

María José Mora, Manuel Gómez-Lara, Rafael Portillo and Juan A. Prieto-Pablos, eds. 2007: *The Woman Turned Bully*. Colección Textos y Comentarios, 10. Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona. 211 pp. ISBN: 978-84-475-3208-7

Jorge Figueroa Dorrego
Universidad de Vigo
jdorrego@uvigo.es

The Woman Turned Bully (1675) is an anonymous comedy that has been described as “very Diverting” (Langbaine 1691: 556), “very amusing” (Baker, Reed and Jones 1812, 3: 418), “a capital comedy with some clever characterization” (Summers 1915: xxxvii, n. 30), and an “enjoyable” play with “[v]ivid characters, lively intrigue, and repartee” (Hume 1976: 303). Despite this, it has received little critical attention down through the years. It is not mentioned in the classical studies on Restoration comedy written by Dobrée (1924), Sutherland (1969), Brown (1981) and Bevis (1988) or in more recent important collections of essays, such as Quinsey (1996), Fisk (2000) and Owen (2001). Maybe these critics agree with Nicoll (1923: 204) that it is “an exceedingly dull comedy” hardly worth mentioning, or perhaps they did not have access to the text, as it has never been easily available.

Fortunately, a fully-annotated, modern-spelling, critical edition of the play has just been published, for the first time, by a team of Spanish scholars from the University of Seville who are the core of the *Restoration Comedy Project*. One of the aims of their project is precisely to publish critical editions of Restoration comedies that are currently unavailable. They have already edited Joseph Arrowsmith’s *The Reformation* (published by the University of Barcelona in 2003) and Thomas Shadwell’s *The Virtuoso* and *Epsom Wells* (printed by the University of Seville in 1997 and 2000 respectively).

In this new edition, the text of the play is preceded by an extensive introduction (15-63) which includes detailed information and an interesting, authoritative discussion about the comedy’s dates of publication and performance, authorship, literary context, satirical elements, first cast and original quarto edition. This is followed by the play itself (65-199), which is presented in modernised spelling and with a large number of pertinent and useful footnotes that explain words, quotations and other cultural or historical references, as would be expected in a critical edition. The footnotes are particularly helpful here due to the important presence of legal jargon, colloquial language and citations from other plays in the dialogue. An appendix about the British monetary units alluded to in the play and a very extensive list of works cited (201-11) complete the volume.

Few facts about the date and authorship of *The Woman Turned Bully* are known, so the editors have had to do a lot of research and guesswork, quite reasonable and pertinent given the sparse surviving data. They surmise that the premiere must have been before March 1675 and that, taking into consideration certain allusions in the text, the play must have been written no later than summer 1673 (17). As for its authorship, it

has sometimes been attributed to Aphra Behn, for example by Sara Mendelson, who argues that the play “betrays Aphra’s authorship through numerous details of characterization and style, including lines which Aphra re-used elsewhere” (1987: 212, n. 72), and also that the female protagonist, Betty Goodfield, is “[e]asily recognizable as the young Aphra Behn . . . an example of [her] favourite female character: the bold, witty young woman who disguises herself and runs wild, fighting duels, making assignations, and occasionally proposing marriage. It hardly mattered what, so long as her behaviour was out of harmony with the code of female respectability” (1987: 141).

Betty would thus have been paving the way for Hellena, the heroine of *The Rover* (1677). According to Mendelson, Behn opted for anonymity in this play in order to protect herself after the failure of *The Dutch Lover* (1673). However, most other Behn scholars have questioned that authorship. For Summers (1915: xxxvii) some parts may be hers, and “the whole conduct of the play is very like her early manner. Beyond this, however, there is no evidence to suggest it is from her pen”. Todd (1996a: xi-xii) agrees that there is no evidence to ascribe it wholly to Behn, but she may have collaborated in it, probably with Thomas Betterton. In her biography of Behn, Todd (1996b: 466, n. 19) insists on this idea and adds that this play has more Latin quotations and legal jargon than Behn normally used, and that suggests a lawyer author (or collaborator). Hughes (2001: 56) sees no grounds for the ascription “beyond the mistaken assumption that no other playwright could create a liberated heroine” and, moreover, “many features seem uncharacteristic of Behn”. The editors concur with the latter critics and conclude that either the author may be “a gentleman of the Inns of Court who decided to try his literary abilities” (28) or the piece may be a collaborative work involving playwrights working for the Duke’s Company. Whoever the author may be, s/he seems to have a very good knowledge not only of legal language and the Inns of Court, but also of contemporary drama and Derbyshire, since these three elements are prominent in the play.

