

Female Voices in a Joyful Comedy *Hyde Park*

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Abstract

Hyde Park, written by James Shirley (1596-1666), licensed in 1632 and published in 1637, is regarded by critics as the second best play of the writer, next to *The Lady of Pleasure*, the best. The characteristic about the play is that it has three triangle male-female relationships and that the language about romance and that of horse racing are delicately mingled. In this paper, the various relationships between men and women are examined by precisely reading *Hyde Park* referring to women in *The Lady of Pleasure*.

1. Introduction

In the play, focuses are on the three relationships; the main story is how their relationships are developed or changed or finished in the process of the play. The relationships are between Carol and Fairfield, one of her suitors, between Julietta and her fiance Trier, and between Mistress Bonavent, a supposed widow and her groom Lacy. Interestingly enough, every three relationship has the form of love triangle. Besides Fairfield, Venture and Rider woo Carol in vain. Trier, as his name suggests, tries Julietta's faithfulness with a man called Lord Bonvile, who believes her a courtesan. On the very day of Mistress Bonavent's wedding, her (supposedly) late husband Lord Bonavent comes back. Every relation respectively changes by the process.

2. Mistress Bonavent's voice of having her husband

Although Mistress Bonavent is among the three

ladies, the outset of the play suggests that the protagonist of this play is Mistress Bonavent. The plot surrounding her integrates entangling three plots. The reason why she seems at first to be the most important part is that she has her voice before the other two ladies. The play starts on the day when the compact between her husband and her that she would wait for her husband for seven years is expired.

Carol. What do you mean to do with him?

Mrs. B. Thou art

Too much a tyrant; the seven years are past,

That did oblige me to expect my husband,
Engag'd to sea; and though within those limits

Frequent intelligence hath reported him

Lost, both to me, and his own life, I have

Been careful of my vow; and where there
hope

Yet to embrace him, I would think another

Seven years no penance: 1.

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After waiting for seven years, Mistress Bonavent would wait another seven years if there is hope of her husband's existence. She even says that another seven years would not be her 'penance'. And yet she also thinks she needs to give Lacy, a suitor, 'the reward of his respects' and 'marry him.' Although Carol, who is a cousin of Lord Bonavent and openly antagonistic to marriages, opposes the idea of Mistress Bonavent, the determination of her getting married is so strong that she makes a promise to be Lacy's wife on the morning of the day of expiring. However, Mistress Bonavent is different from the ladies in *The Lady of Pleasure*, Aretina a wife and Celestina a young widow. Because of their social position as not being virgins anymore, they are allowed, at least in the play, to pursue their 'pleasure' in a material world of fashionable London, and in the word 'pleasure' even sexual innuendo is included. Contrary to them, Mistress Bonavent does not say anything about her pleasure or hope. She has accepted Lacy's wooing not because she is in pursuit of pleasure but because she wants to give him 'the reward of his respects.' Her voice does not represent whether this marriage is her desire or not.

On that day, Lord Bonvile, her supposedly dead husband, returns home disguised. He was directed into the happy house which is actually his own house, and humiliated by being forced by Lacy, his rival, to dance in front of others. Later, Lord Bonvile makes Lacy dance in another scene as his revenge. In social life, the means of revenge is to make someone laughed at and humiliated before others. This battle does not seem to have any connection with their battle over Mistress Bonavent. When Lord Bonavent reveals himself only to Mistress Bonavent in a letter, she does not say anything on the stage. At the last scene, when Lord Bonavent casts off his disguise before others, and claims implicitly his right to have his wife, Lacy gives her back to him saying that he is not mature enough to have her. The most strange thing is that Mistress Bonavent does not have her own voice at that time.

She does not choose her husband by herself. We do not even know whether she is happy or not either. In a sense, she almost transgresses her marriage bond and is narrowly saved. As Leggatt refers to Aretina's return to her husband in *The Lady of Pleasure*, in a slightly different sense, 'Female submission in marriage had a ... power to guarantee the social order'.²

3. Julietta's voice of choosing

While Mistress Bonavent is a widow who have been waiting her husband, Julietta is already engaged Trier when the play starts. Trier introduces her to a man called Lord Bonvile not as his fiancee but as 'a lady of pleasure', which Lord interprets as a courtesan. Trier wants to test Julietta's chastity and tells her to entertain Lord. On the other hand, Lord believes Julietta is a woman given from Trier. The conversation between lord Bonvile and Julietta causes laughter from audience because there is a gap between their intentions.

