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CARNIVAL, LIBERTINISM, SEXUALITY, AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE RESTORED KING IN APHRA BEHN'S *THE ROVER*

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ABSTRACT

AphraBehn's The Rover or the Banished Cavaliers, one of the prominent plays of the Restoration comedy, deals with male-female relationships, libertinism and the carvinalesque. After the puritan rule in Britain was overthrown, the restrictive laws imposed on social life by the Puritan views were also dismissed. Quite contrary to the conservative values of puritanism, the restored period was marked by its pleasure-seeking ruler. The king reopened theaters and abolished the strict laws that Cromwell had enacted to restrict the way people lived. Bringing freedom to the society, Charles II freely enjoyed mistresses and pleasure – hence his nickname "The Merry Monarch." In the play, the parallels between the male characters and hedonistic court of the restored king are quite evident as the libertine lifestyle adopted by male characters is exposed and even criticized. The play, also centres the themes of marriage, ideal love and vitality of female subjectivity in a patriarchal society in which females are seen as the objects or the other rather than being the subjects or parts of any social life. Further, Behn focuses on the concept of de-masculinisation of sexual desires by men as she thinks that women should also have equality and freedom to express their desires and do what they want. This paper aims to discuss the ways in which the play mirrors the seventeenth century's displeased approach to female subjectivity in social life after the collapse of Puritan Protectorate and Behn's harsh criticism of this approach by creating female characters that are witty, mentally strong and confident of their desires.

Keywords: libertinism, carnival, sexuality, restoration comedy of manners, AphraBehn, Restoration, Charles II, power struggle, female subjectivity.

CARNVAL, LIBERTINISM, SEXUALITY, AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE RESTORED KINGIN APHRA BEHN'S *THE ROVER*

In Restoration Comedies it is quite common to find a skeptical insight on politics, class restrictions, and gender differences. Compared to the preceding era of drama, known as the Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama, Restoration Comedies were written more skeptical, adventurous and boldly. *The Rover* (1677), with its story that harbors strict gender criticism, distinguishes itself from many other Restoration Comedies that have misogynist point of view towards women. The play represents diverse types of women by revealing the way they talk among themselves when they are alone and the way they

act when they are in public. Aphra Behn handles the issue of gender criticism with great care and subtlety. In the play male and female characters' true selves are revealed by using the carnival setting. Behn's carnivalesque style presents how both men and women disguise themselves and communicate their inner thoughts more freely, hence accurately, which provides a more precise criticism of gender. One should not leave behind the outcomes of using carnival in literature. The first one is the impossibility of grasping the original, arising from carnival which destroys, changes and reshapes contemporary boundaries and restrictions. Danow argues that carnivals "superimpose one paradox upon another until the original remains forever hidden, undisturbed, and unseen" (64). Therefore, as Derida offers in deconstructionism theory, the original stays hidden yet this time the supplements (carnival, carnivalesque, grotesque) serve in a reversed way: not assisting to find the original but to reshape it. The second outcome of the carnivals is that they "represent an acknowledged reality that provides an inspiration for art" (142). It is not surprising for an environment which is very colorful, free and tempting to be an inspiration for art. Therefore, all these features of carnival become the features of Behn's play which is the perfect example of art inspired by carnival. This paper attempts to present how characters use carnival environment to find true love and/or to assure their lovers' loyalty and how carnivals substitute real life as an affirmation of the collective; arguing that the notions of carnival and carnivalesque behavior are archetypal patterns that humans need to cope with class oppositions and restrictions. Also, it will reveal how Behn emphasizes the importance of mind as a different entity from body while showing how carnivals are inspiration for art in her play. The final part is devoted to the way Charles II and Willmore, the rover represent the libertine culture, and how Behn challenges social norms with her depictions of novelties in male-female relationships in the 17th century.

Carnival as an Archetypal Urge in *The Rover*

In terms of its subject and characters, *The Rover* includes all the characteristics of Restoration drama. It has fops, rakes, wits, and gallants within the themes of marriage, pleasure, love, and sex. In this sense, it may appear as a typical play of Restoration tradition. However, the way Behn handles the issue of woman's position in the society is unique and different from her male contemporaries. For example, in case of Angellica, Marion Lomax (1995) states, "Angellica Bianca leaves the traditional stereotype of a prostitute behind and becomes a complex version of the dangerous scorned mistress." (Behn, Introduction xxvi) Lomax (1995) also points out the playwright's intention as "Behn makes her audience question notions of respectability and notoriety in relation to woman's sexuality." (Behn, Introduction xxv) Although Behn seems to use traditional devices of comedy of manners, she leaves the conventional woman understanding of her time with influential discourses and actions that she has assigned to her characters.

