"Banished his country, despised at home": Cavalier Politics, Banishment, and Rape in Aphra Behn's The Rover

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In Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, or *The Banish'd Cavaliers* (1677), the figure of the cavalier and his banishment during the English Interregnum are integrally linked to rape. In part, rape functions in the play as revenge taken by the cavalier for the loss and exile he has suffered. Behn demonstrates sympathy for such suffering by creating an attractive, extravagant rake-hero in the character of Willmore.[1] Yet, she also offers a sophisticated critique of the rape-as-revenge formulation espoused by the cavalier characters. Rape in *The Rover* differs from its usual depiction in Restoration drama in two ways.[2] First, Behn neither mimics the intense suffering of rapes in tragedies nor does she show rape in a purely comic light.[3] Second, rape is attempted most often, not by the typical villain or fool, but by Willmore, the play's dashing hero. In fact, Willmore was so popular with audiences

1. Willmore embodies many of the traits of the extravagant rake as defined by Harold Love, in that he is vain, self-assured, boastful, cheeky, impulsive, frantic, wild, witty, and excessively libertine; in short, his manner is extravagant in every way which is the ultimate "essence" of this character type (72).

2. Rape itself is not unusual in Restoration drama, especially in tragedies; in fact, it was so prevalent that John Dennis called it "the peculiar barbarity of our *English* stage . . . a Fault . . . for which nothing can make Atonement" (166).

3. Jean I. Marsden explains that tragic rape scenes were popular because they appealed strongly to the pathos of audiences at the time by creating an erotic spectacle as well as the suffering necessary to move the passions (186). Rape became such a common feature in tragedies that it was then parodied in comedies, such as John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696).

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that Behn eventually wrote a sequel for his character: *The Rover II*). The dynamics of Willmore's character provides Behn with the opportunity to engage with the complexities of cavalier politics, and the witty, comic repartee he carries on with others (including Florinda, the one he attempts to rape) provides an avenue for exploring the relation between those politics and sexual violence against women. By showcasing the suffering of female rape victims, Behn also foregrounds rape as a serious transgression against the female subject.

Cavalier politics are central to Willmore's characterization and are bound up in the play's violent exchanges, sexual or otherwise. Banishment and dispossession in Behn's play operates as a means of addressing the effects of the English civil war on women. Willmore is the comic hero of the play, a witty cavalier who is unjustly reduced to poverty and homeless-wandering during the Interregnum, but he is also an attempted rapist. The cavalier libertine uses banishment and dispossession as an attempt to justify degradation and violence towards women, the result of a civil war involving patriarchal struggles over power and property. Willmore, then, as comedic hero simultaneously represents the libertine ethos of the extravagant rake towards which Behn is tensely ambivalent, the banished cavalier ethos to which Behn is clearly sympathetic, and the patriarchal ethos sanctioning sexual domination of women of which Behn is highly critical.

Despite the plethora of critical material written about Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, not enough attention has been devoted to Behn's banishment of her extravagant rake-hero Willmore and the direct relationship between that banishment and attempted rapes in the play. Susan J. Owen is well known for her discussion of rape as a trope of monstrosity in Restoration drama, a trope that is "associated by Tories with rebellion and by Whigs with tyranny and popery" ("Sexual Politics and Party Politics" 16). While Owen's insights into the association of rape with Restoration party politics are well worth minding, Behn's unique representation of rape does not fit well into this particular mold. In fact, Owen herself emphasizes the ambiguity of Willmore as hero in the play, preventing any easy political reduction of the meaning of his rape attempts ("Behn's Dramatic Response to Restoration Politics" 71-72). The ambiguous nature of Willmore's heroic status is likely the cause of divergent readings of his character by critics. Some find his antics essentially comic and others take him quite seriously. Emphasizing manner above deeds, Harold Love asserts that the "sheer comicality" of rakes like Willmore overshadow their moral transgressions (87). Janet Todd sees rape in *The Rover* as a comic expression that disallows the seriousness of its typical depiction in tragedy as voyeuristic and sadistic. It is difficult, however, to see Willmore's spying on Florinda in her nightgown

before he tries to rape her as anything but voyeuristic, and the actions of the men involved in the attempted gang rape of Florinda as anything but sadistic. Indeed, most critics who focus on the comic nature of Willmore as extravagant rake still argue that Behn takes rape seriously—critics Helen M. Burke and Anthony Kaufman are representative examples.[4] While critics such as Burke and Kaufman draw attention to the ways Behn uses comedy to provide serious social commentary, more attention needs to be devoted to the dynamics of power and politics as they relate to rape.[5]

