
HEDONISM, PLEASURE AND AUTHENTICITY IN RESTORATION LITERATURE: THREE TEXTUAL INQUIRIES IN LIBERTINE POETRY

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Received 03 September, 2015, accepted for publication on 20 October, 2015

DOI:10.13165/SMS-15-7-1-07

Abstract. *This paper investigates the treatment of hedonism and pleasure in some poems of the Restoration Era. Firstly, a contextualization of Charles II's period is presented, where a number of examples from the past are mentioned. Secondly, the project will aim to explore the legacy of three renowned poets of the period ranging from 1660 to 1700: Aphra Behn, Sir George Etherege and John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Finally, it centers on the play anonymously published in 1684 entitled Sodom, or the Quintessence of Debauchery. Essentially, the inferred explicit treatment of sexual topics is what marks a before and an after in the themes and rhetoric of English literature.*

Keywords: *Restoration Poetry, Aphra Behn, Etherege, Rochester, Hedonism.*

Introduction

This paper focuses on a genre of English literature written during the period of Charles II¹. Hedonism, eroticism, audacity, sincerity and congruence are some of the nouns which stand out as prominent themes in the works which shall be explored in this analysis. During the course of this paper we shall address the issue of the “merry gang”², or the Court wits. Some remarks on the poetry of the second half of the XVII century by Aphra Behn, Sir George Etherege and John Wilmot (Earl of Rochester) shall also be made. The homoerotic dimension observed in *Sodom* is also cartographed along this investigation. Chronology and subjects, as shall be seen, are interwoven. It has to be said that we are dealing with a period which greatly favoured simplicity, aspects of everyday life and clarity over truculence and complexity³. These are newer experimentation of the ever-puritan Cromwell. The return of monarchy, or the restoration of the English throne, was the foundation for a new era in which a new set of values became fun, more modern times in which new freedoms are beginning to emerge following the theocratic damental.

George Steiner and Robert Boyers⁴ (mention that a great work of eroticism, culture and homosexuality has not yet been written. This approach tries to palliate this intellectual scarcity that contains human interest in terms of both culture and heritage. The emotional, psychological and natural tendencies of each individual can be observed in the literary work either directly or by somewhat fictitious masks.

This contribution circumscribes to each example both in heterosexual and homoerotic subject matter. This study confines itself to the search of these circumstances, in English literature, focusing on writing composed in verse during the Restoration era which is affectionate and sexual. Firstly, the study endeavours to pinpoint a number of previous events and circumstances in the interest of providing context. Following this, there shall be a similarly succinct exploration of this in the period which stretches from 1660 to 1700.

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- 1 Morgan, K. O. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. 2009, pp. 330-340.
 - 2 Merry gang is the term used by Andrew Marvell to refer to these seventeenth century libertine poets. To better understand the context, see the works by Bernd Dietz (1989) a pioneering study, biographical and literary criticism of the Restoration and the Earl of Rochester in general and specific terms.
 - 3 Torralbo Caballero, J. D. *Una nueva poesía en la literatura inglesa: Dryden y Pope*, Alfar, Sevilla.2013, pp.27-85.
 - 4 Homosexualidad: Literatura y política, eds. Steiner, G. & R. Boyers, Alianza, Madrid.1995, pp. 85-15.

The context of the Restoration

The triumphant arrival of the new monarch in Dover on the 25th of May 1660 after his French exile carved out new paths in the lives of the British in general but also more specifically in the field of artistic composition.

The coercion and tension which was full of suffering and a lack of freedom in English society culminated as a civil war broke out on the 30th of January 1649 and in the beheading of Charles I in the gallows outside Whitehall. Afterwards, the Cromwell protectorate caused optimistic and euphoric fortune to arise. Naturally this is reflected in the literature of the period. It should be mentioned, however, that this *res publica* or *interregnum*, at the end of the day, was more of a dictatorship than a common wealth.

This newfound sense of enthusiasm and hope is what allowed for the cultivation of new pictorial dimension in drawings of Peter Lely, for example, in his nude portrait of his lover Nell Gwyn. The matter of fertility during the Restoration stands out in theatre and in poetry as something which reflects the change of values used in social, cultural, political, religious and economic order. Notably, the illustrious opening and ideological liberalization which was restored and sculpted with the new monarchy caused the environment to acclimatise suitably to allow for the emergence of works like *Sodom*, a point which this study shall focus on in order to draw conclusions. There shall also be reflection on the poetry of Behn, Etherege or Rochester.

