

## Behn's and Guillén de Castro's adaptations of Miguel de Cervantes's "El curioso impertinente."

ÁNGELES TOMÉ ROSALES

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### I. INTRODUCTION

THE PLOT OF THE jealous husband's using his best friend to test the virtue of his chaste wife in Behn's *The Amorous Prince; Or, The Curious Husband* (1671) was adapted from the inset story included in Cervantes's *Don Quijote de la Mancha* and entitled "El curioso impertinente." According to Dolors Altaba-Artal (1999: 48), "[w]hen the texts of Cervantes and Behn are closely compared to each other the indebtedness is evident, for the atmosphere, the setting, and the main body of the plot, as well as some of the thoughts and manner of reasoning of the characters."<sup>1</sup> However, there is a noteworthy difference between these two texts: Cervantes's "El curioso impertinente" is a tragic story whereas Behn wrote a comedy from the original text.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, I aim to analyze how she turned a tragic tale into a comedy; that is, I would like to disclose the comic devices which Behn used in order to alter the genre of the original tale. Furthermore, Behn's is not the only adapta-

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1 In the same way as Altaba-Artal, other experts such as Janet Todd (1996: 84-85), Yvonne Jehenson (1998: 31), or Alvin Snider (2006: 321-26) have recently brought up the connection between Behn's subplot in her comedy *The Amorous Prince; Or, The Curious Husband* (1671) and Cervantes's 'El Curioso Impertinente.'

2 It is compulsory to regard the difficulty of this task. In fact, in the Epistle Dedicatory to his *King Lear* (1681), Tate states that "[n]either is it of so Trivial an Undertaking to make a Tragedy end happily, for 'tis more difficult to Save than 'tis to Kill: The Dagger and Cup of Poysion are alwaies in Readiness; but to bring the Action to the last Extremity, and then by probable Means to recover All, will require the Art and Judgment of a Writer."

tion of Cervantes's work: among others,<sup>3</sup> the Spanish Guillén de Castro also turned the same tragic story into a comedy entitled *El curioso impertinente*. This allows us to compare the comedies written by Behn and Castro in order to explore the gender differences and implications: on the one hand, I would like to check whether Behn and Castro used the same devices in order to turn a tragic text into a comedy and, on the other hand, I would also like to examine whether the number, relevance, and role of female and male characters in comedies differ significantly depending on the playwright's gender. This analysis will be carried out by taking into account the difficulties Behn underwent in the reception of her plays within a patriarchal society where women were not expected to write for the stage or have their literary works published.

## 2. "THE CURIOUS IMPERTINENT": A TRAGIC TALE

Eric Bentley (1984: 140) contends that both comedy and tragedy try to cope with "despair, mental suffering, guilt and anxiety," but do so in a different way. In the case of Cervantes's tragic tale and Behn's and Castro's comedies, they all deal with the same topic: a jealous husband tests the virtue of his chaste wife by using his best friend. In each of these three works, the jealous husband suffers from the "despair, mental suffering, guilt and anxiety" which Bentley refers to and which comes from the husband's distrust of his virtuous wife. The main difference between the tragic story and the two comedies is obviously the ending: in Cervantes's tragic tale, every character dies at the end, whereas in Behn's and Castro's comedies, the most relevant characters achieve the aims they had been fighting for from the beginning. Nevertheless, there are also differences

3 Apart from Guillén de Castro's and Behn's adaptations of Cervantes's "El curioso impertinente," I would like to mention the following in order to show the far-reaching reception of this tale: John Fletcher's *The Coxcomb* (1611), Nathaniel Field's *Pardon for the Ladies* (1611), Thomas Southerne's *The Disappointment* (1684), John Crowne's *The Married Beau, or The Curious Impertinent* (1694) or Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* (1703) (cf. Jorge Figueroa Dorrego 1997: 69; Jehenson 1998: 31; Snider 2006: 317). In the same way as the abovementioned English playwrights, Spanish playwrights also adapted it: Josef Joaquín Isurre's *Anselmo o El curioso impertinente* (1791), Adelardo López de Ayala and Antonio Hurtado's *El curioso impertinente* (1853), José de Echegaray e Izaguirre's *Los dos curiosos impertinentes* (1924), Tomás Luceño's *Es de vidrio la mujer... o El curioso impertinente* (1927), or Jaime Armiñán and José M<sup>a</sup> Forqué's *El curioso impertinente* (1967) (cf. Juan María Díez-Taboada 1995: 456-57).

between Behn's and Castro's comedies: every character in *The Amorous Prince* (1673) not only survives but also achieves happiness while, on the other hand, Castro kills the jealous husband in order to clear the way for a happy ending. However, the differences between these two comedies will be dealt with later in further detail. In this section, I intend to analyze the most relevant features in Cervantes's tragic tale.

