With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem

To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,

And what they undid did. (Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra* II. ii. 211-214)

Nonetheless, not only do we find references to Shakespeare in the sublimely description of *Incognita*, but there is also more to comment about it. In his critical edition

³⁷⁷ Compare this passage to Charles Cotton's *Scarronides: Or, Virgile Travestie* (101) mock-epic poem and the description of Venus and her son Cupid:

And go along as meek, and mild,
As any little sucking Child.
When thou com'st there, I know the Queen
Will clip, and kisse thy Cheek, and Chin;
Dandle, and give thee Figgs, and Reasons;
Then must thou play thy Petty-Treasons,
Lick her Lips, Flatter her, and Cog,
And set her Highness so o'th' Gog;
That when she'as layd by Fame and Honour,
Thy Bother may to work upon her.

³⁷⁸ Brett-Smith (1922) in his introduction to *Incognita* claims to have found a reference to it in Lord Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* (1822). If we read carefully through the poem, we find some instances where the similarity is obvious. The poem is a satirist one whose source text is Robert Southey's *A Vision of Judgment* (1821), narrates the death of George III, King of England and what to do with his soul.

But ere he could return to his repose,
A cherub flapp'd his right wing o'er his eyes – (1973, 9)

The very cherubs huddled altogether,
Like birds when soars the falcon; and they felt
A tingling to the tip of every feather, (1973, 12)

³⁷⁹ There is a passage in *The Mourning Bride*, in the last scene of the tragedy (lines 6-10) which is a paraphrasing of this one in *Incognita* and it is spoken by Alphonso to her beloved Almeria:

The Words of Joy and Peace; warm thy cold Beauties,
With the new-flushing Ardour of my Cheek;
Into thy Lips, pour the soft trickling Balm
Of cordial Sighs; and reinspire thy Bosom
With the Breath of Love.

³⁸⁰ Also compare to: "Thy cheeks more fair than are fair Venus' cheeks." (I. i. 99) and "My cheeks? Then Cupid be at thy command!" (I. i. 115) *The Woman* (58-9).

McKenzie see references in Congreve's poem 'On Mrs. Arabella Hunt,³⁸¹ Singing'. If we compared the following fragment and that pointed out by McKenzie the similarity cannot be denied:

... while others brush'd the balmy Dew from off her Face,³⁸² leaving alone a heavenly
Moisture blubbing³⁸³ on her Lips,³⁸⁴ on which they drank and revell'd for their pains.
(*Incognita* 25)

See how they croud, see how the little Cherubs skip!
While others sit around her Mouth, and sip
Sweet Hallelujahs from her Lip.
Those Lips, where in Surprise of *Bliss* they rove;
For ne'er before did Angels taste
So exquisite a Feast,
Of Musick and of Love. (Congreve, *On Mrs. Arabella Hunt singing* 302)

³⁸¹ Arabella Hunt was a singer and lutenist. Purcell and Blow wrote their most difficult songs for her since her high-pitch voice was incomparable. According to McKenzie, Congreve should have written the poem before May 1692, therefore *Incognita* was written first and he recalled the character of his *Incognita* to praise Arabella. Both were good friends and were in correspondence with each other. See Letter 4 (McKenzie 138-9); "Angel ... for you make every Place alike Heavenly where-ever you are. And I believe if any thing could cure me of a natural Infirmary, seeing and hearing you would be the surest Remedy ... Your everlasting Adorer."

³⁸² Also, compare to Charleton's *The Ephesian Matron's* description of her (47): "Her *lips*, swelling with a delicious vermilion tincture ... Her *cheeks* overflowing with pleasing blushes ... A temperate and *Balmy-Sweat*, exstilling from the pores of her snow-white skin."

³⁸³ McKenzie notes that this could be a reference to Thomas Otway's *The Atheist: Or, The Soldier's Fortune* (1684, I. i. 9):

Beaug. With a delicious, little, pretty, smiling Mouth.
Cour. Oh!
Beaug. Plump, red, blub Lips.

However, I have found a previous reference in Thomas Shadwell's *A True Widow* (1678, II, 27):

Self. I was with some Ladies last Night did so commend you, and said you were the most delicate Creature; they did me the favour to say your Eyes were black, and sparkling like mine, and your Nose very much resembling mine, and that you have a pretty pouting about the mouth like me, and fine little blub-lips, I am very well with the Ladies at Court, but I see none like you.

Congreve's library item number 566, Shadwell's *Dramatick Works* 4 Vols. Thomas Shadwell (1642?-1692). The dramatick works of Thomas Shadwell, Esq. London, for J. Knapton and J. Tonson, 1720. 4 vol. 12^o (Hodges 1955).

³⁸⁴ Compare to *The Mourning Bride* (II. vii. 35), "balmy Lips".

The same scene is portrayed in both fragments. These little angels drink from the dew in Incognita's lips whereas the same happen in Arabella Hunt's ode. The little cherubs sip from her lip Hallelujahs. But also, the same patterns are found later in his tragedy *The Mourning Bride* (1697), where it can be read in Almeria's words. The tone here as that of a tragedy is mournful and gloomy, different from what we find in *Incognita* with a more flattering tone:

They shake their downy Wings, and scatter all
The dews collected Dews on my poor Head;
Then fly with Joy and Swiftness from me. (I. i. 150-152)

It is argued³⁸⁵ that Alexander Pope³⁸⁶ introduces a reference to this fragment from *Incognita* in his famous poem *The Rape of the Lock* published in 1712. In the preface to Mrs Arabella Fermor, Pope talks about different creatures who inhabit the four elements. Particularly in the element of air there are these little creatures called the 'sylphs' which "are the best-conditioned creatures imaginable; for, they say, any mortal may enjoy the most intimate familiarities with these gentle spirits, upon a condition very easy to all true adepts, an inviolate preservation of chastity" (*The Rape of the Lock* 38). These creatures are depicted in *Canto I*, and the behaviour they adopt towards Belinda (the protagonist) is surprisingly similar to the cupids in *Incognita*. Several words are exactly the same found in Congreve's novel but ordered and expressed in a subtle different way, yet we still can detect the imitation:

³⁸⁵ See Koziol's "Alexander Popes Sylphen und William Congreves "Incognita"". In this article, Koziol talks about the influence which comes from Congreve and it is found quite clearly in Pope's poem. However, at the very same time there is an influence to John Gay's poem 'The Fan' written in 1714, where the figure of Venus and the Cupids are repeated constantly; certainly, as happens in *Incognita*. Special thanks to Susana Vioque Rocha for her translation of this essay written in German. There is also another reference to this connection in Stephenson's 'Congreve's "Incognita": The Popular Spanish Novela Form Buslesqued" (338).

³⁸⁶ Alexander Pope and William Congreve were in correspondence with each other during the last years of Congreve's life, when he certainly was not in very good health. See Letters 66, 68, 69 and 73 (McKenzie 2011). Also, Pope's dedication to Congreve in the last volume of his translation of his *Iliad* (220-21) is worth mentioning here.

Belinda still her downy pillow pressed,
Her guardian sylph prolonged the balmy rest:
'Twas he had summoned to her silent bed
The morning-dream that hovered o'er her head.
A youth more glittering than a birthnight beau
(That ev'n in slumber caused her cheek to glow)
Seemed to her ear his winning lips to lay. (*The Rape of the Lock* 39)

If we compare both, we find that the downy wings of the cupids in *Incognita* appear as the downy pillow where Belinda is sleeping. Belinda's balmy rest is being prolonged by the sylph whereas in *Incognita* it is the balmy dew from her face the cupids take off it. Belinda's cheeks are glowing due to the sylph glittering, even in darkness. In *Incognita*, the cupids are the responsible ones for fanning her glowing cheeks with their downy wings. Finally, whereas in *Incognita*, the cupids leave just a moisture swelling on her lips, from which they drink and enjoy; in Belinda the sylph places her winning lips to her ear, taking care of Belinda's rest.

After all this sublimely romantic description of *Incognita* through the eyes of Aurelian, the narrator's irony comes back to mock the hero and his hyperbolic infatuation:

Aurelian was very positive a young Cupid who was but just Pen-feather'd, employ'd his naked Quills to pick her Teeth.³⁸⁷ And a thousand other things his transport represented to him, which none but Lovers who have experience of such Visions will believe.
(*Incognita* 25)

The narrator compares the cupids who, according to Aurelian, surround *Incognita* and Aurelian himself as a little young cupid which is still half-fledged and that his naked quills will serve the purpose of picking *Incognita*'s teeth. It is true that this irony is

³⁸⁷ Third category in authorial intrusions by Dawson (150): "evaluative assessment of characters and their actions".

implied by Aurelian himself who, through this metaphor, sees himself as another suitor who is just a mere admirer of Incognita's beauty. The reader who truly considers to be in love could understand what Aurelian feels or as the narrator says: "who have experience of such Visions will believe" (*Incognita* 25).

There is a sort of connection between the narrator and Aurelian. There is a constant mocking tone in the narrator's way of commenting upon Aurelian feelings which denotes in first place that both are really close so as to have this liberty in judging. Secondly, I would say there is an overall mock-heroic or anti-romantic tone which make the story not completely reliable and here lies the peculiarity of this novel as an experiment. After depicting Aurelian's ecstasy when discovering Incognita's face the narrator gives permission to the character to speak:

"'Tis enough that I have seen a Divinity – Nothing but Mercy can inhabit these Perfections – Their utmost rigour brings a Death preferable to any Life, but what they give – Use me, Madam, as you please; for by your fair self, I cannot think a Bliss beyond what now I feel – You Wound with Pleasure, and if you Kill it must be with Transport – Ah! Yet methinks to live – O Heaven! to have Life pronounced by those Bless'd Lips – Did they not inspire where they command, it were an immediate Death of Joy.' (*Incognita* 25)

This declaration of love could be interpreted as archaic and exaggerated. If we read through the lines what we first encounter is the use of 'methinks'. Although, certainly we cannot be sure if this use of the archaic form 'methinks' is made on purpose or not. Perhaps the use of this archaic formula is not accidental and there is a slight reference to the whole archaic and non-realistic wooing. He directly tells the lady that she can use him as she pleases and that the bliss he now feels is everything to him. He even employs a metaphor regarding death in the sense that he would be wounded by her with pleasure and killed with transport as a sort of transcendental experience. In other words, Aurelian's

entire soul and body is at Incognita's disposal. Courtly love is outdone by what Aurelian is displaying to Incognita, the most hyperbolic demonstration of love. Ironically, in case the reader does not realise this at this point in the story, the narrator pinpoints the excessiveness of love: "*Aurelian* was growing a little too loud with his Admiration" (*Incognita* 25).

