

‘Come, what, a siege?’: Metarepresentation in Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley’s *The Concealed Fancies*

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The Concealed Fancies is a play written by Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley, the two eldest daughters of William Cavendish, marquis (and later duke) of Newcastle, during the English Civil War.¹ We can feel reasonably certain that the sisters wrote it in the hope that it could be performed; however, that would have required the presence of their father,² whose return is the climax of the story, from the Continental exile to which he had fled after his comprehensive defeat at the Battle of Marston Moor. The idea of performance must, therefore, always have looked likely to be wishful thinking, and the play remained a closet drama. This was in any case a genre with which it had several features in common, since two of its most celebrated practitioners, the countess of Pembroke and Elizabeth Cary, had set the precedent for female dramatic authorship; moreover, a crucial scene in *The Concealed Fancies* is actually set in a closet, when the three ‘lady cousins’ pick the locks of Monsieur Calsindow’s cabinet and look through his possessions, and it is at least possible that the sisters envisaged any performance of the play at one of the two family homes of Bolsover or Welbeck as taking place in a promenade style which would have involved moving to an actual closet for part of this scene. This link between the literal, the symbolic, and the material

¹ Alexandra Bennett observes that the reference to ‘18. or 22. youth’ ‘supports the contention that *The Concealed Fancies* was written after the fall of Welbeck’, c. August 1644. See “‘Now let my language speake’: The Authorship, Rewriting, and Audience(s) of Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley’, *Early Modern Literary Studies* 11.2 (September 2005). <<http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/11-2/benncav2.htm>> [accessed 5 November 2013]

² The devotion of both real and fictional sisters to their father is so great that Catherine Burroughs detects a scarcely sublimated incest fantasy in the play; see “‘Hymen’s Monkey Love’: *The Concealed Fancies* and Female Sexual Initiation’, *Theatre Journal* 51.1 (March 1999), 21-31 (p. 22). Emily Smith adduces evidence to show that they were also familiar with his literary works; see ‘The Local Popularity of *The Concealed Fancies*’, *Notes and Queries* 53.2 (June 2006), 189-193 (p. 190).

conditions of possible performance is typical of the radical metatheatricity which characterises and configures the play. In this essay, which like the play itself is co-authored, we combine historicist and formalist approaches to the play with a cognitive pragmatic account of its verbal and non-verbal interactions to fully reveal the extent to which the play's internal logic writes back against the external circumstances of its authors, and to highlight what a skilled and sophisticated piece of writing it is. First, we introduce theoretical frameworks from cognitive psychology and pragmatics which are used later to explore the intricacies of cognition and communication in the play. After this we offer an account of the play in its wider context before examining the detail and nature of its metarepresentations. The article ends by drawing connections between the play's apparent preoccupation with metarepresentation and the historical context and conditions in which it was written.

Metarepresentation, Mind-Reading and Communication

Metarepresentation is the capacity to represent representations, for example to think about thoughts or to speak about utterances. It has been the focus of much attention in clinical and evolutionary psychology. The capacity to theorise other minds or to 'mind-read', one form of metarepresentation, has been a central concept in the study of autism, and more recently has been related to other offline capacities such as children's engaging in pretend play, fiction and simulation. These activities are described in the literature as 'offline' or 'decoupled'.³ They are grouped together as cognitive activities which are separated from sets of assumptions an individual holds as truths. These offline activities are thought to be evolutionary adaptations which allow us to do things like running through different possible scenarios to consider the best possible outcome of a situation, or using mind-reading to detect another person's intention to cheat us. At the same time, the 'decoupling' of this material prevents it from interacting fully with true sets and processes, so that, for example, just imagining your house being on fire does not cause you to phone the emergency number, or thinking your friend is worried about being late for her train does not cause you to hurry to the station yourself.

Relevance Theory⁴ is a cognitive theory of communication which concerns itself with the processes we use to understand one another's utterances. Its central argument is that

³ Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, 'Consider the Source: The Evolution of Adaptations for Decoupling and Metarepresentation', in *Metarepresentations: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. by Dan Sperber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 53-116.

