

due to the effects of varying consanguinity regulations. Catholic policy discourages the marriage of relatives, making the woman an outsider to her husband and his family. Among Jews, wives who are members of the same extended family enjoy the protection of a finite and interconnected group of people, making it unlikely that men, unless seriously disturbed, persist in extremely violent behavior. Expanded travel and marital opportunities, particularly in the early-modern and modern periods, make women outsiders and financial commodities in their husband's families and eliminate many of the local checks on violent behavior.

In most cases the rabbis defiantly undermine precedents for forced divorce. While some medieval rabbis express disapproval of wife-beating and suggest punishments, they nevertheless rely on the voluntary cooperation of violent, abusive, and unbalanced men, who, along with the government, are the ultimate arbiters of power in the Jewish community.

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1. Mordechai Frishtik, "Physical and Sexual Violence by Husbands as a Reason for Imposing a Divorce in Jewish Law," *Jewish Law Annual* 9 (1990):145-169; idem, "Violence against Women in Judaism," *Journal of Psychology and Judaism* 14 (1990): 131-153; Avraham Grossman, "Medieval Rabbinic Views on Wife-Beating, 800-1300," *Jewish History* 5 (1991): 53-62; Naomi Graetz, "Some Halachic Aspects of Wife-Beating in the Jewish Tradition: The Case of Rejection," *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1994) B:I: 143-150.
2. Howard Adelman, "Wife-Beating among Early Modern Italian Jews, 1400-1700," *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division B, Volume 1 (Jerusalem, 1994): 135-142; idem, "The Changing Influences of Islamic and Catholic Law upon Rabbinic Approaches to Forced Divorce and Marital Cruelty in the Middle Ages," New England Medieval Conference, Trinity College, 1995; idem, "A Disgrace for all Jewish Men: Methodological Considerations in the Study of Wife-Beating in Jewish History," Yale University, Jewish Studies Faculty Colloquium, 1995.
3. Howard Adelman, "Finding Women's Voices in Italian Jewish Literature," *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing*, Judith Baskin, ed. (Wayne State University Press, 1994), pp. 50-69.

GENDER AND VIOLENCE IN THE NORTHERN FRENCH FARCE



If asked to give a thumbnail sketch of the trickster plays written in Normandy, Ile-de-France, and Picardy between 1450 and 1550, when the farce was at its most popular, most literary specialists would probably allude to the violent nature of the genre, as well as its broad humor and stereotypical characters and situations. While students of the farce have traditionally considered this genre to be purely ludic, in spite of the moralized conclusions terminating most of these plays, farce violence is by no means purely gratuitous, even if not "politically correct" by today's standards. Instead, the violence in the medieval and early modern trickster drama performs a moralizing function, punishing

behaviors which deviated from contemporary social norms, such as adultery and other sexual misbehaviors, thievery, wifely dominance, and husbandly submission.

Media sociologists perceive violence in popular drama as a social barometer, and in their opinion, repeated scenes of violent retribution against a particular antisocial behavior are indicative of a high level of frustration with the specularized deviancy and a widespread conviction that the featured problem behavior cannot be eliminated by rational means. According to specialists of the popular drama, audience members derive satisfaction from viewing the correction of such deviancies because they feel helpless to put a stop to them in real life; they enjoy repeatedly watching the symbolic correction of deviant and undesirable behavior because doing so allows them a catharsis while giving them ideas about how to eliminate antisocial behavior from their own social sphere.

While media sociologists would analyze the farce as a cultural artifact, a product of the social concerns of its playwrights and target audience, for literary specialists the farce's violence is and has always been a literary rather than a social construct, the reflection of a long literary tradition of comic violence epitomized by the French *fabliaux* and the short stories of Italian authors such as Poggio and Boccaccio. While the influence of literary tradition is undeniable, I would like in this essay to open the door, through my own formal analysis of the relationship of gender and violence in this genre (a subject which, to my knowledge, has yet to be broached by other farce specialists) to a socio-historical approach to this genre — leading to an eventual discussion of the social factors which could have motivated contemporary audiences' appreciation of the farce's specularization and solutions to certain social problems.

I will briefly examine here the identity of farce's violent characters and their victims, as well as the deviant behaviors punished by comically violent means, ending with a brief discussion of the social conditions which, in my opinion, may have caused the farce's target audience to enjoy watching the aggressive correction of certain types of antisocial behavior in the century following the Hundred Years' War.

First, which social groups are specularized and placed in opposition to each other in the farce? Most farces depict conflicts between bourgeois men and women, often specifically designated as members of the artisan class; most farces ending with a moralized conclusion (not all do) are farces of male-female conflict. While the farces showing male-female conflict are predominantly about married couples, a few present a female character's efforts to get rid of unwanted suitors or to bring a ne'er-do-well male character to justice. Farces in which the antagonists are not of opposite sexes almost always depict conflicts between two male characters: with the exception of *Sœur Fessue*, there are no extant trickster plays whose *dramatis personæ* is exclusively female, or whose primary conflict involves two or more female antagonists.