3.9.4. An anti-romantic narrator: mocking romantic patterns

Aurelian and Hippolito are ridiculed by the narrator's judgement. The scene in which a 'feigned' skirmish takes place is a foolish manner to laugh at the anti-chivalric tone of *Incognita*. Both characters, especially Aurelian is described using the stereotype of the knight or hero. Even when Aurelian is praised by the narration itself when he rescues Hippolito's governor Claudio dressed as Hippolito. Nonetheless, the reader loses their praise in the following scene, a terribly foolish quarrel where swords are involved. But the truth is that there is a specific point in the narration where Aurelian and Hippolito talk about each other's mistresses and the overall picture is kitsch, effeminate and reminds us of two ladies talking about their respective suitors. And if the narrative itself is not clear enough about the description of both characters, the narrator makes his own comment with a humorous and ironic analogy:

... he gave a Sigh, and passionately taking *Aurelian* by the Hand, cry'd, Ah! my Friend, Love is indeed blind,³⁸⁸ when it would not suffer me to see you – There arose another Sigh; a Sympathy seiz'd *Aurelian* immediately: (For, by the Way, sighing is as catching among Lovers, as yawning among the Vulgar). Beside hearing the Name of Love, made him fetch such a Sigh, that *Hippolito's* were but Fly-blows in Comparison, that was

³⁸⁸ Compare to the conversation between Valentine and Speed in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen* (II, i) where the latter tells his master that he is not able to see her mistress correctly.

Speed.

Because Loue is blinde: O that you had mine eyes, or your owne eyes had the lights they were wont to haue, when you chide at *Sir Protheus*, for going vngarter'd!

answered with all the Might *Hippolito* had, *Aurelian* ply'd him close till they were both out of Breath. (*Incognita* 28-9)

The narrator's sublime judgment "sighing is as catching among Lovers,³⁸⁹ as yawning among the Vulgar" inevitably makes the reader laugh at the hilarious situation where two gentlemen are sighing (considered to be a practice among women mostly). The sudden infatuation of both characters is ridiculed and mocking throughout the story even more than the naivety of the ladies. As Margarete Rubik (385) "he [Congreve] debunks the hyperbolic language and histrionic self-performance typical of French romances ... the love-entanglements he portrays, the sighing suitors and languishing women, in fact closely resemble the plots of amatory stories, only he views them from a satirical vantage point."

If we consider this paragraph out of context we certainly would associate this to a dialogue between ladies, young, naïve and too excessively emotional. From a privileged position as readers, we certainly know why both are sighing for their respective ladies, however, they do not know exactly who they are sighing for. They are just imitating each other's sighing as a subconscious impulse, contagious, but in reality irrational and stupid: "Thus not a Word pass'd, though each wondred why the t'other sigh'd, at last concluded it to be only Complaisance to one another" (*Incognita* 29). If *Incognita* would have the chance to be performed on stage, we might find several humorous scenes in which the audience would laugh at them, the text shows more than it tells, and certainly *Incognita*'s true purposes would be revealed better on stage than just reading them. Of course, this is all my interpretation of the story, since we do not have stage directions we cannot exactly discern the real intentions of Congreve, it is open to interpretation. However, if we read

³⁸⁹ In Dryden's *The Assignment* (I. i), this is portrayed, for instance when Laura tells Violetta:
In the mean time, go in, and sigh, and think fondly and ignorantly of your approaching pleasures:
Love, in young hearts, is like the must of wine;
'Tis sweetest then; but elder 'tis more fine.

between the lines, we could deduce that irony is a repeated pattern through the story and that none of the characters should be taken too seriously.

As McKenzie (vol 2, *Poems* 280) points out, the same previous idea is repeated in another work, 'The Mourning Muse of Alexis'. This pastoral was written upon the death of Queen Mary II in December 1694. This poem was published in January 1695:

MENALCAS. Wert thou with ev'ry Bay and Lawrel crown'd,
And high as *Pan* himself in Song renown'd,
Yet would not all thy Art, avail to show
Verse worthy of her Name, or of our Woe:
But such true Passion in thy Face appears,
In thy pale Lips, thick Sighs, and gushing Tears,
Such tender Sorrow in thy Heart I read,
As shall supply all Skill, if not exceed.
Then leave this common Form of dumb Distress,
Each vulgar Grief can Sighs and Tears express;
In sweet complaining Notes thy Passion vent,
And not in Sighs, but Words explaining Sighs, lament.

In this fragment we find "each vulgar Grief can Sighs and Tears express" (vol 2, *Poems* 280), where basically Congreve expresses how vulgar is to cry and sigh upon Queen Mary's death, that she deserves a sort of high woe, lament and he tries to do it writing this poem: "not in Sighs, but Words explaining Sighs, lament". Nonetheless, although Congreve might have been inspired by what he wrote years before in *Incognita*, the meaning implied in both is different. In *Incognita*, the tone is ironic and certainly what he wants to imply is that sighing is so common when people fall in love, the first infatuation which is excessive and irrational. As sighing³⁹⁰ and love is so related as

³⁹⁰ There is a reference to sighing in Dallas's *Le Roman français*, particularly Chapter II (38) 'Romans d'Aventures' where this pattern is described: "Là on assiste au spectacle curieux de ce qu'on pourrait

yawning and vulgarity. The act of yawning is an unpolite behaviour, something that is not socially approved. Therefore, the narrator ridicules Aurelian and Hippolito showing the 'vulgarity' or 'ordinary' of their behaviours upon the first encounter with two ladies.

Later, there is another instance in which the cavaliers are caught sighing. In this case, they realise that they have been discovered by Aurelian's father due to the jilting's scene and that also Don Fabio has arranged a marriage for Aurelian with the daughter of a nobleman. This marriage will be the happy resolution to the ancient enmity between the two noble families. Thus, we find the cavaliers helpless, desolated and not able to "make discovery of one Contrivance more for their Relief" (*Incognita* 42). What kind of cavaliers are those who do not find words to design a plan? They remain speechless, immutable and not able to find a solution to the problem. Aurelian either accepts his father's proposal or confront him and challenge his patriarchal authority. Finally, a servant brings them light and Hippolito awakes from his mental lethargy and asks Aurelian what they should do, a "Speech, usher'd by a profound Sigh" (*Incognita* 42).

In the pastoral poem, Congreve's tone is different. It is not ironic but serious and judgemental. He desires to praise Queen Anne's persona so much as to state that crying and weeping for her is vulgar as if she were a 'commoner'. He is deeply in mourning and wants to express his lament in a more poetic and elegant manner, through verse.

Another instance where the narrator provides the reader his particular ironic comment is when Hippolito and Aurelian resolve to send Leonora a letter written supposedly by Aurelian (Hippolito in reality) explaining the whole thing. Obviously, to the sensible reader what these two characters are plotting is a non-sense. The narrator knows it too, he is aware of the fatal denouement.

appeler «la maladie des soupirs» ... la maladie est non seulement chronique; elle devient contagieuse." This is cited in Drougge's 'The Significance of Congreve's *Incognita*' (41).

Well this was concluded on, after a great many other Reasons used on either Side, in favour of the Contrivance; they at last argued themselves into a Belief, that Fortune had befriended them with a better Plot, than their regular Thinking could have contriv'd. So soon had they convinc'd themselves, in what they were willing to believe. (*Incognita* 31)

The implied meaning conveyed by the narrator is that they convince themselves even though they were in reality conscious of the confusion. Thus, he even dares to mock about the letter Hippolito is going to send to Leonora. Hippolito does not write one letter but several of them, unable to write a proper letter explaining the situation. After some attempts he decides to choose, according to the narrator, the worst. Nonetheless, the narrator gives us the chance to read the letter and have an own opinion of Hippolito's skills writing epistles: "He writ several, at last pitched upon one, and very probably the worst, as you may guess when you read it in its proper Place" (*Incognita* 31).

As we have seen there are many instances where the narrator in *Incognita* is overly unreliable. For instance, Congreve inherited this ironic/unreliable narrator from different sources. One of them is Charles Sorel's *Lysis*. The story is quite reliable throughout, although is an anti-romance and quite comically tells the adventures of a reader of romances who believes to be a shepherd himself. If we read carefully the last paragraph of the last book, we find the following:

And besides, why may they not distrust me? What know they whether I have not related a fable to them instead of a true History; or that I have not, to disguise things, and not discover the persons I have spoken of, as indeed I have, call'd them by other then their ordinary names, and mistaken *Brie* for some other Province? (96)

Another digression worth commenting in terms of mock-romance features happens in the scene of the tilting. This scene takes over two pages and it is quite well depicted and described, there are plenty of details. Nonetheless, in the middle of the scene the narrator digresses for a moment and addresses the reader telling the following: "The

excuse was so handsomely designed, and much better express'd than it is here, that it took effect" (*Incognita* 38). Firstly, it could be regarded as a mock/false modesty comment in order to attract the empathy of the reader. The language is impeccable, the order and pace of events too, it is neat and coherently written. There is no point in interrupting the narrative to self-reflect. This self-reflection on the part of the narrator is worth noticing and quite 'novel' in romances.

A previous example of an unreliable narrator who shares patterns with the one in *Incognita* is that of Scarron's novels. For instance, in Furetière's *Scarron's City Romance* (41), there is an instance where the narrator admits the story to be true but since he does not have enough resources is obliged to 'add' details of his own:

... how can their greatest secrets, and, almost, their thoughts be made public? how else get we Copies of all their Love-letters, and Verses, with the rest that is necessary to the contrivance of an Intrigue? Our Lovers kept no such officers, so that all their Concerns cannot be told you: Neither did I gather, what I have written, from any one person, whose Memory must needs have fallen very short of retaining all passages; but I have gotten a little here, and a little there, and, to confess the truth, added something myself.

3.9.5. Mere digressions or plot disruption?

There is one instance when the digression is longer than usual. This interference by the narrator is found when Aurelian is wandering around town immersed in his own thoughts about the torn pieces he found. He was roaming the street cursing his own luck. He could not find the piece of the letter where *Incognita* specifies where to meet at midnight. This digression is especially noteworthy due to its length, but also because the narrator does not react in a very polite manner.

Now because it is possible this at some time or other may happen to be read by some Malicious or Ignorant Person, (no Reflection upon the present Reader) who will not

admit, or does not understand that Silence should make a Man start; and have the same Effect, in provoking his Attention, with its opposite Noise; I will illustrate this Matter, to such a diminutive Critick,³⁹¹ by a Parallel Instance of Light; which though it does chiefly entertain the Eyes, and is indeed the prime Object of the Sight, yet should it immediately cease, to have a Man left in the Dark³⁹² by a suddain deficiency of it, would make him stare with his Eyes, and though he could not see, endeavour to look about him. Why just thus did it fare with our Adventurer; who seeming to have wandred both into the Dominions of Silence and of Night ... (*Incognita* 45-6)

The first thing which attracts our interest is the fact that the narrator pauses the story in a point where something important is taking place. Aurelian is wandering around town when unexpectedly a silence disturbs his thoughts. Can silence be more disruptive than noise?

The narrator's first judgement is that what has been said previously could be read by an unwitty person who will not be able to understand the meaning of that silence. However, he explicitly claims that he is not pinpointing to the present reader, which obviously is a clever way not to lose audience. Yet he insists upon the fact that silence may have the same effect than noise to disturb someone's state and that he is pretty willing to explain this to the "diminutive Critick". Then, light is used in a metaphor to describe it. Light is described as the genuine source. It is the force which gives us the possibility to see, without it there is nothing but vast darkness. Thus, this metaphor applies to the fact that the complete silent is what disrupts Aurelian's peace. This utter silence is interpreted

³⁹¹ Compare this to the later narrator in Fielding's *Tom Jones* at the very end of Chapter II (33): "I intend to digress, through this whole History, as often as I see Occasion: Of which I am myself a better Judge than any pitiful Critic whatever"

³⁹² Compare this fragment to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 3.2. 177-180:

HERMIA

Dark night, that from the eye his function takes,
The ear more quick of apprehension makes,
Wherein it doth impair the seeing sense,
It pays the hearing double recompense.

as a bad omen, the calm before the storm. The unconformable silence and the metaphor of being in darkness to be aware of your surroundings is a foreshadowing of what is about to occur in the story.