⁴ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

we use our knowledge of language to decode the linguistic form of utterances, and we use a principle of relevance to combine decoded linguistic material with aspects of context in order to make inferences about what a speaker means. Metarepresentation and mind-reading are central to this model of communication in that we must form hypotheses about the intentions of others when interpreting their utterances. In addition, according to Relevance Theory we often use metarepresentation within our utterances and thoughts. Utterances represent thoughts which themselves may either be descriptive of states of affairs in the world, or may be interpretive of other utterances or thoughts. That is to say, utterances may represent what we believe to be true, or may resemble other thoughts and utterances – this second kind of utterance is metarepresentative. A descriptive utterance might be a simple statement which is communicated as more or less matching a belief of the speaker, such as ‘It’s raining outside’ or ‘The fourteenth of November will be a Thursday’. A good example of a metarepresentative utterance is the case of irony, in which a speaker represents a proposition such as ‘That’s a nice car’. Though the statement is not marked off with a reporting clause such as ‘he thinks’ or ‘she says’, the utterance communicates an implicit dissociative attitude towards the proposition along the lines of ‘Someone must believe that car is nice, but that belief is ridiculous’. In this way, thoughts and utterances can themselves be objects of metarepresentation, and public (spoken or written) metarepresentations can be more or less explicitly marked. We can use reporting clauses or quotation marks in writing or exaggerated intonation patterns to draw attention to the metarepresentative nature of an utterance, or we can simply present them in a deadpan way, relying on the mind-reading capacity of our hearers/readers to understand our intentions.

The general concept of metarepresentation and its linguistic subtype, interpretive use, has proved fruitful in explaining the communicative process at work in the layering of narrative voices in prose fiction,⁵ and looks equally promising as way of examining the communicative strategies in play scripts and performances. *The Concealed Fancies* provides rich material for developing this model. The play is metarepresentationally complex to the extent that acts of metarepresentation and the difficulty of mind-reading the central characters’ intentions seem almost to be its theme. Here real authors metarepresent a fictional world in which characters metarepresent versions of themselves. These acts are transparently metarepresentative to some characters, but not to all. It is difficult to distinguish which of the metarepresented versions of the

⁵ Barbara MacMahon, ‘Metarepresentation and Decoupling in *Northanger Abbey*: Part 1’, *English Studies* 90.5 (2009), 518-544, and ‘Metarepresentation and Decoupling in *Northanger Abbey*: Part 2’, *English Studies* 90.6 (2009), 673-694; Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006).

characters' 'selves' are closer to a sincere representation of them, suggesting an instability of identities and interpretations. This is difficult enough for a reader/audience to negotiate, and some of the characters appear to be even more bewildered by one another. At the same time, the acts of metarepresentation here receive explicit attention from the characters, and are generally foregrounded. As well as the mind-reading that operates between communicating characters, some of these acts are embedded within other metarepresentations, and the resemblance between this play and others provides further metarepresentational complexity.

Drama in the Home: the Closet and the Domestic

A number of elements of *The Concealed Fancies* work on two separate levels, fulfilling both a theatrical and a metatheatrical function and linking actual place with represented place. The metatheatrical nature of the play involves one kind of metarepresentation. A fictional world is represented in which further fictional worlds are embedded, both separated from the 'real', but paradoxically reflecting back upon it. The play is, in the first place, a female complaint, comparable to what Alison Thorne describes as 'narratives of female suffering inscribed in the petitionary and pamphlet literature of the English Civil Wars'.⁶ It is, moreover, one which draws specifically on the idea of Cleopatra:

I practis'd Cleopatra when she was in her captivity, and could they have thought me worthy to have adorned their triumphs, I would have performed his gallant tragedy, and so have made myself glorious for time to come.⁷

Cleopatra was a key figure for the circle of playwrights surrounding and including Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke,⁸ and thus for the development of closet drama as a genre: Mary Sidney herself had translated Robert Garnier's *Antonie*, and her protégés Samuel Daniel and Samuel Brandon had both written tragedies which treated the story

⁶ Alison Thorne, 'Narratives of Female Suffering in the Petitionary Literature of Civil War Period and its Aftermath', *Literature Compass* 10.2 (2013), 134-45 (p. 134).

⁷ Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley, *The Concealed Fancies*, in *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents*, ed. by S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1996), III.ii.13-4. All further quotations from the play will be taken from this edition and references will be given in the text.

⁸ See for instance Yasmin Arshad, *British Art Journal* 51.3.