The context of English Literature

The first area of exploration carried out is Geoffrey Chaucer's pilgrimage, though there were no significant results. However, words registered by investigators Antonio León Sendra and Jesús Serrano Reyes⁵ circumscribe to a Spanish version of the stories in their introduction "Lo que cuenta el Bulero no tiene desperdicio. Viene precedido por un prólogo y una introducción que, en cierto modo, adelantan la importancia del calado humano y social del mensaje del cuento (...). Pero lo que en el acabado del cuento acontece es un mero incidente que no tiene trascendencia homoerótica, ya que es un exabrupto que el Posadero le impropia al Bulero cuando éste trata de sacarle dinero a cambio de la absolución de su pecaminoso pasado: "I wolde I hadde thy coillions in myn hond / In stide of relikes or of seintuarie"⁶.

Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593) translated in couplets two stanzas of the erotic legend *Hero and Leander* (1594) – a poem which Chapman would later finish. The recreation of Marlowe's work celebrates Leander's beauty in homoerotic terms. During the same period, Shakespeare published *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The*

5 Serrano Reyes, J. & A. León Sendra, A. Introducción, in Geoffrey Chaucer, *Cuentos de Canterbury*, Gredos, Madrid, 2004, p.44.

6 Chaucer G. "The Pardoners Tale", in *Canterbury Tales*, Barcelona, Bosch, 1987, pp. 624-5.

Rape of Lucrece (1594). Shakespeare also dedicated his sonnets to “Mr. W.H”. In the same vein, Francis Beaumont recreated *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* (1602) and Abraham Crowley later published his “Davideis” (1656, *Poems*). The sublime attraction of masculine beauty is appreciated in these six works.

The desire which young John Donne displays towards “T.W.” (Thomas Woodward) in 1590 through his four letters tends towards a sentimental and physical bond. This driving force is complemented by the lesbian eroticism which Donne tucks into in “Sapho to Philaenis”, where a dramatic monologue questions heterosexuality and commends homosexuality in a liberal and egalitarian world.

Chronologically speaking, John Milton’s poem *Epitaphum Damonis* (1638) takes place in the same century. The poem is dedicated to childhood friend Charles Doidati, although the passion for another friend, (Edward King) is reflected not long before in the pastoral work *Lydicas* with his inherent hypothesis in *ars longa, vita brevis*, mourning his premature death. They cannot be interpreted as homo-desire but rather passionate and affectionate elegies which are related to the nostalgia between two close friends.

It is here, however, in *Paradise Regained* (1670) where the English puritan bard incorporated temptation with certain homoerotic undertones⁷. Jesus in the desert defeats three temptations, upon saying the Evangel of Saint Lucas⁸. The first book hides cloisters the temptation in the desert; the central books present gluttony, wealth and political power at the top of the mountain and in the fourth one, Satan invites Jesus to tempt God by throwing himself on the pinnacle of the temple.

We shall now move from the distinguished seriousness of Milton –a key and towering figure – as outsider to the contextual and singular libertine atmosphere at that time which seemingly from our perspective, scrutinizes the most human and sincere mysteries of human nature.

Aphra Behn, Etherege and Rochester

Now to turn the floor to a professional writer from England and two poets in order to show the diverse treatment of hedonism, pleasure and the sexual relationship transmitted through poems which express feminine desire and indeed more specific forms of desire for carnal bonding. One such yearning written by Aphra Behn elevates the woman engaging in sexual activity whenever she ridicules the weakness of the young man. Other compositions blame the woman for leaving the man open-mouthed and unable to consummate his desire. Both incursions are carried out in poems which deal with a homoerotic relationship as something more plausible and enjoyable.

7 It is so explained, among others, by N. H. Keeble in “Wilderness Exercises: Adversity Temptation and Trial in *Paradise Regained*” in *Milton Studies*.

8 This excerpt can also be found in Mc 1:12-13 and Mt 4:1-11.

Aphra Behn (1640–1689) enlisted in the Court of Charles II in 1666 to travel as a spy to Antwerp in the Dutch war⁹. It is worth mentioning that Virginia Woolf¹⁰ was the first English writer to underline the pivotal value of Aphra Behn as a professional writer, who made a living my means of her writing¹¹. Her poetry reflects part of the social context of the period as do her fiction and prose. The thematic regeneration opens doors and acts as a breath of fresh air in English literature.