Anita Pacheco and Derek Hughes each offer in depth analyses of power, politics, and rape, accounting for the complexities inherent in Behn's depiction of the cavalier. Pacheco, touching upon Florinda as a facilitator of the exchange of patriarchal power, ultimately concludes that the play participates in an insidious culture of rape that conceals the seriousness of rape for the female subject. While Pacheco's character analysis of Florinda and her take on the role that rape plays in patriarchal exchanges of power is compelling, her conclusion that Behn participates in the propagation of rape culture is less so. On the contrary, Behn condemns rape in its various manifestations even though she does not entirely condemn the figure of the cavalier. Hughes demonstrates the importance of the colonial setting of the play, and the status of the cavaliers within that setting as it relates to the trope of woman as occupied territory. In a similar vein, I hope to demonstrate the importance of the historical backdrop of the English civil war to the play, and the status of the cavaliers due to their banishment as it relates to the cultural and legal formulation of woman as property. My particular focus is on the ways the image of the banished cavalier/libertine, in both its positive and negative representations from the 1640s through the 1670s, shapes the multifaceted depiction of rape in the play.[6] Ultimately, Behn creates cavalier heroes who are appealing to her audience while also critiquing the continual formulation of women as property, rape as property crime, and the denial of the female subject position and female sexuality in patriarchal culture.

4. Helen M. Burke argues that the play is highly critical of the cavalier, turning him into a feminized object of scorn and derision. Anthony Kaufman argues that Behn's play reveals that libertinism sanctions aggression and violence towards women despite masking this tendency with witty language.

5. Ann Marie Stewart does address power dynamics when she argues that "men attempt to rape women in order to curb [their] potentiality for power and freedom," a sign that the women do have the capacity to usurp male authority (26).

6. Stephen Szilagyi claims that, in their banishment, the cavaliers of the play are a sign of the absent patriarch in defeat and the resulting factionalism of Charles II's reign, but he does not relate this to the issue of rape.

Rape partly functions in the play as an act of revenge taken by the cavaliers for the loss of their land, status, worth, and their publicly perceived failures during the civil war. During the English Interregnum, the lands of the banished cavaliers were confiscated by the Cromwellian authorities and their reputations were painted as villainous by Puritan and Commonwealth propaganda. Since the play takes place during this earlier time period, the audience is made to understand in the very first scene that the cavalier is "Banished his country, despised at home" (1.1.128). Upon the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the cavaliers expected to be recompensed for their loss of land but were embittered when the king chose not to do so in an attempt to keep the peace and avoid a parliamentarian uprising. Thus, many cavaliers were reduced to poverty and wielded little political power (excepting the Cavalier Parliament instituted by Charles II). Throughout the 1660s and 1670s, popular representations of the cavaliers shifted from attempts to restore their reputations to criticisms of their political failures and excessive libertinism. In *The Rover,* Behn utilizes all of these shifting ideas of the cavalier since her play takes place in the 1650s but was written in 1677.

In the political propaganda of the English Civil War period, cavaliers were depicted as having a natural propensity for violence and debauchery of all kinds in contrast to the Puritan ideology of self-denial (Markley 116). This is abundantly apparent in many historical documents from the time. In "The Insolency and Cruelty of the Cavaliers" (1643), an anonymous author describes the cavalier attack on numerous small towns in which they were said to have plundered all goods, robbed and stolen from homes, raped, burned buildings and fields, murdered, and tortured: "they ayme at nothing but to bring ruine and destruction upon the Kingdome ... for they come to plunder, and not to fight" (5-6). Even more detailed in its descriptions of the horrors committed by the cavaliers is "A perfect Declaration of the barbarous and cruell practises committed by Prince Robert, the Cavalliers, and others in his Majesties Army" (1642), 'Prince Robert's' cavalry being particularly notorious. Here also the cavaliers are said to have committed murder, rape, theft, robbery, and arson. Both documents are striking in their account of the cavaliers' rapes of local women in that rape is always listed in the same section as robbery and theft while murder of men, women, infants, and even dogs is listed separately. This shows a distinction between crimes of theft, under which rape is categorized, and violent crimes against the human subject, such as murder and torture. In *The Rover,* Willmore embodies the violent, debauched image of the cavalier promoted by Puritans under the Commonwealth, and the formulation of rape-as-property-crime is a motivating factor in Willmore's behavior.

Aphra Behn (née Johnson). Artist: Thomas Uwins. Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London.©

The Rover also incorporates the notion of cavaliers in the 1660s, immediately following the restoration of Charles II to the throne, as saviors of England and as rescuers of the common people from tyranny. Part of this representation is undoubtedly due to the source text *Thomaso, or The Wanderer* (1663) written by Thomas Killigrew who was himself a banished cavalier. Helen Burke reads *Thomaso* as a political allegory in which the cavalier saves the imperiled virgin and by extension England (119-20). The shift towards a positive portrayal of cavaliers can also be seen in popular songs such as "The Cavalier's Comfort" (1655) which expresses a hope

for compensation to be given to the ever-deserving cavaliers and "The Cavaleers Complaint" (1661) which laments the broken promise of the restoration. In 1664, a cavalier anonymously wrote "Truth's Discovery; or, The Cavalier's Case clearly Stated, BY Conscience and Plain-dealing," which more formally and carefully argues for the cavaliers to be given some compensation for their service and loyalty to the king, in part, by blaming the recent banishment and current poverty of the cavaliers for their debauched behavior. This document also attempts to correct the cavaliers' poor reputation by blaming a minority of unauthorized soldiers for the plundering of small towns. Willmore voices the grievances of the cavaliers when he says, "Pox of poverty, it makes a man a slave, makes wit and honour / sneak, my soul grew lean and rusty for want of credit" (3.1.113-4). Clearly, Willmore views his poverty as producing impotence as well as a justifying his behavior. His attempt at justification aligns him with the notions of the cavalier of the 1660s, while his anxiety about loss of power gestures towards the ambivalence surrounding the figure of the cavalier in the 1670s.

