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SEARCH FOR FREEDOM IN APHRA BEHN'S THE ROVER
BA thesis

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ABSTRACT

Aphra Behn was an English playwright popular and influential in the Restoration era. After her death she was largely ignored and has unjustly been left out of the canon of important English writers. This paper analyzes the importance of Behn during the Restoration era and the social issues she tackles in her most famous play *the Rover*.

The thesis begins with an introduction, which gives an overview of the structure of the thesis and its aims. It also focuses on Behn's achievements and life, and is followed by a chapter in which the state of the Restoration era theatres is discussed. Literature review provides research done on the topic of gender and focuses on *the Rover*. The second chapter is an analysis of the female protagonists and the ways in which they tried to take control of their own lives.

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INTRODUCTION

Aphra Behn was a famous female playwright of the Restoration era, who stood out amongst not only other female writers, but male writers of her era as well. She was well known for her witticism, libertinism, royalism and contrarianism, and although a highly popular writer of her time, she was largely forgotten after her death. With the rise of interest in female writers her works have gained attention.

Behn's works benefit from being analyzed, since the works of female playwrights have not yet been analysed enough. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the topics of forced marriage, and the way in which women tried to gain control over their own lives in Behn's most well-known play *The Rover*; and to demonstrate how Behn drew attention to important societal issues of her time, while still adhering to conventional norms. One of the aims is to tackle Behn's critics who do not see her as having had any important contributions to make to culture and literature, and who do not deem her worthy of being included in the canon of writers of English literature (Bloom 2003: para. 7). The author of this thesis uses close reading and previously published articles to reach conclusions. The basis of this thesis, *The Rover or The Banish'd Cavaliers*, was first published in 1677 and became a great success. Although Behn wrote a sequel, published in 1681, it is not discussed in the thesis. *The Rover* is analyzed using a 1995 published version of the play, for which the copytext is from the first and only edition printed in Behn's lifetime in 1677. The aim of the introduction is to provide a necessary context for understanding the societal pressures and circumstances under which Behn was writing. To understand the importance of Behn, her life and the state of the

Restoration era theatres are discussed. The literature review discusses the topic of gender in her works and the relevance of *The Rover* in this context. The analysis of *The Rover* concentrates on the scenes where Behn shows her aversion to contemporary standards and discusses the suppression of women.

Aphra Behn, also known as Astrea, Mrs. Behn and Agent 160, (Todd: 2013) was the first English woman to successfully earn her money by writing. In fact, she was one of the most prolific writers of the time, being second only to Dryden (Hutner 1993: 18). Details regarding her life are obscure. She is known to have written short stories, poems, 19 plays and four novels. It is believed that she was married for a short period of time (thus acquiring the surname Behn), traveled to Surinam, acted as a spy for Charles II, was imprisoned several times; and as a Tory propagandist, served as an important figure in the Exclusion Crisis (Hutner 1993: 3). She might have visited Virginia, which is the setting for her posthumously published play *The Widow Ranter*, which is important as it is the first English play set in the American colonies (Todd 1992: 5).

Her novel *Oroonoko* is a literary landmark, since it is one of the earliest novels written, employs a female first person perspective narrative, and gives an account of the difficulties experienced living in the English colonial settlements (British Library: 2020). According to Pearson (1991: 45), from 1670s to the middle of 18th century, most female writers were aware of Behn's works and perhaps had even read some of them. An adaptation of *Oroonoko* reached the middle-class audience when it was included in one of the first women's magazines (Pearson 1991: 45).

Behn was a translator of scientific texts and a supporter of Copernicanism (Goodfellow: 1996: 230). Furthermore, Goodfellow (ibid.) argues that 'by offering a popular literature on natural philosophy, Behn challenged both traditional gender roles and the social

position of seventeenth-century natural philosophy.” Whether she was a proto-feminist, or adhered to the common style of the time has been debated. Pearson (1991: 40) has pointed out that although many critics agree that Behn’s work has paved the way for other female writers, there are critics such as Katharine M. Rogers, (1983: 98) according to whom Behn settled with the literary conventions of the time and displayed values held by the men of that era.

According to Pearson (1991: 44), Behn criticizes the language used by the society by “allowing women to appropriate for their own uses a sexual vocabulary in which they have previously been the objects of male language. Thus men can be ‘beautiful’ and ‘lovely’ in the eyes of women as much as women can in the eyes of men.” Riwako (2003: 12-15) notes that Behn draws attention to gender issues through rewriting political plays so as to include many female characters in them, which translates to actresses on the stage; as well as through the content, which addresses issues such as arranged marriages and the genuine longing of love by the courtesans. As Goodfellow (1996: 232) notes, Behn differed from other female writers of the era by writing publicly, by not being apologetic about her works and publications, and by constantly asking her works to be judged equally with that of the male writers. She adds that by the standards of her time, “a well-bred and moral woman would be incapable of writing plays for public performance”, and it is therefore not surprising that Behn’s work was attacked for being bawdy and improper.

Even now Behn’s contribution to literature is sometimes overlooked. In his *The English Novel: An introduction* (first published in 2004), British literary theorist Terry Eagleton does not mention Behn’s name once when discussing the arisal of the genre, but names Miguel de Cervantes and Daniel Defoe as plausible candidates for the first novelist (2005: 1) Behn’s plays have received more attention, and *the Rover* has been staged by several

small and large acting companies, most notably by Royal Shakespeare Company in 2016 (British Library: 2020).