Behn's play employs the issue of *acting* by using the carnival as a setting and the carnivalesque style which helps the playwright to compose a play in which characters freely express themselves when they and everyone else are in disguise. In the play female and male characters, alike expose their true selves with the help of the carnival environment. In his work called *Comedy,* Andrew Stott defines carnival as follows: "As a fixture of the medieval calendar, carnival was a special holiday that permitted

the temporary suspension of social rules and codes of conduct and deference" (Stott, 34). In other words, carnival is a specific period or a holiday that breaks the social rules. It breaks the social rules because people are expected to wear masks and disguise which helps to hide their own identity and become whoever they wish to be by hiding their identity with masks. The feature of disguise is significant because it removes the differences between people and both the superior and the inferior become equal. Carnival also helps to remove the limitations and social rules, which creates a freedom for everyone. In addition to that, wearing masks in carnivals helps the lovers conceal their meeting in public that ignores the strict rules of society.

The prologue of the play opens with the statement: "Wits, like physicians, never can agree / When of a different society" (Behn, 1995, Prologue p. 5)[5] which shows how Behn will emphasize the importance of wit throughout her play, in which she will depict one of her female characters Hellena who wants to experience love for once, before being converted to a nun. The play is set in Naples in carnival time, and Behn uses the setting to disguise a young nun-to-be as a gypsy, makes her speak with witty sentences thus reveals how disguise assists to unravel the true wit of women. Hellena – disguised as a gypsy - leaves an indelible impression on Willmore leading him to say: "Hang her, she was some damned honest person of quality. I'm sure, she was so very free and witty" (I, ii, p. 28) which indicates how powerful a woman's wit can be while her identity and body are concealed with disguise. Hellena's sister Florinda, on the other hand, uses disguise not only to reveal her true self but also to test her beloved Belvile's loyalty to her. In the carnival disguised as a gypsy like her sister Hellena, Florinda tries to tell Belville's fortune by looking at his hand which Belvile answers by saying, "I thought how right you guessed: All men are in love, or pretend to be so. Come, let me go; I'm weary of this fooling" (I, ii, p. 24) whereas Willmore, the raven starts flirting with the other gypsy (Hellena) at once. As a fair attempt, Behn shows the true identity of a true lover by using a male character, Belvile, and the lustful rover who perches on his prey acted by Willmore.

Stephen Longstaffe (1998), in his chapter titled, "A Short Report and Not Otherwise: Jack Cade in *2 Henry VI"* published in *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*, points out Bakhtin's view of carnival which emphasizes how people consider carnival as a stage that does not require acting. His view can be summarized as: "Bakhtin insists that carnival does not know footlights, and is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. Whilst carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it" (p. 27). This argument of carnival being a free zone is a curious case because it is closely related with the idea of Cartesian dualism which argues that the body and the mind are different entities and they are separable from each other. Hellena and Willmore fall in love in Act I and the core element of attraction for both of them is their wit. Thus, in the play mind becomes prominent when it is carnival time, a period that provides freedom and unrestraint. The dialogue between them progresses rapidly and provides an insight of how both characters use their wit for flirtation and their method pleases both of them while it provides amusement for the audience. Instead of saying 'I will become a nun', Hellena asks Willmore "Can [he] storm?" (I, ii, p. 22) which

[5] All references to the play will be from Aphra Behn. *The Rover*. Marion Lomax (Ed.). London: A&C Black New Mermaids, 1995.

