

Joseph Arrowsmith, *The Reformation*. Edited by Juan A. Prieto-Pablos, María José Mora, Manuel J. Gómez-Lara and Rafael Portillo. Colección Textos y comentarios, 1. Barcelona, Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, 2003. 201 pages. ISBN: 84-8338-381-0 (paperback).

Jorge FIGUEROA DORREGO
Universidade de Vigo

“Let us kiss, let us kiss, *à la mode d’Angleterre*,” this is the final line of the song which foppish Pacheco sings in Act IV, scene 3, of Joseph Arrowsmith’s *The Reformation* (1673). It conveys one of the main ideas developed throughout this comedy, in particular that which the title refers to: the reformation of Venetian social and sexual mores under the model of libertine Restoration England. Maybe because that project was considered too immoral, but more likely because it was accompanied by a harsh satire on literary critics, particularly John Dryden, the play failed when it was first performed and published, and it was only reissued in two facsimile editions in 1974 and 1986. We must congratulate Juan Antonio Prieto-Pablos, María José Mora, Manuel Gómez-Lara and Rafael Portillo for their original and audacious decision to undertake the first critical edition of *The Reformation*. This congratulation must be extended to the publishers for their similarly daring choice of this play to start their collection of “Textos y comentarios”. No doubt they were persuaded by both the interesting qualities of the text and the academic prestige of the editors, whose merit has been demonstrated in the critical editions of Thomas Shadwell’s *The Virtuoso* and *Epsom Wells*, published by the University of Seville in 1997 and 2000 respectively.

This is certainly a fine edition, which includes a very scholarly and extensive introduction; the text of the play with its prologue, list of *Dramatis Personae*, five acts, and epilogue —all this with abundant footnote

annotations with useful linguistic, cultural, and textual information; an appendix with the musical transcription of the songs of the play, and another one with a checklist of extant copies of this comedy; and finally a lengthy compilation of the works cited. Therefore the expected readership may range from teachers and students of Restoration drama to the general public interested in English literature. This edition manages to cater for all: the learned and the lay.

As previously said, the introduction is very comprehensive (pages 15-64). Its first section gives plenty of facts to establish the date and authorship of the play. Taking into account external and internal evidence, the editors conclude that *The Reformation* was first performed and published in 1673. Although no author's name appears in the first edition, the play is attributed to Joseph Arrowsmith, a man who studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he got an M.A. in 1670. The failure of *The Reformation* most likely made him give up playwriting and devote his life to the Church.

As an aside, allow me to say that this religious devotion seems to clash with the manner this comedy was interpreted by some early critics, such as John Downes, who claimed that the immoral nature of the reformation proposed in the play was the reason for its failure (in Prieto-Pablos *et al* eds. 2003:19). However, it must be pointed out that the reformation did not completely succeed in the play, maybe not so much because "it is false to human nature" as Hughes (1996:134) puts it, but because it was very difficult to implement in the capitalistic, patriarchal society of the seventeenth century. Pedro and Antonio could not elude marriage because they needed the parental acceptance of their unions and the consequent financial benefits. In this respect they ironically ended up like the reformed rakes of other Restoration comedies. For his part, Pacheco sought a match based on love, but was tricked into marrying Lelia, who was only interested in his money. Moreover, it has been argued that Arrowsmith wrote *The Reformation* as a response to Dryden's *Marriage A-la-Mode*, which he and other contemporaries saw more as "a contribution to sexual innuendo than to morality" (Hume 1976:292). So Downes's censure seems unjustified.

Moving now back to the introduction, its second section sets the play in the background of contemporary drama. The editors argue that *The Reformation* combines the three models of Restoration comedy: on the one hand it is a "comedy of wit" because it features witty men and women "of quality," and two fops as their counterpoint and object of ridicule; on the other hand the play contains elements of the "comedy of humours," such as the characterisation of jealous Leandro; and finally, the plot of young lovers

who strive to shun the strict control of stern fathers and prospective husbands is similar to that of the “comedy of intrigue”. The features and concerns of the main characters are then briefly analysed, for instance, Pacheco’s foppishness, Leandro’s melancholy and jealousy, and Ismena’s outspokenness and self-confidence. This section ends with some words on Venice as a recurrent setting in seventeenth-century English drama, mostly connoting licentiousness, and also about the parodic reverse image of the *inglese italianato* that Pacheco represents.

The following section focuses on the Tutor as the butt of personal and literary satire. He is presented as a conceited coxcomb who deems himself a successful poet and a man of fashion. His words in Act IV, scene 1, are clearly meant to ridicule Dryden’s opinions on drama: he admires Shakespeare, Fletcher, Jonson, and Davenant, although they did not know the laws of heroic drama nor did they write good English; his favourite genre is tragedy, even though people like the “little things” (comedies) he sometimes writes; the subject should be some warlike action; the characters should all be invincible aristocratic heroes, no matter how anachronistically mixed; and the plot should revolve around a conflict between love and honour, and end with multiple deaths. In the final scene of *The Reformation*, the Tutor does not get married, but is also reformed: he is made to promise he will try to write a play with no borrowings, nor improbabilities, nor bawdy material. Hume (1976:292) considers him “the heart of the play”, and no doubt the editors of this volume do too, because they devote the largest part of their introduction to him and his satirical parallelism with Dryden. Yet I miss some comments about the relationship between this play and *Marriage A-la-Mode*, which most critics point out and the editors themselves briefly mention too (page 16).

