Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama

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If we judge by the quantity of recent studies of English drama from the mid-seventeenth to the early eighteenth century, the field is flourishing. We have a new comprehensive account of the long-neglected drama written during the English Civil Wars, Commonwealth, and Protectorate (Randall, Winter Fruit); an extensive critical reading of the entire corpus of the drama produced in the last four decades of the seventeenth century (Hughes, English Drama); a new book on Restoration comedy (Canfield, Tricksters and Estates); two studies of the politics of Restoration drama, the first focusing on the oeuvre of Thomas Otway (Munns, Restoration Politics and Drama), the second discussing all the plays of the Exclusion Crisis (Owen, Restoration Theatre and Crisis); an investigation of dramatic plagiarism in relation to changing conceptions of gender and authorship (Rosenthal, Playwrights and Plagiarists); and a collection of essays on women and gender in Restoration drama (Quinsey (ed.), Broken Boundaries). Unfortunately quantity is no proof of quality. These new books do indeed contain some very good work. The overall standard is, however, distinctly, and disturbingly, uneven.

The drama of the period 1642-60 has attracted little scholarly attention since the pioneering studies by Leslie Hotson (The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage, 1928) and by Alfred Harbage (Cavalier Drama, 1936). Both Lois Potter (Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660, 1989) and Nigel Smith (Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660, 1994), discuss dramatic literature at some length, but Dale B. J. Randall's Winter Fruit is the first full-scale treatment of the subject in more than half a century. Randall's is a survey of relatively unfamiliar territory, and its chief virtue is that it offers a reliable guide to little-known and little-studied texts, some surviving in printed form, others only in scribal copies. His exhaustive account of the latter, of manuscript drama by James Compton, third Earl of Northampton, by Mildmay Fane, Earl of Westmorland, by Cosmo Manuche, and by many anonymous writers and translators of plays, is particularly welcome. As a reference work, Winter Fruit is unlikely to be surpassed for years to come: its coverage is extensive, its scholarship conscientious and trustworthy. Unfortunately Randall is unable to provide a viable conceptual framework within which to discuss the wealth of material he had so meticulously amassed and researched. This is evident in the rather arbitrary organization of the book as a whole and of its constituent chapters. The apparently chronological ordering implicit in the opening chapters on late Caroline drama and on the closure of the theatres gives way to generic and thematic concerns: chapters on dramatic pamphlets, drolls and other popular shows, masques, tragedies, comedies, and tragicomedies, coexist uneasily with those on representations of tyranny, and of soldiers and wars. The structure of the book is further weakened by miscellaneous chapters on the influence of the pastoral mode; on translated plays; on publication and republication of pre-Civil War scripts; and on the playwriting of the various members of the Cavendish family. Rather than advancing an original argument or engaging with...
Melinda Zook. Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama. Peggy Thompson. Jan 2001. On this level, the play presents a dramatic world dominated by the two principal patriarchal definitions of women, but in which the boundary separating one category from the other has become blurred. In the case of both Florinda, the play's quintessential "maid of quality," and the prostitute Angellica Bianca, the role reversals arise out of contrasting bids to move from subjection into subjectivity. For the first time, women appeared onstage as actresses, made their presence felt as spectators and patrons, and wrote a number of the plays produced in theaters. In an unusually direct and probing way, drama of the Restoration period raised radical questions about the place of women in the family and in society, and about the essential nature of men and women. The essays examine feminist issues from a variety of historical and theoretical approaches across a spectrum of plays -- comedies, tragedies, tragicomedies, and heroic drama. By addressing the acute questions of gender raised in the drama... The term "restoration" in Restoration drama refers to the return of the monarchy to England after something more than a decade of Puritan rule. Yet the term might with equal justice be applied to the stage itself, for during the Commonwealth interregnum, Puritan authorities repeatedly endeavored, though with limited success, to banish public performances of plays. From September 2, 1642, when Parliament proclaimed that "while these sad causes and set times of humiliation do continue, public stage-plays shall cease, and be forborne," until August 21, 1660, when King Charles II granted patents to English drama. Feminism and literature Literature and society Women in the theater Women and literature Theater Gender identity in literature Sex role in literature Women in literature. Categories. Feminist Approaches to Philosophy in Philosophy of Gender, Race, and Sexuality. (categorize this paper). ISBN(s).