Aristotle (1984: 230) defined tragedy as "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; [...] with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions." Though thought for tragic drama, this definition fits Cervantes's tale: as every character dies at the end, it is serious and it arouses pity, which "is occasioned by undeserved misfortune" (Aristotle 1984: 238); that is, Camila and Lotario's undeserved misfortune, and it also kindles fear, which derives from the possibility that the audience could experience a similar situation. In Cervantes's tragic tale, Camila and Lotario fall in love because of Anselmo's eagerness to test his wife's virtue and, therefore, Anselmo is regarded as responsible for their love affair. As the starting point of Camila and Lotario's betrayal, the audience feels that Anselmo deserves death. On the contrary, the audience may think that Camila and Lotario do not deserve their misfortunes: on the one hand, at the beginning, they endeavor to deceive Anselmo in order not to betray him and, on the other hand, their deaths take place because of a false assumption: Camila runs away because she thinks that Anselmo is aware of her betrayal, although he is not. As regards the audience's reaction in tragedy, Philip Sidney (2002: 98) contends that this genre, "with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world." So, in view of these uncertainties, the audience must feel insecure. Certainly, regarding Cervantes's tragedy, the audience might fear that an unwise resolution could bring about its own tragic death.

Moreover, the tragic dimension is likely to be intensified by "the intermediate kind of personage, a man not preeminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgement" (Aristotle 1984: 238). Certainly, these features fit Anselmo when he fails to rate Camila's virtue highly.

His “error of judgement” leads to a change in his fortune, a change from happiness to misery: at the beginning, we are acquainted with the happiest man in the world, but later he finds out that his wife and his friend had fallen in love, which brings about his misery. Following Aristotle, Dante Alighieri (1984: 31) defined tragedy as “tranquil and conducive to wonder at the beginning, but foul and conducive to horror at the end, or catastrophe.”

After Anselmo’s wedding, Lotario goes on visiting Anselmo and Camila’s lodgings but, as time goes by, Lotario decides to avoid his stays there because he is worried about his friend’s honor.<sup>4</sup> In fact, “[a] man’s reputation, regardless of his social class, depended upon the opinion of others” (Elizabeth A. Foyster 1999: 58) and, therefore, if Anselmo’s neighbors begin to talk about Lotario’s prolonged stays at his married friend’s house, it may affect Anselmo’s reputation seriously because he might be alleged to have failed to control his wife if she was supposed to commit adultery as was common in the early modern period (cf. Robert B. Shoemaker 1998: 101):

el casado a quien el cielo había concedido mujer hermosa, tanto cuidado había de tener qué amigos llevaba a su casa como en mirar con qué amigas su mujer conversaba, porque lo que no se hace ni concierto en las plazas, ni en los templos, ni en las fiestas públicas, ni estaciones (cosas que no todas veces las han de negar los maridos a sus mujeres), se concierto y facilita en casa de la amiga o la parienta de quien más satisfacción se tiene (Cervantes 1995: 396).

Lotario’s words reflect the misogynistic view of women as too prone to gossip and prurience, and for that reason husbands should control their wives’ meetings with both male and female friends. Without any doubt, the effect of these ideas about women was as great on Anselmo as on Lotario. In fact, as Diana de Armas Wilson (1987:26) states, “Camila is regarded barbarically –by both her husband and her lover– as curren-

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4 For a detailed analysis of Lotario’s reluctance to visit Anselmo, see Nicolás Wey-Gómez (1999: 816), who makes use of Freud’s conception of jealousy in order to contend that Anselmo’s impertinent curiosity is based on his latent homosexuality.

cy, as an item of exchange." Cervantes describes a woman who perfectly fits the patriarchal concept of femininity, that is, as Gerda Lerner (1986: 209) points out, "passionate and unable to control her appetites, weak, providing only low matter for the process of procreation, devoid of soul and *designed to be ruled* (my emphasis)."<sup>5</sup> However, in spite of Lotario's reluctance to act in the same way as when his friend was single, their relationship seems to overcome the hardships derived from Anselmo's new marital status. Yet Anselmo is too jealous and asks his friend to help him to try Camila's virtue. The anxiety Anselmo shows is symptomatic of early-modern masculinity. As Mark Breitenberg (1996: 3) remarks,

[a]nxiety and masculinity: the terms must be wed if only for the obvious reason that any social system whose premise is the unequal distribution of power and authority always and only sustains itself in constant defense of the privileges of some of its members and by the constraint of others.