CHAPTER 1. APHRA BEHN'S PLAY *THE ROVER* AND RESTORATION THEATRE

The following chapter will provide an overview of the atmosphere of the era, discusses Behn's own views which are important in the play, the play *The Rover*, and research that has been done on the topic of gender in Behn's work and in particular in *The Rover*. The issues discussed in this chapter will provide necessary background for the analysis of *The Rover*, as the analysis is based on the literature review.

1.1 Behn's religious views

Behn's works belong to the category of Restoration literature, which is defined as "English literature written after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 following the period of the Commonwealth." (Kuiper: 2020). The period was brief and if James II reign included, lasted until 1688. It is important to note the state of the religion at the time, as it had an influence on the overall heightened atmosphere of the time and on the way the King was perceived. Restoration era contrasted greatly with both the Interregnum and the Georgian era, and as Parry (1996: 108-109) notes, it was a time of both Christian and classical renewal; and the analogy of the Augustan golden age was consistently used by those who welcomed Charles' return, especially since similarly to Augustus, Charles had begun his reign after the civil war. Parry (1996: 108) states that "The very term 'Restoration' carried with it a religious connotation, associated with the idea of a return to an original state of perfection, spiritual and intellectual." Parry (1996: 107) also notes that "the royalists were inclined to view the Restoration as much as a religious as a political event, with Charles acclaimed as the savior of

his country's fortunes.' The return of Christ was expected, and although the timing of restoration was debated over, the English really believed they were the new Israelites and many masques of the era dealt with restoring the lost perfection in the present age (Parry 1996: 108). He adds that Charles arriving in London on his 30th birthday was often commented on, as Christ had begun his ministry at the age of 30 (Parry 1996: 107). Many of the poems written soon after the arrival of the King remarked upon the 'Christ-like quality in the King, others saw him as a David, a Solomon, a new king in Israel, even a new Adam come to restore the perfections of innocence and peace.' (Parry 1996: 107). According to Parry (1996: 110) 'Before the divisive religious Acts were issued, there was a sense of national unity unknown for decades.'

Although Behn expressed her skepticism about religion and even seemed to hold anti-religious views, she was an avid supporter of Catholic James and opposed any rebellion against the Stuarts. There are several reasons for Behn's libertinism and support of the views the Court held. First of all, Behn had to support the Court if she wanted her plays published. It was fashionable to be a libertarian, as it was a stance taken by the King against Puritans, and followed by rich upper-class men. As the King was a libertarian, it was fashionable for rich upper-class men to follow his ways in their reckless and self-destructive behaviour.

As Charles had no legitimate children and his brother James was a Catholic, the Whigs supported Charles' illegitimate protestant son, the Duke of Monmouth, as a successor to the throne. (Todd 1992: 15). Behn's loyalty went too far even for the King, as she was arrested for attacking the Duke of Monmouth in an epilogue for the play written in 1682, *Romulus and Hersilia*. (Spencer 1995: x). Behn expressed sympathy for Catholicism, as she believed Puritans to be sexually hypocritical and repressing natural human sexuality (Spencer 1995: x). Szilagyi (1998: 446) points out that the problem with succession was already causing tension

in the 1660s, and he believes that the rivalry between the male characters in *The Rover* is a clear analogue to the rivalry between the political parties.

1.2 Behn's *The Rover*

The Rover or The Banish'd Cavaliers was first published in 1677, and although based on Killigrew's 1664 *Thomaso, or the Wanderer*, it was first produced in D'Avenant's theatre in Dorset Garden (Spencer: 1995). According to Goodman (1996: 131), *The Rover* was regularly performed in London between 1677 and 1743, and excluding 1748, 1757 and 1760, was not staged for more than two hundred years. The reason behind the popularity and the criticism of *The Rover* lies in the themes the play tackles and the witty and frank dialogues it features. Not only does it comment on the political scene of the time, it also remarks on religion, and features several clever women as protagonists, from courtesans to upper class women, all on the path of seeking control over their own lives. Behn claims in the postscript of the play to have directly borrowed only the character of Angellica from Killigrew. Responding to the critics of her play, Behn anticipates the inevitable comparison drawn between her and Killigrew's play, and denies accusations of plagiarism made against her. She concludes her postscript with the words:

I will only say the plot and business (not to boast on't) is my own; as for the words and characters, I leave the reader to judge and compare them with *Thomaso*, to whom I recommend the great entertainment of reading it, though had this succeeded ill, I should have had no need of imploring that justice from the critics, who are naturally so kind to any that pretend to usurp their dominion¹ they

¹ For some of the copies of the second edition on, and for all from third edition on, 'especially of our sex' is used. Behn's name appears on the title-page for the first time in 3rd edition. She might have decided to refer to her gender once her authorship was made public. Explanatory notes (349: 20) for *The Rover*

would doubtless have given me the whole honour on't. Therefore I will only say in English what the famous Virgil does in Latin; I make verses, and others have the fame. (Todd 1992: 248).

Behn claiming the plot as her own suggests that although elements of the play are taken from Killigrew's, her own opinions and views are asserted.