In the 1670s politics grew complicated as international alliances shifted and Charles II had to deal with an increasingly oppositional parliament. Once the celebratory period of the restoration ended, it became difficult to ignore the fact that the cavaliers lost the war and that they only regained England due to the collapse of the Commonwealth under Richard Cromwell. The cavalier past was more often seen as a failure, one that Charles II's restoration could not erase (Szigaly 436). The political failures and excessive libertinism of the cavaliers continued to draw scrutiny as the decade unfolded (Burke 120). Yet, at the same time, cavaliers were still viewed by many as preferable to the austere, tyrannical rulers of the Commonwealth. In his analysis of *The Rover,* Hughes draws a parallel between the uncertainty of the 1670s, when Charles II was jockeying for power with parliament and allying himself with Louis XIV in an unpopular war against Holland, and the uncertainty of the 1650s, when political alliances were also shifting as the future Charles II and James Duke of York moved from France to Spain. Behn's drama, written in the 1670s, embodies the shifting views of the cavalier in Willmore's character, who is imbued with ambivalence and contradiction. Many critics make use of Willmore's affinity to the fool, particularly because it is Edwardo the fool who is the rapist in the source play *Thomaso.* Behn, on the other hand, makes attempted rapists of both the foolish Blunt and Willmore (Hughes 84, Kaufman 2, Pacheco 330, and Todd 217). But Willmore is, of course, also distinctly an attractive, comedic hero. Why does Behn make him both a drunken rapist and an extravagant rake-hero? What does this say about the role of the cavalier and perceived notions of rape in British society?

The legal history of rape in seventeenth-century England provides insight into these questions. From 1550-1700, rape law was slowly revised from the medieval formulation of rape as a violation of property law or theft[7] toward a violation of the woman's body against her will.[8] Practical application of the law, however, tells an entirely different story. From 1558-1700, a low number of rapes were prosecuted compared to other crimes and the conviction rates for rape steadily dropped.[9] Many of the cases that did come before the courts involved female victims who were brutally wounded, or rapes that had been interrupted and brought to trial by witnesses (Beattie 127). Significantly, the courts were far more willing to prosecute rape when the woman's virginity could be verified and when the victim was a man's young daughter (Bashar 38, McLynn 106).[10] Virginity was still largely equated with male property, and "the idea that rape was an offence against property was still prevalent ... rape was a challenge to male ownership and authority" (McLynn 109).[11] Even though the rape

7. Since women were legally considered to be the property of the father or husband, a crime of this nature was not viewed as a transgression against the female subject—rape, abduction, and elopement were interchangeable terms—in the context of medieval law.

8. See the statutes of 1555 and 1597, for example.

9. During the 45-year reign of Elizabeth I, the Sussex Assize records show that 1,000 acts of larceny, 150 burglaries, 100 homicides, and only 14 rapes were prosecuted (Bashar 33). For all five home counties from 1558-1700, only 45 guilty sentences were given out of 274 rape cases, less than 1% of all indictments were made for rape, and the rate of conviction for rape dropped from 1 out of 4, to 1 out of 8 (Bashar 34-35). From 1660-1800, the Surry assizes saw an average of 1 rape trial every 1.5 years, and the Sussex assizes saw 1 rape trial every 4 years (Beattie 126). 60% of men found guilty of rape were granted royal pardons in Surrey from 1660-1800 (McLynn 109).

10. The age of consent was set at 10 years in 1576.

11. These trends prevailed despite the fact that more adult women were pressing charges for rape than ever before (Bashar 38, Beattie 130, and McLynn 110). Women made accusations of rape in the face of what must have been disheartening obstacles. In the late sixteenth century, the courts dictated that serious felonies that carried the death sentence, including rape, be tried at the assizes rather than the quarter sessions (Sharpe 33). While the courts' consideration of the seriousness of rape may be encouraging, this had the effect of making prosecution of rape much more expensive. Additionally, a woman was considered to have a "weak case" if she did not report the rape within 24 hours, if she did not scream or cry out during the crime, if she could not prove penetration, if she was unwilling to be cross-examined regarding every detail of the occurrence, and if she could be proved to have questionable moral character (Beattie 129, McLynn 106)—all of which speaks to "a general feeling that the testimony of women in court was not as reliable as men's" (McLynn 105).

statutes were slowly progressing *de jure*, rape was still often viewed solely in patriarchal terms *de facto*, and primarily functioned to protect male interests at the expense of the female subject. If rape was still commonly considered to be a violation of property and cavaliers were typically considered to have lost their property wrongfully to the Commonwealth, then one way for them to enact revenge was to commit rape. In the case of *The Rover*, the cavaliers' attempts to rape are presented as a way to regain authority and power by possessing women as property, compensating for lost English territories.[12] In fact, the male cavaliers refer directly to poverty, property, and retaliation in the midst of their sexual conquests, rape or otherwise. Behn criticizes the formulation of rape as property crime through her consideration of the consequences such a definition has on female victims.