means ‘is he good at attacking?’, by doing so she prepares a basis for her indication of being a nun-to-be. When Willmore’s answer is revealed: “Oh, most furiously” (I, ii, p. 22), Hellena says: “What think you of a nunnery wall? For he that wins me must gain that first” (I, ii, 22) which is an obscured way of saying that she is going to be a nun and Willmore answers her by saying “A nun! Oh now I love thee for’t! There’s no sinner like a young saint. Nay, now there’s no denying me; the old law had no curse to a woman like a dying maid. Witness Jephta’s daughter?” (I, ii, 22). Using allusions and metaphors in their dialogue strengthens the presentation of wit in the play with the help of the carnivalesque environment. Allusions in the play like this one, show a character’s expectation of the other character to possess a mind that spots the allusion and grasps its importance, relates it with the ongoing issue and provides sustainability of the dialogue; which is considerably sophisticated when compared to only maintaining good looks to attract others as the other restoration comedies illustrate. Behn alters the looks of her characters with the carnival theme but the outcome of her choice paradoxically promotes the mind. Using metaphors, remarks on historical events and politics which require a cultivated mind, is not only a character’s expectation of another, it is also Behn’s expectation of her audience. Thus, Behn presents us with a play in which there are characters with colorful and beautiful appearances but when the carnival environment assists the characters to reveal their inner points of view, our focus immediately shifts to the mind rather than the looks, which supports the Cartesian aspect of carnival presented in literature.

Mind and Body Dichotomy in *The Rover*

As the example of Hellena and Willmore shows, mind becomes the only element that attracts attention, sympathy and admiration rather than the body which gives a fine hint on its beholder’s rank, class or race. Phyllis Gorfain, (1998) in the article “Towards a Theory of Play and the Carnivalesque in *Hamlet*,” taken from *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin* points out Bakhtin’s view on history and on carnivalesque as: “Carnival parodies and mixes discordant genres and conventions for it blurs genre differences along with obscuring the other discriminations we use to purify the borderlines between life and death, the body and what surrounds it” (p. 154). So, when the borderlines are blurred it is easier to comprehend how life and death become inseparable; mind which happens to exist and will continue to do so, becomes the important entity, defeating body and appearance. Another curious aspect of the Cartesian dualism’s relation with carnivalesque is that the mind in carnivalesque style differs from the mind of the Cartesian dualism by its rejection of individualism. When the carnivals are considered from a Bakhtinian perspective, it can be seen that the mind in carnival revolves around collective hence it appreciates archetypal patterns rather than individual criticism. Longstaffe (1998) states that: “Rejection of the individual is affirmation of the collective for Bakhtin, for grotesque laughter mocks the individual in the knowledge that the collective will survive” (p. 28). Appreciation of the collective is evident in the play where Hellena rejects the established norms of society, trying to avoid falling in love with Willmore. Although Hellena wants to experience love at least once before she eventually becomes a nun she is highly critical on the issues of love and marriage thus she rejects her feelings toward Willmore when she knows him. In Act III Florinda says: “I would give my garters she were in love, to be revenged upon her for abusing me. How is’t, Hellena?” (III, I, p. 48). Hellena is mocked by Florinda and Valeria

for being in love and this is an example of grotesque laughter which mocks the individual, affirming the survival of the collective. Throughout the play, Hellena represents a character who insists on individuality, rejecting the collective unconscious with her view on love and marriage which can be summarized with one word: skeptical. Yet, at the end of the play, it is observed that her character development is highly related with her own experience that is shaped by the carnival. The experience that she has in the carnival environment differs from the established norms of society causing a change in her individual stance on the institution of marriage. Thus, the colorful environment which lets each and every individual to reveal their true identity and perceive the other's true identity helps Hellena to reshape her point of view on marriage, by encountering with the collective thus being able to grasp what the collective offers to her. At the end, she willingly and happily decides to marry Willmore which is the proof that her former view of marriage based on the social, socio-economical and class related norms are replaced by what the collective offers with the help of the carnival and this is the result of the affirmation of the collective in carnivals, substituting real life.

Judging the characters only by their appearance contradicts with the most important feature of carnivals in literature: "to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" as stated in David Danow's (1995) *The Spirit of Carnival* (p. 33). The collective derived from the archetypal behavior which exists since the primordial mind does, plays a highly important role in carnivalesque. Thus, literature which revolves around human psyche uses archetypal patterns that human mind needs to survive. In *The Rover* a young Neapolitan lady (Hellena) falls in love with an English captain (Willmore) and another Neapolitan lady (Florinda) falls in love with an English Colonel (Belvile), which destroys the racial boundaries and class restrictions. These discriminations are evident in many parts of the play; when Belvile says: "Come, let's be gone whilst we're safe, and remember these are Spaniards, a sort of people that know how to revenge an affront" (II, i, p. 40), and Willmore says: "If they fight no better they'll ne'er recover Flanders" (II, I, p.40). In a banter between Blunt and Lucetta before they sleep together, Lucetta says "Should you be false and cruel now!" and Blunt replies: "What dost thou take me for, a Jew?" (III, iii, p. 61). Behn keeps the carnivalesque environment in the background at these moments, letting characters reflect what they would think if the carnival did not take place around them. So, what the audience encounters is characters' racist statements in stressful moments, apart from the colorful carnival environment. Carnival can be considered as an archetypal need that humans use to destroy any kind of boundaries which has arisen with their contemporary culture, repressing their primitive urges. That is also evident in *Rabelais and His World,* with Bakhtin saying (1984): "In the grotesque concept of the body a new, concrete, and realistic historic awareness was born and took form: not abstract thought about the future but the living sense that each man belongs to the immortal people who create history" (p. 367).