<http://earlymodernexchanges.wordpress.com/2011/07/30/yasmin-arshad-lady-anne-clifford-and-daniel%E2%80%99s-cleopatra/>

of Cleopatra.⁹ She was also a figure of great interest to the sisters' great-grandmother, Bess of Hardwick, who is known to have had embroidered a hanging of her which once formed part of the set of five *Noble Women of the Ancient World* at Hardwick Hall, and one might indeed speculate on what became of this: since Penelope, Zenobia, Arthemisia, and Lucretia all survive, it seems odd that Cleopatra does not - could she perhaps have been taken to Bolsover or Welbeck?¹⁰ Gillian White points out that the inclusion of Cleopatra in this company is surprising because she was not generally regarded as virtuous,¹¹ but for Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley, who had been besieged in their home by Roundheads as Cleopatra had been in her tomb by Octavius, she was clearly an enabling and indeed empowering figure, not least because her emblem of a snake is also the device of the Cavendish family.

Second, *The Concealed Fancies* deploys the Castle of Love trope. This is a standard motif of romance, and *The Concealed Fancies* knows so; in Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*, for instance, we find, 'she is already wonne, and what needes a longer battery'.¹² The contradictions in the trope which represents courtship as war give rise to much metarepresentational speculation in the communication between characters in *The Concealed Fancies*. This quintessentially metatheatrical play might seem to have little to do with the essentially narrative genre of the romance, but actually we want to argue that the characters evince a consistent interest in doing what the presence of a narrator makes so easy in the romance, which is discovering what is passing in the minds of others. 'Away, away, with your hypocritical language, for I am not yet so vain as to believe your dissembling romances' says Luceny to her suitor Courtley (I.iv.74-6), and we want to suggest that Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is an important point of reference in the play, and provides an ironic imaginative backdrop to the enforced and distinctly

⁹ Samuel Brandon, *The Virtuous Octavia*; Samuel Daniel, *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* (available in an edition prepared by Lucy Knight as part of the MA Shakespeare and Renaissance at Sheffield Hallam University, 2011:< <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/renplays/cleopatra.html> > [accessed 5 November 2013]).

¹⁰ For a description of the Cleopatra panel and its iconography, see Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 61. On the possible meanings of hangings in Cavendish houses see Lisa Hopkins, 'Point, Counterpoint, Needlepoint: The Tapestry in Margaret Cavendish's *The Unnatural Tragedy*', in *Women's Writing* 20.4 (2013), 555-566.

¹¹ Gillian White, "'Pictures of the Vertues": A Set of Wall-Hangings at Hardwick Hall', *Renaissance Journal* 2.3 (January 2005).
<<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/projects/publications/journal/eleven/>> [accessed 5 November 2013]

¹² Thomas Lodge, *Rosalynde* (London: Abel Jeffes for T. G. and John Bushie, 1592), STC (2nd ed.) / 16665, sig. L4r.

non-allegorical feats of chivalry which the defenders of the play's Ballamo Castle find themselves forced to undertake.

In a sense, *The Faerie Queene* was family history for the Cavendishes because the character of Duessa is an obvious portrait of Mary, Queen of Scots, long-term captive of the sisters' great-grandmother Bess of Hardwick and her fourth husband the earl of Shrewsbury,¹³ and *The Concealed Fancies* is strongly focused on family. The main plot, which centres on the two fictional sisters Luceny and Tattiney, clearly affords, amongst other things, a means for the two actual sisters Jane and Elizabeth to express the intellectual sympathy and mutual devotion which is evident throughout their lives and writings; moreover, the subplot introduces three female cousins, who to some extent seem to offer additional portrayals of the two Cavendish daughters and of their younger sister Frances, and also additional roles for them if the play were actually to be performed - Alison Findlay argues that Jane clearly played Luceny and Sh., Elizabeth Tattiney and Cicelly, and Frances Is.¹⁴ Here we see a doubling back of the usual direction of theatrical metarepresentation in that authors/actors metarepresent the thoughts and utterances of a fictional character, but the fictional utterances also, to a degree, represent the thoughts and utterances of the authors and likely intended actors. There are also two brothers, who are clearly based on the real-life Cavendish brothers Charles and Henry and who are gently sent up, the elder being ridiculously romantic and the younger comically prosaic and practical, in ways which may well represent the two young men's actual characters. (Findlay suggests that the sisters drew on their own wardrobes for the female characters and their father's and brothers' for the male.)¹⁵ Their aunt Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent, may be implicitly referred to in the list of cosmetics at I.ii.43¹⁶ and is explicitly so when we hear of 'my Lady Kent's cordials' (3.4.56-7), and the name of one of these, 'Gilbert's water' (3.4.59), may perhaps recall the countess's father Gilbert Talbot, 7th earl of Shrewsbury,¹⁷ who had been both

¹³ See for instance John Staines, *The Tragic Histories of Mary Queen of Scots, 1560-1690* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 117-44.

