

*The Rover or The Banish'd Cavaliers by
Aphra Behn*

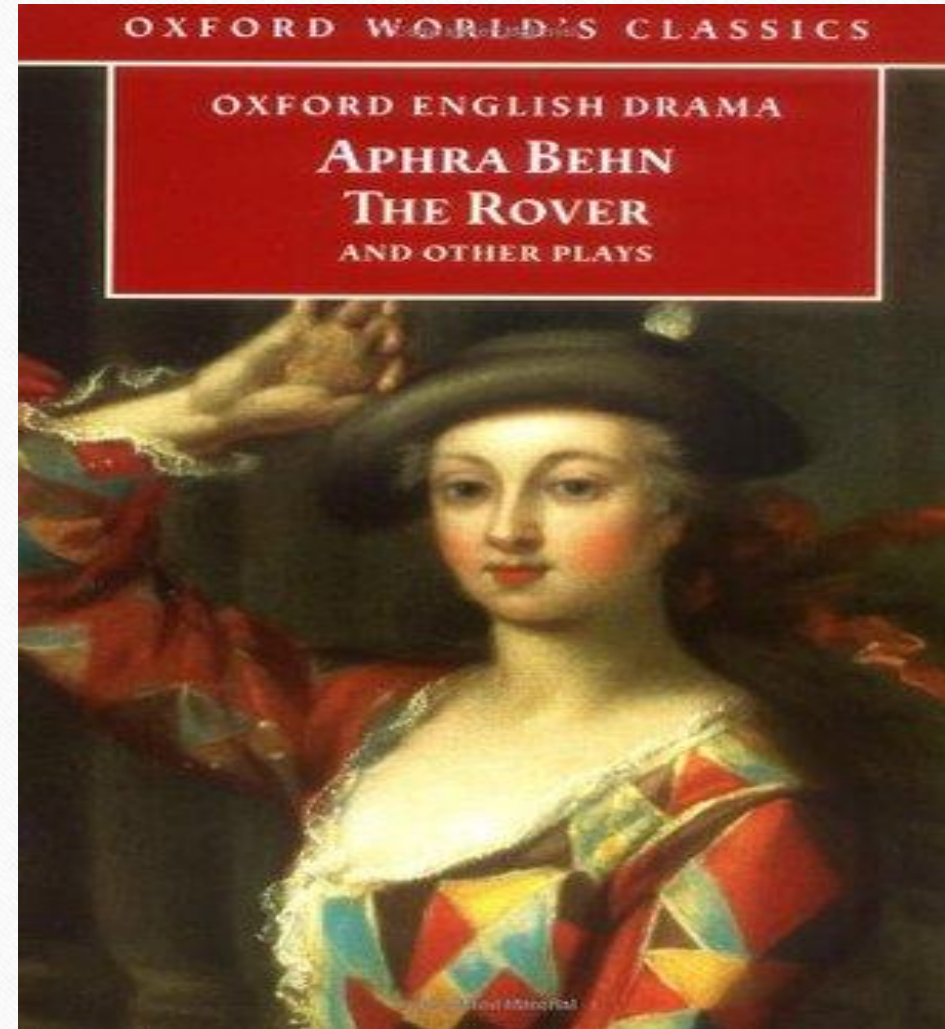
*3rd Semester: Core Course 7: British Poetry and
Drama*

Introduction



*The Rover or The Banish'd
Cavaliers* by Aphra Behn

1. It is a revision of Thomas Killigrew's play *Thomaso, or The Wanderer* (1664)



Portrait of Aphra Behn by Sir Peter Lely



"All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn which is, most scandalously but rather appropriately, in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds."

--Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*



Biography:

- Aphra Behn was a playwright, poet, translator and fiction writer from the **Restoration Era**.
- She was born on 14th December 1640 and died on 16th April 1689.
- She is perhaps best known to modern audiences for her short novel *Oroonoko* (1688), the tale of an enslaved African prince.
- It is notable for its exploration of slavery, race, and gender.
- Employed by Charles II as **spy** in Antwerp.
- Code name: **Astrea** (Astraea: the Greek goddess of innocence and purity: the celestial virgin).



To be continued...

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- Often eluded to sexual desire in writing: (**The Disappointment**, **The Rover**).
 - One of the first prolific, high-profile female dramatists in Britain.
 - **The Rover** was Behn's most famous play with Nell Gwynn, Charles' II mistress, coming out of retirement to play **Angelica Bianca** (the whore).
 - Behn did not take credit for **The Rover** until the third printing. It was initially published under Anonymous.



Writing in the Restoration

- Theatre banned for sixteen years.
- Charles II became Monarch and brought the ideas of the French with him.
- Charles II nicknamed the Merry Monarch.
- Allowed two patents for theatres: The Kings Company and The Duke's Company.



Restoration Theatre

- Presbyterian dissatisfied with lack of religious uniformity.
- Theatres were closed and performance made illegal.
- Female sexuality considered a spiritual flaw.
- **The Rover** was well received by Charles II and there were 158 performances recorded between 1700 and 1760. Behn was also accused of plagiarism multiple times because **The Rover** closely resembles "**Thomas, or, The Wanderer**" by Thomas Killigrew.



Aphra Behn: a Restoration Writer

- Behn's plays were generally popular with their audiences, she encountered criticism from contemporaries and later readers alike for the rampant sexual content.

"The stage how loosely Astraea tread
Who fairly puts all characters to bed."

