

THE RAVISHED HEROINE IN RESTORATION TRAGEDY:  
*IBRAHIM THE THIRTEENTH EMPEROR OF THE TURKS* AND  
*THE CONQUEST OF SPAIN*

MARÍA JOSÉ CALERO DEL VALLE  
*University of Huelva*

In this paper I would like to analyse the features of the two ravished heroines of Mary Pix's *Ibrahim the Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks* (1696) and *The Conquest of Spain* (1705). In these plays Pix tackles the topic of the powerless woman, presented as the soft object of male desire, who is violently submitted to the phallic power. In Pix's plays, Morena and Jacinta fit the general pattern of the virtuous, passive and helpless heroine who must unwillingly submit to the sexual desire of the despotic power of the villain, typically represented by a lascivious king. In Restoration tragedy female sexuality is described in terms of passivity, chastity and silenced suffering. Violence and eroticism surround the powerless woman, whose body, in attracting male desire, will be the cause of her downfall. The last two decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century witnessed considerable enthusiasm for the scenes of rape, which entailed a new and erotically effective ingredient in Restoration drama.

In this paper I would like to analyse the features of the character of the ravished heroine in Mary Pix's *Ibrahim the Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks* (1696) and *The Conquest of Spain* (1705). In these plays Pix tackles the topic of the powerless woman who is violently submitted to the phallic power and who, consequently, is represented as the soft object of male desire. This new tendency would be most related to the arrival of the actresses upon the Restoration stage, innovating, at the same time, English drama. Furthermore, it would generate a new climate for sexual display and sexual politics.

The last two decades of the seventeenth century offered a considerable enthusiasm for the scenes of rape, which entailed a new and erotically effective ingredient in Restoration drama. In Pix's plays, Morena and Jacinta fit the general pattern of the virtuous, passive and helpless heroine who must unwillingly submit to the sexual desire of the despotic and imperative power of the villain, typically represented by a lascivious king. In Restoration tragedy female sexuality is described in terms of passivity, chastity and silenced suffering. Thus, violence

and eroticism surround the powerless woman, whose body, the object of male desire, will be the cause of their downfall. That is why the scenes of rape introduced in Restoration drama help to show archetypes of women sexually exhibited in a radical form. These scenes foregrounded the erotic body of the actresses showing visible signs of the female presence: breasts, bare shoulders, loose hair and ravished costumes. As Jean I. Marsden states: "Such coded signs identify the actress as the focus of desire, so that the rape becomes the physical manifestation of the desire perpetrated by the rapist but implicit in the audience's gaze. Thus the audience, like the rapist, "enjoys" the actress, deriving its pleasure from the physical presence of the female body" (1996:186). Therefore, the erotic and sexual display of the actresses stands for the main attraction in Restoration drama and, undeniably, it was not only a way to give a sexual characteristic to the virtuous heroine but also a means of female exploitation. Marsden asserts that the scene of rape is just another way of confronting goodness and evil: "The origin of these rapes [...] is male sexual appetite, a characteristic most visible in Restoration serious drama, where rape is portrayed as a simple matter of evil versus good, and where "bad" sexual desire results in sexual violence" (1996:187). The female body is regarded as the object of the spectacle, which is sexually and violently abused by male desire. Marsden maintains that the rape scenes divide gender into extremes of active masculinity and passive femininity and, accordingly, a series of gender clichés are transcribed in these scenes: active versus passive, dominant versus submissive, subject versus object and finally desiring subject versus desired object. These dichotomies were crucial components of the social construction of gender and the spirit of Restoration attitudes as regards gender.

Before going specifically into the issue of the present analysis, I wish first to make a summary of the plots of Pix's plays. *Ibrahim the Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks* is placed in the exotic Turkey. The sultan of Constantinople, Ibrahim, is a tyrant, a luxurious and lascivious king despised by the Mufti and Mustapha, aga of the Janizaries, since he is more concerned with sexual matters than with political ones. Ibrahim's favourite mistress, Sheker Para, has fallen in love with the son of Mustapha, general Amurat, a virtuous warrior in love with the equally virtuous Morena, the Mufti's daughter. In despair over Amurat's disdain, Sheker Para decides to take revenge on his loving Morena. The greedy visier, Azema, scorned by the Mufti and Mustapha, will help Sheker Para to carry out her vengeance, which will result in the rape of Morena by Sultan Ibrahim, delighted by Morena's beauty and virtue. Once the violation is committed, the Mufti and Mustapha will start a revolt against Ibrahim, while Morena feels so dishonoured that suicide is the only solution. She drinks poison, though when Amurat convinces her he still loves her and wants her to live, she calls for an antidote. However, it is too late and Amurat too commits suicide. Finally, Amurat's friend, Solyman, fights with Ibrahim and both of them are killed in the fatal encounter.