It is relevant to mention that Aemilia Bassano Lanyer cultivated pastoral writing (*Description of Cookham*) and that Katherine Phillips¹² and Anne Finch also celebrated female friendships. The idea of retreat and seclusion is praised in the bucolic poems. The pastoral literature of Behn¹³ should be so called on account of the fact that the author uses a pastoral name (Astrea) and her male suitors who are Strephon, Celadon, Daphnis o Lycidas. In 1684, the printing press shed light on *Poems on Several Occasions: with a Voyage to the Island of Love*. A year later she published *Miscellany Poems* and in 1688 *Lycidus, or The Lover in Fashion* was also published.

The eroticism present in the retreat of Katherine Philips¹⁴ exploded and manifested itself in a most lively and extensive manner. Behn travelled the path opened by other libertine poets. She ignited the flame of love poetry and her audacity broke ethical ties in terms of the morality of her time. Behn created a pornographic microcosm where before there was idyll. Extramarital relationships lurk anywhere and everywhere, carnal appetite is no longer exclusive to man, the woman also takes the initiative; equality begins to emerge in the relationship as can be observed in the reading of “The Willing Mistress”:

Amyntas led me to a grove,
Where all the trees did shade us;
The sun itself, though it had strove,

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- 9 Goreau, A. *Reconstructing Aphra. A Social Biography of Aphra Behn*, The Dial Press, New York. 1980.
- 10 Woolf, V. *A Room of One's Own*. Harcourt Brace and Company, London. 1929, 1957. Specifically in his 1929 book, she states the following: “she had to work on equal terms with men. She made, by working very hard, enough to live on” (1957: 67). It can be corroborated how the female writer is equalled with men of his time. Virginia Woolf's statement goes further and proclaims the pioneering value of Aphra Behn.
- 11 Torralbo Caballero, J. D. A propósito de las escritoras inglesas en el siglo XVII: una nueva mirada sobre Aphra Behn, in J. M. Estévez Saá & M. Estévez Saá (eds.), *Escritoras y pensadoras anglosajonas. Otras voces y otras lecturas (siglos XVII al XX)*, Arcibel editores, Sevilla. 2008, pp. 15-42.
- 12 García Calderón, A. & J. D. Torralbo Caballero. *Poesía femenina inglesa de la Restauración*, Córdoba, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Córdoba. 2010, pp.101-126.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp.71-96.
- 14 Steibel, A. *Subversive Sexuality: Masking the Erotic Poems by Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn*, in *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, C. J. Summers & T. Pebworth (eds.), Columbia University of Missouri Press. 1993, p.231.

It could not have betrayed us:
 The place secured from hyman eyes,
 No other fear allows,
 But when the winds that gently rise,
 Do kiss the yielding boughs. (...)
 Down there we sat upon the moss,
 And did begin to play
 A thousand amorous tricks, to pass
 The heat of all the day.
 A many kisses he did give:
 And I returned the same
 Which made me willing to receive
 That which I dare not name.

His charming eyes no aid required
 To tell their softening tale;
 On her that was already fired,
 `Twas easy to prevail.
 He did but kiss and clasp me round,
 Whilst those his thoughts expressed:
 And layed me gently on the ground;
 And who can guess the rest?¹⁵

The verses here stand out as being rather daring and very advanced in comparison to the standard literature seen during the period. This being said, it should be noted that the strophes in this particular poem recall “To his Coy Mistress” by Marvell. The challenging of the convention is something which came with “The Disappointment”. This poem contains fourteen stanzas with nine verses each, in iambic tetrameter ending in iambic pentameters and procreating the failure of the male in the sexual relationship which provokes the lover’s flight.

He saw how at her length she lay;
 Her saw her rising bosom bare;
 Her loose, thin robes, through which appear
 A shape designed for love and play;
 Abandoned by her prode and shame.
 She does her softest joys dispense,
 Off’ring her virgin-innocence
 A victim to love’s sacred flame;

15 The poems are quoted from Behn, A. *The Works of Aphra Behn*, Vol. VI, Montague Summers (ed.), New York, Bejamin Blom, 1915, 1967.

While the o'er-ravished shapher lies
 Unable to perform the sacrifice.

This extract postulates female independence and plants the substratum which shall later allow future poems to openly address matter related to people's sexual freedom. A tenuous record is found in "Elegy XIX" by John Donne, which describes the profile of the woman before she goes to bed while the subject of the lyrics indicates that he wants her to be naked and facing him. Other contemporary shared narratives are found in "The Imperfect Enjoyment" both in the work of Rochester and Etherege.