¹⁴ Alison Findlay, "'She gave you the civility of the house': Household performance in *The Concealed Fancies*", in *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, History, and Performance 1594-1988*, ed. by S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 259-271 (p. 260).

¹⁵ Findlay, p. 269.

¹⁶ Susan Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies comment in their note on this passage that 'Lady Tranquillity's cosmetics are not unlike the potions described in *A Choice Manual of Rare and Select Secrets in Physick and Chirurgery* by Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent, a book which is referred to at III.iv.56'.

¹⁷ Kamille Stone Stanton suggests that the point about the experiment with the cordials is that they are alcoholic and that this relates to Cavalier drinking games, but the evocation of family is I think at least as

stepson and son-in-law of the sisters' great-grandmother Bess of Hardwick and from whom their grandfather Charles Cavendish had bought Welbeck and Bolsover.¹⁸ Even the play's marriage-plot is concerned less with the romance of either of the individual unions than with the role played by marriage in the formation of new families: Presumption assures Courtley that 'if she do but behave herself ugly, then I'll tell her that was like a good wife and an honourable stock to bear children on withal' (3.3.36-7) and later adds 'if she do not give respect to my mother and sisters, I will tell her she hath not deserved to enter into my honourable old house' (3.3.39-42).

Writing the Family / The Family Writing

Literature offers writers, readers and audiences the opportunity to explore metarepresentation in rich and complex ways (see note 5), and this kind of literariness is particularly evident in *The Concealed Fancies*. The family into which the sisters was born was an unusually literary one, and running alongside the play's interest in family is a pervading literariness and a profoundly literary sensibility.¹⁹ This is made clear in an exchange between the two sisters:

TATTINEY: Do you not wonder that Courtley and Presumption are held wits?

For methinks there are no such miracles in their language.

LUCENY: Why, that's because we have been brought up in the creation of good languages, which will make us ever ourselves.

(2.3.139-43)

It is clinging to this idea that identity is discursively constituted, and can thus be inflected by will and choice rather than being wholly contingent on experience, which sustains the play's characters in the civil war context of the play. This is characterised not so much by a sense of fear and horror - the sisters are never in any actual danger, and the two brothers approach the rescue of the cousins in a wholly chivalric spirit - as by a dominant note of incredulity at the pass to which things have come. Proper enters asking 'Come, what, a siege?' (3.1.1) as though he simply cannot believe it, before

important. See 'The domestication of royalist themes in *The Concealed Fancies* by Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley', *Clio* 36.2 (2007), 177-197 (p. 195).

¹⁸ Robin O. Warren, 'A Partial Liberty: Gender and Class in Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley's *The Concealed Fancies*', *Renaissance Papers* (2000), 155-167 (p. 158).

¹⁹ For the classic account of this, see Margaret J. M. Ezell, "'To Be Your Daughter in Your Pen": The Social Functions of Literature in the Writings of Lady Elizabeth Brackley and Lady Jane Cavendish', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 51.4 (Autumn 1988), 281-96.

concluding that the best he can do is to ‘Fight as well as a gentleman usher shall’ (3.1.10). Meanwhile Friendly, like the two Stellow brothers, reaches for the discourses and paradigms of chivalry as he struggles to make sense of the situation: ‘By God, I think the ladies have a mind to see how I shall look without an eye’ (3.1.13-15). Given the extent of their connections with other Royalist women, as recently traced by Alexandra Bennett,²⁰ the sisters might perhaps have been aware that in July 1643 Lady Coleburn lost an eye during the siege of Brampton Bryan Castle.²¹ The architecture of Bolsover might flirt with the design of a mediaeval castle, but no one had ever intended either it or Welbeck to be the scene of remarks such as Devinity’s ‘Faith, I’ve been measuring, and the works are not made high enough for the enemies, if shot will enter into every chamber of the house’ (3.1.26-9). Now, in this Alice-in-Wonderland nightmare world in which toy castles must do duty as real ones, gentlemen ushers must fight and well-born ladies are besieged rather than courted, language and the conventions of drama are all that remain to the characters to assert their status as cultured citizens of a more normative reality. It is worth noting that the foul language used by besieging soldiers repeatedly featured among the complaints of the aristocratic women of both sides during the war: Brilliana Lady Harley, for instance, complained that ‘their rotten language infected the air; they were so completely inhuman, that out of their own mouths, and the mouths of their guns, came nothing else but poisoned words and poisoned bullets’.²²