In early modern society, men's honor depended to a large extent on their wives' virtue. Due to women's supposed inferior condition,<sup>6</sup> they have to be ruled by men, but if these men fail to keep women under their control, they will also be considered unable to be in charge of other important issues, such as economy or politics. So, if Camila is not able to preserve her virtue, Anselmo's honor will be affronted and, furthermore, he will be derided as a cuckold, one of the worst offences for men at the time (cf. Foyster 1999: 67). Thus, fears of becoming a cuckold make Anselmo willing to test Camila's virtue although he promises Lotario that he will be satisfied "sólo con que comiences, aunque tibia y fingidamente,

5 When Anselmo asks Lotario to prove Camila's virtue, Lotario warned his friend against his design: "la mujer es animal imperfecto, y que no se le han de poner embarazos donde tropiece y caiga, sino quitárselos y despejalle el camino de cualquier inconveniente" (Cervantes 1995: 403), the sense of being incomplete or inferior examples of the same character (for instance, having less of the faculty of reason)."

6 As R. W. Connell (1995: 68) contends, "[w]omen were certainly regarded as different from men, but different in so, Anselmo witnesses Lotario addressing love poems to Clori/Camila but he does not realize, which reveals that he is unable to control what is happening around him and, therefore, the immediate implication is that Anselmo does not fit the patriarchal ideal of masculinity, which states that men must be able to control and rule their households.

a solicitar a Camila [...] y con solo este principio quedaré contento, y tú habrás cumplido con lo que debes a nuestra amistad” (Cervantes 1995: 406). Trying to avoid being replaced by another person in the enterprise, precisely because he also thinks that Camila will yield to temptation, Lotario promises Anselmo to test Camila’s virtue. However, due to Camila’s “estremos de bondad y de hermosura [...] bastantes a enamorar una estatua de mármol” (Cervantes 1995: 411), Lotario falls in love with her, which is clearly the beginning of the tragic ending insofar as Camila never realizes that her husband is putting her virtue to the test and, therefore, she is not able to plot a way to avoid Lotario’s wooing, as Behn’s female characters do. From his tale, it is possible to infer that, for Cervantes, women are unable to control their own lives and what happens around them. Contrary to her design, Camila falls in love with Lotario; despite this, however, Lotario assures Anselmo of Camila’s virtue: “[T]ienes una mujer que dignamente puede ser ejemplo y corona de todas las mujeres buenas” (Cervantes 1995: 414). At this point, Anselmo decides to finish the enterprise by asking Lotario to write some poems to Clori, a fictional woman who would be Lotario’s lover for Camila.

Thus, Camilia and Lotario manage to deceive Anselmo until one night, when he discovers a man in Leonela’s lodgings. Leonela pleads with Anselmo: “No me mates, señor, que yo te diré cosas de más importancia de las que puedes imaginar [*pero*] déjame hasta mañana, que entonces sabrás de mí lo que te ha de admirar” (Cervantes 1995: 434). Afraid of Leonela’s statement, Camila gets some valuable jewelry and money and runs away. In the morning, Anselmo finds neither Leonela, who had also left his lodgings in order not to tell him about her lover, nor Camila and, when he finds out that Lotario has also run away, Anselmo dies of a broken heart. Lotario dies in a battle in Naples and, after knowing about Lotario’s death, melancholy and sadness bring about Camila’s death. Thus, the initial quietness turns into horror, the horror of death: everyone dies at the end, the typical ending of tragedy in contrast to that of comedy. Although Anselmo’s curiosity is the point of departure, every character’s attitude and circumstances contribute to bring about this tragic ending: on the one hand, Anselmo’s distrust of Camila, Lotario’s attempt to deceive his best friend, Camila’s passivity or Leonela’s selfishness; on

the other hand, the chance meeting between Lotario and Leonela's lover, Camila's interpretation of her husband's words after meeting Leonela and her lover or Lotario's death, among others.