Sir George Etherege (c. 1634–1691), co-founder of the comedy of manners (along with Congreve, Wycherley, Shadwell, Tate, Duffey, Wanbrugh, Farquhar etc.) composed, as aforementioned, "The Imperfect Enjoyment" whose fifty verses written in a soft and urbane tone blame her¹⁶:

She falls on the bed for pleasure more than rest.
 But oh, strange passions! oh, abortive joy!
 My zeal does my devotion quite destroy:
 Come to the temple where I should implore
 My saint, I worship at the sacred door.
 Oh cruel chance! the town which did dispose
 When, overjoyed eith victory, I fall
 Dead at the foot of the surrendered wall.
 Without the usual ceremony, we
 Have both fulfilled the amorous mystery;
 The action which we should have jointly done,
 Each has unluckily performed alone;
 The union which our bodies shoyld enjoy,
 The union of our eager souls destroy.
 Our flames are punished by their own excess –
 (...) ¹⁷

Hedonism is also interspersed throughout other poems by Etherege such as "To a Very Young Lady", "To a Lady who fled the sight of him" or "To a Lady asking him how long he would love her". The latter resembles Donne's "Elegy XVII"¹⁸, this is something reproduced here in the twelve verses distributed between two segments:

16 Etherege, G. *The Poems of Sir George Etherege* (J. Thorpe, ed.) Princeton University Press, New Jersey.1963, pp. 7–8.

17 The poems by Etherege are quoted from J. Thorpe's edition (1963).

18 John Donne's elegy is "Elegy on his Mistress"; it shows how the intertextuality towards the London poet is not limited to his immediate followers (Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan, Marvell, Cleveland, Traherne, Quarles, King) but it goes up to Aphra Behn.

It is not, Celia, in our power
 To say how long our love will last;
 It may be we within this hour
 May lose those joys we now do taste;
 The Blessed, that immortal be,
 From change in love are only free.

Then since we mortal lovers are,
 Ask not how long our love will last;
 But while it does, let us take care
 Each minute be with pleasure past:
 Were it not madness to deny
 To live because we're sure to die?¹⁹

John Wilmot (1647–1680), the second Earl of Rochester²⁰, stands out as a flag-bearer for the “wits” courtesans along with Charles II. What we have here is a type of literary school which is elitist in its customs and freedoms, around the Palace of Whitehall. However, its legacy is not something that should be completely set apart from the rest of the contemporary poetry. For example the poem “Love and Life: A Song” which we are about to analyse also provides evidence of some of these elements. It is related to “To a Lady asking him how long he would love her”:

All my past life is mine now more
 The flying Houres are gon
 Like transitory Dreames giv'n ore
 Whose Images are kept in Store
 By Memory alone.

What ever is to come is not
 How can it then be mine,
 The present Moment's all my Lott
 And that as fast as it is got
 Phillis is wholly thine

19 The poem also shows a line of contiguity with “Inconstancy”, by Cowley. Published in 1772, it recalls libertinism. The poet focuses on hedonism, showing a certain amount of individualism and forgetting social conventions, that is to say, the patterns that follow Milton or Dryden.

20 If we look at the notes on the poet Vivian de Sola Pinto draws (1961: 28-48), for expository reasons, we can refer to Rochester with respect to Dryden, just as there are other similar couples in the literary world in Spenser in relation to Sydney, Richardson versus Fielding, or Swinburne in relation to Tennyson.

Than take not if Inconstancy,
 False Hearts, and broken Vows,
 If I, by Miracle can be,
 This live-long Minute true to thee,
 Tis all that Heav'n allows.²¹

Additionally, just like Aphra and Etherege, the Earl of Rochester also paints an image of premature ejaculation in one of his poems. “The Imperfect Enjoyment” is made up of seventy-two and epitomises the unusual honesty of the poet when it comes to writing about erotic aspects.

My flutt'ring *Soul*, sprung with the pointed kiss,
 Hangs hov'ring o're her *Balmy Brinks* of Bliss.
 But whilst her busie hand, wou'd guide that part,
 Which shou'd convey my *Soul* up to her *Heart*,
 In liquid *Raptures*, I dissolve all o're,
 Melt into Sperme, and spend at ev'ry Pore:
 A touch from any part of her had don't,
 Her Hand, her Foot, her very look's a *Cunt*.