The Rover is a play that deals with social, political and sexual issues of the time. Male protagonists search for fulfillment of their sexual desires, while female protagonists seek for freedom of choice in their lives. The set of *the Rover* allows for comparison between the play and the brief era of sexual and social freedom granted by the example of Charles II. Carnival time allows for cross-dressing and for freedom of expression by being able to conceal one's identity behind a mask. Plays protagonists are siblings Hellena, Florinda and their brother Don Pedro, who tries to marry off Florinda to his friend, while keeping his sister Hellena on the path to becoming a nun. The sisters' paths cross with cavaliers Willmore and Belvile, who start to pursue them. The famous courtesan Angellica falls in love with Willmore and tries to avenge him because of his unfaithfulness. The English gentleman Blunt becomes vengeful as well, after he is deceived by the courtesan Lucetta and ends up as a laughing stock. Hellena and Florinda end up having what they want, and are married to Willmore and Belvile, respectively.

1.3 Behn and the Restoration theatre

During the Restoration period, professional theatres in London were re-established, as if there had been no Civil War (Wickham 1994: 375). As theatres were being reopened, Thomas Killigrew and William D'Avenant were given patents by Charles II to establish their acting companies on behalf of the King and his brother, and therefore have monopoly over the

production of plays (Ricks 1993: 375-376). Both Killigrew and D'Avenant managed to fund the building of new theatres. According to Wickham (1993: 376) The King shared D'Avenant's taste for masques and readily supported him.

Thus Killigrew /.../ found himself forced to follow the trend set by D'Avenant both in seeking to accommodate scenic spectacle and in repairing the gaps in his company, where the playing of female roles was concerned, by admitting women to the ranks of the acting profession. (Wickham 1993: 376).

For the first time in the history of the English theatre, women were allowed on the stage, one of the reasons being the lack of boys trained to play women's parts, and by the end of the century, parts were written especially for women. (Wickham 1993: 377) This was also the era that allowed first female professional English playwrights to appear. Plays intended for public performance had to be submitted, evaluated, and accepted by theater managers, writers, and other influential contemporaries. This often led to conflicts, sometimes to rejection of the works of the female playwrights, and even to plagiarism of the works they had submitted but which had been rejected earlier (Straznicky: 1997: 706-710). To succeed financially, female playwrights had to cultivate personal and professional relations with people who were influential in theatre (Straznicky 1997: 711). Women such as Ann Finch began writing closet dramas, partly to avoid the censorship and criticism (Straznicky 1997: 796). Unlike amongst men, one female playwright is known to have been an actress, which speaks of the likelihood of female playwrights and actresses being in a different category in society (Straznicky 1997: 711).

Women's role in the theatre reached even further than just having actresses and playwrights. After the death of D'Avenant, the Duke's Company was managed by his widow, which might be one of the reasons Behn wrote for the Duke's Company and its successor the United Company. (Spencer 1995: viii-ix)

Spencer (1995: xi-xii) notes that Duke's Company was innovative in its use of scenic design, and although the layout of the Dorset Garden theatre is not entirely known, nor how the scenic effects were achieved, the theatre is thought by some to have specialized in operatic spectacle. Behn is known to have been a theatrical innovator who used the entire stage area. (Spencer 1995: xii) She notes that (1995:xii):

Her characters weave in and out of the scenery, move around between scenic area and forestage, and carry on more than one action simultaneously, using different areas of the stage. Sometimes they operate in a fictional darkness, when the audience can see them and they can't see each other /.../ One of Behn's hallmarks is the frequent use of the 'discovery' scene, when one set of scenery, painted on shutters, is drawn back to reveal actors in place behind. The successive revelation of a number of scenes, painted in perspective, was itself a visual novelty that delighted Restoration audiences.

Behn had access to a theatre this important, must have known her audience and the influence she had on them. Behn seems to have kept in mind her female audience as well, as she often used female narrators, addressed her female audience and dedicated a few of her works to women. (Pearson 1991: 44-45)

As Goodfellow (1996:234) notes, despite Behn's reputation and the harshness of the critics, Behn played a role as a public figure and was able to earn her living by writing; her books were sought after, and her plays continued to be successful, as she averaged a play a year for 20 consecutive years. Although famous and influential during her lifetime, her role was downplayed after her death. She was excluded from the canon and with the arrival of a new era and new conventions, other female writers criticized her style. As Todd (1992: 11) notes, from the beginning of the 18th century, the opinions expressed in the play were too bold for the contemporary audiences. Behn's prompt-book, used for the revival of the play at Covent Garden Theatre from the mid-18th century, includes remarks, changes and excises

made to the text, which reveals the original play's inappropriateness for the Georgian audience (British Library: 2020). Among the drastically edited parts, which change the impact of the play, are the opening scene, Blunt's remarks on adultery, Willmore's attempted rape of Florinda, Blunt and Frederick's threats of raping Florinda, and Willmore's denunciation of marriage. Spencer (1995: xx) points out that the play was revived and performed in 1790 at Drury Lane, as John Philip Kemble rewrote the play as *Love in Many Masks*, "sanitizing Willmore, softening Angellica, and quietening Hellena down." According to Spencer (1995: xx), the play was not performed again until the 1970s and even then the play was noticeably modified. Todd (1992: 1) notes that Behn's works were ignored and left out of the anthologies of women writers because of the societal changes that looked at her way of writing as disgusting.