No female character in *The Rover* illustrates the extreme danger of the patriarchal formulation of woman as property to the extent that Florinda does. Indeed, no other female character is directly threatened with rape in the entire play, yet Florinda is threatened three times. Florinda defines herself as a commodity of value and thus facilitates traditional patriarchal gender relations even as she rebels against her father's choice of a husband for her. In doing so, she helps to make herself the target of revenge for the dispossessed cavaliers. The first rape threat Florinda faces takes place before the time of the play during the siege of Pamplona as she explains, "I was exposed to such dangers / as the licensed lust of common soldiers" (1.1.71-72). Rape is part of the sanctioned order of things in a time of conquest; as territories are violently taken so are women's bodies (Hughes 85). Furthermore, Florinda notably labels the soldiers "common," adding a class dimension to the attempted rape.[13] When Belvile saves her from these lower-class men, he feels entitled to possess her as property; likewise, after his duel with Don Pedro, he says, "I won her by my sword" and "You know I ought to claim a victor's right ... to purchase her" (4.2.94, 4.2.101-13). Florinda becomes a commodity purchased through valor, a territory to which Belvile as cavalier is entitled, literally because of his conquest of her, and symbolically as the dispossessed cavalier who needs to be restored.

12. Jessica Munns explains that in the drama of this period it is not uncommon to see "authority reinscribed as sexual acts ... turning female bodies into territories, implicitly an England, to be possessed and controlled" (145). Janet Todd observes that rape in the heroic plays of the 1660s and 1670s was "the ultimate property crime" (216).

13. This may also refer to the general assumption that officers of rank are not perpetrators of rape, but Willmore is a captain and he attempts rape most often in the play. So, Behn is equally critical of this assumption.

Belvile also plays the role of a traditional romantic hero in the play, motivated by love, but this brand of chivalry tends to define women in terms similar to those that lead to rape later in the play. The chivalric code positions men as aggressive/active and women as passive/vulnerable, thus as a prize to be won. This is a definition that Florinda willingly accepts and promotes (Pacheco 326). In her defense of her choice not to marry Don Vincentio, Florinda claims that her "youth, beauty, and fortune" are worth more than his jointure (1.1.75). Because of her status as a wealthy, beautiful lady, she feels that she has the right to choose a partner. Ironically, the very premises that she uses to argue for her right to choose are the same premises that define her as the valuable commodity of her father, brother, and potential husband. Choosing Belvile, then, is not true rebellion, but rather acquiescence to patriarchal order. Furthermore, Don Pedro can be seen here as violating the patriarchal code of honor since he owes Belville his life and that of his sister's; in which case, Florinda is restoring that sense of order. The other signifier that denotes Florinda's worth is her chastity which she continually refers to as her "honor." She also constantly upbraids Helena for any mention of female desire which Florinda squeamishly denies: "Prithee be not so wild" (1.1.35). It is Florinda's chastity that Belvile defends when he saves her from the soldiers in Pamplona and again from Willmore. Florinda's easy slip from virtuous lady to rape victim works to underscore the problematic formulation of women in the chivalric code. Behn demonstrates that if a woman must always be chaste, passive, and won through conquest, then it becomes difficult to imagine how she will ever manage to engage in sex without being forced.

This can account for the striking similarities between Belvile's right to Florinda as wife and Willmore's attempted justifications for his threatening behavior. Critics have explored the ways in which the masquerade setting of *The Rover* removes the signifiers of women's identities as wife, sister, daughter, lady, and whore; when these distinctions are blurred, women encounter both freedom and danger (Hughes 86, Kaufman 5). But in the garden scene of act 3, it is difficult to imagine that Willmore misses these signs despite his drunkenness. Florinda is literally inside of the wealthy estate of her family not walking the streets in a mask; she carries a box of jewels while dressed in a luxurious nightgown. Elin Diamond explains that the jewel box is "a double metonym for dowry and genitals" (533). Willmore does not rape her because he mistakes her identity due to intoxication (as he later claims) but because he recognizes it. His attempt is symbolically a transgression against a wealthy estate, a cavalier's revenge

for dispossession and lack.[14] Willmore defines his behavior as retaliation: "a judge, were he young and vigorous and / saw those eyes of thine, would know 'twas they gave the first blow" (3.5.43-44). His mention of a judge foregrounds his recognition of the scene as rape as well as his sense of entitlement.[15]