What Carnival Offers: Freedom in Life and Art

One of the outcomes of using carnival in literature is seen in *The Rover* and it is the impossibility of grasping the original, arising from carnival which destroys, changes and reshapes

contemporary boundaries and restrictions. Danow (1995) argues that carnival "superimposes one paradox upon another until the original remains forever hidden, undisturbed, and unseen" (p. 64). The original stays hidden yet this time the supplements (carnival, carnivalesque, and grotesque) serve in a reversed way: not assisting to find the original but to reshape it. The second outcome of the carnivals is that they "represent an acknowledged reality that provides an inspiration for art" (Danow, 1995, p. 142), and an environment which is very colorful, free and tempting is really an inspiration for art.

The task that Aphra Behn, the first English female playwright, assigned to herself was highly conspicuous. In the play, which is a select example of art inspired by carnival, men divested themselves of all sorts of moral, sexual, and social restraints. This liberty did not include women; they were abused under the chains of libertine culture, and restricted in convents, houses, or brothels. Considering the intimidating position of women, Behn showed new alternate ways for women with *The Rover*, and extended their right to speak up. The libertine culture was endorsed by Charles II and his Court's members who rejected moral restraints and puritanism, and lived a life of pleasure and vice. Charles II and his court, novelties in the 17th century with regard to women, and the way Charles II representing the libertine culture in a form of a rover are envisioned in the play.

In *The Rover* there are characters using masks and false identities, which suggests that Behn, influenced from her occupation as a spy, uses disguise as an important element for the play. The use of mask affects the course of the play in different ways. In Act I Florinda, Hellena and Valeria get dressed like gypsies and attend the Carnival in disguise. The use of mask enables them not be noticed by others and to meet their lovers. Actually, their masks give them a kind of temporary freedom because they can act as they wish with the masks. Hellena says they should "be mad as the rest, and take all innocent freedoms" (I, i, p.14), because she knows that it is the only way to go beyond the social boundaries. Under disguise, they take themselves outside the sexuality that society expects them to have. In this way, Behn both uses the theme of secrecy and manages to criticize the social expectations by giving female characters space. In addition, Antonio asks Belvile to fight Pedro under his "name and dress" (IV, i, p. 74) which again reveals the theme of secrecy. However, this time the mask creates confusion by creating false identities. Both Pedro and Belvile are masked but Belvile is supposed to be Antonio. Don Pedro also is "in his masking habit" (IV, ii, p. 77) and only after he thinks Antonio has won the quarrel that he "pulls of his visard to show his face, and puts it on again" (IV, ii, p. 77). Pedro is about to arrange her sister's marriage with the assumption the man under disguise is Antonio but after Belvile reveals his identity, Pedro changes his mind. In Act V, when he learns that Florinda and Belvile get married he wishes them joy, which is surprising when compared to his previous attitude towards the arrangement of marriages. With the removal of his mask, Pedro expresses his fear of his father, the patriarchal power, and wishes Florinda and Belvile to "get my father's pardon as easily, which I fear" (V, I, p. 116). The mask, then, reveals Pedro's different ideas about the patriarchal power to which he belongs to. While the use of mask enables the female characters to act freely but also creates confusion in the interpretation of the characters as the masks conceal their identities. Therefore, the use of disguise is important since it constitutes the basis of the plot and the interaction of the characters.