Taking into account Cervantes's plot, I find some patterns of behavior which are recurrent in both comic and tragic characters. In the same way as comic characters, Camila and Lotario manage to deceive Anselmo twice: Anselmo thinks that Lotario's poems are directed to a fictitious Clori and he also seems to be persuaded that Camila is really upset when Lotario tells her that he loves her. Moreover, misunderstandings are also present in this tragic narrative: on the one hand, Lotario's thinks that Leonela's lover is one of Camila's and, on the other, Camila interprets her husband's words about his talk with Leonela in the wrong way. It is clear that the comedy and the tragedy of this tale share some elements but, they differ in the final consequence of those similar actions. I would like to analyze now Castro's and Behn's comic plots in order to find out whether deception and misunderstandings are also part of their works and, if they are, why they become the origin of comic situations.

### 3. *THE CURIOUS IMPERTINENT: A COMEDY*

Concerning comedy, Alighieri (1984: 31) holds that it "introduces a situation of adversity, but ends its matter in prosperity." As happens in Cervantes's tragic tale, Castro introduces a situation of adversity, although at the beginning: in the first act, the audience is already acquainted with Camila and Lotario's love and prospective marriage. However, when Anselmo meets Camila, he falls in love with her and, as Lotario values friendship more than love, he transfers his beloved Camila to his best friend: "Si tú gustas, de mi mano / quiero casarte con ella" (Castro 1991: 109). It is the first instance of the appropriation of the female body on the part of the male characters in this comedy. Neither Lotario nor Anselmo thinks about taking into account Camila's opinion regarding the exchange. Lotario decides to give Camila in marriage to Anselmo and the latter agrees although he has not met Camila yet. In addition to that, Camila not only declines to confront the decisions Lotario and Anselmo take but also accepts Lotario's will, which consists of pleasing Anselmo:

Vi que amor de solo un día  
 al de mil se adelantaba,  
 en uno que me dejaba  
 y en otro que me quería.  
 Y con causas de olvidar  
 y efecto de agradecer,  
 pude al uno no querer  
 y pude al otro adorar  
 (Castro 1991: 117-18).

Thus, she is depicted as a puppet in the hands of these two men. Camila does not impose her own will although she was really in love with Lotario and she even wanted to marry him before Anselmo's appearance. Moreover, she accepts her father's will and she endeavors to fall in love with Anselmo. This sudden exchange of prospective husband could be considered the beginning of the situation of adversity Dante refers to because it is the origin of Anselmo's, Camila's, and Lotario's unhappiness, which is brought about by Anselmo's anxiety. Like Cervantes's Anselmo, Castro's is also affected by the effects derived by the unequal distribution of power in a patriarchal society but, moreover, his suffering is increased by circumstances: at the beginning, Camila and Lotario were in love and, therefore, the possibility of becoming a cuckold is likelier than in Cervantes's tale. However, it seems that Anselmo does not take into account the fact that his wife and Lotario had been in love because, when he starts to suspect about Camila's faithfulness, Anselmo asks Lotario to test her virtue. Anselmo proves to be very naïve when he expects not to be betrayed by Lotario in this affair:

Y si se rindiese a ti,  
 que nunca el cielo tal quiera,  
 a solo su pensamiento  
 podría llegar mi ofensa  
 (Castro 1991: 124).

Anselmo's statement suggests that he does not trust in his wife's honor but, on the contrary, he relies on her former fiancé in order to test her virtuousness. This is precisely the first mistake Anselmo makes and, therefore, it is also the beginning of his end as a respectable husband. Certainly, Anselmo's attitude seems to be really incongruous: he makes his wife's virtue be tested by her former fiancé. This incongruity which Anselmo does not perceive makes him a comic character. It is also possible to say that the audience may feel superior to him because he fails to foresee the possible consequences of this testing: it is very likely that he will become a cuckold. This superiority on the part of the audience makes him an object of derision for the audience (John Morreall 1983: 4). Moreover, Castro's Anselmo is not as virtuous as Cervantes's: when he leaves home so that Lotario could woo Camila, he tells Culebro about his lewd intentions:

[T]ú has de saber,  
que en casa de Lotario estoy,  
adonde de cierta dama  
he de gozar la hermosura,  
porque tenga más segura  
en mi secreto su fama  
(Castro 1991: 131).