It is not unusual for a Restoration play to take place in Italy, as the Grand Tour was becoming increasingly popular. Szilagyi (1998: 442) notes that the play is infused with popular political and sexual themes of the time. Willmore's name is linguistically associated with Behn's friend, a libertine John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, who was a lover to Elizabeth Barry, the woman who played Hellena. Barry was also a friend of Behn's and is speculated to have been 'Mrs B' in a poem where Behn addressed her friends (Todd 1992: 11). Barry's life was very public, as she was arguably the most famous actress of her time (ibid.).

Corse (2005: 44) also points out that Killigrew mentions Masaniello and his revolt in *Thomaso*, and many Englishmen compared the uprising in Naples of 1647-48 to the Commonwealth period. Masianelli sought to stand up to the Spanish monarchy that controlled Naples at the time, and although Masanielli's revolution was eventually suppressed by the Spanish monarchy, it was compared to the success of the Commonwealth, as both challenged

the aristocratic control (ibid.). *The Rover* was greatly influenced by the current political situation and reflected the current trends in politics.

1.4. Behn and the question of gender

Gender in the works of Aphra Behn has been researched from various angles, from analysing the vocabulary and the usage of pronouns in her poems, to the way she tackles conventions and social codes through pointing out contradictions. This review gives an overview of the research done on the topic of gender first in Behn's works overall, and then focuses on *The Rover*.

Pearson (1991:41) claims that when looking at 14 different works by Behn, it is not possible to tell the gender of the characters in 6 of them; in 8 of the works the characters are female, while some seem to be written deliberately ambiguously and could be interpreted as being either male or female. According to Pearson (1991:44), Behn criticizes the language used by the society by "allowing women to appropriate for their own uses a sexual vocabulary in which they have previously been the objects of male language. Thus men can be 'beautiful' and 'lovely' in the eyes of women as much as women can in the eyes of men." *The Rover* provides several examples of using the vocabulary this way, as in the scene where Hellena is disguised as a boy, Angellica calls Hellena "a pretty advocate" (4.2.227) and "sweet youth", (4.2.270) while Willmore calls Hellena "sweetheart" (4.2.299). The use of gender is seen similarly by Martin (1998:194) who argues that at least three of Behn's poems do not explicitly state the genders of the involved, since ambiguity acts as a linguistic device which helps Behn publicly challenge the conventional gender roles. Martin (1998: 205) also maintains that Behn has written several poems that include deliberately ambiguous words as to

conceal the gender of the character to the reader. Pearson (1991: 181) notes that Behn often has female protagonists wear male clothes for the purpose of endowing them with masculine power and control. Behn has concealed the gender of Hellena directly through cross-dressing in *The Rover* as well, as she appears dressed in man's clothes in the fourth act (4.2.197). At the beginning of act three (3.1. 32). Florinda, Valeria and Hellena enter the scene wearing different clothing for the purpose of concealing one's identity and thus for gaining control as well. In addition to agreeing with Pearson's claims, Martin (1998: 194) adds that Behn has described hermaphrodites or maybe even a third gender in her works. Martin (1998: 203) also claims that Behn used inanimate objects for the purpose of having a non-binary characters in her works. Young (1993:527) reaches the same conclusion as Martin, noting that in one of Behn's poems, a tree is used as a hermaphrodite, claiming the role of a third gender. Zeits (1997:504) maintains that in the mock poem *the Disappointment*, where a shepherd fails to have intercourse with a maid Cloris, Behn allows the female protagonist Cloris to conform to society's expected gender roles while still living out her own passions. According to Zeits (1997: 502) Behn uses ambivalent language to convey the dynamics of sexuality and power, as it is not clear whether Cloris resists having sex because she wants to resist, because Lysander has seduced her, or because resistance is expected to be a trait of an honorable woman by the society. She maintains that Cloris does have freedom of action, as she is shown to be aware of her personal identity and the social constraints. According to Zeits, Behn reveals both

- (1) the intricate negotiations between personal desire and adherence to the social code that women must enact and (2) the social forces that lie behind the conventions and make such acts of negotiation essential for women. (Zeits 1997: 504)

Zeits (1997: 508) claims that instead of the woman being vulnerable, the man becomes vulnerable and thus traditional gender roles are swapped. However, it is clear that not everyone sees the poem this way. Martin (1998:197) argues that Behn's masculine values are represented in *The Disappointment*, as the woman is nearly raped and as the rape seems to be eroticized. Yet another approach to the issue of gender is taken by Riwako (2003:12-15), who notes that Behn draws attention to gender issues through rewriting political plays as to include many female characters in them, which translates to actresses on the stage; as well as through the content, which addresses issues such as arranged marriages and the genuine longing of love by the courtesans. This applies particularly well for *the Rover*, which features many female characters and addresses both of the issues noted by Riwako. Although Pearson (1991) addresses the use of words in unusual contexts, it is clear that most of the research on the topic of gender in Behn's work has been done to address ambiguities that arise from the use of language and pronouns in her works, and the interpretation of the said ambiguous language. Zeits (1997) and Young (1993) claim that the ambiguities of Behn's language could be interpreted as the signs of another gender or deliberate concealment of the actual gender meant, which serves the purpose of challenging the traditional gender roles. Although Zeits does not claim any evidence for the third gender, she does claim that the ambiguous use of language allows for different interpretations of the behavior the woman portrays in *The Disappointment*. This view is not shared by Martin (1998), who does not see freedom given to the woman and who argues that Behn's ambiguous language can be interpreted as Behn's need to compromise with the prevailing views of the time. This approach is different from Riwako's, (2003) who has focused on Behn's possible awareness of how important it is to write female characters into plays, bring actresses on the stage, and raise awareness of the social issues through exposure of women on the stage. It is clear that while the linguistical

ambiguities in the poems have been addressed, there is still room for analysis in Behn's use of language for addressing social issues of the time.