Like other Restoration comedies, *The Woman Turned Bully* blends wit and ‘humours’ with the typical comedic love plot in which young lovers have to outwit elderly characters who try to hinder their relationship prior to a happy ending consisting of multiple weddings. Siblings Betty and Ned Goodfield manage to marry Truman and Lucia respectively in spite of the opposition posed by their mother, Madam Goodfield, and Lucia’s uncle and tutor, Mr. Docket. As is often the case, such conflict is generated by arranged marriage and personal, financial interests. In Betty’s case, her mother has decided to marry her to a member of the wealthy local gentry at Derbyshire (a coxcomb aptly called Alexander Simple). As for Lucia, her uncle Docket refuses to let her marry anyone at all so that he can have control of her dowry. This confrontation between young and old characters is certainly a key motif in the play. The editors point it out but do not elaborate much on the subject; however, it deserves some further comment, because this conflict is not a conventional plot device but rather an explicit argument in the play.

At the beginning of this comedy Ned Goodfield complains that his mother did not allow him to go with his friend Truman to the Inns of Court, because she considered London a place of corruption, and made him go to study at Cambridge. Moreover, in three months he will come of age and manage £800 a year. As we have seen, Madam

Goodfield also arranges her daughter's marriage, disregarding her wishes; and Docket not only blocks Lucia's wedding in order to retain her dowry, but also keeps Truman's estate under control with a heavy mortgage. Truman calls Docket "a covetous Jew" (1.1.149) and, when Ned is told of his mother's plan to marry his sister Betty to Alexander Simple, he states: "The old people may please themselves in talking, but 'tis the young ones must do in these cases" (2.1.22-24). Later, commenting on the possible match Madam Goodfield-Docket, Truman tells Betty: "'Tis a shame that young people should be outstripped in their amours by two such old creatures that have not known what love is, and the true ends of marriage, these twenty years. Let's see who shall be married first of all us . . ." (3.1.306-10). So the whole action of the play is a kind of challenge between the young and the old, which the former manage to win. For that reason, when in the last act Madam Goodfield learns that her two children have married without her consent, she feels disappointed and defeated; similarly, when Docket discovers he has not married Madam Goodfield but her old servant Loveall, he complains that he has been cheated. Although there is the typical comedic reconciliation when Docket orders a dinner and some music to celebrate the weddings, Truman's final words are a meaningful ending for the subject and the piece: "Gray heads may dote as their dull passions move,/ But only heaven and youth make perfect love" (5.3.172-3).

Another important topic in this play is the dichotomy of town versus country. As in other comedies of the period, this duality is presented as a confrontation between the supposed moral corruption, poor quality of life and excessive openness to new, foreign fashions in contemporary London and the assumed innocent, healthy and traditional life in the countryside. Yet, the editors are right to notice that in *The Woman Turned Bully* this dichotomy does not apply to all the characters regardless of where they come from (37-38), because neither Ned nor Betty nor even Frank, her servant, voice any critique of London life, nor are their ideas or behaviour different from Truman's, for instance. What is more, although sometimes outspoken, Lucia is not as witty and active as Betty; and both Docket and his clerk Dashwell pay lip service at least to the Puritanical ideas of the time as regards personal conduct and likes, ideas that are very far from the alleged debauchery of the town. It seems to this reader that this dualism may be to a large extent subsumed into that between the young and the old, because country life is mainly – though ambiguously – represented and defended by Madam Goodfield, her servant Loveall and her steward Truppeny, and the town is personified in some respects by Truman, Ned, Betty and Lucia, and in others by the above-mentioned lawyer and his clerk. It is important to notice, though, that none of the town representatives are epitomes of debauchery. Neither Ned nor Truman is a rake. They are witty and brave, but never bawdy or promiscuous. The prologue says it is an "innocent and unprovoking play" (line 9), and this time these recurrent prefatory words are not stock moral rhetoric. The young may challenge the elderly, the female protagonist may be independent, cross-dress and impersonate a bully, and her mother may drink beer and smoke pipes, but, as far as sexuality is concerned, the laws of decorum are never breached on stage. Hughes qualifies this play as "innocuously moral" (1996: 148).

