
getting power through using witches

In England, the Baroque was a partly useful concept when discussing about the Restoration Comedy. The English theatres were closed for 18 years, during the English Civil War and English Commonwealth. They were reopened in the Restoration of Charles II (1660). During this period, the Restoration Comedy and tragicomedy appeared and were a massive success. *“During the Restoration period successful performances made carefully planned use of the three hours or so that audiences could spend at the playhouse - from the “first music,” which summoned the spectators to their seats, to the announcement of the next day’s offering, which ended the performance by inviting them back.”* (Roach, 2005: 33). They showed *“the seamy sexual side of the smooth social world”* (Alexander, 2000: 160). My aim in this paper is to analyze and compare the trope of masquerade (disguise, dissimulation, carnival) in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* (1681) and John Dryden’s *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1673).

The tragicomedy plot, however, suffers a structural split: one that is the platonic, idealistic and heroic (representing the tragic part of the plot) and the other that is anti-romantic, pragmatic and comical (that is the comic side of the plot). The masquerade in Dryden’s *Marriage-a-la-Mode* is expressed by the: controversial dramatic plot, Baroque mixture of heterogeneous elements, thematic disjunction and formal symmetry. In Behn’s *The Rover* by the cross-dressing and “subversive mimesis”, role reversal and the suspension of hierarchical structures, prenuptial agreements and provisos and by the performing identities: female wits and reformed liberties. *“The spirited action of the Restoration theatre is perhaps epitomized in Act I, scene 2 of Aphra Behn’s The Rover (1677), when the “wild” Helena, on probationary leave from a convent, gleefully preparing her disguise for carnival, speaks decisively in the imperative to her tempted but more timorous companions: “Let’s ramble.”*” (Roach, 2005: 33).

In her Restoration Comedy, *The Rover*, the women use the masquerade in order to hide their true identity and to emphasize their subdued sexuality. The men use this to their advantage, uncovering a darker side of their nature, practically erasing the boundaries between prostitutes and women of quality. *“Behn’s play is set in Spanish Naples during the 1650s. It focuses on the courtship of Florinda by the English cavalier, Colonel Belvile, who fell in love with her in Spain and followed her back to Naples.”* (Corman, 2005: 63). Their marriage is opposed by Pedro, her brother, who wants her to marry Don Antonio. *“The love interest of Florinda and Belvile drives much of the action, including the parallel courtship of their friends Valeria and Frederick, and a considerable amount of the fast-paced intrigue, trickery, and disguise so important to the success of the play.”* (Corman, 2005: 63).

The third relationship that is *“far more lively and engaging”* (Corman, 2005: 63) is her sister’s,

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

Hellena (who was intended to be a nun) with Willmore. Hellena sees nunnery as something that is the complete opposite of what she wanted, so she chooses to adopt the gypsy mask and embrace the liberty that it offers. Willmore, “*the title-character and friend of the other “banished cavaliers”*” (Corman, 2005: 63) directly proportional with the aspirations of the Carnival, is the rover of the play. He only seeks carnal pleasure but still ends up in a “happy ending”. He shifts between her and Angellica Bianca (the courtesan who sells herself for a thousand crowns). He sleeps with Hellena in exchange to his promise of staying loyal to her and almost rapes Florinda when drunk. “*The balance between the serious, high-toned lovers, Florinda and Belvile, and the wilder, wittier Hellena and Willmore best exemplify a standard structural unit in the comedy of the period, one that would become still more popular by the end of the century.*” (Corman, 2005: 64). In the end, Hellena is cleverly manipulating the love game by cross-dressing as a boy and professing her love to Willmore. She is only able to do this because her masquerade allows her to. Thus, she is able to experience an identity which is more “male”. This gives her more power and authority in the play than she would had had if was she only portrayed as herself. The same happens to Florinda, when she joins the Carnival to seek Belvile dressed as a gypsy. The ending is a happy one for almost everyone: Florinda marries Belvile, Hellena marries Willmore and Valeria (kindswoman to Florinda) marries Frederick, Lucetta manages to steal Blunt’s money and Angellica Bianca remains a single widow.