The depiction of women in *The Rover* has been researched from various angles. Morris (2018: 59-61) analyzes the play within the context of the Grand Tour, which in her opinion allows Hellena to experience the world and go against patriarchal expectations which would have Hellena go from her parental household into an arranged marriage. Morris (2018: 66) also believes Angellica's portraits to be equal in function to what sculptures are to young men on the Grand Tour. Diamond (1989: 531-534) reaches a similar conclusion, as she believes Angellica is shown to be a commodity through the scene in which the paintings are first revealed, Angellica is even called a commodity by Blunt. Willmore lifting up a portrait of Angellica shows that Willmore already owns her (Diamond 1989: 532). According to Diamond (1989: 532) Angellica sings to her admirers, draws and closes the curtain, "not to demonstrate freedom, but to flaunt the charms that guarantee and uphold male power.". Although Angellica's figure is clearly adapted from Killigrew's play, Szilagy (1998: 446) argues that Killigrew's Angellica is a patriarchal model who compliantly accepts her position both as a whore and as a woman; willingly accepts her fate and the fact that she is unsuitable for marriage. According to Szilagy (1998: 446) Behn's Angellica on the other hand, appears to be independent. According to Morris (2018: 71), by using Lucetta, Hellena and Angellica as witty and cunning rogue figures, Behn fights against social conventions. Morris (Ibid.) argues that Florinda and Hellena choose their own paths, and that by being able to select one's own mate, women end up being better spouses, which is useful for men as well. Furthermore, by being adventurous and by changing the path predetermined for her, Hellena ends up as an equal to the rover Willmore (Ibid.).

Florinda is seen as an “image of passive femininity,” since she has to be saved from being raped at least twice and so is a “damsel in distress.” (Morris 2018: 71) Pacheco (1998: 325) sees Florinda’s role as contradictory, as she is a highly prized young wealthy upper-class virgin while simultaneously shown to be a commodity object. In the scene in which Willmore attempts to rape Florinda, the audience knows Florinda’s intentions and can consider Willmore’s actions towards Florinda as attempted rape; while from Willmore’s perspective, he was seducing Florinda (while claiming to be seduced), as Florinda’s appearance and conduct seemed to suggest to him that she was willing to have sex (1998: 327-328).

Szilagyi (1998: 435-355) studies the conflicts and power dynamics in the relationship of the characters, especially between the siblings Don Pedro, Hellena and Florinda. According to Szilagyi (1998: 439) their positions seem equal yet are not because of the irreconcilability between their wants. According to Szilagyi (Ibid.) siblings compete with each other to serve their own ends, and while Hellena and Florinda try to dominate each other, they also oppose Pedro. Szilagyi (1998: 438) claims that Behn seeks for equalities within the relationship of Willmore and Hellena, yet sees the marriage between Willmore and Hellena as problematic, as Willmore remains dominant. According to Szilagyi (1998: 447) Hellena and Angellica are both advertising themselves, and the distinction between a whore and a virgin is blurred. Pearson (1991: 48) notes that “Behn creates narrators who either speak with a consciously ironic voice to reveal the contradictions in the received orthodoxies of gender, or unconsciously reveal themselves as victims of these very contradictions.”

Most of the researchers have concluded that the characters are indeed going against their fates, yet still come across as commodity objects. The author of this thesis does not agree with Szilagyi who claims that Willmore ends up dominating Hellena, but agrees with Morris who claims that Hellena ends up Willmore’s equal. The author finds that there is still

discussion to be had about Angellica, whom Diamond finds to be a commodity object owned by men. Although as a courtesan she has to sell herself, there is another way of interpreting the scene where Willmore lifts up a portrait of Angellica, which is discussed in the analysis.

CHAPTER 2. THE ANALYSIS OF *THE ROVER*

This chapter is an analysis which consists of two parts. The first is a discussion on the topic of forced marriage, and the second an analysis of how the women sought freedom and control of their lives in very different ways. Although *the Rover* has been looked at from the gender perspective, this chapter will provide new explanations for the behaviours of some of the female characters in *the Rover*. The characters of Hellena and Angellica will be analysed more thoroughly.

2.1 Arguments against forced marriage

Although all female protagonists argue against boundaries set to them by social conventions, Hellena is arguably the most controversial and outspoken character in the play. As such, she frequently mocks religion, argues against forced marriage, and speaks for the freedom of a woman to choose her own fate. The most important conversations Hellena has are the one in the first act of the play, where she stands up for the rights of herself and her sister, and the ones where she tells Willmore of her reasoning behind wanting to marry him. I agree with Morris' statement that Hellena voluntarily chooses marriage (2018: 61), as opposed to being forced to comply with patriarchal rules. It is possible to argue that by choosing marriage, Hellena becomes a victim of another social convention; as instead of becoming a nun, she gives away her freedom and becomes a man's property. Yet she is disillusioned by the idea of the happy ever after, as she expresses it in the conversation about Florinda's future between Florinda and Don Pedro.

