Caro Partridge, Eneas, editor. *Edward Ravenscroft's Mamamouchi, or The Citizen Turned Gentleman (1672): A Critical Edition*. Peter Lang, 2024. 309 pages

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Ravenscroft's first play, *Mamamouchi* was inspired by Molière's *The Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, but it is much more than a translation, as Eneas Caro Partridge shows in this welcome new scholarly edition from Peter Lang. In Molière's play, the wealthy cloth merchant Monsieur Jourdain aspires to remake himself as a gentleman by learning gentlemanly refinements, such as dressing, fencing, philosophizing, and dancing. A variety of instructors happily take Jourdain's money to train him in aristocratic social performances, secretly snickering at his ambitions and incompetence. His pretensions hinder the happiness of his daughter, who wishes to marry a man whose status does not meet Jourdain's standards, and also leave him vulnerable to a comic manipulation. The suitor courts the daughter in the guise of the son of a Turkish sultan, a trick that dazzles the social-climbing father. Ultimately, Molière's play underscores the relative stability of French social hierarchies through Jourdain's gullibility, comic ineptitude, and inability to raise his status.

Ravenscroft's fascinating *Mamamouch*i suggests that the English status rules might be a little wobblier. His version prioritizes plentitude over streamlined elegance, but, like other Ravenscroft plays, it raises genuine anxiety about status. In Ravenscroft's most well-known play, *The London Cuckolds* (1681), young gentlemen seek to seduce the wives of citizens but sometimes get humiliated themselves. In *Mamamouchi*, Ravenscroft runs with Molière's original conceit, omitting the character of the citizen's wife, who in Molière's version provides the voice of reason against her husband's ambitions. Jorden competes with his son, Young Jorden, for Marina's hand. His daughter, Lucia, loves Cleverwit, but Jorden has arranged a marriage for her to the unappealing Sir Simon Softhead, a move he believes will bring status to his family. Young Jorden and Cleverwit contrive to win love and money by distracting Jorden with two alternative temptations: first, a German Princess (in reality, Betty Trickmore, a servant of Marina, in disguise) is held out as a potential royal marriage partner for Jorden, offering even more

prestige than Marina; and second, the Great Turk (Young Jorden in disguise) offers to make Jorden a "Mamamouchi," which he explains as a high status position in the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish plot, as Partridge explains, has its origins in Molière's implied reference to the Ottoman Emperor's visit to the French court. The English were also fascinated by Ottoman power: some ten years later, Aphra Behn would put a fake Turkish plot to similar use in *The False Count* (1682), although in Behn's play, the younger lover uses a Turkish disguise to terrify the older man into allowing the seduction of his wife.

Mamamouchi is an intriguing precursor to the full-fledged comedy of manners, and in this respect, it is, as Partridge contends, more than a farce, as others have suggested, and merits great scholarly attention. Many critics identify George Etherege's *She Would If She Could* (1668) as the first spark of this genre. In *She Would*, Etherege eliminates the heroic plot that accompanied his earlier comedy and focuses on a relatively narrow bandwidth of well-off but generally not titled characters as they compete for love, sex, money, and status. In Etherege's more refined comedy of manners style, characters rarely state their status ambitions explicitly. In *The Man of Mode* (1676), we have to pay careful attention to notice Dorimant's financial motive in pursuing Harriet. Even Sir Fopling Flutter does not announce that he is training for the aristocracy; in fact, Etherege displays Sir Fopling's *lack* of training to comic ends, such as when he cannot perform the promised caper. In William Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* (1673), Sir James Formal confidently asserts his self-created identity as Don Diego. In *Mamamouchi*, by contrast, Jorden meets with his music master and dancing master to learn the arts of refinement. He also consults them about his wardrobe, reporting that his tailor "brought home this Indian gown, cap, and slippers. How do you like 'em?" (I.i.9). It is hard to imagine that this scene, in which Jorden asks his servants to approve his various fashion items and social skills, did not inspire one of the best moments in *The Man of Mode*, in which Sir Fopling Flutter displays his French fashions. The difference is subtle but revealing: Fopling's social peers are mocking him in very subtle ways, so gently (at least on the surface), that sometimes they seem like they are simply enjoying a nuanced conversation about fashion. In Ravenscroft's comedy, Jorden is being self-consciously flattered by people who are making money

from promising something that they cannot deliver: to turn him into a gentleman.

Despite a generic destiny that dictates this transition will never take place and much hilarity will ensue on the road to this failure, *Mamamouchi* is suffused with the anxious possibility that the line between citizen and gentleman might be more fragile than it seems. The tricksters in Ravenscroft's play tempt Jorden with the possibility of marriage to a "German princess", a reference that, as Partridge notes, would have entertained audiences with the connection to Mary Carleton, who presented herself as an aristocrat so persuasively that she married into English high society. While she was eventually unmasked, her early success shows the fragility of the distinction, and her imprisonment the high stakes of such class impersonation. The increasingly global mixing experienced in England also brought many people into contact with different systems of status, an anxiety-provoking development that Ravenscroft exploits in the Turkish plot. Ravenscroft's Turkish plot acts out a clearly anxious fantasy that a foreign power could bestow great status on an English citizen, something that we might say was already happening through the enormous wealth some merchants acquired through trade. Jorden is so desperate to make this leap that he signs his estate over to his son when he learns that a Mamamouchi cannot own property. It is not hard to see why *Mamamouchi* succeeded on stage, especially with the right performers. Mamamouchi offers numerous entertainment opportunities, featuring songs and dance performances. The scenes with the fake Great Turk and his entourage must have been spectacular. The role of Jorden provides considerable opportunity for amusement over his comic gullibility, stemming from an obsession with social ambition, which is destined to be humiliatingly corrected. In the end, though, the marriages for love take place, Sir Simon and Jorden get to laugh at each other's foolishness, but Young Jorden returns part of the estate he tricked his father out of, and Sir Simon vows to change his ways.

Partridge's edition recovers this highly entertaining and socially insightful play by an underrated author. The edition includes a wealth of information about the play and the author: a brief discussion of Ravenscroft's life and works, a discussion of the sources for *Mamamouchi*, its stage history, and its publication history. The notes are

thorough and helpful. This edition makes a significant contribution to the study of Ravenscroft and highlights this playwright's importance in the development of Restoration drama.