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The Force of Seduction: the Use of Rape Narratives in the Plays of Aphra Behn

Caitlyn Piccirillo
CUNY Hunter College

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THE FORCE OF SEDUCTION:
THE USE OF RAPE NARRATIVES IN THE PLAYS OF APHRA BEHN

by

Caitlyn Piccirillo

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Thesis Sponsor:

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Date

Professor Mira Felner

Signature

May 9, 2017

Date

Professor Claudia Orenstein

Signature of Second Reader

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INTRODUCTION

From its conception, theatre has been a way to tell the stories of others - an art of collective compassion. However until the feminist movement, prejudices and societal constraints forced women's stories to be primarily written by men - those intrinsically unable to understand the intricacies of the female point of view. Before the period of the English Restoration, on the European continent women were able to take part in the portrayal of their stories as performers and spectators, but seldom as the authors. In England, it was not until the late 17th century that women's stories could be portrayed by actresses and written by the first paid female playwrights. At this time there were several women writing for the stage, but Aphra Behn was the first to make a living as a writer. As such, her style combines the popular modes of the time with the perspective of the Restoration female experience. Her plays are most ahead of their time in anticipating later accepted views of rape. Portrayals of sexual assault are nothing new to the stage, but Behn's treatment of the crimes are markedly different from her contemporaries, as well as those who came before her.

In this paper I will explore the Restoration view of rape and the way it was socially embedded in the culture of the period through its portrayal, as well as the numerous ways Aphra Behn explores this topic in her works. I will discuss sexual violence as it appears primarily in two of Behn's works: *The Rover* and *The City Heiress*. I will discuss the political and social climate of the time and how it affected Behn's works. I will also closely examine the texts and determine the agency of the victim, the description of the attack, and the tone of the scene, in order to understand the interpretation of the act Behn offers, and if she presents it with gravitas or as a part of comedy. I hope to determine if Behn's plays vastly differ from those of her contemporaries, and discern if the treatment of rape onstage creates a dialogue against the act, or perpetuates its normalization.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The plays of Aphra Behn and her contemporaries differ largely from the body of drama preceding them due to the specific political moment of the Restoration. Following the successful reign of Elizabeth I, contentions grew between the monarch and Parliament in the Jacobean and Carolinian eras. Parliamentary factions criticized James I and Charles I for their excesses: the Puritanical Parliament grew upset by the excesses of the court – partially for putting on lavish and expensive masques with little financial discretion. Parliament also became resentful of the disregard for parliamentary procedure through the monarch's enactment of laws without their consent. In 1642 the English Civil War began with the Roundheads supporting the Parliament and the Cavaliers supporting the monarchy. The theatres shut down for their "protection" - but also as a reaction to the Puritan majority's distaste for frivolity. In 1649 Charles I was beheaded and during the chaos prince Charles fled to the continent with a number of his supporters.

Following the dissolution of the monarchy, Oliver Cromwell became protector of the English Commonwealth. The years of the commonwealth were generally peaceful; however, when he tried to pass the protectorship on to his unpopular and weak son, the commonwealth was dissolved and the monarchy restored – Charles II returned to England and with him came a hedonistic attitude learned from his time abroad on the European continent. The theaters reopened and flourished once Charles II reclaimed the throne. Charles II gave exclusive theatrical patents to his loyal followers William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew - now the Master of Revels.

But as the reign of Charles II continued, his inability to have a legitimate heir led to some concerns about the eventual succession. Would the crown be passed to James the Duke of York, Charles's Catholic brother and official heir, or James the Duke of Monmouth, Charles's eldest

illegitimate (and Protestant) son?¹ A large part of the anxiety felt by the English at this time was twofold: a conflict of religion and loyalty to the crown. From a religious perspective, the English mistrusted rulers who had strong ties to Rome, fearing interference from the Pope as well as a repeat of the horrors of Mary I's reign, such as the persecution and murder of Protestants. From a more loyalist perspective, the will of the king and the line of succession were absolute, so the Catholic Duke of York had the right of succession. "The Exclusion Crisis"² (1679-1681) – named for the attempted "exclusion" of James the Duke of York from the succession created two factions. The Tories, often former Cavaliers, were loyal to the crown and were deferent to Charles's will. Whigs, the Protestant faction, were wholly against the succession of the Catholic James. The conflict between the Tories and the Whigs was a common trope in Restoration drama, as playwrights would illustrate their sympathies by making the other side seem foolish or violent. Some writers created heroic and virtuous Whigs protecting maidens from lascivious and threatening Tories; others presented suave and witty Tories outsmarting and cuckolding foolish and foppish Whigs. Female characters often got caught in the crossfire of this political debate, as the playwrights used sexual violence as a means to discredit the other side. According to Andrew R. Walkling in his article "Politics and Theatrical Culture in Restoration England," these violations were not only meant to show the opposition in a ridiculous light, but are metaphors for the political current of the time.

Lascivious, often predatory males and their subjection of chaste women to sexual violation crop up incessantly in Restoration tragedies, yet their meaning is subject to a range of explanations, depending upon context and perspective: from an opposition or Whig point of view, such actions may be intended or read as a depiction of tyranny – though whether the reference might be to specific tyrannical acts or to a broader orientation towards arbitrary power is not always clear. A court supporter or Tory, on the other hand, might read the same sexual

¹ Mary Ann O'Donnell, "Aphra Behn: the documentary record," in *The Cambridge Companion*

² Ibid.

transgressions as a trope for rebellion, again with an indeterminately general or specific application.³

Despite the heightened concern at this time, James, the Duke of York was confirmed as the official heir following Charles II's deathbed conversion to Catholicism. However, the themes explored during the Exclusion Crisis would continue to be dramatized throughout the rest of the Restoration.

After Charles II's death, James II ascended to the throne and immediately began to repeal laws that prohibited free worship, specifically the Test Act. The Test Act of 1673 was a law that prohibited non-Anglicans from holding public office, and required people to prove their Anglican faith through a religious test.⁴ In addition, James II began to appoint Catholics to higher positions in court, which "... represented a direct royal attack on the local authority of nobles, landowners, the church, and other corporate bodies whose members believed they possessed particular royal privilege."⁵ In response to this outrage, the British hoped to restore a Protestant to the throne by way of Mary, James II's Protestant daughter, and her husband William of Orange. Yet, after the birth of James II's Catholic son, Parliament began to fear the loss of their power, specifically in its control via the Church of England and parliamentary government. According to Kagan et al.: "William of Orange arrived with an army in November 1688 and was received with considerable popular support. James fled to France, and Parliament, in 1689, proclaimed William III and Mary II the new monarch, thus completing the 'Glorious

³ Andrew R. Walkling, "Politics and Theatrical Culture in Restoration England," *History Compass* 5, no. 5 (July 6, 2007): 1507, doi:10.1111/j.1478-0542.2007.00453.x.

⁴ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, s.v. "Test Act," July 20, 1998, accessed April 15, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/test-act>.

⁵ Donald Kagan, Steven Ozment, and Frank M. Turner, *The Western Heritage*, 10th ed., vol. 1 (Upper Saddle River, NJ, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010), 379.

Revolution.”⁶ This exchange of power was considered peaceful, and led to much less political strife for the remainder of the 17th century.

For a large expanse of history rape was not considered a violent crime against a woman, rather a crime against property perpetuated by a man against another man.⁷ During the Middle Ages, rape specifically was not a sexual crime against a female person, but rather was based in the economic value a virginal woman held for her family: “The term *raptus* – from which the English ‘rape’ will derive – is as complex as it is ambiguous in its medieval usage... *Raptus* refers interchangeably to noncontractual [*sic.*] marriage by abduction or to forced coitus (rape in the modern sense)... *Raptus* is not a public crime, however, but a kind of theft against the man under whose authority the female victim lived.”⁸ This view of rape changed legally during the reign of Elizabeth I, skewing towards the modern view of rape and the idea of consent.

According to Jennifer L. Airey in *The Politics of Rape*:

From the time of Elizabeth I onward, ‘statutes begin to redefine rape as a violent crime against a woman rather than a property crime against her guardians.’ Modifications to the law under *18 Eliz I* (1576) it only reclassified sexual assault as a felony punishable by death without benefit of clergy, but also established that a child under the age of ten could not consent to sex – ‘the Law adjudgeth [*sic*] her unable to consent, at so tender age’ – confirming in the process that a woman over the statutory age did have the ability and the right to exercise the power of sexual choice.⁹

Although this law did make rape a capital offense, the crime was incredibly difficult to prove, leaving the entire burden of proof to the victim. In her discussion of rape in Medieval and

⁶ Kagen et al, *The Western Heritage*, 379.

⁷ Jennifer L. Airey, *Politics of Rape: Sexual Atrocity, Propaganda Wars, and the Restoration Stage* (Lanham, MD: Univ Of Delaware Press, 2014), 8.

⁸ Kathryn Gravdal, "Chrétien de Troyes, Gratian, and the Medieval Romance of Sexual Violence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1992): 565-6, doi:10.1086/494749.

⁹ Airey, *Politics of Rape*, 10.

Renaissance law, Barbara J. Baines describes the requirements for a woman to have enough proof to sue her rapist:

In Bracton's words, the raped woman “must go at once and while the deed is newly done, with the hue and cry, to the neighbouring townships and there show the injury done her to men of good repute, the blood and her clothing stained with blood, and her torn garments. And in the same way she ought to go to the reeve of the hundred, the king's serjeant [*sic*], the coroners and the sheriff”. Should the accused claim “that he did not deprive her of her maidenhood since she is still a virgin” the woman should be examined by “four law-abiding women sworn to tell the truth as to whether she is a virgin or defiled.”¹⁰

Although this description is from a few years prior to *Westminster I*, which began the process of the laws Elizabeth set into motion, this process was still a main part of acquiring proof of a rape. This incredibly embarrassing and demeaning display is a major reason why there were so few cases of sexual assault brought to court during this era. Just as during the modern era, the shame associated with sexual assault oftentimes leads women to under report their rapes, and, if they choose to report after the fact, the crime becomes difficult to prosecute beyond a reasonable doubt.

Virgins who had been raped were the easiest to prove, but many families chose to deal with the matter outside of court, frequently marrying the victim to her attacker, because of the disgrace from being a ruined woman. Women who were married, widowed, prostitutes, or generally sexually experienced stood to be the most vulnerable in these cases, because it was difficult to provide physical proof of violation. For these reasons the recorded number of rapes from the era in judicial sources are exceptionally low, with the exception of the rape of girls under the age of “consent” – which was ten years old.

¹⁰ Barbara J. Baines, "Effacing Rape in Early Modern Representation," *ELH* 65, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 76, doi:10.1353/elh.1998.0009.

Although the definition of sexual assault has changed between the 17th century and the present, for the purposes of this study I will consider rape in terms of the following acts: attempted rape, rape, coercion, and sex without explicit consent. Sexual grabbing and verbal harassment are present in these works, and are understood in our modern society as a part of sexual assault, but Restoration audiences would have viewed these actions not as assault, but more likely as violent rudeness and a sign to distrust the character.

CHAPTER 2: PRECEDENT

The exploration of rape as a topic in theatre was not a new concept when utilized by Restoration playwrights. Unfortunately, rape is a part of society, and as such is reflected in the art of society. We see rape tropes in the earliest recorded theatre up through the Restoration. In Ancient Greek theatre we see it with the capture of Cassandra in *Agamemnon*, the violation of Creusa by Apollo in *Ion*, and the forced cohabitation of Andromache in *Trojan Women*. Although modern readers may consider these circumstances outside the realm of sexual violence because they are so far removed from the modern conception of rape, the consistent theme of coercion and/or slavery suggests rape narratives. According to Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz in her essay, "Greek Theatre: a Rape Culture?", rape narratives can at times be construed through the male point of view until the violence becomes normative:

Violence and ὕβρις [term specifically used in lawsuits to refer to assault, sexual or otherwise]¹¹ as well as the woman's unwillingness, are clear indicators of what counts as rape... the women themselves sometimes use the diction of marriage; as a result, the violence sometimes merges into normative heterosexual relations. These plays reflect at least two self-evident truths: one, that there is more than one point of view on any event, and two, things change; people get used to things.¹²

What is particularly interesting when considering the later treatment of rape is that elsewhere as in Ancient Greece, rape could be construed as seduction rather than violence (which will be discussed at more length later). Yet, the main interesting point Rabinowitz suggests is that women will change the language of violence to one of matrimony, and "get used" to this personal paradigm shift. I point this out because, as I will discuss later, in Behn's comedies,

¹¹ Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, "Greek Tragedy: A Rape Culture?," *Journal Eugesta*, no. 1 (2011): 8, <http://eugesta.recherche.univ-lille3.fr/revue/pdf/2011/Rabinowitz.pdf>.

