

## Genre Shifting in Restoration Adaptations of Cervantes's “El curioso impertinente”

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Miguel de Cervantes's narrative “El curioso impertinente” [“The Curious Impertinent”] inserted into the first part of *Don Quixote*, fascinated the English playwrights of the seventeenth century. This tragic story about curiosity, fidelity, voyeurism and male homosociality was adapted in plots or subplots of several plays written in the Jacobean and Restoration periods, though often, however, averting the tragic ending and adding comedic elements. As regards Restoration adaptations, two good examples are Aphra Behn's *The Amorous Prince; or The Curious Husband* (1671) and John Crowne's *The Married Beau; or, The Curious Impertinent* (1694). Behn's play is a tragicomedy built around a romantic intrigue that attempts to exploit both the serious and comic potentials of the story, and provides a happy ending of reconciliation and multiple marriages thanks to the resolute intervention of the female characters. Crowne's work, however, largely downplays the seriousness of the plot and turns the action around more conceited and superficial characters, who provide several laughter-raising situations. In *The Married Beau* the comedic happy ending is favoured not through witty intrigue but through repentance. This article intends to analyse this genre shift and, more particularly, how Crowne adapts Cervantes's story to the English comic stage of the 1690s.

Keywords: Miguel de Cervantes; “El curioso impertinente” [“The Curious Impertinent”]; adaptation; genre; Aphra Behn; John Crowne

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## Cambio de género literario en las adaptaciones de “El curioso impertinente” de Cervantes en la Restauración inglesa

La novela “El curioso impertinente” de Miguel de Cervantes, incluida en la primera parte de *Don Quijote*, fascinó a los dramaturgos ingleses del siglo XVII. Esta historia trágica sobre

curiosidad, fidelidad y homosocialidad masculina fue adaptada en varias obras de teatro del periodo jacobeo y de la Restauración, aunque a menudo evitando el final trágico y añadiendo elementos cómicos. Por lo que se refiere a la Restauración, este es el caso, por ejemplo, de *The Amorous Prince; or, The Curious Husband* (1671) de Aphra Behn y *The Married Beau; or, The Curious Impertinent* (1694) de John Crowne. La obra de Behn es una tragicomedia construida alrededor de un enredo romántico que intenta aprovechar los potenciales trágico y cómico de la historia y proporciona un final feliz de reconciliación y múltiples matrimonios gracias a la resuelta intervención de los personajes femeninos. Sin embargo, Crowne se deshace considerablemente de la trama seria y hace que la acción gire en torno a personajes vanidosos y superficiales que dan lugar a varias situaciones divertidas. En *The Married Beau* el final feliz viene facilitado no a través del enredo sino por el arrepentimiento. Este artículo analiza este cambio de género literario y, en particular, cómo Crowne adapta la historia de Cervantes a la comedia inglesa de finales del siglo XVII.

Palabras clave: Miguel de Cervantes; “El curioso impertinente”; adaptación; género literario; Aphra Behn; John Crowne

Miguel de Cervantes's narrative of "El curioso impertinente" ["The Curious Impertinent"], inserted in chapters 33-35 of the first part of *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605) fascinated English playwrights in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> This tragic story of inappropriate curiosity, wife-testing, voyeurism and male homosociality was adapted in plots or subplots of several plays written in the Jacobean and Restoration periods, often however averting the tragic ending and adding comedic elements. Even before Thomas Shelton's English translation of *Don Quixote* was published in 1612, Thomas Middleton in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611), also entitled *The Lady's Tragedy*, seems to draw on Cervantes's tale for the subplot in which the fidelity of Anselmus's wife is tested. She fails to be faithful and the ending, as the title indicates, is tragic. However, one year later Nathan Field takes the story of the husband who tests his wife's chastity by asking a friend to tempt her and turns it into the subplot of a comedy entitled *Amends for Ladies* (performed in 1612, published in 1618).<sup>2</sup> Later, in the Restoration period, "El curioso impertinente" was adapted in, for example, Aphra Behn's *The Amorous Prince; or, The Curious Husband* (1671) and John Crowne's *The Married Beau; or, The Curious Impertinent* (1694), as the subtitles of both pieces indicate.<sup>3</sup> This article will analyse the genre shift undergone by the story from tragic tale to tragicomedy in Behn's version, and to comedy in Crowne's later adaptation. However, as Behn's adaptation has already been studied to a considerable extent by other authors,<sup>4</sup> I will discuss in greater detail the latter play,

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge funding for his research from the Spanish government (MINECO project ref. FFI2015-68376-P), the Junta de Andalucía (project ref. P11-HUM-7761) and the Xunta de Galicia (Rede de Lingua e Literatura Inglesa e Identidade III, ref. ED431D2017/17).