During the scene in which Aurelian is struggling to save his life from the villain who has attempted to rape Incognita, again we find a digression worth commenting. Aurelian threatens the villain and tells him that his life is about to end, using direct speech to do so. Then, the narrator turning to indirect speech continues the story in his own voice.

The Fellow amazed at the Voice, turn'd about to have snatch'd up the Lanthorn from the Ground; either to have given Light only to himself, or to have put out the Candle, that he might have made his Escape; but which of the Two designed, no Body could tell but himself: And if the Reader have a Curiosity to know, he must blame *Aurelian*; who thinking there could be no foul Play offered to such a Villain, ran him immediately through the Heart, so that he drop'd down Dead at his Feet, without speaking a Word.
(*Incognita* 47)

Therefore, the narrator is speculating in the very instant of the narration about which decision the villain will take in order to escape his own death. However, he claims that the only person who may know what he decides is himself and no other. Thus, is the narrator omitting information which he considers to be of no value to the story or to give the sense of a fragmented sequence of events? An example of this behaviour is also found in Aphra Behn. For instance, in her short novella *The Fair Jilt* (42), the narration is clearly led by the narrator:

At the End of six Months, Prince *Tarquin* was call'd to his Trial; where I will pass over the Circumstances, which are only what is usual in such criminal Cases, and tell you, that he, being found guilty of the Intent of killing *Alcidiana*, was condemn'd to lose his Head in the Market-Place, and the Princess to be banish'd her Country.

Aurelian does not show himself as benevolent and he wants to redeem the villain for what he has almost done, he deserves to die. Not a single word is uttered when his sword goes through directly to the villain's heart and he falls dead upon his feet. Silence is restored but, in this case not the one which precedes the storm but the one which comes after it.

Regarding the chronology of events in the narrative process, there is an interesting fact to comment upon. At the point in the narrative when Hippolito is in Don Mario's garden looking for Leonora something happens. There is a sudden turn in the previous smooth development of events. If we pay close attention to the following lines, "*Hippolito* entred this Garden near upon the same Instant, when *Aurelian* wandred into the Old Monastery and found his *Incognita* in Distress" (*Incognita* 53). We are back to some pages ago when Aurelian finds Incognita in real danger by the rapist. Therefore, both scenes are simultaneous. However, when the narrator starts narrating Hippolito whereabouts, the impression is that is the following episode in the narrative.

The main problem found in the analysis of *Incognita* is that it is highly difficult to analyse the plot without including the narrator. Sometimes I find extremely challenging to separate the narrator comments and digressions from themes, character's self-introspection or even plot structure. What I want to express is that the narrator is part and parcel of the story itself. The narrator is so inherently attached to the story that it is almost impossible to eliminate him and have the same novel. The importance of the narrator as a leader of the story-telling process has not been yet commented enough, until what extent the narrative is manipulated and our understanding and perception of the story is conveyed through his own lenses. For instance, in the paragraph when the narrator describes both Incognita and Aurelian's rush of emotions. She is about to tell their impossibility to be together, at the end he gives his own opinion about what he has just

told: “Well, the Learned say it was Sympathy; and I am always of the Opinion with the Learned, if they speak first” (*Incognita* 49).

The narrator is trying to justify the excessive behaviour of Aurelian towards *Incognita*’s despair due to his arranged marriage. Thus, he says that it is sympathy, a sensitive reaction to her suffering, according to the wits or “the learned people”, and he agrees on the explanation, provided that they speak first. At this point the narrator, to my mind, is ironizing with his own persona. He openly tells the reader that he leaves the sages to give their own opinion of these tricky things about love, and he will always concur with them only if they speak first, assuring that in any case he will be right because he trusts in the intellectual competence of the learned. Thus, in this case he shows his brilliant smartness not assuming things he is not sure about and reinforcing his arguments upon external parties who are outside the story.

The narrator’s ironic comeback happens at the end of *Incognita*’s account of her dangerous adventure and how Aurelian saved her life from the rape attempt. He leaves free will to the character to relate her story to Aurelian in direct speech. However, when it comes to Aurelian reply to it, he does not allow the character to use direct speech nor even he wastes a line to relate it himself in indirect speech. The only mere information we have is that Aurelian’s speech was passionate and eloquent and that it was so superb that the narrator feels himself unable to reproduce it in the same manner (“much better than I intend to insert here”³⁹³ (*Incognita* 51). Subsequently, the narrator pauses and “takes over” the narrative for a while to explore his own opinion of the story so far,

³⁹³ Compare this “languor” to reproduce a character’s words to Scarron’s narrator in ‘The Tale of the Invisible Mistress’: “They said many more such fine things to each other that I won’t repeat, because I don’t know what they were and I wouldn’t dare make them up ...” (27) and also, in the Second Part, Chapter VII, the narrator states: “It would take a better quill than mine to depict adequately the beautiful punches that were thrown there” (173).

judging the reactions and responses of both characters and leading in an unconscious manner to believe and share his opinion.

He was very free of his Oaths to confirm the Truth of what he pretended, nor I believe did she doubt it, or at least was unwilling so to do: For I would Caution the Reader by the bye, not to believe every word which she told him, nor that admirable sorrow which she counterfeited to be accurately true. (*Incognita* 51)

He gives free rein to his passion in order to convince Incognita of his true feelings for her. According to the narrator, it seems that she believes him. However, he warns the reader not to believe entirely what she has said. In a sense, he is “accusing” Incognita of exaggerating her despair or even “counterfeiting” it. The narrator claims that Incognita is adding a fictitious tone to the actual reality of the story. To my mind, it happens to be in a sense a self-referential statement of the nature of this work, as being “indeed truth so cunningly intermingled with Fiction” (*Incognita* 51). The explanation is that she has told the story in detail so far but she seems to have forgotten one, “for we have another Discovery to make to him, if he have not found it out of himself already” (*Incognita* 51). In this case, the narrator employs the royal ‘we’ very likely as a way to include the reader in the revealing of a secret or as an active part in the story having more knowledge of the situation than some of the characters themselves.

As I said previously, we cannot separate the narrator from the story as two different entities because we simply will be left with snippets of the story. At first sight, the plot is not so interesting as in other novels of the same period, but the introduction of this ironic narrator makes the most out of it. The best manner to appreciate the relevance of the narrator is to extract those fragments aforementioned and comment upon his authority to manipulate and offer his own understanding.

Chapter 4

Conclusions

Edward Wagenknecht defined *Incognita* as “a play in novel form” (Novak, “Congreve’s “*Incognita*” 330). Although there are many critics who think that *Incognita* cannot be defined as a modern novel, this work is found in a prolific period of experimentation and evolution. *Incognita* was published just 27 years before *Robinson Crusoe* was published. Therefore, if not a novel *per se*, a proto-novel or a hybrid in which verisimilitude is sought but not found as stated above in the analysis. I assume the fact that there was a transition or intermingling of genres during the Restoration period and the early eighteenth century. In *Incognita*, there is a massive influence from theatre as stated in chapter 3.2.2. although this work has the shape of a short novel. In terms of plot, it is a romance, but the mocking narrator and its digressions produce the opposite effect providing an anti-romance.

My aim in this dissertation is not to ascribe *Incognita* within a single category; simply because even nowadays it is hard to define a work by a single genre. The richness of literature makes its production be varied; and in this sense *Incognita* is one of the best examples: “*Incognita* ought to develop horizontally, for it presents the old-fashioned “stuff” of romance, its fixed *topoi*, its idealized characters, in a blend of Spanish *novellas* of intrigue and French *romans comiques*”³⁹⁴ (Aercke, “Congreve’s *Incognita*” 301).

The first part of this dissertation aims at explaining the canonical genres which are found in *Incognita*. As this work displays canonical *topoi* as courtly love and the role

³⁹⁴ Ros Ballaster in *Seductive Forms* (1992), traced back the relationship between the early novels in Britain and the Continent, particularly that of women’s novels with a variety of French narrative works. Contrary to Lennard J. Davis’s view that “the novel in England seems to come from an internal development relatively unaffected by continental influence and interchanges.” (*Factual Fictions* 43)

of the knight, medieval romances are introduced in chapter 2.2. Focusing mainly in two themes, chivalry and courtly love since its meaning is mocked throughout the entire novel. These two *topoi* from romances are analysed mainly in chapters 3.7.1., 3.7.2. and 3.7.4.

Also, this dichotomy between the private sphere and the public one or the difference between men and women when it comes to love is found in romances. Nonetheless, they cannot be taken seriously. All elements from old romances are parodied either by the narrator or by characters and their remarkable ineptitude. Salzman pinpoints that romance and anti-romance are interconnected and that the latter cannot “function” without the former, “one cannot see anti-romance as an attempt to destroy or refute romance” (271). That is why an introduction to old romances comes in first place.

Patriarchal authority and archaic values are constantly at stake during the novel and characters seem to be real rebel figures. This is analysed in chapter 3.7.12. when Incognita seems to stand up for her values and right to decide her future. However, at the end we find that everything is happily resolved, and such revolt is not needed. This is analysed mainly in chapter 3.7.7. I chose as a title for this chapter “the illusion” of defying patriarchal authority because as demonstrated in this chapter there is no such rebellion against patriarchy. Even so, the story of rebellion against their respective parents is invalid at the end of the novel.

Regarding the female protagonist, Incognita, a single chapter is devoted to its analysis (chapter 3.8.). The novel begins presenting a feminist character who is invalidated by means of a witty repartee at the beginning of the novel. This evidence of female wit creates great expectations. However, her feminism is not stable and at some points in the novel seems to lose its power. Actually, referring to McKeon terminology, Incognita represents the negation of “romance idealism” towards the “naïve empiricism”.

First of all, she neglects the “romance idealism” from the outset clearly stating that she is not interested in courtly love. Yet she is gullible enough to believe she has a chance to revolt against patriarchy which turns out not to be the case. Furthermore, Congreve had an influence from French and Spanish literature to create the character of Incognita. She reminds us of Dorotea in chapter XIX “The Two Rival Brothers” in Paul Scarron’s *The Comic Romance* (1665) but also “The Tale of the Invisible Mistress” chapter IX in the same work. At the same time, Scarron is indebted to Alonso de Castillo Solórzano’s *Los alivios de Casandra* (1640). Future research evaluating until what extent seventeenth-century Spanish literature has a real impact on seventeenth-century English literature by means of translations into French is something which appeals to me massively.