¹² *Ibid*, 16.

victims of rape will force themselves to accept the violence inflicted upon them by marrying their would be or actual attacker, or brushing off the violation without another word.

Following the fall of Rome and the rise of the Catholic Church, theatrical activity all but ceased except for roaming performers. However, Roman plays were studied in monasteries and convents as a means of teaching and understanding Latin. The only known (named) playwright of the medieval age is Hrotsvit of Gandersheim. Although her plays were not written with the purpose of performance, it is important to consider Hrotsvit's use of rape in her plays because of her place as the first known female playwright in the canon.

Hrotsvit of Gandersheim was a canoness of the Gandersheim abbey in Germany in 955 CE. Most likely the daughter of a wealthy family, Hrotsvit would have been around the court in Gandersheim and was well-educated in Latin.¹³ Her known works are comprised of “eight verse legends; six plays in rhymed, rhythmic prose; two verse epics; and a short poem...”¹⁴, and most of her play focus on the lives of Christian martyrs – specifically virgins. Her literary goals were made clear in her preface to her dramas (and clarified by J. Ellen Gainor in *The Norton Anthology of Drama*): “... She will revise Terence for Christendom. While borrowing his compositional style, she will connect his misogynistic portrayal of women and instead promote images of female virtue and chastity.”¹⁵ Most of Hrotsvit's dramas illustrate the power of female chastity, actively trying to shift the view of women as sinners in the image of Eve, to the image of the Virgin Mary.¹⁶

¹³ J. Ellen Gainor, "Hrotsvit of Gandersheim," in *The Norton Anthology of Drama*, ed. J. Ellen Gainor, Stanton B. Garner, Jr., and Martin Puchner, vol. 1 (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 427.

¹⁴ Ibid, 428.

¹⁵ Ibid, 430.

¹⁶ Ibid, 431.

Dulcitus focuses on the martyrdom of the virginal sisters Agape, Chionia, and Hirena by the Roman Emperor, Dulcitus. The sisters are held captive by the emperor, who lusts after their beauty. They refuse to submit and wed him, because they will not “betray Christ’s holy name... nor stain [their] virginity.”¹⁷ Dulcitus decides to keep them locked in the pantry so he may visit them any time he wishes, and attempts to “satisfy” himself in the dark. Instead of completing this rape, Dulcitus accidentally begins to be intimate with pots and pans: “Into his lap he pulls the utensils, her embraces the pots and the pans, giving them tender kisses,”¹⁸ and in doing so gets covered in soot – making himself the image of the devil. After making a fool of himself, Dulcitus orders the virgins stripped in public so they may feel his humiliation. Yet, “...their garments stick to their bodies like skin,”¹⁹ and their honor is left intact. Furious at their continued insolence, the emperor orders the eldest sisters to make an offering to the gods; but when they refuse, they are burned at the stake – freeing their souls from their bodies, but leaving no mark on their forms. Hirena, the youngest, is brought forth and threatened with torture and death unless she submits. Following her refusal, Hirena is threatened with forced consignment to a brothel, to which she replies, “It is better that the body be dirtied with any stain than that the soul be polluted with idolatry.”²⁰ She is ordered to the brothel, but is rescued by a pair of angels who whisk her to the peak of a mountain. The soldiers shoot her with an arrow, and she dies knowing she will be welcomed as a bride of Christ in heaven.

Hrotsvit’s heroines have agency and maintain control over their destinies and bodies (albeit with some divine assistance). The sisters actively resist the threat against their bodies and

¹⁷ Hrotsvit, “The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agape, Chionia, and Hirena (Dulcitus)”, in *The Norton Anthology of Drama*, ed. J. Ellen Gainor, Stanton B. Garner, and Martin Puchner, vol. 1 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 432.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 434.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 436.

faith. Their certainty of their devotion's path to paradise robs their captors of a victory when they are killed. While Hrotsvit uses rape as comedy, she does not forget the gravity of the situation. Dulcitus is made to look foolish for this assault attempt by groping pots and pans; but at the same time, the sisters fear their impending violation – they huddle together and dread his entrance to their space. Yet, Hrotsvit never allows the sadistic sexuality of the piece to become gratuitous. According to Florence Newman in her essay, "Violence and Virginité in Hrotsvit's Dramas":

The unsuccessful attempts to strip, prostitute, and burn the virgins' bodies and the successful penetration of Hirena's (by an arrow) conflate the sexual with the punitive... nonetheless, the pattern of escalating abuse on the part of the villains and unwavering good cheer on the part of the virgins, reiterated over the course of the play, dispels any sadistic pleasure the audience might take in observing physical suffering.²¹

Unlike the violence against women shown in later Restoration plays, Hrotsvit's goal with escalating violence is not the titillation of her heroines' suffering, but rather their grace in the face of torture and violation. But what is really fascinating is the moment Hirena is threatened with being forced in a brothel. She says: "nec dicitur reatus nisi quod consentit animus" (XII.3), 'with neither [lust nor forced compliance] is one considered guilty, / unless the soul consents freely.'²² Meaning, even though her body is violated, she would remain a virgin in her heart because she never consented. "Identifying chastity as a quality of the mind does not negate the significance of the body but merely subordinates it to the will, which exercises power over it and through it."²³ This is an incredible view of female worth in the face of sexual assault. The dominant understanding of rape victims at the time was that they were damaged property, and

²¹ Florence Newman, "Violence and Virginité in Hrotsvit's Dramas," in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Contexts, Identities, Affinities, and Performances*, ed. Phyllis R. Brown, et al. (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 60.

²² *Ibid.*, 63.

²³ Newman, "Violence and Virginité," 64.

would be at best “sold” to the person that “ruined” them. But Hrotsvit proposes that a woman’s chastity lies not in her body, but her soul – so, women who were raped are not culpable for their violation, and are still morally “pure.” This is a Christian view of female worth to be sure, but an important distinction as Hrotsvit suggests that despite bodily violation, a victim can still be viewed as “clean” in the eyes of the Lord. Also, with Hrotsvit we see an interesting shift in who is victimized in plays. In Greek and Roman theatre, rape victims were usually “known” women - prostitutes, war prizes, or widows. But in the Middle Ages (as with Hrotsvit) we see more of a shift in who is victimized. With the birth and spread of Christianity, there is more focus put on virginity, and the holiness associated with that status. Virgins were most often depicted as being the victim because it highlighted the true evil of the villain, and gave the victim more to lose. This can be seen in many later works, including the plays of Shakespeare and in Restoration tragedies.

Despite harsher penalties for the crime of rape during the reign of Elizabeth I, society of Renaissance England still held fast to the medieval views of rape and its victims as is evidenced by the plays of the period, specifically those of Shakespeare. William Shakespeare wrote thirty-five plays, over 150 sonnets, and numerous larger poems over the course of his career as an actor/playwright. His plays have become some of the most produced works since their publication four hundred years ago. Many Restoration playwrights were influenced by Shakespeare (including Aphra Behn), and some adapted his works with Restoration sensibilities. As Shakespeare was a popular model for Restoration playwrights to fashion themselves after, it is no wonder that some of Shakespeare’s attitudes towards sexual assault and coercive sex are echoed in later works.

Let’s examine the rape of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. First, Lavinia has no agency as she is unable to fight back or speak out after the fact – she literally has her tongue removed,

leaving her silent. She is not only violated, but is left completely defenseless. Second, her rape is used as a method of revenge against her father Titus for the murder of Tamora's son. In framing this assault as revenge, it becomes a reciprocal transaction between owners of property – the life of a son for the shame of a daughter. This echoes the medieval sentiment of rape as property crime: yes, Lavinia is made to suffer totally as a human, but only because she is Titus' "property." Finally, Titus slaughters Lavinia as a way to cleanse both of them from shame. Not only does this remind the audience of her lack of agency – she does not make the decision to die – but also serves to set a precedent that the shame of being raped not only taints the family, but makes the continuation of life impossible. We can see the future reverberations of *Titus Andronicus* in later Restoration tragedy; quite often writers of tragedy would not only depict graphic aftermaths of rape against virgins, but would require these violated heroines to take their own lives to cope with the shame.

Although *Titus Andronicus* graphically depicts rape, *Measure for Measure* illustrates sexual extortion²⁴ and coercion, as well as a bed-trick²⁵, which turns the trope on its head. When Duke Vincentio leaves his post to Angelo on order to test him against the corruption of Vienna, Angelo decides to crack down on an oft-ignored law against extramarital sex. His victim is Claudio, who had impregnated his fiancée Juliet, and is sentenced to death. Claudio begs his sister Isabella, a novice nun, to try to persuade Angelo toward mercy. However, instead of compassion, Angelo counters with a proposition: he will free her brother if she will sleep with him. Isabella steels herself against the unwanted sexual advance, and tells her brother that his death is a blessing because it preserves her virtue. Eventually, Vincentio (disguised as a friar)

²⁴ Martha Widmayer, "'To Sin in Loving Virtue': Angelo of Measure for Measure," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 169, doi:10.1353/tsl.2007.0013.

²⁵ While bed-tricks do provide problematic questions of consent, the study of the history of bed-tricks warrants its own study.

intervenes and convinces Isabella to participate in a bed-trick with Angelo's former fiancée Mariana, whom he rejected after losing her dowry in a deadly accident. Once completed, Vincentio lies to Isabella, saying that Claudio was put to death anyway, and when he reveals himself as the Duke, offers retributive justice. Isabella begs mercy for her would-be rapist and brother murderer; her brother is revealed alive, Angelo is given mercy and married to Mariana, and finally the Duke asks Isabella to marry him, to which she does not reply.

Many consider *Measure for Measure* a "problem play" as it ends happily (with 3-4 marriages set), although it focuses on darker themes of sexuality and death. Ironically, consensual sex is the criminal act in *Measure for Measure*, whereas coercion is presented as the norm. Shakespeare is presenting a topsy-turvy world where engaged couples are persecuted and government officials can sexually extort women for favors. It is meant to make the audience uncomfortable, and question if we really want to see these characters married and happily placed in the end – a reversal of expectation Behn would later recreate in her plays. The three sexual incidents we associate with Isabella – the virgin – are all coercive or violent in nature. When begging for her brother's life, she is offered an ultimatum: her maidenhead for Claudio's head. Isabella initially refuses, associating the loss of her virtue with a type of sadomasochistic torture:

As much for my poor brother as myself;
That is, were I under the terms of death,
Th' impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield
My body up to shame.²⁶

When she delivers the news to Claudio, he begs her to reconsider, and in that moment she likens sex with Angelo for his life to incest. "Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice? / Is't not a kind

²⁶ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. J. W. Lever, Arden Shakespeare (New York, NY: Methuen & Co., 1965), 2.4.99-103.

of incest, to take life/ from thine own sister's shame?"²⁷ For the novice Isabella, for whom the rules of her future convent are not strict enough, the suggestion of having sexual relations is horrifying, traumatizing to the point of almost being described as rape (see above).

The second sexually charged incident Isabella is involved in is the bed-trick as suggested by Vincentio. Although it is Mariana having relations with Angelo, and not Isabella, this trick is still forcing Isabella to go against her beliefs and participate in an act she finds morally reprehensible. The bed-trick follows the biblical pattern of Leah and Rachel, but subverts it by providing Angelo actually with his rightful bride. Although Angelo is tricked into sex with the wrong woman, I would argue that he is not a "victim," as in this moment he loses no power and still holds the life of Claudio in his hands.

Finally, Isabella is coerced into a sexual situation she does not want via the forced engagement to Vincentio. "Isabella, the apocalyptically chaste heroine, does not speak once during the final 85 or so lines, which conclude with the Duke's startling proposal of marriage to her, a notion as insane as anything else in this unbelievable yet persuasive drama."²⁸ Although directorially it is possible to have Isabella nonverbally agree to the marriage, textually the Duke does not allow her to respond, taking away the very agency she fought for the entire play. Isabella had planned on joining the strictest order of nuns and actively resisted ravishment in the face of her brother's death. It is unlikely that she would want to consent to the Duke's proposal but would feel simultaneously pressured to accept because his status and the power he holds over her. Although *Measure for Measure* features no actual rape, the sexual power dynamics of the play, as well as Isabella's unsympathetic rejection of sex, suggests Shakespeare's belief in equality within relationships and the embracing of sexual freedom.

²⁷ Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 3.1.137-139.

