

María José Mora, ed. 2019.
Restoration Comedy, 1671–1682.
New York: Teneo Press

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This is the second volume in a series of four, begun in 2014, which inaugurated *Restoration Comedy, 1660–1670*, also published by Teneo Press. This consolidated team of researchers from the universities of Seville, Cádiz, Vigo, and Córdoba, are in the middle of a paramount enterprise: the cataloguing of all the extant comedies in the Restoration period. This comprehensive approach allows them, as the Foreword announces, to trace “the development of dramatic models and theatre practice” (2019, 3), as well as to provide a thorough description of the texts within the selected range at different levels and an analysis of their most relevant findings. There is a decisive attempt at experimenting with the productive scope of Digital Humanities, as the methods of data collection as well as computation, processing and analysis allow for the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, which contribute to innovative and challenging readings of the corpus of Restoration comedies as they had never been studied before.¹ In this second volume, the contributors have chosen the years 1671–1682, in an effort to include the period of coexistence of the two patent companies, the King’s and the Duke’s, till their merging into the United Company, and the concurrence of political scandals like the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis.

The volume presents a tripartite structure, comprising a thorough theoretical introduction (pages 4–100), a substantial section including the Comedy Files, with all the plays that integrate the corpus of this period (pages 101–574), and a section of Appendices (pages 575–695) which correspond to the original subsections of the introduction and offer valuable information about specific thematic searches. As the contributors acknowledge, their work stems from the comedy files

¹ For an enlightening description of the field of Digital Humanities, see Burdick et al. (2012, 7ff.).

themselves. The first section “Introduction” comprehends relevant categories or subsections. They start by stating the selection criteria for their corpus, most importantly pointing out questions of genre—for example, why in some cases they have chosen tragicomedies and not comedies alone, their choice of premiere for those plays meant to be performed, or the date of publication for closet dramas or for which there is insufficient evidence. That produces a substantial corpus of ninety-seven plays for the period covered in the volume, though some specific subsections pay attention to other prefaces and prologues of lost plays which have been left outside the corpus. This neat explanation devolves an image of the very efficient preliminary work done on the corpus, certainly one of the greatest achievements of the contributors. The rest of the sections reveal important data which analyze the resulting information of computer searches and database work.

Thus, in “Title Pages,” María Jesús Pérez-Jáuregui includes staging details such as the number of plays performed by any of the two patent companies, or information about the growing popularity of mottos, but the diminishing reliance on ornaments or vignettes, in comparison to the previous decade. Intricate and fascinating details about play performance are facilitated by Paula de Pando in the subsection “Performances,” where she draws interesting conclusions like the short-lived presence onstage of most Restoration comedies, or the company responsible for the most successful ones. Other relevant details appear in “Publication,” by Nora Rodríguez-Loro, such as the average number of plays printed yearly, suggesting that more appeared in the early 1670s and fewer did from 1679 onwards. In “Prefatory matter,” María José Mora and Ángeles Tomé Rosales reveal that almost all of the plays include either a prefatory address or a dedication to the reader. The kind and nature of dedicatees suggest that patronage was still prevalent in this period, though some changes were enforced, as unusual dedications prove. The contributors point out that the dedicatory epistles reflect partisan strife, in a clear anticipation of the political events to come. Furthermore, they also claim that in prefaces authors often discuss dramatic theory or engage in the poets’ wars. They discover that prologues and epilogues become a rule in this new decade, appearing in the 97% of the plays produced. They also observe that the number of women delivering the prologues increases to 25% from almost zero in the previous period.

In “Dramatic Structure,” Manuel J. Gómez-Lara concludes that as the location of scenes is concerned, London continues being the most popular setting for the plays, though other distant cities are also included. He also argues that there is not much change with respect to the treatment of the three dramatic unities. In “Genre,” Jorge Figueroa Dorrego carries out the difficult task of generic classification. He makes an effort to assign each play to a specific generic type, and in so doing, he distinguishes among ten categories, the most popular of which are the comedy of intrigue, sex comedy, satirical comedy and farce, a distinction made according to the dominant plot and characters in the play.² As Figueroa Dorrego admits, though, the attribution of some plays to a single generic category is a controversial point. Juan A. Prieto-Pablos systematizes in “Characters” the heading as well as the description types, which he reduces to three, out of which type 2, including one or two further details like age, provenance or family relations to the customary name and title, stands out as the prevailing description in half of the plays. Type 3, featuring details of personality and behavior, was also very popular, since it is found in some 32 comedies. Prieto-Pablos establishes a typology comprising six basic types, resembling very closely the one devised for the first volume in the series: gallants, women of quality, blocking characters, helpers, comic butts, and cheats, with further distinctions for each type. This is a very useful classification in the whole, though it also make us wonder about the criteria used to define them, as some of them seem to be described according to personality, like women of quality, and others according to their dramatic (or narrative) function, like blocking characters and helpers. The contributor comments on some interesting findings, such as the fact that “constant gallants” appear more assiduously in this decade or that blocking characters of the “plotting villain” kind increase in this period, as the logical corollary of the plots and political crisis which were taking place. As might have been expected, many of these categories are heterogeneous, while other types, like “cheats,” acquire a category of their own in their classification for the first time. In the next subsection, “Actors,” Prieto-Pablos concludes that on average plays