Julietta tries hard to entertain the stranger believing her fiance's words and says, 'I have / Nothing but plain humility, my lord / To answer you,' while Lord Bonvile, who has a sexual desire towards her, says 'Upon my honour will you lend me then / But a night's lodging?' Whenever Lord Bonvile uses ambiguous sexual words, Julietta only thinks that he is joking, 'I'll not believe, my lord, you mean so wantonly / As you profess.'

Their languages sometimes have an implication of horse racing and betting as well.

Trier. Which side holds your honour

Lord B. I am o'thy side, Frank.

Trier. I think so,

For all the Park's against me; but six to four
Is odds enough.

Lord B. Will you venture any thing, lady?

Trier. Perhaps she reserves herself for the horse
race.

Julietta. There I may venture somewhat with his
lordship.

When Trier says, 'which side?', we imagine it is a talk about seducing combat, but it turns out the talk about house racing. Richard Levin mentions in 'The Triple Plot of 'Hyde Park' that some words have double meanings such as 'gamesters' and 'sport'. 'In the conversation on racing bets in III.i, the track odds are applied to courting and the gambling terms 'venture' and 'lay' are used with a bawdy double-entendre,...' 3

In this way, the language about horse racing interweaves with combat between innocent love and seducing. Particularly, Lord Bonvile is described as a man who loves women and horse racing. In a male society, romance and betting belong to the same field; whether to win the game or not is their priority. It is interesting to examine the quotation above; Lord Bonvile asks if any lady venture, to which Trier thinks women do not bet, and then Julietta claims she will venture. For Trier, horse betting is nothing to do with women. However, in *Hyde Park*, women starts betting as men do. Julietta's word 'venture' can be read not only referring to horse betting but also to her wager on man's sincerity.

Since Julietta is often left alone with Lord Bonvile, she has spent more time with Lord Bonvile rather than with her fiance Trier. When she was asked to entertain him, she did reluctantly because she thought it was her duty as his fiance. But now, she willingly entertains or 'venture[s]' the Lord, which is beyond Trier's expectation.

Trier. Do you not find him coming? a wild
gentleman;

You may in time convert him.

Julietta. You made me acquainted with him to that
purpose,

It was your confidence; I'll do what I can,

Because he is your noble friend, and one

In whom was hid so much perfection
Of honor, for at first 'twas most invisible,
But it begins to appear, and I do perceive
A glimmering, it may break out a flame,
I shall know all his thoughts at our next
conference;
He has a secret to impart, he says,
Only to me.

The innocence of Julietta is emphasised here. Audience has noticed by now what a confident fidelity Julietta has. She will not be seduced by Lord Bonvile but rather try to 'convert' him to a sincere gentleman.

Even though Bonvile is about to fulfill his pleasure, his desire, Julietta's persuasion makes him regret himself.

Julietta. When your cold blood shall starve your
wanton thoughts,
And your slow pulse beat like your body's
knell,
When time hath snow'd upon your hair, oh
then
Will it be any comfort to remember
The sins of your wild youth?

....

Will you not wish then you had never mix'd
With atheists, and those men whose wits are
vented
In oaths and blasphemy, (now the pride of
gentlemen,)
That strike at heaven and makes a game of
thunder?

Lord B. If this be true, what a wretched thing should I
Appear now, if I were any thing but a lord?
I do not like myself.

The words 'lord' and 'servant' have been used by Julietta and Lord Bonvile for many times with different meanings: Julietta uses these words as sincere service

and Bonvile as sexual implication and both of them use them in male dominant hierarchy. When Lord Bonvile realizes the superficialness of being called but a lord, he is converted just as Lacy casually mentioned before.

In the last scene, Trier reveals the fact that Julietta is his fiancée and the fact that he has tried Julietta's loyalty. Though Trier is sure of her faith which Lord Bonvile guarantees, his test itself does not bring him happy ending.

Trier. 'Twas but a trial, and may plead for pardon.

Julietta. I pray deny me not that liberty:

I will have proof, too, of the man I choose
My husband;

Though Julietta would pardon him, that does not mean she will get married with him. She spurns him and clearly rejects to get married with Trier. By trying her chastity, Trier is tried his chastity in return. She has her voice to choose her husband, who would not doubt nor try her chastity. Julietta clearly declares that it is she who will choose her husband.