In the seventeenth century there was a wave of French romances or *nouvelles* which came from the continent to England and its influence is found in *Incognita* as well. In chapter 2.3. and subchapters it is explained how these new romances evolved not including the marvellous elements found in the medieval ones but still with a romantic plot. Particularly, from Scarron, Congreve borrowed the ironic narrator who is prone to digress quite often during the narrative. There is a single chapter devoted to the narrator (chapter 3.9. and subchapters). First of all, *Incognita* cannot be read without its narrator. One of the difficulties found in analysing this novel was until what extent we can exclude the narrator and still have the same reading experience. Definitely, we cannot because all the irony and description would be lost. Nevertheless, Scarron’s narrator is not the only one Congreve adapts to his novel. In Walter Charleton’s *The Ephesian Matron* (1659) and Joseph Kepple’s *The Maiden-head Lost by Moonlight* (1672) we find fragments which remind us very much of the same digressions in *Incognita*. Also, in Charles Sorel’s *The Comical History of Francion* (1655) we find a narrator willing to please himself while digressing.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, *Incognita* is a play in the shape of a novel. This was the first and only novel written by Congreve, his latter production was only designed for the stage. John Dryden, the Restoration genius, and mentor of Congreve plays an important role in his first work. Particularly, two of his plays *The Assignment* (1672) and *Marriage-à-la-Mode* (1673). In the analysis of *Incognita* I also pinpoints the fact that Congreve was indebted to other dramatists such as William Wycherley, Aphra Behn or George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham.

In chapter 2.5. the one devoted to the novel as genre, I state that *Incognita* cannot be classified as a modern novel *per se*, yet my aim is to bring this work to the fore. The preface is in fact the subject-matter of *Incognita*. The plot is used to display the ongoing discussion about the genre, and also the innovations³⁹⁵ and techniques Congreve incorporates in his first prose work. We can say that there is a conflict between the dramatic ‘showing’ and the narrative ‘telling’ across the story which is represented by means of the conflict between preface and narrator (Aercke, “Congreve’s *Incognita*” 305). This conflict is quite difficult to observe at first sight. Only very skilled and attentive readers will perceive the story between the lines. It is quite controversial since the reader must decide which one to trust: narrator or preface; while at the same time, of course, both are masks created by the author. Therefore, ‘mask’ is a continuous theme in the novel explained in chapters 3.7.1., 3.7.5. and 3.7.8.

It is believed by many critics that the use and mixture of dramatic effects; or his “Dramatick Writing” in narrative is just a manner of destroying its nature. Nonetheless,

³⁹⁵ Regarding Congreve as an innovative dramatist, not only in the sense of content of his plays but in extratextual elements which made him be seen as a pioneer. I consider mentioning that Congreve was the first dramatist to include his own name in the playbills. In a letter from John Dryden, mentor and friend of Congreve, to Elizabeth Steward he pointed out this innovative effect:

This Day was playd a reviv'd Comedy of Mr Congreve's calld the Double Dealer, which was never very taking; in the play bill was printed, — Written by Mr Congreve ... the printing an Authours name, in a Play bill, is a new manner of proceeding, at least in England. (*Letters* 112-3)

form my point of view, the intrusion of techniques from other genres in the shape of a novel is superb and it is one of the main achievements by Congreve.

In *Incognita* we find the tendency Congreve has for representing formal and thematic ambiguities. As a dramatist, he also continues to explore the manipulation of dramatic irony, wit and “dark” subtexts (Aercke, “Congreve’s *Incognita*” 307). It is widely believed that Congreve was one of the most talented dramatists in the Restoration; his superb use of wit and irony present in his works constitute a challenge for academics and critics; as well as for myself in writing this dissertation.

To conclude, my aim in this dissertation is to analyse *Incognita* in depth, not only reading this work from the point of view of genre but also comparing it with different primary sources where intertextuality is found. *Incognita* is not a monolithic work and cannot be classify as such. In reading this short novel, no more than a hundred pages long, there are many references to previous works in seventeenth-century England, France and Spain.

Incognita incorporates features from comedy, romance and anti-romance (as opposed forces); and all in prose which corroborates that this work is a hybrid. Congreve wrote this novel when he was 22 years old, an avid reader well-versed in poetry and mastering ancient Greek. In fact, the song included in *Incognita* is his first poem ever published. All in all, a very young Congreve wanted to contribute to the seventeenth-century *belles lettres* with a novel work as he stated in his preface. The reason why he published this work under a pseudonym, and he never included *Incognita* in any of the editions of his *Works* remains unknown. My guess is that he was never totally satisfied with the quality of *Incognita* because of this experimentation and maybe that is why he never wrote another novel. It is true that his dramatic production was not extensive but of high quality. He finally stopped writing when his masterpiece *The Way of the World*

(1700) was not a real success and he lose hope in the audience and its taste. Nonetheless, I hope this dissertation provide a different way of looking at *Incognita* and seventeenth-century literature in general. The novel did not originate at a particular point in time and at a particular place but there was an evolution and a reaction. Therefore, my final aim is that works like *Incognita* which are, more often than not, unknown to university students were also read and discussed in courses dealing with the origins of the English novel.

Appendices

1.

Charles Hopkins, dedication of *Boadicea, Queen of Britain* (1697)

From *Boadicea, Queen of Britain. A Tragedy* (London: 1697), sig. A2r-A3r.

TO

MR. CONGREVE.

Let other Poets other Patrons Chuse,
Get their best Price, and prostitute their Muse.
With flattering hopes, and fruitless labour wait,
And Court the slippery Friendship of the Great:
Some trifling Present by my Lord is made,
And then the Patron thinks the Poet paid.
On you, my surer, nobler Hopes depend,
For you are all I wish; you are a Friend.
From you, my Muse her Inspiration drew,
All she performs, I Consecrate to you.
You taught me first my Genius and my Power,
Taught me to know my own, but gave me more,
Others may sparingly their Wealth impart,
But he gives Noblest, who bestows an Art.
Nature, and you alone, can that confer,
And I owe you, what you your self owe her.
O! *Congreve*, could I write in Verse like thine,
Then in each Page, in every Charming Line,

Should Gratitude, and Sacred Friendship shine.
Your Lines run all on easie, even Feet;
Clear is your Sense, and your Expression sweet.
Rich is your Fancy, and your Numbers go
Serene and smooth, as Crystal Waters flow.
Smooth as a peaceful Sea, which never rolls,
And soft, as kind, consenting Virgins souls.
Nor does your Verse alone our Passions move,
Beyond the Poet, we the Person Love.
In you, and almost only you; we find
Sublimity of Wit, and Candour of the Mind.
Both have their Charms, and both give that delight,
'Tis pity that you should, or should not Write;
But your strong Genius Fortune's power defies,
And in despite of Poetry, you rise.
To you the Favour of the World is shown;
Enough for any Merit, but your own.
Your Fortune rises equal with your Fame,
The best of Poets, but above the Name.
O! may you never miss deserv'd success,
But raise your Fortunes 'till I wish them less.
Here should I, not to tire your patience, end,
But who can part so soon, with such a Friend.
You know my Soul, like yours, without design,
You know me yours, and I too know you mine.

I owe you all I am, and needs must mourn,
My want of Power to make you some return.
Since you gave all, do not a part refuse,
But take this slender Offering of the Muse.
Friendship, from servile Interest free, secures
My Love, sincerely, and entirely, yours,

CHARLES HOPKINS (Erskine-Hill 104-5)

2.

John Dryden To My Dear Friend Mr Congreve,

On his Comedy called *The Double-Dealer*

Well then, the promised hour is come at last;
The present age of wit obscures the past.
Strong were our sirens; and as they fought they writ,
Conquering with force of arms and dint of wit;
Theirs was the giant race before the flood,
And thus, when Charles returned, our empire stood.
Like Janus he the stubborn soil manured,
With rules of husbandry the rankness cured;
Tamed us to manners, when the stage was rude,
And boist'rous English wit with art indued.
Our age was cultivated thus at length,
But what we gained in skill we lost in strength.
Our builders were with want of genius cursed;
The second temple was not like the first:
Till you, the best Vitruvius, come at length,

Our beauties equal, but excel our strength.
Firm Doric pillars found your solid base,
The fair Corinthian crowns the higher space;
Thus all below is strength, and all above is grace.
In easy dialogue is Fletcher's praise:
He moved the mind, but had not power to raise.
Great Jonson did by strength of judgement please,
Yet, doubling Fletcher's force, he wants his ease.
In differing talents both adorned their age,
One for the study, t'other for the stage.
But both to Congreve justly shall submit,
One matched in judgement, both o'er-matched in wit.
In him all beauties of this age we see:
Etherege his courtship, Southerne's purity,
The satire, wit, and strength of manly Wycherley.
All this is blooming youth you have achieved,
Nor are your foiled contemporaries grieved;
So much the sweetness of your manners move,
We cannot envy you, because we love.
Fabius might joy in Scipio, when he saw
A beardless consul made against the law,
And join his suffrage to the votes of Rome,
Though he with Hannibal was overcome.
Thus old Romano bowed to Raphael's fame,
And scholar to the youth he taught, became.

O that your brows my laurel had sustained!
Well had I been deposed, if you had reigned;
The father had descended for the son;
For only you are lineal to the throne.
Thus when the state one Edward did depose,
A greater Edward in his room arose.
But now not I, but poetry is cursed,
For Tom the Second reigns like Tom the First.
But let 'em not mistake my patron's part,
Nor call his charity their own desert.
Yet this I prophesy: thou shalt be seen
(Though with some short parenthesis between)
High on the throne of wit; and seated there
Not mine (that's little) but thy laurel wear.
Thy first attempt an early promise made;
That early promise this has more than paid.
So bold, yet so judiciously you dare,
That your least praise is to be regular.
Time, place, and action may with pains be wrought,
But genius must be born, and never can be taught.
This is your portion, this your native store;
Heaven that but once was prodigal before,
To Shakespeare gave as much; she could not give him
more.
Maintain your post; that's all the fame you need,

For 'tis impossible you should proceed.
Already I am worn with cares and age,
And just abandoning th' ungrateful stage:
Unprofitably kept at heaven's expense,
I live a rent-charge on his providence:
But you, whom every Muse and Grace adorn,
Whom I foresee to better fortune born,
Be kind to my remains; and O defend,
Against your judgement, your departed friend!
Let not th' insulting foe my fame pursue,
But shade those laurels which descend to you;
And take for tribute what these lines express:
You merit more; nor could my love do less. (Hammond and Hopkins 573-81)

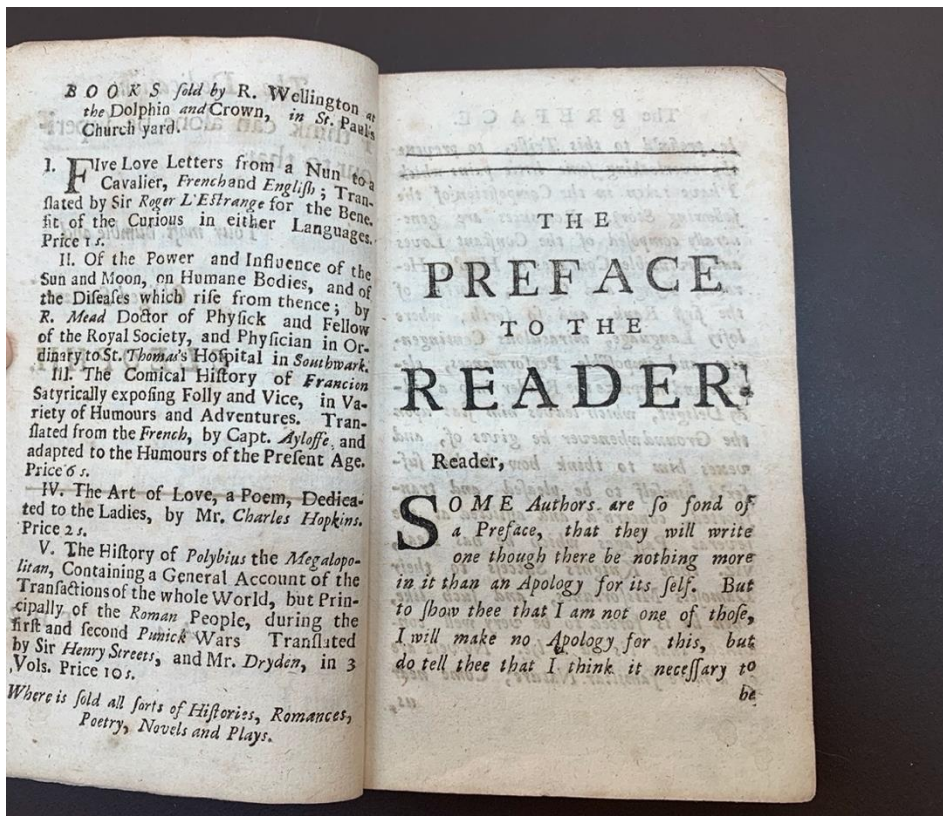
3.