The semantics which are quite a lot more exasperating than the language shows Etherege breaking out into curses and condemnations towards the inefficient male member and the topic of the poem allows for the reflection of the poet onto be planted regarding our fallen condition, the irreversible loss of innocence and nostalgia for the garden of Eden.

The heroic, burlesque tone which precludes the mock heroic dimension cultivated by Pope in *The Rape of the Lock*, the poet's honesty along with his inquisitive mind predict the other compositions. One can conclude that these poems which demythologize sacredness in homoerotic relationships would go deep in order to emanate poems like the ones which were recorded afterwards.

Sixteen verses – four strophes – are enough to reveal signs of homosexuality. The poet deals with the relationship with women in a most vehement manner so as to dedicate himself not only to the act of celebrating Anacreontic features but also to homoerotic instinct²²:

Love a Woman! Y'are an Ass,
 'Tis a most insipid Passion
 To choose out for your happiness

21 Lines by Rochester are quoted from Frank H. Ellis' edition (1994).

22 Rochester: Complete Poems, ed. Frank H. Ellis, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, London. 1994, p. 37.

The idlest part of Gods Creation!
 Let the Porter and the Groome,
 Things designed for dirty Slaves,
 Drudge in fair Aureluas Womb,
 To get supplies for Age, and Graves
 (...)

In the “Song to Cloris” which begins with “Fair Cloris in a pigsty lay” Rochester condemns heterosexual relationships when Cloris wakes up in a pen after dreaming of a relationship and contempt, during Swift’s time²³, of body and sexuality²⁴.

Now piercèd is her virgin zone,
 She feels the foe within it;
 She hears a broken, amorous groom,
 The panting lover’s fainting moan
 Just in the happy minute.
 Fighited she wakes and waking frigs.
 Nature this kindly eased
 In dreams raised by her murmuring pigs
 And her own thumb between her legs,
 She’s innocent and pleased.

“The Maimed Debauchee”²⁵ is found in this satirical work and shows where it is noticeable a stanza with a glaring homoerotic subject, that is, a poem with clear homoerotic features.

Through the heroic stanza employed by Davenant en *Goudibert* y Dryden in *Annus Mirabilis*, the poet compares the old admiral with the defeated libertine in an attempt to demystify the petrified moral scale which was growing between the virtuousness of the admiral and the acceptance of evil of the libertine: “Nor shall our love-fits, Cloris, be forgot, / When each the well-looking linkboy strove t’ enjoy, / and the best kiss was the deciding lot / Whether the boy fucked you, or I the boy”²⁶.

23 An example is the treatment given to human beings along *Gulliver’s Travels*, particularly in the last travel (“A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms”), when Gulliver went back home; and the bio-political approach found in *A Modest Proposal*.

24 *Supra* note 22, pp. 31-40; pp. 22-23.

25 *Supra* note 22, pp. 87-89.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

Sodom

Reading this piece of theatre implies exploring the array of literature incorporated into the Court of Charles II, something which has been rather neglected on a critical level. The work consists of five acts, written in couplets with songs occasionally interpolated in the text. The purpose of *Sodom, or the Quintessence of Debauchery* is declared in the prologue and aims to stimulate both the reader and the spectator. The *dramatis personae* are outlined allegorically (King Bolloxinion and Cuntigratia, the princes Pricket y Swivia; the Buggeranthos, the ladies in waiting Fuckadilla, Officina, Cunticula, etc.) the scheme of the plot is not free from pornographic instances.

The character change which occurs is particularly explicit: Bolloxinion, king of Sodoma with the etymon “bollox” in his name (which finds its semantic correlation in the word “balls”); the princes Swivia which is a response to the colloquial verb to “swive” (which is a synonym of “fuck”). Other examples include Dildo-Maker (“dildo”) not to mention the naming of the Queen (Cuntiagratia) or the court doctor (Flux).

The first act, as can later be seen in our analysis can be catalogued as properly homosexual. The second act ends in an orgy portrayed to the disdainful Queen and her companions as they are discussing events. The men are renounced, an act which has been imposed on them because of the circumstances of the boys deciding that the Queen must gain self-satisfaction from the virile general Buggeranthos.

The third act sees the young princess Swivia seducing her brother Pricket. Having committed incest they are summoned by the lady-in-waiting Cunticula. The fourth act depicts the uniting of the insatiable Cunticula and Buggeranthos, who despite his reputed virility, does not fulfil the appetite of the queen. The climax in this act seems to mystify masculine sodomy by denigrating women. It is this very climax in the face of female nymphomaniac insatiability which immunizes the work and is considered the antidote to the male species in both the court and the army. Here we see a source of pleasure which ends up being less frustrating and problematic.