<sup>2</sup> William Peery (1946), however, casts doubt on Field's indebtedness to Cervantes. Beaumont and Fletcher's comedy *The Coxcomb* (performed c. 1608-1610, published in 1647) and Robert Davenport's tragicomedy *The City Night-Cap; or Crede Quod Habes, et Habes* (performed in 1624, published in 1661) also have plots that resemble Cervantes's narrative, and this has been noticed by some critics. Already at the end of the seventeenth century, Gerard Langbaine claims that the plot of Lorenzo, Philippo and Abstemia in *The City Night-Cap* is borrowed from Cervantes's "The Curious Impertinent" (1691, 117). Floriana Hogan (1955) also believes that Davenport's play and *The Coxcomb* are based on the Spanish tale. However, Abraham Rosenbach argues that in the former the husband offers his wife to his friend as a proof of his friendship rather than to test his spouse, and that Davenport's plot is rather derived from Robert Greene's romance *Philomela* (1592) (1902, 181-182). Peery agrees with Rosenbach (1946, 345). However, Huw Griffiths seems to accept that "The Curious Impertinent" is "a potential source" of *The Coxcomb* (2013, 97). For Trudi Darby and Alexander Samson, Cervantes's influence here is only found in the initial concepts of the close friends and of a man who foolishly acts against his own best interests, after which the play goes in a different direction (2009, 215).

<sup>3</sup> Langbaine claimed that Thomas Southerne's *The Disappointment; or, The Mother in Fashion* (1684) also has "somewhat of the story of *The Curious Impertinent*, in *Don Quixot*" (1691, 489). Many modern scholars have accepted this claim, such as Rosenbach (1902, 184), Yvonne Jehenson (1998, 31) and Dale Randall and Jackson Boswell (2009, 422), among others. However, I contend that the resemblance between the two texts is only partial in that Southerne's romantic tragicomedy is also set in Florence and shows a wife whose fidelity is questioned, but the husband never asks his best friend to test her, which is for me an important aspect in Cervantes's story.

<sup>4</sup> I refer mainly to Dolores Altaba-Artal (1999, 46-63), Alvin Snider (2006, 323-326), Ángeles Tomé Rosales (2010) and Raquel Serrano González (2016). Janet Todd and Derek Hughes also devote some pages to comment on this play in their study about Behn's tragedy and tragicomedy (2004, 87-89). In *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* Derek Hughes makes a more extensive analysis of this play, although here he focuses mostly on the main plot rather than on the subplot that draws on Cervantes's narrative (2001, 39-46).

which has so far received much less critical attention, and will analyse Behn's in the light of this *transmodalisation* process.<sup>5</sup> As will be seen, Crowne adapts the Spanish source to the comic stage of the 1690s, turning it into a comedy with some ludicrous scenes, but also with certain signs of moral reformation at the end.

Briefly summarised, in "El curioso impertinente" Anselmo asks his friend Lotario to try to seduce his wife Camila in order to test her fidelity. Lotario is reluctant at first but he finally agrees. Then Anselmo leaves town to make the seduction easier, but Camila rejects Lotario's advances, writes her husband letters warning him of the former's approaches and urges him to return. However, Lotario and Camila eventually fall in love, and he even gets jealous when seeing another man entering her house, although he later finds out that it was only her servant Leonela's suitor. One day, knowing that Anselmo is spying on them, Camila pretends to quarrel with Lotario and threatens to stab herself if he insists on importuning her. This makes Anselmo happy, and confident of his wife's fidelity. However, fearing that Leonela might disclose their affair, Camila and Lotario decide to run away, she entering a convent and he joining the army, after which Anselmo dies of sorrow. Learning of Lotario's death in a battle, Camila also passes away from grief.

Cervantes treats Anselmo's unjustified anxiety about his wife's chastity in a serious manner, as a kind of obsession or mental disease that, combined with the contemporary ideologies of gender and honour, and his decision to ask his best friend Lotario to court Camila in order to test her honesty, leads to "la tragedia de la muerte de su honra" ["the tragedy of the death of his honour"] (Cervantes [1605-1615] 2004, 365) and, finally, to his own death and those of Lotario and Camila.<sup>6</sup> The story certainly deals with conflicts of both love and honour, and heterosexuality and homosociality, which are frequently the core of many tragedies—both narrative and dramatic—in early modern European literature. Anselmo's impertinent curiosity may be seen as the Aristotelian *hamartia* that brings about the *peripeteia* that turns his once-happy world upside down, and finally leads to the *anagnorisis* of realising the foolishness of an "impertinente deseo" ["impertinent desire"] that turns him into the "fabricador de {su} deshonra" ["the author of [his] own dishonour"] (373). However, Yvonne Jehenson argues that neither Anselmo, nor Lotario or Camila, really achieve tragic stature because none of the male protagonists are worthy enough and Camila never seems to repent of her adultery. For Jehenson, Lotario's triumphant death in battle and Camila's histrionic scene of self-immolation and final retirement to a convent seem the stuff of romance rather than of tragedy (1998, 43-46). In addition, she sees the subplot of the affair of Camila's maid Leonela as one resembling the *comedia de capa y espada*, with its elements of amorous intrigue, deception, mistaken identity, and disguise presented in a light-hearted veneer

<sup>5</sup> I borrow the term *transmodalisation* from Gérard Genette, who coined it to refer to a change in the mode of representation of a literary work, e.g., a case of *dramatisation* of a narrative text or of *narrativisation* of a dramatic piece ([1982] 1989, 356).