This attitude makes him ungrateful and, therefore, it overshadows Camila's betrayal because of her relationship with Lotario. In Cervantes's tragic tale, Camila is punished because he had cheated her husband and, therefore, the audience might think that she somehow deserves punishment. However, in Castro's comedy, Camila cheats on her husband but she does it because he himself has hurled her at her former fiancé and, while Lotario tries to woo Camila, Anselmo is also cuckolding her wife. It is possible to perceive a sexual double standard: on the one hand, Anselmo wants his wife to remain virtuous but, on the other hand, he

himself cuckolds his wife. From that, we can infer that Anselmo is not really in love with Camila but he only wants to preserve her as his property.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, Camila's naivety about her husband's design makes her likeable to the audience. Anselmo had told his wife that the Duke had ordered him to go to Pisa but, while talking to the Duke, he tells her that it is not true. However, Camila is so naïve that, at the beginning, she does not believe the Duke:

A su trato desleal  
Da colores de esta suerte,  
pues él debió de endiablo  
porque quiso a solas verme,  
y luego por no ofenderme,  
se obliga a disimulable  
(Castro 1991: 140).

Her words are really comical because of the incongruity between what the audience expects and what really happens. As readers, we expect Camila to believe the Duke and, as a consequence, to get annoyed about her husband's lies. On the contrary, Camila trusts in her husband and, although he has really deceived her, she thinks that it is the Duke who is lying in order to woo her. Thus, we laugh at Camila's naivety but also grieve that this woman, thinking that her husband is unable to deceive her, is at the same time being betrayed by him. Later, Leonela, whom Culebro had told about Anselmo's whereabouts, tells Camila the truth: "de cierta dama que adora, / está bebiendo el aliento, / tu esposo" (Castro 1991: 148) and, at the same time, she also encourages her to revenge: "Muérete por él, señora, / y está su sombra adorando, / mientras él te está ofendiendo" (Castro 1991: 148). Taking into account Leonela's advice, Camila, who does believe her, decides to take revenge on Anselmo by allowing Lotario to govern her:

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Shoemaker (1998: 101), who contends that "[once married, men and women [...] had a lot of advice, from the church, the law, conduct manuals, and their own family and neighbors, advice which emphasized *the husband's authority over his wife* (my emphasis)."

Y ya en mí puedes mandar,  
 que una mujer de valor  
 en dando el primer favor  
 ninguno puede negar.  
 Tuya soy (Caŕstro 1991: 158).

We must take into account that Camila is a female character in a comedy written by a male playwright. Therefore, it is not astonishing that she fits the patriarchal ideal of femininity: she thinks that she has to be governed by someone, although the challenge lies in that she decides who is going to govern her, Lotario, the man she loves.

Leonela, Camila's maid, brings about the comical ending of the play, although unwittingly. In fact, she intends to do Camila harm but does not succeed and this reversal increases the humor created by Camila and Lotario's sudden happiness. The difficulties appear when Lotario sees Leonela's lover leaving Anselmo's house because he thinks that this man is one of Camila's lovers. In his jealousy, Lotario decides to tell Anselmo the truth, that is, his truth:

Ya tu esposa  
 se ha rendido a mis porfías;  
 vila andar algunos días  
 entre amante y recelosa,  
 y siempre te lo he callado,  
 por pensar si era ilusión,  
 hasta ver su corazón  
 en tu ofensa declarado  
 (Caŕstro 1991: 173).

After taking revenge on Camila, Lotario is asked by Leonela: "lo que anoche viste / no lo sepa mi seńora" (Caŕstro 1991: 174). Thus, he realizes that the man he had seen the night before was not one of Camila's lovers but Leonela's and, therefore, he regrets telling Anselmo: "Yo estuve sin seso, ¡ay cielos!" (Caŕstro 1991: 175). Lotario's reaction to this situation proves that he is governed by his feelings, whereas Camila shows her ra-

tionality when she is informed about Lotario's betrayal. Both of them have decided to deceive Anselmo but, when Lotario talks to Anselmo, he only makes reference to Camila's attitude, avoiding telling him about his responsibility.

Proving her resolution, Camila manages to reverse the plight by making Anselmo witness her rejecting Lotario. However, Camila gets angry about Leonela's licentiousness and dares to hit her because of her embarrassing deeds. In a fur, Leonela tells Anselmo: "Que fue fingido / cuanto viste en tu aposento" (Castro 1991: 183). This revelation hastens the ending of the comedy: Anselmo gets so angry that he tries to kill Lotario. However, he falls off and, before dying, he comprehends that the only solution to this situation is his death:

Fue siempre mi grande amigo  
y el darme agora la muerte  
fue la mayor amistad  
que en su vida pudo hacerme  
(Castro 1991: 186).