Although carnival creates a temporary freedom and joy for both women and men, this positive image of freedom and carnival do not last forever because freedom and disguise cause violence and also the structure of the society cannot change forever as the female characters still remain inferior to the male characters in the play. In his work called *Aphra Behn,* S. J. Wiseman explains this possibility of violence as follows: "Carnival, by loosening the social fixity of the virgins, enables them to use disguise and desire to their own ends- but only at the potential cost of suffering economic dangers, and a physical and sexual violence which almost culminates in brother-sister rape" (Wiseman, 56). In other words, although carnival creates a sexual freedom and freedom for choosing their own destiny, it also causes some damages such as economic and physical or sexual violence. Wearing masks and disguise The scene 5 in act 3 represents one of these sexual violence. In this scene, Florinda is almost raped by Willmore because of the mistaken identity. This rape scene is repeated again in the following scene. But this time she is almost raped by Blunt, Frederick and even her brother, Don Pedro. In this scene, Blunt misunderstands Florinda's identity as he thinks that Florinda is a whore in a disguise. He wants to take revenge of Lucetta as she steals his all money, by raping Florinda whom he confuses with a whore and then Frederick and Don Pedro join to him without knowing that she is actually is his sister. These rape scenes suggest that although carnival helps people to hide their own identity and become another one, disguise also causes mistaken identity and this creates sexual violence.

Representation of Charles II in *The Rover*: A Libertine and the Rover

Southcombe and Tapsell (2010) in *Restoration Politics, Religion and Culture* state that for many observers Charles II's court provided an 'image of vice' for the nation rather than virtue. (p. 69) This observation clearly demonstrates that Charles II and his court members were dissolute people who repudiate virtuous principles and beliefs. They were the perfect representatives of the libertine culture that idealizes and glorifies immoral and sexual acts. There is a rake who we can relate to Charles II; Willmore, the rover. Promiscuity is their prominent common point. With his thirteen mistresses Charles II was the most notorious womanizer among the monarchs, and due to his love of pleasure his nickname was "The Merry Monarch." George Savile, 1st Marquess of Halifax (1750) is known to say that "He lived with his ministers as he did with his mistresses; he used them, but he was not in love with them" (p. 25). This statement openly indicates Charles II's dissolute character. He was tall and regarded as a very handsome and attractive man with his long dark hair, sparkling eyes and a sensuous mouth. It is widely argued that Behn was inspired by Charles II when forming the character Willmore. Both are witty, hedonistic, and keen on sexual pleasures. In *Restoration and Revolution in Britain* "The Culture of the Court," Gery De Krey (2007) writes, "Marital fidelity was a rare commodity among Charles's friends and advisers." (p. 58) In *The Rover* as an answer to Blunt's query, "You are not married are you?" Willmore regards marriage, "All the honey of matrimony but none of the sting, friend" (III. i. p. 52). Both Charles II and Willmore have nothing to do with virtue or virtuous women as Willmore says, "Virtue is but an infirmity in woman, a disease that renders even the handsome ungrateful…" (IV. ii. p. 82).

The Rover was written after a stressful period where the Puritan life style pervaded England. That is, during the dreaded interregnum, theatres were banned as a result of the Puritan views in the Parliament. With the reign of Charles II however, theatres reopened and the king granted theatre licenses that allowed women to become professional actresses to play female roles, which had been previously played by men. So the restored king openly supported theatres and was a patron himself. Furthermore, it is known that Charles II was personally interested in Behn's play, *The Rover*, as he received a private performance himself. In addition to her authorship, Behn works as a spy for England and she uses the theme of secrecy throughout the play. She is known to be employed "as a spy at Antwerp for King Charles II in the war against the Dutch" (Lombardi, 2014, p. 1) between 1665 and 1667. She is even known to have a code-name "Astrea" or "Agent 160" (Lombardi, 2014, p.1). The play itself is considered a tribute, owing to its alternative title *The Banish'd Cavaliers*[6], to the restored king, who was formerly an exiled cavalier. Furthermore, the protagonist Willmore can be considered a parallel to Charles II himself: "Willmore is a member of Charles' fictional exiled court, and he also seems to be a double, both "mimetically and semiotically," of Charles himself" (Beach, 2004, p. 5). Willmore is a strong, witty, uncontainable and dominant male figure that embraces a libertine life style. In this sense, Willmore's powerful existence and libertinism parallels Charles II. Staves (2004) says, "King Charles II himself, imbibed French libertinism when they were in exile on the continent during the interregnum" (p. 20). It is clear from Staves' (2004) statement that Willmore and Charles II are parallels. So Charles II not only reopened theaters and liberated the theaters in England, he also greatly influenced *The Rover*, becoming a part of the plot with his libertine life view, which radically deviated from the puritan life style, which had previously taken England over.