Aphra Behn seems to critique how woman who do not want to adhere to their pre-planned destinies are automatically seen as prostitutes “*Why must we be either guilty of fornication or murder if we converse with you men?*” [1]. The Carnival becomes a way to distribute the sexual double standards used by men to judge a woman. Thus the masquerade challenges the individual and social identities of women’s (sexual) liberty and domination by men or patriarchal means. It is associated with social change, Behn dramatizing the role reversal and the suspension of hierarchical structures, prenuptial agreements and provisos. [1] Helena, Act I, Scene II, 208-209

John Dryden (1631-1700) was a poet, literary critic, translator and playwright. His *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1673) was first performed in London by the King’s Company. The play set in Sicily and follows two plots: “*the versified “high” plot dealing with problems of state and love for the pastorally named Leonidas and Palmira, alongside the prose “low” plot dealing with the adulterous inclinations of the no less pastorally named but much less pastorally inclined Dorinda, Melanthia, Rhodophil, and Palamede.*” (Munnus, 2005: 148). It is “*one of the last plays to deal with the subject of restoration until the revival of the topic during the last years of Charles’s reign*” (Hughes, 2008: 205).

The first plot concerns the love story of Leonidas and Palmyra who were separated from their parents as infants and were raised by Hermogenes, who kept their past secret. When recognized by the usurper-King Polydamas, Hermogenes declares that Leonidas is Polydama’s

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

son. Leonida's new position as prince forbids him to marry Palmyra. The two lovers refuse to stop seeing each other and so Palmyra is sentenced to death. In that moment Hermogenes declares the truth: Palmyra is the child of Polydamas and Leonidas is his son. Palmyra is declared princess but is once again forbidden to marry the man she loves. Hermogenes finally admits the whole truth: Leonidas is the son of the rightful king. So Leonidas starts a rebellion against Polydamas, wins, and declares himself king and is finally permitted to marry Palmyra. *"The error corrected, he returns to being a fisherman's son, is privately identified as the true king, and finally manages to declare his identity publicly as he is on the point of being executed."* (Hughes, 2008: 206). The whole situation that Hermogenes created is a dissimulation which could have been easily avoided, but then it would not be a tragicomedy.

"In the complementary comic plot, two bored couples seek to enjoy each other's partners." (Hughes, 2008: 205). It mixes with the first, concerns Rhodophil and Palamede. Rhodophil is in love with Palamede's fiancée Melantha and Palamede falls in love with Rhodophil's wife Doralice. *"One man has tried to compensate for the tedious immutability of his wife by serial sexual fantasy, successively imagining her in bed as every beauty in Sicily. The marriage falters when all attractive women have been used up."* (Hughes, 2008: 205). The two couples carefully plan their meetings, choosing even the same places and using the same tactics. When their actions are finally discovered, Palamede and Rhodophil decide to stick with their rightful claims, so Palamede amicably divorces his wife and manages to win the heart of Melantha.

The "carnavalesque" (English term used to translate the words of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin) is adapted in many ways. He traces its origins to the back to the Feast of Fools, a medieval festival held by the sub-deacons of the cathedral. Bakhtin also believes that the carnival affects everyone, altering their behavior. Everyone is a participant in the carnival. In conclusion, the trope of masquerade in the two plays are radically different. In Aphra Behn's the women use mask, cross-dressing and the Carnival in order to enjoy a little more liberty than their woman status would normally allow. The rover itself is a masquerade manifestation because of all the actions committed. In John Dryden's, the masquerade is portrayed by the mixture of the two plots and the preposterous ways the conflicts are resolved.

[1] Helena, Act I, Scene II, 208-209

Works Cited

Alexander, Michael: "A History of English Literature", Macmillan Press, 2000, pp. 160

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

Corman, Brian: 'Comedy' "The Cambridge Companion To English Restoration Theatre" edited by Deborah Payne Fisk, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 63-64

Hughes, Derek: 'Restoration and settlement: 1660 and 1688' "A Companion to Restoration Drama" edited by Susan J. Owen, Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 205-206

Roach, Joseph: 'The performance' "The Cambridge Companion To English Restoration Theatre" edited by Deborah Payne Fisk, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 33

Munns, Jessica: 'Change, skepticism, and uncertainty' "The Cambridge Companion To English Restoration Theatre" edited by Deborah Payne Fisk, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 148

gradesfixer.com

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

[GET HELP](#)