Finally, taking into account Anselmo's will and immediately after his death, the Duke encourages Lotario to marry Camila: "Dale a Camila la mano" (Castro 1991: 187). Surprisingly, Lotario agrees: "Pues ya remedio no tiene, / yo la doy" (Castro 1991: 187). Apart from the happy resolution, the immediacy between Anselmo's death and Lotario's proposal of marriage brings about the comic effect, just because of the incongruity between what is usually expected after someone's death, and in particular after a husband's death, and what really happens: this death comes as a great relief to Camila, the widow, and Lotario, who do not hesitate to get engaged.

Deceptions and misunderstandings are also at the heart of this play but, in order to turn Cervantes's tragic tale into a comedy, Castro makes use of the jealous husband. He presents him as a contemptible character and this contempt towards him allows the audience and the readers to

laugh at him.<sup>8</sup> At the beginning, he is willing to marry Camila although she was his best friend's lover; then, he makes his best friend test Camila's virtuousness while he is behaving as a philanderer; and, finally, he intends to punish Lotario. At the same time, Camila and Lotario move us to pity because Anselmo had been making them suffer substantially throughout the whole comedy. Thus, it is so easy to accept his death and, at the same time, welcome Camila and Lotario's marriage.

#### 4. *THE CURIOUS IMPERTINENT: A FEMINIST COMEDY*

Behn was extremely influenced by Spanish novelists such as Cervantes, Quevedo or Castillo Solórzano, among others (cf. Altaba-Artal 1999: 46-47, Figueroa Dorrego 1999: 38), and her adaptation of "El curioso impertinente" is just an example of this literary debt. However, she was not the only one who reworked the tale. As I have already pointed out, other English playwrights based their works on Cervantes's "El curioso impertinente" but Guillén de Castro was the only one who turned this tragic tale into a comedy in the seventeenth century, just about sixty years before Behn did it (cf. Christiane Faliu-Lacourt and María Luisa Lobato 1991: 9). In this section, we intend to analyze the distinguishing resources tapped upon by this female playwright in order to make her comic version of Cervantes's tragic tale by paying special attention to gender issues. Behn also introduces a situation of adversity at the beginning: Antonio wants his friend Alberto to prove his wife's virtue. However, in her comedy, from the outset, Behn inserts some devices which will turn this incipient situation of adversity into prosperity. One of the most important is the knowledge the female characters are provided with. Clarina is acquainted with Antonio's design on proving her virtue: "'Tis strange, since he set him that task so long ago, / He would not begin before" (Behn 1996: 97). In fact, the audience learns about Antonio's design through the female characters. Apart from Clarina, her sister-in-law Ismena is also

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8 Cf. Henri Bergson (1975: 3), who points out that "[1]indifférence est son milieu naturel. Le rire n'a pas de plus grand ennemi que l'émotion."

acquainted with it and her maid Isabella is continuously providing them with information:<sup>9</sup>

—I warrant you, Madam, my Intelligence is good;  
 And to assure you of what I have said,  
 I dare undertake you shall hear the same over again;  
 For just now *Alberto* is come to visit my Lord,  
 Who I am sure will entertain him with no other stories,  
 But those of his jealousy,  
 And to perswade him to Court you  
 (Behn 1996: 97).

According to Regina Barreca (1988: 9), “[*women’s*] writing is characterized by the breaking of cultural and ideological frames.” Patriarchy had prevented women from voicing their ideas and their knowledge. However, when women began to write in the early modern period, they tended to create intelligent heroines, such as Clarina, Ismena or Isabella. In Behn’s *The Amorous Prince* (1673), this intelligence brings about an active answer on the part of these female characters: they make use of disguises in order to avoid Clarina’s wooing on the part of Alberto.

Behn never hesitates to make use of disguises. In fact, disguises are one of the most common strategies used by women in order to provide female characters with the agency and independence that they had been denied, that is, in order to break away from the established order. Frances M. Kavenik (1991: 181) focuses on the aims that female characters have when they dress up as men:<sup>10</sup> “the breeches part is used to break down the basic courtship motif,” which usually consists of an active man wooing a passive woman. When Ismena impersonates Clarina, they avoid this pattern insofar as these women are, at least, as active as the men in the play: they not only avoid Alberto’s wooing of Clarina but also make him fall in

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9 Cf. J. Douglas Canfield (1997: 149), who regards female servants as “subversive women tricksters who operate from the margins, [...] but who nevertheless obtain space of their own on those margins in which to maintain a combination of agency and (subversive) integrity.”