²⁸ Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: the invention of the human* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 1999), 359.

Following the Elizabethan era, the Puritan Commonwealth created a sexual vacuum in England, and the restoration of the monarchy led to a increased interest in sex and sexuality. As this interest increased so too did the social acceptability of the portrayal of rape, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: RAPE'S RISE IN THE RESTORATION

As noted in the previous chapter, the use of rape in theatre was nothing new by the time Charles II was restored to the throne. Yet a number of sociopolitical forces led to an uptick in its use, to the point of rape becoming an ambivalent and light-hearted trope embedded in Restoration comedy.

The first major change that led to the prevalence of rape onstage was the introduction of women on the English stage. England was rather delayed in its acceptance of actresses – countries such as Spain and France had women performing for years prior to the debut of the first English actress. Though the appearance of actresses coincided with a change of attitude toward female sexuality, a large part of this change has to do with Charles II himself. Having grown up in his father's court, Charles had been accustomed to seeing women perform during his father's masques. During the Interregnum, his time on the continent specifically in Paris inured him to the appearance of women onstage. And finally, his proclivity for taking actresses as his mistresses sealed a permanent artistic spot for women onstage during this era. When the theatres reopened, men who had played women resumed their trade (Edward "Ned" Kynaston was a popular female impersonator²⁹). But once women began playing female roles, the appearance of men as women changed from common practice to oddity. In 1662, Charles II decreed in Thomas Killigrew's patent that all women's roles would be played by women.

And for as much as many plays formerly acted do contain several profane, obscene and scurrilous passages, and the women's parts therein have been acted by men in the habit of women, at which some have taken offence, for the preventing of these abuses for the future, we do hereby strictly command and enjoin henceforth... we do... permit and give leave that all the women's parts to be acted in either of the said two companies for the time to come may be performed by women, so long as their recreations, which by reason of the abuses aforesaid were scandalous and offensive, may by such reformation be esteemed

²⁹ Elizabeth Howe, *The first English actresses: women and drama 1660-1700* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 20.

not only harmless delight, but useful and instructive representations of human life.³⁰

From then on, actresses became a fixture of the English stage.

As the popularity of female performers grew, so too did the ability of the playwright to illustrate the female worldview. According to Elizabeth Howe: “In the outstanding plays of the period the sexual realism provided by the actress helped to promote a fresh, sensitive, and occasionally even a radical consideration of female roles and relations between the sexes.”³¹

However, with this type of directness came criticism of the morality of women onstage.

Customarily, theatres were built in red-light districts, drawing associations between theatre and prostitution. Once women were onstage, it was not a far leap to assume the prostitutes outside the theatre would also be employed within. This phenomenon is discussed at length in Kirsten Pullen’s book, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society*. She states:

The prominence of female actresses (who were often also mistresses of male audience members) signaled that London theatres, traditionally located near brothels and frequented by prostitutes, now seemed places where whores could be seen on the stage as well as in the audience and in the surrounding streets. In the public imagination at least, if a woman presented herself on stage, then she would present herself off stage, sexually, as well...³²

Because of the close association between actresses and sexuality, most of the available primary sources about early actresses are not about their talent, but rather their perceived promiscuity outside of the theatre. Many infamous actresses were pronounced “whores,” and even actresses who proclaimed their virtue were openly satirized as being sexually available.³³ This type of criticism derives from a misogynistic point of view, which perceives women in the public eye as over-sexed and licentious, harkening back to more traditional religious views of women. When

³⁰ Howe, *The first English actresses*, 25-6.

³¹ *Ibid*, 37.

³² Kirsten Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: on stage and in society* (Cambridge, UK: 2005), 24.

³³ Howe, *The first English actresses*, 32-6.

women take up too much attention, it is perceived as being solely for male pleasure, granting it a measure of unintended sexuality. The appearance of women onstage therefore existed for the male gaze – which makes the repetition of rape scenes in theatre both unsurprising and frightening. With the male gaze comes an assumption of ownership, meaning that the women presented were available for the taking, as willing or unwilling sexual partners.

The actresses' status as "whore" was not overtly threatening, but the duality of their existence put the status quo in danger. By acting as women of quality, actresses created an illusion of being viable marriage material, granting possible social mobility, but also endangering the social hierarchy as it stood. "In her creation of artistic illusion, the actress threatened to blur social distinction entirely and inspire men in the audience to offer vows of love and even marriage. Actress-as-whore formulations functioned as attempts to stabilize this tension by representing the actress as unmarriageable. Ladies of quality with dowries like Congreve's Millamant were fair game for marriage; whores were not."³⁴ Actresses appeared onstage not only as themselves but also as any number of characters; the idea of viewing a piece of theatre through layers of reality – the actress, her character, her character in disguise, etc. – created an air of confusion, suggesting that the women onstage could be the same as those sitting in the boxes. This duality had not been an issue before, as it was obvious that boys imitating women (however convincing they may be) would never be real marriage material. Further, this issue of actresses endangering the status quo became exacerbated by the practice of actresses becoming "kept women" for high-powered men – including the king. Most notably, the comedienne Nell Gwynn was a long-time mistress of Charles II: "... his affair with Gwynn publicly unsettled class hierarchies: if the grandson of a brothel keeper and the son of an actress could be made a Duke,

³⁴ Laura J. Rosenthal, "'COUNTERFEIT SCRUBBADO': WOMEN ACTORS IN THE RESOTRATION," *The Eighteenth Century* 34, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 11-2.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41467546>.

then the ‘natural’ aristocracy was no longer safe.”³⁵ Jeremy Collier’s essay *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* focused largely on the issue of female performance as a danger to the “patrilinear [*sic.*] succession,” as it encourages the women in the audience towards impropriety and “acknowledging desire.”³⁶ The anxiety over women onstage interrupting the social order became so problematic that in epilogues often the playwright would have the actress step forward and remind the audience that what was seen was not real, and that the women onstage were merely players, not “quality.”³⁷

A major part of the appeal of actresses was the ability to have flesh-and-blood women interacting with their male counterparts onstage. Sexual realism became a part of Restoration drama, allowing for more convincing romantic interludes. But most importantly, the physical female body allowed for the eroticization of the actress, as evidenced by the popularity of breeches roles. These roles were played by women either disguised as men, or playing a younger male part, and the costume of such would allow the audience to have a better view of the shape of the woman’s buttocks and legs.³⁸ However, this eroticization was taken to the extreme by using violence as a means of titillation for the male gaze. Sex seldom occurred onstage – usually the couple would go offstage together, and it would be suggested by sounds and their state of undress upon their reentrance. Violence allowed for a fuller view of the actress’s body; a ravished woman would often appear onstage with her hair and clothes disheveled, revealing her breasts in a way that both suggested violence against her, and took the male gaze into consideration. According to Howe:

³⁵ Pullen, *Actresses and Whores*, 25.

³⁶ Jean I. Marsden, "Female Spectatorship, Jeremy Collier and the Antitheatrical Debate," *ELH* 65, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 883, doi:10.1353/elh.1998.0035.

³⁷ Rosenthal, "COUNTERFEIT SCRUBBADO," 11.

³⁸ Howe, *The First English Actresses*, 56.

The account is part of a long and flourishing tradition of sadistic female martyrdom that began with saints' legends, but in this case the presence of the victim... adds a sensational visual dimension... Significantly, madness in the drama of the period is almost entirely confined to female characters and is presented as a state in which the victim is rendered helpless, incapable of rational thought. Such madness was a convenient means of forcing female characters to commit entertaining violence against themselves, as in Robert Gould's *The Rival Sisters* (1695) in which Alphanta is brought out 'mad, stab'd in many places' with stage directions the tear her wounds wider – presumably by tearing her clothes open to reveal more bloody flesh.³⁹

The sadism used against women onstage therefore not only had historical precedent, but also was exacerbated by the actual ability to show off the female form. In tragedy the virginal ingénue would be ravished by the antagonist, and unable to bear the shame, kill herself. Violence against virgins again allowed for the purest woman to be given a measure of sexuality without granting her agency or consent. In this way, women's helplessness was used to appeal to the sensationalism of male lust.

The perpetration of violence onstage towards women, as well as the prevailing attitudes about actresses, led to dangerous real-life situations for those who trod the boards. There was little protection for actresses – they were servants of the king and were afforded his protection, but that did little to protect them in their day-to-day dealings with the male sex. Because actresses were perceived to be available to any man, they faced threats to their persons. There was little to no security preventing men from entering their dressing rooms, and often visitors morphed into stalkers.⁴⁰ Various examples of violence against female theatre workers exist in the histories of the Restoration stage including the attempted abduction of Anne Bracegirdle,⁴¹ and the various protests made by Rebecca Marshall: “In 1665 she complained to the Lord Chamberlain that the actor Mark Trevor had sexually assaulted her both on and off the stage, and

³⁹ Howe, *The first English actresses*, 42-3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 33.

⁴¹ Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: images of women & women dramatists 1642-1737* (Brighton: Harvester, 1988), 28.

in February 1667 accused Sir Hugh Middleton of various offences and assaults. Marshall was particularly upset that she had been followed by one of Middleton's men who threw feces in her face [because she had rebuffed his advances]."⁴² It would seem that in creating sexualized violence for the benefit of the audience, playwrights and theatre managers perpetuated the very behavior in real life that they seemed to condemn in their plays.

Linked to this presumptuous attitude towards actresses (and women in general) is the rise of libertinism and the male rake. Libertine ideology is strongly aligned with the behavior of Charles II and his followers; connected to the Cavalier politics of the English Civil War, and the Tory political group of the Exclusion Crisis, libertines favored personal liberty (while remaining staunchly loyal to the crown). "In part, the dream for this particular brand of liberty has its origins in notions of absolute individual sovereignty that arose even as absolutism came under assault in the political sphere. A law unto himself, the outlaw rake asserts the ultimate aristocratic privilege of sovereign will and so, in Rochester's words, as a 'peerless peer,' the right to lord over everyone."⁴³ Unsurprisingly a mark of upper-class men, the libertine rake sought sexual freedom and saw sexual conquest as an intrinsic part of his identity. Although they expected women to willingly engage sexually in their games, libertines did little to actively promote female sexual freedom, and mainly used women for their pleasure and reputations. The close association between libertinism and violence against women was expected as rakes were often of a higher social class, and were able to evade punishment for actions perpetrated against women. According to Erin Mackie in their article, "Boys Will be Boys: Masculinity, Criminality, and the Restoration Rake,"

⁴² Pullen, *Actresses and Whores*, 27.

⁴³ Erin Mackie, "Boys Will Be Boys: Masculinity, Criminality, and the Restoration Rake." *The Eighteenth Century* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 130.

The exceptionalism [*sic.*] of elite criminality was a real social fact. Gentlemen of a certain status were rarely charged and almost never convicted for legal trespasses; these gentlemen were the law and so unlikely to condemn their own. Thus the status of rakish masculinity is what rescues its transgressions from relegation to the ranks of ordinary crimes and, instead, transforms them back into signs of the very prestige which guarantees the status-linked exception in the first place.⁴⁴

If social status guaranteed the freedom to do as one wished, it left an opening for upper-class men to take advantage of any woman they saw fit. Women were another bit of property that was being restored to the crown and the upper classes, and they would take it back in any way necessary.

A large part of rake attitudes were in reaction to the years of Puritan rule during the Commonwealth. Following the strict restrictions of those years, those so inclined sought the opposite: excess.

Rake sexuality may have been particularly offensive to more conservative commentators because of the waste implied by sexual relations outside of marriage. The primary aristocratic Wits surrounding Charles II: John Wilmot, Lord Rochester; Henry Jermyn; Charles, Lord Buckhurst; John Sheffield; Sir Charles Sedley; Harry Killigrew; and playwrights George Ethridge and William Wycherley pursued pleasure, not marriage, privileging their own satisfaction rather than the mutual comfort espoused by Puritan rhetoric.⁴⁵

The two patent holders of the Restoration, William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew, shared in the king's sexual exuberance, leading not only to the employ of actresses, but also to an uptick in sexual storytelling.

As mentioned earlier in chapter one, playwrights on both sides of the political spectrum began to use this convention to their advantage. The violence perpetrated against women onstage was meant as a partial metaphor for the political landscape of the time; "Here the body of the woman is clearly a metonymy for the contested land, and rape is clearly both a literal and

⁴⁴ Mackie, "Boys Will Be Boys," 137.