Not only Charles II, but also his court as a whole is represented in the play: "A dazzling group of young wits and writers gathered around the king, among whom the John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, was the most conspicuous" (Holmesland, 2013, p.19). The restoration court was known to be libertine, just like the king. During the English Civil War, the term, Cavalier is used by Parliamentarians for a royalist supporter of King Charles II and his father. Generally, the term, Cavalier refers to the noble supporters of King Charles II. Charles II believed as strongly as his father and grandfather in the divine rights of kings. However he had the good sense to avoid an open break with the parliament. The reign of King Charles II was carefree and relaxed. After Charles II returned to his kingdom, he carefully made peace with his father's enemies. Many Parliamentarians were given positions of authority in the new monarchy but generally the Parliament remained weak, as he strongly believes in divine right. In his portraits, it is possible to see him in his silk and sateen clothes, influenced by the French. King Charles is fond of fashionable, extravagant clothing and flamboyant libertinism. *The Rover* is attributed to the King

[6] Behn, Aphra (1999) (Simon Trussler, and John Barton, Eds.). *The Rover or, the Banished Cavaliers*. Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press

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Charles II because he was an exiled cavalier during Cromwell's reign. In *Perception, Power, Plays, and Print: Charles II and the Restoration theatre of Consensus*, Christopher W. Nelson states that "A case could be made for the introduction of more politically savvy works later in Charles's reign, but essentially Restoration theatre reflects Charles II the man, and vice versa. To further bolster this point, I may also point out that, as we can see from the plays of the first years of the Restoration, authors are typically sycophantic in their praise of the monarch in their works."(Nelson, 2012, p.17). Apparently, Aphra Behn's style appeals to the libertine taste of Charles II. Behn was a supporter of Charles II and she feels free to criticize libertinism in her work, as the King was open to criticism. Hence, the libertine men in *The Rover* are not merely the representation of sexual freedom obtained during the restoration period but they particularly refer to the king and his court. Libertinism experienced in Charles II's court encourages a sexually adventurous life style while challenging social and moral values constructed thus far, namely those constructed by the previous rule. Staves asserts that the libertine court of Charles II "offered a critique of puritanism" (Staves, 2004, p. 21). After the puritan rule, Charles II and his court eradicate the puritan lifestyle by reopening theaters, liberating art, poetry and the society in general. *The Rover* must definitely be inspired by these changes in England, as the play itself is very much interested in the practice of libertinism and it seeks to explore its outcomes for both genders.

The character of Willmore, among others, is distinguished as he is a charming, irresistible yet a selfish man. His name is a combination of the words "will" and "more" to stand for his insatiable appetite for women. According to Beach (2004), "Willmore is both irresistible and sadistic, both exceedingly sexy and extremely disgusting" (p. 15). Willmore, who is a sailor, is on leave after a long time on the sea and he is deprived of sex, willing and decided to enjoy being with as many women as possible during his leave. Hence, it is possible to define Willmore as a libertine. Initially seducing Angelica, Willmore then goes for Hellena, the play's leading lady. However, none of the relationships that Willmore engages in is out of love or affection. Even for his ultimate lover Hellena, Willmore is assessing her with her rank and fortune: "Ha, my gipsy worth two hundred thousand crowns? Oh, how I long to be with her. Pox, I knew she was of quality" (IV, ii, p. 83). Willmore is not only sexually objectifying women but also evaluates them based on their financial status.

Male - female relationships during the restoration period and the reflections of these in *The Rover* are also important for a good understanding of the play. In *The Rover*, both male and female sexual desires and drives are openly exposed. Yet, as the play puts it, it is dangerous for women to go after their desires. The society and conventional value judgments are very strict about how females should always constrain their desires to be a lady. As a result of this strict constraint, the female characters are either ladies, who are religious (to-be-nun Hellena) or prostitutes (Angellica). This dichotomy in the play points out how hard it is for women to actually recognize and act on their desires without being tagged as "prostitutes." In this sense, there is no gray area in between. As female characters explore their sexual drives, the identities they take on blur. Quite frankly, by the end of the play, it is Angellica who is denouncing Willmore's sex spree and points out how destructive his behavior is. On the other hand, the nun-to-be Hellena decides to marry morally "impure" Willmore. It is notable that by the time this marriage actually takes place, Willmore has already slept with the majority of the female characters in the play and even attempted to rape Florinda. Behn makes it quite overt that males are sexually free and