10 Cf. also Edna L. Steeves (1991: 220), who states that the “disguise is used as a major plot device” by another Restoration playwright, Mary Pix.

love with Ismena; that is, they manage to impose their own will although male characters do not realize this until the end. So, throughout the play, it is possible to notice Alberto's and Antonio's needless anxiety. In the same way as Cervantes's Lotario, Alberto does not want to betray his friend. In fact, he is afraid of Camila's falling in love with him although, unlike Cervantes's character, she does not fall in love with him thanks to the female characters' precautionary measures and, therefore, Alberto's worries appear to be unnecessary and, consequently, ridiculous. When Antonio finds out that his friend had deceived him, he gets really angry: "Did I not see how unconcern'd you were, / And hardly paying her a due respect; / And when she even invited thee to speak, / Most rudely thou wer't silent" (Behn 1996: 103). After this first meeting, in the same way as Lotario, Alberto had already fallen in love with the supposed Clarina: "Inform me Love who shares the better part, / Friendship, or thee, in my divided heart" (Behn 1996: 102). However, as Antonio had got so angry, Alberto is willing to put into practice his friend's plan, which consists of wooing the supposed Clarina by talking to her about his love: "My timerous heart that way my tongue would spare, / And tells you of the flames you've kindled there" (Behn 1996: 106) but, this time, unlike Camila, who falls for Lotario, Ismena decides to tell him the truth:

Enough my Lord, have you nought else to say?  
The Plot's betray'd, and can no further go;  
The Stratagem's discover'd to the Foe;  
I find Antonio has more love than wit,  
And I'll endeavour too to merit it  
(Behn 1996: 107).

When he hears this, Alberto gets so surprised that he is not able to lie: "What you have said, I do confess is true" (Behn 1996: 107). So, since the beginning of the comedy, the women have been in control of the situation thanks to Isabella, the maid, who had informed them about Antonio's plot, and thanks to their women's wit, which had helped them to avoid exposing Clarina to Alberto's courtship and, also, preventing their falling in love with each other. Consequently, Ismena becomes so confident

that she is able to tell part of the truth and to acquaint Alberto with her knowledge although she does not reveal her true identity. Alberto's reaction is comical because it illustrates Ismena's superiority: he confesses that his attitude had been plotted by Antonio, but he also proves to be frightened because he thinks that he has fallen in love with his best friend's wife.

Barreca (1988: 5) points out that "women writers have traditionally used comedy to subvert existing conventional structures." The patriarchal concept of femininity is one of these existing conventional structures Barreca refers to. In opposition to the ideal of femininity which patriarchy promotes, female friendship is one of the most relevant points in Behn's comedy. According to traditional misogyny, women are unable to create alliances amongst themselves because they are bossy, greedy, revengeful, self-interested or selfish (cf. Barreca 1996: 1, Finney 1994: 2). As we have already said, Castro's depiction of Leonela illustrates women's inability to create alliances with other women. One of the most noteworthy instances of this takes place when Leonela makes Camila responsible for her own wrongdoings: "¿Tan buen exemplo me has dado, / que tanta culpa me das?" (Castro 1991: 182). On the contrary, by depicting female characters' success as a result of their alliance, Behn's comedy proves that the assumption that women are unable to ally themselves is false. Apart from sympathetic, Behn's female characters are also very witty. In spite of adversity, they are able to reach their aims: Clarina avoids Alberto's wooing, Ismena makes Alberto fall in love with her and Isabella manages to marry Lorenzo. Obviously, this is not easy to achieve unless they make use of their wit and resourcefulness. For instance, Ismena dresses up in order to deceive Alberto and Antonio. Behn's characters want to control their own lives and disguises allow them to do so.

Isabella proves that, through psychological impersonation, it is also possible to obtain similar results: she makes Lorenzo think that he will meet Clarina in her own chamber so that Antonio finds him there and, on account of Isabella's virtue, he forces him to marry her. First, she promises Lorenzo a meeting with Clarina, whom he loves, to "order him at [her] pleasure" (Behn 1996: 110) and, then, she makes Wallet tell Antonio about Lorenzo's presence in his lodgings. Finally, when Antonio

enters Isabella's chamber, having been encouraged by her, Lorenzo feigns to be the "lawful husband to *Isabella*" (Behn 1996: 137) in order to avoid Antonio's wrath. Lorenzo is neither Isabella's husband nor her lover: Lorenzo is in love with Clarina but, as Isabella loves Lorenzo, she thinks that the only way to manage to marry him is by making Antonio believe that they are engaged, although they are not. Thus, as she "impersonates" Lorenzo's supposed wife-to-be, at the end Antonio claims marriage for them and they finally marry despite Lorenzo's attempt to avoid marriage (5.3).