⁴⁵ Pullen, *Actresses and Whores*, 29.

metaphoric weapon in wars between men."⁴⁶ Tory writers created embarrassing caricatures of Whig prudishness to stand in staunch contrast to the heroic sexuality of the Tory rake. For example, "...Wycherley stages the bed-chamber's violent potential as one of his primary themes, but he suggests that it is not the libertine who perpetrates violence against women but the supposed moralist who attempts to constrain women's sexual desires."⁴⁷ In contrast, Whig writers saw themselves as keepers of female virtue and demonized libertine ideology as violent. According to Rosenthal, "Many of the Wits were brutally misogynistic and eager to supplement their alliances with women through congenial and sexual relationships with other men... In fact, Caroline [*sic.*] focus on illicit sexuality tends to privilege the male perspective: within rake sexuality women are objects to be used and within more conservative, domestic models, women are objects to be protected."⁴⁸ And yet, the use of violent sexual imagery appears on both sides; both Whigs and Tories tried to twist the other into the image of the rapist.

An unintentional depiction of libertine desire as rape comes from the Restoration's proclivity for conflating rape and seduction. During this era most sexual intercourse had elements of rape or violence because of a disinterest in female desire or pleasure.⁴⁹ Although there should be a clear and obvious difference between rape and seduction based on verbal consent, often seduction narratives rely on women not actively consenting to sex in order to protect their reputations. There was a social expectation of female coyness – a woman may not

⁴⁶ J. Douglas Canfield, "Tugging Your Rival's Women: Cit-Cucholding as Class Warfare in Restoration Comedy." In *Breaking Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. Katherine M. Quincy (Lexington, KY: 1996), 117.

⁴⁷ Webster, Jeremy W. "In and Out of the Bed-chamber: Staging Libertine Desire in Restoration Comedy." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 90, doi:10.1353/jem.2012.0016.

⁴⁸ Pullen, *Actresses and Whores*, 30.

⁴⁹ Dagny Boebel, "In the Carnival World of Adam's Garden: Roving and Rape in Behn's *Rover*." In *Broken Boundaries: Women & Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. Katherine M. Quincy (Lexington, KY: 1996), 62.

appear openly sexual, but rather must use signs and signals to indicate desire. “Ironically, coyness emerges as one of the only ways for women to exercise romantic or sexual agency.”⁵⁰ This game of silent compliance leads to a dangerous precedent for the idea that a woman’s “no” actually means “yes,” “... one of the most disturbing consequences of repeatedly denying that women mean no [, is] rape is never really rape...”⁵¹

The societal tendency to want to sexualize virginal characters also adds to this problematic dichotomy. Virtuous women were expected to retain innocence, have no sexual desires, and to remain passive. "Virtuous men initiate sexual interaction; virtuous women respond. Accordingly, male sexual agency is a comparatively straight-forward matter in most seduction stories - men know what they want and take steps to get it - while female sexual agency tends to take shape in paradox - as a kind of "passive agency," negative and inward, full of hand-wringing and second-guessing, responsive rather than initiative."⁵² Active resistance onstage towards a sexual aggressor signaled to the audience that the interaction was non-consensual, and what was witnessed was ravishment rather than seduction. However, in curating this convention, female agency was only visibly represented in rape. Female inaction (passivity) signals to the audience that the scene is a seduction ritual, but in doing so it actively separates female agency from female desire.

The difference between seduction and rape rests on this apparently stable opposition of the equivocal to the unequivocal, and this opposition generates a whole series of dichotomies: guilt/innocence, dominance/submission, Rake/Virgin, initiator/reception, victor/victim, sadism/masochism, violator/violated, subject/object, presence/absence. Ultimately, the active/passive, male/female

⁵⁰ Peggy Thompson, *Coyness and Crime in Restoration Comedy: Women's Desire, Deception, and Agency* (Lewisburg: 2012), 15.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 22.

⁵² Toni Bowers, "Seduction Narratives and Tory Experience in Augustan England," *The Eighteenth Century* 40, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 138, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41467709>.

dichotomies, which the valorization of seduction seeks to undermine, are reinscribed within rape.⁵³

Here lies the troublesome issue: if in seduction female agency does not exist, how is it any different from rape? In order to both retain their coy persona and achieve personal satisfaction, female characters must actively negate their own agency.

As the first professional female playwright, Aphra Behn stands out for her female perspective and her critical examination of libertine desire at the expense of female agency. As I will discuss later, Behn's heroines exude sexual agency regardless of sexual status – either by resisting unwanted advances, reacting towards improper treatment by their lovers, or actively pursuing pleasure. Further, while Behn supported the Tory cause, she was unflinchingly critical of the libertine habit of violating women.

⁵³ Ellen Rooney, "Criticism and the Subject of Sexual Violence," *MLN* 98, no. 5 (1983): 1271, doi:10.2307/2906071.

CHAPTER 4: BEHN BIOGRAPHY⁵⁴

While it is not always necessary to delve into a playwright's biography in order to sufficiently analyze their plays, Behn's life experience and general independence informed her understanding of social restrictions and how society might benefit from other social models. Her unusual biography, including the death of her father at an early age and forays into espionage, may have fed into her tendency to reinforce her heroines' resourcefulness as they allude with social pressures. Although there is much information about Aphra Behn's literary life, details about her early personal life have remained in the realm of conjecture, based on clues in her plays-- their prologues and epilogues-- and a few extant letters. It is therefore hazardous to interpret her plays based on biographical information. Writing biographies about Behn became popular after her death, but many of her biographers did not know her personally, or if they did, were not involved in the early part of her life and based their work on accounts by secondary or tertiary sources. Born sometime during the years of Puritan rule, many documents pertaining to her parentage, education, travel, and marriage are lost as a result of the usual historical problems of fire, negligence, or the general restructuring of the government. Despite the danger of drawing inferences about a playwright's life from their plays, many contemporary biographers have used Behn's works as evidence for parts of her life that lack sufficient documentation.

Modern biographers have suggested that Behn's parents were a barber and a wet nurse, whose family name was Johnson. We know that she was educated as a gentlewoman, but lamented never having the opportunity to learn Latin.⁵⁵ We also know that when Aphra was in her early twenties, the Johnson family travelled to Surinam in South America, when her father

⁵⁴ Except where expressly quoted/paraphrased, this chapter is based on a number of Behn biographies, which will be marked with an asterisk (*) in the bibliography.

⁵⁵ Angeline Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra: a social biography of Aphra Behn* (New York, NY: Dial Press, 1980), 31.

received an appointment as Lieutenant General. As suggested by her works, specifically in the prologue of *The Young King* and her novel *Oroonoko*, her father died at sea, leaving her on this journey as an unmarried woman with only her mother, siblings, and servants with her.⁵⁶

"Whatever her feelings about her father, his death unquestionably freed her from one restraint: his presence would no longer ensure that her behavior corresponded to that expected of a young lady of marriageable age, a young lady with a reputation to protect... Whatever the actual circumstances in which her father's death left Aphra, one thing is clear: her economic survival, her future, her life, now depended on no one but herself."⁵⁷ Her time abroad occurred in her late teens to early twenties, and it is likely that this is when her belief in sexual freedom began to blossom. The death of her father possibly allowed Aphra to explore her sexuality without hindrance and freed her to behave without the restrictions of a family patriarch. Her time in Surinam probably inspired her novel *Oroonoko*, which utilizes her experiences there as a means to comment on slavery and class divisions. Based on this text, other biographers have suggested that during her stay in South America Behn entered an affair with a black man due to her sympathetic portrayal of her black characters, but there is no hard evidence pointing towards that conclusion. More importantly, during her time in Surinam, it is likely that Aphra met political refugee and exiled spy William Scot.⁵⁸ Their acquaintanceship would later involve them both in espionage for the crown during the Anglo-Dutch war. Between her stay in Surinam and her time spying in Holland, Behn most likely married Mr. Behn, but little is known about their union. In one of the early biographies there is information that Mr. Behn was a Londoner but of 'Dutch

⁵⁶ Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, 50.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 42.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 66.

Extraction,⁵⁹ meaning he was probably originally from Northern Germany or Holland.

Although it is impossible to truly know why their union occurred, Aphra likely married Mr. Behn because of her age (she was twenty-four when wed) and her financial constraints. This assumption can be drawn not only from her writings where she describes forced marriages to prostitution⁶⁰ (an exchange of money for services rendered), but also from her lamentations in letters that Mr. Behn did not leave her with enough after his passing. As Behn likely married for money, like many of her heroines, it is also probable that Mr. Behn was significantly older than Aphra, as she often writes with disgust about forced marriages between young women and older men. Between 1664 and 1666 the plague hit London, and it is likely that during this time Mr. Behn died, as there is no later evidence of him, as well as descriptions of Aphra as a widow. "Whatever the truth about her marriage and Mr. Behn, after 1667 she lived as an independent woman, 'entirely dedicated to Pleasure and Poetry.'"⁶¹

Following her marriage, Aphra began spying for Charles II, with William Scot as her partner and possible lover. Not much is known about Aphra's time in Flanders, except from a letter she wrote requesting financial assistance in response to the high cost of living. "Behn's last document from the Flanders mission preserved in the Public Record Office, dated 26 December 1666, pleads for permission and money to return to London... Several other documents in the Public Record Office indicate Behn's return to London on £150 borrowed from a Mr Botteler or Butler, probably one of the Duke of Ormond's retinue..."⁶² Aphra would return to England soon

⁵⁹ Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 67.

⁶⁰ Jacqueline Pearson, *The prostituted muse: images of women & women dramatists 1642-1737* (Brighton: Harvester, 1988), 161.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 145.

⁶² Mary Ann O'Donnell, "Aphra Behn: the documentary record," ed. Janet Todd et al., in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.

after that; records indicate that she was arrested for debt, "yet there is no evidence that this warrant was executed or that Behn ever spent any time incarcerated."⁶³

In order to survive, Aphra began to "write for bread."⁶⁴ Although she was not the first female writer, she was the first to do so for a living. She wrote poems, translated works, and wrote hand-written copies of extent works. Her first staged play *The Forc'd Marriage* premiered in 1670, and over the course of her theatrical career she wrote fifteen plays, of various genres including tragedy, tragicomedy, and comedy of intrigue. While she was friendly with Thomas Killigrew from the Kings' Company, she had many of her plays produced by the Duke's Men, especially during the tenure of Lady Davenant, perhaps resulting from a feeling of camaraderie with the distinguished female manager.⁶⁵ Her plays were popular in their day, as evidenced by the popularity of *The Rover* warranting a sequel, and of third-night receipts for at least her first two plays.⁶⁶

Her experiences following the end of Puritan rule and her tenure as a spy engrained in Behn a passionate connection to the Tory party; so passionate in fact, "...that in 1682 a warrant was issued for her arrest for effectively being too vehement in the King's support."⁶⁷ So great was her loyalty to the Stuarts that following the Glorious Revolution, Behn refused to write a verse of the new king, despite being in financial straits.⁶⁸ Yet, Behn was always aware of the contradictions between her politics and the sexual politics of her plays: "She was always aware of the predatory aspects of libertinism, the sexual double standards and the social cost for

⁶³ O'Donnell, "Aphra Behn: the documentary record," 4.

⁶⁴ Ann Marie Stewart, *The Ravishing Restoration: Aphra Behn, violence, and comedy* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2010), 18.

⁶⁵ Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse*, 32.

⁶⁶ O'Donnell, "Aphra Behn: the documentary record," 5.

⁶⁷ Susan J. Owen, "Behn's dramatic response to Restoration politics." ed. Janet Todd et al., in *The Cambridge companion to Aphra Behn* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

women.”⁶⁹ Aphra's connection to the crown also brought with it a familiarity and friendship with a number of the Wits. According to Melinda S. Zook, she idolized John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester and his poetry, even though he was a well-known sexual predator, mainly because he symbolized all of the male freedoms she could never have: "...he was free from want (as she was not); free from customary inhibition (as women were not); and above petty nationalism and religious fanaticism... But most importantly, he was a free, generous spirit, bound only by his allegiance to the traditional aristocratic code of honour and loyalty.”⁷⁰ Behn idealized the libertine ideology of freedom and sought the same sexual expression as her peers, by having numerous affairs and championing female sexuality. "Love was central to her both in life and art, and her poems record a series of relationships, most importantly her painful love for John Hoyle, a notorious homosexual.”⁷¹ And yet, Behn's views were complicated as she wanted the same sexual freedom as the men, but she was highly critical of the violence perpetrated by their actions against women.