In the list of “persons represented”, Madam Goodfield is described as “[a] rich country widow, who drinks and takes tobacco, and can’t speak a word out of the country element. She detests the town, but comes up about an emergent law affair” (69). She hates London because she considers it “the very sink of all debauchery” (1.1.24-25), but she goes there in order to arrange her daughter’s wedding. This is allegedly the second time she has visited the city, and she complains about its noises and smells (which she thinks are produced by “the sins of your naughty city, that make it stink above ground” 2.2.120-21). Madam Goodfield likes only Derbyshire ale and Virginian tobacco rather than the Spanish variety (notice the chauvinism implied). She believes smoking “comforts the stomach, warms the heart, and cheers the brain”, and is good for rheum too (2.2.177-178). London ladies smoke too but hide themselves to do so, whereas she hates dissimulation and thinks smoking is not sinful but healthy. Her routines are very conservative: she always comes home before sunset and goes to bed early. Madam Goodfield is therefore a noteworthy character indeed.

Her servant Loveall is also aware of the difference between country and city life, but she occasionally voices her preference for the latter, as when she comments on the serenade music, which she thinks “much better than our country harp and bagpipe” (2.3.28), or when she confesses that, if she knew there were so many men in London, she would not have stayed in Derbyshire for so long. In other words, she likes men more than country life. As for Trupenny, he also criticises London ale but it is easy to take him to a tavern and get him drunk. In act 4 he sings a song (“sung all wrong, in a drunken humour”) that meaningfully starts “O London, wicked London town!” (4.3.17). The lyrics invoke ladies to reform their lives and to pray instead of having sex, and entreat gallants to also repent and drink beer rather than sack. The town men who hear it comment that it is a foolish song sung by a drunken country fop.

A third important issue in the play, and the one the title refers to, is gender crossing. Betty Goodfield comes to London in man’s clothes and in search of a “town gallant” (1.2.11). Being unacquainted with city life, she asks her experienced, witty female servant, Frank, for help on how to imitate a bully. Interestingly enough, the latter advises her to imitate plays because, “just as some raw poets borrow their scenes from the fop-company they frequent, in the same manner many raw gallants square their behaviour to their fop-scenes” (17-20). Betty has never attended any performance but has read many plays, so she feels confident to follow the advice and “discourse out of plays” (24-25). She does this by sprinkling her conversation with French words and literal phrases taken from recent comedies by Dryden, Etherege, Shadwell and Ravenscroft, all conveniently identified in the footnotes.

On the one hand, as the editors indicate in the third section of their introduction, Betty’s stratagem makes *The Woman Turned Bully* offer an interesting counterpoint to Buckingham’s *The Rehearsal* (1672), which parodied the heroic drama of the time, because Betty engages in a kind of burlesque of the witty and often rakish gallants of contemporary comedies. But her impersonation must consist of more things than quoting from plays; she must be impudent, swear and curse when she talks with men, wake up late and come back home late too, always bribing or beating watchmen, breaking windows and serenading *his* mistress. That is to say, she must behave as rakish comedy heroes too, who are usually blustering, insolent and hectoring (hence *bullies*).

The editors are also right to point out that “the theatre served . . . as a school of fashion from which playgoers – or readers – attempted to take their cue in behaviour and conversation” (40). Consequently, some texts of the 1670s censured the affectation and folly of those people who imitated stage heroes. No doubt drama was an important source of behavioural patterns that contributed to the self-fashioning of Restoration men and women.