The sisters’ response to the fact that the real world in which they find themselves is violent, unpredictable, and no longer safe for aristocratic women is, paradoxically, to turn to another world which is also characterised by violence, unpredictability, and endangered aristocratic women, but in which these are fictional: Spenser’s. It is as if the world of *The Faerie Queene* has come hideously alive, and the only way to counter the nightmare is to fall back on the discourse and conventions of romance in the hope that they will afford a structure which may contain it. Paradoxically, the authors maintain a sense of who they are themselves by engaging in the very literary process of constructing and metarepresenting the minds and identities of others.

An interest in romance in general and in Spenser in particular is signalled early in the play. When Courtley says that Presumption must be the first to divulge the name of his mistress, Presumption exclaims ‘What! Must I be St George?’ (1.1.37), equating

²⁰ Alexandra G. Bennett, ‘Filling in the Picture: Contexts and Contacts of Jane Cavendish’, *Literature Compass* 5.2 (2008), 342-52.

²¹ Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel: Woman’s lot in seventeenth-century England* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 200.

²² Fraser, p. 201.

himself with the hero whose story opens *The Faerie Queene*. A particular parallel is with the house of Alma, who, like the sisters, is associated with courtship, being

wooded of many a gentle knight,
And many a Lord of noble parentage,
That sought with her to linck in marriage.²³

Like the sisters, too, Alma lives in a castle distinguished by its symbolic architecture:

The frame thereof seemed partly circulare,
And part triangulare, O worke diuine;
Those two the first and last proportions are,
The one imperfect, mortall, foeminine;
Th' other immortall, perfect, masculine,
And twixt them both a quadrate was the base,
Proportioned equally by seuen and nine;
Nine was the circle set in heauens place,
All which compacted made a goodly diapase.
(2.9.22)

A striking feature of Bolsover was (and is) the intersection of regularly patterned oblong and square rooms with the round pillars and semicircular vaults of the square Pillar Chamber in particular (the Terrace Range is also punctuated by hemispherical protrusions whose purpose appears to be purely decorative). Most notably, Alma is the head of the House of Temperance, and the decorative scheme of the first room entered by a visitor at Bolsover was predicated on an equation of William Cavendish himself with the qualities associated with temperance: the three other humours are visually depicted, but to make the scheme complete, he himself was required to be present to identify the fourth and most congenial of them. Where Alma, and Spenser's other characters, differ from the sisters' position, though, is that their thoughts can be expressed to us by the narrator. By contrast, the characters of the play display a recurrent anxiety about the possibility of reading each other's minds. It is difficult to untangle the different levels of metarepresentation and mind-reading within the play, and to clarify the way that they relate, overlap and are contained within one another. The discussion of extracts which follows gives an explanation of some examples, but there are many more instances of the play's complexity in this respect.

²³ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton (London: Pearson, 2001), 2.9.18. All further quotations from the text will be taken from this edition and references will be given in the text.

Ostensive Communication and Information

Careless Garb

There are many examples of covert communication in the play. In covert communication the intention to communicate is concealed, thus the speaker has to mind-read the hearer beyond the level of mind-reading at work in overt communication in order to try to ensure that he does not discover her intentions.²⁴ In terms of relevance theory this is not recognised as communication proper, as there is no mutually manifest recognition between speaker and hearer of the speaker's intentions. In this sense it is not ostensive communication.²⁵ The speaker simply manipulates things such that information seems to reveal itself to the hearer. Sperber and Wilson use the non-verbal example of someone leaving a broken hairdryer on the table, hoping that someone else in the house will notice it and repair it without recognising that this was the intention behind the act. In this case there is an informative intention but not a full communicative intention. There are several cases of non-verbal informing in the characters' references to the adopting of 'careless garb'. For example, Luceny describes to her sister her own behaviour and intentions in an encounter with her suitor Courtley: 'I dressed myself in a slight way of carelessness which becomes as well, if not better, than a set dress' (1.4.6-8). To her sister, Luceny acknowledges the care she has taken to look as if she has not taken any care with her dress. In the scene she is describing with Courtley, she intends him to admire the way her 'careless' dress becomes her. She hopes and believes she can read his mind well enough to behave in such a way as will alter his thoughts in a particular direction (admiring her looks), and at the same time she intends for him not to recognise the intention behind her behaviour. Tattiney later mentions using 'careless garb' in a similar way (2.3.149), and Toy refers to 'my careful way of not dressing myself fine when his Lordship comes'. As audience or readers we hold an even more complex set of metarepresentations. We are engaged in an act of interpretation which involves understanding (metarepresenting) the intentions of two authors at a significant historical remove, who themselves metarepresent the fictional characters Luceny and Tattiney, who resemble themselves to a degree, and who metarepresent and attempt to manipulate the minds of their suitors.