Lord B. ...if I desire to be

A servant to your virtue, will you not
Frown on me then?

Julietta. Never in noble ways;

No virgin shall more honour you.

Lord B. By thy cure

I am now myself yet dare call nothing mine,
Till I be perfect blest in being thine.

Julietta chooses reformed Lord Bonvile in the last scene because he has been changed and therefore passed her test. It is interesting to notice that not Trier but Julietta at last chooses her spouse by confirming the other's integrity. Julietta has a voice to say yes or no.

4. Carol's voice of requiring equality

Almost the same relationship between Carol and Fairfield can be found in Shakespeare's plays: Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado about Nothing* or Katharine and Berone in *Love's Labour's Lost*. From the beginning, Carol seems to be the most difficult woman to be wooed by male characters. In the very first scene, Venture and Rider make boast of the presents they are given by Carol, and the next moment, they find that their presents toward Carol were given to the other; Rider's present Diamond ring is now Venture's, and Venture's chain Rider's. Carol's behaviour towards the two shows how Carol is uninterested in love. She is the woman who is thoroughly against the idea of love or marriage. As a woman who rejects wooers, she has her own voice.

Carol: Oh love, into what foolish labyrinths

Dost thou lead us! I would all women were
But of my mind, we would have a new world
Quickly.

She shows her regret for women who worry over love and says if there are only one kind of women like her, who would not care for men, women can build up a new world. Fairfield is only one of her wooers in this scene and seems to have no chance to gain Carol's heart. For Carol, enjoying single's lifestyle is more important than getting married. To Mistress Bonavent who has intention to get married, Carol expresses her opinion.

Carol. What is in your condition makes you weary?

You are sick of plenty and command; you have
Too, too much liberty, too many servants;
Your jewels are your own, and you would see
How they will show upon your husband's wagtail.

From her point of view, having a husband will take away 'plenty' (of her) 'command' 'much liberty' 'many

servants' and her 'jewels'. She does not understand why women are willing to throw such treasure away because of men. Carol's apparently stronghold fortress, however, is easily destroyed by the trick of Fairfield. He does not woo her in an ordinary manner but asks Carol not to love him.

Carol. You have made me swear
That I must never love you, nor desire
Your company.

When Fairfield leaves her, she feels funny about herself.

Carol. I had no affection to him, had been reasonable;
But for the time to come, never to love,
For any cause or reason, that may move me
Hereafter, very strange! I know not what to
think on't,
Although I never meant, to think well of him,
Yet to be limited, and be prescribed,
I must not do it, — 'twas a poor trick in him;
But I'll go practice something to forget it.

After promising not to love him, Carol was surprised with her changed mind. When asked not to love him, she cannot help thinking of him. Even though she thinks that it might be 'a poor trick in him,' her loving heart is fueled. The trick Fairfield makes triggers the romance in Carol.

Although Carol realizes how much she loves him, their relation does not come to mutual recognition smoothly. In order to stir her jealousy Fairfield walks intimately with his sister (whom Carol does not know) and believes his trick succeeds. In return she gives him a trick. She uses Venture's love letter to her in which he says he'll die because of her. She changes Venture's signature to Fairfield's. Carol shows Fairfield the letter and tells that she doesn't want him to die because of her. She says she will love him only to save his life. Their relationship is like a language battle in which one

always tries to take an advantage over the other. And that is why their relationship is unstable and not settled down. They get their mutual love only when they realize that an attempt to defeat the other is in vain. Carol at last recognizes her love saying 'I do love you.' She thinks that this would be the last chance to get along well with him.

Carol. I know you love me still; do not refuse me.
If I go once more back, you ne'er recover me.

