

Book Reviews

Celia R. Daileader and Gary Taylor (eds). *The Tamer Tamed, or The Woman's Prize*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006. Pp 188.

After a long period of neglect, John Fletcher's exuberant comedy *The Tamer Tamed* seems to have come into its own. A successful revival by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2003, when it was played in repertory with Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, has spurred further performances in Europe and the US. The play's scholarly stock has also been on the rise; widely ignored before the mid-1980s, *The Tamer Tamed* has since become increasingly well-known among specialists. Discussion of the play is to be found not only in studies of the work of Fletcher and his collaborators, such as Gordon McMullan's *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts Press, 1994) and Sandra Clark's *The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher: Sexual Themes and Dramatic Representation* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), but also in broader accounts of early modern dramatic culture, including Celia R. Daileader's *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire and the Limits of the Visible* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998) and Pamela Allen Brown's *Better a Shrew Than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003). Perhaps as a result of this interest, the play has gradually become more accessible to scholars and students. An appearance in the student-orientated *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2002) has now been followed by its publication in a single-volume critical text aimed at students and general readers: Daileader and Gary Taylor's bold and thought-provoking edition, published in the Revels Student Editions series.

One of the most valuable aspects of this edition is the critical work of its introduction and commentary notes, both of which are necessarily slim-line in the Norton text. Much previous discussion of *The Tamer Tamed* has

focused on the play's gender politics, its perceived feminism, and its relationship with Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. The latter two issues are often intertwined: those who admire *The Tamer Tamed* are often more likely to vouch for its sexual radicalism, while those who dislike it or think it inferior to Shakespeare's play are likely to argue that it is in fact the more retrogressive play. For instance, in a recent performance review Michael Dobson dismisses *The Tamer Tamed* as a 'much triter piece of work' than *The Taming of the Shrew*, arguing that 'Fletcher's whimsical "wouldn't it be funny if women successfully defied their husbands" plot appeared in performance to take the plight of women far less seriously than does Shakespeare's display of how husbands *can* subdue their wives; the [RSC] press department's attempts to sell Fletcher's play as feminist *avant la lettre* looked either dim or disingenuous as a result'.¹

Neither dim nor disingenuous, Daileader and Taylor nail their colours to the mast with an epigraph from Hélène Cixous ('There have been poets who let something different from tradition get through at any price ... men able to think the woman who would resist destruction and constitute herself as a superb, equal, "impossible" subject') and with their opening statement, 'Sometimes only a man can afford to be a feminist' (1). They put the play's femiocentric concerns in context, outlining Fletcher's patronage relationship with Elizabeth Stanley, Countess of Huntington — a woman praised by her husband for what he called her 'judicious conceit and masculine understanding' (2) — and arguing that a play written by a male author such as Fletcher might actually be a more 'encouraging feminist fable' (3) than one written by a female author, such as Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*.

Daileader and Taylor are particularly good on the play's carnivalesque qualities and its re-appropriation of female indulgence and consumption; '[t]hough the women's cause is serious and their rhetoric martial, essentially they protest by *having fun*' (20; Daileader and Taylor's emphasis). Insisting that the play's scenes of female consumption should not be dismissed as 'misogynistic parody', the editors argue that the women's 'anti-hunger strike' (21) should be read as a calculated response to Katherine's treatment in *The Taming of the Shrew*: 'In memory of the ill-dressed, ill-fed Katherine, the rebels demand money for fine clothes, gorge on pudding and pork, and drink, and drink, and drink, and drink' (20).

An especially pleasing aspect of this edition is its disinclination either to see *The Tamer Tamed* solely through the lens of *The Taming of the Shrew* or to assume that it is necessarily inferior to Shakespeare's play. As Daileader

and Taylor suggest, '[w]e might argue that *Antony and Cleopatra* is a better play than any of Fletcher's tragedies, without assuming that everything Shakespeare wrote is better than anything Fletcher did' (33). Nonetheless, their statement that critics have 'short-changed Fletcher's originality in calling the play a "sequel" to *The Taming of the Shrew*' (15) betrays a somewhat one-dimensional view of the sequel which recent work in film studies has done much to undermine and belies their insightful treatment of the relationships between the two plays elsewhere in the introduction. The adoption of *The Tamer Tamed* as a title for the play over its early modern alternative, *The Woman's Prize*, is also perhaps unfortunate, as it tends to re-inscribe a dependency that the editors otherwise reject.

In addition to the intrinsic interest of its narrative, *The Tamer Tamed* raises intriguing textual and theatrical issues. The play survives in three seventeenth-century texts: in addition to its presence in the 1647 and 1679 'Beaumont and Fletcher' folios, it also exists in what is apparently a scribal manuscript made for a private patron or paying customer, now held by the Folger Shakespeare Library. The manuscript seems to be the earliest text; Meg Powers Livingston has gone so far as to argue that it 'probably represents the play as it was performed in 1611'.² Previous editors have consulted the manuscript, but with the exception of Graham Clevearn Adams in the edition completed for his doctoral dissertation in 1974 they have used the first folio as their copy text. Daileader and Taylor's is the first published edition to be based primarily on the manuscript.