<sup>6</sup> There are several studies that explain this, such as those by Diana de Armas Wilson (1987), Yvonne Jehenson (1998) and Nicolás Wey-Gómez (1999).

(41). So there are some comic elements present in the story, but Cervantes's approach to his narrative is mostly serious, focusing more on the moral debate of the characters and providing a tragic closure to Anselmo's unwise and impertinent test of his wife's fidelity.

As was said at the beginning, many playwrights have been attracted to this story as a source of plots because it is particularly suitable for *dramatisation*. As Darby and Samson have pointed out, it offers a strong central relationship between three characters, a protagonist moved by a foolish obsession, potential for compelling dialogue, dramatic irony and voyeurism (2009, 214-218). Yet, as happens in other cases of *transmodalisation* from narrative to the stage, the action has to be compressed so as to fit into a theatrical script (see Genette [1982] 1989, 356); and even more so when the story is only used for one of the plots. For instance, as Darby and Samson have noted, in *The Lady's Tragedy* (1611), Middleton dramatises Cervantes's story in only four scenes and, consequently, the original exploration of the characters' thoughts and motivations is considerably reduced (2009, 216-217). The Jacobean dramatist must rely on dialogue and soliloquy, and has to speed up the rhythm of events. He makes Leonela's lover, whom he calls Bellarius, an enemy of Votarius (his equivalent to Lotario) and has him more involved in the tragic ending, because he poisons the sword with which the Wife (whom he gives no name) pretends to attack Votarius, and he engages in a fight with Anselmus in which both die, along with the Wife. This final carnage resembles more the bloodshed endings of Jacobean tragedy than that of Cervantes's narrative.

However, many of the playwrights who adapted the story for the stage preferred to avoid the final tragic closure, for instance, Aphra Behn. She used it as a source for one of the two plots of her second play, *The Amorous Prince; or, The Curious Husband*, first performed by the Duke's Company in London in 1671, and published that same year.<sup>7</sup> The two story lines are quite balanced as regards number of scenes, with Behn devoting eight, and part of another two, scenes to this subplot. The action is therefore quite compressed, constrained by the time of the performance, but also the unities of time and space. The events of the play are supposed to happen over about two days, and mostly take place in the Florence homes of several of the characters.<sup>8</sup> Behn keeps the Italian setting, probably because she, as other English playwrights of the time, considered it appropriate to deal with the topics of jealousy, honour and the oppression of women. Todd and Hughes claim that "Behn was fascinated by rigid misogynous Spanish or Italian society, which she tended to see as essentially comic material," and used it thus in her plays in order to point out "the absurdity of cloistering women from the world and then expecting from them morals higher than those of men" (2004, 87). Behn's sympathy towards female characters thus made her rewrite Cervantes's hypotext

<sup>7</sup> Langbaine said that *The City Night-Cap* was also based on Cervantes's narrative, "tho' Mrs. Behn has much out-done that Play, and improv'd the Novel itself" (1691, 18-19).

<sup>8</sup> According to Juan A. Prieto-Pablos, Restoration comedy writers opted for a flexible adoption of the three unities. Most plays combine two plots (not only in tragicomedies), their action occurs over one or two days, and are set in several rooms of the same house or in several houses of the same town (2014, 69-73).

and avert its tragic ending. As Altaba-Artal (1999, 54-60), Snider (2006, 321-324), Tomé Rosales (2010, 161-167) and Serrano González (2016) have all demonstrated, Behn facilitates a genre shift by boosting female agency and solidarity. She renames the protagonists Antonio, Clarina and Alberto, and keeps Clarina away from temptation and potential adultery by creating another female character, Ismena, who is Antonio's sister. Ismena loves Alberto and offers to pass herself off as Clarina during the trial of her chastity. Behn's focus is on women from the moment this plot line is introduced in act 1, scene 4: before we actually meet the male characters, she lets us know about Antonio's jealousy and his plan to use his friend Alberto to court his wife through a conversation between Clarina, Ismena and Clarina's servant Isabella, at the same time as we learn about their counterplot. Ismena's impersonation of Clarina can work because, although Alberto is Antonio's best friend, he has never seen her because "'Tis not the custom here for Men to expose their Wives to the view of any" (Behn [1671] 1996, 98).

Ismena is sympathetic to her sister-in-law, brave to take her place, and, although she is young and has been brought up in a convent, she proves to be both witty and resourceful in her impersonation. Her role is not an easy one as she has to win Alberto's love and, at the same time, keep Clarina's honour intact, but she manages to do both successfully. Like other heroines in Behn's plays, Ismena's *manly* courage and determination is displayed; she even resorts to weapons.<sup>9</sup> In act 4, scene 1, she draws a poniard and threatens to hurt Alberto and herself in order to defend her honour, an action that makes the eavesdropping Antonio realise the absurdity of his jealousy and start to repent his plan. This is in a way similar to what happens in Cervantes's narrative, because Camila also uses a dagger, with which she pretends to attack Lotario and then wounds herself slightly, but this is enough to make Anselmo think she is a good wife who does not deserve his mistrust.