In her later play, *The Conquest of Spain*, Pix also applies the parameters of the raped heroine. Like Ibrahim, the king of Spain, Rhoderique, a tyrant and lascivious villain, is more attentive to libidinous affairs than to political ones. When the

Moors invade Spain, Rhoderique persuades his most loyal subject, general Julianus, to leave his retirement. But Rhoderique's secret plan is to possess the virtuous body of Jacinta, Julianus's daughter who is in love with Theomantius, allegedly dead in battle against the Moors. Clothario and Lodovicus, the king's sycophants, will bring Jacinta to the king's chamber in order for him to rape her. Margaretta, Jacinta's friend and Julianus's ward, is unable to help her. When the ravished Jacinta manages to reach the military camp in search of her father, she finds there her lover Theomantius, who did not die but was kept prisoner of the Moors. Antonio, Margaretta's secret lover, together with the courageous Theomantius and the Moor prisoner Mullymumen decide to take revenge on the king, despite General Julianus's reluctance. Once in the castle a bloody battle takes place. Jacinta is injured by a "friendly and anonymous" sword and dies in her lover's arms, who then commits suicide. King Rhoderique escapes without being punished, but Julianus is wounded and taken prisoner of the Moors. Before Julianus's dying, Mullymumen, general of the Moors, accedes to his final plea not to kill the remaining lovers, Antonio and Margaretta, the only ones who escape a tragic end.

I will then deal with the question of the ravished women and their features in these plays. The first thing that needs to be said about the heroines of these plays is that their chastity and virtue are their most valuable treasures. The heroines' beauty lies in those two conditions, which, although helplessly, they will always try to defend against male menace. However, the lust of the villains sexualizes them and turns them into their desired objects. Besides, the theatrical scenes focused on their bodies make them also victims of their sexual bodies. Thus, paradoxical as it may seem, in Ibrahim the sexual attractiveness of Morena lies in her chastity and purity, as the sultan claims:

*IBRAHIM:*

True, therefore we'll on and fathom  
His Designs, the Maidens Beauty  
Has inflam'd me —who dares oppose  
When I resolve Enjoyment? (Act III)

In *The Conquest of Spain* Jacinta's body also becomes the only obsession of king Rhoderique, whose lust will not be satisfied till he conquers his worthiest battle: the chaste body of Jacinta. For that purpose, his sycophants, Clothario and Lodovicus, will be the help he needs to carry out the crime:

*RHODERIQUE:*

Have you so long been Slaves to my Desires,  
And do you now forget your humble Business?  
When I have nam'd the Object of my Wishes  
Your Diligence shou'd still supply the Means. (Act I)

From all this, it follows that, on the one hand, the characters of Ibrahim and Rhoderique, capable of expressing their sexual desire, are represented as the active and powerful protagonists due to their double status as men and kings. On the other, Morena and Jacinta, their object of desire, perform the role of the

victim on account of their condition as women and subjects.

Let us now look in greater detail into the rape scenes, whose main appeal lies in the combination of both eroticism and suffering, a combination considered in the late seventeenth-century as pathos. According to Marsden:

This violent sense of pathos appears most conspicuously in the scenes of attempted rape, where violence represents an essential part of pathos and where the ravished woman becomes the source of voyeuristic pleasure. The effect of such scenes depends on the objectification of the heroine, on her representation as both object of pity and object of desire. (1996:188)

In Pix's plays the numerous pleas of the virtuous heroine to prevent being raped, together with the wanton desire of the villain, heighten the effect of pathos. The suffering of the defenceless heroine increases the male's sexual desire, resulting in a sadomasochist relation. In *Ibrahim* Morena's pleas are pointless since Ibrahim will not desist in his attempt:

*IBRAHIM:*  
 Slaves, why dally ye thus?  
 By Heaven rage is mixt with love,  
 And I am all on fire!  
 Drag her to yond Apartments! (Act III)

The scenes of rape show a helpless woman, who cannot face the phallic power of her victimiser. The woman is unable to act, her submission contrasts with the rapist's desire. She kneels, cries, weeps and, ultimately, calls for death. However, all of them are, inevitably, devoid of any power to stop rape. In *The Conquest of Spain* the virtuous Jacinta, though aware of her powerlessness, will beg for pity and compassion:

*JACINTA:*  
 'Tis all in vain:  
 Yet I will shake the Palace with my Cries,  
 I may be herald, there is a Power can save me,  
 At whose Command the subtle Lighting flies,  
 The Thunder roars, and trembling Earth gapes wide,  
 Either of these wou'd save me from undoing. (Act II)

Both Morena and Jacinta are unable to escape violation owing to their position of passive and powerless characters, whose lifeless response is just another feature of the virtuous heroine. Moreover, any form of activity will be interpreted as breaking their way of conduct.