Although Szilagyi (1998: 439) claims that Florinda tried to gain power over Hellena when Hellena inquired about marriage, the author of this thesis claims that “‘Ought not to be so curious in a discourse of love” (1.1.29-30) was teasingly said, as Florinda must have known that if anyone shared her values and would help her marry Belvile, it would be Hellena. Hellena trusted Florinda with her ideas, knowing well that she was not supposed to be this curious and that saying what she meant might mean less freedom for her, as Don Pedro had plans for Hellena’s future.

Szilagyi (1998: 440) believes that when Hellena replies to Pedro, “‘I care not, I had rather be a Nun, than be oblig’d to Marry as you wou’d have me, if I were design’d forn’t.”(1.1.138-139) Don Pedro is not aware of Hellena desiring a man. Yet earlier during the same conversation Hellena states, “‘It’s not enough you make a nun of me, but you must cast my sister away too, exposing her to a worse confinement than a religious life?” (1.1.91-21). This gives away Hellena’s attitude not only towards religion and forced marriage, but to nunnery too. She mocks religion, as it is threatening her freedom. Don Pedro is well aware of Hellena’s desire for freedom, as he knows Hellena very well. It is more likely that Don Pedro believes Hellena’s destiny to be secured, as there is no reason to perceive any danger from Hellena’s actions when she is to be a nun. Especially as her fate is seemingly inescapable, and as Callis has a specific task of keeping an eye on Hellena. Yet Hellena’s frankness indicates that she does not care about how her actions are perceived, and that what she does with her youth seems to be more valuable to her than acting according to the norms of the society.

When Hellena comes to learn of Willmore’s character, she still maintains that they ought to marry. She notes how the society values women when they are young, and thus thinks that she can walk away from marriage if she chooses to do so, thus showing her independence and her awareness of what the society values. On the other hand, it is possible that she would

like to have a long-lasting relationship but knows that this kind of seduction is the only way to catch a rake. Even if that is so, her statement means that she believes a woman should be able to divorce and perhaps marry again if she chooses to do so.

“O’ my conscience, that will be our destiny, because we are both of one humour: I am as inconstant as you, for I have considered, captain, that a handsome woman has a great deal to do whilst her face is good, for then is our harvest-time to gather friends; and should I in these days of my youth, catch a fit of foolish constancy, I were undone; ‘tis loitering by daylight in our great journey. Therefore, I declare, I’ll allow but one year for love, one year for indifference, and one year for hate; and then, go hang yourself: for I profess myself the gay, the kind, and the inconstant. The devil’s in’t if this won’t please you.” (3.1.173-181).

Hellena is disillusioned with the idea of marrying for the money, as she fiercely argues against the marriage of Florinda and Don Vincentio, saying, “Marry Don Vincentio! Hang me, such a wedlock would be worse than adultery with another man.” (1.1.125-126). Hellena says she will marry whom she chooses to, not accept someone who wants her, and jokingly notes that she has chosen to court as many men as she can. When Florinda asks Hellena why anyone would marry her when they see what a “mad wench” Hellena is, she responds: “Like me! I don’t intend every he that likes me shall have me, but he that I like: I should have stayed in the nunnery still, if I had liked my lady abbess as well as she liked me. No, I came thence not, as my wise brother imagines, to take an eternal farewell of the world, but to love, and to be beloved; and I will be beloved, or I’ll get one of your men, so I will.” (3.1.37-42)

Although Florinda is seen in unfortunate situations seemingly “a damsel in distress” as noted by Morris (2018: 71), she clearly states her unwillingness to marry Antonio and notes, “I hate Vincentio, sir, and I would not have a man so dear to me as my brother follow the ill customs of our country, and make a slave of his sister” (1.1.62-64).

2.2 Freedom and worth of a woman

This chapter will discuss the means by which the female protagonists, mainly Hellena, Angellica and Florinda seek to find their freedom and control over their own lives. It will focus on Hellena's character and argue against claims that she is submissive to Willmore.

According to Todd (1992: 363) 'The Rover' during the interregnum meant 'someone who wandered around the world, but also an inconstant lover or male flirt, and a sea-robber or pirate.' Although the protagonist Willmore is usually seen as the Rover, the author of this thesis agrees with Morris (2018: 74) who argues that the term might apply to Hellena as well, as she is constantly portrayed as Willmore's equal. As such, she possesses inconstancy; as Angellica notes (2.1.135), 'the sin of all mankind', and as Hellena herself claims, she is Hellena the Inconstant. She clearly sees the worth young women have in this society as she stands up for Florinda, stating, 'I had rather see her in the Hotel de Dieu, to waste her youth there in vows, and be a handmaid to lazars and cripples, than to lose it in such a marriage.' (1.1.126-128). Hellena not only stands up for a woman's freedom to choose a husband, she also shows her awareness of the importance of using the period of being young, as it is valuable in the society.

