The Beaux' Stratagem by George Farquhar (review)

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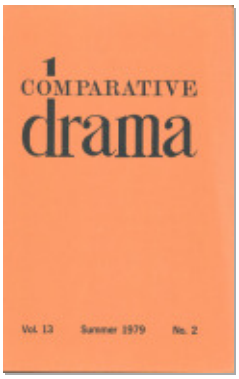

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tator. The greatest mission this kind of stage-centered study can accomplish is to help a spectator *see,* for to be a good audience is to play a major role in keeping Shakespeare alive.

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George Farquhar. *The Beaux' Stratagem.* Ed. Charles N. Fifer. Regents Restoration Drama Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977. Pp. xxxvi + 145. Cloth: $9.95. Paper: $2.75.

As neighboring hospitals, one reads, rush to spend their funds on alluring but overbought equipment—ultra-sound scanners and the like—so publishers compete in healing cultural disorders by turning out editions of the same overprinted plays. No doubt *The Beaux' Stratagem* is an excellent comedy, enjoyed by students who cringe at Etherege and puzzle over Congreve, and enjoyed too by instructors who can teach a "Restoration comedy" that has a clear but intricate formal structure, that nicely simplifies the passage from amoral to moral fashions in comedy, and that does not make too many demands on students' sensitivity to shades of language. No doubt either that the play was the most popular five-act comedy of its century, when it was put on so regularly that Professor Fifer can guess (p. xvii) that it was played somewhere in Britain even in the single season, 1795-96, for which *The London Stage* lists no performance of it. (He is right, too: it appeared at the Orchard St. Theatre, Bath, on 28 May and 20 July, 1796.) Understandably, then, *The Beaux' Stratagem* has found its way into all the standard anthologies and several paperback publishers' lists. No student need pay $2.75, the cost of this Regents edition in paper, to have a serviceable text. Scholars will soon, I hope, be able to turn to Shirley Kenny's definitive Oxford edition of Farquhar's plays, so that Fifer's edition has limited use for them. Despite 1977's being the Farquhar tercentenary, only a remarkable apparatus, with learned notes, new textual discoveries, and/or a brilliant introduction could, I think, justify this edition. Instead, the Regents series offers an able, pedestrian piece of work.

Because Farquhar died in mid-May 1707, a month and a half after the first edition of *The Beaux' Stratagem,* no elaborate textual problems exist. About a quarter of the pages of this edition have at least one textual note; but almost all are trivial (e.g., the correction of obvious errors in .Q1 or elaborated stage directions), though some excisions reflect later eighteenth-century theatre practice. Almost throughout, the text is easily established, and Fifer's version of it is good, with four errors that I caught: in IV.i.99 *read* than *for* then, in IV.i.264 *read* responsible *for* responsable, in IV.ii.86 *read* it *for* is, and in V.i.11 *read* exciseman *for* exiseman. His own emendations are properly cautious, even overcautious in III.ii., when he does not manage to get Scrub offstage before the supposedly surreptitious love scene between Bellair

and Mrs. Sullen. My main doubts have to do with the modernization that the Regents format compels. Most venially, it has occasioned a text inconsistent in accidentals. We get "Igad" and "egad" (I.383, III.iii.236); "'Oons" and "Oons" (II.ii.195, III.iii.373); "'um" (V.ii.90) instead of "'em" (passim); "Oh" and "O" (within two lines of each other, IV.i.150, 152); "hark'ee," "heark'ee," and "hark ye" (II.ii.216, III.ii.4, II.ii.92). The reader of a normalized text ought to be able to feel sure that deviations from the norm mean something; these don't.

More important are changes in punctuation. Modernization here damages Farquhar's lines by turning them into read rather than heard dialogue, exactly what I, at least, do not want to offer students. Farquhar knew how to give the illusion of the speaking voice, with its pauses and haste, especially through the use of the dash, sometimes alone, sometimes with a comma, a semicolon, a period. Little of that remains here. Inevitably, too, some of Fifer's changes have involved small substantive decisions, made silently. For example the country servant Scrub's amazement that city gentry keep duels silent ("No! if our Masters in the Country here receive a Challenge, the first thing they do is to tell their Wives," Q1, p. 29) gets lost in Fifer's "No, if our masters . . ." (III.iii.16). Archer's calling after Mrs. Sullen to return her glove ("Madam—Your Ladyship's Glove," Q1, p. 32) becomes formal presentation in Fifer: "Madam, your ladyship's glove" (III.iii.118). Mrs. Sullen's mixed emotions when Archer confronts her in her chamber ("my most mortal hatred follows if you disobey what I command you now—leave me this Minute," Q1, p. 59) acquire a more definite, peremptory ring when Fifer ends her speech, "what I command you. Now! Leave me this minute" (V.ii.62-64). In each of these three cases I disagree with Fifer's decision—there are others like them, still others where I do agree—but the point is not his rightness. It is that such substantive changes are hidden in a text that lays implicit claim, through textual apparatus, to making options public.

Like his text, Fifer's introduction and notes are sensible, conservative, and rarely wrong-headed. The introduction is more liberal in borrowing from the standard critics than in acknowledging that it does so. It does not speak to various critical and historical points. It also raises no new questions and resolves few old ones; indeed, it ignores those raised by E. Nelson James's book on Farquhar (1972) and Jean Hamard's 130-page introduction to his French translation of this play (1965). Nonetheless it does reasonably capably what it sets out to do. Fifer is best, in fact, on those parts of the play which have most confused previous critics, the relationship between Mrs. Sullen and Archer. His commentary here (pp. xxxiii-vi) is a model of good judgment and accuracy, even without being very original. As to the notes, they too do not suggest any deep research but are largely clear and helpful. Now and again they suffer from irrelevancy, as the introduction does not. Why discuss dinner stops at Lichfield of the London-Warrington coach in 1797 (p. 7) when the text refers to an overnight stop nearly a century earlier? or give the soprano Tofts' date of death, 1756 (p. 48), but not those of her professional career, ca. 1703-09? or tell

when the louis d'or was issued without specifying its relative value as a bribe, which is the purpose it serves in the play (p. 84)? or mention that the Vatican still employs Swiss guards (p. 117)? or explain that the builder of the Eddystone lighthouse died when it collapsed (p. 118)? or note passim when the *OED* cites a word usage from this play (except that "naught," p. 28, is inconsistently not so noted)? These odd facts have no use for a reader, and they usurp space better spent on facts that would help clarify the text, such as I will suggest.