---Alexander Pope



Historical Context:

- A nation wounded and divided by civil war.
- Religious upheaval and anxiety about the future of the monarchy.
- The plays may celebrate court life in all its gorgeous material pomp, but they were written against a backdrop of far-reaching change in governance, the law, the Church and the family.
- A deep unease lies beneath the wit and sexual escapades.
- In 1660 Charles Stuart was invited to take up the English Crown by a nation that had beheaded his father and fought a deeply painful civil war (1642–51).
- He returned from exile in France and began to rebuild a royal court in which theatre was to play a big part.



Setting:

- Aphra Behn's *The Rover* engages with the social, political and sexual conditions of the 17th century.
- Set at carnival time in **Naples in 1656**, the play presents its **1677** audience with the imagined exploits of a group of 'banished Cavaliers'.
- Taking its audience back to the world of Royalist continental exile, the play would have sparked ever-ready memories of the civil wars of the 1640s, which had resulted in the execution of Charles I in 1649.



Characters:

- **Florinda:** Sister to Don Pedro, and Hellena. A very determined woman, Florinda refuses suitors due to her devoted love to Colonel Belvile.
- **Hellena:** a young Woman design'd for a Nun, and Sister to Florinda. A confident, and brave woman like her sister, she questions religion and convinces Willmore to marry her.
- **Valeria:**, a Kinswoman to Florinda who helps Florinda scheme and hide from Pedro.
- **Angellica Bianca:** a famous Courtesan in Spain who returns to Naples to put herself up for sale. Don Pedro and Don Antonio attempt to pay the fee for Angellica, but she falls in love with Willmore, whom she attempts to kill later on in the play.



- **Moretta:** the "lady in waiting," or personal assistant, of Angellica Bianca.
- **Callis:** Governess to Florinda and Hellena in charge of overseeing the girls and making sure they stay out of trouble. However, she is easily convinced and is later trapped in a chest so that she can't interrupt the marriage of Florinda.
- **Lucetta:** a "jilting wench" who steals the clothes and belongings from Blunt.



Men Characters:

DON ANTONIO: the King's Son, The Viceroy's Son, who is good friends with Don Pedro.

- **DON PEDRO**, Florinda and Hellena's brother, a Noble Spaniard, Antonio's Friend.

- **BELVILE**, an English Colonel deeply in love with Florinda despite the disapproval of her brother, Pedro.

- **WILLMORE**, the "rover" to whom the title refers; a naval captain who spends most of his days roaming around.

- **FREDERICK**, English Gentleman, Friend to Belvile and Blunt



- **BLUNT**, a foolish English Country Gentleman who gets duped out of all his possessions by Lucetta.
- **STEPHANO**, Servant to Don Pedro
- **PHILLIPO**, Lucetta's Gallant
- **SANCHO**, Pimp to Lucetta
- **BISKEY** and **SEBASTIAN**, two Bravoes to Angelica
- **DIEGO**, Page to Don Antonio
- **PAGE** to Hellena
- **OFFICERS** and **SOLDIERS**
- **SERVANTS**, **MASQUERADERS**, Off-stage **VOICES**



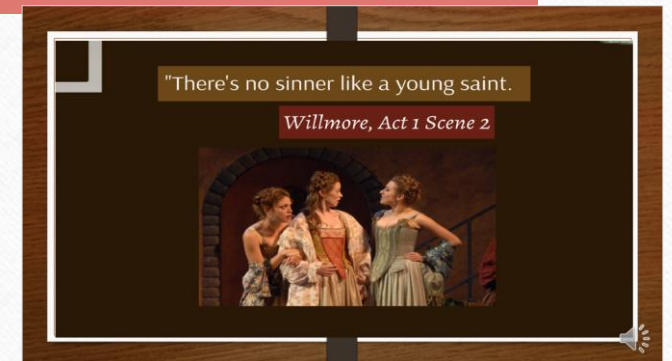
Plot Outline:

- As the plot unravels, Florinda devises a plan to avoid marriage to Don Antonio, and Blunt attempts to rape Florinda as revenge against all women. Eventually Florinda and Belville are married and Hellena and Willmore commit to marry one another.
- The Rover follows the escapades of a band of amorous English cavaliers and Italian women as they enjoy themselves at a carnival in Naples.



The Rover is a Restoration Comedy that features:

- Multiple intersecting plot lines
- Witty dialogue
- Sexual innuendo
- Objectification that fits the style of the time.



"There's no sinner like a young saint.

Willmore, Act 1 Scene 2



The Rover: Style and Structure

- It deals with a group of Englishman in Naples at **Carnival** time and the **amorous adventures** that they get up to. Behn also gives her female characters a lot of **agency** in terms of determining their own destinies and desires.



Themes:

Libertinism and Marriage

[*Mary Astell's Reflections Upon Marriage*

Niccholes's Discourse of Marriage and Wiving]

- Restoration masculinity

[*The Book of Falconry or Hawking* by George Turberville, 1575]

Arranged Marriage
•No true affection initially
•financially oriented
•between two potential partners
•Home-life
•Decided over time
•Someone else decides
•Lifelong
•Occupation
•First impressions
•Personal decision
•Not long lasting (depends)

Pop Question
Restoration Period
Florinda's father and brother wanted her to marry _____ but she liked _____.



•"Pray tell me, sir, are you not guilty of the same... crime? When a lady is proposed to you for a wife, you never ask how fair, discreet, or virtuous she is, but what's her fortune". (2.2, 96-99)



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Thank You.