Aphra differed from the proto-feminists of the time, as their main priority was not sexual freedom, but retaining moral superiority over men via their chastity.⁷² Without the female support, Aphra faced enormous discrimination as a female writer. In general, "... female writers... [were] more likely than male writers to be judged for their life rather than their works, and who [were] often praised for their grace, youth, and beauty rather than actual artistic achievement,”⁷³ yet, because of her wanton beliefs and desires, she dealt with nasty attacks on her work, such as being "...accused of immorality, plagiarism, and passing off the works of her

⁶⁹ Owen, "Behn's dramatic response to Restoration politics," 71.

⁷⁰ Melinda S. Zook, "The political poetry of Aphra Behn," ed. Janet Todd et al., in *The Cambridge companion to Aphra Behn* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 49.

⁷¹ Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse*, 145.

⁷² *Ibid*, 14.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 8.

male friends as her own."⁷⁴ Behn was aware of the double standard by which her plays were critiqued as she "...complains of the double standard by which her own works had been damned for obscenity while similar works by men are applauded: *from a Woman it was unnaturall* [*sic.*]... *Had it been owned by a Man... It had been a most admirable play.*"⁷⁵

Behn, though slightly vilified, knew the audience she was trying to reach. According to Pearson, "Drama of the period was 'highly formulaic,' and many women dramatists accepted the formulas or modified them only in minor ways. After all, they had to sell plays to a male-dominated theatrical establishment, and were consequently forced to compromise in order to succeed."⁷⁶ Behn followed the general formula rather closely in regards to romance and the witty 'gay couple.' From a compositional standpoint, her plays did not differ strongly from her male contemporaries: "A statistical study of Behn's plays reveals her as hardly distinguishable from male writers in the numbers of female characters and the proportions of lines used."⁷⁷

Really, the largest difference between her plays and others exists in tone. Aphra does not shy away from illustrating exactly how power dynamics work in interpersonal relationships.

According to Derek Hughes in *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*: "... Behn herself never takes so rosy a view of women's ability to gain equality of status through equality of linguistic power. For her, men exercise the power of the word because it is always underwritten by that of the sword. The source and continuing support of men's supremacy is in their capacity for violence, of which language is an instrument and an extension."⁷⁸ Male violence is a mark of the patriarchal power wielded over women, and Aphra illustrates this through her darker examinations of rape and coercive sexual contact. Female power, as Behn sees it, exists mainly in courtship and

⁷⁴ Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse*, 143.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 11.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 23.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 146

⁷⁸ Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 10.

romance,⁷⁹ and this struggle for power is often won by the woman - "In these plays the domination and control of the woman and the relative passivity of the men are striking."⁸⁰

Towards the end of her life Behn wrote mainly poetry, but did have two plays performed posthumously. Although the harsh critiques of her work and character continued to appear after her death, Behn's legacy lived on in the many female playwrights that followed her example, such as Margaret Cavendish, Mary Pix, and Susanna Centlivre. Female writers fell into obscurity again with the Licensing Act of 1737 when theater managers would only take financial risk with well-known playwrights and popular themes. Thus the controversial writings of Behn fell to the historical back burner because of the rise of Sentimentalism and a backlash against her flirtation with libertinism until recent years of increased interest in early female writing. Behn set an important precedent for contemporary female authorship and autonomy; her grave tone in regards to male violence presents a layer of reality to rape where her contemporaries only saw a useful trope to eroticize women.

⁷⁹ Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse*, 150

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 152.

CHAPTER 5: RAPE IN *THE ROVER*

The Rover continues to be one of the most popular and familiar of Behn's plays despite being flush with examples of sexual assault – lending itself well to this study. Set in Interregnum Naples during carnival, *The Rover, or the banish'd cavaliers*, is a familiar Restoration comedy following the antics of a group of exiled English cavaliers as they set out to find wealth and love. Behn sets her play during this specific time of year not only to facilitate the trope of mistaken identity and disguise, but also as a metaphor for the topsy-turvy political climate of the Interregnum, as well as the ability of the carnival to shift or displace social norms. The play is about Willmore, the titular rake/hero, yet Behn frames the play in the eyes of the heroines, Florinda and Hellena. Both are displeased with their planned futures; an arranged marriage and confinement to a convent, respectively. Disguised as gypsies in scene 2, the girls escape their room (and their brother, Don Pedro's rules) for one night along with their cousin Valeria with the goal of getting married of their own volition. We are then introduced to the group of cavaliers, the good-natured colonel Belvile, his subordinates Fredrick and Willmore, and Ned Blunt, a member of the landed English gentry. As the two groups collide we see Hellena take romantic interest in the inconstant Willmore, and Florinda reunited with her love Belvile, who had, in an earlier offstage episode, rescued her from rape at the hands of common soldiers. Florinda passes on a letter to Belvile inviting him to meet her at her garden gate later that evening, and Hellena quips with Willmore about their respective sexual appetites. Blunt is lured away by Lucetta, a prostitute, and during their encounter Blunt is robbed, and falls through a trap door into the sewers, where he promises revenge on any woman in his path. Willmore, having parted from Hellena, comes upon the home of Angellica Bianca, a famed courtesan. He steals her portrait advertising her availability for the next month, and as he has no money, seduces her with promises of love and devotion. Afterwards, when Florinda waits in her garden for Belvile, in

only a nightgown and holding a box of jewels, Willmore drunkenly accosts her, thinking she is a whore open for customers. Florinda resists his advances, and is rescued by Belvile, who is horrified by his friend's actions. Despite his anger, Belvile agrees to go with Willmore back to Angellica Bianca's, where he steps in to defend Willmore from another one of Angellica's suitors, Antonio (who happens to be Don Pedro's choice for Florinda). Belvile is taken away by order of Antonio, but later the two sort out the misunderstanding, and in apology Antonio gives Belvile his sword. Shortly after, Belvile disguises himself as Antonio and fights Pedro for the right to Florinda's hand; despite Belvile's victory, Florinda is taken away once it is discovered that Belvile is not Antonio. Florinda escapes her rooms, and she hides in the nearest available place - Blunt's lodging. Blunt (and soon after, Fredrick) threatens her with a beating and violent rape, but are only stopped when Fredrick realizes that she might be a lady of quality rather than a whore. She gives them Belvile's ring as proof, and they lock her away until they can discern her social status. Soon all of the cavaliers plus Pedro arrive, and upon hearing there is a masked woman locked away, begin to argue about who will have their way with her first. Belvile is shown the ring, and quickly realizes that the masked woman is Florinda; however, he is unable to reveal her identity and save her because her brother is present. Willmore suggests that they decide who goes first based on sword length, and Pedro wins the right to rape Florinda first. Luckily, Valeria arrives and convinces Pedro to leave on the pretext that Florinda's disappearance had been discovered. Once he leaves, Valeria arranges for Belvile and Florinda to be quickly married, and Fredrick and Blunt beg for forgiveness. Angellica arrives, jealous of Willmore's deception, and threatens to shoot him, but Antonio arrives and leads her away. All of the lovers are joyously married, and the play ends with a dance.

Before speaking to the specifics of the numerous sexual assaults in this play, it is necessary to recognize the political commentary Behn uses throughout the piece. Given its

setting, as well as the subtitle '*the banish'd cavaliers*,' it is clear that the English male characters are meant to be followers of Charles II. It has been surmised that Willmore could be a stand-in for Charles himself, or Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester. However, Behn's admiration of these two men does not mesh well with the objectionable actions of Willmore. Belvile is meant to represent the upper-class model of heroic romance, and as such "...upholds the upper-class honour code and is committed to a virtuous and unattainable love..."⁸¹ Blunt is set apart as the possible Whig of the group as he is "...a comic butt among the other men who speaks in a crude and old-fashioned country style. Blunt's wealth is intact because his estate has not been sequestered by the parliamentarians, and he may even be a supporter of the Commonwealth..."⁸² Although the cavaliers all participate in reprehensible actions against women, specifically Florinda, Blunt is clearly marked as 'other' in regards to Tory politics, and thus it is unsurprising that his actions against Florinda are the most vile, as Tory writers sought to discredit Whigs on any level. Yet, what is most striking are the libertine characters also participating in the violence. To the cavaliers, violence against women is an act of revenge for the loss of their property and titles back home - the theft of one property for another.⁸³ Behn appears ambivalent in this matter, both feeling compassion for the political exiles, while being disgusted by their actions.

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

⁸¹ Susan J. Owen, "Behn's dramatic response to Restoration politics," 71.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Sarah Olivier, "'Banished his country, despised at home': Cavalier Politics, Banishment, and Rape in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*," *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research* 27, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 58, *Performing Arts Periodicals Database*.

clearly sympathetic, and the patriarchal ethos sanctioning sexual domination of women of which Behn is highly critical.⁸⁴

Willmore is the clearest example of Behn's confusion, as the rake is charming and espouses sexual freedom, but also possesses an inherent danger. Reading her play with politics in mind, *The Rover's* treatment of women becomes a bipartisan issue; she still supports the Tory cause, but at the same time refuses to blame one side over another for female suffering and disempowerment. The rest of the play clearly shows Behn's support of the cavalier's reclamation of power - all three are gainfully wed in the end - but no male fully gets away with violating a woman.

Florinda is the consistent victim of the assaults presented. She exists in stark contrast to the other virgins in the play, as her meek demeanor compounds her ability to be commodified. Hellena- arguably the rake heroine - will not allow herself to be property, and instead uses her wit to eventually obtain Willmore.

Willmore: Oh, I long to come first to the banquet of love, and such a swingeing [sic.] appetite I bring! Oh, I'm impatient. Thy lodging, sweetheart, thy lodging, or I'm a dead man!

Hellena: Why must we be either guilty of fornication or murder if we converse with you men? And is there no difference between leave to love me, and leave to lie with me?⁸⁵

She understands the threat of male lust, and instead uses that desire as well as her own to get what she wants. Valeria, similarly, uses her wits to get what she wants, and is not above scheming to get the job done. Both Hellena and Valeria want marriage, which has its own social benefits, especially protection from other men. Florinda, on the other hand, is commodified from the start, an object which her father or brother can give or sell for their own benefit. Her virtue is meant to contrast with Hellena and Valeria's wildness, just as Belvile's honor contrasts

⁸⁴ Olivier, "Cavalier Politics, Banishment, and Rape", 56.

⁸⁵ Aphra Behn, *The Rover*, in *The Rover and Other Plays*, ed. Jane Spencer, Oxford World's Classics (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.2.190-96.

Willmore's wit. "Belvile... is Florinda's equal, not her opposite. Behn's revision [to Killigrew's *Thomoso*] implies that if women are to be virtuous, men must be virtuous too. Florinda is stereotypically good - unappropriative [*sic.*], passive - but so is Belvile."⁸⁶ And though Belvile is presented as the best match for Florinda - especially since he rescues her from rape twice in the story^{87 88} - he still treats her as a commodity when he wins her hand against Pedro.

Belvile: Nay, touch her not; she's mine by conquest, sir, I won her by my sword
/[...]/ You know I ought to claim a victor's right, / But you're the brother to divine
Florinda, / To whom I'm such a slave; to purchase her/ I durst not hurt the man
she holds so dear.⁸⁹

According to Sarah Olivier, "Florinda becomes a commodity purchased through valor, a territory to which Belvile as cavalier is entitled, literally because his conquest of her, and symbolically as the dispossessed cavalier who needs to be restored."⁹⁰ Florinda recognizes the necessity of being commodified as a means of protection. She conjures the name Belvile when in the most danger - "Stay, sir; I have seen you with Belvile, and English cavalier: for his sake use me kindly; you know him, sir."⁹¹ – because she knows her person does not warrant enough protection without male ownership. To the men in this play, "...without names, all women are classed as whores,"⁹² names meaning not only their actual names, but also the names of the men in their lives.

Florinda's maintained innocence and choice of a suitor speaks to her attempted agency.

According to Paula R. Backschneider, "agency is 'the will to act purposefully, independently,

⁸⁶ Heidi Hunter, "Revisioning the Female Body: Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Parts I and II," in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. Heidi Hunter, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 109.

⁸⁷ Behn, *The Rover*, 1.1.70-4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.5.71-5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.2.91-103

⁹⁰ Olivier, "Cavalier Politics, Banishment, and Rape", 62.

⁹¹ Behn, *The Rover*, 4.5.106-7.

⁹² Hughes, *The theatre of Aphra Behn*, 87.

and self-consciously.”⁹³ She repeatedly runs away from the men who would control her in order to marry who she wants, but in the world of the play this agency actively leads to assault. From a cynical perspective this would suggest that Behn does not believe in active female choice; however, based on the treatment of the other women in this and her other plays, we know this is not the case. Alternatively, it would seem Behn is commenting on how society devalues female agency by consistently putting the most virtuous heroine in harm's way and by both heroines requiring marriage to protect their perceived freedom.