²⁴ In discussing abstract cases, we follow the convention of referring to speakers as 'she' and hearers as 'he', as in Sperber and Wilson.

²⁵ Sperber and Wilson, pp. 49-54.

Acting

The covert intentions evident in instances of dressing carelessly in the play are paralleled in several cases of acting to manipulate and sometimes mislead other characters. Acting is like metarepresentation in that it is a decoupled activity – actors do and say things ‘as if’ they were someone else. They temporarily hold assumptions and make utterances as fictional characters which are cognitively marked off as separate from the set of assumptions they hold as truths, and the descriptive utterances they might make as real people. Where the acting is ostensive we can see it as actually metarepresentative at a general level in that the utterances and behaviour of a particular character are represented by a real person (an actor) as worth thinking about and forming an attitude towards. In this way acting resembles an interpretive utterance such as irony in communicating propositions and opening up possible attitudes towards those propositions. The play itself then is an act of explicit metarepresentation. Within it, covert acting is often referred to openly between the sisters, but is concealed from those they intend to manipulate by it. There are several examples of this. Luceny asks Tattiney ‘Prithee, tell me how you acted your scene?’ (1.4.2-3), and acting is discussed at greater length between Sh. and Cicilley in the following lines:

SH.: Pray, how did I look in the posture of a delinquent?

CICILLEY: You mean how did you behave yourself in the posture of a delinquent?

Faith, as though you thought the scene would change again, and you would be happy though you suffered misery for a time. And how did I look?

SH.: As yourself; that’s great, though in misfortune.

CICILLEY : So did you.

SH.: How should I do otherwise, for I practised Cleopatra when she was in captivity, and could they have thought me worthy to have adorned their triumphs, I would have performed his gallant tragedy and so have made myself glorious for time to come.

(3.4.4-18)

In addition there are Pert’s references to Toy acting ‘her several scenes’ (4.5.55-57), and there is the scene in which Luceny and Tattiney act in a less casual way by dressing up as nuns (4.2). Manipulating other minds by dressing carelessly and acting seems to be the domain of the women in the play. While Courtley and Presumption are not particularly good at detecting the intentions of the sisters, they are not completely unaware of the acting;

COURTLEY: Prithee dear companion, tell me in what humour is thy mistress?

PRESUMPTION: Faith, my misfortune is, she knows her scene-self too well.

As well as indicating the suitors' awareness that there is a degree of acting going on in their interactions with Luceny and Tattiney, these opening lines of the play immediately introduce acting as a theme. The suitors make a similar reference to the sisters acting later in the same scene (1.1.52-54).

Mind Manipulation in Linguistic Communication

The examples discussed so far show intentions to manipulate other (usually male) minds by dressing and acting a certain way. This behaviour is explicitly acknowledged between the female characters of the play and is neither entirely understood nor entirely unrecognised by the characters they intend to mislead. A linguistic version of this manipulation occurs when characters use utterances which we (audience/readers) can see they are not committed to, but which they intend their fictional hearers to believe, or at least partly believe. This is in fact a complicated way of describing a lie, which seems a simple thing, but in fact involves a greater than usual degree of mind-reading on the part of the speaker, and if we are to be successful detectors of lies, also on the part of the hearer. At the same time, in the cases of attempted deception in the play, the layers of intention and mind-reading seem more complex than those in a straightforward act of telling a lie. These attempts to deceive or at least mislead seem also to be covert attempts to inform addressees of yet something else. The distinction made in relevance theory between covert and ostensive communication is again useful here. What is ostensibly communicated is intended to be communicated, and this first order intention is also intended to be recognised by the hearer of the utterance.²⁶ This is the kind of communication which pragmatic theory generally sets out to explain, but relevance theorists also acknowledge cases in which someone intends to make another person aware of something without letting him know of that intention, as in the example of the broken hairdryer discussed earlier. A linguistic example of the same kind of thing can be seen in the following exchange:

PAULA: Have you seen George lately?