The edition includes no collations (in keeping with the series policy for Revels Student Editions), but a comparison reveals that the folio texts have also been consulted and that in some cases their version of a particular passage has been preferred. For instance, on her pretended sick-bed in act five, scene one, Livia subjects her elderly suitor Moroso to a series of insults under cover of begging forgiveness for her previous treatment of him. In the manuscript, she declares 'methought then he was a beastly fellow / & gaue it out his cassock was a barge cloth', but in the folio she gains an extra line: 'me thought then he was a beastly fellow. / (Oh God my side) a very beastly fellow: / And gave it out, his cassock was a Barge-cloth'. The added line adds to the comedy of the sequence, giving the actor playing Livia the opportunity to feign increased pain and to repeat the insult; it also, presumably, provides the actor playing Moroso with more to react against. It is not unlikely that the line was originally included in the text on which the manuscript is based, the scribe accidentally missing it out, and it is therefore understandable that Daileader

and Taylor chose to include it. They do not incorporate all of the folio's additional material; longer passages, most of which add extended comic business to the sub-plot, are instead printed in the appendix.

Daileader and Taylor also present with admirable clarity the complex issues relating to the censorship of the play in the 1630s. The earliest known reference to *The Tamer Tamed* is a note in the office book of Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, recording that on 18 October 1633 he had sent a messenger with a warrant to 'to suppress *The Tamer Tamed*, to the Kings players, for that afternoon ... upon complaints of foul and offensive matters contained therein' (4). The playbook seems only to have been returned after Herbert had scrutinized and annotated it thoroughly, and he ordered Edward Knight, the King's Men's book-keeper, to 'purge' the players' parts as he had done the book. As Daileader and Taylor point out, however, the obscenity of *The Tamer Tamed* is not easily removed; it is embedded not only into the play's narrative but also into the aesthetic effects of Fletcher's fluid and often genuinely funny dramatic dialogue.

Taking the opposite approach to the Master of the Revels, the editors attempt to undo some of the effects of censorship. Even the manuscript, which may have been copied from the prompt-book before Herbert's intervention, seems to have been purged somewhat: 'Heaven', for example, regularly replaces 'God', which in some cases appears in the later printed text. Taylor and Daileader generally follow the folio texts in these cases, adopting the folio opening line, 'God give 'em joy', rather than the manuscript's rather limp 'Heauen giue 'em ioy'. They also conjecturally reconstruct some additional oaths and other obscenities missing from all of the extant texts, placing them in square brackets to alert the reader to their provenance. For instance, where the folio's Sophocles says 'Beleeue me' and the manuscript's Sophocles says 'I swear', he says here "'Od's me' (4.4.64). Where the manuscript and folio texts have a short line (the folios including a dash to indicate that something has been omitted), Daileader and Taylor's Petruccio exclaims "'Od's precious!' (1.3.288): an oath also found in Fletcher's *Humorous Lieutenant* and *Women Pleas'd*. In act 2, scene 3, Petruccio despairingly threatens to feed his disobedient wife 'hard eggs, till they brace her like a drum' (2.3.30). In the manuscript, the next line reads, 'she shall be pamperd with,' while the folio texts read 'She shall be pamperd with —'. An obscene threat has clearly been expunged; Daileader and Taylor therefore substitute 'a shit-hole stopper' (2.3.31). As a result of such reconstructions, they note, theirs is 'more "offensive" than any previous printed text of the play' (5).

More contentious than the treatment of censorship is Daileader and Taylor's approach to another aspect of theatre history: the play's original performance venue. It is generally agreed that the play was written around 1610–1, and previous commentators have often assumed that because *The Tamer Tamed* was performed by the King's Men in the 1630s it must originally have been intended for performance alongside *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Blackfriars and Globe. Daileader and Taylor argue, however, that it was first performed at the Whitefriars theatre by the Children of the Queen's Revels and that its earliest companion piece was not *The Taming of the Shrew* but Jonson's *Epicoene*. (Supporting evidence is not presented here, but is forthcoming in Taylor's article 'The Date and Original Venue of Fletcher's *Tamer Tamed*'.) A strong relationship undoubtedly exists between *The Tamer Tamed* and *Epicoene*; the performance of *The Tamer Tamed* at Whitefriars would put it in a repertory which also included Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* and Nathan Field's *A Woman is a Weathercock* and *Amends for Ladies*. However, the Queen's Revels attribution is not as unproblematic as Daileader and Taylor suggest in their bland statement that '*The Tamer Tamed* was probably first performed between December 1609 and April 1610 in the Whitefriars Theatre by the Children of the Queen's Revels' (25). To my knowledge, the available evidence (relating to issues such as the number and scope of the play's female roles, the requirements of the performance space in the extant texts, known revivals, and publication patterns) is somewhat contradictory.

Minor caveats aside, this dynamic and provocative edition remains an extremely useful addition to the armouries of scholars and students alike.

LUCY MUNRO

Notes

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- 1 'Shakespeare Productions in England, 2003', *Shakespeare Survey* 57 (2004), 261.
 - 2 'Herbert's Censorship of Female Power in Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 13 (2001), 215.