As much as this rape scene is about power and revenge, it is also about sex. By pandering to a male audience, Behn safeguards the financial success of her play while also subtly criticizing the libertinism espoused by Charles II's court. Two of Willmore's arguments to Florinda convey a libertine philosophy. First, he says, "thou may'st be free with me" (3.5.29) and then says, "I am so [a filthy beast], and thou ought'st the sooner to lie with me for that rea- / son—for look you child, there will be no sin in't, because 'twas neither designed nor premeditated" (3.5.33-35). On the surface, these sentiments may be attractive to both men and women because they allow freedom. In the libertine philosophy, sex is natural and so women do not need to fake sexual modesty. Such a formulation would be viewed by Behn's courtly audience as an escape from the hypocritical ethics of a Puritan "sexual ideology that insists on the indivisibility of chastity and feminine identity" based on self-denial (Markley 116).[16] In addition, the libertine idea of sexual desire as natural is based on the materialist philosophy of Hobbes as well as a twisted version of Epicureanism (Manning xxvi). In Hobbes' theory, man is ruled completely by brute instinct and passion in the state of nature (without any form of government). For libertines, supposedly "free" sex is justified as a condition of the natural state. Willmore's reference to this philosophical argument would be at once recognized by the courtly audience many of whom acted on the same principles in their daily lives so that they could easily align themselves with Willmore's position. On the other hand, Hobbes saw nothing appealing in the state of nature and considered it to be so violent that it needed strict governance. As did many complaints leveled against the cavaliers in the 1640s and 1650s,

14. Anita Pacheco and Anne Marie Stewart both argue that Willmore's rape as retaliatory violence in this instance is a way of exerting or reclaiming his lost masculinity and power (330; 29-30). But they do not connect the retaliation to cavalier politics.

15. Anita Pacheco explains that Willmore's comment also mirrors seventeenth-century court trials for rape in which a woman's dress or behavior was said to imply her desire to be seduced (330). Indeed, his words also piercingly point to the extent to which men's testimonies were valued over women's in the courts, and the immense difficulties women faced in taking rape to trial (see footnote 11).

16. Janet Todd insists that because Puritans and dissenters condemned rape and wife-beating, these by contrast became associated with the cavalier (216).

Florinda's appellation of Willmore as a "filthy beast" (3.5.32) emphasizes the monstrosity of his actions. Willmore pivots from an appealing to an atrocious posture in this scene, embodying the politically shifting notions of the cavalier. Audience identification also shifts, potentially, from Willmore to Florinda.

Operating under the construction of a male gaze, this scene opens with Florinda appearing scantily dressed in her nightgown as an erotic object on display. Willmore spies her through the gate from the same angle as the audience. The effect is reinforced by the playing of the entire scene on the open stage, surrounded on three sides by the audience, stressing audience-actor contact (Copeland, *Staging Gender* 24). The audience perspective may easily align with Willmore's. Willmore's gaze soon becomes sadistic as he interprets Florinda's attire and open gate as an invitation for sex and her refusal of his advances as erotic play. Here, Willmore's rape attempt becomes "a comic expression ... that forceful men are really fulfilling female desires" (Todd 216). This may have appealed to many members of Behn's audience who "see the rape through male eyes" (Todd 216). But there is another option for audience identification: Florinda. This potential identification depends upon how the attempted rape is staged, particularly how much force Willmore uses and at what moments. But it is clear from their exchange and the stage directions, that as Willmore calls for Florinda's free admittance of sexual desire, the amount of physical force he exerts over her ironically increases as does Florinda's horror and disgust. If the emphasis in the scene is placed on this disjoint, then it becomes obvious that Willmore's male gaze misinterprets Florinda, and that under his gaze she is not at all free—and a criticism of the libertine ethos emerges.

The other major attempted-rape scene in the play, which takes place in Blunt's rooms, operates in a similarly complicated way. The violence begins as obviously retaliatory. Blunt monstrously proclaims: "No, young one, no prayers or tears shall / mitigate my rage; therefore prepare for both my pleasures of en- / joyment and revenge, for I am resolved to make up my loss here / on thy body" (4.5.78-80). Blunt is landed gentry, not a cavalier, but his rape is a revenge for property theft (Lucetta previously steals all of the possessions he carries on his person including his clothes). Once the action turns into near gang rape, sex and power become further enmeshed. The disguised Florinda's passive running away to the other side of the room excites the men even more. Sex in which the woman literally must submit to male dominance becomes tantalizing. What starts as revenge for a property crime becomes arousing in and of itself because of the extent to which the model of a submissive woman needing to be

forced is ingrained in societal discourse and practice, chivalric, Puritan, libertine, or otherwise.[17]

The participation of Florinda's brother, Don Pedro, in the attempted gang rape signifies the barbarity of the violation.[18] Behn uses Don Pedro's attempt to rape his own sister (not knowing it is her) to problematize the male gaze. His act is so disgusting that it is difficult to imagine even the cavalier/libertine audience members finding it amusing. On a basic level, this shows that all victims of rape are sisters, or family members, to someone, which helps to negate the woman as object formulation and foreground female subjectivity (on the condition that the males recognize their sisters as subjects). At the same time, this scene parallels an earlier one in which Don Pedro also denies the autonomy of his sister by trying to arrange her marriage.[19] When Don Pedro initially tries to convince Florinda to marry Don Vincentio, Hellena describes the grotesque prospect of Florinda having to go to bed with her betrothed using phrases such as, "the bed, that which his forefathers live and died in," "uncase his feeble carcass," "[he] yawns and sighs a belch or two," "his foul sheets," "a worse confinement" (1.1.89-115). The picture Hellena paints of Don Vincentio is monstrous and underneath all its shows of legal marriage is actually forced sex. This, in turn, equates Don Vincentio's monstrousness with Willmore as "the filthy beast." The scene of the gang rape, with its echoes to earlier moments in the play, conflates various forms of sexual violence and thus acts as Behn's most poignant critique of both the cavalier/libertine ethos and traditional patriarchal gender relations: the ultimate message is that they are perhaps not as different as they may seem, for women. Just as women are exchanged as property in the marriage market, so they are the embodied site on which the banished male enacts revenge for his dispossession. In both cases, women are formulated as property, bought and sold or stolen and repossessed. In both cases, the formulation of woman, which