The first assault we witness onstage is at the hands of Willmore. The scene is presented in the traditionally comic fashion of mistaken identity, with Florinda appearing half-dressed and Willmore drunk. The scene could have been potentially comedic, had the misunderstanding been based in the nuance of language, but Behn instead builds the threat towards Florinda until the scene breaks into physical violence. The scene begins with Willmore attempting to use flattery and wit to charm the aloof Florinda: "Sweet soul! Let me salute thy shoe-string."⁹⁴ Yet, when Florinda resists, calling Willmore a "filthy beast,"⁹⁵ he does not take it as a real refusal, but as coy repartee towards his advances. He plays on the idea that should she openly consent that it would be a sin - "willful fornication"⁹⁶ - and that he interprets her refusal as a means of keeping her reputation. At her second refusal and exclamation of "rape," he becomes angry and accuses her of laying a trap akin to a spider catching flies in a web.⁹⁷ Here Willmore is acting as though "no means yes" and that in saying "no" the unnamed woman is really asking for sexual contact. Peggy Thompson discusses this dichotomy in her book *Coyness and Crime*, explaining that "... saying no while meaning yes can enable rather than restrict feminine agency. At times, for

⁹³ Thompson, *Coyness and Crime*, 2.

⁹⁴ Behn, *The Rover*, 3.5.17.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 3.5.30

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 3.5.37.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 3.5.54.

example, it allows women in Restoration comedies to circumvent cultural restrictions on their sexual behavior while maintaining the appearance of virtuous unwillingness; in other instances, it provides women opportunities to test their suitors.”⁹⁸ However, this concept of coyness backfires for Florinda, as the norm of female reserve allows Willmore to feel empowered in continuing his pursuit after multiple refusals. From this point on Willmore cuts Florinda off before she is able to verbally defend herself, until he physically assaults her: “Come, no struggling to be gone; but an y’are good at a dumb wrestle, I’m for ye, look ye, I’m for ye. (*Florinda*] struggles with [*Willmore*].)”⁹⁹ We can see that even in this moment, when she struggles against him, that Willmore still is convinced of Florinda’s fake resistance, based on the phrase “dumb wrestle.” What began as a comic interlude based around a misunderstanding quickly morphs into a scene of actual violence. “The audience, knowing considerably more about Florinda and her motives than Willmore does, has a double perspective on the action; it understands both that this is an attempted rape because the woman refuses her consent, and that in Willmore’s eyes, Florinda, defined not by what she says but by her conduct and appearance, cannot be other than consenting.”¹⁰⁰ Willmore’s language in the scene is that of a comic rake, but Florinda never plays along, creating tension that breaks into violence. The scene visually is set up as voyeuristic, with Florinda in a state of undress, holding a small box of jewels – a visual metaphor for her virginity¹⁰¹ - but, as the misunderstanding continues, the scene’s tone moves from one of voyeuristic comedy to erotic danger. The spectacle of the scene shifting tone so drastically showcases Behn’s feelings about male violence; even Willmore our comic hero, can

⁹⁸ Thompson, *Coyness and Crime*, 2.

⁹⁹ Behn, *The Rover*, 3.5.66-8.

¹⁰⁰ Anita Pacheco, "Rape and the Female Subject in Aphra Behn's "The Rover"," *ELH* 65, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 328, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30030182>.

¹⁰¹ Thompson, *Coyness and Crime*, 64.

perpetrate violence. In this way the playwright does not allow libertine misogyny off the hook for its mistreatment of women despite their charm.

The second attempted rape of the play is committed by Blunt (and later in the scene, Fredrick). Blunt decides to revenge himself against all women in response to Lucetta's actions: "Oh, how I'll use all womankind hereafter! What would I give to have one of 'em within my reach now! Any mortal thing with petticoats, kind fortune, send me, and I'll forgive last night's malice!"¹⁰² When Florinda enters and Blunt begins to threaten her, she does not care if she is a whore or a woman of quality, but is only intent on his revenge. "For Blunt, whore and virgin are interchangeable in the market of the patrilineal masquerade – they are 'as much one as t'other.'" Behn comically disrupts the masculinist discourse of the masquerade, however, by putting it in the mouth of Blunt, the powerless fool with the 'old rusty sword,' whom the banished cavaliers associate with only for his money."¹⁰³ Blunt's language of assault is far more violent than Willmore's earlier rhetoric. This is because Blunt's attack is not about lust, as Willmore's was, but about power.

Blunt: Cruel? 'Adshearlikins, as a galley-slave, or a Spanish whore. Cruel, yes: I will kiss and beat thee all over; kiss, and see thee all over; thou shalt lie with me too, not that I care for the enjoyment, but to let thee see I have ta'en deliberated malice to thee, and will be revenged on one whore for the sins of another. I will smile and deceive thee, flatter thee, and beat thee, kiss and swear, and lie to thee, embrace thee and rob thee, as she did me; fawn on thee, and strip thee stark naked, then hang thee out at my window by the heels, with a paper of scurvy verses fastened to thy breast, in praise of damnable women. Come, come along.¹⁰⁴

Aside from presenting a far more realistic and frightening version of rape, what is interesting is that Behn give the most savage language and actions to the comic fool, who is originally

¹⁰² Behn, *The Rover*, 4.5.11-4.

¹⁰³ Hunter, "Revisioning the Female Body," 110.

¹⁰⁴ Behn, *The Rover*, 4.5.47-56.

presented as the butt of the joke. Here Behn's Toryism appears full-force – almost all of the men in the play are attempted rapists, but Blunt, the assumed Whig, is the worst.

Fredrick's appearance should have marked him as the savior, because of his cavalier status, but he quickly joins in Blunt's revenge:

Blunt: We'll both lie with her, and then let me alone to bang her.

Fredrick: I'm ready to serve you in matters of revenge that has a double pleasure in't.

Blunt: Well said. – You hear, little one, how you are condemned by public vote to the bed within; there's no resisting your destiny, sweetheart.¹⁰⁵

Yet, the key here is when Florinda evokes Belvile's name; Blunt uses it as an opportunity to build upon the assumption of her harlotry, Fredrick worries about the possibility of her being of a higher class rather than a prostitute: "I begin to suspect something; and 'twould anger us vilely to be trussed up for a rape upon a maid of quality, when we only believe we ruffle a harlot."¹⁰⁶

Fredrick's concern over Florinda's class stems from a fear of judicial retribution – "... a rapist would only be punished is he assaulted a chaste woman"¹⁰⁷ – and shows that though he has little respect for women of low repute, he will be careful before violating an upper-class lady.

Unlike the previous scene with Willmore, Behn never sets this scene up under the pretext of comedy or eroticism. There is no witty banter during the scene, only repeated threats of bodily harm. Florinda does resist – which is an indication of rape rather than seduction – her clothes remain in place and the danger is never sexualized. We know from the stage directions that there is supposed to be a struggle, "[Blunt] pulls [Florinda] rudely,"¹⁰⁸ but the audience is assured before her exit that she will not be harmed in the interim. Knowing that this is a

¹⁰⁵ Behn, *The Rover*, 4.5.99-105.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.5. 121-3.

¹⁰⁷ Dagny Boebel, "In the Carnival World of Adam's Garden: Roving and Rape in Behn's *Rover*," in *Broken Boundaries: Women & Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. Katherine M. Quinsey, (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 65.

¹⁰⁸ Behn, *The Rover*, 4.5.46.

comedy, Behn's insertion of such a violent scene should be jarring to the audience. This scene is not the ultimate threat against Florinda, and yet the following violent scene is not presented with the same gravitas as this one. Perhaps the purpose of this rape scene, contextualized by the need for power rather than lust, is to showcase the actual devastation of rape without feeding into eroticism. Behn shows the actual powerlessness rape victims feel without objectifying the onstage subject, discomforting the audience with Florinda's sudden lack of control.

The third and final scene of sexual violence in the play is an attempted gang rape of Florinda at the hands of Blunt, Fredrick, Willmore, and Don Pedro. Since Florinda is masked and therefore anonymous, the men are free to show their most base and violent desires. Behn utilizes this scene to up the ante – each rape scene is more disturbing than the last: the first was for drunken lust, the second for revenge, and the third for male competition. When all of the men arrive, they are all ready and willing to attack, with only Belvile showing restraint when he realizes Florinda's identity.

Behn uses Don Pedro's attempt to rape his own sister (not knowing it is her) to problemize 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).¹⁰⁹

This scene is meant to be disturbing on many levels. First, it is a proposed rape on a virginal heroine made into a game among the men. "Each man expresses his desire to enjoy the hidden Florinda, and they finally agree to settle their debate on the basis of a thinly veiled phallic competition: the man with the longest sword will possess the woman."¹¹⁰ Second, it is a proposed gang rape, with the men agreeing to take turns violating a woman they have not seen.

¹⁰⁹ Olivier, "Cavalier Politics, Banishment, and Rape", 66.

¹¹⁰ Jean I. Marsden, "Rape, Voyeurism, and the Restoration Stage," in *Broken Boundaries: Women & Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. Katherine M. Quinsey, (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 194.

Finally, it is disturbing because it quickly morphs into a scene of incestuous rape at the hands of the victim's brother. When Pedro offers the faceless woman a choice, "I am better bred, than not to leave her choice free,"¹¹¹ he is not giving her an option not to be raped, but rather a pick of who should rape her first.¹¹² Florinda's flight across the room away from her attackers is not perceived by the men as a true refusal, but as a part of the seduction ritual. All sex in this ritual has an air of non-consent, why should they believe any differently in this scenario? Most distressfully, Pedro is only prevented from raping Florinda by their cousin – who tells him that Florinda has escaped her confinement. Her rape at the hands of her brother is not stopped out of compassion for this unnamed woman, but rather a desire to maintain control over his own property (his sister).

Following Pedro's exit, Florinda is revealed to the rest, and all three of her attackers beg her forgiveness, and despite all three having attempted to rape her, she quickly forgives them and even offers Fredrick Valeria's hand in marriage.

Willmore: (kneels and kisses her hand) Thus it must be received then; and with it give your pardon too.

...

Fredrick: So, now do I stand like a dog, and have not a syllable to plead my own cause with. By this hand, madam, I was never thoroughly confounded before, nor shall I ever more dare to look up with confidence, till you are pleased to pardon me.

...

Blunt: I have a pardon to beg too, but 'adsheartlikins, I am so out of countenance, that I'm a dog if I can say anything to purpose.

Florinda: Sir, I heartily forgive you all.¹¹³

Although it is possible for a victim of sexual assault to forgive her attacker, the swiftness of Florinda's forgiveness seems problematic. According to *Rereading Aphra Behn*: "... Behn's juxtaposition of the attempted gang-rape of Florinda immediately prior to the wedding

¹¹¹ Behn, *The Rover*, 5.1.123.

¹¹² Hunter, "Revisioning the Female Body," 111.

¹¹³ Behn, *The Rover*, 5.2.155-188.

ceremonies at the end of the play undermines the moral code that marriage supposedly embodies; thus, Florinda's fairy-tale union with the Prince Charming Belvile is depicted as disturbing and fictional."¹¹⁴ The quick exoneration and marriages of the three couples creates cognitive dissonance, forcing the audience to question why they wanted these people married in the end, and if the lack of real comeuppance justifies the happy comic ending. Behn's use of rape in this play is clearly not meant to be taken lightly by the audience, but rather to force that audience to question the normalization of images of violence against women.

¹¹⁴ Hunter, "Revisioning the Female Body," 111.