Southerne praising *The Old Bachelour*.

Dryden has long extended his command,
By right divine, quite through the Muses' land,
Absolute Lord; and, holding now from non
But great Apollo his undoubted crown, —
(That empire settled, and grown old in power,)
Can wish for nothing but a successor,
Not to enlarge his limits, but maintain
Those provinces which he alone could gain.
His eldest, Wycherley, in wise retreat,
Thought it not worth his quiet to be great;

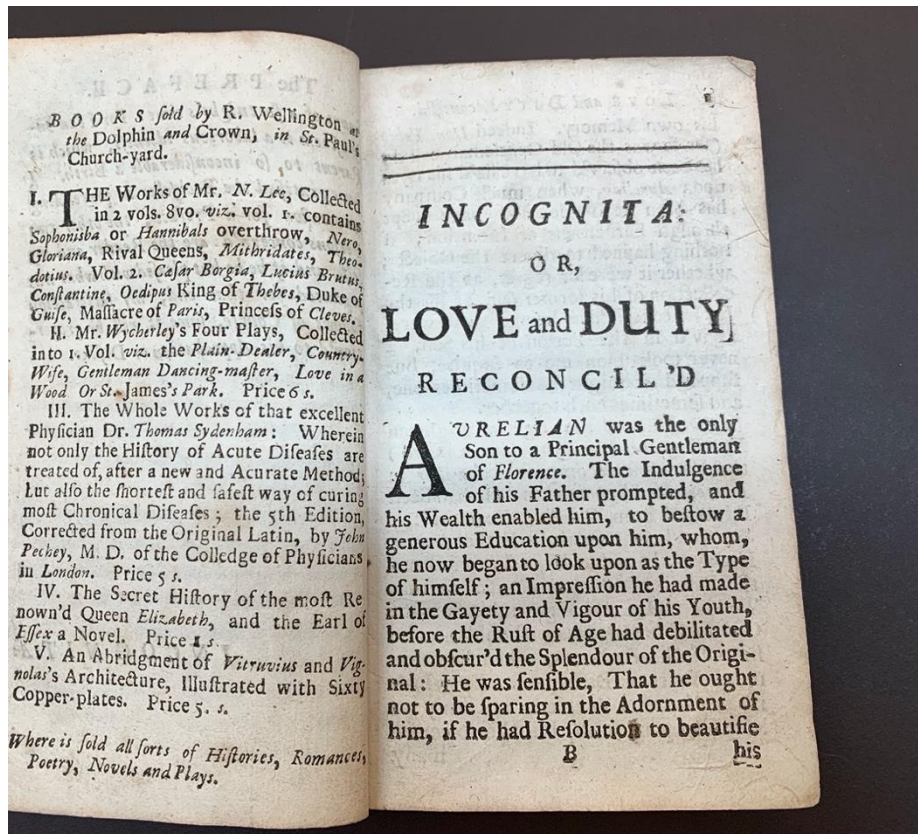
Loose wandering Etheredge, in wild pleasures tost,
 And foreign interests, to his hopes long lost;
 Poor Lee and Otway dead! CONGREVE appears
 The Darling and last comfort of his years!
 May'st thou live long in thy great Master's smiles,
 And, growing under him, adorn these isles;
 But when, — when part of him (be that but late!)
 His body yielding must submit to fate,
 Leaving his deathless works, and thee, behind
 (The natural successor of his mind),
 Then may'st thou finish what he has begun,
 Heir to his merit, be in fame his son. (*Life of William Congreve* 39)

4.

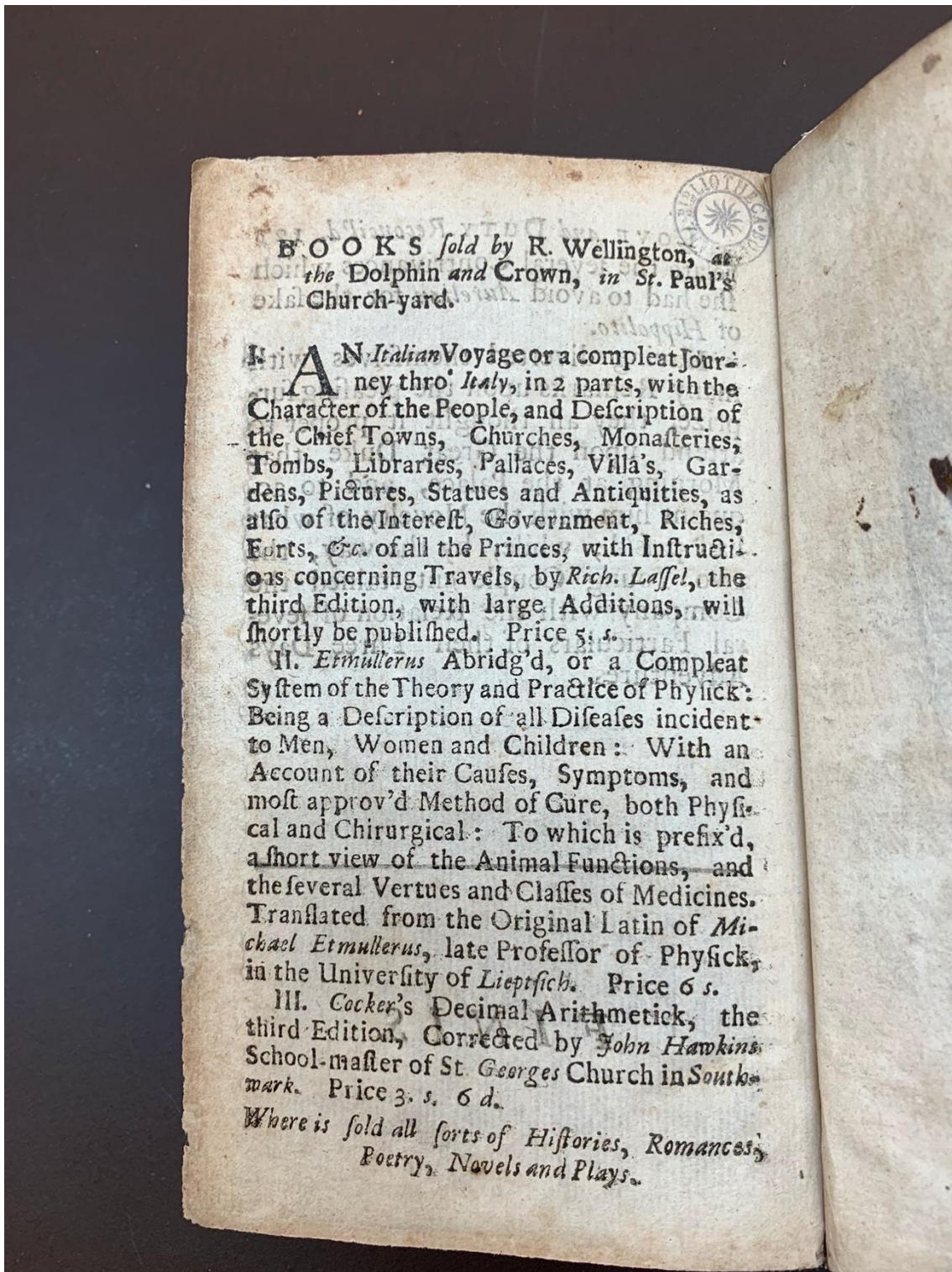


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BOOKS sold by R. Wellington, at
the Dolphin and Crown, in St. Paul's
Church-yard.

I. **A**N Italian Voyage or a compleat Journey thro' Italy, in 2 parts, with the Character of the People, and Description of the Chief Towns, Churches, Monasteries, Tombs, Libraries, Pallaces, Villa's, Gardens, Pictures, Statues and Antiquities, as also of the Interest, Government, Riches, Forts, &c. of all the Princes, with Instructions concerning Travels, by Rich. Lassel, the third Edition, with large Additions, will shortly be published. Price 5. s.

II. *Ermullerus* Abridg'd, or a Compleat System of the Theory and Practice of Physick: Being a Description of all Diseases incident to Men, Women and Children: With an Account of their Causes, Symptoms, and most approv'd Method of Cure, both Physicall and Chirurgical: To which is prefix'd, a short view of the Animal Functions, and the severall Vertues and Classes of Medicines. Translated from the Original Latin of *Michael Ermullerus*, late Professor of Physick, in the University of *Lieptsich*. Price 6 s.

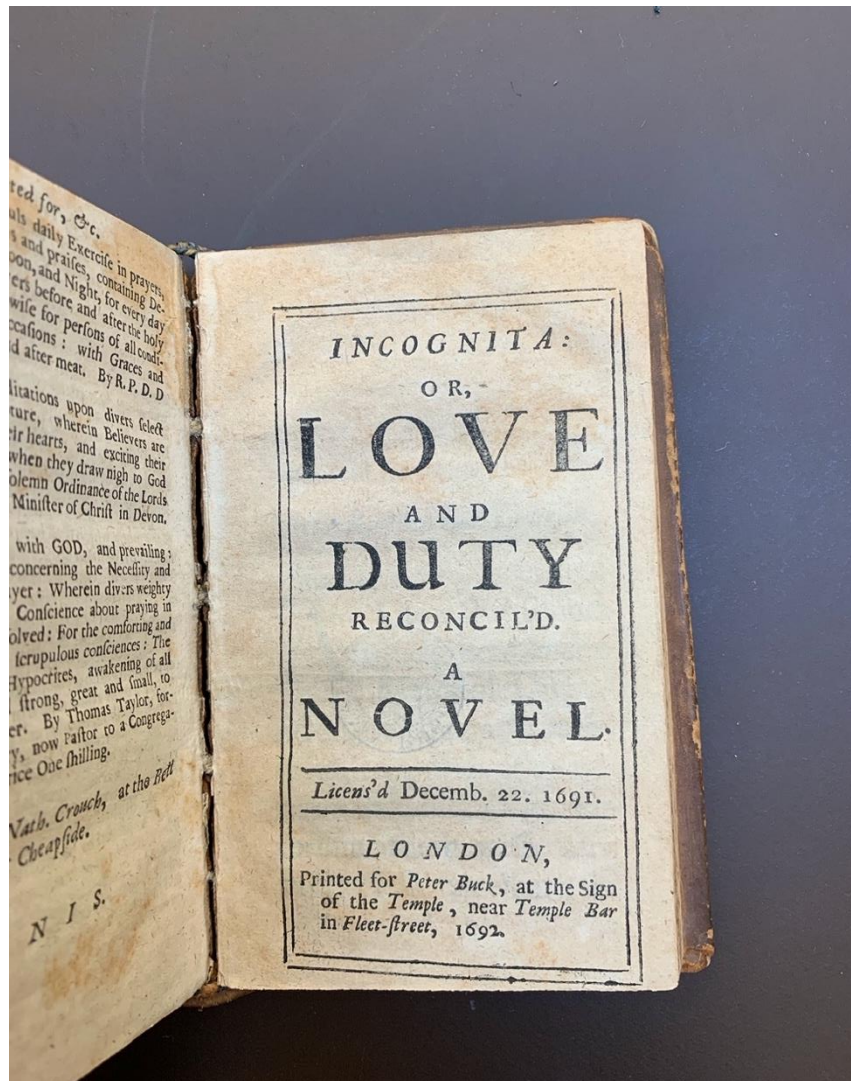
III. *Cocker's* Decimal Arithmetick, the third Edition, Corrected by *John Hawkins*, School-master of *St. Georges Church* in *Southwark*. Price 3. s. 6 d.