17. Pacheco asserts, "It is in this sense that the world of *The Rover* can be called a rape culture ... because male (and to some extent female) sexuality produces a socio-cultural script which measures masculinity by the capacity to exercise power" (341). While Behn incorporates this "script" into her play, however, she does so to criticize it in the ways explained above.

18. The fact that the scene is an attempted *gang* rape may also have signified its barbarity to a seventeenth-century audience. In his examination of women as victims of crime, Frank McLynn notes that of the few prosecutions made for rape, the most famous and brutal involved attacks on one woman by multiple men (107-08).

19. Pacheco pointedly articulates what occurs in this scene: "Don Pedro comes close to violating his own property" (333).

denies her personhood, is sanctioned by contemporary legal practice. Cavalier politics, as Behn carefully demonstrates, had real, lasting, traumatic impacts on women's personal lives.

While there is no threat of rape for Angellica Bianca, there is still a sadistic male gaze and female submission to a sexually dominant male in her relations with Willmore. Bianca advertises herself by displaying three portraits of her beautiful figure. Even though she chooses to do so and also sets the price, this exhibitionism turns her into a commodity, one which panders to the male gaze.[20] Hughes also believes that Bianca "commodifies herself in ways that limit her power" (95). The purposeful use of the stage's vertical axis to convey Bianca's "status as unobtainable *object* (italics mine) of desire" and the subsequent eroticization of the actress playing her character has been emphasized by Nancy Copeland (*Staging Gender* 21).[21] It is the pictures (commodities) themselves (and Willmore's theft of one of them) that incite a violent outbreak of male competition for power among the men whom Bianca wants to see as a group of courtly suitors. These fights always end up being between the banished cavaliers and the colonial Spanish land owners occupying Naples. Bianca becomes the "native woman in colonial conquest" (Hughes 85) as Florinda was in Pamplona. There is a parallel between the austere, Catholic, Spanish rule in Naples and the Puritanical, Cromwellian rule in England. So, the cavaliers' fight against the Spanish is another instance of revenge. Once again, the male gaze precipitates actual violence. When he is invited into her quarters, Willmore forges a connection between gazing and male virility: "I will gaze—to let you see my strength" (2.2.67). Pacheco draws a parallel between the language Willmore uses to seduce Bianca ("those wounds your eyes have made" [2.2.65]) and the language he uses to justify his attempted rape of Florinda ("those eyes of thine … 'twas they gave the first blow" [3.5.44]) (340). In both instances, Willmore presumes that his lustful gaze justifies his aggressive sexual behavior (Todd 219). Continually,

20. Ever since Catherine Gallagher's article, "Who was that masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn" critics have drawn similarities between Aphra Behn and Angellica Bianca. I agree with Derek Hughes, however, that Bianca's commodification of herself, which *lessens* her agency, makes it difficult to view her as any sort of direct self-revelation on Behn's part (96).

21. Elin Diamond sees this juncture in the play as an instance of "gestus," which she defines as "a moment in the performance that makes visible the contradictory interactions of text, theatre apparatus, and contemporary social struggle" purposely crafted by the author (519). Bianca's picture is both a commodity in the world of the play and a fetishized set piece, demonstrating male control of the theatre (Diamond 532).

he perceives any sexual encounter as a battle to be won and as a way to be revenged/recompensed.

In their verbal exchange prior to sex, Willmore posits an ideal of free love through his criticism of the mercenary love of the prostitute, but concurrently both Willmore and Bianca continue to speak of sex as conquest. Willmore accuses Bianca's charging for sex as mercenary (although it seems as if he would be willing to pay the price if he had the money). She retorts that marriage is mercenary too, a financial exchange of commodities at the marketplace.[22] Adeptly twisting her point to his advantage, Willmore responds, "It is a barbarous custom, which I will scorn to defend in our sex, / and do despise in yours" (2.2.90-91). Similar to the arguments he uses with Florinda, Willmore once again offers what seems to be free love and this is clearly attractive to Bianca. But everything else the two say, as well as the circumstances surrounding their relationship, undermine this notion. Bianca refers to her seduction as a conquest multiple times in this scene (2.1.133, 2.2.45) and Willmore, aside from the language that smacks of retaliatory violence mentioned previously, also uses words like "slave" and "vanquished" (2.2.124). Upon entering her quarters, Willmore proclaims to Bianca, "I came to rail at you" (2.2.10). It is precisely this aggressive dominance that Bianca admits attracts her to Willmore: "Sure, this from any other man would anger me—nor shall he / know the conquest he has made" (2.2.44-45). Her submission to Willmore's aggressive "will" mirrors the pastoral song that she sings on her balcony about the shepherdess who passively submits to the shepherd: "And with kind force he taught the virgin how / To yield what all his sighs could never do" (2.1.178-79). Free love as a libertine ideal comes off as a sham. Indeed, Willmore's libertine seduction of Bianca leads to her subsequent powerlessness and desperation.