they are unquestioned as they follow their sexual drives even when it goes as far as sexual assault. On the other hand, for ladies the options are limited: Either act as a lady, or a prostitute. As a result of this, many female characters take on false identities. The patriarchy being forced on women is also evident in Florinda's case. Florinda is a beautiful upper class lady however she is not regarded capable of making her own decision about marriage. As she is forced to marriage, Behn points out how women are considered objects or commodities to be exchanged. The only difference between prostitution and arranged marriage is that in the latter, one of the relatives gives consent on behalf of the bride-to-be.

Objectification and commodification of women are the themes that Behn emphasizes as Willmore attempts to rape Florinda. As the play explores how both genders experience sexuality, it emphasizes that physical attraction mostly suffices to trigger males off. Men take interest in women merely because they are "women" and not "men." So the male libertines of *The Rover* regard women as sexual objects. After Willmore's failed attempt at raping Florinda, the play reveals Willmore's "unselective" approach to women: "I consider'd her as mere a Woman as I could wish." (III, vi, p. 69). Willmore is clearly not interested in neither the identity nor the personality of the woman he intends to sleep with. What matters that it is a woman. This emphasis on the unrestrained fashion with which Willmore approaches women is contrasted by Florinda's restraint as she plans to elope with Belvile: She has to run, hide and worry about her brother finding about her love relationship. On the other hand, Willmore can get drunk and recklessly harass basically any woman he encounters just because he is a man. Here, the play criticizes how males are privileged over females in terms of experiencing libertinism. As the play points out, the men are at advantage, in comparison to women, in that they are free to choose their partners and to go after their sexual interests. Women, on the other hand, are usually regarded as objects of the male sexual drive. The play criticizes Willmore's behavior as Belvile calls him a "beast, a brute" and a "senseless swine" (III, vi, p. 68). Nevertheless, Aphra Behn does not go so far to actually punish Willmore: The sexual harassment is simply not taken seriously and he never gets a punishment for his attempt.

Even though the Willmore character is blatant in chasing his sexual desires, it is not right to say that this play is a critique of libertinism of Charles II through Willmore. When Angellica discovers that Willmore has deceived her, she vows for revenge. She then delivers an anti-libertine speech aimed at Willmore: "How many poor believing fools thou hast undone?" (V, I, p. 111). Apart from verbal denunciations, such as Angelica's outburst over his infidelity and Belvile's calling him "a senseless swine" (III, vi, p. 111) after he attempts to rape Florinda, Willmore does not receive any actual punishment for his libertine lifestyle. Beach asserts that *The Rover* "asks its audience to laugh away its concerns about the court's sexual behavior or, like Hellena, to have a tolerant and even admiring attitude about the court's audacity" (Beach, 2004, p. 3). The lack of punishment for Willmore points out that rather than criticizing libertinism in general, *The Rover* is much more specific as to criticize libertinism as an act that could only be experienced by men. "Behn constructs the bedroom as a site of baroque violence, and her bedrooms indict libertine characters for both their sexual and social desires, suggesting that both forms of desire exploit women" (Webster, 2012, p. 89). This is also supported at the end of the play, as Hellena is undecided whether to marry Willmore or go on with nunnery: "Let the most voices carry it – for Heaven, or the captain?" (V, i, p. 121). This "binary opposition" is resolved as people cry "the Captain." Here, the fact that the majority supports the Captain suggests that men are not being

punished for their practice of libertinism. "While libertinism authorized women's free enjoyment of sexual pleasure, a serious problem for Behn was that libertinism was a masculinist ideology" (Staves, 2004, p. 21). So the play is more concerned with the discriminative aspect of libertinism in overall rather than generally criticizing libertinism and through libertinism, Charles II's court.

