

## The Political Voice of Aphra Behn

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### **Abstract**

This work of literary history analyses the relationship between the fiction of Aphra Behn and the developing partisan politics of the Restoration period, focusing on Behn's use of set tropes of political rhetoric of both Whig and Tory supporters and on the influence of her feminist views on her political writing. It rests on the assumption that in the Restoration period the public and private spheres were still closely interlinked and thus almost any kind of literature engaged in politics, ranging from formal treatises to drama and amatory fiction.

The thesis opens with a chapter setting up the historical background and the literary context of the reign of Charles II and James II, which offers a brief overview of the main rhetorical strategies of all kinds of political writing – the household analogy of formal treatises, the Cavalier libertine culture of the Restoration comedy, the relationship between romance and allegory, Tory feminism developed by Margaret Cavendish and methods of political rhetoric employed by John Dryden, the author closest to Behn in political and religious adherence.

The third chapter uses this context to sum up Behn's approach to politics in the whole of her work, employing some of her pindarics to prove her invincible loyalty to Charles II and James II and the examples of *The Rover* and *The Roundheads* to explore Behn's feminist critique of the Stuart libertine culture and patriarchal ideology in contrast with her support of their divine right to the throne during the Exclusion Crisis.

The last part of the thesis consists of the analyses of individual prose works by Aphra Behn with a focus on the narrative strategies employed to promote the Tory ideology and criticize their opponents, such as allegory, roman a clef, typological writing, classical examples, caricature and celebration of the noble royal figure. In *Love-Letters* and *The Dumb Virgin* the analysis concentrates on their discussion of the power inherent in the control of representation, sexual-political analogy and historical allegory. *Oroonoko* is used to explore Behn's version of Tory ideology based on the concepts of honour, loyalty and royalty inherent the King's body. *The Fair Jilt* offers an example of Behn's transformation of the caricature of ambitious sexual Jacobite female with stress on the public nature of aristocratic ethics. *The History of the Nun* and relative stories of double loyalty are studied for their work with the allegorical potential of romance and in *Memoirs of the Court of the King of Bantam* Behn

employs the popular caricaturing approach to Stuarts' opponents. Each analysis tries to focus on a different feature of Behn's political writing, so that the thesis would encompass the whole scope of her rhetorical strategies. The main stress is put on Behn's use of set tropes of political writing and their subverting through the feminist thought, as Behn does not allow her heroines to be subjected to political theory and uses the potential of romance for multiple layering of meaning and allegory to build complex characters not limited by the political idea present.