JEAN: I saw him when I was on my way to the hospital yesterday.

²⁶ See Sperber and Wilson, as well as Diane Blakemore, *Understanding Utterances* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

Jean's answer ostensibly appears to be answering Paula's question with what amounts to a straightforward 'yes', but, given the right contextual conditions, may also be covertly informing Paula that she went to the hospital yesterday in the hope that Paula will ask her why and engage her on the subject of her health.

While it seems clear that a lot of covert linguistic communication (strictly speaking information rather than communication) is taking place in the play, exactly what the characters are trying to covertly inform one another of is often unclear. Soon after mentioning her 'careless' way of dressing, Luceny, in conversation with her sister, says of Courtley:

and when he made his approaches of love, by speaking in a formal way, I answered him: I could not love so dull a brain as he had, always to repeat he loved me. I had rather have him say he hated me, for that would be some variety!
(1.4. 8-10)

This is complex, both in terms of its metarepresentational levels and what is communicated ostensibly and covertly. Firstly, and within the overall metarepresentational nature of the play, Luceny metarepresents Courtley's declarations of love to her with an accompanying attitude of scorn, and yet the persistent attention of the sisters to their suitors suggests that their attentions are in fact welcome. This contradiction suggests that the authors are communicating a sceptical attitude towards Luceny's scornful attitude. As readers/audience we might further deduce that Tattiney is not entirely convinced by what her sister appears to be communicating either. We might also suspect that Luceny is aware but not overtly acknowledging of Tattiney's awareness of her real thoughts, and that Tattiney is aware of Luceny's awareness, and so on. This raises the question of why Luceny ostensibly communicates a scornful attitude towards Courtley's declarations of love at all, if neither we nor her sister believe she really holds such an attitude. She may be protecting herself, and/or playing to an expectation of feminine resistance in courtship.

There is further complexity in this extract in Luceny's metarepresentation of her own utterances to Courtley, beginning 'I answered him . . .'. Here she reports herself using these assertions descriptively, as assertions she would like Courtley to believe that she believes. We may well get the sense that between the sisters there is a recognition that these 'assertions' are just part of a resisting posture, and so what appears to be descriptive use in the interaction with Courtley is interpretive use, and therefore metarepresentative between the sisters. At the same time, it is unlikely that Luceny really wants Courtley to believe that she would like him to say he hates her. It is

difficult to say what she would have Courtley believe. There is a sense that she is overtly encouraging him, that she intends this to be interpreted as covert encouragement, yet does not wish to make this intention mutually manifest between the two of them.

There are several other similar instances in the play. Another example in which there is explicit attention to the intention to inform covertly through mind-reading and verbal manipulation occurs when Mr Steward sends a message via Sage, saying he wants Sh. to look over the accounts. After initially saying she doesn't want to see them, Sh. says to Sage:

No, stay. It is better to please him, and tell him I do not suspect his honesty. Therefore he needs not bring the books so soon, and let him know this was his plot to see whether I suspected him, and to let him see I confide in him, I will not take the books this month.

(4.3.22-27)

Findlay refers to this incident in the play as socially significant: 'The ability to transcend domestic labour and indulge in play-making is one of the privileges of noble birth that the play celebrates'.²⁷ At the same time it is an opportunity to represent one mind second-guessing another. Sh.'s attempt to covertly inform Mr Steward of her confidence in him arises from her suspicion that his request was a covert attempt to find out how much she trusts him. Assuming she is right, one act of mind-reading and covert informing is subverted by another.

Mind-Reading and Gender

The manipulation of other minds through dressing 'carelessly', acting and speaking in certain ways, and the second-guessing of others' intentions seems to be at the heart of many of the interactions in this play. Mutual deception and confusion between characters is a feature of other plays of this period and later, but in this play there is a special intensity and self-conscious focus on the mechanisms of mind-reading. Much of the manipulation depends on the concealment of real intentions and a fluctuation between descriptive use, where the speaker, at least ostensibly, commits to the propositions of her utterances as truths she believes, and interpretive use, where the speaker represents a proposition along with a dissociative attitude towards it, discernible

²⁷ Alison Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 44.

to some but not all. Care's speech to Pretty encapsulates this rather more elegantly: 'You speak not as you think, and with this dallying discourse never minds your business' (V.v.15-17). With all this dallying discourse it is not surprising that some of the characters, mainly the male characters, spend the play in a state of bewilderment as to what other characters really mean to communicate.²⁸ While they seem to know that they are supposed to do some complex work in interpreting, they openly profess to being unskilled in the kind of mind-reading they need to do to understand the utterances and behaviour of Luceny and Tattiney. For example, Courtley says of Luceny 'By god, mine's so courtly-coy, I know not what to make of her; for when she smiles I know not whether 'tis a scorn or a grace!' (1.1.23-5).