Fairfield admits that 'Each other's now by conquest.' As Venture and Rider sees her as 'a trophy of vanquished love', Fairfield only thinks of being a conqueror before. However, he is changed: both are conquerors and both are conquered. Before this time, each of them only thinks of beating the other but now they realize that the way they took to each other is not suitable for getting married. To be equal is the most important for male-female relationship and necessary condition to be married. Without Carol's voice from the bottom of her heart, their relationship would not be created equal. As Fairfield says before 'This is a new doctrine / From Women, Her voice is a doctrine to lead their relationship' 4

5. Female Voices in *Hyde Park*

Three relationships have a form of love triangle: beside Fairfield, Carol has two other suitors; Rider and Venture; Julietta rejects Trier and accepts Lord Bonville at the last scene. Mistress Bonavent separates from Lacy and returns back to her husband. As the play proceeds, their former relationships are changed and developed. Some men are accepted and some are rejected. The symbol is easily shown by nightingale and cuckoo and willow garlands. Defeat in the horse race is connected with cuckoo and willow garlands. The defeated men, Venture, Rider, Trier and Lacy heard cuckoo and are given willow garlands symbolically. And

yet they remain in the celebration by invitation from Bonavent. Community is the most important factor for the characters in comedies. Community has its own particular world in which everybody has to live together. In *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff is bullied by everybody but is accepted and not put away by the members of Windsor society. Lacy is not thrown out of the residence of Bonavent.

It is clear that almost all the characters gather in Hyde Park, like the citizens of Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* move from the city towards the fair.

Expectation that something must happen in the park grows larger and larger while audience is watching the drama. Someone says, 'See at Hyde Park,' another says, 'Do you go to Hyde Park?' Hyde Park should have some kind of role to play in this comedy.

According to Butler, 'Hyde Park is a green world in urban London, is country and town, nature and art.... The park is both the natural environment of [the] gentry and a symbol of their ideals of decorum and balance, social and moral distance....'⁵ Simon Trussler, though admitting the contrast, claims that 'Hyde Park is no pastoral Arden or mythic Athenian wood.'⁶ He develops his argument from the point that Hyde Park is 'a place in which to play games, whether amorous or athletic skill'. He concludes that this is a play only for the people who have leisure time to pass. Hyde Park is 'privileged urban' as Ira Crank mentioned, in which people enjoy games of love and horse racing.'⁷

In the play, neither milkmaid nor jockey has any influence on the characters who enjoy their leisure time. It is Lord Bonvile who wins over Venture in the wager of the horse racing, which predicts their fortunes in wooing. However, Hyde Park does not have so much influence on the characters as Arden does. According to Trussler's theory, among the characters who do not 'need work for a living' Bonavent is a returned merchant, who earns money. 'To Bonavent belongs the future.'⁸

Hyde Park is a public place where people

mingle each other, observe each other and speak about others. Shirley's interest lies in 'the way people relate to each other in society at large' as Leggatt mentions.⁹

While Carol and Julietta create new relationship with their will, Mistress Bonavent returns back to her former relationship. Compared with Carol and Julietta, who have their voice and the right to choose their husband respectively, Mistress Bonavent is passive in the male society. Excepting Bonavent who comes back from outer world, the main characters know about each other by observing others. As some names of the characters, such as Trier, Venture and Rider, suggest, Hyde Park is the place of game. And in the world of game, in that 'privileged urban', female characters can speak out.

6. Conclusion.

The relationship between women and men were changing in 1630s the age of King Charles. Some women started to have their own voices, and men had still illusion that they had power over women. The play *Hyde Park* must have had an appeal for female society gathering around Queen Henrietta Maria who had gradually influenced on English royal court in 1630s. The mutual relationship between female and male characters reflects the ideal of the people in the society though not the reality of the age.

Notes.

1. Quotations of *Hyde Park* are from Dyce, Alexander: *Hyde Park* (in *The Dramatic Works and Poems of JAMES SHIRLEY* in 6 vols., 1833; 2nd Vol.,) [reprinted edition, Tokyo: Honnotomosya, 1997]
2. Leggatt, Alexander, *Introduction to English Renaissance Comedy* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999) p.164
3. Levin, Richard, 'The Triple Plot of 'Hyde Park'', *The Modern Language Review*, 62 (1967) p.22
4. Sanders, Julie, *Caroline Drama: The Plays of*

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Massinger, Ford, Shirley and Brome (Northcote House Publishers, 1999) p.49-50

5. Butler, Martin, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p.179

6. *Hyde Park*, ed. Simon Trussler (London: Methuen; RSC Programme/ Text, 1987) p.XX

7. Clark, Ira, *Professional Playwrights Massinger, Ford, Shirley and Brome* (University Press of Kentucky, 1992) p.139

8. Trussler, p.XXI

9. Leggatt, p.156