Where is sold all sorts of Histories, Romances, Poetry, Novels and Plays.

Editions of *Incognita*

1. *Incognita: Or, Love and Duty Reconcil'd. A Novel.* Licens'd Decemb. 22. 1691.

London, Printed for Peter Buck, at the Sign of the Temple, near Temple Bar in Fleet-street, 1692.³⁹⁶



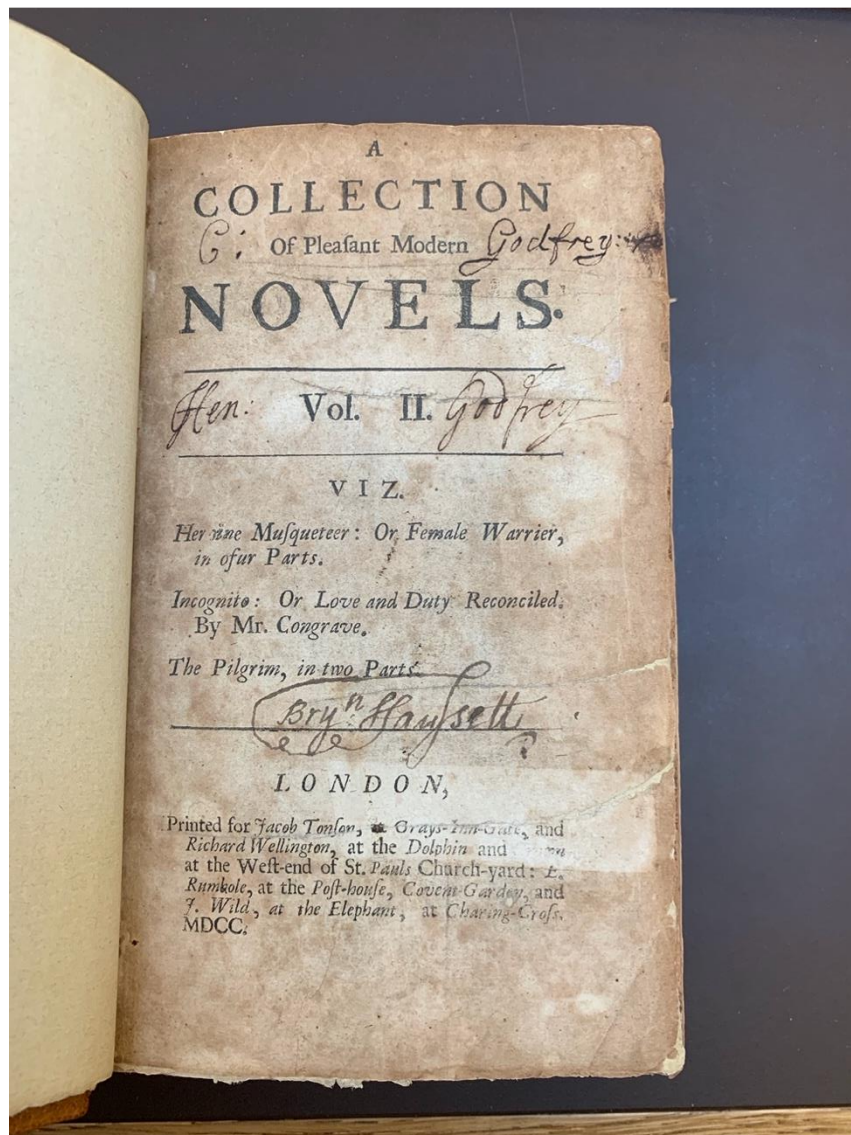
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³⁹⁶ In the description of the images I have changed the spelling of the long ‘f’ for a modern one.

2. A Collection of Pleasant Modern Novels. Vol. II. Viz. *Heroine Musqueteer: Or Female Warri-er, in ofur Parts. Incognito: Or Love and Duty Reconciled. By Mr. Congrave. The Pilgrim, in two Parts.* London, Printed for Jacob Tonson, at Grays-Inn-Gate, and Richard Wellington, at the Dolphin and Crown at the West-end of St. Pauls Church-yard: E. Rumbole, at the Post-house, Covent-Garden, and J. Wild, at the Elephant, at Charing-Cross, MDCC.



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Format (8°)

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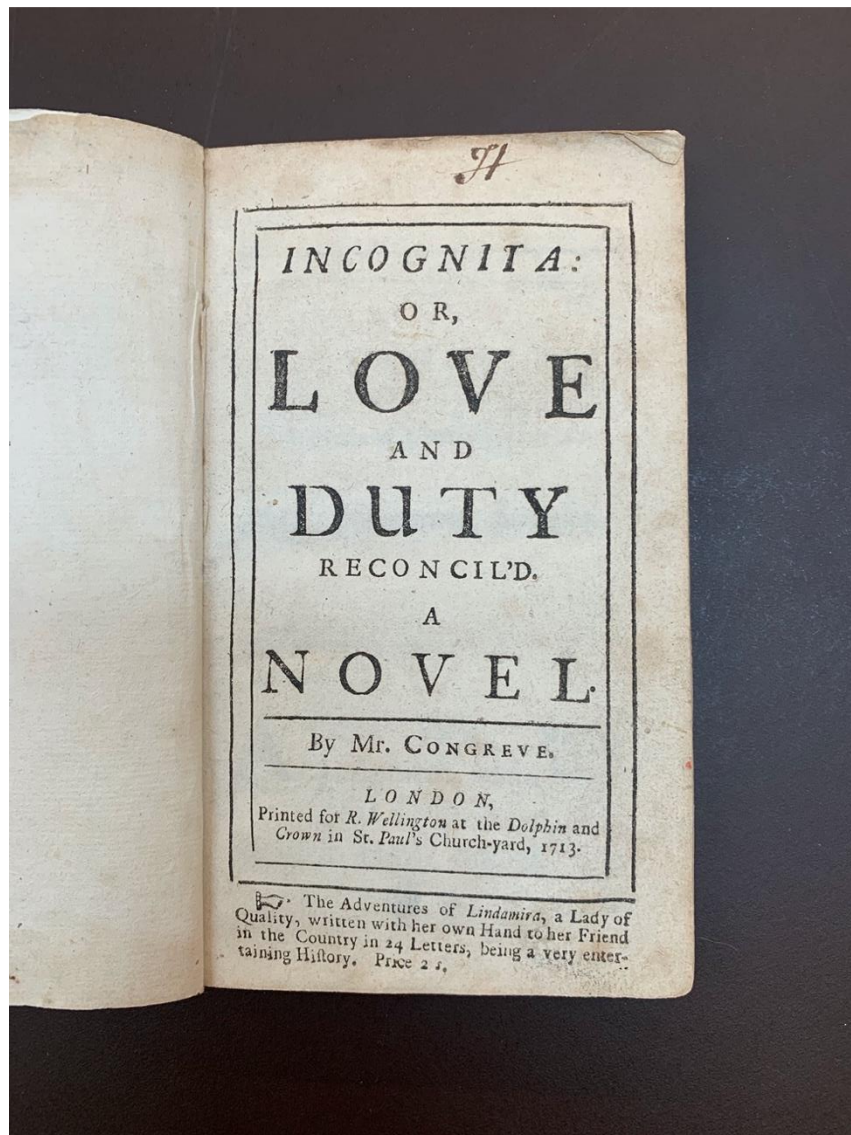
Printed for R. Wellington, at the
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Mr. Addison, Mr. Fries, Mr. W.
Companion, or the Description
by which many useful Arts
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ry, Stereometry, Geography, and
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or a compleat Journey thro' the
e Character of the People of
Towns, Churches, Monasteries,
illa's, Gardens, Pictures, Statues
of the Interest, Governours,
Princes; with Instructions
Lassel, Gent. The Second
by a Modern Hand.
n; being a choice Collection
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INCOGNITA:
OR,
LOVE
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A
NOVEL.



LONDON,
Printed for R. Wellington, at the Lute in
St. Paul's Church-yard, 1700.

3. *Incognita: Or, Love and Duty Reconcil'd. A Novel.* By Mr. Congreve. London,
Printed for R. Wellington at the Dolphin and Crown in St. Paul's Church-yard, 1713.

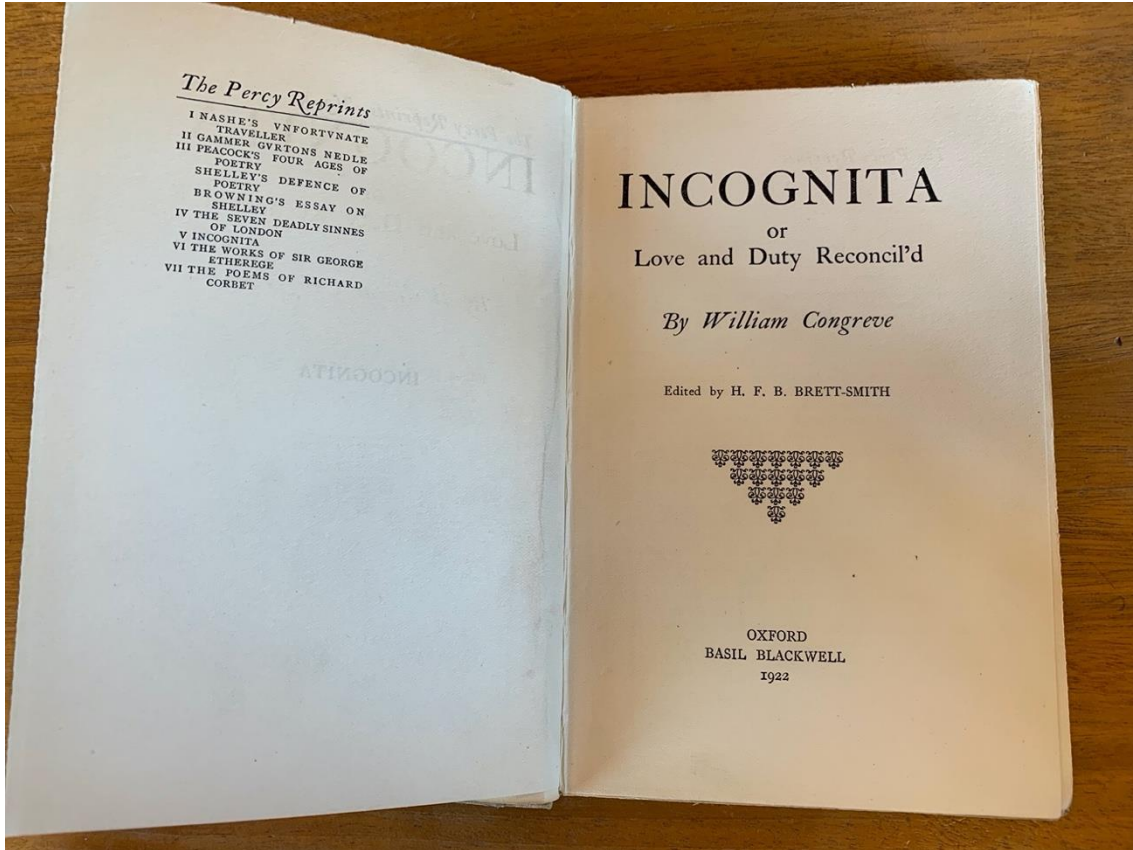


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4. The Percy Reprints No. 5. *Incognita*. By William Congreve. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
Incognita or Love and Duty Reconcil'd. By William Congreve. Edited by H. F. B. Brett-Smith. Oxford, Basil Blackwell. 1922.