The women of the play exploit the inferior mind-reading capacity of the men at the same time as being, or appearing to be, infuriated by them. Luceny, referring to Corpolant and speaking to Tattiney, says 'Alas, he understands not. You must name my name, or else his dull brain understands not.' (2.3.62-63). Attempts by the men to deceive the women of the play tend to fail. Discretion tells Caution of a time he tried to deceive the ladies:

DISCRETION: Once I had a design to vex them, since they will not be pleased: I made one of the grooms say, one of their coach-horses was plundered and that, I knew, would passionately vex them.

CAUTION: And were they angry?

DISCRETION: No. They're quick at fancy, and knew it was a plot of me.

(4.6.26-32)

Contextual Instability

So the women are 'quick at fancy' and the men have 'dull brains'. The women adopt a careless way of dressing, act their scenes and manipulate their utterances in such a way as to covertly inform male characters of one thing while ostensibly communicating another. Between themselves they metarepresent their own and the men's utterances with new dissociative attitudes so that the whole play feels communicatively complex and unstable. Although we may ideally be in a slightly better position to make subtle interpretations, as readers/audience we may experience at least some of Courtley and

²⁸ This representation of women being difficult to understand is still part of the dominant ideology of gender and extends far beyond the fiction of this particular play.

Presumption's bewilderment, at the same time as understanding some of the superior knowledge of the two sisters.

Avoiding committing to certain attitudes and utterances, the covert acts of informing and the manipulation and second-guessing of other minds and subverting of others' intentions would seem pertinent to the actual authors' situation in what we can assume was an outwardly polite and co-operative but underlyingly hostile relationship with their besiegers. They might well have to have had daily or almost daily interactions with parliamentary troops, and if so, they would have had to think carefully about everything they said, might have represented particular versions of themselves which concealed their true attitudes and would have had to do a lot of mind-reading and second-guessing. It is in this context that the play represents minds too as besieged, and inverts the power dynamic of the real-life situation by presenting women as the better equipped of the two sexes when it comes to this sort of siege. While Courtley can do no more than lament 'What a misfortune's this to me, / To court a wench that doth so truly see' (1.4.10-11), Tattiney is confident that she can see straight through Presumption: 'Now, do you think the pulling down your hat and looking sad, shall make me believe your speech for truth? But you are deceived' (2.2.20-2). Even the otherwise revered Lord Calsindow does not escape being read in this way, as Sh. notes, 'Why, I'll pick his cabinet locks, and there you shall see his magazine of love. I dare swear you shall see locks of all manner of coloured hairs, and favouring ribbons in as many colours as the rainbow' (3.4.72-6). Women, by contrast, are confident manipulators of personae. Luceny notes in the epilogue how she has thoroughly bamboozled Courtley by a careful strategy of mixed signals: 'I looked soberly, as if I would strictly observe him, yet dressed myself contrary to his instruction, and my behaviour was according to my dress' (Epilogue.14-17), and when Courtley tells her she is finely dressed she replies 'I am glad you said so, for now I shall understand you by contraries. So, sister, I knew he was to seek about again for a new good counsel' (Epilogue.22-5). A woman may read another woman - towards the beginning of the play, Luceny says knowledgeably of her future mother-in-law 'Though I look obedient and civil to her, I will let her discretion understand in silence, that I know myself, and that I deserve thanks for coming into her family' (1.3.124-7) - but when it is men who are doing the besieging, these women at least can resist because they have, as Luceny says, 'have been brought up in the creation of good languages, which will make us ever ourselves' (2.3.142-4), even when the world outside has gone mad.

The chaotic and adversarial context of the play results in a foregrounding of the women's resisting acts of mind-reading and linguistic manipulation. Theories of cognition and communication have been used here to show just how complex and

intricate these acts are. At a more general level, the theories help us to identify a concern with metarepresentation in *The Concealed Fancies* which is central to many other works of literature. Continuing work in this area suggests that one of the functions of literature is to use fictional worlds to explore and develop the metarepresentational capacity.