

REVIEWS

A RESTORED COMEDY. María José Mora, Manuel J. Gómez Lara, Rafael Portillo and Juan A. Prieto Pablos, eds. *The Woman Turned Bully*. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2007.

The Woman Turned Bully is one more of the high-quality editions prepared by members of the Universidad de Sevilla. Other works like *The Virtuoso* (1997), *Epsom Wells* (2000) and *The Reformation* (2003) form part of the good results obtained by the Restoration Comedy Project <<http://alojamientos.us.es/restoration/editions.html>>. Since 1995, members of the Department of English literature at the Universidad de Sevilla started working on the Restoration comedies. Their basic objective was to provide more information on these plays as well as produce modern critical editions of those hardly accessible. A database of the comedies, farces, burlesques and drolls, as well as some tragicomedies in which comedy has a significant part, all produced during the Restoration, is under construction at the moment with some samples available. Because of its quality, this project has received official recognition and funding by the Spanish Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia.

This edition of *The Woman Turned Bully*, published by the Universitat de Barcelona, is the first since 1675 printed quarto which has been collated with extant copies to constitute the base for the present work. Spelling, punctuation, and some other formal aspects have been modernized as far as they did not imply altering meanings or sounds conveyed by the original forms. The book includes a well structured introduction where the editors discuss elements related to the play.

Going further than the first date of publication, the possible date for the performance of the play is considered, as well as its authorship, since no name is given in the quarto edition. The increasing amateur writing might justify the anonymity but there could be other reasons for the author's silence: it could be the case of a rewritten version of a previous work or, simpler than that, it could be the case of a well known author uncertain about the success of the play and therefore tried to avoid the consequences of failure for his/her reputation. Though there is no vindication of a definite authorship, the editors analyze references provided in the text comparing them with other plays to strengthen or minimize the attribution of *The Woman Turned Bully* to Aphra Behn, a Restoration female dramatist, whose remarkable production must be taken with high regard if we consider that it was only after 1660 when women were allowed to be professional actresses. Though there are several points in favor for her authorship it is also possible that the play was the result of a collaborative work, that is, the product of more than a single author working for the Duke's Company.

The plot of the comedy shows influences of the Spanish "comedias de capa y espada," and can be included within a "new type of comedy which blended different issues —wit, love, intrigue, manners and above all satire—" (29), a final element conveyed quite often by exploiting the medieval concept of "humours," as it happens in other contemporary works. Nevertheless, as Styan well says, this repetition of characters and plots from play to play for about forty years, seemed by the time unimportant since



these were just “convenient pegs on which to hang the true elements of drama offered by Restoration comedy. And where might they be found? In the code of speech and behavior which lay dormant in the lines, and in whose secrets player and spectator could share—but only through the right sort of performance” (1). However, the text has manifest peculiarities to make it relevant, such as its portrait of the legal world of the period: its attorneys and clerks, and their legal expressions and “malapropisms.” These are the target of the author’s satire, nevertheless stating that not all deserve criticism.

Worthy of mention is also the evolution in the concept of theatre play, a fact that is revealed by a female character, Betty Goodfield, whose knowledge of the contemporary drama comes not as being a spectator but a reader, drama is now written not only to be represented but to be read. Printed play-texts will mean a wider reach of theatre and with it the influence exerted by their authors. This influence includes the recalling of other literary works, such as *Don Quijote*, whose sentences the characters quote with especial emphasis, and furthermore: “In the printed quarto, most of the quotations are also marked out in italics for the benefit of the reader” (44, n.51).

Madam Goodfield’s reference to the *canary* (115), malmsey or malvasía wine, may also take us to Shakespeare’s plays, in fact, this word’s first entry registered by the *Oxford English Dictionary* corresponds to Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* in 1597; other quotes from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries follow. But malmsey was imported from the Mediterranean since the Middle Ages, and it is only when Crete was seized by the Turkish Empire in the middle of the 17th century that the Canary Islands production grows. The *canary* wine appears as a basic product for the commerce with England between the 16th and 17th centuries to the extent of becoming its monopoly. “El conflicto de la Compañía de Canarias fue una viva demostración del monopolio británico del comercio insular y mostró palpablemente las limitaciones que este hecho representaba para la economía canaria” (Arbelo García and Hernández González 28). The reduction of the English imports of *canary* will be due to

political and economic factors, British merchants buy more than what they sell and the two countries keep in conflict, problems that will contribute to the final substitution of *canary* for Portuguese wines.¹ Nevertheless, Madam Goodfield’s comparison of *canary* and Derby’s ale, has nothing to do with the disappearance of the imports of malvasía, which by the time of the play was still highly appreciated, but with separating the uses of the country and the city: the defense of tradition, or plain coarseness, as opposed to open-mindedness, or plain snobbism.

In spite of comedies being read, *The Woman Turned Bully* was written to be represented as it in fact was on 24 March 1675 by the Duke’s Company at the Dorset Garden Theatre. By then, this was a well equipped theatre with imported machinery that does not seem to have been necessary for the staging of this work. The analysis of the directions establishes at least two acting spaces, though the editors provide a whole description of the stage and the other playhouse areas.

No list of artists was provided in the quarto edition but several actors and actresses of the Duke’s Company are here suggested to have played the different roles according to their previous performances. This is an aspect the editors consider: “Since the actor was usually identified with a particular character-type, casting became not only a powerful tool in the definition of character, but also an effective means of establishing the expectations of the audience” (Mora 78). The inclusion of a “breeches part,” where the female character dressed as a man would reveal part of her legs, was a lure for the audience and an element to take into account when selecting an actress to play that role.

This edition of *The Woman Turned Bully* is, first of all, enjoyable by itself, but it has other qualities. Besides providing a new amusing reading to be used in class, it might be considered a

¹ Further information can be found in the seminal work by Antonio Betherncourt Massieu, “Canarias e Inglaterra: el comercio de los vinos (1650-1800),” *Anuario de Estudios Atlánticos* 2 (1956): 195-308.

source for further research both in the fields of literature and linguistics. The jargon of law as reproduced in the comedy could be one of such objectives for which the notes offered by the editors could be a first step. Even though the realism of this type of comedy can easily be questioned due to its plot, it is also true that Restoration comedy was realistic, especially if compared with heroic drama, as Salgado states: "It is fairly clear that a less stylized, more naturalistic style of acting was used in comedy. Scenery and stage properties would confirm visually the general impression of contemporary actuality, a world smaller, tidier and altogether more familiar than the evoked by the exotic splendour of 'heroic' settings" (144). A deeper analysis of the language would help to add or reduce to this conception of the comedy. In the same terms, the capacity of its audience to understand the terminology, quite often in Latin, would help to clarify the idea of who were the theatregoers of this period and might also have something to say about the success or failure of the play.

Therefore, several are the reasons to praise the appearance of *The Woman Turned Bully*, but may it suffice to say it is a well done work.

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