Finally, the fifth act breaks the plot and the expectation of the reader and spectator given that an adversative turn is supposed upon guessing the plot. First of all, the women are humiliated in front of the Virtuous one, the provider of dildos in the court. Complaints, illnesses and discontentment begin to emerge and Flux who, as aforementioned is the royal doctor prescribes as *deux ex machine* the return of conventional sexuality²⁷:

To love and nature all their rights restore-
 Fuck women and let buggery be no more:
 It doth the procreative End destroy,
 Which nature gave with pleasure to enjoy.
 Please her, and she'll be kind: if you displease,
 She turns into corruption and disease.

27 *Sodom or the Quintessence of Debauchery*, New York, Olympia Press. 2004, p. 58.

The topic dealt with previously may begin to encounter difficulties and weaken making way for heterosexual nature or behaviour. This is an unexpected, premature, sudden escape which does not follow the course and method which the work has dealt with from the first act at all. We shall address this issue in the following section of the article.

Sodom, “Act I”

The start²⁸, from the moment the curtains open is emphatic: the decorative tapestry with every type of sexual position. The King, after having proclaimed himself in the zenith of his kingdom, and dictating ‘I eat to swive, and swive to eat again’²⁹, reinforced topologically by the structure which breaks the bond – chiasmus – it does not take long to articulate the slogan to emancipate his nation “my Nation shall be free”: “My pintle only shall my scepter be; / My laws shall act more pleasure than command / And with my Prick, I’ll govern all the land”³⁰.

This proclamation is likely to require a clearing up of doubts of sorts in the minds of the audience or readership: What does he wish to free his people from? Which burden does he wish to get rid of? The style of ruling? Could heterosexuality be a burden? Perhaps he is trying to denote the neglect of homosexual practices by royal decree in favour of heterosexual ones? He also elaborated on his style of governing before other monarchs: “Let other Monarchs, who their scepters bear / To keep their subjects less in aw than fear”³¹.

In fact, another tangible indication of the King’s position on the matter can be seen at the end of the act. The final part of the act presents heterosexuality as an abomination, since heterosexuality appears to be considered an aberrant perversion of character. The, the next right flows³²:

Let conscience have its force of Liberty.
I do proclaim, that Buggery may be us’d
Thro all the Land, so Cunt be not abus’d
That, the proviso, this shall be your
Trust (*to Borastus*)
All things shall to your order be adjust.
To Buggeranthos, let this charge be given
And let him bugger all things under h..ven.

28 *Supra* note 27, p.9.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*, pp.13-14.

The King issues a command to everyone in the land and invites them to partake in the Sodomy. In a previous parliament, general Borastus had already suggested that the monarch leave his wife, Queen Cuntigratia and invite Pine or Pockenello to replace her: “I could advise you, Sir, to make a pass / Once more at loyal Pockenello’s arse. / Besides, Sir, Pine has such a gentle skin, / It would tempt a Saint to thrust his Pintle in”³³.

We should add that Bolloxinion had previously already devised sexual disdain so that he and his spouse could harbour homoerotic acts, as can be observed in the following excerpt: “As for the Queen her Cunt no more invites. / Clad with the filth of all her nasty whites / Come, we miss-spend our time, we know now how / The choice of Buggery is wanting now”³⁴.

Twely bears claim to all of this, declares himself a candidate and recreates moments with the monarchy. The King, who has before him an offer of four young men, chooses Pockenello as his companion and without dismissing the chance to flirt with the others. All the while, Pockenello supports his acceptance with the following four verses³⁵:

BOLLOXINION

Pine I remember how my sperm did flow,
Twely, I’m in arrears to thy rewards
But let’s be active, whilst the time affords;
Now Pockenello for a mate I’ll choose
His arse shall for a moment be my spouse.

POCKENELLO

That spouse shall, mighty Sir, tho it be blind,
Prove to my Lord, both duitful and kind,
‘t Is all I wish, that Pockenello’s Arse
May still find favour from your Royal Tarse.

BOLLOXINION

And next with Twely, I will have a Touch
And Pine

These illustrative displays and examples clarify how, in the first act, the topic which forms an integral part of this paper lays hidden in the text. The second act shows the female gender taking revenge on men because they feel uncared for and abandoned. They take part in mutual masturbation and use mechanic inventions etc. From here onwards, the theme and the narrative thread take place rapidly until the end of the work.

