This is an accepted version of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *ANQ: A Quartely Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2017.1361804>

**“Franglais Fops” and mocking the French in English Restoration Theatre**

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, France was the dominant cultural force and England lay under its influence in terms of art and fashion. However, Restoration comedy found a means of turning the power structure on its head by overtly mocking those subjugated by all things French. The stock character commonly known as the “Frenchified fop”, but which I prefer to label a “Franglais fop” for reasons that shall become apparent, is one of Restoration comedy’s greatest comic inventions. In this essay, I wish to examine one case study of this type of fop: Monsieur de Paris in William Wycherley’s *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* (1671). De Paris, like his more famous counterpart Sir Fopling Flutter in Etherege’s *Man of Mode* (1676), is English by birth but enamoured with French culture following a brief sojourn in France. Analysis of de Paris’s case will reveal how the Franglais fop provides the means to critique both gallants and to mock the French.

**A tale of two tongues**

According to the OED, the term fop has been in usage in English since the mid-fifteenth century. Yet, it is primarily associated with the period of the Restoration, and most notably with the comedies of the period. As such, the term denotes a person who is excessively interested in the vicissitudes of fashion. It is quasi synonymous with the term “beau” (taken from the French), as in Farquar’s *The Beaux’ Stratagem* (1707). Though the fop was not an English invention and had counterparts in other European cities, François Maximilien Misson notes that London had a fair number in his *Mémoires et observations faites par un voyageur en Angleterre* (1698). Misson describes fops as extremely fashion conscious: “ce sont des coureurs de nouvelles modes; des Perruques & des habits chargez de poudre” (28) and identifies the theatre as well as the Park as their natural habitat. In Restoration comedy, the fop is a symbol of the metropolitan elite much ridiculed for following in weather-vane like fashion the fickle changes of fortune at the Court. A quick survey of plays from the Restoration theatre – broadly conceived as covering the latter half of the seventeenth century from 1660 onwards –[[1]](#endnote-1) shows the prevalence of the fop as a comic character. From John Crowne’s eponymous hero in *Sir Courtly Nice* (1685) to Clodgate in Thomas Shadwell’s *Epsom Wells* (1671), there are numerous examples of foolish gallants. The Franglais fop is a specific variety of which Wycherley’s Monsieur de Paris, or Nathaniel Paris as he is in fact called, is a prime example. Monsieur de Paris appears in the very first scene of *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, immediately setting himself apart from his interlocutors. He does so by expressing a love of all things French and by dismissing English customs, all the while speaking in a Franglais dialect. This begins in his very first address to his cousin Hippolyta: “Servitèur, Servitèur, la Cousinè, I come to give the *bon Soir*, as the *French* say” (Wycherley 1.1.88-9). She responds by entreating him to give her information about “the fine Gentleman they talk of so much in Town” 1.1.90-91). Since the person in question, Mr Gerrard, is a rival for his cousin’s affection, he sets about delivering back-handed compliments in which Gerrard’s main fault is being English. For instance, he claims that “he is truly pretty man (…), for an *English*-man” (1.1.104-5), yet he lacks certain key qualities in de Paris’s esteem, for he cannot “sing a *French* Song, nor swear a *French* Oatè, nor use the polite *French* word in his Conversation” (1.1.129-30).

The opposition that Monsieur de Paris sets up between French and English attitudes continues in Scene 2, when he meets Gerrard in a French restaurant in London: “Tis very veritablè, Jarniè, what the *French* say of you *English*, you use the debauch so much, it cannot have with you the *French* operation, you are never enjoyeè; but come, let us for once be enfinement gaillard, and sing a *French* sonnet” (1.2.1-4). In the above, the grave accent is not to be taken in the modern French acceptation, but rather as a phonetic transcription of the intended stress placed on the letter “e”. Markley has best described de Paris’s idiosyncratic idiom as undermining the “distinctiveness of both French and English, […] and generally fitting together parts of speech as though they were mismatched pieces of different jigsaw puzzles” (1988: 154). Indeed, de Paris’s caricatured French accent is in the lineage of a host of characters signalled as French and mocked as such on the Restoration Stage, such as the troupe of French actors in Davenant’s *Playhouse to let* (1663). Yet, he is perfectly capable of expressing himself in grammatically normative English. In lines, 28 to 30, for instance: “Why, she said, she is to be marry’d tomorrow to a person of Honour, a brave Gentleman, that shall be nameless, and so, and so forth (little does he think who ‘tis)”. Such instances highlight the fact that de Paris is playing the role of the would-be Frenchman, and producing an unwitting caricature in the process. This point is made by Gerrard when he exclaims ironically: “Monsieur, now give me leave to admire thee, that in three months at Paris, you could renounce your Language, Drinking and your Country (for which we are not angry with you, as I said) and come home so perfect a *French*-man” (1.2.110-3). It also prefigures later scenes in which de Paris’s uncle will force him to abandon his French ways and his affected manner of speaking – “I will hereafter speak clownish good English” (4.1.114).