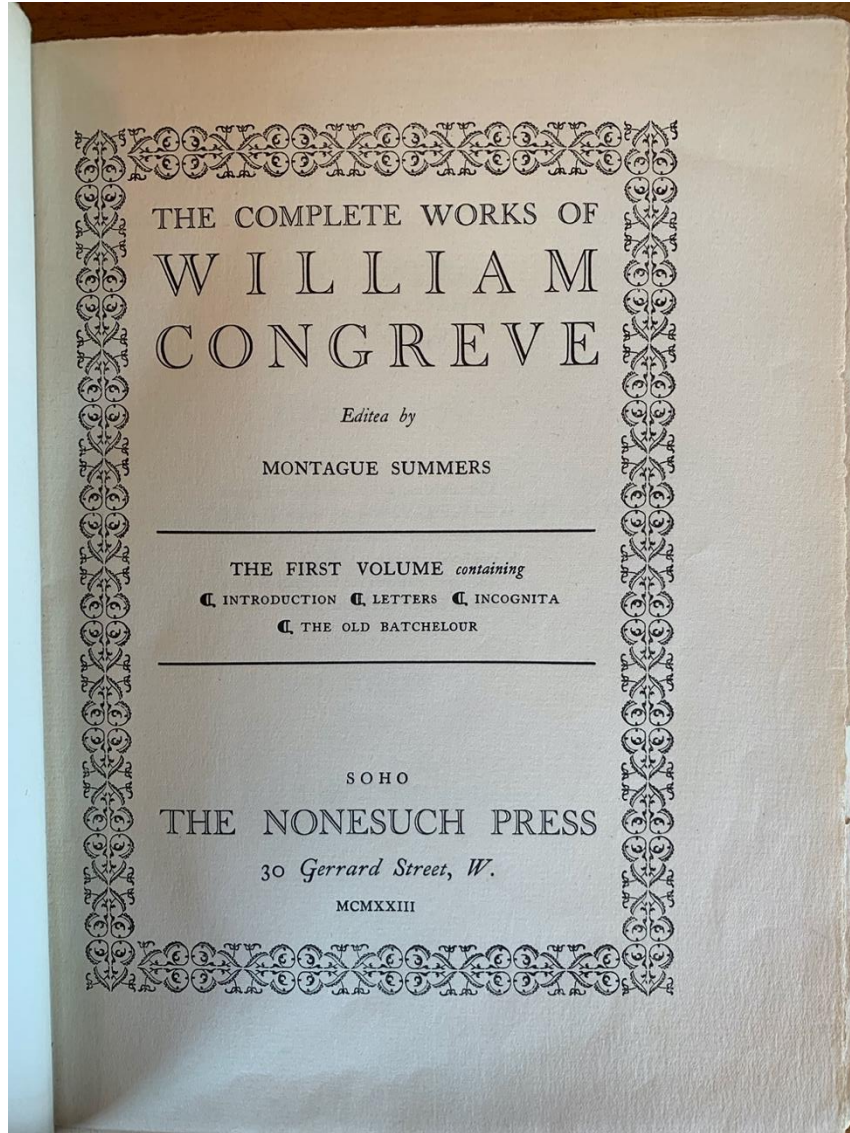


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Format (xviii, 71, [1] p.: incl. facsim; 20 cm)

(Upper Reading Room Open Shelves) A. 5. 32/5

5. *The Complete Works of William Congreve*. Edited by Montague Summers. The first volume containing Introduction, Letters, Incognita, The Old Batchelour. Soho, The Nonesuch Press, 30 Gerrard Street, W. MCMXXIII.



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Format (4v.; 27 cm)

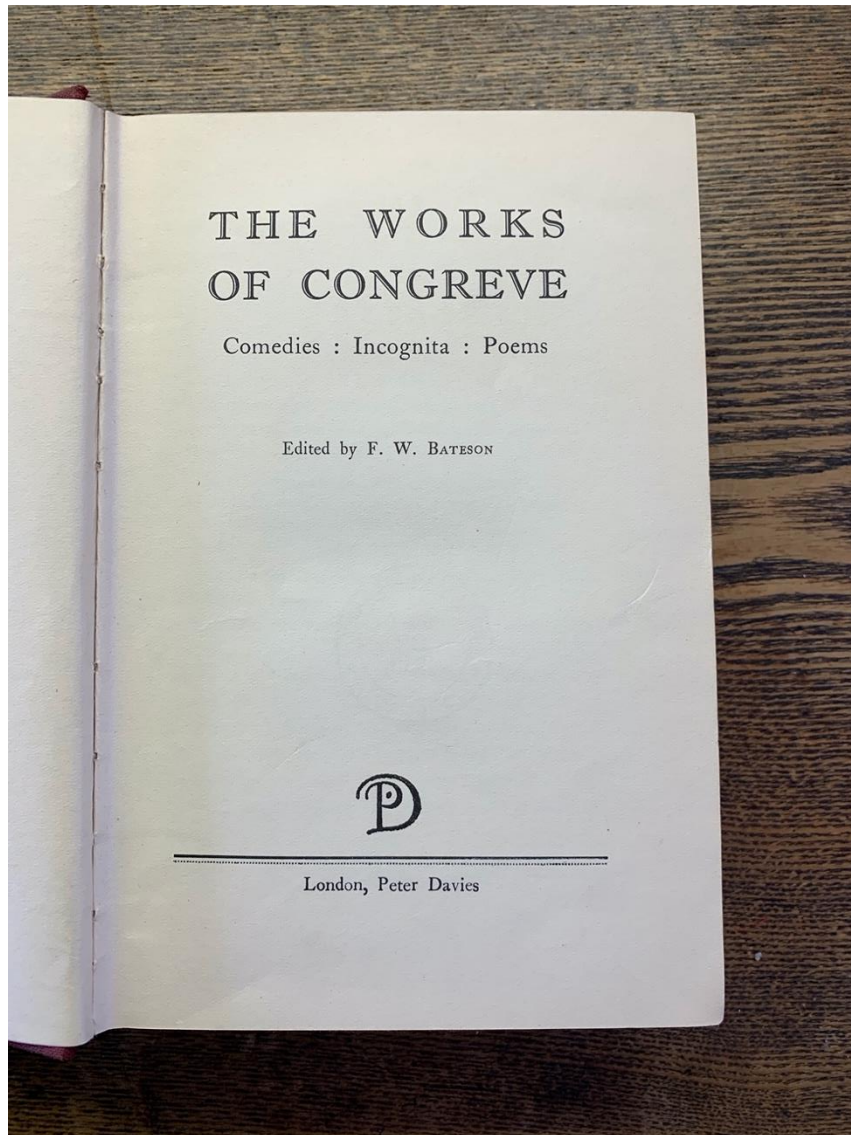
(Upper Reading Room Open Shelves) A. 5. 1996

INCOGNITA
OR
LOVE AND DUTY
RECONCIL'D

A NOVEL

Licens'd Decemb. 22. 1691.

6. *The Works of Congreve. Comedies: Incognita: Poems.* Edited by F. W. Bateson.
London, Peter Davies, 1930.



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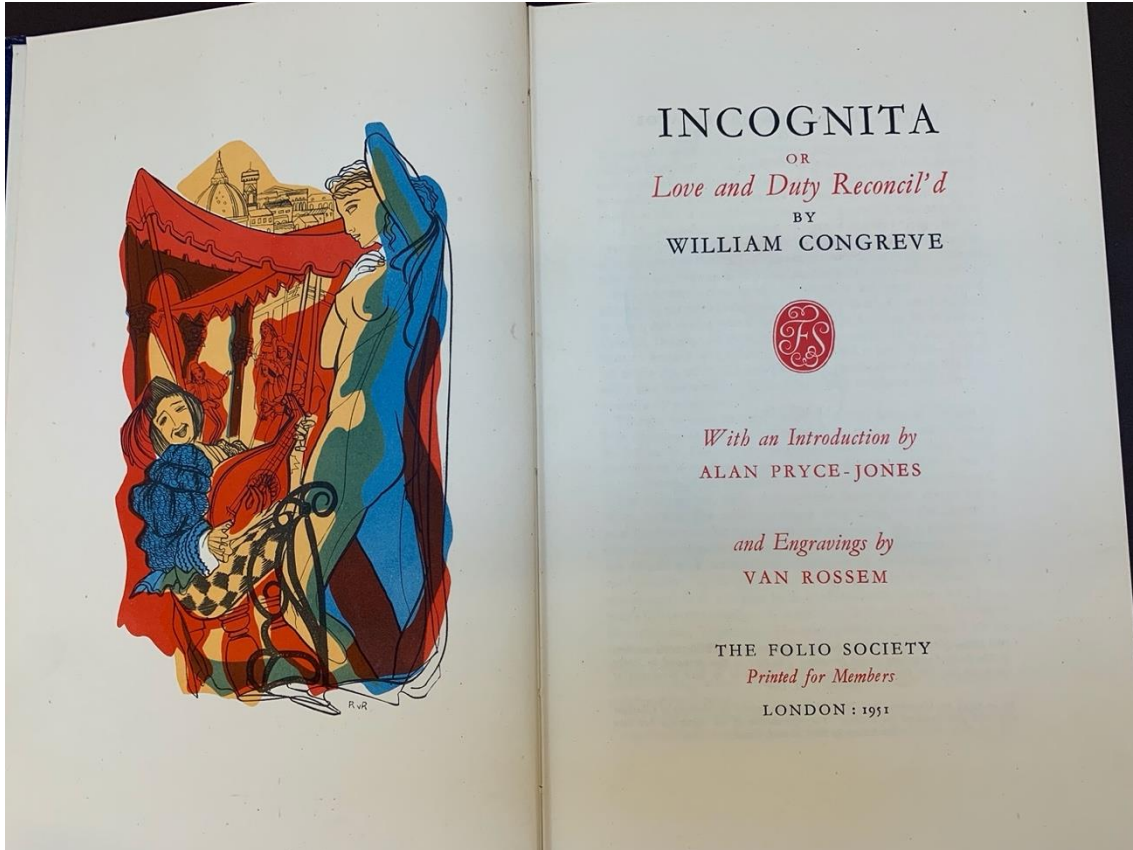
Format (xxviii, 507 p.; 19 cm)

(Upper Camera Main Floor Open Shelves) SE. 12C 180. 4

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INCOGNITA

7. *Incognita or Love and Duty Reconcil'd* by William Congreve. With an Introduction by Alan Pryce-Jones and Engravings by Van Rossem. The Folio Society. Printed for Members. London: 1951.