On the other hand, in this play this whole question is related to another common practice in contemporary comedy: cross-dressing. Like other comedic heroines of the time, Betty wears men’s clothes in order to hide both her identity and gender, so that she can meet young gallants freely and safely (see Pearson 1988: *passim*; Rothstein and Kavenik 1988: 168). Her impersonation raises interesting issues related to gender studies. Betty’s worry about how to pass for a town gallant obviously entails a reflection on what masculinity means in the Restoration period. But, obviously, the play also explores what femininity signifies at the time, the situation of women then, and the different strategies they devise in order to develop their own identities within that situation. It is interesting to contrast Betty to Lucia, who is not so active but who voices harsh complaints about her confinement.

In conclusion, this is an entertaining comedy with a good plot and engaging characters, which deserves more academic consideration because it raises interesting issues related to genre, gender, society and culture in the late seventeenth century. Many of these issues are mentioned in the introduction of this edition, although I would have preferred to see some of them more elaborated than they are, instead of, for instance, so much information about the machinery, costumes and music necessary for a performance of this play, or so much guesswork about the possible cast of the premiere, with results that I find of doubtful relevance as they stand. Yet this disagreement does not intend to question at all the value of this edition, which I certainly consider courageous, original and scholarly. I would like to encourage the editors, as well as other colleagues and publishers, to continue unearthing fascinating works like this, because there are many interesting texts from the Restoration period still unavailable to the general public or without an easily accessible critical edition.

Works Cited

- Baker, David E., Isaac Reed and Stephen Jones 1812: *Biographia Dramatica; or, A Companion to the Playhouse*. 3 Vols. London: Longman *et al.*
- Bevis, Richard 1988: *English Drama. Restoration and Eighteenth Century, 1660-1784*. London: Longman.
- Brown, Laura 1981: *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760*. New Haven: Yale UP.
- Dobrée, Bonamy 1924: *Restoration Comedy, 1660-1700*. Oxford: Clarendon P.
- Fisk, Deborah P., ed. 2000: *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Hughes, Derek 1996: *English Drama 1660-1700*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- 2001: *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*. Houndmills: Palgrave.
- Hume, Robert 1976: *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon P.

- Langbaine, Gerard 1691: *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets*. Oxford: George West and Henry Clements.
- Mendelson, Sara H. 1987: *The Mental World of Stuart Women: Three Studies*. Brighton: Harvester.
- Nicoll, Allardyce 1923: *A History of Restoration Drama, 1660-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Owen, Susan, ed. 2001: *A Companion to Restoration Drama*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Pearson, Jacqueline 1988: *The Prostituted Muse. Images of Women and Women Dramatists 1642-1737*. London: Harvester.
- Quinsey, Katherine, ed. 1996: *Broken Boundaries. Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky.
- Rothstein, Eric and Frances M. Kavenik 1988: *The Designs of Carolean Comedy*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP.
- Summers, Montague 1915: 'Memoir of Mrs Behn'. Montague Summers, ed. *The Works of Aphra Behn*. London: Heinemann. xv-lxiv.
- Sutherland, James 1969: *English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon P.
- Todd, Janet 1996a: 'Textual Information'. Janet Todd, ed. *The Works of Aphra Behn*. Vol 5 of *The Plays, 1671-1677*. London: Pickering. xi-xix.
- 1996b: *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*. London: Andre Deutsch.

Received 30 July 2008

Revised version accepted 12 December 2008

Jorge Figueroa-Dorrego is Tenured Lecturer of English Literature at the University of Vigo. He obtained his PhD at the University of Santiago de Compostela in 1998 with a dissertation on Aphra Behn's prose fiction. His main research areas are early modern women writers, Restoration literature, humour and gender studies. He is the author of various papers and monographs (such as 1999. *Aphra Behn* and 2002. *Tecendo tramas, fiando ficções*), and co-editor of several collections of essays on those subjects (e.g. 2003. *Re-shaping the Genres: Restoration Women Writers* and 2003. *Revisiting and Reinterpreting Aphra Behn*).

Address: Universidade de Vigo, Facultade de Filoloxía e Tradución, Campus Universitario, 36310 Vigo.
Tel.: +34 986 812084. Fax: +34 986 812380