The taunts Moretta levels at Willmore underscore what it is really at stake for him in his sexual encounter with Bianca. Moretta immediately declares Willmore unworthy of Bianca due to his impotence and poverty: "He knows himself of old; I believe those breeches and he have / been acquainted ever since he was beaten at Worcester ... we have no scraps, we can afford no kindness for God's / sake; in fine, sirrah, the price is too high i'th'mouth for you, / therefore troop, I say" (2.2.18-19, 2.2.23-25). Both Willmore's failures as a cavalier during the civil war (the battle of Worcester was the final losing battle for those loyal to the monarch) and his subsequent lack of funds, strip him of the social standing and power. Moretta's biting insult elicits sympathy for the cavalier in a humorous way. After his

22. Elin Diamond and Nancy Copeland both thoroughly examine the ways in which the categories of whore and virgin lady are collapsed within the play.

conquest of Bianca, Willmore distinguishes himself from "the crowd of common lovers" (3.1.88-90) while showing off the purse of money Bianca gives to him. Willmore ostentatiously expresses his libertine aptitude for seduction—of even the most hard-to-get woman. At the same time, "common" also connotes social standing, so that Willmore's words as he waves the purse in everyone's face can be read as a direct retort to Moretta's earlier taunts. Sexual encounters provide him an opportunity to exact his dues as the dispossessed cavalier.

Hellena is exceptional in *The Rover* in that, unlike Florinda or Bianca, she unashamedly expresses female sexual desire; but even she must act within the strictures of the limited options provided for women under patriarchy. The predicaments and actions of Hellena mirror Behn's own ambivalence towards libertine formulations of sexual practice. Behn was often criticized for writing too explicitly about sex by the public and male playwrights of her time. She wrote about the double standard that existed for women writers: "the most unjust and silly aspersion ... *That it was baudy*, the least and most Excusable fault in the Men writers, to whose Plays they all crowd, as if they came to no other end than to hear what they condemn in this: *but from a Woman it was unnaturall*" (Behn qtd. in Russell, "Introduction" to *The Rover*). Hellena is similarly upbraided in the play for her willingness to explore sexuality; she also has to negotiate her terms within the double standards that exist for women. Florinda, the chaste virgin, rebukes Hellena's curiosity about romance and sex, telling her she is an "impertinent thing" (1.1.1) and admonishing, "Prithee be not so wild" (1.1.35). Noticing the same tendency in Hellena, her brother Don Pedro calls her a "wild cat" when he asks Callis to watch her carefully lest she go out to enjoy the masquerade (1.1.144). Hellena unabashedly proclaims, "what dost thou see about me that is / unfit for love?" (1.1.37-38). Hellena's expression of female sexuality provokes discomfort and condemnation in those characters who adhere to a more conventional sexual ideology.

Willmore is the only character in the play who accepts this aspect of Hellena much to her pleasure. Hellena declares to Willmore, "[W]e are both of one humor; I am as inconstant as you ... the devil's in't if this won't please you," (3.1.169-78). To which he responds, "Oh most damnably—I have a heart with a hole quite through it / too; no prison mine to keep a mistress in" (3.1.179-80). To a young woman about to be forced into life in a nunnery by her father and brother, Willmore's excited acceptance of her wildness and his avowal to promote her freedom from such a "prison" must be refreshing to say the least. Behn parallels Willmore's and Hellena's sexual desire before they even meet one another. Frederick says, "No friend to love like a long voyage at sea" (1.2.98), to which Blunt responds, "Ex-

cept a nunnery" (1.2.99). The implication is that women feel sexual drives *naturally* just as much as men; the virtuous modesty of Florinda is the fabricated societal convention. In this way, *The Rover* is part of the broader "increasing awareness that female subordination was a social rather than natural or inevitable inequality" occurring during the Restoration period (Munns 144). It also poses a challenge to the notion so prevalent in patriarchal ideology that a woman who demonstrates sexual modesty may need to be forced. Willmore's libertine acknowledgement of female sexuality is genuine, striking in its contrast to the hypocrisy of traditional (Spanish Catholic or English Puritan) attitudes towards love, marriage, and sex. Hellena radically unravels such traditional attitudes in the first scene of the play when she artfully describes Florinda's monstrous prospects with Don Vincentio.