Moroever, Leonela's counterpart in Behn's *The Amorous Prince*, Isabella, is presented as clever, supportive and as chaste as the other women. Therefore none of these three female characters behaves improperly, in spite of their active roles and the risky situations they get involved in, particularly Ismena and Isabella. They help each other to overcome peril, outwit the male characters, and achieve their aims. Their pragmatism, solidarity and ingenuity allow them to resist patriarchal restrictions and abuse. Serrano González highlights how the play is populated by female characters whose male guardians endeavour to confine them, although all attempts to contain female agency are effectively frustrated (2016, 153). As Ismena puts it, "[t]his unlucky restraint upon our Sex, / Makes us all cunning" (Behn [1671] 1996, 109).

The comedic ending of Behn's hypertext favours the final acceptance of errors, forgiveness and reconciliation. Poetic justice is applied at least with respect to the female characters, whose virtues are rewarded. Antonio and Alberto are finally happy

<sup>9</sup> In this play there is another female character that uses a weapon to confront a man: Laura, who draws a dagger against the sexual advances of Prince Frederick. Armed women appear also in Behn's *The Dutch Lover* (1673), *The Rover* (1677), *The Young King* (1679) and *The Widow Ranter* (1689)—see Pearson (1988, 157-158).

to realise that the moral conflict they created was only imaginary. However, Antonio's unjustified anxiety about Clarina's fidelity, and his abusive treatment of his wife as a possession and a whore is disturbing and potentially fatal. Ismena's intervention frees her sister-in-law from any temptation and any potential failure, and thus places the whole moral dilemma in Alberto's mind. So, what the plot of *The Amorous Prince* is testing is actually not the wife's faithfulness, but rather the friend's, something which is also present in Cervantes's story but which is more prominent here because the *real* Clarina is never tempted. Although Alberto considers Antonio's request foolish, and is afraid that "love above [his] friendship may prevail" (99), he accepts it in order to prevent Antonio from turning to someone else and thus being "expos'd to th'scorn of others" (100). When Alberto then sees Ismena unveiled for the first time, he laments:

Oh, how my Soul's divided  
 Between my Adoration and my Amity!  
 Friendship, thou sacred-band, hold fast thy interest,  
 For yonder Beauty has a subtle power,  
 And can undo that knot, which other Arts  
 Could ne'er invent a way for. (100)

And, after that first meeting with her, he says:

I will my Honour to my Love prefer,  
 And my Antonio shall out-Rival her.  
 [...]
 Inform me Love who shares the better part,  
 Friendship, or thee, in my divided heart. (102)

This shows the extent to which, for Alberto, the conflict is between love and honour, as well as between love and friendship. It is a serious moral dilemma that haunts him throughout the whole play, and that makes his plight similar to that found in other tragedies, tragicomedies and heroic plays of Restoration England. Besides, during the trial, Alberto is appalled by the responsiveness of a woman he believes to be his friend's spouse. Already in act 2, scene 3, he says in another aside:

She yields, bad woman!  
 Why so easily won?  
 By me too, who am thy Husbands friend:  
 Oh dangerous boldness! Unconsidering woman,  
 I lov'd thee, whilst I thought thou could'st not yield;  
 But now that easiness has undone thy interest in my heart:  
 I'lle back and tell thee that it was to try thee. (110)

However, Alberto never does that because he then sees a man (Lorenzo) serenading Clarina and entering her house, and concludes that she is having an affair with another man. Derek Hughes (2001, 42) argues that Alberto's first experience of his love for the woman who will become his future wife (Ismena) seems distressful and sexually transgressive, because in his mind, and in that of Antonio, she has become a whore. This *whorification* of the female sex is already behind Antonio's decision to test his wife's chastity six months after their wedding, even though he has no actual reason to distrust her. Besides, one of the first things we hear him say is that women are easy to win over with flattery and jewels. As Elizabeth Foyster has explained, in the early modern period men considered women seductive by nature or easy to tempt, insatiable once aroused, and often promiscuous: "once a woman had initially transgressed she would repeat the sin over and over again," and this was the reason for men's anxiety about women's sexuality and about the social consequences of their possible failure to uphold the established gender hierarchy (1999, 170).<sup>10</sup>

As was said before, Antonio starts to realise his mistake when the woman he thinks is his wife tries to kill Alberto and then herself, although he does not know she is Ismena and that she is simply pretending. Antonio then begins to seriously repent of his behaviour: "Curse on my little Faith; / And all the Curses madness can invent, / Light on my groundless jealousy" (Behn [1671] 1996, 128), he exclaims in an aside. Later he tells Alberto that his decision to test Clarina's virtue was "an idle fault" for which he sincerely repents and apologises, both to his friend and his wife.