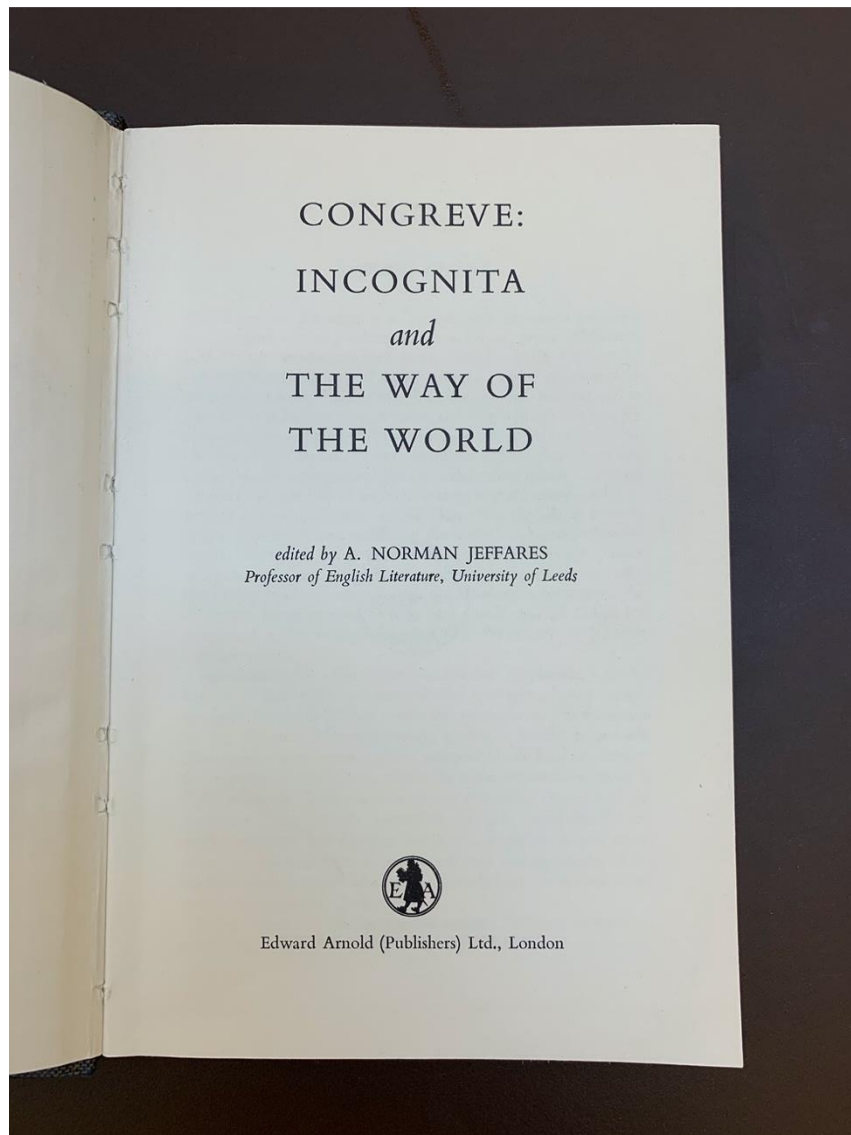


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Format (71 p. plates 25 cm)

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8. *Congreve: Incognita and The Way of the World*. Edited by A. Norman Jeffares. Edward Arnold, London, 1966.

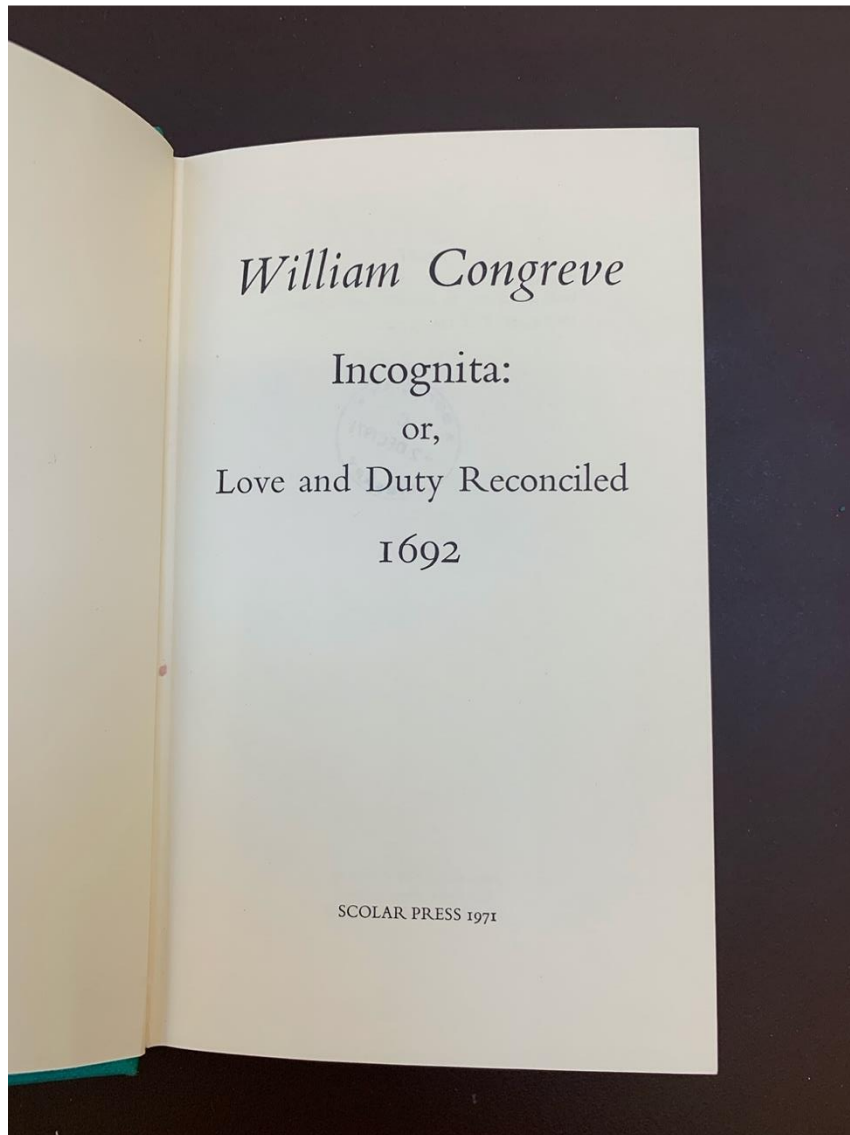


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Format (192 p. facsim. 20 cm)

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9. William Congreve. *Incognita: or, Love and Duty Reconciled*. 1692. Scholar Press, 1971.

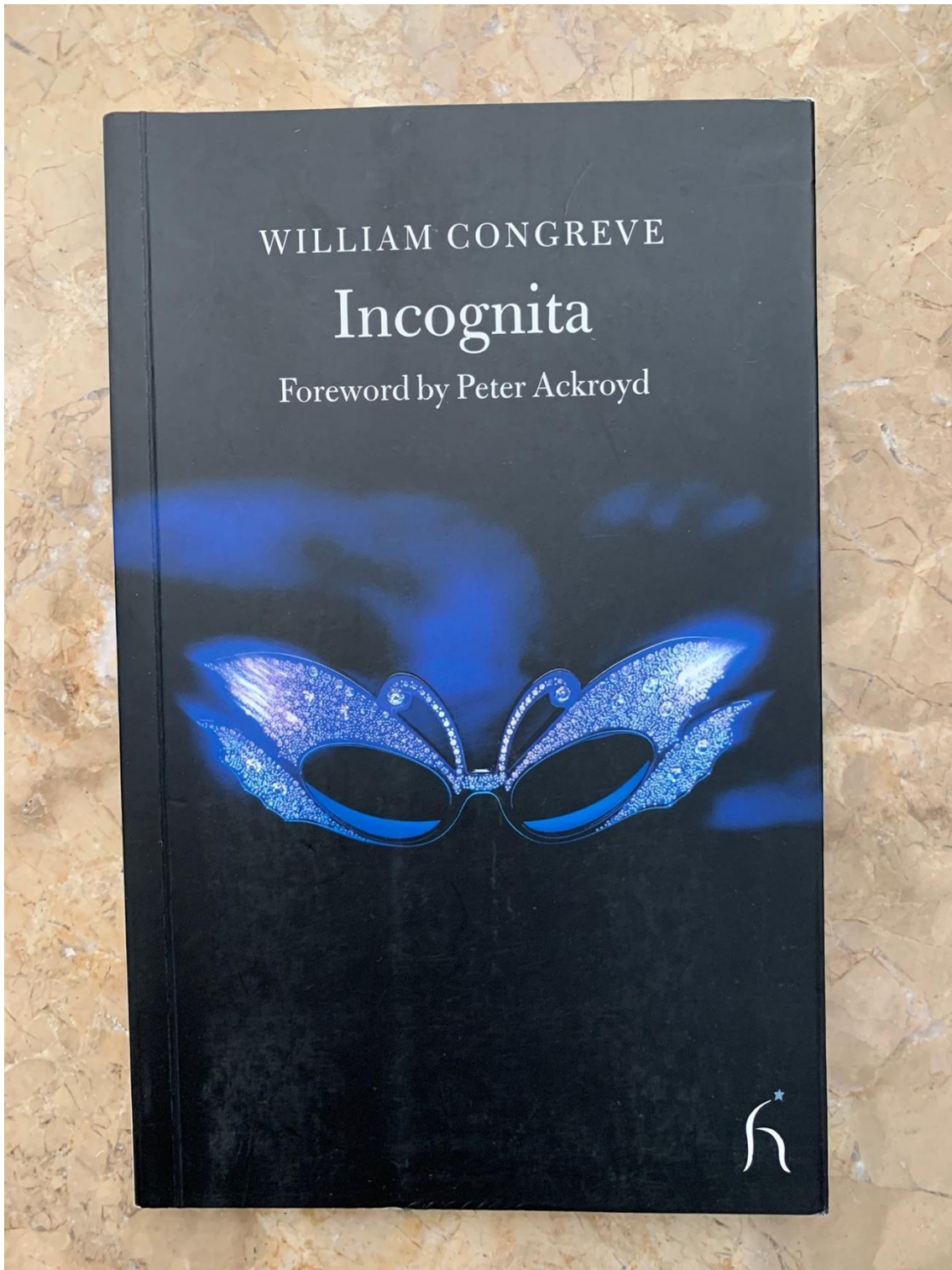


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Format ([17], 128 p.; 20 cm)

(Stored Offsite) 256 e.17660

10. William Congreve. *Incognita*. Foreword by Peter Ackroyd. Hesperus Press, 2003.



My own copy

Format (x, 82 p.; 20 cm)

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