I do not follow Vance’s analysis of the scene at the French house, when he claims that “reflective of masculine identity whatever the context, Gerrard and Martin ‘gang up’ on Monsieur, who feels compelled to provide a substantial defence of his ‘Frenchness’” (2000: 53). Rather, it seems that Monsieur de Paris provides the means to both mock French people and fops in one go. This occurs during jokes made by Gerrard and de Paris about the link between France and venereal disease. The former quips that “one main qualification of a French-man” is that he should be afflicted with the pox, to which de Paris joyfully replies: “I am very pockie; pockie enough Jarnie, that is the only *French* qualification may be had without going to Paris, mon foy.” (Wycherley 1.2.138-40).[[2]](#endnote-2) It is also clear in the scene that Monsieur de Paris’s adoption of the French nation is the butt of the jokes and his mock accent and use of French words instead of their English equivalents is misguided. Such pretence prefigures that of his more illustrious stage colleague, Sir Fopling Flutter, who chooses to include French terminology out of pure snobbery. In his opening lines, Flutter comments that “the bellès assemblès form themselves here everyday” and compliments one of the characters (Dorimant) on his looking very Parisian: “I have not met with any of my acquaintance who retain so much of Paris as thou dost” (Etherege 3.2.88). Indeed, Flutter is so enamoured with Paris that all that comes from the city is worth complimenting. This infatuation with France is what characterises de Paris, and in both cases these extravagant Francophiles are signalled out for mockery.

**Fashion victims**

Monsieur de Paris and Sir Fopling Flutter take great pride in appearing and sounding French. Their dress sense is tied up with their appreciation of language, and with heir subjugation to French style comes their subjugation to the French language. In *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, Monsieur de Paris comes up against a lover of another culture, and it is their opposition which will draw out not only the ridicule of their infatuations but also highlight the fickle changes of fashion. The ridicule of de Paris finds its match in that of his uncle James Formal, or Don Diego as he prefers to be known, who has chosen Spain as his country of adoption. It is fitting that the model chosen by the older man should be Spain, a country whose influence on fashion had considerably dimmed since the beginning of the century. If Monsieur de Paris seems ridiculous because he is following a fashion of Francophilia, Don Diego is definitely outmoded – as Gerald Marshall puts it “each character manifests a mental ‘hobbyhorse’” (1993: 13). Just as de Paris speaks a mixture of French and English, Don Diego’s dialect mixes Spanish with English: “As hard as it is for those who are no kept up to be honest, look you con Licentia Sister” (Wycherley 2.1.8-9). Don Diego also plays on the opposition between his native and adopted nations:

And I will be a *Spaniard* in every thing still, and will not conform, not I, to their ill-favour’d *English* Customs, for I will wear my *Spanish* Habit still, I will stroke my *Spanish* Whiskers still, and I will et my *Spanish* Olio still; and my Daughter shall go a Maid to her Husband’s bed, let the English Custom be what ‘twill (2.1.38-42).

The ridicule is derived also from the fact that these things were all outmoded at the time. Of course, the implication is that chastity before marriage is also in London at least, a thing of the past. The verbal humour is combined with performance humour through costuming, which gives rise in the fourth act to the humiliation of Monsieur de Paris as he has to wear Spanish clothing, which he despises. Before that though, there is a battle of fashion that occurs between the two men. Monsieur de Paris mocks his uncle’s outfit and nearly provokes him to a duel in defending his choice of “pantallons” against the “Spanish Hose”. The characters trade insults, both compare each other to dogs; Monsieur de Paris is like a “great old Fat, slovenly Water-dog” whereas Don Diego resembles a “great grisled-long-Irish-Grey-hound” (Wycherley 3.1).

The battle between French and Spanish takes on meta-theatrical significance, illustrating the power battles between England and other European nations.[[3]](#endnote-3) Criticism of the way people dressed had political implication. It was considered in some circles a national disaster that England should be so indebted to France in fashion terms. This was the tone of Evelyn’s discourse on fashion, *Tyrnannus or the Mode* (1661) which set to mock the choices of the gallants of the time in terms of dress. Describing the outlandish use of silk on the suit of some Westminster peer, Evelyn notes that “a Fregat newly rigg’d kept not half such a s clatter in a storme, as this Puppets Streamers did when the Wind was in his Shroud’s” to the extent that “whether he were clad with this Garment, or (as a Porter) only carried it, was not to be resolv’d”. He provides a backhanded compliment to the Spanish by saying that “we deride the Spaniard for his odd shape, not for his Constancy to it”. In other words, the problem with Spanish dress sense is not its unchangeable quality. Rather the latter is a virtue for, as he explains further “Laws are in credit as they are Ancient, and the very alteration of Elements, Weather, and Dyet are full of Perill; ‘tis that renders us Weak, Old Sick, and at last destroyes us”.[[4]](#endnote-4)

The so-called jacket episode during which Charles II attempted to disenfranchise himself from French fashion highlighted the fraught political situation and the latent desire to re-emblazon the pride of the English stage and monarchy. Meanwhile, in the theatre, by putting onstage a laughable Francophile fop, playwrights were able to satirise the dominance of French fashion from a position of relative safety. The fop is removed from power: either by being a bourgeois or by being a country notable, and mocking the fop is a form of political and social conservatism: it is a means of putting everyone back in their place. For all the examples of French culture on display in London (from restaurants to tailors), there was disdain that was brimming under the surface. Mocking outsiders, particularly those who were connected to the elites, could prove a facile but efficient target for comedy writers in the period. This was even more the case when the stereotype of the outsider is grafted onto the stock-made character of the ‘fop’, one of the period’s most iconic and idiosyncratic creations.