CHAPTER 6: COERSION in *THE CITY HEIRESS*

The City Heiress was first produced five years after *The Rover*, with Mrs. Elizabeth Barry, the famed tragedienne, in the role of Lady Galliard, marking the shifting tone within this comedy. By encouraging a tragic actress to portray the lead role, Behn is encouraging the audience to subconsciously expect something disastrous to happen rather than something fun and rollicking as in a normal comedy. The play follows a Tory rake, Wilding, as he cunningly seeks financial revenge against his Whig uncle Sir Timothy Treat-all, and seduces various women. At the start, we learn that Sir Timothy is disinheriting his nephew for all of his gambling, whoring, and Tory politics. Wilding decides to secure his future by unloading his lower-class mistress Diana onto his uncle under the guise of her being the heiress Charlot, while marrying the real city-heiress himself. In the meanwhile, he is attempting to seduce the young widow Lady Galliard, who, despite her best judgment, loves him. Lady Galliard has a second suitor, the pensive Sir Charles Meriwill, a Tory friend of Wilding who cannot hold her attention. Despite having eloped with Charlot, the virginal heiress who also loves him, Wilding's passion for Galliard leads him to repeatedly argue with her about the sexual freedom they both long for. When Wilding finally grows tired of her refusals, he threatens Galliard with ending the flirtation, which finally forces her to agree to a late-night meeting. Later that evening Galliard tries to refuse again for her honor, but eventually submits to Wilding's protestations against her hypocritical desires and sleeps with him. Following their tryst, Galliard is distraught at the loss of her virtue, and it is only when Wilding threatens to kill himself that she allows herself to admit that she wants to continue their sexual encounter, even if only for an hour. Immediately following Wilding and Galliard's intimate moment, Sir Charles arrives drunk and demands to be invited into Galliard's rooms, after being goaded on by his rambunctious uncle, Sir Anthony. Though usually soft-spoken and kind, Charles is emboldened by alcohol and pushes into the

room, just as Wilding escapes out the back. Enraged that his target already had male company, Charles threatens Galliard with rape should she not promise to marry him. As she continues to resist his violent attack, Charles undresses more and more until she finally promises to wed him the next day, not realizing that his uncle has witnessed her pledge rendering it a binding contract. She leaves the room, pursued by Charles who has not been fully satisfied – we next see him triumphantly undressed on Galliard’s balcony, suggesting his sexual conquest of her. The scene shifts to Wilding and the other Tories robbing Sir Timothy of his papers dealing with inheritance, creating a startling echo of Galliard’s violation. Completing the robbery, Wilding sees Charles on Galliard’s balcony, and in a rage, goes to confront his supposedly untrue lover. Charlot arrives just as Wilding confronts Galliard, upset because she believes Galliard has married Wilding and ruined her. Wilding promises Charlot undying devotion and marriage, and seeing her reputation quickly destroyed, Galliard agrees to marry Charles. Both Wilding and Galliard end the play in beneficial marriages, but unhappy at the loss of their actual loves.

From the start Behn subverts the audience’s expectations of the play’s focus. The title, *The City Heiress* or *Sir Timothy Treat-all*, suggests that the protagonist will be one of the titular characters, Charlot or Sir Timothy. However, neither of these characters is the active agent, nor do they participate in the majority of the play’s conflict. Sir Timothy is presented at the start as the antagonist in Wilding’s story: the one he must get around in order to achieve his goal of an advantageous marriage to Charlot and successful seduction of Lady Galliard. However, Wilding has no real obstruction to his objective: from the onset Sir Timothy is no real threat, Charlot has already eloped with him, and Galliard has already become susceptible to his charm. Although the structure of the play suggests that Wilding is the protagonist because his conflict is presented in the very first scene – just as Hellena and Florinda’s conflicts were presented first in *The Rover* – the majority of the play is centered on Lady Galliard’s choice between her two suitors, Wilding

and Sir Charles. Charles is Wilding's foil; we can see this in their treatment of Galliard over the course of the play. At the beginning, Wilding is arrogant and selfish in his interactions, whereas Charles is meek and reverent. Once Wilding has seduced Galliard, his demeanor becomes tender, and it is then that Charles becomes violent. Galliard changes the most over the course of the play, and as the conflict between heart and reputation has higher stakes than Wilding's various conquests, I would argue that Galliard is the true protagonist of the play. Wilding may be the traditional Restoration rake-hero, but just as in *The Rover*, the focus is on the witty heroine. Behn is able to comment on the place of women in her society by framing Galliard's story as the conflict between Wilding and Charles, a device acceptable to the Restoration audience.

Just as in *The Rover*, Behn problematizes sexual assault as an extension of the political climate. "... [One] odd, and rather enigmatic feature of the play is that it combines a politically topical interest in inheritance with a complete absence of patrilineal succession... Fatherhood appears only as a fiction, and inheritance is contingent, proceeding neither from birth nor merit, but force and fraud."¹¹⁵ The fight for inheritance is a recurring theme: Wilding is disinherited by Sir Timothy; Galliard enjoys a sense of freedom because of the financial security provided by her late husband's inheritance; Sir Anthony threatens to disinherit Sir Charles for his failure to court Lady Galliard; and Wilding finding security in the marriage to Charlot. This is a clear connection to the Exclusion Crisis, with Behn commenting on the necessity of following the proper royal succession. By backing the Duke of Monmouth, Behn suggests that the Whigs are encouraging an unnatural succession, and unlawfully denying James the Duke of York his rightful inheritance (just as Sir Timothy, the Whig uncle, does to Wilding). Behn sets it right by rewarding the Tory hero with a lucrative marriage, and saddles Sir Timothy with the unsuitable

¹¹⁵ Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, 153.

Diana, Wilding's former mistress. In this way, Behn is equating women with property, a comparison not lightly made. According to Derek Hughes, "Implicitly, Behn makes a point that recurs throughout her work: that the systems of authority that she supports in the state are oppressive when replicated in the domestic sphere."¹¹⁶ We can see the replication of the dichotomy between the political and the domestic spheres specifically through the robbery of Sir Timothy after the rape of Lady Galliard. "The fraudulent acquisition of Sir Timothy's estate becomes disturbingly linked with that of Lady Galliard's body."¹¹⁷ Behn links these two events so that the connection between the theft of property and rape are disturbingly superimposed:

Sir Charles gains the courage to intimidate Lady Galliard through drunkenness, and we have seen how he got drunk: forcing Sir Timothy to kneel in front of his own guests and drink the King's health, and drinking along with him. A ritual of toasts gives the timid Tory the courage to be a sexual tyrant: the manhandling and forcing of Sir Timothy's body is replicated in that of Lady Galliard's, and the replication leads in turn to another ritual of loyal toasts when, after his conquest of Lady Galliard, Sir Charles throws money to a group of musicians and bids them 'drink the King's Health, with my Royal Master's the Duke' (V.i.339-40).¹¹⁸

The violence perpetrated against Galliard is held in stark contrast to that of Sir Timothy, so that the audience is aware that one moment they may laugh at the Whig's misfortune, and feel horrified at the same mistreatment of a woman in another. At the same time it may even be tempting for the audience to laugh at Lady Galliard's misery specifically because her abuser had been weak, and now elicits respect from the Tory audience and his Tory uncle. "Sympathy for women is subordinated to Tory triumphalism."¹¹⁹ Another striking example of how Behn treats the difference between the Tory and Whig attitudes about women is specifically seen through Sir Timothy and Sir Anthony. The basis for these two uncles comes from Terence's comedy

¹¹⁶ Hughes, "Aphra Behn and the Restoration theatre," 41.

¹¹⁷ Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, 154.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Owen, "Behn's dramatic response to Restoration politics," 77.

*Adelphi (The Brothers)*¹²⁰ and we see a similar structure of upbringing with the two knight's rearing of their nephews. Wilding turns out far more rowdy under the strict Whig influence of Sir Timothy, Charles is a far more restrained person until Sir Anthony steps in and fully encourages bad behavior. "Behn's contrast between the joyless Puritan and roistering Royalist is, however, far more problematic, and it reveals more clearly than ever how keenly she felt the conflict between political obedience and sexual dignity."¹²¹ Sir Anthony goads Charles into raping Galliard, telling him, "I am mistaken if she be not one of those Ladies that love to be ravisht [*sic.*] of a Kindness. Why, your willing Rape is all the Fashion, Charles."¹²² It is odd that Behn makes these violent characters Tories, especially in light of their despicable treatment of women. Women, in this play, mean nothing more than inheritance and property; the ability to have many mistresses and/or marry the wealthiest women is a mark of victory. In claiming ownership of her body, Charles has turned Galliard into little more than an object, where her agency no longer matters.¹²³ Further, once he had claimed ownership over Lady Galliard, Charles seizes the power she held within her household. Economic power is an intrinsically political issue, as he who holds the money wields the most power in society. Once Charles has empowered himself through the violation and disempowerment of Lady Galliard, her servants no longer follow her orders:

Lady Galliard: [To the Footman who is going.] Sirrah, run to my Lord Mayor's, and require some of his Officers to assist me instantly; and d'ye hear, Rascal, bar up my Doors, and let none of his mad Crew enter.

Sir Charles: William, you may stay, William.

Lady Galliard: I say, obey me, Sirrah.

Sir Charles: Sirrah, I say – know your Lord and Master.

¹²⁰ Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, 152.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹²² Aphra Behn, *The City Heiress* (Middletown, DE: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 71.

¹²³ Stewart, *The Ravishing Restoration*, 82.

William: I shall, Sir.¹²⁴

The servants recognize that Lady Galliard no longer wields the power once her bodily autonomy has been taken away. Also, if money is a mark of power regardless of gender within the play, it is necessary to note the shifting dynamics of economic power. At the start, Wilding is disinherited and has no economic power, yet by the end of the play gains the inheritance of Charlot. Although Charlot had little power to begin with due to her elopement with Wilding, she held a great deal of power in her decision to marry. Similarly, Lady Galliard begins the play with general economic freedom, granted power by her late husband, but has the power stripped away slightly by her seduction by Wilding, and all at once by her rape. Charles takes her financial power by force, eventually blackmailing her into submission. Most disturbing in this pattern is the disempowerment of women after marriage. She "...portray[s] marriage as a place that provides protection, but unfortunately is a necessary evil for women left with few choices."¹²⁵ She shows that although financial security can lend women a degree of freedom, society dictates that an unmarried woman of any standing can and will be taken advantage of. Society already leaves women in a disadvantaged state: money only delays the inevitable. Love is deemed as an extravagance afforded to women for only as long as society deems proper. This is clear in Galliard's marriage to Charles despite his raping and blackmailing her. Although she loves Wilding, the shame of rape and allowing herself to be seduced puts enough pressure on her reputation to warrant the easy fix of matrimony.

Galliard's social position as a widow presents her with a considerable amount of agency and personal mobility for a female character. "Lady Galliard is a woman unlike any other in Behn's plays, for her birthright (as a woman of quality), sexual availability (a widow,

¹²⁴ Behn, *The City Heiress*, 92.

¹²⁵ Stewart, *The Ravishing Restoration*, 83.

experienced but available), and economic influence (inherited) provide her with considerable power, yet, at the same time, without a husband to protect her, she is vulnerable.”¹²⁶ Unlike Florinda in *The Rover*, Galliard’s financial security does not hinge on whom she marries or the approval of a male family member; she is financially independent living off the funds left from her late husband. Galliard also possesses considerable sexual agency because as an experienced but currently unmarried woman, she is aware of what marriage and sex encompasses, and therefore can be more discerning in her choice of partner. Her sexual availability is a double-edged sword, however, in that should she choose a lover (and was considerably discreet) she could enjoy the kind of sexual freedom Behn touted in her plays; but she also risked the danger of ruining her respectable reputation through concessions to her desires. Galliard’s (and by extension Behn’s) concern about suitor suitability is ever clear in the drawn-out courtship with Wilding. “For Galliard, Wilding is both appealing and revolting, and she grapples with the public libertine image of Wilding versus the private man she loves, the public image of herself as a widow and the private woman who embraces sexual freedom.”¹²⁷ Wilding’s bad behavior is attractive to Galliard, but his well-known predilection for chasing many women at once gives her pause: how can she be sure he will remain faithful to her and preserve her public image? Behn grappled with the same conundrum as Galliard in her own personal life, leading some critics to draw comparisons between the playwright and the character. Behn herself was a widow, and known for her various lovers over the years. Perhaps Galliard’s struggle against her sexual desires was Behn’s way of illustrating to the Tory public the double standards their seductive reasoning creates for women. Also troubling is the eroticization of male violence in the play. “The appeal [of the rake] is undeniable, and critics such as Melinda Zook [claim] that Behn

¹²⁶ Stewart, *The Ravishing Restoration*, 79.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

found the predatory rake ‘irresistible,’ and Susan Staves argues that ‘Behn’s amorous women also eroticize male violence, finding themselves drawn to men... who do not scruple to use force to grab and ‘ruffle’ women.’”¹²⁸ It is clear that Wilding’s fiery sexuality is attractive to Galliard and that bad behavior is set up to be rewarded. “...Sir Charles Meriwill, ... treats Lady Galliard with a timid deference ... contrasts with Wilding’s arrogant boisterousness, and at first alienates her. The deference is, however, largely to her social quality: whereas Wilding addresses Lady Galliard as ‘Madam’ and ‘Widow,’ Sir Charles addresses her as ‘Madam’ and ‘your Ladyship.’”¹²⁹ Galliard’s dismissal of Charles’s polite suit and yielding to Wilding’s assertive treatment sets a dangerous precedent for the perception of how men can and should treat women. This suggests that only aggressive and impolite men have a chance with women, and this leads the timid Charles to become more belligerent in his suit, and eventually rape Galliard to spite her preferential treatment and yielding to Wilding. More troublesome still is Behn’s decision to have Galliard marry her attacker in the end. In doing so Behn is rewarding the ultimate crime against personhood with Lady Galliard’s titles, property, and inheritance. I would argue, however, based on Behn’s other examples of mercenary marriages and sexual violence that the playwright is not condoning the behavior but illustrating that women of her time were presented with impossible choices once their reputations were threatened. The main difference between the two suitors is consent. Wilding’s behavior is not the most admirable, but he certainly waits for Lady Galliard’s consent before acting upon their mutual desire. Behn takes her most sexually free female character and shows how quickly that freedom can turn into enslavement. Galliard is fully aware of her precarious situation, which is why she resists her desires for so long. Many other Restoration comedies feature widows and wives who quickly act on their desires, finding

¹²⁸ Stewart, *The Ravishing Restoration*, 62.