According to Szilagyi (1998: 438) the relationship between Hellena and Willmore is problematic, as Willmore has dominance over her. I do not believe this to be the case, as Hellena is clearly just as cunning, if not more, than Willmore. She exhibits predatory and obsessive behaviour, as she manipulates her way into marriage with Willmore who states his disinterest in marriage several times. Although Willmore tries to hide his relationship with

Angellica and is manipulative as well, he does not go as far as Hellena, who uses the carnival time to her advantage and hides her identity through changing her clothes in order to speak to Angellica and get a reaction from Willmore. When Hellena becomes aware of Willmore's adventures with another woman, she does not choose to leave, nor does she act hurt. She claims to not be in love (3.1.14), yet reveals that she is angry and afraid at the thought of Willmore being in love with anyone but her (3.1.22-24). It is likely that her feelings arise from her not being able to process the thought of being outwitted by someone; and she did go to the carnival with the intention of seeking new experiences and freedom (1.1.173-178). She proceeds to regain her control over Willmore by attempting to get Willmore to marry her (3.1.167-169). When Hellena has Willmore kneel and kiss her hand and to promise he will never see Angellica again, Hellena notes, "Now, what a wicked creature am I, to damn a proper fellow." (3.1.263-264). While Angellica tries to keep control of herself while seeing Willmore courting Hellena (3.1.197-198), Hellena seems to enjoy the fact that Willmore has been courting someone else and she found out about it, as this gives her an advantage. It seems like Hellena is enjoying the power that comes from knowing how much Willmore wants her. In fact, she seems to be taking the carnival situation as if it were a game. Her attitude and vanity are best described by herself, as she says, "to write little soft nonsensical billets, and with great difficulty and danger receive answers, in which I shall have my beauty praised, my wit admired (though little or none), and have the vanity that way, because I am to be a nun, and so shall not be suspected to have any such earthly thoughts about me; but when I walk thus, and sigh thus, they'll think my mind's upon my monastery, and cry, 'how happy 'tis she's so resolved'; but not a word of man." (3.1.55-62). As she goes to the carnival with the intention of seducing and being seduced, she seems to always be one step ahead of Willmore.

Angellica possesses the same characteristic traits as Hellena, as she is also incredibly predatory, advertises herself, is independent and full of pride. Indeed, they seem to be resolving the same question, as they both comment on how they have decided to solve the problem of people being inconstant. When it comes to Angellica, it is worth keeping in mind that the feeling of superiority is not necessarily equal to what power characters hold when looking at their circumstances objectively. Although the author of this thesis agrees with the interpretation of Angellica being a commodity, there is no need to believe that Angellica singing to her admirers, drawing and closing the curtain is a sign of submission to male power, or that Wilmore lifting up a portrait of Angellica shows that he owns Angellica (Diamond 1989: 532). On the contrary- Angellica is first introduced to the characters first by words, followed by pictures, and then by Angellica being on the balcony (2.1.116). She sells herself as a commodity object, yet is clearly in control of the image she creates for herself. It might even be argued that this deliberately created mysteriousness and control over her self-image is what gives her a reputation of a 'famous courtesan', as noted by Belvile (2.1.95) This self-presentation also allows her to ask for such high prices, which in turn allows her more liberty when choosing her clients. As she herself admits, she is vain, and does not mind when men laugh at the price she is sold at (2.1.117-123). As long as she is talked about, the myth of her being more special than other courtesans is alive, and as a narcissist she has the power she craves. She notes that 'inconstancy is the sin of mankind, therefore I'm resolved that nothing but gold shall charm my heart' (2.1.135-136) and profits very well off of it. When Moretta asks Angellica how she has avoided falling in love (2.1.137-140), Angellica reveals that she has not had the time because she is so highly sought after (2.1.142-144). This seems to be an excuse, as she is presented throughout the play as someone who is very narcissistic. As Szilagy (1998: 447) notes, Angellica "ignores patriarchal structures and exhibits no remorse".

In fact, being distant and cold is such a part of her image that when being hurt, she keeps her composure and decides to resolve her jealousy in another way without hurting her reputation and self-worth (3.1.196-197). Angellica is used to having control, and when she succumbs to madness and aims a gun at Willmore (5.1.210), she is unable to process the fact that she has lost control over a man.

Lucetta resolves to solve the problem of control in the same way as Angellica, in other words, by being the best in her trade. This is not unusual, as neither of them have a chance of being married. They both seek to control others by using tricks, making their houses look lavish and luxurious, and by creating mysteriousness around them. Like Angellica, Lucetta is also highly confident, as she notes ‘‘He’s English, too, and they say that’s a sort of good-natured loving people, and have generally so kind an opinion of themselves, that a woman with any wit may flatter ‘em into any sort of fool she pleases.’’ (1.2.201-206). Not only do Lucetta and Angellica see men as prey, but so does Moretta, who notes with pity that courtesans who fall in love end their victory over men (Moretta 2.2.158-166).

