

**The Rover**  
**By**  
**Aphra Behn**  
**( A Short Study )**

By  
Shailesh Ranjan  
Assistant Professor  
Dept. of English,  
Maharaja College, Ara.



**Aphra Behn**  
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## About the Author

- Aphra Behn was one of the first English professional writers wrote plays, poetry, short stories and novels.
- Little information is known about her early life.
- She was born in about 1640 near Canterbury, England. Her family were Royalists, connected with powerful catholic families and the court.
- She may have been raised Catholic and educated in a convent abroad.
- As one of the first English women to earn her living by her writing, she broke cultural barriers and served as a literary role model for later generations of women authors.
- Rising from obscurity, she came to the notice of Charles II , who employed her as a spy in Antwerp.

- After her return to London she started her writings.
- She wrote under the pastoral pseudonym Astrea.
- A staunch supporter of the Stuart Line, she declined an invitation from Bishop Burnet to write a welcoming poem to the new king William III.
- She died shortly after. Her grave is not included in the Poets Corner but lies in the East Cloister near the steps to the church.
- Virginia Woolf writes about her in her famous work 'A Room of One's Own' - " 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."

- She challenged with expressing herself in a patriarchal system that generally refused to grant merit to women's views. Women who went against were in risk of being exiled from their communities and targeted to be involved in witch hunts.
- Though she is best known for pioneering the format of novel, she first made her living from writing plays, primarily comedies.
- She wrote freely on the topic of women's sexuality , as shown through *The Disappointment*.
- She is one of the most prolific dramatists of her time second only to John Dryden.

# Works of Aphra Behn

## Plays

- The Forc'd Marriage (1670)
- The Amorous Prince or The Curious Husband (1671)
- The Dutch Lover (1673)
- Abdelazer (1676)
- The Town Fop (1676)
- The Rover (1677)
- Sir Patient Fancy (1678)
- The Feigned Courtesans (1679)
- The Young King (1679)
- The False Count (1681)
- The Roundheads or The Good Old Cause (1681)
- The City Heiress (1682)
- Like Father, Like Son (1682)
- The Luckey Chance (1686)
- The Emperor of the Moon (1687)

## Novels

- The Fair Jilt
- Agnes de Castro, or, the Force of Generous Love (1688)
- Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister, in three parts (1682-1687)
- Oroonoko (1688)

## Critics view on Aphra Behn

- *“For Aphra Behn, writing was an act of sexual politics , a balancing of the powers of “masculine” intellect and ‘feminine’ charm in a daring leap toward freedom of speech and action of women. She was principally concerned with what might be called the public and private faces of women’s oppression in the society of seventeenth century England.”*

Cheri Davis Langdell

- *“The wit of her comedies seems to be generally acknowledged, and it is equally acknowledged that they are very indecent, on which account I have not thought my self under any obligation to persue them. It would have been an unworthy employment, nicely to estimate a wit which, having been applied to the purposes of impiety and vice, ought not only to be held in the utmost detestation, but consigned, if possible, to eternal oblivion.”*

Dr. Kippis



- *“Masterpieces are not single and solitary births ; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice. Jane Austen should have laid a wreath upon the grave of Fanny Burney, and George Eliot done homage to the robust shade of Eliza Carter . . . All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn . . . For it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds.”*

Virginia Woolf

- *There were other voices who had begun to speak out against marriage for money in Aphra’s time, but few took the logical conclusion of such a stance as far as she did, nor elaborated it as part of a larger politics of sexuality.*

Angeline Goreau



## The Rover

- The Rover or The Banished Cavalier is the most frequently and performed of Aphra Behn's plays.
- It is a play in two parts written in 1677.
- It was first performed by the Duke's Company at the Dorset Garden Theatre in 1677.
- It was initially published anonymously but in the prologue of the third edition did Behn finally take credit for the play.
- It is a revision of Thomas Killigrew's play Thomaso , or The Wanderer (1664).
- Regarding the play , John Dryden writes – “ It lacks the manly vitality of Killigrew's play , but shows greater refinement of expression.”

## Characters of 'The Rover'

- Don Antonio : the Viceroy's son
- Don Pedro : a noble Spaniard , his friend
- Belvile : an English colonel in love with Florinda.
- Willmore : the Rover
- Frederick : Friend of Belvile and Blunt.
- Blunt : An English country gentleman
- Stephano : servant to Don Pedro
- Philippo : Lucetta's gallant
- Sancho : pimp to Lucetta
- Lucetta : a jilting wench
- Angellica Bianca : a famous courtesan
- Florinda : sister to Don Pedro
- Hellena : a gay young woman designed for nun, sister to Florinda.

( Scene :Naples , in Carnival time )

## Plot of 'The Rover'

The Rover follows the escapades of a band of banished English cavaliers as they enjoy themselves at a carnival in Naples. The story strings together multiple plotlines revolving around the amorous adventures of these Englishmen, who pursue a pair of noble Spanish sisters, as well as a mistress and common prostitute. The titular character is a raffish naval captain, Willmore. He falls in love with a wealthy noble Spanish woman named Hellena, who is determined to experience love before her brother, Pedro, sends her to a convent. Hellena falls in love with Willmore, but difficulties arise when a famous courtesan, Angellica Bianca, also falls in love with Willmore. As the plot unravels, Hellena's older sister, Florinda, attempts to avoid an unappealing arranged marriage to her brother's best friend, and devises a plan to marry her true love, Colonel Belvile. Finally, the third major plot of the play concerns English countryman Blunt, a naïve and vengeful man who becomes convinced that a girl, Lucetta, has fallen in love with him. When she turns out to be a prostitute and thief, he is humiliated and attempts to rape Florinda as revenge against all women for the pain and damage that Lucetta has caused him.

In the end, Florinda and Belvile are married, and Hellena and Willmore commit to marry one another.

## Theme of 'The Rover'

The Rover is one of the most popular plays of Aphra Behn. It focuses upon human desire and act. It revolves around Willmore, Hellena, Angellica, Don Pedro etc. The plot of 'The Rover' revolves around love, courtship, and marriage and most characters spend the entirety of the play either chasing after a personal love interest or else orchestrating matrimonial arrangements for others. The major themes of the play are :

- Theme of Disguise
- Theme of Love versus Lust
- Theme of Woman struggle
- Theme of Class and Money
- Theme of Marriage and Courtship

## Important Questions

- Discuss Aphra Behn as a dramatist ?
- Discuss ‘The Rover’ as a Restoration Comedy ?
- What is the theme of ‘The Rover’?
- Write a short note on female characters of ‘The Rover’?
- Discuss the carnival setting of Aphra Behn’s ‘The Rover’?
- Compare the character of Hellena and Angellica ?



Thanks