I own the Crime;  
 And first I beg thy Pardon,  
 And after that, will get it from *Clarina*;  
 Which done, I'll wait upon thee to the Camp,  
 And suffer one years Penance for this sin. (145)

Hence there is a still a dark undertone in Behn's rendering of "The Curious Impertinent." This serious, dark hint is reinforced by the other plot of the play, that of the eponymous "Amorous Prince," Frederick, who first seduces the sister of his friend Curtius, and then makes advances to Curtius's prospective wife too, in a very cold and arrogant manner. It is a serious treatment of "the rakish misuse of political power" that parallels "Antonio's misuse of his husbandly authority" (Todd and Hughes 2004, 89). In both plots men attempt to objectify and manipulate women, but Frederick's abuse of rank and power is even more troubling. The play should therefore be considered a tragicomedy, as Robert Hume (1976, 286), Altaba-Artal (1999, 48), Hughes (2001, 39), Todd and Hughes (2004, 87-89) and Serrano González (2016, 146) have noted, rather than an outright comedy, as the original title page and Tomé Rosales (2010)

<sup>10</sup> See also Mark Breitenberg's insightful study about *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (1996).



describe it.<sup>11</sup> As with other tragicomedies of the 1670s, this is a split-plot play that blends tragic and comic elements, the tone is often serious, the characters are members of royalty or the nobility, the action is set in continental Europe, and the sources are often also continental (mostly French or Spanish).<sup>12</sup> Behn herself was aware of the composite nature of her play and wittily said about it in lines 29-30 of the prologue: "Not serious, nor yet comick, what is't then? / Th'imperfect issue of a Lukewarm brain" ([1671] 1996, 87).

Intrigue tragicomedy was the genre Behn used in her first plays, much in the line of other dramatists of the late 1660s and early 1670s. But later she contributed to the success of other forms that became more popular in the late 1670s and early 1680s, such as intrigue comedy, sex comedy, farce and satirical comedy. As is well known, the plays of this period were often bawdy and cynical, intending to please the libertine upper classes that dominated the audience. However, after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the new monarchs promoted moral reform in English society. The comedy of the 1690s reflected this tendency and attempted to be increasingly more exemplary, slowly moving towards the sentimental comedy of the early eighteenth century—see, for instance, Hume (1976, 381-396), Bevis (1988, 146-162), Corman (2000, 65-69) and Combe (2001). Dramatists continued to exploit the appeal of the rakish gallant, but made sure that he reformed in the end, embracing marriage and a future decent life guided by his virtuous wife.

Twenty-three years after the premiere and publication of *The Amorous Prince*, John Crowne takes a step further in terms of genre shift in the *dramatisation* of "The Curious Impertinent." In *The Married Beau; or, The Curious Impertinent*, first acted at the Theatre Royal in London in 1694, he turns Cervantes's narrative into a fully-fledged comedy, mainly by incorporating no serious plot or tone, making the protagonists less noble and introducing a number of ludicrous characters. And, although there is final repentance of previous acts of vanity and libertinism, the tone of the play is light and comic in general. In the process of *transmodalisation*, Crowne obviously has to shorten the action in the original story in order to comply with the three unities and staging limitations, but he devotes more time than previous dramatists to this plot, which is the main one and occupies most of the play. Crowne sets the action in the area of Covent Garden rather than Florence, which brings the play closer to the audience's environment and to the other comedies of the period, often set in London. Also closer to contemporary comedy is the characterisation, because the world of the play is one of beaux, coquettes, rakes and fools. Cervantes's Anselmo is here transformed into the "Married Beau" of

<sup>11</sup> For Hogan, *The Amorous Prince* is "a romance, leaning heavily in the direction of the comedy of intrigue" (1955, 294).

<sup>12</sup> For example, for her tragicomedy *The Dutch Lover* (1673) Behn draws on Calderón's play *Peor está que estaba* (1636) and Francisco de Quintana's *Experiencias de amor y fortuna* (1626), a romance translated into English as *The History of Don Fenise* in 1651. See sections about sources and genres in Manuel Gómez-Lara and María José Mora (2014).

the title, called Mr Lovely, and the list of *Dramatis Personae* says “[h]e has some Wit, but some Affectation: believes himself very Handsome, and desires to be thought so by all Ladies, and specially by his Wife” (1694, n.p.).<sup>13</sup> Mrs Lovely is described as “[a] witty, beautiful Coquet, that loves to be Courted and Admir’d, but aims at no more. She’s proud, and has Value for Honour” (n.p.). So the Lovelys are very different from Anselmo and Camila, a fact we know from the very beginning, and as such we can expect different motivations and attitudes from these two protagonists. And Lotario’s counterpart here is called Polidor, described as “[a] Man of Wit and Fortune; much esteemed and trusted by *Lovely* (n.p.). Yet his actions and words reveal that this esteem and trust are not requited, because Polidor thinks Lovely is actually a fool, particularly after he asks him to court his wife in order to see whether she really likes him. Polidor’s first thoughts are expressed in the following aside (act 1, scene 1), just before he accepts Lovely’s request:

Is he a Fool to the Degree he seems?  
 Or does he think me one, and has a mind  
 To put a little pleasant Trick upon me?  
 I care not what he means—He has anger’d me,  
 I’m bound in Honour, to do all I can  
 To lay a Pair of Horns over his Cock’s Comb,  
 Revenge my self and make him an Example. (Crowne 1694, 4)

We never see Polidor suffering the moral conflict Lotario and Alberto do: he is a more cynical character, Lovely is too conceited and frivolous to be taken seriously, and the bond of friendship between them is not so strong. Polidor’s only worry is that his beloved Camilla might find out and break up with him.<sup>14</sup> But he tells Mrs Lovely that he is no real friend of “such a foolish Creature” who only loves himself (31).<sup>15</sup>

Like Anselmo, Lovely knows the request seems mad, because he actually thinks his wife is “the Top and Glory of the Creation” (2) and will resist Polidor’s advances; but he wants to be admired by her:

Oh, Sir! To be admir’d by a fine Woman,  
 Surpasses infinitely, infinitely,

<sup>13</sup> This is one of the earliest examples of the use of the word *beau* as a kind of synonym of *fop*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives a definition of *beau* as “[a] man who gives particular, or excessive, attention to dress, mien, and social etiquette; an exquisite, a fop, a dandy”; the first example given is from 1687 (Simpson and Weiner 1989, s.v. “Beau”). Robert Heilman (1982, 365) has noted the frequent usage of the term *beau* with the meaning of fashion-fop in comedies of the 1690s.

<sup>14</sup> This Camilla should not be confused with Cervantes’s Camila. The former is Lovely’s sister, whereas the latter is Anselmo’s wife.

<sup>15</sup> In Nathan Field’s comedy *Amends for Ladies* (1639), Subtle also thinks the Husband is a coxcomb and is willing to seduce the Wife. He has no strong moral conflict either.

All the Delights her Body can bestow.  
 I'd rather a fine Woman shou'd admire me,  
 And to Eternity deny her Body.  
 Than grant me her Body fifty times a Night,  
 And all that while never admire me once.  
 Oh Heavens!  
 What wou'd I give, this Wonder of a Woman,  
 Did believe me a Wonder of a Man? (3)

Lovely wants to find out if his wife will resist the seduction, citing reasons of honour and religion or, as he says, "from an infinite Regard to me" (4). So he is not moved (or not completely) by an anxiety springing from gender ideology, but rather by a narcissistic impulse that makes him comparable to the typical fops of Restoration comedy, although he may not be so affected and ostentatious as them.<sup>16</sup> Such a vain, foolish fellow cannot be seen as a tragic hero because it is difficult to take him seriously and sympathise with him. He is even more active than Anselmo in furthering his wife's infidelity, because he insistently asks her to be kind to Polidor since "He's half my self, there's one Soul between us, / And we two together make one Husband" (38), and as such, that Polidor would commit adultery if he lay with another woman. Then, when he learns about his wife's infidelity, he considers himself the most miserable man on earth, and he wants to kill her and then himself. But this threat of tragedy does not last long because he soon hears his wife saying that he is a handsome young man and she would not change him for any other, and he also hears Polidor saying that he will not cuckold him again. These words make Lovely suddenly forget his deadly intentions and deem himself the happiest man in the world. In this way, he is presented as moody and even puerile. Lovely is finally included in the comedic happy ending of forgiveness and reconciliation thanks to his wife's repentance and because he thinks he has achieved his aim after all: "Now I've all Joys by me on Earth desir'd: / By her I most admire, I am admired" (66).

For Staves, Lovely is an example of an increasing softening attitude towards the fop in the reign of William and Mary, parallel to the ideals of masculinity, reacting against crude, cynical libertinism and moving towards refinement, civility and sensitivity (1982, 422-423, 428). For Snider, Lovely is "a bully of heightened feeling and refined sensibility" (2006, 329). However, I do not see any refinement or any proposal of a new type of masculinity in Lovely. The increasingly sentimental tastes of the 1690s may be less sympathetic to rakes—making them finally repent their wanton ways—and more benevolent to fops—treating them less crudely and allowing them to participate in the happy ending. Yet Lovely is too vain and foolish, too abusive towards his wife and

<sup>16</sup> Susan Staves, however, claims that Cervantes provides no psychological explanation for Anselmo's decision to test his wife's virtue but that Crowne cites Lovely's foppery as a motive, and that the use of blank verse intends to make him sound less contemptible and ridiculous (1982, 422).

women in general, and even too critical of marriage at a certain moment, to represent a new ideal of masculinity. Like the previous “curious impertinents,” he assumes that women are easily won with flattery and money, and concludes that his wife’s failure to resist Polidor’s advances proves that she is a whore but his friend is brave and honest. His harsh criticism of matrimony in act 5, scene 1, is not proper in a sentimental comedy hero, no matter how disappointed he might be at that moment:

Marriage is worse than *Bridewell* to our Sex:  
 Strumpets are whipp’d in *Bridewell*, but in Marriage  
 Harlots are duly Rods for honest Men.  
 I wou’d have none but Malefactors marry.  
 Instead of drudging in Plantations,  
 I’d have’em doom’d to stay at home and marry,  
 Plough their own Wives, and Plant that Weed Mankind. (Crowne 1694, 58)

Nonetheless, he soon capriciously changes his mind and feels the happiest man in the world when his wife says he is handsome. According to Hughes (1996, 341), Lovely ends up as blind as Sir Jasper Fidget in William Wycherley’s sex comedy *The Country Wife* (1675), and it is true that he turns a blind eye to his wife’s infidelity, but Lovely’s foolishness is different from Sir Jasper’s, and his wife is not like Lady Fidget either. Mrs Lovely is a coquette and, like her husband, likes being liked.<sup>17</sup> So it is not difficult for Polidor to seduce her. Yet she is not as active in that seduction as Lady Fidget and, what is more important, she soon bitterly repents of her transgression. The moralistic vein of the 1690s in England would not favour a cynical ending like Wycherley’s, but rather require final penitence.

Mrs Lovely is outraged when her husband leaves her alone with Polidor and comments in an aside (act 2, scene 1):

Is the Man mad to run away from me,  
 And leave me with the Temptingst Man on Earth,  
 After he has declared a Passion for me?  
 I’le show more Wisdom than my Husband does. (Crowne 1694, 15)

She also feels offended at Polidor’s courtship, because it means that he thinks she is “an ill Woman” (18) and he wants to wrong his friend. So she threatens to tell her husband if he does not give up. She then resorts to female solidarity, asking for Camilla’s help, which disabuses Camilla of her idealised view of Polidor, and she states: “I thought the lost Perfection of Mankind / Was in that Man Restor’d” (25). Camilla thus feels that

<sup>17</sup> Snider argues that sensibility “feminizes Lovely, puts him in a passive position, makes him ineffective and masochistic, alienates him from conventional roles of spark, rake, and jealous husband” (2006, 329).

Polidor has deceived her and treated her like a whore, so she will punish him, because she is neither a coward nor a saint. She will help Mrs Lovely to defeat him. However, Camilla is not as strong and witty as Behn's Ismena, Mrs Lovely is not free from temptation like Clarina and, therefore, the female bonding in Crowne's comedy is more brittle and has a serious moment of crisis. Mrs Lovely surrenders to Polidor's seduction and Camilla finds them together by accident. First, Camilla blames women's weak nature and feels ashamed of being a woman herself, but then firmly confronts Mrs Lovely. The latter threatens to stab Camilla, and Camilla threatens her with publishing the news in the *Gazette*. This crisis is short-lived, because Mrs Lovely then blames Polidor's forceful advances and promises not to see him again, and thus she regains Camilla's sympathy.

After that scene, in act 4, we see Mrs Lovely repeatedly expressing her repentance and wish to reform. She tells Camilla: "I'll change my course of life; / Throw off my Vanities and vain Society, / And get acquainted with some good Divine" (45); a little later she says to her servant Lionell: "I'm an undone, lost Woman: Heaven and Grace / Abandon'd me, and now my Honor's gone," and in an aside: "Farewell intriguing, and come happy Vertue, / There's no true peace, or pleasure but in thee. / I'll break with Polidor" (50). When he comes and makes sexual advances again, she asks him to repent and says that cuckolding is an old sin that "'tis time it dyed; / It shall with me, I'll harbour it no more" (53). Mrs Lovely is more worried about public shame and that her reputation depends on the discretion of her servant Lionell, who knows of her infidelity, and about her husband's or Polidor's possible comments about her, than about any moral or religious consideration. She complains to Polidor: "You have made me a Servant to my Servant: / My Reputation is at her Command" (52), and she confesses in an aside that she hates shame "more than Death" (55).<sup>18</sup> However, her anxiety and contrition seem serious and credible enough. The performance of Elizabeth Barry, the most famous actress of the time, with experience in both comic and tragic roles, probably contributed to that credibility in the premiere of this play.

A little less credible is perhaps Polidor's repentance, which is also necessary in order to guarantee an exemplary happy ending that would be acceptable when the play was premiered. As was said before, his friendship with Lovely is not like Lotario's with Anselmo. Polidor thinks Lovely is a foolish man who deserves to be ridiculed. He takes advantage of the chance he is given of courting his wife, which he does in spite of the love he allegedly has for Camilla, "[a] virtuous, devout, reserv'd young Beauty, of small Fortune," as she is described in the *Dramatis Personae* (Crowne 1694, n.p.). Although he is aware that, if Camilla finds out that he is seducing Mrs Lovely, he will lose her, Polidor engages in the seduction plan with the fruition and cynicism of a Restoration