33 *Supra* note, p.12

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*, pp.12–13.

The English critic and historian Richard Norton³⁶ does not hesitate to infer that Rochester is a herald of pornographic literature. Nor does he vacillate when he claims that the literary bravery in *Sodom* is supreme and brilliant. Thus, he compares the grace of the heroic couplets to the verses of Pope and Dryden³⁷. The latter of these claims is looser and more disputable. To further endorse this idea, let us highlight the fact that a scholar such as Bernd Dietz³⁸ does barely attributes any literary value to it when he infers that *Sodom* is a piece of work without any literary importance and without an ideological and philosophical framework, although he does recognize the worth for the fields of anthropology and history of customs³⁹.

Bernd Dietz deduces the above mentioned after deciding to dedicate a centenary and a half of pages exhibiting and studying the poetic corpus of the Earl in great detail. The aforementioned expert coincides with Norton in his belief that *Sodom* is an illustrative instance of pornographic literature from its era, and he adds that it is a work that deserves to be read so that its value could be assessed, as it is a simple piece of art⁴⁰. Both parties also coincide in their explanations of the particularities of the defense of homosexuality which the work takes a leading role in, at least for the first preliminary act. The historian proves to be convincing when he confirms that “this play is not a defense of bisexuality or libertinage in general, but of homosexual in particular”⁴¹. The treatment which the homosexual category receives from both the audience and the author is something which stands out from the norm three centuries before the conceptual adaptation of the term.

Conclusions

In the period of Charles II, literature sees a mutation in so far as the general topic and themes within the work are concerned. Hedonism, pleasure, merry characters and authenticity come to the fore without any kind of restrictions, ethical ties or moral corsets.

36 Rochester: Complete Poems, ed. Frank H. Ellis, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, London. 1994, pp. 5–6.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

38 It is clarified from the date of their books on the subject. It follows that their jobs are pioneers in this area, since the date of its publication and the content that approached from the social and historical context, love poetry to epigrammatic and satirical work of Rochester without ignoring a survey on developing a problematic textual history of critical reception.

39 Dietz, B. *Estudios Literarios Ingleses: La Restauración, 1660-1770*, Madrid, Cátedra. 1989, p.149.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Norton, R. *England's First Pornographer, A History of Homoeroticism*; 1974, 1998. revised, 4th, February, 2006, [interactive] [Retrieved 29 April, 2014] from <<http://www.infopt.demon.co.uk/wilmot.htm>>, pp. 5–6.

If John Donne shapes a journey of calm for the woman, Aphra Behn expands further when talking about the way she is treated. The same can be said for Etherege and Rochester. Aphra Behn sets herself up in the literary battle field during this period⁴² struggling to survive on numerous levels (personal, physical and literary). Etherege and Rochester serve as singular poets as if it were a collateral dedication and as a pastime. Both men are aristocrats who bear as much honour when it comes to their fondness for alien poetry with the utmost level of professionalism⁴³. Life is more important than poetry. The art of good conversation is, at the very least, as highly esteemed as well written lyrical poetry. For this reason it is understandable that the “wits” boast dilettantism by disregarding the publication of their works cultivating a creative need which in a way which was more sporadic than constant.

Donne and Milton are two other examples worth mentioning. In the case of John Donne he contrasts the amphibology of the person who composed the most passionate homoerotic love poems of the Renaissance. The example of Milton turns out to be paradoxical or impossible to be used for homoerotic interpretation seeing as the writer got married three times during the course of his life. However, the excessive and passionate elegiac talent which two Miltonian compositions exhibit are what we have decided to examine in this article. These examples should be interpreted as a mere artistic recreation of this type of eroticism. There is no attempt to find interpretations which go beyond poetry, in the lives of the creators which seem of little interest seeing as we have decided to concentrate in art for art’s sake, on the semantic closure of the poem or and the thematic coordinates set in this composition.

The three areas which have been most profoundly explored in this chapter seem to indicate very distinct realities. The honesty of the poet is the culmination of his work. For this reason, one place where an example of sincere intention instead of merely rhetoric or creativity can be seen in other poets of the Restoration, not only in their demystification of idealism and in their perfection in heterosexual love but also in their approach as is the case of John Wilmot, with the exception of the explicit nature of *Sodom*.