The gender and social relationship of the antagonists determines the type of misbehavior corrected by violent means. Husbands and wives, for example, typically beat each other to punish either adultery or disobedience. By contrast, when a female character beats an unrelated male character, she usually does so in retribution for theft or slander: in *Le Rapporteur*, for example, two women beat an unrelated man for telling scurrilous stories about them, while in *Le Pâté et la tarte* the baker's wife beats a beggar for stealing baked goods and for causing her husband to doubt her honesty. When both aggressor and aggressed are male, however, deviant sexual behavior and gullibility are the primary reasons for punishment: the title character in *Le Goguelu* beats his old, blind

master for lusting after his much younger maid, while the two scoundrels in *Cauteleux, Barat et le vilain* gleefully destroy a naive peasant's wares knowing they can do so without fear of retribution. Finally, a female character never beats another female character in the farce, and in only one case (*La Tripière*) does a male character beat an unrelated female character.

While it is a general rule that the farce aggressor, by punishing deviant behavior, is "in the right" from a moral standpoint, a wife who beats her husband is the exception to this rule. In such farces, neither antagonist is meant to be perceived as just; instead, farces in which a wife beats her husband demonstrate the husband's own deviance from society's expectations: if he had not, in some way, ceded his masculine authority to his wife and permitted her to gain the upper hand, whether by allowing her to give him orders or by submitting to her will in some other way, he would not have been beaten.

Why was wifely adultery and insubordination, husbandly ineffectualness, the thievery of beggars, and the lechery of old men so often the subject of criticism and violent punitive measures in the early farce? Why did farce's playwrights almost never depict male characters doing violence to female characters unrelated to them, while often showing female characters in the act of beating unrelated males? In my opinion, the answers lie, at least in part, in the socio-economic conditions of the time. If the dating of early farce scholars is reliable, the farces incorporating the most vociferous anti-female rhetoric, the most blatant calls for female domestic disempowerment and the fiercest beatings of disobedient wives were written during a period of high male unemployment (1470-1500), after record numbers of women had entered the labor force as a result of the depopulation of the century following the Black Death of 1348. Why single out lusty old men for punishment? While the "dirty old man" had long been a target of literary and normative ridicule in comic drama and literature, as well as through the ritual known as the charivari, it is possible that at this particular time the farce's target audience found satisfaction and release in viewing the punishment of this particular social type due to a newly heightened perception of competition for marital partners: during the period 1460-1500 improved living conditions lead to a population explosion which rapidly returned the sex ratio to a normal, roughly 1:1 ratio after almost a century in which there were more females than males in the general population. Why does the farce so often make thieving beggars the target of the comic violence of aggrieved tradesmen and women? Perhaps because the members of the farce's target audience felt the security of their property to be in jeopardy because of an increased number of destitute street dwellers in this period of high unemployment. These are, however, merely hypotheses.

To my knowledge, a formal analysis of the relationship between gender and violence in this genre, or between farce's dramatic conflicts and those of contemporary northern French society, has yet to be published. Farce specialists have debated structural and formal considerations for decades; in my opinion, it is time to consider an interdisciplinary approach to this genre. Since farce depended for its survival on immediate acceptance by the general public, further examinations of the relationship of gender and violence in the farce should not fail to take into account the *air du temps*, as well as literary tradition, when considering playwrights' motivations for targeting the same deviant characters and antisocial behaviors for physical punishment in play after play.

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LESSONS ON CASTIGATING WOMEN IN THE WAR-TORN WORLD OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA



Violence against women is evidenced in Spanish literary works as early as the 12th century. The final drama of the national epic, The Poem of the Cid, is precipitated by the brutal beating of the Cid's daughters. The epic itself is a litany of victorious but brutal battles to recapture lands from the moors.

In a story of a 14th-century prose work violence is used to tame an ill-mannered bride. The plot is international, but the technique is national. ¹ In numerous romances of later centuries daughters, wives and mothers are starved, beaten, stabbed, strangled or beheaded. The ultimate example of violence is seen in the ballad of the wife who is made to ride having just given birth. Her misguided husband demands that she dress and mount because he is returning her to her father. His mother had convinced him that while he was gone, his wife had insulted them both and complained about the poor care she receives from him. ²

Women are victimized by both men and women. A rejected father, a weak king, an angry husband, or a misguided son are equalled by a malicious mother-in-law, a jealous queen, a brooding princess or hateful sister-in-laws. The difference between the abusers is that women act decisively while men often initiate a continuum of violence.

Beatings, starvation, and repeated rapes are not uncommon. These are perpetrated by men. It would be difficult for a woman to beat an able woman into unconsciousness and impossible for her to rape her. However she is capable of plotting her death. She is even capable of killing her own. We see this in the ballad of the mother who serves her husband their son's head and tongue for dinner because the child always told his father what happened while he was gone.

Decapitation is more dramatic when imposed on women. In one particular ballad a mother asks her young daughter to place her soon-to-be-severed head on a platter and take it to the king. The child does so and the mother's head protests its innocence.