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<sup>18</sup> Cervantes's narrator uses a similar imagery to describe how much Camila depended on Leonela's discretion when he says: "Que este daño acarrear, entre otros, los pecados de las señoras: que se hacen esclavas de sus mismas criadas y se obligan a encubrirles sus deshonestidades y vilezas" ["For the sins of mistresses entail this mischief, among others, that they make themselves the slaves of their own servants, and are obliged to hide their dishonest and vile acts"] (Cervantes [1605-1615] 2004, 354).

rake. He soon wins Mrs Lovely over with conventional love rhetoric and in act 4, scene 2, when she talks of conscience, he accuses her of being spoilt by Camilla, whom now he sees as “no Woman” but “a Church-Monument, / A Picture of Virginity in Marble” (Crowne 1694, 48).<sup>19</sup> When Mrs Lovely repents, he calls her “a false, dissembling, artful Jilt,” who has probably sinned before and will sin again in the future, so he must free his friend from “so dangerous a Wife” (53-54). He tells Lovely what has happened and, as the latter then wants to kill both his wife and himself, Polidor sees the consequences of his acts and decides to make amends: “What have I done? Curse on all lewd Intrigues! / When we give up our Reason to our Lusts, / It is no wonder if we act like Beasts” (55). And in the end he asks Camilla to marry him and be his moral guide: “Your Love will charm me into Piety”; which she accepts “to advance your Vertue by my Love” (65). Thus, Crowne joins the contemporary discourse of the reformation of manners and the tendency to make the rake repent before the comedic ending of multiple marriages.<sup>20</sup>

Yet the happy ending is not the only element of this genre shift from a tragic tale to a stage comedy. Crowne adds two comic figures to the action: Thornback and Sir John Shuttlecock, played by two successful comedians of the time, Thomas Doggett and William Bowen respectively. Thornback is presented in the *Dramatis Personae* as “[a] bold, debauch’d, conceited, witty, elderly Spark; who thinks himself very well to be lik’d by any Beauty, and attempts all Women he knows” (Crowne 1694, n.p.). He is the typical old bachelor who likes wooing young women, but all of them laugh at him or wish to cheat him into marriage. Thornback is a ridiculous fellow who ends up wedded to Mrs Lovely’s maid, Lionell. But even more ludicrous is Sir John Shuttlecock, “[a] whimsical, silly, giddy, young Amorous Fop; in love with all the Women he sees, and is never in a Mind a minute” (n.p.). Somewhat resembling Marlowe in Oliver Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer* (1771), he is pathetically inarticulate when wooing ladies. As he explains to Lionell: “I’m a Pe-goose with a Lady; but I’m the Devil with a Chamber-Maid. Here I can kiss without a Matter of the Spiritual Ceremonies” (28); but Lionell easily gets rid of him with witty retorts, proving that he is in fact helpless with maids too. A particularly ludicrous scene is when he embraces a post and speaks to it as if it were a woman, making Thornback jealous of him because he does not realise it is actually a post. He ends up married too, but still doubting which of the women is prettier. He is, therefore, conceived of as a foolish fop created to make the audience laugh.

To conclude, we have seen how the two adaptations of Cervantes’s “El curioso impertinente” in the English Restoration period not only *transmodalised* the hypotext,

<sup>19</sup> The actress who played Camilla in the first performance of this comedy was Anne Bracegirdle, who was also famous for her roles of modest young girls. For the casting of this play, see William Van Lennep (1965, 434).

<sup>20</sup> Polidor is included in David Berkeley’s list of penitent rakes in Restoration comedy (1952, 223, n1) and, within that, of rakes whose conversion is presented as being influenced by feminine “charms” (233, n36-n37). Berkeley also points out Crowne’s use of verse within the framework of satiric comedy.

changing from narrative to drama, but also changed the work from a serious, tragic treatment to a comic one. Aphra Behn adapts it in one of the two plots of her intrigue tragicomedy *The Amorous Prince*, in order to expose the reification of women's and men's abuse of power. Behn gives more agency to the female characters, whom she presents as guiltless but also supportive, active and resourceful enough to outwit the male protagonists and thus avert a tragic ending. In this way she tries to exploit both the serious and comic potentials of "The Curious Impertinent," and provides a happy ending of reconciliation and multiple marriages. John Crowne opts for a fully comic approach to the topic, and adapts the situation in Cervantes's story to the reality of the late Restoration stage. On the one hand, he moves the action to Covent Garden and notably alters the characterisation, making the action turn around more conceited and superficial characters that provide several laughter-raising situations. He makes the story of wife-and-friend-testing be carried out by common figures of Restoration comedy, such as a foolish husband, a cynical libertine, an old man in search of love affairs and an awkward fop. Lovely's impertinent curiosity is largely due to his narcissistic need to be admired, and he is presented here as ridiculously foolish, so not very different from the other fops of the period. But, on the other hand, Crowne makes the happy ending depend largely on the repentance of the transgressive members of the infidelity, the coquettish wife and the rakish friend, so that the play may comply with the new moralistic demands of the 1690s.

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Received 12 July 2017

Revised version accepted 25 January 2018

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