Hellena marrying Willmore also points out that females should go after their desires, no matter how challenging they seem. It is important to note that it is Hellena who virtually *seals the deal,* as she marries Willmore, using her wit: she is the one to propose and to talk Willmore into marriage. When the couple reveals their names, it comes out as a funny reversal: it is Robert the Constant" for Willmore and "Hellena the Inconstant" for Hellena (V, i, p. 119). Behn plays with the idea of constancy and turns gender roles upside down as Hellena "cages" Willmore as a husband. The reason why Hellena is able to easily pursue her own interests and eventually gets married to the man she loves is that she has a free personality and she does not hesitate to express herself. Hellena is strong headed and will not simply yield to the life style the society and her family imposes on her. She uses her wit and intelligence rather than her beauty in order to charm Willmore and she becomes successful at it. Florinda, on the other hand, represents a woman that takes on conventional social roles that her gender is designated to fill. However, she experiences a clash between these conventions and her feelings: She loves none of the candidates that her brother brings up. Yet, she is not courageous enough to stand up to her brother and assert her own feelings. The only way Florinda can marry Belvile is by elopement. This points out how patriarchy restrains women and their desires. The play suggests the idea that women should be chasing their dreams, regardless of whether their desires conform to social conventions or not. According to Behn, libertinism should not apply only to men. So rather than merely bashing patriarchy, the play ingeniously asserts that females should be freer of constraints and be able to take on libertinism if they would like to.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Behn's *The Rover* deals with libertinism and sexuality on the grounds that there is an inequality between the sexes concerning the way libertinism is employed and the way each gender can (or cannot) pursue their sexual desires. While Willmore freely enjoys sleeping with multiple women with "no strings attached," Hellena has to make a strict decision between religion and Willmore, the charming captain whom she is in love with. Aphra Behn satirizes those who underestimate women's capabilities, power and free will. Her female characters have the strength to direct their lives and lovers in the way they like as opposed to the outlook of men seeing women as possession and acting accordingly. As Adam Beach asserts in his article "Carnival, Politics, Generous Satire, and Nationalist Spectacle in Behn' *The Rover,*" the play "asks its audience to laugh away its concerns about the court's sexual behavior, or like Hellena, to have a tolerant and even admiring attitude about the court's audacity." (Beach, 2004, p. 3) Despite drawing keen resemblance to Charles II, Willmore is not a means with which Behn openly criticizes the king and his court, as the character remains unpunished and even rewarded at the end of the play. Rather than that, Behn supports the idea that women must become freer and thus being able to drop their false identities. Carnival in *The Rover* has an important place as it creates freedom and equality for all characters. It breaks the social rules and stereotypes, and changes

the balance as women become more active and confident. As Marion Lomax says, “This world, where women can take the initiative, is the world of carnival. It is a time of misrule; everything is turned upside down, prohibitions are temporarily removed, and privileges and rank suspended. Everyone, however different, can be integrated by joining in” (Behn, xix). However it does not last long because disguise and wearing masks cause mistaken identities and it leads to sexual violence. In addition to that, the major characters accept marriage as an institution which shows that it is the end of carnival, as such a flirtatious character as Willmore approves of getting married to Hellena. The end of carnival is good for female characters because they end the carnival by getting the life they wish for. One last reason why carnival does not last forever is that it is a short break. Carnival begins in a specific period of time and after a while it ends. In this period the world is upside down and social norms and institutions in the society disappear for a while. This makes everyone, including both women and men, equal. The carnival in *The Rover* shows this equality between men and women in a detailed way but at the end of the play, it is seen that Willmore and Hellena, Florinda and Belvile marry and it shows that it is the end of carnival. In fact, it implies that it is the end of sexual freedom for some male characters as they accept marriage as an institution. The marriages at the end of the play prove that it is the end of carnival as it is a short break when Willmore is taken into consideration. During the carnival time, Willmore is represented as a flirtatious character who seduces two women at the same time for having a sexual relationship. He feels comfort in flirting with both female characters (Angela and Hellena) thanks to the carnival but at the end of the play, it is seen that he is forced to marry Hellena which shows that his carnival which makes him freer, is over as such a womanizer accepts the marriage as an institution. Although the carnival ends at the end of the play, as some characters accept the marriage as an institution, which shows that social norms have come back, the outcomes of this carnival for female characters is a success. After the carnival ends, Hellena and Florinda attains the real life that they dream as they marry the ones they wish by rejecting their father and brother’s order. In other words, even if they lose the equality that they gain in carnival time, they end carnival by marrying their beloveds, which is a success for the female characters. That’s why these marriages imply that it is the end of carnival, but at the same time, its outcome is victory for the characters.

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