Through these procedures, Behn's characters prove that patriarchy is not as firm and stable a system as it was thought to be, insofar as, by making use of disguises, even psychological, women (Clarina, Ismena, Isabella) are able to break down the designs which have been created by supposed superior beings (Antonio, Alberto; Lorenzo). Hence, these female characters manage to impose their own will, although the male characters are not conscious of it until the end, which shows their lack of control. On the one hand, Alberto had not been informed about Ismena's transvestism and, therefore, she feels in control of this situation. Alberto loves the woman he is courting, but he does not know that this woman is Ismena until she tells him. Regarding this, Snider (2006: 326) holds that Alberto's love for Ismena is due to a sense of transgression; that is, Alberto falls in love with her because he thinks that Ismena is his friend's wife, although at the end he finds out that she is not. Thus, this revelation makes not only the audience but also the characters laugh, because they experience something which does not fit into our internalized patterns of experience (Morreall 1983: 16). On the other hand, the sense of transgression also applies to Isabella's affair. Lorenzo enters Isabella's chamber because he thinks that, there, he will meet Clarina, the married woman he loves. On the contrary, due to Isabella's design, he meets Antonio, her husband, and, as this encounter makes him so frightened, he takes into account Isabella's advice, which consists of pretending to be his husband-to-be. This false statement leads inexorably to his marriage to Isabella.

Isabella's struggle for Lorenzo is about to ruin Clarina and Ismena's plan. One day,

Alberto arrives at Clarina's lodgings and finds Lorenzo there. He becomes so jealous that he encourages Antonio to witness the supposed Clarina's attitude towards him. In order to check his wife's faithfulness, Antonio hides in her lodgings but, having been informed about Antonio's presence, the supposed Clarina feigns to be faithful to her husband: "I'll still retain / My love for him; and what I had for you, / Which was but Friendship, I'll abandon" (Behn 1996: 127). Moreover, she also pretends to think that Alberto's love for her may be her own fault: "But stay, / Thou say'st my Beauty forc'd thee to this wickedness" (Behn 1996: 128). Thus, she makes them believe that she is willing to commit suicide. Having witnessed everything, Antonio feels embarrassed about having suspected Clarina's virtue. By the time he goes out, Clarina's impersonator, lying half dead, looks pertly up and, at this point, Alberto realizes that everything had been feigned.

Later, Ismena says in an aside. "You'll be more surpriz'd, when you know / That you are cheated too as well as *Antonio*" (Behn 1996: 129). As I have pointed out before, Ismena feels and proves her superiority because, with the help of Clarina and Isabella, she had made Alberto fall for her. Furthermore, after the performance, Antonio thinks that his wife had been tempted to cuckold him and had not succumbed to it, which would mean that Antonio's plan had succeeded. The happy ending is only due to the active role of these three female characters: Clarina, Isabella, and Ismena, who manage to deceive the male characters in order to achieve their aims. This comic resolution of the plot is possible because the woman dramatist creates female characters who are active, independent, intelligent, and sympathetic towards other women. This is common in plays written by Behn and also by her female successors on the stage at the turn of the century: Ariadne, Pix, or Centlivre, among others.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

I have dealt with the way in which masculine anxiety reflects the absurdity of the dominant ideology in a patriarchal society. In fact, the three works I have analyzed here start from the curious husband's doubts about his wife's virtue, which make him so anxious because of the responsibil-

ity the society imposes on husbands as regards their spouses' sexuality. On the one hand, in Castro's, and even in Cervantes's, work the anxiety the husbands show appears to be justified by their wives' unfaithfulness but, on the other hand, Behn introduces extremely different female characters who are ahead of the male characters' design and, therefore, they manage to avoid the tragic events that both Camilas undergo throughout the other two works. Behn's female characters are active, intelligent, talkative or witty, whereas Castro's and Cervantes's seem to be prurient, silent and submissive. Thus, it is possible to infer that, regarding women, Behn provides a different perspective. In Cervantes's and Castro's plays, the ingenuous Camilas are easily governed by male commands, although they do not foresee or wish the possible effects incurred by them. Instead, in Behn's comedy, women are sensible beings who prove that they are not as inferior as patriarchal precepts indicate: they are able to control their lives and the situations brought about by the male characters who, under the influence of the patriarchal ideology, underestimate their intelligence. Finally, it is possible to state that, in order to reach the comic effect, Behn and Castro make use of different interpretations of feminine and masculine gender identities.

angelestome@uvigo.es  
UNIVERSITY OF VIGO

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