Florinda tests whether her perception of Belvile is true by pretending to be someone else in order to see if Belvile would lie with another woman. According to Pacheco (1998: 324-325) Florinda thinks herself valuable as she is young, of high birth and a rational being, yet she seeks her independence in a patriarchal way, as she implies that she should marry a wealthy old man worthy of her. As she notes in the beginning of act 1, ‘‘I shall let him see, I understand better what’s due to my beauty, birth and fortune, and more to my soul, than to obey those unjust commands’’ (1.1.20-23). According to Morris (2018: 71), Florinda seems to be in a constant need for help. And although she does need saving, she is no less opinionated about her worth than Hellena is, nor does she lose her head in hard situations which she comes out of by herself. Despite being perceived as a commodity object, Florinda’s role remains the

one that points out the contradictory attitudes towards women. In the scene where Wilmore tries to rape Florinda, both of the characters' subjective perspectives are shown to the audience in order to show how a courtesan and a high-class woman may be indistinguishable from one another, and how both of them have rights over their own bodies (Pacheco 1998: 331-332). Blunt's confusion about not being able to tell a whore from a virgin can also be read as a reference to female spectators and actresses who were kept as mistresses, as it would have been impossible to tell them apart as they often watched the Restoration plays in vizard-masks (Diamond 1989: 529- 530).

Overall, there is no need to assume that Hellena is submissive to Willmore or that Angellica is just a commodity object owned by men. In the first part of the analysis, Hellena's aversion to forced marriage and her character are described. In the second part of the analysis, the author of this thesis argues against the idea that Angellica is just a commodity object. The author of this thesis finds Hellena to be equal to that of Willmore and sees Angellica and Hellena both sharing the same narcissistic traits which allow them to succeed in their environment.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of the thesis was to analyse how the female characters in Aphra Behn's most well-known play *The Rover* tried to keep control over their own lives as much as they could under the circumstances they were in. In this thesis the author argued against the idea held by many critics that Behn merely conformed to the norms of the era and concluded that the main characters used their perceived role in the society to gain as much power over their own lives as possible, opposed to being submissive to men.

This thesis gave an overview of significant contributions Aphra Behn has made to the English literature and culture. The background on *The Rover* and Behn's religious views were discussed in order to understand the society in which and for which she was writing. Context to *The Rover* was added by discussing the play itself, and by discussing the culture and the status of female writers of the Restoration era. Studies that have concentrated on gender in Behn's *The Rover* were used as a basis of the analysis and thus also discussed in a chapter. Other studies on the topic of gender in her works were mentioned as well, as they provided additional context.

Despite noting the independence of characters Hellena and Angellica, previous researchers have found them to be examples of how Behn wrote characters that were submissive to men. This thesis showed how the female characters can be read as being equal to men, as they were well aware of their strengths and used them to manipulate others.

First part of the analysis showed female characters', mostly Hellena's, aversion to planned marriages, and how they acknowledged the worth of being young. This part also explained some of Hellena's behaviour and argued against the idea of Florinda trying to overpower Hellena. Second part of analysis argued against the idea that one of the female

protagonists, Hellena, is inferior to her partner Willmore. It also argued against the idea that Angellica is just a commodity object submissive to men, and showed how the characters Hellena and Angellica are both cunning, and solve their problems by creating images of themselves that allow them to have as much power and control over their lives as possible. The main similarities between the characters which allow the reader to interpret them as more than just submissive to their male counterparts were also discussed.

The author of this thesis used close reading as a method and acknowledges the risk of overanalyzing and asserting culturally and personally biased opinions; yet notes that critics from previous eras have faced the same difficulty, perhaps even more so, judging from their apparent lack of neutrality towards female writers.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Noneth Helen Viro

SEARCH FOR FREEDOM IN APHRA BEHN'S THE ROVER

Bakalaureusetöö

2020

Lehekülgede arv: 35

Käesoleva bakalaureusetöö eesmärk on näidata Aphra Behni olulisust oma kaasaegsete seas ning uurida kuidas Behni näidendi „The Rover” naistegelased end tolleaegses ühiskonnas kehtestada üritasid. Ühtlasi vaieldakse selles töös vastu kriitikutele kes leiavad, et Behn ei olnud uuenduslik vaid järgis ühiskonna tavaid. Selleks annab töö ülevaate ka Aphra Behni panusest Inglise kirjanduse ja kultuuri arengule.

Töö koosneb kahest suuremast peatükist. Esimeses on välja toodud töö eesmärgid ning Aphra Behni taust, inglise restauratsiooniperioodi õhustik ja näidendi „the Rover” taust. Kirjanduse ülevaates on välja toodud uurimused mis on Behni töid ja täpsemalt näidendit „The Rover” sarnasest vaatenurgast käsitlenud. Kui osad uurimused on leidnud, et „The Rover” naistegelased on meestele alluvad, siis teine peatükk käsitleb peategelase Hellena karakterit ning näitab, et Hellena ei jäänud kuidagi alla oma partnerile Willmore'ile. Analüüsi teises osas on arutletud selle üle kuidas peategelased Hellena ja Angellica kasutavad teadlikult ära oma rolli ühiskonnas selleks, et saada enda elu üle võimalikult suur kontroll. Ajastu kontekst ja analüüs näitavad, et Behn ei läinud mitte lihtsalt oma ajaga kaasa, vaid tõi välja ühiskonna valukohad, ning omas uuendusliku lavakasutajana olulist rolli kaasaegse ühiskonna tõlgendamisel ja muutmisel.

Märksõnad:

Aphra Behn, inglise kirjandus, inglise restauratsioon

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

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