¹²⁹ Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, 150.

comedy in the cuckolding of husbands and the danger of gossip. Yet, for Galliard love is second to her reputation in importance – hence her choice to marry her attacker rather than pursue her heart’s desire following her rape. “In her relationships with both Wilding and Sir Charles, resistance is Lady Galliard’s only option, and it eventually corners her into a marriage she does not want. She may be aware of the trap she is in, but, like Behn herself, Lady Galliard ‘cannot transcend, reject, or even vilify... the deceptive and repressive mechanisms that constrain female desire.’”¹³⁰ The self-awareness of reputation also makes for an attractive target for Wilding: “Galliard’s self-loathing at the thought of capitulation reveals her passive nature of the role she is forced to take. Her modesty, as Markley argues, ‘is the ultimate mark of her objectification, a ‘necessary bait’ that both excites Wilding’s passion and forces her to repress ‘Love and Nature.’”¹³¹ Wilding’s seduction also takes away a portion of Galliard’s agency despite her desire and consent. A number of critics have labeled Wilding’s seduction technique as “browbeating” and I would have to agree. Despite her private desires, Galliard is very clear in her initial refusal to submit to Wilding. The repetition of Wilding’s request shows little respect for Galliard’s refusal, and worst of the language of his courtship slowly morphs into shaming.

Wilding: Oh, Sex, on purpose form’d to plague Mankind!
 All that you are, and all you do is Lye.
 False are your Faces, false your floating Hearts;
 False are your Quarrels, false your Reconcilements:
 Enemies without Reason, and dear without Kindness;
 Your Friendship’s false, but much more false your Love;
 Your damn’d deceitful Love is all o’er false.¹³²

This coercive technique is successful, but Galliard immediately regrets relinquishing to this demand after the act is completed. “Undone, undone! Unhand me, false, forsworn;/ Be gone,

¹³⁰ Thompson, *Coyness and Crime*, 73.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 72.

¹³² Behn, *The City Heiress*, 69.

and let me rage till I am dead. / What shou'd I do with the guilty Life about me?"¹³³ What's more, Wilding threatens to kill himself if Galliard does not consent to allowing him to stay, or continue their tryst in the future.

Wilding: Or if you – promise me then tomorrow.

Lady Galliard: No, hear my Vows.

Wilding: [*Lays his Hand on his Sword*] Hold, see me die; if you resolve 'em fatal to my Love, by Heaven I'll do't.

Lady Galliard: Ah, what –

Wilding: Revoke that fatal Never then.

Lady Galliard: I dare not.

Wilding: Oh, say you will.

...

Lady Galliard: Ah, I confess I am but feeble Woman.¹³⁴

Though presented as romantic, these course techniques are emotionally abusive and still do not protect Galliard from the personal ruin she fears. Further, her capitulation to Wilding gives Charles proper ammunition to threaten her not only with rape but also the ruin of her reputation. "In short, [Charles] Meriwill uses knowledge of Galliard's sexual history as blackmail, and she is trapped by her own act of freedom."¹³⁵ Not only does Galliard's rape constitutes a physical assault, but there is almost the financial rape as well, given that by forcing her to submit to his demands of matrimony, Charles takes away Galliard's financial independence, and as mentioned earlier her power within the household. By raping her, Charles removes Galliard's agency in its totality.

Lady Galliard's rape at the hands of Charles is left possibly ambiguous, as Charles does not physically drag her offstage. The audience also does not have the voyeuristic satisfaction of seeing the aftermath onstage, specifically because the stage directions do not show the signs of ravishment such as looking ruffled or clothing undone; and just as in other plays of this era

¹³³ Behn, *The City Heiress*, 72.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 74.

¹³⁵ Stewart, *The Ravishing Restoration*, 114.

where a rape occurs it is not shown graphically on stage. However, there are context clues within the scene prior to and following the rape that suggests its occurrence. First, despite Galliard's agreeing to the marriage in order to get Charles to leave, he will not stating: "Gad. I'll not leave her now, till she is mine;/ Then keep her so by constant Consummation. / Let Man o' God do his, I'll do my Part, / In spite of all her Fickleness and Art;/ There's one sure way to fix a Widow's Heart."¹³⁶ He explicitly says that he will force her acquiescence and seeing that he has her trapped ("...you're caught, struggle and flounder as you please, Sweetheart, you'll but entangle more..."¹³⁷) and shoos his uncle away so he may have his way with her. The next time we see Charles is on Lady Galliard's balcony: "[... *Sir Charles come into the Balcony undrest.*] *Sir Charles:* Good morrow, Uncle. Gentlemen, I thank ye: Here, drink the King's Health..."¹³⁸ His appearance above undressed and paying musicians to drink, suggests his attack was successful. Behn makes a concerted effort not to use this rape for titillating purposes, as the audience never gets the satisfaction of seeing the actress playing Galliard as a sexualized victim. She actually re-creates the voyeuristic expectation onstage in the form of Sir Anthony. According to Derek Hughes, "... if exuberance by definition exceeds the limits of normal, Sir Anthony exceeds the limits of exuberance in particular, his approving commentary on the manhandling of Lady Galliard is an ugly display of voyeurism; like the Neapolitan carnival in *The Rover*, this one-man carnival has his ugly side."¹³⁹ As he peeps through the door, Sir Anthony acts as a surrogate audience, a comment on their expectation for erotic violence. We should be made uncomfortable by not only his inappropriate voyeurism, but also his encouragement of the violence perpetrated. If he is saying what the audience may be thinking,

¹³⁶ Behn, *The City Heiress*, 79.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 91.

¹³⁹ Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn*, 153.

what does that say about the expectations and depravity of the men in the audience? Perhaps Behn is holding up a mirror to her audience and asking them to reconsider what they perceive as normal and sexual in the theater.

Behn yet again subverts the trope of satirizing violence against women by not allowing the scene to become too comedic to entertain the danger of the impending attack. There is comedic opportunity for the actor playing Charles, as he is drunk when he begins threatening her, and by slowly removing his clothing, his threats continue to not be taken seriously. However, there is no indication that the clothing removal is used for comedic effect, rather a visual threat of his intentions – if his words do not convince her of the threat, his actions will. He also verbally and physically accosts her, adding to the reality of the attack.

Sir Charles: Come, Widow, let's to Bed.
[Pulls her, she is angry]
Lady Galliard: Hold, Sir, you drive the Jest too far;
 And I am in no humour now for Mirth.
Sir Charles: Jest: Gad, ye lye, I was never in more earnest in all my life.¹⁴⁰

His language is a violent in nature, making his intentions clear to Galliard and the audience: “Mean? Why I am obstinately bent to ravish thee, thou hypocritical Widow, make thee mine by force, that so I have no obligation to thee, and consequently use thee scurvily [*sic.*] with a good Conscience.”¹⁴¹ Charles’s attack is partially motivated by lust and partially revenge, infuriated that he already had given herself over to someone else earlier.¹⁴² “Meriwill goes into a rage, drunk and furious that the woman he has come to pursue already had male company. His anger with Galliard demonstrates the sexual double standard for women, which dictates that they be the object of desire, but are forbidden to own or act upon their own passions.”¹⁴³ His attack all

¹⁴⁰ Behn, *The City Heiress*, 76-7.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁴² Behn, *The City Heiress*, 76.

¹⁴³ Stewart, *The Ravishing Restoration*, 81.

comes down to a need for power, as is evidenced by his sudden change from affable and deferent too demanding and dominant.

Sir Charles: No frowning; for by this dear Night, 'tis Charity, care of your Reputation Widow; and therefore I am resolv'd nobody shall lie with you but my self. You have dangerous Wasps buzzing about your Hive, Widow – mark that – [*She flings from him.*] Nay, no parting but upon terms, which, in short, d'ye see, are these: Down on your Knees, and swear me heartily, as Gad shall judge your Soul, d'ye see, to marry me to morrow.¹⁴⁴

The image of Galliard on her knees not only evokes a sexual image of domination, but a political one as well, as if an invader forced a conquered people to bow to him.

The starkest reality of Galliard's rape is seen a several scenes later when she threatens to call the authorities. As mentioned earlier, there was little to no legal recourse against rape, especially if the victim was not a virgin. Charles is well aware of this fact, expresses that even if the authorities did arrive, his authority as an upper-class male would keep them "loyal"¹⁴⁵ to him – especially since he has witnesses to her coerced promise of marriage. By taking the time to have Galliard seek justice, Behn shows the reality of being a rape victim; few people believe the claims, especially against powerful men, and the recourse will often only make matters worse for the victim. The depiction of rape and coercion in *The City Heiress* illustrates the difficult position women faced in a society that both shames and encourages female sexuality. Both rape and seduction are shown as detrimental and both leave a powerful female with little to no choice about her future.

¹⁴⁴ Behn, *The City Heiress*, 77.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 93.

CONCLUSIONS

Although Behn's illustration of rape is not perfect from the perspective of post-third wave feminism, it is important to note that she was a product of her time and was reacting to the circumstances of her society as best she could. The condemnations against sexual violence had to be tempered with the audience's tastes of the day, especially given her need to support herself as a writer. Her depictions are not free of some of the problematic ideations of her time, specifically when it comes to the eroticization of Tory sensibilities, especially since a large portion of the Libertine sexual appetites rested on misogyny and violence. However, Behn understood the problematic nature of her political inclinations and does not shy away from presenting Tory heroes who perpetrated violence against women as a way of showing that violence crossed political boundaries. To ensure that her audience understood the gravity of rape and the powerlessness that victims feel in its aftermath, her depictions of rape are not sexualized, but instead present the violent reality of the crime and the rationale behind the perpetrator's attack. According to Stewart, "In Behn's most violent rape scenarios, such as in *The City Heiress* and *The Rover*, rape is a response to rage, a means of acting out revenge, in the scenes are graphic and harsh. The darkness of the scenes is consistent with overarching notions of sexual violence."¹⁴⁶ Behn does not fall into the Restoration trope of lust as cause of rape; rather she highlights the power struggle inherent in rape, and subverts the lustful rapist trope by making the attacks be about power. Willmore's attack of Florinda is underlined by his assumption of power over any woman because of his status as a man. Charles's attack is specifically about taking power away from a strong woman, and laying claim to her as an object. By changing the rapist's rationale, Behn subverts the genre and criticizes the normalization of rape as a comedic a device.

¹⁴⁶ Stewart, *The Ravishing Restoration*, 94.

Is clear that although Behn sought to bring light to women's plight, especially in the area of sexual freedom and rape, she did not have a viable solution to the problem in mind.

Aphra Behn's plays present our only evidence of the seventeenth century woman's response to the dramatic representation of rape. In [her plays] she outlines one central problem, the objectification and commodification of women, but while she balances the attempted rapes with suggestions of female sexual autonomy and examples of female power, she provides no solutions.¹⁴⁷

It is unsettling that Galliard marries her attacker and that Florinda quickly forgives and forgets her attacks. However, it must be remembered that rape victims had little choice after the fact, and that it is not unrealistic that they would marry their attacker or quietly sweep their violations under the rug in order to secure their honor and position. Perhaps these happy endings were also a demand of the comedic genre, but through them Behn places a spotlight on the incongruity of society's expectations for rape victims. What is special about Behn's perspective as opposed to other writers of the time is that as a woman she was in a position to accurately comment on and critique social norms from a woman's perspective. The uncomfortable situations Behn created for her female characters served as a mirror of the warped mores of society and forced the spectator to view a woman's plight through a woman's eyes.

¹⁴⁷ Marsden, "Rape, Voyeurism, and the Restoration Stage," 196.

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