First, though, some minor errors or imprecision should be corrected. Boniface (p. 9) pours ale, not wine. "Out of doors" (p. 17) does not mean "out of fashion" but "useless" (v. *OED*, "door" 5). The money needed for parliamentary elections (p. 19) probably was for treats, not bribes (see J. H. Plumb, *Sir Robert Walpole,* I [1956], 58-60). The two meanings offered at different times for "spleen" (pp. 29, 60) suggest that Fifer has not thought through the medical motif of the play, to which "spleen" (melancholy) is central. "Physic" should be glossed as "purgative," not "medicine" (p. 43): confession cures the ill by unburdening them. Contrary to the implication of the note on p. 47, parodies of Milton hardly existed in 1706-07, and as indicated by Lady Winchilsea's "Fanscomb Barn," written "in imitation of Milton" shortly before this, any kind of blank verse might be called Miltonian. Finally, I am puzzled by a note on p. 63, that a passage sniping at "his grace" in a song Archer sings is "reputed" to allude to the Duke of Ormond's reneging on a promise to Farquhar. "Reputed" by whom and on what evidence? Farquhar's play *The Recruiting Officer* and poem *Barcelona,* the two works written most shortly before *The Beaux' Stratagem,* both praise Ormond highly.

The notes sin more by omission than by irrelevancy or error. Can there really be an audience that does not understand words like "fricasseed," "mountebank," "proselyte," and "bays" (glossed on pp. 18, 44, 119, and 132 respectively), but that at the same time does understand such unglossed expressions as "obstructions" (=constipation, p. 10), "purchased" (=captured, p. 20), "cargo" (=thieves' slang for a large purse of money, p. 34), 'underpocket" (=a cloth purse worn under clothing, p. 35), "tops to his shoes" (=elongated tongues, p. 45), "uncleanness" (=adultery, p. 72), "closet" (=a small private room, p. 84), "can" (=drinking mug, p. 98), "half seas over" (=drunk, p. 99), "dark lanthorn" (=shuttered lantern, p. 111), and "lint" (=linen fluff for dressing wounds, p. 117)? I should think that an editor would be far readier to explain archaisms like "purchased" or uncommon usages like "lint" than words that anyone can find in any dictionary. Similarly, I miss needed glosses of the pun on "simpling" and "culls" (simple/cull[y], Pro. 19-20), of the typical eighteenth-century classification of rabbit as fowl (p. 18), of the sexual pun on "favor" (p. 45), of "clear starched" (p 47), of the political status of Brussels (pp. 52-53), of the law that impressment required a court of "three justices" (p. 57), of the late seventeenth-century practice of showing a great deal of fashionable ladies' breasts in portraits (p. 87), and of the valuation of the guinea at twenty-one shillings at the time of the play even though it

was legally worth only twenty (because the price of gold was rising in relation to the silver of the pound sterling, p. 88). There is no explanation of the names of the highwaymen Bagshot and Hounslow or of Gibbet's title of "Captain." These are all matters that professional, as well as student readers of a Regents edition might miss.

To have been thorough, as I suggested earlier, would have helped justify yet another *Beaux' Stratagem;* to have had new insights would have helped; Fifer's solid edition leaves thoroughness and critical insights to some later editor.

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Howard Felperin. *Shakespearean Representation: Mimesis and Modernity in Elizabethan Tragedy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. Pp. x + 199. $11.50.

Howard Felperin's study of *Shakespearean Representation* is a wide-ranging and ambitious work which essentially carries forward two lines of argument at once. First of all, it reexamines Shakespeare's use of Tudor dramatic patterns in his major tragedies, defending them against an "archaeological" criticism which would view them merely as the products of native dramatic "influence." Secondly, it attempts to outline a dynamic view of literary history which might derive literary history "from within literature itself rather than impose upon it an historical model drawn from . . . apparently non-literary contexts" (p. 27). Felperin carries on his double argument provocatively, if not always persuasively, and readers will surely find themselves challenged by his book to reexamine their assumptions about both subjects. As a discussion of Elizabethan tragedy, however, the book is somewhat unsatisfying, since Felperin's method of analysis and his writing style fail to communicate much of the dramatic power of the plays.

Felperin's view of literary history in general and Shakespearean tragedy in particular rests on two basic premises. The first, implicit throughout the book but not too well developed, is that man is essentially a symbol-creating, role-playing animal struggling to find authenticity amid the symbols and roles given him by his society or culture: "We have no way of conceiving of, much less comprehending, life except through the mediation of sign systems, however rudimentary, un-self-conscious, or popular" (p. 39). The second premise is that "art does not so much imitate life, as *mediate* life. . . . What art does manifestly imitate is previous art or the artistic constituent of human life" (p. 39). The book's title, therefore, punningly alludes to Felperin's major thesis, that writers continually rework the patterns supplied by previous literature in order to create the illusion that they employ no art at all: "For mimesis, the illusion of reality traditionally ascribed to literature . . . arises not from the direct imitation of 'nature,' or 'life,' or 'experience,'