² These are the two categories selected by Brian Corman in his book on genre in Restoration comedies, as being “the most useful and direct means to examine issues of genre and generic change” (1993, xi). It must be admitted, though, that Corman accounts for some eighty-one plays for the whole period of study, while the corpus in Restoration Comedy, 1671–1682 already surpasses that number.

contain 13 or 14 individual characters, as did the plays produced in the previous decade. A change is found, however, when approaching the sex of characters and performers. Thus, Aphra Behn favors female characters significantly in her plays, but even so, the presence of women is below the company's average. Moreover, data related to the sex of the character, Prieto-Pablos contends, should not be interpreted as a sign of growing gender awareness, since with few exceptions like Behn's works women do not play agentive roles. Progressively, we discover, actors and actresses' names appear in the characters' list, though no explanation for this change is given. The recurrence of male and female performers in the cast of plays produced by one particular company is stable, and the access of young actors and actresses ends in an exponential growth of the roster. Most of the time, actors and actresses stick to the same character types.

As for "Stage Directions," Manuel J. Gómez Lara and Antonio Rosso claim that they follow the essential dynamics of the previous decade but increase mainly because more plays are intended for the stage. They distinguish five types: references to the acting space, to acting, special effects, props, and non-performative directions, as well as a detailed number of subcategories for each of them. In "Music," Rafael Vélez Núñez studies the presence of music in the chosen decade, which, he claims, continues being an important element in the comedies. Following the average occurrence of musical turns in this second decade, a high percentage (91.8%) of extant plays contain songs; 69.4% also include dances. As in the former period, dances in particular are concentrated productively in the finale. Last, but not least, in "Sources," María José Mora identifies sources for more than half of the extant comedies in the period, a percentage higher than in the former decade. She explains how sources for comedies are primarily English, especially from Jacobean and Carolean drama, but French sources are also numerous, both from plays and romances or novels, Molière being a favorite by far. Mora argues that this use of foreign sources includes in some cases a second plot more congenial to the English taste. Spanish sources come third in the ranking, with at least nine comedies. Calderón remains the most popular dramatist, while some other Spanish influences come through French versions,

as in the case of some of Cervantes's stories, María de Zayas' and Castillo Solórzano's.³

The most substantial part of the catalogue corresponds to the Comedy Files, which systematize the study of the corpus in a highly efficient way, including the following entries for most of the plays: Title, Author, Publication, Modern editions, Performance details, Preface, Dedication, Prologue, Epilogue, Characters (with the description provided in the printed versions of the plays), Location and Time (including scene divisions and scene locations), Plot summary, Genre, Stage directions, Songs and Dances, Sources and Comments. The plays are alphabetically ordered by author in all cases. The volume concludes with a section of appendices, arranged following the categories specified in the "Introduction": Appendices 1, 2 and 3 on information drawn from title pages, Appendix 4 on performances, Appendix 5 on publication, Appendix 6 on prefatory matter, Appendix 7 on dramatic structure, Appendix 8 on genres, Appendix 9 on characters (occurrences following each character type), Appendix 10 on actors (according to the roles they play, male and female occurrences, and performers for each company), Appendix 11 on stage directions, Appendix 12 on music (specifying musical pieces), and Appendix 13 on sources. A final section of References on aspects related to Restoration playwriting, dramatic theory, performance and individual authors is included.

No doubt, this new volume produced by the members of the Restoration Comedy projects is a valuable contribution to the drama of the period, providing important tools for future researchers in the field, as well as shedding light on late seventeenth-century writing as a whole and on the society and culture of the Restoration, opening the way, for example, for cross-generic and inter-generic analyses, and suggesting that the crossing of data from related categories (and related genres) might yield enlightening results in the long run.

References

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³ This much could be also affirmed about the prose fiction of the period (Braga Riera 2010, 108).

Reviews

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How to cite this review:

Villegas López, Sonia. Review of María José Mora, ed., *Restoration Comedy, 1671–1682* (New York: Teneo Press, 2019). *SEDERI* 30 (2020): 157–62.

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