After the rape, the ravished female character is represented as an erotic spectacle. Some parts of the female body are highlighted as mainly erotic symbols, such as the loose hair and the disordered clothes. The lost state in which the female character is exhibited proves the violence of the rape and her suffering. In *Ibrahim* a new scene in Act IV shows the tragic and erotic image of a distressed Morena with "her hair down and much disorder'd in her dress". This image of the violated Morena is constantly repeated all through Act IV, both visually and descriptively. In the Mufti's description about Morena's rape

erotic terms intermingle with the violent ones pinpointing the already mentioned erotic female symbols:

*THE MUFTI:*

Her dear hands in the Conflict cut and mangled,  
 Dying her white Arms in Crimson Gore,  
 The savage Ravisher twisting his  
 In the lovely Tresses of her hair,  
 Tearing it by the smarting Root,  
 Fixing her, by that upon the ground: (Act IV)

Also, in *The Conquest of Spain* Jacinta makes reference to her “loosen’d Hair”, her “Bossom bruise’d” and her “Garments rent” when describing the horrible crime to her father Julianus:

*JACINTA:*

Her loosen’d Hair wound round the Villain’s Hand,  
 Calling in vain on Heaven and her Father,  
 Her tender Bossom bruise’d, her Garments rent  
 With struggling to escape the foul Dishonour. (Act III)

Although the rape does not occur on the stage, the echoed visions of the violated woman establish a “coded tableau”, which presents sexual femininity as a signifier of the rape. Finally, the ravished heroine is displayed on the stage and in front of the audience as an erotic object.

As the result of the rape, the dishonour suffered by the virtuous heroines turns them into monsters. The monstrous violated woman represents the woman who has been devoid of any purpose in the patriarchal society. Marsden describes the violated woman: “Sexually experienced but virtuous, she is not virgin, wife, or whore and thus serves no legitimate function within a patriarchal society” (1996:192). In Pix’s plays Morena and Jacinta repeatedly describe themselves as abominable and contagious to human sight and even to themselves. The rape is not presented as an individual wrong, but as a conflict that affects the whole community; for instance, Morena describes herself as a “hated Image of my wrong” or “a sad Wretch whose loss is irreparable” and expresses the need of being driven to an isolated and dark place in order to hide her disgrace. In spite of the fact that she claims to have a virtuous soul, Morena’s ravished body is compared to a “polluted Cage” (Act V). As for Jacinta, she also considers herself too vile a sight, someone who must avoid human contact:

*JACINTA:*

Let me go  
 From whence I never may again return.  
 Where shall I find a Place to shroud my Shame?  
 To Rocks, to barren Desarts let me fly,  
 To dusky Caverns, far from human Sight (Act III)

The desolate, dark and devastated region she chooses for herself stands for her monstrous condition, which does not allow her a place in society. Indeed, Morena and Jacinta’s crime is a contagion that can only be cured with death. Their

uncleanliness makes them outrageous for patriarchal society, which, ultimately, considers them the ones to blame.

We are then drawn to the issue that suicide is the only way out for the ravished woman in a patriarchal society. Woman's passivity is shown by their capability of self-sacrifice, self-criticism and self-punishment. According to Jacqueline Pearson: "Some internalise the inflexible rules of patriarchy to the extent of punishing themselves for sins for which they are not to blame: paradoxically they demonstrate their real innocence by accepting and punishing their guilt" (45). All in all, order has to be restored and the only possible way is that of erasing the monstrous, the female body, which is represented as the source of disgrace and despised when proved unworthy. Nor is revenge a viable way of replacing good since it entails a new transgression. In Pix's plays *Morena*, incapable of taking revenge, asks for "an Opiate Draught to lull my sorrows, or some desperate compound that may turn my brain" (Act III) and which she describes as a "precious Juice". She will prove her innocence by drinking poison and that will be her last political act and the last exhibition of her powerlessness. Jacinta's display of her blood-stained bosom in front of her father conveys the ultimate representation of eroticism and violence in the female body:

*JULLANUS:*

A most immense, inevitable loss,  
But veil that Wound from my tormented Eyes;  
Believe me Child, these Drops more hardly flow  
Then all those Streams of Blood I lost in Battle.

*JACINTA:*

Alas, I cannot bear the killing sight,  
Oh, Weep no more. (Act V)

The "wound", the "streams of blood" and "the killing sight" allow two readings: physical violence as well as sexual intercourse. Once again, the female body, through self-punishment and self-sacrifice, stands for the object of desire and brutality. The psychological and physical wound of Jacinta, which she describes as "The welcome Present of an unknown Arm, who did not mean the kind Relief to me" (Act IV), will drive her to death, and finally she will be able to demonstrate her real innocence. It appears that the options for women under patriarchy are so limited that both *Morena* and *Jacinta* will just have to accept its rules and, consequently, die in order to prove their true moral standards.

Let us conclude then by saying that the arrival of the actresses in the Restoration stage favoured many theatrical aspects. Thanks to the actresses, many male and female Restoration playwrights exploited the female presence in the most morbid facets. The new combination of the two effective ingredients, eroticism and violence on the female body, emerged with the intention of motivating a different response in the (male) audience. However, although I will not concern myself here with other aspects of Pix's plays, it is worth mentioning that *Morena* and *Jacinta*'s bodies are not only eroticized but they are also endowed with political signification. *Morena* and *Jacinta* – Turkey and Spain – become politically sexed and sexually politicized by the sexual and political desire of male conquest.

Taking everything into account, it can be said that Restoration theatre helped to construct an idea of femininity based upon ideas such as powerlessness, passivity, self-sacrifice and self-punishment, which consigned women to a vulnerable status constantly threatened by men's desires.

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