Finally, so as not to hide the most resistant spirits of the era, it is worth mentioning a quotation that – together with John Evelyn’s legacy- inaugurates the literary genre of the diaries. Samuel Pepys (1633–1703)⁴⁴ writes an entry in his diary which is a reflection on the poet Sedley, specifically regarding the incident where he

42 Torralbo Caballero, J. D. *Parnasos y batallas en el germen de la crítica literaria*, Editorial Celya, Salamanca. 2004.

43 They can be compared to other needy material support writers who are, for example, Dryden and Wycherley. It is fruitful to look for self-representation of the poet in *MacFlecknoe*, the reasons about his self-assertion against Thomas Shadwell. The generic issue of self-representation, the fight in the battlefield and the emerging literary criticism can be read *Parnasos y batallas en el germen de la crítica literaria* (Dubois, 1978; Torralbo, 2007).

44 Pepys, S. *The Illustrated Pepys. Extracts from the Diary*, selected & edited by R. Latham, London, Bell & Hyman Limited.1982, p.54.

is naked on the balcony. The Pepysian innocence seems bewildered by the festive encounters of Rochester, Dorset and Buckingham. The *Diary* – by who was Secretary of the board of the Armada and Secretary of Admiralty – is a gold mine in terms of sexual field. However, our survey should concentrate here on the finding of praises of divinity for not having recognised the sin of sodomy. Let us also add to the sincerity of the diarist to the list of credentials that the assertion in endorsing that sodomy has become as common among our gallants as it is in Italy⁴⁵:

1 July. Mr. Batten telling us of a late triall of Sir Charles Sydly the other day, before my Lord Chief Justice Foster and the whole Bench, for his debauchery a little while since at Oxford Kates; coming in open day into the balcone and showed his nakedness – acting all the postures of lust and buggery that could be imagined, and abusing of scripture and, as it were, from thence preaching a mountebanke sermon from that pulpit, saying that there be hath to sell such a powder as should make all the cunts in town run after him – a thousand people standing underneath to see and hear him. And that being done, he took a glass of wine and washed his prick in it and then drank it off; and then took another and drank the King's health. Upon this discourse, Sir J. Mennes and Mr. Batten both say that beggery is now almost grown as common among our gallants as in Italy, and that the very pages of the town begin to complain of their masters for it. But blessed be God, I do not lo this day know what is the meaning of this sin, nor which is the agent nor which the patient.

This shy yet daring writer only has to recognize the practice of sodomy among the young men, regardless of the fact that he does not share their reality. He does this through a sociological lens and with extreme attention to detail.

The triad of poems are identical in subject to those we have already cartographed clearly stating a treatment with zero restrictions which the aforementioned poets toil over to devote themselves to this sexual and amorous phenomenon. A synergy and source of enjoyment for the inquisitive reader of the period and undoubtedly are provided upon reading the *Diary*.

Let us once again name some threads which run through the project as well as a number of communicating vessels for thematic purposes. After all, an English poet had already portrayed a naked woman towards the bed in “Elegy XIX “Elegy XIX. To His Mistress Going to Bed”. This exact poet with both religious and secular tones in his work had already died before Rochester, Etherege and Behn were born.

If we take it that among Metaphysicals one can observe obvious individualism, as is the case with those who followed Ben Jonson it can be said that more social, shared elements (such as the way they bucolic names which some poets take is represented). With Milton and with Dryden it must be inferring a more public kind of poetry since they think of a message which is capable of redeeming humanity, especially that of the puritan writer. Behn, Etherege and Rochester each leave a legacy which presents a redeeming message in a purely religious sense. This is something which we can

45 Peppys, *supra* note 44.

describe as poetry extremely closely related to human reality and which has a certain freshness to it and is not disguised as something else. It is quite simply put, a group of poets who are taking a rather direct and close subject.

For the above-mentioned reasons, it is not daring to deduce that during the era of the Restoration, that literature in general terms becomes more and more democratized and talks about the native soils. In short, by extension this is to attach them to the human condition, seeing as formerly taboo topics are touched upon, when they are not disparaged by blinded critical attacks: daily issues, quotidian themes, concentrated on the individual. Evidence provided by literary evidence is being filled with new thematic treatments.

Obviously, in Dryden's opportunities for future investigation arose since he lays down the basis for the modern era. Let us add as part of our conclusion that during the Restoration then nation of England emerges and became modernized in different orders: there was progress and there was a will to speak at length about human nature in a way which is clearly honest and free from prejudices. We find ourselves faced with libertinism as a form of expression of the honest man. It is an intellectual, spiritual and human legacy.

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