The next section gives information about the company that first performed the play (the Duke’s Company) and their playhouse (Dorset Garden Theatre), as well as about stage setting, music, dancing, and the audience, both in this play and in Restoration drama. Then there are some notes on the language and style of the text, which generally followed the standard of the time, although with certain syntactic and lexical constructions which were rare in the period. They include a list of some linguistic features that were common in Restoration comedies but are no longer in use now, information which may be useful to foreign students of English, and to all those readers who may not be familiar with seventeenth-century literature. The introduction ends with data about the text, which first appeared in a quarto volume printed for William Cademan (who, curiously enough, played

the role of one of the ‘reformers’ in the first performance). The present edition leaves grammar and vocabulary unaltered, but regularises or modernises spelling, punctuation, and the presentation of character names, stage directions, and scene headings.

As for the play itself, I do not agree with Shepherd and Womack (1996:144), who describe it as an “unconvincing satire” without really explaining why. I think it is amusing, clever, and interesting enough, not only for casual reading but also for academic research. *The Reformation* bears the sign of the times, featuring most characteristics of the Restoration comedy in the Carolean period, many of which are quite successfully treated. The very idea of a foppish *anglicised Italian* leading a society for the reformation of sexual and social mores in Venice —known at the time as the Adriatic Whore— under the model of libertine Restoration England is a very witty and effective foundation for satirical comedy. Arrowsmith adds to this an element of literary satire which is developed in the prologue, the figure of the Tutor, the last lines of Act V, and the epilogue. The play shows the rivalry between the two London theatre companies, a burlesque of heroic drama, a mockery of Dryden’s arrogant nature and questionable literary style, and a complaint about the critics’ exaggerated power to influence on the plays’ reception. No doubt Arrowsmith foresaw the fate of his play, as prove both the epilogue encouraging the audience to free themselves from “these usurpers’ tyranny” (line 26), and the quotation from Horace’s *Satires*, “Sunt, quibus in Satyra videor nimis acer”. There were actually people who thought he was too harsh in his satire, and made the play fail.

The Reformation is a good text to study issues such as gender, sexuality, and marriage, so recurrent in Restoration drama (cf. Gill 2000). The play presents the usual conflict between the young generation, in pursuit of sex and personal freedom, and the old generation, representative of the power of money and social restrictions, which become the main obstacles for the young to satisfy their desires. Pedro’s 80-year-old father is not “so civil as to die” (I, 1, 34) and let him inherit his fortune. The young lovers must evade the watchful eye of the girls’ father but finally get his blessing (and consequent dowry). The Nurse who helps Camillo watch his “brisk” daughters is cheated and scorned: “Thy being old is enough to make us hate thee,” says Pedro (115); whereas she envies the young ladies for their attractiveness and vital energy. As usual in Restoration comedy, both generations reach a final compromise: marriage conceived as “a witty, cultivated alliance of elegant, like-minded individuals” (Gill 2000:191) who freely choose a union based on mutual affection, respect, and faithfulness.

The play offers interesting material to study seventeenth-century masculinity. Camillo and Lysander show to what extent men's honour depended on their daughters' or wives' behaviour. The old man is obsessed with the confinement of his daughters, and grows furious when he learns he has been gulled because he will become the talk of the town and the subject of ballads. Lysander complains that an unfaithful wife is considered cunning whereas the cuckolded husband is scorned. For his part, Leandro finds his jealousy incompatible with the sexual freedom of the Reformation, prefers to accept the rules of the old, and reveals himself a prospective tyrannical husband, thus receiving no final reward. Yet the male character who draws more attention is probably Pacheco, "the strangest piece of fantasticness ... a mere switching fop" (II, 1, 61-62). His social affectation and overt effeminacy make him laughable: he looks at himself in the mirror, combs his wig, prinks, struts about, sings, ... As all fops, he delusively thinks he masters wit and fashion but is actually laughed at by the really witty characters, so his comicity largely comes from the incongruity between the way he thinks he appears and the way he is perceived (Williams 1995:60). This kind of masculinity is unacceptable and therefore rejected (Gill 2000:203), yet Pacheco is no threat to Pedro and Antonio but an assistant in their courtship of his sisters.

As for the female characters, most prove to be witty, outspoken, and rebellious. Hughes (1996:134) has pointed out "the satire of male tyranny over women" present in this play. The text actually abounds in images of confinement, oppression, and slavery applied to women, and in female voices that openly long for love, liberty, and laughter. For Mariana women are miserable creatures who depend on a severe father or a cruel husband. For Ismena their bodies are confined but "there's no man can rule a woman's mind" (I, iii, 69), so they must muster courage to rebel. One of the alleged aims of *The Reformation* is to free women from male tyranny, and in the epilogue the author tells the ladies his objective is "to gain and give you liberty" (34).

To sum up, this is a fine, scholarly edition of *The Reformation*, which recovers this amusing satire from near oblivion, and hands it over to the academic world for its study and re-assessment, and to the general public for its sheer enjoyment. The editors' introduction and annotations place the play in its social, cultural, and linguistic context. And the text offers us new insights into important issues in Restoration drama such as literary rivalry, social mores, sexuality, gender, national identity, and so on. Surely this time the play will have a better reception than in 1673.

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Author's address:

Universidade de Vigo
Facultade de Filoloxía e Traducción
Campus Universitario As Lagoas-Marcosende
36200 Vigo, Spain
jdorrego@uvigo.es