Yet, despite Willmore's acceptance of Hellena's sexuality, she nonetheless must succumb to the double standard facing her as a woman. Hellena cannot actually engage in any sexual encounter without entering into a marriage contract while Willmore can and does. "And ... what shall I get? A cradle full of noise and / mischief, with a pack of repentance at my back?" Hellena shrewdly asks when Willmore presses her for sex without marriage (5.1.439-40). This bit of dialogue is an important aspect of Behn's critique of the libertine ethos. Even though Hellena has managed to find a way to articulate and act on her own desires, she still must navigate the male-dominated seas upon which she casts herself with caution.

Indeed, she sails through the danger more adeptly than any other female character, manipulating the signs of gender and sexuality much more successfully than Florinda and Bianca. Helena disrupts and controls the male gaze when she removes her mask for Willmore momentarily and at other times refuses to do so, while also declaring their mutual desire: "Well, I see our business as well as humours are alike; yours to / cozen as many maids as will trust you, and I as many men as have / faith, see if I have not as desperate a lying look as you can have / for the heart of you" (3.1.182-85). She turns the tables on the male's assumed right to interpret the visual signifiers of women's bodies when, dressed as a gypsy, she reads Willmore's palm—and quite correctly too. Lastly, she cross-dresses in male clothes to gain access to public and private spaces to which she would otherwise be barred, namely the streets during the masquerade and Bianca's quarters.

But, as this last action most especially shows, such maneuvering is a fine, dangerous line to walk. Hellena is always in jeopardy of losing her disguise and the control of its signification and with it the opportunity for self-determination. Although cross-dressing allows Hellena protection (when Florinda goes out as a woman alone, she is always threatened with

rape) and freedom, it also panders to the male gaze of the audience who gets to see the female actress's lower body in tight clothing. Likewise, Hellena has the upper hand at Bianca's lodging when Willmore believes her to be a man, but as soon as he recognizes her, he plays with her fragile position and Hellena is afraid for her safety. Hellena's situation is always precarious.

The shaky ground on which Hellena walks reflects strongly Behn's ambivalence towards libertine/cavalier attitudes. The true paradox comes at the end of the play when Hellena and Willmore go off stage to have sex only after submitting to the high cost of a marriage contract. Anita Pacheco asserts that "in attempting to domesticate her hero and provide for her heroine's happiness, [Behn] is driven to participate in the concealment of rape that her play has systematically revealed as a patriarchal strategy" (342). There is no evidence offered, however, that Willmore will ever be domesticated or that Hellena will be happy. Far from concealing rape, Behn pushes its depiction as far as she can in a comedy, and that makes the marriage all the more unsettling. Hellena's and Willmore's is the only purely mutual and non-violent sex of the entire play (most likely a relief for some audience members, especially women). In order for mutual sex to occur, Willmore pays the price of absolute liberty but it is doubtful that he will transform into a loyal, doting husband. What he gains is Hellena's fortune and status. Marriage is presented as another, more lawful, way for the cavalier to be restored. The costs Hellena pays here are much higher even though it is she who wants the marriage. What is married life with Willmore, dashing cavalier and drunken rapist, going to entail? It is not difficult to imagine that it may bring the "pack of repentance" Helena wishes to avoid. Underneath the sexual gratification is Hellena's flight from life in the convent to the next, quickest, available (and perhaps slightly better) alternative. Behn ingeniously makes her conventional ending of the comedy in marriage disturbingly problematic so that the play becomes more than the sum of its parts. In this play, there is always a cost for the woman who engages with the libertine no matter how strong her character. Likewise, sex and cavalier politics are consistently enmeshed.

Perhaps what is most troubling about the play is how Behn manages to make Willmore an appealing character despite his brutality towards women. To some extent, the audience wants to see Willmore happily married at the end of the play because his wit is so well matched by Hellena—even if it becomes unsettling when given the slightest further consideration. This is not only because of the fact that marriage is a convention one expects to see in comedy, it is also because Behn is clearly sympathetic to the cavalier figure as much as she is consciously aware of the multi-faceted threat he poses to, more or less, all types of women. For Behn and her audience (in-

cluding many court libertines who were both theatre-goers and patrons), the libertine mentality was exciting and fresh, a brand of humanist skepticism that challenged old authorities. R.D. Hume and Gillian Manning conclude that Restoration comedy on the whole does not lend much serious support to the rake (175; xxvi), but one must also acknowledge that the controversial nature of Willmore, including his debauched behavior, likely helped to make him an attractive character.

Willmore, as an extravagant rake, exudes confidence and blatant disregard for the consequences of his actions on a grand scale. As he swaggers about town confounding women and men alike, he re-appropriates the image of the debauched, plundering, rapist cavalier promoted by Puritans in the 1640s and 1650s, wearing it as a badge of perverse honor shamelessly for all to see. Such outright, brazen arrogance is always attractive to audiences, perhaps not so much despite its distastefulness but precisely *because* of it. To be able to flaunt that of which others are ashamed garners disbelieving wonder. Behn cleverly creates such a version of the quintessential cavalier in her hero. But it is far from untested glorification; underneath its shocking amusement is a biting critique of women's fate in a patriarchal society that continually finds new ways of justifying degradation and violence towards women. The fact that she can pull off both notions at the same time, even in the same set of lines, is more unbelievable than even Willmore's antics.

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