**Works cited**

Crowne, John. *Sir Courtly Nice*. Critical edition by C.B. Hughes, Mouton, 1966.

D’avenant, William. *The Playhouse to let*. The Dramatic Works, vol. 4. The Library of the

University of California Riverside. <http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/william-davenant/the-dramatic-works-volume-4-eva/1-the-dramatic-works-volume-4-eva.shtml>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2017.

De Beer, Esmond. ‘King Charles II’s Own Fashion: A Celebrated Episode in Anglo-French

Relations 1666\_1670. *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 105-115.

Dobson, Michael. ‘Adaptations and Revivals’. *The Cambridge Companion to English*

*Restoration Theatre,* edited by Deborah Payne Fisk, Cambridge UP, 2000, pp. 40-51.

Dulck, Jean, Hamard, Jean and Imbert, Anne-Marie. *Le Théâtre anglais de 1660 à 1800*.

PUF, 1979.

Etherege, George. *The Man of Mode*. 1676. Methuen, 1988.

Evelyn, John. *Tyrannus, or the Mode*. 1661. *Gyford* <http://www.gyford.com/archive/2009/04/28/www.geocities.com/Paris/LeftBank/1914/tyrannus-text.html>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2017.

Farquhar, George. *The Beaux’s Stratagem*. 1707. A. & C. Black, 2006.

Fielding, Henry. *The Mock Doctor*. 1732. Routledge. 1889.

Hughes, Derek. *English Drama 1660 – 1700*. Clarendon Press, 1996.

Jantz, Ursula. *Targets of Satire in the Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve*.

Salzburg UP, 1978.

March, Florence (2010) *La Comédie anglaise après Shakespeare. Une esthétique de la*

*théâtralité 1660 – 1710* (Aix en Provence: Presses Universitaires AMU).

Markley, Robert. *Two Edg’d Weapons. Style and Ideology in the Comedies of*

*Etheredge, Wycherley and Congreve*. Clarendon Press, 1988.

Marshall, W. G. *A Great Stage of Fools. Theatricality and Madness in the Plays of*

*William Wycherley*. AMS Press, 1993.

Misson, François Maximilien. Mémoires et observations faites par un voyageur en Angleterre.

1698 .<https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Mémoires_et_observations_faites_par_un.html?id=T-5GAAAAcAAJ&redir_esc=y>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2017.

Priestley, Margaret. ‘Anglo-French Trade and the “Unfavourable balance” Controversy,

1660-1685.’ *The Economic History Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 37 – 52.

Shadwell, Thomas. *Epsom Wells*. 1673. Text Creation Partnership, 2003.

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=eebo;idno=A59419.0001.001>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2017.

Vance, John. *William Wycherley and the Comedy of Fear*. University of Delaware Press,

2000.

Wycherley, William. The Gentleman Dancing-Master, A Comedy. 1693. Text Creation

Partnership, 2005. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=eebo;idno=A67199.0001.001>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2017.

1. There is some debate as to the exact length of the period encompassed by the term “Restoration drama”, and its siblings “Restoration theatre” and “Restoration comedy”. Dulck, Hamard and Imbert have even argued that the 18th century in English literature begins in 1660 and ends in 1789 (1979: 9). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. In other plays of the period, the link between venereal disease and France is also made clear, for instance in the *Plain Deale*r (1676) when Horner wishes to pass for a eunuch and enlists the help of a quack to propagate a rumour to that effect. Following a trip to France, he was seen by an Anglo-French doctor who botched a cure for the small-pox. Horner’s experience provides scope for a double dig at France, not only in terms of the nation’s health, but also in terms of their medical capabilities. Many years later, the person of Dr Misaubin to whom Fielding ironically dedicated his *Mock Doctor* (1732), could be seen as the embodiment of the French quack. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Fashion is clearly important in *The Man of Mode* also; as Ursula Jantz duly notes, “Sir Fopling as as well as Don Diego and Monsieur de Paris expect that their dress will serve to put them on an equal plane with the wits in the plays in which they appear” (1978: 123). Flutter’s arrival in Act 3 is immediately followed by a discussion of his attire, which includes tasselled pantaloons, a coat that makes him “show long-waisted” (Etherege 3.2.156), a breech that is a “handful too high” and “well fringed, large and graceful” gloves (3.2.160). After Sir Fopling’s clothes are listed and examined article by article, Emilia then comments that “he wears nothing by what are originals of the most famous hands in Paris” (3.2.162). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Charles II would attempt to follow Evelyn’s recommendations by introducing an English vest in what was according to Esmond S de Beer “one of the most celebrated episodes in the history of English costume” (1938: 105). This fashion that was supposed to be long-lasting was initiated in 1666, but petered out by all accounts at the beginning of the 1670s. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)